

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM of Art houses a moderate-sized marble statue dated to the end of the third century CE (Figure 2). It shows a man with sheep, two of which sit by his feet. Staff in left hand, the man carries a third sheep aloft on his shoulders, its legs resting garland-like around his chest. The man's right hand is placed with gentle firmness on the creature's limbs, seeming to caress them. His elbow juts out sharply where the tail grazes it. This detail throws into relief the visual counterpoint of the man's fingers, so fluidly entwined with the sheep's bony extremities. In this respect, the Cleveland statue differs emphatically from another exemplar in the Vatican Museum dated slightly later to the first quarter of the fourth century CE (Figure 3).¹ The Vatican statue also shows a man carrying a sheep on his shoulders; however, this creature's limbs are deliberately set apart from the human torso supporting it. Apart from the expanse of the shepherd's shoulders, a part of his head, and his hands which grasp the sheep's legs, no other points of contact obtain between human and animal. It should be noted that the Vatican statue is believed to have been extensively restored.² Nonetheless, it serves as an illuminating contrast to our piece in Cleveland in which, even as the two species depicted are unmistakably distinct, they are also unmistakably entangled. Human head, torso, shoulders, and limbs are in contact with the sheep carried aloft; indeed, in some parts, the proximity between the human and beast banishes areas of bodily autonomy for both altogether. This may appear to be an inevitable consequence of a human placing an animal on his shoulders. However, in this case, the bringing together of the human and the animal foregrounds an interface where they merge to form a physical unity. This unity was interpreted specifically as a Christian motif,³ and was considered by church fathers to be the fundamental expression of salvation.

1 As has been commented, the Cleveland and Vatican shepherds are most often juxtaposed because of their excellent state of preservation. See the comments in Hornik, "Freestanding Sculpture," 79.

2 de Blaauw, "Early Christian Art Exhibited and Re-considered," 25–26.

3 Eusebius interpreted the shepherds on fountains in Constantinople as Christian. See Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, trans. Cameron and Hall, 140 (3.49).

By virtue of depicting shepherds, the images discussed above distill the essence of the bucolic to its most incisive and salient components. The shepherd evinces a long ancestry stretching back to ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman iterations, as scholars have noted.⁴ The *criophoros* or *moscophoros* showing a youth carrying a ram or bull on his shoulders, had sacrificial and protective connotations, while the Hermes *psychopomp* was a guide for the deceased and a shepherd of souls traversing the boundary from the world of the living to that of the dead. The motif could refer to good fortune and a state of felicity, love, and peace.⁵ It could harbour an evocative dimension by conjuring the vision of a paradisiacal garden or the earthly bounties of nature.⁶ Alternatively, it could allude to the qualities of leadership and defensive violence in order to protect those in danger.⁷ In keeping with its multivalent references, the shepherd was popular in late antiquity across a range of media such as gems, lamps, textiles, sculptures, sarcophagi, and frescoes. The immense exegetical flexibility and syncretism of late antique visual culture meant that it could be read as a generic figure presiding over a pastoral scene, or as the Christian Good Shepherd encompassing the concept of salvation, albeit with the shepherd now offering himself as the sacrifice on behalf of his sheep.⁸ The occurrence of the shepherd motif on a variety of objects in no way conflicts with its intrinsic ability to signify the *criophoros*, Hermes, Christ, or simply a shepherd. If anything, the motif could acquire some, all, or only one of those identities depending on the audience, which itself could encompass Christians and non-Christians of all stripes. Thus, the very designation of the “shepherd” opens up a rich set of associations relating to funerary, imperial, baptismal, and pastoral discourses in the pre-Christian and Christian dispensations.

But despite its many layers, the kinds of questions the shepherd imagery has elicited remain relatively limited. These entail excavating its visual and literary sources from antiquity; of determining its pagan or Christian affiliations; of gauging its monarchical and spiritual undertones; and of highlighting its significance within Christian rituals and themes regarding baptism,

4 Literature on this topic is extensive. For recent studies, see Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 65–72, and Awes Freeman, *The Good Shepherd*.

5 Provoost, “Pastor or Pastor Bonus?,” 34.

6 Zanker and Ewald, *Living with Myths*, 28–29, 127–29.

7 Awes Freeman, *The Good Shepherd*.

8 On the syncretism of late antique visual culture, see Elsner, “Art and Architecture,” 736–61, and Couzin, “Syncretism and Segregation in Early Christian Art,” 18–54.

death, paradise and/or the afterlife. Allegorical, theological, and abstract ideals associated with the shepherd are usually highlighted at the expense of questions that probe its pictorial, material, and spatial qualities specific to the context in which it occurs. For instance, little is said about the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep as it is depicted in an image other than to mention the shepherd's stance, and thereby to assert the general theme of care and leadership undertaken by the pastor/shepherd. Nor do we reflect on the larger implications of the human-animal interface via the shepherd imagery. Finally, the range of interactions possible between the shepherd and a viewer, and the implications of such interactions, have not been probed.

This chapter examines a selection of images depicting shepherds and sheep in the late antique period whilst seeking to situate them in a richer art historical—rather than mainly theological or allegorical—context. In doing so, the chapter makes two broad arguments. First, it proposes that the image of the shepherd with a sheep on his shoulders (be he the Christian Good Shepherd, or simply a shepherd) is an intentional pictorial expression of the physical closeness of two (or more) distinct species or categories of being. Theologians in late antiquity were certainly invested in definitions of the “human” vis-à-vis the divine, and the possibilities for those categories to unite, separate, or overlap.⁹ The theme of “mixing” or “blending” (*krasis* in Greek) was a more or less continuous concept in discourses about the body and the proper ordering of the material world; this was evident in early Christian discourses as well.¹⁰ In a similar vein, I would argue that the relations between humans and non-human animals, their “blending” and otherwise, were also serious considerations in the period. This is evinced in numerous instances in late antiquity that situated humans and animals in a spectrum rather than strictly in opposition.¹¹ In our case, the shepherd—whether he is read as an ordinary shepherd, or the human representation of Christ, or as the complicated admixture of humanity and divinity that was Christ—is shown as so entwined with his sheep as to make them appear as a unified being. That this particular human-nonhuman combination was significant and appreciated as such in the period, is attested to by the frequent pairing of the shepherd motif with other figures also dealing with animals,

9 Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*.

10 See the insights in Penniman, “Blended with the Savior,” at 519.

11 See Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, and Neis, *When a Human Gives Birth to a Raven*.

such as Daniel and the lions, or more commonly, the prophet Jonah being swallowed by, and/or emerging from, the *ketos*/sea creature, and of Jonah reclining under the vine.¹² Whilst recognized in the scholarship as narratives of salvation and typological stories relating to Christ in the New Testament, it is not acknowledged that each of these episodes also shows a human body in close relations with a non-human species (be it terrestrial, marine, or vegetal) and the implications arising therefrom. Furthermore, in depicting the episodes of Jonah swallowed by the *ketos* and his subsequent repose under the vine, these images yoke the bucolic setting to the biblical tale by presenting that setting as the desired aftermath to an anguished physical experience. Paradoxically, this yoking also has the effect of underlining the dark edge of the bucolic, since the prophet's repose is also the time of his waiting on the downfall of Nineveh. This is a resonance distinct from the themes of protection and salvation usually accorded to the mode. Finally, it is surely of importance that the Jonah imagery, among the most popular in early Christian art, concentrates *almost exclusively* on the human-nonhuman interfaces rather than on other episodes from the prophet's life.¹³

My second argument is that the human-animal combination evident in the shepherd imagery was abandoned because it posed problems regarding the physical integrity of Christ and his tactile presence vis-à-vis his followers. Boniface Ramsey's argument (broadly accepted in the scholarship with some variations) is that the image of the Good Shepherd was no longer necessary or useful once Christianity had taken firm hold from the fifth century onwards, and that a commanding imperial saviour, rather than a rustic keeper of sheep, was better suited to the epoch's needs.¹⁴ This claim has been somewhat tempered by arguments that posit Christ as an amalgam of the shepherd's leadership qualities with imperial overtones.¹⁵ However, I claim that also at stake was the viscerally tactile implication of that specific version of shepherding with the sheep on the man's shoulders; that is, of the specifically human-animal interface at play in that depiction. We already gauge this in the famous image in the chapel of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, where the sheep are removed from the shepherd's body

12 For more on the term "multispecies," see the articles in the special issue of *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2016).

13 Jensen, "Early Christian Images and Exegesis," 71–72, and Jensen, "Introduction: Early Christian Art," 10.

14 Ramsey, "A Note on the Disappearance of the Good Shepherd," 375–78.

15 See the arguments in Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 83, and Awes Freeman, *The Good Shepherd*, 101–5 discussed in a later section of the chapter.

except in one delicate visual passage. In the pictorial repertoire following upon the drastic waning of the Good Shepherd motif, it is rare for Christ's body to be shown as touching, or being touched, to any great extent by anyone other than his mother. When tactile contact does occur, it is usually for purposes of legitimization, such as in the episode of the Doubting of Thomas, or when Christ is shown with imperial figures. (In the latter, the crown usually serves as an appropriate barrier separating Christ's body and that/those of the ruler/s.)¹⁶

Apart from these two arguments, I shall also demonstrate that the shepherd imagery in monumental and miniature contexts exerts a literal magnetism. Positioned on unavoidable thresholds, or in the very centre of the surfaces of ceilings or rings, it exercises a gravitational power that pulls viewers and other images toward itself. Furthermore, it invokes the component of voice as part of this magnetic quality; specifically, the shepherd's voice as an essential and reciprocal component of his relations with his flock. Biblical passages and patristic commentaries reinforce the sonic bond between shepherd and sheep which is said to be reflected, in turn, in the bonds forged between any self-respecting bishop and his congregation.

The chapter ends with a brief consideration of the Quinisext Council's ban on images of Christ as a lamb in favour of images of him as a human, all the better to depict his suffering. Through this ban, the Council's edict reinforces prevailing perceptions about the limits inherent to animals, and animal imagery, in relation to the complexity of Christ's nature and depictions of him. Specifically, the ban reinforces the perceived *limits* of animals as a species and their capacity to manifest and communicate a narrative of Christian suffering to a human audience.

Shepherds and Sheep in Late Antiquity

Shepherds and sheep are fundamental to the iconography of Orthodox Christianity, particularly in the late antique era.¹⁷ Images of shepherds and shepherding themes are fairly common up till the early fifth century CE. Elements integral to the bucolic, such as pastures and springs amongst which shepherds, sheep, and other creatures rove, are alluded to in the books of the Bible, notably the Psalms, and they also appear in the visual domain. By extension, we find many references to them in the sermons and

¹⁶ Aurell, *Medieval Self-Coronations*, 96–126.

¹⁷ Henri Leclercq's famous study counts some 300 examples. See Leclercq, "Pasteur (Bon)," 2272–390.

commentaries of the church fathers. Indeed, it has been argued that Gregory of Nazianzus drew on literal aspects of ancient bucolic poetry to fashion some of his orations, which were arguably among the most popular of his output in Byzantium.¹⁸ In this general corpus, one of the consistent tropes informing the shepherd's relationship with his sheep is the mediating element of voice, and vocal address to the flock and/or to an individual.¹⁹

This relationship is dramatically outlined in the text known as the *Shepherd of Hermas* dated to the years between the late first and the second centuries CE.²⁰ To judge by the number of surviving manuscripts, the *Shepherd* was immensely popular and unmatched by any New Testament text in antiquity barring the Gospels of Matthew and John. The *Shepherd* consists of 114 chapters, a sizeable portion of which is devoted to visions and instructions, regarding the virtuous life that leads to salvation.²¹ Importantly, the being who delivers the divine commandments and explanations of ethical conduct to the narrator is a shepherd. This shepherd frequently uses concrete examples of elements rooted in the bucolic world—distinct types of vegetation (vines, elms, leafless and budding trees), styles of shepherding, and the behaviour of sheep—to outline the path to redemption or damnation. The text thus advances the figure of the shepherd as an intermediary and emissary between God and humans. It also embeds the bucolic as setting and context into the very fabric of the ethical teachings on offer.

Similar aspects inform the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep in the New Testament as well. Take the famous passage in the Gospel of John 10:1–20; the Parable of the Good Shepherd. At its core the narrative outlines an ethics of ingress; appropriate behaviour engaged at the threshold of the dwelling of sheep, thereby transforming both that dwelling and its door into spaces that induce a moral comportment. First, the parable posits the good shepherd as one who enters by the door, unlike the thief who breaks in through some other aperture. The very mode of ingress is a marker of one's identity as the shepherd who belongs in that space, or conversely as an interloper who belongs elsewhere.

18 MacDougall, "Callimachus and the Bishops," 171–94.

19 Some themes related to textual voice, or the persona projected via a text, are explored in Maramodoro and Hill eds., *The Author's Voice in Classical and Late Antiquity*.

20 Lookadoo, *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

21 For printed work, see Hermas, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, ed. Taylor.

The parable goes on to observe that:

To him [the good shepherd] the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep listen to his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts all his own sheep outside, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. However, a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.

Thus, the conduct of the good shepherd consists both of his using the door (and not some other mode of entrance), *and* the deployment of his voice. Herein lies an insistence on the shepherd's calling of the sheep by their individual names. Moreover, the good shepherd's vocal role is opposed to that of his negative counterpart (the thief), whose voice does not function in the ideal mode because it is unknown to the flock; the thief cannot call to each sheep individually because he does not know them; the interloper's voice serves to scatter the flock instead of bringing it together. Even as the tenor of the passage in John is about the flock in its collective sense, folded into it is the import of the call to each individual sheep.

The parable then states that Jesus' words were opaque to his listeners, underscoring their difficulties in grasping language that exceeds the literal. Jesus is compelled to explain the truth by the letter, saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All those who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture... I am the good shepherd."

The development within the parable from object to subject (that is, from door to Christ); of behaviour at a particular space, which threshold is then transmuted to identity (the door *as* Christ), entails a number of cognitive imperatives. Christ is Christ. He is also a door through which salvation is guaranteed. (Importantly, Christ-as-door permits both entrance and exit to the believer who "will go in and out and find pasture.") Christ is also the good shepherd who himself comes to that door (which, we recall, is also himself) and leads the flock out. Patristic literature lifted the essence of this relationship between the human caregiver and the non-human creature, both of whom are shown to engage in a dialogue concerning their roles, expectations, comportment, and shifting affects in the extant commentaries.

Gregory of Nyssa's second homily on the *Song of Songs* (Cap 2, *Patrologia Graeca* 44, 802) is a concise instance of the above points. Gregory calls on the Good Shepherd who carries the flock on his shoulders to show the way to the peaceful pastures, and to "lead me to the good grass that will nourish me...and the spring...[to] fill myself with God." Apart from the pleasant grass

and watery spring, Gregory also specifically asks for the shepherd to “call me by my name so that I, your sheep, hear your voice, and by your speech give me eternal life. Answer me, you whom my soul loves.”²²

The ideas animating this homily, at once so tender and so filled with foreboding for those who are not part of this particular flock (and who shall, therefore, be denied entry into heaven), are clear. The basic concept consists of the shepherd leading his sheep to the pastures where they may eat and drink their fill, and where they may lie down in the noontime sun “unstained by any shade.” This is a vision of bucolic entirely abstracted from earthly contingencies, such as shadows formed by the play of the sun’s rays. If the bucolic itself is an artificial literary and visual construct (see Introduction), a conceit attained through the temporary suspension of the ordinary labours engaged in by humankind and other species, then the scene conjured in Gregory’s commentary is informed by yet another level of artificiality and suspension. Here, natural conditions (such as shade) are eliminated.

Shade is an implicit component of the bucolic tradition. The first *Idyll* of Theocritus describes the shepherd’s seat beneath the elm tree during high noon, invoking a shady spot.²³ In Gregory’s commentary, the good sheep are those who have deliberately rejected the changes of the day marked out as morning and evening, and which entail variations of light and shadow. When the bucolic is transposed to a conception of the Christian paradise, it is sun-dered of the contingencies that lead to the cycles of day and night, and their accompanying patterns of light and shade.

The nourishment Gregory speaks of in his commentary (food, drink, and rest) is as much spiritual as it is material. But essential to it is the role of voice enacted by both the sheep and the shepherd. In the commentary, it is the sheep (via Gregory) who articulates the need of the pasture, its delights, and its import for the larger enterprise of spiritual salvation. That salvation in turn is contingent on the shepherd’s voice which must necessarily call to the sheep. Indeed, the shepherd must go a step further and name each sheep individually. The love and longing of the sheep for the shepherd is mediated, sealed, and manifested by the latter’s voice.

Arguably one of the most important tools a Christian bishop has at his disposal is his vocal prowess. If Christian believers are figured as sheep, then the bishop of a congregation is figured as a shepherd who must necessarily wield his voice in instructing and moulding his flock. This is a point Peter

²² Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. McCambley, 37.

²³ Theocritus, *Idylls*, www.theoi.com/Text/TheocritusIdylls1.html.

Brown made more broadly by underscoring the bishop's role as advocate for his community, in part qualified to do so on the basis of his *paideia*, or the language of culture encompassing a classical education that includes rhetoric and persuasion.²⁴ Conversely, a canny bishop could also modulate his literal voice—sometimes into silence—to score a point.²⁵ In his sermon on the Baptism of Christ, Gregory of Nyssa evinces an understanding of such vocal dynamics. He claims to recognize his flock and to feel a shepherd's affections for them. Here Gregory assumes a persona and its appropriate affect which entails a varied emotional landscape conditioned by the behaviour of the sheep. Importantly—and pertinent to my point about the pulling, or magnetic power of the shepherd—Gregory identifies the success of the bishop as one who can gather together his congregation (or sheep). He remarks,

I wish, when I am set upon this watchtower, to see the flock gathered round about the mountain's foot: and when it so happens to me, I am filled with wonderful earnestness, and work with pleasure at my sermon, as the shepherds do at their rustic strains. But when things are otherwise, and you are straying in distant wanderings, as you did but lately, the last the Lord's Day, I am much troubled, and glad to be silent.²⁶

For our purposes, the passage regards the shepherd's voice in relation to his emotional affect. The latter is contingent partly on what the shepherd (or Gregory, in this case) sees regarding his flock. When that flock is gathered together, the shepherd is inspired to make his rustic music. By the same token, Gregory as the bishop is enthused to work at his sermons. But when the flock strays, the shepherd falls silent. The very presence and/or absence of voice signals the shepherd/bishop's state of mind which, in its turn, signals the moral comportment of the flock/congregation.

Finally, the physical proximity between, and the near-indistinguishable human-nonhuman amalgam that is the shepherd and his sheep, acquires significance within the discourse on shepherds and flocks. Again, it is Gregory of Nyssa who underscores this in his polemic against Apollinarius of Laodicea whose teachings denied that Christ was of human flesh.²⁷ Appropriately enough, Gregory begins his anti-Apollinarian polemic with the metaphor of shepherding. He asks whether Apollinarius is a wolf in sheep's clothing or a

24 Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*. See also Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 156, on a bishop's ability to persuade through rhetoric.

25 Maier, "The Politics of the Silent Bishop," 503–19.

26 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ*, ed. Schaff and Wace, trans. Wilson.

27 Gregory of Nyssa, "Against Apollinaris," 37, 39.

true shepherd. It is critical to recall here that the polemic concerns the true nature of Christ, a subject that had occupied theologians throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, and beyond. Gregory uses the figure of the Good Shepherd as proof positive of the fleshly constitution of Christ. In doing so, he is at pains to point out that Christ as shepherd carries *the entire sheep* on his shoulders, and that this has implications regarding the voice of him who carries, and the voice of the being who is carried. Gregory remarks,

He does not carry the skin nor leave behind the innards as Apollinarius would like it. Having placed the sheep on his shoulders, it becomes one with him by partaking of his divinity...He who bears the sheep upon himself bears no trace of sin...Once the pastor takes the sheep upon himself, he becomes one with it and speaks with the voice of the sheep to his flock. How does our human weakness hear the divine voice? In a human fashion, that is to say, in the manner of sheep he says to us, "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10.16). And so the pastor who has taken upon himself the sheep speaks our language and is both sheep and shepherd. He assumed the sheep in his own person, and what he had assumed is a pastor.²⁸

This remarkable passage emphasizes the importance of the intense tactile contact between shepherd and sheep, the carrying of the latter by the former, which leads to union between them. This is no superficial or partial burden for the shepherd ("he does not carry the skin nor leave behind the innards"); it is a complete entity he bears upon his body such that "he becomes one with it." Moreover, that union also implicates the unity of voice which here is advanced as an instrument for conveying divinity to all too human listeners (or all too nonhuman sheep). Significantly, all of this occurs because the shepherd lifts the sheep bodily, and in its entirety, such that the two species appear to be one.

Keeping all the above considerations in mind, how might we envision the ontological implications on a human viewer who looks at such an image? This viewer is placed firmly outside the physical proximity and tactility of the shepherd-sheep ensemble. Yet, the viewer may have still identified with the sheep, which would entail a consideration of the human identifying with a different species altogether. On the other hand, perhaps the image functioned as an address, a call from the shepherd, via its sonic and visual dimension, to the one looking at it. In such a case, the image would have functioned less as the focus of immediate identification for the viewer than as proleptic aspiration; a call to be heeded that would lead to a place of salvation.

28 Gregory of Nyssa, "Against Apollinaris," 38.



Figure 4. Shepherd and figures, intaglio ring, fourth century CE. Red carnelian, 1.3 × 2.2. × 2.4 cm. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum. Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum. CC0 1.0.

Human and Nonhuman

The human-nonhuman component of assemblages such as the Good Shepherd and their implications are evident in other image combinations but with effects that vary according to their medium. A red carnelian ring at the Walters Art Museum shows the shepherd with two sheep at his feet, flanked by a vine and an anchor with the Christian monogram (Figure 4). The surface area, small to begin with, nicely accommodates all the figures. The vine may be an

enticement to imagine other biblical stories (notably that of Jonah resting under the vine) which are often shown in conjunction with the shepherd. In this instance, he is shown emphatically facing away from the viewer toward the right. The negation of direct visual address implies a different route to salvation for the owner, possibly through implied touch (via the finger on which the ring may rest), and a *vocal* invitation that may perhaps encompass the owner despite the shepherd's gaze being deflected in a direction that expressly excludes that owner.

The shepherd statue in Cleveland is a particularly compelling instance of the above observations, especially when viewed in conjunction with the other statues in the hoard in which it was originally located.²⁹ The hoard consists of a total of eleven sculptures, six being pairs of male and female busts, and the remaining five depicting scenes believed to be drawn from Christian scripture. In this latter group, we find two exuberant statues identified as the prophet Jonah and the sea creature that first swallowed him (Figure 5) and then spat him out (Figure 6).

This is not surprising, since one of the most frequent motifs to be paired with the shepherd is the story of Jonah. Scholars rightly observe that both motifs are related because the Jonah cycle is perceived as a representation of the burial and resurrection of Christ, and as the spiritual death and renewed identity of the believer in Christ.³⁰ However, what is less observed is that these particular sculptures are also viscerally graphic manifestations

²⁹ Wixom, "Early Christian Sculptures," 67–88.

³⁰ Awes Freeman, *The Good Shepherd*, 84.



Figure 6. Jonah cast out of the *ketos*, 280–290 CE. Marble, 41.5 × 36 × 18.5 cm. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art's Open Access Initiative.



Figure 5. Jonah swallowed by the *ketos*, 280–290 CE. Marble, 50.4 × 15.5 × 26.9 cm. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art's Open Access Initiative.

of a human enmeshed with, and within, a nonhuman creature.³¹ They are the biblical visions of monstrous metamorphoses, the end result of which is the restoration of Jonah's integral human body, free of any external or non-human entanglement.³² And if they were placed in juxtaposition with the male and female busts, then the contrast between the complexly entwined human-nonhuman ensembles and the portraits free of any such entanglements, would have been even more pronounced.

31 Hornik does very briefly touch upon this aspect by analogizing the statues of Jonah and the *ketos* with the concept of the centaur. Hornik, "Freestanding Sculpture," 80.

32 See the comments on the visual bipartite, tripartite, and four-part possibilities of Jonah, the *ketos*, and the vine in Sandin, "Salvation, Correctness, and Healing," 73–74.

Take the statue of Jonah ingested by the *ketos*, itself perceived to be a hybrid as it was part land creature and part fish (Figure 5).³³ William Wixom points to the many possible precursors to have inspired the *ketos*, and the amalgams of different species entailed therein.³⁴ This hybrid assemblage extends to encompass the human figure of Jonah as well. The work unfolds in an organic cascade of curves, the *ketos*'s tail frozen into an S-shape, inverted or otherwise, depending on one's view. Meanwhile the prophet's legs bend and stretch at the knee so that his feet, joined tidily as an acrobat's, graze that tail. (Recall that the sheep's tail similarly grazes the shepherd's elbow in the statue of the shepherd in the same hoard.) The human limbs are more angular, less powerful and expansive than those of the *ketos*. Yet even as the contrast between the human and the creature is played out in the upper reaches of the sculpture, Jonah's head and torso are forcefully rammed inside the creature's mouth below. Is the bulge in the *ketos*'s neck a testament to its own oral strength? Or is this a sign of the human Jonah infiltrating that massive bulk? It could be both; the point remains that the prophet and *ketos* are shown as beings that are entirely merged. (This is particularly apposite in visual contexts such as the pyxis in which the narrative of Jonah being ingested by the *ketos* complements Jonah's role as a sign of the eucharist, to be ingested in turn by the believer—in this case, the motif of transformation via ingestion is literalized.)³⁵ The back view of the sculpture gives no hint that this is not a single being. Part of the visual delight and salvific relief afforded by the piece is the gradual discovery that it is *not* in fact a single entity.

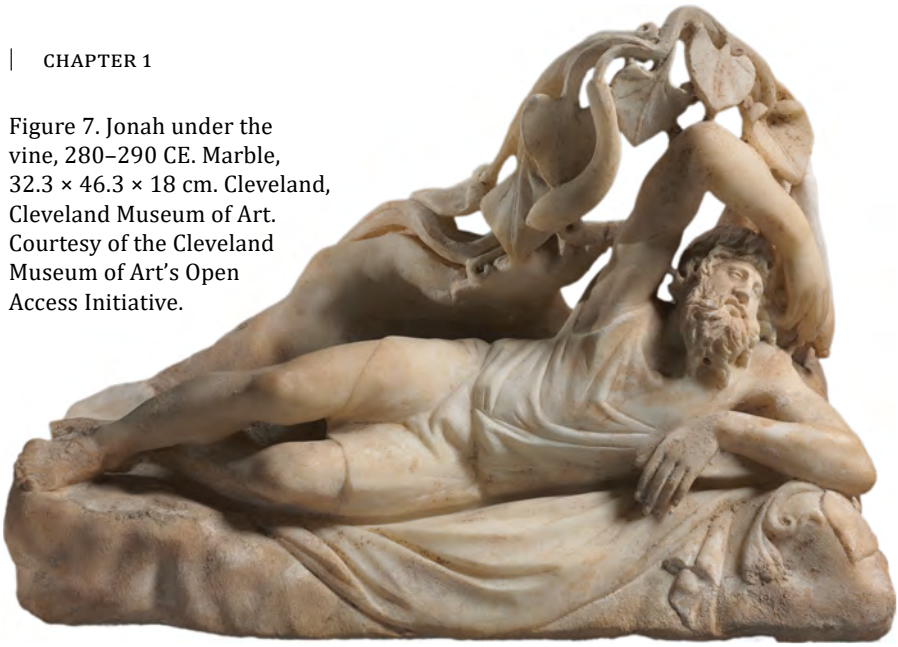
The episode from the Book of Jonah (Jonah 1, Jonah 2) tells us that he was swallowed by a big fish and that he spent three days and three nights in the beast's belly. Of equal significance as this marine residence, is the fact of Jonah's vocal pleas throughout the period of his captivity. Jonah 2:1–10 delineates a symphony of voices starting with the prophet's cry to God ("I cried by reason of my affliction...out of the belly of hell cried I, and you heard my voice...my prayer came in to you, into your holy temple") and ending with God's command to the *ketos* to spit him out ("And the Lord spoke to the whale and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land"). Where Jonah's physical presence was obliterated—or at least obscured—by the beast, his sonic presence managed to escape that marine interior and make itself heard in

33 Hornik, "Freestanding Sculpture," 79.

34 Wixom, "Early Christian Sculptures," 85.

35 Sandin, "Salvation, Correctness, and Healing," 84.

Figure 7. Jonah under the vine, 280–290 CE. Marble, 32.3 × 46.3 × 18 cm. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art's Open Access Initiative.



God's temple. Per the biblical story, Jonah's voice had as penetrative and visceral a materiality as his own body with regard to the *ketos*. Such conceptions about voice are embedded in late antique commentaries. Basil of Caesarea's *Hexaemeron* treats the subject of creaturely voices which, according to him, are a manifestation of the tongue or the mouth striking air, and which manifest a material presence. This phenomenon is unlike God's voice which, according to Basil, is immaterial and unnecessary as the latter communicates via thoughts, and not a complex vocal apparatus entailing the brain, impressions, the vocal canal, tongue, and air (*Hexaemeron*, Homily 2.7, Homily 3.2)³⁶. Voice as an integral component of creation appears in Basil's commentary well before the appearance of man or any other beast in it. It is thereby accorded a certain primal significance.

The Cleveland statue displaying the egress of Jonah (and consequently, the strength of his vocal presence which enabled his escape) is as extravagantly sinuous as the one that shows his ingestion (Figure 6). Once again the beast's tail contours up and forward in an S-shape; Jonah's hands (one fragmented) graze the tail. This time we see Jonah's head, torso, and arms stretched up and outwards. Without some knowledge of the episode and the accompanying statue (of the ingestion), it is impossible to tell whether this is a figure being cast out, as the museum label in Cleveland would have it, or in the process of being taken in. Suffice to say that both pieces together depict an extraordinary, tortuous, and heightened version of human and nonhuman enmeshment.

36 Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron*, in *Letters and Select Works*, ed. Schaff.

In contrast, the statue of the shepherd and his sheep is a relatively more sedate image of two distinct species inhabiting the same space (Figure 2). The sheep flanking the shepherd on either side are at a slight remove from him. But that distance, small as it is, only reinforces the physical closeness between the man and the sheep on his shoulders. This ensemble resembles the intimacy between man and plant as depicted in yet another sculpture from the same hoard, believed to be a representation of Jonah reclining under the vine (Figure 7). The stone that furnishes the ground billows up like a wave behind the man and sprouts an elaborate botanical shelter, its shape echoing his raised arm. As Thomas Arentzen, Virginia Burrus, and Glenn Peers point out, “the gourd plant and the resting prophet take shape together as two necessary, interdependent parts of a single visual thought.”³⁷ Jonah’s pose itself is modelled after depictions of Endymion and river gods who are often shown reclining in a similar manner. The choice of Endymion as a model is particularly apt since the figure’s connections to the themes of shepherding and eternal sleep relate well to the bucolic tenor of Jonah’s pose, and his restful sleep under the plant’s shadow.³⁸ A couple of leaves brush lightly against Jonah’s elbow and arm. Further on the right, the vine and the human limb are conjoined. This passage is akin to the conjoined nature of the sheep’s legs and the man’s torso in the statue of the shepherd.

The implications of this sort of human-animal and human-plant entanglement were pondered over in late antique exegeses on the Book of Jonah. Bishop Irenaeus (second century CE) in a sermon on the imperishability of chosen human bodies, seizes on the example of Jonah because despite being swallowed by the deep (the *ketos*’s belly), he was cast out safely on land by the command of God. Irenaeus underscores the natural expectation that a human being ingested by a marine creature shall not survive, or shall at the very least suffer grievous bodily damage. That this did not occur is similar, in Irenaeus’ view, to the three boys who were flung into the furnace and miraculously survived with not even the smell of smoke clinging to them when they emerged from the flames. In both cases, the bodies are posited as extraordinary precisely because they escape the experiences anticipated by a normative human—or mortal—materiality (*Against Heresies*, 5.5.2).

A couple of centuries after the proposed date of the Cleveland statues, Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, elaborated on the possibilities of that same

37 Arentzen, Burrus, and Peers, *Byzantine Tree Life*, 60.

38 Hornik, “Freestanding Sculpture,” 80.

human-*ketos* entwinement in the Book of Jonah. Although the prophet is deemed a prefiguration of Christ because of his temporary residence inside the *ketos* and unharmed emergence from its depths (as Christ rose from the dead), Cyril takes pains to underline their differences. He admits the resemblance between Jonah and Christ before going on to provide a resounding refutation of it so as to prove Christ's greater feat. In the process Cyril, like Irenaeus before him, ruminates upon the transformations that a human body might undergo when forced into the belly of a marine creature. Cyril asks,

whether [it] is harder, for a man after having been buried to rise again from the earth, or for a man in the belly of a whale, having come into the great heat of a living creature, to escape corruption. For what man knows not, that the heat of the belly is so great, that even bones which have been swallowed moulder away? How then did Jonas, who was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, escape corruption? And, seeing that the nature of all men is such that we cannot live without breathing, as we do, in air, how did he live without a breath of this air for three days?³⁹

Whilst both Irenaeus and Cyril conclude that God's grace allowed Jonah to emerge unblemished from the *ketos*, striking here is their awareness of and insistence on the varieties of bodily transformation (mouldered bones, lack of breath) that are the real possibilities of such an entanglement. The pertinence of this insight to the Cleveland statues is that if some viewers understood them to allude to the Book of Jonah, they might also have been acquainted with similar discourses around the body and the multispecies possibilities enabled by such episodes, even if at a rudimentary level. The entire point of the Jonah story—and one well captured by the statues—is the restoration of a sound, undamaged physical self even after the distortions it endures via the entangled collision with a different species. The convulsions of that body are resolved by the peacefully reclining figure of Jonah on land, under the vine; the bucolic idyll after the storm. This image, however, is emphatically temporary, a precursor to decay, since God withers away the plant specifically in order to make Jonah understand *the value of humans vis-à-vis* other species. If the other two statues of Jonah depict the miraculous preservation of a human body despite its metamorphic entanglement with the marine creature, the vine denotes the flourishing of a vegetal form immediately before its decline. Thus, in these four sculptural pieces we find dramatic and deliberate visual commentaries on the possibilities of humans, non-human animals, and plants approaching, devouring, sheltering, touching,

39 See Cyril, *Catechetical Lectures* 14.18. Cited hereafter parenthetically in the text.



Figure 8. Jonah praying, 280–290 CE. Marble, 47.5 × 14.8 × 20.3 cm. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art's Open Access Initiative.

and echoing each other in myriad ways. Some of these actions overlap; the *ketos* in devouring Jonah also shelters him (and this is emphasized in contemporary exegeses on the episode), and in spitting him out retains for a while, its tactile contact with the prophet's human form.

One final statue depicts a man (believed to be Jonah) standing in the orant position, hands and head raised in address to somebody or something unseen (Figure 8). The orant pose, common in figures in catacombs and sarcophagi, is usually read as the pose of prayer to God. If we project such an interpretation onto the image, we find that it rounds out the leitmotif of human-nonhuman contact animating this group of statues. In this case, it is a human who addresses a divinity that is emphatically non-human, and of a species deemed impossible to capture in ordinary matter.

In keeping with the themes of salvation and renewal associated with Jonah and the Good Shepherd, it is proposed that these sculptures once adorned a funerary or baptismal space. Equally plausible is the suggestion that they formed part of a garden, perhaps placed on or around a nymphaeum or fountain.⁴⁰ Each of these spaces—baptismal or funerary monument, or garden—resonates with the themes of metamorphosis, be it from life to death, from one dispensation to another, or from season to season. To my mind, however, the proposition of these sculptures decorating a fountain is the most attractive for a number of reasons. Recall that among the earliest Christian images mentioned by Eusebius are those of the Good Shepherd and Daniel and the lions which, he claims, were depicted

⁴⁰ See Wixom, “Early Christian Sculptures,” and Fliegel, *A Higher Contemplation*, 23, 191.

on a fountain.⁴¹ A fountain is an especially appropriate structure for displaying such ensembles because it foregrounds the distinct ecologies at play in them. It is a man-made infrastructure for coaxing a natural element into artificial configurations, and it affords intricate sight- and soundscapes (via water, and birdsong, and possibly other sonic components). If the Cleveland sculptures of Jonah and the shepherd were placed around a fountain, they would have reinforced the power of those seeming opposites (natural-manufactured) as a spectrum of possibilities rather than as conflicting absolutes. Evidently the patrons (and the sculptors) relished those possibilities and delighted in having them visualized in these images.

The Magnetism of the Shepherd

The magnetism embedded in the figure of the shepherd and his voice is intentionally orchestrated in the contexts in which this imagery appears. One view of the Cleveland shepherd, for instance, shows the man and the sheep on his shoulders, as well as those by his feet, looking in the same direction, as though heeding a summons enthralling enough to captivate human and animals alike. Although that summons is a purely implied external force (and evident only from one particular viewpoint), it is nonetheless instructive for its shaping of the entire image as a response on a specific vector, and as coaxing a unified stance (for the viewer, along with the shepherd) toward that call. A similar phenomenon is evident in the Walters ring examined earlier (Figure 4). Precisely this sort of gravitational power is evident in several key examples explored in this section, on both intimate and monumental scales. In these, the position of the shepherd vis-à-vis the viewer undergirds and reinforces the call of the shepherd to his sheep; the image literally pulls the viewer and other surrounding imagery towards itself, much as the shepherd draws his flock around him by naming each individual sheep.

A terracotta lamp dated to the last years of the second or the early third century CE is a perfect instance of this phenomenon (Figure 9).⁴² Produced in the Florentius workshop in Rome, it is an example of a Christian image emanating from a source that was, however, known to produce lamps decorated with all kinds of pictorial themes for an audience comprising Christians and non-Christians alike.⁴³ The lamp shows the shepherd with a sheep

⁴¹ See note 3, above.

⁴² Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 172.

⁴³ Spier, "The Earliest Christian Art," 5–6, 171–72.



Figure 9. Shepherd and figures, lamp, third century CE. Terracotta. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. © Art Resource.

draped across his shoulders at the very centre in a frontal stance. More sheep cluster around the shepherd's feet, all of them facing him, either with a direct gaze or with twisting heads. Other smaller figures appear on either side, which the literature reads convincingly as Jonah under the vine and Jonah being spit out from the *ketos*, a dove perched upon Noah's ark, and symbols of the sun and moon. All these figures are hard to detect amidst the swirling reliefs.

Significantly, the two vignettes identified as episodes from Jonah's

life are placed in the middle ground, squarely within the bucolic landscape. Or to put it another way, the bucolic setting envelopes the figures such that it becomes their natural—if not strictly accurate—habitat. The bucolic is advanced here not only as the appropriate landscape for salvation involving humans, animals, and vegetation; it also holds the potential to expand and eclipse all other settings to its advantage. The entire surface of the lamp is presented as the shepherd's domain, the others subordinate to him in scale and position, and all of them participants of the bucolic setting. Since such lamps were used not only for the practical function of illumination, but also in funerary, apotropaic, and devotional contexts, the theme of the shepherd and Jonah fits well into the roles enabled by this object.⁴⁴

Some of the most striking examples of the centrality and drawing power of the shepherd imagery occur in the Roman catacombs. Scholars have generally associated the motif in these funerary spaces with themes of salvation, deliverance, and guidance in the underworld, closely related to the functions of Hermes from pre-Christian times.⁴⁵ But an additional consideration is that the shepherd imagery essentially occurs within a space intended for,

⁴⁴ For an overview of scholarship on terracotta lamps, see Schoolman, "Image and Function," 165–77.

⁴⁵ Awes Freeman, *The Good Shepherd*, 83.

and occupied by, human remains, which are themselves in interface with the earth and in a state of transition as they decompose. The Good Shepherd, as an amalgam of a human and nonhuman species, is a powerful—and ideal—expression not just of salvation, but also of the kinds of transitions and interfaces a human body may be subjected to.

Consider the catacombs of Priscilla, one of the most frequently reproduced images of which features the Good Shepherd. This fresco adorns a ceiling in the “Cubiculum of the Velatio” (Chapel of the Veiled Woman), named thus because of the image of a veiled woman in an orant position who features in the centre of a composition on a lunette on one wall. The shepherd is depicted in a roundel on the ceiling directly above this chamber in the centre of a suite of four lunettes featuring birds, among which are two resplendent peacocks (Figure 10). Our shepherd stands bearing a horned creature over his shoulders, one arm extended in address, (perhaps in the process of reaching out to an animal), toward his right. He is flanked by sheep on either side. The crisp geometry of the contour encircling the composition is softened by the wavy green lines signifying plants that frame the shepherd on each end, and atop which perch birds. The inclusion of these winged creatures within the shepherd’s image field, in almost as close vicinity to him as the sheep, underlines the man’s distance from the other birds who are trapped in their own compartments and separated from the shepherd, both as a figure in his own right, and as part of a bucolic composition. The larger variety of species and colours in the centre offsets the relative paucity of vegetation, creatures, and corresponding colours in the other compartments on the ceiling. The bucolic scene is the most vibrant and crowded of all, signifying this as a culminating space, expansive enough to contain a diversity of elements. This is also a reminder that the human remains in the catacomb are at a relatively large physical distance from the images laid out on the ceiling, and certainly from the central image of the shepherd. The latter is at the opposite end of the spectrum, occupying an area filled with colour, vegetation, and nonhuman species such as birds, in emphatic contrast to the immediate surroundings of the actual humans buried in that space. The shepherd occupies the heart of the ceiling, much as the image of a Christ Pantokrator might function on a dome from which the cascading images of the Theotokos, apostles, and the Holy Spirit emanate.

The above effect is intensified in the catacombs of Sts. Peter and Marcellinus. Here again the shepherd features on the ceiling of a chamber, occupying its own roundel at the centre of a series of arches and lunettes (Figure 11). The shepherd looks toward his right, like his counterpart in the catacomb of Priscilla, the requisite sheep on his shoulders. The surroundings underscore



Figure 10. Catacomb of Priscilla, fourth century CE. Fresco, Rome. © Alamy Stock Photo.



Figure 11. Catacombs of Peter and Marcellinus, third century CE. Fresco, outside Rome. © Alamy Stock Photo.

the bucolic by including leafy trees and two seated animals on each side of the man. The framing lunettes and arches include episodes from the life of Jonah and orant figures respectively. The orant figures supply visual pauses in the narrative rhythms set by Jonah's misadventures at sea and on land. They also constantly reinforce the centrality of the shepherd by raising their arms up toward it. The shepherd roundel thus would seem to consolidate Jonah's life story and the praying figures, as though the bucolic were the very source of the narratives radiating outward from it. It is also, simultaneously, the latter's culmination at the centre of the ceiling. Just as such a setting furnished the entire landscape for the biblical episodes on the terracotta lamp examined previously, so too in the catacomb frescoes, the bucolic furnishes the foundation and climax for the other episodes, with the shepherd figure in command at their centre. And once again, this is the scene that is arguably situated at the greatest distance from the space of the dead occupying the catacomb. It is simultaneously a commentary on, and the ideal image for, the kinds of interspecies relations a human body can aspire to enter into even as it underlines its pictorial, spatial, and physical differences from the deceased.

I end this section with a consideration of two sarcophagi: one, a renowned exemplar known as the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus at Rome, and another a relatively little-known one from Singidunum/Belgrade in the Roman Balkans which has not received much attention from scholars outside that region. Sarcophagi are, of course, related to the theme of death and the transformations implied and imagined to inform the transition to that state. Recent literature on the conceptual and material resonances of Roman sarcophagi underlines the themes of framing, sub-framing, entrances and exits, mimesis and transitional moments, depicted on and around these objects; essentially containers for the dead in material and/or conceptual form.⁴⁶ Some of these themes certainly apply to the two early Christian sarcophagi under discussion here. Both are notable for their depiction of the shepherd along with scenes from the life of Jonah. A critical point is that the images on these sarcophagi literally appear *between* the living human being/viewer, and the remains of the deceased human the containers are intended to house.⁴⁷ Thus, the human bodies depicted on the sarcophagi—and their entanglements with other bodies or beings, escapes therefrom, and other states they might assume—mediate between a living body/viewer (that may

46 Elsner, "Decorative Imperatives," 178–95, and Ewald, "Paradigms of Personhood," 41–64.

47 Platt, "Framing the Dead on Roman Sarcophagi," 353–81.



Figure 12. Sarcophagus, third–fourth century CE. Limestone. Belgrade, National Museum of Serbia. Photograph by the author.

or may not be in interface with other human viewers and/or species), and a dead body. The conditions and transitions of the latter are relatively more predictable than those that might afflict a living body, although the dead are still susceptible to contingencies such as violence, destruction, or removal of their remains. And, in the same vein as the lamp and catacombs studied above, the shepherd and Jonah episodes on the sarcophagi also place human bodies in close physical contact with nonhumans, each with important implications about the longevity of the state/s in which they occur.

The Singidunum sarcophagus was discovered in the eponymous region in the province of Moesia, which was known to have had Christian martyr cults, but a relatively small number of archaeological finds that can definitively be labelled as early Christian.⁴⁸ The sarcophagus was excavated in Belgrade and is a unique instance of such an object from the region (Figure 12). It is made of limestone with a pitched roof adorned with acroteria.⁴⁹ Its sides are carved with scrolls. It was probably reused during its history.⁵⁰ The centre of its front

48 Pilipović and Milanovic, “The Jonah Sarcophagus,” 219–45, and Pilipović and Milanović, “The Traditional Model,” 261–78.

49 For comments on the visual complexities of sarcophagi lids, see Elsner, “Decorative Imperatives,” 180.

50 For an overview of the scholarship on the sarcophagus, see Pilipović and Milanovic, “The Jonah Sarcophagus,” 219–22.

panel displays an elaborate narrative, showing a ship with a billowing sail supported by a cross. From this vessel, the naked body of Jonah is tossed headfirst into the sea and into the waiting mouth of the *ketos*. The water teems with another fish, or dolphin, (or *ketos*?) on which a putto perches. As we move to the left, Jonah is spat out from the monster's maw. His arms are raised like an orant, directly towards a shepherd holding a sheep on his shoulders. This figure is the largest, most imposing, and centrally disposed of all the living creatures depicted in the hectic image field. If many Roman exemplars show clear-cut frames and subsets of frames, even if only to subvert them in complex and playful modes,⁵¹ the front of the Singidunum sarcophagus intentionally obscures such separating devices in favour of a melee of scenes with overlapping human, fish, monsters, water, and plant.

Pictorially and thematically, Jonah's direct address (via his outstretched arms and body) to the shepherd makes perfect sense, since the latter is read as a symbol of salvation. But more interesting is the passage concerning Jonah with the sea monsters and the fish/dolphin ridden by the putto. This comprises a writhing mass of human and nonhuman bodies stacked against and above/under each other, all engaged in a variety of interactions. The image has been interpreted typologically as salvific, with Jonah's disgorgement alluding to his physical resurrection, and the dolphin, putto, and *ketos* alluding to the salvation of the soul, or alternatively the putto being a non-Christian motif that could be interpreted as Christian.⁵² But equally and emphatically, this visual passage is also a meditation on the range of attitudes that a human, or human-like (in the case of the putto) body may assume in its interface with a sea-monster and other marine creatures: in Jonah's case, the headfirst descent into and then ascent out of the *ketos*; in the putto's case, its straddling stance vis-à-vis the fish/dolphin. These entanglements are also (in Jonah's case) temporary states from which the human will extricate himself to be rendered whole and integral.

Towering above Jonah and on top of the composition is a magnificent flourishing plant with a bird (perhaps a peacock or dove?) embedded in it. This would seem to allude to the vine under which Jonah rested. This image, like the marine passage, is a transitional and temporary phase of the sort that we find in the depictions of certain myths on and around Roman sarcophagi.⁵³ As in the Cleveland sculpture, the plant is allowed a moment of glory in

51 Platt, "Framing the Dead on Roman Sarcophagi," 353–81.

52 Pilipović and Milanovic, "The Jonah Sarcophagus," 230.

53 Platt, "Framing the Dead on Roman Sarcophagi," 361.



Figure 13. Sarcophagus, third century CE.
Marble, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome. © Art Resource.

the visual field before the informed viewer recalls its subsequent withering. Importantly, the plant does *not* shelter the shepherd, who stands at a slight remove from the marine and land adventures depicted on the right. This separation may be intended to recall that the plant is a *temporary* refuge—and thereby, of a different category—in contrast to the shepherd. The latter is the only figure to look out directly at the viewer. Just as Jonah addresses him, so too is the sarcophagus' viewer implicated in a direct address with the shepherd. It is the latter who denotes certain and eternal salvation, unlike the figures in the other transitory episodes depicted. Although not centrally placed (as is often the case with portraits of the deceased or other focalizing figures on sarcophagi), the shepherd categorically exhibits his pulling power vis-à-vis Jonah, and the viewer, as he certainly did with his sheep as per the biblical parable—the animal now shown draped across his shoulders in an image of perpetual deliverance.

The S. Maria Antiqua sarcophagus is not as explicit in exhibiting the pull of the shepherd for Jonah or other figures and episodes (Figure 13).⁵⁴ However, a little-observed fact is that its entire front panel is organized to accommodate bucolic themes. The two shorter side panels, in categorical contrast, show marine scenes with a ship and an oceanic divinity holding a trident in one case, and men handling fishing nets in the other. Many possible vectors of narratives are enabled by this (or any other) sarcophagus: the shorter sides could be imagined as leading to the elongated panel on the front. Indeed, the side showing the ship (which intrudes on the front panel)

54 Bovini and Brandenburg, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage I*, no. 747.

is a plausible prelude to the first vignette on the left of the front panel, which is the aftermath of Jonah's shipwreck and ingestion by the *ketos* (Figure 13). However, each side could also be viewed as independent of the others.

The centre of the front panel features a female orans figure and a male "philosopher" with a scroll who might perhaps be the patrons of the sarcophagus. Although no bucolic features are evident here apart from the setting of the trees, the vegetal component is significant since it occurs right across the rest of the panel. One could argue that pictorial choices were made so as to intensify the human-vegetal and human-animal relations gradually from the sides toward the centre. So accordingly, we find on the left, Jonah's naked body stretched Endymion-like, with one leg directly touching and supporting the *ketos*'s belly such that the human limb and monstrous stomach seem one, the former flowing out of the latter, and Jonah's toe merging into the patterned striations of that stomach. A vine shelters Jonah (more on this detail below). On the right of the central couple under the trees, we find a shepherd with a sheep slung on his shoulders and two standing sheep on either side of him. Further on, we see a child who stretches an arm to fondle one sheep, and a man who touches the child's head whilst a dove perches above and looks down upon them. This vignette has been read as a scene of possible baptism (although such an interpretation is mainly speculative). Whether a baptism or not, it is certainly part of a series of cascading instances of tactile relations between humans and animals or nonhumans (the *ketos*, and the dove which almost touches the older man's outstretched arm) each of which culminates in the central figure of the female orant whose raised arms intersect with the leaves: the vegetal counterpart of Jonah's bodily engagement with the *ketos* directly to the left. The male philosopher contains resonances of the figure of the shepherd to his right—seated by a tree in a bucolic landscape, albeit with a scroll and sans sheep. Björn C. Ewald made the point that sarcophagi depicting philosophers replace the "scopic" paradigm of mythological sarcophagi with an "aural" paradigm and the dramatization of the act of listening, which chimes in well with the dimensions of sound in relation to the bucolic.⁵⁵

A word about the vine under which Jonah rests. This is not simply a (transitory) shelter for the prophet; it also supports a diagonal ledge on which three rams sit, two facing toward the right and one to the left. Rams or sheep (without a shepherd) also appear in seemingly random, unexpected areas near Jonah on other sarcophagi, such as one in the British Museum,

⁵⁵ Ewald, "Paradigms of Personhood," 57.

and another fragment in the Princeton Museum of Art. In these, as on the *S. Maria Antiqua* exemplar, the animals seem to occupy and oversee areas close to Jonah's reclining body. They are explicit markers rounding out a bucolic setting which the flourishing vine is a mere hint of. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the vine withers, but the sheep remain; again, a play on temporary *vis-à-vis* eternal rest and salvation. Consequently, the bucolic is itself signalled as a transitory state, all too liable to shatter if the underlying conditions alter (via the vine). But critically, it also holds the possibility of everlasting endurance because of the imminent presence of the shepherd who shall, in time, reclaim his flock.

On the *S. Maria Antiqua* sarcophagus, the bucolic setting is expanded to flank the centre and serve as a universal space—as on the Berlin terracotta lamp—to encompass all the characters, including those implicated in the “baptism” scene. It serves both as detail (via the trees and rams and sheep) and as an entire episode unto itself (via Jonah under the vine and the shepherd figure). Interestingly, the front view of the panel also occasions a slight glimpse of the curved sides. We see a part of the ship encroaching the flat surface on the left, signalling the transition from the marine to the pastoral. But in a more complicated twist, the curved end on the right depicts a tree and a man under it, with the exigencies of relief being such that this appears as an unusually tight human-vegetal assemblage in its frontal configuration. Upon moving to the right, one realizes that this human is in fact independent from the tree and, presumably, the other scenes unfolding on the front. Whether the human-plant entwinement was intended or not, it is nonetheless an effect of the stacking of scenes and figures. In such a capacity, it furnishes an intriguing play on the Jonah-and-vine configuration on the other end; a coda to the kinds of entanglements made possible by the narrative twists of biblical and non-biblical episodes, and the material possibilities of the object itself.

The Last Shepherd

In a short but influential article from 1983, Boniface Ramsey ponders the reasons behind the gradual, and then near-total, disappearance of the Good Shepherd motif from the visual discourse in the first half of the fifth century CE.⁵⁶ Ramsey offers four reasons for this phenomenon: the rustic, humble shepherd was increasingly incompatible with the image of Christ;

56 Ramsey, “A Note on the Disappearance of the Good Shepherd,” 375–78.

the Christian church was in a less defensive position and saw no need for an essentially pastoral figure to represent it; whereas the Good Shepherd emphasizes a gentle leader and guide, by this era there was a greater imperative to show Christ as a king or teacher; and that the shepherd gradually became irrelevant to major Christological developments of the era. Ramsey's points have not been refuted, and for good reason, as they seem to sum up the basic trends of the epoch and its imagery. However, I would argue that at least as far as Christological matters were concerned, the Good Shepherd motif was critical in that it further complicated one of the most essential subjects debated in the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries and beyond: the nature and ontology of Christ. Furthermore, I suggest that the complications entailed in the representation of a human (and in the case of Christ, an extraordinary human) and nonhuman are a major factor behind the disappearance of the Good Shepherd. We find strong hints of this in the debates regarding not just the ontology of Christ, but also in his relations to God, the Theotokos, and his mortal followers.

In brief, the First Councils of Nicaea and of Constantinople in the fourth century among other things condemned Arianism, which posited that the nature of Christ was created by God, and therefore was subordinate to God. The ecumenical councils of the fifth century aimed to resolve this subject whilst also determining the relational nature of Christ and the Theotokos.⁵⁷ Nestorianism, which posited that Christ's human and divine natures were distinct, was condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431 CE) and then again at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) which asserted that Christ had "two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."⁵⁸ It was also at the Council of Ephesus that the Theotokos's status as Theotokos, or "Mother of God," was determined.⁵⁹ This chapter is not the appropriate venue to launch into a detailed excursus of these Christological debates; suffice to say that the heated discussions about the nature and relations of Christ also inevitably included questions about Christ's bodily relations with other humans (such as the Theotokos) and his congregants.

Two important spheres in which the above ideas are most strikingly encapsulated are 1) in representations of the Theotokos and Christ, and 2) in ideas about the eucharist—the body and blood of Christ—and the most

57 See the authoritative volume by Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*. See also Price and Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*.

58 Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 262–63.

59 One study is Price, "Marian Piety and the Nestorian Controversy," 31–38.

appropriate ways to distribute and receive it. The tactile interface between Christ and his congregants as once exemplified in the ubiquitous Good Shepherd imagery (and as explicated by Gregory of Nyssa, among others, discussed above), was evidently not a straightforward matter; hence the prevalence of, and consequent need to condemn, Arianism, Nestorianism, Apollinarianism, and other such so-called heresies.

Ioli Kalavrezou argues that in the centuries following upon the Council of Ephesus and the confirmed status of the Virgin as “Theotokos,” she was represented holding her son, but that there was clearly a reluctance to delve any deeper into the mother-son relationship.⁶⁰ Even as late as the sixth century, the visual evidence suggests a bare minimum of physical contact between Christ and his mother, with the imagery being “unemotional and distant. Mary is still the Theotokos as defined at the council, a concept which precludes the establishment of any direct emotional connection between her and her son that could imply a family relationship.”⁶¹ It is exactly this reluctance to depict the relations between Christ and other beings, even his own mother—and particularly, the tactile relations between Christ and other humans and non-humans—that I suspect were at play in the disappearance of the Good Shepherd imagery. If the mother could not hold her son close, then nonhumans such as sheep were certainly to be denied such proximity.

We find a similar caution, if not outright chariness, in the dispensation and reception of Christ’s body and blood as well in this period.⁶² Although church fathers and bishops asserted that communion is desirable and a necessity, the specific bodily and tactile attitudes toward it on the part of humans are deemed important enough to be enumerated. The *Didache* (second century CE), a manuscript used for the instruction of catechumens, warns that the eucharist is exclusive; it is not intended for those not baptized in the name of the Lord and one should “not give what is holy to the dogs.”⁶³ Basil of Caesarea underscores the importance of receiving communion and avers that desert fathers and solitaries do so without the aid of a priest. He is also careful to underline that in times of persecution or strife, ordinary people may partake of the eucharist without a priest since, even when the latter

60 Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother,” 165–72.

61 Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother,” 168.

62 Marksches, “Current Research on the Eucharist in Ancient Christianity,” 417–46.

63 See Draper, “You Shall not Give What Is Holy to the Dogs,” 242–58; and van de Sandt, “Do Not Give What is Holy to the Dogs (DID 9.5D and Matt 7.6A),” 223–46.



Figure 14. Lunette over the north portal, 425 CE.
Mosaic, chapel of Galla Placidia, Ravenna. © Alamy Stock Photo.

administers it in times of peace, once the sacred matter touches a recipient, that person has complete power over it and lifts it to his lips with his own hand.⁶⁴ Basil's comments are particularly significant because of the incipient power play implied in the tactile handling of Christ's body and blood by the communicant who, one hopes, would treat this matter with due reverence since he alone has control over it once it has been administered.

Cyril of Jerusalem goes even further to specify exactly how the communicant's hands should touch the eucharist. He instructs, "Come not with your wrists extended, or your fingers spread; but make your left hand a throne for the right, as for that which is to receive a King. And having hollowed your palm, receive the Body of Christ, saying over it, Amen. So then after having carefully hallowed your eyes by the touch of the Holy Body, partake of it; giving heed lest you lose any portion thereof; for whatever you lose, is evidently a loss to you as it were from one of your own members" (*Catechetical Lectures* 23.21).

Cyril even underlines the ideal mode of receiving the blood of Christ which differs from the reception of his body: "Then after you have partaken

⁶⁴ See Basil the Great, *Letters and Select Works*, ed. Schaff.

of the Body of Christ, draw near also to the Cup of His Blood; not stretching forth your hands, but bending, and saying with an air of worship and reverence, Amen" (*Catechetical Lectures* 23.22).

These instructions reflect the urgency of the subject of Christ's physical nature, its manifestation, and above all, the necessity of mandating a set of tactile relations to mortal humans when they handle it. I believe these considerations also determined the separation of the shepherd from his sheep in what is virtually the final expression of this motif in late antiquity and thence onward: the renowned mosaic image of Christ as the Good Shepherd which graces the north entrance to the chapel of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (425 CE) (Figure 14). This serene composition depicts the shepherd in a rocky landscape, relieved somewhat by grasses, plants, and robust sheep. Three of these creatures flank the shepherd on each side; he strokes the one closest to him tenderly under the chin. Physical contact here is radically modified in relation to our Cleveland statue and other instances studied above, but it is still important enough to be retained in the shepherd's gesture. All the sheep face their keeper. We find no hints here of the occasional inattention of the beasts that inflects similar images of shepherds (discussed in Chapter 3). This is an undernoted but important point, since it firmly establishes the shepherd, or Christ, as the focal centre of vision, both within the picture field and for the viewer positioned outside it. Moreover, we recall that this image occurs on the threshold *within*, and facing toward, the chapel. Thus, it faces the viewer when they turn and prepare to leave the building. In this respect, the image resonates well with Christ's words about his flock attaining salvation by "going in and out" (as the viewer is clearly supposed to do vis-à-vis the chapel), rather than inviting the viewer to traverse only one sole direction. The image is intended as the culmination of the other representations in the chapel, being the ultimate vision encountered as one advances to the door to *exit*. Thus, it exercises a pulling power by explicitly provoking movement towards itself—movement, moreover, that is inevitable because a viewer must at some point depart from the building.

The major thrust of analyses of this image tends to focus on the imperial stance—and thereby, nature—of Christ whose golden robe overlain by the purple cloak and majestic seated posture would seem to allude to his status as something more than just a shepherd. Added to this is the evidence of the cross standing upright in his hand in place of a shepherd's crook.⁶⁵ This interpretation is convincing in all respects. But I wish to add the point

⁶⁵ Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 83.

(again, undernoted) that Christ is still depicted in *tactile* contact with both the cross and one of the sheep in a manner that would seem to make each of those entities profoundly integral to the Saviour's figure. The salient iconography of the Good Shepherd as one whose very bodily composition is touched by non-human creature/s is immediately apparent, even if it is much tempered from the earlier iterations of the shepherd with the sheep bodily held on his shoulders.

The Quinisext Council: The Limits of the Species

A couple of centuries after the Ravenna mosaic was manufactured, a church council was convened under Justinian II at Constantinople that explicitly dealt with the subject of an image bound to the bucolic: the lamb as Christ. The fact that a council broached this matter lends further credence to my argument that a similar set of concerns probably played into the disappearance of the Good Shepherd imagery as well, albeit without those concerns having been articulated as concretely and clearly. The 82nd canon of the Quinisext Council, held in 692 CE, is well known to Byzantine art historians as it mandates the replacement of one iconographic choice (the lamb) with another (Christ as a human). The canon states:

In some depictions of the venerable icons, the Forerunner is portrayed pointing with his finger to a lamb, and this has been accepted as a figure of grace, prefiguring for us through the Law the true lamb, Christ our God. Therefore, while these ancient figures and shadows have been handed down as symbols and outlines of the truth passed on by the church, we prefer grace and truth, which have been received as fulfilment of the law. Therefore, so that what is perfect may be depicted, even in paintings, in the eyes of all, we decree that the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Christ our God, should from now on be portrayed as a man, instead of the ancient lamb, even in icons; for in this way the depth of the humility of the Word of God can be understood, and one might be led to the memory of his life in the flesh, his passion and his saving death, and of the redemption which thereby came to the world.⁶⁶

Charles Barber points to the canon's concern regarding the inadequacy of the lamb, and remarks that it is "an insufficiency in this type of symbolic representation. Instead, the canon decrees that such figures should be replaced by the representation of Christ as a man."⁶⁷ Although it has been argued that

⁶⁶ I have used the translation in Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 42.

⁶⁷ Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 42.

the canon was not an unequivocal prohibition on lamb imagery so much as a suggestion, its formulation is nonetheless interesting for our purposes.⁶⁸ In highlighting the insufficiency of the symbol, the canon also highlights a perception regarding the insufficiency of a nonhuman species vis-à-vis the experiences of a human. The reasons put forward for replacing the lamb with Christ regard the greater understanding such a substitution would enable. Christ as human would allow for the apprehension of the intensity of his human suffering; the profundity of his teachings; and the terrifying nature of his death, which is also the source of redemption for humankind.⁶⁹ The subtext is that the image of the animal is incapable of exhibiting the same features and of exciting the same response to the same degree. This is a profound shift not only in iconographic terms, but also for its implications for the human-animal configuration that was comfortably—even vigorously—propounded in earlier centuries.

We find the consequences of Canon 82 in some (not all) subsequent imagery, in which the picture field is dominated by human beings—or to put it another way, largely cleansed of beings that do not bear superficially human features.⁷⁰ The visceral union between the shepherd and his sheep that was so integral to the early church fathers' conception of salvation, is now replaced with a world in which *humankind* and its concerns regarding an all too human suffering and salvation are paramount.

68 Anderson, "Images in Byzantine Thought and Practice," 150–51.

69 See further discussion in Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 42–52.

70 Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 42–52.

