



# The Body as a Mirror of the Soul

Physiognomy from Antiquity  
to the Renaissance

**Lisa Devriese**  
(ed.)

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PHYSIOGNOMY FROM ANTIQUITY  
TO THE RENAISSANCE

Edited by

Lisa DEVRIESE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The present volume is the result of an interdisciplinary workshop that took place in November 2016 at the University of Leuven and that aimed to address certain gaps in the historical research on physiognomy. This workshop, entitled ‘The Body as a Mirror of the Soul. Physiognomy from Antiquity to the Renaissance’, concentrated on physiognomic thought and texts in a diachronic perspective. It focused on texts from Antiquity up to the seventeenth century, written in different languages, such as Greek, Arabic, Latin, and the vernacular. There were two key questions at stake. The first concerned which status the discipline of physiognomy – thematically at the crossroads between natural philosophy, medicine, ethics, and psychology – enjoyed over the centuries. The second concerned how the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonica*, which was considered an authoritative text due to its attribution to Aristotle, was approached and connected with other physiognomic treatises by scholars from different time periods and disciplines.

This workshop explicitly aimed to deepen the knowledge of physiognomy as a discipline. This was done, on the one hand, by adopting a diachronic perspective: we focused not only on the medieval tradition in its own right, but also considered this tradition as an essential intermediate step between the ancient and Renaissance physiognomic tradition. On the other hand, the texts under discussion were studied not only from a doctrinal point of view, but also from a historical and text-critical perspective. This diachronic and multidisciplinary approach allowed us to detect and analyse shifts in content, aim, and method that have occurred in the long history of physiognomy. Eight of the nine contributions in this volume were presented at the workshop. The first article on ancient physiognomy was added later to offer a more balanced volume.

The workshop and volume would not have been possible without the enthusiasm of the contributors, or without the financial support of the Fund Van de Wiele, HIW Conference Fund, and OJO. The workshop was created within the framework of my research project ‘The Body as a Mirror of the Soul. An Inquiry into the Reception of pseudo-Aristotle’s *Physiognomonica* in the Middle Ages’, supervised by Pieter De

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Valuable help in preparing the volume was given by Céline Szecel, Wendy Frère and Phyla Kupferschmidt, and I'm grateful to the staff of Leuven University Press for their professional guidance.

I wholeheartedly dedicate this volume to Pieter De Leemans, supervisor of my doctoral research and co-organiser of the workshop, who passed away on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2019. I will remember him as a loyal friend, helpful colleague, and passionate scholar.

Lisa Devriese

Enikő BÉKÉS

## THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF APOSTLE PAUL: BETWEEN TEXTS AND IMAGES

*In studies about physiognomic works, we frequently explore to what extent these texts can help us decode certain human representations, and whether we can consider them sources of inspiration in the case of written or visual portrayals. Although the influence of physiognomic theories on art history had always been stronger in the periods of revival of Antique aesthetics, comparing portraits and physiognomic treatises from other periods, for example Late Antiquity, might have lessons as well. In this paper, I examine the apocryphal description of apostle Paul from the Acts of Paul and Thecla in the light of physiognomy and present its relationship with the early Christian iconography of the apostle.*

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Studies on physiognomic literature often analyse the connections between physiognomic theories and human representation, considering physiognomy as a possible source of inspiration in the case of certain written or visual portrayals. In this article – applying a similar interdisciplinary method – I will examine the apocryphal description of apostle Paul from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in the light of physiognomic theories and present its relationship with the early Christian iconography of the apostle.

According to the basic tenet of physiognomy, human characteristics and external appearance are in perfect harmony with each other; in other words, conclusions can be made about one's inner character based on external characteristics. In literature, this works the other way around as well, as writers often adjust appearances, including by means of physiognomy, to correspond with the character they have portrayed. Although we find character descriptions of physiognomic

1. This article is a revised version of my earlier article published in Hungarian: Enikő Békés, "Pál apostol fiziognómiája," in *Természet az arcon: A Fiziognómia Története az Ókortól a XVII. Századig*, ed. Éva Vigh, Ikonológia és Műértelmezés 11/2 (Szeged: Jate Press, 2006), 381-414.



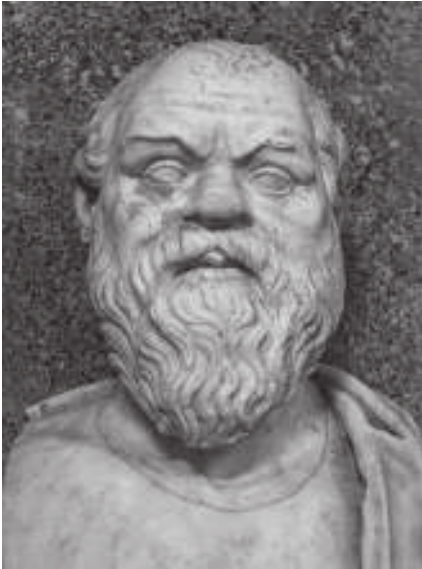


Fig. 4.1—Bust of Socrates, Rome, Musei Vaticani, fourth-century Roman copy of a Greek original.

types in the works of several ancient playwrights and historians, it is Suetonius who wove detailed, so-called iconographic portraits into emperors' biographies.<sup>2</sup> Physiognomic thinking also had an influence on creative processes in the fine arts and it can often be detected in both the written and the visual sources that depict historical figures.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to highlight one example in connection with my article: the various representations of Socrates – with his bald crown, high and rounded forehead, large eyes, snub nose and fleshy lips – are all taken from the satyr Silenus' iconography (Fig. 4.1).<sup>4</sup> Socrates' portrayal is so contrary to contemporary ideals of beauty that we might think it to be a caricature, were we not familiar with the sources related to his appearance. When we compare the elements of Socrates' representations with only the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonica*, we discover an image that suggests a negative personality. However, with the help of the interpretation

2. The influence of physiognomy on ancient literature has been thoroughly investigated by: Elizabeth C. Evans, "Roman Descriptions of Personal Appearance in History and Biography," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 46 (1935): 43-84; eadem, "Physiognomics in the Ancient World," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 59/5 (1969). See also: J. Couissin, "Suétone physiognomiste dans les vies des XII Césars," *Revue des Études Latines* 21 (1953): 234-256; Alan Wardman, "Description of Personal Appearance in Plutarch and Suetonius. The Use of Statues as Evidence," *The Classical Quarterly* 17/2 (1967): 414.

3. Luca Giuliani, *Bildnis und Botschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986); Bente Kiilerich, "Physiognomics and the Iconography of Alexander," *Symbolae Osloenses* 63 (1988): 51-66; Aristoteles, *Physiognomonica*, übersetzt und kommentiert von Sabine Vogt (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), 45-107.

4. Paul Zanker, *Die Maske des Sokrates. Das Bild des Intellektuellen in der Antiken Kunst* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1995); Luca Giuliani, "Das älteste Sokrates-Bildnis," in *Bildnisse. Die Europäischen Tradition der Portraitkunst*, ed. Wilhelm Schlink (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1997), 11-55.



Fig. 4.2—Bust of Emperor Traian Decius (249-251), Rome, Musei Capitolini.

developed in Plato's circle and also detailed in the Platonic Dialogues, we discover the 'positive' satyr character that was praised by Alcibiades.<sup>5</sup> Socrates' case shows that we always have to consider the context of the physiognomic description. This will also be necessary when analysing the apocryphal characterisation of apostle Paul, which can be easily misunderstood otherwise. Similarly to Socrates, we better understand the message of apostle Paul's physiog-

nomy by analysing the written description of the apostle's appearance, which corresponds to his visual portrayal.

## 2. Late Antique portraits in the light of physiognomy

Before the analysis, I will briefly introduce how the new ideal of the man of the era is reflected in the portraits of Late Antiquity and how the new features that appear on the portraits relate to the physiognomic tractates. Many comparisons of ancient portraits and the definitions found in physiognomic works have been made, but this method has been less frequently applied to portraits from Late Antiquity. However, the new ideal of man plays an important role both in Paul's description and in the development of the apostle's visual portrayal.

The antecedents of the characteristic features of portraits from Late Antiquity can already be observed on statues from the second century (Fig. 4.2). However, a profound stylistic change occurred in the third century, when a worried, troubled expression becomes dominant. This developed due to the economic, social and intellectual crisis of the

5. Alcibiades claimed that the philosopher charms people with his talk in the same way as Marsyas does with his music, cf. Plato, *Symp.*, 215b, 216d; Plato, *Theaitetos*, 143e.



Fig. 4.3—Head of Emperor Constantine I, Rome, Musei Capitolini, fourth century.

Roman Empire. The portraits of the barracks emperors are often characterised by a deeply lined forehead and a robust wrinkle between the nose and the mouth, which create a particularly grim expression.<sup>6</sup>

The transformation of the portrait art of Late Antiquity has also been influenced by the aesthetics of the Neoplatonic Plotinus. Plotinus' idea of 'the body to be conquered by the soul' questioned the validity of *kalokagathia*,

the classical ideal of beauty in Antiquity. As is well known, Plotinus rejected the idea of beauty as expressed by proportions and numbers, together with the idea of 'a sound mind in a sound body'. In his view, beauty can be found not in symmetry but in divine splendour, and a body can only be beautiful if a soul of divine origin shines through it.<sup>7</sup> Despising the body results in asceticism and the new hero of Late Antiquity, the ascetic type, can be recognised in most representations. Some of the most prominent characteristics of this new physiognomy are large eyes and wide, dilated pupils. Plotinus believed that the only criterion of beauty was divine aura, and this can be best illustrated on portraits by purposely emphasising the eyes (Fig. 4.3).<sup>8</sup>

6. James D. Breckenridge, *Likeness: A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968); Hans Peter L'Orange, *Likeness and Icon. Selected Studies in Classical and Early Medieval Art* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1973); James D. Breckenridge, "Portraiture," in *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 2-7; Susan Wood, *Roman Portrait Sculpture 217-260 A.D.: The Transformation of an Artistic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

7. Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI, 7, 22. Cf. also: H. von Heintze, "ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ – Homo Spiritualis," in *Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, ed. Herbert Beck and Peter Bol (Frankfurt: Liebieghaus, 1983), 180-190.

8. Hans Peter L'Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1947).

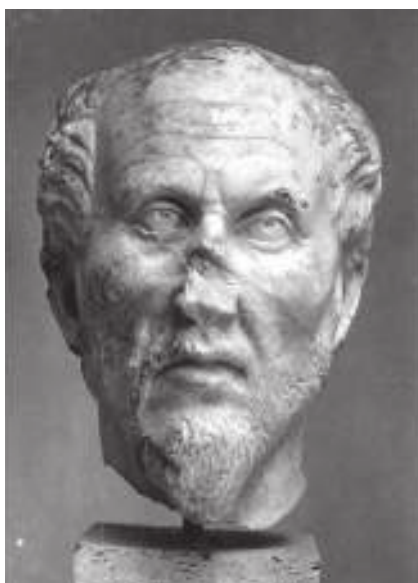


Fig. 4.4—Head of Plotinus, Ostia Antica, Museo Ostiense, second half of the third century.

When studying antique portraiture, we often observe that ancient philosophers' representations were shaped by an effort to demonstrate their teachings rather than to reflect their true appearance. The thoughts characteristic of the given philosopher or school of philosophy are again depicted with the help of physiognomic correspondences. For example, several portraits of Plotinus were discovered in

Ostia, which makes it possible to examine how the above-mentioned philosophical thinking is represented in his images (Fig. 4.4). The representations of Plotinus eminently confirm the image we form of the philosopher based on the written sources. His portraits are characterised by an elongated, narrow, triangle-shaped head, a wrinkled forehead, a bald crown, a drooping mouth, and close-set eyes.<sup>9</sup> These elements make up a rather bitter, ascetic expression, which is in line with Porphyry's description of his master, i.e. that Plotinus 'seemed ashamed of being in the body'.<sup>10</sup> Plotinus has an influence not only through his philosophy, but also through his portraits. From the second half of the third century, philosophers are depicted with a similar physiognomy. For example, L'Orange discovered several correspondences between the representations of Plotinus and apostle Paul and traced back the apostle's images to the Plotinus portraits.<sup>11</sup>

9. On the portraits of Plotinus, see L'Orange, *Likeness and Icon*, 32-42; von Heintze, "ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ," 185.

10. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, cap. 1. Translation from: Porphyry, *On the life of Plotinus and the order of his books; Enneads I. 1-9*, ed. and trans. A.H. Armstrong, The Loeb Classical Library 440 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 3.

11. L'Orange, *Likeness and Icon*, 41-42.

In sum, comparing the main characteristics of the portraits from Late Antiquity with the pseudo-Aristotelian tractate gives the impression that these characteristics only symbolise negative traits since large, open eyes and thick eyelids are characteristic of shameless people;<sup>12</sup> a thin, wrinkled face with a defeated gaze is typical of a timid person;<sup>13</sup> large, protruding eyes (like those of an ass or ox) are typical of stupid people;<sup>14</sup> asymmetry or lopsidedness is typical of the disingenuous panther<sup>15</sup> (who is the opposite of the ideal lion in every respect); a clouded, surly, wrinkled forehead suggests an angry, irritated, bull-like nature;<sup>16</sup> creased eyebrows suggest a grumpy or a sad person.<sup>17</sup>

Comparing the portraits of Late Antiquity and the literature on physiognomy also shows that anti-classical tendencies that contradict the classical antique ideal of beauty gained prominence in portrayals in late Roman times. Portraits show a continuous change in art history, including in the art of portraiture in Antiquity, which is in line with an evolving world view. However, in physiognomic literature, the same ideal had been considered the standard from ancient times to the Renaissance, matching the classical antique canon. In late Roman times, we can assume that contemporary intellectuals were perfectly aware that, from the point of view of the classical canon, these features are symbols of a negative character. Moreover, these representations strived to differ from the values that they did not accept anymore. The portraiture of Late Antiquity was not too distant from Christianity either, and this intellectual background could also have influenced the development of apostle Paul's literary and visual portraits.

12. Aristoteles, *Physiognomonica*, ed. Devriese, cap. 17. In what follows, I will use the chapter numbers of this edition: Aristoteles, *Physiognomonica. Translatio Bartholomaei de Messana*, ed. Lisa Devriese, Aristoteles Latinus XIX (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2019).

13. Aristoteles, *Physiognomonica*, cap. 20.

14. Aristoteles, *Physiognomonica*, cap. 63.

15. Aristoteles, *Physiognomonica*, cap. 42.

16. Aristoteles, *Physiognomonica*, cap. 64.

17. Aristoteles, *Physiognomonica*, cap. 69.

### 3. The description of apostle Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

The apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* have an iconographic description of apostle Paul that is quite rare in Christian literature.<sup>18</sup> Similar Christian literary portraits were first examined by Joseph Fürst, who has demonstrated the use of *eikonismos* and *charakterismos*, or the use of physiognomic characterisation in apocryphal texts.<sup>19</sup> However, the special nature of the Paul description lies not only in the detailed narration, but also in attributes that – at least seemingly – create a negative impression and contradict his personality. According to the story, after learning that Paul was to arrive to Iconium, a man named Onesiphorus hurried to meet the apostle. They had not met in person before, but based on a description by Titus, he still recognised him:

Finally he noticed Paul coming towards him, a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness, for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.<sup>20</sup>

Here, I will focus on the first part of the description, which contains the physical characteristics. This part may give a negative impression to the reader, and the literature has tried to resolve the contradiction between apostle Paul's person and the image conveyed in several ways. For a long time it was believed that the author described Paul's appearance in this way based on personal experience or oral tradition. This idea was rejected after it was shown that the text was written after the Apostolic Age, during the second half of the second century CE.<sup>21</sup> According to another view, the solution lies in ethnic typology.

18. *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 3, in: Richard A. Lipsius and Max Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* (Leipzig: Hermanun Mendelssohn, 1891), 237.

19. J. Fürst, "Untersuchungen zur Ephemeris des Diktys von Kreta," *Philologus* 61 (1902): 390. More recently: Chad Hartssock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

20. Quotation from John Bollók, "The description of Paul in the *Acta Pauli*," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla. Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 1. For a more recent commentary with textual notes on the *Acts of Paul*, see: Jeremy W. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla: A Critical Introduction and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2009).

21. Bollók, "The description of Paul," 2. According to Tertullian, the *Acts* were written by a presbyter in Asia Minor, cf.: Tertullian, *De baptismo*, 17, 5: 'Sciant in Asia presbyterum, qui scripturam construxit quasi titulo Pauli suo cumulans convictum atque confesum id se amore Pauli fecisse et loco decesisse.'

In other words, the apostle's appearance corresponds to the so-called 'Jewish type'. In the following, I will summarise the most relevant interpretations of this description and then present a few more aspects that might explain the role of this characterisation.

Grant's source analysis was limited to a single specific literary source, emphasising the parallels between the apostle's description and a poem of Arkhilokhos containing similar anti-idealist features.<sup>22</sup> Malherbe's study claims that in the eyes of contemporary readers this description may not have necessarily been seen as negative.<sup>23</sup> Fürst categorises this depiction as a description of the physiognomic type, but he did not conduct a more detailed analysis.<sup>24</sup> Also Dobschütz does not exclude the possibility of a physiognomic approach, but according to him, as the description contradicts the ideal of beauty, these characteristics cannot be attributed to the apostle.<sup>25</sup> From these different interpretations, it is clear that the interpretation of the apocryphal place is not easy or straightforward. Later writers may have felt that the description contradicted the apostle's personality. Consequently, later translators and authors often produced an improved version of the description. For instance, in one place 'crooked legs' are replaced by 'elegant calves'.<sup>26</sup>

22. R.M. Grant, "The Description of Paul in the Acts of Paul and Thecla," *Vigiliae Christianae* 36/1 (1982): 1-3. For a similar interpretation of Paul's portrait as an anti-hero, see: Ernst Dassmann, *Der Stachel im Fleisch. Paulus in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Irenäus* (Münster: Aschendorf, 1979), 279.

23. A.J. Malherbe, "A physical description of Paul," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 172. This opinion is shared by Bruce Malina and J. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 100-152: they examined the portrayal of the apostle also in the light of physiognomy, yet they consider it a description of the ideal male. A positive connotation of Paul's physical appearance, taking into consideration the narrative, is also emphasised by Heike Omerzu, "The Portrayal of Paul's Outer Appearance in the Acts of Paul and Thecla: Reconsidering the Correspondence Between the Body and Personality in Ancient Literature," *Religion and Theology* 15 (2008): 252-279. For a critique of the relevance of physiognomy, see M. Betz, "Die betörenden Worte des fremden Mannes: Zur Funktion der Paulusbeschreibung in den Theklaakten," *New Testament Studies* 53 (2007): 130-145 (esp. 132-137). In her interpretation 'his [i.e. Paul's] human appearance proves to be the antitype of the erotic lover such as depicted in the stereotypes of Greco-Roman novels.' It is also worth noting that the interpretation of the passage also depends on its translation, and, in some cases researchers disagree with each other in this respect.

24. Fürst, "Untersuchungen zur Ephemeris," 381.

25. Ernst von Dobschütz, *Der Apostel Paulus, II. Seine Stellung in der Kunst* (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1928), 1, 45, Anm. 5.

26. von Dobschütz, *Der Apostel Paulus*, 2.

The Hungarian classical philologist János Bollók was the first to examine the description in more detail in light of the physiognomic literature.<sup>27</sup> The *Act of Paul* contains the most important physiognomic characteristics: stature, hairstyle, leg shape and parts of the face. We also know from previous research by Evans and Barton that physiognomic tractates were known in the second century CE when the *Act* was created.<sup>28</sup> In Bollók's opinion, apostle Paul's external description was based on a fine-tuning of the inner characteristics described in the second letter to the Corinthians and the physiognomic literature.<sup>29</sup> In the second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle was accused of the same flaws as in the description of the *Act of Paul*. After comparing the elements of the description with the physiognomic literature, we see that the exact same personality emerges from the individual characteristics that the Corinthians accused the apostle of having. According to physiognomy, a small stature, crooked legs, a bald head, a uni-brow and a hooked nose are characteristics of a grim, stupid, cunning, shameless and timid person.

In my opinion, however, while there may be some truth in Bollók's supposition, it is debatable whether interpreting this description with the help of a single source is advisable. Furthermore, the apocryphal description may also be an early appearance of the new ideal of man presented above, which contradicts the classical ideal of beauty. In his first letter to the Corinthians, apostle Paul himself distinguishes between our 'corruptible earthly' and 'incorruptible divine image'.<sup>30</sup> To summarise, similarly to the physiognomy of Socrates or Plotinus, when we only compare the description of Paul with physiognomic literature, we will have a negative impression. However, appearances often deceive, and the ugly exterior may hide positive inner qualities.

Several of those who have investigated the description of Paul accept that it may also refer to a surrendering of the beauty that manifests itself in external qualities. According to them, this is supposed to sym-

27. Bollók, "The description of Paul," 6-9.

28. Elizabeth C. Evans, "The Study of Physiognomy in the Second Century A.D.," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 72 (1941): 96-109; Tamsyn S. Barton, *Power and Knowledge. Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine Under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 95-131.

29. Bollók, "The description of Paul," 10-11. The *loci* of the accusations are: 2Kor, 10.1-2; 10.10; 12.11; 12.16; 13.2.

30. 1Kor, 15, 49. For the characteristics of the new ideal, see also: B. Brenk, "Homo coelestis, oder von der physischen Anonymität der Heiligen in der Spätantike," in *Bildnisse*, 124.





Fig. 4.5—Saint Paul with Thecla, detail of an ivory casket, London, The British Museum, ca. 430.

bolise that the apostle's personality and speech is influential in spite of his ugly appearance.<sup>31</sup> The story in the apocryphal *Act* supports this hypothesis (Fig. 4.5). Thecla, the other protagonist of the *Act*, converts as a result of the apostle's words, without ever having seen him:

Thecla [...] sat at the window hard by, and hearkened night and day unto the word concerning chastity which was spoken by Paul [...] and further, when she saw many women and virgins entering in to Paul, she also desired earnestly to be accounted worthy to stand before Paul's face and to hear the word of Christ; for she had not yet seen the appearance of Paul, but only heard his speech.<sup>32</sup>

Ernst Dassmann collected the quotations that also praise the effect and style of Paul's words. For example, in the *Apocalypse of Paul*, there is talk of the 'sweetness and power of his words', while in the apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and Paul, it is the pagan writer who highly appreciates the style of apostle Paul's letters. The

31. Ernst Dassmann, *Paulus in frühchristlichen Frömmigkeit und Kunst* (Ospladen: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1982), 49; Jan N. Bremmer, "Magic, Martyrdom and Women's Liberation in the Acts of Paul and Thecla," in *The Apocryphal Acts*, 36-59; Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989).

32. *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 7. Translation from *The Apocryphal New Testament. Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses with other Narratives and Fragments*, transl. James Montague Rhodes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 274.

rhetorical skills of Saint Paul were also held in high esteem by the Church Fathers and John Chrysostom talks about the fecundity of Paul's sermon. Furthermore, for Saint Augustine the apostolic letters constituted one of the most important reading materials after his conversion.<sup>33</sup> The power and sweetness of Paul's words are similar to those of Socrates.

Thus, the apostle's reverence is not only detected in official Church circles, but also in apocryphal writings and folk religiousness. Of course, this does not mean that the apocryphal texts would reflect apostle Paul's theology in the way that the *Acts of the Apostles* or the letters do.<sup>34</sup> However, there is one common feature between the teachings of apostle Paul and the apocryphal *Act*, and I believe that this element can also be attributed to the description. This is the ascetic lifestyle, the preaching of sexual self-denial, which is one of the main messages of the *Act*. Apostle Paul could already have become a model of puritan life due to his thoughts recorded in the Bible, and this may have influenced the author of the *Act* as well.<sup>35</sup> I believe that the image of Paul suggested by the description, i.e. a new ideal of man, fits the apostle, who preached an ascetic lifestyle. In fact, L'Orange and Testini have traced apostle Paul's iconography to images of Plotinus, who followed similar principles.<sup>36</sup> Celibacy, a central idea within several apocryphal *Acts*, could also have presented an opportunity to become independent of the norms of society. An external appearance differing from the ideal of beauty of the era could fit with a lifestyle that was new for contemporary society.

33. Ernst Dassmann, "Aspekte Frühchristlicher Paulusverehrung," *Chartulae, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 28 (1998): 92, 97-102.

34. Michael Grant, *Paulus. Apostel der Völker* (Bergisch Gladbach: Lübbe, 1978), 12. On the relationship between the canonical texts and the apocryphal *Acts*, see: Andreas Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), 68-71; W. Rordorf, "In welchem Verhältniss stehen die apokryphen Paulusakten zur kanonischen Apostelgeschichte und zu Pastoralbriefen?," in *Text and Testimony. Essays in Honor of A.F.J. Klijn*, ed. A. Hilhorst (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 225-241; Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 212; P.W. Dunn, *The Acts of Paul and the Pauline Legacy in the Second Century* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1996), 150-151.

35. Cf. for example 1Kor, 7; Grant, *Paulus*, 39-41. The figure of Thecla and her deeds contrast with the apostle's views on women, cf.: 1Kor, 14, 34; 1Tim, 2, 12. See also: Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 71.

36. L'Orange, *Likeness and Icon*, 32-42; P. Testini, "L'apostolo Paolo nell'iconografia cristiana fino al VI. secolo," in *Studi Paolini*, ed. Paolo Brezzi (Roma: Istituto di Studi Romani Editore, 1969), 64-66.

Besides the power of the apostle's speech and the virtuousness of his character, another element can be linked to his external description. Already in the *Acts of Apostles*, Paul appears as a learned orator, a missionary, a miracle maker.<sup>37</sup> The Christian literature often employs the expressions 'doctor', or 'magister gentium, magister ecclesiarum et praedicator rectae fidei' when describing him.<sup>38</sup> Thus, in addition to the influence of his words and rhetorical skills (see Socrates), the negative elements of the description may also symbolise the wisdom (see Homer's portraits), fortitude of spirit and *theios aner* (likeness of a divine man) of the apostle, whose biographies were also popular in the second and third centuries.<sup>39</sup> The realistic description contrasts new values with the classical ideal of beauty and he preaches that beauty does not always indicate valuable inner qualities.

Thus, following ancient tradition, the description in the apocryphal *Act* tries to bring the apostle closer to the reader through persuasion. However, like with portraiture in Late Antiquity, comparing the description with the physiognomic literature highlights the novelty of the description in its own era. Nevertheless, the description in the *Act of Paul* not only improves our understanding of apostle Paul's reception, but one of the key elements of the description, baldness, became apostle Paul's attribute in fine art as well. If the apocryphal *Act* could have influenced the representations, then the above analysis can also bring us closer to understanding his portrayal in fine art. In what follows, I will examine the relationship between the apocryphal Paul description and the representations of the apostle, as well as how Saint Paul's iconography is related to the spread of the apostle's cult.

37. Dassmann, "Aspekte Frühchristlicher Paulusverehrung," 89.

38. Edda Weise, *Paulus, Apostel Jesu Christi. Lehrer seiner Gemeinden* (Tübingen: Eberhard-Karls-Universität, 1997); Dassmann, "Aspekte Frühchristlicher Paulusverehrung," 95.

39. For more on these god-like sages: Ludwig Bieber, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ. Das Bild des 'göttlichen Menschen' in Spätantike und Frühchristentum* (Darmstadt: Buchhandlung O. Höfels, 1976); von Heintze, "ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ," 180-190; D. Stutzinger, "ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ: Die Vorstellung vom aussergewöhnlichen göttlichen Menschen," in *Spätantike*, 163-174.

#### 4. The iconography of apostle Paul

Saint Paul already appears among the twelve apostles in their earliest representations as a group. Among them, apostles Paul and Peter, princes of the apostles and Founders of the Church, first gained an individual, characteristic appearance. Baldness and a beard are dominant elements of apostle Paul's iconography, while his attributes include the *rotulus*, the codex and the book. He is entitled as *doctor mundi*. Regarding Paul's baldness, I believe that the *Act of Paul* could have influenced Paul's representations. However, before I expand on my hypothesis, it is necessary to examine briefly the circumstances of the emergence of Paul's iconography.

The development of the individual iconographies of apostles Peter and Paul can be dated to the middle of the fourth century CE, or rather the second half of the fourth century.<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of the fourth century, apostle Peter already appears on his own, while apostle Paul joins him at the middle of the century. Paul may have needed an individualised physiognomy to distinguish him from Peter. The iconography of the two apostles and their joint portrayal developed during the fourth century on sarcophagi with scenes of the passion, as well as in the *Traditio legis* scenes.<sup>41</sup> There are many examples of apostle Paul's early representations (e.g. the Iunius Bassus sarcophagus) but in the dual portrait of apostles Peter and Paul, their differentiated physiognomy is more noticeable (Fig. 4.6). The image of the two apostles, either in profile or facing each other, mostly appears on *fondo d'oro* or other memorabilia and medallions. The representation of distinctly individual characteristics starts around 360 AD. The two apostles are represented together in the spirit of *concordia apostolorum*. This type of iconography may originate from the portraits of co-emperors, the representations of the Dioskuri or Romulus and Remus, who were placed by the cult of Peter and Paul in Rome. The dual portraits of spouses may even be the precursors of this type of iconography.<sup>42</sup> The

40. J.M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum. Christian Propaganda at Rome in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries. Study in Early Christian Iconography and Iconology* (Oxford: BAR, 1982), 3; Manuel Sotomayor, "Petrus und Paulus in der frühchristlichen Ikonographie," in *Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, 199. On the representations of the two apostles, see also: David R. Cartlidge and James K. Elliott, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (London: Routledge, 2001), 138-148.

41. Sotomayor, "Petrus und Paulus," 205.

42. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*.



Fig. 4.6—Saints Peter and Paul, fondo d'oro, Rome, Musei Vaticani, second half of the fourth century.

apostles who appear either side of Christ, represented as a sovereign, are also often associated with consuls or *duces in militia Christi*.<sup>43</sup>

These representations are also important because it is primarily in these works of art that apostle Paul gains a distinct image. After their initial similarity, there appeared to be a demand to differentiate Peter from Paul, and for apostle Paul this was achieved through his baldness. The majority of the literature treats Paul's iconography as dependent on Peter's. Their iconography is closely linked and Paul's can only be interpreted through Peter's. Although apostle Peter's iconography had

43. Friedrich Gerke, "Duces in militia Christi. Die Anfänge der Petrus-Paulus-Ikonographie," *Kunstchronik* 7 (1954): 96.

indeed developed earlier, in the end apostle Paul still has a much more characteristic physiognomy.

It is important to note here that Church propaganda played quite a large role in shaping the dual portraits, contrasting apostolic primacy with paganism, and thus trying to win Roman aristocrats over to the state religion of Christianity. It was during pope Damasus' papacy (366-384) that *Concordia apostolorum* became a defining element of Church policies. Damasus' aim was to strengthen the unity of the Church, which had weakened due to the Arian controversy, and reinforce the central status of Rome. He used the cult of the apostles to accomplish this, and he also contributed through poems he wrote about the princes of the apostles in Vergil's hexameter.<sup>44</sup>

But what did apostle Paul's cult represent within the shared reverence of the princes of the apostles? The apostle seemed quite suitable for the role of the converter of pagans in the second half of the fourth century both as *doctor mundi* and as a representative of the *ecclesia ex gentibus*. Peter Brown calls the philosophers of the last third of the fourth century 'Saint Paul's generation', because it was at that time that Christian philosophers discovered the apostle's writings and started to comment on them.<sup>45</sup> Thus their work also helped the apostle, now as a Christian philosopher, to become both a role model for pagans and their teacher through his teachings and the story of his conversion. Obviously, Peter's figure of the simple fisherman was not suitable for this role. The fourth-century spread of apostle Paul's cult constitutes exactly the intellectual historical background where the representations gained their own reasons for existence.

To summarise, the description in the *Act of Paul* played a significant role in the development of apostle Paul's physiognomy. The apocryphal description could have fulfilled several things that were important at the time. Besides making it possible to distinguish apostle Paul from Peter, it also conformed to the non-classical ideal that was already present in the representations from the fourth century. Furthermore, the somewhat unusual iconography, which built less on

44. Dennis Trout, *Damasus of Rome, The Epigraphic Poetry: Introduction, Texts, Translations, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Marianne Sághy, "The Bishop of Rome and the Cult of the Martyrs," in *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity*, ed. Geoffrey Dunn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 37-57.

45. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 151; idem, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 376.



Fig. 4.7—Saint Paul, fresco in the catacomb of Saint Thecla in Rome, fourth century.

classical traditions, could also have expressed that apostle Paul's theology and his ideas of missionary work did not insist on traditions as rigidly as Peter's did.<sup>46</sup> In addition, a narrow, elongated face became a common feature of apostle Paul's physiognomy, and this ascetic appearance complemented the image of an apostle preaching self-denial (Fig. 4.7).<sup>47</sup>

46. For Peter as representative of the 'ecclesia ex circumcissione' and Paul as representative of the 'ecclesia ex gentibus', see: Sotomayor, "Petrus und Paulus," 209. The representations of apostle Peter are rather influenced by the classical iconography of philosophers.

47. According to the latest archaeological findings and restorations, one of the earliest, fourth-century portraits of the apostle can be found in the catacomb of St. Thecla in Rome. The fresco was found in 2009, and it is not yet clear whether the catacomb was named after Thecla of Iconium, follower of Paul the apostle.

## 5. Links between the apocryphal description and the iconography of the apostle

In what follows, I will examine whether the apocryphal *Act of Paul* could have had an influence during the fourth century, and whether it was known at the time. The literature is quite divided on whether we can consider the description of the *Act of Paul* a possible source of his iconography. The majority of the previous research has only discussed this issue in passing, and some researchers do not mention the apocryphal description in their writing about the Paul iconography at all. For a long time, many of those who took into account the existence of the description did not accept a possible link between the *Act* and the representations. These authors rejected the hypothesis by saying that the description is fairy-tale-like, false and not suited to Paul. Based on the arguments presented above, I share the view of those who do not exclude the possibility of a link between the description and fine art. The latest research<sup>48</sup> accepts the possibility that there may indeed be a link between the apocryphal text and the early Paul iconography, but a similar analysis of the description and the portraits with a shared literary, art historian and philological approach has only been made by a few scholars. In this respect I agree with Callie Callon, who contextualises the description and the iconography in the wise philosopher teacher figure. Callon has also investigated the apocryphal passage in the light of the literary and visual tradition.<sup>49</sup>

The widespread popularity of the *Act of Paul* is indicated by the fact that the part of the three-part *Act of Paul* that contains the description has also spread independently, known as the *Act of Thecla*.<sup>50</sup> The text of the *Act* has survived in many manuscripts and it has been translated into several languages (Latin, Coptic, Arabic, Syriac, Slavic, etc.), and it already enjoyed prestige in the early Church. For a long time it was not even considered a heretic work, but almost a part of the Bible, and

48. Cartlidge and Elliott, *Art*, 17, 138-139.

49. C. Callon, "The Unibrow that never was: Paul's appearance in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes and Alicia J. Batten (London: Routledge, 2014), 99-116. However, she proposes that Paul's unibrow is better understood as the intellectual 'knitted brow' of Antiquity because this feature better befits the representation of Paul as a philosophical figure during the whole *Act* as well as in the broader literary and iconographic tradition in general.

50. Carl Schmidt, *Acta Pauli* (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1936).





Fig. 4.8—Thecla ship with Paul as captain, detail of a sarcophagus, Rome, Musei Capitolini, fourth century.

the *Decretum Gelasianum* only declared it apocryphal in 496.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it is highly likely that the description in the *Act* would have been considered authentic at the time of the development of the apostle's iconography.

The reputation of the *Act* can best be exemplified with the representations of Thecla, since the miracles of the martyress could only have been known to the early Christians from this *Act*.<sup>52</sup> One of the earliest joint Paul and Thecla representations is a fourth-century fragment of a sarcophagus found in the San Valentino church in Rome (Fig. 4.8). On the fragment, we see a ship with the inscription 'Thecla' on it. A man

51. On the popularity of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* see: Bernhard Kötting, *Peregrinatio religiosa, Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen in der Alten Kirche* (Münster: Stenderhoff, 1980), 140-160; Claudia Nauerth, *Thekla, ihre Bilder in der frühchristlichen Kunst* (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1981), IX; F. Gori, "Atti di Paolo e Tecla," in *Complementi Interdisciplinari di Patrologia*, ed. Antonio Quacquarelli (Roma: Città Nuova, 1989), 262-263.

52. For the most complete discussion of the images of Thecla and Paul, see: Cartlidge and Elliott, *Art*, 134-171; David R. Cartlidge, "Thecla: The Apostle Who Defied Women's Destiny," *Bible Review* 20/6 (2004): 24-33. More broadly on the cult of Thecla, see: Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of St. Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). On the frescoes in the Cave of St. Paul at Ephesus, see also: <http://ephesusfoundationusa.org/projects/the-cave-of-st-paul>.

can be seen catching a fish in the bow of the ship, while behind him a bald man is steering the sail with the inscription 'Paulus' beside him.<sup>53</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Since we have quite a lot of evidence concerning the reputation of the *Act of Paul* in the fourth century, we can assume that the apocryphal description has influenced fine art. Most previous researchers traced the characteristics of the apostle's description and his portrait to a single source or precursor. In my opinion, to understand the spirit of the description and the message of Paul's physiognomy, we need a more extensive analysis of intellectual history. I believe that physiognomic thinking, as one possible tool in the processes of image creation, can improve our understanding of the message of the apostle's 'image'.

53. For an interpretation of this fragment, see: Ulrich Fabricius, *Die Legende im Bild des Ersten Jahrtausends der Kirche, Der Einfluss der Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen auf die altchristliche und byzantinische Kunst* (Kassel: Oncken, 1956), 110; Nauwerth, *Thekla*, XII.