



# Early Christian and Byzantine Art

# Early Christian Catacomb



In Roman Empire

**PROHIBITIONS OVER CHRISTIANITY**

**PRACTICE CONSIDERED MISAPPROPRIATE**

**CATACOMBS - EARLY CHRISTIAN ART CREATED UNDERGROUND**

**UNDERGROUND PASSAGeways TO BURY DEAD AND HOLD OCCASIONAL RELIGIOUS SERVICES**



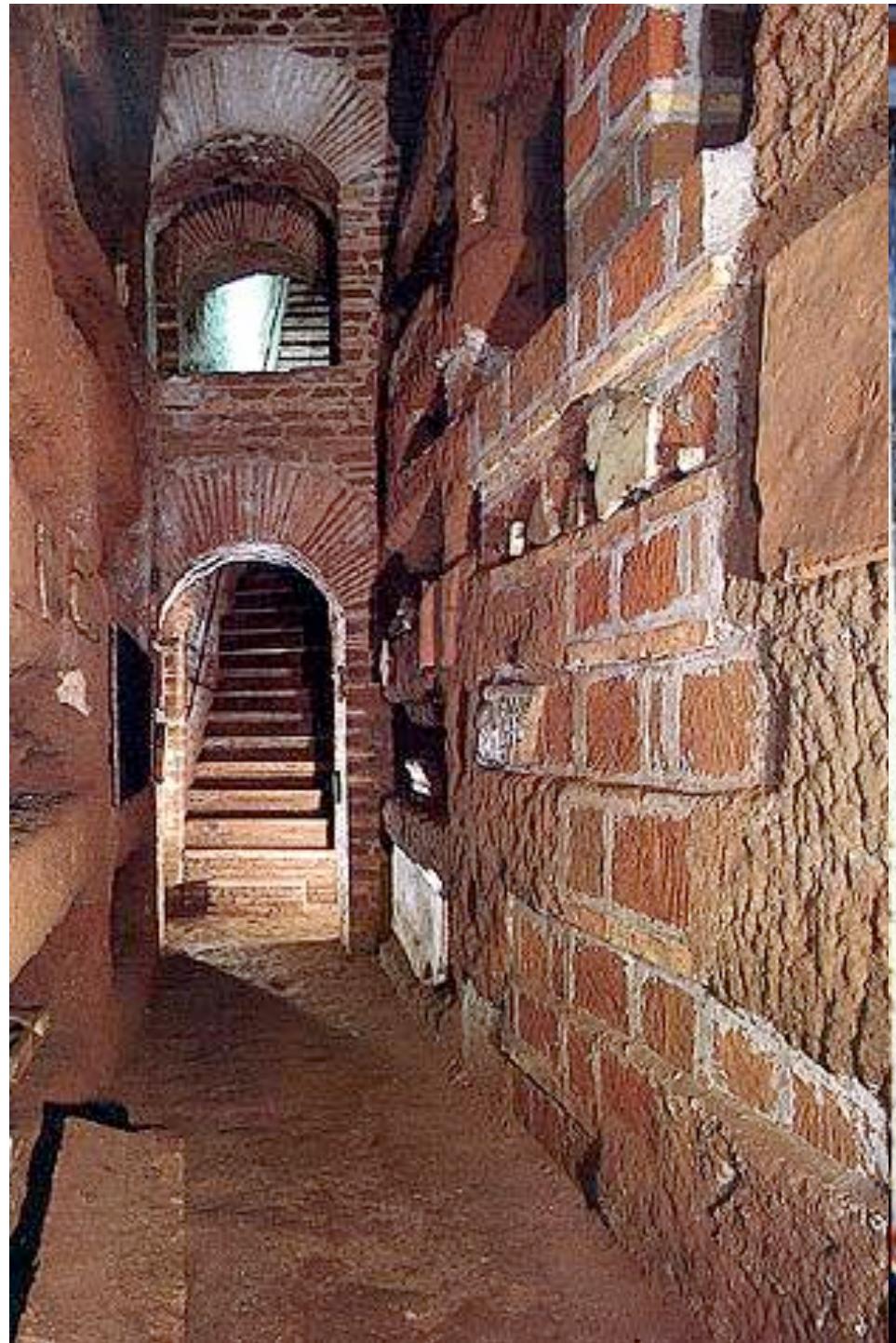
## **Early Christian Catacombs**

**GREW TO BE MASSIVE UNDERGROUND NETWORKS OF TUNNELS, LIGHTED AND VENTILATED BY AIR SHAFTS.**

**EARLY CHRISTIAN ART OF CATACOMBS DIFFERED FROM THE ART OF ROME IN MANY WAYS.**

**ARTISTS SHOWED LITTLE INTEREST IN THE GRACE AND POWER OF THE HUMAN BODY SO VERY IMPORTANT TO GREEK AND ROMAN ARTISTS.**

**CHRISTIAN ART WAS INTENDED TO ILLUSTRATE THE GLORY AND POWER OF CHRIST**



QVASE Vnde IEGEMITVS · LADIEVS KETVS  
PIG MORT PATESSERAS CASTELLE  
SEXT RIGHTA ANNIS · SVRIP AGRIB  
ACCIVM NATA PTRA SMATI · C TEBAS





## Dawn of Christianity and the wake of Byzantium Empire

**AD 313 - CONSTANTINE PROCLAIMED CHRISTIANITY TO BE THE OFFICIAL RELIGION OF ROMAN EMPIRE**

**CHRISTIANITY SURFACED IN THE WAKE OF THE DYING ROMAN EMPIRE**



**CONSTANTINE ESTABLISHED A NEW CENTRE OF POWER IN THE EAST OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE**

**CENTRE GRADUALLY GREW IN WEALTH AND POWER WHILE ROME IN THE WEST GRADUALLY DECLINED**

**THIS LEFT CONSTANTINOPLE AS THE SOLE SEAT OF ROMAN POWER.**

**AD 350 - THE CAPITAL AND HEAD OF THE CHURCH MOVED TO THIS EASTERN LOCATION**



**THIS ALLIANCE OF CHURCH AND STATE SURVIVED INTO THE MIDDLE AGES**

**TO BUILD CHURCHES THE CHRISTIANS BORROWED FROM THE ROMANS AND  
SELECTED AS THEIR MODEL THE BASILICA**

**BASILICA – LONG SPACIOUS BUILDING THAT ROMANS TRADITIONALLY USED AS  
MEETING HALLS**













**ICONOCLASTS RAISED ISSUES OVER IMAGERIES AND ITS USE IN RELIGION**

**EARLY CHRISTIANS AGREED – STATUES REMIND THE GRAVEN IMAGES**

**TO ACKNOWLEDGE SUCH FIGURES AS GOD, OR ONE OF HIS SAINTS, AND PLACE THEM ON ALTAR SEEMED OUT OF QUESTION**

**IN ABSENCE OF STATUES HOW WOULD THE POOR PAGANS CONVERTED TO NEW FAITH, GRASP THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OLD BELIEFS AND NEW MESSAGE**

**MAKING THE PAGANS ADMIT AND ACCEPT THAT GOD EXISTS, IS TRUE AND REAL WAS NOT POSSIBLE WITH SCULPTURES IF THEY REMINDED OF THE DEAD**

**MESSAGE OF THE ONE ALMIGHTY AND INVISIBLE GOD COULD BE MORE DIFFICULT TO GRASP IF THEY SAW SUCH STATUES IN THE CHURCHES?**



**CHRISTIANS OBJECTED TO LIFE LIKE STATUES BUT IDEAS ABOUT PAINTINGS  
DIFFERED GOOD DEAL: USEFUL AS THEY REMIND THE CONGREGATION OF THE  
TEACHINGS RECEIVED**

**MEMORIES OF SACRED EPISODES COULD BE KEPT ALIVE**

**6<sup>TH</sup> C. POPE GREGORY'S REMINDER TO PEOPLE WHO WERE AGAINST ALL PAINTINGS  
- 'PAINTING CAN DO FOR THE ILLITERATE WHAT WRITING DOES FOR THOSE WHO  
CAN READ'**



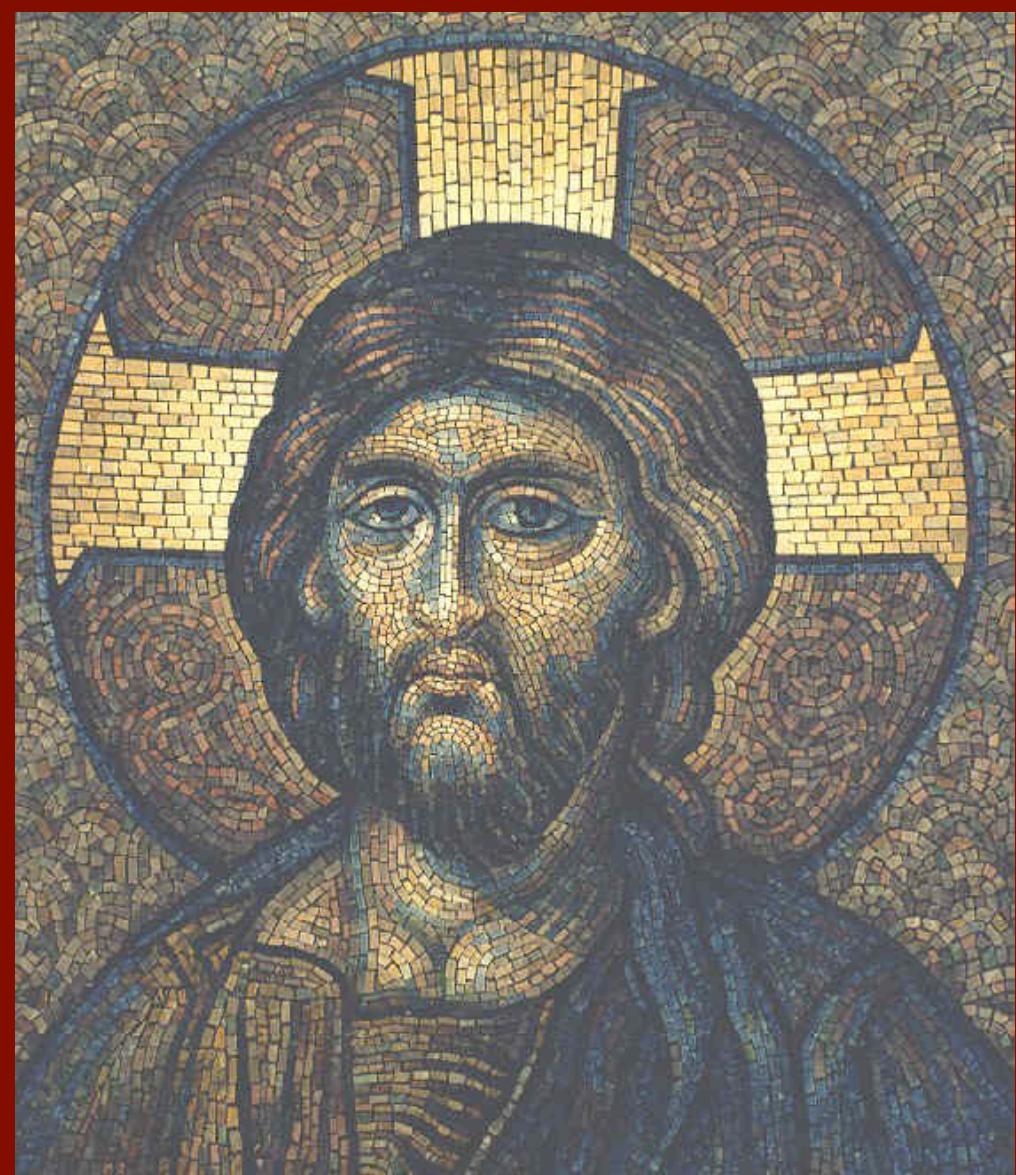
IT WAS OF IMMENSE IMPORTANCE FOR THE HISTORY OF ART THAT SUCH A GREAT AUTHORITY HAD COME OUT IN FAVOUR OF PAINTING. HIS SAYING WAS QUOTED AT TIMES WHEN PEOPLE ATTACKED THE USE OF IMAGES IN CHURCHES.



## Ideas define style



**TYPE OF ART THUS ADMITTED WAS OF A RESTRICTED NATURE. IF GREGORY'S PURPOSE WAS TO BE SERVED, THE STORY HAD TO BE TOLD AS CLEARLY AND SIMPLY AS POSSIBLE.**



## **Byzantium Murals**

### **VISUAL NARRATIVES**

**MOSAIC AS A 2D MEDIUM  
NARRATING CHRISTIAN STORIES ON  
WALLS OF BASILICAS**

**A ROMAN TECHNIQUE OF USING  
MARBLE IN ITS NATURAL COLOURS  
TO DECORATE VILLAS.**

**LATER ADOPTED BY BYZANTINE  
ARTISTS USING PIECES OF GLASS  
WITH IRREGULAR SHAPES AND  
SIZES**

**ART DECORATIVE IN NATURE**

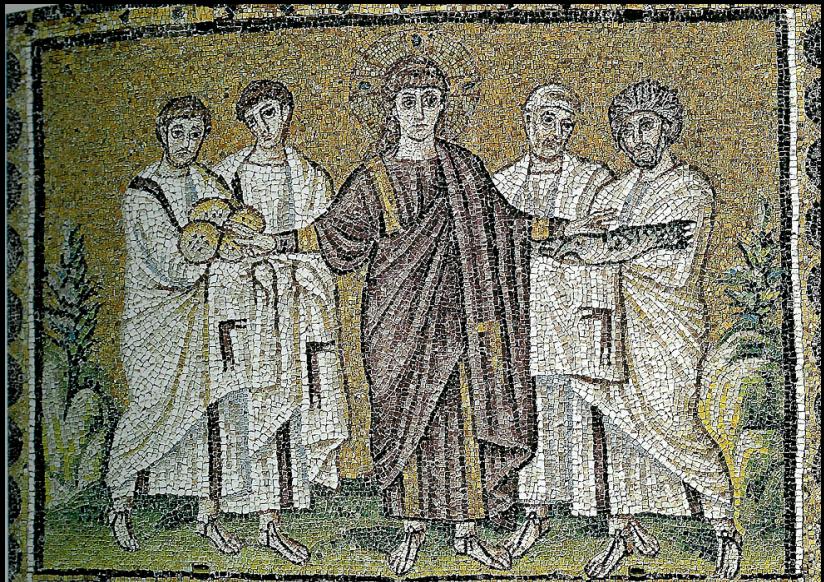
**DESIGN MADE OF TINY PIECES (TESSERAE) OF COLOURED STONE, GLASS OR TILE  
ADHERED TO SURFACE OF PLASTER OR CONCRETE ON WALLS, CEILINGS OR FLOORS**



## Style of art

INITIALLY, PAINTERS FOLLOWED ROMAN MODEL OF STORY-TELLING THAT WAS OF A DESCRIPTIVE NATURE BUT GRADUALLY CONFINED TO THE STRICTLY ESSENTIALS

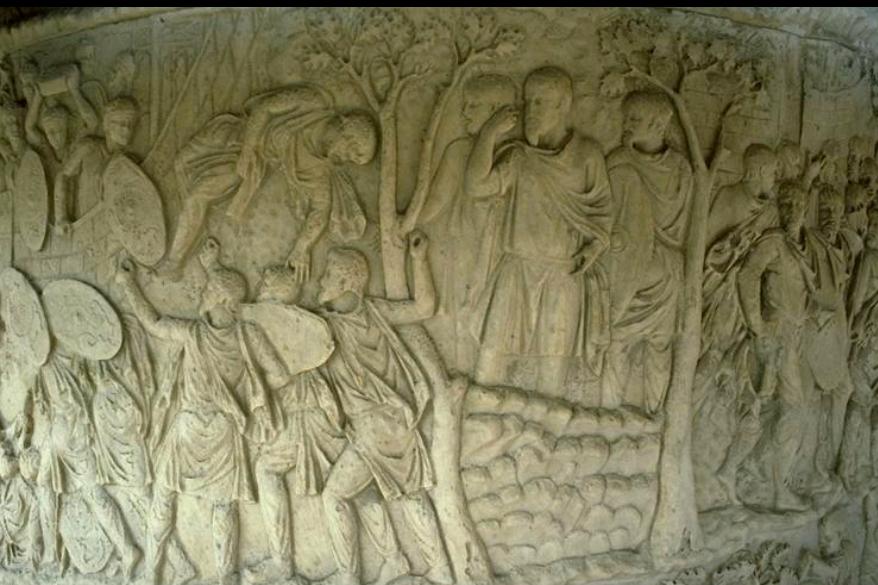
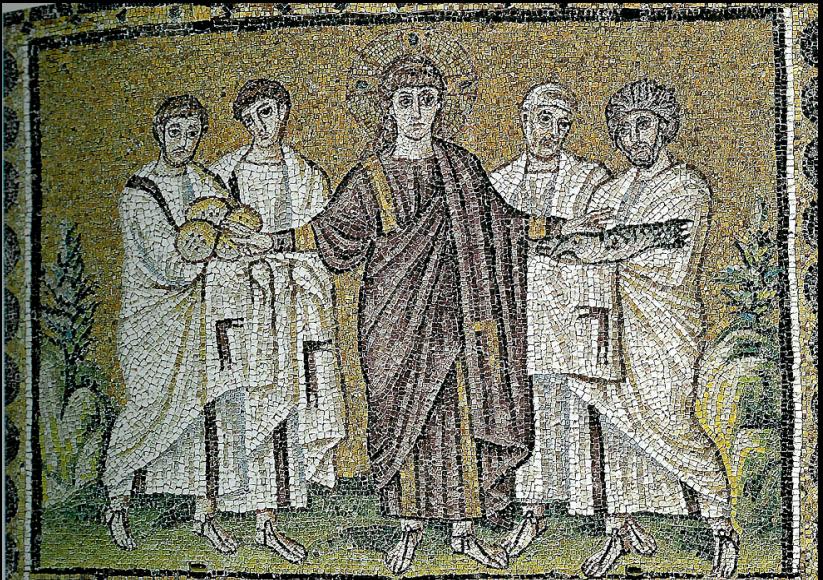
ANYTHING THAT MIGHT DIVERT ATTENTION FROM THE MAIN AND SACRED AIM WAS OMITTED



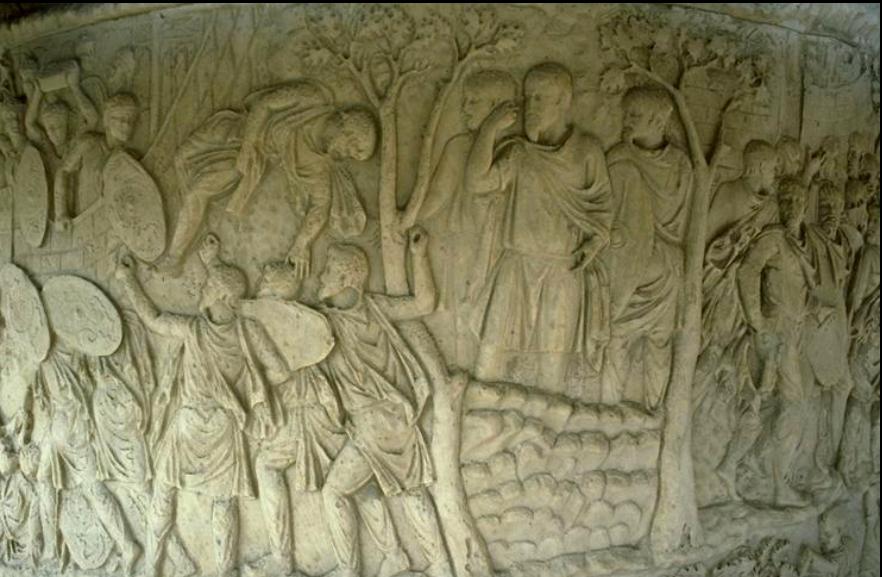
**CHARACTERISTICS OF BYZANTIUM MURALS CAN BE REALIZED THROUGH THIS MOSAIC FROM CHURCH IN RAVENNA ILLUSTRATING A STORY FROM THE GOSPELS**



**ROMAN ARTIST MIGHT HAVE PORTRAYED A LARGE CROWD OF PEOPLE TO CREATE A DRAMATIC SCENE BUT BYZANTINE MURALISTS STRICTLY ADHERE TO THE MINIMAL**



**TWO APOSTLES STANDING ON EITHER SIDE OF CHRIST OFFERING HIM 5 BREADS AND 2 FISHES IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH A MIRACLE.**



**CHRIST IN THE CENTRE OF A SYMMETRIC COMPOSITION, DEPICTED STILL AND CALM AS HE LIVED IN THE IMAGINATION OF EARLY CHRISTIANS**



**DRAPE WITH A PURPLE ROBE WITH ARMS STRETCHED OUT BLESSING ON BOTH SIDES.**



**DECORATIVE QUALITY - THE BACKGROUND LAID OUT WITH THE GOLD TESSERAE  
THE SCENE ENACTED ON THIS GOLD BACKGROUND *SUGGESTIVE* IN NATURE**



**FOOD HELD WITH COVERED HANDS, A COMMON CUSTOM**



A SACRED AND SOLEMN CEREMONY - SYMBOL OF CHRIST'S ABIDING POWER  
EMBODIED IN THE CHURCH.



**THE STYLE LACKS MOVEMENT AND DEFICIENT IN FACIAL EXPRESSIONS THAT  
WAS A PRIDE OF GREEK AND ROMAN ART - STILL RETAINS EXPRESSIVE  
QUALITIES**

## **INTENTIONS AND AIMS –**

**FIGURES SHOWN IN STRICT FRONTAL VIEW REMINISCENT OF CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS BUT THE ARTIST MUST BE WELL ACQUAINTED WITH ROMAN COPIES OF GREEK ART.**

**THE FORMS THAT THE ARTIST USED IN THIS NEW ATTEMPT WERE NOT JUST A SIMPLE STYLE BASED ON ARCHAIC QUALITIES BUT A CURIOUS BLEND OF INTELLIGENCE AND SOPHISTICATION**

**MOSAIC APPEARS STIFF AND RIGID. IF THE PICTURE LOOKS RATHER PRIMITIVE TO US, IT MUST BE BECAUSE THE ARTIST WANTED IT TO BE SIMPLE**

**BYZANTINE ARTISTS TRANSFORMED THE SIMPLE ILLUSTRATIONS OF CATACOMBS INTO MAJESTIC IMAGES FOR THE GLORIFICATION OF CHRIST AND HIS POWER THAT DOMINATES THE CHURCH INTERIORS**

**ART AIMED AT COMMUNICATING THE CHRISTIAN IDEALS IN A SIMPLE MANNER TO THE SIMPLE PEOPLE**



**OBSERVATION OF NATURE, THAT AWAKENED IN 500 BC GREECE , PUT TO SLEEP AGAIN ABOUT 500 AD**

**ARTISTS NO LONGER CHECKED THEIR FORMULAE FOR REALITY**

**THEY NO LONGER SET OUT TO MAKE DISCOVERIES OF REPRESENTING A BODY, OR TO CREATE THE ILLUSION OF DEPTH**



**BUT THE DISCOVERIES ONCE MADE WERE NEVER LOST**

**GREEK AND ROMAN ART PROVIDED AN IMMENSE STOCK OF FIGURES STANDING,  
SITTING, BENDING DOWN OR FALLING AND TYPES PROVED USEFUL IN THE  
TELLING OF A STORY**



**GESTURES WERE ASSIDUOUSLY COPIED AND ADAPTED TO EVER-NEW CONTEXTS**

**BYZANTINE ARTISTS INCLINED OVER OBSERVANCE OF TRADITIONS**

**BYZANTIUM CHURCH PRESERVED THE IDEAS AND ACHIEVEMENT OF GREEK ART  
IN THE TYPES USED FOR DRAPERY, FACES OR GESTURES.**



**ART CLEARLY REVEAL THE INSPIRATION  
DRAWN FROM ROMAN MODELS**

**THERE WERE ALSO INFLUENCES FROM  
THE EAST THROUGH THE INDIAN AND  
AFRICAN ART AND ARTEFACTS**

**OBSERVE**

**FOLDS DRAPED ROUND THE BODY, THE  
METHOD OF MODELLING THE FACE AND  
HANDS BY MARKING THE SHADOWS AND  
EVEN THE SWEEP OF THE VIRGIN'S  
THRONE**



