

CHAPTER 3

FISH SYMBOLISM IN EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS¹

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I investigate the use of fish symbolism in the texts of early Christian inscriptions and literature, all of which are catalogued in Appendix 1 with accompanying texts and translations.² Geographically, these materials were written throughout the extent of the Mediterranean basin area, and chronologically they date from the end of the second century C.E. to the beginning of the seventh century C.E. Whereas I focussed in Chapter 2 on isolated pagan meanings and their application in Christian contexts, I concentrate in this chapter on the interplay of both pagan and Christian references and associations.

In order that one may better understand the framework of meanings of fish symbolism, I give most special exegetical attention to the interpretation of one particular tradition of fish symbolism—that of the eucharistic fish from the water spring. And within that tradition, I give most detailed exegetical attention to one text—the Avercius inscription.

In doing this kind of careful analysis, I hope that readers will gain a

1. For a catalogue of phrases in which the fish symbol appears, from antiquity through the medieval period, still useful, though lacking textual context and translations, see J. B. Pitra, “*IXΘΥΣ* sive de Pisce Allegorico et Symbolico” (1855). German translations of many of these texts (though often again without full textual context and lacking the original language) may be found in the appendix of L. Wehrhahn-Stauch, “Christliche Fischsymbolik von den Anfängen bis zum hohen Mittelalter” (1972). F. Dölger, in *IXΘΥΣ* (5 vols. 1910-1943), collects many of these texts in unsystematic fashion (sometimes texts without translations, sometimes translations without texts, often without full textual context, and generally with little apparent thematic order). In addition, exegesis and discussions of a few selected passages may be found in most of the references listed in n. 1 of Chapter 2, but especially in C. R. Morey, “The Origin of the Fish Symbol” (1910-1912) and in F. Dölger, *IXΘΥΣ*.

detailed understanding of the uses of fish symbolism in one particular context, and thus they will see how important it is to understand the full context in which a symbol is used. For it is not only because they have overlooked the full range of uses and referents of symbols, but also because they have ignored the context in which those symbols have been used, that many scholars have been led to the one-dimensional dictionary approaches that have characterized the interpretation of ancient religious symbols.³ Since the Avercius inscription is probably the most fundamental single piece of evidence (textual or iconographic) from antiquity relating to early Christian fish symbolism, it is the best example for my most detailed exegesis.

After studying fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription, I investigate two other texts involving the tradition of the fish from the water spring: the inscription of Pectorius of Autun and the so-called “Narration of Events Taking Place in Persia.” Since these two texts postdate the Avercius inscription, by studying them, I have not only been able to examine more fully other contexts, but also to view to a limited extent the chronological development of early Christian fish symbolism.

2. Textual references (e.g. “Text # I.1”) are to the catalogue in Appendix 1, unless otherwise indicated.

3. Some scholars have attempted to treat the fish symbol in isolation from the rest of the inscription (e.g. C. R. Morey, J. Engemann). While another scholar, F. Dölger (in his five volume work, IXΘΥΣ) examined items such as the Avercius inscription in close detail, he failed to relate fish symbolism to the overall context (pagan and Christian) of the inscription, primarily because he preferred one-dimensional solutions and did not ultimately accept pagan influence. For this general problem, see especially pp. 99-118 above, especially 110-17.

When I finish the symbolism of the fish from the water spring, I examine fish symbolism as it exists in other thematically organized groups of texts: fishing for Christ and for Christians, fish symbolism and baptism, fish symbolism and food, as well as fish symbolism and the acronym ΙΧΘΥΣ. By doing this, I follow the various transformations in the networks of meaning of fish symbolism that will (I hope) enable the reader to obtain a broad understanding of the various textual contexts in which this symbolism is found.

Overall, I examine in one way or another most of the textual evidence for fish symbolism. As a result, I cover its range of meaning in early Christian texts to an extent not yet attempted by scholars——primarily all of whom have treated the textual evidence as virtually an appendage to their chief interest, the interpretation of iconographic evidence. I observe in Chapter 4 on iconography that the visual depictions of fish take on new meaning, when one has investigated the textual evidence independently.

**THE FISH FROM THE WATER SPRING AND THE
EUCHARISTIC FISH**

The Avercius inscription⁴ (Text # I.1)

- 1 As a citizen of a select city I have made this
monument
while alive in order that I might have a public
place for my body.
My name is Avercius, the disciple of a holy
shepherd
who pastures his flocks of sheep on mountains and
on fields
- 5 (and) who possesses huge eyes, which he casts down
everywhere.
For he has taught me faithful words [...],
he who has sent me to look up at a kingdom
and to see a golden-robed and golden-sandalled
queen.
There I saw a people who had a brilliant seal,
10 and I saw the plain of Syria and many cities,
including Nisibis,
after I crossed over the Euphrates. Everywhere I
had brethren,
while I had Paul in my carriage. Faith led me
everywhere
and furnished everywhere as nourishment a fish
from a water spring,
(a fish) which was enormous and pure, and which a
holy virgin grasped.
- 15 And she (Faith) bestowed it among friends so that
they could always eat it,
as they had excellent wine and as they gave it
in its mixed form with bread.
While present I Avercius said that these (words)
were to be written here,
when I was in my seventy-second year.
Let everyone, who understands these (words) and
who is in unison (with them), pray on behalf
of Avercius.
- 20 Let no none put any other person in my tomb.
If anyone does this, he or she will pay two
thousand gold coins to the Roman treasury

4. For previous edition of, and commentaries on, the Avercius inscription, see Endnote 1. For a history of the discovery of the inscription and discussion of its layout, see Appendix 3.1.

and one thousand gold coins to the well-endowed
fatherland of Hieropolis.

Of all the early Christian texts that use the fish as a symbol, the Greek funerary inscription in verse commissioned by Avercius, bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia, is the clearest example of a text that incorporates into its symbolic network a large and diverse number of referents and associations. In studying this inscription and the use of the fish as a symbol in it, I show that it combines pagan and Christian meanings to perhaps a greater extent than any other early Christian text containing fish symbolism. Furthermore, one discovers that its intentionally complex and multivalent language produces an especially complex network of meaning. Finally, an understanding of the inscription suggests that the use of the fish as a symbol reflected, on the one hand, the way in which early Christians viewed their identity, their community, and the center of their worship—Christ—and contributed in small part, on the other, to the organization of their cultural system.

Close analysis reveals that the inscription should probably be dated somewhere between 192/93 and c. 212 C.E.—which most likely makes it the earliest clearly datable and extant Christian inscription from antiquity.⁵ My reconstruction of the text of the inscription, along with text critical commentary, may be found in Appendix 3.4.⁶ It is very much similar to those of others with some small differences. Unlike

Ramsay, who reformulates the text based on metrical considerations, I follow many editors in my unwillingness (unless there is a very good reason) to rewrite the text as given by his vita.⁷

Pagan and early Christian aspects of fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription. During the first twenty to thirty years of interpretation of the Avercius inscription, scholars focussed much of their attention on the debate as to whether it was a pagan or a Christian inscription—and thus whether fish symbolism was pagan or Christian. Since that time, most interpreters have come to the conclusion that the Avercius inscription was almost certainly Christian.

Yet, even when scholars were not directly responding to the assertion of the pagan character of the inscription, in their interpretations they concentrated on showing and specifying its distinctively Christian characteristics. For example, in his important studies of the Avercius inscription in the context of his study of fish symbolism, Dölger devotes almost the entire bulk of his writing to clarifying precisely to which items various words of the inscription refer. Thus, for example, while

5. For discussion of dating, see Appendix 3.2.

6. For the sources of my reconstruction, see Appendix 3.3.

7. In fact, it is quite possible that errors still remain—but better the errors of a fourth or fifth century C.E. writer than those of a modern one. In addition, the rendering of the inscription in the vita often suggests that the author of the vita did not understand ancient metre or chose to ignore it. Yet, the Alexander inscription (see Appendix 3.1) and the extant original parts of the Avercius inscription also clearly indicate that ancient poets could make metrical errors, or take metrical license.

(for Dölger) the entity that furnishes the fish to Avercius, “Faith” (Πιστις), normally refers to an abstract pagan goddess,⁸ here it actually refers to the idea of Christian faith;⁹ while the realm in which the fish dwells, the “water spring” (πηγή), often refers to a sacred body of water with fish, here it actually refers to Christian baptism;¹⁰ while the items to which the fish symbol refers—bread and wine—generally indicate a normal secular meal, here they actually refer to the eucharist;¹¹ and most important, while “fish” (ἰχθὺς) might be thought to refer to the fish of Atargatis, here it actually refers to Christ and the Christian eucharist.¹² And, in spite of this, Dölger still goes far beyond most scholars (including A. Abel in his essential study) in at least recognizing that these words have pagan connotations—even if he does this only in order to reject those very connotations.

In the final analysis, most interpreters assume that in the Avercius inscription one needs simply to identify the Christian referents without further elaboration.

8. For discussion of the goddess “Faith” in Roman religion, see G. Piccaluga, “Fides nella religione romana di età imperiale.”

9. IXΘΥΣ 2:482-83. As I discuss below on pp. 606-07, faith also refers to the faith gained by baptism, which is turn related to fish symbolism.

10. Vol. 2 of IXΘΥΣ.

11. IXΘΥΣ 2:491-507.

12. Vol 2. of IXΘΥΣ. Dölger does this with many other words in the inscription, such as the word “queen” (βασίλισσα). He claims that, while normally it would refer to the empress, here it actually refers to the early Christian Church: IXΘΥΣ 2:475-76.

Nevertheless, it is the most notable and distinctive feature of this inscription that its words and phrases bear several referents and associations, both pagan and Christian. I discuss the interpretation of most of these words in detail in Appendix 3.5 and 3.7. Not surprisingly therefore, the “pure fish” (καθαρόν ἰχθῦς) and the “water spring” (πηγή) in which it dwells (vv. 13-14) fit in perfectly with all the other words of the inscription, since they both possess referential frameworks that simultaneously include pagan and Christian referents.

For, in contrast to the majority of scholars who have argued that vv. 12-16 contain the most Christian elements of the inscription,¹³ I have already demonstrated in Chapter 2 that two of the major components in this section——sacred fish and sacred fishponds (or water springs)——are important features of pagan religions and of pagan religious sanctuaries.¹⁴ Early Christians like Avercius did not use this imagery only to ignore its rather obvious associations.

Furthermore, these items do not bear exclusively religious connotations. When ancient persons considered the image of fish as presented here, they would undoubtedly have thought of those large fish that were served at secular meals in the Graeco-Roman world.¹⁵ Moreover, the mention of bread and wine (along with fish) would undoubtedly have

13. See Appendix 3.5.

14. See pp. 161-213 above.

15. See pp. 124-39 above.

recalled normal secular pagan meals, since bread and wine were normal components of such meals.¹⁶

In addition, as already established in Chapter 2, fish were an important part of the menu in pagan religious meals that were connected to the cult of the dead. And they were important sacrificial foods offered to chthonic deities.¹⁷

As can be seen in the inscription, Avercius likewise describes this fish in terms of bread and wine. While these two items probably in part refer to the eucharist, they were (like fish) also probably associated with the pagan cult of the dead and chthonic sacrifices (as already shown in Chapter 2). In fact, of the foods served in pagan funerary meals, it is known that bread and wine were prominent, since they were frequently depicted in meal scenes on pagan funerary reliefs, and are mentioned in some funerary cult inscriptions.¹⁸ Finally, the word *καθαρός* (as well as its cognates, especially *καθαρμός*), which describes the fish in the Aver-

16. On the preparation of bread and on its consumption in secular contexts, see the following for a start: H. Blümner, Technologie und Terminologie, 1-96; “Bäckerei” in PW 2:2734-43; L. A. Moritz, Grain Mills and Flour in Classical Antiquity; and B. A. Sparkes, “The Greek Kitchen.” For religious use of bread in the Graeco-Roman world, see J. Engemann, “Brot.” On the preparation and consumption of wine in secular contexts, see the following: R. Billiard, La vigne dans l’antiquité (viticulture); C. T. Seltman, Wine in the Ancient World; G. Hagenow, Aus dem Weingarten der Antike; A. Tchernia, Le vin dans l’Italie romaine (economic history and trade); and F. Lissarauge, The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet. For religious use of wine, see K. Kircher, Die sakrale Bedeutung des Weines im Altertum.

17. See pp. 163-65 above.

18. See pp. 518-39 and 547-49 below, as well as Chart 1 in Appendix 5.

cius inscription, could be applied (both in pagan religions and in ancient Judaism to any pure (as in clean) item that is suitable to serve as a sacrificial victim or as a sacrificial altar or as a place of sacrifice such as a temple or to the individuals involved in sacrifice (priests, ministrants, those seeking expiation, etc.)—thus suggesting that the fish was viewed here in part as an item associated with sacrifice.¹⁹

Consequently, on the basis of the chthonic associations of fish in general and on the basis of the partial chthonic character of many of the elements (bread, wine, and the word “pure”) surrounding the fish in the Avercius inscription, one can conclude that fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription was symbolically linked to death. And most significantly the symbolic coloring of death here was not exclusively Christian, but in part pagan.

It is particularly relevant for the interpretation of fish symbolism that some scholars have been tempted to point to the “fish from the water spring” (ἰχθὺς ἀπὸ πηγῆς) as a rare example in the Avercius inscription of a reference that is exclusively Christian in meaning.

It is true that after the Avercius inscription—by the time of the inscription of Pectorius of Autun (early fourth century C.E.) and the “Narrative of Events Taking Place in Persia” (fifth century C.E.) the

19. On the subject of purification in Greek religion, see for a start on this immense topic W. Burkert, Greek Religion, 75ff. (with references to καθαρὸς, et al.). The association is extremely common in ancient Judaism. In this regard, it is significant to note that the translators of the Septuagint generally translate Heb. טָהוֹר with Gk. καθαρὸς = “clean,” as in animals that are suitably clean for sacrifice; e.g. Gen. 8.20.

phrase had become definitively Christian. Yet, contrary to this point of view, there is no example of such terminology in early Christian literature prior to the Avercius inscription. Indeed, in Chapter 2, I have explored in depth the symbolism of fish in the pagan world, and there would have been ample reason for a Christian to have adopted fish as a symbol based on the numerous pagan usages of it. Furthermore, I have mentioned repeatedly that ancient pagan writers frequently remarked upon sacred fish in water springs, as well as tame fish. For a Christian to refer to a fish in a water spring would certainly have seemed reasonable to all pagans reading this inscription. Finally, any pagan would have understood the meaning of words such as πανμεγέθης (“enormous”) and καθαρός (“pure”), which are used to describe “the fish from the water spring.” As shown above, πανμεγέθης would have implied the huge fish that were indicators of wealth and status, while καθαρός (in addition to suggesting sacrifice) would have suggested the sacred fish that were dedicated to a particular deity.

In spite of this, Dölger argued that the reference to a single fish was not appropriate for a pagan context, since pagan texts always referred to a plethora of fish when they described fish.²⁰

This is not really true, however. For example, in Chapter 2, I examined the stories of Roman aristocrats who were fond of one particular individual fish. In addition, I also observed that, when ancient authors speak of fish as a food, they very frequently refer to single fish as the most highly prized type of food and as indicative of wealth and

status. As another instance, from the sanctuary of the Syrian goddess in Smyrna, one might cite the inscription which states that individual fish could be eaten when those fish died.²¹

Finally, I also showed in Chapter 2 that the description of a single fish as large (πανμεγέθης) was a common pagan topos and indicated that such a fish was especially suited for wealthy/aristocratic individuals or persons aspiring to that status. Since so much pagan language is already present in the Avercius inscription, it should confirm my argument in Chapter 2 that the large fish in Avercius was also intended to be associated with high status in the pagan world. Consequently, the use of a fish as a status symbol suggests that Avercius was himself a person of high status.²²

As I indicate in Appendix 3.6, several scholars, predominantly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,²³ argued that the Avercius inscription was pagan and that the fish symbol belonged to a pagan cult rather than to early Christianity.²⁴ They do this because of the appar-

20. F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 1:8-9.

21. See p. 193 and n. 244 in Chapter 2.

22. See further pp. 351-55 below. There I discuss the theme of prominent early Christians (including Avercius) travelling to Rome—another indication of high status.

23. Clearly influenced by the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule, which came into prominence at this time. Most recently E. Dinkler takes up the pagan argument once again in Signum Crucis (1959), 158-60.

24. For a summary of these views, most convenient is A. Abel, “Étude sur l’inscription d’Avercius,” 382-94. For full discussion, see Appendix 3.6.

ently pagan tenor of much of this inscription——especially because of the pride in being a citizen of a particular city, because of the fines mentioned at the end of it, because of the garland inscribed on the east side, and because of the altar style of the monument——as well as the generally obscure (i.e. mystical) language (especially words such as *νοῶν* and *συνωδός*).

In Appendix 3.7, however, I believe that I have demonstrated that there is nothing in this inscription that either prevents it from being Christian or suggests that it is not Christian. Indeed, numerous internal and external factors suggest that this inscription was inscribed as a consciously Christian text.

Rather than identifying the fish as a pagan or syncretistic symbol, one now sees (since the inscription is probably Christian and since Avercius is identified by Eusebius as one of the orthodox who was opposed to Montanism) that fish symbolism,²⁵ despite strongly pagan associations, was apparently perfectly acceptable within orthodox Christianity.²⁶ One should, therefore, return the fish symbol of Avercius to the mainstream currents of ancient Christianity where it seems to have flourished.

For the interpretation of the fish in Avercius, it is important to note that the context of the fish in vv. 12-16 of the inscription suggests that the reference to the fish is Christian and thus puts the phrase “fish from the water spring” into the category, which I discuss in Appendix 3.7

25. On the opposition of Avercius to Montanism, see [EH 5.16.1-5](#).

(category 2), of those words or phrases, which have in part a pagan background, but (because of the context in the inscription) are probably or almost certainly Christian.

In particular, there are no expressions in pagan literature that discuss the perpetual giving of fish as food to friends everywhere in the world, as v. 15 of the inscription states. In depicting a fish scene in this way, the Avercius inscription suggests a communal meal, in which the fish, as well as the bread and wine, are shared by a group of people not just in one place, but in a variety of places throughout the Mediterranean basin region. In addition, there are no analogous references outside of early Christianity to “holy virgins.” Hence there are no such references to “holy virgins” grasping fish, while in fact later Christian texts do have similar descriptions.²⁷ Furthermore, while it is known that fish, wine, and bread were all important ingredients in standard meals in the Graeco-Roman world, the specific association of fish as designating wine and bread is not made in pagan literature.

Since this was apparently a communal meal, I am led to suggest that this meal was a special cultic meal (whose culinary components are not attested as a group in pagan religions) shared by members of the cult in whatever cities they are present. Since the phrase “holy virgin” seems

26. This refers also to all the other images and symbols discussed in Appendix 3.5. On the identity of Avercius, see Appendix 3.2.

27. For example, in the inscription of Pectorius of Autun (Text # I.2) and the “Narrative of Events Taking Place in Persia” (Text # I.2), both of which I argue below are definitively Christian.

to have been Christian,²⁸ one may conclude that this cultic community was Christian. In addition, the description of the meal is clearly reminiscent of the descriptions of eucharistic meals in early Christian literature, where bread and mixed wine are prominently featured——thus indicating that this meal probably refers in large part to the eucharist.²⁹

Of course, once the Christian character of the fish in the Avercius inscription is established, it is natural and correct to understand the mention of the fish as a direct reference to Christ. In fact, numerous other early Christian texts clearly indicate that a single fish referred to Christ (e.g. Text # VI.2 of Tertullian).³⁰

Furthermore, large fish were also associated by early Christians with Christ, such as one from the Physiologus (c. third century C.E.) and the fish in “Narration of Events Taking Place in Persia” (c. 434-439 C.E.) that nourishes the entire world with its flesh——the latter a clear eucharistic reference.³¹ There may also be a connection in the early

28. See pp. 324-25 below.

29. E.g. Justin, Apology 1.65: »Επειτα προσφέρεται τῷ προεστώτι ποτήριον ὕδατος καὶ κράματος . . . διάκονοι διδῶσιν ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ εὐχαριστηθέντος ἄρτου καὶ οἴνου καὶ ὕδατος.” [“When bread and mixed wine are brought to the leader of the brethren . . . the those present a share of the eucharistic bread and wine and water.”

30. See also the discussion of the many examples of the fish as Christ on pp. 436-45 below.

31. Physiologus = Text # XV.1; “Narration”=Text # I.3. In addition, in an early fifth century Christian text, the so-called Cena Cypriani (c. 400, Text # XV.2), particular species of fish were associated with particular Old Testament biblical figures——thus indicating again that it was a topos for Christians to have symbolized Christ with a fish.

second century C.E. between Christ and the “large fish” (ἰχθύες μεγάλοι) that are caught in the post-resurrection fish meal of Jesus in John 21.1-14, especially since they are eaten along with bread in the context of death—hence making this meal (like the eucharist) a reference to the death of Christ).³² In the fourth and fifth centuries C.E., Augustine and Quodvultdeus clearly designated the fish/Christ as a “large fish” (magnus piscis).³³ In addition, the fish acronym ΙΧΘΥΣ (that is, Christ) can be described by Maximinus (the Arian) in the fourth century C.E. as a “huge mystery” (ingens mysterium ΙΧΘΥΣ).³⁴

There is possibly another confirmation that the fish refers to Christ. Once the Christian character of the inscription has been established, the word χρηστός (“good,” “excellent,” “prosperous,” etc), used in v. 16 to describe the wine and in v. 22 to describe the city of Hieropolis, takes on new meaning. For in the Graeco-Roman period “etas” were generally pronounced in the same fashion as “iotas”——thus making χρηστός sound like χριστός (“Christ”) in the very same passage where the fish symbol appears. Since this epitaph is a poem and since sounds are very important in poems, I would further suggest that Christians might easily have understood the connection between χρηστός and Christ. In a context where a fish designates Christ, this is probably extremely signif-

32. See Text # VII.2 in Appendix 2. See also Luke 24.41-42 (Text # VII.1 in Appendix 2).

33. Texts # X.B.1 and XII.2 respectively.

34. Text # XIII.4.

icant, since it associates the fish with an object (wine) that is also closely associated with Christ.³⁵

Finally, I show in further detail below in the inscription of Pectorius of Autun and “The Narration of Events Taking Place in Persia” that a fish in its eucharistic role clearly designates Christ.

Thus, by designating a fish as symbolically synonymous with bread and wine, Avercius is indicating that, when one eats the fish, one is also ingesting the eucharist—the body and blood of Christ. Since there is no evidence that early Christians actually ate fish at eucharistic meals (except for the Marcionites in Section X.E of Appendix 1), the depiction of Avercius seems to be a symbolic eating of fish.

Of special importance for the interpretation of fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription are two items: 1) the word “water spring” (πηγή), since the Avercius inscription refers to a “fish from a water spring” (ἰχθὺς ἀπὸ πηγῆς); and 2) the phrase “holy virgin,” since it is this virgin who grasps the fish.

In regard to the second item, the phrase “holy virgin” (παρθένος ἄγνη) does not seem to have any pagan parallels, while there are parallels in Book Eight of the Sybilline Oracles (third century C.E.) where (if one accepts the probable Christian authorship of this section of Book Eight) this phrase, or simply the word “virgin,” most likely refers either to the church or to Mary, mother of Jesus.³⁶ The former seems gener-

35. For more on this topic, see W. Paton, “Note on the Inscription of Avercius.”

36. Three times: 8.270: “. . . ἐξ κτισιν ηξει ἀντίτυπον μίμημα

ally the more prominent referent, since the word “virgin” clearly refers to the Church in innumerable early Christian texts.³⁷

If one accepts this, then it is the church that for Avercius holds the fish/Christ: just as the virgin holds the fish in her hands, so the church offers the eucharistic fish to Avercius and his friends. This confirms what I said above, namely that the consumption of the fish should be seen in a communal light—in particular, in the light of the early Christian community. Furthermore, from the extensive description of

φέρων εἰς παρθένον ἀγνήν, ὕδατι φωτίζων διὰ πρεσβυτέρων αἶμα χειρῶν . . . [“. . . he (Christ) will come to creation to bring a corresponding copy to the holy virgin, at the same time illuminating by water through the hands of elders. . . .”]; 8.290-91: “δώσει δ’ εἰς μάστιγας ἀναπλώσας τότε νῶτον· (αὐτὸς γὰρ κόσμῳ παραδώσει παρθένον ἀγνήν)” [“Stretching out his back, he (Christ) will give it to whips. For he will hand over the holy virgin to the world”]; and 8.357-58: “ἑπτα γὰρ αἰῶνων μετανοίας ἡματ’ ἔδωκεν ἀνδράσι πλαζομένοις διὰ χειρῶν παρθένου ἀγνῆς”: “For he gave seven days of ages to erring men through the hands of the holy virgin.”]

37. For early Christian references to the “holy virgin,” or simply “virgin” as church, see the following sources collected in F. Dölger (IXΘΥΣ 1:101-02): 2 Clement 14: **Ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἀνθρώπον ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ**· τὸ ἄρσεν ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς, τὸ θήλυ ἡ ἐκκλησία.” [“**God made humanity male and female**. Christ is the male; the Church is the female”]; Irenaeus, Against Heresies (quoting the Gnostic Marcus): . . . τὸν δὲ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τόπον ἢ παρθένος ἐπέδειξεν” [“the virgin signifies the place of the church”]; Hegesippus (second cent.) as quoted in Eusebius, HE 4.22.4: “καὶ μετὰ τὸ μαρτυρήσαι Ἰάκωβον τὸν δίκαιον, ὡς καὶ ὁ κύριος, ἐπὶ τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ, πάλιν ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ αὐτοῦ Συμεὼν ὁ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ καθίσταται ἐπίσκοπος, ὃν προέθεντο πάντες, ὄντα ἀνεψιὸν τοῦ κυρίου δευτέρου. διὰ τοῦτο ἐκάλουν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν παρθένον, οὐπω γὰρ εἴθε ἀκοαῖς ματαίαις” [“and after James the just was martyred, for the same reason as the Lord, in turn his nephew Simeon, the son of Klopas, was made bishop—he whom all had proposed, since he was another cousin of the Lord. On account of this, they called the Church virgin, for it had not yet been corrupted by vain preaching.”] See Endnotes 7-8 for early Christian descriptions of the marriage of the virgin church and Christ.

the meals Avercius ingested “everywhere,” the eucharistic fish seems to have been the central symbol that united Avercius to individual Christian churches.³⁸

It may well be, however, that the representation of the Church through the metaphor of a virgin incorporates the idea of Mary as an indirect reference in its symbolic network. As a suggestion of this possibility, one might consider the passage from the “Martyrs of Lyons,” where the virgin is described as “mother.”³⁹ In this regard, it is clear from a later text, the “Narrative of Events Taking Place in Persia” (c. 430)—which also includes a virgin and the fish—that Mary is the “holy virgin” (Text # I.3). Thus, to some extent Mary might also be understood by Avercius as holding the eucharistic fish/Christ. If one accepts this, then Avercius may in part be describing the fish/ Christ as an item to which Mary gives Christians access.⁴⁰

In addition to the identification of the virgin, I should also observe that both the shepherd and the virgin are connected through the use of the adjective *ἅγιος* (“holy”). Because of this, the fish is placed in a scene that is probably related to the description of the good shepherd.

38. For further discussion of the marriage of the virgin to Christ and its relation to the production of fish/human beings, see pp. 364-66 below.

39. As quoted in Eusebius, HE 5.1.45: "διὰ γὰρ τῶν ἐζωποιοῦντο τὰ νεκρά, καὶ μάρτυρες τοῖς μὴ μάρτυσιν ἐχαρίζοντο, καὶ ἐνεγίνετο πολλὴ χαρὰ τῇ παρθένῳ μητρὶ, οὗς ὡς νεκροὺς ἐζέτρωσε, τοὺτους ζῶντας ἀπολαμβάνουσα." ["For through the living (i.e. the confessors) the dead were brought to life, and the martyrs brought grace to those not bearing witness, and much joy came to the virgin mother, who had miscarried them as if dead (i.e. those denying) and received

In fact, it seem that early Christians regarded the fish/Christ and the shepherd/Christ as symbols that could be closely related.⁴¹ This probably also indicates that the fish is to be understood here partly in a bucolic sense.

Also crucial for an understanding of fish symbolism is the reference to the realm in which the fish/Christ lives——namely a “water spring” (πηγή).⁴² In Chapter 2, I determined that sacred springs often contained sacred fish, and this is clearly one of the intended associations of “spring” in this passage of the Avercius inscription. In this context, one should also note that sacred fish in springs were particularly associated with prophecy and oracles. That this is the case in the Avercius inscription,⁴³ I have already suggested above and is further confirmed

them back alive.”]

40. See below on pp. 364-66 below for the sexual implications of this.

41. See pp. 336-41 below.

42. Technically in antiquity, this word could refer to any kind of source of running water including water that filled the ocean (which was the source of all water), but generally, at least in the Graeco-Roman period, it almost always referred to the flowing sources of smaller bodies of freshwater, such as streams, pools, ponds, lagoons, natural springs, natural fountains, and wells. Not only did it refer to the source of the waters, but it referred to the body of water itself. Thus, when using πηγή, a Greek speaker usually referred simultaneously both to a particular body of water and to the source of that water. Depending on the context, the appropriate translation can vary. Generally, I have chosen the word, “water spring,” since in English it can imply both a source of water and water itself. I leave further specification, if that is possible to the context. Because the source of all water was the same in the Graeco-Roman world——the ocean which connected all waters——the use of the word πηγή also implies this original connection as well.

I should add that the Gk. word κρήνη is the more specific word for an actual natural spring. In this regard, it is significant to note that the

by the overlap of much of the Avercius inscription with certain passages in another oracular document—the Sybilline Oracles.⁴⁴

In addition, the use of πηγῆ (“water spring”) in other early Christian textual contexts is of significant relevance for the interpretation of fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription. Since early Christian writers recommended baptism in running water, as expressed also in the phrase “living water” (ὄδωρ ζῶν),⁴⁵ it is not surprising that πηγῆ comes to suggest the context of baptism in early Christianity and thus certainly associates fish symbolism with baptism as well.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it is also possible that “water spring” (like the “holy virgin”) refers to Mary—leading to the possibility that the fish dwells in a realm that symbolically refers both to baptism and to Mary.⁴⁷

As mentioned in Chapter 2, water (for which πηγῆ is one of the appropriate terms) was in general associated in Graeco-Roman antiquity with the origin and multiplication of life. In this regard, it is probable that that association in the Avercius inscription was also included in the symbolic network of “water spring” (πηγῆ)—one of the most important words for understanding fish symbolism. Since baptism and the area of Hieropolis was particularly associated with hot springs.

43. See pp. 205-09 above.

44. See Endnote 2.

45. E.g. Didache 7.

46. See Endnote 3 and the following pages below. There is other evidence in the Avercius inscription to suggest a baptismal context; see Endnote 4.

person of Mary were naturally connected with the giving of life and since (as just indicated above) in early Christian texts “water springs” (πηγαί) are closely connected to “living water” (ὕδωρ ζῶν), where the word for life (ζῶν) is literally included, the association of πηγή with the creation of life seems to be verified. Further confirmation of this association is found in a significant invocation from Clement of Alexandria (more or less contemporaneous with the Avercius inscription), “σωτὴρ ἡμῶν λόγος, πηγή ζωοποιός” (“our savior, the Logos, life-giving water spring”). The key word in this passage is ζωοποιός, a word which shows that πηγή is to be associated with the giving/creating of life.⁴⁸

In regard to πηγή, I would propose the following partial description of the symbolic network. One of the centers of the symbolic network of πηγή is its association with the production of life and around that central association form a group of referents, including baptism, Mary, and sexuality.⁴⁹ It is, of course, also significant that every one of these

47. See Endnote 5.

48. Protrep. 10.110. At a later date in the fourth century C.E., Basil of Caesarea also uses ζωοποιός with reference to πηγή and God: Adv. Eunom. 2.25. Based on the Clement passage, Dölger (1:95-96) originally wanted to argue that πηγή referred exclusively to baptism in the Avercius inscription—but one can now see that there are other associations as well. Twelve years after equating πηγή and baptism, Dölger himself cites this passage as part of his rejection of that equivalence and in support of a new equivalence of πηγή and Christ (IXΘΥΣ 2:488-89). This, however, seems redundant, since the fish already refers to Christ. Here one can see the tendency of Dölger (in addition to other scholars) to focus on one meaning and to eliminate the rest.

49. In certain instances, Christ might be the appropriate referent, but probably not here.

referents is also a part of the referential framework of fish symbolism and thus the two words are inextricably linked.⁵⁰

Below I demonstrate that in the Avercius inscription this association serves to emphasize the productive qualities of the fish/Christ.⁵¹ In my discussion of the “Narration of Events Taking Place in the Court of the Sassanids,” I also show that Christians associated water—the sea especially—and the fish/Christ with generation and fertility.

In sum, fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription must be interpreted in terms of early Christianity, as well as in terms of the Graeco-Roman world (secular and religious) in which early Christians found themselves.

General structure of the Avercius inscription and its relation to fish symbolism. In order to understand in greater depth the fish symbolism of the Avercius inscription, a rough sketch of the literary organization of the epitaph may be helpful; for no scholar has rigorously placed fish symbolism in the overall structure and context of a particular text.⁵² By doing that, it may be possible to gain subtleties of meaning in fish symbolism that have been missed.

I would suggest the following breakdown:

50. See for example pp. 355-70 below.

51. See pp. 364-66.

52. For example, in IXΘΥΣ, Dölger presents huge amounts of material that pertain to the interpretation of the Avercius inscription. Yet, he is never able to relate that material to fish symbolism, partly because he does not attempt to understand the structure of the text.

1) vv. 1-2: standard Phrygian epigraphic description of the construction of the tomb and declaration of municipal pride; 2a) vv. 3-6: description of the holy shepherd; 2b) vv. 7-11a: according to the instructions of the shepherd, Avercius travels to Rome and Syria, where are described what he sees;⁵³ 3) vv. 11b-16: description of those who accompanied Avercius on his travels (brethren, Paul, faith, and a holy virgin) and what was given to him on his travels (the enormous fish with bread and wine). This section can be split into two further sections. 3a) vv. 11-12a: description of two of his escorts (brethren and Paul); 3b) vv. 12b-16: description of the supplying of the fish by two others of his escorts (faith and the holy virgin) and description of the qualities of the fish; 5) vv. 17-22: Postscript, citing (with one exception) the standard items in Phrygian inscriptions.⁵⁴

Situated in between Sections 1 and 5, which are (for the most part) standard epigraphic formulae, vv. 3-16 constitute the heart of the inscription. Since the fish symbol occurs at the end of this portion, it is significant that the earlier material points toward it.

In this regard, I should mention the difference in emphasis in the shepherd section (vv. 3-11a) and in the fish section (vv. 12b-16), since this points to the fish symbolism below and in part explains how Aver-

53. The worldwide travels of Avercius seem to parallel those of another individual named Euteknios who was apparently Christian. For text and interpretation of this inscription, see the following: A. Audin, J. Pouilloux, and J. F. Reynaud, "Une nouvelle inscription grècque à Lyon"; L. Robert, *BE* (1976) 587-588, nr. 799; C. P. Jones, "A Syrian in Lyon"; and W. Wischmeyer, "Die Aberkiosinschrift als Grabepigramm," 35ff.

cius uses the fish as a symbol. In the shepherd section, the emphasis is active, since Avercius performs certain actions. That is, he travels and sees different items. As a precursor of the emphasis on the viewing activity of Avercius in vv. 7-11a, the inscription in v. 5 describes the shepherd in terms of the size of his “eyes” (ὄφθαλμοῦς) and how many places there are upon which his eyes can look down (πάντη καθορώντας). In vv. 7-11, verbs for seeing occur four times.⁵⁵

Thus, the emphasis in the shepherd section is the active viewing of Avercius in his travels.

In the organizational scheme of the epitaph, vv. 11b-12a serve as a transitional nexus. At this point, the inscription moves away from what Avercius sees on his journey to what accompanies him on his journey: namely “brethren” (συνο[μαίμους], v. 11b) and “Paul” (Παύλον, v. 12a). These accompanying items are connected by the verb ἔχω (“to have”). In other words, Avercius “had” (ἔσχον, v. 11b) brethren and “had” Paul (ἔχων, 12a) with him.

Thus, the inscription is here concerned with what Avercius brings with him.

In the section with fish symbolism, this is to some extent continued in vv. 12b-16, where it is clear that Avercius also had Faith and a holy virgin as company with him on his journey.⁵⁶ But in vv. 12b-16, the

54. For the interpretations of Sections 1 and 5, see Appendix 3.8.

55. ἀναθρήσαι (v. 7), ἰδεῖν (v. 8), εἶδον (v. 9), εἶδα (v. 10).

56. One should remember that it is not clear who the subject of vv. 15-16 is and that the inscription could be ambiguous—thus possibly

emphasis changes from a description of the individuals accompanying Avercius to a description of the items that they offered to him—chief of which is the eucharistic (in the form of bread and wine) “pure fish”/ Christ. That is, the inscription does not merely cite faith and a holy virgin as his escorts (which was the case for Paul and brethren), but particularly focusses on the fact that they bring a fish to Avercius.

It is in this section with fish symbolism (designated as 3b, in which the emphasis decisively moves away from the active role of Avercius as viewer and traveler to the passive role of Avercius as one who receives items of benefit—primarily the fish/Christ in its eucharistic role (in the form of bread and wine). In particular, the emphasis is on the reception from Faith of the fish, bread, and wine—as indicated by the verbs of furnishing and giving: παρέθηκε (v. 15), ἐπέδωκε (v. 15), and διδοῦσα (v. 16). Likewise, it is not Avercius who grasps the fish, but rather a holy virgin who grasps it, so that he and others may eat it.

In sum, in vv. 12b-16 the inscription describes Avercius as the object of action rather than as the subject of action. Faith, along with the holy virgin, provides, and Avercius then receives.

For Avercius, fish symbolism primarily referred to objects that were intended as items to be received. If I am correct in associating the “holy virgin” in part with the Christian church, then the fish/ Christ in its eucharistic role was also viewed by Avercius as a sacrament that the in-

associating both Faith and the holy virgin with the serving of the fish meal. See my text-critical commentary in Appendix 3.4 on these verses.

dividual Christian (including Avercius himself) received in a subordinate role from a generously giving church and from a generously giving Christ.

As a literary piece, the epitaph moves gradually from a consideration of Avercius as actor to Avercius as receiver. In terms of the active-passive/doer-receiver dichotomy suggested by the inscription, the following division may be of help: vv. 3-11a: Avercius in his role as traveller and viewer; vv. 11b-12a: some of the escorts of Avercius; and vv. 12b-16: other escorts of Avercius, with particular emphasis on what they provide for him. It is significant that this movement culminates in the reception of the fish as food (as well as the menu of bread and wine associated with it)—thus making the fish the focal point of the inscription and possibly suggesting that it was the most important image in the inscription.

This is of great significance for the general interpretation of the fish as a symbol. For, if I am right, the earliest extant Christian inscription considered the fish one of the most important symbols of early Christianity. And it is further significant that Avercius viewed what he considered one of the most important early Christian symbols—the eucharistic fish/Christ—as referring to something that was not primarily done by individuals, but that was given to them.⁵⁷

57. For example, this ties in well with the subordinate role Christians viewed themselves as having vis-à-vis Christ in fishing and baptismal scenes; see e.g. 334, 357, 473 below.

In one other regard, there is an important distinction between vv. 3-11a and vv. 11b-16 that is crucial for understanding fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription. In the former portion, the text concentrates on the visit of Avercius to different places and persons: a “kingdom” (βασιλεία, v. 7), a “queen” (βασιλίσσα, v. 8), a “people” (λαός, v. 9), “Syria” (Συρία, v. 10), “Nisibis” (Νισίβις, v. 10), the “Euphrates” (Εὐφράτης, v. 11a), etc. While he mentions “people” (λαός) in v. 9, who probably are the Christian community of Rome, there is no description of a relation with those people.

In contrast, the second portion (in addition to highlighting fish, bread, and wine) focusses much more than the earlier portion on the relation between Avercius and others whom he apparently regards as Christians. The very terms “brethren” (συνομαίμοι) and “friends” (φίλοι) suggest the relationship of Avercius to those whom he meets. “Brethren” emphasizes a blood relationship (family or relatives), although this is almost certainly metaphorical, while “friends” suggests a relationship based on something other than blood kinship—but nevertheless a close relationship. In addition, as the word “friends” also suggests, vv. 13-16 describe the eating of the fish not as the meal of one individual, but rather as a communal meal shared by several persons.

Thus, in the second half of the inscription, Avercius emphasizes the close relationship between members of the early Christian community.

At the center of this close relationship, Avercius situates the fish—in particular its role as symbol of Christ and the eucharist (as

suggested by its association with bread and wine discussed above). In so doing, he indicates that he considers the fish to be associated with the extremely close kinship that he believed characterized early Christianity.⁵⁸ Of course, a eucharistic symbol, as the fish is here, is extremely appropriate in this context, since the eucharist clearly was one of the major communal sacred meals shared among early Christians.

In general, structural analysis of the Avercius inscription reveals the centrality of fish symbolism for Avercius, its function as something given to early Christians, and its role as a socially unifying communal symbol.

Structure of the Avercius inscription: fish symbolism and shepherd symbolism. In addition to interpreting the place of fish symbolism in the general structure of the Avercius inscription, it is also necessary to interpret the relationship between fish and shepherd symbolism, if one is to comprehend Avercius' understanding of fish symbolism. For, in vv. 3-6 (2a), where the qualities and deeds of the shepherd are described, several repetitions of specific words and syllables occur that link it with the section on the fish below in vv. 12b-16 (3b). As a result they lead me to suggest not only that the fish and the shepherd are the two major images of this inscription, but that fish symbolism must in part be understood in light of shepherd symbolism.

58. I show below on pp. 374-76 and 501-02 below that the designation of Christ as a fish and early Christians as fish may reflect a social self-conception analogous to certain totemic cultures.

These words and repetitions are as follows: 1) ἄγνός, which describes the shepherd (v. 3) and the holy virgin who grasps the fish (v. 14);⁵⁹ 2) ἔγω (v. 5), which describes the visual prowess of the shepherd (v. 5) and which describes what accompanies the fish, namely wine (v. 16); 3) μεγάλος (v. 5), which emphasizes the large size of the eyes of the shepherd, and πανμεγέθης (v. 14), which emphasizes the large size of the fish; 4) πάντη (v. 5), which shows that the shepherd sees everywhere, as well as πάντη (v. 13) and διὰ πάντος (v. 15), which show that the fish is present everywhere at all times; and 5) the syllabic repetition of καθ- in the words καθορώντας (v. 5) and καθαρός (v. 14), which serves as a poetic way of connecting the shepherd scene to the fish scene.

In addition, there is one other important similarity between vv. 3-6 and vv. 12b-16. Through the use of the adjectives ἄγνός and καθαρός, the inscription indicates that both the shepherd and the fish are sacred beings.

In general, therefore, it would seem that Avercius very much wants his readers to understand that the images of the fish and shepherd were closely related.

From our knowledge of archaeological evidence, it is known that both the fish and the good shepherd were important images on early Christian monuments. For example, the epigraphic monument of Livia Primitiva (now preserved in the Louvre, Paris) bears a chriophorus at

59. In regard to the problem of the subject of vv. 15-16, see the relevant discussion in Appendix 3.4.

the center with a sheep on either side of it.⁶⁰ At the far ends are two huge vertically placed fish (facing upwards) and an anchor. In addition, the combination of good shepherd and fish, and/or the word IXΘΥΣ (sometimes with accompanying images of Jonah scenes), are especially frequently found on seal rings from the third to fourth centuries C.E..⁶¹

In this regard, it is very probably not an accident that Avercius mentions in v. 9 the word σφραγιδα, which, although it can (and in this case does in part) refer to baptism in Christian texts,⁶² normally would indicate a seal or signet ring. From Clement of Alexandria (Text # XVII.1), one can surmise that seal rings were as popular with early Christians as they were with most people in the Roman world.⁶³ Since shepherds and fish (as well as fishermen) were common on early Christian rings,⁶⁴ and were often associated together on them, it is probable that Avercius was thinking of this association when he made reference to a seal ring. In addition, I establish below that shepherds and fishermen are juxtaposed in at least two early Christian texts.⁶⁵

In any event, both the fish and shepherd are two of the most important images found in early Christian iconography. Furthermore, while

60. See Chart 2.III.1 in Appendix 5; see also the discussion on pp. 599 and 603-04 below.

61. For images of fish and shepherds, see n. 292 below in Chapter 4.

62. See Endnote 4.

63. On the popularity of seal rings, see V. Chapot, "Signum" (with references).

64. See n. 292 in Chapter 4 for more examples of fish on seal rings.

shepherds are more commonly found than fish in early Christian texts of the pre-Constantinian period, the fish is nevertheless clearly a significant image in early Christian texts of that period, and even more so in the fourth century C.E. and afterwards (as my discussion in the remainder of this chapter shows). Their juxtaposition in the Avercius inscription should therefore be no surprise and shows that fish symbolism could fit together well with shepherd symbolism.

In regard to the symbolism of the shepherd and the fish chiefly in the Avercius inscription, the shepherd (as already observed) serves the active role of sending Avercius on his travels, while the fish serves the passive role as the reward for Avercius and his friends.

As one who tends and protects sheep, the shepherd is naturally suited to an active role. And, in early Christian literature, this is confirmed by many examples, such as the shepherd who, though he has lost only one sheep out of a hundred, seeks out and saves the one who is lost.⁶⁶

In contrast, the major focus of the fish in this inscription is its reference to Christ and its association with the eucharist,⁶⁷ which is an item that a Christian receives. In this fashion, Avercius links his fish to

65. See p. 416 below.

66. Matt. 18.10-14 and Lk. 15.3-7, as well as throughout early Christian literature.

67. The other referents and associations mentioned in Chapter 2 are crucial for an understanding of fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription, but they are of less direct emphasis than these two items in the general constellation of meaning.

those large fish that were given as food to wealthy individuals in the Graeco-Roman world. As distinct from the shepherd/Christ who saved Christians by searching for them, for Avercius the fish/Christ in its eucharistic form saves Christians by being given to them.

In addition, the juxtaposition and close relationship of the shepherd and fish in the Avercius inscription probably also confirms that the fish—like the shepherd—was to be understood partly in a bucolic context. While I already noted in Chapter 2 that water iconography (including scenes of fish) were associated with bucolic themes that were particularly appropriate in funerary contexts for indicating the locus amoenus, I should additionally note here that shepherds were popular for precisely this purpose as well.⁶⁸ Furthermore, just as Greek and Latin writers frequently employed descriptions of water scenes in order to present a bucolic and idyllic atmosphere,⁶⁹ they also used depictions of shepherds and their flocks of sheep or goats for that purpose as well.⁷⁰

By emphasizing a bucolic atmosphere in his epitaph, Avercius not only displays the idyllic future which awaits him and other Christians, but he also shows that fish symbolism itself contributes to that idyllic fu-

68. See in general N. Himmelmann, Über Hirten Genre.

69. E.g. for Latin texts on sea waters, see the appropriate sections in E. de Saint-Denis, Le rôle de la mer dans la poésie Latine. See also the next note.

70. For bucolic literature and these kinds of rustic scenes, see for example B. Effe and G. Binder, Die antike Bukolik. In general on shepherds in buoclic context, see also J. Engemann, "Hirt."

ture. By including shepherd imagery, Avercius strengthens the bucolic components of fish that might otherwise have been relatively suppressed. Thus, the bucolic associations of early Christian fish symbolism, which have generally been ignored by most scholars, must be added to its network of meaning.

There is another important reason for connecting shepherds and fish. The reference to eyes (ὄφθαλμοῦς) in v. 5, which describe the shepherd, also suggest the ever-open and ever-awake eyes of fish discussed in Chapter 2. This was especially apt in a funerary context, where divine protection of the deceased was of great significance.

In conclusion, shepherd imagery at the beginning of the Avercius inscription is structurally connected through repetitions of words and syllables to fish imagery at its end. In this way, Avercius follows the pattern found in early Christian iconography, in which fish and shepherds are sometimes juxtaposed. There may even be a specific reference to seal rings (σφραγεῖδα in v. 9), which frequently bore images of fish and/or shepherds.

For Avercius and for other early Christians, these two images were therefore clearly of great symbolic importance. In part, one might explain this on the grounds that large fish and shepherds were particularly important to early Christians as symbols of Christ. But there was more to it than that. Their linkage can be explained on at least two further grounds that are related to a general Graeco-Roman context: 1) both evoke a bucolic context which is especially appropriate on a funerary inscription; and 2) both have associations with eyes.

The visual coloring of fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription.

From what I have just discussed, one can see that the textual linkage of the fish and the shepherd in the Avercius inscription corresponds to similar visual linkages of the same two images in early Christian iconography.

There is another feature of the Avercius inscription that recalls early Christian iconography as well. And that is the reference to a single large fish in the context of a meal with bread and wine. This combination is found in numerous early Christian paintings and sarcophagi.⁷¹

In general, the description of the fish in the Avercius inscription—both in connection with the shepherd and in connection with a meal of bread and wine—seems to be a verbal analogue to some early Christian iconography. Thus, fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription ought to be seen as extremely visual in nature.

The importance of $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ for the interpretation of fish symbolism.

Another item is also of great importance for understanding fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription: namely the repetition of $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ (“all” or “every”) as an indicator (among other things) of the universality and universal understanding of fish symbolism among early Christians in the Graeco-Roman world. In fact, I would suggest that the inscription in part uses $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ to emphasize the universal claims of Christianity as a

world religion, whose symbols——especially the eucharistic fish——serve as important proof of this claim.

In fact, throughout the Avercius inscription, the *πάς* (both an adjective and a pronoun)——including its adverbial forms of *πάντη* (“everywhere”) and *δια πάντος* (“always”), as well as a prefix in *πανμεγέθης*——occurs eight times, which is extremely frequent for an epitaph of only twenty-two verses.⁷² Related to this is a significant alliterative feature of the inscription——namely the repetition of the letter “*π*” a total of thirty-two times.⁷³ I would suggest that this repetition serves the importance of remphasizing the word *πάς*, and derivatives of it, which also begins with a “*π*.” Also of great interest, Avercius even goes to the extent of not using the normal prefix *παμ-* (as in *παμμεγέθης*) in v. 14,⁷⁴ but opts instead for the much rarer prefix *παν-* (as in *πανμεγέθης*)——an alteration that is not at all necessitated from a metrical point of view, but clearly points to *πάς*. This is of special significance, since *πανμεγέθης* is one of the two adjectives describing the fish.

Assuming that the Christian character of the Avercius inscription has been demonstrated within a reasonable degree of certainty,⁷⁵ I would

71. See Chapter 4, *passim*.

72. Here follows a list of the occurrences: *πάντη* (“everywhere,” v. 5); *ἄσπεα πάντα* (“all the cities,” v. 10); *πάντη* (“everywhere,” v. 11b); *πάντη* (“everywhere,” v. 12b); *πάντη* (“everywhere,” v. 13); *πανμεγέθης* (“enormous”——or literally “entirely huge”——v. 14); *δια πάντος* (“always”); and *πάς* (“everyone,” v. 19).

73. H. Grégoire mentions the alliteration of “*π*” briefly, but only as a formal literary device, in “Encore l’inscription d’Avercius.”

74. It is interesting to note that many of the manuscripts revert to the

suggest that universal claims of Christianity are indicated by Avercius through $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ in primarily two ways. First, the inscription uses $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ in order to underscore the presence of Christians from one end of the Roman empire to the other end. That is why five of the eight instances of words incorporating $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ have a locative sense.⁷⁶ As confirmation of this, the inscription mentions the river Euphrates and Nisibis, which are at the very eastern borders of the Roman empire.⁷⁷ On the other hand, it mentions Rome, which, while not at the furthestmost western point of the empire, would certainly have been regarded in the western sector of the Graeco-Roman world.⁷⁸ In addition, the city of Rome seems to have been the most central focal point for eastern Christians travelling west.⁷⁹

more standard $\pi\alpha\mu\mu\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\theta\eta\varsigma$ —thus inserting good Greek, but missing one of the structural themes of the epitaph.

75. See Appendix 3, passim, especially 3.7.

76. $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\eta$ four times and ($\alpha\sigma\tau\epsilon\alpha$) $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ once.

77. Nisibis was briefly captured by the Roman military commander Lucullus from the Armenians in 68 B.C.E. and by another Roman military commander Lusius Quietus in 114 C.E. during the Parthian campaigns of the emperor Trajan. But these were ephemeral conquests. After the conquest of Lucius Verus in his Parthian campaigns of 163-166 C.E., it remained under Roman occupation until 363 C.E., when it was ceded to the Sassanid Persians.

78. On the theme of east and west in travel epitaphs, see W. Wischmeyer, “Die Aberkiosinschrift als Grabepigramm,” 35ff. For further discussion of Rome and the Christian church at Rome in the Avercius inscription, see pp. 351-55 below.

79. See n. 93 below. One should also especially note in the west the city of Lyons (Lugdunum) in Gaul (Gallia Lugdunensis), where early Christians from Asia Minor (most famous of whom was Irenaeus)

That Christians were present everywhere is emphasized in a second way as well. In the shepherd section of the inscription, Avercius seems to express the following simile: just as the shepherd looks down everywhere (πάντη, v. 5)—presumably for his sheep (especially the lost ones)—so Avercius looks at Christians everywhere, probably to visit them and to minister to them.⁸⁰

On the other hand, after the travelogue, the figure of Paul is mentioned (v. 12a) apparently as a kind of second model for the travels of Avercius. While the figure of the shepherd points to the travelogue in vv. 7-11a, the reference to Paul not only points backward to the description of the voyages of Avercius prior to Paul's mention, but also points forward to one of Avercius' major activities on those travels—the eating of the eucharistic meal (as symbolized by the fish) with Christians everywhere in the Roman empire.⁸¹ For it is clear from πάντη that

formed an important religious community. But it was never the kind of intellectual and travel focal point that Rome was. As far as early Christians were concerned, it is not clear whether, in the time of Avercius, Christian communities in Spain were significant enough even to visit (see n. 88 in Appendix 3).

80. This is emphasized by the repetition of the reference to “fields”: πεδίοις (v. 4) and Συρίας πέδον (“field of Syria,” v. 10).

81. The connection between v. 12a (with its reference to Paul) and vv. 12b-16 is made in at least two direct ways. First, if the letters after ΕΠ . . . in v. 12a are read οχῶ, then οχῶ (“chariot,” v. 12a) and προήγε (“leading,” v. 12b) would fit together quite naturally. For in a general sense προάγω refers rather frequently to leading someone on their travels. If instead the letters after ΕΠ . . . are read επομην (“follow”), then it would present a natural counterbalance to προάγω (“lead”). (For the problem of reading this lacuna, see my brief comments in the text-critical commentary in Appendix 3.4). Second, ἐπι occurs only twice in two significant positions in the Avercius inscription, once in v. 12a with the carriage (or, in the alternative

Paul (along with the brethren, faith, and the holy virgin) was present “everywhere” Avercius went. Evidently, from the point of view of Avercius, Paul was associated both with travelling to many places (i.e. “everywhere”, including Syria and Rome) and with eating communal fish (that is, eucharistic) meals with his Christian brethren in those places.⁸²

From this analysis, one can see that, among other things, Avercius was claiming that the eucharistic fish meal (in a metaphorical sense) was something ingested by all Christians everywhere.

That all Christians moreover were united by this eucharistic fish meal and understood the fish symbolism, is suggested not only by πάντη (vv. 12 and 13) and by φίλοις (“friends”, v. 15), but also somewhat further down in the inscription in v. 19, where it says that “everyone (πάς) . . . knows (νοῶν) . . . and is in harmony (συνῳδός)” (i.e., with what has been said in the inscription). The former adjectival participle νοῶν certainly indicates knowledge and understanding, while the latter adjective συνῳδός suggests agreement and thus unity.⁸³ That is, Avercius claims that all Christians everywhere understand and agree with what he

emendation, as a prefix in the verb *ἔπομην*) and another time as a prefix in the verb *ἔπέδωκε*—thus acting as a connector between the two parts by means of the repetition of a particular word.

82. While there is no evidence in the time of Paul for the fish symbolizing the eucharist, it clearly did by the time of Avercius. Once again, eating the fish is not meant literally, but symbolizes the consumption of the eucharist.

83. It may be significant that συνῳδός arises from the root noun ᾠδή, which means “singing”—perhaps suggesting the communal singing of Christians in church.

says. And clearly for him, as my analysis of the structure of the inscription above indicates, the eucharistic fish was of central importance for that claim.

While Avercius seems to have made this claim for all the symbols, he appears to have emphasized the fish particularly. For in the fish section (vv. 12b-16) derivatives of $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ occur four times—half of the total instances in the inscription. In addition, alliteration of the letter “pi”—which (as mentioned above) probably reemphasizes $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ —occurs thirteen times in these verses, far more than in any other section of the inscription. In addition, I have already observed that an adjective describing the fish, $\pi\alpha\nu\mu\epsilon\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\theta\eta\varsigma$ (“enormous”), refers to $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$.

To summarize, Avercius uses $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ and derivatives to emphasize the geographical universality of early Christianity and the common characteristic that all Christians shared—namely, their shared understanding of the kind of symbolic language found in the text of his inscription. From the structural analysis above, it seems clear that the fish in its eucharistic role was the focal and culminating image of this symbolic language.

As a result, I would propose here that Avercius was actually describing the fish as a symbol that was understood by all Christians everywhere—that is, from one end of the Graeco-Roman world to the other.

The Maritima inscription and Avercius' claim of universality. If one examines the language in v. 12, one may conclude that there is some truth to the claim of universality by Avercius. For its language, though written by a man from an out-of-the-way town in rural Phrygia, is comes surprisingly close to the language of an early Christian funerary inscription from the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome for a woman named Maritima.⁸⁴

Μαρίτιμα σεμνή γλυκερὸν φᾶος οὐ κατέλειπας·
σχες γὰρ μετὰ σου ἄνατον·
with 2 fishes
εὐσέβεια γὰρ σὴ πάντοτε σε προάγει

Pious Maritima you have not left the sweet light,
for you have with you immortality [that is,
through Christ],
and your piety always leads you.

The composition of this inscription reflects a similar background to that of the Avercius inscription on several counts: the description of the spiritual journey of Maritima in terms of an abstract concept (“piety,” which is very closely related in meaning to “faith”); the use of the same verb προάγω that describes piety “lead(ing)” Maritima; the emphasis of the word πάς (πανάθανατον and παντοτε); and the connection of this description with fish imagery,

One should also take note that these four elements are not found together in pagan texts——another factor suggesting the early Christian character of this section of the Avercius inscription.

Even more important, both inscriptions use the same kind of peculiar language (piety/faith, *προάγω*, and *πάς*) in relation to fish symbolism—once textually (Avercius inscription) and again iconographically (Maritima inscription).⁸⁵ Probably the reason why fish symbolism is related to this language has something to do with the early Christian use of fish as a symbol for the eucharist.

Thus, there is some reason to think that early Christians in at minimum two different places (Phrygia and Rome) understood at least some of the same language of the Avercius inscription.

Furthermore, I show in the other sections of this chapter and in Chapter 4 that much of the fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription in fact does reflect a relatively consistent interpretation of fish by early Christians throughout the Mediterranean basin area.

Fish symbolism and obscure language. As one can see, Avercius does not refer to the eucharist in a direct and bald fashion (for instance, with a noun or verb such as *εὐχαριστία* or *εὐχαριστέω*, as is commonly found in early Christian texts). Rather, he uses the image of an enormous pure fish from a spring in order to refer symbolically to the eucharist. In addition, he includes two elusive figures (rather than a specific individual or type of individual, such as a priest) who are responsible for

84. See Chart 2.I.33 in Appendix 5.

85. The depiction of two fish in the Maritima inscription and the mention of one fish in the Avercius inscription is not a problem. In Chapter 4, I argue that two fish, as well as one fish, can refer to Christ; see pp. 560-01.

the distribution of the eucharistic fish——namely, Faith and a holy virgin. If he had wanted to be direct, he could easily have used language that would have given him that result, but here (as he does throughout the inscription) he instead chooses extremely rich symbolic language.⁸⁶

This brings one back to v. 19. In the verse, Avercius indicates that there are those who would “know” (νοῶν) what he is saying. Naturally, this implies that there are some who would not know. Presumably, the former were Christians, while the latter were non-Christians.

In doing this, the Avercius inscription suggests that early Christians belonged to an exclusive group, whose members alone could correctly interpret certain kinds of symbolic language. Fish symbolism was clearly one component of that language. This finds further confirmation in the tradition of fish that were understood as symbols of silence and that were therefore associated with esoteric language, particularly among followers of Pythagoras.⁸⁷ Therefore, it is probable that Avercius intended a connection between the silent fish and the veiled character of the inscription.

86. This is indicated by the multitude of referents and associations that many of the of the words in this inscription have, the complexity of which I have explored in Appendix 3.5, 3.7.

87. See pp. 279-85 above.

The interpretation of fish symbolism in regard to the high status of Avercius and the churches of Rome

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, enormous fish were signs of high status or of aspirations of high status.⁸⁸ This alone would probably be enough to establish the emphasis on status by Avercius, when he refers to an enormous fish (that is, the eucharistic fish/Christ) in his epitaph.

Yet there is even more in the inscription and in the vita that would further emphasize the relationship of fish symbolism to high status. For it is clear from the vita that Avercius himself as a bishop was a man of high status, and, in addition, only well-to-do persons could afford to commission such a large, elaborate inscription. As Appendix 3.5 indicates, the use of the word “carriage” (ὄχος) and the relatively high fines suggest an individual who was presenting himself as a person of some importance. Furthermore, it is clear from the inscription that Avercius was concerned with emphasizing the status of certain other Christians, especially the church of Rome.

Thus, there is a general indication that status associations of large fish could be tied in some way to the specific status aspirations of individual early Christians.

As mentioned above, Avercius seems to have journeyed to Rome partly to see the Christian church there. This is suggested especially by the use of the word βασίλισσα (“queen”), which can refer to the church in early Christian texts, as well as by the use of the word λαός (“peo-

88. This is also true in early Christian texts, as this chapter and Chapter 4 demonstrate.

ple”), which here suggests the Christian community of Rome.⁸⁹ From the type of language used, Avercius furthermore appears to have held the church of Rome in especially high esteem. For he employs royal terminology (such as calling the church a queen) to describe the church of Rome.⁹⁰ The respect for the Roman church in Avercius recalls a passage from Irenaeus, who says that their traditions went back to Peter and Paul and that on this account it was the pre-eminent church in the Roman world.⁹¹

Perhaps significantly, both Irenaeus and Avercius mention the presence of Christians “everywhere” (*undique* and *πάντη*) at the same time that they view Rome as their major focus. In this way, both suggest that Rome serves as a central focal point for their universal religion.

Furthermore, in addition to following the instructions of the holy shepherd and the model of Paul, Avercius appears to have focussed his travels on Rome,⁹² apparently following in the footsteps of many impor-

89. See Appendix 3.7.

90. As the following examples indicate: βασιλείαν (“kingdom,” v. 7); βασιλισσαν (“queen,” v. 8); χρυσόστολον (“golden-robed,” v. 8); and χρυσοπέδιλον (“golden-sandalled,” v. 8). Two of these words (χρυσόστολον and χρυσοπέδιλον) suggest the garb of royal persons; see p. 767 and n. 62 in Appendix 3. In addition, λαμπρός (in the phrase λαμπράν σφραγίδα = “shining seal,” v. 9) suggests the splendor with which royal individuals would have been associated.

91. See endnote 6.

92. On early Christians travelling to Rome, see also J. B. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers* 1.2:450ff.; and M. Guarducci, “L’iscrizione di Abercio e Roma,” 187-89. Focus on Rome does not, however, confirm the primacy of Rome, as Guarducci suggests in her article.

tant (that is, of high status) Christians from the east who also travelled there, as well as taught there.⁹³ Generally the types of people listed in the previous footnote fall into two categories: 1) those who travel to Rome and reside there for an extended period of time in order to teach; 2) and those who travel there for a brief stay in order to consult on church matters with officials from the Roman churches.

Although it is not completely certain, it would seem that Avercius should be included in the latter category, since he presents his trip to Rome as part of a larger journey. Thus, like Polycarp and Irenaeus, he may have travelled to Rome on some issue involving his church and the church of Rome.⁹⁴ That he would be meeting with important church officials (and possibly with the empress) certainly suggests that Aver-

93. E.g. 1) Valentinus, c. 130-160 (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 3.4-5; Eusebius, HE 4.11.1); 2) Cerdo, c. 140, to teach (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 1.27.1, 3.4.3; Eusebius, HE 4.11.1); 3) Justin Martyr, c. 138-165, to teach (Justin, Apol. 2.3; Tatian, Or. 19; Eusebius, 4.29.1-3); 4) Marcion, c. 140-160, to teach (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 3.4.3; Justin, Apol. 1.26; Eusebius, HE 4.11.2); 5) Tatian, c. 150-172, to study with Justin Martyr (Tatian, Or. 18-19; Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 1.28; Eusebius, HE 4.29.1-3); 6) Polycarp, c. 155, in order to discuss the Easter problem (Eusebius, HE 4.14.1); 7) Hegesippus, c. 155-190, to combat various heresies (Eusebius, HE 4.22.2-3); 8) Marcellina, c. 155-66, to teach (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 1.25.6); 9) Irenaeus, c. 170, to discuss the Montanist problem (Eusebius, HE 5.4.2); 10) Theodotus of Byzantium, c. 190, to teach (Hippolytus, Philos. 7.35f., 10.23f.; Epiphanius, Panar. 54; Eusebius, HE 5.28.8-12); 11) Noetus of Smyrna, c. 200, to teach (Hippolytus, Philos. 9.2, 10.27; Epiphanius, Panar. 12, 57) Origen, c. 212 (Eusebius, HE 6.14.10).

94. See previous footnote. If, on the other hand, he was a teacher in Rome for some time, he nevertheless presents himself as being associated in some important way with the church of Rome.

cius was an official of some importance and status. This would fit in well with the description of him in the vita as a bishop.⁹⁵

Thus, the symbol of the enormous fish, along with the other symbols in the Avercius inscription, are seen as acceptable and praiseworthy to a person (Avercius) and a community (Rome) of high status. As shown above, this fits in well with the associations of large fish in the Graeco-Roman world with persons who are, or aspire to be, wealthy and/or aristocratic. The description of the Roman Christian community with royal vocabulary would seem to confirm the interest of Avercius in status and status symbols.

In sum, Avercius presents the fish as a universal Christian symbol, but a symbol which was understood by Roman Christians and which appealed to his own particular status aspirations, as well as those whom he was visiting.⁹⁶

As observed in Chapter 2, however, according to Avercius himself it would also seem that, although Avercius was concerned with the status of certain groups (the church of Rome), nevertheless, everyone everywhere among early Christians symbolically could eat the fish.⁹⁷

95. For the problem of whether Avercius may have met with the empress Faustina, see n. 61 in Appendix 3.

96. I emphasize “aspiration,” since the area of Hieropolis in the valley of Sandukli was remote, rural, and relatively poor in antiquity. In contrast to this tradition of fish symbolism, the symbolism of fishermen fishing for fish in many early Christian texts is based on the ideal of poverty and weakness. See pp. 242-47 above and 414-15 below.

97. The frequent depictions by early Christians of large fish in catacomb paintings and sarcophagus reliefs would seem to confirm this.

Therefore, although the inscription of Avercius suggests that large fish could reflect the status aspirations of individual early Christians, Avercius also seems, at the same time, to indicate that that status which had been available to a few was now available to all who were Christian.⁹⁸ Thus, the imagery of large fish reflected both the aspirations of individual Christians, as well as the possibility that all Christians could attain high status by eating this very special fish that was associated with Christ and the eucharist.

Mapping the symbolic territory of the fish symbol in the Avercius inscription. Contrary to the arguments of most scholars, the words and phrases of the Avercius inscription are laden with numerous referents and associations—almost all of which are of both pagan and Christian origin.⁹⁹ Many words have several connotations. For example, “queen” (βασιλισσαν) can refer to a pagan deity, a Roman empress, and the church, while “seal” (σφραγείδα) can refer to pagan seal rings, Christian seal rings, gemstones, and baptism.¹⁰⁰ Almost every word of the inscription has at least a double meaning,¹⁰¹ and it is this complexity that Avercius exploits in the symbolism of his epitaph.

98. An availability, however, that depended on an understanding of the large fish as not only a pagan symbol, but also as a Christian symbol that referred in part to Christ and the eucharist.

99. See Appendix 3.4-7 for the multivalent meanings of words and phrases other than those directly related to fish symbolism. For words directly related to fish symbolism see, the Chapter 2 and this chapter.

100. See Appendix 3.5-7.

It is in this context that one must view the symbolism found in the Avercius inscription. On its symbolic territory, meanings and associations are woven together so that they influence one another (back and forth) and so that the divisions between them are permeable. Likewise, while Christian referents and associations transform pagan ones, they are also all dependent on them.

I would like now to chart the various meanings and associations of fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription.

First, the fish as food is one of the central foci in the constellation of the referential network of fish symbolism. Since it is a large fish (*πανμεγέθη*), it was associated in the Graeco-Roman world with the meals of wealthy individuals and with the aspirations of those desiring high status. At the same time, this makes it appropriate as a symbol of the early Christian eucharistic meal, since its large size/ high status emphasizes the importance of the eucharist for the early Christian community. As readers see in Chapter 4, the large size of the Christian fish is also confirmed in a number of early Christian paintings and sarcophagus reliefs.

In addition, the large size of the fish is also important in another way. For the fish in the Avercius inscription clearly refers to Christ himself through the eucharistic components, namely the flesh (bread) and blood (wine) of Christ. Thus, its large size underlines the immensity/pre-eminence of Christ as the central religious symbol in the early Christian community. Christ is not just any fish, but a fish representing

the highest status. This ties in with other early Christian texts mentioned above that represent Christ in terms of a large fish with clearly high status. For example, the Physiologus (whose traditions probably go back as far as 200 C.E.), explains that large fish (unlike small fish) were also perfect fish—thus making them appropriate to be associated with various biblical figures including Christ.¹⁰² In the Gospel According to Thomas, the author expresses a similar idea, by referring to the fisherman who prefers the big fish to all the little fish.¹⁰³ Much later in the sixth century C.E. in a text of Gregory the Great the large size of the fish seems to indicate the success of the fishing expedition of Peter.¹⁰⁴ In these previous two texts, the message is clear: large fish are the desired fish. In addition, the description of the IXΘΥΣ acrostic by Maximinus (the Arian) as a “huge mystery” suggests that in the fourth century C.E. the high status of the fish/Christ was related to its size.¹⁰⁵

By using a large fish to represent Christ, Avercius also emphasizes the authoritative position of Christ and the subordinate role of Christians in relation to him. For, as one has seen, the fish is situated at a point in the inscription where it emphasizes the passive role of Christians as recipients of something that is provided for them.

101. See especially Appendices 3.5 and 3.7, as well as the discussion in the previous pages.

102. Text # XV.1.

103. Text # II.C.2.

That the fish could come to symbolize Christ and the eucharist in the Avercius inscription is related not only to the size of the fish, but also to its popularity as a food in the Graeco-Roman world. As indicated in the first chapter, the fish was ubiquitous in visual, gustatory, and olfactory ways. Of all possible foods, therefore, fish would have been one of the most natural to choose.

At the same time that the fish clearly refers to Christ and the eucharistic meal, the fish also suggests other kinds of meals——particularly ones that are linked in the context of death. Because the inscription is clearly a funerary text, the mention of a meal would have automatically led either a Christian or a pagan to think of funerary meals. For example, I have already shown in Chapter 2 that fish could sometimes be a main dish served at funerary meals, and this will be confirmed in further detail by iconographic evidence in Chapter 4. And, as also indicated in Chapter 2, meals such as the eucharist and the agape, were closely related to death, in that they celebrated the death of Christ. In addition, both the eucharist and the agape meals are mentioned as parts of the funeral services of early Christians——consequently relating these apparently distinctively Christian meals to the more widespread funerary banquets. Thus, the fish in the Avercius inscription was associated with at least three meals, all linked in the context of death.

In fact, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, the association of the fish with death originated among pagans who sacrificed fish only to chthonic

deities, who associated fish with the underworld, and who served fish frequently in funerary meals. As a result, to mention a fish in a funerary inscription, as Avercius did, would have been appropriate as a general funerary allusion. No doubt Christians would themselves have served fish at funerary meals, but it is the general association of fish with death that made it possible for Christians to associate the fish with the death of Christ.

This seems to be confirmed in the late first and early second centuries C.E., when two New Testament texts describe the meal with Christ after his death and resurrection as including fish.¹⁰⁶ In the fifth century C.E., the author known as Quodvultdeus specifically refers to the dying Christ through the symbol of a large fish, when he spoke of “Christ the fish who was great because of his passion.”¹⁰⁷ It is also of interest to note that around 400 C.E. Rufinus of Aquileia specifically associates the dead Christ with the fish caught by the hook (of the fisherman).¹⁰⁸ Likewise, an important Christian tradition in the early fifth century C.E. associates the roasted fish with the crucified Christ.¹⁰⁹

In the general context of death, I should mention the adjective καθαρός (“pure”), because among pagans it was associated with expiatory sacrifice. Since the eucharist was also regarded by early

105. Text # XIII.4.

106. Luke 24.41-42 and John 21.9-14 = Section VII in Appendix 2.

107. Text # XII.2: “Piscis magnus ex passione sua Christus.” Here magnus has the connotation of both great and large.

Christians as a sacrifice—in imitation of the sacrifice of Christ—the word καθαρός very probably connoted the sacrificial aspect of the eucharist. Thus “the pure fish” is also the sacrificial victim.

In addition to its association with death, the fish is clearly associated in the Avercius inscription with water, as the reference to “fish from a water spring” indicates. Since the word for water spring—πηγή—was also associated with baptism,¹¹⁰ and since early Christians associated baptism with death,¹¹¹ the reference to fish and death finds a new symbolic subnetwork. Thus, instead of solely orienting the meaning of fish toward food and death, Avercius expands its orientation in the direction of water and death. In order to arrive at this expanded orientation, I would suggest that Avercius depends upon a prior association of water and death among pagans, who saw the depths of water, and the fish that swam in that water, as closer to the underworld. Thus, for pagans the fish was associated with death through water; and for Avercius the fish was associated with death through the waters of baptism (which reenacted symbolic death).

Furthermore, the reference to “faith” suggests the faith acquired in baptism. As a result fish symbolism is connected by Avercius to baptism not only through water, but also through the idea of faith.

Yet baptism and baptismal water of course promised something

108. Text # II.C.9.

109. See Section X.D in Appendix 1.

110. See especially Endnote 3.

more than death—a new life. Thus, early Christians including Avercius drew on a pagan tradition (as discussed in chapter two) that saw water as an alien realm, where strange and miraculous occurrences took place. By baptizing oneself in water, one entered a liminal realm where religious transformations could occur. By describing Christ as a fish from water, Avercius indicates that Christ—like fish—lived in a liminal realm outside of normal reality. When the virgin as church grasps that fish/ Christ, she literally grasps the property of another realm. And evidently Christians grasp that liminal property through baptism.

But unlike the eucharist, which he describes in relative detail, Avercius only hints at the baptismal association of the fish/Christ and water. Thus, baptism is a secondary association in the symbolic network of the fish in the Avercius inscription.

On the other hand, the phrase “fish from a water spring,” along with the word “pure” (καθαρός), indicates a primary association with the sacred fish that often dwelled in fish ponds of various pagan religious sanctuaries and were so tame that they could be held by the hand. This is suggested further by the word δράσσομαι, which indicates “holding with the hand,”¹¹² as well as by the reference to the large size of the fish. For frequently writers described these tame fish as large—once

111. See pp. 406-81 below for full discussion of baptism, death, and life in early Christian texts.

112. See more on handling fish with one’s hands, see pp. 216-21 and 299 above.

again demonstrating another association of the “enormous fish” in the Avercius inscription. For pagans who looked at this inscription, they would naturally have thought of these sacred fishes dedicated to various pagan deities.

In addition, one can assume that, since early Christians regarded both the eucharist and baptism as salvific rituals, Avercius would have understood the symbolism of the fish/Christ in terms of its association with salvific activities of various fish—especially the dolphin (which, as discussed above, was considered a fish)—in the Graeco-Roman world. In other words, because of the topos of fish saving the lives of human beings, it was possible for Avercius to represent Christ—the savior of Christians—in the form of a fish. In addition, as mentioned above, one of the meanings of *μεγέθης* was “strong”/“powerful,” suggesting the kind of fish that could come to the aid of human beings/Christians.¹¹³ As also indicated in the previous chapter, divinities could metamorphose into fish, and sometimes fish had been human beings. Just as a god or a human being could become a fish, so an early Christian could represent Christ in the form of a fish.

This does not mean that Avercius viewed Christ as a fish divinity, but it does suggest that he and his fellow early Christians would have understood the background of pagan religions and mythology well enough to make sense of the symbolism. Christ could become a fish symbolically only because of the religious traditions of fish having been human beings and of divinities having become fish. In my map of the

symbolic terrain of fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription, this type of association would be secondary to the primary foci of Avercius—— e.g. Christ as savior through the eucharist——but critical to understanding those foci.

Yet it was not only sacred fish that were regarded as tame, but many wealthy aristocrats had fish as fish as pets, which they adorned with jewelry, which came to them when called by their names, and which allowed themselves to be taken by hand. Such practices evidently reflected the belief among many that fish had human qualities that were worthy of exceptional praise. Thus, from another direction, a secular tradition also makes it possible for Avercius to represent Christ in the form of a fish.

In relation to sacred fish, it is also important to recall from Chapter 2 that, while religious sanctuaries generally forbade most persons from eating the vast majority of sacred fish, some fish (such as sturgeon) were regarded as sacred because of their culinary excellence, and sometimes their presentation at a meal could be accompanied by music and dance. Since the fish is clearly meant to be consumed in the Avercius inscription, it would seem that Avercius excludes the tradition of forbidding the eating of sacred fish, and instead he draws on the tradition of eating in a religious fashion particularly exceptional fish. This is confirmed to some extent by the reference to the size of the fish, since large size is related to culinary excellence——thus showing another association of *πανμεγέθης*.

The description of the fish in Avercius as πανμεγέθης also suggests another fish——namely the constellation of the Southern Fish (Ἰχθὺς μέγας), which I discussed in Chapter 2.¹¹⁴ By referring to this astronomical fish, Avercius indicates in an alternate way the salvific functions of the fish/Christ. For not only did the Southern Fish save the lives of various individuals, but it was the grandparent of the twin fish Pisces, under whose sign salvific occurrences were supposed to take place, including the end of one age and the beginning of another age. Since these astronomical allusions were well-known topoi in antiquity, one can estimate that Avercius was probably alluding to the fish/Christ/ eucharist as an eschatological and astronomical sign of salvation.

Furthermore, both the fish and its large size suggest a phallus and sexuality, since fish in general——especially large fish——were commonly associated with human genitalia and with sexual/reproductive activities. In Chapter 2, I observed that fish were ordinarily regarded as the most sexually active animals and that dolphins in particular displayed great pleasure in activities with strongly sexual overtones. I also showed that animals in the hands of women——paralleling the fish grasped in the hands of the holy virgin in the Avercius inscription——were often regarded in antiquity as allusions to phalluses and sexual intercourse.

In addition, I have shown above that the holy virgin, who grasps the fish/Christ, corresponds in part to the church. In further regard to the

113. See p. 189 above.

holy virgin, early Christian texts frequently describe with rather evocative erotic imagery the marriage of the virgin church as bride to Christ as bridegroom.¹¹⁵ Particularly illustrative passages may be found in the Banquet of the Ten Virgins by Methodius of Olympus (in Lycia, d. c. 311).¹¹⁶ The images of conceiving/bearing children (i.e. Christians) is also an important part of much of this imagery. In the concluding hymn of Methodius Banquet, the identification of a queen with the virgin is significant, since both a queen and a virgin are mentioned in the inscription of Avercius.¹¹⁷

It is likely, therefore, that through the use of erotic imagery Avercius alludes to the common theme in early Christian literature of the marriage/spiritual intercourse of Christ (here the fish/Christ) and the virgin church.¹¹⁸ By tying together Christ and the church through the symbols of the fish and the holy virgin, Avercius also implies the procreative power that this union produces——namely the conversion of many Christians. Indeed, the connection between the Christ-church marriage and the conception/birth of Christians is made frequently in these early Christian marriage texts.¹¹⁹ Apparently for Greeks and Romans, the smaller the fish/phallus, the more ineffectual were its re-

114. See pp. 248-61 above.

115. See Endnote 7.

116. See endnote 8.

117. See Endnote 8.

118. For these correspondances, see Endnote 7 below.

sults.¹²⁰ Thus, the “enormous” (πανμεγέθης) fish/phallus was probably regarded as particularly powerful and effective in its reproductive/missionary activities.¹²¹

That Avercius and his Christian friends ate this fish of great sexual/procreative/missionary power also suggests that they themselves were ingesting sexual/procreative/missionary power. Since eating fish (particularly in a large and good meal) was regarded in the Graeco-Roman world as having sexual overtones and as serving an aphrodisiac purpose, this suggestion finds further confirmation.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to four further possible associations of the fish in the Avercius inscription.

First, the emphasis in v. 19 on the those who know/understand (i.e. the words of the inscription) and the generally elusive and obscure language of the epitaph suggests an indirect connection with the topos of the silent fish, which was commonplace in the Graeco-Roman world.

119. See the discussion in Endnote 8.

120. See p. 294 and n. 573 in Chapter 2.

121. I should add that the sexual associations of the fish symbol may not constitute the first example of an erotic theme in the Avercius inscription. For, as mentioned above (see Appendix 3.5), the description of the shepherd, whose eyes look down everywhere, recalls a description of Eros in the Pallatine Anthology. Also of interest is a passage in the Apocalypse of Daniel 11 (c. 800 C.E., but whose traditions go back earlier), which mentions that a virgin named “Injustice” gave birth to the antichrist by touching the head of a small fish. The description seems almost the sexual reverse of the Avercius inscription, where a holy virgin (instead of an unjust virgin) grasps a large fish (instead of a small fish). It is unclear to what extent the author of the Apocalypse is intentionally making use of an older tradition. For the text, see Text # XX.1.

Second, in mentioning the fish, Avercius also probably refers indirectly to the IXΘΥΣ acronym. While the actual word is the accusative ιχθῦν, Avercius clearly associates the word itself with Christ and thus possibly with the acronym. And there are other examples where the exact letters of the acronym are not spelled out, but where the acronym is clearly understood. This is the case in the inscription of Pectorius of Autun, which describes the fish very similarly to the fish in Avercius and which mentions the genitive, dative, and accusative of the word ιχθῦς, but at the same time has the IXΘΥΣ acrostic at the side. It is also the case in Text # VI.2 of Tertullian, where the acrostic is indicated in the accusative (ιχθῦν), as well as in a variety of inscriptions.¹²²

Third, fish from springs were primarily associated among pagans with sacred fish that, in addition to acting as creatures sacred to a particular deity, had an oracular/prophetic function. As a result, one would expect that the fish/Christ had a similar function in the Avercius inscription. That it did indeed have this function is further suggested by the similarity (as noted) of much of the language throughout the inscription to specific passages in the Sybilline Oracles, especially Book Five, but also in Book Eight (with the repetition of the reference to the holy virgin). Thus, the role of the fish/Christ in the Avercius inscription is partly prophetic.

And it is probable that the prophetic message of Avercius in part referred to the age inaugurated by the coming of Christ, since the description of the fish in the Avercius inscription seems to have been

partly influenced by astrological language, since the meaning of the early Christian fish seems to have had a strong astrological component, and since fish in general, according to ancient astrological speculation, were associated with the onset of a new age.

Fourth, Avercius associated fish symbolism with Graeco-Roman bucolic themes that would have placed Avercius and his readers in a soothing context, with which any pagan would have felt comfortable. But it is also probable that this bucolic atmosphere alluded to the idyllic life of the above-mentioned new age that was promised to early Christians and that was inaugurated by the fish/Christ.

In conclusion, a thorough examination of the language of the inscription of Avercius reveals that the fish was a symbol with a complex multivalent network of meanings and associations. As I demonstrate more briefly below in some of the other early Christian texts, these meanings and associations vary depending on context and emphasis. In particular, the central reference in the Avercius inscription is to the function of the fish as food, especially as eucharistic food in the form of the body of Christ. Though probably not as central (since it does not comprise as many verses) is the reference to the fish as a sacred fish found in sacred waters. Because the fish is sacred, the eucharist takes on even greater meaning as a particularly sacred event. At the same time, the sacred fish from a spring is consumed——surprising from the pagan point of view, since sacred fish generally swam free and were not

eaten. Thus, in the Avercius inscription, the function of the fish as food transforms the normally free-swimming, non-consumable sacred fish into a sacred food.

On the other hand, many of the references of the fish are indirect. For example, the Avercius inscription alludes to the fish and baptism indirectly through the mention of a “water spring” (πηγή). The same is true for the reference to other meals (such as funerary banquets and agapes), to silence, to the astronomical fish, to the acronym ΙΧΘΥΣ, and to the prophetic message of a new Christian era.

The central references to eucharistic food and sacred fish take on various meanings depending on a variety of associations: status, sacrality, death, expiation, salvation, sex, prophecy, authority of Christ, and bucolic atmosphere. Particularly key to understanding many of these associations are the words πανμεγέθης (“enormous”) and καθαρός (“pure”). The former adjective suggests the associations of high status, sexual potency, salvific power, and authority of Christ, while the latter adjective suggests sacrality and expiation.

In addition to the network of meaning outlined above, fish symbolism in the inscription of Avercius is made even more complex by the concurrent suggestion of both pagan and Christian associations: e.g. funerary meal/eucharist, sacred fish/Christ, sacred spring/baptism, sexual fish/missionary activity, etc. Of particular interest (as indicated above), much of the language of the inscription generally suggests pagan deities, and likewise the sacrality of the fish suggests animals dedi-

cated to pagan deities.¹²³ Yet, because of the Christian context, it is clear that the fish/Christ is dedicated not to a pagan divinity, but to the god of the Christians.

Thus, as in the case of the language of the inscription as a whole, the pagan religious description of the fish is transformed into a Christian religious description. On the other hand, the pagan associations of the fish symbol make it possible to have a Christian fish symbol. For instance, without a tradition of fish in sacred fishponds, it would have been impossible for Avercius to have referred to a fish from a spring. As a result, the pagan associations and referents of the fish symbol exist side by side with the Christian associations and referents. In the end, they join to create a symbolic network of many references and hence of multidimensional meaning.

In the Avercius inscription, one sees fish symbolism in connection with a sacred creature in sacred water, on the one hand, and as the embodiment of the eucharist, on the other. These two referents are situated at the center of what one might call the complex of meaning of the fish symbol, as Avercius conceived it. After the Avercius inscription, other texts show an essentially similar conception of fish symbolism,

122. For a discussion of this issue, see pp. 468-74 and 586-613 below.

123. See Appendix 3.5.

especially the inscription of Pectorius of Autun (Text # I.2) and the so-called “Narration of Events Taking Place in Persia” (Text # I.3). In general I will highlight those aspects of fish symbolism in these two texts that distinguish its use by these authors from its use by Avercius.

The Pectorius inscription (Text # I.2)

Divine race of the celestial fish, make use of a
pious heart,
as you, one among mortals, receive the immortal
spring
of oracular waters. Refresh your soul, friend,
with the ever-flowing waters of wealth-giving
wisdom.
Receive the honey-sweet food of the savior of
the saints.
As you hunger, eat a fish that you hold in the
palms of your hands.
Bring satisfaction with a fish, for which I yearn,
Lord savior.
I pray to you, light of the dead, that my mother
rests well.
My father Aschandius, dear to my heart,
along with my sweet mother and brothers,
remember your Pectorius in the peace of the fish.

The initial letters of the first five verses spell the word $\iota\chi\theta\upsilon\varsigma$
(= IXΘΥΣ).

The inscription of Pectorius was found in Autun (ancient Augustodanum) in southern France north of Lyons in 1839 and is now preserved in the museum of that city.¹²⁴ As is observable from the photograph,

124. For text and analysis of the Pectorius inscription, the following are most useful: F. Lenormant, “Mémoire sur l’inscription d’Autun” (1856); O. Pohl, Das Ichthys Monument von Autun (1880, most definitive of all); J. Wilpert, Prinzipienfragen der christlichen Archäologie, 55-62 (1889); H. Leclercq, “Pectorios,” 2884-98; F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 1:12-15, 1:177-83 (1928), 2:507-15 (1922); and M. Guarducci, Epigrafia greca 4:487-94. For more detailed bibliography, see the following: H. Leclercq, “Pectorios,” 2896-98 (for detailed discussion of the early bibliography); J. Quasten, Patrology 1:175; and

the stone has some breaks that result in lacunae at several points. In Text # I.2 of Appendix 1, I follow the reconstruction of Otto Pohl, but have indicated in Appendix 4.1 those proposals which are more probable and those which are less probable. In my opinion, the inscription probably dates to the early fourth century C.E.¹²⁵ On metrical and thematic grounds, the inscription seems to split into two sections. Vv. 1-6 appear to form one unit, composed of three elegiac couplets and of the IXΘΥΣ acronym, which is used as an acrostic (in verses 1-5). In addition, these verses concentrate on the symbolism of the fish and of the oracular waters. In contrast, the last five verses are hexameters, which focus on the death of the mother of Pectorius,¹²⁶ as well as on his family relations.¹²⁷ The first letters of vv. 7-11 form no

M. Guarducci, Epigrafia greca 4:487.

125. Although paleography in inscriptions is notoriously difficult to use for dating purposes, and any supposed date is very hypothetical, the high and narrow lettering style point toward a date in the fourth century C.E. The use of Greek rather than Latin suggests a date somewhat early in the fourth century C.E.

126. It is difficult to determine who died, but, since εὖ εἶδοι (“may you rest well . . .”) occurs in v. 8 in regard to the mother of Pectorius, it would seem likely that it is death of the mother that is recorded here.

127. Many scholars argue that the first six verses are a composition that predates the actual epitaph, as reflected in vv. 7-11. In particular, they point out that the peculiar usages and vocabulary of vv. 7-11 (λιλαίω in its active form, σε λιτά~ζομε, μνή~σεο, and especially Πεκ~το~ρόυϑ) betray a very late Greek writer who could not have been the same as the composer of the first six verses. In addition, the change in metrical form suggests different authors for the two sections. At the same time, the first six verses (as shown below), recall the language of the Avercius inscription—thus suggesting an early date for them.

Yet, it seems to me that the primary distinction between vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-11 consists in their different subject matter—the first section constituting a poem on fish symbolism, the second section functioning as a funerary epitaph. This distinction may best explain the dif-

apparent acrostic.¹²⁸

Unlike the Avercius inscription, where use of fish symbolism is restricted to one section (vv. 12b-16), here throughout the inscription it is definitely specified three times (vv. 1, 6, 7) and probably a fourth time (v. 11). In addition, the IXΘΥΣ acrostic itself in vv. 1-5 not only constitutes at least the equivalent of a fifth mention, but confirms the impression that fish symbolism pervades the entire inscription. Unlike Avercius, who gives considerable weight to the shepherd as Christ, as well as to the fish as Christ, Pectorius focusses almost exclusively on fish alone. Thus, I would suggest that, for the Pectorius inscription, the fish was utilized as the central symbol of what it meant to be Christian, here in a funerary context.

ferences in meter and language. In fact, there is no internal evidence to contradict the possibility that the entire inscription could have been written in the fourth century C.E., and by one individual. Without that internal evidence, the best presumption is a single composition of the same date. While it is certainly likely that much of the language of the first six verses predates the fourth century (as the comparison with the Avercius inscription suggests), it is nevertheless also likely that the epitaph was composed by one author, probably in the fourth century. That author simply used older language.

128. Unsuccessful attempts have indeed been made to make an acrostic out of the first letters in vv. 7-11. See O. Pohl, Das ICHTHYS-Monument von Autun, 19-21.

The central use of fish symbolism is further confirmed by the reference of Pectorius to the “divine race of the heavenly fish” (Ἰχθύος οὐρανοῦ θεῖον γένος). For, by referring to Christians in this way, Pectorius denominates them as a group, which is specifically identified by its association with a fish—that is, Christ in the form of a fish. This goes further than Avercius, who uses fish symbolism primarily to link Christians with one another throughout the Graeco-Roman world rather than explicitly identifying a fish emblematically with Christians as a group.

In addition, when Pectorius describes Christians as the race of the fish, the language recalls the descriptions by anthropologists of some groups who identify themselves with particular animals—a practice commonly placed by them in the category of totemism.¹²⁹ Since there is no evidence for the actual eating of fish at specifically early Christian religious or cultic meals (eucharist and agape) or for abstinence from fish,¹³⁰ both of which practices are found in many totemic groups,¹³¹ I

129. For summaries of the evidence, I found the following of particular use: W. R. Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites (1899), especially pp. 226-293; J. G. Frazer, Totemism and Exogamy (1910) and Totemica (1944); R. Firth, “Totemism in Polynesia” (1931); A. P. Elkins, “Studies in Australian Totemism” (1933); J. L. Fischer, “Totemism on Truk and Ponape” (1957); and J. V. Ferreira, Totemism in India (1965). For an inventory of definitions of totemism, see those collected in J. V. Ferreira, Totemism in India, 8-60; and J. Hekel, “Religious and Spiritual Belief.” C. Lévi-Strauss, following A. R. Radcliffe Brown, has argued that totemism is simply a mode of thought used for the integration of polarities (nature and society), but in doing so he relegates the particularities of totemic forms to relative unimportance—an approach which is not that useful in this study of symbolism that focusses so heavily on historical contexts: Totemism (1962).

130. From the evidence of funerary meals, it would seem that many Christians (like most others in the Graeco-Roman world) may well have regarded actual fish as worthy of consumption in funerary meals.

would deduce that the totemic association of Christians with fish was made in these cases in a figurative fashion—that is, without a specific reference to a cultic practice involving fish. For example, from the description of the fish as “honey-sweet food of the savior of the saints” (σω~τή~ρος ἀγίων μελιδέα . . . βρώσιν, v. 5), it is rather clear that the fish is here a symbolic representation of a cultic practice in which Christians ingested the body of Christ in the form of bread and wine—which was called the eucharist. In other words, the eucharist did not actually involve fish as part of the menu, but fish symbolically represented the eucharist.

Thus, the physical ingestion of Christ was conceived by Pectorius (and others whom I discuss below) in totemic terms by identifying early Christians with a particular animal—a fish—that is symbolically ingested in a communal meal.

If one accepts the notion that a totem is at least in part a symbolic reflection of the social structure of a particular group,¹³² the self-description of Christians as a race of the fish would have been one way of describing their own particular form of social unity. For example, to have described themselves as followers of a fish would have suggested

But this has more to do with a general chthonic association than with totemic identification.

131. For meals in totemic groups, see the discussions in W. M Robertson Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, 276-77; J. G. Frazer, Totemism and Exogamy, 1:12, 2:6-7, 2:230-38, 4:230-32; and J. V. Ferreira, Totemism and India, 71, 137, 142.

132. For example, see J. L. Fischer, “Totemism on Truk and Ponape”; and also E. Durkheim, Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, passim.

that they——like fish who live in the miraculous and alien realm of water——belonged to an alien realm in which miracles of all sorts could occur.¹³³ For, like fish, early Christians did not view themselves as belonging to the realm in which most creatures or human beings lived, but to another realm, which was in part associated with death. Given the ancient view of the sea as close to the underworld and given the chthonic associations of fish, it is easy to understand the early Christian association of the fish with the death of Christ, as embodied in the eucharistic sacrifice.

But, on the other hand, that realm was also associated with the salvation of the messianic age, as the astrological symbolism of fish implies. Thus, since they conceived of themselves as constituting the race of the the fish/Christ, early Christians ingested the fish so as to connect themselves socially to one another as persons united by the death of Christ and by the promise of future salvation.¹³⁴

By describing themselves as a race of the fish, early Christians such as Pectorius were also designating themselves socially as a group that was positioned somewhere between the normal arena of earthly existence and the completely transformed arena of the new world to come as saved by Christ. For, in general in the Graeco-Roman world, fish were regarded as creatures which resembled human beings in some ways, which were thought capable of eliciting empathy from human beings, and which (in some cases) were believed to have formerly beeb

133. On the miraculous character of water, see pp. 262-76 above.

134. For more discussion of fish symbolism and totemism, see pp. 501-02 below.

human beings metamorphosed into fish——thus making it in fact possible to use a fish as a symbol of Christ. But, as inhabitants of a strange realm, where life depended on water and not on air (as for all other creatures), fish were also considered somewhat different from the majority of land-based animals, as is suggested by the surprise of some writers at the domesticity of some fish.¹³⁵ Thus, the eating of the fish/Christ in the Pectorius inscriptions (and in other texts where the fish symbolizes the eucharist) served to emphasize the liminal status that early Christians conceived themselves to possess. And because of that liminality they viewed themselves as distinct from other social groups.

As is clear from the above discussion, I believe that the reference of the fish/Christ to the eucharist is a prominent feature in the constellation of meaning of fish symbolism in the Pectorius inscription, as well as the Avercius inscription. Furthermore, the Pectorius inscription views the eating of fish as a sacred enterprise, as is shown by referring to it as “the food of the savior of the saints.”

Other features in the description of the fish as food in the Pectorius inscription recall the language of the Avercius inscription and suggest a common textual tradition. For example, both texts use the verb ἐσθῆν (“to eat”) in referring to the consumption of the fish. Although they use different words, both texts also describe the reception of the fish by a grasping movement of the hand. While Avercius employs the verb δράσ~σεσθαι (“to grasp with the hand”), Pectorius employs the noun παλάμη (literally “palm of the hand,” but more generally a “hand” in the act of grasping something).

Since a specific word is used in the Pectorius inscription to designate

the hand, I should explain that this most likely reflects a practice of early Christians in receiving the eucharist in their hands.¹³⁶ Thus, while (as noted in my discussion of the Avercius inscription) the reference to a fish in a hand probably had a sexual connotation, it also referred to the custom of a particular Christian cultic ritual. From the descriptions of Pectorius and Avercius, one might therefore conclude that the taking of the eucharist itself was subconsciously perceived by some early Christians as partly an erotic or sexual act.

On the other hand, there are some distinctive features in the presentation of the eucharistic fish in the Pectorius inscription vis-à-vis the Avercius inscription. First, bread and wine are not explicitly mentioned, and Pectorius relies instead on a general reference to “food” (βρώσιον, v. 5). Perhaps for Pectorius, it was unnecessary to mention them, since the frequent citation of the fish, the inclusion of the fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ) acrostic, and the reference to the fish as food of the savior, made it quite clear that eating the fish was equivalent to eating the eucharist. Second, the fish is described as “honey-sweet” (μελιδέα, v. 5). It may be of significance to note that a honey drink was quite frequently mentioned as a food brought to the dead¹³⁷—thus, making it an

135. See pp. 213-38 above.

136. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catachetical Lecture 5.21; and John Chrysostom, Elcoga quod non indigne accedendum sit ad divina mysteria 47 (= PG 63:898). See the discussion in F. Dölger, ΙΧΘΥΣ 2:510p2f15.

137. Μελι-κρά-τον. E.g. Lucian, Philosp. 21 and Charon 22. On the preparation and use of honey in Graeco-Roman antiquity (including as an offering to the dead) see “Mel” in PW 29:364-84; and J. Toutain, “Mel.”

appropriate condiment for the eucharistic sacrifice, as well as making it an apt modifier for the chthonic fish. Third, the eating of the fish is directly linked to Christ by reference to the word “savior” (σωτήρος, v. 5), which (as I discuss below) is also “savior” in the ΙΧΘΥΣ acronym—thus specifically underlining the salvific features of the fish/Christ and those Graeco-Roman traditions of fish symbolism that tied in with salvation.¹³⁸ And fourth, the recipients of the fish/Christ in the eucharist are described as “hungry” (π[ε]ι~νά~ων, v. 6), an adjective which implies that, prior to the fish, they had not had enough to eat. This should in part be understood in the sense of hungering for the salvation of Christ.

As the use of the verb, πεινῆν (“to hunger” or “to crave,” v. 6) suggests, another of the themes of the inscription, which is directly relevant for the use of fish symbolism by Pectorius, is the notion of desiring—whether it is desire for food, desire for the refreshment of water (θαλαπέο, v. 3), desire for the satiation of the fish (λιλαίω, v. 7), praying for the well-being of his mother (εὖ εἶδοι . . . λιτά~ζομε, v. 8), or wishing that Pectorius be remembered (μνήσεο, v. 11).

Evidently for Pectorius, the eucharistic fish/Christ serves as that symbolic complex, which can fulfill those desires. Thus, Pectorius focused much more emphatically than Avercius on the use of the fish as a symbol that promised salvation. This emphasis on salvation is further emphasized by the use of the word “savior” (σωτήρ) twice (vv. 5 and 7), as well as its incorporation into the “sigma” of the acrostic ΙΧΘΥΣ.

One should not be completely surprised by the greater emphasis on salvation in the Pectorius inscription than in the Avercius inscription.

For Avercius was a bishop, who may well have had no family (in so far as one can glean from the sources) and, in any case, was primarily concerned in his pastoral duties with the establishment of Christian unity. In contrast, Pectorius devoted three verses to his family (mother, father, and siblings, vv. 8-11). The promise of salvation is a natural focal point for persons concerned with the well-being of their families in life and in death.

From the point view of Pectorius, the hope for salvation was evidently best expressed by means of fish symbolism.

In general, the references to the savior and to the saints (v. 5), the employment of the IXΘΥΣ acrostic as a clear reference to Christ, and the address to Christ as “lord savior” (δέσποτα σῶτερ, v. 7) also makes the Pectorius inscription more explicitly Christian than that of the Avercius inscription.

I would suggest that this latter difference between the Pectorius and Avercius inscriptions might be explained in part from a chronological perspective, since it can be understood partly in light of chronological developments in fish symbolism. For example, in so far as the Christian character of the fish symbolism in the Avercius inscriptions (as well as the Christian character of the entire text of the Avercius inscription) are difficult to ascertain, the Avercius inscription is following the pattern of pre-Constantinian Christian inscriptions. Generally, these inscriptions were evidently presented so as to make themselves barely distinguishable from their pagan counterparts.¹³⁹ Since the Avercius inscription was erected and composed at the very beginning of the emer-

gence of identifiable Christian material evidence (the end of the second century C.E.), the elusive character of its fish symbolism, which fits in well with the elusive character of the entire text, should not be surprising. For in this period proclamations of membership in the Christian community or explicit confessions of Christ, as for example with the IXΘΥΣ acronym, are rarely to be found in inscriptions.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, if one accepts the proposal that the IXΘΥΣ acronym was understood as a secondary reference of *ἰχθὺς* in v. 13 of the Avercius inscription, it should not be surprising that it remained in the referential background of the symbolic complex of fish symbolism.

On the other hand, the Pectorius inscription with its IXΘΥΣ acrostic seems to have been composed at the beginning of the Constantinian period, or shortly thereafter. In this period, Christian inscriptions frequently bore indications of their Christian character, especially with their use of the chi-rho in order to refer to Christ.¹⁴¹ By directly referring to Christ through the use of the IXΘΥΣ acrostic (that is, where the letters of the acronym form the beginning of five successive lines),¹⁴² Pectorius was following the practice of others who at the same time (in the Constantinian period and thereafter) were openly professing

138. See pp. 195, 206, 228-31, 248-61 above.

139. For more detailed discussion of this, see Appendix 3.7.

140. The situation is clearly different in literary texts, where material of an identifiably Christian character abounds. Consequently, it is not an accident that the only certain pre-Constantinian use of the IXΘΥΣ acrostic occurs in a literary text—the Sybilline Oracles: Text # XIII.1.

141. A glance through the pages of ICUR will quickly reveal this.

their allegiance and devotion to Christ.

In general one should also say that the religious character of the Pectorius inscription—which had a strong impact on his understanding of fish symbolism—was not only more explicitly Christian than the Avercius inscription, but was also more explicitly religious. This is indicated in part by the emphasis on salvation already highlighted above, but also by other words that clearly made the fish symbol a religious symbol: “pious” (σεμνῶ, v. 1), “divine” ([... θε]ϊον, v. 1), and “oracular” (θεσπεσίων, v. 3); the phrase, “immortal spring among mortals” ([. . . πηγῆ]ν ἀμβρο~τον ἐν βρο~τέοις, v. 2); and possibly the verb, “I pray” (λιτά~ζομαι = an iterative form of λίσ~σομαι or λιτομαι, v. 8). By using this kind of terminology, Pectorius makes clear that, when he speaks of the fish, he is speaking of divine and eternal matters.

In contrast, while the language of Avercius indicates that the fish refers to sacred fish from springs, it is not as direct as in the Pectorius inscription, and the language of the remainder of the inscription only indirectly suggests the religious character of fish symbolism. In part, I would suggest, this may be explained by the generally more indirect character of the Avercius inscription. As shown in my commentary on the Avercius inscription (including the appendices), Avercius constantly plays on the secular and sacred aspects of various words and phrases, including the image of the fish, which is associated with the large fish of a wealthy secular meal, as well as with the sacred fish found in sacred springs and with sacred food. Generally, it is always indefinite as to whether Avercius refers to a secular or a sacred object. In contrast, Pectorius is very explicitly referring to sacred objects. Words such as

“hungering” (πινάων) and “honey-sweet” (μελι~δέα) can be applied to normal culinary matters, but the weight of the language in the Pectorius inscription is openly religious. This also may have something to do with the later date of the Pectorius inscription, when Christian religiosity was expressed in an open fashion more commonly than before. In addition, one should expect religious language, when declarations of Christianity (such as the IXΘΥΣ acrostic) are made.

In regard to another difference with the Avercius inscription, I would note in the Pectorius inscription the greater emphasis on water, which takes up essentially two whole verses (vv. 3-4). In addition, the noun “water” (ὕδωρ) is mentioned twice, as well as the noun “spring” (πηγήν) and the adjective “ever-flowing” (ἀενάοις). This is critical for an understanding of the use of fish symbolism by Pectorius, since water symbolism was so closely tied to fish symbolism in the Graeco-Roman world and in early Christianity. For, because of its associations with a miraculous realm and with the production of life in the Graeco-Roman world, not only water, but its inhabitants——namely fish——became associated with the miraculously salvific waters of baptism and the production/conversion of fish/Christians through those waters.¹⁴³ As a result, it is likely that, by emphasizing water, Pectorius was also emphasizing baptism——in the context of fish symbolism——to a greater degree than is case in the Avercius inscription.

While oracular/prophetic elements were important for understanding fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription——especially language similar to passages in the Sybiline Oracles and the general association of

fish with pagan oracles—they consist for the most part of indirect allusions rather than explicit references. On the other hand, the inscription of Pectorius explicitly designates the water, in which the fish apparently swam, as “oracular” (θεσπεσιών). In a Christian inscription that is particularly concerned with fish symbolism and with salvation through IXΘΥΣ, the reference to oracles would have been appropriate for several different reasons: the association of fish symbolism with oracles in the Graeco-Roman world;¹⁴⁴ the interpretation of acronyms such as IXΘΥΣ as indicators of oracles; the fact that the IXΘΥΣ acronym first appeared in an oracular document—the Sybilline Oracles; and the fact that Christian oracles in general (such as the Christian parts of the Sybillines) were so concerned with salvation.

And, if one accepts the reading of ο[ὐρανίον . . .] in v. 1 (which seems the most probable of the choices), the reference to the astronomical/astrological fish—that is, a fish which is in the heavens (οὐρανοί)—is also explicit. In this regard, one should note that ancient astrological speculation had a strong oracular component, as can be seen from the association of the fish constellations (Southern Fish and Pisces) with messianic developments. In any case, the astrological reference in the Pectorius inscription would have been an even

142. For full details see pp. 493-504 on the IXΘΥΣ acronym below.

143. See pp. 406-81 below.

144. On oracular fish, see pp. 186-87 above.

more explicit reference to the Southern Fish than the “huge fish” (ἰχθὺς πανμεγέθης) in the Avercius inscription.¹⁴⁵

Finally, I should mention the verb “satisfy” (χο[ρταζ], v. 7). By using this word, Pectorius probably alludes to its use in Matt. 15.33, 37, and Mark 8.4 in order to describe the feeding of fish (as well as bread) to the multitude. Consequently, fish symbolism in the Pectorius inscription not only refers to the eucharist and to grave meals, but may also refer to the scriptural description of the multiplication of fish and loaves of bread.

In conclusion, I would briefly suggest the following general outline for the constellation of meaning of fish symbolism in the Pectorius inscription. Like the Avercius inscription, the Pectorius inscription emphasizes as its central reference the function of the fish as food, while at the same time referring to the fish as a creature from a spring. Yet, also included as a direct reference in the Pectorius inscription (whereas Avercius includes it as an indirect reference) is the acronym/acrostic IXΘΥΣ, with special stress on the “sigma,” because of its reference to the “savior” (σωτήρ, i.e. Christ). This ties in with one of the general themes of the inscription——namely the concern for salvation.

Moreover, the Pectorius inscription also refers directly (whereas Avercius refers indirectly) to the astronomical/astrological fish with its use of the adjective “heavenly”, which is certainly to be related to the prediction of a new age——thus also tying in with the IXΘΥΣ acrostic

145. See pp. 248-61 above.

that also implies a new age.¹⁴⁶ Finally, Pectorius generally associates the fish with oracular/prophetic functions to an even greater extent than Avercius does.

In general, Pectorius includes a greater number of direct references. To the list of the previous paragraph, I would add the reference to baptism, which (because of the language of refreshment) should be considered as a nearly direct reference. As I have discussed, this overall increase in direct references may well have to do with the indirect and indefinite nature of much of the Avercius inscription (conditioned by its early date), as opposed to the more direct profession of Christianity at a later date in the Pectorius inscription.

Like the Avercius inscription, Pectorius refers indirectly to meals other than the eucharist that are linked in the context of death, such as funerary banquets and agapes. But, unlike the Avercius inscription, there are no identifiable allusions to the silent fish. In addition, while Avercius focusses very directly on the sexual connotations of fish symbolism by referring to a “holy virgin” and by describing the fish as “enormous,” Pectorius refers to it indirectly—that is, only by mentioning the placement of the fish in the hand. Furthermore, Pectorius includes in his symbolic parameters an indirect reference to the feeding of fish and loaves to the multitude (through the use of the verb, “to satisfy,” $\chi\omicron\rho\tau\acute{\alpha}\sim\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$), while this meal is not identifiably found in the referential framework of fish symbolism in the Avercius inscription.

In contrast to the Avercius inscription, there are no central adjectives (such as $\pi\alpha\nu\mu\epsilon\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\theta\eta\varsigma$ and $\kappa\alpha\theta\alpha\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$) that act as a type of magnet, so as to

draw diverse associations around the image of a fish. It is clear that some of these associations are present, such as sacrality, death, salvation, sexuality, oracular promise, but they are each communicated or assumed in different ways. For example, sacrality is indicated by association with a spring, as well as with the saints and the savior. Death is assumed, since the fish was so commonly associated with it and since the inscription is funerary. Salvation is indicated by various references to the savior. Sexuality is suggested by the placement of a fish in a hand. And oracular promise is indicated by the word *θεσπεσιῶν* (“oracular”). In other words, the Pectorius inscription is not as centralized in organizing the constellation of meaning of fish symbolism.

While the fish symbol in the Pectorius inscription is, as in the Avercius inscription, made more complex by the concurrent suggestion of both pagan and Christian associations——e.g. funerary meal/eucharist, sacred spring/baptism, heavenly (i.e. astrological) fish/heavenly Christ, sacred fish/Christ, etc.——nevertheless the alternation between the two symbolic territories is much less dynamic than in the Avercius inscription. For Pectorius makes it much more explicit that his epitaph is Christian. For example, while the fish in the Pectorius inscription clearly recalls the sacred fish of pagan springs, the terms associated with it (*σωτήρος* and *ἁγίῳ*) show that it is conceived as sacred in a clearly Christian sense. In contrast, in the Avercius inscription, the adjective *καθα~ρός* (“pure”) leaves room for uncertainty as to religious orientation. Although Pectorius maintains some of the indefinite language, he clearly communicates the Christian character of the inscription and of

the fish symbol. Thus, fish symbolism, which was once indeterminately Christian and/or pagan, has become definitively Christian.

146. See pp. 493-504 below.

The Narration of Events Taking Place in Persia (Text # I.3)¹⁴⁷

From out of Persia, Christ was known from the beginning. For nothing escapes the notice of those in that (country) who are learned in the laws and who toil after all matters. For just as he was engraved on golden treasure boxes and was placed in royal temples, I say that the name of the Christ comes above all from the temples there and from the priests in them. In the temple of Hera, which is beyond the royal houses and which King Cyrus—the diviner of all piety—constructed, he (Cyrus) set up golden and silver statues and decorated them with very costly precious stones. I do not say this in order to ridicule these decorations. In those days, as the written tablets teach, when the king entered the temple to receive the explanation of his dreams, the priest Prouppipos said to him: **I rejoice with you lord, since Hera has become pregnant.** Smiling the king said to him: **A dead woman is pregnant.** He said: **A dead woman came to life and bears life.**

And the king (said): **Make clear to me what this is.** He said: **Truly you have arrived here at the right time. For all night the statues remained dancing, both the men and the women, saying to one another: Come rejoice with Hera.** And they said to me: **Approach, prophet. Rejoice with Hera that she is loved.** And I said: **Who has been loved—the one who does not exist?** They said: **She came to life and she is not called Hera, but Ourania; for great Helios loved her.** The females say to the males that they disparage the deed. **Water Spring is the one loved. Was not Hera betrothed to a carpenter?** And the men said: **On the one hand, we accept that she is rightly called Water Spring, but on the other hand her name is Muria.¹⁴⁸** **For in her womb, as in the sea, she bears a ship of countless measures burden.¹⁴⁹** **If she is Water Spring, she is to be understood in this way. For the spring of water always flows forth with the spring of life, which has only one fish caught on the hook of divinity, since it nourishes the entire world with its flesh as if in the sea.** (The women): **You have spoken well: She has (as her husband) a carpenter, but not from the marriage couch, which gives birth to a carpenter. For this one who became a carpenter—the child of the chief carpenter—constructed a three-fold heavenly roof with clever skills and made this three-housed mansion by means of the word.** In this way the statues remained engaging in rivalry concerning Hera and Water Spring and they spoke in unison: **When the day is finished, we will all know completely what**

147. The best edition of the text is E. Bratke, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch der Sasaniden. For interpretations of the text, see especially the following: Idem, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch; A. Harnack, “Zur Abercius-Inschrift”; C. R. Morey, “The Origin of the Fish Symbol” 10:426-30; and F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 2:252p2f62.

148. Muria can refer to the concept of a countless” number (literally) “10,000” and to the name “Mary.”

is certain. Now therefore, lord, remain the rest of the day. For the deed will in any case bring a perfect demonstration (and) it will not reveal external reality. While the king remained there looking at the statues, suddenly the harp players began to play the harps and the Muses began to sing. And each of the four-footed and the winged creatures made of silver and gold, which were inside, acted with its own voice. As the king was shuddering and entirely filled with fear, he was about to leave, since he could not bear the sudden confusion. The priest said to him: **Remain, king. For the perfect revelation is present, which the god of gods has chosen to make clear to us.** After these words were so spoken, the roof opened and a bright star came down. And it set itself above the column of Water Spring and this voice came: **Lady Water Spring, great Helios sent me at the same time to reveal to you and to minister at the childbirth—a childbirth without stain, which was made for you who have become the mother of the first ranks and who are the bride of the thrice-named single divinity. The seedless child is called Beginning and End. On the one hand, the beginning of salvation and, on the other hand, the end of destruction.** All the statues fell on their faces, while Water Spring stood. On her was found attached a royal diadem which has above it a star set with rubies and emeralds. Above it stands the star. Immediately the king ordered that there be brought (to him) as many of the wise interpreters of signs as were in his kingdom. After the messengers exhorted everyone with their trumpets, all came to the temple. As they saw the star above Water Spring and the diadem together with the star-studded stone and the statues lying on the floors, they said: **King, the divinely inspired and royal root has emerged, and it bears the stamp of the heavenly and earthly king. Out of Judah, a kingdom will come up that will remove all remembrances of the Jews. That the gods have fallen to the ground, means that the end of their honor has come. For the one coming will thoroughly shake in it the worthy females, as well as the young males. Now, therefore king, send forth to Jerusalem. For you will discover the son of the all-mighty in his corporeal form, as he is elevated corporeally by the bent knees of women.** And the star remained above Water Spring (who is called Urania), until the Magi were to depart. And then it went forth with them. Deep in the evening Dionysus appeared in that temple without the Satyrs and said to the monuments: **Water Spring no longer gives oracular responses as one of us, but rather better than us. Better than us she gives birth to a certain man of divinity, who is a fetus of Fortune. O priest Proupippos, what are you sitting there doing? The deed that is written has arrived for us, and we are about to be proven as liars who have reached beyond our abilities. Those things which we have made visible, we have made visible. Those things which we have ruled, we have ruled. We no longer give oracles. We have become inglorious and dishonored, as only one among all (of us) assumes his own honor. I have spoken for Mithrobades.** No longer do the Persians demand tribute of the earth and the air. For the one who establishes these is present, as he conveys effective tribute to the one sending these. He rebuilds the image and constructs the image for

the image and gives the dissimilar to the similar. Heaven rejoices with the earth, and the earth boasts as it receives the heavenly boast. What was above was below. What the happy troop does not see, the wretched troop sees. A flame threatens these, while dew is present to those. It is the fortune of Karia that she gave birth to Water Spring in Bethlehem. It is the grace of Water Spring that she bore the one longed-for from heaven and that she conceived the grace of grace. Judea has blossomed and immediately our Judea has disappeared. Salvation came three times to the gentiles and to those of other races. Relief increases for the suffering. Deservedly the woman dance saying: **Lady Water Spring, bearer of flowing water, mother bearing the splendor of heaven, from whose heat the cloud bedews the world, remember your female servants, dear mistress.**

Of great importance is the text above, entitled “The Narration of Events Taking Place in Persia” (hereafter designated as the “Narration”),¹⁵⁰ which was situated at the chronological end (c. 434-439 C.E.) of the textual tradition that uses fish symbolism in order to symbolize the fish/Christ as eucharistic food from a water spring. Although the authorship of the text is attributed by the “Narration” to the non-Christian Aphroditon,¹⁵¹ it is likely that the it was in fact composed by a Christian author, possibly by Philip of Side in his Christian History.¹⁵² In any case, the stories in the “Narration” probably in fact originated well before 434-439 C.E.¹⁵³

149. That is, a huge ship.

150. For full discussion of manuscripts and of the stemma, see E. Bratke, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch, 61-87, 111-27. In partial or full form, the text of the “Narration” exists in at least twenty-three Greek manuscripts, as well as in Old Church Slavonic and (possibly) Armenian translations (but apparently not in Latin); see E. Bratke, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch, 128.

151. As an important advisor (ἀρχι-μά-γει-ρος, 1.4) to the Persian king, Arrianatos allegedly examined the royal archives of the Sassanid kings of Persia,

152. So argue E. Bratke, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch, 163-64; and A. Harnack, “Zur Abercius-Inschrift,” 17-18. Only a very few

As my translation indicates, the story concentrates on an event that took place in the Temple of Hera (presumably in Persepolis according to the story), which King Cyrus had built and in which he had set up statues of various divinities. Upon entering the temple one day, Cyrus learned from the temple priest Proupippos that the statue of Hera had miraculously come to life (ἀνέζη~σε, ll. 17-18) and that it had become pregnant (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔλαβεν, ζώην γεννᾷ, ll. 15-18). From the priest, he also learned that the male statues of the gods and the female statues of the goddesses, as they were dancing, had engaged in a discussion concerning the meaning of this event. In the process of this discussion, the king also discovered that Hera had several other names: Urania (Οὐραν~ία), Water Spring-Source (Πηγῆ), and Mary (as hinted at by the name, Μυρία). Although betrothed to an actual carpenter, she was in the process of giving birth (but not by means of her husband, as is indicated by the phrase “not by means of the marriage couch,” οὐκ ἐκ λέχους, l. 18) to a heavenly carpenter, who was to build heavenly structures—— clearly a reference to the miraculous birth of Christ.

In explaining this, the male statues describe the pregnancy of Hera/Urania/Mary/Water Spring-Source as taking the form of a water spring in which a fish is caught on the hook of divinity and nourishes

fragments of this history actually remain extant.

153. Since the “Narration” is mentioned in Anastasius Sinaita (d. c. 700), its terminus post quem must be late seventh century C.E. Furthermore, in a scholion at the end of the “Narration” (45.1-9), Philip of Side is mentioned as one of the sources of the “Narration,” including the section investigated here——thus suggesting that the traditions in the story go back well before the date of the composition of his Christian History (Χρισ~τιανικὴ Ἱστορία), c. 434-439 C.E. For a discussion of texts that cite the “Narration”, see E. Bratke, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch, 87ff.

with its flesh all those who eat it—a reference (as I show below) to the birth and death of Christ, as well as to the symbolic births and deaths of Christians through baptism and the eucharist. Upon hearing of this development, Proupippos requested that the king remain the following day, and he was rewarded by a vision in which the statues sung and moved about. At the high point of this confusion, a star descended upon the statue of Hera/Urania/Mary/ Water Spring-Source in order to announce to her the coming of the “seedless child” (ἄσπορον βρέφος, l. 13.18)—evidently a combined reference to the annunciation of the birth of Christ and the star of Bethlehem.¹⁵⁴

In general, in the “Narration” the identification of Muria/Mary with female deities served to emphasize her role as a powerful figure who acted as conceiver/bearer of the enormous (thus, also powerful) fish/Christ. Just as Hera was a mother of great deities, just as she was queen of the heavens, and just as Hera and Urania were associated with the moon and childbirth,¹⁵⁵ so Muria/Mary gave birth to an even more powerful deity in the form of the fish/Christ who would also be a king

154. In his interpretation of this section, F. Dolger concludes that its author must have been a syncretist who combined Hera/ Urania with Mary. But in fact the text is a rejection of the power of the pagan gods—especially clear in the speech given by Dionysus—and an affirmation of the power of Christ. Since an interest in Mary arose because of the Nestorian controversy in the first half of the fourth century C.E., the story of Hera/Mary in the “Narration” may well have been shaped in part as a response to that interest.

155. In general on Hera (including the above-mentioned features), see M. Nilsson, Geschichte der griechischen Religion, passim; W. Burkert, Greek Religion, 131-35 et passim; and W. K. C. Guthrie, The Greeks and their gods, 66-73 et passim.

of the heavens.¹⁵⁶ Since the mother of Christ, therefore, had astral connections (moon and heavens), since she was particularly associated with childbirth, and since she was an extremely powerful personage, it is possible to understand more easily why the author of the “Narration” chose to represent Christ in the form of a fish. For fish were regarded as important astrological signs and were also associated with procreation. Furthermore, when fish were enormous, they acquired an association with high status—thus, making them appropriate to represent an individual of great power and importance, as well as the child of a figure of great power and importance.

Because of some of the astrological associations mentioned above, it seems logical to suggest that the fish as Christ in the “Narration” was associated to some degree with astrological symbolism. This is further confirmed when the “Narration” describes the one with whom Muria/Mary is pregnant—the fish/Christ—in l. 15.14 as “the one who is longed for from heaven” (οὐρα~νο~πόθητον) and in l. 15.18 as “the splendor of heaven” (οὐρά~νι~ου φωστήρος). Since Christ is associated here with the sun god (ll. 18.3-4), as he is in other early Christian texts and in early Christian iconography,¹⁵⁷ and since the sun

156. By identifying Mary with Urania (Οὐρανία), the author of the “Narration” was probably associating Mary with the moon goddess, who according to some ancient traditions was apparently designated with the name Οὐ~ρα~νία. In particular, in Semitic areas, Urania was associated with the moon goddess (e.g. Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.8). As the story of Elagabalus indicates, Urania seems to have been the moon goddess in Emesa in Syria. This would also seem to have been the case for the heavenly goddess of North Africa, Taanit. For a discussion of this identification, see R. Turcan, *Héliogabale*, 147ff. This is further suggested by the reference to Great Helios (ὁ Μέγας Ἥλιος, “The Great Sun” god, l. 13.14), who later in the story of the “Narration” is equated with Christ (ll. 18.3-4). In general, the moon and goddesses of the moon were closely associated with childbirth.

god and moon goddess were closely associated in Graeco-Roman religion to the extent of marriage,¹⁵⁸ the “Narration” seems to be connecting the birth of Christ to astral phenomena. This is of course explicitly indicated by the lengthy discourse concerning the star over Hera/Urania/Mary/Spring——namely, the star of Bethlehem (ll. 13.11ff.). In fact, as shown in Chapter 2, it was argued that the sign of the fish (Pisces) may well have been understood in association with the appearance of this star.¹⁵⁹

As is evident from the text of ll. 12.12-16 of the “Narration”, the fish is above all closely associated with the word *πηγή*, which has the clearly dual meaning of “source” (as in the procreative source of Christ——that is, Mary) and “water spring” (the spring of water in which the fish is caught). In doing this, the “Narration” transforms the use of *πηγή* in the Avercius and (probably) the Pectorius inscriptions so that it refers not just to the sacred springs/Church in which the sacred fish/Christ dwelled, but also to Mary, whose womb served as the procreative source/spring of the fish/Christ. While in the Avercius inscription, the association of *πηγή* with Mary is at best an indirect reference, here it is clearly a primary direct reference and is essential for understanding the use of the fish symbol in the “Narration.” Just as many in antiquity

157. See for example on the portrayal of Christ as sun god in iconography Sister C. Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 64-97. For examination of Christ as sun god in texts, see F. Dölger, *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit*; and *idem*, *Sol Salutis*.

158. As celebrated, for example, by Elagabalus; see pp. 769-70 below.

assumed that fish came to life due to the stimulation of water and just as many associated water with the production of animal life, so the fish/Christ came to life through the wombed medium of Mary in the form of a spring/source of water.

By associating Mary and her pregnancy with sacred water springs, the “Narration” designates not only her as sacred, but also the offspring which she is bearing—that is, the fish/Christ. This is confirmed, when (alluding probably both to the image of sexual intercourse and of birth) the “Narration” explains that the “spring of water flows forth with the spring of the spirit” (ll. 12.13-14).

In addition, by calling Mary a water spring/uterine spring, the “Narration” associates her with the creatures that dwell in that spring—namely fish, of which the fish as Christ is of special importance. Thus, Christ is literally described by the “Narration” as a sacred fish in the sacred spring of Mary. From this one can also see that sacrality and sexuality were inextricably linked in the network of meaning of fish symbolism in the “Narration.”

Naturally, the conception/procreation of Christ through Mary in the “Narration” appropriately ties in with the phallic associations of fish that I have explored in detail in the exegesis of the Avercius inscription. On the one hand, it is clear that the fish “on the hook of divinity” (τῷ τῆς θεότητος ἀγκίστρῳ, l. 12.15) is the product of the spiritual insemination of the Spring/Mary. Yet, the “Narration” also indicates that this fish “nourishes the entire world with its flesh” (τὸν πάντα κόσμον . . . ἰδία

σαρκὶ τρέφων, ll. 12.16-17). Thus, the fish also has an active function in promoting the well-being of others.

While it seems that the fish/Christ primarily refers here to the ingestion of the eucharist, it is also probable that the eucharistic fish has a phallic connotation. For, when the statues explain that Spring is also called Μυρία (l. 12.1), it justifies this appellation by indicating that “she bears a ship of countless measures weight” (μυρία~γω~γὸν ὀλκάδα φέρει, l. 12.12-13)—in other words, a ship that is enormous. Consequently, it is also implied that the fish that she bears in her womb is an enormous fish. In this way, the “Narration” is linked to the tradition of describing the fish/Christ as enormous, as discussed in my investigation of the Avercius inscription. And enormous fish had (among other things) associations in the Graeco-Roman world with phalluses. From this latter association, it would therefore appear that the fish/Christ in its eucharistic role functions in a partly erotic/sexual fashion. On the one hand, it suggests the birth of Christ, and, on the other, it suggests the production of fish/Christians who will be nourished by the fish/Christ.

While water and fish were associated in the Graeco-Roman world with fertility and sexuality, sacred fish in sacred fishponds were also associated with oracular/prophetic functions. As a result, one would expect that the water spring/Mary and the fish/Christ would be associated with oracular/prophetic functions as well. This is confirmed by the mention of oracles in two passages of this section of the “Narration”—χραμα~τιζει (ll. 14.15-16) and χρησμούς (l. 15.2)—

indicating that Mary and Christ, and not the pagan gods, provide the true oracles. Just as the sacred fish in sacred springs prophecy the future, so also do the water spring/Mary and the fish/Christ.

The oracular associations are clearly also connected to the appearance of the star of Bethlehem (ll. 12.11ff.), which is an astral oracle accompanying the birth of the fish/Christ. As suggested above, the fish symbol may also have an astral connection in the “Narration.” Since the fish was particularly associated with the coming of a new age and since the text describes Christ as born from heaven (l. 15.14), it is probable that the “Narration” is equating the birth of Christ in the form of a fish with the coming of a new age as predicted by the heavenly fish.

It also possible that the mentions of the star and the fish are linked in another way, since the star may have been understood as the triple planetary conjunction taking place in the sign of the fish—— Pisces—— in 7 B.C.E., when Christ was born.¹⁶⁰ That this is a possibility, is

159. See pp. 256ff. above and Endnote 4 below for further discussion.

160. See pp. 256ff. above.

suggested by the location of the story in Persia, which was generally associated with astrology in antiquity and where originated the notion that triple planetary conjunctions inaugurated new ages.¹⁶¹

In addition, the description in the “Narration” of the water of πηγῆ, in which the fish/Christ abides, suggests flowing water, as in especially the following two words: ἀεναΐζει (“always flows,” l. 12.14) and ναματοφόρε (“bearer of flowing water,” l. 15.18). Thus, it is likely that baptism—which is very closely associated with flowing water—is a part of the referential framework of πηγῆ. Since the fish/Christ is also closely connected to πηγῆ in ll. 15.14-16, it is probable that the fish also has baptismal associations. In fact, in early Christian texts, the catching of fish by fishermen often refers to the baptism of early Christians, and there is probably an allusion here to this as well.¹⁶²

Furthermore, while the reference (ll. 12.16-17) to the nourishment of the entire world with the flesh of the fish/Christ (while it emerges from the “water spring”, πηγῆ), refers in large part to the eucharist as a sacrifice, it also probably refers to the nourishment that the Christian church provided to its followers. For, as discussed above, “water spring” (πηγῆ) often referred in early Christian literature to the baptismal waters of the Church.¹⁶³ In this context, the “Narration” may well be indicating that the fish/Christ does not nourish his followers solely by himself, but through the baptismal medium of his church. In

161. See Endnote 4 in Chapter 2.

162. See pp. 406-81 below.

this regard, there are references at the end of the portion of the text that relate to the function of Hera/Ourania/Mary/Water Spring-Source and the fish/Christ as beings which bring “relief” (ἀνάψυξις, l. 15.16) to people by means of water and “dew” (δρόσος, as well as δροσίζουσα, “bedewing,” ll. 15.12 and 15.19). Not only does this type of language suggest the watery streams of πηγή along with their sexual connotations, but it also suggests the relief that the church brings to the world in the wake of the birth to Mary of the fish/Christ.

In addition to continuing the textual tradition that associates fish symbolism with a water spring, the “Narration” in ll. 12.13-16 links itself to another textual tradition that was not directly alluded to in the Avercius and Pectorius inscriptions——namely, the motif of fishing for Christ, which is also closely related to the motif of fishing for Christians.¹⁶⁴ While in early Christian texts fishing can refer to missionizing, baptism, crucifixion, and resurrection, in the “Narration” it primarily refers to the conceiving/bearing/procreating of Christ. In this context, one should recognize that some Christians regarded fishing as similar to conception. This is confirmed by the use of the verb συλλαμβάνειν (“to catch” or “to conceive” in l. 15.14), as well as in two important texts of Origen: Texts # II.A.1 and II.D.1.¹⁶⁵ For the author of the “Narration”, just as one catches fish, so Hera/ Ourania/Mary/Water Spring-Source conceives the fish/Christ.

163. See pp. 327-30 above and Endnote 3 below.

164. See pp. 406-67 below.

Significantly, in Text # II.A.1, Origen uses a phrase that is very similar to that found in the “Narration”: ἐν τῷ Πέ~τροῦ ἀγκίστρῳ συν~ει~λη~μένον (“caught/conceived on the hook of Peter”) as compared to τῷ τῆς θεό~τητος ἀγκίστρῳ λαμβα~νό~μενον (“caught on the hook of divinity”) in the “Narration.” From this comparison, it seems probable that the author of the “Narration,” who regarded the fish/Christ as the child of Hera/Ourania/Mary/Spring-Source, was drawing on a common topos that regarded fishing as a metaphor for conception.

While Origen is concerned with the catching/conception of Christian fish through conversion, the “Narration” is concerned with the catching/conception of Christ as fish. It is very possible that some early Christians (such as Origen and the author of the “Narration”) conceptualized the catching/conceiving of the fish/Christ in the watery womb of Mary as a paradigmatic example for the catching/conception of Christian fish in the watery womb of the church—especially since πηγὴ could refer both to spring and church in early Christian texts.

In addition to connecting fish symbolism and πηγὴ to conception, the text of the the “Narration” apparently also establishes the eucharist as part of the referential framework of the fish symbol. As shown in the Avercius and Pectorius inscriptions, the eating of the fish is equivalent to the eating of the eucharist. Therefore, since the fish is clearly Christ and since (as in Avercius) it is understood as large, it is logical to presume that the fish, which “nourishes the entire world with its own

flesh” (τὸν πάντα κόσμον ὡς ἐν θαλάσῃ διαγινόμενον ἰδία σαρκὶ τρέφω), is also the fish/Christ in its eucharistic role.

By describing the eating of the eucharist in terms of feeding on the flesh of the enormous fish/Christ, the “Narration” also possibly links itself to the biblical tradition of Leviathan, whose flesh God promised as food for the Jewish people.¹⁶⁶ Like Leviathan, Christ is described as a huge fish, whose flesh is eaten by many (here, “the whole world,” τὸν πάν~τα κόσμον). In this case, it would seem that the Jewish tradition of associating the eating of Leviathan with the messianic banquet may well be understood in the description of the fish by the “Narration.” In fact, it appears that the eucharist itself may in part here be perceived as somehow related to the messianic banquet of Leviathan.

Furthermore, the description of “what is inside the womb” (ἤτις ἐν μήτρᾳ, l. 12.12) of Mary/Water Spring as “a ship of countless measures burden” (μυριαγωγὸν ὀλκάδα, l. 12.13) clearly refers to the fish, who is here understood as a ship/fish/Christ. That the fish is “countless measures burden” means that it is enormous. Not only is this a sexual reference, but it also refers to the large fish consumed in wealthy meals that Avercius used as a symbol for the eucharist. Thus, the “Narration” is probably borrowing from the Avercius inscription itself or drawing on a tradition associated with it. In any case, the large fish confers high status on the eating of the fish/Christ in its eucharistic role.

In addition, large size frequently was associated with pagan divini-

165. See a discussion of the usage of συλλαμβάνειν in relation to its

ties, as is indicated by the appellation “great” (μέγας)—so often given as an epithet to deities and in part an indication of size.¹⁶⁷ This finds confirmation in the “Narration”, when the sun god is called “The Great Sun God” (ὁ Μέγας «Ἡλιος») and when the sun god is identified in a syncretistic way with Christ himself: “to Zeus as Sun God, the great king Jesus” (Διὶ Ἡλίῳ θεῷ μεγάλῳ βασιλεῖ Ἰησοῦ), ll. 18.3-4). Just as gods were considered great, so the fish/Christ in its eucharistic role was considered great.

Finally, two phrases indicate that the ship/Christ and the fish/ Christ (as it nourishes the entire world) are located in places that are regarded as similar to the sea: ὡς ἐν πελάγει, (“as if in the high sea,” l. 12.12) and ὡς ἐν θαλάσση (“as if in the sea,” ll. 12.15-16). In part, the “Narration” views the womb of Hera/Ourania/Mary/Spring-Source as similar to the sea, probably because both are so closely associated with pregnancy and procreation. While I have shown many pagan texts describing water and the sea in this way, there are also many early Christian texts that view water and the sea as fertile places— associating them with the missionary activities of Christ and Christians, as well as with the baptism that follows.¹⁶⁸ Thus, in this context, the fish/Christ abides in the sea, because the sea was productive for its birth/life-death-resurrection and for the birth/conversion/baptism of

use in Methodius of Olympus (Banquet) in Endnote 8.

166. See pp. 170-74 above.

167. See p. 767 and n. 46 in Appendix 3.

fish/Christians.

On the other hand, the allusion to the sea also suggests the symbolism commonly found in early Christian texts that the sea is equivalent to the world in which all human beings live.¹⁶⁹ In doing this, these texts view the fish/Christ as one who has taken on suffering by leaving heaven and entering the sinful world/sea in which human beings live. By describing the womb of Hera/Ourania/Mary/Spring-Source as the world and by describing the abode of fish as the world, the “Narration” suggests that the fish/Christ is about to enter the world of fish/human beings. He has come from heaven (οὐρανο~πόθητον, l. 15.14) to enter the world. Thus, at the same time that the fish/Christ abides in a realm which is productive and associated with salvation through baptism, it also an an evil place.¹⁷⁰

In conclusion, as opposed to the inscriptions of Avercius and Pectorius, the “Narration” provides a much heavier emphasis on water symbolism than on fish symbolism. To some extent this is confirmed by the number of appellations attributed to Water Spring (three) in contrast to the number of appellations attributed to the fish (one). In the case of the fish, one may speak of the fish/Christ, but in the case of water

168. See pp. 406-81 below

169. See the various references on pp. 406-81 below.

170. For further discussion of this reference to two apparently opposite elements——sea = productivity/baptism and sea = world——see pp. 460-63 below.

spring, one may speak of Hera/Ourania/Mary/Water Spring-Source. As a result, the fish is subordinated not only to water, but to Mary—which is perhaps the fundamental appellation of “water spring” (πηγή). Second, the “Narration” is the first example of a text directly describing the fish/Christ in relation to Mary. Furthermore, unlike the Avercius and Pectorius inscriptions, the “Narration” combines the traditions of catching fish with the tradition of the eucharistic fish/Christ.

In contrast, the “Narration” follows the inscriptions of Avercius and Pectorius by using fish as a direct reference to Christ, as well as by employing the same oracular, salvific, sexual/generative, and eucharistic associations. Although the “Narration” seems more directly related than the two above-discussed inscriptions to the Leviathan tradition, a connection in the cases of Pectorius and Avercius is nevertheless also very possible. In its organizational framework, the “Narration” is more similar to the Pectorius inscription than to the Avercius inscription in that there are no central adjectives tying together the network of associations.

FISHING FOR CHRIST AND FOR CHRISTIANS

Introduction

In Section II in Appendix 1, early Christian texts are collected that treat fish symbolism in the context of fishing. In this section, I demonstrate that this association is crucial for understanding fish symbolism. Not only will readers view (I hope) the symbols of fish/Christians and the fish/Christ in a different light, but they will see that fishing incorporates the symbolism of baptism and life-death-resurrection to such an extent that that they clearly are to be understood as basic constituents of fish symbolism.

As indicated in Chapter 2, writers in the Graeco-Roman world discussed the practice of fishing in various types of secular literature (such as natural history). Perhaps most prominent was a special type of literature called Halieutica that was particularly concerned with methods of fishing,¹⁷¹ including different techniques used for different species of fish, problems posed by different kinds of shore line and water, the proper habits and mores of the fisherman, etc. In fact, Graeco-Roman writers sometimes compared the art of persuasive rhetoric, as well as its effectiveness in convincing people by means of attractive words, to the activity and profession of fishing.¹⁷² And (as I show) this type of metaphor clearly had an influence on the early Christian texts under consideration here.

Yet in this section, early Christian texts remove the idea of the activity and occupation of fishing, and of catching fish, from its normally secular rhetorical context in the Graeco-Roman world and instead place

it in a religious context. For it is found in religious literature and is used as a religious symbol of the powerful effectiveness of Christian preaching and doctrine in converting human beings to Christianity—that is, in making them members of a religious community. Or fishing is used as a religious symbol of the death and resurrection of the fish/Christ in relation to the symbolic death and resurrection of fish/Christians through baptism.

Fishing as preaching and conversion

Generally, one can describe the relevant early Christian texts in the following ways. First, making reference to the biblical call of the fishermen,¹⁷³ to the capture of the fish with a coin (or coins) in its mouth by Peter in Matt. 17.24-27,¹⁷⁴ to the division of the good fish and the bad fish in Matt. 13.47-50,¹⁷⁵ to Ezekiel 47.9-10,¹⁷⁶ or occasionally to the description of the post-resurrection fishing expedition in John 21.1-8,¹⁷⁷ most of the texts refer to Christ or the apostles as fishermen who catch fish with nets or hooks. For those texts focussing on the coin, the

171. For a summary of this literature, see Endnote 1 in Chapter 2.

172. See pp. 247-48 above.

173. Biblical Texts # I.1-3.

174. Biblical Text # III.1.

175. Biblical Text # IV.1.

176. Biblical Text # XVI.1.

177. Biblical Text # II.1.

designated fisherman is naturally Peter.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, those texts that focus on the post-resurrection fishing expedition in John 21.1-9 refer to Peter and the apostles as fishermen.¹⁷⁹ For those texts concerned with the call of the fishermen, those designated are: Jesus,¹⁸⁰ Jesus and Peter,¹⁸¹ Peter,¹⁸² or the apostles as a group.¹⁸³ In the case of the net in Matt. 13.47-50, the fishermen seem to be a general reference to all those who devote themselves to the capture of fish, whether it is Jesus, the apostles, or preachers who in the latter instance (as I show below) lived in the period in which the authors of the various texts wrote.

In several of these texts, the apostles and/or Jesus seem to be understood as paradigms for the activities of Christian preachers who convert non-Christians to Christianity or who convince Christians to be better Christians. For example, Origen in Text # II.D.1 speaks of fishing in terms of “not only then, but also now” (οὐ μόνον τότε ἀλλὰ καὶ νῦν)—thus, comparing the apostles to contemporary preachers—

178. Origen in Texts # II.A.1-2; Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.A.3; Ambrose in Text # II.A.7; Ps. Augustine in Text # II.A.9.

179. Augustine in Text # II.C.11; Sedulius in Text # II.C.14a-b.

180. Clement of Alexandria in his hymn in Text # II.C.1; Cyril of Jerusalem in Text # II.C.3; Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.C.4; Gregory of Nazianzus in Text # II.C.5.

181. Ps. Augustine in Text # II.A.9 and Gregory the Great in Text # II.C.16.

182. John Chrysostom in Text # II.C.8.

183. Peter Chrysologus in Text # II.C.12; Basil of Seleuceia in Text # II.C.15.

while Cyril of Jerusalem in Text # II.C.3 clearly speaks of those coming to church as those caught by the bait of the fisherman.¹⁸⁴

Second, in contrast to the fishermen who refer to Christ and to the apostles/preachers—both of whom have the active role of fishing-catching/converting-preaching (to) Christians—the fish themselves frequently and explicitly refer to the actual and potential converts to Christianity (or to those Christians that need to be maintained within the Christian flock). Thus, fish have the passive role of human beings, who through the hook or net of preaching are caught/converted to (or maintained within) Christianity.

For instance, as early as the late second century C.E., Clement of Alexandria equates fish with human beings (μερόποι, that is “mortal persons”),¹⁸⁵ while in the third century C.E. Origen declares that fish are human beings.¹⁸⁶ Much later Ambrose says rather directly,¹⁸⁷

184. To these I would add the following: Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.D.2, which refers to “us” as the fish caught; John Chrysostom, who refers to “we” as the fishermen in Text # II.C.8; Zeno of Verona in Text # II.A.6, which seems to refer to the preaching of the Gospel in Church; Augustine in Text # II.C.9, who addresses his fishing-like sermon to “you” in the plural; Basil of Seleuceia in Text # II.C.15, where “we” suggests Basil and his fellow preachers; Isaac of Antiocheia in Text # II.D.6, in which the net explicitly refers to the church; Gregory the Great in Text # II.C.16, which similarly identifies the net with the “holy church” (*sancta ecclesia*) and where the “preacher of the church” (*predicator ecclesiae*) is specifically mentioned; and Peter of Laodicea in Text # II.A.10, where “we” appears to refer to the contemporaries of Peter.

185. Text # II.C.1.

186. Text # VII.3.

187. Text # II.A.7.

“Oh human being, you are a fish” (Piscis ergo es, o homo).¹⁸⁸ In a letter to Delphinus of Bordeaux, Paulinus calls himself a fish who was rescued from the ocean/world and then baptized by Delphinus.¹⁸⁹ In two early Christian texts, the fish appears to refer to the first martyr, Stephen: Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.A.3 (probably) and Ambrose in Text # II.A.7 (explicitly). Furthermore, in this category of fish/(potential) converts, one should include all of the texts in Section II.D in Appendix 1.

Third, as indicated above, the use of the hook or net in these early Christian descriptions of fishing usually refers to preaching (sometimes by means of the Gospel) for the purpose of conversion, or of preserving persons who were already Christians within the church. For example, in the third century C.E., Origen in Text II.C.1 equates the net with the “grace of the holy scriptures” (χάρις . . . ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερῶν γραφῶν), while in the fourth century C.E. Cyril of Jerusalem in Text # II.C.3 refers to the “nets of the church” (δικτύων ἐκκλησιαστικῶν) and Zeno of

188. The following texts also include references to fish as potential and actual converts: Origen in Text # II.A.2 and II.D.1; Cyril of Jerusalem in Text # II.C.3; Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.A.3; Gregory of Nazianzus in Text # II.C.5; Jerome in Text # II.E.1; Augustine in Text # II.C.10; Peter Chrysologus in Text # II.C.12; Theodoret of Cyrhrus in Text # II.E.2; Cyril of Alexandria in Text # II.B.1; Basil of Seleuceia in Text # II.C.15; Gregory the Great in Text # II.C.16; Ps. Augustine in Text # II.A.9; Peter of Laodicea in Text # II.A.10. The designation of human beings as fish is not necessarily directly related to the activity of fishing, although the symbolism of fishing is probably in general in the referential background of such texts. For example, by means of Genesis 1.20, Severian of Gabala (Text # VI.5) and Isidore of Seville (Text # VI.8) explain why human beings are called fish without explicit mention of fishing, as does Tertullian in Text # VI.2 when he discusses fish/Christians in relation to baptism.

Verona in Text # II.A.6 explicitly states that “in fact, the hook signaled preaching” (hamum vero [significasse] praedicationem).¹⁹⁰

From the categorization offered above, it is evident that these texts view fishing as a symbol of the missionizing to, and conversion of, Christians by Christ, by the apostles, and by contemporary Christian preachers themselves (including the writers of these very texts). Likewise, some of them (especially the later texts) seem to view fishing as a symbol of the pastoral attempt to keep persons who are already Christians within the church, for example in the following two cases:

189. Text # II.C.13.

190. See also the following texts: Origen in Text # II.A.2 (which associates the fishing expedition of Peter with the words of God (τὰ λόγια, “the sayings”); Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.A.3, where it says “for Peter was destined to preach and to be a fisher of persons” [“destinatus enim ad praedicationem Petrus et piscator hominum”]; Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.D.2, which compares the net in Matt. 13.47-50 to the preaching of Christ [“praedicationem suam”]; Jerome in Text # II.C.7, which explains that the nets are “the combinations of words, the shelters of an oration, and the nooks of disputations” [“verborum complexiones et quasi quidam orationis sinus et disputationum recessus”]; Jerome in Text # II.D.3, which explains that “they wove for themselves a net out of gospel creeds from the Old and New Testaments” [“contexerunt sibi ex veteri et novo testamento sagenam euangelicorum dogmatum”]; Peter Chrysologus in Text # II.C.12, which describes fishing “by the hook of the celestial word” [“hamo caelestis verbi”]; Ps. Augustine in Text # II.A.9, which describes the “nets of the word” [“verbi retia”]; Sedulius in Text # II.C.14a-b, which refers to “the precepts of God” [“praecepta Dei”]; Basil of Seleuceia in Text # II.C.15, which exclaims, “by using what kind of beautiful language, will we net the hearers of the speeches?” [“Ποίαν κινήσαντες γλώτταν τῷ κάλλει τῶν λόγων τὰς ἀκοὰς σαγηνεύσωμεν;]; Gregory the Great in Text # II.C.16, which points out that “because the preacher of the church separates us, therefore, from the waves of this world . . . he brings fish to the solidity of the the shore . . . by the voice of holy preaching” [“Quia ergo praedicator ecclesiae nos a mundi huius fluctibus separat . . . pisces ad soliditatem littoris pertrahit . . . sanctae praedicationis voce,” etc.]; and Peter of Laodicea in Text # II.A.10, which refers to fishing as “instruction” [“τῶν διδασκῶν”].

tine in Text # II.C.10 and Gregory the Great in Text # II.C.16. Clearly in the above-mentioned texts fishing was viewed symbolically as the religious activity of rhetoric and represented the pastoral goals of Christian preachers. As a result, one can probably conclude that the use of fishing as a symbol was an important part of the repertoire of early Christian preachers, and to some extent it represented the interests of those individuals who were preachers.

Generally, since preaching and conversion are such major themes in all the texts, I would argue that the preaching of Christ and/or of the apostles were understood as paradigms and symbols of the preaching activities (both for missionary and non-missionary purposes) of these Christian preachers in all the texts as well.

And fourth, from the evidence that was adduced in Chapter 2, it is clear that the image of “bait” (δέλεαρ, δελεάζειν) as persuasive rhetoric was a theme found in Graeco-Roman literature.¹⁹¹ In these early Christians texts, references to bait as persuasive preaching are also quite frequent.¹⁹² Often this bait is described in terms of sweetness. For example, in Text # II.A.3, Hilary of Poitiers refers to “sweet bait” (cibi dulcedine), which suggests the description by Petronius Arbiter of oratory as “honeyed lumps of words” (mellitot verborum globulos).¹⁹³ In an analogous way, Clement of Alexandria in Text # II.C.1 describes

191. See pp. 247-48 above.

192. In addition to the texts mentioned below in the paragraph, see the following: Clement in Text # II.C.1; Cyril of Jerusalem in Text # II.C.3; Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.A.3; Gregory of Nyssa in Text

the life that results from the catching of fish as “sweet” (γλυκερή, l. 21)—probably suggesting as well the sweet character of the lure. Thus, in general these early Christian texts portray preachers as fishermen who seek to catch fish and bring converts to Christianity by means of bait and preaching. While fish refer to the audience of individuals listening to the eloquent rhetor/preacher, fishermen refer to the eloquent speakers who caught the audience/fish with their eloquent rhetorical bait.

That fishermen and fish would be associated by early Christians with the verbal skills of preaching was a natural association for persons living in the Graeco-Roman world. For example, the sign of Pisces was frequently associated in astrological literature with loquaciousness and rhetoric, possibly because the silence of fish evoked the idea of a silent audience enraptured by an eloquent speaker.¹⁹⁴ Since the astrological association of fish and eloquence was so common, it is also probable that the early Christian depictions of fishing contained in their referential framework an astrological component.

In any event, it is clear that, by associating themselves with fishing, early Christians were claiming a certain type of eloquence for themselves.

II.C.6; Basil of Seleucia in Text # II.C.15.

193. Sat. 1.

Fishing and early Christian ideals of poverty

In Chapter 2, I indicated that by describing Christ, his apostles, and early Christians as fishermen, these texts indicate that many early Christians throughout the extent of antiquity (as early as Clement of Alexandria) portrayed themselves as in some way poor. For fishing was stereotyped in Graeco-Roman literature both as the occupation of a poor person and as disdained by persons with high social pretensions.¹⁹⁵

Although fishermen may not have been as badly off as this literature suggests, nevertheless, by calling themselves and their founders fishermen, they are reflecting (at least in these texts), I would argue, the ideals of poverty and of social self-deprecation that many early Christians apparently valued. While the early Christian texts under consideration here do not make direct allusion to socio-economic issues or problems, it is likely that this low status was simply assumed by the writers of these texts, given the overwhelming quantity of textual evidence for the low status of fishermen in the Graeco-Roman world. In fact, the association of fishermen and low status was so common that it would probably have been automatically made without any need for special commentary.

In addition, I should mention that it is this symbolic function of fishermen in early Christianity that causes some authors to contemplate the tension between learnedness and faith, with the latter generally prevailing. For example, many Christians of the fourth century appar-

194. See p. 248 above.

ently used the tradition that the disciples of Jesus were fishermen in order to claim that one's ignorance proved one's rectitude. Jerome mocks these as persons of "stultifying rusticity" (*crassa rusticitas*).¹⁹⁶ On the other hand, Jerome himself notes that, while the fishermen were "uneducated" (*indoctus*), they were in fact endowed with "knowledge" (*scientia*).¹⁹⁷ In his biography of Martin of Tours, Sulpicius Severus excuses his own "unpolished" (*incultus*) and "faulty" (*vitiosus*) "discourse" (*sermo*) with the observation that the disciples of Jesus were not orators, but rather fishermen.¹⁹⁸ There is an almost identical passage in the *Life of St. Caesariion*.¹⁹⁹

Bucolic aspects of fishing and the context of death

Likewise, fishing was one of the activities associated in the Graeco-Roman world with bucolic settings in both iconography and literature.²⁰⁰ Clearly, the depiction of fishermen in early Christian iconography, such as that found especially in early Christian cemeteries and catacombs, drew on the pagan tradition of associating the dwelling place of the dead with the pleasant possibility of an enjoyable afterlife in a

195. See pp. 242-47 above.

196. *Ep.* 27.2

197. *Ep.* 53.4.

198. "Prologue" 3-4

199. Cited by S. Cavallin in *Literarhistorische und textkritische Studien zur Vita S. Caesarii Arelatensis*, 22.

bucolic and rustic setting—the so-called locus amoenus. That this is part of the background of the early Christian textual tradition as well, is suggested by the simultaneous presence of the shepherd and the fisherman in two of the following texts in Appendix 1 (one from the second century C.E. and one from the fifth century C.E.): Clement of Alexandria in Text # II.C.1 and Gregory the Great in Text # II.C.16. In these instances, it would seem that for their authors the occupations of fisherman and shepherd were regarded as two of the primary roles with which Christ was to be associated—very similarly to the way Avercius associated fish and shepherds.²⁰¹

In general, I would suggest that in the majority of fishing texts given in Appendix 1, the depictions of Christ—as well as the apostles and contemporary early Christian preachers—as fishermen generally allude to bucolic themes. Since bucolic imagery is associated with funerary settings in pagan literature, these writers were probably also alluding to the context of death, which (as I discuss) is an important part of early Christian treatments of fishing.²⁰² Furthermore, in making use of these bucolic themes, early Christian writers were probably suggesting the idyllic and bucolic life to come for Christians.

Yet, one should remember that unlike the bucolic descriptions of watery regions by Greek and Latin writers, it would seem that early Christian textual depictions of fishing transform an amorphous associa-

200. See pp. 288-89 above.

201. See pp. 336-41.

tion with a rustic environment into a specific reference to the missio-
nizing to, and conversion of, non-Christians to Christianity through
preaching—as well as to the homiletic exhortation of persons who
are already Christians so that they would remain within the Christian
community.

The prolific results of early Christian fishing

Since fish were renowned for their prolific qualities and since the
water in which they lived was thought to be connected in one great
stream throughout the world,²⁰³ the description of fishing for Christians
in early Christian texts finds another resonance in its referential
framework. For, like fish, Christians regarded themselves as having
great multiplicatory powers—that is, as being capable of increasing
their numbers to extraordinary degrees. In the case of Tertullian, this is
suggested by his use of the word pisciculi, “little fish.”²⁰⁴ Likewise, in
early Christian literature, writers make frequent comments concerning
the extent of Christianity and the numbers of Christians everywhere in
the Roman world. By using fish as a reference to Christians, I would
propose that these fishing texts, suggest that fish/Christians were to be

202. See this section throughout (pp. 406-81), especially pp. 423-36
and 445-60 below.

203. See pp. 263-64 above.

204. For more discussion of this passage, see e.g. pp. 145-49 above
and pp. 468-74 below.

found everywhere in great numbers and throughout the Graeco-Roman world.

Several texts in Appendix 1 appear to corroborate this. In one text, Zeno of Verona states that the hook of the gospel was preached “throughout the world” (per mundum),²⁰⁵ while Basil of Seleucia in another text speaks of converting “peoples and cities” (δήμους καὶ πόλεις), the land and waters of which will be “swarming” (ἐπαναστάσεις) with fish.²⁰⁶ In both cases, they make reference to fishing. Expressing a similar sentiment, Peter Chrysologus describes how the net is dragged through “nations” (gentes) and “peoples” (populos)—an indication of how far the fishing/preaching extended—and included fish/human beings of “all kinds without discrimination” (confusas . . . sine discretione personas)—thus including everyone everywhere.²⁰⁷ This is similar to a reference in Isaac of Antiocheia who alludes to catching fish of every type.²⁰⁸ Also referring to catching converting fish “of every type” (ex omni genere) is Gregory the Great who describes this variety as the “sum of the human species” (humani generis summa).²⁰⁹ In his description of the messianic age to come, Jerome states that the fishermen in the messianic river of Ezek. 47.9-10 will catch every species of fish (one hundred and fifty-three varieties, as he

205. Text # II.A.6.

206. Text # II.C.15.

207. Text # II.D.5.

208. Text # II.D.6.

follows John 21.11)——another way of saying that preachers everywhere will convert all human beings in the world to Christianity.²¹⁰

In virtually all the texts, in which it is clear that the sea refers to the world, the depiction of fishing for fish/Christians implies that the task of the fisherman/preacher extends everywhere: just as the sea extends throughout the world in one great stream, and just as fish are found in it everywhere, so fishermen/preachers must ply their trade throughout the world.²¹¹ In addition, the production of Christians was clearly understood through the simultaneous reference to fishing and the sacrament of baptism.²¹²

Early Christians and empathy for fish

Furthermore, by identifying themselves as fishermen and as fish, early Christians were probably influenced by the kinship that many persons in the Graeco-Roman world felt with fish. As described in Chapter 2, fish (including dolphins) were frequently thought to have human

209. Text # II.D.7.

210. Text # II.E.1. For the Ezekiel passage see Text # XVI.1 in Appendix 2. For more on these fish, see R. M. Grant, “One Hundred and Fifty-Three Fish (John 21:11)”.

211. It is also possible that the reference in John 21.1-8 to the multitude of fish caught by Peter and by others in fact indicates a similar use of fishing symbolism at the end of the first century C.E. The author of John might well have considered fishing as a symbol for the prolific character of Christianity, which could encompass all types of people in all types of places.

212. See this section throughout (pp. 406-81), especially pp. 467-81 below.

traits, often saved the lives of human beings, had intelligence, were thought at times to have metamorphosed from human beings, could fall in love with human beings, allowed persons to caress them with their hands, and could sometimes serve as beloved pets that had names and wore jewelery.²¹³ This is confirmed by the texts in Section V in Appendix 1 which indicate that early Christians were capable of admiring certain traits of fish—often to the extent of making them view fish as more virtuous in many ways than human beings. It is this type of admiration for fish, and capacity to identify to some degree with them, that allowed early Christians not only to describe Christ as a fish, but also to describe themselves as fish. In addition, since these authors praise the natural, and therefore divine, law of fish vis-à-vis human law, it is possible that, by denominating themselves and their founder as fish, some early Christians were also aligning themselves with divine law as against human law.

For example, contrary to human beings, fish know their own habitats,²¹⁴ and even the smallest of water creatures—sea urchins (unlike human beings)—are able to foresee the onset of a storm.²¹⁵ According to Ambrose, fish were willing to protect their children to the extent of inserting them into their bodies—something which human

213. See especially pp. 213-38 above.

214. Basil in Text V.1.3.

215. Basil in Text # V.1.5.’

beings were not even willing to do.²¹⁶ In addition, their migratory patterns were a subject of wonder,²¹⁷ as was their knowledge of the proper birthing times and their willingness to embark on long journeys for the sake of propagating their species.²¹⁸ For these reasons, Ambrose describes their behavior in terms of the obedience (obsequitur) to a “divine law” (lex divina) and to “celestial mandates” (mandata coelestia)—clearly referring to the mandates of God.²¹⁹ In some cases, Ambrose can even designate fish as “rational” (rationabilis).²²⁰ In fact, Basil of Caesarea argues that, unlike human beings, fish were aligned with the natural law of God (νόμος φύσεως, “law of nature”).²²¹ In reference to sea-urchins, Basil explains that God left a “footprint” (ἄχνος) on them.²²²

That early Christians could link their praise of fish directly to their identification of Christians with fish is strongly suggested in two passages of Ambrose: Texts # V.5 and V.6. In the former, Ambrose exhorts Christians to act like those species of fish that stay above the waves in storms and, therefore, avoid drowning. In particular, in Text # V.6, Ambrose equates that type of fish with Christian faith—thus

216. Text # V.2.

217. Ambrose in Text # V.3.

218. Ambrose in Text # V.4.

219. Text # V.3.

220. Text # V.3.

showing that fish could be viewed as paradigms for Christians.

Early Christian fishing symbolism and the ubiquity of fish in the Graeco-Roman world

In regard to fishing, it is appropriate to underscore again the ubiquitous presence of fish as food (both in its solid form and in its liquid form as fish sauce) in the diet of all people living in the Graeco-Roman world.²²³ Because of this, the occupation of fishing was an essential component of the economies of the Graeco-Roman world, as well as necessary for the physical well-being and survival of its inhabitants. Thus, when one read texts in which early Christians speak of fishing for fish/Christians, one must remember that they are employing a symbolic mode of discourse that is rooted in the socio-economic situation of the world in which they lived.

For example, when they describe themselves fishing, they are describing an activity that in the Graeco-Roman world literally puts food on the table, providing the basic protein foodstuff (liquid and solid) of day-to-day existence. Just as fishing is essential for the physical sustenance of Christians, as well as everyone else in the Graeco-Roman world, so “fishing” for Christians is also an essential activity; but it is essential for the spiritual sustenance of persons. As many of the texts themselves state with their references to life (and living) and death (and

221. Text # V.1.3.

222. Text # V.1.5.

dying), in the same way that fishermen catch fish and pull them in, Christ—along with his apostles and his preachers—converts human beings to Christianity and thus literally brings life to them. Fishing for fish is necessary in order to provide food for life, while fishing for converts is necessary for the eternal lives of the fish themselves.

Fishing and baptismal symbolism: the reenactment of life, death, and rebirth.

In addition to describing the capture of fish/Christians by the fishermen/Christ/apostles/preachers, the early Christian texts of Appendix 1 also clearly indicate that hooking or netting converts not only brings them into the church, but brings them to a new kind of eternal life—an eternal life that is apparently made possible, according to some texts, through baptism and the eucharist. As early as Clement of Alexandria at the end of the second century C.E. in his hymn to Christ, the activity of fishing for Christians (μερόποι,²²⁴ “mortal persons”) is generally associated with salvation (σωζομένων, l. 24). Much later in the fifth century C.E., Basil of Seleuceia also describes fishing as a means “to salvation” (πρὸς σωτηρίαν).²²⁵

While the passages above refer in general to the salvation provided by the success of these sacred fishing expeditions, other passages relate the new life of fish/Christians to their old life as unknowing fish/ human

223. See pp. 124-61 above.

224. Text # II.C.1.

beings. For instance, according to Gregory of Nazianzus, the fisherman/Christ rescues fish/human beings from the dangerous sea/world in which they live.²²⁶ In general, as I discuss in greater detail below,²²⁷ the descriptions of the world as a dangerous sea demonstrate that the life apart from Christianity was also regarded in negative terms.

That this new life was something quite different from what went before it is indicated as early as Clement of Alexandria, when he contrasts the “wicked seas” (πελάγους κακίας) of the world with the “sweet life” (γλυκερή ζωή, l. 28) that the fisherman/Christ brings to the fish/human beings by catching them.²²⁸ Likewise, for Origen the fish/human being take up “another life” (ἄλλην ζωήν) by “coming out of the sea and fleeing its bitter waves” (ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάσσης ἀνελθεῖν καὶ φυγεῖν αὐτῆς τὰ πικρὰ κύματα).²²⁹ For Hilary of Poitiers the teaching of Christ is not only again compared to a net, but the net/preaching leads all fish/human beings in every part of the sea/”world” (saeculum) out of that dark realm “into the light of the true sun” (in lumen veri solis)—where good fish (as opposed to bad fish) will be rewarded at the time of judgment.²³⁰

As these passages suggest, new life is eternal and full of rewards.

225. Text # II.C.15.

226. Text # II.C.5.

227. See pp. 452-59 below.

228. Text # II.C.1.

229. Text # II.D.1.

This is confirmed in another passage of Jerome, which states that good fish/human beings will be removed “from the salty and the bitter whirlpools” (de salsis et amaris gurgitibus—that is, from the world—and instead be transferred “into the vessels of celestial mansions” (in vasa caelestium mansionum).²³¹

Yet while these early Christian texts in Appendix 1 proclaim the joyous rewards for captured fish/Christians, several of them also indicate that salvation was to be connected with the death and/or martyrdom of fish/human beings. At the same time, they make clear that it is a death that will be followed by a new and eternal life.

For example, according to Origen, death is the result of fishing, since even good fish “die a death” (ἀποθνήσκει θάνατον). But he reminds his readers that it is a symbolic death “to the world” (τῷ κόσμῳ) and “to sin” (τῇ ἀμαρτία), which in the end allows the fish to “live again” (ζωοποιεῖται).²³² In addition to indicating afterlife, such phraseology with its language of life, death and rebirth, probably also refers to baptism.²³³ The reference to baptism is further suggested by the emphasis on transformation (μεταβάλλειν) and metamorphosis (μεταμόρφειν): the fish/human being becomes something better (κρεῖττον) and more divine (θειότερον). Such language is echoed much later in the fifth century C.E. by Ps. Augustine, who speaks of changing “from a fish to a fish”

230. Text # II.D.2.

231. Text # II.D.3.

232. Text # II.D.1.

(de pisce ad piscem).²³⁴

In the fourth century C.E., according to Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.A.3, the catching of the fish by the fisherman/Peter was apparently to be associated with the martyrdom (martyr) of Stephen—and significantly (as I demonstrate below) in imitation of the “passion” (passione) of Christ.²³⁵ Although the name of Stephen is not specifically mentioned, the passage probably refers to him, since Stephen was the first Christian martyr, as is indicated in Acts 6.8-8.1 and as is suggested by the phrase, “that first martyr” (ille primus martyr). While death clearly resulted from this fishing expedition described by Hilary, evidently the result is the “glory of God” (Dei gloriam) through the four Gospels (as symbolized by the four denarii)—which seem here also to be a form of fishing/preaching.

Other texts in the fourth century C.E., and later, also make clear that fishing for human beings results in their death, followed by rebirth. For instance, like Hilary, Ambrose associates the fishing activities of Peter with the death and martyrdom of Stephen (here explicitly mentioned).²³⁶ In addition, Cyril of Jerusalem states that those who are caught in the nets/preaching of the church “will die” (θανάτωση).²³⁷ But it is also evident that this death brings new and (implicitly) eternal life. Thus,

233. See pp. 433ff. below.

234. Text # II.A.9.

235. Text # II.A.3.

236. Text # II.A.7.

Cyril of Jerusalem says those who “die, will live again . . . and rise again” (θανατώσας ζωοποίησιν . . . καὶ ἀναστήναι)—once again (as in Origen) referring to eternal life and to baptism, as well as probably indirectly referring to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Likewise, for Ambrose in the above-mentioned text, a hook, and the consequent martyrdom, does not actually “slay” (internecat) or “kill” (interficit) good fish—the latter apparently referring both to Christ and to Christians, since Ambrose mentions fish in both the plural and the singular (boni et mali pisces . . . bonum piscem).²³⁸ Rather, for Ambrose, the martyrdom of good fish/Christ/Christians results in a “good reward” (bonum pretium), and the martyrdom of Stephen is described as “glorious” (glorioso). In fact, he explicitly says in another section of the passage that the hook does not really “kill” (occidit), but rather “sanctifies” (consecrat).

For another of the texts in Appendix 1, that of Peter Chrysologus, the death and/or martyrdom of Christians produces entirely positive results, culminating in the expectation of a new eternal life.²³⁹ According to him, the fishermen/apostles/preachers raise the fish/human beings “out of the whirlpool of death” (de mortis gurgite) by bringing them “eternal light” (lucem . . . sempiternam, as in eternal life) through the activity of fishing. They achieve this by means of their hooks—that is, the word of God as preached; and they achieve it by means of eternal

237. Text # II.C.3.

238. See below on pp. 436-45 for discussion of the simultaneous

food, which is probably a reference to the eucharist.

As I have occasionally mentioned in these passages—all related to the interpretation of the separation of the good fish and the bad fish in Matt. 13.47-50 in section II.D of Appendix 1—the fishermen/Christ/apostles/preachers give the eternal reward not to every fish, but only to the good fish (i.e. good Christians), while the bad fish (bad Christians and/or non-Christians?) are rejected. In fact, in the case of the above-mentioned passage in Origen, the deaths of bad fish are characterized by the absence of an afterlife, as opposed to the deaths of good fish who “will live again” (ζωοποιεῖται).²⁴⁰ Throughout Section II.D, the texts indicate that the netting of the good and bad fish was to be associated with the messianic judgement that would result in the punishment of bad individuals and the reward of good individuals with eternal life. In doing this, they follow the text of Matt., where the passage clearly indicates that the division of the good fish from the bad fish will take place “at the end of the age (or world)” (ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος).

Different authors speak of this with different terminology. As mentioned, Origen speaks of the death of non-Christians as an actual death in which there is no hope of afterlife versus the symbolic death of Christians who are reborn and gain eternal life.²⁴¹ In Hilary the passage speaks of the “selection” (electio) of the good fish versus the “rejection”

reference of the fish symbol both to Christ and to Christians.

239. Text # II.C.12.

240. Text # X.D.1.

(abiectio) of the bad fish.²⁴² In another text, Jerome contrasts the bitter sea with the waters of the quiet port, where “at the consummation and end of the world” (consummatio et finis mundi) good fish will enter the vessels of the celestial mansion and bad fish will be burnt in Gehenna.²⁴³

In general, one should take note that at least in the Latin texts, while the word saeculum is sometimes used to indicate the bitter world in which early Christians lived.²⁴⁴ it can also mean an “age,” as in Gk. αἰὼν—and, in this context, referring to the end of an age (as may well also be intended in the Matthean passage). This is certainly suggested by those texts that use saeculum, when referring to fishing and the end of the world.²⁴⁵ Thus, those texts that employ the word saeculum probably simultaneously indicate the world in which early Christians lived and the end of that world, as well as the end of an age. As might be evident, this is especially appropriate considering the astrological connotations of fish symbolism.

241. Text # II.D.1.

242. Text # II.D.2.

243. Text # II.D.3.

244. Hilary of Poitiers in Texts # II.A.3, II.C.4, II.D.2; Ambrose in Text # II.A.7; Jerome in Texts # II.D.3, II.E.1; Augustine in Texts # II.C.11, II.D.4; Peter Chrysologus in Text # II.D.5; Paulinus of Nola in II.C.13; Gregory the Great in Text # II.D.7.

245. Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.D.2; Ambrose in Text # II.A.7; Jerome in Texts # II.D.3, II.E.1; Augustine in Texts # II.C.11, II.D.4; Peter Chrysologus in Text # II.D.5; Gregory the Great in Text # II.D.7.

In regard to the symbolism of fishing for Christians, I should mention one theme that I believe should be situated as one of its primary associations——namely the relation between fishing for Christians and resurrection/baptism (which I have already discussed to some extent). In particular, one should cite the use of the following verbs indicating the ascent from water, as well as recalling the language of baptism and resurrection: ἀναβαίνω = “rise up”;²⁴⁶ ἀνασπάω = “arise”;²⁴⁷ ἀναφέρω = “take up”;²⁴⁸ ἀνέρχομαι = “come up”;²⁴⁹ ἐξάγω;²⁵⁰ ascendo = “ascend”;²⁵¹ educō = “draw out”;²⁵² elevō = “raise up”;²⁵³ extraho = “drag out”;²⁵⁴ protraho = “drag forth”;²⁵⁵ tollo = “raise”;²⁵⁶ and (de . . . ad) transduco.²⁵⁷

In his description of the net/teaching of the fisherman/Christ passing

246. Origen in Texts # II.A.1 and II.A.2.

247. Cyril of Alexandria in Text # II.B.1.

248. Gregory of Nazianzus in Text # II.C.5.

249. Origen in Text # II.D.1.

250. John Chrysostom in Text # II.C.8.

251. Ambrose in Text # II.A.7.

252. Sedulius, Text # II.C.14b.

253. Ambrose, Text # II.A.7.

254. Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.D.2; Paulinus of Nola in Text # II.C.13; Ambrose in Text # II.C.7.

255. Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.A.3.

256. Peter Chrysologus in Text # II.C.12.

“through the entire framework” (per omne elementi illius corpus) of water and dragging out fish/Christians into “the light of the true sun” (ex saeculo in lumen veri solis), Hilary of Poitiers provides an especially vivid description of the movement of fish/Christians from the depths of the sea to the heights of the sun.²⁵⁸ In a similar fashion, Ambrose explains that the apostolic nets drag out the fish “from the depths to the light” (de profundo ad lumen) and lead them “from the lower to the higher regions” (de infimis ad supera).²⁵⁹

In addition to indicating movement from an inferior place to a better place, these verbs of ascension (as suggested) indicate the resurrection of Christians. This seems to be explicitly indicated in the passage of Cyril of Jerusalem with the direct reference to resurrection (ἀναστῆ-
ναι).²⁶⁰ Furthermore, this resurrection seems to be modeled on the resurrection of Christ. For (as will be seen below), when a single fish refers to Christ in some of the early Christian texts in Appendix 1, it clearly also refers in part to the resurrection of Christ—to the extent of using the same verbs of ascension as used for fish and Christians.²⁶¹

It is also significant that Origen applies the verb ἀνέρχομαι only to the good fish and not to the bad fish—a suggestion that the good fish

257. Ambrose, Text # II.C.7.

258. Text # II.D.2.

259. Text # II.C.7.

260. Text # II.C.3.

261. See p. 441 below.

alone really rise and are resurrected.²⁶² As confirmation of this, Origen himself indicates in this passage that the bad fish (unlike the good fish), after being caught, die a physical death without resurrection.

Furthermore, I would suggest that the emphasis on ascension from water in some of these texts refers not only to the resurrection of Christians, but at the same time also refers to the baptism of Christians. I have already observed above that the catching/deaths of fish/ Christians through fishing/preaching and their rebirth may well refer to baptism. In several of these fishing texts that discuss the deaths of fish/Christians, mention is also made of the ascension of fish/Christians.²⁶³ This way of organizing fishing symbolism (with the capture/death followed by ascension) would seem to indicate that the ascension of captured fish/Christians was probably to be associated with the symbolic death of fish/Christians through baptism, followed by their rebirth in baptism.

Since some of the texts in Section II in Appendix 1 also focus on the death and resurrection of the fish/Christ, it is very possible that the death and rebirth of Christians in baptism is modelled on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ: just as Christ died and was resurrected, so Christians die and are resurrected through baptism. This relationship

262. Text # II.D.1.

263. Origen in Text # II.D.1, Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.A.3, Ambrose in Text # II.A.7, and Peter Chrysologus in Text # II.C.12.

between the death and resurrection of Christ and the baptismal experience of early Christians is made clear in a variety of texts.²⁶⁴

In regard to this connection of fishing and ascension to baptism, one should examine the passage in Clement of Alexandria, which pertains to the use of appropriate images by Christians on seal rings, including fish and fishermen.²⁶⁵ In this passage, Clement associates fishermen (ἀλιεῦον τις, literally “someone fishing”) with “children who are rising up from the water” (τῶν ἐξ ὕδατος ἀνασπόμενων παιδίων). Not only does Clement use a verb of ascension (ἀνασπόμενων),²⁶⁶ but he uses the image of “children” (παιδίων) to describe the fish caught in the water—and thus I would argue to refer to baptism. For baptism is often associated with the production of children, as, for example, in Methodius of Olympus.²⁶⁷ And through the use of the verb συλλαμβάνω, it is also notable that Methodius uses the symbolism of fishing for fish/Christians and catching them to refer to the production of chil-

264. E.g. Origen, Homily on Jeremiah 19.14 (= PG 13:493); Origen, Commentary on Romans 5.8 (= PG 14:1038); Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lecture 3.12; Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogical Lecture 2.4 (20.4), 2.7 (20.7); Basil of Caesarea, On the Holy Spirit 35 (= PG 32:129); Basil of Seleuceia, Sermons on Easter 1.5 (= PG 28:1080); Ps. Justin Martyr, Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos 137 (= PG 6:1389); Theodore of Mopsuestia, Commentary on Romans 7.4 (= PG 66:805); Mark the Hermit, Opuscula 4 (= PG 65:985); Dionysius, the Ps. Areopagite, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 2.2.6 (= PG 3:404) and 4.3.10 (= PG 3:484); and Eutychius Constantinopolitanus, Sermo de paschate et de eucharistia 5 (= PG 86:2397).

265. Text # XVII.1.

266. Comparable to the use of the same verb by Cyril of Alexandria in Text # II.B.1 in the fifth century C.E.

dren——thus suggesting a connection between fishing and baptism, both of which are associated with the production of children.²⁶⁸ In any event, in his case, Clement would seem to indicate that, as fishermen caught fish, apostles baptized Christians.

In the fourth century C.E. John Chrysostom alludes almost directly to baptism, when he explains that the fish/human beings that are dragged in nets out from the sea (i.e. world) are thrown back into the water again (i.e. baptized).²⁶⁹ This is probably an allusion to the baptismal reenactment of life——death——life (see below). In the fifth century C.E. in Syria, Theodoret of Cyrrhus apparently relates the fish and water of the messianic river in Ezekiel to baptism and to fishing.²⁷⁰

Also at the end of the fourth century C.E., but in Latin and in the West in Italy, Paulinus of Nola clearly refers to baptism, when he describes himself as a fish pulled out of the sea by the preacher Delphinus of Bordeaux who baptized him.²⁷¹ By speaking of dying “to the nature that he had been living” (*cui vivebam naturae morerer*), as well as of “salvation” (*salus*), Paulinus uses the language that was associated with early Christian baptism. In addition, in the fifth century C.E., Sedulius clearly expresses the general connection of fish with water in fishing scenes to baptism, by indicating that the fish/water in John 21.1-14

267. E.g. Methodius of Olympus (d. c. 311), Banquet 8.5.

268. See Endnote 8.

269. Text # II.C.8.

270. Text # II.E.2.

brings about purification (abluo) and rebirth (renascor)—that is, baptism.²⁷² Unlike, any of our other fishing texts, Sedulius explicitly equates fish with water. And, in addition, unlike many other texts,²⁷³ he specifically eliminates the eucharist from the referential framework of the fish, as he focusses exclusively on baptism.²⁷⁴ Thus, the text of Sedulius places the imagery of baptism more toward the center of the referential framework of fishing symbolism than any of the previously discussed texts.

Finally, I should mention that the following three texts of Origen use the verb συλλαμβάνω in a similar way to the above-discussed passages in Methodius of Olympus and in the “Narration”.²⁷⁵ Texts # II.A.1, II.A.2, and II.D.1. As noted above, this verb can refer simultaneously to catching a fish and to the conception of living beings (here fish). Thus, fishing is understood (at least in Origen) in part as a kind of conception, pregnancy, and birth. In two of these passages (II.A.2 and II.D.1) Origen refers (similarly to Methodius) to the catching/conception of Christians (as opposed to Christ, e.g. in the “Narration”) through missionizing, followed probably by baptism. If I am correct about the

271. Text # II.C.13. It is according to Ep. 3.4 and 19.2 that Delphinus baptized him.

272. Text # II.C.14a-b.

273. See Section I and X.C (with references to other passages) in Appendix 1, as well as my discussion of the Avercius inscription.

274. Cf. Eznik of Kolb who excludes fish as a major part of the eucharistic menu in order to oppose the Marcionites: Text # X.E.2. But he is not really referring to fish as a symbol of the eucharist.

interpretation of συλλαμβάνω, what makes these two passages significant, and other fish-catching texts as well (with their references to death and rebirth), is that they regard conversion to Christianity as a kind of birth process; it proceeds from conception/catching to gestation/death to birth/baptism. This is especially clear in Text # II.D.1, where fish are conceived/caught (συλληφθεῖς), then die (ἀποθνήσκει (that is enter the baptismal pool), and then are brought to life again (ζωοποιεῖται, that is leave the baptismal pool).

In summary, fishing for Christian fish was regarded as a symbol of rescue from life in the waters of the present world, followed by baptismal death and rebirth.

Fishing for Christ and its relationship to fishing for Christians

On the other hand, in Text # II.A.1, through the use of the verb συλλαμβάνω I have already suggested that Origen (like the “Narration”) refers in part to the conception of Christ. This brings one to another genre of fishing passages. While the early Christian fishing texts in Appendix 1 generally refer to fish as potential Christians, a substantial number of them also designate Christ as the fish, who in being caught (followed by being killed and crucified) then catches/converts other fish/Christians to Christianity.

Before discussing this particular tradition, I would like to investigate briefly the text found in the Commentary on Matthew 13.10 by

275. See pp. 433-34 above and Endnote 8.

Origen,²⁷⁶ since it is difficult to determine to which category (fish as Christians or fish as Christ) it belongs and since it thus serves as a useful entry point into the fish/Christ genre of fishing texts.

While it is clear that Peter is the fisherman in the passage of Origen, it is particularly difficult to determine to whom the fish refers. Most problematic is the relative pronoun ὃ (dative, “it” or “him”), preceded by the preposition ἐν (generally “in,” but here “to”). Because one of the Latin manuscripts sets forth the relative pronoun in the plural—quibus—and because the plural fits in thematically well with the tradition of depicting a fisherman who fishes for many fish, several scholars have proposed the emendation of the Greek text to the plural form ἐν οἷς (“to them”).²⁷⁷ If one were to accept this emendation, οἷς would refer back to the previous word in the plural ἀνθρώπων— thus, setting up the equivalence that the one fish refers to several human beings. In other words, the fishermen fishing for one fish is actually fishing for many.

Yet none of the Greek manuscripts contains the plural form. In such a case, I prefer to accept the predominant reading in the original language (Greek). In addition, it seems rather strange to indicate a reference to many fish/human beings through the use of one singular fish. In fact, this does not occur in any of the texts in Appendix 1. It is

276. Text # II.A.1.

277. See the text of E. Klostermann in GCS that accepts the emendation of Huetius. After rejecting his own earlier assumption that the fish here referred to Christ (IXΘΥΣ 1:18), F. Dölger also tentatively agrees with this emendation (IXΘΥΣ 2:31).

very possible that the Latin translator believed that this passage made more sense in the thematic tradition of the fisherman who fished for many fish. But modern historians should not do this.

In any event, since the singular form of the relative pronoun is preferable, it still remains difficult to determine to whom the fish refers. While Dölger prefers the plural reading, he suggests that a singular ὁ could conceivably refer to the previously mentioned fishing-”hook” (ἀγκίστρον).²⁷⁸ Yet, in reading the passage it makes no sense for the pronoun to refer to the hook when it has already been mentioned; to have the fish on a hook refer to another hook is at best an awkward construction—both from a thematic and a syntactical point of view. Since Peter is the fisherman, it is also unlikely that the fish refers to Peter—which leaves one with the most likely possibility: the fish refers to Christ. Pointing in this direction are the manuscript tradition, syntax, and thematic logic.

Thus, in early Christian texts prior to the fourth century C.E., this text of Origen probably constitutes the one piece of evidence that links the tradition of depicting the fisherman fishing for fish with the tradition of depicting the fish as Christ.

While this hypothesis remains a probability in my opinion for the pre-Constantinian period, a number of texts make clear that the two traditions of fishing and of a fish referring to Christ are closely and definitively linked in the fourth century C.E. and afterwards, as indicated in the early Christian fish catalogue presented here (Appendix 1).

For example, according to Jerome, the fish that is captured by the fisherman refers to Christ in his role as a second Adam liberating the first Adam—the latter evidently representing humanity.²⁷⁹ In several passages one can see that the catching of the fish/Christ represents the death and resurrection of Christ. According to Zeno of Verona, the hooking of Christ bears witness to the “death” (mors) and “second coming” (adventus) of Christ”.²⁸⁰ Gregory of Nyssa describes the capture of the fish/Christ on the hook as a reference both to death and life — an indication of the death and rebirth of Christ.²⁸¹ For Ps. Athanasius the coin in the mouth of the fish/Christ refers to the crucifixion (σταυρός, σταυρωθήναι) of Christ.²⁸² For Ps. Augustine, the fish refers to Christ as one who was crucified (with reference to the fish in Tobit) “whose liver was roasted on the coals of the passion” (cuius iecore per prunas passionis assato).²⁸³

Perhaps more extensively than any other writer in Appendix I, Rufinus of Aquileia describes in Text # II.C.9 the catching of fish/Christ by means of a hook in relation to the death of Christ. In this regard, he combines the symbolism of the crucifixion-resurrection with the eucharist. By allowing himself to be hooked, Christ was crucified “with a

278. ΙΧΘΥΣ 2:31.

279. Text # II.A.4.

280. Text # II.A.6.

281. Text # II.C.6.

282. Text # II.A.8.

profusion of immaculate blood” (profusione immaculati sanguinis). At the same time, the death of Christ is according to Rufinus to be associated with the eucharistic food that his body provides.

As discussed in Chapter 2, as well as in my exegesis of various texts (the Avercius inscription, the Pectorius inscription and the “Narration”), the close association between the eucharist and the death of Christ was an important component of early Christian fish symbolism. And here again, Rufinus associates the fish with death. But in this instance the fish refers to death in a two-fold way—not only through its association with food symbolism and (therefore) with the eucharist, but also through its connection to the symbolism of fishing and (therefore) to the crucifixion.²⁸⁴

On the other hand, the death of the fish/Christ and its embodiment in the eucharist is clearly also meant by Rufinus to point to the resurrection that will follow. Thus, in the beginning of the passage, Rufinus clearly indicates that the fish/Christ is “immortal” (immortalis) and will “strip” (spoliatura) death. Toward its conclusion, the death of the fish/Christ produces the opening of the gates of hell. In this way, the Rufinus passage conforms to all previous discussion of early Christian fishing symbolism, in which one can see that the deaths of the

283. Text # II.A.9.

284. This differs from the Avercius and Pectorius inscriptions, but is similar to the “Narration.”

fish/Christ and fish/Christians are to be followed by rebirth and eternal life.²⁸⁵

While I demonstrated above that the language of ascension frequently applied to fish/Christians, it could (as one now can see) apply in some cases to the fish/Christ: ἀναβαίνω = “rise up”;²⁸⁶ a(d)scendo = “ascend”;²⁸⁷ educo = “bring out”;²⁸⁸ and extraho = “drag out.”²⁸⁹ As in the case for fish/Christians, the language of ascension probably here again alludes in part to death and resurrection—in this case, the death and resurrection of Christ.

Furthermore, for many of the writers in Appendix 1, it is clear that in the symbol of fishing a single fish could refer to Christ at the very same time that a multiplicity of fish could refer to Christians. For instance, from my analysis above (if I am right), one can see from two passages of Origen’s Commentary on Matthew that, in the same commentary on the same Matthean passage, fish can refer to Christ at one time, and to

285. Not directly relevant for my purposes here is the introduction by Rufinus of the reference of the fish apparently to Leviathan, whose flesh (like that of Christ) feeds the world. It does, however, once again demonstrate that the referential framework of the fish symbol can be extremely complicated. In this case, the fish can refer at the same time to the flesh of the savior Christ and to the flesh of the evil Leviathan. For discussion of this passage in the context of fish symbolism and Leviathan, see pp. 170-74 above.

286. Origen, Text # II.A.1.

287. Zeno of Verona in Text # II.A.6.

288. Rufinus of Aquileia in Text II.C.9.

289. Rufinus of Aquileia in Text # II.C.9.

Christians at another.²⁹⁰ Likewise, in his Commentary on Matthew, Jerome can use fish to refer both to Christ and to Christians, although (unlike Origen) he refers to two different Matthean texts: Matt. 17.24-27 and 13.47-50.²⁹¹ Ps. Augustine can have a fish refer to both Peter and Christ in the very same passage.²⁹² Although it does not directly involve fishing symbolism, one finds in a passage of Tertullian another clear example of a simultaneous reference to Christ (through the IXΘΥΣ acronym) and to Christians (pisciculi).²⁹³

In this way, fish symbolism can at the same time explicitly refer to two different referential objects—Christ and Christians. On the face of it, this referential framework would seem to constitute a logical conflict in meaning. Yet, Christians make clear that it is perfectly acceptable that, even in the same fishing passage or in different fishing passages in the same text, fish symbolism can refer to two apparently contradictory items at once.

I would surmise that generally in the bulk of early Christian texts involving fish symbolism, where fish refer directly to Christians, there is simultaneously in the background an indirect reference of a single fish to Christ. And vice-versa, where fish symbolism refers directly to Christ, I would conjecture that there is simultaneously in the background an indirect reference of a multiplicity of fish to Christians.

290. Texts # II.A.1. and II.A.2.

291. Texts # II.A.4 and II.D.3 respectively.

292. Text # II.A.9.

In general, these two elements are not simultaneously placed in the foreground of the referential framework of fish symbolism; that is, they are not simultaneously emphasized. Yet occasionally there occur instances where these two apparently contradictory elements can find themselves situated in the referential foreground.

Thus, one finds confirmation of the phenomenon (discussed in Chapter 1), in which a symbol—because it compresses huge amounts of information into a small space (so to speak)—often includes referential items that seem opposite to one another.²⁹⁴

293. Text # VI.2.

294. See e.g. pp. 24 and 31 above. In that section, I have indicated that a religious symbol can not be explained in terms of a precisely organized structure, in which all its components (referents and associations) fit neatly together. Rather, as part of an intricate cultural system, a religious symbol expresses all the complexities of societal and personal worldviews. Not only does this result in the inclusion of a multiplicity of referents and associations (that is, multivalency of meaning), but (as I suggested) it also produces situations in which overlappings of meanings can occur—as is especially the case in dream symbolism (both ancient and modern). For, in a particular instance, while one referent or association may be directly emphasized, another referent or association may be indirectly situated in the background of the referential framework. Usually, these indirect referents or associations merely obliquely condition and shape the meanings of other referents and associations in a given context. But sometimes, probably because of the nature of a particular context or because indefiniteness does not particularly disturb certain authors, an indirect referent or association breaks out of the background (so to speak) and finds itself directly linked to another referent with which it is not normally linked so openly. While (as has been seen) this sort of phenomenon is more common in the symbolism of dreams (where apparently inexplicable and contradictory referents are frequently linked) than in textual materials, examples such as this show that symbols as formulated in texts are (like symbols in dreams) parts of intricate symbolic networks and reflect a referential framework, consisting of deeply situated overlappings of meanings that can at times emerge at the surface.

Therefore, since fish symbolism can periodically refer simultaneously to Christ and to Christians, it should not be surprising that, for some of the writers of these passages involving fishing symbolism, the death and resurrection of the fish/Christ served as a model for the death and resurrection of fish/Christians. For instance, in so far as Gregory of Nyssa is concerned, the death and life (i.e. resurrected eternal life) of the fish/Christ would seem to presage the general conquest of death for all human beings forever, as is indicated by the reference to the “total destruction” (ἐξαρανισθῆτω) of death.²⁹⁵ Analogously for Rufinus of Aquileia, the death of the fish/Christ leads to the conquest of death in general.²⁹⁶

As a rule, it is certainly plausible to assume (as suggested above) that the death and resurrection of the fish/Christ served as model for the death and rebirth of fish/Christians through baptism. This is to some extent confirmed by the language of ascension. Although Ambrose does not equate the fish with Christ in Text # II.A.7, he does allude to the passion of Christ, when he explains that the hook that catches the fish/Christian causes it to “flow over with the blood of a precious wound” (pretiosi vulneris perfundit sanguine)—an apparent reference to the wound of a martyr in imitation of the wounds of Christ and very similar to the language offered in the above-mentioned passage of Rufinus of Aquileia.

295. Text # II.C.6.

Death and life in early Christian fishing: the influence of the Graeco-Roman world

As I have observed in this portion of the discussion on early Christian fishing symbolism, the texts under consideration focus on death, rebirth (or resurrection), and eternal life—whether referring to fish/Christians or to the fish/Christ. In view of my study of fish and water symbolism in the Graeco-Roman world in Chapter 2, it should come as no surprise that early Christian fishing symbolism was so closely associated with both death and eternal life.

On the one hand, fish were closely connected to death, since they were considered appropriate sacrifices for chthonic deities, since they were one of the common foods used in cult of the dead banquets, since they dwelled in darkness beneath water, and since dolphins (at least) were regarded as bearers of the dead. Perhaps as a result of this, ancient astrologers viewed the sign of the twin fish Pisces as signalling the death of an era or age. Likewise, bodies of water (especially the seas and oceans) could be associated with death, since they were thought to be situated near the underworld and since they were perceived as a realm of darkness, whose physical area and inhabitants could not really be seen with the eyes.²⁹⁷

296. Text # II.C.9.

297. On the darkness of the ocean for early Christians, see Clement of Alexandria in Text # VII.2, Hilary of Poitiers in Text # II.D.2, and Basil of Caesarea in Text # VIII.1. The latter two texts explicitly contrast the ocean with the light outside of it.

Consequently, when early Christians focussed on the resultant death caused by catching the fish/Christ or fish/Christians, they were making use of a well-established Graeco-Roman tradition.²⁹⁸ Just as fish were associated with death by pagans, so they were appropriate symbols for early Christians to use in order to describe the physical death of the fish/Christ and the symbolic death (through conversion and baptism) of fish/Christians. While the death of the fish/Christ presaged the symbolic deaths of fish/Christians, their deaths also constituted the end of an age—as is indicated in several texts: e.g. the reference to total destruction of death by Gregory of Nyssa;²⁹⁹ the description of the “shore” (*littus*) as the end of the sea and thus symbolically as the end of the world/age;³⁰⁰ and the numerous texts I have already examined regarding Matt. 17.24-27 and the division of the good fish/human beings from the bad fish/human beings at the time of judgement.³⁰¹ In view also of the above-mentioned association of the astrological sign of

298. In one of the texts in Appendix 1, Eznik of Kolb makes clear (in Armenian) in the fifth century C.E. that many early Christians borrowed from this Graeco-Roman tradition by specifically associating fish with death and the chthonic realm: Text # X.E.2. While clearly most Christians did not accept the rejection by Eznik of the association of fish and resurrection (since fish were also associated with life), they did accept (along with Eznik) these mortuary associations of fish.

299. Text # II.C.6.

300. Augustine in Texts # II.C.11 and II.D.4; Gregory the Great in Text # II.D.7.

301. See the texts in Section VII in Appendix 1.

fish—Pisces—with the end of an age,³⁰² it is therefore readily understandable why early Christians found fishing symbolism so appropriate.

In addition, when fishermen—Christ, the apostles, and preachers—converted Christians by capturing them, they were fishing/preaching in a realm that was closely associated with death. As a result, one should not be surprised that, since bodies of water were associated in the Graeco-Roman world with the underworld and with death, two early Christian texts in Section II explicitly designate the sea or ocean as a realm of death: Peter Chrysologus who speaks of arising “out of the whirlpool of death” (de mortis gurgite);³⁰³ and Gregory the Great who refers to dwelling “in the watery depths of eternal death” (in aeternae mortis profunda).³⁰⁴ According to Gregory of Nyssa, the hook that captured Christ entered a realm of death (θάνατος) and darkness (σκοτός).³⁰⁵ Finally according to Ambrose, the depths of the ocean are designated as the lower regions and would seem to be specifically associated with darkness and death, since they are contrasted with the light outside of it.³⁰⁶

In this regard, one should also note (for the fourth century C.E. and

302. See pp. 248-61.

303. Text # II.C.12.

304. Text II.D.7. Gregory the Great uses similar language (which also bears resemblances to the following passage in Gregory of Nyssa) in another text, where he refers to the ocean as the “snare of our death” (laqueum nostri mortis): Text # X.D.6.

afterwards) the terminology of early Christian fishing literature (the same as non-Christian Graeco-Roman literature throughout antiquity) that describes the ocean (where the fish/Christians will be caught) in terms of its great depth and fathomlessness:³⁰⁷ “from the depths” = ἐκ βάθους;³⁰⁸ in the depths” = ἐν βυθῷ;³⁰⁹ and especially “out of” or “in the depths” (with the connotation of fathomlessness) = de profundo, in profundo, in profunda, or profundis.³¹⁰ While these words can sometimes generally refer to the ocean as a whole, they do so by emphasizing the deep character of the ocean. In another passage, Basil of Caesarea clearly indicates that seas were regarded as extremely deep, when he speaks of the hidden underground channels that connect all the waters of the world.³¹¹

Since the realm of death (for pagans synonymous with the underworld), where fish/human beings lived and where fishing/converting took place, was thought by many to be located near the bottom of the

305. Text # II.C.6.

306. Text # II.C.7.

307. For more reference to this aspect of water in general, see pp. 267-68 above.

308. Gregory of Nazianzus in Text # II.C.5.

309. Peter of Laodicea in Text # II.A.10.

310. Hilary of Poitiers, Text # II.D.2; Ambrose, Text # II.C.7; Jerome, Text # II.A.4; Augustine, Text # III.3; Rufinus of Aquileia, Text # II.C.9; Paulinus of Nola, Text # II.C.13; and Gregory the Great, Text # II.D.7. Outside of fishing passages and outside of Section VII in Appendix 1, see also Augustine in Text # X.C.2

ocean depths, the description of the sea or ocean as extremely deep would emphasize for individuals living in the Graeco-Roman world—whether pagan or Christian—its proximity to the realm of death.³¹² In addition, the great darkness of these depths probably recalled the darkness of the chthonic realm. Furthermore, when one considers that the Latin words profundum(a) and profundus were commonly associated in Latin literature with the underworld (for the same reasons as mentioned above),³¹³ one can surmise that they (along with the other words) had similar connections with death and the realm of the dead in early Christian texts.

At the same time, several early Christian Latin fishing texts in Appendix 1 describe the sea, in which fish/human beings dwelled, as having “whirlpools” (gurgites).³¹⁴ In general, it is important to note that, what was meant by this word in Latin, was often a bottomless pit or raging abyss. While the word gurges could sometimes designate the sea as a whole, it carried with it the connotation of an abyss. Thus, it is easy to understand Augustine, when he refers to whirlpools of the “abyss” (abyssi).³¹⁵ In early Christian texts, the Latin word abyssus, as well as its Greek equivalent ἄβυσσος, is frequently synonymous with

311. Text # IV.2.

312. See pp. 270-71 above.

313. See p. 270 and n. 493 in Chapter 2.

314. Jerome, Texts # II.A.4 and III.2; Augustine, Text # III.3; Peter Chrysologus, Text # II.C.12; Sedulius, Text # II.C.14.

315. Text # III.3.

the underworld.³¹⁶ Moreover, in Latin literature, gurgēs explicitly designates rivers of the underworld or could generally be associated with death.³¹⁷ Since the association with death was a standard component of the meanings of this word, one can assume that this was also the case in early Christian texts. As a result, one should find it unsurprising, when Peter Chrysologus refers to coming “out of the whirlpool of death” (de mortis gurgite).³¹⁸

Thus, with different terminology, one can see again how for many early Christians fishing/preaching took place in a salt-water realm closely associated with death. In the use of all these words—βάθος, βυθός, profundus, and gurgēs—early Christian fishing symbolism emphasized the deep, fathomless qualities of the ocean that made individuals in the Graeco-Roman world believe that the underworld (the realm of death) lay at its bottom and that fishermen/preachers rescued fish/human beings from those frightening depths.

At the same time, in antiquity both fish and water could be associated with life. For example, I have observed that the Graeco-Roman world viewed fish as particularly fertile and prolific. Probably because

316. Greek NT and Vulgate, Rom. 2.7 (Hades); Luke 8.31 (Tartarus); Rev. 9.1. It is found throughout early Christian texts: e.g. Acts of Thomas 32: “ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ τὴν ἀβυσσον τοῦ Ταρτάρου οἰκῶν καὶ κατέχων”; [“I (the serpent) am the one who inhabits and possesses the abyss of Tartarus.”]

317. E.g. Vergil, Aeneid 6.296, says that the river Acheron in the underworld “boils over with filth and with it whirling waters” = coeno vastaue voragine gurgēs aestuat; and Juvenal, Sat. 3.266, refers to the river Styx in the underworld as “the dirty abyss of water” = gurgēs caenosus.

they were associated with phalluses——producers of life——through ingestion fish were thought to act as aphrodisiacs, as stimuli for the production of life. As might be expected, they were sacred to Aphrodite/Venus——the goddess of love and of the production of life. Furthermore, many in the Graeco-Roman world saw water as the source of all life. Because they considered salt to be of special productive and sexual power, they also believed that salt water was associated with sexuality and the production of life.³¹⁹

As a result, in the Graeco-Roman world, fish——as well as seas and oceans——could simultaneously refer both to death and to life. As discussed in Chapter 1 and as elaborated further in regard to the simultaneous reference of the fish symbol to Christ and to Christians, symbols are capable of referring simultaneously to objects that seem to contradict one another, or that seem to stand in opposition to one another.³²⁰ In the case of the seas or oceans and their inhabitants, the simultaneous association with both life and death may have resulted from the ancient belief that seas or oceans were situated in a liminal position between the underworld below (the realm of death) and the heavens above (the realm of immortal life). In fact, popular folk belief conceptualized the coming of night as the sinking of the heavens into the ocean, while oth-

318. Text # II.C.12.

319. For materials in this paragraph, see pp. 262-76 and 292-301 above.

320. See pp. 24 and 31 above.

ers described the ocean as a combination of heaven and earth.³²¹ In a sense, the ocean (including its inhabitants, fish) was viewed in the ancient world as the repository of the two fundamental principles of human existence: heaven and earth——life and death.

From the evidence of the fishing texts in Appendix 1, one can see that early Christians (like pagans) associated the ocean and its inhabitants with life, as well as with death.

Often “life” meant the new kind of eternal life that was provided for Christians. Yet, while water could be associated by early Christians with immortality (chiefly through baptism), it was at the same time, however, frequently associated with a bitter and wretched worldly life. In these cases, the associations of water with life were a bad thing——especially for fish/human beings. By understanding the terrible environment in which fish/human beings were thought to live, one can better comprehend how early Christians regarded life for fish/human beings prior to their conversion to Christianity. In addition, one can better perceive from what kind of unsafe realm it was that early Christians believed that the fishermen/Christ/apostles/Christian preachers were rescuing these fish/human beings.

Direct reference is made to this kind of negatively evaluated “life” (Gk. βίος; Lat. *vita*) for fish/human beings in five texts. For Origen, the sea/life is associated “with briny affairs” (ἀλμυροῦς πράγμασι), where salt clearly has the connotation of bitterness.³²² For Hilary of Poitiers, the sea/life is “worldly life” (*saecularis vita*) that is to be abandoned by fish/human beings in favor of Christian preaching and missionizing.³²³ For Gregory of Nazianzus, life for fish/ human beings is described in terms of “unsettled” (ἄστατος) and “briny” (i.e. bitter,

321. See pp. 272ff.

322. Text # III.1.

323. Text # II.C.4.

άλμυρός) waves.³²⁴ And for Cyril of Alexandria and Peter of Laodicea, who either draws directly from Cyril or from a common tradition, the sea/life is described for fish/human beings in terms of “bitter” (πικρός) or “wicked” (πονηρός) “troubles”/“disorders” (ταραχαι), out of which fish/human beings are dragged.³²⁵

While the early Christian fishing texts under consideration here use the word βίος and vita to describe worldly life,³²⁶ an even greater number of texts explicitly equate the seas and oceans, in which fish/human beings lived, with the then-present world or age:³²⁷ κόσμος =

324. Text # II.C.5.

325. Texts # II.B.1 and II.A.10 respectively.

326. Throughout the texts in Sections II and III in Appendix 1, one should note the distinction between the use of βίος and ζωή. In general, both words are best translated as “life” in English. But βίος refers to a mode of life, whereas ζωή indicates the substance of organic existence. Thus, in the texts, life/βίος is evaluated in negative terms, since it applies to the mode of life in worldly affairs. In contrast, life/ζωή applies to life in its substantial form, and several texts consequently use it to refer to the new kind of life that is available to Christians: e.g. Clement of Alexandria in Text # II.C.1 (l. 28); Origen in Text # II.D.1; Gregory of Nyssa in Text # II.C.6.

327. Generally the terms for sea or ocean in the fishing texts of Appendix 1 are the two standard terms in Greek and Latin: θάλασσα (θάλαττα) and mare (marinus = adjective). The following are different words for the sea or ocean: πέλαγος, primarily poetic (Clement of Alexandria, Text # II.C.1); aequor, the surface of the sea and also primarily poetic (Ps. Augustine, Text # II.A.9); pelagus (Sedulius, Text # II.C.14b); salum, indicating salt water (Ps. Augustine, Text # II.A.9). One should also remember that other terms indicating the depth of the sea: βάθος, βυθός, and profundum(a)/profundus, which can refer to the sea as a whole as well, but with a special connotation; see pp. 447-50 above.

“world”,³²⁸ saeculum = “world” and/or “age”;³²⁹ mundus = “world.”³³⁰

As discussed above,³³¹ the word saeculum can also mean an “age.”

And its use in the relevant passages suggests (among other things) that the present world is of limited duration, with the promise of a new age and life for those who become fish/Christians.

From these descriptions of the present sea/life-world, it is quite clear that early Christians viewed it as a bitterly harsh place from which its inhabitants—fish/human beings—needed to be rescued. In addition to the hostile descriptions mentioned above in regard to “life,” one should note that the sea/world was particularly described in terms of the turbulent waves that disrupted it. For example, among Greek writers, Clement of Alexandria describes a “wave” (κύμα) as “hostile” (ἐχθρός) to fish/human beings, and he designates the ocean as evil (πελάγοι κακίας).³³² In a similar fashion, Origen refers to waves as “bitter” (πικρός) and as the abode of “cares and concerns for money” (τῶν τῆς φιλαργυρίας φροντιδῶν καὶ μεριμνῶν).³³³ Latin writers such as Jerome

328. See Origen, Text # II.D.1; Ps. Athanasius, Text # II.1.

329. See the following texts: Hilary of Poitiers, Texts # II.A.3, II.C.4, II.D.2; Jerome, Text # II.D.3; Augustine, Texts # II.C.11, II.D.4; Peter Chrysologus, Text # II.D.5; Sedulius, Text # II.C.14.

330. See Zeno of Verona, Text # II.A.6; Gregory the Great, Text # II.C.16.

331. See pp. 429-30 above.

332. Text # II.C.1.

333. Texts # II.D.1 and III.1 respectively. For κύματα (“waves”), see also Gregory of Nazianzus in Text II.C.5, which is discussed in more

“raging with anger” (fremens ira).

Overall, these texts depict a watery realm that is extremely difficult for fish and human beings to inhabit. By describing the world in this fashion, early Christians were carrying forward an ancient literary tradition of depicting the turbulence of life and the world in terms of rough waves and storms.³⁴¹ In general, these texts generally emphasize the frightening character of the world which human beings inhabit and the type of life they would have had without Christianity. Perhaps most vivid and detailed in their depiction of the wretched plight of those fish/human beings who live in the sea/world are two passages of Augustine and Peter Chrysologus.³⁴²

Another characterization found in three texts emphasizes the terrifying nature of the turbulent sea/world as a place that one could not trust—that is, where faith was lacking. Thus, Augustine describes this world as an abode of “faithlessness” (infidelitas) in contrast to the “faithful earth” (fidelis terra).³⁴³ In a similar fashion, Peter of Laodicea portrays the depths of life in the sea in terms of “faithlessness” (ἀπισ-

339. Text # II.A.9.

340. Text # II.D.5.

341. E.g. Aeschylus, PV 886, “on the waves of mischief” (κύμασιν αἰτίας); Aeschylus, Sept. 758, “just as a sea of evils, the wave drives . . . “(κακῶν δ’ ὡσπερ θάλασσα κυμ’ αἰεὶ . . .); Cicero, Planc., “we who are thrown into this storm and waves of people” (qui in hac tempestate populi iactemur et fluctibus); Horace, Ep. 2.2.85, “amidst the waves of life and the storms of the city” (rerum fluctibus in mediis et tempestatibus urbis).

342. Texts # II.D.4 and II.D.5 respectively.

τία).³⁴⁴ Using different terminology for expressing fear about the world, Eucherius of Lyons states that the waves of the sea signify “temptations” (tentationes) to be avoided.³⁴⁵

In addition to indicating bitterness directly by means of adjectives such as πικρὸς and amarus, the early Christian texts in Appendix 1 are also able to suggest it through the use of words meaning salt, or connoting salt, as indicated by the following words: “briny” = ἀλμυρὸς;³⁴⁶ “saltiness” = salsitas (as in “bitter”——amarum——with saltiness);³⁴⁷ “salty” = salsus;³⁴⁸ and “salt water” or “brine” = salum.³⁴⁹

While salt clearly refers to the bitterness of life and the world in most of the above passages, I would conjecture that salt also indicates the production of life——here in these early Christian texts the production of fish/human beings and fish/Christians. For in the Graeco-Roman world salt——like fish——was considered an aphrodisiac and was associated with fertility.³⁵⁰ While there are no explicit references to the use of salt as an aphrodisiac in early Christian materials, one does possibly

343. Text # III.3.

344. Text # II.A.10.

345. Text # III.4.

346. Origen, Texts # II.D.1 [twice] and III.1; Gregory of Nazianzus, Text # II.C.5.

347. Augustine, Text # II.D.4.

348. Jerome, Texts # II.A.4, II.D.3, III.2.

349. Sedulius, Text # II.C.14b; Ps. Augustine, Text # II.A.9.

find therein the association of salt with the prolific multiplication of life. For example, according to Origen and to Jerome, “out of the salty and bitter whirlpools” come both good and bad fish (that is, the sum of humankind).³⁵¹ For Gregory of Nazianzus, the “briny waves” contain all “humanity” (ἄνθρωπον).³⁵² While these texts refer to the full mixture of humanity, Sedulius—when dealing with the capture of fish/human beings for baptism—apparently emphasizes the quantity of fish from the salt sea/world that have been converted to Christianity and that have therefore made it to salvation.³⁵³ According to him, “out of the enclosing brine of the whirlpool” comes “an immense brood of a fishy congregation” (*immensa sinus piscosae congregatationis*)—clearly underlining the number of fish that arise from the salt water.

From these four passages, it seems clear that there is a direct connection between the salt of the sea/world and the quantity of fish/human beings produced in it and from it.

Thus, the salty waters from which fish/human beings are pulled/converted to Christianity are both bitter and filled with life—that is, highly populated.³⁵⁴ In fact, most of the early Christian texts mention-

350. For salt and the production of life, see pp. 267-70 and 297-98 above.

351. Texts # II.D.1 and II.D.3 respectively.

352. Text # II.C.5.

353. Text # II.C.14b.

354. For a discussion of the quantity of fish caught in early Christian fishing/preaching expeditions, see pp. 417-19.

ing salt may well have this connotation. In the latter case of Sedulius, one can see that, while the salty sea was bitter for both fish and human beings, it could at the same time be quite surprisingly positively evaluated.³⁵⁵ In regard to salt, one can probably explain this by explaining that salt and salt water were connected for Sedulius both to the bitterness of life and to the production of life, since the bitterness of life in fact led to the production of life in the form of fish and Christians.

In general, one can see in this part that the early Christian emphasis on the references of fish/fishing/water to death and life was based on references already made in the Graeco-Roman world. Significantly, death and life both had positive and negative connotations from an early Christian, as well as a non-Christian, point of view.

For example, for those in the Graeco-Roman world, fishing/fish/water suggested the joys of love and sexual pleasure, but they also indicated the multiplication of life's cares and troubles. For early Christians, life could be immortal, but it also referred to the terrible life endured amidst a world overpopulated with evil. Furthermore, at the same time that fishing symbolized the productivity of early Christian missionizing, it also symbolized the production of sins. The converse was true as well. For those in the Graeco-Roman world, while fish/water could refer to the underworld, it could also refer to the death of an age. And for early Christians, while fishing/fish/water could point to a death that represented the end of a person's life, they also pointed

positively to a kind of death that meant immortal life.

In early Christian interpretations of fish/fishing/water, these apparently contradictory notions combined to create a religious symbol that was exceedingly complex in its network of meanings. In the final analysis, fish symbolism allowed the kinds of life and death envisioned by early Christians to prevail over other kinds of life and death that early Christians rejected.

Two kinds of water

At this juncture, after I have just discussed the apparent contradiction between the effects of bitter salt and productive salt on fish and human beings according to Sedulius, it may be appropriate to observe that the early Christian fishing texts in Appendix 1 describe (often at the same time) two kinds of water that are associated with two opposite kinds of existence, in which fish/Christians live.

First, there is the water that comprises the sea and that represents the world, as well as the vices attendant to it. In that water, fish/human beings find themselves trapped. And it is the task of fishermen/Christ/apostles/preachers to capture/convert them and pull them out of it. As I have indicated, one can locate examples (direct or indirect) of this kind of water in almost every text from Section II.A-D of Appendix 1.

Second, there is the water that is associated with baptism and therefore brings about salvation. For example, in contrast to the waters

of the world, Theodoret makes clear in that the waters of the messianic river of Ezekiel are to be primarily associated with “salvific waters” (σωτηριῶν ὑδάτων).³⁵⁶ Likewise, according to Sedulius fish signify the waters of baptism, as can be seen from the terminology of purification (abluo) and rebirth (renascor).³⁵⁷ From the contexts of these passages, I believe it is possible to suggest why they speak of salvific waters. For they involve messianic or miraculous contexts; the former interprets the messianic river of Ezekiel, while the latter discusses the post-resurrection fishing expedition of John 21.1-14.

Yet, an examination of all the early Christian fishing texts reveals that the sea itself (and not in a directly messianic or miraculous context) often bears the simultaneous connotations (apparently contradictory) both of the world in which fish/human beings lived and of salvation for fish/human beings through baptism. For instance, as I have suggested in numerous cases, the act of fishing pulls fish/human beings out of the sea/world and leads them to rebirth. As I have also argued, this was clearly understood as baptismal symbolism.³⁵⁸ Consequently, the act of baptizing someone was in part viewed as a reenactment of the position of humanity in the realm of death and darkness (the sea/world), followed by the capture of fish/human beings by fishermen/ Christ/apostles/ Christian preachers in that realm, and culminating in the

355. This fits in well with the above discussion of the coexistence of contradictory references in the same symbol.

356. Text # II.E.2.

emergence out of that realm into the light of a new realm of eternal life.

Thus, the sea has a double reference to apparently contradictory items in these fishing texts. On the one hand, it refers to the world and the life in it. But it also refers (directly, as well as indirectly) to the baptismal water that represents both the sea/world and the salvific/ waters that bring about the renewal of a new kind of life as a fish/Christian.

Because of this, John Chrysostom can explain in Text # II.C.8 that different waters produce different kinds of fish—one unintelligent and mute (those that are produced according to Genesis 1.20), and the other intelligent and spiritual (those that are produced by baptism).³⁵⁹ In fact, it seems clear in this passage that fish are pulled out of kind one water (the world) and thrown back into another kind of water (baptism).

Likewise, a passage in Sedulius can refer to the waters, in which Christian fishermen fished, not only as the world, but also as baptismal water.³⁶⁰ According to Optatus of Milevis, what was “water” (aqua) was transformed into a “fish-pool” (piscina)—evidently a reference both to baptism and to the designation of early Christians as fish (no doubt caught by Christ, et al.).³⁶¹

Ps. Augustine precisely expresses this idea, when he explains that the fish/Christ, in being “caught” by Peter, is transferred (among other

357. Text # II.C.14a-b.

358. See especially pp. 423-36.

359. Text # II.C.8. For Gen. 1.20, see Text # XI.1 in Appendix 2.

360. Text # II.C.14a-b.

things) “from the sea to a spring” (de mari ad fontem)—suggesting the transformation in baptism of the salt water of the sea/world into the fresh water of baptismal salvation.³⁶² By using the word fons, the text of Ps. Augustine links itself to the tradition of the fish from the spring, as expressed in the inscriptions of Avercius and Pectorius, as well as the “Narration”.³⁶³ In doing so, it re-emphasizes the critical association of fish and fishing symbolism to baptism—which I discuss in somewhat further detail in the next section.

Conclusions

In sum, as a part of fish symbolism, early Christian fishing symbolism incorporated many of its referential components from Graeco-Roman traditions of fish symbolism, fishing symbolism, and water symbolism. It then adapted them to Christian interests and interpretation. As a result, an intricate and multivalent network of symbolism emerges from these texts that expresses one small aspect of a vast cultural system.

For example, I have observed that early Christian fishing imagery drew on the oratorical imagery in Greek and Latin literature of a rhetor luring in his listeners through his sweet words as a fisherman lures in a fish with sweet bait. In doing so, early Christian writers conceived of fishermen as Christ, the apostles and Christian preachers who converted human beings to Christianity with the honeyed words of early Christian

361. Text # XIII.2.

362. Text # II.A.9.

pastoral exhortation. Since the occupation of fishing was associated with poverty by Greeks and Romans, it is also probable that early Christians used the image of a fisherman to emphasize the ideals of a poor and ascetic life, both of which were of great importance in early Christian teaching.

At the same time, fishing imagery can also refer to the fish as Christ. In that genre of fishing text, there are examples of simultaneous references of a fish to Christians and to Christ. While these particular examples can best be explained by the complex nature of symbolism, one should also remember that even where there is not a simultaneous mention of both these referents—but only an explicit allusion to one of the referents—nevertheless, in the referential background of each referent, probably remains the other referent.

Furthermore, in the employ of fishing symbolism, by identifying themselves and their founder—Christ—as fish, early Christian texts likewise reveal that they drew on Graeco-Roman traditions of admiration for the virtues of fish, of empathic identification with fish, and of associating fish with the divine laws of God.

Perhaps above all, fishing symbolism drew on various Graeco-Roman traditions that associated fish and water with death and life. As I noted, fish were frequently associated with the underworld and with underworld deities, while water—especially the salt water of the seas and oceans—was considered a realm of darkness near the underworld. On the other hand, fish were also associated with the

production and multiplication of life, while salt water was considered a stimulus to the production of life and the substance that made possible new life. In this regard, early Christians saw themselves as fish that multiplied prolifically through the pastoral activities of fishermen/Christ/apostles/Christian preachers. By fishing and converting human fish to Christianity, those fish at first died in the act of catching and of being pulled out of their element, but (through the transformative power of baptismal water) were saved for a new eternal life. Originally these fertile fish/human beings lived in an environment that was filled with life, but was in fact a life equivalent to death; a life of unfathomably deep darkness and bitter, disturbing whirlpools. By being fished and pulled out of this world of turbulent life—the equivalent of death—they themselves died a death, but not a real death. For in that death, they found a new life.

Therefore, because they lived in a liminal realm between heaven and underworld, Christians—like fish—originally found themselves between life and death. Through fishing/preaching, early Christians chose that aspect of this realm, which held the possibility of true life.

As a means of depicting the breakthrough from the realm of death to the realm of true life, many of the early Christian texts in Appendix 1 include in the referential framework of fishing symbolism both direct and indirect references to baptism. Through the imagery of baptism, these texts describe the reenactment of death followed by transformation through the miraculous power of baptismal water into eternal life.

In addition, as fishing provided the sustenance of life for individuals in the Graeco-Roman world in the form of food, fish also provided spiritual sustenance for early Christians in the form of the fish/ Christ, whose death and resurrection provided spiritual nourishment by serving as a model for the symbolic death and resurrection through baptism. For, at the same time that Christians died to the world and were reborn through the water of baptism, the early Christian texts in Appendix 1 depict Christ as allowing himself to enter the maritime world as a fish, whereupon he is caught. In the act of catching the fish/Christ, he also dies and is resurrected. The sequence of entry of the fish/ Christ into the sea/world of death, succeeded by its capture/crucifixion—and culminating in its resurrection—served as a model for Christians who followed Christ, as they were caught by his sermons (as well as those of his apostles and later preachers), and died, and then were resurrected to new life through baptism.

In some ways, most illustrative for this interpretation of fishing symbolism is the astrological aspect of Graeco-Roman fish symbolism. For fish constellations served as an indication of the death of an age and the birth of a new age. Thus, an early Christian might have understood that, just as astrological fish presaged both death and life—death of one age and birth of another—so early Christian fishing symbolism represented both the death and life of fish/Christ/Christians, as well as the death and rebirth of the age. The latter was transformed from the bitter quality of salt water to the sweetness of the fresh water of salvific

baptism. In fact, the frequency of association between fishing symbolism and the imagery of the destruction of the world or age in early Christian texts—especially those involving Matt. 13.47-50—lends credence to the possibility of the influence of astrological traditions that linked fish with the ends and beginnings of ages.

FISH SYMBOLISM AND BAPTISM

Introduction

Since I have explored the subject of baptism in some detail in previous sections, here in this section I am briefer and deal primarily with those matters that were not taken up for discussion earlier or that now need further elaboration. In particular, I will examine the subject of fish and baptism, without regard for fishing symbolism, and instead with primary focus on the symbolism of fish and water.

363. All of these show the importance of fresh water in baptismal symbolism and in fish symbolism, when it is related to baptism.

Tertullian: large fish and small fish

In Section VI in Appendix 1, one finds a variety of passages dealing with the subject of fish and baptism. Of particular interest are two texts of Tertullian, Texts # VI.1 and VI.2, the latter of which I discussed to some extent in Chapter 2,³⁶⁴ since it mentions the IXΘΥΣ acronym and since it refers to “little fish” (pisciculi). By using IXΘΥΣ, Tertullian refers to the fish/Christ. Although he employs the accusative form of “fish,” ἰχθῦν, rather than the nominative ἰχθῦς, the use of a Greek word in a Latin text (rather than using Lat. piscis for fish) almost certainly suggests that this is in fact the acronym that refers to Christ.

There is a similar example of this, when Jerome refers in the fourth century C.E. to a recipient (Bonosus) of one of his letters as a son of ἰχθῦς in the genitive form of ἰχθῦος rather than in the typical nominative form of the acronym. Again his use of a Greek word in a Latin context suggests that it is in fact functioning as an acronym.³⁶⁵ At the same time, the Pectorius inscription features the IXΘΥΣ acrostic, while employing the genitive (ἰχθῦος) and dative (ἰχθῦτι) of ἰχθῦς in the text of the epitaph. As shown above, the two references in the text seem to have referred to the acronym—thus showing again that forms other than the nominative can be used.³⁶⁶

While the use of the fish acronym refers to Christ, Tertullian also employs, by making reference to pisciculi, the fish symbol in order to refer to Christians—thus once again allowing fish symbolism to refer

364. See pp. 145-49.

365. Text # XIV.1.

simultaneously to the fish/Christ and to fish/Christians. In doing this, Tertullian designates those who are baptized as little fish in water. And they exist in some kind of relationship with the fish/Christ.

It is not easy to determine the exact nature of this relationship on account of the syntax of the sentence. For it is not clear with what word the prepositional phrase, secundum IXΘYΝ, belongs. Does it follow nascimur, as in, “we are born according to the fish”? Or does it follow pisciculi, as in “we who are little fish according to IXΘYΝ (fish)”? It appears to me that the latter is somewhat more likely than the former, since in terms of word order secundum immediately follows pisciculi and since thematically the contrast between IXΘYΣ and pisciculi in this passage seems of importance. In addition, the preposition secundum and the adjective secundus can designate the idea of secondary rank, as in “behind” or “after” something.³⁶⁷

Thus, I would propose the translation: “But we who are little fish in relation to IXΘYΝ (fish), our Jesus Christ.” In this way, the contrast between the two kinds of fish is even more emphasized than it would otherwise have been.

In any case, whichever translation is accepted, since the use of the word pisciculi obviously designates fish of small size, one can surmise that Tertullian is making a comparison between the small size of the fish that are baptized and the large size (and/or rank) of the fish/ Christ = IXΘYΣ. As I observed in the Avercius inscription and as I indicate be-

366. Text # I.1, vv. 1 and 6.

367. E.g. Plautus, Capt. 238; Cicero, Off. 2.3.11.

low, this follows an early Christian tradition of depicting the fish/Christ as extremely large.³⁶⁸

In Chapter 2 and in my discussion of the Avercius inscription in this chapter, I have discussed what were the sorts of associations that large and small sized fish had in the Graeco-Roman world. Fish that were small were associated with poverty (and thus likely to be deprecated by those with lofty pretensions), as well as with fertility and the ability to multiply. At the same time, they were regarded as appropriate in quantity for the making of fine fish sauces (and thus here likely to be praised) and, when travelling in great quantities, capable of extraordinary feats. In contrast, large fish were always regarded as a status symbol of wealth, power, and money. They were associated with great sexual power in the form of phalluses and with the salvifically oriented constellation of the Southern Fish. In addition, large fish—especially dolphins—were associated with the rescue of human beings from drowning in the ocean.

Here in the passage of Tertullian, the reference to small fish/Christians and fish/Christ probably draws on many of these traditions. For example, the reference to small fish in Tertullian was probably also an indication of the lower rank and status of those who were baptized vis-à-vis the obviously lofty rank and status of Christ. In addition, Tertullian may well be associating Christians with the ideals of poverty that were important to many early Christians. For example, early Christians could praise the consumption of small fish as an indication of an appropriately ascetic meal for Christians.³⁶⁹ Clearly these associations tie in with the traditional Graeco-Roman association of small fish with low status and of

large fish with high status.³⁷⁰ In addition, the reference to pisciculi points to a plurality of fish, whereas IXΘΥΣ refers only to one fish. Just as small fish were thought to multiply prolifically in the Graeco-Roman world, so Tertullian portrays early Christians as numerous in quantity.

On the other hand, as one sees in my investigation of the Avercius inscription, the large fish/Christ (in addition to indicating the above-mentioned high rank of Christ) has a phallic association and refers in part to the production/conception through baptism of Christians. Together with the many fish represented by pisciculi, the large fish represented by IXΘΥΣ may well connote the conception/production by one fish/Christ of numerous fish/Christians through baptism.

While it probably does not constitute a major portion of the referential framework of fish symbolism in Tertullian, the association of large quantities of small fish with fine fish sauces and with the ability to perform exceptional feats may have made it possible for Tertullian to designate them as Christians. For it would not have been appropriate to depict them purely as essentially detestable creatures. Thus, it is very likely that these positive features were taken into account in the fish symbolism of Tertullian, although in an indirect way.

In general, the referential framework of fish symbolism in the Tertullian passage is closely tied to baptism. By emphasizing the inferior position of baptized small fish/Christians vis-à-vis the superior position of the fish/Christ, Tertullian explains that baptism provides entry into a

368. These comments are scattered throughout.

369. See Section X.H in Appendix 1.

community that looks up to Christ as its leader and that must remain united in order to have power—in contrast to the divisive heretics (from his point of view) whom he lambasts in the very same passage.

By underscoring the numerous quantity of fish/Christians, Tertullian also alludes to the fertility and productive power of baptism, which (through the aid of the fish/Christ) increases the numbers of fish/human beings entering the Christian community.

In regard to the latter point, it seems apparent in both of the passages that Tertullian regards the bulk of fish/Christians as somewhat weak and prone to the influence of heretical teachings. For example, in Text # VI.1, he contrasts the fish-like qualities of average Christians—who are able only to reach the top of the water (that is, be baptized)—with the bird-like qualities of Christian martyrs who in dying are able to ascend to even higher places (ad superiora) than fish can ever hope to reach.³⁷¹ Evidently, death was something that martyrs did not fear, but average Christians did fear. In addition, in Text # VI.2, the designation of fish as tiny pisciculi emphasizes the general impression of weakness. Furthermore, Tertullian indicates in Text # VI.2 that Christians must remain in the water of baptism to stay alive, by saying that Christians are saved only by constantly remaining in baptismal water (aqua permanendo); for they die when they leave that water.

370. This certainly seems to be the case in a passage from the Gospel of Thomas: Text # II.C.2.

371. This is probably an allusion to Gen. 1.20, which refers to the creation of fish (literally “crawling creatures”) and birds; see pp. 476-77 below for discussion of this biblical passage.

Thus for Tertullian, fish symbolism suggests a certain degree of weakness, both in regard to the fish themselves and even in regard to the baptismal water that protects them, since martyrs can ascend to even higher places. This should remind us that Tertullian views the status of fish/baptized Christians and the sacrament of baptism as a first step to an even higher goal.

The somewhat diminished valuation of baptism in these particular passages of Tertullian seems to be unique in the face of the other texts in Appendix 1 (certainly including those in the previous Section III on fishing) and may have something to do with his Montanist predilections (as suggested by the emphasis on martyrdom in Text # VI.1). But his view of fish/Christians as weak seems to conform to many of the texts that I have investigated. For example, from the description of fishing in early Christian texts, it is clear that, by equating fish with human beings and future Christians, they are also indicating that the fishermen/Christ/apostles/preachers are in the more powerful position; for fishermen capture fish and can do with them what they want. As a result, the fish/converts are entirely dependent on their captors.³⁷²

In summary, Tertullian employs Graeco-Roman traditions of large and small fish in order to contrast Christian fish with the Christ fish.

372. In my analysis of the fish/Christ in the Avercius inscription, I also showed that fish symbolism in its eucharistic role indicated the subordinate role of individual Christians vis-à-vis Christ and the Christian church. On this see pp. 334, 357, 473.

Water and Baptism: production and multiplication

To return to the subject of fish and baptismal symbolism, I should note the emphasis in several early Christian texts on the protective and preservative quality of salvific waters in regard to fish/Christians. From Tertullian's point of view, not only is water responsible (through the mediation of God) for the physical creation of life and for the spiritual creation of eternal life (as Tertullian himself discusses),³⁷³ but it maintains life—in particular, those fish/human beings who were baptized into Christianity.³⁷⁴ In another text at a later date in Milan, Ambrose also indicates this preservative quality of water by pointing out that water is a place “for maintaining security” (*tuendae salutis*) and “fleeing death” (*fugiendae mortis*)—apparent allusions to baptism.³⁷⁵ Likewise, in a different text, Ambrose explains that water transforms everything that is terrifying, violent, and unpleasant on land into items that are welcome, peaceful, and pleasant³⁷⁶—evidently including fish, as in fish/Christians who are transformed by baptism.³⁷⁷ Finally, according to Zeno of Vero-

373. Text # IV.1. See also p. 477 below.

374. Text # VI.1

375. Text # IV.3.

376. Text # IV.4. This ties in with certain strands of Graeco-Roman literature, in which there are debates that praise one natural element and/or the creatures that reside in it over another, such as the dialogue of Plutarch, entitled Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer?

377. Also according to Ambrose, it was in water that Christ was protected by fish (Text # IV.5).

na, fish/Christians were described as “living in baptismal water” (baptismatis aqua viventes)—probably because it was safe there.

Thus, salvific water was seen as a realm of safety for fish/Christians, all of whom also normally lived within a realm of danger.³⁷⁸

By viewing water in this way, early Christians maintain traditions of Graeco-Roman water symbolism that are crucial for understanding fish symbolism. For instance, these texts follow Graeco-Roman tradition in affirming the miraculous power of water (e.g. as in baptismal transformation) and in associating water with the creation of life. By also associating it with tranquility and peace (likewise Graeco-Roman), they are making a distinction between the terrifying aspects of the salt-water sea/world and the peaceful characteristics of fresh water springs and ponds. In the Graeco-Roman world, such springs and ponds, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, usually refer to fish sanctuaries that are sacred to particular deities.³⁷⁹ But early Christians transformed their meaning from sacred springs to baptismal fonts that, instead of being sacred to various deities, were sacred to Christ and to God.³⁸⁰ For springs and ponds were frequently associated among early Christians with baptism, as is indi-

378. Text # VI.4.

379. See pp. 183, 192-93, 217-21.

380. In a text from the fifth century C.E. (Text # VI.7), Orientius of Gaul openly suggests that the birth of the fish/Christ in water was related to baptism. That is, by his birth, Christ made certain waters sacred.

cated, for example, by frequently designating the baptismal pool as a “spring” (Gk. πηγή; Lat. fons), as in a few of the texts of Appendix 1.³⁸¹

Thus, when texts note that fish are protected and preserved in water, they are also indicating that, just as sacred fish were protected in sacred springs, so fish/Christians were protected in the sacred waters of their sacred baptismal fonts.³⁸²

In regard to fish and water symbolism in the context of baptism, one should also note several texts in Appendix 1 that place special emphasis on the relationship between the creation of water and of animal life—especially fish—in Gen. 1.20 and the sacrament of baptism. In doing so, they draw on Graeco-Roman traditions, as well as some early Christian traditions that themselves place great esteem in the capacity of water to produce life.

For example, with regard to early Christian traditions, one should especially note a text of Tertullian that lauds water (as opposed to earth), because it was chosen by God to produce life in Gen. 1.20.³⁸³ In this passage, Tertullian clearly views the giving of animal life in Gen. 1.20 as closely connected to the giving of “celestial life” (vita caelestis) in

381. I have discussed the former on pp. 328-30 above, while the latter may be found in the following texts relating to baptism: Zeno of Verona in Text # X.H.2; Optatus of Milevis in Text # XIII.2; Ps. Augustine, Text # II.A.9.

382. Of course, I speak here of Graeco-Roman influence on early Christian fish and baptismal symbolism. No doubt Christians would not have recognized the sacred character of pagan fish or springs. But it certainly seems probable that they borrowed pagan terminology to say something with a new twist about their own relationship to fish and water.

baptism. Since it compares ordinary Christians to fish, as well as Christian martyrs to birds, it would seem that another passage in Tertullian also refers to Gen. 1.20, partly in relation to baptism and to fish symbolism.³⁸⁴ Most relevant for fish symbolism, Severian of Gabala explains that he always thinks of Gen. 1.20, when he sees fish/Christian converts coming out from baptism with eternal life.³⁸⁵ Similarly at the very end of late antiquity, Isidore of Seville designates the fish in Gen. 1.20 as human beings who are “renewed” (renovati) through the sacrament of baptism.³⁸⁶ Though he has a somewhat more negative view of actual fish, John Chrysostom in the fourth century C.E. also clearly relates Gen. 1.20 to baptism.³⁸⁷

In general, therefore, the creation of life in Genesis is related to the creation of life in baptism; for baptismal water produced Christians, just as the terrestrial water of Gen. 1.20 produced actual fish.

Fins and scales

In the text of Tertullian discussed above (Text # VI.2), he mentions that martyrs ascend to higher places than normal Christians. But in general, most of the texts I investigated on fishing give a more favorable

383. Text # IV.1

384. Text # VI.1

385. Text # VI.5. Here fish = “crawling creatures” (Gk. ἐρπετά; Lat. reptilia). As Basil of Caesarea in Text # VI.9 indicates, these are clearly synonymous with fish.

386. Text # VI.8.

evaluation to the baptismal ascent of Christians. This is also true in Section VII in Appendix 1. In it early Christian writers interpret Lev. 11.9-12, which prohibits the eating of fish without scales and fins and which commends the eating of fish with scales and fins.³⁸⁸ Clearly early Christian texts see the fish in this biblical passage as analogous to human beings. Over and against fish without scales and fins, which live in ignorance in the grimy depths of the sea/world, fish with scales and fins are designated as those who want to ascend out of the sea to knowledge of higher places.

Furthermore, in Section VII in Appendix 1, there is a great deal of language referring to fish living at the bottom of the ocean (that is, living nearest to death and ignorance) and/or ascending to higher places.³⁸⁹ As

387. Text # II.C.8.

388. See Text # XIII.1 in Appendix 2.

389. Language indicating the location in the ocean of those fish without fins and scales: “In the depths (ἐν τῷ βυθῷ), Epistle of Barnabas in Text # VII.1); “in the darkness of the depths” (ἐν σκοτει εἰς τὰ βάθη, Clement of Alexandria in Text # VII.2); and “in the depths of the waters” (in profundis . . . aquarum, Origen in Text # VII.4); “they dwell always at the bottom and in the mud itself” (in imo semper et circa ipsum caenum demorentur, Origen in Text # VII.4); “in the lower regions” (in imis, Gregory the Great in Text # VII.7). All of this reflects the Graeco-Roman tradition that the bottom of the ocean lay near the underworld and death.

Language indicating the upward movement of fish with fins and scales: “they ascend to higher regions” (adscendunt magis ad superiora, Origen in Text # VII.4 and several more passages in this text); “sublime and celestial life” (vita sublimis et coelestis, Hesychius of Jerusalem in Text # VII.5); “they are accustomed to jump even above the water” (dare etiam saltus super aquas solent, Gregory the Great in Text # VII.6, and he uses very similar language in Text # VII.7); “to jump toward celestial desire that they might seek the upper regions through contemplation” (saltus dare per coeleste desiderium, ut superna per contemplationem appetant, Gregory the Great in Text # VII.7); and “at

a result, it is probable that, by reference to fish without scales and fins, most of the texts in this section in Appendix 1 are indirectly referring to people who have not been baptized into Christianity or to Christians who have polluted with heresy or deficiency the baptism they have received. And, by reference to fish with scales and fins, it is probable that these texts are indirectly referring to people who have been baptized into Christianity and remain in good standing. This is explicitly confirmed in two texts of Section VII in Appendix 1: Origen in Text # VII.4 and Hesychius of Jerusalem in Text # VII.5. In the latter text, Hesychius of Jerusalem in the fifth century C.E. clearly designates the fish in Lev. 11.9-12 as human beings and explicitly identifies them as those who are baptized into Christianity. In this case, he places both types of fish into the category of those who are baptized, but he places those fish without fins and scales into the category of apparently deficient or heretical persons.

In Text # VII.5, Origen (in the third century C.E. in the extant Latin translation of the Greek original) refers to the ascent of fish/ human beings with scales and fins to higher places in terms of resurrection (resurexisset).³⁹⁰ In addition, he argues for the necessity of “fins”

some time with leaps of the mind, they know how to ascend to upper regions” (aliquando superna conscendere mentis saltibus sciunt, Gregory the Great in Text # VII.7). In this regard, one should also note Text # VIII.1 of Basil of Caesarea that speaks of the fish ascending “from the deep toward the light” (ἀπὸ τοῦ βυθοῦ πρὸς τὴν ἀνω ἐπιφάνειαν). From my discussion above (pp. 430ff.), ascent would seem to indicate conversion and baptism.

390. In regard to the requirement that resurrected fish should have fins, one should quote more fully from this text of Origen: “Unless it (the

(pinnae), since fins allow fish to ascend by “swimming to higher places” (ad superiora nitatur), just as baptismal candidates exit the water. Similarly, he argues for the necessity of “scales” (squamae), since scales must be “shed” (deponere) by the fish, just as newly baptized Christians shed their “old garments” (vetera indumenta).

Clearly the references to ascent, resurrection, and shedding of garments are a part of the language of baptism. Into that baptismal language, Origen brings the tradition of associating fish with human beings. It is also significant that Origen combines the interpretation of the Leviticus passage with fishing, since, as already demonstrated, the activity of fishing was seen as analagous to baptism.

Conclusion

In general, in many of the early Christian texts in Appendix 1, both in this section on baptism and in the section on fishing, fish symbolism and baptismal symbolism are intertwined. In the section on fishing, I observed that, just as fishermen captured fish, preachers converted human beings to Christianity through the sacrament of baptism, which reenacted

fish) had fins, it could not be resurrected from the mud of disbelief nor could it arrive in the nets of faith.” [“Nisi enim habuisset pinnae, non resurrexisset de caeno incredulitas.”] In this context, one should also note that Severian of Gabala in Text # XI.1 predicates the resurrection of Christ on the fact that he was a fish. According to him, Christ would not have been resurrected, if he had not been a fish. From the passage of Origen, this would appear in part to refer to the presence of fins on certain fish. Thus, it would seem that for Severian, Christ was a fish because he could literally and figuratively rise toward the surface.

the movement of Christians from the depths of death in the watery turbulence of the world to the heights of light and eternal life.

In this section, one sees the importance of fish and baptismal symbolism in contexts that focus on the peculiar qualities of water and on the Levitical division between fish with scales and fins and fish without scales and fins. In the latter case, Christian texts developed a Jewish tradition for the purpose of emphasizing the importance of baptism. In the former case, these texts developed Graeco-Roman traditions that emphasized the preservative and life-giving power of certain waters, so that the baptismal waters of fish/human beings could sanctify them, protect them, and give them eternal life. In so doing, writers were able to distinguish between different types of fish and people. Probably present in all of this is the description of early Christians as helpless small fish who need to be baptized. And in the case of Tertullian that baptism was understood as being performed by the big fish Christ.

FISH SYMBOLISM AND FOOD

Eucharist

In my discussion of the fish from the spring, I explored in detail the fish as a symbol of Christ and the eucharist. In doing so, I observed that certain early Christian texts combined several Graeco-Roman traditions referring to the eucharistic fish in the following ways: as a food that was often associated with high status and culinary excellence (especially when they were large fish); as a food that was perhaps the most essential protein staple in the diet of individuals living in the ancient world; as sacred animals that were dedicated to specific deities; as creatures that often saved the lives of human beings and that were viewed as worthy of admiration and empathy; as beings that were associated with life and death; as astrological signs that could signify the beginnings and ends of ages; as animals that were associated with phalluses and fertility; and as creatures that lived in an oceanic world that was thought to bridge geographically the polar opposites of the underworld and the heavens.

In this way, the eucharistic fish came to represent to early Christians a symbol that referred to a multitude of referential objects:³⁹¹ food that represented the claims of high status in general for Christianity and the claims of specific individuals for particular high status within the Christian community (e.g. Avercius); food that was essential to the spiritual sustenance of Christians; food that embodied Christ himself and that was dedicated to the memorializing of him; food that recalled the salvific activities of Christ that saved the Christians who ate him in the form of a

fish; food that allowed Christians to identify with Christ; food that was identified with both the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as the symbolic death and resurrection of Christians in baptism; food that reminded Christians of the transitory character of this age and the beginning of a new age; and food that symbolized the productive capacity of Christ in bringing about the conversion of innumerable persons to Christianity.

In texts in Appendix 1 other than in Section I, particularly in Sections X.C and X.D (which date exclusively from the fourth century C.E.), various aspects of this extremely intricate network of meanings of fish symbolism are highlighted. In Texts # X.C.1-2 of Augustine, it is virtually certain that he is referring to the fish in its role as Christ, since it is a single fish (and not two or more fish as in the miraculous feedings described in Sections X.A and X.B). This is suggested further in Text # X.C.2 by the reference to a “pious” (pia) earth eating the fish—an indication of a religious banquet—and is confirmed, when Augustine refers to a “sacrament” (sacramenta) of the fish that is eaten (commedit)—clearly referring to the eucharist. Similarly in X.C.1, fish are distinguished from other animals (sea creatures and birds), because they are associated with a special “banquet” (mensa) associated with the “faithful” (credentium).

Because of the language of ascension (levatus, levatum) applying to the fish as it rises up “from the deep” (de profundo), it is probable that these passages of Augustine are referring to the death and the resur-

rection of Christ. For descriptions of the ocean as deep—which the Latin word profundum clearly implies—were associated with the realm of death, while ascension was associated with rebirth and resurrection.

Thus, by eating the fish/eucharist, early Christians were identifying not only with Christ, but with his death and resurrection. While these texts were written in the late fourth century C.E., they follow a tradition of depicting the fish/Christ in the form of the eucharist that began in the late second century C.E. with the Avercius inscription.

In further regard to the eucharist, Peter Chrysologus refers to the fish in one text as “life-giving food” (esca vitalis).³⁹² In this way, he directly ties together the death and resurrection of Christ, who was roasted on the cross, with the eating of the fish/Christ. Just as Christ died and was raised, Christians were given new life (after dying to the world) by eating the fish/Christ in the eucharist.

Other texts in Section X.D in Appendix 1 also relate fish symbolism in its function as food to the death and resurrection of Christ, but here through the image of Christ as a roasted fish. Drawing on the New Testament descriptions of post-resurrection fish meals of Christ and the apostles in John 21.9-10 and Luke 24.41-42, as well as on the fish that healed Tobit of his blindness and was afterwards roasted and eaten (Tobit

391. As I have noted, the ingestion of fish does not refer to a literal consumption of fish in a eucharistic meal, but is rather a figurative act.

392. It is interesting to note that in another text, Peter Chrysologus also refers to the bait for catching fish/Christians as “life-giving” food: Text # II.C.12.

6.1-9),³⁹³ these early Christian texts specifically identify Christ with the fish and designate his death and passion by the roasting (assatus) or cooking (decoctus) of a fish.³⁹⁴

From the rhyming passage in Augustine, assus . . . Christus . . . passus (“roasted . . . Christ . . . suffered”), it almost seems that the association of the roasted fish with the crucified Christ had a formulaic character—at least by the beginning of the fifth century C.E.³⁹⁵ From the passages commenting on Tobit 6.1-9, it would seem that the death of the roasted fish/Christ was specifically related to the healing/salvation of human beings.³⁹⁶ For example, in one text Peter Chrysologus suggests that the death of the roasted fish/Christ leads to “resurrection” (resurrectio) for his followers.³⁹⁷ On the other hand, for Gregory the Great, the roasted fish stands solely for the death of Christ, while the honeycomb stands for his resurrection.³⁹⁸ In general, it would seem that for these Christian writers of the fourth through the sixth centuries C.E. the roasted fish generally stood for the death of Christ, but also presaged the resurrection to come (both his own and that of his followers).

393. See biblical texts II.1, VII.1, and XV.1 in Appendix 2.

394. Assatus: Augustine, Text # X.D.1; Eucherius, Text # X.D.3; Ps. Augustine, Text # X.D.4; Gregory the Great, Text # X.D.6; Clavis Melitonis, Text # X.D.7. Decoctus: Quodvultdeus, Text # X.D.5.

395. Text # X.D.1.

396. This follows Graeco-Roman belief that fish had great medicinal effectiveness: see p. 155 above on the curative properties of garum.

397. Text # X.D.2.

While the word decoctus simply referred to the general act of cooking, the more frequently used word assatus (five times versus one time in these particular texts) indicated in the late antique world the cooking of food over a fire (i.e. grilling).³⁹⁹ In Chapter 2, I already observed that the sights and smells of grilling fish constituted one of the most ubiquitous sensory experiences in the ancient world. Thus, the description of the passion of Christ in terms of a roasted fish would have evoked the images of fish on open grills that were so prevalent in the Graeco-Roman world. In other words, one might have said: just as fish were grilled over fire, so Christ died in his passion.

While the eucharist is only indicated explicitly in one of the passages of Section X.D (# 2 of Peter Chrysologus), it is probable to assume that the mentions of Christ as a roasted fish referred in some way to it—especially since the eucharist was of course also closely associated with the death and resurrection of Christ. If one accepts the presence of the eucharist in an indirect way in the referential framework of the roasted fish/Christ, these texts therefore describe it in terms of the ingestion of cooked (as opposed to raw) food—here fish—that anyone in the Graeco-Roman world might have eaten. Thus, the eucharist—and whatever other meals are being described—is represented in Section X.D as a standardly prepared meal of fish that, although it clearly refers to a cultic meal, draws primarily from secular cuisine of the Graeco-Roman world.

398. Text # X.D.6.

In so far as the literary tradition is concerned, the symbol of Christ as a roasted fish in Section X.D can be traced back to the end of the fourth century C.E. in Latin-speaking regions of the Western Mediterranean basin area. While there is no evidence for an earlier literary tradition, I show in Chapter 4 that iconographic evidence from the Christian catacombs in Rome—extending back to the third century C.E.—suggests that cooked fish were an important part of certain cultic meals that probably in part referred to eucharists.⁴⁰⁰ This would lead one to suspect that the origins of the literary tradition of roasted fish probably go back much earlier than the extant evidence allows one to ascertain for certain.

Miracle of loaves and fish

While the association of a fish with food could refer to the eucharist and/or to the death of Christ, there is ample evidence that it also referred sometimes to the miraculous feedings of the crowds with bread and two fish (Sections X.A and X.B in Appendix 1). Citing the descriptions of this miracle from New Testament passages located in Appendix 2 (Sections V and VI) of biblical texts that relate to fish symbolism, early Christians writers depict their symbolic role in a variety of ways—but, most important, all with an emphasis on the miraculous qualities of the food.

For example, according to Clement of Alexandria the capacity of these two fish—which, according to him, represent Greek philosophy—to feed the multitudes resulted from their “taking a share of the

399. For example, it is used extremely frequently in the cookbook of

blessing of the Lord” (τοῦ κυρίου μεταλαμβάντες εὐλογίας) that led to their “breathing in” (ἐνεπνεύσθησαν) “the resurrection of divinity” (τὴν ἀνάστασιν τῆς θεϊότητος).⁴⁰¹ From this description, one can see that these are special fish associated with God (or Christ) and with the resurrection of Christ—once again continuing the sacred associations of fish in early Christianity, as well as continuing its association with the renewal of life and resurrection.

At the same time, according to Hilary of Poitiers the two fish—in addition to their association with the prophets and John, as opposed to bread which is associated with the law—are clearly related to baptism through the mention of the “strength of water” (*virtus aquae*).⁴⁰² That this refers to baptism (in addition to the reference to water) is suggested by reference to water as “the hope of human life” (*vitae humanae spes*), since “life” was so commonly associated with baptism—probably accompanied by the suggestion of eternal life. This is confirmed in Hilary by reference to this food as “eternal” (*aeternus*). In a similar fashion, Prudentius refers to the meal of the two fish and five loaves as an “eternal banquet” (*aeterna mensa*).⁴⁰³

From the point of view of Paulinus of Nola, the miraculous feeding could be associated with a funerary meal, which his friend Pammachius

Apicius (*De re coquinaria*) in regard to all foods including fish.

400. See pp. 558-66.

401. Text # X.A.1.

402. Text # X.A.2.

held in memory of his sister Paulina and to which the indigent Christians of Rome were invited.⁴⁰⁴ As a result, Paulinus associates the two fish with a funerary context—which is appropriate in the Graeco-Roman context of associating fish so frequently with death and with the chthonic realm. In addition, Paulinus extensively discusses the physical aspects of the miraculous growth of the loaves and fish so as probably to emphasize further the supernatural character of the meal held on behalf of Paulina.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, the stress on the miraculous and supernatural character of both the New Testament miracle and the contemporary funerary meal served partly to place that funerary meal in a Christian context.⁴⁰⁶ It was not just a meal associated with the pagan cult of the dead, but a meal whose miraculous character stemmed from its associations with the miracles of Christ.⁴⁰⁷

403. Text # X.A.4.

404. Text # X.A.3. It is interesting to note that the vast crowds at this funerary banquet would probably have vividly recalled the imagery of the crowds at the feeding miracle. This is most likely why Paulinus thought in the first place of employing the feeding miracle in this context.

405. One should note that this refers to the actual growth of food while Christians chew and masticate it, as well as to the multiplication of the loaves and fish.

406. I should add, however, that, while fish may have been eaten at this banquet, clearly the reference to two fish is primarily symbolic and probably also functioned in part to boast of Pammachius' generosity in feeding the poor by referring that generosity to a New Testament miracle.

407. I show in Chapter 4 that this also has implications for the interpretation of fish in meal iconography in some of the Christian catacombs of Rome. See pp. 559-61.

According to Augustine the fish in the second feeding referred to the first converts to Christ——thus hinting at the prolific, and therefore miraculous (though in a different way from above), character of the numerical growth of Christianity.⁴⁰⁸ As I have repeatedly noted, this ties in aptly with the Graeco-Roman tradition of associating fish with fertility and fecundity.

I should add that the two latter texts——Paulinus of Nola in Text # X.A.3 and Augustine in Text # X.B.1——in addition to referring to fish, also make reference to another fish that is the fish/Christ. It is probable that in these passages the references to the fish in the feeding scene caused the writers to think of another fish that referred to Christ.⁴⁰⁹ Although these writers probably did not interpret either the New Testament multitude, or the crowds at the funerary banquet, in a eucharistic sense (as eating Christ), evidently these fish were nevertheless indirectly connected to Christ in his role as fish. Thus, I would suggest that the act of eating in the funerary banquet given by Pammachius, as well as in the New Testament banquet, had an indirect association with the fish as Christ so that Christ (through the symbolism of a fish) was to some extent regarded as present at both banquets.

In general, these texts regard fish as being associated with miraculous phenomena. While this was no doubt in part related to the New

408. Text # X.B.1.

409. This provides confirmation again that fish can be simultaneously associated with very different items that do not seem to make sense together.

Testament description of the story as a miracle, it was very likely connected as well to the Graeco-Roman tradition of associating the sea, and the creatures inhabiting it, with miraculous phenomena.⁴¹⁰ Within the network of meanings of fish symbolism in these passages, there are several themes centered around the miraculous nature of the fish in the feeding miracle. Clearly foremost among them is the association of the fish with eternal life that was suggested in various ways in Texts # X.A.1 (referring to resurrection), X.A.2 (referring to the food as eternal), and X.A.4 (referring to an eternal banquet).

In this regard as well, the two fish in Text # X.A.3 of Paulinus of Nola were probably also associated with eternal life. For, in almost every early Christian text that I have explored,⁴¹¹ where fish were associated with death, there was also the promise of eternal life. That would have certainly been the case in a funerary banquet with strongly religious overtones, as the description by Paulinus of the miraculous increase of food indicates. In addition, I should note that Christ was denominated by Paulinus as the “fish of living water” (aquae vivae piscis), which (in addition to being a reference to baptism) also very likely refers to the eternal life (vivus) that baptism promises. Furthermore, it is probable that the networks of meanings of the fish as Christ and of the two fish in the New Testament feeding miracle overlapped at various points—thus probably also indirectly associating the two fish with baptism and life. This

410. See pp. 262-76 above. The association of fish with miraculous events was also probably one of the associations of the original feeding miracle in the New Testament.

seems also to be suggested, when Paulinus uses the word “sources” (fontes) to describe the origins of the bread and the fish, since fontes also refer to baptismal pools.⁴¹²

In a somewhat different way, Text # X.B.1 of Augustine also suggests the association of the fish with life—but here life in the form of increasing the numbers of Christians as members of the early Christian community. There may also possibly be an allusion to this in Text # X.A.3 of Paulinus of Nola, when he refers to the meal of bread and fish in terms of “spiritual fecundity” (spiritalis fecunditas).

In general the miraculous meal of loaves and fish was associated with eternal life and/or resurrection, which could be expressed by reference to conversion, baptism, funerary meals, or meals in paradise. Contrary to eucharistic fish symbolism there does not seem to have been reference to the death and crucifixion of Christ, but solely to his resurrection and the consequent hope in resurrection for Christians.

411. With perhaps the exception of Eznik of Kolb in Text # X.E.3.

412. Similarly πηγῆ, which I have discussed on pp. 327-30 above.

FISH SYMBOLISM AND THE ΙΧΘΥΣ ACRONYM

As I have commented in passing throughout this chapter and Chapter 2, the word “fish” = ἰχθυς commonly functioned in early Christianity (both in literature and in material evidence) as an acronym. Because of literary explanations of the acronym in the fourth century C.E. and because of the use of the acronym in acrostic compositions as early as the third century C.E. (Section XIII in Appendix 1), one can ascertain that its initial letters clearly stood for Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτήρ = Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.

Here it is helpful to note the distinction between the terms acronym and acrostic—terms which many scholars have used synonymously. An acronym, however, generally refers to a word that is formed from the initial letters of the successive parts of a compound phrase. On the other hand, an acrostic generally refers to a composition, where the initial letters of successive lines or verses form a word or a series of words. When ΙΧΘΥΣ is used simply as a word in a sentence (e.g. Text # VI.1 of Tertullian) or as an isolated word on an inscription (e.g. the funerary inscription of Licinia Amias),⁴¹³ it is functioning as an acronym. When it forms the initial letters of a composition, as in the relevant verses of the Pectorius inscription or the Sybilline Oracles,⁴¹⁴ it functions as part of an acrostic composition.

In early Christianity, there is much more evidence for the use of ΙΧΘΥΣ as an acronym than as part of an acrostic composition. Of

413. See Chart 2.I.23 in Appendix 5.

course, this can be explained to some extent, since the latter is a much more complex and difficult endeavor. In any case, the use of IXΘΥΣ both as an acronym and as part of acrostic compositions suggests its connection to a popular tradition of word-play in the Graeco-Roman world.⁴¹⁵ From this one can see that many individuals regarded words as having magical properties. In this sense, the use of the fish acronym IXΘΥΣ is a form of word magic that must be considered an important aspect of ancient religious belief and, therefore, shows the extent to which early Christianity in its fish symbolism was influenced by Graeco-Roman religions.⁴¹⁶

Since the modern discussion of early Christian fish symbolism began, scholars have spent much of their time debating the problem as to whether the IXΘΥΣ acronym was responsible for the origins of fish symbolism in early Christianity or whether it originated after fish symbolism was already ensconced in the symbolism of early Christianity, as if to ex-

414. Texts # I.2 and XIII.1 respectively.

415. Other than IXΘΥΣ among early Christians, perhaps the most famous word-play in antiquity is the sator-arepo-rotas-opera palindrome, which some have tried to attribute to early Christianity, although the evidence for that seems slim. The four words are spelled the same backwards and forwards. For a start see the following: G. de Jerphanion, “La formule magique SATOR AREPO ou ROTAS OPERA” (1935, summary of prior theories); idem, “Encore la formule SATOR AREPO”; idem, “Du nouveau sur la formule magique ROTAS OPERA (et non SATOR AREPO)”; J. Carcopino, Études d’histoire chrétienne. Le Christianisme secret du carré magique (in support of Christian origins); review of Carcopino by H. Last (criticizes Christian origin theory); and W. Moeller, The Mithraic Origin and Meanings of the ROTAS-SATOR Square (with comprehensive bibliography, though evidence for Mithraic origins at best remains very uncertain).

416. See especially, H. Usener, Götternamen.

plain the earlier fish symbolism.⁴¹⁷ Primarily due to a lack of early evidence, however, the discussion has produced no satisfactory solution.

As far as is known at this point, I would argue that it is best to assume from the limited evidence that early Christian fish symbolism and the early Christian acronym arose at the same time, probably toward the end of the third century C.E. This is suggested by the simultaneous use of fish symbolism and the acronym in a text of Tertullian at that time.⁴¹⁸ Outside of Tertullian, who combines both features (general fish symbolism and the acronym) of fish, the earliest independent verification for early Christian fish symbolism is found in the inscription of Avercius in the late second century C.E. and in the hymn to Christ in Clement of Alexandria around the turn of the same century.⁴¹⁹ Similarly, the earliest independent verification for the early Christian IXΘΥΣ acronym other than Tertullian, is found in the third century C.E. as part of an acrostic composition in Book 8 of the Sybilline Oracles.⁴²⁰

Because acronyms and acrostics were closely associated in the ancient world with oracles (as is indicated by the use of IXΘΥΣ in the Sybilline Oracles) and because they were thought to lend authenticity to oracular

417. Most prominent among those advocating the existence of early Christian fish symbolism without the IXΘΥΣ acronym is F. Dölger in his monumental five volume study, IXΘΥΣ. On the other hand, C. R. Morey presents the position in support of the priority of the acronym in “The Origin of the Fish Symbol”——most extensively in parts 2 and 5. For more recent interpretive developments on the relationship of the IXΘΥΣ acronym to fish symbolism, see J. Engemann, “Fisch, Fischer, Fischfang,” 1043-47.

418. Text # VI.2.

traditions,⁴²¹ the use of $\iota\chi\theta\upsilon\varsigma$ as an acronym, as well as in acrostics, very likely had oracular connotations (which are very important for an understanding of the acronym). I have already observed in my discussion of fishing that fish symbolism was in general closely related to oracular traditions.⁴²² As a result, the early Christian use of $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ shared this oracular association with early Christian fish symbolism.

Thus, fish symbolism and the use of the $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ acronym were never that distinct—again suggesting the probability that they both arose simultaneously.

For the interpretation of early Christian fish symbolism, this means that an understanding of both fish symbolism in general and the use of the $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ acronym is mutually informative. In fact, I have touched on this above in my discussion of the simultaneous reference of fish to Christians and to Christ in certain early Christian texts.⁴²³

In the texts in Section XIII in Appendix 1, it is evident, for example, that they are depicting the fish as Christ— $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ —in its role as a divine entity entering the world. Thus, the Sybilline $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ acrostic composition describes Christ as coming “into the waters” ($\wp\delta\alpha\sigma\iota$, l. 47). According to the interpretation of this acrostic by Augustine, Christ came while “alive into the abyss of this mortality, as if entering into the depths

419. Texts # I.1 and II.C.1 respectively.

420. Text # XIII.1, ll. 217-50.

421. E.g. Cicero, On Divination 2.54, 111, 112.

422. See pp. 186-87 above.

of the waters” (in huius mortalitatis abyssu velut in aquarum profunditate vivus).⁴²⁴ Similarly, Maximinus explains that Christ in the form of the fish—IXΘΥΣ—entered “the sea of this world (or age)” (saeculi huius mare). Thus, the texts with the IXΘΥΣ acronym describe Christ in the same fashion as some other texts discussed in the section above on fishing, where the fish/Christ entered the sea of the world in order to bring eternal life to humanity.

From the texts presented in Section XIII in Appendix 1, it is clear that the IXΘΥΣ acronym is attached to the ideas of death and life in primarily two ways. First, in the Sybilline acrostic poem the IXΘΥΣ acronym is related to death and life through the concept of the end of an age and the beginning of a new age, as mediated by the last judgement with Christ as judge.⁴²⁵ In this regard, it is notable that the composer of the Sybilline acrostic poem adds an extra “sigma” to IXΘΥΣ in order to stand for the word σταυρός (“cross”).⁴²⁶ In addition, the composer builds on this word-play by also adding a discussion of the death and crucifixion of Christ in the final stanza of the poem (ll. 244-250) that corresponds to σταυρός—clearly also tying in with the ubiquitous theme of the de-

423. See especially pp. 436-45.

424. Text # XIII.3. As I have indicated, the references to “abyss” (abyssus) and to “depth: (profunditas) suggest (among other things) an association with death and the underworld; see pp. 270-71 above.

425. Text # XIII.1.

426. There is no such addition in the other two examples of the IXΘΥΣ acrostic (in the inscription of Pectorius in Text # I.2 and in the translation of the Sybilline poem by Augustine in Text # XIII.3) or in any of the other examples of the acronym.

struction of the world or the end of the age. Yet, at the same time, reference is made to the “immortal” (ἀθάνατος, l. 250) nature of Christ—thus indicating not only the triumph of Christ, but also the triumph of Christians who will likewise have a kind of immortal life.

Overall, one can say that $IX\Theta Y\Sigma + \Sigma(\text{igma}) = \sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ refers to the end of an age or the beginning of a new one, as well as the death and resurrection of Christ, and the consequent new immortal life for Christians.

From this description of the referential framework of $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ in the Sybilline poem, one can see that the function of $\iota\chi\theta\upsilon\varsigma$ as an acronym must have been closely connected to fish symbolism in general. For it continues the theme of death and life, as well as the beginnings and ends of ages (with its probable astrological origins), that was prevalent in both Graeco-Roman and early Christian uses of fish symbolism.⁴²⁷ Once again this provides support for my proposal of the simultaneous emergence of fish symbolism in general and the $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ acronym.

At this point, I should add that these themes are also well-suited to the oracular associations of acronyms and acrostics, which I mentioned above. In addition to being placed in an oracular document (the Sybilline Oracles), the $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ acrostic and acronym would seem to have been

427. In the context of the death of Christ, I should also mention the text of Quodvultdeus, since it relates the $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ acronym to the passion of Christ, who was “cooked in his passion” (in passione decoctus): Text # XIII.5. At the very least, this connects $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ to the general association of fish symbolism with death. Yet, as the reference to the healing powers of $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ /Christ indicates (based on Tobit 6.1-9), new life is probably suggested here as well.

used here to predict the occurrence of certain events——namely the last judgement and the coming of a new age. This would certainly seem to have been the case with its use in the inscription of Pectorius. From this I would surmise that the relatively frequent use of the IXΘΥΣ acronym on inscriptions and gemstones also had a similar predicative or oracular function.⁴²⁸

Second (in regard to the association of the acronym with death and life) the use of the IXΘΥΣ acronym could be explicitly associated with baptism according to two texts: Tertullian in Text # VI.2 and Optatus of Milevis in Text # XIII.2. For Tertullian, the water of baptism——which seems to be associated with IXΘΥΣ——clearly preserved the lives of Christians. From the point of view of Optatus, the fish as Christ——IXΘΥΣ——transformed normal water into the water of baptism (as the reference to piscina (“fish pool”) indicates and thus created water that was “salvific” (salutaris) “for the life of the human species” (ad vitam generis humani).⁴²⁹ In this case, the reference to life also suggests the transformation through baptism of normal life to eternal life. In general, the reference to baptism provides another focal point for underscoring the life-giving aspects of the IXΘΥΣ acronym that also characterize fish symbolism in general.

428. Appendix 5: Chart 2.I.6, 8, 16, 23, 32, 36, 39, 48, 53, 54; Chart 2.III.1-2; Chart 3.1-9, 15.

429. Of course, salutaris would here have the connotation both of “salubrious” and “salvific.”

In addition to its associations with life and death, the IXΘΥΣ acronym also functioned as an alternative designation for Christ. As a result, one might be tempted to compare the designation of Christ as IXΘΥΣ to the use of fish in names, which was a popular custom especially among certain Roman aristocrats, but probably elsewhere in the Graeco-Roman world as well.⁴³⁰ It seems even more probable that this designation of Christ as IXΘΥΣ generally indicates the kind of close relationship between Christians and Christ that also characterized the empathic rapport between many ancient individuals and certain fish (both secular and sacred fish).

That this Graeco-Roman tradition of empathy for, and identification with, fish may have had an influence on the designation of Christ as IXΘΥΣ is suggested by two texts in particular. According to Tertullian, IXΘΥΣ refers to “our” (noster) Jesus Christ—where “our” certainly connotes a close relationship.⁴³¹ Even more evocative in its language is a passage of Jerome, in which he explains that a certain Bonosus is a “son” (filius) of IXΘΥΣ—with the implication that the relationship between Bonosus and IXΘΥΣ/Christ was characterized not only by closeness, but also in terms of a father-son kinship.⁴³²

430. See p. 221 and n. 312 in Chapter 2.

431. Text # VI.2.

Thus, by using ΙΧΘΥΣ as a designation for Christ, early Christians were at the same time expressing their close familial-like relationship with him—a feature that would certainly have been readily comprehensible in a Graeco-Roman context as well.

By denoting themselves in familial terms through the ΙΧΘΥΣ acronym and through the symbolism of the fish/Christ, early Christians were also presenting their social structure in a fashion that was similar to certain totemic groups.⁴³³ In particular, clans in primitive societies that identified themselves with totem animals also often saw themselves as members of the same familial unit.⁴³⁴ Thus, referring to someone as a brother or sister could actually sometimes indicate what we would call a cousin.

Not altogether dissimilarly, Christians called one another brothers (συνομιῶμοι) as one can see in the Avercius inscription. Therefore, when Christians described themselves as related by kinship to the fish/ Christ, they were (like totemic clans) speaking of themselves as a segregated unit that had a familial structure. In addition, just as the totemic clan was founded by the totem animal—their ancestral parent(s)—so early Christians were also founded by their ancestral parent in the form of the fish/ΙΧΘΥΣ/Christ.

432. Text # XIV.1.

433. For fish symbolism and totemism in general, see pp. 374-76 above.

434. For example, see the discussion in A. P. Elkin, Studies in Australian Totemism, 120ff. In a similar fashion, Roman “clans” (gentes) generally saw themselves as an extended family unit and could even use animals as emblems: see the references in J. M. C. Toynbee, 35 and 349, n. 21.

In contrast to the influence of Graeco-Roman traditions——although perhaps similar to totemic societies in non-Mediterranean regions (some of whom actually call themselves “the fish clan”)⁴³⁵——it is significant to note that there is no Greek or Latin evidence to support the use of ἰχθῦς as a designation outside of early Christianity. Thus, in the Mediterranean world early Christians alone found ἰχθῦς useful. For them it served to designate their divine leader——Christ——probably because (unlike other words identifying specific species of fish) it was suitable for development into an acronym. In addition, as suggested in Chapter 2,⁴³⁶ early Christians also found ἰχθῦς appropriate as a designation, because it was a generic term that did not apply to a specific species of fish, but rather to all fish in general——in this way serving to indicate that the followers of Christ (who were also designated as fish) were not limited to a specific geographical, social or ethnic group/species, but were a universal group that incorporated all groups/ species.

Overall, one sees again that early Christians used Graeco-Roman traditions of fish symbolism to craft new networks of meanings. In the case of the ΙΧΘΥΣ acronym they transformed Graeco-Roman fish symbolism so that it could serve as a totemic and symbolic name for Christ, which referred to his life-giving power, his oracular association with a new age, and his extremely close relationship with his followers.

435. See the materials collected in R. Firth, “Totemism in Polynesia.”

Furthermore, the use of IXΘΥΣ as an acronym does not exclusively explain early Christian fish symbolism, but serves as one component in a complex network of meanings. Most overtly it functions as a signal of Christ and Christianity, but (like most signals) it depends upon other referents and associations for its capacity to communicate.⁴³⁷

When interpreting the meanings of early Christian fish, it is useless to attempt to establish which had chronological priority—the acronym (signal communication) or the various meanings of fish (symbolic expression). For an item cannot communicate without signalling something, and a signal only works when it expresses something meaningful to those who are using it—that is, when it functions symbolically.⁴³⁸ In fact, this is confirmed by the textual evidence, in which the IXΘΥΣ acronym and fish symbolism seems to have emerged simultaneously (late second century C.E.) as central elements in early Christian religious thought.

436. See pp. 88-89 above.

437. For discussion of signal and symbol, see Chapter 1, passim.

438. One can only say that a symbol is more inclusive than a signal, since it includes signals as one component in a much larger referential framework.

As can be seen in Appendix 1 from the fact that there are many more references to fish symbolism generally than specifically to the IXΘΥΣ acronym (Section XIII), it is probable that most early Christian focussed a greater degree of overt emphasis on the symbolic aspects of fish than on signal aspects. This confirms my proposal in Chapter 1 that pre-industrial societies (in contrast to our own) give greater conscious weight to symbols than to signals.

ENDNOTES

1. For editions of the text of the inscription and/or commentary on it, see especially the following: G. B. de Rossi, "Un'iscrizione greca novellamente scoperta nella Frigia" (1882); W. Ramsay, "The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia" (1883, his first edition of the text with commentary); W. Ramsay, "Notes from Asia Minor" (1884, updated text); G. B. de Rossi, *ICUR* 1:XII-XIX (1888, important text and commentary); J. B. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers* 1.2:493-501 (1889, text with very important commentary); W. Ramsay, "Early Christian Monuments of Phrygia" (1889, text with full commentary); J. Wilpert, *Principienfragen der christlichen Archäologie*, 52-56 (1889); "Archeologia: Marmi cristiani, scoperti dal Sig. Ramsay nella Frigia" (1890); Th. Zahn, "Abercius Marcellus von Hieropolis" (1893, text and very important full commentary); O. Marrucchi, "Notizia archeologica: La regina delle iscrizioni cristiane venutaci dall'Asia"; *idem*, "Nuove osservazioni sulla iscrizione di Abercio" (1895); J. Wilpert, *Fractio Panis*, 68-70, 122-25 (1895); T. M. Wehofer, "Philologische Bemerkungen zur Aberkiosinschrift" (1896, important commentary); W. Ramsay, *The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* (1897, text with commentary) 2:720-29; H. Leclercq, "Abercios" (1907); F. Dölger, *IXΘΥΣ* 1:8-11, 1:87-112, 1:136-38 (1910; 2nd ed. 1928) and 2:454-507 (1922, his commentary in both volumes is perhaps the most fundamental); C. R. Morey, "The Origins of the Fish Symbol" (1911); A. Greiff, "[1] Zum Verständnis der Aberkiosinschrift" (1926) and "[2 and 3] Zur Aberkiosinschrift" (1929); A. Abel "Étude sùr l'inscription d'Abercius" (1933, fundamental commentary and review of the literature); A. Ferrua, "Nuove osservazioni sull'epitaffio di Abercio" (1944, the most important study of the paleography and the best actual epigraphic reading of the carved inscription); M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia Greca* 4:377-86 (1978); W. Wischmeyer, "Die Aberkiosinschrift als Grabepigramm" (1980, text and fundamental study of the pagan features of the Avercius inscription, but at the same time confirming its Christian character).

Other important studies dealing with specific topics are: 1) W. Paton, "Note on the Inscription of Abercius" (1906). On the identity of the "holy virgin" as the church, which is equivalent to "faith"; on the interpretation of δρᾶσσω ("grasp"); and on the interpretation of χρηστός as related to Christ; 2) H. Grégoire, "Encore l'inscription d'Abercius" (1933). On the proposal of reading ΣΥΝΟ . . . as συνομαίμος and on the alliteration of the letter "pi"; 3) W. M. Calder, "The Epitaph of Avircius Marcellus" (1939). On the proposal of reading ΣΥΝΟ . . . as συνομημους. Also by investigating the original field notes, he concludes that there was no "eta" after ΒΑΣΙΑ . . . and that the reading should be βασιλεία; 4) *idem*, "Early Christian Epitaphs from Phrygia" (1955). On the issue of veiled and unveiled early Christian inscriptions from Phrygia; 5) M. Burzarecchi, "La ΠΗΓΗ e la ΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ ΑΓΝΗ dell' iscrizione di Abercio" (1955); 6) M. Guarducci, "L'iscrizione di Abercio e Roma" (1971). On the Avercius inscription and the importance of Rome in early Christianity; and 7) B. McNeil, "Avircius and the Song of Songs" (1977).

For bibliography on the interpretations of the text as pagan, see Appendix 3.6. See Appendix 3.3 for bibliography on the text of the vita, on the text of the vita's version of the inscription, and on the layout of the inscription.

2. I would point to a passage in Book Five (which is predominantly Jewish) of the Sybilline Oracles 5.434-37, in which a surprising number of words that occur in the Avercius inscription are also found in it. Since the Sybilline text is Jewish, it is much more likely that a Christian than a pagan would have made use of the traditions expressed in it:

αἰᾶτ' σοι, Βαβυλῶν χρυσόθρονε, χρυσοπέδιλε,
πολυετῆς βασιλεία μόνη κόσμοιο κρατοῦσα
ἢ τὸ πάλαι μεγάλη καὶ πάμπολις, οὐκέτι κείσῃ
οὔρεσιν ἐν χρυσεῖσι καὶ νάμασιν Εὐφρήταο.

Woe to you, golden-throned and golden-sandalled
Babylon.
As one kingdom alone you ruled over the world
(and) were formerly great and universal. You will
no longer lie
in the golden mountains and streams of the
Euphrates.

For convenience, I note the overlap of words in the Avercius inscription and in the Sybilline passage:

Table of References:

πόλις = v. 1
οὔρεσιν = v. 4.
μεγάλος = vv. 5 and 14.
βασιλεία = v. 7.
χρυσοπέδιλος = v. 8
χρυσέος = v. 8 (in compound form)
Εὐφρήταος = v. 11.

As one can see from the list, although there are significant differences, a general similarity of language is found in both texts. It is also significant that in Book Five of the Sybilline Oracles, Babylon ordinarily refers to Rome, and thus there is a precise overlap in the use of βασιλεία (“kingdom”), since it indicates the kingdom of Rome in the two texts. The use of adjectives compounded with χρυσέος . . . (“gold-”) suggests the royal character of the terminology, which is appropriate in both texts. Thus, in the use of these common words, as well as the others in the “Table of References,” it is possible that the Avercius inscription and the Sybilline Oracles draw upon a common oracular tradition.

3. In the first volume of IXΘΥΣ, Franz Dölger brings forward many of the relevant references, though he refuses to recognize the influence of the pagan connotation of the word (IXΘΥΣ 1:95-96). For example, the connection between πηγή and baptism is quite explicitly stated in Physiologus 6:

βάπτισαι τρίς ἐν τῇ ἀεννάῳ πηγῇ τῆς μετανοίας

Baptize yourselves three times in the ever-flowing spring of repentance

and in the Sybilline Oracles 8:315-16:

. . . ἀθανάτου πηγῆς ἀπολυσάμενος ὑδάτεσσιν τὰς πρότερον κακίας . . .

“...washing off their former sins in the waters of the immortal spring”...

In fact, πηγή and living water are frequently joined in a suggestion of baptismal washing: Letter of Barnabus 11.2: ἐμὲ ἐγκατέλιπον πηγὴν ὕδατος ζωῆς καὶ ἐαυτοῖς ὠρυξαν βόθρον θανάτου” [“They have abandoned me, the spring of living water, and have dug for themselves a pit of death”]; and Hippolytus, Philosophoumena 5.27: καὶ πίνει ἀπὸ τοῦ ζώντος ὕδατος, ὅπερ ἐστὶ λουτὸν αὐτοῖς, ὡς νομίζουσι, πηγὴ ζώντος ὕδατος ἀλλομένου” “And they drink from the living water, which is their baptismal washing and is (they think) a spring of gushing living water.”

4. While the reference to “seal” in v. 9 suggests the seal rings so popular in the Roman world, yet in early Christian literature (especially 2 Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Acts of Thomas) seals frequently refer to the seal of baptism, often referred to as the “seal of washing,” the “seal of God,” and the “seal of the Lord” (σφραγίς τοῦ λουτροῦ, σφραγίς τοῦ Θεοῦ, and σφραγίς τοῦ κυρίου). It is described as marked on the forehead. Also of importance is a passage in the Acts of Phillip 38, in which the author refers to “the seal always radiantly shining-” (τὴν φωτεινὴν σου σφραγίδα τὴν πάντοτε λάμπουσαν). In addition, Ps. Hippolytus describes the recently baptized as “shining” (“λαμπρός”) “as the sun,” just as in the Avercius inscription: On the Holy Theophany 9. For a discussion of this material with all relevant references, see F. Dölger, Sphragis, 80-88; and A. Abel, “Étude de l’inscription d’Abercius,” 362-65.

Significantly, in the Acts of Thomas 26-27, the seal is directly joined with the eucharist, where (after baptizing) Thomas offers the eucharistic meal to those whom he had just baptized. In this regard, I would argue that the mention of a baptismal seal in the Avercius inscription fits in well with the reference to the fish below, not only because the fish suggests baptism, but also because the fish clearly symbolizes the eucharist. From this it would seem that the fish can refer to baptism and the eucharist simultaneously. Thus, the order of baptism-eucharist, as suggested in the Acts of Thomas and in early Christian literature in general, is confirmed in the Avercius inscription. In fact, early Christian texts generally admonish that admission to the eucharist was predicated on the reception of baptism.

5. Although Dölger (in the same section as that mentioned in Endnote 3) denies that πηγή can have other Christian referents, it seems nevertheless that πηγή and its Latin equivalent (more or less) in early Christian literature—fons—can also refer to Mary, mother of Jesus (e.g. H. Usener in Das Weihnachtsfest, 34-35, n. 18; and (!) ΙΧΘΥΣ 1:90-92. For example, in a homily (PG 10:116) of Ps. Gregory Thaumaturgos (fourth century C.E.), the author speaks of Mary as:

αὕτη πηγή ἀέναος, ἐν ἣ τὸ ζῶν ὕδωρ ἐβλυσεν
τὴν ἐνσαρκίαν τοῦ κυρίου παρουσίαν.

She is the ever-flowing spring, in which
the living water gushes forth with the in-
carnation and coming of the Lord.

Most significantly, the “Narration of Events Taking Place in Persia” (see commentary in Section II.B in Chapter 3 and Text # I.2 in Appendix 1) strongly suggests that πηγή is Mary who conceives the fish/Christ.

Against this Dölger argues that such references are too late to be considered for the interpretation of the Avercius inscription. In addition, Dölger wants to specify the meaning of different words by excluding multiple references or associations.

Yet clearly the “Narration” is itself an ancient interpretation of the same tradition of the “fish from the spring” that is represented in the Avercius inscription. Thus, since that document is an ancient witness, one must take into account the possibility that, as in the case of the “holy virgin” with its multiple Christian referents, the symbolic network of $\pi\eta\gamma\eta$ includes both a reference to baptism and to Mary. This is especially suggested by the multivalent character of so many of the words I have already examined, and is clearly important for an understanding of the fish in the Avercius inscription.

6. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.3.1-2 (also cited in relation to the inscription of Avercius by M. Guarducci, “L’iscrizione di Abercio e Roma,” 189-95): “Sed quoniam valde longum est in hoc tali volumine omnium ecclesiarum enumerare successiones, maximae et antiquissimae et omnibus cognitae a gloriosissimis duobus apostolis Petro et Paulo Romae fundatae et constitutae ecclesiae eam quam habet ab apostolis traditionem et adnuntiam hominibus fidem per successiones episcoporum pervenientem usque ad nos indicantes, confundimus omnes eos qui quoquo modo, vel per sibiplacentiam vel vanam gloriam vel per caecitatem et sententiam malam, praeterquam oportet colligunt. Ad hanc enim ecclesiam propter potentiorum principalitatem necesse est omnem convenire ecclesiam hoc est eos qui sunt undique fideles, in qua semper ab his qui sunt undique conservata est ea quae est ab apostolis. . . . Hac ordinatione et successione ea quae est ab apostolis in ecclesia traditio et veritatis praeconatio pervenit usque ad nos. Et est plenissima haec ostensio unam et eandem vivificatricem fidem esse quae in ecclesia ab apostolis usque nunc sit conservata et tradita in veritate.”

“Since it would take too long to enumerate the successions of all the churches in such a volume as this, (I will deal with) the greatest and most ancient church at Rome, which is known to all, which was founded and established by the two glorious apostles Peter and Paul, and which bears its tradition from the apostles—a tradition that extends all the way to us through the successions of bishops, who point out the faith that was proclaimed to humanity. We confound all those who in some way offer inappropriate conclusions, either because of self-satisfaction, or vainglory, or blindness, or bad judgement. On account of its mighty pre-eminence, it is necessary to join every church—that is, those who are faithful everywhere—to this church, in which that tradition from the apostles has always been preserved by those who are everywhere. . . . (list of the Roman bishops) . . . In this ordering and in that succession from the apostles, the tradition in the church and the proclamation of truth still now come forth to us. This fully demonstrates that there there is one and the same life-giving faith, which is still now preserved for us by the apostles in the church and handed down in truth.”

7. For bridal imagery in early Christian literature, see F. Dölger ΙΧΘΥΣ 1:102-10. Some of the tradition of portraying Christ as bridegroom and the church as bride probably goes back to 2 Corinthians: . . . ἡρμουςάμην γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἀνδρὶ παρθένον ἀγνήν παραστήσαι τῷ Χριστῷ. [". . . for I betrothed you to Christ so as to present a pure virgin to her one husband."'] Because it describes a bridal virgin who wears special garb and who symbolizes the church, the following passage from the Shepherd of Hermas 4.2.1-2 (based on the woman described in Rev. 12.1) is of great interest: Μετὰ δὲ τὸ παρελθεῖν με τὸ θηρίον καὶ προελθεῖν ὡσεὶ πόδας λ', ἰδοὺ, ὑπαντᾷ μοι παρθένος κεκοσμημένη ὡς ἐκ νυμφῶνος ἐκπορευομένη, ὅλη ἐν λευκοῖς καὶ ὑποδήμασιν λευκοῖς, κατακεκαλυμμένη ἕως τοῦ μετώπου, ἐν μίτρα δὲ ἦν ἡ κατακάλυψις αὐτῆς· εἶχεν δὲ τὰς τρίχας αὐτῆς λευκάς. »Εἰγων ἐγὼ ἐκ τῶν προτέρων ὄραματάων, ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἐστίν, καὶ ἰλαρότερος ἐγενόμην. . . . [“After passing by the beast and going about thirty feet further, a virgin suddenly appeared to me, adorned as if she were coming from the bridal chamber, all in white and in white sandals, veiled to the forehead and having a turban for a head-dress. She had white hair. I knew from my earlier vision that it was the church, and I was all the more happy. . . .”

For another interpretation of this woman from Revelation, see n. 103 in Appendix 3.

8. Methodius of Olymbrus, Banquet 3.8, 8.5 and the final bridal hymn (11). I quote from Methodius 3.8:

ὅθεν ὁ ἀπόστολος εὐθυβόλος εἰς Χριστὸν ἀνηκόντισε τὰ κατὰ τὸν Ἀδάμ. Οὕτως γὰρ ἂν μάλιστα ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς σαρκὸς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν συμφωνήσει γεγονέναι· ἥς δὴ χάριν καταλείψας τὸν Πατέρα τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, κατήλθεν ὁ Λόγος προσκολληθησόμενος τῇ τυνακί· καὶ ἔπνευσε τὴν ἑκστασιν τοῦ πάθους, ἐκουσίως ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ἀποθανῶν. «Οὕτως αὐτὸς ἐαυτῷ παραστήσει τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν ἐνδοξὸν καὶ ἀμωμον, καθάρισας τῷ λουτρῷ, πρὸς ὑποδοχὴν τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ μακαρίου σπέρματος, ὃ σπείρει μὲν αὐτὸς ὑπηχῶν καὶ καταφυτευὼν ἐν τῷ βάθει τοῦ νοός· ὑποδέχεται δὲ καὶ μορφοῦ δίκην γυναῖκος ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἰς τὸ γεννᾶν τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ ἐκτρέφειν. Ταύτη γὰρ τὸ αὐξάνεσθε καὶ πληθύνεσθε πληροῦται προσηκόντως, εἰς μέγεθος καὶ κάλλος καὶ πλῆθος καθ' ἡμέραν αὐξανομένης αὐτῆς διὰ τὴν σὺνερξιν καὶ κοινωνίαν τοῦ Λόγου, συγκαταβαίνοντος ἡμῖν ἔτι καὶ νῦν καὶ ἐξισταμένου κατὰ τὴν ἀνάμνησιν τοῦ πάθους. Οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλως ἡ Ἐκκλησία συλλαβὴν τοὺς πιστεύοντας καὶ ἀναγεννήσαι διὰ λουτροῦ τῆς παλιγγενεσίας δύναιτο εἶναι μὴ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ὁ Χριστὸς κενώσας ἑαυτὸν ἵνα χορηγήῃ κατὰ τὴν ἀνακεφαλοῖωσιν, ὡς εἶπεν, τοῦ πάθους, πάλιν ἀποθάνη καταβάς ἐξ οὐρανῶν καὶ προσκολληθεῖς τῇ ἑαυτοῦ γυναικὶ τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ παράσχοι τῆς πλευρᾶς ἀφαιρεῖσθαι τῆς ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν τινα, ὅπως αὐξήθωσιν οἱ ἐν αὐτῷ οἰκοδομηθέντες ἅπαντες οἱ γεγεννημένοι

διὰ τοῦ λουτροῦ ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων καὶ ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς, τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς ἀγι-
ωσύνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῆς δόξης προσειληφότες.

“Wherefore the apostle related Adam directly to Christ. For in this regard we agree that the Church was born from his bones and his flesh. On account of her, the Logos left his father in the heavens and came down to join to his wife. And sleeping in the trance of his suffering, he willingly died on her behalf. On this account, he presented the Church to himself as glorious and blameless, purifying her with the baptismal washing so that he would be the receptacle of the noetic and blessed seed, which he sows while echoing and planting it in the depths of her mind. It is received, and the Church transforms the custom of a woman into the giving of birth and the nourishing of virtue. For the (command) ‘go forth and multiply’ (Gen. 1.28) is suitably fulfilled for her, so that she increases in size, in number, and in beauty every day through union and communion with the Logos, which still now comes down to us and transforms us through the memorial of his suffering. For not otherwise could the Church conceive the faithful and give birth again through the rebirth of baptismal washing (Titus 3.5), unless Christ emptied himself on their behalf, in order that he might be contained by them through the recapitulation of his suffering (as I said). After coming down from the heavens, he dies again. And joined to his wife, the Church, he offers the power of his side for removal so that all those built up in him might increase and be born through baptismal washing from his bones and flesh—that is, receiving it from his holiness and from his glory.”

Here it is significant to note that this passage is also directly related to fishing. Along with ἀρπάζω, ἀλιεύω, and θηρεύω—συλλαμβάνω is a word commonly applied to catching fish (e.g. Aelian, NA 1.2; Dio Chrysostom, Or. 5.3; and Origen Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew 13.10; idem, Homily on Jeremiah 16.285). In addition, in order to refer to the open sea—that is, the deep—Greeks use the word βάθος. Both of these words are used in this passage and thus the motifs of water and of fish-catching also stand in the background of the meaning intended by Methodius. Furthermore, the conceiving of Christians implies catching/converting them, as one catches fish.

The concluding hymn of the Banquet is a paean of the marriage and union of the virgin Church with her bridegroom, Christ. Once again the use of erotic imagery is an important part of its symbolism. I will quote a few passages: (7) Ἦνοιγμέναις θύραις, ανασσα/ φαιδρόκοσμε, δέδεξο θαλάμων εἰσὼ χ' ἡμᾶς/ ἀχραντόσωμε, καλλίνικιε νύμφα, καλλίπνου/ ὁμόστολοι παρήμεθα Χριστῷ, πανόλβια/ μέλπουσαι σὸν γάμον, θαλός; (20) «Ὑμνοῖς, μάκαιρα νεόνυμφε, θαλαμηπόλοι/ αἱ σαὶ γεραίρομεν σὲ νῦν, αἰθικτε παρθένε/ Ἐκκλησία χιονόσωμε, κυανοβόστρυχε/ σάφρον, αμωομ' ἔρασμα; and the choral refrain: Ἄγνεῦ σοι καὶ λαμπάδας φαεσφόρους/ κρατοῦσα, νυμφιε, ὑπαντάνω σοι: “With open gates, Oh brilliantly adorned queen, receive us inside your wedding chamber— Oh spotless, beautifully conquering, and beautifully breathing queen. We who are enrobed in the same way are present with Christ and with complete joy celebrate your marriage, Oh sapling” (11.7); “Oh blessed

bride, with hymns we chamber maids honor you now, Oh untouched virgin, Oh white-bodied Church, ebony-tressed, modest, blameless, beloved one" (11.20); "I keep myself chaste for you and I meet you, Oh bridegroom, as I hold radiant torches" (= choral refrain).

CHAPTER 4

FISH SYMBOLISM IN EARLY CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY¹

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I investigate fish symbolism in early Christian iconography, including paintings, sarcophagi, reliefs, mosaics, gemstones, inscriptions, and various other media. As was the case for texts under consideration in the previous chapter, geographically these materials were produced throughout the extent of the Mediterranean basin area, and chronologically they date from the end of the second century C.E. to the beginning of the seventh century C.E. In addition, I am examining at least three different functional contexts—namely, funerary settings, churches, and personal accoutrements (e.g. jewelry).² As in Chapter 2, through an examination of the interplay of pagan and Christian referents and associations, I generally explore the complexity of fish symbolism as an overarching theme.

In the analysis of archaeological materials, two problems occur that are generally more difficult to resolve than in texts. First, while the dating of most relevant literary materials (pagan and Christian) that pertain to fish symbolism is in large part reasonably secure, the precise dating of archaeological objects can often be rather difficult. Fortunately, in the area of dating early Christian archaeological materials, especially catacomb paintings and sarcophagi, scholarship has made much progress within the last thirty years, in part due to technical advances made in the

1. For general bibliography on early Christian art/archaeology and visual symbols, see Endnote 1. For general bibliography on Graeco-Roman art and visual symbols, see Endnote 2.

area of photogrammetry and in the chemistry of both paint and stone, as well as in the capacity to identify workshop styles of sarcophagi.³ Furthermore, materials from churches are generally somewhat easier to date, since they often possess identifying inscriptions, can be corroborated by literary evidence, or are situated in a context that allows them to be dated on exclusively archaeological grounds.

Despite this, one should continually keep in mind that the ability to date funerary evidence (while improved) is tentative and can be easily revised (often jumping from fifty to one-hundred years). The dating of inscriptions and gemstones remains especially difficult and subject to change.⁴

Thus, while improved methods allow for greater certainty than before, one must always take into account the possibility of revisions in interpretation.

2. For an explanation of such geographical, chronological, and functional pp. 1-11 in Chapter 1.

3. For photogrammetry, see the references listed in Endnote 1. For sarcophagus workshops, as well as other kinds of workshops, see pp. 9-10 and nn. 223-224 in Chapter 1. For up-to-date scientific study of marble in the Graeco-Roman world, see J. C. Fant (ed.), Ancient Marble Quarrying and Trade; and idem, Cavum Antrum Phrygiae. On the chemistry of catacomb paint, see J. Deckers, Die Katakombe "Santi Marcellino e Pietro", 21ff.

4. On the problems of dating ancient inscriptions, see my very brief comments in "Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin," 674-75.

Second, it is not always possible to identify with certainty the religious affiliation of a particular item. As observed in Chapter 2, the presence of fish imagery is not itself an indication of Christianity, since fish and fishermen were depicted on pagan monuments as well.⁵ Identification is particularly difficult on objects—especially sarcophagi and inscriptions—whose original context (location) is unknown, which do not (in the case of sarcophagi) have a clearly identifiable accompanying inscription, or which do not possess iconography that is particularly associated with early Christian monuments (the Jonah story, the miracle of the rock, New Testament miracles, etc.).⁶ Furthermore, many inscriptions do not allow for certain determination of religious affiliation, since different groups can often use similar language.⁷ As in dating, in instances such as these, one must accept the possibility that an initial identification might later need to be altered.

In many cases, the best proof may be based on the location of an item in a clearly identifiable Christian context, such as a Christian

5. See pp. 518-39 and 614-39 below.

6. In this regard, one should also note that shepherds carrying sheep on their shoulders (chriophori) are found sometimes on pagan objects, especially sarcophagi—thus making them problematic for the identification of a Christian object. I should note, however, that chriophori are more frequently found on Christian than on pagan sarcophagi from the Graeco-Roman period. For example, a quick glance through the sarcophagi in F. Deichmann, Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage, reveals the huge numbers of chriophori found on early Christian sarcophagi; this is not the case in corpora of pagan sarcophagi. As a result, even though the early Christian use of chriophori is borrowed from the Graeco-Roman world, a sarcophagus with a chriophorus is more likely to have been Christian than pagan.

7. As in the case of the chriophorus, however, it is more probable that ancient Christians rather than pagans used certain words and expressions; e.g. see pp. 621-22 below.

cemetery/catacomb or church. While many researchers speak of the intrusion of pagan objects into Christian contexts—especially catacombs—it is generally best to follow the principle that an item found in a clearly Christian context should be regarded as Christian until definitively proven otherwise. For instance, just because D(iis) M(ani-bus) (the pagan invocation to ancestral underworld divinities) is found on a funerary inscription or just because pagan deities are depicted in iconography, does not indicate pagan origin. There is plenty of evidence that early Christians were quite willing to use pagan formulae on inscriptions and to depict pagan deities.⁸

In general, the chapter is divided into the following three topics: 1) fish symbolism in meal scenes; 2) the depiction of fish as isolated objects outside of apparently organized scenes; and 3) fishing symbolism in both realistic and fantastic forms. The first section on fish in meal iconography contains the most detailed and lengthy analysis. In part, this culinary material lends itself to a thorough investigation, because of the richness of its details and because of the availability of pagan iconographic evidence that is suitable for comparison. In addition, it serves as a useful companion study to the studies of fish as food throughout Chapter 3,

8. For instance on the use of D(iis) M(anibus) on early Christian Latin inscriptions, see F. Becker, Die heidnische Weiheformel D M; G. C. Greeven, Die Siegel D M; and H. Nordberg, “Éléments païens.” On pagan deities in ancient Christian iconography, see for a start K. Weitzmann, “The Survival of Mythological Representations in Early Christian and Byzantine Art.” Two interesting examples are the following: the fourth century C.E. Christian mosaic pavement from Hinton St. Mary in Northern Dorset in England that depicts Bellerophon slaying the Chimaera (e.g. J. M. C. Toynbee, “A New Roman mosaic pavement Found in Dorset”; and idem, The Christian Roman mosaic: Hinton St. Mary Dorset); also the the paintings of Hercules in the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome (e.g. A. Ferrua, Le pitture della nuova catacomba di Via Latina).

since it involves a comparably detailed investigation and since it deals with the same subject of fish symbolism from a different point of view—one that is iconographic as opposed to one that is textual.

FISH SYMBOLISM IN MEAL SCENES⁹

General description of the evidence

In early Christian iconography (primarily in catacomb paintings and on sarcophagi),¹⁰ images of fish are found very frequently in meal scenes,¹¹

9. When seeking the bibliography, date, detailed description, and/or plate for each item discussed, one should consult the charts and plates in Appendix 5. For meal iconography Chart 1 is by far the most pertinent. Therefore, all references in this section are to Chart 1 unless otherwise indicated. For convenience, I try to give the date of a particular item in the text of the chapter itself, at least for the first time that it is introduced in a significant way. The following abbreviations are used in that chart, as well as in notes of the chapter itself: de Bruyne = L. de Bruyne, "La peinture cémétériale constantinienne"; Deckers = J. Deckers, Die Katakombe "Santi Marcellino e Pietro": Repertorium der Malereien; Döl. = F. Dolger, IXΘΥΣ; Engemann="Fisch, Fischer, Fischfang"; Gar. = R. Garrucci, Storia dell'arte cristiana; Gerke = F. Gerke, Die christlichen Sarkophage der vorkonstantinischen Zeit; Him. = N. Himmelman, Typologische Untersuchungen an römischen Sarkophagreliefs; Jast. = E. Jastrzebowska, "Les scènes de banquet dans les peintures et sculptures chrétiennes des III^e and IV^e siècles"; Koch = G. Koch, Die mythologischen Sarkophage: Meleager; Matz = F. Matz, Die dionysischen Sarkophage; Nestori = A. Nestori, Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane; Rep. = Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage (Rom und Ostia), ed. by F. W. Deichmann, et al.; Testini = P. Testini, Le catacombe e gli antichi cimiteri cristiani in Roma; Wehrhahn-Stauch = L. Wehrhahn-Stauch, "Christliche Fischsymbolik von den Anfängen bis zum hohen Mittelalter"; Wpp = J. Wilpert, Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms (pls.); and WPs = J. Wilpert, I sarcophagi cristiani antichi (pls.). Note that in the paintings from the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, I use the abbreviation "Deckers/Nestori," since their numeration systems coincide. The bibliographic listings for a particular picture are not comprehensive, but refer to the most basic works in the bibliography; for full bibliography consult the references given. In general my numeration system follows that of Jast. for paintings. For sarcophagi, I usually proceed in the following order: Rep., Him., Jast., Döl., Gerke, Wpp/WPs, Wehrhahn-Stauch, and Engemann. All meal iconography in paintings and sarcophagi belong to the sigma couch variety, unless the kline couch variety is specifically indicated.

10. In this chapter, following previous scholarship, I accept as Christian all paintings found in the Christian Roman catacombs. The paintings in the hypogeum of Vibia (Jast. 25-26) may well be syncretistic, belonging to a group or (even more likely) to a family that was partly Christian and partly pagan; for full bibliography, see the references listed in Jast. As for sarcophagi, I do not follow traditional scholarship that identifies as Christian only those sarcophagi that possess clearly identifiable

in which several seated or recumbent persons on semi-circular couches wait to eat them.¹² In general, a single large, long, and undivided fish is placed on one or more oval platters. In all the relevant paintings of CatPM and in some sarcophagi, these platters rest on round three-legged tables (with their feet often in the shape of lion paws),¹³ while in all other

Christian elements in their iconography (e.g. orants, baptism of Christ, Jonah, etc). Instead, I include under the category of “Christian” all sarcophagi found in unquestionably Christian contexts (chiefly catacombs in Rome) on the principle that items found there are to be considered Christian until proven otherwise. While it is true that pagan items were reused by early Christians and that they were also sometimes placed in the catacombs by individuals from the middle ages to modernity, it is more likely than not that they were used by early Christians.

The real motivation for excluding these sarcophagi is the assumption that neutral or apparently pagan iconography was only rarely used by Christians. There is, however, no proof for that. By excluding them, one proves one’s own assumption. For example, on funerary inscriptions it is well-known that early Christians and Jews used the pagan invocation to ancestral divinities D(iis) M(anibus), but many scholars try to bypass this evidence, because it contradicts their notions of ancient Judaism and early Christianity. But, as I argue in my article “Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin” (683, 699-700), this is unacceptable. The same applies here.

On the other hand, I have placed sarcophagi whose original context is not known under the category of “pagan,” unless there is clear indication of explicitly Christian iconography.

11. The following abbreviations for various catacombs should be noted: CSac = Chapel of the Sacraments in the catacomb of Callixtus in Rome; CapGrec = Capella Greca in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome; CatPM = Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus in Rome. The following abbreviations for museums should be noted: MusPC = Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican Museums (formerly in the Lateran, that is ex Laterense) in Vatican City; and MusNazRom = Museo Nazionale Romano (otherwise known as Museo delle Terme) in Rome.

12. See the materials collected in Chart 1 in Appendix 5 and discussed in the remainder of this chapter. For some photocopies of the materials, see the plates at the end of Appendix 5. Not every meal scene in Chart 1 contains fish as part of the menu. But, as will become clear, in order to understand the function of fish in Graeco-Roman meal scenes, it is necessary to have a detailed understanding of meals both with and without fish.

13. In CatPM, all fish platters are displayed on tables: Jast. 9, 10, 11,

paintings and in many sarcophagi, they rest directly on the ground (sometimes with a mat or cloth in between) or on the cushioned bolster in front of the couch (once).¹⁴ Occasionally, two fish are represented side by side on the same platter.¹⁵ At times, on sarcophagi servants are depicted as bearing platters of fish toward the meal gathering,¹⁶ as also in the hypogeum of Vibia.¹⁷ In addition, some sarcophagi indicate that fish were cooked in rock ovens.¹⁸ In general, fish are not as frequently found in early Christian sarcophagi as they are in early Christian paintings.¹⁹

In these meal scenes, one finds essentially two separate iconographic traditions: *sigma* and *kline*. Since many scholars have isolated fish imagery from its context by ignoring its relation to these traditions, I believe it is important here to outline them. In so doing, I hope to be able

14, 15, 16, 17. On early Christian sarcophagi, see the following for fish platters on tables: Rep. 151; Him. 29, 34, 41, 52.

14. Fish platters appear to be laying on the ground in the following scenes: (a) Paintings—CSac (Jast. 1-4), CapGrec (Jast. 5), Coemeterium Maius (Jast. 7), the catacomb of the Giordani (Jast. 8), the hypogeum of Vibia (Jast. 25); and (b) sarcophagi—Rep. 150, 557; Him. 52, 9 (?), 15-16, 33, 37, 44, 51. In the case of one painting in the Coemeterium Maius, fish platters appear to be lying on the bolster itself: Jast. 6.

15. Paintings: Jast. 3, 5; sarcophagi: Him. 16.

16. Rep. 150; Him. 31, 33.

17. Jast. 25.

18. See n. 51 below for list of relevant sarcophagi. The presence of rock ovens also suggests an outdoor setting. For more on the iconographic evidence for the indoor or outdoor location of these meals, see pp. 539-44 below.

19. See the statistical discussion on pp. 536-38 below.

explain the context of fish symbolism and therefore to shed new light on its network of meanings.²⁰

In early Christian iconography, most frequent and important is the depiction of several diners (some of whom are drinking in glasses) usually seated or sometimes recumbent (or partially recumbent) on semi-circular couches,²¹ known as the sigma or possibly stibadium (στιβάδειον),²² presumably so named in the former instance on account of the lunate form of the Gk. letter “sigma” in Graeco-Roman times.²³ This lunate couch would probably have been made comfortable by blankets, fabrics, and/or mattresses.²⁴ From a remark in Martial, one can guess that some sigma couches were made of wood, which was gilded with various items, such as tortoise shells.²⁵ It also seems possible that some sigma couches were

20. I am not here investigating the following features of this iconography: indications of an outdoor setting, poses of the diners, and inscriptions. I am saving these for discussion on pp. 539ff. below, when I try to ascertain the actual function of the banquets depicted.

21. The history of preferences for sitting and reclining at meals in the Greek and Roman worlds is very complex and fluctuates depending on chronological period, region, desire to emphasize authority (in which case, sitting on a throne-like chair was often featured), or specific practical needs. For an introduction to this problem, see T. Klauser, Die Cathedra, 2-12. From the iconographic evidence in Chart 1, it would seem that in the Roman imperial period and throughout late antiquity, individuals could both sit and recline on semi-circular couches while eating.

22. For discussion of these lunate couches, see “Sigma” (G. Rodenwaldt) in PW, ser. 2, 2:2323-24; “Στιβάδειον” (Poland) in PW, ser. 2, 3:2481; and P. Girard, “Lectus,” 1021-22. The relevant ancient literary references are: Martial, Ep. 10.48.6, 14.87.2; S.H.A., Elagab. 25; Pliny, Ep. 5.6.36; Servius, Com. on Virgil’s Aen. 1.698; Sidonius Apollinarius, Ep. 1.11, 2.2.

23. So Martial himself says when he refers to the sigma couch as “lunate” (lunata) in Ep. 14.87.2.

24. For the covering of beds and couches in antiquity, see P. Girard,

composed of pillows, cushions, and blankets, placed directly on the ground and having no substructure.²⁶ Usually the diners are male, but in several paintings and in one sarcophagus there also examples of females.²⁷ In two of the paintings, young male children are found and, in one of those, an adult male has his arm around a child.²⁸ In front of the couch are typically found thick soft “bolsters” (pulvini),²⁹ which were generally used for resting one’s arms or placing one’s food.³⁰ In front of

“Lectus” and E. Saglio, “Pulvinus.”

25. Martial, Ep. 14.87.2, in which he says that his sigma was “inlaid with tortoise shells” (scriptum testudine). It is also known from other literary evidence that kline couches were often gilded with gold, silver, ivory, and tortoise shells. See P. Girard, “Lectus,” 1021 and n. 23 (with references).

26. As in S.H.A., Elagab. 25.

27. CatPM, Jast. 15 (second from the right) and Jast. 20 (figure at left). Both Engemann (“Der Ehrenplatz,” 246) and Deckers (268) reject the identification of a woman in the middle position of the sigma couch in Jast. 14 (also in CatPM). See also Jast. 5 in CapGrec (third from right) and Jast 6 in Coemeterium Maius (far left, third from left, and second from right). Numbers of males and females may have significance for the kind of meals depicted and for the interpretation of fish symbolism; see pp. 552-53 below. All examples are early Christian. In one pagan sarcophagus, one does find a male head on a female body: Him. 20. It seems likely that the female head was removed in favor of the male head, possibly because someone found the iconography too strange; it is not certain whether this took place in antiquity or at a later time. In Him. 22 (pagan), it is possible that the figure at the left end of the sigma couch is female.

28. Jast. 11; Jast. 14.

29. Only in one case are diners reclining on the cushioned bolster itself: Jast. 12 in CatPM. For a discussion of these bolsters, see E. Saglio, “Pulvinus.”

30. See E. Saglio, “Pulvinus.”

these bolsters, food items (primarily fish, bread, boar, and fowl) are ordinarily situated on platters on the ground or on tables,³¹ while bread loaves are frequently shown in bread baskets (which are also often put at the sides of the couch).³²

Further to the side in virtually all sarcophagi are exhibited servants both standing and/or walking in the direction of the meal. These servants are often occupied with keeping a rock oven fired up, retrieving bread, and bringing food or drink to the diners.³³ They are almost always male, but there is one example of a female.³⁴

In paintings of the CatPM, servants or family members acting in the role of servants are positioned in one of two ways.³⁵ First, they are shown upright at the side of the sigma couch or more or less in front of it, as they are in the process of bearing cups or jugs of wine to the diners.³⁶ Or second, they are portrayed as seated in chairs (cathedrae) similar to ones still found in the Roman catacombs.³⁷ In absolute contrast

31. Usually the tables have no tablecloth, but occasionally they do: Jast. 9, 10, 19.

32. For more details on bread baskets, see n. 73 in this chapter, as well as pp. 532-35 and 551-52.

33. As for example in Rep. 557.

34. Jast. 6.

35. For the possible identification of these as family members, see p. 553 below.

36. Jast. 9, 10, 12, 15-17, 19-20, 25.

37. Jast. 11, 14, 17. The seating of a female on a chair beside a couch is found as early as the seventh century B.C.E. in the Assyrian relief from Kujundschik. See P. Jacobstahl, "Göttinger Vasen," 35; cited in T. Klauser, Die Cathedra, 4, n. 13. In this case, the seated female is a queen. For more on cathedrae, see T. Klauser, Die Cathedra (1927).

to their sarcophagi, early Christians therefore depict all servants in their paintings as either female adults or male youths.

In contrast both to sarcophagi and CatPM paintings, early Christian paintings in CSac and CapGrec do not have servants at all, but simply display diners on sigma couches.

The number of diners is also of significance. In four paintings in CSac,³⁸ in one in CapGrec,³⁹ and in two others in the Coemeterium Maius,⁴⁰ seven diners are positioned on the sigma couch. Despite the tradition of the proverbial number of seven diners to a couch there is, however, ample evidence that this was not always literally followed. Thus, the number of diners in the paintings of CatPM is variable (always five or less),⁴¹ as is the case throughout meal scenes on early Christian sarcophagi (numbering anywhere from two to seven). In addition, although Martial once refers to his sigma couch as holding seven diners, he refers at another time to a particular sigma couch as holding eight diners.⁴²

Within the category of sigma couch meals falls a sub-category that includes banquets associated with mythological figures and events. Here

Since publication of this book, there have been more examples found in North Africa and in Italy (including the Roman catacombs) which may be located in a variety of scattered publications.

38. Jast. 1-4.

39. Jast. 5.

40. Jast. 6-7.

41. Jast. 9-21.

42. See Epig. 10.48.6 and 14.87.2 respectively.

I would note two different mythological traditions.⁴³ These two traditions comprise the vast bulk of mythological sigma couch meals. First, there is the meal after the Calydonian boar hunt of Meleager, which includes in its iconography Meleager, Atalanta, the Dioscouri, Oineus, male servants, as well as the preparation of the boar for eating.⁴⁴ In addition to drinking wine, the diners naturally feast on the boar.⁴⁵ Second, there is the iconography depicting the festive parties of Dionysus and his retinue of maenads, satyrs, and sileni. Sometimes it also apparently refers to the banquet celebrating the marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne. As might be expected, the reliefs show the diners drinking wine and eating nothing. Sometimes the preparation of wine is depicted.⁴⁶

Comparison of pagan and Christian meal iconography with fish

In general, except for the greater number of occurrences of images of fish,⁴⁷ early Christian sigma couch meal iconography on sarcophagi follows the model of pagan sigma meal iconography on sarcophagi (with the exception of sarcophagi that involve mythological scenes):⁴⁸ both

43. I refer to those sigma banquets catalogued by Koch and Matz. For discussion of the Meleager iconography, see Section I.H in Chart 1.

44. For full discussion of the myth of Meleager, see “Meleagros” in Roscher.

45. For a general description of this iconography, see Jast., p. 55.

46. For a general description of this iconography, see Jast., p. 58.

47. See pp. 536-38 below for occurrences of fish.

48. For pagan sigma couch meal iconography on sarcophagi, see Section I.F-H in Chart 1.

types frequently feature bread loaves and wine as part of the menu,⁴⁹ as well as fish and occasionally boar;⁵⁰ both consistently depict at the meal variable numbers of diners seated or recumbent, or also semi-recumbent, on semi-circular sigma couches; both indicate the thick “bolsters” (pulvini) in front of the sigma couch; both show servants bringing the diners bread loaves, fish, and wine; both show servants stoking with wood the fire in a rock oven for the preparation of fish and meat;⁵¹ and both show the three-legged tables where platters of fish, bread, and boar heads lie.⁵²

The difference between mythological sigma couch sarcophagi (almost all pagan) and non-mythological sigma couch sarcophagi (both pagan and Christian) consists in the special iconographies associated with particular mythological traditions. In general, this means that the menus (except for wine) are different;⁵³ fish are never consumed and bread is only rarely eaten.⁵⁴ At the same time, the identity of the diners in mythological sigma couch meals is clear. In other words, non-mythological and myth-

49. Bread: Christian—Rep. 150-151, 298, 557, 591, 778, 793, 890, 893, 942; Him. 3, 9, 11, 16, 31, 33-34, 37, 41, 44, 51-52; Pagan—Him. 1, 4, 6, 12, 14, 19, 22-23, 25-26, 28, 39-40, 50, 53, 56. Instances with wine are too frequent to mention.

50. For fish on sarcophagi, see pp. 536-38 below. Boar: Christian—Rep. 298; Him. 33, 45; Pagan—Him. 1, 14, 26.

51. Christian: Rep. 557 (for fish), 794, 885, 942; Him. 34 (for fish), 37 (for fish). Pagan: Him. 6 (for fish?), 12, 14 (for boar), 22 (for fish), 25, 39 (for meat), 42, 47.

52. Christian: Rep. 151; Him. 29, 33-34, 41, 45; Jast. 6. Pagan: Him. 10, 20, 23, 38-40, 49, 55.

53. In the banquets of Meleager, boar is naturally eaten and wine drunk. In the banquets of Dionysus wine is ingested, but no food.

ological sigma couch meal iconographies are very similar: bolster in front of sigma couch; several diners; presence of wine; rock ovens; and servants bringing food and wine.

Since there is not a great quantity of pagan sigma couch meal iconography in paintings, it is difficult to make a completely trustworthy comparison.⁵⁵ But one can see that, unlike early Christian sigma meal paintings, there are no fish represented in them and that the individuals depicted (when recognizable) are all male.⁵⁶ On the other hand, there are clear similarities: bolsters (pulvini) are placed in front of the sigma couches;⁵⁷ tables are often placed in front of the diners;⁵⁸ food sits in front of them;⁵⁹ they drink wine;⁶⁰ and servants bring them food and wine.⁶¹

Second, in addition to sigma couch meals, a second type of meal ico-

54. For example in Meleager sarcophagi, bread is only eaten in Koch 138.

55. I would exclude from this comparison the painting in the attic of the tomb of Clodius Hermes (Jast. 24) and two paintings in the catacomb of Vibia (Jast. 25-26), since it is not clear whether they are Christian, pagan, or syncretistic.

56. The pagan paintings are: Jast. 22-23, 27-32. For more discussion of the occurrence, or lack of occurrence of fish, see pp. 536-38 below. For discussion of the possible significance of the inclusion of females, see pp. 552-53 below.

57. Jast. 27-28.

58. Jast. 22, 29, 31-32.

59. Jast. 22, 30, 32.

60. Jast. 22-23, 27, 29-32.

nography that often included images of fish was important in the Graeco-Roman period—banquets where the deceased ate on a kline. There are very few examples of kline meals in early Christian paintings or sarcophagi.⁶² Generally, one or two diners recline on a straight bed or couch (κλίνη, lectus), which are made comfortable by separate pillows or cushions, (presumably composed of various kinds of stuffings, such as straw, hay, wool, and bird feathers), blankets, fabrics, and mattresses.⁶³ Many of these klinae were extremely elaborate and luxurious structures, often made of wood, which was gilded or inlaid with gold, silver, ivory, and tortoise shells.⁶⁴ Unlike the sigma couch, there are not more than two diners present, and they never sit, but always recline. In many of the sarcophagi, it is clear that the two diners refer to a marital pair.⁶⁵ In addition, the diners do not lean on a “bolster” (pulvinus) situated in front, but rather rest on pillows or cushions (culcita) placed on the kline itself. From our knowledge of ancient burial practices, it is apparent that these

61. Jast. 22, 27, 28 (?), 29, 31-32.

62. There are two paintings in the CatPM and one in the hypogeum of the Flavii in the catacomb of Domitilla. There are six early Christian sarcophagi: Rep. 119, 680, 806; Him. 13, 21, 26. For this material, see Section II.A-C in Chart 1.

63. On these materials, see P. Girard, “Lectus” and E. Saglio “Pulvinus.”

64. See P. Girard, “Lectus,” as well as n. 25 above.

65. Pagan: Him. 4, 6-7, 10-11a, 14, 16, 24, 29-30. Christian: Him.-21.

klinae were references to the biers on which the deceased lay.⁶⁶

Beside wine (which was popular in sigma couch meals as well),⁶⁷ one finds a great number of festive items in kline meals, such as flower baskets, garlands framing the scene, musicians of various instruments (lyre, cithara, and pandurium), and winged erotes.⁶⁸ None of these occur in sigma couch meal iconography (paintings and sarcophagi), except for the framing garlands which appear on a regular basis only in mythological sarcophagi.⁶⁹ In general, there are many more females depicted in kline meal iconography than in sigma couch meal iconography, including female diners (usually spouses),⁷⁰ servants,⁷¹ and musicians.⁷²

In terms of the menu, the only recognizable meat is fish, and the occurrences of bread loaves in kline meals on sarcophagi are much less frequent than in non-mythological sigma couch meal iconography on sarcophagi and in paintings from all the catacombs except CatPM.⁷³ In the

66. See P. Girard, "Lectus."

67. Both in cups in the hands of the diners, as well as in cups or pitchers held by servants.

68. As in the cases of Him. 1, 3, 10, 19.

69. The only exception on non-mythological sarcophagi is an early fourth century sarcophagus from Sesto Fiorentino: Him. 38.

70. Him. 2, 13.

71. Rep. 119, 806; Him. 1, 3, 8, 10, 20, 22, 25-26, 28, 30, 32, 42.

72. Him. 1-5, 7-8, 10, 12, 15-19, 23, 37, 41-42.

73. In non-mythological sigma meal sarcophagi (both pagan and Christian), thirty-eight out of a total of fifty-seven sarcophagi have bread loaves (67%); while four out of forty-four kline meal sarcophagi

latter instance, the percentages are closer to the kline banquet material.⁷⁴ Probably the comparison between sarcophagi is most significant, since there is a sufficient quantity of materials from which to draw conclusions.

Early Christian sigma meal iconography is found as early as c. 230-240 C.E., while non-mythological pagan sigma banquet scenes date as early as the first century C.E.. Pagan mythological banquets with sigma couches date generally from the second century C.E. In contrast, the origins of kline meal iconography extend at least as far back as the seventh century B.C.E. among the archaic Greeks and the early Etruscans. From them the early Romans took up this iconography, and it continued in late antiquity,⁷⁵ although its popularity seems to have diminished vis-à-vis sigma meal iconography.⁷⁶ From the evidence of Servius in his commentary on Vergil's Aeneid, the dates of both sigma and kline meal iconographies would seem more or less to conform to chronological developments in Roman dining practices: "the ancients did not have sigma couches, but feasted on three beds that were spread out flat,"⁷⁷ in other words a triclinium (as in three klinae=tria/ clinia). The

have bread loaves (9%). On the other hand, only one out of twelve Meleager sarcophagi with sigma couch meals has bread loaves (8%). In early Christian paintings with sigma couch meals (except CatPM) seven out of eight have bread loaves (88%)

74. Only one out of thirteen has bread loaves (8%).

75. For general discussion of the history of the kline, see P. Girard, "Lectus." For bibliography on banquet iconography prior to the Roman imperial period (ancient Greeks, Etruscans, and Romans in the Republic), see the references listed in Jast., 8, n. 7 (through 1979).

76. This clearly reflects a change in dining practices; whether or not it has anything with changing views of death and afterlife is uncertain. It

beds mentioned in reference to the “ancients” clearly refer to klinae. In contrast, Servius clearly regards the lunate couch as a late development. Further support for this is suggested by the word “sigma” itself, since the use of the lunate Greek “sigma” occurred not prior to the hellenistic period and became particularly popular in the Roman period.⁷⁸

Thus, most of early Christian meal iconography refers to dining furniture, whose origins were relatively recent.⁷⁹

As I have been noting, early Christian meal iconography displays food and drink items that accompany fish. Most prominent of food items are loaves of bread. In paintings, the loaves are generally placed in great numbers in several large baskets (generally seven or eight),⁸⁰ and they are shaped as small elongated forms (if visible) in CSac,⁸¹ catacomb of the Giordani,⁸² the so-called Fractio Panis in CapGrec,⁸³ and Coemeterium

may also help to explain the popularity of fish (see p. 579 below).

77. 1.698: “Antiqui stibadia non habebant, sed stratis tribus lectis epulabantur.”

78. It developed this way from cursive script. For general introduction to Greek letter forms on inscriptions, see G. Klaffenbach, Griechische Epigraphik, 41-43 (with relevant bibliography).

79. This may well have implications for the type of meal depicted; see pp. 539-66 and 579 below.

80. On the number of baskets, see pp. 551-52 below.

81. Jast. 2-4, 230-250 C.E. Jast 1 is the only painting in CSac without numerous baskets.

82. Jast. 8, 250-300 C.E.

83. Jast. 5, dated from 300-325 C.E.

Maius.⁸⁴ In two paintings from CSac and CapGrec,⁸⁵ loaves of bread also rest in a platter, and in one painting from the Coemeterium Maius they sit beside the platters.⁸⁶ Sometimes the fish are placed at the very center between the baskets,⁸⁷ and sometimes the baskets are placed in front of the fish.⁸⁸

In sarcophagi, loaves of bread are usually indicated by two perpendicular lines in the form of a cross.⁸⁹ In cases of this type, a cross with a Christian connotation was not very likely intended, since pagan meal scenes also furnish the same crossed lines.⁹⁰ On the whole, in scenes where fish are featured, individual loaves of bread are placed beside a fish,⁹¹ or around a fish in symmetrical arrangement.⁹² Also frequently depicted are servants carrying loaves of bread.⁹³

In general, on early Christian sarcophagi with images of fish, one finds that loaves of bread are placed beside a fish without any reference to a

84. Jast. 6 (300-325 C.E.), 7 (c. 250 C.E.).

85. Jast. 3 (230-250 C.E.), 5 (300-325 C.E.).

86. Jast. 6. In all three cases, the loaves of bread are found both in and out of baskets.

87. Jast. 4-5.

88. Jast. 2-3, 8.

89. As in a late third century C.E. sarcophagus in the MusNazRom: Rep. 73.

90. See the references in n. 16 in Chapter 3.

91. E.g. Rep. 557 (300-325 C.E.) from the catacomb of Praetextatus.

basket.⁹⁴ Perhaps it is most significant that there are no examples of meal scenes (Christian or pagan) on sarcophagi, in which fish are served as part of the menu and in which only one bread basket is displayed at either side of the meal scene. In fact, only on early Christian and pagan sarcophagi without images of fish, does one often find one basket of bread loaves at the side of a meal scene.⁹⁵ In these cases, a servant is always stationed beside the basket and often is in the process of actually removing one of the loaves from the basket.⁹⁶ In all of the well-preserved scenes of this latter type, several bread loaves are laid out in front of a semi-circular bolster.

While archaeological evidence can admittedly always be skewed due to accidents of preservation, the absence of a bread basket seems to suggest that in meal scenes on sarcophagi where fish are featured in a prominent position, the lone bread basket would have spoiled the visual symmetry. Probably as a result, it was not included. One can therefore surmise that fish were awarded a certain degree of prominence in these iconographic depictions. In fact, in Rep. 150 (discussed above), as if to emphasize the image of a fish at the center, the picture shows a servant

92. E.g. Rep. 151 (280-290 C.E.) in the MusPC.

93. E.g. Rep. 151.

94. As again in Rep. 151.

95. Rep. 778, 793, 942; Him. 11, 55. Rep. 591 and 794 are too fragmentary to determine for certain the presence or absence of fish.

96. Rep. 591, 778, 793; Him. 11.

who not only brings the diners a loaf of bread, but who also apparently brings them two fish.⁹⁷

Furthermore, in the overall arrangement of much of early Christian meal iconography on paintings, fish are usually placed in the center of the picture—an observation which scholars such as Franz Dölger, Josef Engemann, and Elisabeth Jastrzebowska fail to note in their zeal to show that fish are depicted both in pagan and Christian iconography.⁹⁸ For example, in Jast. 11 from the CatPM,⁹⁹ the painter clearly gives the fish central visual importance by situating the four diners sitting on the semi-circular couch in such a way that they surround the table and the fish on it. This is more or less the pattern of all meal scene paintings in the CatPM. Even in pictures where platters of fish are placed on the ground, they are given great emphasis, such as in paintings in the CSac (Jast. 1-3) and in the so-called Fractio Panis of CapGrec (Jast. 5). In the latter instance, a fish platter essentially constitutes the mid-point of a nearly straight line, at either of whose ends are placed baskets. This clearly establishes a fish as one of the central foci of visual attention. In two of the paintings of CSac (Jast. 2 and 3), the baskets are placed in front of the fish so that the diners together with the baskets form a complete ring (circular or semi-

97. A fragment from an early fourth century Christian sarcophagus cover from Ostia provides another example of a sarcophagus in which the carver places the fish in a central position: Him. 52.

98. Döl. 5:329-638; J. Engemann, “Fisch, Fischer, Fischfang,” 1059-64; Jast., passim.

99. As can be seen from the chart, the vast majority of CatPM paintings date from 300-325 C.E.

circular) around a fish platter. As a result, the painter positions a fish platter in the very center of the meal scene, which in this case is an enclosed rounded form (as opposed to a line). Further emphasizing the visual centrality of fish are the diners themselves, many of whom point their arms toward fish platters.¹⁰⁰

To my knowledge, only one early Christian sarcophagus depicts a fish in the context of bread baskets.¹⁰¹ But this example differs from typical sarcophagus iconography, where a large bread basket is placed at the side of the meal scene. In fact, it seems to conform to the iconography of early Christian paintings, where fish are found centrally positioned between baskets of bread. Thus, its placement between baskets again emphasizes visual centrality.

In addition to the visual centrality of fish in early Christian meal scenes that I investigated above, it is also apparent from these scenes that early Christians preferred to depict fish on the menu rather than other kinds of food—again not discussed by Dölger, Engemann, and Jastrzebowska.¹⁰² In all early Christian sigma meal scene paintings, except for one,¹⁰³ where food is visible, a fish is featured as a centerpiece of the menu.¹⁰⁴

100. Jast. 1-2, 4-6, 9, 14-17.

101. Rep. 150 (275-300 C.E.).

102. See n. 9 above for references.

103. Jast. 12 in CatPM. And there may be reason for this; see pp. 565-66 below.

104. Jast. 1-5, (Jast. 6 is unclear, but probable), 7-11, 14-17. Empty of

In contrast, we possess no pagan meal scene paintings with fish served as one of the courses.¹⁰⁵ Thus, at least from an iconographic point of view, painters in Christian contexts apparently viewed fish as more appropriate for inclusion in meal scenes than did painters in pagan contexts.

The breakdown of occurrences of fish in meal scenes in sarcophagi is more complex than in paintings. On sigma (semi-circular) couch meal scenes, one finds a clearer preference for images of fish among early Christians than among pagans (that is, in non-mythological scenes). Out of twenty-two sufficiently well-preserved sarcophagi from the third through fourth centuries that can be identified as early Christian or found in an early Christian context, fifteen have images of fish and seven do not, that is 68% to 32%.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, out of twenty-one sufficiently well-preserved pagan sarcophagi, eight have images of fish and thirteen do not, that is 38% to 62%—the exact reverse percentage of Christian evidence.¹⁰⁷

food is Jast. 19. Too fragmentary are Jast. 13, 18.

105. I do not include the painting from the hypogeum of Vibia, since its religious orientation is unclear: Jast. 25.

106. With fish: Rep. 150-151, 557; and Him. 9, 15-16, 29, 31, 33-34, 37, 41, 44, 51-52. Without fish: Rep. 298 (boar head), 778 (loaves of bread), 793 (loaves of bread), 942 (loaves of bread); Him. 3 (boar head), 11 (bread loaves), 45 (boar head). Too fragmentary to determine: Rep. 591, 794, 885, 890, 893; Jast. 6; Him. 35-36.

107. With fish: Him. 6 (?), 20, 23, 28, 38, 40, 53, 55. Without fish: Him. 1, 4, 10, 12, 14, 25-26, 39, 43, 47, 49, 50, 54. Too fragmentary to determine: Him. 18-19, 42.

In kline couch meal scenes, I do not possess enough early Christian examples to make a precise determination about Christian preferences. But for pagans, the percentage of fish occurrences in kline meal scenes is much higher than in sigma couch meal scenes—in fact, almost the exact opposite. Out of twenty-three sufficiently well-preserved sarcophagi from the second through the fourth centuries C.E. that are pagan, sixteen have images of fish and seven do not, that is 70% to 30%.¹⁰⁸ Plainly, for some reason, pagans represented fish in kline meal sarcophagi at approximately the same rate that Christians represented fish in sigma couch meal iconography. In this regard, I should note in kline iconography that the appearance of images of fish on platters in front of the diners occurred on a regular basis in the Roman imperial period, and not in earlier periods, when kline iconography was also popular.¹⁰⁹ In consequence, it would seem that representations of fish in meals were more popular among Romans at a later date than before.¹¹⁰

108. With fish: Him. 1, 3, 8-11, 15, 19, 20, 22-26, 29-30. Without fish: Him. 2, 7, 14, 16-18, 28. The following are too fragmentary: Him. 4-5, 11A, 31-33, 35-42.

109. For comparative purposes on the relative rarity of fish in older banquet materials, consult the following corpora for a start: S. de Marinis, La tipologia del banchetto nell'arte etrusca arcaica; R. N. Thönges-Stringares, "Das griechische Totenmahl"; B. Fehr, Orientalische und griechische Gelage; and J.-M. Dentzer, Le motif du banquet couché dans le Proche Orient et le monde grec.

110. This would also be suggested by pagan sigma meal iconography. While less than early Christian sigma couch meal iconography, its low rate of fish occurrences (38%) is nonetheless greater than in kline meals prior to the Roman imperial period.

Since early Christians very rarely used kline iconography, it is probably more important to focus on the occurrences of fish in early Christian sigma meal iconography—which is in fact relatively abundant (a total of thirty instances). In this case, it would seem that early Christians transformed pagan iconography by placing much greater emphasis on images of fish. While it is possible that images of fish in sigma couch meal iconography were elements borrowed by early Christians from kline meal iconography, it is striking that this would have been the only element they chose to borrow. For example, there are no traces of framing garlands, flower baskets, erotes, and musicians. Thus, early Christians seem to have intentionally placed greater weight on images of fish than on any other single item in meal scene iconography.

Pagan Aspects of Meal Iconography with Fish

In order to understand fish imagery in early Christian meal iconography more clearly, it is necessary to investigate the type of meal that was being depicted. For this purpose, I initially examine the internal evidence of the iconography itself and then relate it in so far as possible to specific meals that are known from external sources.

Before speculating on possible Christian connotations of particular features in these meals, I wish to examine first those aspects of the meals that are understandable and explainable in a pagan context, or in a general Graeco-Roman cultural context. For the most part, scholars who view these meals as not specifically Christian are in effect divided into two

camps—one that views them as actually taking place in the Graeco-Roman world and another that views them as potentially taking place in paradise after death. In the former category, one can distinguish two sub-categories: those who view these meals as actual banquets of living persons (with perhaps the co-participation of the deceased) that took place near, or inside, a tomb and that were therefore associated in one way or another with the ancient cult of the dead; and those who view them as actual meals that took place at home for normal nourishment purposes.¹¹¹

111. For a summary of some of these views, see Jast., pp. 8-11. At the end of his description of each scene, Deckers lists those scholars who side with one or another of these groups.

For the physical location of these meals, one can look to the frequent presence of certain items that suggest an open-air context.¹¹² In particular, on early Christian sarcophagi, one commonly finds the depiction of trees as framing elements. By the same token, the presence of plants in two meal scene paintings suggests an outdoor setting,¹¹³ as do the depictions of pitchers and bottles lying on the ground in three of the paintings.¹¹⁴ In addition, the recurring use of the parapetasma (“canopy”) on sarcophagi indicates that these meals were held outside where the diners needed protection from wind and rain.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the placement of fish platters and bread loaves directly on the ground in some sarcophagi and in some paintings suggests a setting that was not indoors where tables were generally used for bearing meal items. In this regard, I should note that the kinds of tables depicted (primarily the common three-legged varieties in our iconography) could be employed indoors or outdoors.¹¹⁶ At the same time, rock ovens, which are featured in numerous sarcophagi and one painting, could have only been used out-

112. These items are also present in pagan paintings and sarcophagi.

113. Jast. 9 and 12.

114. Jast. 9, 12, 17.

115. This is found everywhere; see Chart 1. The parapetasma is also found once on a pagan painting: Jast. 31.

116. Most of the early Christian paintings outside of those found in the CatPM exhibit food items directly on the ground, while those in the CatPM have tables.

doors.¹¹⁷ Finally, as opposed to stone benches such as kline couches,¹¹⁸ sigma couches (which were composed of wood, covered by cushions, pillows, and blankets) were probably often portable items that could be taken to various locations.¹¹⁹ They would have been especially appropriate in outdoor settings, where permanent eating structures were much less likely to be built.

At the same time that internal features of the meal scenes themselves often seem to suggest an outdoor context, these scenes in catacomb paintings are in addition often placed near other scenes that are unquestionably in part bucolic (i.e. outdoor) in nature, as in the following instances:¹²⁰ Jonah at rest under the gourd tree;¹²¹ festoons of leaves, flowers, and rose petals;¹²² flower vases, flower cups and/or ornamental flowers;¹²³ birds, including doves and peacocks;¹²⁴ rustic scenes including

117. See n. 51 above for list of sarcophagi with rock ovens.

118. In this regard, it is perhaps significant to note again that early Christians only display kline couches rarely in their meal iconography.

119. As already observed, the passage in S.H.A., Elagab. 25, suggests that air pillows could even be used in place of the wooden sub-structure; see p. 522 above.

120. I have included here all items in the same cubiculum as a meal scene, but have tried to indicate when the items is on the same wall as the meal scene, on the vault of the cubiculum, or on another wall. By the phrase “same wall,” I include all parts of an arcosolium, such as the front, the vault of the arch, and the lunette.

121. Jast. 1 (vault), Jast. 2 (same wall), Jast. 3 (another wall), Jast. 6 (another wall), Jast. 14 (same wall), Jast. 16 (on same wall), and Jast. 17 (on same wall).

122. Jast. 3 (another wall), Jast. 6 (another wall), Jast. 7 (another wall), Jast. 9-10 (on vault, same wall, and other walls), Jast. 11 (same wall),

shepherds (chriophori=good shepherd) and sheep,¹²⁵ as well as horses and gazelles,¹²⁶ and marine settings including fishermen,¹²⁷ boats,¹²⁸ and dolphins.¹²⁹

Likewise, although early Christian meal scenes on sarcophagi do not have the same kinds of ornamental features that paintings have, there are nevertheless a few similar indications of open-air settings in neighboring

Jast. 12 (same wall), Jast. 13 (same wall), Jast. 14 (on other walls), Jast. 15 (on other walls), and Jast. 18 (same wall).

123. Jast. 1 (another wall), Jast. 2 (vault), Jast. 3 (same wall and another wall), Jast. 4 (another wall and same wall), Nestori 2 (another wall), Jast. 6 (vault and another wall), Jast. 9-10 (other walls), Jast. 11 (same wall), Jast. 14 (vault and another wall), and Jast. 18 (another wall).

124. Jast. 1 (birds, peacocks and doves on vault and other walls), Jast. 2 (peacocks and doves on other walls; doves of Jonah on the same wall), Jast. 3 (birds on same wall and another wall), Jast. 4 (bird on another wall and dove on same wall beside green branch), Nestori 2 (birds in flight on vault and doves on another wall), Jast. 7 (birds in flight on vault), Jast. 9-10 (birds in flight on vault), Jast. 11 (birds on same wall and peacocks in the actual meal lunette itself), Jast. 14 (birds on another wall), Jast. 17 (birds in flight on same wall), Jast. 19 (doves on same wall).

125. Jast. 1 (vault w/two shepherds), Nestori 2 (vault and another wall w/sheep and milk), Jast. 6 (sheep on vault and shepherd on another wall), Jast. 14 (shepherd in vault), Jast. 17 (shepherd on same wall), and Jast. 20 (shepherd on same wall).

126. Jast. 6 (horse on another wall) and Jast. 14 (gazelle on vault and two horses on another wall).

127. Jast. 1 (same wall) and Jast. 2 (same wall).

128. Jast. 2 (another wall).

129. Jast. 1 (another wall) and Nestori 2 (another wall).

scenes: Jonah at rest under the gourd tree;¹³⁰ shepherds and sheep;¹³¹ hunting scenes;¹³² and marine settings including sea-centaurs and Nereids,¹³³ as well as fishermen.¹³⁴

In most contexts, the presence of bucolic imagery suggests the likelihood that those who conceived this meal iconography wished to recall in an indoor setting (that is, inside catacombs or tombs where the paintings and sarcophagi were actually placed) the above-ground pleasures that were available, including meals.¹³⁵ In fact, from texts and inscriptions, it is clear that in the Graeco-Roman world both pagans and early Christians often developed the tomb area into a “garden” (hortus, cepotaphium, κήπος, etc.), whose flowers, fruits, and vegetables could apparently be made available for use in funerary banquets.¹³⁶

In regard to bucolic settings, one can compare pagan paintings and sarcophagi, which have many of the same elements as their early Christian counterparts. Particularly illustrative are two pagan paintings from

130. Where it seem to be associated with the meal: Rep. 591 and Rep. 942.

131. Sigma: Rep. 778, Him. 26. Kline: Rep. 793, 806.

132. Sigma: Him. 33. Kline: Rep. 119.

133. Rep. 557.

134. Kline: Rep. 806.

135. Of course, all this also has to do with the creation of the atmosphere of a locus amoenus: see pp. 288-91 above.

136. See for example H. Leclerq, “Cepotaphium” (with references to sources).

the last quarter of the first century C.E., Jast. 31 and Jast. 32. The former exhibits a meal, which takes place near a tree, a fisherman with a fishing rod, a boat, a house in the midst of trees, a cliff, and shepherds with goats. The latter takes place in between two pedestals with large peacocks standing on top of them and a parapetasma in the background.¹³⁷

Since the iconographic evidence points toward an outdoor setting for early Christian meal scenes, the proposal by some scholars that these scenes refer to domestic meals seems unlikely.

In addition, archaeological evidence of the Roman catacombs probably indicates that most grave meals (cult of the dead) took place not in the catacombs themselves, but outdoors under the open sky or indoors in above-ground basilicas.¹³⁸ For there are no permanent dining benches in the catacombs (except for the so-called triclia in the Catacomb of San Sebastiano),¹³⁹ and there is insufficient space in the catacombs themselves for a large enough group of people to dine. Since most of the meal iconography I am examining originates in the Roman catacombs, the relevance of this fact should be clear.¹⁴⁰

137. It is interesting to observe that just as sigma couch meals in meal iconography are set outdoors, Pliny also sets his sigma meal outdoors in a bucolic context with fountains of water: Ep. 5.6.36.

138. On the likelihood of outdoor meals as outlined here, see Jast., pp. 70-71. There does not seem to be any evidence that early Christian meal iconography is depicting indoor meals in above-ground basilicas, although it is known that memorial meals for the dead could take place there; see Paulinus of Nola, Text # II.A.10. I discuss him on pp. 489-92 above, as well as pp. 559-61, 570, 581 below.

139. On the triclia in San Sebastiano, see E. Jastrzebowska, Unter-

In this regard, I should also note that there are some internal clues in the early Christian meal scenes themselves suggesting that they refer to some degree to actual dining events.¹⁴¹ First, in both paintings and in sarcophagi (especially in sigma couch iconography), there are indications that meals were intended to seem realistic. For example, as some of the plates in this dissertation indicate,¹⁴² the diners are often depicted in realistic poses: they do not all look the same—— some bend one elbow and some bend another; some look one way and some look another; some are drinking from glasses and some are not drinking; some are bearded and some are not; their hairstyles are different; etc. There is also the sense of an actual meal taking place, as the diners talk to one another, look at one another, and point at the food (usually fish). In addition, as mentioned above,¹⁴³ the number of diners is variable——indicating the kinds of minor differences that would characterize actual meals.

In this respect, a corollary of the iconographic attempt at realism is found in the CatPM, where there are inscribed in meal scenes painted epigraphic exhortations to the servants (Agape and Irene) to serve the suchungen zum christlichen Totenmahl.

140. That is, providing that these meals refer to an actual meal rather than solely to a potential meal in paradise.

141. In fact, this is also true for pagan meal iconography in paintings and on sarcophagi.

142. See in particular pls. 2-6 below.

143. See pp. 524-25 below

food hot (da calda, porge calda) and to mix the wine (misce).¹⁴⁴ Often, this is requested for an individual (mi) or several of the diners (nobis).¹⁴⁵ The use of misce refers to the need in antiquity (and this is still true in many parts of the Mediterranean) to weaken with water what what would otherwise have been (from the Graeco-Roman point of view) barbarically strong wine.¹⁴⁶ By including these exhortations, the painters give the impression of an actual meal taking place.

Since a domestic meal seems improbable on account of the outdoor contexts of these scenes, it is most plausible from the general cultural point of view of the Graeco-Roman world that these meals at least in part referred to some kind of funerary meal. From what is known of Roman practices,¹⁴⁷ feasts of this kind could have taken place on public holidays

144. Porge: Jast. 14, 16. Da calda: Jast. 17. Misce: Jast. 11-12, 14-17. For discussion of the names of the servants, see pp. 562-66 below.

145. Mi: Jast. 11, 17. Nobis: Jast. 13-14.

146. For example, according to Herodotus, the Argives said that the Spartan king Cleomenes (c. 519-490 B.C.E.) went mad and died by drinking the strong wine of Scythians (Hist. 6.84). This was true throughout antiquity.

147. Since the meal iconography is almost exclusively found in the western area of the Mediterranean, the Roman point of view seems most relevant. There are not many sufficient general discussions of the Roman cult of the dead, but one might find it useful to consult the following: A. M. Schneider, Refrigerium; A. Parrot, Le "refrigerium" dans l'au-delà, 131-71; K. Latte, Römische Religionsgeschichte, 98-103; and T. Klauser, Christlicher Märtyrerkult, heidnischer Heroenkult und spätjüdische Heiligenverehrung. For discussion of the worship of the domestic ancestral deities—Lares and Penates—see D. G. Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion." For general discussion of Greek worship of the dead, see the following: E. Rohde, Psyche; R. Garland, The Greek Way of Death; D. Kurtz and J. Boardman, Greek Burial Customs; and R. N. Thönges-Stringaris, "Das griechische

such as the Parentalia and the Feralia from February 13-22,¹⁴⁸ which were devoted to the veneration of the dead (often in the form of the ancestral divinities known as the manes),¹⁴⁹ or on the birthday of the deceased, or on other days that might be set by will of the deceased or by act of a particular funerary collegium.¹⁵⁰

Of the items served in the menus of such meals, it is clear from the inscriptions of funerary collegia that bread loaves and wine were the basic prerequisites, presumably because they could be inexpensively distributed to large numbers of people and because they were staples of Roman meals.¹⁵¹ And this is certainly confirmed by the evidence of both pagan and early Christian meal iconography.

Totenmahl.” For an interesting description of cult of the dead in modern rural Greece, see L. Danforth, The Death Rituals of Rural Greece.

148. On the Parentalia and Feralia, see “Parentalia” in PW (W. Eiseuhut) and “Feralia” in PW (Samter). For their place in the Roman calendar, see H. H. Scullard, Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic, 74-76. One can find an ancient description of the Feralia in Ovid, Fast. 5.533-70.

149. On the manes in general, see “Manes” in PW (Mahrbach).

150. In general, on the worship of the dead in collegia and the kinds of funerary collegia (religious, domestic, and occupational), see J.-P. Waltzing, Étude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains 1:256-300. It is less likely that the meal after burial (known as the silicernium or περιδειπνόν) was intended, since it appears that this meal took place at home: indicated by Demosthenes in the fourth century B.C.E. (De coron. 288), although it is certainly possible that Romans may have followed a different practice. On this meal in pre-Roman Greece, see R. Garland, Greek Way of Death, 39ff., 119ff.; and “Περιδειπνόν” in PW (F. Pfister). For the Roman version of this feast, see “Silicernium” in PW (Klotz). Even less is known of other Roman funerary feasts, such as those held on the day known as Novemdiale (probably meaning nine days after burial); for a discussion of this day,

In addition to bread and wine, one should observe that funerary collegia distributed sportulae. These could refer to the funds that paid for the meat items—which were served as the main dishes in funerary meals—and/or to the actual meat items themselves.¹⁵² Unfortunately, it is not generally specified what types of meats are intended. It is primarily from the iconography that one can presume that fish was one of the popular items served,¹⁵³ as well as from the general association in the Graeco-Roman world of fish with death.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the presence of rock ovens in many sarcophagi meal scenes shows that the composers of the iconography wished to indicate that fish were cooked therein and afterwords were served to diners.¹⁵⁵

Yet there are a few texts that offer clues for early Christian meals. As early as the late first and early second centuries C.E., Luke 24.41-42 and John 21.9-14 describe a meal with several large fish that takes place after the death and resurrection of Christ—which might in fact therefore constitute a kind of funerary meal (especially in the case of John, where see “Novemdiale Sacrum” in PW (E. Mahrbach).

151. See J.-P. Waltzing, Étude historique, 4:685ff.

152. On sportulae see J.-P. Waltzing, Étude historique 4:687-88; E. Albertini, “Sporta”; and “Sportula” in PW (Hug.).

153. It is known that sardines were served in funerary meals in some pagan banquets, such as that held in Lanuvium by the worshippers of Diana and Antinoos; see pp. 164-65 above. While the large fish depicted in meal iconography (both pagan and early Christian) are clearly not sardines, one can guess that, in a more luxurious banquet, large fish might replace tiny fish like sardines.

154. See pp. 162-70 above.

the consumption of fish is clearly part of a meal including bread).¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, Paulinus of Nola's description of the food in a funerary banquet as coming from "water springs" (fontibus) implies that he is literally citing fish as part of the menu.¹⁵⁷

From what is known of the word sportula,¹⁵⁸ it was also used by the emperor Claudius to refer to a hastily prepared informal meal,¹⁵⁹ apparently in contrast to the kinds of formal meals that were provided by emperors before him.¹⁶⁰ This probably suggests the generally informal nature of funerary feasts, which were not so rigorously designed to emphasize the rank and class of the participants.¹⁶¹ Since sportulae frequently referred to the doles that patrons gave their clients to feed themselves however they chose, it makes sense that funerary sportulae could be flexibly applied to specific menu items. In part, the tremendous popularity of the cult of the dead (along with its funerary feasts) among all types of individuals and groups including early Christians may have re-

155. See n. 51 for a list of meal scenes with rock ovens.

156. See Texts # 1-2 in Section VII in Appendix 2.

157. Text # X.A.3 in Appendix 1. See pp. 559-61, 570, and 581 below for further discussion of the relationship of this passage to early Christian meal iconography. See also pp. 489-92 above.

158. Sportulae originally referred to the little baskets that important persons including emperors used to distribute food and money to their clients; later it came to refer to the food items themselves.

159. Suetonius, Claud. 21.4-5.

160. Namely Augustus, who "gave banquets constantly and always formally . . ." ("convivabatur assidue nec umquam nisi recta . . ."): Suetonius, Aug. 74.

sulted from this informal and flexible character.

In any case, literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence make it quite clear that the cult of the dead, as well as feasts associated with it, was extremely widespread among early Christians,¹⁶² despite the discomfort of the Christian hierarchy.¹⁶³ Frequent references to drinking toasts (such as “we bless on behalf of the wine glass” or “drink and live”),¹⁶⁴ as well as to refrigerium (“cool refreshment”) in early Christian inscriptions confirm that these feasts were often characterized by the drinking of wine,¹⁶⁵ as the meal iconography presented here suggests. This is confirmed by textual sources, which describe early Christian funerary meals as often characterized by boisterous behavior and drinking.¹⁶⁶

161. Suetonius refers to the concern of Augustus for “rank” (ordo) at his banquets: Aug. 74.

162. For discussion of early Christian evidence, see the following for a sampling: H. Leclercq, “Refrigerium”; A. M. Schneider, Refrigerium; T. Klauser, Die Cathedra im Totenkult; idem, “Das altchristliche Totenmahl”; A. Stüber, Refrigerium Interim; L. de Bruyne, “Refrigerium Interim”; R. Krautheimer, “Mensa-Coemeterium-Martyrium”; T. Klauser, Christlicher Märtyrerkult; E. Jastrzebowska, “Iconographie des banquets aux III^e-IV^e siècles”; S. Poque, “Spectacles et festins offerts par Augustin d’Hippone pour les fêtes de martyrs”; and E. Jastrzebowska, Untersuchungen zum christlichen Totenmahl. On North Africa, there is a plethora of secondary literature. For a start, perhaps most fundamental are Y. Duval, Loca Sanctorum Africae; and P.-A. Février, “Le culte des martyrs en Afrique.”

163. E.g. Ambrose who attempted to prohibit Christians like Monica (the mother of Augustine) from laying food and drink at the graves of the martyr saints: Conf. 6.2.

164. Ad calice benimus and πὶ ἐζήσῃς. For these toasts and similar versions, see the following: R. Garrucci, Vetri ornati in figure di oro; H. Vopel, Die altchristlichen Goldgläser; H. Leclercq, “Agape”; and CII 515-22.

165. Apparently often to excess. See the discussion in T. Klauser, “Das altchristliche Totenmahl,” 115-16. For ancient references to refri-

As in pagan texts, early Christian texts do not give many details on the food,¹⁶⁷ and the only evidence for fish as an important dish in funerary feasts is meal iconography. Yet, that evidence has proven accurate in regard to other aspects of the funerary meal menu, such as the inclusion of bread and wine. Thus, one can in all probability conclude that fish constituted an important dish in the funerary meal menus of both pagans and early Christians.

In addition to determining the genre of meal portrayed and the contents of its menu, it is necessary to ascertain the composition of the meal participants. By explaining their number, sex, and age, it should help to understand who were depicted as eating fish and for what reason.

In respect to their number, one can guess that those scenes with several baskets of bread may have referred to a large quantity of persons eating at a public and communal meal.¹⁶⁸ For, not that many loaves of bread are needed for the seven individuals arrayed around the sigma couches. In these cases, it is probable that the depiction of seven persons referred to the ideal number of seven individuals who were supposed to

gerium, see the secondary literature listed in n. 162 above, as well as J. Janssens, Vita e morte, 285ff.

166. For collections of the material, see n. 162 above.

167. Augustine refers to his mother Monica bringing “pulse” (pultes), “bread” (panem) along with wine: Conf. 6.2. But his apologetic purpose is made clear by his attempt to deemphasize the quantity and quality of the menu (and undoubtedly any associations with pagan deities); for example, pulse was one of the simplest foods. On the other hand, Zeno of Verona seems to imply that the cult of the of the dead among early Christians could involve real “meals” (prandia): Tract. 1.6.15 (PL 11:366).

be arrayed around a single sigma couch and that therefore many more than seven would have actually been understood to be present—— probably dining on a number of sigma couches.

On the other hand, in many of the sarcophagi,¹⁶⁹ one finds that only one basket and/or a few loaves of bread are pictured——here possibly suggesting that a limited group of persons needed only a relatively small amount of bread. In this type of instance, it seems most likely that a family or a small group of like-minded individuals were intended.

It is significant that, in all these cases of small quantities of bread, only five or fewer persons are gathered around the sigma couch, as opposed to seven persons in cases of large quantities of bread. Furthermore, in the paintings of CatPM, one also finds five or fewer individuals around sigma couches, again suggesting a small group.¹⁷⁰

Thus, in general in meal iconography, there seems to be a division between large and small gatherings.

In terms of the gender and age of diners depicted in early Christian meal iconography in both paintings and on sarcophagi, most of them

168. CSac, CapGrec, Jast. 6-8, Rep. 150.

169. See p. 533-34 above.

170. Since bread was clearly one of the basic elements of all meals in Graeco-Roman antiquity, it is probable that bread loaves are absent in the paintings of CatPM, not because these early Christians did not eat them, but because of reasons that involve the placement of primary emphasis on the image of a single fish. In this regard, I argue below that in part this emphasis results from a specifically Christian interest in the image of a fish as a reference to Christ; see pp. 579-80 below.

clearly adult males.¹⁷¹ But, as observed above, there are examples of a few children and women, for the most part (with the one exception of CapGrec) associated with smaller gatherings.¹⁷² In addition, it is also possible that the women sitting in the cathedrae of Jast. 15-16 are not servants, but participants in these smaller meals and probably family members; for ancient texts often describe Roman women as sitting, while men are simultaneously reclining.¹⁷³ It is also conceivable that those depicted as female servants or adolescent male servants are actually family members as well.

Thus, it seems likely that the smaller gatherings actually refer to families—or to private groups selected from a variety of families—¹⁷⁴ in which could be found young and adult along with male and female.¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, the larger gatherings probably refer to public and communal meals of early Christians that pagans would have understood as funerary meals similar to those given by collegia. In fact, the meal scene in the probably pagan hypogeum of the Aurelii with its

171. See pp. 522-23 above.

172. See p. 522 above.

173. See the discussion with references in T. Klauser, Die Cathedra, 8-11.

174. See the discussion in Jast., pp. 66-67 on the number of banqueters and the familial character of these paintings.

175. That adult men seem to predominate in early Christian meal iconography suggests that they were given greater prominence at these meals. On the other hand, the presence of female spouses in non-mythological kline meals (for the most part, pagan) suggests that female members of a family could be accorded significant prominence.

large number of participants would seem to refer to a funerary meal of a collegium.¹⁷⁶

In general, it would seem that fish were appropriate dishes in both types of meals, although greater prominence is given to them in familial or private group meals. I show below that this may well be related to the early Christian emphasis on the single fish as referring to Christ, as well as to the excess cost of providing large fish to an enormous number of persons.¹⁷⁷

While the meals depicted in early Christian iconography clearly refer to the cult of the dead, it seems probable that even in a pagan context they are referring to more than one meal.

Thus, in his study of meal iconography, Nikolaus Himmelmann has demonstrated that the idealized form of non-mythological kline meals indicates that they took place in the afterlife.¹⁷⁸ The festive features of such iconography (which I have already explored) suggest that this was a paradisiacal meal, in which the diners celebrated the joy of the deceased in reaching paradise. In addition, a fourth century C.E. painting from the catacomb of Vibia clearly shows that a fish meal on a sigma couch can occur in the context of the “judgement of the good” (bonorum iudicio)—that is, in paradise.¹⁷⁹ Here the diners include one of the de-

176. Jast. 28.

177. See pp. 575 and 578-80

178. Typologische Untersuchungen, 23ff. When mythological erotes hover over diners, the iconography implies an otherworldly context.

179. Jast. 25. As I have said above, the paintings of this hypogeum

ceased——Vibia. In this regard, Josef Engemann has shown that in some of the paintings of CatPM, which again take place on sigma couches, the central position of diners may have indicated their status as deceased.¹⁸⁰

The importance of these meals——that is, that they are not just a normal funerary meal——would seem to be confirmed by the position of many of the meal scene paintings in CatPM and in the Coemeterium Maius. They are in the lunette of an arcosolium,¹⁸¹ which is the most central spot in an arcosolium——therefore probably indicating that these paintings were especially important and not just straightforward funerary meals.¹⁸² Furthermore, because lunettes are placed directly over the loculi (where the dead lie) and because they are isolated from the surrounding iconography, they seem to have been the central focus of iconographic attention. One should also notice the flower garlands and necklaces worn by the diners in the Vibia painting, since such festive apparel is also found in many of the diners in the meal scenes of CatPM, who wear white tunics with stripes (orbiculi and clavi)——very possibly seem syncretistic.

180. "Die Ehrenplatz beim antiken Sigmamahl."

181. A semi-circular burial niche with an inset half-arch at the top; beneath the arch is the lunette: Jast. 6-7, 9-18.

182. I show below that the centrality of meal scenes might also indicate that they could refer to early Christian agape feasts. See pp. 567-71.

(and certainly in the case of Vibia) an indication of the joy felt on behalf of the deceased for their reception into a joyous afterlife.¹⁸³

In such cases these meals were therefore not referring to domestic meals, but rather to a combination of funerary meals and meals in paradise.

There is one further nuance to note here. Just because these meals do not primarily refer to domestic meals, does not mean that there is no allusion to them. In fact, funerary meals and meals in paradise are not altogether different from normal secular meals. For example, bread, wine, and fish comprise the menus of all ancient meals. At the same time, all varieties of meals (funerary, general festal, paradise, and domestic) in Graeco-Roman antiquity feature semi-recumbent or recumbent diners on sigma couches. The very fact that designers of monuments used these items, suggests that special meals were simply more elaborate versions of standard domestic meals and that there were consequently only extrinsic—not fundamental—differences between them.

Another pictorial item sheds light on the domestic character of fish in early Christian meal iconography. In a context that is not that of a meal scene, there is found in the crypt of Lucina in the catacomb of Callixtus (c. 200-250 C.E.) a painting that depicts two fish facing one another beside which are baskets of bread.¹⁸⁴

183. On clavi see “Clavus” in PW (Hula.).

184. Nestori 2. For a detailed discussion of the crypt of Lucina (probably one of the oldest sections of the Roman catacombs) and dating problems, see L. Reekmans, La tombe du pape Corneille et sa région cémétériale, 187-202 (especially 192-94). For a discussion of the fish

Of course, the placement of fish and bread together discloses their function as food. But there is more to it than that; for this picture is based on the tradition of domestic still-lives that were frequently found in Roman homes in Campania along the Bay of Naples.¹⁸⁵ Thus, fish symbolism in some early Christian contexts can explicitly refer to a domestic context that in part refers to meals and that in part refers to the displays of food that would have been found in homes. In general, it would have evoked the feelings of physical satisfaction that food brings.

Of course, this would be appropriate not only in a strictly domestic context, but would have fit in a funerary context that was also trying to evoke that sense of physical satisfaction——both for visitors to the graves and for visitors who ate with them.

In the final analysis, one might generally speak of at minimum a two-tiered referential system for early Christian depictions of meals. The primary focus was on festal meals (funerary and paradisiacal), but in the background one finds an allusion to the ubiquitous domestic meals that individuals in the Graeco-Roman world ate on an everyday basis. Indeed, some of the components of special meals were used, precisely because they were so familiar to people.

imagery, see especially F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 5:527-34, with full references to older bibliography; see IXΘΥΣ 4:162.1-2 (pls.) and pl. IX *infra* for photographs. For dating of the paintings, see L. Reekmans, “La chronologie de la peinture paléochrétienne”; and F. Wirth, Römische Wandmalerei, 167-70.

Christian aspects of meal iconography with fish

While it is evident from this analysis that early Christian meal iconography would have been readily understandable to any pagan in the Graeco-Roman world, I have already established that there are some significant differences between pagan and Christian materials. In addition, there are other characteristics of these scenes that make them unusual and lend to them a complexion that is at least in part distinctively Christian. As a result, the images of fish need to be treated not only in a pagan context, but in a Christian one. Therefore, I will now review possible Christian aspects of meal iconography and fish imagery.

First, as already noted, the preponderance of statistical evidence suggests that, although (as Dölger first argued) the use of fish in Christian meal iconography was unquestionably borrowed from pagan meal iconography, the appearance of fish in Christian meal scenes with sigma couches is considerably more frequent than its appearance in pagan meal iconography with sigma couches.¹⁸⁶ Since sigma couch iconography is more relevant than kline iconography for the interpretation of early Christian meal scenes,¹⁸⁷ one can only conclude that early Christian meal iconography is in general partly characterized by a preference for fish. In this regard, meal scenes in early Christian paintings may be particularly significant, since (when determinable) fish occur in every case except one, while in definitively pagan meal scene paintings there are no examples of

185. See J.-M. Croisille, Les nature mortes campaniennes: especially pls. B-C and 31-33.

any fish at all.¹⁸⁸

Second, I have observed that it is only in early Christian meal scenes that seven (for the most part) baskets of bread are included, often with fish placed between them to emphasize their visual centrality.¹⁸⁹ On the one hand, these baskets suggest a larger group of persons eating at a meal than in any pagan meal scenes, which generally show just one basket. In the Christian case, these are probably meals in which a relatively large segment of the community would have participated.

If one seeks an illustrative textual example, the best might be that described by Paulinus of Nola in Text # X.A.3 of Appendix 1, in which the throngs of poor eat in a memorial banquet.¹⁹⁰ According to Paulinus, it was actually Christ who fed them: “Christ, the true bread himself and the fish of living water, filled them with five loaves of bread and two fish.”¹⁹¹ Not only is it significant that bread is mentioned as one of the foods in this meal (since bread is important in funerary meals in general), but also that the whole scene is placed in the context of the biblical story of the multiplication of loaves and of fish.¹⁹² In this regard, it is

186. See pp. 536-38 above.

187. See p. 538 above.

188. See pp. 536-38 above.

189. Seven baskets: Jast. 2, 5-8 (also the sarcophagus, Rep. 150).
Eight baskets: Jast. 2. Ten baskets: Jast. 4.

190. For more discussion of this passage, see pp. 489-92 above, as well as pp. 559-61, 570, 581 below

191. ”quinque panibus et duobus piscibus panis ipse verus et aquae

additionally important to note that, in most of the early Christian paintings with numerous baskets, two fish are displayed, either on the same platter or on different platters.¹⁹³ By using two fish, the iconography probably recalls the two fish in the biblical passage.

In contrast, in the paintings of CatPM, where there are no bread loaves or bread baskets, there is found only one fish.¹⁹⁴

Thus, it seems that those meal scenes with numerous baskets may be referring to a public communal funerary meal that is at the same time placed in the context of the biblical meal of bread and fish. In this respect, one should remember that the crowd described both in the biblical meal and in the Paulinus passage accords well with the presence of numerous baskets and of seven diners (as opposed to five or less in CatPM)—both of which also indicate an extremely large group.¹⁹⁵

In regard to fish symbolism in meal iconography, I should note another feature of the passage in Paulinus. At the same time that he mentions two fish as referring to the multiplication of bread and loaves, he also connects those two fish to Christ as the “fish of living water.” From this one can infer that, when iconography depicts either one or two fish, it is likely referring to some degree to Christ. Contrary to those who say that only one fish can refer to Christ, it would seem that two fish can also

vivae piscis Christus explevit.”

192. See Texts # V.1-4 in Appendix II.

193. Jast. 2-3, 4 (probably), 5, 8.

194. For a list of meal scenes showing just one fish, see pp. 534-35

evoke a reference to Christ as fish.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, when in early Christian iconography two fish are shown in between numerous baskets, there is probably a reference both to the multiplication story and to Christ as fish.

Third, in this regard, I should note that two of the meal scene paintings in CSac are placed directly next to imagery that is clearly baptismal:¹⁹⁷ the baptism of Christ and fishermen in the act of fishing.¹⁹⁸ At the same time, the Jonah narrative with its partly baptismal meaning is found in numerous instances in paintings in close connection with meal iconography including fish,¹⁹⁹ as is the miracle of Moses drawing water from the rock in paintings.²⁰⁰ When fish are shown in these meal scenes,

above, as well as Chart 1 in Appendix 1.

195. On the size of these banquets, see pp. 551-52 above.

196. For example, F. Dölger and J. Engemann believe that, because early Christian iconography often depicts more than one fish in their fish meal iconography, this iconography is simply following pagan traditions of depicting meals with fish: *IXΘΥΣ* 5:543-610 and “Fisch, Fischer, Fischfang,” 1062. This takes pictorial symbolism and metaphorical thought much too literally: one fish=Christ and two fish does not equal Christ is a modern linear equation that does not reflect ancient thought.

197. Jast. 1-2.

198. On fishing as baptismal, see pp. 406-81 above.

199. Jast. 1 (vault), 2 (same wall and twice on other walls), 3 (other wall), 4 (other wall), 6 (other wall), 14 (same wall), 16 (same wall), 17 (same wall). The relationship between baptism, fish and the Jonah narrative is especially clear in the early Christian basilica mosaic in Aquileia; see pp. 612 and 632 below for discussion of this mosaic. While the Jonah narrative cycle also appears on sarcophagi with meal scenes, it is not found in those meals scenes that include fish: Rep. 591, 778, 794, 890, 942.

200. Jast 1 (another wall), 2 (another wall), 4 (another wall), 7 (vault), 9/10 (vault), and 19 (same wall). The rock miracle is not found on sar-

they are probably emphasizing the baptismal imagery that surrounds them in the same cubicula.²⁰¹

Fourth, the employment of the names, Agape (Agape/Αγάπη, six times) and Peace (Irene/Ειρήνη, five times) for the female servants in most of the meal scene paintings of the CatPM, suggests a Christian context.²⁰² For these names rarely appear in identifiably pagan contexts and thus seem to have been characteristically Christian (or, in the case of Irene, Jewish as well).²⁰³

Some have suggested that these names are simply the real names of particular servers who were employed at these meals.²⁰⁴ Yet, like the name “Faith” (Πίστις), in the Avercius inscription,²⁰⁵ these names, outside of their particular function as names, have as generic words a specific religious significance as well.²⁰⁶ Agape could have referred to the

cophagi with meal iconography. Because of this and because of the absence of the Jonah cycle on sarcophagi with meal scenes that include fish, it would seem that baptismal associations of fish in meal scenes were not as directly present on sarcophagi as they were in paintings.

201. For a discussion of the contexts of meal scenes on paintings, see Jast., pp. 62-65, although she concludes that there is no discernible pattern.

202. Agape: Jast. 10, 14-17; Irene: Jast. 9, 11, 14-17.

203. For example, see the indices of CIL.

204. E.g. F. Dolger, IXΘΥΣ 5:492-500; E. Jastrzebowska, “Les scènes de banquet” (implied throughout); and A. Stüber, Refrigerium Interim (130-36). For full lists, see the references listed at the end of each relevant painting in Deckers.

205. As found in v. 12.

206. For the view that these names could have a symbolic function, see

so-called “love feasts” (as in agape feasts), which were so characteristic of early Christianity.²⁰⁷ Likewise, “peace” was a word associated in inscriptions much more frequently with Jews and Christians than with pagans,²⁰⁸ and it seems in inscriptions to have connoted the blissful state in which both Jews and early Christians to some extent lived in the present, and certainly hoped to live in the soon-to-come afterlife.²⁰⁹ Considering the frequent appearance in the CatPM of fish in banquet scenes, which were accompanied by a reference to a servant named Irene, such a reference may well be significant.

Since the designation of these servers with the names Agape and Peace occurs five times in six different locations of the catacomb, it is likely that the composer of the imagery did not intend to use these names as real appellations. While Christians in fact did at times use these names

e.g. R. Rochette, “Mémoires sur les antiquités des catacombes”; G. B. de Rossi, “Escavazioni”; J. Wilpert, Die Malereien (see each relevant painting). For full list, see the references at the end of each relevant painting of Deckers.

207. On the agape feast see my discussion on pp. 567-71.

208. E. Dinkler, “Schalom—Eirene—Pax”; and L. Kant, “Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin,” 679. In general on peace in early Christianity, see E. Dinkler, Eirene: Der urchristliche Friedensgedanke; and K. Wengst, Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ. On “Peace” as a divinity in antiquity, see E. Simon, Eirene und Pax: Friedengöttinnen in der Antike.

209. One may find a possible confirmation of the eschatological connotations of the word “peace” in the inscription of Pectorius of Autun (probably late fourth century C.E.); see Text # I.2 in Appendix 1. If one accepts the reading given in the text of the Appendix, Pectorius refers (significantly for my purposes) not merely to “peace,” but to the phrase “the peace of the fish”—thus indicating that the fish itself could at times specifically connote of peace.

as real appellations (probably for the same reasons given immediately above),²¹⁰ it is unlikely that all early Christian servers of food in the Cat-PM by coincidence possessed the same names. In addition, although funerary inscriptions indicate that the name Irene/Εἰρήνη was common among early Christians in Rome, the name Agape/Ἀγάπη was much rarer.²¹¹

Furthermore, it seems probable that in one painting (Jast. 15) the words addressed to the female servants were not intended for specific individuals. In this painting there are two servants, one adolescent boy on the left and a female on the right. On the upper left, it reads Agape da calda (“Agape, serve it hot”) and, on the upper right, it reads Irene misce (“Irene, mix it”). Since there are not two female servants (but one male and one female), the names Agape and Irene cannot refer to them.

Three explanations seem possible. First, it is conceivable that Irene and Agape are prototypical names for early Christians and that they are simply applied generically to all early Christian servants. This seems the least likely explanation, since Agape was not a prototypical name.²¹² Second, these could have been symbolic names, which functioned artistically to personify the ideas of peace and agape, which I briefly discussed

210. As early Christian inscriptions throughout the Mediterranean area testify.

211. See the indices of ICUR.

212. It is probable, however, that (as mentioned above) an early Christian would have recognized these names as Christian and would thus have distinguished the depiction of these banquets from the depictions of pagan banquets.

above. Such an explanation finds support in the inscription of Avercius, where the name “Faith” is applied to one who serves food—in this case apparently the food constituting the eucharist. Such a usage would further suggest that the meals of these paintings did not solely refer to funerary meals, but also referred to other types of meals, which may have been specifically Christian. Third, it is possible as well that, at important religious meals, the early Christian community gave what one might now call stage names to certain participants—in this case the servers.

Since the last possibility is more speculative than the second one, it would seem most likely that the second explanation—that the names, Agape and Irene functioned as personifications—is to be preferred. Nevertheless, the second and third explanations are not mutually exclusive, since Agape and Irene could simultaneously refer both to personifications and to stage names.

As observed above, fish in visually central positions on tables are present in most of the paintings of the CatPM and in almost all of the paintings in which Agape and Irene are mentioned.²¹³ In this regard, it is significant that in the only banquet painting in the CatPM depicting a food other than fish (in this case, a bird), the servant is named Sabina, a standard Roman female name with apparently no allegorical function.²¹⁴ This suggests that the placement of fish in banquet iconography was of great importance for the symbolic value of a meal, since, in one of the only times the featured foods is not fish, the name is clearly not referring

213. See pp. 534-36 above.

to a personification. Furthermore, it suggests that images of fish are related to the names Agape and Irene, as well as to the ideas to which they refer.

In the case of these paintings from CatPM, dating is significant—— that is, the early fourth century C.E.²¹⁵ They should therefore most likely be seen in relation to the change in the status of Christianity brought about by Constantine. For, by explicitly using the Christian names of Agape and Irene, the iconography indicates to the observer rather overtly that it is Christian and that the meal it depicts has Christian overtones. In contrast, earlier paintings such as those in CSac (Jast. 1-4) leave greater ambiguity as to their religious affiliation, to the religious character of the meals depicted, and to the significance of the images of fish. In this regard, one might characterize the symbolism (including fish symbolism) of the paintings of CatPM as having a primary emphasis on Christian referents, while pagan referents are in the background. On the other hand, in the paintings of CSac, all referents have relatively equal weight.

214. Jast. 12.

215. For dating, see references at the end of each meal scene in Deckers.

Specific identification of the meal with fish

While exploring early Christian meal iconography and its relation to pagan meal iconography—all in the context of fish symbolism—I have observed that there are references to a number of different meals. Throughout this analysis, it has become clear that these meal scenes in part refer to funerary banquets that were a component of the pagan cult of the dead. At the same time, I have investigated to some extent the relation of several meal scenes to the biblical story of the multiplication of bread and loaves. Furthermore, I have shown that most meal iconography probably in part indicates a banquet in paradise.

In addition to these meals, I would suggest that there are two further forms of nourishment to which meal iconography also refers. I have already briefly mentioned one in this chapter—the eucharist. In support of this I would offer at least three reasons. First, two of the major components of these meals are bread and wine—also the two components of the eucharist. Second, fish are given greater attention in early Christian meal scenes than in pagan ones. Since I have observed in Chapter 3 that fish symbolism in textual evidence often refers to Christ as ingested in the eucharist, it is plausible to think that in scenes where bread and wine are also featured, the consistently prominent image of a fish refers in part to the eucharist. Third, several paintings in the CatPM place special emphasis on a single fish—thus suggesting here that the primary emphasis is on Christ in his eucharistic role.

In addition to the above forms of nourishment, I would propose another meal to which early early Christian meal scenes probably refer. The name Agape in six of the paintings of the CatPM offers the clue that one must consider meal iconography in light of early Christian love feasts or agape feasts. Although ancient texts are not clear about the function and arrangements of such banquets, it is known that they could be large public or small private gatherings, in which early Christians gathered at a meal for prayer, preaching, the singing of hymns and possibly (in many instances) eucharistic communion.²¹⁶ There is also reason to think that funerary banquets could function at times as a form of agape feast.²¹⁷

By now it should be clear that the referential framework of early Christian meal iconography, as well as the fish symbolism in it, is exceedingly complex; for these meal scenes seem to have alluded to a number of different possible meals, and they seem to have had both pagan and Christian connotations. If there is to be a common thread found in the extraordinarily diverse referential framework of this meal iconography, I would suggest that, because many early Christian meals were in some way related to death and to salvation from death, there was a primary emphasis on those meals that were linked in the context of death.

Of course, in this regard I have noted in the previous two chapters the extent to which fish were associated with death. In addition, the location

216. On the agape feast in general, see J. P. Keating, The Agape and the Eucharist; and H. Leclercq, "Agape." The relation of the eucharist to the agape feast is very difficult to determine, with some texts indicating a rather clear separation, while others see them as closely joined.

217. See the evidence found in church ordinance literature in J. F. Keating, The Agape and the Eucharist, 138-40; 156, n. 3. See pp. 569-70 below for further discussion of funerary collegia.

of these scenes in a sepulchral context suggests that the meal had funerary connotations.

There are other reasons to believe that many of these meals were linked by death. For example, since throughout early Christianity the eucharist celebrated the death and resurrection of Christ, since it expressed to a degree hope in salvation after death, and since the last rite given to a person before death was the eucharist, or more precisely viaticum,²¹⁸ the eucharist was without doubt for early Christians closely related to, and associated with, death and early Christian ideas about death.²¹⁹ In addition, I have already observed that the ritual of the eucharist was closely related to the agape feast, which the eucharist seems to have initiated.²²⁰ Although it is difficult to determine precise distinctions between the eucharist and the agape feast, it would also seem that the agape feast itself, like the eucharist, memorialized the death and resurrection of Christ. It is furthermore significant that after the decree of the emperor Augustus the only legally permissible collegia were funerary ones,²²¹ and it would therefore make sense that an agape

218. On viaticum see F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 2:515-35; A. C. Rush, Death Christian Antiquity; G. Grabka, "Christian Viaticum"; and A. C. Rush, "The Sacrament of the Dying in Christian Antiquity."

219. In general on the eucharist in early Christianity, see J. P. Keating, The Agape and the Eucharist; and (for a collection of sources) D. J. Sheerin, The Eucharist. For starter bibliographies, see E. Ferguson, "Eucharist"; and E. Dassmann, "Eucharistia."

220. See pp. 573ff. below.

221. See CIL 14.2112 and the discussion in Appendix 2 of Keating, The Agape and the Eucharist.

feast, which was more or less equivalent to a collegium banquet, would have sometimes taken place at cemeteries.²²² At this point, one should not forget that in later Christian literature Jesus was referred to as a fish roasted on the cross——thus linking the eating of the fish with both Jesus and his death in an apparent eucharistic context.²²³ Finally, in relation to the meal following the multiplication of loaves and fish, I should note again that it is included by Paulinus of Nola in the context of death, which in this case is a memorial meal.²²⁴

In Chapter 2, I also noted that the messianic banquet, in which Leviathan was the main dish, may have influenced the inclusion of fish in early Christian meal iconography.²²⁵ If so, early Christians would have appropriately connected it to the general context of meals related to death, especially the eucharist and meals in paradise, which celebrated the triumph over death.

The image of the fish therefore would have echoed with the reverberations of several sacred meals all linked in the context of death——funerary meals and eucharists, agape feasts, the miraculous meal following the multiplication of fish and loaves in the New Testament, the heavenly banquet to come in the afterlife, as well as possibly the Jewish messianic meal of Leviathan. Through emphasis on different features of these meals, early Christian iconography would have created different

222. See for example H. Leclercq, “Agape,” 808-15.

223. See pp. 484-87 below for full discussion.

224. Text # X.A.3.

constellations of meaning for fish with different types of iconography. It is those constellations which I investigate below.²²⁶

In addition to a diversity of meal contexts, the above observations show that meal iconography and its use of fish imagery should not be interpreted either exclusively in pagan or in Christian terms. While almost all the features of early Christian meal iconography (including images of fish) can also be found in pagan meal iconography and while the meals depicted in early Christian contexts could refer in part to a typical pagan funerary banquet, I have established that there is substantial evidence to indicate a Christian orientation.

225. See pp. 170-74.

226. See pp. 572-85 below.

Scholarly misconceptions. On the other hand, most scholars have interpreted these paintings exclusively either as Christian or pagan. Through the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century, scholars (from Josef Wilpert to Aldo Nestori) generally saw these paintings as eucharistic meals or agape feasts or a *mélange* of both.²²⁷ It was the work of Dölger which cast doubt on the assumptions of previous scholars who assumed the Christian character of the meal.²²⁸ Basing his conclusions on the comparative evidence of sarcophagi, he instead argued that these paintings were realistic depictions of pagan funerary meals and that they were not specifically a part of Christian worship, but rather a part of the pagan cult of the dead. According to him, there was nothing specifically Christian in these paintings (contrary to what I have argued above). For Elisabeth Jastrzebowska, although she is not so confident as Dölger that the banquets in these paintings reflected actual meals, she nevertheless sees these banquets as conventional pagan iconography for the indication of funerary meals.²²⁹

Fish symbolism in meal iconography

227. Most striking are the descriptions of Nestori in his definitive iconographic guide to the paintings of the Roman catacombs (Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane), in which he laconically labels all meal scene paintings as “agape” or “banchetto eucharistico.” For a summary of this view, see Jast., pp. 6ff and Deckers at the end of each meal scene painting in the CatPM.

228. IXΘΥΣ 5:329-638.

229. “Iconographie des banquets.” See also J. Engemann, “Fisch, 1059-65 (though he modifies this position later in “Der Ehrenplatz beim Sigmamah!”).

Correspondingly, fish are interpreted quite differently by historians, depending on which way one understands meal iconography. Those who see these banquets as eucharistic or agape meals either interpret the fish as IXΘΥΣ, a symbol of Christ, or as a reference to the fish in the biblical story of the miraculous multiplication of bread and loaves. On the other hand, those who see these banquets as a pagan funerary meal interpret the fish as a conventional food dish in the menu of that meal.

In both their interpretations of the general banquet and of fish, it seems that the authors ignore the complexity of the material and impose a solution that treats both the banquet and fish not as symbols, but as signals: 1) When you saw a banquet scene, you were to think of the eucharist—or when you saw a banquet scene, you were to think of a pagan funerary meal; 2) When you saw the fish, you were to think of Christ—or when you saw the fish, you were to think of a food dish in a meal. In effect, this amounts to the same kind of mistaken signal approach noted as a division among scholars in Chapter 1: the “decoration” (pagan)—“symbolism” (Christian) dichotomy.²³⁰

I would argue again that the very complexity and multivalence of this material demonstrates that matters were much more complex than this type of one-to-one correspondence theory would suggest. In this chapter and in the following discussion, I show that, in contrast to the above signal approaches, the meaning of fish in early Christian meal iconography consisted of an intricate network of referents and associations that

formed a symbolic complex.

For those who interpret early Christian meal scenes as exclusively pagan and who interpret fish as simply conventional parts of a Graeco-Roman menu, it is enough to indicate that fish in meal scenes actually have no significance at all other than as realistic descriptive images. Yet, from my discussion in the previous chapter of the cultural significance of fish in the Graeco-Roman world, several characteristics of fish as depicted in these scenes are immediately apparent, and they suggest that the meaning of fish in pagan monuments is much more complex than the above-mentioned signal position implies. So I would propose to look at fish imagery first solely from a pagan point of view in order to demonstrate that even before it reached Christianity, fish were already used as extremely complicated symbolic networks.

For example, one may inquire as to why pagan iconography would choose to depict fish as a main course more frequently than meat and fowl items. I would suggest that part of the motivation stems from the general preference for fish as a food in the Graeco-Roman world.²³¹ Of all foods, it was fish that most frequently graced the tables of the majority of individuals. If one were to have thought of a normal meal, one would have thought first of all of including fish in it. Thus, it is not surprising that the painters of the meals under consideration here depicted fish. For them it was simply a natural indication for any meal.

Yet the meals depicted in this iconography are also, as I have con-

230. See pp. 99-118.

tended, special meals. Consequently, it should not be surprising that the painters and relief carvers, instead of depicting a small fish which would have indicated standard, non-festal meals, depicted a large fish, which would have indicated special celebrations and important banquets.²³² With the use of a large fish, the iconography indicates a special meal.

In addition, large fish—especially fish, which cover a platter, as well as fish which are single, undivided, and heavy (as all the fish are, but especially in the paintings of CatPM)—indicate high status or the desire to be of high status.²³³ By status with regard to fish, this includes both wealth and social position. Thus, the iconography of these paintings indicates that the families buried in the appropriate cubicula wished to show, by means of the depiction of the banquets which they hosted, that (like pagans) they were prosperous and highly regarded members of a community (perhaps of both the Christian community and of the wider non-Christian community in Rome).²³⁴

In addition to size indicating prestige, I should also recall that large fish with their phallic association can indicate great powers of sexuality and fertility.²³⁵ In a Graeco-Roman context, the consumption of these

231. See pp. 124-61 above.

232. I have indicated that at Lanuvium small fry (probably sardines) were funerary banquet; see pp. 164-65 above. But this is clearly for lack of the dead meal would thus have simply been a normal meal. In contrast meal iconography evidently wanted to emphasize the special character of funerary meals.

233. See pp. 124-39 above.

234. I want to emphasize again that this iconography only represents status and can not tell historians whether or not these Christians were

large fish would have suggested that the diners consuming them were ingesting the strength and prestige of the fish themselves. To eat them therefore would not only have implied that they were persons of high status, but that they were ingesting items that made them in some way even stronger and more important.

As I have also argued, the fish was an appropriate symbol in the context of death.²³⁶ Not only were fish such as dolphins generally associated with death, but fish were brought as offerings to chthonic deities and, perhaps most significantly, were considered an important food in the cult of the dead. As a result, I would here suggest that the depictions of the fish in early Christian paintings and sarcophagi at the very least refer to, or are associated with, the funerary nature of the setting (a burial place), the funerary character of the meal (cult of the dead), and an important component in the menu of that meal. To use a fish in such a context reemphasizes the sepulchral character of the meal and of the burial place.

In regard to the previous two observations (sexuality/fertility and death), it is also pertinent to note that a fertility symbol makes sense in a funerary context. For example, in the Graeco-Roman world it is not uncommon to find phallic depictions, as well as other fertility symbols, in funerary contexts.²³⁷ For they imply the continuance of life in some form in spite of the obvious indications of the termination of life. By using fish

actually of high status.

235. See pp. 292-301 above.

236. See pp. 162-70 above.

symbolism, the iconography suggests that the death of the body does not end life for the deceased or their survivors.

In addition, since funerary banquets were meant to serve not only as a religious celebration on behalf of the dead and as a meal at which the deceased was present and was fed, but also as an actual eating event that nourished the diners, I should point out that such meals had both a religious and a secular component——religious in the sense that they constituted a ritual on behalf of the dead and secular in that people actually did eat to nourish themselves. For this reason, the meanings of fish in meal iconography probably also possessed religious and secular aspects. In this regard, I should cite the evidence in Chapter 2 that indicated that certain fish (such as sturgeon) were so delicious that they were worthy of being venerated.²³⁸ This does not necessarily imply that the fish depicted in early Christian meal iconography were of such a kind, but it does suggest that the eating of fish in apparently secular settings could have religious overtones.

Thus, the depiction of the consumption of fish in these paintings is appropriate, because, like the generic character of the funerary banquet itself, fish possessed the connotations of normal food, special food, and religious food.

As a food of high status, fish were not only useful in funerary meals, but were especially appropriate for meals in paradise. This might explain why fish are so much more commonplace in pagan kline banquets than in

237. See for example the inscription on p. 598 below from Boulogne-

pagan sigma meal banquets, since the emphasis in kline banquets seems to be unambiguous in its focus on afterlife.²³⁹ While status is a matter of concern for persons hosting a funerary meal, it is even more important when celebrating a conclusive sign of status——entry into paradise. It should come as no surprise therefore that fish is also served in the paradisiacal banquet of Vibia.²⁴⁰

In sum, just as fish indicate status in the funerary banquets of this world, they also indicate the status gained by those achieving an eternal afterlife.

In such cases, the association of fish with death is clearly also important, since meals in paradise would naturally have been associated with death. At the same time, the messianic associations of fish symbolism (the triumph over death and the end of an age) in the Graeco-Roman world would certainly have had a place in paradisiacal banquets, since fish had messianic associations not only for Christians, but evidently for pagans as well.²⁴¹

In general, both pagan and early Christian meal iconography place visual focus on images of fish and usually give them a central position in their scenes. In addition, in contrast to their predecessors in the classical and hellenistic periods (and among the Etruscans), individuals in the sur-mer and the discussion there.

238. See pp. 130-01 above.

239. It may well also have referred to a funerary meal, but I would suggest that it chiefly refers to a meal in paradise.

Graeco-Roman world (especially in the western Mediterranean) frequently used fish as a main dish in their meal iconography. As a result, one can see that the textual evidence that speaks of the Graeco-Roman love of fish is confirmed. When persons see fish depicted, they are seeing an item that is chosen because it is one that is regarded as preferred and choice. In fact, it is on pagan sarcophagus meal scenes (sigma couch, and especially klinae) that the Graeco-Roman preference for certain kinds of fish can perhaps be seen equally as well as in any of the textual evidence.

I would suggest that it is in this esteem for these types of large and appetizing fish that in part gave early Christians the opportunity to build an even more intricate network of fish symbolism in their meal iconography. Because fish were so popular among Romans and Greeks, I would propose that early Christians chose to develop a kind of meal iconography, whose inclusion of fish would have been fully understandable in a Graeco-Roman cultural context. Like their pagan counterparts, when early Christians depicted a large fish (especially in CatPM and in many sarcophagi), they would also have been claiming a degree of status for themselves, their families, and their community. In effect, they were making the same kinds of prestige claims as pagans.

Yet, as already indicated, there is more to it than that. As analyzed above, fish were even more popular items in early Christian than in pagan sigma meal iconography. In addition, unlike pagan meal iconography,

240. Jast. 25.

early Christian meal scene paintings in the CatPM show images of fish that were given singular visual centrality, since generally no bread loaves are included in their vicinity. Thus, it would seem likely that in paintings where single fish were shown, images of fish represented Christ/ΙΧΘΥΣ. In this regard, I would argue that this is the case most explicitly in the CatPM, where Christian names are inscribed beside the meals, while it would have been less obvious (though probable) in sarcophagus meal scenes.

Consequently, the status of a large fish would have taken on new meaning. As was seen in the Avercius inscription, just as a large fish could indicate the status of the consumers, it would also have indicated the status of Christ as the Christian God. Thus, this is not just any fish, but a divine entity. This would also undoubtedly have enhanced the prestige of the diners who were eating a doubly prestigious fish, since it is both large and refers to Christ.

At the same time, I have observed that the two fish often depicted in meal scenes in paintings with seven or more bread baskets (CSac, Coemeterium Maius, and the catacomb of the Giordani) refer simultaneously to the two fish used to feed the multitude in the biblical multiplication story and also to the fish as Christ. While these fish are large enough to indicate prestige,²⁴² they must share the spotlight with numerous baskets

241. See pp. 248-61 above.

242. Except CapGrec (Jast. 5), where the sigma couch and the diners overshadow in size the platter of twin fish. In this case, status may be less of a concern.

of breadloaves (seven or more) so as to indicate a large communal banquet and the biblical story of miraculous growth.²⁴³ Here therefore the association of large fish with prestige is combined with a biblical reference.

In addition, throughout Chapter 3, I demonstrated in detail that in a Christian context the sexual powers of large fish in the Graeco-Roman world can indicate success, or hope of success, in acquiring converts and multiplying group membership. In fact, it is known from the description of Paulinus that the nourishment provided by the memorial meal, with its double reference to funerary meals and to the meal following the miraculous growth of food in the biblical multiplication story, was intended for “the hope of those still starving gentiles (whom) it satisfies physically, and waters spiritually, the people hungering for faith. . . .”²⁴⁴

Therefore, it would seem plausible to suggest that in the depiction of these early Christian meals, the consumption of large long fish—especially fish that referred in part to Christ—was intended to indicate the hope for an increased number of Christian converts through the ingestion of a particularly effective and powerful food—the enormous fish as Christ.

As noted several times, the connecting link between all the different types of nourishment to which early Christian meal iconography refers is the context of death—whether it is funerary banquets, meals in

243. The presence of five fish in one of the meal scene paintings of the Coemeterium Maius probably suggests the growth from two fish to five fish.

paradise, agape feasts, the meal following the multiplication of bread and loaves, or the eucharist. And all but the biblical meal seem to have been actual early Christian meals, whether of the private kind (in the CatPM and most sarcophagi) or of the public kind (CSac, Coemeterium Maius, and the catacomb of the Giordani).

In every one of these cases, fish figure prominently. Consequently, it should be clear that the association of fish with death in the Graeco-Roman world was paramount for early Christians, as it was for pagans.

But early Christians took the sepulchral associations of fish into new directions, not only by bringing them to chiefly Christian meals, but by changing a general association into a more specific one. While for pagans fish were associated with death in a general way and were therefore appropriate images in a funerary context, for early Christians in their meal iconography fish specifically referred in part to Christ in his eucharistic role—that is, as one whose death brought life to Christians. Yet one should always remember that early Christian meal scenes refer to pagan funerary banquets as well and that the transformation of fish as a funerary food into the eucharist would be impossible without the prior pagan association of fish with death.

Here it is important to understand that what made this transformation possible were other associations of fish in the Graeco-Roman world. Namely, as was seen in Chapter 2, because pagans could identify to some extent with fish (they had human characteristics, could be pets, froliced

244. Text # X.A.3: “in spem ieiunarium adhuc gentium esurientes fidem populos carnaliter satians et spiritaliter inrigans.”

with youths, etc.),²⁴⁵ it was possible for a fish to symbolize Christ in an early Christian meal scene. Thus, one can see in this meal iconography an intertwining of two different associations: food and the empathic relationships between human beings and fish. There is a third association as well: that of the salvific role of fish in Graeco-Roman culture. For fish were thought to save human beings from all sorts of dangers.²⁴⁶ It is because they were so helpful to Greeks and Romans that a fish could come to symbolize in these meal scenes Christ in his role as a savior of human beings.

The salvific role brings us back to death again. For it is through death (both literally in paradise and figuratively in baptism) that Christ as fish brings life to those who consume him in the eucharist. In this instance, early Christians would probably have incorporated the general association of fish with the end of one age and the beginning of another.²⁴⁷ In meal iconography, such large fish may have referred to the constellation of the southern fish, otherwise known in antiquity as “great fish” or “large fish,” which was closely connected to messianic activity.²⁴⁸

Finally, as suggested above for some catacomb meal scenes,²⁴⁹ I should note that in much of meal iconography, while fish primarily refer to some extent to food, generally there was a probably at least a second-

245. See pp. 213-38.

246. See pp. 195, 206, 226-29, 248-61 above.

247. See pp. 248-61 above.

248. See pp. 248-61 above.

ary reference to baptism. Considering the analysis of texts in Chapter 3, one should not be too surprised by this, since there are early Christians texts where this double reference to food in the form of Christ and to baptism occurs.²⁵⁰ It may be plausible to suggest that the death and resurrection of Christ (as were embodied in the eucharistic fish) were also embodied in the ritual of baptism (as indicated by a fish), where Christians died and gained new life.

The general association of fish with baptism would also probably mean that fish in early Christian meal scenes referred in a secondary way to Christians themselves as fish who were captured and baptized. As a result, two fish could simultaneously refer to Christ, to the meal following the multiplication of bread and fish, and to baptized Christians.

To conclude this discussion, it may be helpful to look at a sixth century painting from the last supper scene from the time of Theodoric (493-526 C.E.) in Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna.²⁵¹ In that painting, the complexity of Christian and pagan associations has to a large extent disappeared. Here the diners are clearly Christ and the twelve apostles. No baskets of bread are present, but simply two fish, which probably represent the bread and wine of the eucharist (one fish for each item). From this one can see that the interplay of pagan and Christian referents and associations has to a large extent disappeared. A new symbolic network was created, whose central focus was clearly Christian. Early

249. See pp. 561-62.

250. Perhaps most notably in the inscription of Pectorius of Autun.

Christian fish symbolism in meal scenes had entered an entirely new stage, whose difference from the meal scenes in this chapter underscores the tremendous dynamism and sprawling character of early Christian fish symbolism before Christianity became the exclusive state religion at the end of the fourth century C.E.

Conclusion

In general, I have attempted to establish that one cannot understand fish symbolism in early Christian meal iconography without understanding its function and symbolism in both pagan and Christian contexts. In addition, it is clear that a one-to-one correspondence approach (whether this refers to the so-called “decorative” or “symbolic” approaches) leads to interpretation of fish imagery in meal iconography nowhere. For it denies its intentionally complex character and ignores the very pagan associations that make a particular reference possible.

Furthermore, I have tried to demonstrate that the interpretation of fish symbolism cannot be separated from the overall context of meal iconography in which it appears. Nor, on the other hand, can images of fish be reduced to a simple element of a realistic picture, as if they were just there by happenstance. Rather, early Christian meal scenes let images of fish function as symbols with a complex network of meanings which are embedded in their context and at the same time point beyond it.

251. For bibliographic references, see n. 10 in Chapter 1.

THE DEPICTION OF FISH AS ISOLATED OBJECTS IN NON-NARRATIVE SCENES²⁵²

Of all iconography with images of fish, it is perhaps the depiction of fish outside of a narrative context (primarily on epigraphic monuments and on gemstones) that drew the attention of modern scholars to the use of fish as an important early Christian iconographic symbol. It would even appear that this genre of fish depiction led to the modern interpretation (especially in Christian symbol dictionaries) that early Christian iconographic images of fish were used as part of a secret code, by means of which early Christians spoke to one another, since they allegedly could not communicate in a normal fashion due to the persecution of the Roman government.²⁵³ In large part, this is based on the ancient association of fish with the IXΘΥΣ acronym, which many see as the original motivation for early Christian fish symbolism.²⁵⁴ In fact, this view has so

252. For a catalogue of inscriptions as identified by the name of the deceased, see Chart 2 in Appendix 5. I would like to note the following abbreviations for this section: Becker = Die heidnische Weiheformel D. M. (Diis Manibus sc. Sacrum) auf altchristlichen Grabsteinen; Döl. = F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ; EC = Catalogue of the Early Christian Antiquities of the British Museum; and Leclerq = H. Leclerq, "IXΘΥΣ."

253. Originally proposed by R. Mowat in a brief "Commnication" on IXΘΥΣ (1898) and later in fuller detail in "IXΘΥΣ" (1902). Since code breaking has been in modern times an important feature of military operations, it is perhaps significant that Mowat was a major in the French military. The position relating fish symbolism and the acronym IXΘΥΣ to persecution of Christians is frequently repeated in early Christian symbol dictionaries. See for example G. G. Sill, A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art, 20-21: "The Greek initials for Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior, spell out the word fish in Greek (ichthus), and the fish is the oldest Christian symbol of Christ, used by the persecuted early Christians to identify themselves as believers. To the uninitiated the fish was merely a decoration; to the persecuted Christian it was a secret sign of his faith."

254. On the relationship of fish symbolism to the IXΘΥΣ acronym, see

dominated the popular discourse that Hollywood films such as “Quo Vadis,” whose characters draw pictures of fish in the dirt to indicate to one another that they are Christians, are in fact representing a position that has found (and even still finds) scholarly adherents.

Although not all scholars (especially those working primarily on early Christian fish symbolism) have gone to that extreme, it is perhaps these isolated figures of fish that have also led to the general presumption that images of fish were a part of an early Christian symbol code that allowed complex theological dogmas to be expressed in concise, simple terms.²⁵⁵ For example, André Grabar uses the isolated fish imagery on a painted wall in the Crypt of Lucina in the catacomb of Callixtus as one of the prime examples of his “image-signs”——here referring exclusively (according to him) to the eucharist.²⁵⁶ As indicated in Chapter 1 and as previous sections in Chapters 2 and 3 have shown, this position is untenable, and here I would add that code approaches such as this are essentially a more sophisticated version of what one sees in “Quo Vadis.”

Indeed, based on what one now already knows about early Christian fish symbolism, one can assume that isolated depictions of fish were just as complex in their symbolism as were the fish described in texts and depicted in meals. Since there is no surrounding narrative context,²⁵⁷

pp. 493-504 above.

255. See pp. 41-48 above.

256. *Christian Iconography*, 7-9. On the specific position of Grabar, see especially p. 42 above.

257. By narrative, I am simply referring to a coherently organized event.

however, it is particularly difficult to interpret with any degree of assurance the specific referents and associations in this type of iconography. As a result, descriptions of referential frameworks of fish symbolism are by necessity more speculative, and one should always keep this in mind when examining my interpretations. Yet I also show below that the texts of inscriptions (both on funerary monuments and on gemstones) and the appearance together with fish of other isolated images can provide important non-narrative contextual clues, albeit with some degree of uncertainty.²⁵⁸

At the outset, I should note that it is difficult to determine the pre-Christian origins (if there are any) of isolated fish symbolism. First, it is clear that dolphins were frequently depicted in Roman iconography on lamp bowls. They are shown in an assortment of poses including dolphins wrapped around the shaft of an anchor, two dolphins facing one another with an anchor between them, individual dolphins swimming in water, and other variations. Significantly, all of these dolphin poses are found on early Christian gemstones, sometimes accompanied by the IXΘΥΣ acronym, and occasionally they are found on epigraphic funerary monuments.²⁵⁹ In general, however, inscriptions (as opposed to gemstones) prefer to use fish that are clearly not dolphins.²⁶⁰

258. By isolated images, I do not mean that they are unrelated to one another, but rather that no ascertainable event is intended.

259. The following sampling of lamp catalogues provide numerous examples: P. de Brun and S. Gagnière, Les lampes antiques du Musée Calvet d'Avignon; S. Loeschke, Lampen aus Vindonissa; or H. B. Walters, Catalogue of the Greek and Roman Lamps in the British Museum.

260. As exceptions I would cite the following examples in Chart 2 in

To complicate matters, in several cases it is not certain whether the inscriptions with isolated fish images (often with anchors) are pagan or Christian. From Chart 2 at the end of this chapter, I would cite the inscriptions of Aegrilius Bottus, Domitianus, Exuperius, Lucius Septimius Severinus, Marcus Aurelius Hermaiscus, Quintus Vettina Eunoetus, the Scirti, and Valeria Victoria.²⁶¹ In these cases, there is no language or iconography that is identifiably Christian. In addition, in at least nine cases,²⁶² the inscriptions use the commonplace invocation to the pagan ancestral gods, D M (for diis manibus).

On the other hand, not only are there numerous instances of clearly Christian inscriptions using diis manibus,²⁶³ but there are at least three instances where clearly Christian inscriptions use diis manibus and fish iconography together on the same inscription: Licinia Amias, Pomponia Fortunula, and Popoulenia.²⁶⁴ In addition to showing that D M does not prove the pagan origin of a monument, these examples showing both D M and fish suggest the possibility that Christian inscriptions could make simultaneous use of pagan and Christian religious ideas.

Vitalio (I.35) and Scirti (I.42).

261. Respectively: I.13, I.17, I.25, I.29, I.40, I.42, I.47.

262. Chart 2: Aelius Titus Batonis (I.2), Domitianus (I.9), Exuperius (I.17), Licinia Amias (I.22), Marcus Aurelius Hermaiscus (I.30), Marcus Gutius Verinus (I.31), Pomponia Fortunula (I.37), Saturius (I.41), and Valeria Victoria (I.47). To these I would add Iulius Iustus (F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 2:396-97; 3:37.4 = pl.), Naevius Faustus (F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 2:401), and three funerary monuments from Dalmatia (Döl. 2:389-93; 3:41.1-3 = pls.; 3:42.1 = pl.).

263. For discussions of diis manibus in Christian inscriptions, see n. 8

Furthermore, several instances of fish iconography on pagan funerary epigraphic monuments come from contexts that are clearly distinct from the above-mentioned funerary inscriptions. In the part of Dalmatia now in Bosnia-Herzegovina in Yugoslavia, there are eight instances of fish on funerary monuments, but in most cases they are facing a disk that seems to represent a sacrificial bowl (patera)—thus indicating that here fish were perhaps specifically intended as sacrificial offerings or food for the dead.²⁶⁵ Also in these inscriptions are frequently found amphoras and jugs, as is the case in an inscription from Tarugo of Marcus Gutius Verinus, which also bears images of fish and of a bowl—again suggesting the context of sacrifice, but here including liquid sacrifice or libations.²⁶⁶ On several dedicatory inscriptions from North Africa that are associated with Baal Hammon (= Saturn) and Tanit (= Astarte and Attargatis),²⁶⁷ fish iconography is found that may well suggest a reference to votive offerings to these deities or that function as symbols of the goddess.²⁶⁸

In contrast, the inscriptions in Chart 2 are clearly funerary and not dedicatory. In addition, they do not have not bowls or amphoras, but rather usually an anchor or nothing at all. Outside of these inscriptions, there is not a funerary inscription with fish iconography from a purely pa-

264. Chart 2: I.23, I.37, I.38.

265. Döl. 2:391-94, 3:41.1-3 (pls.), 3:42.1 (pl.).

266. Chart 2: I.31.

267. On the associations of Attargatis with fish, see pp. 191-98 above.

gan context, such as a known pagan tomb or columbarium (which do not seem to have been Christian, since the bodies of the deceased were cremated). In contrast, there is a substantial number of identifiable Christian monuments that have fish iconography, often with anchors.²⁶⁹

In this regard, it is also significant that at least three early Christian inscriptions with fish iconography can be dated to a relatively early period. For example, the lettering style of the inscription of Licinia Amias suggests a date from around 200 C.E. and certainly prior to the fourth century C.E.²⁷⁰ In the cemetery beneath the basilica of San Sebastiano, four Christian inscriptions (Ancotia Auxesi, Ancotia Irene, Gaius Ancotius Epaphroditus, and Sempronia Agathouti) with fish iconography can be dated to possibly as early as the mid-second century C.E. and no later than the early third century C.E because of the archaeological context.²⁷¹ As observed in the previous chapter, it is also at the end of the second century C.E. that Avercius composed his funerary epi-

268. Döl. 2:270-77, 3:26-27 (pls.).

269. See the catalogues in F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 1 and 5 and in Leclercq. Since many of the monuments simply have fish with perhaps an anchor or the acronym IXΘΥΣ, but without further words, I have not included them in the chart or plates at the end of the chapter.

270. Although paleography is a notoriously questionable criterion for precise dating, the style of the letters in this inscription bear no resemblance to fourth century inscriptions. See Döl. 1:161 for discussion and reference to another inscription of 155 C.E. with an almost identical letter style.

271. Chart 2: I.3-5, I.43. For dating and/or archaeological context of the cemetery in San Sebastiano see the following for a preliminary investigation: G. Mancini, "Scavi sotto la basilica di S. Sebastiano" (especially 46-48); A. Prandi, La Memoria Apostolorum in Catacumbas; F. Fornari, S. Sebastiano (a very brief summary); and F. Tolotti, Memorie degli Apostoli in Catacumbas.

taph with its heavy emphasis on fish symbolism. Consequently, it would seem that, when Christians began to create identifiably Christian inscriptions around the end of the second century C.E., they made use of fish iconography both in epigraphic iconography and in epigraphic texts.

At the same time, it is important to note that the inscriptions that are not identifiable as Christian or pagan do not predate the second century C.E. This is also true of pagan sarcophagi that use fish in late second century kline meal scene iconography.²⁷²

At the very least, it would therefore seem that, around the very same time Christians were identifying themselves in archaeological monuments, individuals in the Graeco-Roman world began to use fish as important images in their iconography. In general, this confirms what I observed in Chapter 2, when I discussed the tremendous popularity of fish in the second and third centuries C.E., as demonstrated by writers such as Plutarch and Athenaeus. Although fish were also popular before that, apparently for individuals in the Graeco-Roman world that popularity found its way into iconography in the second century C.E.

But there may be even more to it than that. Since fish iconography on funerary inscriptions is clearly more widespread among Christians than pagans and since its appearance on inscriptions coincides exactly at the same time that Christians were creating their own identifiable archaeological monuments, I would suggest the hypothesis that many of the funerary inscriptions with fish and anchors which Dölger believes to have been pagan were actually Christian inscriptions.

It is virtually impossible to believe that Christians did not use funerary inscriptions prior to the end of the second century C.E. From this one can only conclude that Christian funerary inscriptions were simply indistinguishable from pagan funerary inscriptions. In all probability, they used D M and all the other standard funerary epigraphic formulae in Greek and Latin. No doubt at this time they had not developed any unique Christian names, but simply used the same ones as everybody else. The use of fish at the end of the second century C.E. in iconography would certainly not have shocked pagans as very much out of the ordinary, but would have been a convenient way to identify funerary monuments of deceased Christians as identifiably Christian. In this way, early Christians would have used an item (fish) that had long roots in the Graeco-Roman world, but would have been sufficiently distinctive to make known their identity.

This does not preclude the possibility that some of the inscriptions with fish were pagan, but strongly suggests the probability that many of them were Christian and that their purpose was in part to signal that they were Christian without drawing attention to an item that others in the Graeco-Roman world might have found bizarre.

Once again, however, I should emphasize that this signal aspect of fish symbolism is dependent upon the various referents and associations that meant so much to early Christians.

In order to do this, it is necessary to describe the referential network of fish symbolism on these monuments. As in my discussion of fish in meal scenes, I outline (without first postulating a Christian context) the rough framework of referents and associations that would have been

available to a non-Christian individual in the Graeco-Roman world. In my opinion, it is only prudent to do so for these inscriptions on at least three counts: some of those from Dalmatia and Tarugo (with images of jugs, amphoras and bowls) are clearly pagan;²⁷³ my hypothesis concerning the Christian identification of the others must be considered tentative; and (in any case) my hypothesis does not suggest that all of them must be Christian. In addition, as repeatedly emphasized, the meanings of pagan fish symbolism serve as the basis for the early Christian use of fish as an important religious symbol.

Above all, fish were generally associated with death in the Graeco-Roman world and were clearly viewed in the inscriptions from Dalmatia and Tarugo as references to sacrificial gifts for the dead or to funerary meal food. Undoubtedly, even when fish were seen as swimming in water (as for example would certainly seem to be the case of fish swimming in a horizontal position on inscriptions and gemstones toward anchors),²⁷⁴ the context of food would seem to apply to these instances of fish symbolism. For in several cases of fish appearing to swim, there are

272. See pp. 528ff. above.

273. I exclude the Baal Hammon and Tanit dedicatory inscriptions from North Africa, since the images of fish on them probably belong to a specialized cultic symbolism that is specifically connected to those deities.

274. In some cases, the water is specifically indicated by curvy lines: e.g. in Chart 2 Lucius Septimius Severinus (I.25) and Sempronia Agathouti (I.43); and Döl. 4:172.1 (pl.), where there is actually also bread. Vertically placed fish on two of the inscriptions from San Sebastiano (Atimetus = A.5 and Ancotia Irene = A.4), as well as numerous examples on both inscriptions and gemstones (especially of dolphins), probably in part indicate a fish captured in water. For the latter, see Charts 2 and 3.

also found bread loaves (Domitia, Syntrophion, T. Flavius Eutychius, and two grave closures).²⁷⁵

Thus, the context of death is always of primary importance for fish iconography on inscriptions, while the reference to food is of primary importance at least in those instances where food is specifically indicated (that is, in inscriptions with bowls or bread loaves). On the other hand, the presence of fish on a gravestone probably always suggested funerary food or offerings of some sort, even without these indicators, since fish were so closely associated with that function and since fish that swim did not preclude fish that were consumed. In these latter instances, the reference to food would most likely have been a secondary one.

The culinary context for fish does not seem to be explicit on gemstones, because there are no examples on them of bread loaves, bowls, or other indicators of a meal. Since gemstones on rings, medallions, and other kinds of jewelry in the Graeco-Roman world have often borne representations that (one hoped) would have had a positive magical effect on the bearers and a negative one (apotropaic) on those who were their enemies, it seems likely that fish were in part chosen because, in the Graeco-Roman world, they were thought to have had powerful magical properties.²⁷⁶ This certainly seems to be the case in the use of the IXΘΥΣ acronym in the inscription of Marinna,²⁷⁷ since one finds therein a concern for the possibility that someone might disturb her grave.

275. E.g. in Chart 2: Domitia (A.11), Syntrophion (A.44), Titus Flavius Eutychus (A.46), and two grave closures (B.1, B.3).

276. See J. Engemann, "Fisch, Fischer, Fischfang," p. 994.

On the positive side, fish were believed to enhance fertility and sexual potency, which not only would have referred directly to actual sexual relations, but would also have been closely linked to the general power that an individual possessed.²⁷⁸ Conversely, the reference of fish in the Graeco-Roman world to silence would have encouraged the silence of one's enemies.²⁷⁹ In addition, their association with sleeplessness,²⁸⁰ because their eyes were continually open, just as in the case of the popular evil eye,²⁸¹ would have indicated that divine forces were always wide-awake in watch against one's enemies.²⁸²

Furthermore, the magical powers of fish make sense in another context; for fish probably gained their magical influence, because they were strange and mysterious creatures who lived in a watery realm that was foreign and associated with the realm of the afterlife.²⁸³ Thus, part of their magical power originated in their association with death and afterlife. While the context of death may not have been a preeminent association of fish on gemstones, it was clearly an association that in part endowed images of fish with magical power. In the general referential

277. Chart 2.I.32.

278. See pp. 292-301 above.

279. See pp. 279-85 above.

280. See pp. 285-87 above.

281. On the evil eye in the Graeco-Roman world, see for a start W. Deonna, Le symbolisme de l'oeil.

282. There may well be a direct connection between the apotropaic

framework of fish symbolism on gemstones, the association of death should probably be placed in the background, out of which emerged the more explicit magical associations.

On the contrary, fish iconography on funerary inscriptions most likely referred more explicitly than on gemstones to the connection between death and magical power that was inherent in fish symbolism. From numerous epigraphic texts, it is well-known that individuals in the Graeco-Roman were particularly concerned with the disruption of burial through the interference of another intruding grave.²⁸⁴ In the view of many persons, the apotropaic power of fish would in part have acted as a magical iconographic deterrent to those seeking to disrupt the peace of the deceased—that is, “this grave is protected by ever-watchful divine powers; do not disturb it, or . . . “ On a more positive note, the magical and divine power of fish probably promised a satisfying afterlife for the deceased—here in funerary contexts indicating that they would be well-fed by their survivors. In this way, the fish iconography on inscriptions could have connected the magical power of fish to the role of fish as food.

In addition to its association with death, the magical power of fish was also probably related to its association with the forces of sexuality and fertility. In a funerary context, the presence of fish would probably have indicated the promise of new life—new life for the deceased after death

function of the evil eyes and of the fish with its ever-open eyes.

283. See pp. 262-76 above.

and the promise of progeny for their survivors. In this regard, it is significant to note that, in one of the child graves beneath the inscription of Domitianus in Boulogne-sur-mer in France with its images of two fish, there was found on the skeletal remains of a child a necklace on whose medallion gemstone was depicted a phallus.²⁸⁵ Here this would seem to suggest that the images of fish were connected both to the hope of new life for the child and for the addition of more children like him or her to the family.²⁸⁶ At the same time, the depictions of large vertically placed fish (not shown with portrayals of fishermen) in two inscriptions from San Sebastiano in Rome (Ancotia Irene and Atimetus) and on the sarcophagus of Livia Primitiva (originally from Rome) suggest a phallic connotation.²⁸⁷

Fish are also related to new life in another way, since they were associated astrologically with death and deliverance.²⁸⁸ To put them on an inscription or even on a gemstone would possibly have indicated a hope for salvation through the influence of the stars.

284. E.g. R. Lattimore, Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs, 106-18.

285. Chart 2.I.13. See V.-J. Vaillant, "Le nouveau cippe romain de Boulogne-sur-mer," 222-23.

286. In fact phalluses are often found in funerary contexts: see H. Herter, "Phallos" in PW 19.2:1728-33.

287. Chart 2: A.4-5 and C.1. On large fish as phallic, see pp. 293-94

For persons in the ancient world, a satisfactory afterlife consisted not only of being well-fed, but of living in an ideal setting, which was for them the bucolic countryside.²⁸⁹ In part, the display of a fish indicates those parts of rustic regions associated with water, which was considered an essential feature of a bucolic setting in antiquity. Here the close association of fish and shepherds/sheep in the same iconography—in three inscriptions (Domitia, Heliopais, and Lucius) and on the sarcophagus of Livia Primitiva²⁹⁰ suggest both water and land as rustic regions.²⁹¹ In general, fish are included in funerary iconography so as to suggest the watery aspects of an ideal bucolic afterlife. When the juxtaposition of fish with shepherds is made on gemstones, it would have indicated for pagans a pleasant life in the present—that is, while alive.²⁹²

above.

288. See pp. 248-61 above.

289. On the importance of bucolic contexts for afterlife, see pp. 288-91 above.

290. Chart 2.I.11, 2.I.21, 2.III.1. See also the inscription of Pastor, which contains the IXΘΥΣ acronym: Chart 2.I.36. There is probably a double wordplay here: IXΘΥΣ meaning fish and pastor meaning “shepherd.” Thus, in a different way, shepherds and fish are probably connected here.

291. On fish/fishermen and shepherds/sheep, see pp. 336-41 above.

292. See the following instances in Chart 3: 1-3, 5, 8-9, 14-16, 21. It is also interesting to note that in Chart 3.17a, the crook of a shepherd is placed above a fish.

As well as these factors, one must consider another that fits in well with the general interest of much of the Graeco-Roman world in word-play. In at least three instances on funerary epitaphs, one of the motivations for the use of fish iconography seems to have been the connection between an actual name and a fish or anchor. In the case of the inscription of Licinia Amias, the image of a fish is very likely linked to the name Ἀμιά (Amias), which also refers to a tuna.²⁹³ In two instances of inscriptions (Ancotia Auxesi and Ancotia Irene) from the cemetery beneath the basilica of San Sebastiano in Rome, the names of Ancotia (Ἀγκώτια) and Ancotius (Ἀγκώτιος) are probably indirectly related to the Greek and Latin words for anchors and halyards: ἀγκυρα, ἀγκοινα, and ancora.²⁹⁴ For the stem ἀγκ- (Lat. anc-) generally indicates any bent item (especially a bent arm) and thus is used as a stem in words for bent objects,²⁹⁵ such as anchors.²⁹⁶ In this instance, the reference to an anchor might have led not only to the depiction of an anchor, but also its natural accompanying item—a fish.

293. Chart 2.I.23.

294. Chart 2.I.3-4.

295. The use of a “nu” instead of a “gamma” is not surprising in later Greek and probably here follows Latin practice (especially likely in the city of Rome), as indicated by the Latin word for “bent,” ancus, where the stem is clearly anc- (see also Lat. uncus). Furthermore, ἀγκ- and ἀνκ- would also have been pronounced in almost the same way and would have therefore orally evoked the same notion of “bent.”

296. Some other related Greek words with the stem ἀγκ- and the meaning of “bent” are the following: ἀγκος, ἀγκών, ἀγκωνίζω, ἀγκάλη, ἀγκύλη, etc.

Thus, it seems possible that in certain cases the stimulus for fish symbolism stemmed in part from the magical power of proper names themselves.

Another factor is determinative for the entire referential framework of isolated fish symbolism. As repeatedly noted in Chapter 2, fish were a pervasive feature of life for any individual in the Graeco-Roman world. Menus not only featured fish regularly as one of the primary ingredients, but gave many non-fish items the taste of fish through the application of garum and other related sauces.²⁹⁷ Isolated fish began to appear on monuments in the second century C.E., which immediately follows the period of tremendous popularity of fish that reached its great heights in the first century C.E. and continued throughout the remainder of Graeco-Roman antiquity. I believe that this is not an accident. In part, this sudden flourishing of isolated fish iconography was probably related to the growing ubiquitousness of fish in the Graeco-Roman world.

From all indications, this development was particularly associated with Christian monuments and with the distinctively Christian identity that they were signaling. As persons in the Graeco-Roman world, Christians would undoubtedly have been just as interested in fish as pagans and consequently would have understood the kinds of referents and associations that fish had outside of a Christian context. From the Christian

point of view, therefore, the popularity of fish in their socio-cultural environment likely meant that fish would be particularly effective items for identifying themselves and for expressing their religious attitudes and beliefs.

In general, I would suggest that the referential framework of isolated fish symbolism centered on essentially three primary meanings: eucharist, new life (baptism, astrological new age, and/or the ideal bucolic environment characterizing new life), and Christ as embodied in the IXΘΥΣ acronym. For the most part, scholars have tended to emphasize one of these three at the expense of the others and have felt compelled to manipulate the meaning of isolated fish symbolism so that it would fit into the kind of one-one-correspondence approach outlined in Chapter 1. Yet, as should be clear from my discussions in Chapter 2, all of these meanings were clearly interrelated. Thus, fish could refer to the eucharist, because they referred in part to Christ, who was embodied in the eucharist. At the same time, they could refer to Christ, because the commonplace associations of fish with food (and therefore the eucharist) meant that fish could represent what Christians consumed——namely Christ. In addition, the baptismal associations (as well as the astrological and bucolic ones) of fish were clearly related to the eucharist in the context of death; that is, both recalled the death of Christ, which in turn brought new life. Likewise, because a fish could represent Christ, it also became possible that fish could represent Christians (that is, those who were baptized).

I could continue, but the overall pattern should be clear.

Before treating these individual areas of meaning, I should note that images of fish were sometimes included in iconography that was composed of a variety of images. For example, on the sarcophagus of Livia Primitiva, I have already proposed that a fish is placed together with sheep, a shepherd, and an anchor in such a way that it seems as if it is formulating a catalogue of symbols.²⁹⁸ Furthermore, on a number of gemstones, one finds composite subjects including fish alongside doves, shepherds, sheep, Jonah scenes, and anchors.²⁹⁹ From these depictions, it would seem that some early Christians viewed fish as one in a series of important visual symbols, by means of which they represented themselves to one another and to non-Christians (pagans and perhaps Jews).³⁰⁰ As a result, the complexity of fish symbolism would suggest to a certain extent that series of symbols such as the above examples were not religious codes, but rather concise visual ways of expressing complex symbolic systems.

In my discussion of the pagan aspects of isolated fish symbolism, I argued that fish iconography was clearly associated with food in general,

297. See pp. 149-55 above.

298. Chart 2.III.1. See p. 113 above.

299. In particular Chart 3.15-16.

300. Except for the isolated images of fish and anchors, all of these images were extremely popular subjects in iconography on paintings, sarcophagi, and gemstones. An examination of the index of Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane (by A. Nestori) reveals their high frequency.

as well as in sepulchral contexts with food for sacrificial offerings and funerary feasts. From the evidence of funerary epitaphs and grave closures in Chart 2 that show images of bread and fish together (which one does not generally see in pagan monuments of that type), it is probable that they are referring to a specifically Christian meal—— most likely the eucharist.³⁰¹

In contrast, connections to the eucharist would have been placed further in the background of the referential framework of fish symbolism on early Christian gemstones, since there is no evidence of bread loaves or other food items on them. But one must not make the error that many scholars make in assuming that, unless there is specific iconographic or textual evidence to the contrary, the imagery should be considered decorative or one-dimensional. In fact, absence of evidence does not prove this, but should simply lead to the admission that one does not know the references of fish iconography on gemstones for certain. Considering the weight of textual evidence pertaining to fish symbolism, considering the instances on several gemstones of composite arrangements of series of symbols including fish, and considering the relationship of fish on many gemstones to the IXΘΥΣ acronym, one should, in fact, probably assume that fish on gemstones had extremely complex symbolic networks that would have contained a variety of referents and associations including the eucharist——albeit in the background.

In addition, it is interesting to note the offering of fish in the inscription of Iulia Martina, since it places that scene beside an epigraphic text

expressing hope for life in God (in deo vivant).³⁰² In this regard, the inscription of Theodoros is significant, since it also joins the image of a fish to an inscription mentioning the hope for life in God (Ζώμεν ἐν θεῷ).³⁰³ As a result, one might even suggest that at least in instances such as these the consumption of fish produces new life—thus returning one to the above-mentioned issue of new life and fish symbolism.

While most scholars have focussed on one or another of three areas of isolated fish symbolism (eucharist, baptism, and Christ),³⁰⁴ they have not, however, placed baptism under a more comprehensive category, which I proposed above and call “new life.” Of course, baptism was in large part a ritual emphasizing the new life attained by becoming Christian. But, as I have observed, early Christian fish symbolism focussed on new life not only in terms of baptism, but also in terms of the idea of a new age for all humanity and of a rural landscape that would make this new life a happy place in which to live. A broader category is therefore needed.

In at least one instance—the inscription of Licinia Amias—the connection between baptism and fish is indicated by the reference to “fish of the living” (ΙΧΘΥΣ ζώντων), where “living” here seems to indicate “living water” (ὕδωρ ζών).³⁰⁵ In addition to referring to fish through the

301. See also pp. 558-66 above.

302. Chart 2.I.20. On this terminology, see J. Janssens, Vita e morte, 324-26.

303. Chart 2.I.45.

304. Perhaps most clearly explained by C. R. Morey, “The Origin of

use of the IXΘΥΣ acronym, the inscription also refers to fish through the depiction of two fish.

Another indication of the connection of fish iconography to baptism is the inclusion of textual references to faith on inscriptions together with images of fish. For the creed of faith was recited during baptism, and that is why faith became an indication of an individual who was baptized.³⁰⁶ For example, in the inscriptions of Nonius Vitalius and Postumius Eutheron, the depiction of two dolphins and the IXΘΥΣ acronym (respectively) occur together with an epigraphic text that contains the adjective “faithful” (fidelis).³⁰⁷ In the inscription of Marcianus, a fish is depicted, and the deceased is described as a “neophyte” (neophytus), which means one who is newly baptized.³⁰⁸ Finally, at the same time that the inscription of Zosimos displays images of fish and an anchor, the deceased is described as one who is “faithful from the faithful” (πιστὸς ἐκ πιστῶν).³⁰⁹ Although it is difficult to determine the precise meaning of this phrase, it seems to indicate that Zosimos was one who had been baptized into Christianity by other baptized Christians.

While there is no internal evidence that gemstones with fish iconog-
the Fish Symbol.”

305. 2.I.23.

306. On the reference of faith to baptism in inscriptions, see J. Janssens, Vita e morte, 19-36.

307. Chart 2.I.35 and 2.I.39.

308. Chart 2.I.28.

raphy refer to baptism, one can guess that they did, since seal rings functioned in the Graeco-Roman world as a kind of personal identificatory mark,³¹⁰ and baptism seems to have constituted the identificatory mark that made one a Christian.³¹¹

The kind of new life that baptism (as represented by fish iconography) promises is suggested in the funerary inscription of Marcianus, for whom the inscription requests: “let the heavens open for you” (celi tibi patent).³¹² In another sense, the reference to “heavens” recalls the importance of the astrological associations of fish symbolism with the promise of new life in a new age. Whether there are one or two fish, the astrological connotations of fish were clearly messianic and eschatological.³¹³ The connection between fish symbolism and baptism leads to another eschatological reference in the inscription of Macedon, which combines the iconographic of a fish with a direct textual reference to “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις).³¹⁴

From another point of view regarding new life, I have already shown that the atmosphere of paradise, whether in a pagan or a Christian context, was regarded in terms of a rustic ideal. But for early Christians, the new life provided by baptism affected life prior to death as well. Thus,

309. 2.I.49.

310. For discussion of rings in general, see Endnote 2.

311. For baptism as a seal, see F. Dölger, Sphragis.

312. Chart 2.I.28.

313. See pp. 248-61 above.

for ancient Christians, the juxtapositions of fish/fishermen and shepherds/sheep on some gemstones suggest that the rustic ideal also characterized the life of the Christian in his or her life while alive.

In addition to the association of fish iconography with new life, it also clearly could refer to Christ, usually in the form of the IXΘΥΣ acronym—frequently seen in the inscriptions in Chart II. In several instances, it is significant that the acronym comes immediately after references to God in the inscriptions of Betton, Eutychianus, and Victor (where it also comes after a chi-rho)—thus emphasizing the importance of the divine both in terms of God and Christ.³¹⁵ It is also of interest that in the inscription of Licinia Amias, the acronym comes immediately after the invocation to the pagan deities, diis manibus—here apparently indicating that the divine can be indicated both in terms of pagan and Christian divinities.³¹⁶

Furthermore, through an examination of some inscriptions and gemstones, it is apparent that the IXΘΥΣ acronym is not simply a word, but also could sometimes possess the connotation of the iconographic image of a fish. This is suggested in instances where iconographic images of fish occur simultaneously with the IXΘΥΣ acronym in numerous cases on

314. Chart 2.I.26.

315. Chart 2.I.6, 2.I.16, 2.I.48.

316. Chart 2.III.1. On the possible henotheistic interpretation of God and the inclusion both of pagan and Christian divinities into one entity, see my discussion of the manes in “Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin,” 683-84.

gemstones and in the inscription of Licinia Amias.³¹⁷ It is also shown in the inscription of Pectorius, where the acronym is combined with an evocative description of a fish in a spring, so that it is clear that the author of the poem had some kind of imagery in his mind.

While the IXΘΥΣ acronym obviously refers to Christ, iconographic images of a fish seems to refer explicitly and directly to Christ in the fourth century C.E. and afterwards, when they are accompanied by a chi-rho (the first two Greek letters of the name, Christ = Χριστός). Especially significant are images of fish that directly follow or precede a chi-rho, such as in the inscriptions of Emilius, Lucius, and Saturius.³¹⁸ In such cases, it is also possible that these images of fish not only refer to Christ through the chi-rho, but that they also refer to him by functioning in part as iconographic representations of the IXΘΥΣ acronym itself. For example, just as the IXΘΥΣ acronym follows references to God in several inscriptions, in the inscription of Theodorus, an image of a fish follows a reference to “living in God”—here suggesting that a fish is equivalent to the IXΘΥΣ acronym.³¹⁹

Thus, it seems that, at least in the context of fish symbolism, iconographic image and word are closely linked in the same symbolic network. Iconographic images of fish represent the IXΘΥΣ acronym in their referential network, and at the same time the IXΘΥΣ acronym brings to mind fish imagery. Furthermore, I would surmise, the iconographic

317. In general see Chart 2, and specifically Chart 2.III.1.

318. Chart 2.I.15, 2.I.24, 2.I.41.

image can refer to the word (when the word is not carved), while (at least in the Pectorius inscription and probably in many other cases) the word can refer to an image (when the image is not carved). In large part, this should confirm the possibility that, contrary to the tendency in some scholarly circles of seeing the iconographic images of early Christian art and the words of early Christian literature as completely unrelated, those who formulated early Christian iconography in fact not only kept visual features in mind, but also verbal ones; and those who used words also kept visual features in mind. This discussion should recall my argument in Chapter 1: in a study of symbols one must not view either texts or iconography as secondary appendages of one another.

In the final analysis, there are two ways of using fish to make reference to Christ: one primarily visual and the other primarily verbal, but the visual and verbal are always to some extent intermingled.

While the IXΘΥΣ acronym in general refers primarily to Christ, it is interesting to observe in the inscription of Licinia Amias that, as has been seen, in addition to the Christian wordplay on *ixθύς*, there is another kind of wordplay on Amias and tuna.³²⁰ Thus, it would seem that the composer of this epitaph transformed a secular wordplay on fish into a religious wordplay on fish.

From an instance such as this, it is perhaps easier to see how important is the magical component of fish symbolism in the Graeco-Roman world that clearly inspired this kind of wordplay in the first place and that

319. Chart 2.I.45. In the inscription of Marcellos, an anchor following

clearly influenced the early Christian interpretation of fish symbolism. Here I should add that the magical associations of fish were also important in other even more fundamental ways. Thus, one can plausibly deduce that it was the magical efficacy of fish that in part made possible its reference to the transformative power of baptism and the eucharist, to the astrological influence of heavenly bodies, and to the divine authority of Christ himself, whose own partially magical efficacy in changing human life into a new kind of life was such an important part of early Christianity.

In conclusion, I have tried to show how Christians built their own interpretation of isolated fish symbolism on that of the Graeco-Roman world in which they lived. From this analysis, one can see that they enriched the referents and associations of pagan fish symbolism, while at the same time they formulated a kind of fish symbolism that was just as complex as that found in early Christian meal scenes. In this regard, I should again underscore the tremendous dynamism of a symbolism that allowed images of fish to refer at the very same time both to Christ and to Christians—whether one or two fish are depicted. Although I do not want to argue that isolated fish symbolism was the most important aspect of early Christian fish iconography and although I must again admit the uncertainties that are always inherent in interpreting this particular kind of

a chi-rho seems to refer to Christ in place of the fish: Chart 2.I.27.

iconography, I think that one can now begin to understand the tremendous significance that isolated fish symbolism held for early Christians.

Further developments. As an addendum to this section, one should observe the fourth century (375 C.E.) iconography of the early Christian Brescia Lipsanoteca (made of ivory) in northern Italy.³²¹ At the far left on the sculpted pilaster is a large fish hanging by a hook from a cord on a nail. Here the reference seems to have been to the crucifixion. This is made even more explicit in a now destroyed fresco from a church in Aquileia on the northern Italian Adriatic, in which a fish hangs by a hook from a line that extends from a cross, on which Christ is being crucified and is held by Mary/Ecclesia.³²²

In cases such as these, fish symbolism was explicitly related for the first time to the crucifixion. Since fish were closely associated with death in the Graeco-Roman world, such a reference is easily explainable. In addition, it parallels textual developments of approximately the same chronological period that showed Christ as the fish roasted on the cross.³²³

Yet, in a sense, the reference of a fish to the crucifixion underlines the

320. See Chart 2.III.1.

321. For a beginning, see F. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 5:205-225 and 3:5.4 (pl.); J. Kollwitz, Die Lipsanothek von Brescia; J. Engemann, "Fisch, Fischer, Fischfang," 1080 (with up-to-date bibliographic references); and L. Wehrhahn-Stauch, "Christliche Fischsymbolik," 38.

very allusive character of early Christian fish symbolism prior to the end of the fourth century; for it was not until this relatively late period that the image of a fish referred directly to one particular item to such an extent vis-à-vis other items. Thus, a fish in a meal scene of the third and early fourth centuries C.E. may have referred to Christ, but that reference was not made explicitly—which would have been the case, for example, if it had been placed beside an indisputable image of Christ (as here an image of a fish is placed beside a nail or an actual cross).

In general, as I suggested with the meal scene from Ravenna,³²⁴ the explicit character of the references from Brescia and Aquileia indicates that early Christian iconographers tended to specify the referents of fish imagery more precisely as one moved forward chronologically.

322. L. Wehrhahn-Stauch, “Christliche Fischsymbolik,” 38, fig. 43.

323. See pp. 484-87 above.

324. See pp. 584-85 above.

FISHING ICONOGRAPHY³²⁵

Introduction

In this section, I examine most available evidence for fishing imagery on sarcophagi and in paintings, as well as a few examples in other material media. Generally, one may divide this iconography into two categories. The first category consists of the depictions of one or two individual fishermen in the process of capturing a fish or simply displaying the result of a fishing success. The second category consists of depictions of frolicing youths and/or erotes, who are engaged in fishing (among other things) amidst semi-*Nilotic* scenery.

Description of Category 1: individual fishermen

In those instances of fishermen engaged in catching fish, the fishermen are depicted in dynamic non-frontal positions so as to emphasize the action involved in capturing a fish.³²⁶ The catching apparatus can consist of a rod with line attached to it or of a net being drawn in.³²⁷ In those instances where they have already captured fish, the fisherman is often depicted in a static position so as to indicate that the fishing activity has

325. Unless otherwise indicated, all references in this section are to Chart 4.I.

326. Rep. 35, 777, 832, 955; WPs 4.1, 141.2; WPp 27.2, 27.3; glass bowl from Carthage (Chart 4.VI.1).

327. Fishing rod with line: Rep. 35; WPs 4.1. Nets: Rep. 955; WPs 141.2. The glass bowl from Carthage depicts fishermen of both types on opposite shores: Chart 4.VI.1.

been completed.³²⁸ Sometimes they are shown with a fishing line at the end of which is attached a fish to a hook,³²⁹ and sometimes they are shown with a large basket into which they have put the captured fish.³³⁰

From the depictions of their clothing and accoutrements, one sees confirmation of the literary descriptions of fishermen as poor and socially disadvantaged.³³¹ For example, their apparel often consists of merely a breech-cloth (the so-called subligaculum) without cover for their upper body;³³² this was frequently worn by poor individuals engaged in manual labor. At other times, fishermen wear a tunic with one sleeve bare,³³³ which was called the exomis (ἐξωμίς) or sleeveless chiton (χιτὼν ἑτερομάσχαλος) and which was worn by slaves and the poor.³³⁴ Sometimes the fisherman carries a “wallet” (σάκκος, saccum) or a small basket.³³⁵ In the Graeco-Roman world, poor persons and beggars often

328. Rep. 70, 806, 955; WPs 4.1, 10.4 (= Rep. 806).

329. Rep. 70; WPs 1.3, 4.1; Gar. 5:371.4 (= WPs 2.1).

330. Rep. 35; 747.3; glass bowl from Carthage (Chart 4.VI.1).

331. See pp. 242-47 above.

332. Rep. 35, 747.3, 832; Gar. 5:371.4 (= WPs 2.1); WPs 27.2; so also both fishermen in the glass bowl from Carthage (Chart 4.VI.1).

333. Rep. 35, 70, 777, 835, 955, 958; WPs 1.3.

334. See “Χιτὼν” in PW 3:2309-85 (Amelung), especially 2328-29 and Supplement 1:288-94 (Amelung); and G. Blum, “Tunica.”

335. Wallet: Rep. 777, 955 (in which the fish can be seen). Basket: Rep. 35, 806; WPs 1.3; Gar. 5:371.4 (= WPs 2.1).

used such items to carry bread, grains, and also small fish,³³⁶ as is explicitly the case in one instance.³³⁷ In other instances, fishermen hold the fish directly in their hands.³³⁸

Of particular interest is the unique depiction on a glass bowl from Carthage in North Africa of a scene of two fishermen, one of whom is fishing with a line and the other with a net, on opposite shores.³³⁹ Significantly these fishermen are designated as the apostles, Peter and John——thus demonstrating the Christian character of the monument. As a result, other features of this scene were probably meant to be understood in a Christian context, such as the building in the background and the two fish placed crosswise on some rocks between the apostolic fishermen.³⁴⁰ While the placement of these fish recalls similar iconography in non-Christian Roman contexts,³⁴¹ here they should probably be understood in part as a reference to those Christians captured by the missionary hooks of Christian preachers.³⁴²

336. See “Saccus” in PW 2.1:1622-25 (Hug.); and E. Saglio, “Saccus.”

337. Rep. 955.

338. Rep. 806, 832; WPs 10.4 (= Rep. 806), 4.1.

339. Chart 4.VI.1.

340. The proper interpretation of the building remains undetermined: J. Villette believes it a tomb, while L. Wehrhahn-Stauch sees it as the temple out of which salvific water flows in Ez. 47 (for this biblical passage see no. 14 in Appendix 2; and for commentary on it, nos. II.E.1-2 in Appendix 1).

341. See pp. 556-57 above.

342. Of course, this is only one part of the symbolic network. It would

Furthermore, one also occasionally finds some significant iconography featuring fishermen on gemstones. One of them depicts a fisherman bearing a line at the end of which is a fish that is designated as IXΘΥΣ.³⁴³ In this instance, the image of a fisherman is clearly linked to a fish in its form as Christ. At the same time, one genre of gemstones represents Tobit as a fisherman gutting the magical fish that would cure him of his blindness.³⁴⁴ As observed in the previous chapter, the fish of Tobit in part refers typologically to Christ, whose miraculous activities also produced a healing result.³⁴⁵

In addition to the actual portrayals of fishermen in this category, one must also describe the kinds of images to which these fishermen are linked. In this regard, one should distinguish between two types of linkage. The first consists of those images which are separate from the fisherman scenes, but which are associated by proximity with fisherman iconography. The second consists of those images that either constitute the actual scene in which fisherman iconography is embedded or form separate visual components of the same scene as the fishermen.

Especially frequent on sarcophagi are the depictions of fishermen in the vicinity of shepherds.³⁴⁶ In some instances of this type, fishermen are also include such items as the two fish miraculously feeding the crowd in the New Testament, as well as Pisces and Christ.

343. Chart 3.6.

344. Gar. 5:173.8-10.

345. See pp. 484-87.

346. For general discussion of the concurrent use of the images of

placed in panels to the side of a central scene covering the main body of the sarcophagus that often includes shepherds.³⁴⁷ In one sarcophagus, a fisherman and shepherd are placed at either side of a meal scene (which perhaps significantly includes a fish in the meal), while the narrow sides of the sarcophagus have a fisherman and shepherd, thus forming a kind of double frame.³⁴⁸ In two sarcophagi, the fisherman and shepherd form corresponding side panels.³⁴⁹ From the arrangements on one sarcophagus, one can see that a panel of a fisherman forms the left panel beside the central panel of Orpheus in his role as shepherd.³⁵⁰ In another sarcophagus, two fisherman are seen immediately below the scene of a shepherd beside a sheep barn.³⁵¹ Of significance are two instances, where fisherman iconography is placed directly beside baptismal scenes.³⁵²

In the category of coherent scenes in which fishing forms only one component, I would place one particular example depicting the Jonah narrative, in which fishermen can be seen plying their trade at both horizontal ends of the narrative (Rep. 35). Here they are probably included in part to emphasize the marine context that the Jonah narrative would na-

fishermen and shepherds in early Christian iconography, see M. Simon, "Symbolisme et traditions d'atelier dans la sculpture chrétienne."

347. Rep. 747; Gar. 5:371.4 (= 1:2.1).

348. Rep. 806 and WPs 10.4.

349. Rep. 777 and 955.

350. The right panel is destroyed: Rep. 70; WPs 4.1.

351. Rep. 35.

turally have evoked. Thus, in this case, the symbolic network of these fishermen must have included an association with the symbolism of the Jonah story.

In addition to this context, I should note that, in two boating scenes on sarcophagi, a fisherman is portrayed as part of the company of the boat along with the other sailors.³⁵³ In one of these, the boat is clearly the same as that boat which bore Jonah before being thrown into the jaws of the sea monster. As in the above case, the symbolic network of the fisherman would therefore have been connected to the Jonah story.³⁵⁴ But in these two instances, the placement of the fishermen on the boat suggests that the boating activity itself is directly connected to fishing.

Because of the nature of much of early Christian iconography (especially iconography prior to the early fourth century in the Constantinian period), it is often difficult to discern when two images form one scene or two separate (but related) scenes. For example, while the fishermen in Rep. 35 above can be viewed as framing elements of a marine scene, they can also be comprehended as distinct images that bear meaning beyond this purely atmospheric sense. At the same time, in the cases of the iconographic juxtaposition of a fisherman and a baptism, we have two separate scenes, but together they also can be understood to constitute two thematic wings of the same diptych. Thus, although the divisions made above help to explain the function of fishing imagery in different

352. Rep. 777.

353. Rep. 832 and 958.

iconographic arrangements, one should also remember that they must usually be regarded as only partially explanatory.

In general, the depiction of fishermen in pagan iconography in the Graeco-Roman world is not common on sarcophagi, although it is relatively frequent in paintings and on sculpture in the round.³⁵⁵ In contrast to this, the number of early Christian sarcophagi with images of fishermen is relatively frequent (at least seven), while there are comparatively few examples of fishermen in early Christian paintings and sculpture in the round. The reference of Clement of Alexandria to fishermen on early Christian seal rings would seem to indicate that he assumed that they were common on non-Christian seal rings as well.³⁵⁶

It is possible that the accidental character of archaeological preservation—especially given the rather small data base available in this case—has simply produced a difference that is not representative of what was the actual state of affairs. Yet, it may be important to observe that, when individual fishermen (that is, Category 1) are depicted in Christian material media, they are for the most part found in funerary contexts.³⁵⁷ On the other hand, when they are depicted in pagan material media, they are found for the most part in domestic contexts.³⁵⁸ In part, one may view this as a result of the paucity of iconographic evidence

354. Rep. 958.

355. E.g. sculpture in the round: H. P. Laubscher, Fischer und Landleute.

356. See Text # XVII.1 in Appendix 1.

from early Christian houses.³⁵⁹ But it may also indicate that early Christians were particularly interested in relating the symbolism of fishermen to a funerary context, whereas pagans primarily viewed it as more closely connected to the establishment of a pleasant environment that would be appropriate for relaxing and eating in one's home. In this regard, it is likely that the general association of fish with death would have applied to the imagery of fishermen in early Christian funerary iconography.

In order to determine the frequency of appearance of images of fisherman in sarcophagi, one should consider the problem of the identification as Christian or pagan of the following four sarcophagi: those found in La Gayole in France, Ravenna, the Giardini Boboli in Florence, and Sardinia.³⁶⁰ In my opinion, these sarcophagi are more probably Christian than pagan. While images of sheep-bearing shepherds (chriophori) and orants may sometimes be included in pagan sarcophagi (as well as in various other visual media),³⁶¹ they are both in fact characteristic of visual symbols found on early Christian monuments. If one examines the various collections of sarcophagi, it is clear that shepherds and orants are

357. As can be seen by a quick glance at Chart 4.

358. In paintings and sculptures that decorated homes.

359. See pp. 4-5 above.

360. WPs 1.3; WPs 2.2; WPs 1.3; and Gar. 5:395.5.

361. On chriophori in ancient art see N. Himmelmann, Über Hirten-genre in antiken Kunst; and on orants in ancient art, see T. Klauser, "Studien," 115-45 (1959).

much more frequently found on early Christian than pagan ones. In addition, in three of the four sarcophagi, shepherds and or orants appear together on the same sarcophagus—an even stronger confirmation of their probably Christian character. In any case, there are seven indubitably Christian sarcophagi with depictions of fishermen.³⁶²

Interpretation of Category 1

As observed in Chapter 2, Greeks and Romans used a variety of water images including fishing in order to establish the atmosphere of a bucolic environment (the so-called locus amoneus) in both sepulchral and domestic contexts.³⁶³ In this regard, one group of scholars who has examined early Christian fishing scenes has concluded that there is nothing more to add to their interpretive descriptions than to indicate that they are simply modelled after the bucolic settings of pagan imagery.³⁶⁴ And for them “bucolic” simply refers to the evocation of a pleasant environment without necessarily suggesting the context of an afterlife. By defining the function of such imagery as solely atmospheric, these scholars are in fact advancing one version of the decorative theory that I have already examined in depth in Chapter 1.³⁶⁵

Yet, as noted above, one must question the assumption that those in

362. Rep. 35, 70, 747, 777, 806, 832, 955, 958.

363. See pp. 288-91.

364. E.g. J. Dölger, IXΘΥΣ 5:641-47; F. Gerke, Die christlichen Sarkophage der vorkonstantinischen Zeit (consult the relevant sarcophagi); and J. Engemann, “Fisch, Fischer, Fischfang.”

the Graeco-Roman world used fish and fishing iconography solely for the purpose of decoration. For example, I have shown in this chapter that a large fish in a pagan meal scene not only indicated a normal meal, but also (among other things) prestige, death, sexuality and fertility, and the continuance of life after death. By ascertaining these referents and associations, I confirmed a conclusion in Chapter 2 that a bucolic atmosphere formed only one aspect of the symbolic network of fish symbolism in the ancient world.

Furthermore, in a funerary context in the Graeco-Roman world, one would have used a bucolic environment for much more than a purely decorative purpose. Like many other images, ancient iconographers characteristically used fishermen in order to evoke the pastoral qualities of a particular environment and in order to set a specific tone for a variety of different iconographic arrangements. In a sepulchral context, therefore, fishermen did not function merely as meaningless decorative fillers, but rather as images that could produce a bucolic mood—which for a variety of reasons seems to have comforted visitors to the grave and the deceased themselves.

Indeed, in general, in the Graeco-Roman world, a bucolic atmosphere constituted an ideally comforting environment in which the well-to-do wished to spend their leisure time in life and in which everyone hoped to live after death.³⁶⁶ It could further function as a specific description of the truly bucolic garden areas surrounding ancient tombs and cemeteries,

365. See pp. 110-17

in which family and friends (especially including members of collegia) gathered to eat funerary meals and to participate generally in the cult of the dead.³⁶⁷ By using this iconographic vocabulary of pastorality, individuals such as early Christians were therefore using a variety of images including fishing (whether fishermen, shepherds, birds, Jonah lying under the gourd tree,³⁶⁸ or doves) to evoke a tone that comforted by reference to an ideal location in the afterlife, an ideal location in this life, and/or to an actual bucolic funerary setting in this life. Fishing imagery would certainly have set a pastoral tone that indicated these kinds of ideal locations, although it is unclear whether it would have referred to the specific context of an actual funerary garden or an outdoor funerary dining area.³⁶⁹

Thus, from the outset one can guess with some degree of likelihood that the association of early Christian fishing scenes with “decorative” imagery only forms the very beginning of the iconographic story.

366. See pp. p. 543 above.

367. See pp. 541-45 above. As argued there, early Christians would, for the most part, probably have eaten outdoors outside of catacomb structures.

368. Modelled after the beautiful youth Endymion who was believed to have slept everlastingly and is pictured in iconography sleeping under a tree.

369. Fishing ponds could sometimes even be included in funerary areas. E.g. Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani 5.6: “. . . in the cemetery of Marcobius Candidianus, which is situated near the fishponds (piscinae) on the Mappalian Way. . . .” Thus, fishing scenes could have literally indicated the watery features of the rustic environment of a sepulchral context.

In contrast, other more theologically oriented scholars have ignored the pagan bucolic context and have assumed that fishing scenes must simply be understood in terms of the early Christian metaphor of Christ as fisherman converting Christians³⁷⁰—which in turn refers to later Christians (apostles and preachers) converting their contemporaries to Christianity.³⁷¹ For commentators such as these, the bucolic associations of fishing in the Graeco-Roman world do not exist or are completely irrelevant, as are the other pagan associations outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. As argued throughout, this is clearly an incorrect approach. For the “Christian” meaning of fishing symbolism (as for fish symbolism in general) depends upon the prior “pagan” associations and referents of that symbolism.

In general, one can assume that the kinds of referents and associations of fishing symbolism in texts were also a part of the network of meanings of fishing symbolism in iconography. So as not to repeat much of this material again, I would like to draw attention to a few specific aspects of early Christian fishing iconography that provide a different lens on fishing symbolism in general.

1) It may be significant that depictions of fishermen are as a rule placed to the side of more centralized images, such as shepherds, philosophers/teachers with scrolls, and the Jonah narrative. Thus, they are not the most emphasized images in early Christian iconographic ar-

370. E.g. J. Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (relevant sections); L. Wehrhan-Stauch, “Christliche Sarkophagsymbolik”; and L. Drewer, “Fisherman and Fishpond.”

rangements. Instead, their placements suggest that they were frequently viewed as framing elements and that consequently one of their primary purposes was to set a pastoral tone.

2) Although fishing iconography served this tone-setting function, it most likely also functioned as a symbolic network that was composed of numerous referents and associations. This conforms to my general working hypothesis that the meanings of images of fishermen in early Christian iconography were not completely divorced from the meanings of early Christian textual descriptions of fishermen. Even more important, the ubiquitous use of fishermen as complex symbols in early Christian literature makes it difficult to believe that what was widespread in one medium (texts) would have been unknown in the other (iconography).³⁷²

At least four features of the iconography seem to confirm this hypothesis. In the first place, images of fisherman on sarcophagi are often placed in separately framed panels, such that they were apparently understood as discrete visual units. As a result, it would seem that, although they framed more centralized pictures, images of fishermen possessed their own distinct status as symbols, which were separated from other visual items on the relevant sarcophagi. In general, these specially

371. See pp. 406-481.

372. The presumed chasm between the two media has more to do with the intellectual distance between art historians and textual interpreters in some modern academic institutions than it does with any evidence for such a distance between ancient iconographers and writers.

framed fishermen probably served the double purpose of setting a mood and functioning as symbols with all the concomitant referents and associations.

In addition, in two cases, images of fishermen are placed next to baptismal scenes (probably representing John the Baptist and Jesus)—thus suggesting the commonplace association in early Christian texts between fishing and baptism discussed in the previous chapter.³⁷³ With the baptismal context, one can also probably infer that in these cases fishing symbolism was closely connected to the missionary metaphor of early Christian apostles and preachers as fishermen converting non-Christians in the form of fish to Christianity. In all probability, the association of fishing and baptism, as well as conversion, naturally formed a component of the symbolism of all early Christian fishing iconography, whether or not actual baptismal imagery was present in the vicinity.³⁷⁴

The missionary aspect of fishing symbolism is explicitly confirmed in one instance—the glass bowl from Carthage—where the two images of fishermen are identified as John and Peter.³⁷⁵ In general, the images of fishermen in early Christian iconography probably refer in part to the apostles.

Furthermore, one finds on two early Christian sarcophagi with images of fishermen a centralized depiction of a philosopher/teacher—

373. See pp. 406-81, especially 423-36.

374. As the ubiquitousness of those associations in early Christian texts suggests.

375. Chart 4.VI.1.

probably Christ——reading from a scroll.³⁷⁶ By using this type of iconography, early Christians were likely conveying (at least in two instances) an educational context and were intending to emphasize the role of Christ as teacher. As a result, one can infer that other images associated with, or even framing, the image of Christ as philosopher/ teacher acquired an educational connotation as well. Thus, early Christians may have sometimes given bucolic images such as fishing scenes an added pedagogical allusion so that what was once fundamentally bucolic also became educational. In this regard, fishing might not only have evoked a pastoral landscape, but also the tradition of apostles and preachers convincing non-Christians to convert to Christianity partly by means of their pedagogical skills. This would certainly have tied in nicely with the missionary themes discussed above.

Finally, the frequent concomitant uses of images of fisherman and orants (five times) on the same early Christian sarcophagi suggests that fishing scenes were viewed in a religious context.³⁷⁷ Whether or not orants referred to the deceased in prayer, to the living praying for the deceased, to a combination of both, or to some general abstract idea of piety, they clearly signified prayer in one form or another. Since prayer was an important component of ancient religious life——whether pagan or Christian——orants probably therefore indicated in part the sacral character of the iconography associated with them, such as fishing

376. Rep. 747; WPs 2.1. In Rep. 777, the role of the man with a scroll in the act of baptizing is not clear. Possibly the scroll refers to the baptismal liturgy.

scenes. If this was true, then one can conclude that early Christian fishing scenes functioned in a more complex fashion than simply as images setting a pastoral mood,³⁷⁸ but bore instead at least some religious connotations.

3) In relation to the missionary aspects of the symbolism of fishermen, one should observe the inclusion in the iconography of the three universal elements—water, which is closely related to fishing scenes, as well as to boating pictures including the Jonah narrative; earth, which is indicated through the depictions of trees and plants, as well as through sheep grazing; and air, which is displayed by means of images of doves flying. In addition to following a tradition of envisioning the world in terms of the three elements—an ancient literary and scientific commonplace—this mode of iconography may express the view that Christianity would spread throughout the world. Just as an image of the entire universe is expressed through three elements, so the possibilities of expansion are also universal—as especially indicated through the conversion imagery of fishermen.

4) As shown in the descriptions of the attire of fishermen, it is clear that they were understood as poor individuals. From what was discussed in Chapter 2, this conforms well to the literary descriptions of fishermen as poor, uneducated, unclean, and socially disadvantaged in general. For

377. Rep. 747, 777; WPs 1.3, 2.1, 4.1; and Gar. 5:395.5.

378. I should add here that, given my interpretation of orants as implying something religious, orants also to some extent set a mood. In this case, they set a religious mood, which would have been be a part of the symbolic complex of orants.

this reason, it is probably not an accident that images of fishermen and shepherds coincided so frequently in early Christian iconography.³⁷⁹ For at the same time that shepherds—as well as the sheep pasturing around them—were regarded as components of the prototypically idyllic pastoral landscape,³⁸⁰ they were also considered poor, undeducated, boorish, immoral, unclean, and socially disadvantaged.³⁸¹

In general, therefore, a pastoral mood and socio-economic lowliness constituted concomitant features of the symbolism both of fishermen and shepherds.³⁸² As a result, early Christian fisherman iconography was in part emphasizing the role of apostles and preachers as fishermen, who could combine (among other things) a connotation of an idyllic life after death with the ideals of poverty and non-conformity to social norms.

5) As one sees in Chapter 2, the symbolism of fishermen (like fish themselves) in the Graeco-Roman world included associations with sexuality and fertility.³⁸³ In particular, one of the most important of the patron deities of fishermen was Priapus—the phallic god.³⁸⁴ In early Christian fishing iconography, there are frequent depictions of long, large

379. See pp. 336-41 above.

380. See pp. 336-41 above.

381. For this contradiction in ancient Judaism, see the comments of J. Jeremias, “πομπήν,” 488-89.

382. This is not completely foreign to modern American conceptions of rusticity, which also can combine an idealization of country life with a dislike for, and misrepresentation of (e.g. ignoring the poverty of many rural areas), the inhabitants who live there.

383. See pp. 292-301.

fish, often at the end of long fishing rods and lines,³⁸⁵ and these clearly suggest the imagery of phalluses (as argued above).³⁸⁶ In addition, the placement of these fish in a vertical position not only suggests the image of a phallus, but also recalls the depictions of phalluses on some monuments, including those dedicated to Priapus.³⁸⁷ Thus, early Christians may have partially intended their fishing iconography to evoke the tremendous multiplicatory powers of fish and the capacity of fishermen to tap into that power—with the intention of indicating the divine power of Christian preaching in converting to Christianity numerous individuals throughout the geographical extent of the ancient world.³⁸⁸

384. See p. 295 above.

385. Rep. 35, 70, 955 (in the right hand of the fisherman); WPs 1.3, 2.1 (= Gar. 5:371.4), 4.1.

386. See p. 575, etc.

387. For these figures, see H. Herter, De Priapo.

388. In general, see pp. 406-81.

Category 2: fishing scenes of fantasy in early Christian contexts and their interpretation

In contrast to the depictions of one or two fishermen fishing in a standard marine setting (as in the first category), early Christians also depicted fishermen as several naked, frolicsng putti and/or erotes amidst the picturesque features of fantastic marine scenes.³⁸⁹ There are at least seven examples of this type of iconography.

In a floor mosaic of the southern basilica of Theodore in Aquileia (314-319 C.E.)—apparently beneath the altar—numerous images of fishing were placed alongside the Jonah narrative and in the context of typical Roman mosaic iconography,³⁹⁰ which displays the abundant variety of fish species in the Mediterranean.³⁹¹ Of all the instances, this is the only one that includes the Jonah story as one of its components. In a now destroyed church located on the Monte della Giustizia (near the baths of Diocletian) in Rome, the apse contains paintings (now destroyed and dating from c. 375-400 C.E.) that include a band with fishing scenes and apparently a similar display of marine fish species.³⁹² In addition, one

389. Putti = naked children; erotes = naked winged boys in the form of Cupids. For investigation of putti in Roman art, see R. Stuveras, Le putto dans l'art romain. On erotes in ancient iconography, see "Eros" in LIMC 3.1:850-1086; 3.2, pls. 609-741; 4.1:1-12; 4.2, pls. 6-12.

390. The standard publication is G. Brusin and P. L. Zovatto, Monumenti paleocristiani di Aquileia e di Grado. For an updated treatment, see Bruna Tamaro, et al., Da Aquileia à Venezia, 185ff. and pls. For briefer description, see Chart 4.V.1 in Appendix 5.

391. For more discussion of this, see pp. 288-91 above and Chart 2.V.1.

392. The original description and plate is found in G. B. de Rossi,

can determine from drawings that, in the now destroyed mosaic on the cupola of the early fourth century mausoleum of Santa Costanza, a waterscape with fishing scenes was represented in front of an array of biblical images.³⁹³ In the apses of two churches in Rome—San Giovanni in Laterano and Santa Maria Maggiore—fishing scenes also figure prominently in apse iconography.³⁹⁴ While these latter two examples clearly date from the thirteenth century, they are so remarkably similar to the Santa Costanza iconography that they were probably based on older models from which all three borrowed. Finally, in a fourth century Christian sarcophagus from Rome, one finds in a boat youths who are engaged in fishing.³⁹⁵

From the inclusion of shorelines, embankments, trees, buildings, water fowl (ducks, swans, and assorted birds), and land-based fishermen, one can see that early Christians intended this scene to represent the shore-

“Oratorio privato del secolo quarto scoperto nel Monte della Giustizia,” although it seems likely that the identification of this building as a private house or house church is incorrect (see P. Testini below). De Rossi also cites an important glass piece that may have relevance for the interpretation of the apse iconography in “Insigne vetro.” For a general description, see C. Ihm, Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei, 15-16, 149-50, and fig. 1. The most comprehensive and detailed analysis is found in P. Testini, “Osservazione sull’iconografia del Cristo in trono fra gli apostoli” and “L’oratorio scoperto al ‘Monte della Giustizia’.” For briefer description of this, see Chart 4.V.2 in Appendix 5.

393. For the mosaic iconography of this monument, see H. Stern, “Les mosaïques de l’église de Sainte-Costance à Rome”; also J. Engemann, “Fisch, Fische, Fischfang,” 1053-54. See my description in Chart 4.V.3 in Appendix 5.

394. E. Müntz, “Notes sur les mosaïques chrétiennes de l’Italie.”

395. Rep. 557 (Chart 4.I).

lines of seas and oceans.³⁹⁶ In general, a warm-weather Mediterranean climate appears to have been clearly indicated, since most of the youthful fishermen (erotes and putti) are depicted as naked, since many of the trees are cypresses and palms, and since cattle were sometimes grazing beside the water. Yet, the employment of wings on the youths and the absence of clothes on their bodies certainly did not reflect an actual event, but rather an imaginary and fanciful conception that one should regard as a sort of fantasy. Therefore, while normally clothed fishermen (which one finds in the previous category) are also found here in these fishing scenes, they are ensconced in a completely different environment.

In regard to the position of the fishermen (both youthful erotes or putti and normally clothed adult males), one encounters them in boats, on rafts, on piers, on shore, and riding on the backs of dolphins. In terms of the methods of fishing, those fishing are found using rod and line, harpoons, nets, and fences (which were employed in the Graeco-Roman world to maneuver fish into an enclosed and limited area for easy capture). Furthermore, images of large baskets filled with fish are also common in these fishing scenes.

In general, these fishing scenes also bear the stamp of Nilotic imagery that is found in Graeco-Roman iconography with its warm-weather flora and temples on the shore, as well as the figures of fantasy including erotes and putti.³⁹⁷ Thus, while the water represented in these scenes

396. Thus, I would disagree with the conclusion of A. Hermann ("Der Nil und die Christen," 66-68) that these are essentially Nilotic scenes. On the other hand, the fantasy-like descriptions of both Nilotic imagery and these fishing scenes must have been closely connected, as can be

clearly referred to seas or oceans, the iconography is also tinged with reminiscences of the Nile river. In a sense, this combination of freshwater and saltwater would have been perfectly acceptable to individuals in the Graeco-Roman world. For, as described in Chapter 2, all the waters of the earth were thought to be connected.³⁹⁸ Furthermore, as a scene of fantasy, such a combination was an appropriate feature. Finally, in the church apses of San Giovanni in Laterano and Santa Maria Maggiore, the rivers where the fishing takes place seem to have referred to rivers of paradise, as similar imagery in the fifth century apse mosaic of Hosios David in Thessaloniki makes clear.³⁹⁹

The kinds of fantasy-like iconographic motifs found in this imagery also occur in pagan fishing iconography of all material media, especially the use of putti and winged erotes as boatmen and fishermen.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, the use of such motifs in early Christian iconography suggests a very explicitly seen in some of the paintings of Pompeii.

397. Especially from Pompeii: see A. Hermann, "Der Nil und die Christen." An example of a Nilotic scene with putti in an early Christian context is found in an apse mosaic of the early fourth century basilica of old St. Peter's (preserved in sixteenth century drawings); see H. Leclercq, "Mosaïque," DACL 12.1, 267-73 and fig. 8529.

398. See pp. 263-64.

399. For discussion and plates of this church, see A. Grabar, Martyrium, 2:98, 2:198-202; C. Ihm, Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei, 182-84 and pl. 13.1; R. F. Hoddinot, Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia, 175-77, figs. 48a, and photos VI-VIII F; F. Gerke, "Il mosaico absidale di Hosios David al Salonico"; and J. Snyder, "The Meaning of the 'Maiestas Domini' in Hosios David."

400. For paintings, see the references collected in A. Hermann, "Der Nil und Die Christen," 65, n. 261.

clear dependence on pagan models. When early Christians used fishing iconography, they were probably drawing in part on the meanings of such iconography in pagan contexts. Since fishing scenes of this type were particularly popular images in pagan domestic contexts, one can assume that they served to set the kind of pastoral mood already discussed in detail.

In addition, the display of marine species that are found in at least two early Christian instances (the Basilica of Theodore in Aquileia and the church on Monte della Giustizia in Rome) and in several pagan cases suggests the function of the seas and oceans as suppliers of some of the basic nutritional needs, as well as gustatory pleasures, available to individuals in the Graeco-Roman world.⁴⁰¹ This would also have probably been true (though to a lesser extent) of normal fishing scenes, where only a few fish species are indicated, since a small number of items was clearly intended to represent much larger possibilities.

As a result, such depictions may have served as a reminder of the miraculous power of water. By using figures of fantasy such as erotes and putti who were engaged in a fanciful kind of fishing, both pagans and early Christians probably further emphasized this miraculous power. In addition, the association of fishing scenes with both the Nile—a river whose floods wonderously furnished food for much of the Graeco-Roman world—and the biblical rivers of paradise further emphasizes the supernatural character of the activity in which the fishermen were engaged.

Yet, unlike the pagan use of fantasy fishing iconography, early Christians employed it not primarily in domestic contexts, not on relatively small objects (such as sarcophagi), nor in tombs, but rather in central positions in relatively large religious monuments. In fact, five of the seven occurrences of this iconography are found in churches, while the seventh comes from a mausoleum—all major buildings.

At the same time, it is probably significant that in such important structures early Christians placed this iconography not in peripheral locations—as was the case in the first category—but rather in visually central and important positions.⁴⁰² In fact, in four of the five above-mentioned churches, fishing scenes are placed in the central apse, while in the basilica at Aquileia they are placed in another equally significant position beneath what would have been the altar.

Therefore, rather than functioning as decorative extras, fishing imagery constituted centrally placed iconography in significant buildings. Contrary to the arguments of some scholars who view these scenes purely as conventional pastoral mood setters, their prominent place in

401. For full discussion of this, see pp. 124-61 above.

402. In the overall iconographic arrangements, however, fishing imagery is of secondary emphasis in comparison to the imagery surrounding it (shepherds and sheep, Christ enthroned, etc.)—which confirms my conclusion that fishing iconography was seen as a complement to other early Christian iconography, especially shepherds (see pp. 336-41). Nevertheless, the fishing imagery of Category 2 is placed in a more central location *vis-à-vis* the entire monument than it was in Category 1, since fishing imagery is carved at the edges of a sarcophagus (Category 1), but in the most important place in a church (Category 2).

major architectural structures suggests that they indeed had a very important symbolic function and a complex network of meanings.

In general, one can probably assume that the kinds of referents and associations of fishing imagery described in my discussion of Category 1 are similar to those here in Category 2. But there are particular features of the iconography that suggest a somewhat different overall constellation of meanings.

For instance, because of the central placement of these fishing scenes, there may have been a particularly strong emphasis on the missionary interpretation of fishing by early Christians. In this regard, in scenes where marine life is displayed in all its variety, the multiplicatory powers of fish would have further emphasized the persuasive capacity and power of conversion of early Christian preaching. The frequent occurrences of images of large baskets of fish would have suggested the same thing. In addition, the presence of erotes indicates an erotic component of this imagery—suggesting that conversion through preaching is akin to capture by love. Furthermore, the association of the waters of fishing scenes with miraculous power emphasizes the sacred task in which preachers were engaged while they fished for Christians.

As discussed in Chapter 2, fish were particularly associated outside of early Christianity with the salvation of human beings—by means both of stories of rescues and of the tradition that fish represented the coming of a messianic age.⁴⁰³ And I observed in Chapter 3 how this was used in early Christian fishing symbolism. Thus, perhaps more than in Category

1, the employ of centrally placed fishing imagery would probably have confirmed the salvific force of the early Christian message. In addition, the proximity of fishing imagery to scenes of Christ and to the Jonah narrative also suggest the importance of salvation.

Finally, the fantastic character of much of the imagery of Category 2—erotes, putti, combination of river and ocean, Nilotic features, and rivers of paradise—suggests an emphasis on the wondrous nature of fishing that did not seem to be as present in the more mundane examples of Category 1. Thus, here the religious function of early Christian fishing imagery seems to be explicit.

403. See pp. 195, 206, 226-29, 248-61.

ENDNOTES

1. On early Christian visual symbols, and early Christian art in general, useful overview bibliographies may be found in the following: Dumbarton Oaks Bibliographies (covering bibliography from 1892-1967), which organizes in 2 vols. the annual bibliography in Byzantinische Zeitschrift; P. Testini, L'archeologia Cristiana (2nd ed.), "Appendice bibliografica," 809-31; and P. C. Finney, "Early Christian Art and Archaeology." In vol. 2.28 in Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, a bibliography by P. C. Finney should be forthcoming. In order to keep up with the most currently developing bibliography, useful are Archäologische Bibliographie (probably the most complete for iconographic themes); "Bibliographische Notizen und Mitteilungen" in Byzantinische Zeitschrift (especially under "Ikonographie. Symbolik. Technik"); and Repertoire d'art et d'archéologie (especially under "... paléochretien (art)"). For articles on a variety of iconographic themes, see Dictionnaire d'archéologie et de liturgie (very important for many articles on early Christian symbols); Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum; and Rellexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst.

For a list of visual symbols in catacomb paintings, see A. Nestori, Repertorio Topografico. Because its photographs were taken (though touched-up) when paintings were in better condition, the plates in J. Wilpert, Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms, are still essential for third and fourth century catacomb painting. For an annotated list of imagery on sarcophagi, see Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage (ed. F. Deichmann, et al.; for Roman Christian sarcophagi, see the volume, Rom und Ostia). Since early Christian symbols appear frequently on gold glass (including Jewish gold glass), see especially the following corpora for various visual symbols therein: R. Garrucci, Vetri ornati in figure in oro; H. Vopel, Die altchristlichen Goldgläser; C. R. Morey, The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library; I. Schüler, "Note on Jewish Gold Glasses"; and T. M. Schmidt, "Ein jüdisches Goldglas." For discussion of the Christian gold glass materials, see J. Engemann, "Bemerkungen zu spätromischen goldgläsern" and "Anmerkungen zu spätantiken Geräten." I do not know of a comprehensive survey of early Christian symbols found in jewelry and gemstones, but a still very important collection of early Christian gems is O. M. Dalton, Catalogue of the Engraved Gems of the Post-Classical Periods (British Museum), although other significant collections exist also in Germany and in Rome. Basic for the study of visual symbols on inscriptions is P. Bruun, "Symboles, signes, et monogrammes."

For a discussion of symbols in the context of early Christian art in general, most up-to-date and comprehensive is F. Deichmann, Einführung in die christliche Archäologie. Unfortunately (though it contains some useful bibliography), to be avoided is G. Snyder, Ante Pacem, which incorrectly dates many post-Constantinian materials and images to the pre-Constantinian period. For a broader survey of symbols extending chronologically beyond the ancient period one may consult with some degree of caution (see pp. 47-48, etc.) the following lexicons of Christian symbols: L. Réau, Iconographie de l'art chrétien; H. Aurenhammer, Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie; E. Kirschbaum et al., Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie; and G. Schiller, Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst.

Since Rome is the location where the vast majority of pre-Constantinian art exists and where a huge quantity of fourth century art is found as well, it is useful to know something about the catacombs. Most extensive on this topic remains P. Testini, Le catacombe romane (with the review of H. Brandenburg, in Byzantinische Zeitschrift), but useful also are U. M. Fasola, "I cimiteri cristiani," and L. Pani Ermini, "Antichità cristiane." For later bibliography, see the "Appendice bibliografica," in P. Testini, Archeologia cristiana (2nd ed.), 802-13. Still of critical importance, and in much need of reevaluation, is G. B. De Rossi, Roma sotterranea cristiana (1864-1877). For a general sketch in English, useful is J. Stevenson, The Catacombs. For the origins of the catacombs, see H. Brandenburg, "Überlegungen zu Ursprung und Entstehung der Katakomben Roms." An acquaintance with the Rivista di archeologia cristiana allows one to remain current with excavation developments in Rome. For appraisal of the state of catacomb study, see L. Reekmans, Die Situation der Katakombenforschung in Rom and "Zur Problematik der römischen Katakombenforschung."

The technique of photogrammetry, where three-dimensional pictures are taken, and drawings made from them, is making the catacombs and the symbols within them more accessible to interpretation. In this regard, of particular importance (especially because of the wealth of iconographic materials, including several banquet scenes with fish) is the exhaustive photogrammetric study of the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus (mostly fourth century paintings) in J. Deckers, et al., Die Katakombe "Santi Marcellino e Pietro". For a study of the use of photogrammetric techniques in funerary settings, see especially L. Reekmans, "Essais photogrammétriques." But also see *idem*, "Zur Problematik der römischen Katakombenforschung," 257-60; and Die Situation der Katakombenforschung in Rom, 37-38.

Since dating is so difficult for archaeological materials in general and since it is of such importance for discerning historical developments and changes in the meanings of visual symbols, one should point to the following studies on early Christian painting, which are of critical importance: L. Reekmans, "La chronologie de la peinture paléochrétienne"; and L. Pani Ermini, "L'ipogeo dei Flavi in Domitilla" (I and II). Unfortunately, the studies of late antique Roman painting have not been able to establish chronologically clear and definable styles. In this regard, most useful for distinction between painting styles (though not always for chronological purposes) is especially P. Wirth, Römische Wandmalereien. But see also: J. de Wit, Spätromische Bildnismalerei; M. Borda, La pittura romana; and W. Dorigo, Late Roman Painting. For distinctions between pre-Constantinian and post-Constantinian sculptural reliefs on sarcophagi, see especially F. Gerke, Die christlichen Sarkophage der vorkonstantinischen Zeit; H. Brandenburg, "Stilprobleme" and "ARS HUMILIS." For dating of catacomb materials on the basis of archaeology, see L. Reekmans, Die Situation der Katakombenforschung, 22-38.

On early Christian views of art as found in literary evidence, see the groundbreaking discussion in Sister C. Murray, Rebirth and Afterlife, 13-36 (also "Art and the Early Church"), where she questions the commonly held notion that early Christian writers objected to visual imagery

and attempted to ban artistic depictions. As she points out, there is no evidence to support the idea that visual imagery is a product primarily of heretics or of the ignorant and uneducated poor. For interesting parallels on the origins and development of the Christian cult of the saints, see P. Brown, The Cult of the Saints. For both Jewish and Christian inscriptions, there is (as far as the extant evidence allows one to discern) no distinction in the use of visual imagery by poorer and more well-to-do persons. For a more traditional presentation, however, see F. Deichmann, Einführung in die christliche Archäologie, 110ff.

For general overviews of early Christian art and archaeology, best are F. Deichmann, Einführung in die christliche Archäologie; and P. Testini, L'archeologia cristiana. Also of use is A. Effenberger, Frühchristliche Kunst und Kultur. In English, there is no up-to-date satisfactory work, although one may still find helpful the following older works: A. Grabar, Early Christian Art from the Rise of Christianity to the Death of Theodosius and The Golden Age of Justinian from the Death of Theodosius to the Rise of Islam; F. van der Meer and C. Mohrmann Atlas of the Early Christian World; C. R. Morey, Early Christian Art; and W. F. Vohlbach and M. Hirmer, Early Christian Art. Not meant as an overview, but very useful is E. Kitzinger, Byzantine Art in the Making.

Since symbols may be found in churches (though generally, almost all fourth century and later), it is desirable to be familiar with Christian architecture. Fundamental and a starting point are R. Krautheimer, Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture and Corpus Basilicorum Christianorum Romae. For a study of a pre-Constantinian church with its iconography, see C. H. Kraeling, The Excavations at Dura Europus . . . The Christian Building. For corpora of iconographic scenes in churches, see for a start (among others) C. B. Ihm, Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei on apse mosaics; and W. Oakeshott, The Mosaics of Rome, which includes church mosaics.

For a history of the discipline of "Christian Archaeology" (consult pp. 99ff. above for a discussion of this phrase), see especially, F. Deichmann, Einführung in die christliche Archäologie, 14-45. Also useful primarily for the catacombs (which are very much at the foundation of the discipline), see P. Testini, Le catacombe, 15-37; *idem*, Archeologia cristiana, 64-72; and J. Stevenson, The Catacombs, 45-54. Useful as an example of over-exaggeration is G. Snyder, Ante Pacem, 3-7. In regard to the latter, though he is correct that there are definite groups in Rome (Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana) and in Bonn (Institut für Antike und Christentum"), it is important to know that not everyone falls under one category or the other. For instance, some of those mentioned by him under the Rome school are, in fact, not educated or a part of the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana or even share their intellectual position. Often it is a matter of orientation and not membership in a "school."

2. Clearly a footnote cannot provide an introduction to ancient art and its relation to ancient visual symbols, nor is there space in the text for such a purpose, but a few very introductory and cursory bibliographic citations might be helpful for those unfamiliar with this material. Since Christian art and symbols were a part of ancient Roman art in the Graeco-Roman world, one needs to be aware of the appropriate corpora. I have found of particular value for this purpose the collections of visual materials in the sarcophagus series, published by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. For an introduction to sarcophagi, see G. Koch and H. Sichtermann, Römische Sarkophage. Collections of other corpora and relevant bibliography may be found in B. Andreae, "Bibliographie zur Sarkophagforschung." For ancient painting, particularly valuable is H. Mielsch, "Funde und Forschung zur Wandmalerei" (with extensive bibliography); see also the references to late antique painting in Endnote 1. Because of its importance for Roman wall painting, Pompeii contains materials which provide exceptional rewards through study. For reviews of the subject matter of Pompeian iconography, see for a start the following: L. Curtius, Die Wandmalerei Pompejis; K. Schefold, Pompejanische Malerei; *idem*, Die Wände Pompejis (especially the index); and *idem*, Vergessenes Pompeji. Because of the frequent appearance of fish on finger rings, it is useful to be familiar with the major bibliography and handbooks on this material. For introductions with useful bibliographies, see M. Henig, "The Luxury Arts"; P. Zazoff, Die antiken Gemmen; R. Higgins, Greek and Roman Jewelry; J. Boardman, Greek Gems and Finger Rings; and especially for bibliography, Babesch (Bulletin Antieke Beschaving--Annual Papers on Classical Archaeology) 58 (1983): 133-177. Since fish also appear on Roman lamps, one needs to consult the relevant corpora. See the bibliography in K. Goethert-Polaschek, Katalog der römischen Lampen. Unfortunately, no comprehensive study exists of visual images in non-Christian inscriptions.

For a study of the meaning of Roman funerary art, still classic is B. Andreae, Studien zur römischen Grabkunst. For more general bibliographic purposes, most useful are the bibliographic compilations found in Archäologische Bibliographie; in Repertoire d'art et d'archéologie; and in Babesch. For general information with bibliography on a variety of iconographic subjects, see the Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (= LIMC). Also important is the computer data base of LIMC, located in Rutgers, N.J. For general introductory overviews of Roman art in English, see M. Henig (ed.), A Handbook of Roman art, as well as D. Strong, Roman Art. Also useful are R. Bianchi-Bandinelli, Rome: The Center of Power; and *idem*, Rome, the Late Empire.

Chapter 5

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

By this point it should be clear that early Christian fish symbolism consisted of extremely complex networks of meanings, which were organized in a dazzling variety of ways. Rather than functioning as codes that revealed singular object in the form of one-to-one correspondence, early Christian fish symbolism served as intricate referential arrangement that furnished meaning through varying degrees of emphasis and through differing referential relationships. As a result, my study has demonstrated that fish symbolism is fundamentally relational in nature.

In addition, early Christian fish symbolism was not simply a theological statement, or a mystical expression, or a pleasant decoration, or a sociological reflection. Instead early Christians used fish as a mythico-religious symbol that included theological, cosmic, decorative, and socio-historical components in its overall network of meanings. In fact, the various attempts to see fish in terms of one particular perspective crumble before the extraordinary complexity and multivalence of meaning that emerge, when divergent perspectives are allowed to coexist.

At the same time, fish symbolism is not reducible to a particular function in the Graeco-Roman world--whether culinary, status signifying, bucolic, sacred, salvific, astrological, apotropaic, or sexual. In virtually every instance of early Christian fish symbolism, there exists the probability that each one of these aspects is present to one degree or another. Differences in meanings depend upon differing emphases among them, and relationships between them.

Furthermore, the various attempts to understand early Christian fish symbolism either as a self-contained Graeco-Roman symbol or a self-contained Christian symbol neglect to take into account the overwhelming preponderance of referential elements that bear the stamps of both worlds. In almost every instance, features that were Christian emerge out of a Graeco-Roman network of meanings, while features that were originally Graeco-Roman bear the imprints of early Christian reinterpretation.

In the final analysis, it is impossible to understand early Christian fish symbolism without comprehending its non-Christian Graeco-Roman components--both secular and religious. Similarly, early Christians saw fish symbolism through Christian lenses, and thus one must also pay equally close attention to Christian elements.

As suggested through Chapter 1, what applies methodologically to early Christian fish symbolism, almost certainly pertains in general to religious symbolism in the Graeco-Roman world. Consequently, the failure of numerous scholars to consider a diversity of perspectives and functions in their descriptions of ancient religious symbols means that they omit many of their essential referential components.

This omission ultimately renders the kinds of approaches discussed in Chapter inadequate and (even more significant) ahistorical.¹ In contrast, my dissertation has taken alternate approach, arguing that symbols function as elements crucial to the organization of the human environment. As early Christian images, fish served as symbols that organized (not copied) their Graeco-Roman environment in Christian mythico-religious terms. In order to do this, they incorporated under the rubric of the mythico-religious category a wide variety of referents and associations that make possible this organization. By considering all the refer-

ences and associations accessible to the modern historian, I believe that I have therefore presented in this dissertation a more historically precise description than heretofore accomplished.

In addition to establishing a methodological approach that includes historical complexity, I have attempted to avoid the pitfalls caused by the necessary acquisition, and presentation, of a great bulk of detail. In fact, this kind of informational flood has caused many interpreters to feel compelled to embark either upon the above-mentioned reductionist paths or to write works that are essentially trivia collections. Instead of following these approaches, I have endeavored to organize an admittedly massive quantity of material in (I hope) reasonable coherent ways, as well as (most important) to establish the probably organizational outlines of numerous symbolic networks, each with its own inherent logic.

From the descriptions in the previous chapters, it should be self-evident that not only did fish symbolism consist of complex networks of meanings, but that it also condensed those networks under a single image. In this way individuals in the Graeco-Roman world could use a single religious symbol like the fish to express an entire worldview. (e.g., Freud, Turner, and Langer), who see condensation as a powerful tool that is essential for some type of human cognition. As suggested in Chapter 1, the tendency toward condensation also produces extraordinarily intricate relationships and often even the coexistence of apparently opposing elements: e.g. fish referring simultaneously to Christ and Christians, to death and life, or to destruction and salvation.

In one sense, descriptions of ancient religious symbols can therefore at no time be exhausted, since one can never gain full access to the

continually evolving worlds that they encapsulate. Descriptions of ancient fish symbolism, as well as all descriptions of symbols, should constantly remain ready and available for further modifications. Because of the approach adopted in Chapter 1, these modifications will generally not invalidate previously formulated descriptions, but should serve primarily to give greater depth to them.

THE CONTEXTS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN FISH SYMBOLISM

My investigation seems to suggest that chronology and geography do not constitute fundamental factors in the organization of referential networks prior to the sixth century C.E.. As indicated in Chapter 2, the wording of the second century C.E. Avercius inscription itself suggests a commonly assumed understanding of fish symbolism throughout the extent of the Graeco-Roman world.²

There are some exceptions to this, such as the representation of Christ as a fish roasted on the cross--a representation which is not extant prior to the end of the fourth century C.E.³ But as a rule chronological and geographical consistency, rather than difference, characterize early Christian fish symbolism.

In the sixth century C.E. (and sometimes one-hundred to one-hundred and fifty years earlier, one begins to see a change from a chronological point of view, particularly in iconography.⁴ Here the Graeco-Roman features of fish symbolism begin to recede into a distant background, and fish take on a much more explicitly Christian coloring.

Before this period, however, differences in the organization of symbolic networks depended primarily on other contextual factors, espe-

cially genre and function. Through with some exceptions, sarcophagi and paintings in funerary contexts (for example) tend to emphasize the culinary and eucharistic aspects of fish symbolism, while conversely iconography found in churches tends to emphasize associations with the creation of life, missionizing, and baptism.

At the same time, the orientations and purposes of various texts and visual compositions can determine the overall arrangements of meanings. For instance, if a writer was interested in the eucharist and its relation to fish symbolism, that writer customarily emphasizes various eucharistic associations as opposed to baptismal associations.

EARLY CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM AND BROADER CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the extensive descriptions of fish symbolism offered in this dissertation, one might gain a fair hint of its broader cultural implications. For, by making images of fish important features of their symbolism, early Christians demonstrated that they viewed their world to some extent in terms of fish, with all the attendant referents and associations. From their point of view, for example, not only did they envision a large fish as a symbol of Christ, but they envisioned Christ in the context of fish. Likewise, while they conceived of small fish as symbols of themselves, they also conceived of themselves in terms of small fish. In a very real sense, therefore, fish symbolism served as one small way of framing and arranging a conception of early Christians of themselves, their environment, and their place in it.

For individuals in the Graeco-Roman world and for early Christians, fish were given a more prominent position than generally found in the modern world. In fact, like everyone in the Graeco-Roman world, early Christians were physically surrounded by the tastes, odors, and sights of fish and therefore found fish natural symbols for a plethora of items. As a result, fish imagery ably served as a type of symbolism that could help to explain the world in which early Christians found themselves.

In order to explain their world in terms of fish, early Christians divided it into a variety of categories, each with fish symbolism as the central focus: eating, water, bucolic atmosphere, sacrality, salvation, cosmos (earth and heavens), apotropaic protection, sexuality and fertility, etc. Early Christians expanded these categories so as to include meals specifically sacred to Christians (eucharist and agape), baptism, and Christ.

Here the choice of categories is clearly significant, since it suggests that early Christians placed special emphasis on the particular segments of their world covered by those categories and the appropriateness of fish in symbolizing them. For example, it demonstrates that eating an important symbolic arena in which early Christians expressed themselves. In addition, it shows that fish, along with bread and wine, were crucial components in that process of expression.

Within the categories themselves, vast sub-networks of meanings formed. For example, high status was associated with large fish in the form of Christ, and low status was associated with small fish in the form of Christians. In turn, these elements were associated with other components, such as sexuality, so that Christ was associated with the vast sexual power of large fish, while Christians were associated with the vast hordes of fertile small fish.

But, inter-categorical relationships are equally important. For instance, when focussing on fish in regard to eating symbolism, early Christians were relating the realm of eating to other realms. Thus, for instance, there was a relationship between the position of fish in food symbolism and the position of fish in a cosmic context (e.g. in the heavens). Part of this connection originated in the salvific function of fish symbolism, since certain types of ingested food in particular contexts were sometimes associated with salvation, since some fish were thought to save the lives of human beings, and since the astrological signs of fish (Pisces) often indicated salvation.

In this way, food, cosmos, and salvation were viewed as overlapping categories connected to fish symbolism. As my discussions in previous chapters demonstrate, this is also true of virtually all categories. Thus, one discovers a kind of miniature cultural system with fish constituting its innermost symbolic nucleus.

I have therefore returned to the beginning of the dissertation with its emphasis on the cultural aspects of symbolism. By studying the intricate referential networks of fish symbolism, I hope that I have shown how a symbol can open a small view on to a much broader culture.

- ¹. See pp. 12-54.
- ². See pp. 342-47 above.
- ³. See pp. 484-87 above.
- ⁴. See e.g. pp. 584-85.

