

FISH AND DOVE.

BY THE EDITOR.

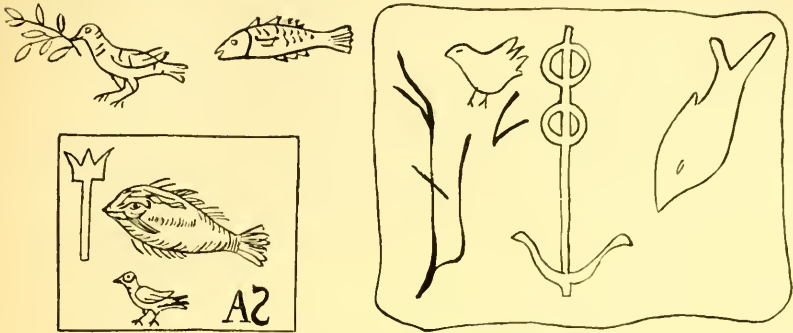
AT the beginning of the Christian era, Hither Asia and Egypt, known as the Levant or the Orient, exercised a most enduring and decisive influence upon the development of mankind. Rome had conquered the Orient by force of arms, but the Orient conquered Rome by force of her older civilization; for Rome adopted eastern institutions, eastern beliefs, and eastern forms of worship. Western democracy was supplanted by an eastern autocracy, and long before Christianity took root in Rome, eastern religions were introduced from Egypt and Babylon and Syria, in spite of senatorial prohibitions and severe persecutions. It is therefore not improbable that the many similarities that obtain between Roman Christianity and Oriental modes of belief are not purely accidental but indicate an historical connection. If they were accidental they would be extremely curious and we would have to confess that the coincidences would be the more remarkable. At any rate a knowledge of Oriental religions is an indispensable factor for a comprehension of Christian symbolism and Christian modes of worship.

We will here consider the fish and the dove, the sacred animals of Astarte, which reappear during the third and fourth centuries A. D. as important Christian symbols.

We possess a curious book on the goddess of Syria, written by Lucian, a native Assyrian who saw the places he describes and is a reliable authority. From this book we learn many details concerning the worship of the Syrian goddess in her holy city, Hierapolis.

Hierapolis in Syria, a few miles west of the upper Euphrates on the road toward Antioch, was the center of a popular cult devoted to Istar, the great mother-goddess and Queen of Heaven. Lucian calls her the Syrian Hera (or Juno) and claims that there is no more venerable, "nor any holier place in the world" than Hierapolis. It is remarkable that both the pigeon and the fish sacred to Istar of Hierapolis reappear in the same close union in the Christian catacombs.

Lucian describes the Hera of Hierapolis as holding a scepter in one hand and a spindle in the other. She wears a crown in the form of a turret and her head is surrounded by a halo. Her belt



FISH AND DOVE IN THE CATACOMES.*



CHRISTOGRAM WITH DOVE AND FISH.

This combination is typical for many graves in the catacombs. The present instance is taken from a tomb in the cemetery of Priscilla according to Boldetti, p. 371. It covered the tomb of a boy Priscinus.



THE TOMBSTONE OF REDEMP̄TA WITH URN, DOVE AND FISH.

Formerly in the Kircher Museum, now lost. (See Lupi, *Ep. Scv. M.*, p. 185.)

is the same as that of Venus Urania, which implies that it is ornamented with stars. Above her forehead she wears a gem which is called "the lamp" for at night it emits such a brilliant light that the

* In the left upper corner we see a dove with olive branch and a fish, without any inscription. It was discovered in the cemetery of Priscilla. De Rossi proves (*Bul. di arch. cr.*, 1864, p. 9 f.) that it belongs to the third century. Underneath we see a trident and a bird accompanied by the letters AS. It is recorded by Boseo in *Roma Sotterranea*, p. 210; and Aringhi (Vol. II, p. 522) states that it was found in the cemetery of Nereo and Achilleo. The trident renders it doubtful whether it is Christian or pagan. The third stone contains besides a bird and a fish an anchor and a scrawl of unknown significance without inscription. It comes from the cemetery of Cyriacae (cf. d'Agincourt, *Sculpture*, VII, n. 21, and de Rossi, n. 68.)

temple is lit as by lamps; though the light is somewhat weaker than daylight it always remains luminous.

The context suggests that the gem on the head of the Syrian goddess must have been a real lamp covered by colored glass.

Lucian also mentions as a special peculiarity of the Syrian



BENEMERENTIRVSTICIANE
QVEANNORVM LIIII
MENSES X DIEBVS
XX IN PACE



THE EPITAPH OF RUSTICANA IN THE CATACOMBS.

The epitaph is framed in by a praying woman on one side and a dove and fish on the other. The deceased lived to the age of 54 years, 10 months and 20 days. She was buried in the cemetery of Priscilla, the picture being reproduced from Lupi, *Ep. Sev. M.*, p. 118; Marini, *Papiri diplomatici*, p. 355 et al.

PR | M M M FECIT PR | ME

VENEMERENTI QVAE VIXIT

ANNIS LI·MES IDVS V DIEBVS



PRIMA'S TOMBSTONE IN THE CATACOMBS.

The Christian character of this sarcophagus is assured by the X placed between a palm branch and a fish with a laurel wreath in its mouth. The dove stands to the right of the inscription in which PRIMMM apparently stands for *Primus maritus*, *Prime* for *Prima*, *mesidus* for *mensibus* and *venemerenti* for *benemerenti*. It means that her "husband Primus made the tomb for Prima the well deserving, who lived fifty-one years, five months and some days."

goddess that she always looks the worshiper straight in the face. If a man turns to the right she follows him with her eyes; while at the same time a man may pass to the left and she will do the same. This peculiarity seems to suggest that the image in question, unlike the artistic sculpture of Greece, was either a bas relief or a comparatively

flat statue, for the trick of making pictures always look at the spectator is nothing remarkable, and has been from time immemorial quite well known to the profession of painters, but it can scarcely be imitated in plastic statuary. There have been found, however, statues in high relief of the corresponding Phenician goddess which are sufficiently flat to render such a trick possible.

Our frontispiece represents a statue in high relief of the mother-goddess of Cyprus. It has apparently served as an altar piece in an Istar temple in the same way as the statues of the Syrian Juno that Lucian describes.

In another place Lucian speaks of the goddess as being seated



PAX

AMIANOC



DOVES IN THE CATACOMBS.

The dove followed by the word PAX is an epitaph which has been published by Marini in his *Atti de' fratelli Arcali*, p. 266; the group to the right is recorded by Boseo *R. S.*, p. 564, and is simply marked with the name Ammianus. It is difficult to decide whether the figure behind the dove is a fish or a lamp or a flower:



THE TOMB OF VLPIUS.

Of the two illustrations of this epitaph the bird with the bunch of grapes stands above, and the hooked fish below the inscription, which reads in poor Latin *Vlpius restitutu[s] dormiente in pace*.

in a chariot, drawn by lions, not unlike the goddess Rhea, a drum in her hand and a turret crown on her head. In the interior of the temple, presumably the Holy of Holies, Lucian relates there was a statue of Hera enthroned on lions, and one of Zeus standing on a bull, both made of gold, and between the two golden statues stood another golden symbol which was quite different from any other statue. He says that it had no definite shape but contained all divine forms. The Assyrians simply called it the sign,¹ but no one could give any information concerning its origin or its shape. On the summit of it rested a golden dove, the representative bird of Istar. We need not hesitate to assume that this so-called sign was simply a

¹ σημείον.

pillar, a mazzeba,² such as commonly served to indicate the divine presence in the primitive days of stone worship,³ when it was called by the Jews as well as the Phenicians "house of God," or Bethel.⁴

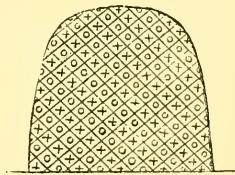


ISTAR.*



ISTAR.†

We have innumerable instances of such pillars representing Istar or Diana on coins and medals. Sometimes the sacred symbols of the deity to whom the pillar is dedicated are carved into it.



ASSYRIAN MATZZEBA COVERED WITH SOLAR DISCS AND CROSSES.

From Ohnefalsch-Richter, *Kypros*, Plate LXXXIII, 2.

Incidentally we call attention to the trinity of the cult at Hierapolis. There were three emblems, the statues of Zeus and Hera and a pillar with a dove perched upon it, symbolizing the divine

² מַצְבֵּה

³ See the author's article on "Stone Worship," *Open Court*, XVIII, 45, 661.

⁴ בֵּית־אֵל. Or transcribed into Greek βαϊθελιον.

* From a rock carving at Boghaz-Köi in Asia Minor.

† The similarity to Christianity becomes more apparent when we consider that the Holy Ghost, which the dove there represents, was for a time and in certain places regarded as feminine and the mother of Christ.

Father, the divine Mother, and an impersonal Bethel represented in the shape of a dove. We know that almost every temple of the Orient exhibited in the Holy of Holies a trinity of some kind—in Egypt mostly Osiris, Isis and Hor, and the persistence of tradition



A CHRISTIAN CARNELIAN IN THE
KIRCHER MUSEUM.

This shows the Good Shepherd, a ship, an anchor, a dove on a T cross and a fish on each side of the anchor. Through these symbols are scattered the letters IXΘΥΣ.



CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS.

Among them the dove on the ark and underneath Jonah's whale; on the left of the Good Shepherd Jonah under the gourd, and underneath seven sheep.

appears from the fact that all over China both the Buddhists and the Taoists have trinities in their shrines. The Buddhists call their trinity the triple gem and the Taoists "the three Holy Ones." When we would ask why there are three Holy Ones, not two, nor four,



THE TOMBSTONE OF EUTROPUS.

The occupant of this tomb was a sarcophagus maker. The inscription reads, "The Saintly and God Fearing Eutropus in peace. His son made it" (i. e., the tombstone). On the right hand is shown the coffin ornamented with four dolphins. Above it hovers a dove with an olive branch in his mouth.

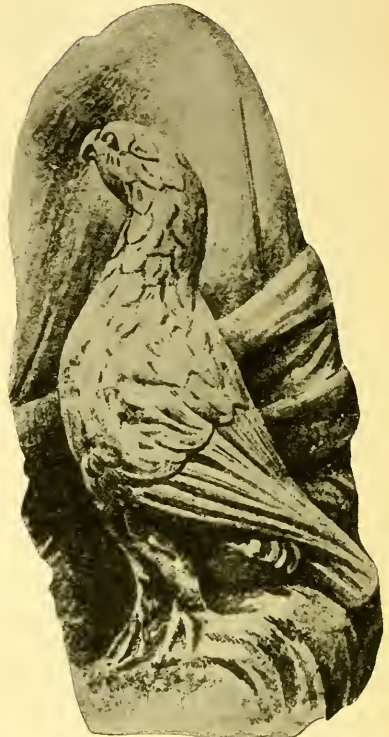
no one can give us an authoritative answer, for the books of Taoism contain no information on the subject.

Concerning the animals held sacred by the worshipers of the Syrian goddess Lucian says: "Among the birds the dove was in their

opinion most holy. Even to touch it was deemed sin, and if this should happen unintentionally to any one he would be impure for a whole day. The doves make much use of their immunity, so much so that they live there and enter freely into the living rooms searching for food without fear."



ISTAR WITH DOVE.



ISTAR'S DOVE (DETAIL).

During the Hellenistic period.

Concerning the holy fish in Hierapolis Lucian says:

"Not far from the temple is a lake in which there are a great many holy fishes of different kinds; some of them are extraordinarily large and have names of their own. They come when called. While I watched them I found one among them who had an ornament of golden flowers on his fins. I saw him repeatedly and always with

wreaths and exhaling the odor of incense. Daily many people swim to it in order to pray there and deck it with fresh flowers."

One of the greatest festivals which attracts great crowds is what is called "the procession to the lake," because, as Lucian tells us, "on this day all the statues of the gods descend to the lake, among them Juno first, for the sake of the fish, lest Zeus see them before the same decoration. The pond is said to be very deep. I have not sounded it but it is said to be about 200 yards. In the middle of the pond stands a stone altar which at first sight seems to swim and move upon the water, and this is believed by many people, but it seems to me to rest on a high column. This altar is always covered her, for if that should happen, it is said that the fish in the lake



ROCK CARVING AT BOGHAZ-KÖI.

Bas-relief in the British Museum.

would die. Now he comes indeed to see them but the goddess prevents him, keeps him back, and does not cease urging him to return."

The custom of bathing the statues of the gods was quite a common practice, and, like baptism, is a ceremony based on the notion of the sanctity of water as the substance of life. We meet with the same custom even among the Teutons, of whom Tacitus gives us a vivid description saying that a goddess was ceremoniously bathed in a sacred lake of an island, and some archeologists believe they have discovered this locality in the now so-called Hertha lake on the Island of Rügen.

Wieland, the German translator of Lucian's complete works, makes this comment on the Syrian goddess (First edition, Vol. V. pp. 347-348):

"Since Lucian often leaves our curiosity unsatisfied in this rather desultory account of the Syrian goddess, it may not be unwelcome

to many readers if I endeavor to throw further light upon this mysterious goddess, her temple and some of its peculiarities, so far as I have the means at hand. Larcher, in his essay *Memoire sur Venus* (p. 16 f.), says: 'The Syrian goddess was regarded as a Venus, and it is the more probable that she was a Venus since she was thought of as nature itself, or at least as the first cause which brought forth from moisture the beginnings and seeds of all created things. Hyginus likewise asserts that this goddess was Venus. He says that "an egg of extraordinary size fell into the Euphrates from heaven; the fishes rolled it to the bank; the doves hatched it and Venus came out of the shell and was henceforth called the Syrian goddess. At her request Jupiter, wishing to do honor to her virtues, transferred the fishes to a place among the stars, and because of this the Syrians include the fishes and doves among the gods, and do not eat them." According to Strabo the goddess was called Atergatis, and according to Eratosthenes, Derketo. He says that she fell at night into a lake near Bambyce (which according to Ælianus and Appianus is Heliopolis) and was saved by the great fish.'

"So far Mr. Larcher. This last legend, as may be assumed of all fabulous traditions of the ancient world, had an historical foundation according to the geographer Mnaseas as cited by Athenæus. Mnases said that Atergatis was a Syrian queen and had been so fond of fish that she forbade her subjects to eat fish under the heaviest penalties, but on the other hand commanded them to deliver all they caught to her own kitchen. This in his opinion is the origin of the abstinence from fish which became an article of religion with the Syrians, and also the origin of the custom to worship silver or gold fishes of Atergatis, deified by later generations, when they had some important request to make of her. He also states as a positive fact (although Lucian makes no mention of it) that real boiled and baked fishes were placed daily before the goddess and were afterwards eaten by the priests as her representatives in her name, a circumstance to which I would have been willing to swear even before I knew of this passage in Athenæus; for it is absolutely incredible that some hundreds of priests (whose maintenance demanded a great amount and variety of provisions) would have left unused a lake full of the finest fish and would not have been crafty enough to have combined the sanctity of these fishes (by which they were merely secured against the profane palates of the laity) with the interest of their own fastidious tastes."

Wieland's utilitarian explanation of the sacramental eating of

the fish by the priests is beside the mark, for it substitutes a modern culinary motive and underrates the power of religious tradition.

For the sake of completeness we will quote what Prof. W. R. Smith has to say on the dove:

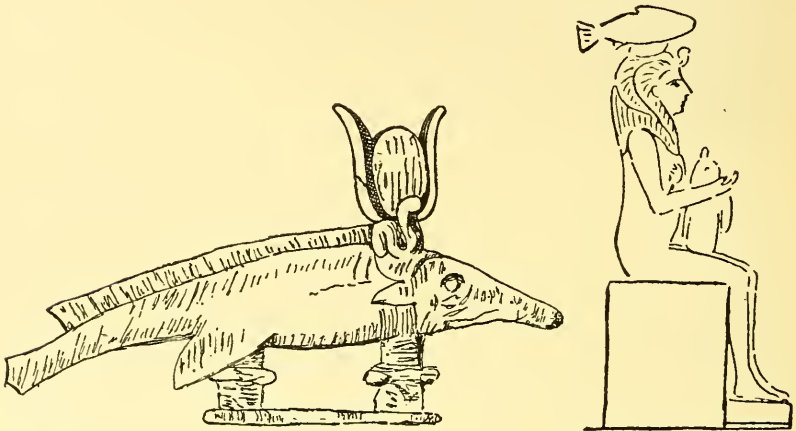
"The dove, which the Semites would neither eat nor touch, was sacrificed by the Romans to Venus; and as the Roman Venus-worship of later times was largely derived from the Phenician sanctuary of Eryx, where the dove had peculiar honor as the companion of As-tarte, it is very possible that this was a Semitic rite, though I have not found any conclusive evidence that it was so. It must certainly have been a very rare sacrifice; for the dove among the Semites had a quite peculiar sanctity, and Al-Nadim says expressly that it was not sacrificed by the Harranians. It was, however, offered by the Hebrews, in sacrifices which we shall by and by see reason to regard as closely analogous to mystical rites; and in Juvenal, VI, 459 ff., the superstitious matrons of Rome are represented as calling in an Armenian or Syrian (Commagenian) haruspex to perform the sacrifice of a dove, a chicken, a dog, or even a child. In this association an exceptional and mystic sacrifice is necessarily implied.

"When an unclean animal is sacrificed it is also a sacred animal. If the deity to which it is devoted is named, it is the deity which ordinarily protects the sanctity of the victim, and, in some cases, the worshipers either in words or by symbolic disguise claim kinship with the victim and the god. Further, the sacrifice is generally limited to certain solemn occasions, usually annual, and so has the character of a public celebration. In several cases the worshipers partake of the sacred flesh, which at other times it would be impious to touch. All this is exactly what we find among totem peoples. Here also the sacred animal is forbidden food, it is akin to the men who acknowledge its sanctity, and if there is a god it is akin to the god. And, finally, the totem is sometimes sacrificed at an annual feast, with special and solemn ritual. In such cases the flesh may be buried or cast into a river, as the horses of the sun were cast into the sea, but at other times it is eaten as a mystic sacrament. These points of contact with the most primitive superstition cannot be accidental; they show that the mystical sacrifices, as Julian calls them, the sacrifices of animals not ordinarily eaten, are not the invention of later times, but have preserved with great accuracy the features of a sacrificial ritual of extreme antiquity."

We notice here that the dove is sacred, but that the mere touch of it renders people impure because things sacred are what anthropologists now are in the habit of calling "tabu." In the same way

the same animal which serves as the emblem of the deity and is eaten sacramentally, will otherwise not be eaten, and its very touch renders unclean. This is specially true of the boar, the animal sacred to Adonis, and when among the Israelites the old Adonis cult had been abrogated the pig continued to remain tabu, only henceforth it was regarded as impure and its pristine sacred character was entirely lost sight of.

The Syrians are Semites kin in race to the Hebrews, and so it is but natural that some of their institutions should be similar to those. Lucian says of the Hierapolitans that they sacrificed bulls and cows, also goats and sheep; but that only the swine are neither offered nor eaten, since they look on them as an abomination, and



THE OXYRHYNCHOUS WITH SOLAR DISK.

ISIS AND THE FISH.

From a bronze in the Louvre.

some believe that this did not happen on account of disgust, but because this animal was originally holy.

The pig was deemed a most effective offering not only among the Semites but also in Greece where we find it used as an expiatory sacrifice in the Eleusinian mysteries.

The sacredness of the dove and the fish were not limited to Hierapolis. The dove was the bird of both Venus and Diana all over the lands of classical antiquity, and the fish was the emblem of the second person of the old Babylonian Trinity since its Sumerian and its remotest prehistoric ages, and this fish deity was a mediator between God and man. To him was attributed in Babylonia all knowledge, all civilization, all religion, all morality, as much as in

Egypt to Osiris. Folklorists assume that this fish was the sun who was regarded as rising from the waters in the east and sinking back into the waters in the west, and that during the night he lived in the depths of the ocean. Some features of Oannes reappear in Ea, the god of the ocean and of water.

Similar ideas in which the fish is regarded as sacred, have prevailed in many other countries. We know that in some provinces of Egypt certain fish were sacred, and among them we especially know the large Oxyrhynchous, which was distinguished among the scaled creatures by its extreme fertility. It was represented in Egypt as carrying the solar disk on top of its head, which indicates its connection with sun worship. Isis herself was represented as the fish goddess, bearing on her head the emblem of a fish.