

# SARCOPHAGI: 'Jesus' Passion'

Passion: Latin: Suffering

## Who?

The scene depicts Jesus' final days, including his trial, death and resurrection.

## What?

Sarcophagi are stone coffins that have carved images on them. The images often feature scenes from the Bible or the lives of saints.

This particular sarcophagi has a variety of images that reinforce the belief that Jesus' death and resurrection were a triumph over sin and a sign of hope. The entire decoration is based on the Passion and resurrection of Jesus.

## When?

It dates from the 4th Century.

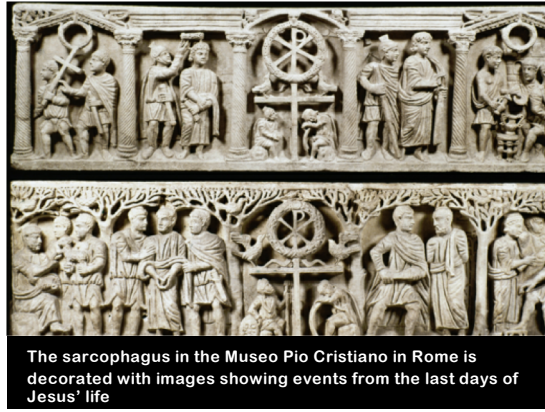
## Where?

The **Museo Pio Cristiano** in the Vatican, Rome.

## Why?

Humans often use images and symbols to help explore ideas and to find ways of expressing beliefs.

The Jesus' Passion sarcophagi expressed beliefs about death, resurrection and eternal life.



The sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano in Rome is decorated with images showing events from the last days of Jesus' life

### The Cross: Chi-Rho Symbol of Resurrection

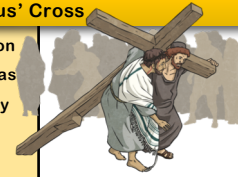
For the centre piece there is a stylised cross with the Chi-Rho symbol representing Jesus. The Chi-Rho is an ancient symbol of the resurrection. It is formed from the first two letters of the title 'Christ' in Greek (Chi = X, Rho = P). When merged together they form the 'Chi-Rho'. To reinforce the fact that Jesus' death was a victory over sin, the Chi-Rho is placed within a wreath that is held in the beaks of two eagles. The wreath is the Roman symbol of victory. The eagles represent God because in Roman religion they were used to represent the god Jupiter. This cross sits above two soldiers who are looking up at it in awe.



The Chi-Rho is a traditional symbol for the Resurrection of Jesus

### Simon of Cyrene: Carrying Jesus' Cross

On one panel there is an illustration of the scene where a man known as Simon of Cyrene was instructed by the Romans to carry Jesus' cross to the crucifixion.



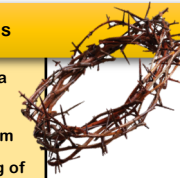
### Jesus' Trial before Pilate

Another panel shows Jesus being presented for trial before the Roman governor Pilate.



### The Crown of Thorns

The next panel shows Jesus being given a crown of thorns by the soldiers guarding him – they gave him the crown to mock him as he was accused of calling himself King of the Jews. However, the crown in the image is actually filled with jewels which symbolises that Jesus' death was actually a triumph over sin.



### Pilate Washes his Hands of the Blame

Next to it is the scene of Pilate, who did not want to execute Jesus but gave in to the pressure of the crowd and the Jewish authorities, washing his hands to symbolise that he wouldn't take responsibility for crucifying Jesus.



## Summary

- The sarcophagus with scenes of the Passion conveys Christian beliefs about eternal life

## Knowledge Check

- What are sarcophagi?
- What does the 'Jesus' Passion' sarcophagus depict?
- What does the word *passion* translate to?
- What are the four main events of the Passion?
- What does the Chi-Rho symbol represent?
- What is the wreath a symbol of?
- Why is the crown of thorns filled with jewels?
- Why is Pilate depicted washing his hands?

## Choose a Task

- Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
- Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
- Create a poster/leaflet

### CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

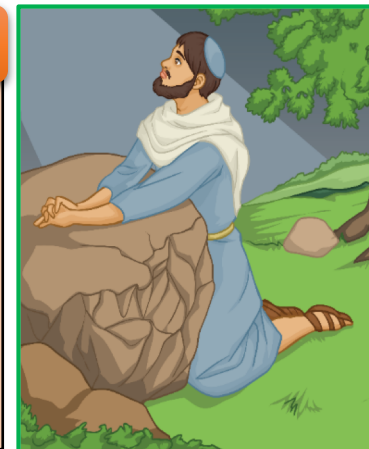
## Exam Question

b) Describe how the Sarcophagus reflects Catholic belief in life after death [5]

## What is meant by Jesus' *Passion*?

This term comes from the Latin word for 'suffering' and is used to refer to the suffering Jesus endured during the last few days of his life. The Gospels describe the main events of the Passion:

- Garden of Gethsemane:** Where Jesus prayed for the strength to face the difficulties he was to endure. This was where he was arrested.
- Two trials:** Jesus appeared before the Jewish authorities to face religious charges. He then was tried by the Roman official (Pontius Pilate) and charged with rebellion.
- Suffering:** Under instructions from Pilate, Jesus was whipped, hit and had a crown made out of thorns placed on his head.
- Crucifixion:** This is a cruel and painful way to die. Jesus was nailed to a cross (nails in the hands and the feet). The Gospel accounts say that he was on the cross for six hours. Eventually, his body could take no more and he died. The soldiers checked that he was dead before removing him from the cross and placing him in a tomb.



The Garden of Gethsemane scene shows Jesus humanity, where he struggles to come to terms with his fate.

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."<sup>37</sup> He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.<sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

<sup>39</sup> Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. <sup>41</sup> "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

<sup>42</sup> He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." (Matthew 26)