

ON THE MEANING OF PINTURICCHIO'S *SALA DEI SANTI*

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I

The visitor who passes through the Vatican apartment of Alexander VI does not usually remain long, for greater rewards await him on the floor above. Regretfully, art historians – or more precisely, iconographers – have participated in this neglect, leaving unexplored an elaborate pictorial programme found in one of its rooms, the Sala dei Santi.¹ Rectangular in plan and roofed by two Late Gothic cross-vaults (plate 11), the Sala was decorated by Pinturicchio and a small army of assistants who moved through the suite in 1492–4,² leaving behind on the walls a dense residue of embellishment, of fresco, stucco and gilding. This bright excrescence fills the upper half of the walls, which are shaped into lunettes by the vaulting, and covers the vaults as well. Upon entering the room, one sees above the opposite doorway *The Visitation*, and then, moving counter-clockwise around the walls, five scenes from the lives of various saints (fig. 1): Sts Anthony and Paul, St Catherine, St Barbara, St Susanna of the Hebrews, and St Sebastian. The serial combination of these subjects is puzzling enough; but – still more curious – overhead, in the two cross-vaults, glittering small-scale against a deep blue background, wheel mythologies of ancient Egypt, of Isis and Osiris (plates 12 and 13).³ It is a complex and unique programme, obviously one of some special thrust which insists upon the importance of its meaning. But after four-and-a-half centuries closed off from the world (the rooms were virtually forgotten until 1897),⁴ the frescoes have seemingly lost their power to speak.

In trying to comprehend and explain their themes, I cannot claim a complete elucidation. That, I suspect, would involve a full-scale monographic effort, for the Sala in its comparatively limited setting may present a scheme almost as extensive pictorially, and as complicated in iconology, as the Sistine Chapel decorations of the previous decade – and possibly still more recondite. But this much is clear, that a number of symbolic values may be associated with the various subjects; and that among these occur coincidences so precise, and reciprocals of meaning so cogently interlocked, that the existence of an underlying theme can be inferred – specifically, a theme which centres on the Church.

Let us first consider what the wall-frescoes themselves may suggest to the attentive

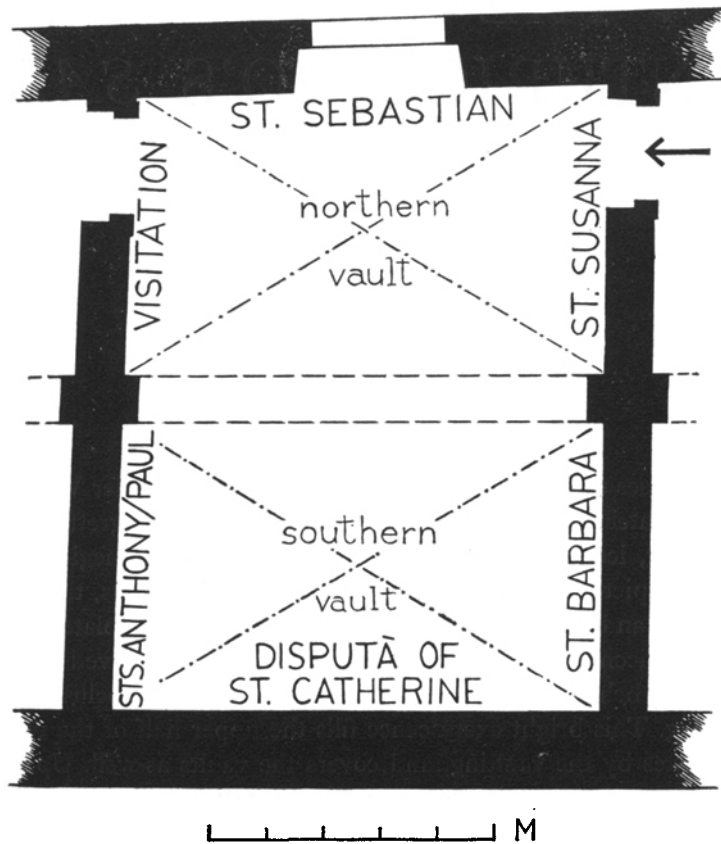


Fig. 1 Plan of the Sala dei Santi, Vatican.

viewer. As a broad common denominator, five of the six histories show saints delivered from tribulations of one kind or another. Thus the aged hermits, Saints Paul and Anthony, are miraculously fed by the raven in a (theoretically) barren desert. Under a more lethal threat of destruction, St Catherine defeats in argument the pagan emperor and his fifty philosophers, as promised by the angel. The event of deliverance is most graphically depicted in the next fresco, where St Barbara eludes her homicidal father as the latter, confounded, dashes off in the wrong direction. St Susanna is shown at the inception of her ordeal, accosted by the false judges, but in the background we find her extraordinary salvation by the infant Daniel. And lastly, St Sebastian stands an unresisting target for the archers, raptly insouciant in his ordeal – and soon to enjoy a miraculous recuperation at the hands of St Irene (despite the angel who alludes to his ultimate reward). Thus five of the frescoes hold in common a similar theme, which we may formulate provisionally in these terms: the Lord delivers His saints in time of difficulty. This motto, however, suggests only the literal significance of the scenes. I will propose hereafter that the miraculous rescue of the saints – these are significantly not

scenes of martyrdom – from physical threat or difficulty symbolizes divine assistance to Ecclesia in her temporal guise.

The Visitation (plate 14) seems at first not to accommodate itself to generalization, for the meeting of Mary and St Elizabeth involves no rescue from mortal threat or tribulation. As a subject, it is fraught with manifold themes – of humility and joyful praise, of homage, of the recognition of Christ, and of the complex workings of the Holy Spirit – none of which appeals immediately for alliance with the other frescoes. Yet, sensible within its tautly interwoven symbolism, there are allusions to divine assistance. The grandest of these reverberates throughout – that of Christ presented here as *Salvator Mundi* for the first time to human witness, to St Elizabeth and the unborn precursor. The Bible elaborates upon the significance of this miraculous *adventus* in the words of Mary herself. She magnifies the Lord that she in her humble station bears the Saviour, and enumerates how, the Saviour having come, the Lord rescues the faithful from their tribulations. In fact, the examples she gives could virtually have supplied the subjects for the other wall-histories, the verses serving as *tituli* one-by-one.⁵ Also linked to the Visitation are less exalted themes of divine aid and succour (as distinct from deliverance), specifically, those of Mary's ministrations to the aged Elizabeth in her travail,⁶ and of Christ (sometimes conjoint with Mary) aiding St John by sanctifying him for the arduous mission to come.⁷ A stress in the *Visitation* fresco upon either St Elizabeth or her unborn son would be unusual; it would seem an undue emphasis, tipping the grand balance of thematic weight which is in the event. But the fresco itself gives evidence of such an emphasis. In the background, behind the two holy women, St Elizabeth appears again, holding the new-born Baptist in a situation of immediate peril – the soldiers of Herod – from which divine intervention will rescue them.⁸ This small secondary incident may well be taken as a gloss on the central theme of divine aid to St Elizabeth and/or St John; and both events may, ultimately, bear reference to the 'deliverance' verses of the Visitation text.

Despite these prospective solutions, the *Visitation* remains an obtrusive element in the series of wall-frescoes, given the weight and thematic complexity of its subject, and the presence of the Virgin as protagonist; also because neither St Elizabeth nor John the Baptist is exposed to any physical danger or difficulty in the central occurrence. The fresco seems to require some specific and limited interpretation if it is to fit into the room (in fact, Steinmann believed that it was shunted into its place from the neighbouring Sala dei Misteri).⁹ As a result, we are led to suspect that the *Visitation* is an important key to the entire programme. If we can explain its true significance, the rest may follow.

At this point, it is necessary to turn from the room itself to evidence of a written kind. The Feast of the Visitation held a particular import for the papacy at the time of Alexander's election, that of a plea to the Virgin. It solicited her to make a visitation to the Church – as she had to St Elizabeth and John the Baptist – to lend assistance in the struggles of the Church against her heretical foes. Perhaps for this reason, the feast had become, in that era of schisms preceding Alexander's rise, something of an issue, a liturgical bone of contention in the struggle over the most crucial considerations – which pope, which Ecclesia? It was first established in the bitterest depths of the Great Schism

(1389);¹⁰ was confirmed by the rump Council of Basle (1441);¹¹ re-published by Nicholas V (1451);¹² and finally, re-confirmed in more 'embellished' form by Sixtus IV (1475).¹³ At first, the foes of Ecclesia were understood to be schismatics within the Church;¹⁴ in the promulgations of 1475, however, they were redefined as the infidel Mohammedan Turks then assaulting Christendom from the east.¹⁵

The last of the bulls, published less than twenty years before the decoration of the Sala and, in fact, probably drafted under Alexander's own supervision,¹⁶ was accompanied by an encyclical in which Sixtus IV enlarges upon the reasons for re-establishing the feast, and develops the earlier Visitation symbolism in certain clear and particular terms: for instance, it is hoped that the Virgin in making a second visitation will trample on the mountains infested by the rabid infidels (just as once she had trodden across the Judean mountains to visit St Elizabeth;¹⁷ and St Elizabeth is asserted to be a type of the Church: the text refers to 'Ecclesia Christi . . . cuius typum gerebat Elizabeth'. The Latin phrasing thus draws attention to the significance which St Elizabeth bears as a type. As such she figures in an extended simile: the Church, having been made fecund by the Holy Spirit (as had been St Elizabeth), has conceived all the faithful in her womb and is going to give birth to them; the impious enemy seeks to abort the souls in the womb of the Church with sword and fire; but if the voice of Mary's greeting were to sound in the ears of the Church, the offspring in her womb would leap for joy at the approach of the Lord (obviously, as had John the Baptist at the Visitation).¹⁸

We have observed that St Elizabeth was not subject to any danger or tribulation at the time of the Visitation. But in the 1475 encyclical, she symbolizes the Church in greatest distress and so brings the fresco into accord with the generic theme we have described in the wall-histories – that of the saints rescued in time of difficulty.¹⁹ We may suppose that the depiction of Mary's coming to St Elizabeth, taken as literal narrative, does illustrate this theme directly if imperfectly, so that the picture rounds out the wall-histories in a consistent way. The encyclical certainly permits this inference; still more immediately, it explains the presence of the little scene to the rear, included as an additional, on-site clue to expose the theme and its symbolism more clearly: for St Elizabeth and the new-born St John (that is, the Church and the souls in her bosom) flee the enemies of the Christian name. Most importantly, the encyclical leaves the *Visitation* fresco pregnant of deeper meaning for the entire cycle, imbuing it with a symbolism of Ecclesia, Mohammedan threat, and deliverance fervently prayed-for. Indeed, in two other histories of the Sala, an almost identical set of values is enunciated quite expressly, as we shall discover shortly.²⁰

Susanna of Babylon can be considered a saint,²¹ but her appearance with other saints in a full-scale mural decoration (plate 15) is exceptional. As an exemplar of chastity, she is well-suited to assume a symbolic role as the bride of Christ, as Ecclesia. She is so considered by St Isidore and Rabanus Maurus,²² perhaps on the basis of the standard patristic exposition by St Hippolytus, in which the entire Susanna episode is endowed with an ecclesiastical symbolism.²³ In the latter case, the story becomes a precisely apt illustration of the Visitation values: Susanna is equated with the Church imperilled; the garden, so extensively particularized in the fresco, refers to all the souls in the Church;

and the two Elders are likened to nations, Jewish and Gentile, hostile to the Church (just as the 1475 encyclical describes the threat of the infidel Mohammedan hordes). Since all this is so apposite to the text of the encyclical, it seems inescapable that the history of Susanna was placed opposite the *Visitation* by design, serving to reflect the latter's meaning in a very direct fashion.

To recapitulate briefly, the several promulgations of pope and council serve to confirm that, at their most rudimentary level, the wall-histories expand on a common theme – the Lord's deliverance of His saints in distress. Indeed, the *Visitation* fresco, to which the documents directly apply, represents Ecclesia's votive call for divine assistance. Placed where it is seen immediately by the viewer upon entering, it provides as it were the text of the Sala; while the other wall-histories illustrate that text in a quite literal way (perhaps even picturing the five 'rescue' verses of the biblical narrative).²⁴ The programme, however, is fundamentally concerned with the deliverance of Ecclesia. The *Visitation* and *Susanna* frescoes complement each other at this level of meaning: they are pendant in their location opposite each other, and in their significance, one rendering the other in more understandable terms.

Completing the iconological core of the programme is a third painting, *The Disputà of St Catherine* (plate 16). It also refers to the salvation of a beleaguered Church, and with the other two frescoes, confirms our proposed theme by a triangulation of meaningful placement: for, staged impressively across the broad end wall, the *Disputà* describes in precise terms a final resolution of the Church's difficulties, and forms thereby the culminating scene of the entire programme.

The importance of the *Disputà* is emphasized by its size and location. It occupies the largest field of the entire apartment and is placed at the end of the room, receiving light directly from the window. The indispensable clue to its meaning is found in the triumphal arch modelled in high relief upon the wall, and situated with great prominence in the centre of the scene. The viewer quickly recognizes the arch as that of Constantine, at which point an inconsistency emerges; for the monument is not displayed in Rome, but in the city of Alexandria (where the story of St Catherine unfolds). The arch thus makes a forcible demand upon our attention, appearing to assert an important theme. Specifically, of course, it refers to the battle of the Milvian Bridge and recalls that Constantine defeated there the anti-Christian armies of Maxentius. Fixing these references beyond doubt in our fresco, is the fact that St Catherine – who was a niece of Constantine – is shown here confronting Maxentius himself.²⁵ Thus in surveying the fresco, we understand that while the unflinching maiden fails to dissuade the Tetrarch (who was then persecuting the Christians with unspeakable ferocity) from the worship of his pagan gods, her uncle Constantine will defeat and bring him to death.²⁶ The context therefore reinforces the most literal meanings of the monument, which signifies first and foremost the theme of victory over a pernicious foe, and thereby evokes resounding echoes throughout the programme of the Sala. In an extended sense, it alludes to the triumphant emergence of Christianity in the early fourth century. Constantine was remembered as the first Christian emperor, and his victory over Maxentius had always been constructed in terms of an intervention, by miracle, on behalf of the Christian Church, in which

Constantine acted as the instrument of the Lord and subsequently, having recognized His divine assistance, bestowed upon the Church the official recognition and support of the empire.²⁷ Therefore, by translating the arch into the history of St Catherine, a number of specific meanings are crystallized in a form highly relevant to the Sala. They correspond to basic components of the 1475 encyclical: to divine assistance in favour of a troubled Church and to the defeat of pagan armies. Indeed, the arch refers to the great, historic pattern of such events. The happenings of 312-13 – of pivotal importance in Church history – ushered in a golden era of tranquillity, in which the various parts of the Church were united in one harmonious Body of Christ.²⁸

Clothed in its wealth of meanings, the arch exists in a future realm within the *Disputa* as an answer to the supplications of a persecuted Church. Here then is the outcome for which the Sala prays – a new triumphant recognition of the Church, involving, for Alexander's day (according to the 1475 encyclical), a conclusive defeat of the Mohammedan Turks. To make these ecclesiastical goals clear as such, Alexander has appropriated the arch to himself: the ox, symbol of the Borgia papacy, is placed atop its attic; and a motto of Alexander's, PACIS CULTORI – suitable to a triumphal arch – is applied in hopeful reference to a new reign of peace.²⁹ Thus we are given to understand that the victory is that of the Church, with particular emphasis, of course, upon its accomplishment by Alexander.³⁰ Moreover, we are reminded that the enemy is the Mohammedan Turk by the nobles of Maxentius' court, who are dressed in contemporary Turkish costume, authentic, not romantically invented.³¹ Prince Djem, brother of the Sultan himself, may possibly be described in the hawk-faced horseman at the right side; there is, at the least, an old rumour of his presence in the fresco.³²

A final note on the Mohammedan issue. It concerns the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, the most profoundly moving of all victories over the Islamic foe, which culminated 800 years of struggle and left the Cross supreme over all of Alexander's native land. Word of this conquest resounded through Europe in the winter of 1491-2, when the Moorish stronghold of Granada fell to the armies of Ferdinand and Isabella. The capitulation took place on 25 November, that is, the feast day of St Catherine.³³ Potentially, the triumph at Granada held a double relevance for the programme of the Sala. On one hand, it represented a major victory over the Mohammedans, assuming a special significance in Christian eyes as a compensation for the loss of Constantinople.³⁴ On the other hand, it touched Alexander personally, and not merely as a son of Valencia. For it was a late consequence of his diplomatic mission to Spain, undertaken in 1472-3 in order to raise support and funds for a Turkish crusade, and also, in a collateral effort, to unite the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon.³⁵ On first hearing the news of surrender, Alexander must have considered St Catherine's day to mark not only a profound turning of eras, but an event of great personal satisfaction. This may be the germ whence the first inspiration for the Sala was to spring. In any case, some eighteen months later, when it came to planning the largest pictorial field of his new apartment, that space was allocated to St Catherine. Thus the inclusion of the triumphal arch in this particular history not only evokes recollections of a recent victory over the Mohammedans in Spain, but also promises a future victory over the great Turkish sultanate centred at Constantinople.

II

With the subject matter of the six wall-histories, we are on familiar ground. Moreover, the essential significance of the programme is established by a series of papal bulls and encyclicals, and by traditional, well-defined meanings. Hence the peculiarities – and there are several – stand out all the more conspicuously, and yet are likewise to be explained by traditional means. In this, and in their similar significance, they serve to confirm and even emphasize the basic meanings of the programme.

The ceiling is a different matter. It presents in the Isis-Osiris cycle an extraordinary novelty of subject whose meaning, failing discovery of the original *libretto*, is likely to remain inexact for the modern viewer. Hence we can attempt only to approximate the values of the programme here, and rather cautiously at that. A hypothesis can be derived from a study of the ancient sources – there are only two or three upon which the ceiling could have been based (that is, Diodorus, Plutarch, and Tibullus)³⁶ – with the assistance of a new rendition of the Isis-Osiris myths that was produced in Alexander's circle; and by considering these sources within the context of the wall-programme. From such a line of approach, we observe at the start that the ceiling is consonant with a general theme of divine assistance: the northern vault is devoted to the activities of Osiris in favour of a troubled mankind; the southern vault illustrates the ministrations of Isis to her murdered spouse, whose reincarnation she secures.³⁷

In the ancient sources Osiris is seen as the great benefactor of mankind. He appeared during a long-distant era of great brutality, of cannibalism and lawlessness among men, bringing peace to all nations by an army which eschewed the military arts and taught those of agriculture instead.³⁸ After an introductory scene in which Osiris, having shed the accoutrements of war, marries Isis, the three succeeding fields of the northern vault depict his benevolent tutelage: he teaches mankind the cultivation of grain and of the vine, and the gathering of fruit. Hence the vault is devoted to the basic significance of Osiris' reign, to his peaceful – and pacifying – activities.³⁹

These deeds are recounted with tireless perseverance in the *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII*⁴¹ of Giovanni Nanni, who was personal secretary to Alexander. That the *Antiquitates* assigns to Osiris the central role in ancient history, with special emphasis on the civilizing of Italy, serves to explain the unexpected appearance at this time and place of a large-scale, pictorial cycle devoted to Osiris. It is not, itself, the basis of the programme; for it masquerades pompously as objective history⁴¹ – a register of the most remote antiquity – as the Sala could not. But in view of Nanni's long and conspicuous presence as theologian at the Vatican court, and as a humanist specializing in things Egyptian (whence his inflated prestige on the European stage), the *Antiquitates* must be considered a valuable guide to the Isis-Osiris myth as conceived in the 1490s, in the cultural environment of the Sala itself. In this, his major work, Nanni engages in an extensive scholarly flim-flam; but his strange, ingenious study and the more legitimate programme of the Sala are closely related off-spring – non-identical twins – of the same mentality, even the same mind.

In his account of Osiris, Nanni makes one major departure from the ancient sources. He describes the Egyptian king as a martial leader who repeatedly warred with and expelled the tyrannical giants as he entered new territories, always in prologue to the introduction of a rustic civilization.⁴² Hence, throughout the ceiling, the role of Osiris as the great deliverer of mankind – the prototypical hero (inherent in the antique tales, explicit in Nanni) – is accented by the four statues surmounting his various thrones and conveyances. They represent heroes and heroines, two Jewish and two Greek, who saved their people in time of distress – namely, Judith and David, Hercules and Theseus.⁴³

At its most literal level, the northern vault entertains us with tales of a king, whether mythical god or hero, who lends his assistance to a troubled mankind; hence *Salvator Orbis* is one of his epithets, according to Nanni.⁴⁴ We need not here labour the face value of this rough analogue to the wall-histories below, but what of its deeper significance? I intend to suggest, hereafter, that Osiris alludes in some way prototypically to a triumphant papacy (wishfully embodied in Alexander), and, by extension, to an Ecclesia prevailing in all parts of Italy or of Christendom – or even the entire world.⁴⁵ Precisely how the original programme may have verbalized this I would not hazard to say; but Nanni's mythology of Osiris helps in reaching at least a broad approximation of meanings. The central theme of the *Antiquitates* responds automatically to that of the 1475 encyclical and its visual elaboration in the *Disputa* – as, I suspect, it did for Nanni, who surely brought the two themes together. In the paramount act of his reign, Osiris came to the aid of suffering Italy which cried out piteously for deliverance from the giants who are described as evil and impious tyrants who had laid hold of and oppressed the Italian realm;⁴⁶ and Alexander comes as newly elected pope to a comparable situation: to an Ecclesia pleading for divine assistance against the Turkish depredations (which at times had penetrated into Italy itself).⁴⁷ Similarly, the outcome – Osiris' expulsion of the foe and his establishment of an empire of universal peace – is comparable to Alexander's dream of a triumphant Christendom (achieved, of course, with divine assistance). Though not depicted in the northern vault, the preliminary martial phase of the Osiris story certainly forms a residuum in the scenes of peace, as part of the multi-faceted analogy to Alexander's circumstances and goals – an analogy which is sustained within the Constantinian context evoked by the arch of the *Disputa*.

The specific link in the equation is found in the Apis bull. In the antique legends, he was the animal of Osiris, and appropriately so, a benign creature who aided mankind in carrying out the agricultural advice of the kingly benefactor.⁴⁸ In him and his descendants did Osiris return reincarnated;⁴⁹ or, according to Nanni's 'historical' account, Apis was a cognomen for the living Osiris throughout most of the ancient world.⁵⁰ Yet simultaneously for Nanni, he was a mythical ancestor of the Borgia bull – Alexander being descended from Osiris himself!⁵¹ – a notion we shall find declared visually at one point in the southern vault.⁵² Consequently, in the scene of the *Disputa*, when we discover the ox as the Borgia symbol triumphant atop the Arch of Constantine (representing the great victory over the tyrant Maxentius), we understand its reference to Osiris–Apis and to his deeds, both implicitly to his triumph over the giants and more openly to his activities in

the northern vault.⁵³ The motto below the Borgia bull, *PACIS CULTORI*, may therefore be taken in a virtually literal sense: he is the cultivator of peace, as if in reference to the Apis bull in his most humble guise. But the relationship can be framed in broader terms. Given the thematic concentration of the vault, with its four peaceful scenes abstracted from the elaborate Osiris story, one can hardly avoid sensing in that distant *pax osiridis* a prophetic allusion to the world-wide *pax christiana* of the Constantinian age (intended as a direct allusion, I suspect), and, thus by extension, to that which Alexander will 'cultivate'.

It would be ill-advised to pursue these mutual references further than required to make the basic point; there is no reason to suppose the author of the programme did. But one datum of external evidence calls for mention. Comments in the *Antiquitates* upon any post-antique topics are rare in the extreme. There occur, however, a few references to the Borgia popes, Callixtus III and Alexander, and in these Nanni is concerned exclusively with their role as leaders of Christendom against the Mohammedan Turks. Thus he mentions Callixtus as notable for expelling the Turks from Pannonia and from Hungary, and for establishing the Feast of the Transfiguration to celebrate the latter victory.⁵⁴ For Alexander, Nanni foresees a like destiny. Significantly, for our hypotheses, in the passage closing out the *Antiquitates*, he thinks in terms of the Osirian empire as a model for Alexander's projected Christendom. He notes that in the inaugural year of his reign, Alexander and the curia were present at a site near Vetulonia, when there occurred the unearthing of certain antique remains – sacred statues and triumphal ornaments of the ancient Italic kings – which had survived from the empire of Osiris.⁵⁵ It seems a weak, almost extraneous ending to his lucubrations on antiquity, until the reader recalls that Nanni, in an earlier passage,⁵⁶ had taken the event as an augury that the new pope would enlarge Christendom – obviously in likeness to Osiris expanding his dominion throughout Italy and beyond. Thus the central episode of ancient civilization was to be re-enacted by Alexander and the Church.

III

In recreating a benevolent reign of peace founded by Osiris for the relief of a desperate mankind, the scenes of the northern vault form a compact and meaningful entity. Not quite so apparent is a unity of theme in the neighbouring vault. If we have been correct to this point, however, its four histories may be construed under the rubric of Isis' assistance to her spouse. Although the sequence begins with the assassination of Osiris and concludes with his triumphal reinstatement (in reincarnated form as the Apis bull), the true protagonist is the Egyptian queen: through her efforts is Osiris regenerated, and his foe, the evil Typhon, defeated.⁵⁷ But all our foregoing argumentation contends for a still deeper coherence of purpose; and there is some reason to believe that, here as well, behind the rather simple iconographical import, reflections more specific and complex can be traced of the wall-programme – once, that is, values associable with Osiris are explored at greater length.

We may be confident that the author of the programme gave serious consideration to Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, for that treatise is devoted to the two Egyptian deities, to their complex tales and interpretations; and indeed it has left traces on the ceiling of its consultation.⁵⁸ Plutarch's own views are given high visibility in a cardinal passage opening the study, and are thereafter reinforced as occasion permits. Most importantly, he (and only he) treats the myths as allegories, and in terms of a religio-spiritual significance inviting their application to a Christian programme. But Diodorus also makes an important contribution here. He affords much material of a purely narrative nature that can be taken as buttressing Plutarch's ideas, especially the point with which we begin – the view that Osiris represents an active force in advancing knowledge and the worship of the highest Deity.

Both Plutarch and Diodorus view the Egyptian king and queen as beneficent daemons who assist in disclosing the gods to mankind. As latter-day Greek writers they describe the divinities or the highest spiritual truths – Plutarch's 'the First' and 'the Lord' – as residing above and at some remove from Isis and Osiris, but as nevertheless revealed through their activities. Specifically, according to Plutarch, it was Osiris who 'taught [the Egyptians] to worship gods'.⁵⁹ And says Diodorus, 'he also made golden chapels for the rest of the gods mentioned above, allotting honours to each of them and appointing priests to have charge over these'.⁶⁰

At one point, the venerable Nanni takes up this theme, though in connection with Osiris' disseminating knowledge of grain. He surmises that the Egyptian king may have played a role in revealing matters of dogma and sacrament to Melchizadek, priest of the most high God – for Melchizadek employed 'deified and sacerdotal' bread in sacrifice, thereby prophesying 'salvation from death caused by the blindness of souls'.⁶¹ In this way Nanni toys with assigning to Osiris a prototypical reference to the Christian priesthood. Also reflective of his role in furthering true religion is Nanni's more general, pervasive view of Osiris as the enemy of evil, who 'declared war on the impious throughout the world' – one of the most persistent leitmotifs of the *Antiquitates*.⁶²

In the weightiest interpretation of all, Plutarch asserts that Osiris in his earthly form represents the Logos, although not in its most sublime existence, eternal and undefiled, for he specifies that Osiris' dismemberment symbolizes the tearing-up of the sacred Word, the 'lore of the gods'.⁶³ In such a proposition, I believe, the author of the Sala programme, who was an ecclesiastic, let us remember, concerned with a Vatican setting, would have found it easy to discover in Osiris an aspect referring to sacred religious doctrine. In the basic passage opening his study, Plutarch frames his view of Osiris in a broader context.⁶⁴ He considers the actors of the ancient myth (including Isis and Typhon) as personifying three primal religio-spiritual factors, a triad of elements which interact cyclically throughout history. Clearly, Osiris embodies religious truth. Typhon, an evil and destructive agent, 'destroys and scatters the sacred Word', just as he had slaughtered Osiris in the myth; indeed, he is all but directly, if not absolutely portrayed as the enemy of true religion. Opposing him is Isis, who 'collects and puts together and delivers' the sacred Word [as she had fused together the mutilated body of Osiris],⁶⁵ showing divine objects to the priests who 'carry in their soul, as in a box

[again a reference to Osiris],⁶⁶ the sacred lore about the gods' free from superstition.

The second vault of the Sala is dedicated to the elemental drama of this interaction, to the death and dismemberment of Osiris at the hands of Typhon, the subsequent ministrations of Isis, and the regeneration and triumph of Osiris-as-Apis. This selection of events makes for a tight thematic concentration. Shearing away endless divagations of the story, it centres upon those fatal, climactic events which underlie Plutarch's allegorical view of the legend.⁶⁷ At the same time, construed in such terms the vault contains all the elements needed for a balanced equation with the programme of the walls; indeed, if our understanding of that programme is valid, it sanctions the specific application of the Osiris myth to the Ecclesia-Mohammedan conflict, and in a pattern of meanings modelled upon those of the *Disputa*. Thus I propose that Osiris, as a ruler who taught the worship of the gods and fought the impious, who established a priesthood, and who himself embodied the religious dogma entrusted to that priesthood, personifies an organized religion and therefore, typologically, the Christian Church. This proposition tends to sustain, and borrow support from, the churchly references we earlier discerned in Osiris, in the northern vault. And in view of Nanni's particular emphasis on Osiris' attacking impiety by arms throughout the world, he may be taken to symbolize, by extension, the Church militant in the temporal arena. The rest falls easily into place. As a corollary, I infer that Isis refers to the Virgin, and that her various ministrations on behalf of Osiris should be understood as assistance to the Church;⁶⁸ and that Typhon, the violent foe of the sacred Word, represents anti-Christian forces – 'an impious enemy . . . swollen with rabid fury against the Christian name' (to adopt the wording of the 1475 encyclical).⁶⁹

This hypothesis works reasonably well in reading the vault sequentially, and may even embrace the entire ceiling. We have earlier observed that the reign of Osiris, as shown in the northern vault, may allude to the world-wide tranquillity enjoyed by the Church during the Constantinian era (a tranquillity which Alexander proposed to recover). The peace is broken in the initial scene of the southern vault, *The Assassination of Osiris*, by Typhon. This malevolent daemon kills and dismembers Osiris much as the Mohammedans threaten to destroy Christendom.

In *The Restoration and Rites of Osiris' Body* are depicted the ministrations of Isis. She gathers the scattered limbs of Osiris and inters them – actually fusing them together (as our sources tell us) – and so prepares his regeneration. This can simply refer to the Virgin's solicitude for the Church, but in the context of Alexander's papacy, it may well involve the re-integration of all those parts of the Church lost by sword and flame to the Moslems (just as Eusebius describes how the sundered limbs of the Body of Christ were reunited in A.D. 312-13).⁷⁰

In the third compartment, *The Advent of the Apis*, we find the successful outcome of Isis' ministrations – the re-emergence of Osiris as the Apis bull (representing a miraculously restored Church), to whom a universal homage is made. The earlier victory of Isis over the armies of Typhon is not shown,⁷¹ but it is unmistakably referred to in several details: in the military standard which Isis holds, marked with the hawk of Osiris (?); and in the mutilated torso of Typhon who, propped amid the discarded implements

of war, is forced into an enraged acknowledgement of the Apis. The downfall of Typhon foretells defeat for the Mohammedan Turks; obeisance to the Apis promises a world-wide recognition of the Church.

The fourth and concluding field of the vault depicts *The Procession of the Apis*. Here the transmogrified Osiris is shown engaged (apparently) in a priestly function of some significance. According to the inscription,⁷² his procession among the populace was preliminary – and perhaps prerequisite – to the worship of the gods;⁷³ his elect and ecclesiastical status is confirmed by the papal insignia born by children preceding the train.⁷⁴ But the scene was also conceived to imply, as a kind of visual homonym, a celebration of the recent ascendancy of Apis–Osiris over his enemies (and, symbolically, of the Church over the Moslems), for he is elevated in honour as his procession moves amongst the people. In view of these features and, most importantly, the position of the scene in the narrative sequence of the vault, there is little doubt that *The Procession* depicts the triumphal resumption by Apis–Osiris of his place in the exercise of true religion.

These meanings are reinforced by the location of *The Procession* just above and to one side of the *Disputà*, in which, as we have seen, the Arch of Constantine proclaims the victory of Ecclesia in no uncertain terms. In their proximity, these two final frescoes draw for us the equation of Osiris-as-Apis with the Church in an extraordinary visual syllogism: just as the Apis bull, one of an unbroken succession of bulls, is capstone of the Egyptian system of worship (and, we believe, personifies that system), so the papal insignia – the Borgia bull – stands emblematic of the Christian Church in its triumph. Both are bulls, both are raised aloft in triumphal honour; and the connection of the two symbols,⁷⁵ one the distant ancestor of the other,⁷⁶ is stressed by the procession of the Apis down the slope of the vault towards the *Disputà* (as seen from the middle of the room), preceded by the Borgia device. Therefore, as in the walls below, placement reinforces the sense of the programme: the two iconographical systems converge in two culminating scenes of similar import and, at this one point of almost physical tangency, mesh with precision.⁷⁷

IV

In this study, we have relied upon a number of indirect sources at various removes from the Sala, trying to infer by blind reckoning the specifics of the programme. Doubtless the method and results are both imprecise (but not necessarily invalid); and therefore some idea of the likelihood of our conclusions would be welcome. With this in mind, a few summarizing comments are offered here upon methodological validity, and upon the plausibility of our solutions in terms of the historical context.

I have attempted to make an approximation, and only that, of the iconological values of the ceiling, assuming that (in view of the setting) a Christian significance is likely, and seeking, by recourse to Nanni's *Antiquitates*, to generalize some essentials of the Isis–Osiris legend within the context of values defined by the wall paintings. Poten-

tial dangers attend this method. The recorded tales are extremely intricate and overlapping, and fouled in a complex of possible interpretations (including the extensive array catalogued by Plutarch), offering the opportunity to piece out and shape the material at will, and at various possible levels of meaning. In such treacherous shoals, the historian might easily founder amid a new 'Nannism' five hundred years after the original fact (or may only seem to, since Nanni himself was probably the author of the programme). But it must be emphasized that the author, whoever he may have been, has himself made a very concentrated selection of events – in both the northern and southern vaults – and in this has provided some useful intimations of his purpose. Moreover, this selection and our interpretation of it are in close congruence with Plutarch's allegorical view of the legends. If the ceiling has any meaning beyond that of mere illustration Plutarch is surely relevant, for, as we have observed, his is the only significant, ancient interpretation of the Isis–Osiris myth known to the Renaissance; and it was unquestionably known to the author of the programme.

This study has attempted to show that the Sala is concerned with an Ecclesia in great difficulty, menaced by the Islamic foe; and that the Plutarchian allegory is made to bear reference to this theme. Both these issues we have assessed in terms of their internal validity. But what of our hypotheses in the historical setting of the Sala? I have suggested that the recent fall of Granada may have provided the inspiration for the invention of the programme; but as to any specific date or event in Alexander's life as pontiff or private individual which may have occasioned that programme, I can shed no light. At the least, however, we may observe that its themes are quite plausible in a Vatican context of the late Quattrocento.

It hardly needs emphasizing that the Mohammedan threat had formed the main preoccupation of the papacy during the previous four decades, ever since the Turks had engulfed Constantinople. The Vatican, like the nerve-centre of a sprawling, ill-knit, and unresponsive Christendom, was itself jolted by the Turkish attacks, and galvanized into a series of abortive efforts at retaliation – attempts at councils and armadas, congresses and crusades. Circumstance demanded that every pope deal with the Turkish question, and Alexander was no exception. Indeed, his personality and past career would lead one to expect the Borgia pope, of all pontiffs, to give high priority to a crusade. He had been among the cardinals who joined Pius II at Ancona in 1464 ready to embark with the fleet, when the pope's death forestalled that ill-conceived venture; he had donated a galley to the cause, at a cost of very considerable financial strain.⁷⁸ Again, in 1472–3, in an initiative towards a crusade, he had conducted his great diplomatic mission to Spain.⁷⁹ And upon his accession to the papal throne, he had stressed a crusade against the infidels as a major, even primary goal of his reign.⁸⁰

Thirty-five years before, Callixtus III, uncle of Alexander, who had brought him to Rome and made him cardinal, had emphasized the Turkish crusade as the overriding concern of his brief papacy; and Alexander, as newly elected pope, vowed on several occasions that he intended to emulate the policy of Callixtus.⁸¹ But such a statement of anti-Turkish intentions was hardly exceptional. His own past history and concerns were joined here to general precedent, for every pope of the second half of the Quattrocento

began his reign with strenuous asseverations of a policy to answer the Mohammedans. Thus it may not be merely coincidental that the Sala was mapped out early in his reign, probably within the first eight or nine months.⁸² This suggests the hypothesis – no more than tentative – that it reflects an official theme for Alexander's reign as announced at its inception.

With all its heady implications of politics on a vast scale, of Ecclesia leading the temporal powers, and of the pope supreme, the programme of the Sala would be consistent with the well-defined picture we possess of Alexander's temperament. His successful role as Vice-Chancellor under five popes tells of his affinity for power and practical affairs. Pragmatic by nature and immensely energetic, his ambitions only expanded on reaching the papal throne; neither scholar, nor reformer, nor pious devotionalist, he was most concerned with the political fortunes of his papacy. Nevertheless, the Sala should not be taken as a direct expression of Alexander's purely private will to imperium. Whatever motivations underlay its thematic choice, by its own credentials it forms, pictorially, the culmination of a forty-year concern of the Vatican with the Turkish threat.

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NOTES

- 1 To my knowledge, only Saxl has made an effort to unravel the iconological problems. Suggesting that the wall-frescoes refer to the Seven Virtues, even he expressed doubt regarding his hypothesis. See F. Saxl, *Lectures*, I, London, 1957, 174–88 (especially pages 177 and 181–5).
- 2 It is virtually certain that the apartment, or, more specifically, the sequence of five full-size private chambers of that apartment (plus Alexander's two small personal *cubicula* to one side?), was painted between the winter of 1492–3 and that of 1494–5. The dating is commonly, and perhaps universally, accepted, on the basis of reasonably firm documentation (assembled by W. Bombe, *Geschichte der Peruginer Malerei bis zu Perugino und Pinturicchio*, Berlin, 1912, 224–7).
- 3 The pictorial decoration includes some minor elements: (A) five small frescoes concerning the earlier history of Isis, which are located on the underside of the arch separating the two vaults; and (B) a tondo of the Virgin and Child set above the entrance door and below the cornice of the room (hence below the large-scale picture fields), which – in view of its shape and placement – seems to have no connection with the larger complex, as if it partook of the nature of a portable painting.
- 4 Some of the vicissitudes of the apartment during the Cinquecento and thereafter are sketched out by C. Ricci in *Pinturicchio*, London, 1902, 87–90.
- 5 See Luke 1:46–55 – that is, the Magnificat and the subsequent 'rescue' passage. Although the latter verses (1:50–5) tend to receive less attention than the Magnificat, they constitute an indispensable complement to it, and were the subject of commentary by many of the great theologians. They refer in very concrete fashion to the ultimate act of divine assistance – to salvation itself – which forms a ground-swell of meaning close to the surface of the entire Visitation event. The significance of these verses is identical to our hypothesized theme for the wall-histories, i.e. that of divine assistance to the faithful in

distress; it is quite explicitly stated, and obviously consonant with the subject matter of the histories, even to the point of matching them, verse-to-painting. I cannot, however, present any evidence that the passage did in fact contribute to the Sala programme. Two observations are cause for some caution. First: were Luke 1:50-4 a basis of the programmatic text, the room would present an entirely new, visual exposition of the verses (not, in my view, beyond the inventive bravado of its author); and second: it would involve an apparently weak link with regard to the fresco of St Sebastian (noted below. To scan the verse-fresco correlation:

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation (Luke 1:50). Any of the five frescoes might illustrate this verse, but that of St Sebastian does so most aptly. A paradigm of those who witness for the faith, the saint was distinguished for exhorting martyrs to remain steadfast, as well as for bearing witness himself – as we see him here in the standard conception, suffering bodily for his fear of the Lord. Also, the treatment in the Sala would answer to the verse, with St Sebastian standing against the column of fortitude, the Colosseum visible in the distance, and the angel displaying the appropriate symbols.

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts (Luke 1:51). The picture of St Barbara may be related to this verse, in view of two aspects of the narrative which are emphasized here. First, the bronze tower in which Dioscoursus imprisoned his daughter dominates the scene, and displays the crevice which resulted when the Lord rent the tower with a thunderbolt. This could refer to the 'strength of his arm'. Second, the moment of confusion when St Barbara was miraculously spirited away is emphasized, with her father and his cohort confounded and starting off in the wrong direction. Hence an illustration of 'scattering the proud'.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree (Luke 1:52). In the story of St Catherine, we find the youthful saint besting in argument the Roman tetrarch upon his

throne (along with his fifty philosophers). This occurs with the divine assistance promised St Catherine in a vision the preceding night. Thus I suggest that the fresco relates to the phrase, 'put the mighty down from their seats'. Moreover, as pointed out later in the text, the Arch of Constantine in the background refers to the defeat of the tetrarch. The corollary phrase, 'exalted them of low degree', does not seem to have been considered.

He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away (Luke 1:53). Clearly, a divine gift of nourishment for those in need is illustrated in the fresco of the two hermit saints, Paul and Anthony, miraculously fed in the desert (although the converse, the denial of food to the rich, is not described).

He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy (Luke 1:54). In the story of St Susanna of Babylon, we are given the rare representation of an Old Testament (Apocryphal) saint who can represent the Jewish nation.

6 A sampling of passages that allude to Mary's mission of assistance is given here. St Ambrose, *Expositionis in Lucam*, II, 22: '... superior venit ad inferiorem, ut inferior adjuvetur: Maria ad Elizabeth, Christus ad Joannem' ('... the greater came to the lesser, that the lesser might be helped, Mary to Elizabeth, Christ to John'), in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus . . . series latina*, Paris, 1844 ff. XV, 1641. Bede, *Homiliae genuinae*, II: '... mulieri provectae aetatis virgo juvencula ministerium sedula impenderet' ('... a youthful maiden might diligently perform assistance to a woman of advanced age'), Migne, *PL*, XCIV, 15. St Peter Damian, *In Sermone de Nativitate Sancti Joannis Baptistae*: 'Nolebat itaque Maria discedere, donec grandaevae puerperae ministerium sedulitatis impenderet . . .' ('And so Mary was unwilling to go away until she gave the aged child-bearer the ministrations of her care . . .'), Migne, *PL*, CXLV, 899. Jacobus da Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 24 June: 'Then the Blessed Virgin dwelt with her kinswoman for three months, caring for her in waiting; and she it was who received the newborn child in her holy hands, and performed in his behalf the duties of a midwife,' *The*

- Golden Legend*, trans. G. Ryan and H. Ripperger, London, 1941, I, 323. From the office for the Feast of the Visitation composed by Cardinal Adam Easton for Boniface IX: 'Maria tribus mensibus / Quasi stetit laboribus / Elisabeth subdendo . . .' and 'Adjutrix visitatio / Et frequens ministratio / Elisabeth oblata . . .' ('For about three months, Mary continued in her labours by ministering to Elizabeth; and "The aiding visitation and frequent ministration offered to Elizabeth . . .'), G. M. Dreves, *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, Leipzig, 1886-1922, XXIV, 91. A fifteenth-century addition to the original office for the Feast of the Visitation: 'Regina caeli protulit / Ministram viliori, / Maria dat auxilium / Obstetricis, servitium / Ancillae suae thori' ('The Queen of Heaven offered herself as an attendant to a lesser one; Mary gave the aid of a midwife, and service at the couch of her own handmaiden'), Dreves, XXIV, 94.
- 7 We cite three examples of the theme from Church literature. Origen, *In Lucam homilia VII*: 'Jesus vero, qui in utero illius erat, festinabat adhuc in ventre matris Joannem positum sanctificare' ('Jesus, in truth, who was in her womb, was hurrying there to sanctify John [who had been] placed in his mother's womb'), in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus . . . series graeca*, Paris, 1857 ff., XIII, 1817. Ambrose, *Expositionis in Lucam*, II, 29-30, describes one result of the Visitation: 'Unguebatur itaque, et quasi bonus athleta exercebatur in utero matris propheta; amplissimo enim virtus ejus certamini parabatur;' and also, '. . . praesentia domini matris in utero roboratur . . .' ('And so the prophet was anointed and, just as a good athlete, was being exercised in his mother's womb; indeed, his strength was being prepared for his most glorious contest; and '. . . he is strengthened in his mother's womb by the presence of the Lord . . .'), Migne, *PL*, XV, 1643-4. Jacobus da Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 24 June: 'Then, when the salutation issued out of the body of our Lady, the greeting entered into the ears of the body of S. Elizabeth, and into her child that she had within her, which child was anoint of the blessed Holy Ghost, and, by the presence of our Lord, sanctified in the womb of his mother and replenished with grace . . .,' *The Golden Legend . . . as Englished by William Caxton*, London, 1900, III, 256.
- 8 Described in the *Protoevangelion*, XVI:1-8. The fleeing group is not the Holy Family. Comparison with the foreground figures reveals them to be Sts Elizabeth, Zacharias, and (therefore) John the Baptist, even though the *Protoevangelion* does not suggest that Zacharias departed with them.
- 9 See E. Steinmann, *Pinturicchio*, Leipzig, 1898, 60. It strikes me as implausible that the author of a large-scale, Renaissance pictorial programme in the Vatican would treat the project in such an off-hand manner as to include an extraneous subject on the walls (as Steinmann proposes), or give over the vaults to an unrelated, secular subject (as Saxl asserts on page 181). According to Saxl's hypothesis, the Egyptian cycle illustrates the ancient history of the bull, heraldic symbol of the Borgia; as an expression of family pride, it was applied like some elaborate, out-size bookplate to the ceiling.
- 10 Transcribed in Sebastiano Franco and Henrico Dalmazzo (eds), *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum pontificum . . .*, Turin, 1857-72, IV, 602-4.
- 11 G. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum, nova et amplissima collectio . . .*, Paris, 1900-27, XXIX, 211-13.
- 12 Franco and Dalmazzo, V, 106-7.
- 13 Odorico Rinaldi, *Annales ecclesiastici ab anno definit Card. Caes. Baronius . . .*, Cologne, 1691-1727, XIX, 263-4 (the year 1475, sections 34-6).
- 14 Rinaldi (XVII, 139: for the year 1389, section 3) assigns this significance to the establishment of the feast in 1389: '. . . ut beata Virgo suis precibus Ecclesiae unionem reformare, et reformatam conservare dignaretur' ('. . . so that the Blessed Virgin with her prayers might deign to restore the unity of the Church and preserve it restored'). See also Rinaldi, XVIII, 255 (for the year 1441, section 8): '. . . removendi schismatis causa fuerat concepta' ('. . . it [the bull] had been conceived for the sake of removing the Schism').
- The decree by the Council of Basle of 1441 (Mansi, XXIX, 212-13) states

- that the purpose of the feast concerns a church in difficult straits. It appears to expand the significance of the feast, praying to Mary for her aid against both the storms buffeting Ecclesia and the wars afflicting Christendom ('... pro dolor! Christianitas in laboribus et angustiis constituta cernatur, cumque fere ubique divisiones et bella . . . et ipsa etiam Ecclesia militans non mediocribus agitur procellis'). It may represent, therefore, something of a middle term between the bulls of 1389 and 1475, in which the emphasis is shifting from heretics creating schisms within the Church, to infidels assailing her from without. In this, the Visitation bulls reflect the changing nature of the trials confronting Ecclesia.
- 15 Rinaldi makes this observation in his introduction to the text of the bull (XIX, 263: the year 1475, section 34). It seems valid in view of an encyclical of Sixtus IV (*loc. cit.*, section 35) accompanying the bull itself, which explains the reasons for re-instituting the feast. It refers to '... publicus, ac impiissimus hostis . . . extinctis in utero foetibus ejus aut abortis, ferro atque igne populatam contendit delere de terra.' A major feast – with an octave for the universal church – re-established in 1475 can hardly have referred to any other conflict. It might have included the struggle against the Mohammedans in Spain, but so far as a transference of meanings to the Sala in 1492–4 is concerned, this is impossible since the Moors had been expelled from the peninsula a matter of months before Alexander's election to the papacy (partly as a result of his own efforts).
- 16 Alexander was working in the Vatican in 1475 when the Visitation bull was promulgated. He was in charge of the papal chancery, as indeed he was for thirty-five years (from 1457 to 1492), and was deeply involved in its day-to-day workings, even publishing a volume on chancery practice in 1487. The process of locating the earlier Visitation bulls and encyclicals, of preparing the latest version, and of issuing and registering it officially, involved some four or five of the chancery departments – there were six in all – under Alexander's immediate supervision (see Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI*, New York, 1924, II, 71–7). Of course, this only provides a possible occasion for Alexander to become acquainted with a symbolism directed against the Mohammedans. The Feast of the Visitation, however, seems to have been sufficiently noteworthy that he would probably have known of its significance anyway; so too, probably, would Nanni da Viterbo, celebrated humanist and theologian at the Vatican court for many years, and likely author of the Sala programme (see pages 15–16).
- 17 '... si videlicet ad hanc revisendam calcatis montibus, qui rabido tumentes nomini Christiano infesti sunt, Maria . . . descenderit'. The encyclical is given in Rinaldi, XIX, 263–4 (the year 1475, sections 35–6).
- 18 'Ecclesia Christ . . . spiritu foecundata divino, utero suo fideles omnes coelo paritura concipiat;' and 'impiissimus hostis . . . extinctis in utero foetibus ejus aut abortis, ferro atque igne'; and 'Si enim vox salutationis suae in aures Ecclesiae personuerit, exultabunt profecto proles in utero ejus . . . prae gaudio salientes in occursum Domini. . . '
- 19 I may observe here that the room could be conveniently explained as an illustration of the motto which Alexander took on his accession to the papacy: 'In my distress I cried unto the Lord and he heard me.' (See De Roo, II, 378; the motto is taken from Psalm 120:1.) However, this seems a comparatively weak solution.
- 20 It is possible that the re-institution of the Feast of the Visitation relates in its significance to the Holy Year of 1475. Five years earlier Sixtus' predecessor, Paul II, had ordained that the Jubilee be celebrated in 1475 (before which time, Holy Years had occurred only at half-century intervals). In general, the reasons he gave concerned the plight of Ecclesia – the schisms (now finally ended), the wars within Christendom, the immediate threat of the Turks – all of which are mentioned in one or another of the Visitation bulls and encyclicals. (Pastor quotes from the 1470 Jubilee bull in *The History of the Popes*, ed. F. I. Antrobus, London, 1891 ff., IV, 117.) Hence it is interesting that the Visitation encyclical was promulgated on 1 January of the new Holy Year: for the octave of the Feast of

- the Nativity, which opened the Holy Year, falls upon this date, and honours Mary Mother of Christ for her role in the Nativity.
- 21 As observed by Saxl (177); as suggested by Migne, who records a sermon of Abelard and a poem of Hildebert under the heading of *Sancta Susanna*; and as confirmed by F. G. Holweck in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints*, London, 1924, 940.
- 22 St Isidore: 'Susanna figuram Ecclesiae habet, quem testes falsi Judaei, quasi adulteram legis, accusant', in *Allegoriae quaedam sacrae Scripturae*, no. 126 (Migne, *PL*, LXXXIII, 116). Rabanus Maurus: 'Susanna interpretatur lilia vel gratia ejus. Haec figuravit Ecclesiam, quam falsitate Judaei quasi adulteram accusant,' in *De Universo*, III, 1 (Migne, *PL*, CXI, 66).
- 23 St Hippolytus, *Fragments in Susannam*; especially the commentary on verses 7, 10, and 22 (Migne, *PG*, X, 690-8).
- 24 See n. 5.
- 25 It is likely that the history of St Catherine and the fifty philosophers is based on the *Legenda Aurea*. Here the Roman tetrarch is given as Maxentius (see the legend in Voragine, trans. Ryan and Ripperger, 708-16). Of course, this is an historical error, for Maximin ruled in Egypt during the Great Persecution - as, in fact, was known to Voragine (716). But for the Middle Ages, it was Maxentius whom St Catherine confronted, an identification which is found in the basic set of hagiographic sources for her martyrdom, the *Passio*, and which passes into Voragine's account. That St Catherine was the niece of Constantine is a point sometimes asserted, sometimes not, in the other tributary source of her legend, the *Conversio*, a production of the late Gothic period devoted to her ancestry, birth, and mystic marriage to the Christ Child.
- In an important current within this *Conversio* tradition, first explored by Hilker in the 1920s, considerable pains are taken to emphasize St Catherine's relation to Constantine, and to place her ordeal in the context of the entire Constantine-Maxentius issue - a formulation of the legend which seems to have flourished especially in Italy. Precisely because Constantine, favoured with the miraculous vision of the Cross, undertook his divinely sponsored campaign against Maxentius, did this iniquitous tyrant seek out St Catherine. We are told how Maxentius was driven from Rome and came to Alexandria, how he heard that St Catherine was the niece of his enemy, and how he thus determined to persecute both her and the Church in vicious retaliation. The events of the *Passio* are then recounted. Finally, having put the virgin saint to death, Maxentius returned to Rome; at which point - in one version at least - the events of the Milvian Bridge are given.
- Perhaps this last feature left a trace in the *Legenda Aurea*, in the indication that Maxentius' death was a punishment for the martyrdom of St Catherine (see n. 26 below). Important aspects of the *Conversio* were adopted into the *Legenda Aurea* towards the mid-Quattrocento; see, for instance, Voragine, trans. Caxton, VII, 2-3, where St Catherine's relation to Constantine is detailed.
- Two texts of the *Conversio* in question, Italian and Latin, were published by A. Hilker in 'Eine italienische Version der Katharinenlegend,' *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, XLIV, 1924, 151-80; from which I draw two passages as illustrative of the points made above: 'Et quando audivit [Maxencius] ipsam esse neptam Constantini qui ipsum de Roma fugaverat, cuius adhuc letalis inimicus erat, cogitavit versa vice in contumeliam Constantini neptem eius scilicet Katerinam de omnibus regnis paternis deponere . . .' (180); 'Volens igitur Maxencius Katerine regna auferre et augere ydolatriam . . ., videns se tam obprobriose per Constantinum de urbe fugatum, repentina rabie commotus ecclesiam Christi zelo invidie et ydolatrie persequi instituit . . .' (180).
- 26 Voragine (trans. Ryan and Ripperger, 715) brings this to the reader's attention: 'The manner of Maxentius' punishment for this [death of St Catherine] and other crimes is told in the history of the Invention of the Holy Cross'; in which history, Voragine describes the tetrarch's defeat at the Milvian Bridge.
- 27 These propositions are emphasized at length in two primal treatments of the subject by Eusebius: *Historiae*

Ecclesiasticae, Book IX, ix (Migne, *PG*, XX, 819–23); and *De Vita Constantini*, Book I, xxviii–xlii (Migne, *PG*, XX, 945–55). In both cases, Eusebius draws a highly significant parallel between the crossing of the Red Sea – in which God's miraculous intervention saved His chosen people – and Constantine's great victory, one event obviously serving as prototype for the other.

Of far greater popularity during the later Middle Ages was an entirely different, alternative account taken from the *Vita Sylvestri* material, in which the Lord intervened on the Church's behalf by curing Constantine of his leprosy. This likewise resulted in the official recognition of Christianity and, in addition, the so-called Donation of Constantine. So far as I can determine, this does not weaken the significance of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, nor of the arch as a reference to the triumph of Christianity. Incidentally, the Sylvestrian events were thoroughly discredited by Alexander's time. See C. B. Coleman's *Constantine the Great and Christianity (Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law*, LX, no. 1), New York, 1914, 161–202, for a general treatment of these issues.

- 28 Eusebius describes this *pax christiana* at length in the *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, Book X, i–iii (Migne, *PG*, XX, 842–7), evoking the image of the 'unification of the members of Christ's body conjoint in one harmony, in accordance with a prophet's prediction . . . [in which] there came together bone to bone and joint to joint'.
- 29 The inscription reads: ALEXANDER.VI.PONT. IUST.PACIS.Q(ue).CULTOR. It is found on the front of a commemorative medal which displays a bust of Alexander (see De Roo, IV, opposite p. 476, for an illustration). The reverse shows the Castel Sant'Angelo and records the inauguration of Alexander's projects for that fortress. This would appear to date the medal and its inscription to a moment shortly after the Sala was painted – to approximately December 1494, when the digging of the moat, which is mentioned on the medal, was begun (see De Roo, IV, 472–3, and Doc. 187, p. 566; also Pastor, VI, 168–9).
- 30 Use of the Arch of Constantine for such a purpose had a recent precedent. The

monument had appeared with similar connotations a decade earlier, and a few hundred feet away, in Botticelli's *Punishment of Korah*. Here the symbol of Constantine's triumph was made to reflect an ecclesiastical victory, in which the high priest – that is to say, typologically, the pope – asserts his supremacy over the priesthood, with the Lord protecting the faithful who subscribe to that supremacy, and destroying those who rebel against it (see L. D. Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel Before Michelangelo*, Oxford, 1965, 66–70). This usage of the arch that draws upon the Sylvestrian legend in which Constantine confirms the pope as head of all the bishops. So far as I can determine, the arch in the Sala alludes more closely to values implicit in the monument itself – the Church triumphant over an anti-Christian army, and its consequent identification with a world-wide empire (that is, with Christendom). Theologically speaking, this represents the opposite side of the coin to the arch in the Sistine Chapel, for it involves the political primacy of the pope (represented here by the Borgia ox) over Christendom, or even a universal empire.

- 31 In the Borgia apartment, such dress is found only in the *Disputa* (and in a single figure in the history of St Sebastian, the captain directing the martyrdom). Turkish costume was used again with literal reference by Pinturicchio in the Piccolomini Library, in the scene of Pius II arriving at Ancona in preparation for a crusade against the Turks. In both this fresco and the *Disputa*, Turkish figures are based closely upon a sketch-book of Gentile Bellini, which contains visual notes of his trip to Constantinople in 1479–80 (see Ricci, 112–17). Hence the presence of these figures in the *Disputa* should not be explained as alluding to contemporary persons of c. 1493, included as spectators to the history of St Catherine, either as Turks or as figures in Turkish dress at the papal court (although one of the actors may actually have been at the Vatican: see n. 32). In view of their genesis, they may in fact represent individuals at the court of the Sultan himself.
- 32 The prince was a famous and much indulged captive at the court of Alexander

- until January 1495 (De Roo, IV, 181). Pastor (V, 301-2) reports several descriptions of Djem which require that he be identified with the Turkish horseman, provided he is present at all. Only this figure corresponds to descriptions of the prince as approaching forty years of age (in c. 1493), having a dark complexion and a hooked nose, and given to wearing an immense turban. His placement as a major actor to one side, face in profile, is also consistent with the figure as a portrait of Djem; as is the fact that no study for this figure has been discovered among the Bellini drawings (see the preceding note). Steinmann (67-70), relying upon the various descriptions, believed the horseman to be Djem. Venturi and Phillips agreed; however, other writers have discovered the prince in the white-turbaned young man at left-centre, who faces us in the full pride of his finery, or not at all in the fresco (Ricci, 115).
- 33 Among the terms of the treaty of surrender, signed on 25 November 1491, was an agreement that the Spanish forces would take possession of the city sixty days thereafter. The time was shortened somewhat at the instance of the Moorish king, and the ceremonial entry occurred on 2 January 1492; four days later, Ferdinand and Isabella made their triumphal ingress. Repercussions of the victory struck Rome in a vast eruption of festivities on 5 February, fuelled in part by Alexander himself. See W. H. Prescott, *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic*, ed. C. H. Gardiner, Carbondale, Ill., 1962, 147-8; Johann Burchard, *Liber Notarum*, ed. E. Celani (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, XXXII), Città di Castello, 1906, I, 336-8; and Rinaldi, XIX, 403 (for 1491, section 5), and 406-7 (for 1492, sections 1-5).
- 34 According to Prescott (148) and Pastor (V, 314).
- 35 See the accounts in De Roo, II, 167-207; O. Ferrara, *The Borgia Pope Alexander the Sixth*, trans. F. J. Sheed, New York, 1940, 70-7; and M. Mallett, *The Borgias*, New York, 1969, 93-6.
- 36 Long familiar to Renaissance scholars, these were the only classical authors then available who provide a coherent record of the Egyptian legends. And, in fact, certain details of the executed scenes indicate an acquaintance with all three sources: see notes 39 and 58.
- 37 On the intrados of the arch separating the two vaults, five octagonal *quadretti* recount the story of Io's translation into Isis, Queen of Egypt. They make for an entertaining preamble to the more serious matter of the ceiling proper, but do not, so far as I can discern, form part of the basic iconological structure. However, the scene of the two priestly sages attending Isis - they are Hermes Trismegistus and Moses, both of whom foretell the world under Grace - may betray a disposition towards pagan-Christian typology in the ceiling.
- There is considerable diversity of opinion about the identification of the scenes and their narrative sequence. In my opinion, the sequence begins at the bottom of the arch towards the west and zigzags upwards to the scene at the apex. The pictures illustrate: (1) Mercury lulling Argos to sleep; (2) Mercury decapitating Argos; (3) Jupiter pleading with Juno to cease tormenting Io; (4) Isis presiding as Queen of Egypt; and (5) Osiris making advances to Isis. This last octagonal scene is turned to facilitate visually for the spectator a transition into the neighbouring field of the northern vault, where the story continues with the marriage of Isis and Osiris.
- 38 See Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, trans. C. H. Oldfather *et al.* (*Loeb Classical Library*), London, 1933-67: 'Osiris was the first, they record, to make mankind give up cannibalism; for after . . . Osiris had also devised the cultivation of these fruits [wheat and barley], all men were glad to change their food . . . because . . . it seemed to their advantage to refrain from their butchery of one another' (I. 47-9). ' . . . he [Osiris] gathered together a great army, with the intention of visiting all the inhabited earth and teaching the race of men how to cultivate the vine and sow wheat and barley; for he supposed that if he made men give up their savagery and adopt a gentle manner of life he would receive immortal honours . . .' (I, 55). ' . . . Osiris was not warlike, nor did he have to organize pitched battles or engagements, since every people received him as a god

because of his benefactions' (I, 59). 'Finally, Osiris in this way visited all the inhabited world and advanced community life by the introduction of the fruits which are most easily cultivated' (I, 63-5).

Also see Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, trans. J. Gwyn Griffiths, Cambridge, 1970, 137: 'It is said that Osiris, when was king, at once freed the Egyptians from their primitive and brutish manner of life; he showed them how to grow crops. . . . Later he civilized the whole world as he traversed through it, having very little need of arms, but winning over most of the peoples by beguiling them with persuasive speech. . . .'

- 39 The three ancient sources mentioned in n. 36 have all left traces of their contribution in this vault. Tibullus describes three different kinds of agricultural pursuit which correspond to the illustrations of Osiris teaching the Egyptians (figs 3B, 3C, 3D). See Tibullus, as translated by J. P. Postgate, in *Catullus, Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris* (Loeb Classical Library), London, 1962, 231. Although Diodorus mentions these several activities, only Tibullus refers specifically to that of the last scene, in which fruits are gathered from trees; moreover, the inscription of this scene is a revision of Tibullus' wording (as pointed out by Saxl, I, 182, n. 12).

Diodorus is also a probable source, for only he states that Osiris became a benefactor to mankind *after* his marriage to Isis, and then describes his beneficent acts (see Diodorus, I, 47-9) - just as the marriage-scene introduces the contents of the northern vault. The inscription of the next field (SUSCEPTO.REGNO . . .) corresponds to Diodorus' wording, ' . . . after Osiris . . . succeeded to the kingship'. Moreover, Osiris appears in a star-decked cloak in the northern vault, as also described by Diodorus (I, 39).

Finally, only Plutarch reports the Mnevis to be a black bull, as he appears in *The Planting of Wheat* (Plutarch, 171); see n. 53.

- 40 Giovanni Nanni, *Antiquitat variarum volumina XVII*, Paris, 1512 (first published in 1498 under the title, *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum* . . ., Rome). Nanni emphasizes the world-wide scope of Osiris'

endeavours. In phrases taken from Diodorus (I, 89) and subjected to interminable cloning throughout the *Antiquitates*, he quotes from the legendary stele of the Egyptian king: 'Sum Osiris rex: qui vniuersum peragraui orbem: nec fuit in orbe locus quem non audiuerim: docens ea: quorum inuentor fui . . .' ('I am Osiris the King who traversed the entire world; nor was there any place in the world I did not go, teaching things of which I was the discoverer . . .'), as on fol. XXVIv, for example. Nanni often refers to the universal domain of Osiris: 'Osiris . . . qui vniuerso imperauit orbi' ('Osiris . . . who ruled the entire world'), on fol. XXVIv. He also lays stress upon the benefactions of Osiris: 'Docuit ergo putare arbores et granum post araturam serere: ac metere . . . docuit: palis adiungere vitem: et vinum conficere' ('There he taught them how to prune trees and sow grain after ploughing, and how to reap . . . he taught them how to join vines to the stakes and to make wine . . .'), fol. XXVIIIv. Also, Nanni writes of Osiris ' . . . docens tauros domesticare ad aratum: vnde Apis vnum ex cognominibus habuit. . . . Docuit arare: serere: plantare vineas: et vinum conficere: et ceruosam . . .' (' . . . teaching them to domesticate bulls to the ploughing; whence he got Apis as one of his names. . . . He taught them to plough, to sow, to plant vineyards, and to make wine and beer . . .'), fol. XXVIv. Twice Nanni quotes the three pairs of lines from Tibullus (231) which correspond to the three scenes in the northern vault, a striking coincidence since neither Nanni nor the ceiling continues on through Tibullus' reference to the crushing of grapes (see fol. XXVIIIv and fol. CXXVIIv).

- 41 Thus Osiris is not described as a mythical deity, but a historical person worshipped as a god; nor is he reincarnated in the Apis bull. That is to say, Nanni's account is not itself the matter of religious allegory. The nature of his purpose may explain why Nanni did not draw (so far as I can ascertain) upon the *De Iside et Osiride* of Plutarch, whose philosophical and moralizing approach to the myths did not (presumably) provide sufficient grist for his mill of historical revisionism.

- Instead, Nanni relies habitually on Diodorus the historian. This does not rule out the possibility that he utilized some information in Plutarch, for a number of salient points in the latter's retelling of the myths are also found in Diodorus' account, and may be masked thereby.
- 42 For example: '. . . hic Osiris fuit Iuppiter Iustus: qui vniuerso imperauit orbi: subactis omnibus impiis et facinorosis: quibus in toto orbe bellum indixit et intulit . . .' ('. . . this Osiris was Jupiter the Just, who gained rule of the whole world after having subjugated all the impious and villainous, on whom he declared and waged war throughout the world . . .'), Nanni, fol. CXIIIv. Also: '. . . oppressoresque a duabus partibus Italiae aggressus deuici: deque illis triumphauit. Quid vero post liberatam Italiam . . . Italos docuerit: residuae sacrae effigies indicant' ('. . . attacking the oppressors from the two parts of Italy, I conquered them and triumphed over them.' The remaining hieroglyphs tell what he taught the Italians after the liberation of Italy . . .'), Nanni, fol. XXVIIIr/v.
- 43 The identifications of David, Judith, and Hercules are secure, but that of the remaining figure (in *The Restoration and Rites of Osiris' Body*, fig. 4B) is problematic. The attributes of trident and dolphin indicate Neptune, but the type is entirely alien – a solecism among the entirely traditional images of the other three figures. With some misgivings, I suggest that he is not Neptune, but his son. In one important variation in the canonical story, Theseus was begotten not by Aegeus but Neptune. Certain examples of poetry and vase painting of classical Greece testify to this, describing Theseus as plunging to the bottom of the sea to be crowned by Amphitrite, with the approval of Neptune, as a recognition of his true parentage (see C. Dugas and R. Flacelière, *Thésée, Images et Récits*, Paris, 1958, 13–18 and 69–71). This event may not have been known to Renaissance Italy, but two important passages were: Diodorus (III, 3) asserts directly that Theseus was the son of Neptune; Plutarch in his *Vita Thesei* refers several times to such a contention (as a probable myth). Therefore, our figure might serve as Theseus, being young, beautiful, and beardless, and holding the attributes of his father – these perhaps referring to his founding the Isthmian games in honour of Neptune. As Theseus, the figure would make a meaningful pendant to Hercules (who stands atop the equipage in the opposite field), just as the two Jewish figures, David and Judith, are complementary in placement and meaning in the northern vault. But why such an apparently makeshift set of allusions? To begin with, there was no distinctive, canonical image for Theseus; nor could he have been equipped with a sword and the Minotaur's head, since both the Apis and the heraldic beast of the Borgia were bulls. But in Nanni's genealogical scheme, Theseus made the son of Neptune becomes the nephew of Osiris – just as Hercules was the son of Jupiter and therefore, for Nanni, of Osiris Jupiter the Just (Nanni, fol. CXIIIV).
- 44 Nanni, XXVIv.
- 45 We can hardly go wrong in considering the particular goal as invested with an implication of world-wide dominion – which recurs as a thematic thread in this study – on the most general theological grounds: the pope, as head of the universal church, is invested by God with ultimate monarchical sanction in the temporal world (just as Moses received the powers of both priest and leader). And, more particularly, two (apparent) typological systems in the Sala sustain the concept. First, the Church of the Constantinian era was closely identified with the Roman Empire, and so presumably with the entire civilized world. Second, the domain of Osiris also encompassed the known world; the conspirators who murdered the king (and were subsequently defeated by Isis) represented many realms far and near of that empire. Hence it was not mere whimsy on Pinturicchio's part that the decorations of Osiris' furniture, before and after the murder, are an aggregation of motifs Egyptian, Jewish, Greek, and Roman (including even the initials S.P.Q.R.).
- 46 'Secundo continet litteras sacras Gygantum opprimendum Imperium Italiae et italicorum evocantium: et festinantis auxili. Tertio litteras sacras compositae ac liberatae Italiae' ('Secondly, [the column]

- contains the hieroglyphs of the Giants overwhelming the realm of Italy and of the Italians calling upon [Osiris] and of [Osiris] hastening to aid [them]. Thirdly, the hieroglyphs of the settled and liberated Italy'). Nanni then gives a detailed, expository translation: 'Draco malum significat: vt Diodorus in iiii liber dicit. Ergo quoniam hoc malum in sceptro est: vtique tyrannos occupantes Italiae imperium portendit. Aues in propriam nido aperto ore: sunt secunda effigies. Proprius nidus propriam patriam significat: et os apertum clamorem et vocationem: atque locutionem annotat: vt ait Xenophon. Sunt autem duo nidi altera a dextris altera a sinistris. Ergo aues iste clamantes in proprio nido sunt Itali evocantes et implorantes auxilium Osiridis: ab vtraque parte Italiae . . .' ('The dragon signifies evil, as Diodorus says in his fourth book. Therefore, because this evil is on the sceptre, assuredly it portends tyrants laying hold of the realm of Italy. The second figure is of open-mouthed birds in their own nest. Their own nest signifies their own country, and the open mouth designates a crying out, a calling, even a speaking. Therefore the birds calling out thusly in their own nest are the Italians calling forth and imploring the aid of Osiris from both parts of Italy . . .'). See Nanni, fol. XXVIIr.
- 47 The parallel may possibly extend to specific regions within Italy. The call to Osiris came from Istria and the Alps, and from Apulia (Nanni, fol. XXVIIr); that is, from the two extremities of Italy, whence, in the fifteenth century, some twelve to fifteen years before Alexander's election, there had arisen cries for delivery from the Turks. In 1477, Mohammedan forces had swept along the Isonzo valley (that is, along the Istrian frontier), into Friuli, and into the neighbouring Alps; and in 1480, they had attacked into Apulia, holding Otranto for more than a year (see De Roo, V, 6; and Pastor, IV, 331-43). It is interesting to note that Nanni, who enjoyed the particular favour of Sixtus IV, was especially concerned with the Turkish menace. His brief volume, *De futuris christianorum triumphis in Saracenos*, was apparently rushed into print in Genoa a bare four months after the Turks invaded Apulia, when fearful reaction to the Mohammedan threat had reached its height.
- 48 See Diodorus, I, 69 and 301. That Nanni was aware of this reason for the Apis-Osiris association is apparent on fol. XXVIv (see n. 40).
- 49 According to Diodorus (I, 291-3), it was believed that '. . . at the death of Osiris his soul passed into this animal [the Apis], and therefore up to this day has always passed into its successors. . .'. Plutarch (187) writes that 'they believe that the Apis is the animate image of Osiris . . .'; also (163) that the Egyptian priests report 'that Osiris and Apis have been interwoven into the same being, . . . that we ought to regard the Apis as the corporate image of the soul of Osiris'.
- 50 Nanni, fols XXVIv and XXVIIr, for example.
- 51 Erik Iversen reports this on the basis of Nanni's *Commentaria* (the first edition of his *Antiquitates*) in 'Hieroglyphic Studies of the Renaissance', *Burlington Magazine*, C, 1958, 20.
- 52 See page 26 and n. 77.
- 53 As observed earlier (n. 41), the ceiling illustrates the mythical narratives, and not Nanni's 'historicized' account. Thus in *The Planting of Wheat* (fig. 3B), we find present both Osiris and the Apis-to-be. Two oxen are yoked at the ploughing, one black and one white. The white bull would be the future Apis (in fact, his shape and stance are identical to those of the Apis in *The Advent of the Apis*, fig. 4C; but, consistently with the story, he lacks the distinctive, straited markings: see n. 58). His companion under the yoke would be the Mnevis, a black-skinned version of the Apis honoured at Heliopolis (the Apis himself was housed and tended at Memphis): see Plutarch, 171 and 149.
- 54 As repeated by Nanni, fol. XCr and fol. CXLVIIIv.
- 55 Nanni, fol. CLXXIV. Specifically, their provenance was of the period after the empire had been purged of Osiris' assassins.
- 56 In fact, on two previous occasions does Nanni write of Alexander in connection with the recovery of these Etruscan relics, on fol. XCr and fol. CXLVIIIv. In the latter of these, he reflects on '. . . Alexandro. VI. in cuius pontificatus exordio: e cauernis et latebris terrae:

vetustissimorum Italiae regum
 triumphalia in hac sua vrbe Vetulonia
 . . . videlicet futurae sub eo pontifice
 felicissimo propagationis imperii
 Christiani: et sedis apostolicae
 illustrationis diuinum portentum'
 ('. . . Alexander VI, in the beginning of
 whose pontificate the triumphal ornaments
 of the most ancient kings of Italy were
 brought forth in his own city of Vetulonia
 from the caves and hiding places of the
 earth. . . . Under this most propitious
 pope, this was a divine portent of the
 propagation of the Christian Empire and
 of the representation of the Apostolic
 See').

- 57 These events are described by Diodorus (I, 65–9 and 293); and by Plutarch (137–9, 145–7, 159, 205). It is Plutarch (173) who refers most explicitly to 'the episodes of dismemberment, return to life, and rebirth, related to Osiris'. Nanni (fols CXXXVv–CXXXVIr) also relates these events, relying most obviously on Diodorus. He describes Isis' efforts in behalf of Osiris – her defeat of his enemies, her collecting of his scattered remains, and her fusing them into a likeness of his earlier form – but omits, of course, the final stage, that of Osiris' regeneration.
- 58 I have already pointed out one instance in the northern vault (n. 39). The southern vault affords three, perhaps four indices of familiarity with Plutarch. (1) Typhon's appearance as a mutilated stump in *The Advent of the Apis* (fig. 4C) corresponds to Plutarch's assertion that the evil daemon was not killed at his defeat – a significant point for his allegorical view of the myth (as we shall discuss in the text); see Plutarch, 147, 181, 207. (On the contrary, Diodorus, I, 65, reports the slaying of Typhon.) According to Plutarch, Isis' lieutenant, Horus, castrated Typhon to shear him of his strength, and removed his sinews to make a lyre. Hence in *The Advent*, the mutilated form at the left (whose features are surely those of the assassin who strangles Osiris in fig. 4A) seems to cry in fury as obeisance is made to the Apis, has his arms and legs amputated, and – as nearly as the condition of the fresco permits – appears to lack genitals. That Typhon is not killed is a significant sign

of reliance not merely upon Plutarch's narrative, but upon the core-values of his interpretation. (2) According to Plutarch (145–7), Isis gathered the scattered pieces of Osiris and saw to his burial and rites *prior* to the campaign against, and defeat of Typhon, just as we find in figs 4B and 4C. Diodorus (I, 65–7) inverts the order of these events. (3) In *The Advent of the Apis*, the peculiarly striped or brindled markings of the Apis surely reflect Plutarch (185–7), who writes that 'many features of the Apis are like the phases of the moon, the bright parts being shaded off into dark'; whereas, shortly before, he had observed that there are twenty-eight 'illuminations and measures of time in each of the moon's monthly orbits', to which the rising of the river corresponds (14 cubits of depth near Memphis corresponding to the full moon). (4) It is likely that the standard which Isis holds in *The Advent* displays the hawk of Osiris in flight, as described by Plutarch (199–200). I have found no evidence of Tibullus or Diodorus in the southern vault, with the conceivable exception of the youth carrying stalks of wheat on his back in fig. 4B, who might reflect a reading of Diodorus, I, 49 (although the scene hardly represents a festival of Isis).

- 59 Plutarch, 137.
 60 Diodorus, I, 51.
 61 Nanni, fol. CXXVIIv.
 62 It appears in a number of close variations. See, for example, fol. CXXXIIIr: 'necque [Ioui Cretensis] bellum impiis in vniuerso orbe indixit vt Osiris. . . .'
 63 The entire passage from Plutarch (205) reads: 'It is not therefore without reason that they relate in their myth that the soul of Osiris is eternal and indestructible, but that his body is frequently dismembered and destroyed by Typhon, whereupon Isis in her wanderings searches for it and puts it together again. For what is and is spiritually intelligible and is good prevails over destruction and change; but the images which the perceptible and corporeal nature fashions from it, and the ideas, forms and likenesses which this nature assumes, are like figures stamped on wax in that they do not endure forever.'

The term 'lore of the Gods' appears in Plutarch, 121; that it refers to Osiris is

- clear from the context, as we shall discuss subsequently above.
- 64 See Plutarch, 119–23.
- 65 In essence, there are two accounts of the manner in which Isis disposed of the pieces of Osiris' body. According to one, perhaps the more prominent version, she fashioned of spices and wax a separate image of Osiris around each part as she recovered it, thereby producing a multiplicity of images throughout Egypt. But Diodorus also reports that the several pieces were shaped into a single form (II, 359); or that they were collected and put into a wooden ox (I, 293). Their unification corresponds to Plutarch's report that Isis put his body together again (205), a point of great allegorical significance. Nanni (fol. CXXXVIr) opts for the re-integration version. And the author of the Sala programme obviously did likewise, for *The Restoration and Rites of Osiris' Body* shows the parts collected together, and the inscription refers to a single tomb (VXOR.EIVS.MEMBRA.DISCERPTA.TANDEM.INVENIT.QVIBVS.SEPVLCRV.M.CONSTITVIT). This variant of Isis' activity tends to stress her role as a recreative principle, which is discussed by Plutarch (203–5): she 'receives all corporeal and spiritual forms . . . offering herself to it [the good] for reproduction and for the fructifying in herself of effluxes and likenesses'. Also, Plutarch (213) says that Isis is reported 'to search for certain remnants and scattered parts of Osiris . . . receiving the destroyed pieces and hiding them; and with these she reveals again what is coming into being and produces it from herself'.
- 66 This refers to another section of the legend in which Typhon tricks Osiris into a chest, and in which Isis eventually recovers the body of Osiris, still in the chest. See Plutarch, 137–45.
- 67 Admittedly, the selection of these final events could depend either upon Plutarch's interpretative contraction of the legend (121 and 205–7), or upon Diodorus' basic presentation in I, 65–9 (Nanni's narrative on fols CXXXVr–CXXXVIr is based upon Diodorus). We have noted, however, that Plutarch is a more apparent source for the ceiling, and especially for the southern vault. However, since the accounts of both authors, often overlapping, were probably quite familiar to the author of the programme – especially if he was Nanni – it would be meaningless to speak in terms of exclusive reliance upon one source or the other for knowledge of the general legend.
- 68 Most logical would be the equation of Isis to the Virgin, and of Osiris to Christ; and I have little doubt that a case for such a proposition could be made here, relying upon Late Medieval and Humanist writers. However, the facile Nanni makes an ingenious transposition of Christ into the Body of Christ, the Church, thereby making it possible to harmonize the Isis–Osiris myth with the basic ecclesiastical programme of the Sala.
- 69 Rinaldi, XIX, 263–4 (for 1475, section 35).
- 70 As quoted in n. 28.
- 71 Omission of an intervening battle scene helps the viewer to make a more pointed association between the mutilated remains of Osiris in the preceding scene and the apparition of the Apis here.
- 72 The inscription is obviously garbled, for OSENSUM is not a word. I take it to be *ostendo* (in the supine), from which the *t* has been dropped. The inscription is then logically readable and agrees with the picture: SACRA NON PRIUS INITIABANT QUAM POPULO OSTENSUM BOVEM ASCENDERENT ('They did not begin the sacred rites before they went up in order to display the bull to the people').
- 73 At first glance, the fresco appears to show a religious procession in which the image of a deity is carried by litter to a place of sacred rites directed to that deity. It is significant, however, that neither the scene nor the inscription is focused upon any rites of the Apis; and, if they were, the effect would be repetitive after the preceding *Advent of the Apis*: for, if a worship of the Apis occurs in the vault, it surely occurs in *The Advent* where the actors kneel before the bull as he appears beside the sacrificial altar. Hence I suggest that the sacred rites to which the final scene alludes were not dedicated to the Apis himself.
- 74 The double crown with inverted rays is Alexander's personal form of an old Borgia device, as discussed by Saxl (I, 178–9).
- 75 Both appear to be small gilded effigies. I know of no reason why such an effigy

- should replace the Apis himself in *The Procession*, unless to emphasize his kinship with the bull atop the Arch of Constantine.
- 76 The genealogical connection involved here of Osiris-Apis with the Borgia pope is affirmed by the placing of Hercules (among the four acroterial hero-figures) atop the ceremonial litter; for, according to Nanni, Alexander was descended from Osiris through Hercules (Iversen, 20).
- 77 If my hypotheses regarding the Sala are correct, a redundancy of iconological values occurs automatically, whether intended or not, in which the Osiris cycle relates indirectly to the vicissitudes of ecclesia in the fifteenth century by reference to the history of early Christianity, from the calm preceding the Great Persecution to the events of 312-13. In this case, Typhon is a type of Maxentius, and the Apis refers to the Church restored of the early fourth century.
- 78 De Roo, II, 136-42. He was forced to mortgage and/or rent his palace, and to farm out the revenues from his bishopric of Valencia.
- 79 See n. 35 for citations.
- 80 De Roo, II, 400-1, and V, 7-9.
- 81 De Roo, II, 400, and V, 7-8, 24-5; also, Pastor, V, 397.
- 82 From a complex of considerations, it seems likely that Pinturicchio began work on the Sala dei Santi in (approximately) the late spring of 1493. He had been in Orvieto at the time of Alexander's election in August 1492, and was still there on 17 November of that year, when he is recorded as working on a fresco for the cathedral (Ricci, 83). He probably responded to the pope's summons shortly after that date, for by 9 December 1492, notice reached the chapter of Orvieto that the painter had appealed their disagreement to the Apostolic Camera - the issue being one of a payment of fees (Ricci, 84). In any case, at the end of March 1493, Alexander wrote to the canons that Pinturicchio was then working in the Vatican Palace (Ricci, 84). This papal brief almost certainly refers to the artist's activity in the Borgia apartment. The only doubt arises from Vasari's statement that Pinturicchio also decorated a set of rooms overlooking the Cortile di S. Pietro, but the context of the assertion suggests that this lost enterprise was carried out under the preceding pope, Innocent VIII (G. Vasari, *Le vite* . . ., ed. G. Milanesi, Florence, 1906, III, 498). Since the Torre Borgia was not yet constructed, Alexander's missive implies that the painter was then working somewhere in the first three private rooms.
- It is a reasonable assumption that Pinturicchio worked by stages through the apartment towards the two Torre Borgia rooms (rather than in the reverse direction), these being located opposite the entrance and both carrying the date 1494 (he subsequently appeared in Perugia in February 1495 to sign the contract for a major undertaking, the main altarpiece for S. M. dei Fossi). The progress of the decorative campaign westwards through the apartment receives a degree of confirmation from two features: (A) the master's own participation, in terms of design and execution taken together, decreases towards and into the Torre Borgia rooms, doubtless as his band of assistants grew in size, and as he turned to ornamenting a series of rooms in the Castel Sant'Angelo with grotesques (J. Schulz, 'Pinturicchio and the Revival of Pagan Antiquity', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXV, 1962, 45, n. 38); and (B) in the last two chambers, he employs grotesque ornament in a fully antique style (not merely borrowing some occasional motifs) - that is, he creates a vibrant, attenuated filigree silhouetted against a light (usually gold) background as a two-dimensional pattern, yet poised simultaneously within an undefined, often light-filled space. This is the first dated instance of such mature grotesques in Pinturicchio's career; a number of mixed or tentative, 'transitional' attempts are found in the preceding rooms of the apartment.
- On the basis of Alexander's letter of March 1493, we may infer that the first chamber to be decorated by Pinturicchio was then nearing completion, but that the pope had not yet charged him with embellishing the entire apartment (he promised the painter's speedy return to Orvieto - in *aliquot dies*). Pinturicchio may well have been concluding his labours in the Sala dei Misteri, the first in sequence

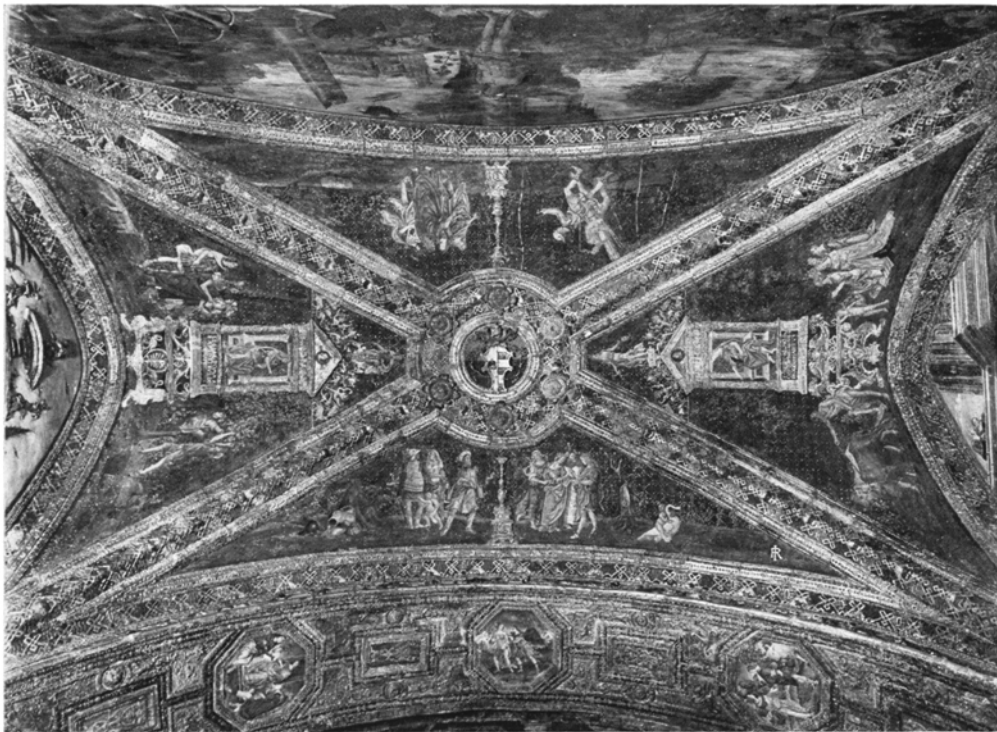
ON THE MEANING OF PINTURICCHIO'S 'SALA DEI SANTI'

of the rooms; for, three months later, that room is omitted from a description, tantalizingly brief, of the apartment as it was prepared for a week-long occupancy by Prince Federigo of Naples (all the succeeding rooms, including the pope's two smaller, personal rooms to one side, were sumptuously arrayed in velvet and brocades: see Burchard, I, 384-5). Since it was the neighbouring room, the Sala dei Santi was probably the next to claim Pinturicchio's attention. I would not wish to make too much of any single one of

these all too circumstantial data, but taken together, they do suggest a beginning date for the Sala of approximately May 1493. (It should be recognized that E. Steinmann (76-77), by studying the development of grotesques throughout the entire apartment, hypothesized a 3:2:1:4:5 sequence in the decoration of the rooms. In my view, there is insufficient evidence for so precise an ordering; in any case, the Sala dei Santi would retain the same rank among the three *extra-Torre* chambers.)



11 The Sala dei Santi. Vatican. (Photo Alinari)



12 Pinturicchio, The Northern Vault, Sala dei Santi. Vatican. Reading counter-clockwise from the bottom: A. *The Marriage of Isis and Osiris*; B. *The Planting of Wheat*; C. *The Growing of the Vine*; D. *The Picking of Fruit*. (Photo Anderson)



13 Pinturicchio, The Southern Vault, Sala dei Santi, Vatican. Reading counter-clockwise from the bottom: A. *The Assassination of Osiris*; B. *The Restoration and Rites of Osiris' Body*; C. *The Advent of the Apis*; D. *The Procession of the Apis*. (Photo Anderson)



14 *The Visitation*. Vatican, Sala dei Santi. (Photo Anderson)



15 *Susanna and the Elders*.
Vatican, Sala dei Santi.
(Photo Anderson)

16 *The Disputa of St Catherine*. Vatican, Sala dei Santi. (Photo Anderson)

