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University of Sussex

Wendy Watson: Candidate for Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil)

**The Art of Personification in Late Antique
Silver: Third to Sixth Century AD**

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, University of Sussex
August 2012

VOLUME ONE

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree:

Signature:

University of Sussex

Wendy Watson: Candidate for Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil)

**The Art of Personification in Late Antique Silver:
Third to Sixth Century AD**

Summary

This thesis examines the extent to which, in an artistic context, personifications, and allegorical figures and scenes, were embedded in the culture of Late Antiquity from AD 300 to 600. 'Personification' can be read both as a noun and a verb, and I explore it in both senses. My examination is carried out through a series of case studies of figurative imagery on contemporary silver plate. I make an empirical study of the primary objects within my thesis in relation to texts and other objects never considered in conjunction before.

The representations on the silver plate discussed in my thesis are broadly divided into three categories: secular, imperial and cultic. In the secular grouping, I discuss their links to literature, the theatre, and their place in the dining room. Imperial imagery often featured personifications and in addition was circulated throughout the known world, and so I examine the power held by these particular, and predominantly female, figures. Although pagan cults were by this time dying out, a few surviving cultic objects such as the Parabiago Plate allow an examination of this form of personification.

During this period there were huge changes as the Roman Empire divided into Eastern and Western Empires and adopted the Christian faith. The former became the Byzantine Empire and the latter went into a perceived decline, particularly after the sack of Rome in AD 410. I look at how pagan personifications and allegorical groups survived this transition, and assess the significance of this form of continuity.

This thesis demonstrates that in Late Antiquity the art of personification functioned in all aspects of life. It was a subliminal language, accessible in varying degrees to contemporary viewers depending on their education and status. It was a potent propaganda tool, and in what was then a patriarchal society it provided images of strong, powerful females.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine the extent to which the art of personification was pervasive and influential in all walks of Late Antique society, and how it acted as a subliminal language, through a study of contemporary representations on silver plate. This, in turn, can increase an understanding of the way society operated at that time, and reveal the culture, interests, aspirations and mores of contemporary viewers.

My title, *The Art of Personification*, is deliberately ambiguous. The term ‘personification’ can be read as both a noun and a verb, and I will explore it in both senses. As a noun, a ‘personification’ means giving human form to an abstraction, object or place; for example, the female personification Nike represents victory. As a verb, the remit of the word widens. ‘To personify’ borders on allegory, and can encompass entire figurative groups in Late Antique art, such as hunting tableaux: the hunt scene has, for instance, been described as representing, among other things, an imperial triumph, the quest for understanding, the struggle that was Christian life, and the life force itself.¹ In all instances, as is implied by the word itself, personification involves the use of human figures to represent abstract values, places, or concepts such as the seasons. It also often relates to literature, particularly when the figures acting as personifications are from mythology, and thus these figurative representations can carry with them a narrative which may or may not be known to the viewer. Personification was in effect a means of communication, as I will demonstrate, and it could convey often complex messages and ideas, as well as representing more straightforward values such as victory.

My examination is conducted through a series of case studies of figurative imagery depicted on contemporary silver plate. There are several reasons for selecting this medium: there are a number of personifications and/or scenes that personify abstract values depicted on silver plate from this period; silver was used in a variety of ways and contexts; and the

¹ See for example: Dominic Perring, “‘Gnosticism’ in Fourth Century Britain: The Frampton Mosaics Reconsidered”, *Britannia*, 34 (2003), p. 105; Martin Henig, *The Art of Roman Britain* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1995), p. 155.

number of suitable surviving silver objects is ‘manageable’. That is to say, there are enough items to provide a variety of examples, but not an amount which would make analysis untenable. To date, about 1500 pieces of late Roman and early Byzantine silver plate have survived, and of these, a small proportion bears imagery related to personifications and allegorical figures.² I have confined my study to silver from the Western and Eastern Roman, later Byzantine, Empires. During the same period the neighbouring Sassanid Empire in Persia produced some silverware carrying related imagery, but this would require a separate study and is outside my terms of reference. I have also limited my study to a time period between the third and sixth centuries AD. Although it might seem more logical to continue into the seventh century, and indeed into the eighth century and the arrival of the period of Iconoclasm which forced a reappraisal of figurative imagery, this would have increased the volume of my thesis considerably; for example, I would certainly have had to devote a chapter to the David Plates from the Cyprus Treasure which, although depicting Christian imagery, can be argued to hold other allegorical and imperial meanings. Therefore, being constrained by the strictures of the word-count available, I have reluctantly stopped at around AD 600.

Although the silver I discuss was predominantly owned by members of the élite, this thesis will look at the ways in which personifications were woven into the fabric of daily life of all classes. In Late Antiquity, personifications and allegorical figures and groups were visible everywhere, from the bathhouse to the dining room, in the theatre and on the streets in parades. They appeared on official silver plate and coins, and were even displayed on clothing. They were invoked at weddings and depicted on funerary monuments. Personifications had long been a part of pagan rituals, but in a newly Christian age they managed to retain their influence as their images and attributes were assimilated into Christian art. Everyone, from the emperor down, used images of personifications for protection and support, and as a way of increasing their power. They were thus important and influential figures and by studying them it is possible to assess people’s concerns, and the core values that were considered to be important at that time.

² Marlia Mundell Mango, ‘Silver in Changing Contexts’, in *The Road to Byzantium: Luxury Arts of Antiquity*, ed. by Frank Althaus and Mark Sutcliffe (London: Fontanka, 2006), p. 59.

Personifications and allegorical figures have been somewhat overlooked in previous studies of silver plate. Until recently, art historians have gone to great lengths to identify the iconography and the owners of silver vessels bearing images that include personifications and allegorical scenes, but the deeper significances and possible reasons for a particular choice of subject matter have frequently been disregarded. The focus has tended to fall on male figures such as emperors, rather than their female companions who act as personifications. In this context, personifications have been treated as incidental and their presence unremarkable. This is another reason to study them: in order to counterbalance previous studies which have focussed on representations of powerful men.

One of the themes running through this thesis is the presence of female imagery in what was a patriarchal empire. Late Antique society was organised along patriarchal lines, and women were considered to be physically, intellectually and emotionally the inferiors of men.³ Middle and upper-class women did not have the option of a career but were expected to remain in the home, marry and have children; the lower classes held various low-status jobs from actresses to barmaids and midwives. Women could not stand for public office or vote. Despite this, personifications which were widely depicted on imperial and official imagery were usually female; Latin and Greek are gendered languages hence the female bias, as the values and places they represented tended to be feminine nouns. Therefore, in the patriarchal society of Late Antiquity, these figures provided a strong, visible female presence in an otherwise male-dominated world.

Most of the objects discussed in this thesis were the property of members of the upper classes. Although the lower orders in Late Antiquity may have owned some small items of silverware, the function, quality and weight of the figurative silver plate examined here is of a type that would have belonged to the wealthier, often aristocratic, echelons of society.⁴ I will explore how people used these objects, why they would choose to display particular

³ It was assumed that all women wanted was to marry and have children, and until then they should remain chaste. Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 13, 29, 119.

⁴ J.P.C. Kent and K.S. Painter, eds, *Wealth of the Roman World* (London: British Museum Publications, 1977), p. 19.

images, and what this tells us about their beliefs and interests. My concern is not to categorise or assess the monetary or historical value of these items, but to investigate the significance of the figurative iconography depicted thereon. In the past, much effort has been expended on issues of precise dating, identifying the site of manufacture and attributing ownership.⁵ Nearly all these objects were buried or concealed in some way by their original owners, and there has been often quite detailed conjecture as to the reasons why they were hidden. Some have a name scratched on the underside, which has tempted scholars to link them to a known personage. However, it has to be accepted that a lot of this information will never be accessible, and so in my thesis these matters are secondary to the images, and the information they can convey.

I will make an empirical study of the primary objects within my thesis in relation to texts and other objects never considered in conjunction before. For example, at times I will use mosaics and textiles from the East to inform and interpret iconography on silver found in the West. Furthermore, both Latin and Greek authors will be cited.⁶ This intermingling of cultural sources can be justified when one considers that the Roman Empire in the fourth century spanned a vast landmass from Britain in the West to Turkey and Syria in the East, and North Africa. Those controlling this huge area, who were from the élite and therefore the likely owners of the silver under discussion, were united by a common culture and education; this is described in Chapter One, and is another theme that runs throughout the narrative. Furthermore, some of the silver plate found in the West may have originated from the Eastern Empire, and both Greek and Latin inscriptions appear on the objects.

The period under discussion, AD 300-600, was one of huge change as the Roman Empire divided into Eastern and Western Empires; the former became the Byzantine Empire and the latter went into a perceived decline, particularly after the sack of Rome in AD 410. Also during this time, Christianity became established as the state religion. There can be a tendency to divide religious iconography from Late Antiquity into Christian or pagan, but

⁵ For example, K. S. Painter, 'The Mildenhall Treasure: A Reconsideration', *The British Museum Quarterly*, 37 (1973), pp. 154-180.

⁶ Alan Cameron describes the presence of both Greek and Latin texts and authors in Late Antiquity, in Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 527-535.

the mid fourth-century viewer would have thought this of little relevance.⁷ Christians and pagans were buried side by side in the catacombs, and pagan personifications were absorbed into Christian art. There are records of mixed marriages within aristocratic circles, where the emphasis was on property and inheritance rights rather than personal issues. This apparent tolerance lasted until the reigns of Gratian (367-383) and more particularly Theodosios I (379-395), when the legal status of pagan cults was challenged, and their ties to emperor and state broken.⁸ In my thesis I will take the view that there was no clear point at which Christianity became established and paganism was excluded; it was rather a gradual and sometimes messy changeover.⁹ It is in this context of not being clear-cut that I will look at how personifications and allegorical groups survived this transition, and assess the significance of this form of continuity.

When studying a silver object one has to consider the possibility that it might be a fake. The example of the Risley Lanx, which briefly made its way into the British Museum collection and was exhibited in York, before being revealed as the work of the Greenhalghs, an infamous family of forgers, serves as a reminder that even the experts can be deceived, albeit temporarily.¹⁰ In contrast, objects from the Hoxne Hoard have an incontrovertible provenance as they were excavated from their original burial site in Suffolk. The objects I discuss have all been verified by museum experts; I have proceeded on the assumption that they are genuine, and my analysis is based upon this premise.

In the context of the art of personification on silver, there has been scholarship on both silverware and personifications. However, writers on Late Antique silver plate have not for the most part written specifically about personifications and allegorical groups, and those writing about personification and allegory rarely engage with silverware. The closest to any analysis of this form of representation is carried out by Ruth Leader-Newby, who

⁷ Books with titles such as *Early Christian Painting*, by Pierre du Bourguet (New York: Viking Press, 1965) and *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, by John Lowden (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1997) do in fact contain a mixture of Christian and pagan imagery.

⁸ *Theodosian Code*, 16.1.2.

⁹ See for example: G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), pp. 1-13; Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 1-31.

¹⁰ C. Johns and K. Painter, 'The Risley Park Lanx "Rediscovered"', *Minerva* 2.6 (1991), pp. 6-13.

writes about figurative imagery in her book *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity*.¹¹ Leader-Newby's book examines silver plate in terms of Late Antique cultural history, with particular emphasis on *paideia*, the classical education of the élite. However, apart from a discussion about Ge, personification of earth, on the *Missorium* (large plate) of Theodosios, she deals with personifications in very general terms, and is not concerned with the reasons for their presence on silver plate or the fact that they were predominantly female, instead choosing to focus on the principal male figures. Nor does she extend her analysis into the realm of the theatre. Leader-Newby does not look at allegorical figures such as Herakles, or groups such as hunting scenes, nor does she engage with the significance of Dionysiac imagery.

Scholars working on individual silver objects and hoards have also tended not to discuss issues arising around personification. In the case of the Mildenhall Treasure, virtually nothing has been published. In 1977, Kenneth Painter, then Keeper of Romano-British Antiquities at the British Museum produced a small handbook on this hoard, and Richard Hobbs, also at the British Museum, is currently undertaking a programme of re-publication.¹² To date there has been no full study of the figurative imagery depicted on the numerous objects. Jocelyn Toynbee did assign a possible allegorical meaning to the Mildenhall Great Dish, suggesting it could represent souls in bliss in paradise.¹³ Dionysiac imagery includes the so-called 'Bacchic mask' motif, which appears on the Mildenhall Great Dish as well as in the border friezes of some dishes from the hoard, and François Baratte has charted the Bacchic mask's development, but he does not expound on its possible meanings.¹⁴

The Esquiline Treasure is another prestigious hoard, consisting of many pieces of fourth-century silver plate, some of which include depictions of personifications. Kathleen Shelton's book is in the form of a detailed catalogue of the objects, and focuses on the

¹¹ Ruth Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004).

¹² K. S. Painter, *The Mildenhall Treasure: Roman Silver from East Anglia* (London: British Museum Publications Ltd, 1977); Richard Hobbs, personal communication, 14 June, 2010.

¹³ J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Britain under the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 309.

¹⁴ François Baratte, *La Vaisselle d'Argent en Gaule dans L'Antiquité Tardive* (Paris: De Boccard, 1993), pp. 182-87.

possible owners of the treasure.¹⁵ Elsewhere, Sheldon has written on the city-tyche, giving a detailed history of the evolution of this personification and its appearance in various media, although not its imperial role.¹⁶ Gudrun Bühl has made a study of the Esquiline tyche statuettes and produced a reconstruction of the likely seat on which they might have been displayed.¹⁷ She casts doubts on the identification of one of the tyches as the statuette of Alexandria, and I have expanded on this.

Marlia Mundell Mango's volume on the Sevso Treasure, co-written with Anna Bennett, contains much useful detail about the objects from this hoard but nothing about personifications apart from basic identification.¹⁸ There is no commentary on the significance of allegorical groupings. An intended second volume on the iconography of the silverware remains unpublished for legal reasons, as ownership of this hoard is contentious. Marlia Mango has written extensively on Late Antique silver plate but her approach is archaeological; she does not delve into social history and only comments broadly on imagery depicted on the vessels.¹⁹

In 2010, Catherine Johns, a former curator of the Romano-British collections at the British Museum, produced the definitive book on the Hoxne Hoard of Late Antique silver plate.²⁰ Some of this silver depicts allegorical figures and personifications, and Johns provides a comprehensive description of items from the hoard.

The *Missorium* of Theodosios is another object without a dedicated book. Bente Kiilerich, whose book *Late Fourth Century Classicism in the Plastic Arts* contains a detailed section on the *Missorium* of Theodosios, identifies the reclining figure of the personification Ge

¹⁵ Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure* (London: British Museum Publications Ltd, 1981).

¹⁶ Kathleen J. Shelton, 'Imperial Tyches', *Gesta* 18.1 (1979), pp. 27-38.

¹⁷ Gudrun Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma: Stadtpersonifikationen der Spätantike* (Zurich: Akanthus, 1995), pp. 107-142.

¹⁸ Marlia Mundell Mango and Anna Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure: Part One, Art Historical Description and Inscriptions, Methods of Manufacture and Scientific Analyses*, JRA Supplementary Series 12.1 (Ann Arbor, MI: 1994).

¹⁹ For example, Marlia Mundell Mango, 'The Sevso Treasure Hunting Plate', *Apollo* 132 (1990), pp. 2-13.

²⁰ Catherine Johns, *The Hoxne Late Roman Treasure: Gold Jewellery and Silver Plate* (London: The British Museum Press, 2010).

and her accompanying *erotes* (small boys), but develops the discussion no further.²¹ Sabine MacCormack refers to both the *Missorium* of Theodosios and the *largitio* (largess) plate of a late fourth-century emperor, Valentinian I or II, in *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*.²² Her interest is in the imperial iconography, but she does discuss the presence of Ge and the *erotes* on the former although, like Kiilerich, she sees Ge only as a submissive figure, personifying fecundity and the world over which the emperor rules. The evidence from a wider survey, however, suggests that this personification is a much stronger presence, who upholds the power of the ruler.

In turn, scholars publishing on the subjects of personification and allegory occasionally discuss silverware. Toynbee produced two articles packed with dates and examples, tracing the development of representations of the personifications *Roma* and *Constantinopolis* from AD 312-578, predominantly on coins and medallions but also including the Esquiline statuettes.²³ She comments on the presence of personifications in Late Antique society, and calls them ‘new art-types sprung from the old tradition’, but does not discuss this idea further.²⁴

Elsewhere, Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin have co-edited a collection called *Personification in the Greek World: from Antiquity to Byzantium*, which contains various papers on the subject ranging from pre-Homeric times to the Byzantine period.²⁵ These consider personifications in literature, art, and religion, and several are apposite to my thesis as they discuss similar imagery, albeit in forms other than on silver plate. Liz James has written on the question of what images of empresses may have personified; while she does, on occasion, refer to imagery on silver plate, it is usually in the context of imperial

²¹ Bente Kiilerich, *Late Fourth Century Classicism in the Plastic Arts* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993), pp. 19-30.

²² S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 214-220, 204-205.

²³ J. M. C. Toynbee, ‘Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-Antique Art from 312-365’, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 37 (1947), pp. 135-144; J. M. C. Toynbee, ‘Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-Antique Art from 365 to Justin II’ in *Studies presented to David Moore Robinson on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. George E. Mylanos (St. Louis: Washington University, 1951), pp. 261-77.

²⁴ Toynbee, ‘Roma and Constantinopolis’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 37, p. 136.

²⁵ Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin, eds, *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2005).

art, not the domestic sphere.²⁶ James's work on empress personifications crosses over with that of Henry Maguire, who has developed an art-historical theory around images of a decorative female bust that he has identified as a 'wealth-bringing woman', which appears particularly on Late Antique textiles and mosaics, and also on silver plate.²⁷

As well as the works detailed above, exhibition catalogues sometimes look at Roman and Byzantine silver plate and personifications together, although they serve to categorise, date and describe objects, rather than offer hypotheses on the meaning and subsequent understanding of their iconography.²⁸ However, these provide a good source of basic information such as the dimensions of objects, and the appended bibliographies can be helpful in assisting further research.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis has seven chapters. My initial chapter, *Setting the Scene: Aristocrats and Allegory*, is concerned with personification and allegory in literature and education, and through this I introduce topics linked to personification that appear throughout my thesis. I explore the role of *paideia*, the classical education mandatory in Late Antiquity for the upper classes and those who wished to rise up through society. The ability of contemporary viewers to identify a personification or comprehend the allegorical meaning of a scene could hinge on possessing this education, and in recognising these representations they demonstrated their superior learning and rank. I will make clear the links between figurative imagery on the silver and literary sources, and demonstrate how

²⁶ For example, Liz James, 'Who's that girl? Personifications of the Byzantine Empress', in *Through a Glass Brightly*, ed. by Chris Entwistle (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), pp. 51-56.

²⁷ Henry Maguire, 'The Mantle of Earth', *Illinois Classical Studies* 12.2 (1987), pp. 221-28.

²⁸ The following are the principal ones I consulted: Kurt Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979); Sheila Bonde, ed., *Survival of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Medieval Art* (Providence RI: Brown University, 1987); Susan B. Matheson, ed., *An Obsession with Fortune: Tyche in Greek and Roman Art* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1994); Frank Althaus and Mark Sutcliffe, eds, *The Road to Byzantium: Luxury Arts of Antiquity* (London: Fontanka, 2006); Elizabeth Hartley and others, eds, *Constantine the Great: York's Roman Emperor* (Aldershot: York Museums Trust, 2006); Robin Cormack and Maria Vassilaki, eds, *Byzantium 330-1453* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008).

group scenes could personify allegorical meaning. Figures and scenes depicted on silver plate also appeared in other media, such as mosaics, textiles and sarcophagi, indicating the extent to which society utilised this type of imagery, and I start to explore the possible reasons for this. The syncretism between paganism and Christianity emerges in some of the representations, and with it the role of personification in creating imagery for the new Christian faith. All these themes continue through the following chapters.

Having set the scene in chapter one, I move into the sphere of the performing arts in my next chapter: *Dramatis Personae: Personification and the Theatre*, and use the Sevso Meleager Plate for my case study. This is an exploration of two differing aspects of personification associated with the theatre, and is in two distinct sections. Section one explores the genre of so-called ‘Bacchic Masks’, representations of Dionysiac heads that were used to break up decorative frieze sections on silver vessels. With their connotations of pantomime masks, they provided the link to Dionysos, god of the theatre, and all that he personified. I will demonstrate that they were not just decorative but significant in themselves. In the second section, I establish the connection between mythological scenes, such as those pictured on the border frieze of the Meleager Plate, and theatrical performances. I will show that these popular tales were also scenes from classical enactments, which were being performed in the theatre in Late Antiquity, and suggest that through studying this imagery it is plausible that actors played the parts of personifications on stage in these shows.

This discussion leads on to chapter three, *Drunk and Disorderly: Dionysiac Imagery on the Mildenhall Great Dish*. Despite its high quality and extraordinarily rich imagery, there has been very little study of the Mildenhall Great Dish. I will use it to explore the myriad connotations of Dionysos and his followers in the *thiasos* (procession). I describe how they worked both individually and as a group to personify a wide range of abstractions, of which fertility and conviviality were just two. The representations on this dish also contain allegorical meanings with associations of life and death, which is why Dionysiac imagery was considered suitable for all kinds of occasions ranging from weddings to funerals.

Again, I provide evidence of how aspects of this type of imagery were subsumed into Christian art.

From drinking to eating: the next chapter, *The Art of Dining*, focuses on personifications in the dining room through the medium of the ‘Empress’ pepper pot from the Hoxne Hoard. This *piperatorium*, in the form of a female bust, is unparalleled. I will use it to explore the possible functions this small object may have originally fulfilled outside of the very practical one of dispensing pepper or other spices. It resembles an aristocratic woman, and was perhaps intended to represent Helena (c. between 250 and 257 – between 330 and 336), the first Christian empress; other objects in the hoard bear Christian symbols and so this would suggest that it, too, was a religious object. Alternatively, its design may have been copied from coins or modelled on so-called empress steelyard weights which were used throughout the Empire at that time; it could therefore have personified the might of imperial power. It almost certainly personified bounty and wealth in some form. Like many of the silver objects surveyed, it would have provoked conversation and provided an opportunity for diners to display their *paideia*, and consequent grasp of the deeper concepts of personification and allegory.

I next turn to the imperial court in *The Power behind the Throne: Personifications on Imperial Silver*. This chapter surveys personification within the imperial cult, which was still present in Late Antiquity. I use a small silver statuette of the personification of the genius of an emperor, to convey the depth to which this cult was then embedded throughout the Empire, and how the emperor continued to be venerated despite the burgeoning Christian religion. I then examine how personifications were utilised in order to reinforce imperial power. Three picture plates depicting three different emperors have survived, and they portray the three main roles performed by an emperor: performing an *adventus* (ceremonial arrival); leading the army; and executing court rituals. Two of the emperors solicit the support of Nike (Victory); the third is depicted with Ge (Earth), to show both his domination of the earth and its reciprocal power. These dishes have been previously studied, but the focus has been on the might of the depicted imperial figure. However, all

of them also feature a personification, and I show how these companion figures were necessary in order to maintain the *status quo*.

Continuing the imperial theme, in *City-Tyches: Official Personifications*, I examine the role of this potent and widespread figure, which personified the fortunes of both city and empire. The image of the city-tyche was a guarantee of high quality and appeared on coins and hallmarks. The consul Ardabur Aspar (d. 471) chose to have himself portrayed flanked by a pair of city-tyches on his *largitio* plate, which would have been presented by him as a token of consular largess. Depending on their identity, these city-tyches may have imparted his personal history to the recipient as well as symbolising his official status and power. My exploration of this adds a new dimension to our understanding of the presence of tyches on official silver. The Esquiline city-tyche statuettes were ceremonial objects that would have been viewed by both public and court, probably in official parades as they seem to have been designed for movement. An argument not until now fully stated, is that there may even have been a Christian element to these figures, as they could represent the four great patriarchates as well as the cities of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria. I demonstrate that the city-tyche was a ubiquitous personification which appeared in all walks of life, and in all media, and carried enormous authority.

The significance of personifications and allegorical groups is the theme that runs throughout all these chapters, and my final chapter, *The Parabiago Plate: Pagan presence in a Christian Age*, examines a dish on which the art of personification reaches its apogee. Apart from the goddess Cybele, her consort Attis, and the three Corybantes (armed dancers), all the many other figures depicted thereon are personifications, who combine to impart a body of information. Between them they represent heaven and earth, the oceans and rivers, and the passage of time itself. As a group they evoke the cycle of nature and the changing seasons, and the movement of the stars and planets. They indicate that this dish commemorates specific festivities which took place every spring. These are complex themes, here easily conveyed simply through the use of personifications. The way they work together has not previously been fully analysed. Yet again there is a syncretism, as some of the beliefs and figures of the cult of Cybele morphed into Christian values. Yet

again there is a link to the contemporary theatre, as by Late Antiquity the rituals relating to this cult were being acted out on the stage. The production and survival of this object is deeply significant in itself. It was made at a time when the aristocracy was fighting to retain the old religions, and it was obviously highly valued for its imagery, as it was buried with its final owner. It confirms that, at the end of the fourth century, personifications continued to be seen as very powerful figures.

A final note: I have appended four appendices containing the full passages of texts referred to in my thesis. In order to achieve consistency, I have used the spellings provided in the *Dictionary of Byzantium* for proper nouns.²⁹ I have given dates when they are known. Also, throughout my thesis I refer to images and texts that are non-Christian as ‘pagan’. This was originally a disparaging term coined by Christians in Late Antiquity to describe non-believers, and the word *pagani* translates as country dwellers. Paganism was never a religion and those concerned would never have identified themselves as a group. It is a relational concept designed by Christians eager to distinguish themselves from non-Christians.³⁰

²⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. by Alexander Kazhdan and others, 3 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

³⁰ Robert Shorrock, *The Myth of Paganism: Nonnus, Dionysus and the World of Late Antiquity* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), pp. 4-6, and n. 23 on p. 134; Alan Cameron, *Last Pagans of Rome*, pp. 7, 14-24.

Chapter 1 - Setting the Scene: Aristocrats and Allegory

In this first chapter, through a study of contemporary representations on silver plate, the links to literature and, more widely, education, of imagery depicting personifications and allegorical figures, will be established. The word ‘personification’ is a broad term, and art in Late Antiquity depicted it in a variety of ways. I start with four case studies of silver vessels carrying figurative representations, which I have selected as they demonstrate some of these different aspects of personification and allegory: the Corbridge Lanx depicts a probable female geographical personification who is the key to interpreting the rest of the scene; the Muse Casket from the Esquiline Treasure portrays eight of the nine Muses, who personified various areas of the arts; a silver bowl from Carthage bears allegorical bucolic scenes, which could evoke both classical and Christian meanings; and hunting scenes such as those on the Sevso Hunting Plate traditionally personified imperial Roman virtues.

Crucially, the contemporary viewer would have required a classical education, known as *paideia*, in order to fully interpret much of this imagery. These objects were produced in the fourth and fifth century, and one at least was probably still in use in the sixth century, and so they demonstrate the continuing influence of the classics and their associated imagery, which often harked back to Ancient Greece. The ruling élite were linked through *paideia* and their visual culture over the vast area that was then the Roman Empire, stretching from the borders of today’s Afghanistan in the east to Britain in the west and the deserts of Africa in the south. Therefore, representations such as those discussed below were highly important in promoting a sense of kinship among the powerful upper class.

The Corbridge Lanx

In this section I will use a large tray known as the Corbridge Lanx (plate 1) to demonstrate the complexity of interpreting certain classical imagery, and how this would have been achieved by those in possession of an élite education in Late Antiquity. Once identified,

the central figure of a personification of the island of Ortygia provides an explanation for the entire scene.

The Corbridge Lanx, dating to the fourth or fifth century AD, was found on the banks of the River Tyne near Corbridge, Northumberland, in 1734, and is now in the British Museum. It is 50.3 cm long, 38 cm wide, and weighs 4600 g. Corbridge, originally *Coriosopitum*, was a Roman garrison town, not far from Hadrian's Wall. All the other objects under discussion in this chapter are not believed to have had any form of ritual use, but this dish is considered to be cultic and therefore properly pagan, that is, without any Christian associations.³¹ The iconography may be a pastiche, using classical mythological figures from different sources, in which case this lanx was only ever an interesting decorative object.³² Alternatively, it is possible that no single interpretation was envisaged, but the visual programme was designed to be ambiguous and/or to offer a variety of readings. But I shall proceed with my analysis on the premise that this is a knowledgably constructed scheme which refers to the cult of Artemis and Apollo, and that the central female figure is a personification of the isle of Ortygia, which was also known as Delos.³³ In order to convey the complexity of interpreting this type of imagery, and thus the need for *paideia*, I relate the principal mythology, but each strand of legend has a variety of differing details far too numerous to recount here.

Five large figures comprise the main scene. On the left is a figure invariably identified as Artemis, the huntress. She is dressed in a short tunic with a decorative square bib front, simulating an *aegis* (breastplate), over a knee-length robe. A long cape is draped over her left arm, and she wears decorative laced open-toed boots. Her hair is tied up in a bun and she has a diadem. An armlet and a bracelet are etched on each arm. This is her traditional costume and a late fourth-century plate, now in Berlin (plate 2), shows the goddess dressed in exactly the same way, so she is easily recognised. She holds a bow in her left hand and an arrow in her right. Between her and the next figure is a decorative outdoor altar, on top

³¹ Marlia Mundell Mango, 'The Corbridge Lanx', in *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. by David Buckton (London: British Museum Press, 1994), pp. 36-39.

³² Jas Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 192.

³³ Mango in Buckton, *Byzantium*, pp. 36-38.

of which there is an apple (?) and two blossoms, similar to those garlanding the neighbouring tree containing nine small birds and a larger raven or eagle.

Artemis faces a figure identifiable as Athena, the warrior goddess, who raises her right arm in greeting, her middle and index fingers extended, signifying speech. Athena's large shield is propped up against the tree. She wears a short *chiton* (tunic) over a full-length robe, and on her breast is a rectangular bib representing her *aegis* with its Gorgon's head. She sports boots and a plumed helmet, and holds an upright spear in her left hand.

Standing behind Athena, in the centre of the picture, is a female holding a tall, thin sceptre. She wears a *himation* (over-garment, cloak) over a long *chiton*, the former draped around her bent right arm and over her left shoulder in the style of philosophers and thinkers. The first two fingers of her right hand, which rests on her upper chest, are extended in the speech gesture. Behind her, another woman sits on an ornately carved stool and turns to look at Apollo who stands on the far right of the scene. Her seated position, matronly veil and a line across her brow indicate that she is older than the other figures.³⁴ Her left hand, fingers splayed, is raised in front of her and she holds a spindle in her right. In the background is a freestanding column of blocks topped by a globe on a decorated plinth. The identity of these two women is uncertain, but Toynbee and Painter, Mango, Sheldon and, more tentatively, Leader-Newby all opt for the geographical personification Ortygia (standing), originally the Titaness Asteria, and her sister Leto (sitting), the mother of Apollo and Artemis by Zeus.³⁵ Both were daughters of the Titans Coeus and Phoebe, and Asteria turned herself into a quail to escape the attentions of Zeus, plunged into the sea and became the floating island of Ortygia, later called Delos in some tales.³⁶

On the far right is the final figure, identifiable as Apollo, who looks across to his twin, Artemis. He is naked apart from toeless laced boots and a cape which hangs from his left

³⁴ O. Brendel, 'The Corbridge Lanx', *Journal of Roman Studies* 31 (1941), p. 113.

³⁵ J.M.C. Toynbee and K.S. Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates of Late Antiquity: AD 300-700', *Archaeologia* 108 (1986), p. 32; Mango, 'The Corbridge Lanx', in Buckton, *Byzantium*, p. 36; Kathleen Shelton, 'The Corbridge Lanx', in Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, pp. 132-133; Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, p. 146.

³⁶ Pierre Grimal, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 63. See Brendel, 'The Corbridge Lanx', *Journal of Roman Studies* 31, pp. 100-127, for a detailed analysis.

shoulder. His hair is tied up at the back and he wears a wreath. He stands at the foot of an awkwardly rendered set of steps leading to a small temple, and his decorated lyre rests against the right column. The building frames Apollo, indicating that it is a shrine to him, and it is garlanded with blossom like the tree. He holds a bow similar to that of his sister, and offers a sprig to the seated Leto, his mother, a gesture which traditionally involved an olive branch, symbolising peace. Perhaps the tree under which Artemis and Athena stand is also supposed to represent an olive tree, as the gnarled and irregular shape certainly resembles this type of tree. Above either side of the pitched temple roof is a circle within which is a star motif symbol of divine presence, and large leaves suggesting tall palm trees. There is also a simplified rendering of two palm fronds in the foreground.

Legend dictates that Leto gave birth first to Artemis and then nine days later to Apollo on Ortygia/Delos between an olive tree and a date palm, and on this lanx the seated female is placed between the symbolic leaves of these two trees. She is looking closely at the olive branch offered by Apollo, and almost touching the foreground palm leaves with her foot; a diagonal line linking them would run through the length of her body, and this underlines that the identification as Leto is correct. The representation of these two trees, along with a temple and the presence of his mother, suggest that the scene on the dish is indeed set on Ortygia/Delos, the birthplace of Apollo.

In the foreground section, on the left, liquid flows from an upturned vessel placed on a rocky outcrop, signifying a body of water; this could indicate that the scene is set on island surrounded by the sea. A dog wearing an ornate collar turns its head directly upwards to witness the meeting of Artemis and Athena. Next to it, a stag appears to crash down towards a second, larger, outdoor altar which bears three depictions, representing a flame protected by two circular wind shields.³⁷ Both the dog and the stag are attributes of Artemis, and the pose of the latter may be one of reclining rather than falling, albeit poorly rendered. To the right, a griffin, an animal associated with Apollo, is seated facing right but looking back at the stag. The whole scene is surrounded by a decorative border with a

³⁷ Brendel, 'The Corbridge Lanx', *Journal of Roman Studies* 31, p. 103.

vine motif. The weight, fourteen pounds, three ounces, two scruples, is inscribed in Latin on the reverse side.

The story of the birth of Artemis and/or Apollo on Ortygia is present in a variety of classical sources such as Hesiod, Apollodorus, and Aristophanes, so this was a well-known tale in Late Antiquity, although accounts and references can differ in detail.³⁸ When Leto was about to give birth to her divine twins, Apollo and Artemis, by Zeus, Hera (wife of Zeus) was jealous and forbade every place in the world to offer her shelter, so Leto wandered without finding a resting place. Finally the floating island of Ortygia agreed to receive her, and as a reward the island was fixed to the sea-bed by four columns which kept it in place. Because Apollo, the god of light, first saw daylight on its soil it was named Delos, 'the Brilliant'. Alternatively, the Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo has it that the goddess Leto stopped at Ortygia to give birth to Artemis, the firstborn of her twins. Artemis then helped Leto across the sea to the island of Delos, where Leto gave birth to Apollo. Other ancient sources state that the twins were born in the same place, which was either Delos or Ortygia, and that Ortygia was an old name of Delos. Nevertheless, all agreed that the story involved an island that was originally called Ortygia.

The nine small birds in the tree on the *lanx* may be quails, a direct allusion to Ortygia which translates as 'the place of quails'.³⁹ Asteria initially changed into a quail before becoming Ortygia, and legend has it that Zeus transformed himself and Leto into quails when they coupled.⁴⁰ These do not look like small, plump, ground-dwelling birds (but this may be due to lack of knowledge on the part of the silversmith). Close observation of the figure of Ortygia shows that she is wearing what appears to be a feather as a head-dress, and this could refer to her transformation. Traditionally feather head-dresses were worn by the Muses, as can be seen on the Muse Casket for example (Plate 3). Ortygia is standing in the philosopher pose often adopted in representations of the Muses, but this figure is not a Muse as she does not have an attribute such as a scroll, mask, or musical instrument, and

³⁸ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 918; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1.4.1; Aristophanes, *Birds*, 870; Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 56.

³⁹ Kathleen Shelton in Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, pp. 132-133.

⁴⁰ Graves, *The Greek Myths*, p. 55.

there is no precedence for the inclusion of a Muse in this grouping. The large bird on the branch directly above Athena, in what seems to be a deliberate pairing, might be a sea eagle, as in Book Three of the *Odyssey* this goddess turns into an eagle.⁴¹ However, it may represent Zeus, as he did take the form of an eagle on occasions, and Ovid describes Asteria as being held in the struggling eagle's clutch when the god attempted to rape her.⁴² It has to be accepted that the significance of this avian group is now lost to us, and just a matter of conjecture.

The reading of figurative imagery such as on this dish can be problematical, as there are no mythological tales that group Athena with Artemis and Apollo. It would therefore seem that the scene on the plate is of a place, rather than an event, and the identification of the centre female as the geographical personification of Ortygia/Delos offers a coherent solution. This is borne out by an account from Macrobius (dates unknown but writing AD 395- c. 431) stating, 'there is in the island of Delos a temple of Providence, called the temple of Athena "Forethought" and appropriate rites are celebrated in it'.⁴³ He later remarks 'there is at Delos an altar at which the god [Apollo] is worshipped only with a ritual prayer, and no victim is slaughtered'.⁴⁴ The scene on this dish probably depicts a shared sanctuary with two altars, dedicated to the worship of Athena and the twins, Artemis and Apollo. This could make it some type of commemorative object, relating to a visit to the island; if this was the case, then its function relied on identification of the personification of Ortygia.

As is apparent, a certain amount of classical knowledge is required in order to understand the iconography of objects such as the Corbridge *Lanx*, and identifying this type of personification was probably confined to those on the more highly-educated level of Late Antique society. The Romans had adopted the fifth century BC Athenian system of

⁴¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 3.415-6.

⁴² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 6.107.

⁴³ Ideo in insula Delo ad confirmandam fidem fabulae aedes Providentiae, quam ναὸν Προνόιας Ἀθηναῖς appellant, apta religione celebratur. Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, 1.17.55, ed. by Ludwig von Jan (Gottfried Bass, Quedlinburg and Leipzig: Gottfried Bass, 1852), p. 164, and trans. by Percival Vaughan Davies (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 124.

⁴⁴ Esse Deli aram apud quem hostia non caeditur, sed tantum sollemni deum prece venerantur. Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, 3.6.2, in von Jan, ed., p. 281, trans. by Davies, p. 208.

education for the élite known as *paideia*, ‘education’, specifically in terms of child-rearing. This process in its ideal form took five to ten years, and its principal subjects were rhetoric, grammar, music, philosophy which included mathematics, and a little geography and natural history, although the emphasis was on the first two of these.⁴⁵ A set of canonical texts, most of which dated from the fifth and fourth centuries BC, and their structure and grammar, were taught in fragmented form. Virgil, Terence, Sallust and Cicero were the standard four authors in Latin, and those in Greek included Homer, Thucydides, Demosthenes; their writings, along with selected Attic plays and orations, became the basis for a lot of the subject matter in art, which was commissioned by the upper classes to reflect their superior knowledge of these prestigious works. As the texts included personifications, they were therefore also reproduced in the related imagery. There was a particular emphasis on literary culture in terms of rhetoric, as public life for the élite male required high linguistic skills. *Paideia*, with its rigid and narrow schemes of learning, stressed the importance of conformity and continuity, and discouraged individual thinking.⁴⁶ Libanios (314-394), a fourth-century pagan rhetorician, wrote of the hardships of acquiring this knowledge, saying that the root of education was bitter, but its fruits sweet.⁴⁷ The process of educating the élite in this way continued throughout the period, and was still available at the end of the sixth century.⁴⁸ This form of learning united the Roman aristocracy, and gave them an opportunity to connect to a past golden age from whence sprang the Trojan hero Aeneas whose descendents Romulus and Remus founded Rome, and through him to the gods themselves.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Peter Heather, ‘Literacy and Power in the Migration Period’, in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. by Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 183; Tim Whitmarsh, ‘Reading power in Roman Greece: the *paideia* of Dio Chrysostom’, in *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetoric of Classical Learning*, ed. by Yun Lee Too and Niall Livingstone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 193; Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 11-14; A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602*, 2 vols (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), vol. 2, p. 1003.

⁴⁶ Averil Cameron, ‘Education and Literary Culture’, in *The Cambridge Ancient History: The Late Empire AD 337-425*, XIII, ed. by Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 675.

⁴⁷ Libanios, *Progymnasmata*, Anecdote 3, in *Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, trans. by Craig A. Gibson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), pp. 65-78.

⁴⁸ Averil Cameron, *Continuity and Change in Sixth Century Byzantium* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), p. 27.

⁴⁹ Ismene Lada-Richards, *Silent Eloquence: Lucian and Pantomime Dancing* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 2007), pp. 98-100.

As an education based on *paideia* for the élite was maintained throughout Late Antiquity, the use of personification as a rhetorical and literary device persisted. Within classical texts abstract values and natural forces were frequently portrayed as personifications, and this convention was continued by contemporary writers, both pagan and Christian, in Late Antiquity. The Christian poet Ausonius (310-395), tutor to the future emperor Gratian at the end of the fourth century, often used personification, and for example personified all the then major cities in his descriptions of them.⁵⁰ At around the same time, the pagan poet Claudian (c. 370-410) was using this device to convey more abstract concepts, and he treated personifications as being divine:

Other gods also live within this enclosure. Unfettered Licence and mercurial Anger, wine soaked Sleeplessness, innocent Fears, the Pallor that is the lover's badge, trembling Audacity, pleasant Fear, fickle Pleasure and the lovers' Vows who play in every passing breeze. And among them there is always Youth closing Age out of the grove.⁵¹

Much later, in AD 563, Paul the Silentiary, in praise of the newly reconstructed church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, still employed personifications, here Dawn and Iris, the rainbow:

[...] through fivefold openings pierced in its back it provides sources of light, sheathed in thin glass, through which, brilliantly gleaming, enters rosy-ankled Dawn [...] Above them are bent arches of measureless size like the many-coloured rounded bow of Iris.⁵²

This type of phrasing is Homeric, and he used it to display his learning and high status; those equally well versed would have picked up on the classical references.

⁵⁰ Ausonius, 'The Order of Famous Cities', *Works*, book 11.

⁵¹ Nec cetera numina desunt: hic habitat nullo constricta Licentia nodo et flecti faciles Irae vinoque madentes Excubiae Lacrimaeque rudes et gratus amantum Pallor et in primis titubans Audacia furtis iucundique Metus et non secunda Voluptas; et lasciva Volant levibus Periuria ventis. Quos inter petulans alta cercive Iuventas excludit Senium luco. Claudian, *Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria*, 76-85, in *Claudian*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Platnauer (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1963), pp. 248-49.

⁵² Διατμηγείσα δὲ νότοις πένταχα μοιρηθέντα δοχήϊα φωτὸς ἀνοίγει, λεπταλέαις ὑάλοις κεκαλυμμένα, τῶν διὰ μέσσης φαιδρὸν ἀπαστράπτουσα ῥοδόσφυρος ἔρχεται ἥως [...] τοῖς ἐπι μυριόμετρος ἐπιγναμφοθεῖσα κεραΐη, οἷάπερ εὐκύκλιο πολύχροος ἱρίδος ἄντεξ. Paulus Silentiarius, *Εκφρασις τοῦ Ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας*, 407-10, 457-8, in *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius*, ed. by Paul Friedländer (Leipzig and Berlin: 1912), pp. 238, 240, trans. by Cyril Mango, *Description of S. Sophiae*, in *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 82.

Paideia and its associated classically informed imagery were tools in the struggle for power, and personification was part of this. Since the early fourth century the Christian Church had battled over the issue of *paideia*, which presupposes an inherent belief in the reality of the pagan gods and classical heroes. In AD 362 the pagan emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363), in his attempts to quash Christianity, introduced a decree which prohibited Christians from teaching the classics in schools.⁵³ However, high-ranking churchmen such as Bishop Gregory of Nazianzos (330-390) complained, as they wanted to continue interacting with Greek literary culture; indeed, the future archbishop and Church Father, John Chrysostom (347-407) was sent by his mother to Libanios for a classical education, as at that time only the most puritanical Christian families had objections to this.⁵⁴ Early Christian writing was considered uncouth and barbaric, as it was written in a style of Greek and Latin that would have horrified the more educated reader, whereas *paideia* emphasised the importance of using words with skill and beauty, and to an established format. Christian writers instinctively turned to *paideia* in order to express themselves elegantly and in a scholarly fashion. This argument continued throughout the following centuries, and despite the disapproval of the Christian church of any associations with pagan traditions, its adherents continued to express themselves using classical forms and expressions, and of course personifications.

We cannot know whether the Corbridge Lanx was intended for use in a temple or a private dwelling, but it was certainly designed for display and comment. Luxury objects such as this served to promote the exclusivity of the rich and aristocratic, as the significance of their imagery was restricted to the educated classes. In order to understand that it depicts a shared sanctuary to Apollo, Artemis and Athena which was known to have existed on Delos, the viewer has to recognise the geographical personification. Everyone in Late Antiquity would have been familiar with the concept of personification at some level as, for example, personifications of Victory and Good Fortune appeared on coins and were ubiquitous. However, unless a verbal explanation was provided, the identification of

⁵³ Glanville Downey, 'Julian and Justinian and the Unity of Faith and Culture', *Church History*, 28.4 (1959), p. 343 and n. 10 for the edict in full.

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Oration* 4.5; A.H.M. Jones, 'The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity', in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. by Arnaldo Momigliano, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 31.

Ortygia would have been apparent only to those of a higher rank, and thus greater education. It gave the people in power a sense of unity through their shared knowledge.

Paideia connected the rich and powerful across the huge area that was the Roman and Byzantine Empires, as possession of a classical education was a requirement for those joining the upper echelons of the army and bureaucratic organisations.⁵⁵ It was a form of qualification that led to mobility within the class structure, as it allowed those who had managed to acquire a good education the chance to achieve élite status for themselves.⁵⁶ In order to demonstrate their superior schooling, upper-class Romans surrounded themselves in the home with objects bearing classical imagery. Floor mosaics, wall paintings and textiles depicted mythological and allegorical scenes, and figuratively decorated silver plate would have been part of such schemes. For those newly arrived in the aristocracy the acquisition of such objects offered a chance to create a family history linked to a glorious past. A twentieth-century analogy might be the occasion when the upper-class Michael Jobling scathingly described the self-made businessman and politician Michael Heseltine as someone who had to buy his own furniture rather than inherit family heirlooms.⁵⁷ Throughout Late Antiquity, despite the burgeoning of Christianity and its newly developing iconography, classical forms in art retained their potency and continued to be produced, as is evident from surviving imagery in all media.

The Muse Casket

In this section I will examine the iconography of a decorated silver container known as the Muse Casket, because it bears representations of eight of the Muses (plate 3). Previously, using the example of the Corbridge Lanx, I demonstrated the use of a personification in the form of a single female figure, Ortygia, whose presence within the group was the key to understanding the scene, and where a level of knowledge was required to identify her. However, some personifications were universal within Late Antique society, and such were

⁵⁵ Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 151-162.

⁵⁶ Keith Hopkins, 'Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire', *Past and Present*, 32 (1965), pp. 17-18.

⁵⁷ Wednesday 17 June, 1987. As recorded by Alan Clark, *Alan Clark: A Life in his Own Words*, ed. by Ion Trewin (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 316.

the Muses. Although they were regarded as goddesses, they also acted as personifications in symbolising different aspects of the liberal arts. In silver they appeared on objects owned and used by women such as the Muse Casket, and they represented the educated woman in a patriarchal society. The image of the Muse was used by men to display learning and acquisition of culture, and appeared in male dominated areas such as the dining room. Their appearance on consular diptychs indicates that they were officially recognised, and considered to be authoritative forces. As I will show, the Muses were associated with both weddings and funerals, and they had apotropaic (protective) qualities. They were powerful female figures who, above all, were understood to offer inspiration to poets, speakers and writers, and they maintained their potency throughout Late Antiquity. Through the use of their imagery, and by close association with it, they provided a means for educated élite women to exhibit their own learning and power, limited though this might have been.

The Muse Casket is a mid to late fourth-century circular silver container with a domed lid, forming part of the Esquiline Treasure, now in the British Museum in London.⁵⁸ It is 32.7 cm in diameter, and 26.7 cm high. Three chains attached to the body allow the object to be suspended. The interior of the casket is fitted with a bronze plate with five circular holes for individual silver vessels comprising a flask and four canisters, which would have held perfumes, powders and oils. Because of its function as a container for toiletries, we can assume that the owner of the Muse Casket was female. A medallion edged with a wreath motif tops the dome, and contains a female figure sitting on a folding stool under the spreading branches of a tree (plate 4). A large bird sits on the wrist of her right hand. Sixteen panels divided by fluted columns with Corinthian capitals radiate out from this central roundel, and while the eight concave sections are left plain, the eight flat panels are highly decorated with urns, birds and vine motifs. This decoration continues on the bottom section, where the eight concave sections each contain the standing figure of one of the nine Muses, identifiable by their feather head-dress and relevant attributes. The ninth Muse, Erato, is missing, and might be represented by the figure in the top medallion, an aspect to which I will return. Each Muse stands under a shallow archway between the fluted

⁵⁸ Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure*, pp. 75-77.

columns; they wear a variety of tunics and robes, and their hair is dressed with a frontal feather. The Muses traditionally wore this headgear in allusion to their victory in a singing contest with the Sirens/Pierides who, on losing, were turned into birds.⁵⁹

On the casket, eight of the individual Muses are represented as follows, moving anti-clockwise from the centre: Urania; Melpomene; Clio; Polyhymnia; Terpsichore; Euterpe; Thalia; and Calliope. Erato does not appear and she may be represented by the figure shown on the lid medallion, although she does not sport a feather head-dress. This seated female is a genre figure which appears, for example, in a border scene of a fourth-century mosaic pavement from Antioch, Antakya in modern Turkey, accompanied by a gardener (plate 5). She also appears in exactly the same pose in a third-century mosaic from the House of Menander, Room 13, Antioch, as part of a scene depicting a gardener bringing flowers for women to weave into wreaths, which may be associated with a tomb shown in the background.⁶⁰ There is no clear explanation for the large bird seated on her wrist. I can tentatively surmise that it could allude to the victory of the Muses over the Pierides; this would suggest that she is herself a Muse. Alternatively, it might be a continuation of the decorative scheme, as birds are depicted in all the non-figurative decorative panels on the casket.

It is possible that the figure in the medallion is indeed a depiction of the owner of the casket as the ninth Muse, as this form of representation appeared on sarcophagi from the period.⁶¹ A third-century sarcophagus from Rome depicts a married couple seated in the company of eight Muses, the wife holding a lyre and taking the part of the ninth Muse, again Erato (plate 6). Like the figure atop the casket, she does not wear the feather head-dress. There is therefore a precedent for the iconography on the casket, indicating the existence of an accepted artistic convention at that time to depict an élite woman as a Muse. Erato would have been a particularly appropriate choice. The Greek names of the other eight Muses relate to their attributes and so Polyhymnia means ‘rich in themes’, Calliope, ‘beautiful

⁵⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 5.658-78.

⁶⁰ Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), vol. I, p. 206.

⁶¹ As suggested by Janet Huskinson, ‘Women and Learning: Gender and identity in scenes of intellectual life on late Roman sarcophagi’, in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Richard Miles (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 195.

voiced', and Terpsichore 'she who delights in the dance', and so forth, but the name 'Erato' simply translates as 'lovely', an epithet that could refer to the casket's owner. As well as being the Muse of lyrical poetry and ceremonial verse, Erato personified love: '[...] thou [Erato] sharest the power of Cypris [Aphrodite], and by thy love-cares dost charm unwedded maidens; wherefore to thee too is attached a name that tells of love'.⁶² The Muse Casket might have been intended to be a gift to a young woman, as arguably it contains a message of admiration and love, which could be decoded by a cultured female.

The key point here is that, in order to understand these subtleties, both donor and recipient would need to be educated. Most women were not schooled, but those that were would have been instructed in the classics and mythology. Many were also taught Latin and Greek, but they were expected to speak and write in a different style to their male counterparts.⁶³ And unlike men, women were not taught the skills of rhetoric, as their schooling finished at the age of twelve when they were considered to be marriageable. This was a culture that prized learning, yet it was left to the husband of an upper-class woman to take responsibility for the completion of her education.⁶⁴ There is some evidence that the male educated élite approved of educated women. Gillian Clark gives the example of Maria, daughter of the Roman general Stilicho, who was lauded in a wedding poem for being more interested in reading Latin and Greek texts than thinking about her forthcoming marriage.⁶⁵ This silver casket was an élite item, and it is possible that an educated female may have interpreted the scene in the top medallion in the manner described above. Certainly, ownership of such an object would have connoted learning and conferred status on its owner. Through its depictions of the Muses it could have been empowering, as it would have allied its female owner to a group of extremely influential and potent female personifications.

⁶² εἰ δ' ἄγε νῦν, Ἑρατώ, παρά θ' ἴστασο, καί μοι ἔνισπε, ἔνθεν ὅπως ἐς Ἴωλκὸν ἀνήγαγε κῶας Ἰήσων Μηδείης ὑπ' ἔρωτι. σὺ γάρ καὶ Κύπριδος αἶσαν ἔμμορες, ἀδμητὰς δὲ τεοῖς μελεδήμασι θέλγεις Ὕπαρθενικὰς. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 3.1-5, ed. and trans. by R.C. Seaton (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1912), pp. 194-5.

⁶³ Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, pp. 135-136.

⁶⁴ Paul Veyne, ed., 'The Roman Empire', in *A History of Private Life: from Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 20.

⁶⁵ Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, p. 135.

The Muse Casket was designed for public display, and therefore may have been taken to the bathhouse. In the third century, Clement of Alexandria (150-215), described the bathing rituals of upper-class women, which involved silver vessels:

And of what sort are their baths? Houses skilfully constructed, compact, portable, transparent, covered with fine linen. And gold-plated chairs, and silver ones, too, and ten thousand vessels of gold and silver, some for drinking, some for eating, some for bathing, are carried about with them. Besides these, there are even braziers of coals; for they have arrived at such a pitch of self-indulgence, that they sup and get drunk while bathing. And articles of silver with which they make a show, they ostentatiously set out in the baths, and thus display perchance their wealth out of excessive pride.⁶⁶

Such scenes are enacted on the lower panels of the Projecta Casket, a large and highly decorated silver container which is part of the same Esquiline hoard of silver (plate 7). Attendants are shown carrying a variety of bathing accoutrements for the use of their mistress at the bathhouse, one of which is a circular casket suspended by chains from a ring; this seems to refer directly to its companion piece, the Muse Casket. A fourth-century mosaic pavement from Piazza Armerina in Sicily depicts a similar tableau, only here the casket is rectangular (plate 8). Both text and images tell us that there was a large element of self-fashioning, a process of constructing a socially acceptable public persona through the use of attire, possessions and behaviour, in the ownership and parading of such objects. The presence of the Muses on the Muse Casket indicates that this item of silverware was not simply to provide a show of wealth and position, but also to display the *paideia* of its female owner. Consideration should also be given to the possibility that ownership and display of this object by a woman would have been seen as a reflection of the prestige of her male partner, under whose control she was situated. A wife was then considered to be an adjunct to her husband, and part of his household, over which he had complete control. In this way, rather like the casket itself, she would have been viewed as one of his high-status possessions.

⁶⁶ Πῶς περὶ τὰ λουτρὰ ἀναστρεπτέον. Οἷα δὲ καὶ τὰ λουτρὰ αὐταῖς· οἵκοι τεχνητοί, συμπαγεῖς καὶ περιφορητοί, διαφανεῖ σινδόνι καλυπτόμενοι, καθέδραι τε ἐπίχρυσοι, ἀργυρόηλοι καὶ σκευὴ μυρία χρυσοῦ τε καὶ ἀργύρου, τὰ μὲν εἰς προπόσεις, τὰ δὲ εἰς τροφάς, τὰ δὲ εἰς τὸ λούσασθαι περιφερόμενα· ναὶ μὴν καὶ ἐσχαρίδες ἀνθρώκων· εἰς τοσοῦτον γὰρ ἀκρασίας ἤκουσιν ὥς δειπνεῖν καὶ μεθύειν ἔτι λουόμενας· Clement of Alexandria, *The Paedagogus*, 3.5, in University of the Aegean, <www.aegean.gr/culturaltec/chjmlab> [accessed 2 August, 2012]. Trans. by William Wilson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

In addition, the Muse Casket would have been eminently suitable for a wedding present, as the Muses were on occasion associated with nuptials. In the fifth century, Nonnos of Panopolis described the marriage of Harmonia to Cadmos and noted:

The nine Muses too struck up a lifestirring melody: Polymnia nursing-mother of the dance waved her arms, and sketched in the air the image of a soundless voice, speaking with hands and moving eyes in a graphic picture of silence filled with meaning.⁶⁷

They were seen as bearers of good fortune, with apotropaic powers. In his *epithalamium* (wedding speech) for Athanasius, dated 566-570, the Coptic poet Dioscorus of Aphrodito (b. c. 520) noted that on the day he was born, ‘The nine Muses circled round you in their dance’.⁶⁸ These personifications had a beneficial and protective effect, as well as the ability to inspire.

The Muses were not just personifications of various forms of the arts, but also understood to be actively creative forces, particularly in the field of literature. They were frequently depicted alongside poets and writers, indicating they were regarded as influential figures, and worthy of representation. They personified the moment of inspiration, as described by Dioscorus, who pleaded, ‘[...] O Muse, shed on me the new-fallen dew of divine eloquence, singing the harvest of a new theme of song [...]’.⁶⁹ This was their gift, but Chorikios of Gaza, a Christian sophist and rhetorician writing at the end of the fifth/beginning of the sixth-century, tells us that they could also reclaim it, ‘When human beings are boastful, the Muses apparently are forced to take the gift of music away from them’.⁷⁰ This symbiotic relationship is evident in a third-century mosaic from a private

⁶⁷ Μέλος ἐκρούσαντο βιοσσόον ἐννέα Μοῦσαι, καὶ παλάμας ἐλέλιξε Πολύμνια, μάλα χοπεΐης, μιμηλὴν δ’ ἐχάραξεν ἀναυδέος εἰκόνα φωνῆς, φθεγγομένη παλάμησι αοφὸν τύπον ἔμφροني αἰγῇ, ὄμματα δινεύουσα. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, 5.103-7, ed. and trans. by W.H.D. Rouse (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1940), vol. 1, pp. 176-77.

⁶⁸ ἀμφὶς ἐκυκλώσαντο χοριττίδες ἐννέα Μοῦσαι., Dioscorus of Aphrodito, *Epithalamium for Athanasius*, in L.S.B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 86.

⁶⁹ Μοῦσα [θ]εορρή [των ἐτ] ἔρην [δ]ρόσ[ο]ν [ε]ὐεπιάων ἄμμι νέης μέ[λπου]σα δίδ[ου] τινὰ κ[α]ρπὸν αἰοδῆς, τὸν νέον ἡγεμόνα προφερέστατον ὑμνοπολεῦευν, Dioscorus of Aphrodito, *Encomium of John, Duke of the Thebaid*, 27-30, in MacCoull, trans., *Dioscorus of Aphrodito*, pp. 137, 139.

⁷⁰ ἀλαζονεΐα δὲ ἄρα, ὥς, ἔοικεν, ἀναγκάζει καὶ Μοῦσας ἀνθρώποις ἐμβαλεῖν ἀμουσίαν. Chorikios of Gaza, *Choricii Gazae Opera*, ed. by R. Foerster and E. Richsteig (Leipzig: B.G. Teubneri, 1929), p. 194. *Preliminary Talks*, 8[XV].2, trans. by Robert J. Penella, ed., *Preliminary Talks and Declamations*, in *Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity* others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 40.

villa in Sousse, depicting Melpomene and Clio, identifiable by their attributes, standing either side of a seated Virgil (plate 9). It has been suggested that such a portrayal might symbolise the divine touch upon humanity.⁷¹ A scroll on his lap bears some of the opening words of the *Aeneid*, which refer to Juno: ‘Tell me Muse, the causes of her anger’, showing that even someone as highly regarded as Virgil was in thrall to the Muses.⁷²

It is evident that the Muses were understood to have control over the creative powers of men. In a large third-century mosaic floor from Vichten, northern Gaul, Homer is in the centre, accompanied by Calliope and surrounded by the eight other Muses, all in octagonal medallions (plate 10). A fourth-century mosaic pavement from Sfax, Tunisia, has a central medallion containing Clio and a seated unidentified poet, surrounded by interlacing laurel wreaths which form eight further medallions, each featuring a full-length Muse with their attribute (plate 11). The poet is probably the owner of the house, who has chosen to be shown with the Muses not only as an assertion of his culture, but also as a form of protection.⁷³ A late fourth-century mosaic from Arroniz in Navarre, Spain, depicts the Muses in nine irregular trapezoid segments surrounding a central scene including Pegasus, and each is in conversation with a male figure. None of their male companions can function without them. This widespread presence of expensive mosaics depicting the Muses in private dwellings indicates the power of these female personifications, and the desire of men to appropriate this for themselves.

This form of representation extended to ivory diptychs, where a single Muse on one panel was paired often with a seated male on the other. An example of this is in the Treasury of S. Giovanni Battista, in Monza (plate 12). The two figures are on the same scale, and the Muse is probably Terpsichore as she appears to be dancing as well as playing the lyre. Other ivories showed the Muses as a group. In the Louvre are a pair of ivory plaques, and on each are three pairs of poets and Muses in three registers; the third panel with Clio, Polyhymnia and Melpomene is missing (plate 13). The existence of these and other similar ivories, all from the fifth century, demonstrates the continuing belief in the powers of the

⁷¹ John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), p. 142.

⁷² Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.8.

⁷³ Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 130.

Muses, and accurate characterisation shows that their significance continued to be understood.⁷⁴ Their appearance alongside male figures and in the expensive, high-status medium of ivory, indicates that they were seen as highly potent figures.

The Muses also appeared on official imperial ivories. A single inscribed panel of a diptych of a fifth-century consul, Flavius Constantius, now lost, depicted a standing Muse; by extrapolation the missing section would have probably shown a poet figure (plate 14).⁷⁵ It is extremely significant that a consul would have chosen this type of imagery for what was an official document, albeit one given to friends and supporters. The consul must have prided himself on his intellect, and possession of *paideia*, and wished to shown himself as a fashionably cultivated man. The imagery on this panel is unique among the thirty-two surviving inscribed consular diptychs, but as thousands of diptychs are thought to have been produced at the time, originally such representations may not have been so unusual. It denotes the high status of the Muses, as their imagery was considered to be a suitable subject for official purposes.

Similarly, the church historian Eusebios (AD 263-339) recorded how the emperor Constantine I (306-337) set up statues of the Muses in the palace of his new capital city, Constantinople:

All these things the emperor diligently performed to the praise of the saving power of Christ, and thus made it his constant aim to glorify his Saviour God. On the other hand he used every means to rebuke the superstitious errors of the heathen [...] while the Delphic tripods were deposited in the hippodrome and the Muses of Helicon in the palace itself. In short, the city which bore his name was everywhere filled with brazen statues of the most exquisite workmanship, which had been dedicated in every province, and which the deluded victims of superstition had long vainly honoured as gods with numberless victims and burnt sacrifices, though now at length they learnt to renounce their error, when the emperor held up the very objects of their worship to be the ridicule and sport of all beholders.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Malcolm Bell in Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, pp. 258-61.

⁷⁵ Kathleen Shelton, 'The Consular Muse of Flavius Constantius', *Art Bulletin*, 65.1 (1983), pp.7-23.

⁷⁶ Haec omnia imperator ad gloriam salutiferae Christi virtutis omni studio peragebat, ac Deum quidem Servatorem suum hac ratione colere non cessabat. Gentilium vero superstitiosum errorem omnibus nodis studebat convincere [...] et in ipso quidem circo tripodes Delphici; Musae autem Heliconides in palatio. Denique civitas illa imperatori cognominis, tota passim replete est signis aeneis, quae eleganti opera elaborate, per singulas provincias olim dedicate fuerant. Quibus cum homines morbe erroris oppressi, longo temporis spatio centenas victimas et holocausta incassum perinde ac diis immolavissent, sero tandem sapere

Despite the bishop's argument that this was a form of mockery on the part of Constantine, it seems that the emperor wanted to harness the potency of the Muses, as he placed them in the very centre of power. It has been suggested that the founding of Constantinople in the East robbed Rome of the imperial court and its unique status in the civilised world of being at the heart of events.⁷⁷ This transfer of power triggered an awareness of Rome's cultural heritage, and in the East the aristocracy expressed their devotion to old Rome through the classical arts. The settings and content of these were pagan, and they promoted the continuation and burgeoning of images of personifications, both as a means of expression and as a symbol and link to the past.

As will become apparent throughout my thesis, in Late Antiquity quite a lot of classical imagery was transferable in terms of both medium and function, and depictions of the Muses appeared on a variety of objects including funerary monuments (as has already been described). The Muses were associated with the rites of death, and traditionally they performed at the funerals of heroes such as Achilles when, 'nine Muses sang your dirge with sweet responsive voices'.⁷⁸ They appeared on sarcophagi, either on their own or sometimes with Apollo and Athene, and usually displaying their particular attributes. A late third-century example, now in the British Museum (plate 15), in which scenes of Muses inspiring a poet and a musician flank the inscription, bears the words:

Μ (Σ) [εμπρώνιος Νεικοκράτης]. \ ήμην ποτέ μουσικός άνήρ, \
 ποιητής και κιθαριστής \ μάλιστα δε και συνοδείτης \\
 5 πολλά βυθοίσι καμών \ όδηπορίες (αίο) δ' άτονήσας,
 ένπορος εύμόρφων γενόμην, \ φίλοι, μετέπειτα γυναικών. \
 10 πνεύμα λαβών δάνος σύρανόθεν, \\
 τελέσας χρόνον αύτ' άπέδωκα. και μετά τον θάνατον \
 Μοῦσαί μου το σώμα κρατούσιν.

didicerunt, postquam imperator issdem ad risum et oblectamentus spectantium uti coepit. Eusebios, *Oration in Praise of Constantine*, in *Life of Constantine*, 3.54. Latin text and trans. in Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201>> [first accessed 15 September, 2009].

⁷⁷ J.M.C. Toynbee, 'Review: Die Kontorniaten: Ein Verkanntes Propagandamittel der Stadtrömischen Heidnischen Aristokratie in Ihrem Kampfe Gegen das Christliche Kaisertum by Andreas Alföldi', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 35 (1945), pp. 115-121.

⁷⁸ Homer, *Odyssey*, 24.60.

M. Sempronius Nicocrates. I was once a cultured man. A poet and a lyre-player, and indeed a member of a festival troupe. Exhausted from many voyages, resting from my days on the road, I became, friends, a procurer of beautiful women. Fate came from the heavens, taking my spirit. My time was up and I rendered my accounts. And after death the Muses keep charge of my body.⁷⁹

Here the presence of the Muses indicated the occupant's love of learning, and they were tasked with acting as guardians in the afterlife. The fact that the deceased was prepared to place himself in their hands in death demonstrates their high status among the living.

All of this makes it clear that the Muses were extremely potent female figures, and their presence was welcome at all stages of human life. The female owner of the Muse Casket would have been aware of their diverse powers, and in displaying this object in a public place such as the bathhouse, could have both demonstrated her superior learning and aligned herself with these mighty personifications of the arts.

Bucolic Scenes

In the previous two sections I have looked at very specific, named personifications, but there was no limit to the number of personifications that could appear in an image, and there was no set format as to what constituted a personification. Therefore not only individual figures but entire scenes could personify abstract qualities, although the level of comprehension of this genre varied according to the intellect of the viewer. A category within this field was figurative bucolic imagery, which acted as an allegory for an idealised rural world and a past golden age. Romans felt that it reflected their origins, as described in the first century BC by the writer Varro (116-27 BC), in his treatise on agricultural matters, *De Re Rustica*:

Further, does not everyone agree that the Roman people is sprung from shepherds?
Is there anyone who does not know that Faustulus, the foster-father who reared
Romulus and Remus, was a shepherd? Will not the fact that they chose exactly the

⁷⁹ Greek text and translation, British Museum:

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=459897&partid=1&searchText=sempronius+nicocrates&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=1> [accessed 13 October, 2010].

Parilia as the time to found the city demonstrate that they were themselves shepherds.⁸⁰

Bucolic imagery was relatively common on silverware; for example, a silver bowl from Carthage (plate 16) dated to the fourth/early-fifth century, and now in the British Museum, depicts a shepherd standing between a dog and a ram in the central medallion. It has a diameter of 17.5 cm and weighs 389 g. The wide border frieze contains a further four pastoral scenes, each picturing a herdsman with a variety of sheep, goats and dogs; these vignettes are separated by four profile masks, a motif that is dealt with in detail in Chapter Three. A similar scene can be found on a silver dish dated 527-565, now in the Hermitage (plate 17). It shows a thoughtful herdsman sitting on a stone bench, his hands wrapped around his right knee as he surveys two domesticated goats; a dog sits at his feet. Women as well as men were depicted as part of this genre. The Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin holds a central roundel with a broken edge, all that remains of a fifth to sixth-century vessel, depicting a shepherdess herding her four sheep through the countryside (plate 18). Her child is slung on her back and she holds a basket of fruit; the scene is framed by a cypress tree on the left and a gnarled leafy tree on the right. A dog walks across the bottom segment, and the distant town can be seen in the top right of the image.

Pastoral imagery appeared often on Late Antique silver plate, partly due to the popularity of Virgil (70-19 BC), one of the authors studied by the élite, who wrote at length about bucolic subjects such as shepherds and goatherds, set within idyllic rural settings. Virgilian imagery appeared in various media and across the Empire; in the context of the dining room it could have generated erudite conversation. The late fifth-century AD *Virgilius Romanus* manuscript (cod. lat. 3867), now in the Vatican, is west-European and almost certainly Romano-British, although it was in France in the Middle Ages.⁸¹ In it, the

⁸⁰ Romanorum vero populum a pastoribus esse ortum quis non dicit? Quis Faustulum nescit pastorem fuisse nutricium, qui Romulum et Remum educavit? Non ipsos quoque fuisse pastores obtinebit, quod Parilibus potissimum condidere urbem? Varro, *De Re Rustica*, 2.1.19, ed. and trans. by W.D. Hooper and H.B. Ash, *On Agriculture* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1934), pp. 316-17. The *Parilia* was the shepherds' festival held on 21 April.

⁸¹ Martin Henig, *The Heirs of King Verica: Culture and Politics in Roman Britain* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2002), p. 82.

Eclogues, also known as the *Bucolics*, are populated by herdsmen in conversation or performing song, and the accompanying illustrations depict this (plate 19). The text and illustrations in the manuscript are echoed in bucolic scenes depicted on silver plate.

In this thesis, text and imagery from both Eastern and Western Empires are cited and compared, and this is possible because the audience for classical works came from both, as the élite were united in their knowledge through *paideia*; both Greek and Latin authors were studied. From the fourth century the knowledge of Greek in the West started to die out, and the upper classes in the Western Empire, who had always valued their Hellenic cultural roots, began to read Greek works in translation rather than the original form.⁸² In the late fourth century the aristocrat Symmachus (c. 345-c.402) had to revise his schoolboy Greek in order to help his son with his schoolwork, and Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430), who was very interested in Greek philosophy and theology, used translations and a lexicon. Despite this, some of the aristocracy retained the Greek tradition, with writers such as Macrobius, one of the last writers in this tongue as late as the fifth century.

The Late Antique interest in Virgilian literature is encapsulated in a series of debates set out by Macrobius in his compendium *The Saturnalia*, written in the first half of the fifth century. These conversations take place between members of the Roman élite during this three-day winter festival, and although the work is fictional, some of the named participants were well-known figures in late fourth-century society, chosen for their learning. The book was intended to provide a store of useful information for Macrobius' son, and to demonstrate the art of intellectual argument. Whole chapters are devoted to such matters as comparisons between Virgil and other writers, or analysis of Virgil's choice of vocabulary. Significantly, all of Macrobius's dialogue takes place in the dining room, and it is a fine example of how *paideia* was a vital element in élite life. In Late Antiquity, silver plate depicting pastoral imagery, in use or on show, may have contributed to such discussions, as

⁸² H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. by George Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward Inc., 1956, repr. 1964), pp. 342-355.

the imagery would have pricked interest and could have been employed to display superior knowledge.⁸³

Hellenistic sentiments about a past rural idyll were also appropriated by the Christian church from the very early stages of its development and used allegorically, a prime example being that of Christ as the Good Shepherd. Gregory of Nazianzos used bucolic analogies in his preachings:

Tormented by profound grief, yesterday I sat sadly
Alone in a shady grove, withdrawn from all human company.
It pleases me to heal my weariness of spirit in this way,
Making quiet conversation with my weeping heart.⁸⁴

These examples demonstrate that bucolic scenes on silver plate, such as the meditative goatherd on the Hermitage plate, provided syncretic imagery that connected the classical and Christian worlds, and acted as a form of continuity from one to the other. Such imagery could appeal to both the classical scholar and the contemplative Christian. To the educated élite such scenes would have personified a past golden age, and offered an opportunity to quote Virgil. Meanwhile, the Christian viewer would have seen in them the goodness of a simple life close to nature, and a reminder of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

The Sevso Hunting Plate

As I stated in the introduction, allegory is a form of personification, and in this section I use the example of the Hunting Plate from the Sevso Treasure (plate 20) in order to demonstrate how hunting scenes could carry allegorical meanings in Late Antiquity. This silver and nielloed dish, which bears scenes of a day's hunting in both the border and the central medallion, has a diameter of 70.5 cm and weighs 8873 g.⁸⁵ The Hunting Plate's usage spans the period under discussion. Manufacture of the dish has been dated to the

⁸³ Sidonius (c. 430-490) refers to a 'nitens abacus', 'glittering sideboard' in a description of his dining room, *Letters*, 2.2.11.

⁸⁴ Quoted in 'The Classical Heritage in Byzantine Art', by Vera Zaleskaya, in eds Althaus and Sutcliffe, *Road to Byzantium*, p. 53. Full reference not given.

⁸⁵ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 45.

fourth century AD, but it could have been in use for over one hundred and fifty years, as the vessels from this hoard were buried in a sixth-century copper cauldron. Although the dish is in good condition, most of the original gilding has worn away and there are some cracks and signs of wear; additionally it was damaged during its deposition by its proximity to a neighbouring plate.⁸⁶ Plates such as this might have served as tripod table tops rather than laden with food, as they would have been extremely heavy to carry, and indeed such an arrangement is depicted in the central scene on this dish, where a picnic is shown taking place (plate 21).⁸⁷ As a table it would have been in close proximity to the diners, who could have observed the figurative representations and commented on them.

Hunting was a popular pastime for the aristocracy, and it also relates to eating; it is therefore not surprising that scenes of this activity appeared on items of silver plate displayed or used in the upper-class dining room. However, as well as celebrating an élite pastime, the image of the hunt connoted a variety of abstract qualities to those who saw it. As I have already shown, personification was a subjective concept, with interpretation often resting on the education of the contemporary viewer, and so the meanings they took from such imagery would vary. Using the Hunting Plate, I will show that the imagery on such an object could personify the qualities of valour and bravery. Traditionally a hunting scene represented a king overcoming his enemies, and in Byzantine art was considered to be part of a triumphal cycle, and a way of preparing a ruler to be brave and fair.⁸⁸ In Christian iconography, the hunt scene embodied the struggle that was Christian life.⁸⁹ In Roman funerary symbolism the heroic hunt represented the victory of good over evil and thus immortality. The hunt was also aligned to philosophical thinking of the time, and could act as a stimulus for intellectual debate.

The central medallion illustrates the course of the day's events, which it presents in three segments. In the top area, two elk are being driven into a pen by hunters and a dog, and at

⁸⁶ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, pp. 72-73.

⁸⁷ Marlia Mundell Mango, 'From "glittering sideboard" to table: silver in the well-appointed *triclinium*', in *Eat, Drink and be Merry (Luke 12:19) – Food and Wine in Byzantium*, ed. by Leslie Brubaker and Kallirroe Linardou (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2007), p. 129.

⁸⁸ Vera Zaleskaya, 'Plate with Meleager and Atalanta', in eds Althaus and Sutcliffe, *Road to Byzantium*, p. 159.

⁸⁹ Perring, '"Gnosticism" in Fourth Century Britain', *Britannia* (2003), p. 105.

the bottom of the plate a boar hunt is taking place. The focal point of the picture is a picnic scene in the central area. Four men and a woman recline under an awning on a semi-circular *stibadium*, here an outdoor couch but more usually found in the dining room, in front of which a low round table holds a large fish. While servants bring them food and drink, other activities involving the preparation of the repast are taking place around them. A river is being fished, meat is butchered, and a cook crouches before a lit stove. The names of Sevso's horse, *Innocentius*, and hound, *Pelso*, are inscribed alongside the animals.⁹⁰ The border frieze, which is split up into twelve segments, shows a series of chases involving a variety of animals from hares to big cats and elk, a total of fifty-four beasts and twenty-three hunters, plus a single bucolic scene of a shepherd tending his flock (plate 22). The master's large villa and an ox cart also feature. Unusually, these tableaux are divided by shrubs, rather than by masks or pillars.

An inscription runs around the medallion, starting from a *Chi-Rho* monogram, the Greek symbol for Christ, at the top centre (plate 23). The original Latin reads: '*HEC.SEVSO. TIBI.DVRENT.SAECVLA. MVLTA.POSTERIS.VT PROSINT.VASCVLA.DIGNA TVIS*' followed by the *Chi-Rho*. It translates as, 'May these, O Sevso, yours for many ages be, small vessels fit to serve your offspring, worthily'.⁹¹ The original owner Sevso was therefore of the Christian faith, and this dish was presumably part of a valuable set presented to him as a gift. The inscription expresses an awareness of mortality and the desire to create a dynasty, with Sevso at its head as the founder. It is ingenuously deprecating, as the description 'small vessel' is hardly applicable to this heavy silver dish with a diameter of just over 70cm. There could be an element of flattery on the part of the giver, with the suggestion that it was but a trifle, and that Sevso was in possession of far greater wealth and rank. Conversely it may have reflected the higher status of the giver, to whom this plate and others like it were of little consequence.

⁹⁰ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 78. Another example of naming favourite animals can be found in a third to fourth-century AD mosaic pavement showing two mounted hunters and attendant with dogs named *Ederatus* and *Mustela* pursuing a hare and a jackal, Maison de Laberii, Oudna, Tunisia.

⁹¹ Translations of this inscription vary. This is in 'faulty elegiac verse' according to Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 77, whose translation I have used.

The imagery on the Sevso Hunting Plate indicates that the family was extremely rich, or aspired to be. Within the frieze are depicted scenes of a large estate including a villa with its own farm, here represented by a group of domestic animals. All the paraphernalia of hunting, men, horses, hounds, equipment, is shown, and in the medallion there is even a fisherman in the process of landing his catch. Another group of servants prepare, cook and serve the meal. It is clear that the aristocratic picnickers possess leisure time unavailable to the slaves waiting on them. One of the diners is female, which reinforces the dynastic theme of the plate with its message of procreation.⁹² It may be that the wealthy owner kept the dish at his town house, as a reminder of his country estate. It signified the abundance of his land, and his ability to control nature. With its associations of food and luxury, the subject matter was eminently suitable for display in an élite dining room.

Hunting was a popular aristocratic pastime, and in Late Antiquity hunt scenes appeared in a wide range of different media: paintings, mosaics, textiles, ivories, sculpture, ceramics, glass and, of course, silver plate.⁹³ They even appeared on jewellery; the Hoxne Hoard contains five gold bracelets bearing this motif. The hunt emerged as a favoured subject for mosaics in the third century, as a result of demand from patrons who enjoyed hunting themselves.⁹⁴ It became progressively popular throughout Late Antiquity, and increasing stress was placed on its symbolic values, which are described below.⁹⁵ A fifth to sixth-century mosaic pavement from Antioch has many of the same images that appear on the borders of the Sevso Hunting plate (plate 24), and demonstrates this form of personification; the representations are centred around the figure of a huntsman, who is probably a personification of valour and manly courage, as hunting was a popular allegorical image for these qualities.⁹⁶ Two further mosaic pavements, originally found near this one, depict busts of the personifications of Ktisis (Foundation), now badly

⁹² Dunbabin and others suggest it may have been a wedding gift: Katherine Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 143 and note 4, p. 237.

⁹³ For example see Olga Osharina, 'Textile with a Hunting Scene' in eds Althaus and Sutcliffe, *Road to Byzantium*, p. 150.

⁹⁴ Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, pp. 48, 52.

⁹⁵ Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, vol. I, p. 237.

⁹⁶ Lawrence Becker and Christine Kondoleon, *The Arts of Antioch: Art Historical and Scientific Approaches to Roman Mosaics and a Catalogue of the Worcester Art Museum Antioch Collection* (Worcester, Mass: Worcester Art Museum, 2005), p. 235; Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, vol. I, pp. 344-345; Paul Zanker, *Roman Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010), p. 194.

damaged, and Megalopsychia (Greatness of the Soul) respectively, also placed centrally within hunting scenes (plate 25). This demonstrates the manner in which the hunt could hold an allegorical value, as in these mosaics two levels are represented, the human and the divine, strife and victory, effort and achievement.

The Piazza Armerina in Sicily boasts two outstanding fourth-century examples of hunt pavements, and the Sevso scene is comparable to its mosaic of the Small Game Hunt, which shows a similar picnic scene surrounded by the activities of the hunt (plate 26). A very significant difference between the two is that the mosaic pavement has, placed at the top centre, the depiction of a sacrifice to Diana, whereas the Sevso plate replaces this with a simple *Chi-Rho* at the top of the roundel. The client who commissioned the Sevso dish obviously felt comfortable in placing Christ at the top, positioned in the same place, and ensuring the continuity of good fortune for the hunt.

The hunting scene was also an imperial motif. A popular theme was that of the royal hunter triumphant over wild beasts, which was understood to represent the emperor conquering his enemies.⁹⁷ This association goes back to ancient times, and was adopted by Alexander the Great (356-323 BC).⁹⁸ In the second century AD the Emperor Hadrian (117-138) appropriated the hunt as a symbol for the display of valour, and the Hadrianic tondi preserved on the fourth-century Arch of Constantine in Rome have this as their theme.⁹⁹ In the official iconography of the victorious hunt, dating from the rule of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), there were four constant components: *virtus* (the valour of those participating); *pietas* (deference to the gods, state and family); *concordia* (harmony in terms of both the nation and the family); and *clementia* (clemency).¹⁰⁰ These were considered to be core values in Late Antique society, and in displaying hunting scenes private individuals could be considered to be self-fashioning, as they aspired to be seen to be in possession of the same qualities as their ruler.

⁹⁷ Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, vol. I, p. 243.

⁹⁸ Glanville Downey, 'The Pilgrim's Progress of the Byzantine Emperor', *Church History*, 9.3 (1940), pp. 209-210.

⁹⁹ Richard Brilliant, 'Scenic Representations', in Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁰ Zaleskaya in eds Althaus and Sutcliffe, *Road to Byzantium*, p. 159.

Understanding of this association between the hunt and these aspirations was not confined to the aristocracy. Couched in simple language aimed at a lower level in society, *The Tabula of Cebes*, which although written in the first or second century continued to be read throughout Late Antiquity, used the allegory of the hunt as a philosophical tool.¹⁰¹ It is peopled throughout by personifications, and describes how the victor triumphed against wild animals with the aid of the virtues:

‘Happiness, with all the other Virtues, crown him as Victor in the greatest struggles, - namely, against the most terrible Beasts, who before, enslaved, tormented, and devoured him. All these now he has overcome and repelled from himself, holding himself well in hand, so that they, to whom he formerly slaved, now must serve him.’
 ‘I am anxious to know the identity of the wild Beasts you mentioned!’
 ‘Ignorance,’ said he, and Error. Or don’t you consider them wild beasts?’
 ‘And pretty savage too,’ agreed I. ‘Then Sorrow, Despair, Love-of-Money, Intemperance and other Badness. All these he now rules, instead of as before, being ruled by them.’¹⁰²

As the text makes clear, wild beasts were employed in various spheres of philosophy and teaching to personify negative qualities. Literature such as this can give us an insight into the response of ordinary people on viewing a heroic hunt depicted in imperial monumental art. They would have deemed the emperor, idealised as the perfect man, as having strength of character and virtue, and able to overcome passions and temptations. It indicates that the concept of the hunting scene as an allegory was embedded in all strata of Late Antique culture and society, and provides further evidence that the imagery on the Sevso dish could have been interpreted as in this way.

¹⁰¹ Downey, ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’, *Church History* 9.3, pp. 211-215.

¹⁰² Στεφανοῖ αὐτὸν, ἔφη, τῇ αὐτῆς δυνάμει ἢ τε Εὐδαιμονία, καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι Ἀρεταὶ πᾶσαι, ὥδπερ νενιχηότα τοὺς μεγίστους ἀγῶνας. Καὶ ποίους ἀγῶνας νενίχηεν αὐτός; ἔφην ἐγώ. Τοὺς μεγίστους, ἔφη, καὶ τὰ μέγιστα θηρία, ἃ πρότερον αὐτὸν χατήσθιε, καὶ ἐχόλαξε, καὶ ἐποίει δοῦλον. Ταῦτα πάντα νενίχηε, καὶ ἀπερρίψεν ἀπ’ ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ χεχράτηγεν ἑαυτοῦ, ὥστε ἐχεῖνα νῦν τούτῳ δουλεύουσι, χαθάρπερ οὗτος ἐχέειναις πρότρον. Ποῖα ταῦτα λέγεις τὰ θηρία; πάνυ γὰρ ἐπιποθῶ ἀχοῦσαι. Πρῶτον μὲν, ἔφη, τὴν Ἀγγοίαν, καὶ τὸν Πλάνον. ἢ οὐ δοχεῖ σοι θηρία ταῦτα εἶναι; Καὶ χονηρά γε, ἔφην ἐγώ. Εἶτα τὴν Αὐχὴν, καὶ τὸν Οδυρμόν, καὶ τὴν Γπερηφάνειαν, καὶ τὴν Φιλαργυρίαν, καὶ τὴν Ἀχρασίαν, καὶ τὴν λοιπὴν ἅπασαν Καχίαν. πάντων τούτων κρατεῖ, καὶ οὐ κρατεῖται, ὥσπερ τὸ πρότερον. *Cebetis Tabula*, 22-23, ed. by Fridericus Drosihn (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1871), pp. 19-20, trans. by K.S. Guthrie, *The Greek Pilgrim’s Progress* (London: Cuzac and Co., 1910).

Furthermore, the individual could have understood the allegory of the hunt to be akin to their own struggles throughout life.¹⁰³ Clement of Alexandria aligned the hunt to the search for truth: ‘As, then, he who is fond of hunting captures the game after seeking, tracking, scenting, hunting it down with dogs; so truth, when sought and got with toil appears a delicious thing’.¹⁰⁴ The theme of the hunt was taken up by Christians who used it to symbolise the battle between good and evil, and the Sevso Hunting Plate bears a *Chi-Rho* at the top of the inscription. The use of this motif within mythological and cult scenes was on occasion intended to paganise Christ, rather than the other way round, and thought to ward off demons because it appeared on the Emperor’s labarum.¹⁰⁵ However, on the Sevso dish the *Chi-Rho* is surrounded by a victory wreath, a symbol of Christian triumph over death. The presence of this wreath rather than just a basic *Chi-Rho* symbol implies a deeper knowledge of the Christian faith, and it corresponds to the sentiments expressed in the inscription. It is therefore feasible that this hunting scene was designed to personify Christian beliefs and aspirations. The group of picnickers in the medallion includes a woman, and this is accordingly not an accurate depiction of a day’s hunting, as even elite females did not hunt.¹⁰⁶ It is a contrived family group, with Sevso and his wife in the centre, and his young son to whom he points, at the left end of the *stibadium* (plate 27). The latter is feeding *Innocentius*, the horse, and perhaps this epithet describes him as well. They are accompanied by another youth and an older man, and together symbolise an idealised Christian family, enjoying the rewards of their way of life.

In Late Antiquity images were not usually related to a particular medium or type of object, and the use of the same motifs for different purposes and in different media was commonplace. For example, smaller hunt scenes in the shape of roundels or bands were attached to clothing (plates 28 and 29), where they personified bravery, and may have had

¹⁰³ Downey, ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’, *Church History*, 9.3, pp. 211-213.

¹⁰⁴ Quemadmodum ergo qui studio tenetur venationis, postquam quaesiit, investigavit, indagavit, canes, qui cursu persequerentur, emisit, feram capit; ita etiam apparet verum dulcedine quaesitum, et labore paratum. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 1.2, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 8, p. 709, trans. by Wilson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II.

¹⁰⁵ Henig, *Art of Roman Britain*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁶ Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, p. 149.

an apotropaic value in protecting the wearer from harm.¹⁰⁷ In the case of the Sevso plate, some of its imagery echoes that found on sarcophagi of the period. Two examples from the third and fourth centuries AD respectively, each display a hunt scene (plate 30). It can be seen that they follow a set format as, for example, the poses of the boar on the left and the group of elk or deer being driven into nets on the right, are similar to those depicted on the dish (plate 31). When appearing on sarcophagi, the hunt personified the struggle against and the victory over death.¹⁰⁸ It has been suggested that some standardised images might have been derived from monumental sculptures and paintings, whose fame led to replication.¹⁰⁹ Their iconography may have in fact been transmitted by small works such as the silver plate under discussion. Although local artists and patrons made minor changes, they remained true to the basic formulae. On the Sevso plate, some of the imagery may have carried a resonance of that depicted on sarcophagi, and reminded contemporary viewers of their struggles in life and the ultimate outcome, death.

To summarise, the literary device of using the hunt as a metaphor for philosophical and religious conflicts in life found form in depictions of the hunt, and such scenes on the Sevso Hunting Plate provide a good example of the use of allegory in figurative art in Late Antiquity. The hunt scene was a motif of imperial art and personified the traditional virtues of the late Roman Empire, and it was also employed for the allegorical representation of male valour and courage. Used in conjunction with the *Chi-Rho* symbol it could signify the Christian struggle to overcome evil and the trials of life; the diners in the central medallion of the Sevso dish, surrounded by hunting vignettes, may thus personify an ideal family reaping the rewards of their faith. The hunt was widely understood as an allegory of the battle between life and death, and good and evil, and additionally there was also an apotropaic element to this type of imagery.

To summarise, in this chapter I have carried out four case studies of silver vessels bearing figurative imagery: the Corbridge Lanx, the Muse Casket, a bowl from Carthage, and the

¹⁰⁷ André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Washington: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 99.

¹⁰⁸ Brilliant, 'Scenic Representations', in Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 12.

Sevso Hunting Plate. I have used them to establish the role literature played in the creation of representations of personifications and allegorical figures in Late Antiquity. The acquisition of a classical education through *paideia* was essential for the upper classes, as it demonstrated their suitability to hold power, and one way of indicating superiority was to display a deep knowledge of classical representations. Thus, the complex process of identification of specific personifications such as Ortygia on the Corbridge Lanx, acted as a form of class demarcation. Although most women were not formally educated, some élite females were learned, and the Muse Casket is emblematic of this. This chapter introduces the first of many powerful female personifications, the Muses, and demonstrates that their imagery could have been used by the female owner of the casket to self-fashion, and show herself as a cultivated woman. It might also reflect favourably on her husband, as at that time a wife was considered to be part of the man's household, over which he had complete control.

I also addressed the use of allegory through bucolic imagery on a bowl from Carthage and the hunting scenes on the Sevso Hunting Plate. The bowl offered an opportunity for the viewer to display their knowledge, and thus superior status, of authors such as Virgil, who wrote about rural themes. The Sevso plate demonstrated how the hunt could symbolise both moral and material aspirational values, and like the Muse Casket offered an opportunity to self-fashion. The examples given in this chapter show that motifs and images were transferable, and could appear in mixed media and bear different connotations, according to their situation. Furthermore, this was a period of religious syncretism with the official adoption of Christianity as the state religion, and some of the imagery discussed would have been open to differing interpretations according to the beliefs of the contemporary viewer. This chapter has dealt with the links between personification and literature, and the theatre is closely tied to this, as the subjects of plays and tableaux at that time originated in classical texts. Turning from the literary arts to the performing arts, Chapter Two examines the connections between personifications on silver plate and the theatre in Late Antiquity.

Chapter 2 - *Dramatis Personae*: Personification and the Theatre

This is a chapter of two distinct parts, in which I will explore the connections between personifications and allegorical scenes depicted on Late Antique silver plate and the theatre of this period. The subject of my case study is the Meleager Plate from the Sevso Treasure (plate 32).

In the first section I will examine the presence of so-called ‘Bacchic masks’ which appear in many border friezes of Late Antique silver including the Meleager Plate; they are in the form of profile heads and are deployed as break points within a decorative band. These heads connect to one of the earliest personae of Dionysos, as god of the theatre, and personify the world of drama. They can often form a significant part of the iconography, and yet very little scholarly attention has been paid to this popular motif.

In the second section, I will use the example of the Meleager Plate to present a new concept: that many figurative scenes depicted on silver vessels can be directly related to theatrical performances. These scenes were not confined to large picture plates, as several smaller silver vessels show just a single dramatic episode, but for the purposes of my analysis I will focus on the seven vignettes depicted on this dish. Some of these tableaux include personifications, and I will examine their function within these dramatic scenes. Using the little evidence available, I will further suggest how these personifications could have been incorporated into dramatic performances and played by actors in the theatre of that time.

The Sevso Meleager Plate

This silver dish is 69.4 cm in diameter, weighs 8606 grams and has been dated to the first half of the fifth century AD.¹¹⁰ It is called the Meleager Plate because the central medallion contains a depiction of the Calydonian boar hunt, a tale featuring this hero. The broad outer

¹¹⁰ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, pp. 99, 152.

border is divided into six scenes separated by six large masks in profile resting on stepped plinths decorated with simple patterns. Starting from the bottom of the upright plate and moving anti-clockwise, the scenes have been identified by Mango as follows: the Perseus cycle; Hippolytos and Phaedra; Pyramos and Thisbe; Paris and Helen (?); Leda and the Swan, Meleager and Atalanta, and Aphrodite and Adonis; the Judgement of Paris.¹¹¹ If there is a theme to the figurative decoration, it is one of pairings and love in myriad forms, and the Bacchic masks reflect this as they too are in couples, alternating male/female. The three female masks look to the viewer's left and the three male masks face to the right, and I start with an examination of this motif.

Bacchic masks

The large heads on pedestals that can divide border tableaux on silver plate are known as 'Bacchic masks', as they originate from theatre masks and have Dionysiac associations. The reason they can be considered a form of personification is that not only do they personify the theatre in general, but also the figures from the Dionysiac *thiasos* (procession) that they directly represent can themselves personify a wide variety of abstract values (these are discussed more fully in the next chapter). This motif has received little attention from art historians, apart from François Baratte, who has charted its evolution and iconography, although he has not examined its deeper significance, and the possible response of the contemporary viewer.¹¹² He states that although theatre masks had been used previously in a decorative manner on silver, the organisation of alternating heads, sometimes on pedestals, started in the second century AD. Up until the third century, masks on silverware were shown from various views, often with more plasticity than later examples (plate 33). From this, a more linear and abstract Byzantine style emerged, and profile heads such as those on the Meleager Plate started to appear around the beginning of the third century. Initially they continued to represent Dionysos and his followers, Pan, Silenos, Herakles, satyrs and maenads, but eventually other generic heads such as young women, appeared. Early examples did not have necks but gradually this detail was

¹¹¹ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 121.

¹¹² Baratte, *La Vaisselle d'Argent en Gaule*, pp. 182-187.

introduced, leading them to look more like portraits than masks. Female representations began to display fashionable rather than classical hairstyles, and thus lost their resemblance to the original maenads. The scheme never varies; there are usually four, although occasionally six or more heads. They have their origins in Roman pantomime masks with closed mouths, rather than the tragic, comic and satiric masks of Greek drama with their gaping mouths.¹¹³ Lucian (125-180) described these stage masks thus: ‘The mask itself is very beautiful and appropriate to the underlying dramatic theme. Its mouth is not wide open like the others but closed’.¹¹⁴

Bacchic masks provide a link to the theatre and the pleasures of life, as Dionysos was the god of the theatre in Late Antiquity. It has been argued that drama and play-acting have their roots in the early Dionysiac mystery-cult, and that they originated in rituals and celebrations by men dressed as satyrs.¹¹⁵ Dionysos was believed to be present in person at the ancient ceremony of the mixing of the wine, where a large mask of this god was hung up on a wooden column and a robe was draped below it to create the impression of a full-sized figure.¹¹⁶ Representations that refer to theatrical performances were circulating in Greece from the sixth century BC, and one of the most common motifs was that of the mask, either carried or worn by actors, or used decoratively. In Athens, Dionysos was the god of acting, music and poetic inspiration, and this connection continued down into Late Antiquity, where he was recognised as the god of actors.¹¹⁷

By Late Antiquity, Bacchic masks were routinely employed to divide a variety of scenes from different genres. They appeared on bucolic imagery: on a fourth to early fifth-century AD bowl found at Carthage for example, heads of maenads and *sileni* (elderly male followers of Dionysos) survey pastoral scenes depicting shepherds tending their flocks (plate 34). This might suggest that they had become just a convenient tool with which to

¹¹³ Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 61.

¹¹⁴ τὸ δὲ πρόσωπον αὐτὸ ὥς, κάλλιστον καὶ τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ δράματι εἰκός, οὐ κεχρηνὸς δὲ ὥς ἐκεῖνα ἄλλα συμμεμυκός· ἔχει γὰρ πολλοὺς τοὺς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ βοῶτας. Lucian, *de Saltatione* 29, in *Lucian*, ed. and trans. by A.M. Harmon, 8 vols (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1913-1967), vol. 5, pp. 240-41.

¹¹⁵ Richard Seaford, *Dionysos* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 88-89.

¹¹⁶ Otto, Walter F., *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. by Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 87.

¹¹⁷ Seaford, *Dionysos*, p. 101.

partition sections of friezes, as an alternative to the traditional columns or urns. However, a companion bowl from the same hoard belies this (plate 35). Here, two of the four scenes depict peaceful bucolic imagery, but the masks turn away from these to regard the other two tableaux which show a lion and a leopard attacking an antelope. In addition the heads are accompanied by attributes, a *pedum* (crook carried by satyrs) for the male masks and a *tympanon* (drum played by maenads) for the female masks. Dionysos was associated with the more dangerous elements of nature, such as wild animals and the fruits of the vine which went into making wine, and it is therefore fitting that the masks should direct the viewer to the violent scenes. The deliberate positioning of the direction of the masks seems to have become an established formula, as four fourth-century bowls from the Mildenhall Treasure with a mixture of scenes all comply with this concept; that is, the orientation of the masks privileges bloodthirsty tableaux over pastoral views (plates 36 to 39).

These mask personifications can sometimes act to indicate a more subtle message. A silver cover for a flanged bowl from the same Mildenhall hoard bears a frieze depicting centaurs fighting wild beasts, which is divided by six masks (plate 40). The heads of Dionysos and a satyr are paired with female heads, while Silenos and Pan are the third couple. The hairstyle of Dionysos's partner is contemporary and more elaborate than that of the maenad opposite the satyr; an ornate hairdo often indicated a high-ranking female, and so perhaps she represents Ariadne (plate 41). Close examination reveals that the masks all look in towards scenes of wild beasts chasing the centaurs, and away from the centaurs in combat with them. With a couple of fabled exceptions, in mythology, centaurs were seen as frightening, wild, dangerous and unable to hold alcohol, and were generally disliked and feared. Meanwhile, by Late Antiquity Dionysos and his followers were no longer perceived as being threatening, unlike in ancient times, but were understood to be playful, even when drunk. It could therefore be argued that on this silver lid the masks, representing the good side of life, revel in the routing of the villainous centaurs.

On the Meleager Plate, the three pairs of masks (plate 42) do not seem to have been positioned to emphasise certain scenes. Mango has tentatively identified these heads as representing an old man and Helen, Meleager and Atalanta, and a Dioskoros and an

unnamed female, as these characters are in the relevant scenes being surveyed by these particular pairs of masks.¹¹⁸ However, there is no precedent for the masks to take on the same identity as characters within the frieze they divide. The ‘old man’ is almost certainly a *silenos*, as this was one of the most popular and recurring mask subjects, and his partner is not Helen but a maenad; in the next section I will also question the identity of Helen in the section they bookend. ‘Meleager’ and ‘Atalanta’ are more probably Dionysos and Ariadne, as the male head has the androgynous appearance that was typical of this god, and it also bears no resemblance to the image of Meleager in the central medallion. The head identified as a Dioskoros is again unlike either of the pair of Dioskouroi depicted in the central medallion, and it does not sport the characteristic *pilos* (conical hat). It is more likely to be a satyr and its companion is another maenad; a similar mask with the same curling forelock, and paired with a maenad, appears on a casket within the same Sevso hoard, and has been catalogued as a satyr.¹¹⁹ As this analysis suggests, these Bacchic masks represent figures from the Dionysiac *thiasos* and carry with them connotations of the theatre.

Marble and plaster theatrical masks were part of the decorative scheme of theatres in Late Antiquity (plate 43); on the Meleager Plate the masks can also represent architectural features, framing the tableaux which could be scenes from plays, as I will later demonstrate. Bowls and dishes with the Bacchic mask motif would have been used or displayed in the dining room, and in this social setting, the masks would have personified not only the theatre, but also the merrymaking and conviviality that were so closely linked to Dionysos. As Chorikios observed:

It seems to me that Dionysos, who is, after all, a laughter-loving god, has taken pity on our nature. Different cares disquiet different people – the loss of children, grieving over parents, the death of siblings, the demise of a good woman. Poverty gnaws at many, and dishonour brings grief to many others. It seems to me that Dionysos takes pity on mankind and provides an opportunity for diversion in order to console those who are dispirited [...] The god is generous and well-disposed to humanity, so as to provide laughter of every kind.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, pp. 148, 151.

¹¹⁹ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 462.

¹²⁰ Καί μοι δοκῶ τὸν Διόνυσον, φιλόγελως γὰρ ὁ θεός, τὴν ἡμετέραν ἐλεήσαντα φύσιν - ἄλλαι γὰρ ἄλλοις ἀνῴσι φροντίδες, τὸν μὲν παίδων ἀποβολή, τὸν δὲ πένθος γονέων, ἕτερον θάνατος ἀφρλφῶν, ἄλλον χητιδῆς

The figurative scenes on the Meleager Plate

All of the tableaux depicted on the Meleager Plate originate from literary sources, but it is arguable that they are also all scenes from plays and entertainments performed in Late Antiquity. In this section I focus on their theatrical aspects, and how these relate to personification. I will start by addressing the central medallion, and then work anti-clockwise round the six tableaux depicted in the border frieze.

The subject of the central scene is the Calydonian Boar Hunt (plate 44). In this tale, a boar was sent by Artemis to ravage the region of Calydon in Aetolia, because its king failed to honour her in his rites to the gods. It was killed in a hunt in which many male heroes took part as did the huntress Atalanta, who first wounded it with an arrow before it was slain by Meleager; for this he presented her with its hide. Here, the naked hunter Meleager sits on the skin of the slain boar, gazing back over his shoulder at his lover Atalanta. She wears a diadem and carries a quiver, her attribute. The couple are flanked by the Dioskouroi, Kastor and Polydeukes (Castor and Pollux), who can be identified by their distinctive *piloi* (caps); in the background are two more hunters, one of whom has been named as Ankaïos the Arcadian because he holds a two-headed axe.¹²¹

In Chapter One, we saw how the hunt was understood as an allegory in Late Antiquity, and symbolised traditional Roman virtues, and this Meleager tableau would have carried these connotations. In addition, Meleager himself was viewed as a personification of male courage. The Greek orator Dio Chrysostom (40-120) wrote, ‘suppose a man were to say that he is a huntsman, and that he surpasses Hippolytos himself or Meleager in both his valour and his diligence’.¹²² This indicates that these two heroes were seen as

γυναικὸς τελευτῇ, πολλοὺς ἔνδεια δάκνει χρημάτων, πολλοὺς ἀτιμία λυπεῖ - , δοκῶ δὴ μοι ταῦτα ἐκεῖνον οἰκτεῖραντα τῶν | ἀνθρώπων τοῖς εὐτραπέλοις τοιαύτην ἐμβαλεῖν ἐπιτήδευσιν, ὅπως ταύτη παραμυθοῖντο τοὺς ἀθύμως διακειμένους. [...] οὕτως εὐχαρὶς ὁ θεὸς καὶ φιланθρωπία προσκείμενος, ὥς ἐκ παντὸς ἐπιτρέφαι γέλωτα γίνεσθαι τρόπον. Chorikios, *Choricii Gazæi Opera*, in eds. Foerster and Richsteig, pp. 351-52. Trans. *Orations*, 332 (=8), 31-32, quoted in G.W. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 2006), pp. 62-63.

¹²¹ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 124.

¹²² εἰ δὲ κυνηγέτης εἶναι λέγοι τις καὶ τὸν Ἰππόλυτον αὐτὸν ἢ Μελέαγρον ὑπερβάλλειν τῇ τε ἀνδρείᾳ καὶ τῇ φιλοπονίᾳ, μηδὲν δὲ φαίνοιτο πράττων ὁμοῖον. Dio Chrysostom, ΛΟΓΟΙ - ΠΕΡΙ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑΣ - *On*

personifications of specific virtues; moreover, they were both portrayed in the theatre. As Libanios, in the fourth century, commented:

The theatre saw Deianeira, but also Oeneus and Acheloüs and Herakles and Nessus. It saw Daphne fleeing but Apollo pursuing as well. It saw Atalanta, but not without Meleagros. A dancer showed Phaedra in love, but also added Hippolytus, a self-controlled young man. Briseis is led away from Achilles' tent, but by the heralds.¹²³

The Late Antique theatre acted as an influential conduit for the transmission of classical culture, and it was accessible to all classes of society, unlike literature which was limited to the more educated.¹²⁴ Therefore, mythological tales such as those described by Libanios would have been familiar to a wide audience. Scenes and stage settings from the theatre were reproduced in wall-paintings, vases, textiles and mosaics, representing a real interest in the contemporary stage.¹²⁵

In Late Antiquity, there were three types of theatrical entertainment: excerpts from tragedy; mime; and pantomime.¹²⁶ During the second century, performances more akin to what we would term vaudeville had started to replace serious drama in the theatre, and pantomimes and mimes, which had always existed, came to the fore.¹²⁷ Mimes were light-hearted and often slapstick, dealing with issues such as adultery, and Herakles and Odysseus were popular as comic figures.¹²⁸ Mime performers were able to speak, and did not use masks. Women were known to have performed mime, but the pantomime performer was, by

Philosophy - Discourse 70.2, ed. and trans. by H. Lamar Crosby in *Dio Chrysostom*, 5 vols (William Heinemann Ltd, 1951), vol. 5, pp. 150-51.

¹²³ εἶδε Δηιάνειραν τὸ θέατρον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν Οἰνέα καὶ τὸν Ἀχελῷον καὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα καὶ Νέσσον. εἶδε τὴν Δάφνην φεύγουσαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν Ἀταλάντην οὐκ ἄνευ γε τοῦ Μελεάγρου. Φαίδρου ὀρχηστὴς ἐποίησεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν Ἰππόλατον πρᾶσέθηκεν, ἐγκρατὴ νεανίσκου. Βρισηὶς ἀπάγεται τῆς Ἀχιλλέως σκηυῆς, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τῶν κτιρύκων. Libanios, *ΠΡΟΣ ΑΠΙΣΤΕΙΛΗΝ ΠΙΠΡ ΤΩΝ ΟΡΧΗΣΤΩΝ – A Reply to Aristides on behalf of Dancers*, *Oration* 64.67, ed. and trans. by Margaret E. Molloy, *Libanios and the Dancers* (Hildesheim: Olms-Wiedmann, 1996), pp. 128-9, 160.

¹²⁴ Blake Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 18.

¹²⁵ Mark Griffith, 'Telling the tale: a performing tradition from Homer to pantomime', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*, ed. by Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 32; T. B. L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1995), p. 72.

¹²⁶ Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁷ T. D. Barnes, 'Christians and the Theater', in *Roman Theater and Society*, ed. by William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 167.

¹²⁸ See Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows*, pp. 20-21 for details of this debate.

tradition, male.¹²⁹ Although both were related to classical tales, pantomime was more mystical than mime, and thus attracted a higher class of audience who were sufficiently educated to interpret the performance. Unlike today, pantomime in the Roman world consisted of a dance in which one silent artist enacted mostly mythological tales, taking on all the roles by the use of a set of different masks. He was accompanied by the chorus and an orchestra, which could contain wooden clappers, pipes, drums, cymbals, castanets, the *kithera* (lyre) and the organ.¹³⁰ A skilled pantomime artist could perform many tales, including that of Hippolytos and Phaedra, who appear in the Meleager Plate border frieze (see Libanios – ‘a dancer showed Phaedra in love [...]’ above).

Many scholars now believe that by Late Antiquity classical plays were not performed in their entirety but just the most famous scenes, staged as dramatic interludes.¹³¹ There seems to have been a tradition of presenting motionless tableaux during performances. Plutarch in the second century had commented ‘[...] the dancers, having arranged their overall appearance (*schema*) in the shape of Apollo or Pan or a bacchant, retain these attitudes, like figures in a painting’.¹³² In the fourth century Libanios reiterated this; in his defence of the art of pantomime he states:

Would one admire more the continuity and number of their whirling, or the sudden rigid position after this, or the posture maintained in this position? For they spin around as though they have wings, and they finish in a motionless position as if they are fixed with glue. And with the position the picture presents itself.¹³³

It is possible that the representations on the Meleager Plate were created in the same vein, showing tableaux from theatrical enactments. I have already described aspects of

¹²⁹ Barnes, ‘Christians and the Theater’, p. 169.

¹³⁰ E. J. Jory, ‘The Drama of the Dance: Prolegomena to an Iconography of Imperial Performance’, in Slater, ed., *Roman Theater and Society*, pp. 4-5.

¹³¹ Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows*, p. 21.

¹³² εἰς ἃς φερόμεναι τελευθῶσιν αἱ κινήσεις, ὅταν Ἀπόλλωνος, ἡ Παμὸς, ἡ τινος βάκχης σχῆμα [*schema*] διαθέντες, ἐπὶ τοῦ σώματος γραφικῶς τοῖς εἶδεσιν ἐπιμένωσι· τὸ δὲ τρίτον ἡ δειξις, οὐ μιμητικὸν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ δηλωτικὸν ἀληθῶς τῶν ὑποκειμένων. Plutarch, *Quaestionum Convivalium, Morelia* 747D, trans. by Lada-Richards, Ismene, *Lucian and Pantomime Dancing*, p. 47.

¹³³ πότερον δὲ ἂν τις ἀγασθεῖν τὴν τῆς περιφορᾶς ἐν πλήθει συνέχειαν ἢ τὴν ἐξαίφνης ἐπὶ τοῦτῳ πάγιον στάσιν ἢ τοῦ ἐν τῇ στάσει τηρούμενου τύπον; ὥς μὲν γὰρ ὑπόπτειοι περιάγονται, τελευτῶσι δὲ εἰς ἀκίνητον στάσιν ὥσπερ κεκολλημένοι, μετὰ δὲ τῆς στάσεως ἡ εἰκὼν ἀπαωτᾷ. Libanios, *Oratio* 64.118, in Molloy, *Litanies and the Dancers*, pp. 140, 175.

personification and allegory connoted by the central scene, and I will now focus on the six scenes depicted in the border frieze of this dish, and consider them in similar terms.

I start with the portrayal of a dramatic moment in the story of the Hippolytos and Phaedra (plate 45a). Phaedra is shown lounging on her couch, attended by her elderly nurse. The latter has just given a letter from Phaedra to Hippolytos, her stepson, which contains a declaration of love. This will lead to his death at the instigation of his father, Theseus. Hippolytos spurns Phaedra and throws the missive to the ground, instead preferring to remain chaste and true to the virgin goddess Artemis and to go hunting, as evidenced by the presence of his horse and a huntsman holding two dogs on leads. To the far right, a city-tyche with turreted headdress and cornucopia, sits on a rocky outcrop (plate 45b). Use of this female personification, who commonly bore a turreted crown, to represent a city was widespread. As the name suggests, her origins are in *Tyche*, the Greek goddess of chance, and she was understood to represent the fortunes of the city. Chapter Six explores this motif in depth.

This particular city-tyche is an example of an animated personification, as she is turning to hold up her right hand, palm facing towards the other figures, an action not usually associated with this type of personification; she is more usually depicted in a rigid position, holding an object such as a staff or sheaf. The gesture is one of ‘stop’, and suggests she is issuing a warning. She could represent Troezen, the town where Hippolytos founded a temple to Artemis, was spied upon by Phaedra, and finally died after an attack instigated by Theseus. However, it is probable that this is the tyche of Athens, as most of the events in the tale took place in this city. The protagonists were lodged there at the palace of Theseus when Phaedra wrote her letter, was rejected, accused Hippolytos of rape and then committed suicide. On learning of Phaedra’s death and allegations of rape, Theseus banned Hippolytos from Athens, and the gesture of the city-tyche echoes this debarment. Athens was much larger than Troezen and figured in many other mythological tales, so would have been familiar to contemporary viewers versed in *paideia*. This city was an integral part of the story of Hippolytos and Phaedra, hence the likely presence of its tyche.

Athens is mentioned in a laudatory manner several times in Euripides' play, *Hippolytos*. Theseus banishes his son, saying, 'Go forth from this land with all speed as an exile, and come no more either to god-built Athens or to the borders of any land ruled by my spear'.¹³⁴ Hippolytos bemoans, 'I shall leave glorious Athens as an exile', and at the end of the play Theseus laments, 'Glorious Athens, Pallas' territory, what a man you have been bereft of!'.¹³⁵ In Seneca's adaptation of the same play, Athens is also mentioned three times. This section of the border frieze could represent a Euripidean tableau, which would suggest that in performance an actor might have played the personification of Athens, dramatically debarring Hippolytos.

However, Phaedra and Hippolytos themselves could act as personifications. Hippolytos was seen to personify self-control; in the fourth century, the Greek rhetorician Menander Rhetor cited Hippolytos as an example of temperance (*sophrosyne*), because he was immune to the temptations of passion.¹³⁶ The allegorical values connoted by the legend of this couple were adopted by those of the Christian faith. A late fifth/early sixth-century manuscript of an *ekphrasis* of Prokopios of Gaza (465-528), describes two mural pictures depicting scenes from the story of Phaedra and Hippolytos, and indicates that they were new at the time Prokopios wrote it.¹³⁷ Alongside these two scenes was a representation of Timotheus, commissioner of the pictures for the city of Gaza, in a boat-filled harbour. We know he was a Christian, as Prokopios remarked on his piety, and so it seems that their story was acceptable to a Christian audience.¹³⁸ Because of his resistance to his step-mother's advances, Christians adopted Hippolytos as a personification of resolute

¹³⁴ ἔξεργε γαίης τῆσδ' ὅσον τάχος φυγὰς, καὶ μέτ' Ἀθέναις τὰς θεοδμήτους μόλῃ, μὴτ' εἰς ὄρους γῆς ἧς ἐμὸν κρατεῖ δόρυ. Euripides, *Hippolytos*, 973-5, ed. and trans. by Arthur S. Way, *Euripides*, 4 vols (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1946), vol. 2, pp. 238-9.

¹³⁵ Φευξόμεσθα δὴ κλεινὰς Αθῆνας, and, ὦ κλεῖν' Αθηνῶν Παλλάδος Θ' ὀρίσματα. Euripides, *Hippolytos*, 1094-5, 1459, in Way, ed. and trans, *Euripides*, vol. 2, pp. 248-9, 276-7.

¹³⁶ Menander Rhetor, *Treatise IV*.10.416, as suggested by Christine Kondoleon, *Domestic and Divine: Roman Mosaics in the House of Dionysos* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 183-4.

¹³⁷ Rina Talgam, 'The *Ekphrasis Eikonos* of Procopius of Gaza: The Depiction of Mythological Themes in Palestine and Arabia during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries', in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Brouria Bitton-Ashkelong and Aryeh Kofsky (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 210-12; Glanville Downey, Review: *Spätantiker Gemäldezyklus in Gaza: des Prokopios von Gaza Ekphrasis Eikonos*, by Paul Friedländer, in *The American Journal of Philology*, 62.3 (1941), pp. 381-382.

¹³⁸ Talgam, 'The *Ekphrasis Eikonos* of Procopius of Gaza', p. 216.

virginity.¹³⁹ In contrast, Phaedra could function as a personification of unrequited love and unnatural passions in her desire for her stepson, and the tale acted as a warning against such temptations: she was roundly condemned by Prokopios. So, representations of Phaedra and Hippolytos are just one example of how certain mythological characters came to act as personifications in their own right, and survived the transition to Christianity in Late Antiquity.

The couple appeared frequently in mosaic pavements where they were sometimes associated with different groupings. For example, in the Hall of Hippolytos at Madaba, Jordan, they are shown underneath a panel depicting Aphrodite and Adonis with the Three Graces (plate 49), as in mythology they are connected; after Hippolytos rejected Aphrodite in favour of the chaste Artemis, Aphrodite caused Phaedra, Hippolytos's stepmother, to fall in love with him as revenge and this led to his death. To avenge this, Artemis then brought about the death of Adonis, lover of Aphrodite. These mosaics have been dated to the sixth century and demonstrate the continuing interest in classical tales. They also indicate that these images were not just traditional motifs, but that there remained sufficient learning to pair these two scenes. This would suggest that imagery such as that on the Meleager Plate, produced at least a century earlier, would have been compiled with knowledge and deliberation.

Imagery relating to this couple was polyvalent, and considered suitable for a variety of situations. Even within the Sevso hoard, as well as the Meleager Plate, a pair of situlae and a ewer depict Hippolytos and Phaedra (plate 46). There is also a casket (plate 47) designed to hold toilet flasks and with bathhouse imagery, so it can be inferred that a collection such as this would probably have been used for bathing.¹⁴⁰ Hippolytos was an extremely popular figure in Coptic art, and the scene with Phaedra and the nurse was often reproduced in textiles (plate 48). Hippolytos and Phaedra also appeared on sarcophagi (plate 50). This may seem rather incongruous but, as described in the previous chapter, certain scenes carried wide connotations, and this was one such. As a tableau on a sarcophagus, or indeed

¹³⁹ Olga Osharina, 'Fragment of a Tunic with scenes from Euripides' Tragedy Hippolytus', in eds Althaus and Sutcliffe, *Road to Byzantium*, p. 152.

¹⁴⁰ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 401.

anywhere else, Hippolytos and Phaedra could personify the values of self-control and restraint, temperance, purity and virginity, all qualities to which the Romans aspired. Conversely, their story was an allegory of the danger of unnatural passion.

Moving anti-clockwise, the next section of border frieze on the Meleager Plate depicts the tale of Pyramos and Thisbe (plate 51a). As young lovers, they were forced to live apart by their parents, and so they arranged to meet by a mulberry tree, close to a spring. Thisbe got there first, but was chased away by a lioness fresh from a recent kill, who bloodied and mauled the veil the young woman had dropped; the Meleager Plate depicts the cat with the garment between her teeth. Pyramos discovered this and, thinking Thisbe dead, killed himself. Thisbe returned to find him dead, and this scene of discovery is shown on the plate, as she flings her arms wide in horror in a moment of heightened drama. Tales such as this, originally from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, could have been enacted on the stage or in the dining room, as a pantomime's repertoire was mainly drawn from traditional mythology, and Ovid's poem lent itself to this form.¹⁴¹

To the right, a shepherd plays the *syrinx* (pan pipes), and at his feet water flows from an upturned urn, which may represent the spring near where the couple were to meet, and from which the lioness drank. The shepherd is not part of this myth, but acts as a personification of the countryside, indicating that the action is taking place outside the city walls. He might also represent the music that would have been played during a dramatic enactment of this tale. The fifth-century Gallo-Roman aristocrat Sidonius (*c.* 430-490) described entertainment taking place in the dining room while feasting, during which extracts from plays and tableaux would have been performed:

Give us also the brass-bound syrx, friend of the naked satyrs; give us the reedy notes of pipe-players in whom the breath that is to fill the pipe comes humming through the caverns of the palate, to be forced out by the noisy puffed cheeks. Give us the ditties of comedy and the utterances of tragedy; give us all that the advocates, all that the poets, shout with diverse gesture.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, p. 63; Lada-Richards, *Silent Eloquence*, pp. 204-5, n. 4; Nicholas Horsfall, 'Epic and Burlesque in Ovid, Met. viii. 260ff', *The Classical Journal*, 74.4 (1979), pp. 330-332.

¹⁴² Date et aera fistulata, satyris amica nudis; date ravulos choraulas, quibus antra per palate crepulis reflanda buccis gemit aura tibialis. Date carminata socco, date dicta sub cothurno, date quicquid advocate, date

Pyramos and Thisbe are each accompanied by a female river personification (plate 51b). The couple were named after a river and the stream that flowed into it, which explains the presence of these personifications, as they remind the viewer of this dual identity. When Nonnos wrote about Pyramos and Thisbe in the fifth century it was as rivers, rather than in human form:

[...] the other [the Alpheios river] had lost the road of his old-time hunt, and rolled along in sorrow, until seeing Pyramos the lover moving by his side, he cried out and said, ‘Nile, what am I to do? Arethusa is hidden! Pyramos, why this haste? You have left your companion Thisbe – to whom? Happy Euphrates’.¹⁴³

Pyramos and Thisbe also appear in a mosaic panel at Paphos in Cyprus, where Pyramos is depicted in the manner of a river personification (plate 52). He lounges alfresco, clutching a cornucopia and leaning on an upturned urn from which water flows, while in the background a lioness savages Thisbe’s cloak. This was the standard pose for a river personification, and another example can be found on a seventh-century silver plate, part of the Lambousa Treasure from Cyprus, depicting scenes of David and Goliath (plate 53). Both have a static, detached quality.

Yet the two river personifications on the Meleager dish do not comply with iconography of this motif, as here they mingle with the ‘humans’ and act in a like fashion; they adopt differing positions which mimic the actions of Pyramos and Thisbe. The (contradictorily female, as subject is male) Pyramos river personification on the left bends down towards the dead Pyramos, her head drooping in a similar manner to his, while the personification of the Thisbe river gazes at the scene along with her namesake, and stretches her arm towards her. She is shown wearing a necklace and pendant, unlike the Pyramos personification, and this feminine ornamentation reinforces her link to a female rather than a male character. Both personifications are involved in the action, and acting out the

quicquid et poetae vario strepunt in actu. Sidonius, *Letter to his friend Tonantius*, 9.13.76-86, in *Sidonius: Poems and Letters*, trans. by W.B. Anderson, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 576-7.

¹⁴³ Σθνερπύζοντα δέ λεύσσω Πύραμον ἱμερόεντα τόσῃν ἀνενεῖκατο φωνέν. Νεῖλε, τί κεν ῥέξαιμι καλυπτομένης Ἀρεθούσης; Πύραμε, τί σπεύδεις; τίνι κάλλιπες ἠθάδα Θίσβην; ὄλβιος Εὐφρήνης. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, 6.339-48, in Rouse, ed. and trans., vol. 1, pp. 238-39.

emotions of their alter-egos, rather than maintaining the detached appearance of a typical river personification.

This humanising of personifications and their integration into everyday life is exemplified in a series of mosaic panels, now in private collections and thought to have come from Syria (plates 54 - 56). These have been dated to the late-fourth to early-fifth century AD, and depict the upbringing of a young man called Kimbros.¹⁴⁴ The scenes are nuanced by the presence of named personifications, who are shown mixing in a natural way with the humans depicted alongside them. So, for example, in a panel depicting the process of his education (plate 55a), on the right there are two pairs of dates personified: the *Tessareskaidekate* (fourteenth) of *Loios* (October), and the *Ebdomnikas* (*Hebdomas*, seventh) of *Daisios* (August). They stand in between two portrayals of Kimbros with his tutor, Alexandros.¹⁴⁵ The personification of *Paideia*, here spelled *Pedia*, appears standing behind the seated tutor (plate 55b). She wears a green robe with a red-hued *himation*, and extends her right hand in gesture towards his mouth, indicating that the tutor is imparting a traditional education to his student.¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere on the panels *Diaeleuthera* (Manumission), *Proeleusis* (Progress), *Philia* (Friendship), *Enteuxis* (Petition), and *Menusis* (Denunciation), are among the many other personified abstract concepts that appear in these scenes. These panels are deeply significant, as they portray the personifications in exactly the same way as the human figures, and as interacting with them. This imagery suggests that the inhabitants of Late Antiquity would conceive of personifications looking and acting like themselves, and very much part of everyday life. By inference, it can be surmised that it would not have been out of place for actors to take the part of personifications on the stage in order to inform the narrative.

¹⁴⁴ Published in Constantin A. Marinescu, Sarah E. Cox and Rudolph Wachter, 'Walking and talking among us: Personifications in a group of Late Antique mosaics', *Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome*, 352 (2005), 1269-1277; Constantin A. Marinescu, Sarah E. Cox and Rudolph Wachter, 'Paideia's Children: Childhood Education on a Group of Late Antique Mosaics', *Hesperia Supplements*, 41 (2007), 101-114.

¹⁴⁵ Marinescu, Cox and Wachter, 'Paideia's Children', p. 111.

¹⁴⁶ Marinescu, Cox and Wachter, 'Walking and talking among us', p. 1274.

A water personification appears in the third section of the Meleager Plate frieze, but here it is male. This is a hunting scene (plate 57a), and Mango identifies them as follows:¹⁴⁷

Helen and Paris are in the centre, flanked by the Dioskouroi, shown with their horses.

Helen wears boots and holds an upright spear and stole; her right hand rests on the right shoulder of Paris, who wears a Phrygian hat. This is a soft, peaked cap associated with Phrygia (Anatolia) and indicated one of Eastern origin. He holds a spear in his right hand, has a large shield on his left arm, and stands on the slumped corpse of a lion. On the right, a bearded male personification sits on a large rock, his hand resting on an urn from which water is sprinkling.

Nevertheless, other evidence suggests a different scenario. Mango's identification of this tableau is based on comparison of the representation of 'Paris' in this scene, with that of Paris in another section of the frieze, but although they both wear Phrygian caps, the former's tunic is plain whereas the latter's has decorative borders, and he wears a cloak.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, in literature there is no specific tale involving Paris, Helen, a pair of hunters and some form of water. More plausibly, the scene may depict Dido and Aeneas, characters from Virgil's *Aeneid*. This couple were brought together during a hunting party, when there was a huge storm:

[...] a great rumble of thunder began to stir in the sky. Down came the rain and the hail and the Tyrian huntsmen [...] scattered in fright all over the fields, making for shelter as rivers of water came rushing down the mountain. Dido and the leader of the Trojans [Aeneas] took refuge together in the same cave.¹⁴⁹

Moreover, Dido was in love with Aeneas and pursued him, and on the dish she is shown reaching to grasp the shoulder of his tunic in what appears to be a gesture of seduction (plate 57b).¹⁵⁰ She is dressed to go hunting as, like Atalanta in another section, she wears

¹⁴⁷ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 140.

¹⁴⁸ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 142.

¹⁴⁹ Interea magno misceri murmure caelum incipit; insequitur commixta grandine nimbus; et Tyrii [...] per agros tecta metu petiere; ruunt de montibus amnes. Speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem deveniunt. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4.160-170, in Project Gutenberg e-book of the *Aeneid*, trans. by David West (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1990), p. 83.

¹⁵⁰ Kurt Weitzmann states that the grasping of the mantle is a seductive gesture in 'The Survival of Mythological Representations in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and their Impact on Christian Iconography', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 14 (1960), p. 54.

the short tunic and boots of the huntress. The Phrygian hat worn by Aeneas corresponds to my interpretation, as Virgil makes several references to Aeneas's Phrygian origin, and he is frequently depicted wearing such a hat in Roman art. Both principal figures hold spears, again suggesting hunting, and they are flanked by two horsemen wearing tunics and holding spears. These are identified by Mango as the Dioskouroi, but they are more likely to be the Tyrian huntsmen described by Virgil.¹⁵¹ In contrast to the depiction here, the Dioskouroi in the central medallion of the Meleager Plate are nearly naked, wear *piloi* and are heavily muscled, unlike this pair. Additionally, on the Meleager Plate, a dead lion lies under the foot of the male figure, and this refers to the hunt in the story of Dido and Aeneas; there are several tapestry examples of this couple shown hunting, with a lion and a panther at the feet of their horses (plate 58). There is no reference to a lion or lionskin in connection with Paris and Helen.

However, it is the presence of the male water personification that provides a key piece of evidence that this is a representation of Dido and Aeneas, rather than Paris and Helen (plate 57c). The personification sits at the right, his hand resting on an upturned urn from which sprays water, as if from a great height. He has been provisionally identified by Mango as the Eurotas river in Sparta, linking to Leda and the Swan in the next panel (Leda was seduced by Zeus on the banks of this river). However, artistic convention demands that a personification should connect to the rest of the tableau in which it is located.¹⁵² It cannot represent the Eurotas, as there is no precedent or reason for a personification to be in a different picture section to its subject. Personifications were always carefully chosen and placed logically to enhance the meaning of a representation, and there would be no reason for its presence if this were Paris and Helen. In this instance, if the scene is Dido and Aeneas, the figure could represent the 'rivers of water' from the storm that rushed down the mountainside, and confined the couple to a cave, where they consummated their union.

Portrayals of Dido and Aeneas appeared in other media. For example, a sixth-century mosaic panel from ancient Sarrin in Mesopotamia, part of a large scheme, shows a couple

¹⁵¹ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, pp. 141-143.

¹⁵² Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 143.

sitting in a rustic setting (plate 59). They are dressed in hunting gear, the male wearing a Phrygian hat; both hold staffs or spears and they are flanked by their mounts. They have been identified as being either Meleager and Atalanta, or Dido and Aeneas.¹⁵³ The latter seems more likely, as the female does not bear Atalanta's characteristic quiver of arrows. They are extremely similar in appearance to figures on Folio 13 of the *Virgilius Romanus* (cod. lat. 3867), which portrays Dido and Aeneas sheltering in a cave (plate 60). Outside are depicted two huntsmen with shields and spears, their horses tied to a tree. One of them is using his shield as an umbrella, another way of indicating the heavy rain that was such an important factor in the tale. All the same elements of the story are in both this depiction and the tableau on the Meleager Plate.

Dido and Aeneas were often portrayed on the stage. In the fifth century, Macrobius, a keen admirer of Virgil, described how his tale of Dido and Aeneas was so popular that:

[...] it so wings its way, as truth, through the lips of all men, that painters and sculptors and those who represent human figures in tapestry take it for their theme in preference to any other, when they fashion likenesses, as if it were the one subject in which they can display their artistry; and actors too, no less, never cease to celebrate the story with gesture and in song.¹⁵⁴

As the tale of Dido and Aeneas, this section of the frieze fits in with the overall theatrical theme I propose in respect of the Meleager Plate.

Moving anti-clockwise, the next section of frieze contains three pairs of lovers: Leda and the swan, Meleager and Atalanta, and Aphrodite and Adonis (plate 61). Leda is shown from behind, reaching out to caress her swan lover, who stands on the back of an *eros*. An inverted torch leans against a small altar in front of her; this usually signified death or sleep in Roman art. The *eros* offers up a globe-shaped object, the sphere of Zeus. In the centre are paired Atalanta and Meleager, also subjects of the central medallion, facing each other. Atalanta, dressed in a short tunic and boots, wears a quiver of arrows and holds a bow in

¹⁵³ Janine Balty, *La Mosaique de Sarrîn (Osrhoène)* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1990), p. 55.

¹⁵⁴ Et ita pro vero per ora omnium volitet, ut pictores ficturesque et qui figmentis liciorum contextas imitantur effigies hac materia vel maxime in efficiendis simulachris tamquam unico argumento decoris utantur, nec minus histrionum perpetuis et gestibus et cantibus celebrentur. Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, 5.17.5, in von Jan, ed., p. 449, trans. by Davies, p. 359.

her left hand. She offers a bowl to Meleager. A boarskin is draped over his right arm, and he holds a spear. To the right Aphrodite and Adonis gaze at each other, although their bodies face frontally. At the far right a dog, symbol of the hunt, sits under a tree, looking back at his master Adonis.

It has already been established that Meleager was represented on the stage, and the two other couples in this tableau were also depicted in the theatre. The Christian apologist Arnobius (d. AD 330) gives an indication of some of the subjects of theatrical performances and enactments of the early fourth century:

Does Jupiter [Zeus] lay aside his resentment if the Amphitryon of Plautus is acted and declaimed? or if Europa, Leda, Ganymede, or Danäe is represented by dancing does he restrain his passionate impulses? Is the Great Mother [Cybele] rendered more calm, more gentle, if she beholds the old story of Attis furbished up by the players? Will Venus [Aphrodite] forget her displeasure if she sees mimics act the part of Adonis also in a ballet? Does the anger of Aleides die away if the tragedy of Sophocles named Trachinioe, or the Hercules of Euripides, is acted? or does Flora think that honour is shown to her if at her games she sees that shameful actions are done, and the stews abandoned for the theatres?¹⁵⁵

By the fourth century in Rome, the number of days set aside for *ludi* featuring theatrical spectacles had risen to around a hundred, as officials sought to distract an increasingly restive urban population; this caused resentment by the Christian clergy whose churches were empty during these games.¹⁵⁶ As late as the fifth century, the theatre of Pompey in Rome was restored and continued to put on classical performances.¹⁵⁷ In the sixth century Chorikios of Gaza wrote his oration *Apologia Mimorum* defending the art of the mime.¹⁵⁸ Theatrical shows with mythological themes continued, and the Christian writer Jacob of Serugh (451-521), railing against them in his homilies, incidentally gives us valuable details

¹⁵⁵ Ponit animos Iuppiter si Amphitryon fuerit actus pronuntiatus que Plautinus, aut si Europa, si Leda, Glanymedes <si> fuerit saltatus aut Danae, motum conpescit irarum? tranquillior, lenior Mater Magna efficitur si Attidis conspexerit priscam refricari ab histrionibus fabulam? Obliterabit offensam Venus si Adonis in habitu gestum agere viderit saltatoris in motibus pantomimos? Indignatio relanguescit Alcidae, si tragoedia Sophoclia cui Trachiniae nomen est, Euripidis aut Hercules actitatur? Existimatve tractari se honorifice Flora, si suis in ludis flagitiosas conspexerit res agi et migratum ab lupanaribus in theatra? Arnobius, *Against the Heathen*, 7.33.3, in the Latin Library, trans. in Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

¹⁵⁶ Richard C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 193-194.

¹⁵⁷ Beacham, *The Roman Theatre*, p. 195.

¹⁵⁸ Chorikios, *Apologia mimorum* in *Choricii Gazaei Opera*, ed. by R. Foerster and E. Richsteig (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 344-80.

of the plots performed.¹⁵⁹ These included Leda and the swan, Europa and the bull, Danaë and the shower of gold, Apollo and Daphne, and tales of Kronos, Herakles, Aphrodite and Artemis. Despite Christian opposition, theatrical performances remained part of imperial ceremonial. At the foot of one panel of an ivory diptych commemorating the consular games of Anastasius in 517 (plate 62) can be seen a group of performers enacting mime and tragedy; this is the last securely dated document showing a pagan performance.¹⁶⁰ In 526 Emperor Justinian I (527-565) closed the theatres, although performances continued until 540.¹⁶¹ Attempts were made to ban pantomime but it continued throughout the period under discussion.¹⁶²

If we are to believe the sixth-century account of Prokopios of Caesarea (500-565), perhaps the stage appearance of Justinian's future wife, Theodora (c. 497-548), was a comedy mime version of the Leda tale:

Often, even on the stage, she stripped before the eyes of all the people, and stood naked in their midst, wearing only a girdle about her private parts and groin; not because she had any modesty about showing that also to the people, but because no one was allowed to go on the stage without a girdle about those parts. In this attitude she would throw herself down on the floor, and lie on her back. Slaves, whose duty it was, would then pour grains of barley upon her girdle, which trained geese would then pick up with their beaks one by one and eat.¹⁶³

A Late Antique Coptic textile roundel from Egypt depicts a burlesque performance of Leda and the Swan (plate 63). It shows a parody of the classical tale, with Leda holding the bird up by its neck while covering her private parts.¹⁶⁴ No doubt it would have caused

¹⁵⁹ Joseph of Serugh, *Homily 3*, in C. Moss, 'Jacob of Serugh's Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre', *Le Muséon*, 48 (1935), pp. 89-90, 107-112.

¹⁶⁰ Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy*, p. 74.

¹⁶¹ Griffith, 'Telling the tale', eds McDonald and Walton, *Cambridge Companion*, p. 33.

¹⁶² Beacham, *The Roman Theatre*, pp. 152-153.

¹⁶³ Πολλάκις δὲ καὶ τῷ θεάτρῳ ὑπὸ θεατῇ παντὶ τῷ δήμῳ ἀπεδύσατό τε καὶ γυμνῇ διὰ μέσου ἐγένετο, ἀμφὶ τὰ αἰδοῖα καὶ τοὺς βουβῶνας διάζωμα ἔχουσα μόνον, οὐχ ὅτι μέντοι ἡσχύνετο καὶ ταῦτα τῷ δήμῳ δεικνύναι, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐνταῦθα γυμνῷ παντάπασιν παριέναι οὐδενὶ ἔξεστιν ὅτι μὴ τῷ ἀμφὶ τοὺς βουβῶνας διάζωμα ἔχοντι. οὕτω μέντοι τοῦ σχήματος ἔχουσα, ἀναπεπτωκυῖα τε ἐν τῷ ἐδάφει ὑπτία ἔκειτο. θῆτες δὲ τινες, οἷς δὴ τὸ ἔργον τότε ἐνέκειτο, κριθᾶς αὐτῇ ὑπερθεν τῶν αἰδοίων ἐρρίπτουν, ἃς δὴ οἱ χῆνες, οἱ ἐξ τοῦτο παρεσκευασμένοι ἐτύγγανον, τοῖς στόμασιν ἐνθένδε κατὰ μίαν ἀνελόμενοι ἤσθιον. Prokopios, *Historia Arcana - Secret History*, 9.20-21 in *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, vol. V, ed. by Michael Krascheninnikov (typis Mattiesenianis, 1899), trans. by H.B. Dewing, in *Prokopios*, vol. I (London: William Heinemann, 1935).

¹⁶⁴ Eunice Dauterman Maguire, *Weavings from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt* (Champaign, Ill: Krannert Art Museum + Kinkead Pavilion. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1999), p. 143.

amusement, attached to a garment, and such a spectacle would have been familiar to theatregoers at that time. Although there is no mythological connection between Leda and the other two couples in the same section of the Meleager Plate, each has a love story to tell.

The next section of the frieze depicts the Judgement of Paris, another popular subject of drama and romance (plate 64a). From the left, there are six figures, Paris, Hermes, Aphrodite, Athena and Hera, plus an unidentified female on the right. Paris is seated on a rock holding a *syrix*, and can be identified by his Phrygian hat. Hermes, the winged messenger, holds his distinctive staff in his left hand and with his right offers the golden apple to Aphrodite, the winner of the competition. Next to her stands Athena with spear and helmet, and then Hera, who sits on a throne, gesturing with her right arm. An unidentified female stands on the right, leaning on a pillar and observing the scene.¹⁶⁵

We know the Judgement of Paris was an established theatrical work throughout Late Antiquity, as in the fifth century, Augustine recorded a public performance of this legend:

[...] this story about Mars is as false as the tale told about the three goddesses, Juno, Minerva and Venus, who are related to have engaged in a beauty competition, with Paris as a judge, for the prize of the golden apple – a story which is performed in song and dance, amid the applause of the theatre.¹⁶⁶

In addition, we have a second-century description of a fictive pantomime performance of the Judgement of Paris in Corinth, in *The Golden Ass* by the Latin prose writer Apuleius (AD 125-180). As this author has provided factual information elsewhere in fictional work it is worthy of consideration.¹⁶⁷ Although this relates to an event some two hundred years before the manufacture of the Meleager Plate, it is a reasonably accurate description of the scene on the dish:

¹⁶⁵ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 128.

¹⁶⁶ non minus hoc, quod de Marte dicitur, falsum esse adseuerans, quam illud quod de tribus deabus, Iunone scilicet et Minerua et Venere, quae pro malo aureo adipiscendo apud iudicem Paridem de pulchritudinis excellentia certasse narrantur et ad placandos ludis deos, qui delectantur seu ueris seu falsis istis criminibus suis, inter theatricos plausus cantantur atque saltantur. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18.10, in the Latin Library, trans. by Henry Bettinson, *City of God* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972), p. 772.

¹⁶⁷ K. M. Coleman, 'Fatal Charades: Roman Executions staged as Mythological Enactments', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 80 (1990), pp. 52-53.

[...] a youth was acting out control of the flock. He was handsomely dressed to represent the Phrygian shepherd Paris, with exotic garments flowing from his shoulders, and his head crowned with a tiara of gold. Standing by him appeared a radiant boy, naked except for a youth's cloak draped over his left shoulder; his blond hair made him the cynosure of all eyes. Tiny wings of gold were projecting from his locks, in which they had been fastened symmetrically on both sides. The herald's staff and the wand which he carried identified him as Mercury [Hermes]. He danced briskly forward, holding in his right hand an apple gilded with gold leaf, which he handed to the boy playing the part of Paris [...] Next appeared a worthy looking girl, similar in appearance to the goddess Juno [Hera], for her hair was ordered with a white diadem and she carried a sceptre. A second girl then burst in, whom you would have recognised as Minerva [Athena]. Her head was covered with a gleaming helmet which itself was crowned with an olive-wreath; she bore a shield and brandished a spear [...] After them a third girl entered, her beauty visible unsurpassed. Her charming, ambrosia-like complexion intimated that she represented the earlier Venus [Aphrodite] when that goddess was still a maiden. She vaunted her unblemished beauty by appearing naked and unclothed except for a thin silken garment veiling her entrancing lower parts.¹⁶⁸

On the Meleager Plate, five of the six figures bear a close resemblance to Apuleius's description. Although in the depiction Paris wears a Phrygian hat, not a gold crown as described by Apuleius, he is well-dressed with a decorative tunic and cloak, and holds a *syrinx* indicating that he is a shepherd boy. In both text and plate, Hermes is naked with a cloak over his left shoulder and holds his *caduceus*, a staff entwined with two serpents and surmounted by wings; in both, he holds the apple, although in the text he gives it to Paris, whereas on the dish he presents it to Aphrodite, the winner of the contest. In the play and on the plate she is naked, apart from a veil around her lower body. Athena is also as portrayed by Apuleius with helmet, shield and spear. On the plate, Hera does not wear the diadem or carry the sceptre described by Apuleius; however, she is enthroned, suggesting

¹⁶⁸ Capellae pauculae tondebant herbulas et in modum Paridis, Phrygii pastoris, barbaricis amiculis umeris defluentibus, pulchre indusiatus simulabat magisterium. Adest luculentus puer nudus, nisi quod ephebica chlamida sinistrum tegebat umerum, flavis crinibus usquequaque conspicuus, et inter conas eius aureae pinnulae colligatione simili sociatae prominebant; quem [caduceum] et virgula Mercurium indicabat, Is saltatorie procurrens malumque bracteis inauratum dextra gerens (adulescentis), qui Paris videbatur, porrigit, qui mandaret Iuppiter nutu significans, et protinus gradum scitule referens et conspectu facessit. Insequitur puella vultu honesta in deae Iunonis speciem similis: nam et caput stringebat diadema candida, ferebat et sceptrum. Inrupit alia, quam putares Minervam, caput contacta fulgenti galea — et oleaginea corona tegebatur ipsa galea — clypeum attollens et hastam quatiens et qualis illa, cum pugnat. Super has introcessit alia, visendo decore praepollens, gratia coloris ambrosei designans Venerem, qualis fuit Venus, cum fuit virgo, nudo et intecto corpore perfectam formositatem professa, nisi quod tenui pallio bombycino inumbrabat spectabilem pubem. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 10.30-31, in the Latin Library, trans. by P.G. Walsh, *The Golden Ass* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 212-13.

her high rank. Therefore, the tableau on the dish could be the representation of a theatrical performance, such as that described by Apuleius.

There is uncertainty over the identification of the sixth figure on the Meleager Plate frieze, a modestly dressed female standing behind Hera and observing the scene (plate 64b); Mango has cautiously identified her as Helen, the prize in the contest.¹⁶⁹ But there is no precedent for her appearance in this scene, as she is not mentioned in mythology or represented elsewhere in Greek or Roman art as being present during the Judgement of Paris. The pose the figure strikes, cross-legged, leaning on a pedestal and supporting her chin in her hand, is actually that of a Hellenistic type of Muse.¹⁷⁰ An example of this is found on the late third-century sarcophagus of Marcus Sempronius Nicocrates in the British Museum (plate 15b and c). However, there is no reason for the presence of a Muse in this scene, despite the iconographical link.

Another suggestion is that the unidentified female is Eris, personification of discord. It was at her instigation the competition took place, after she flung the golden apple of the Hesperides among the three goddesses who were attending a banquet, in order to cause strife.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, there are precedents for her inclusion in this scene. In ancient Greece, Eris was often included in depictions of the Judgement of Paris; for example a female bust with her name inscribed alongside floats above the participants on a fifth century BC Attic vase, now in the Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe (plate 65). A thousand years later, she was still part of this group, as she was depicted holding the apple on a fifth to sixth-century ivory pyxis, alongside Hermes and the three goddesses (plates 66 and 67). Here, Eris holds up an apple on the extreme right of the Judgement of Paris, and this same figure therefore appears on the left in the Banquet of the Gods, which is depicted on the other side of the pyxis. Eris was a personification who was not only an active participant in mythological events, but also produced children who were themselves personifications:

¹⁶⁹ Mango and Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, p. 128.

¹⁷⁰ Kurt Weitzmann, 'Illustrations of Euripides and Homer in the Mosaics of Antioch', in *Antioch-on-the-Orontes, III: The Excavations, 1937-39*, ed. by R. Stillwell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 238.

¹⁷¹ Colluthus, *The Rape of Helen*, 59-62.

Hateful Strife [Eris] bore painful Toil,
Neglect, Starvation, and tearful Pain,
Battles, Combats, Bloodshed and Slaughter,
Quarrels, Lies, Pretences, and Arguments,
Disorder, Disaster – neighbours to each other –
And Oath, who most harms men on earth,
When someone knowingly swears false.¹⁷²

She was a powerful figure who played a key role in the Judgement of Paris. On stage she would have produced the apple and initiated events leading to the Judgement of Paris, and could have remained as a bystander, watching with pleasure the results of her malicious actions. Both in the theatre and on the plate her presence as the personification of Strife would have epitomised the discord being created.

The sixth section of frieze contains three separate scenes from the life of Perseus (plate 68a). Firstly, we see the armed Akrisios pursuing his daughter Danäe, who is clutching her child Perseus in her left arm, while looking back and repelling her pursuer with the right. Akrisios feared a prophecy that said he would die at the hand of his grandson, and so Danäe and her son were cast out from their family home in Argos, and thrown into the sea in a locked wooden chest. The central group shows Andromeda being rescued from a sea monster by the now adult Perseus, who wears the helmet of Pluto and the winged sandals of Hermes. On his left arm he bears the shield of Athene and he holds the head of the gorgon Medusa, who he had previously killed, and the silversmith has even incised Andromeda's now empty chains. The third segment depicts the fisherman Diktys and a male personification, seated behind him. Diktys rescued Danäe and the young Perseus when they were washed up on the island of Seriphos, and he is shown extending his hand in welcome, either to the adult Perseus in the centre, or to Danäe and her infant opposite.

¹⁷² Αὐτὰρ Ἔρις [Eris] στρυγερὴ τέκε μὲν Πόνον ἀλγινόεντα, Λήθην τε Λιμόν τε καὶ Ἄλγεα δακρυόεντα, Ὑσμίνας τε Μάχας τε Φόνους τ' Ἀνδροκτασίας τε, Νείκεά τε ψευδέας τε Λόγους Ἀμφιλογίας τε, Δυσνομήν τε Ἀάτην τε, συνήθεας ἀλλήλησιν, Ὅρκον θ', ὃς δὴ πλεῖστον ἐπιχθονίους ἀνθρώπους, πημαίνει, ὅτε κέν τις ἐκὼν ἐπιόρκον ὁμόσση. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 226-232 in *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, ed. by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1914), trans. by M.L. West in *Hesiod, Theogony: Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 10.

The bearded male personification is viewed from behind, holding a branch or rush in his right hand, and with an overflowing cornucopia balanced on his left knee (plate 68b). He must surely personify the island of Seriphos, which became a refuge for Perseus and his mother, and which he later leaves and then returns to with Andromeda. It is significant that this personification is depicted next to Diktys, as the latter was eventually made king of this island by Perseus. *Andromeda*, *Diktys* and *Danäe* were all titles of plays, now lost, by Euripides, and Seriphos plays a key part in the tale of Perseus. In the theatre, the island might have been represented by props but it could also have been played by an actor, who would have been recognised by the contemporary audience, familiar with the concept, as a personification.

If we are to take the author Apuleius at his word, in the second century a whole range of personifications appeared on the stage:

The girl whose appearance in arms had revealed her as Minerva was protected by two boys who were the comrades in arms of the battle-goddess, Terror and Fear; they pranced about with their swords unsheathed, and behind her back a flautist played a battle-tune in the Dorian mode [...] But now Venus becomingly took the centre of the stage to the great acclamation of the theatre [...] Next floated in charming children, unmarried girls representing on one side the Graces at their most graceful, and on the other the Hours in all their beauty. They were appeasing their goddess by strewing wreathes and single blossoms before her, and they formed a most elegant chorus line.¹⁷³

Although this passage describes a fictional performance taking place some two centuries prior to the date of the plate, the inclusion of a variety of personifications suggests that their appearance was an expected part of Late Antique drama, as these traditional plays were still being performed throughout this period. As this implies, the tableaux on the Meleager plate may be direct representations of mimes and tragic scenes performed in the theatre.

¹⁷³ At illam quam cultus armorum Minervam fecerat duo pueri muniebant, proeliaris deae comites armigeri, Terror et Metus, nudis insultantes gladiis. At pone tergum tibice Dorium canebat bellicosum et permiscens bombis gravibus tinnitus acutos in modum tubae saltationis agilis vigorem suscitabat [...] Venus ecce cum magno favore caveae in ipso meditullio scaenae, circumfuso populo laetissimorum, dulce subridens constitit amoene [...] Et influunt innuptarum puellarum decorae subole, hinc Gratiae gratissimae, inde Horae pulcherrimae, quae iaculis foris serti et soluti deam suam propitiantes scitissimum construxerant chorum, dominae voluptatum veris coma blandientes. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 10.31-32, in the Latin Library, trans. by Walsh, p. 214.

The idea that theatrical vignettes might appear on silver plate is not surprising, as the wealthy and upper-class across the Empire enjoyed visiting the theatre. The aristocrat Sidonius wrote to his friend Consentius of Narbonne:

And when you chanced to put aside serious concerns and were attracted by the shows of the theatre, the whole company of actors would grow pale, as if the god of the bow and the nine Muses, were sitting as judges beside the stage [...] Why should I tell how the harpists, flute-players, mimes, rope-walkers and clowns quail as they display before you their reeds, quills, jests, bouts and ropes?¹⁷⁴

Performances of dramatic excerpts also took place in private houses, as part of the entertainment during dinner and drinking parties.¹⁷⁵ Here, mosaic pavements, frescoes and tapestries would have echoed the imagery on the silver and the action taking place; for example, groups of surviving frescoes and mosaics from Pompeii and Antioch depict scenes from famous plays of Euripides, with their themes of passionate and destructive love, juxtaposed.¹⁷⁶

The individual panels of the Meleager Plate have an overall theme, celebrating the portrayal and personification of various aspects of love. The Calydonian Boar Hunt with Meleager and Atalanta depicts love as a partnership. Perseus showed heroic love in rescuing Andromeda, and Dido and Aeneas represent love betrayed. Hippolytos and Phaedra symbolise chastity and unrequited love as well as unnatural passion, and Pyramos and Thisbe, tragic love. The Judgement of Paris represents love as lust, in the hero's choice of Helen over power, wisdom and skill in battle. Aphrodite and Adonis stand for divine love, as do Leda and the swan.

They are also subjects of dramatic interludes on the stage at that time, and may represent theatrical scenes. Even Augustine, who was later to decry the theatre, described how in his youth he enjoyed watching scenes of lovers in plays:

¹⁷⁴ *Iam si seria forte terminantem te spectacula ceperant theatri, pallescit chorus omnis histrionum tamquam si Arcitenens novemque Musae propter pulpita iudices sederent [...] quid dicam citharistrias, choraulas, mimos, schoenobatas, gelasianos, cannas, plectra, iocos, palan, rudentem coram te tripidanter explicare?* Sidonius, *Letter to Constantius*, 23.263- 67, 300-303, in Anderson, *Sidonius*, vol 1, pp. 300-303.

¹⁷⁵ Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows*, p. 30.

¹⁷⁶ Weitzmann, 'Illustrations of Euripides and Homer', in ed., Stillwell, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes, III*, p. 241.

Stage-plays also carried me away, full of images of my miseries, and of fuel to my fire [...] but then in the theatres I rejoiced with lovers when they wickedly enjoyed one another, although this was imaginary only in the play. And when they lost one another, as if very compassionate, I sorrowed with them, yet had my delight in both.¹⁷⁷

They are bordered by Bacchic masks, which provide another link to the performing arts, and simulate the décor of a Late Antique theatre. Furthermore, the personifications of Athens, the rivers Pyramos and Thisbe, a storm, Eris and the island of Seriphos are deliberately and carefully placed within these scenes, in order to facilitate understanding of the subject matter. This in turn suggests that in the live theatre of the day, actors could have represented personifications in order to clarify the action taking place.

In this chapter I have established the connection between some representations of personifications on silver plate, and the world of the theatre in Late Antiquity. In the first section I argued that Bacchic masks, personifications of both the theatre and also of characters from among the followers of Dionysos, were not just decorative motifs utilised to break up a frieze, but could have a function in their own right, pointing the viewer to sections of imagery with particular significance. They were a link to the performing arts, and personified the good life, happiness, pleasure and having fun, and a cultivated and civilised life.

In the second section, the border vignettes demonstrated how the presence of personifications could help identify particular scenes, for example Dido and Aeneas sheltering from a storm, here personified. Characters such as Hippolytos would act as personifications or allegorical figures in their own right, and the need for *paideia* in interpreting some of the more complex groupings once again came to the fore. I further suggested that these tableaux could depict stage performances taking place in the contemporary theatre, and moreover that actors may have taken the part of personifications

¹⁷⁷ Rapiebant me spectacula theatra plena imaginibus miseriarum mearum et fomitibus ignis mei [...] sed tunc in theatris congaudebam amantibus, cum sese fruebantur per flagitia, quamvis haec imaginarie gererent in ludo spectaculi, cum autem sese amittebant, quasi misericors contristabar; et utrumque delectabat tamen, Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.2-3. Latin text <<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/confessionii/index.htm>> [accessed 7 August, 2012], trans. and ed. by Albert C. Outler, Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

as well as the principal characters. Additionally, Bacchic masks frame these scenes and act as a reminder of the theatrical masks that would have decorated an actual Late Antique theatre. These Bacchic heads served as an introduction to Dionysiac imagery, and the following chapter will explore this genre in more depth.

Chapter 3 - Drunk and Disorderly: Dionysiac Imagery on the Mildenhall Great Dish

In Late Antiquity Dionysos was god of the theatre and his imagery, in particular the Bacchic mask motif, could represent the world of drama. Aside from this aspect, Dionysos, his *thiasos* and his attributes could personify different things at different times, in different places and on different objects. Additionally, depictions of them, both individually and as a group, could sometimes hold allegorical meanings. I take the Mildenhall Great Dish as my prime example, as it depicts a wide range of the characters that comprised his retinue, and also bears an associated marine *thiasos* (plate 69). Despite this, surprisingly little has been written about this object and its companion pieces from the Mildenhall Treasure.¹⁷⁸

In this chapter, I will show that as well as personifying conviviality through the pleasures of wine-drinking, Dionysos stood for fertility. His companion Herakles could act as a personification; when shown in his drunkenness he stood for flawed humanity, but he could also be depicted as a hero, where he personified strength, tenacity and even the chance of apotheosis. He was invoked at marriages as a role model for the bridegroom, as was Dionysos who personified nuptial bliss because he represented both the good life and fertility, two hopes for the future most commonly expressed at weddings.

Dionysos worked closely with Poseidon with whom he shared the attribute of the pine, and Oceanos who personified the waters that surround the world and those leading to Hades. He was also at times conflated with Orpheus, as he was able to embody the hope of a better life after death, a concept that eventually extended to resurrection with the increasing influence of Christianity. This is most obvious in Dionysiac representations on sarcophagi, but objects such as the Antioch chalice continued to carry this message by appropriating

¹⁷⁸ There is a brief description and some limited technical information in Painter, *The Mildenhall Treasure*. Richard Hobbs, 'The secret history of the Mildenhall Treasure', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 88 (2008), 376-420, provides a detailed account of the mystery surrounding the discovery of this hoard. Hobbs is also undertaking a programme of re-publication of the Mildenhall Treasure at the time of writing.

Dionysiac iconography, here in the form of a vine. A strong syncretism between the cult of Dionysos and the newly emerging Christian faith will become clear in this chapter, as Christianity absorbed some of Dionysos's mythology and adopted his imagery for its art.

I will start with a full description of the plate as it has to be seen as an entity with interrelating figures, and then focus more closely on different aspects of its iconography.

The Mildenhall Great Dish

The Mildenhall Great Dish came to light in the 1940s when it was discovered on display in the Suffolk home of Sidney Ford, an agricultural engineer who collected local antiquities. It had been there for four years, after being dug up in a nearby field by one of his employees, along with thirty-three other items which collectively became known as the Mildenhall Treasure. At a coroner's hearing it was established that the collection was Treasure Trove, and it was removed to the British Museum where it has since remained. This large plate has a diameter of just over 60cm and weighs 8256 g.¹⁷⁹ In the absence of associated coins, it has been dated to the fourth century on grounds of its style; for example, it has a heavier type of rim-beading that was only introduced on silver plate at that time.¹⁸⁰ The prime function of decorative dishes such as this was one of display. Like the Sevso Hunting Plate, it may have acted as a table top, supported on tripod legs. It is extremely unlikely that it would have been used to hold food, as it would have been far too heavy, and the imagery would have been obscured; large, plain platters served this purpose.¹⁸¹

The decorative scheme covers the entire surface of the plate and consists of a Dionysiac *thiasos* dancing along the beaded outer edge, around a central medallion bordered by shells containing a marine *thiasos*. Within this central section, outlined by a bead border in high relief, is the mask-like face of Oceanos, personification of all the water that surrounds the

¹⁷⁹ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 22.

¹⁸⁰ Painter, *The Mildenhall Treasure*, pp. 12-13. D.E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1966), p. 194.

¹⁸¹ Richard Hobbs, 'Platters in the Mildenhall Treasure', *Britannia*, 41 (2010), p. 332.

world, or of the sea god Poseidon (plate 70). Their imagery seems to have at times become conflated in Late Antiquity, and I will therefore discuss both identities.¹⁸² This large head is encircled by a marine *thiasos*. A pair of nereids (sea-nymphs) accompanied by a *ketos* (sea-dragon) and a *hippocamp* (sea-horse) swim up towards their male companions, who have scaly tails. Another nereid lounges along the coiled tail of one of these tritons, and a further nereid rides side-saddle on the twisting tail of a sea-stag.

Around this central medallion dance the outer figures, who are on a larger scale, although still not commensurate with that of Oceanos. This parade encompasses virtually the full set of characters from the Dionysiac *koine* including Pan, who is infrequently depicted in this context. The absence of an *eros* figure is a notable exception. In the bottom section of the plate, assuming the Oceanos head is viewed upright, a satyr dances between two maenads, one holding a *tympanon* (drum) and the other an inverted *thyrsos* (plate 71). This is a fennel stalk topped with a pine cone which acted as a staff, and was a phallic symbol carried primarily by the androgynous Dionysos and his female followers.¹⁸³ The left maenad purposefully holds what seems to be a piece of cloth but is actually the end of a long scarf (not fully shown); this action is depicted more clearly by a female dancer diagonally opposite across the plate whose wrap is shown in full (plate 72). The satyr has a *nebris* (a goatskin, often depicted as a pronged cape) draped over his left arm, and his *pedum*, the crook which was carried by male participants, is on the ground under his feet. To the right, another satyr plays on the *aulos* (double pipes), and slung over his left arm is the distinctive *nebris*. At his feet, a panther jumps over two small boulders; big cats were particularly associated with Dionysos, and '*panthera*' is the generic term used in antiquity to describe leopards and cheetahs, both spotted animals, which were procured from Asia and Africa.

Moving anti-clockwise, this group of four is divided from the next vignette by a low decorated pedestal, on which rests the mask of a bearded *silenos*, facing to the right (plate 73). '*Silenos*' can be either the generic name for an old satyr or refer to Silenos, the tutor of

¹⁸² Levi comments on their shared iconography, Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, vol. 1, p. 597.

¹⁸³ Eric Csapo, 'Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction', *Phoenix*, 51.3/4 (1997), p. 260.

the young Dionysos, and he was usually portrayed as a rollicking, bearded old man with thick lips, a snub nose and bulging eyes. Here the mask regards Pan dancing with a maenad, who shakes a tambourine. Pan reaches towards her, his *nebris* slung over his arm, and drops his *pedum*. Conforming to contemporary iconography, he is depicted in a state of sexual arousal, unlike the rest of the male characters, and holds the *syrinx* (pan pipes), his principal attribute. He has a spiral star motif lightly marked on each shoulder; this was a symbol of divinity.¹⁸⁴ Beneath his leaping hooves is a tied goatskin containing fruit, probably grapes. A heavily draped female, hair in a bun, walks away from him towards the figure of Dionysos (plate 72). Although she has not been identified as such, this could be a representation of Ariadne. All the other female figures in this parade are paired with a male partner, and all the other principals of the *thiasos* are present on the plate. It would therefore be logical to show her with her husband Dionysos.

He is at the top centre of the dish and thus completely inverted when it is viewed with the Oceanos medallion upright. A classical urn stands between the couple and is at the approximate opposite point to its twin at the bottom of the plate. Dionysos faces forward and is naked except for his boots, although he has a mantle draped over his left arm and wears a diadem. His left foot rests on the haunches of a crouching panther who looks back up at him. With his right hand he balances a bunch of grapes on his shoulder; he holds a beribboned *thyrsos* in the left. His hair is tied up at the back in a bun. Dionysos was a very enigmatic god, and had a feminine side, which was reflected in his androgynous appearance. He was generally rendered nude, or even if he was draped his genitals remained exposed. He was often depicted with his right arm raised above his head, and holding a *thyrsus* in his left, as here. This gesture is known as the Lykeios pose, named after a lost Praxitelean bronze statue of a standing Apollo Lykeios at rest.¹⁸⁵ On the dish, he looks down at a *silenos* whose aged figure bows in supplication before him, holding out a bowl. In his right hand the old man holds a flail, which was a ritual object of the cult of Dionysos, and he wears boots and a voluminous loincloth.

¹⁸⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 1943.

¹⁸⁵ Susan Macmillan Arensberg, 'Dionysos: A Late Antique Tapestry', *Boston Museum Bulletin*, 75 (1977), p. 8.

Moving right, behind the *silenos* a satyr performs a wild dance, the *pedum* in his left hand raised above his head and his *syrinx* tumbling to the ground beneath him (plate 74). He too has the spiral star motif on his right shoulder, whilst the left is covered by his *nebris*. He partners a maenad, who dances gracefully towards him, clapping together a large pair of cymbals. In the final tableau two satyrs are helping a naked drunken Herakles, whose lionskin, wrapped around his club, lies on the ground beneath him (plate 75).

It is noticeable that Dionysos is at the top of the plate and thus inverted to the central medallion. This plate does have a 'right way up' because of the central face, yet the principal character is not in the middle at the bottom as one might expect, but placed in the centre of the top. When the dish stands upright the face of Oceanos dominates, whereas when it is turned through one-hundred-and-eighty degrees the focus immediately switches to Dionysos. This may be to avoid conflict between the images of two gods competing for the viewer's attention. Because these are the two most powerful figures on the dish, this would spread the view of them and the direction of their power if the plate were lying flat, perhaps surrounded by diners.

This double perspective would allow the two most important participants at the meal to each have a direct view of one of these gods. In Late Antiquity, there was a strict protocol around the positioning of diners in the elite *stibadium* (dining area). The order of seating meant that the senior figure and the next in rank sat opposite each other, at either end of the curved couch, also called a *stibadium*. The highest ranking person would lounge on the right of the couch (viewer's left), *in cornu dextro*, with the next in line at the opposite side, as these places offered the best view of the entertainment taking place in an open area in front of the diners.¹⁸⁶ Next to the 'seconder', the guests would be seated in gradually lowering status, with the lowest ranking guest at the table, specifically identified as the *parasitus*, seated right next to and behind the host.¹⁸⁷ Sidonius described in detail attending a banquet given by the emperor at which this author, as the *parasitus*, was seated next to

¹⁸⁶ Katherine M.D. Dunbabin, 'Triclinium and Stibadium', in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. by William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991), p. 135.

¹⁸⁷ Simon Ellis, 'The End of the Roman House', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 92.4 (1988), p. 575.

the emperor Marjorian (457-461).¹⁸⁸ This ranking can be clearly seen in two sixth-century representations of the Last Supper, a mosaic in Ravenna's San Apollinare Nuovo (plate 76), and a miniature in the Rossano Gospel (plate 77). In both these scenes, the distinctive figure of Christ is on the viewer's left. It is thought that these images reproduce the type of dining that was prevalent at that time.¹⁸⁹ If the Mildenhall Great Dish was used as a table, it could be positioned so that the two most senior diners were facing head-on to either Dionysos or Oceanos.

The God of wine

In Late Antiquity, Dionysos could act as a polyvalent personification. The imagery on the Mildenhall dish provides an opportunity to explore aspects of this. The most commonplace connotation, and one that has survived to the present day, was the joy of wine-drinking, and this is represented fully by the Dionysiac *thiasos*. In ancient Greece, this cortege comprised only maenads, also known as Bacchantes, but by Late Antiquity other characters associated with Dionysos had been introduced. As well as the god himself and the maenads, representations could include the figures of satyrs, *sileni*, Herakles, Pan and Eros. Panthers, tigresses, lions and goats would sometimes appear as well. Together, these figures formed the *thiasos*, and they were usually shown interacting and dancing. On the Mildenhall dish, Dionysos's followers from the marine world are also depicted, and the entire scene is a celebration of uninhibited pleasure, in which wine would have played an important part.

Drinking was very much part of the culture of dining in Late Antiquity, and the imagery on the Mildenhall plate mirrors this convivial activity. As the Greeks before them, the Romans drank wine with their meals, a practice that continued after the establishment of the Byzantine Empire. Drunkenness was frowned on and wine was taken watered down, sometimes with salty water to cut some of the sweetness.¹⁹⁰ As today, there were various

¹⁸⁸ Sidonius, *Letter to Montius*, 1.11.10-15, in Anderson, *Sidonius*, vol. 1, pp. 405-11.

¹⁸⁹ Joanita Vroom, 'The changing dining habits at Christ's table', in Brubaker and Linardou, *Eat, Drink and be Merry*, p. 203.

¹⁹⁰ <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/wine/wine.html> [accessed 30 April, 2010].

qualities of wine, with Falernian being of the highest standard, and most desirable.

Sidonius described Bacchic play-acting at Late Antique banquets in the fifth century thus:

Let attendants, their heads bent by the chased metal, bring in lordly dishes on their laden shoulders. Let bowls, goblets, and basins join Falernian with nard, and let roses stitched together wreath tripods and tankards. It is a joy to pass through lines of garlands, waving scent-bottles as we go; it is a joy to surrender our languid limbs to frolic in aimless circling and to counterfeit even Bacchanals with foot and dress and voice all a quiver. From her town between the two seas let Corinth send harping-girls who have learned stage singing and dancing at the warm training-school, and whose musical fingers replacing the quill shall ply the strings that wake to life at their touch, while their tongues sound in harmony.¹⁹¹

The Romans did not view alcohol abuse in the same way as we do today, when we treat it as a medical problem of addiction. Rather, they considered those who could not control themselves under the influence of alcohol to be morally defective and of weak character.¹⁹² It is thought that heavy drinking, often in the form of drinking contests, among the upper classes was accepted at *epulae*, *convivia* and *comissationes* (banquets, dinner parties and revelries).¹⁹³ However, drunkenness was not confined to the élite, as the fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus (325-391) testified : ‘Let us now turn to the idle and lazy proletariat ... They devote their whole life, to drink, gambling, brothels, shows, and pleasure in general.’¹⁹⁴ Augustine described the drunken antics of the followers of Dionysos, and it seems the cult claimed powers of prophecy:

[...] the spectacle presented by your magistrates and the chief men of the city when intoxicated and raging along your streets; in which solemnity if you are possessed by a god, you surely see of what nature he must be who deprives men of their reason. If, however, this madness is only feigned, what say you to this keeping of

¹⁹¹ Geruli caput plicantes anaglyptico metallo epulas superbiores umeris ferant onustis. Paterae, scyphi, lebetes socient Falerna nardo tripodasque cantharosque rosa subtilis coronet. Iuvat ire per corollas alabastra ventilantes; iuvat et vago toratu dare fracta membra ludo, simulare vel trementes pede, veste, voce Bacchas. Bimari remittat urbe thymelen Palenque doctas tepidas ad officinas citharistrias Corinthus, digiti quibus canentes pariter sonante lingua vice pectinis fatigent animate fila pulsa. Sidonius, *Letter to Tonantius*, 9.13.49-75, in Anderson, ed. and trans., *Sidonius*, vol. 2, pp. 574-77.

¹⁹² John H. D’Arms, ‘Heavy Drinking and Drunkenness in the Roman World: Four Questions for Historians’, in *In Vino Veritas*, ed. by Oswyn Murray and Manuela Tecuşan (London: British School at Rome, 1995), p. 317.

¹⁹³ D’Arms, ‘Heavy Drinking and Drunkenness’, in eds Murray and Tecuşan, *In Vino Veritas*, p. 307.

¹⁹⁴ Nunc ad otiosam plebem veniamus et desidem [...]hi omne, quod vivunt, vino et tesseris inpendunt et lustris et voluptatibus et spectaculis, Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae a Fine Corneli Taciti*, 28.4.29, in the Latin Library, trans. by Walter Hamilton in *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Later Roman Empire* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986), p. 365.

things hidden in a service which you boast of as public, or what good purpose is served by so base an imposition? Moreover, why do you not foretell future events in your songs, if you are endowed with the prophetic gift? Or why do you rob the bystanders, if you are in your sound mind?¹⁹⁵

The Christian church was forced to address the problem of drunkenness and this presented a dilemma, as the taking of wine was an integral part of the Eucharist, and so they could not completely outlaw it. They quoted I Timothy 5.23, ‘Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities’. The use of wine as a libation in pagan ritual was specifically banned in 392.¹⁹⁶ Yet Dionysiac imagery with its connotations of pleasurable intoxication and loss of inhibition continued to be reproduced; for example, the Sevso Treasure contains a ewer and an amphora, both dated to the fifth century, depicting figures from the *thiasos* (plates 78 and 79). The fourth-century Mildenhall Great Dish is therefore not the relic of a dying pagan age, but a reflection of the vibrant drinking culture that continued throughout Late Antiquity.

Despite Christian opposition to pagan customs, elements of Dionysiac beliefs and imagery filtered through into Christian practices and iconography, and the vine and wine-drinking are examples of this.¹⁹⁷ In Genesis we find the following passage, part of Jacob’s blessing of his twelve sons:

Binding his foal unto the vine and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes:
His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch;
He will wash his garments in wine,
His clothes in the blood of grapes.
His eyes will be darker than wine,
His teeth whiter than milk.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ nisi ut nobis decuriones et primates civitatis per plateas vestrae urbis bacchantes ac furentes, ante oculos quasi spectacula poneremus: in qua celebritate, si numine inhabitamini, certe videtis quale illud sit quod adimit mentem. Si autem fingitis; quae sunt ista etiam in publico vestra secreta, vel quo pertinet tam turpe mendacium? deinde cur nulla futura canitis, si vates estis? aut cur spoliatis circumstantes, si sani estis? Augustine, *Letter to Maximus of Madaura*, 17.4, in *Opera Omnia* <<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/index.htm>> [accessed 7 August, 2012], trans. by Rev. J.G. Cunningham, Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

¹⁹⁶ *Theodosian Code*, 16.10.12.

¹⁹⁷ In the second century Justin Martyr (100-165) denounced Dionysos and his followers and associated them with the devil in a passage entitled ‘The Devil, since he emulates the truth, has invented fables about Bacchus, Herakles and Sculapius’, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 59.100-165.

¹⁹⁸ *Genesis*, 49.11-12.

This has echoes of the early cult of Dionysos, which was considerably more blood-thirsty than in later days. When Ampelos, the lover of Dionysos, died and was resurrected as a vine, the plant, fruit and wine produced from the grapes were seen as the body and blood of Ampelos: ‘He lives, I declare Dionysos; your boy lives [...] Ampelos is not dead even if he died; for I will change your boy to a lovely drink’.¹⁹⁹ Both pagan and Christian beliefs had occasions when wine becomes blood: the poet Timotheus of Miletus called wine ‘the blood of Dionysos’, and in the Christian church the Eucharist represented wine as the blood of Christ.²⁰⁰ The correlation between wine and blood was a particularly strong point of syncretism between the two beliefs.

Vine carpet mosaics (plate 80) were a popular theme for the interiors of houses, and in particular dining rooms, where they were often shown in conjunction with other Dionysiac imagery, but elsewhere they could carry another message. A fourth-century panel from the floor of the original basilica at Panayia Chrysopolitissa, now the Church of Ayia Kyriaki, in Paphos, Cyprus (plate 81), depicts a fruiting vine with the Greek inscription *ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ Η ΑΜΙΤΕΑΟC Η ΑΛΗΘΙΝΗ*, ‘I am the true vine’, the words of Jesus quoted in the New Testament Gospel of John.²⁰¹ The motif of the vine was also considered an appropriate motif for funerary art, as can be seen in a mosaic panel in the north ambulatory of the fourth century mausoleum of Sta. Costanza in Rome, where a huge vine springs from all four corners to cover the picture field (plate 82). Alongside domestic scenes of harvesting and treading the grapes, figures of *erotes* climb around the branches picking bunches of fruit (plate 83). This theme is echoed in the decoration of the porphyry sarcophagus of Constantina (between 307 and 317 – 354), a daughter of the Christian emperor Constantine, which also depicts *erotes* harvesting grapes and which once stood here before being moved to the Vatican Museum (plate 84). On the sides of the Junius Bassus (317-359) sarcophagus, the front panel of which contains a series of biblical scenes, similar small

¹⁹⁹ Ζῶει τιο, Διόνυσε, τεδὸς νέος [...] Ἀμπελος οὐ τέθνηκε, καὶ εἰ θάνεν· ἡμερόεν γὰρ εἰς ποτόν, ποτόν, εἰς γλυκὺ νέκταρ ἐγὼ σέο κόῦρον ἀμείψω. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, 12.142-147, in Rowse, ed. and trans., pp. 409-10.

²⁰⁰ Timotheus of Miletus, *Poetae Melici Graeci*, 780, quoted in Eric Csapo, ‘Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction’, *Phoenix*, 51.3/4 (1997), p. 258; Shorrock, *The Myth of Paganism*, p. 106.

²⁰¹ John, 15.1: Henry Maguire, *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1998), p. VI 148.

boys harvest and tread the grapes (plate 85). These examples demonstrate how the symbol of the vine was gradually appropriated by the Christian church.

Other silver vessels which display Dionysiac vine motifs are more clearly intended to represent Christian beliefs. Viticultural imagery appears on the sixth-century so-called Antioch Chalice, once thought to be the Holy Grail but now identified as probably being a lamp; the seated figures of Christ and his followers are placed within a large rambling vine (plate 86).²⁰² Also present are an eagle and a lamb, and it is generally understood that the presence of these alongside Christ symbolised the resurrected Lord.²⁰³ The Antioch Chalice echoes the iconography of a late-first/early-second century silver goblet from Hermoupolis, now in the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria (plate 87). This vessel is also encompassed by a vine, only here vintaging *erotes* busy themselves among the branches, observed by the reclining figures of satyrs and maenads.²⁰⁴ On the Antioch Chalice two types of imagery, Dionysiac and Christian, work together to reinforce the all-important message of hope for the afterlife. Motifs such as the bunch of grapes held by Dionysos on the Mildenhall dish are a precursor to this, and their appearance within Christian images held Dionysiac resonances.

Dionysos and fertility

Both the *thyrsus* and the bunch of grapes held by the Mildenhall Dionysos would have symbolised fecundity. Dionysos was originally an agricultural god through his association with the vine, and because of this he continued to personify fertility even into Late Antiquity. Imagery such as that on the Mildenhall Great Dish would have held this connotation for the contemporary viewer. According to the *Apologia* of the second-century Christian apologist Athenagoras, the fruit of the vine was Dionysos, the vine itself Semele, his mother, and the flaming heat of the sun Zeus, his father.²⁰⁵ The vine, shown alone or with vintaging *erotes*, was a symbol of fecundity, and both the god himself and his

²⁰² Helen Evans in eds Cormack and Vassilaki, *Byzantium 330-1453*, pp. 382-3.

²⁰³ Margaret Frazer, 'The Antioch Chalice', in Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, p. 606.

²⁰⁴ Kondoleon, *Domestic and Divine*, pp. 237-238.

²⁰⁵ Athenagoras, *Apology*, 22.

attendant imagery could personify fertility.²⁰⁶ It was not just his connection to the vine that made Dionysos a god of fertility, as he was also associated with trees and fruit. On a third-century vine carpet mosaic at the House of the Dionysian Procession, in El Jem, Tunisia, his bust is depicted with a crown of flowers and fruits, within a central medallion whose border is a laurel wreath laden with fruits and flowers (plate 80). This reflects a well-established connection. Long before, Plutarch (46-120) had said that:

To show that the Greeks regard Dionysos as the lord and master not only of wine, but of the nature of every sort of moisture, it is enough that Pindar be our witness, when he says

May gladsome Dionysos swell the fruit upon the trees,
The hallowed splendour of harvest time.²⁰⁷

In the second century, the rhetorician and philosopher, Maximus of Tyre, had described how the peasants honoured Dionysos by planting an uncultivated tree-trunk as a rustic statue, and Plutarch further noted that all Greeks sacrifice to Dionysos as a tree god.²⁰⁸ Dionysos was associated with the pine tree specifically, and representations of cones, with their phallic connotations, appeared frequently in Dionysiac imagery. The *thyrsos* is always shown topped with a pine cone, and often entwined with ivy, another plant connected to this god, as like the pine it is evergreen, and it resembles the vine in its growing habits. Several legends surround the ivy, as it was supposed to have protected the baby Dionysos from the flames of Zeus which consumed his mother, Semele.²⁰⁹ Pine cone and ivy motifs had only Dionysiac associations in Late Antiquity. So it can be seen that over a long period Dionysos was associated with various forms of nature and agriculture, and was connected to beliefs surrounding the fertility of the land.

²⁰⁶ Mango in Buckton, *Byzantium*, p. 40.

²⁰⁷ ὅτι δ' οὐ μόνον τοῦ οἴνου Διόνυσον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάσης ὑγρᾶς φύσεως Ἑλληνες ἡγοῦνται κύριον καὶ ἀρχηγόν, ἀρκεῖ Πίνδαρος ⁸ μάρτυς εἶναι λέγων δένδρεων δὲ νομὸν Διόνυσος πολυγαθῆς αὐξάνοι, ἀγνὸν φέγγος ὁπώρας. Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, Moralia*, 4.35, in Gregorius N. Bernadakis, ed., *Plutarch's Morelia*, vol. II (Leipzig: Teubner, 1889), p. 507, trans. by F.C. Babbitt, vol V, *Morelia* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 87.

²⁰⁸ Maximus of Tyre, *Philosophical Orations*, 2.1; Plutarch, *Morelia*, 675.

²⁰⁹ Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 153.

Herakles

On the Mildenhall Great Dish, Herakles is shown in a drunken stupor, unable to stand unaided (plate 75). Herakles was a complex figure in Late Antiquity, and there were many representations of him in different modes. He was frequently portrayed as a hero, because during his lifetime he was stoic, and exemplified the adage of virtue victorious over vice. Passionate and emotional, he was responsible for many deaths in fits of madness, including those of his own children. He was a mortal with divine ancestors, who was raised by gods and even visited the Underworld, and eventually was apotheosised. He had huge physical power and in his twelve labours rid the world of a variety of monsters. He could personify strength, sexual prowess and sheer determination alongside a flawed humanity.

The drunken Herakles was a genre subject, with a stock pose which appears in various media, the personification of untrammelled pleasure and all that was contemptible about over-indulgence. This figure was often shown with Dionysos, and came to personify the frailty of man when stood alongside the gods.²¹⁰ In the fifth century Macrobius wrote:

And indeed it is not without good reason that the old-time makers of images represented Herakles as holding a drinking vessel, and sometimes as unsteady with drink; not only because the hero was said to have been given to drink but also because an old tale tells of his having crossed vast tracts of sea in a drinking vessel, as though in a ship.²¹¹

The drunken Herakles was a popular character in ancient Greek comedy. According to legend, Herakles challenged Dionysos to a drinking contest which the former lost, and so for a period of time he joined the *thiasos*.²¹² This tale is perhaps the inspiration for the Dionysiac procession depicted on the Mildenhall dish. On this plate, Herakles is being helped by two satyrs. One, whose upper body only is depicted, stands behind him, grasps him round the chest and pulls back to try and prevent him falling. His exposed shoulder

²¹⁰ R. Talgam and Z. Weiss, *The Mosaics of the House of Dionysos at Sepphoris* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2004), p. 51.

²¹¹ Herculem vero fictores veteres non sine causa cum poculo fecerunt, et nonnumquam cassabundum et ebrium, non solum quod is heros bibax fuisse perhibetur, sed etiam quod antiqua historia est Herculem poculo tamquam navigio ventis immensa maria transisse. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 5.21.16, in von Jan, ed., p. 488, trans. by Davies, p. 380.

²¹² Richard Stuart Teitz, 'The Antioch Mosaics', *Apollo*, 94, (1971), p. 441.

sports a spiral star. The other, seen from behind wearing a *nebris*, stands to the right and offers his left shoulder in support. The naked Herakles is tall and has a massive bull chest. He holds a piece of cloth with an embroidered border in his right hand, perhaps to suggest the robes he has lost due to his intoxicated state. He is pictured in similar fashion on a fifth to early sixth-century bowl depicting the *thiasos*, now part of the Dumbarton Oaks collection (plate 88).²¹³ This vignette also appeared on sarcophagi, which are discussed further in a later section of this chapter (plate 89). It is interesting to note that in all these representations the upper half only of the rear satyr is shown; perhaps this relates to the use of some form of pattern book, or the widespread use of silver plate bearing such imagery may have acted as a conduit for certain sorts of iconography. It indicates that stress was placed on conformity to type, and that the wealthy purchasers of luxury objects such as the Mildenhall Great Dish opted for an established iconographic formula. This shared visual culture based on classical myths had the effect of binding people of the Empire together over what was then a vast area.²¹⁴

Silver plate bearing Dionysiac imagery would have been part of a larger decorative scheme, and the drinking competition between Dionysos and Herakles was often portrayed in mosaics which, located in the dining area, would have mirrored the activities taking place over dinner. Two houses in Antioch have been found to contain mosaic floors depicting this scene. One dates to the early second century and also portrays a *silenos*, and the other is a third-century version set in a niche; both are in a triclinium (plates 90 and 91).²¹⁵ A enormous third-century mosaic at the House of Dionysos at Sepphoris in Galilee has this as its theme, and the actual contest is shown in the large central panel (plate 92). Inscriptions in Greek identify the two principals: Dionysos lounges on a couch as Herakles kneels and raises a wine cup to his mouth, while grouped around them are satyrs and maenads.²¹⁶ A smaller panel from this same pavement shows the paralytically drunk Herakles slumped on the ground, being tended by a maenad and a satyr (plate 93). One word is inscribed above

²¹³ Marvin C. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, vol. 1 (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1962), pp. 5-6, plates VI and VII.

²¹⁴ Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, p. 13.

²¹⁵ Becker and Kondoleon, *Arts of Antioch*, pp. 178-181.

²¹⁶ Talgam and Weiss, *House of Dionysos at Sepphoris*, pp. 48-54.

the group: ‘*MEΘH*’, which translates as ‘inebriation’. In this instance the group scene acts as the personification of drunkenness. Another panel, again titled *MEΘH*, portrays the drunkenness of Dionysos, but in contrast he is sitting upright without support, promoting the enjoyment of drinking in moderation (plate 94). As a god, he would not have succumbed to the weakness of the human Herakles. These different mosaic sites in Antioch and Sepphoris are hundreds of miles apart. It points to a shared culture over a very wide area, and the migration of classically educated families who created a demand for such representations, and the silver plate that matched them.

Because he personified the power of good over evil, Herakles made the transition from pagan to Christian icon. Images of his deeds appear in the predominantly Christian Via Latina catacomb frescoes in Rome, dating from the fourth century. They are in a chamber sandwiched between Christian burial sites, and they seem to have been painted by the same artists that decorated these latter rooms.²¹⁷ One of the lunettes contains a scene of Herakles bringing Alcestis back from Hades once he had tamed Cerberus, the hound of hell (plate 95), and this theme of life after death and resurrection chimes with similar Christian beliefs. Boethius (480-524), the sixth-century Christian philosopher, used his knowledge of classical myths and Platonic philosophy to demonstrate the path to a higher power. In his book *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, written as a dialogue between himself and Philosophy, who he personified as a woman, he cites Herakles as a Christian symbol:

To hold on high the sphere of heaven with never bending neck
Of all his many toils the last was, and most hard,
And for this last and greatest toil the heaven was his reward.
You gallant men pursue this way of high renown,
Why yield you? Overcome the earth, and you the stars shall crown.²¹⁸

Cassiodorus (485-585), successor to Boethius as *magister officiorum* at the court of the Arian Christian ruler, Theodoric the Great (454-526), recorded that this king planned to

²¹⁷ Jas Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 271-279. Also Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, p. 219.

²¹⁸ Vltimus caelum labor inreflexo sustulit collo pretiumque rursus vltimi caelum meruit laboris. Itē nunc fortes ubi celsa magni ducit exempli uia! Cur inertes terga nudatis? Superata tellus sidera donat. Boethius, ‘The Hero’s Path’, *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, 4.7. 29-35, in *Boethius*, ed. and trans. by H. F. Stewart (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1968), pp. 362-63.

build ‘a great basilica of Herakles at Ravenna’.²¹⁹ Herakles had become a Christian personification, and his deeds assumed allegorical meanings.

Herakles was also a popular allegorical figure in late Roman Britain. This might be attributed to the high presence of military families who were, in effect, holding the more distant outposts of the Empire, and to them he personified all that was heroic. The British Museum holds a third-century silver medallion found in Northumberland and probably part of a *trulla* handle (shallow bowl used as a ladle), which depicts the legend of Herakles and Antaeus (plate 96). Herakles stands behind the latter, grasping him round the waist and lifting him off the ground, as the only way he could overcome him was by removing his contact with the earth. In the background can be seen the legs of a seated draped woman who has been identified as Minerva, but is more likely to be Ge, the mother of Antaeus, who very significantly personified Earth.²²⁰ Below this scene are shown other of his labours. This wrestling contest is reproduced in a *piperatorium* from the Hoxne Hoard from Suffolk, only here Antaeus stands on the head of Ge, who is thus very appropriately beneath his feet (plate 97). This scene also appeared in a fourth-century mosaic pavement at Bramdean in Hampshire, now destroyed, and known to us only through drawings.²²¹ These are all examples of how his deeds were seen as models of spiritual strength overcoming obstacles. However, on the Mildenhall Great Dish we see the human facet of this character, and one with which the surrounding convivial diners could have more easily identified.

Dionysos, Herakles and weddings

Because of the qualities they personified, both Dionysos and Herakles had strong associations with nuptials, and the Mildenhall dish may have been intended as a gift to

²¹⁹ Quapropter in Rauennati urbe basilicae Herculis amplum opus aggressi. Cassiodorus, Letter from Theodoric to Agapetus, *Letters*, 1.6, in *Corpus Christianorum*, vol. 96 (1973), p. 17, trans. by Thomas Hodgkin, *The Letters of Cassiodorus* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1886), p. 148.

²²⁰ Toynbee says woman is standing and presumably Herakles’ patron, Minerva, in *Art in Britain under the Romans*, p. 304.

²²¹ D.J. Smith, ‘Mythological Figures and Scenes in Romano-British Mosaics’, in *Roman Life and Art in Britain*, ed. by Julian Munby and Martin Henig, 2 vols (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1977), vol I, p. 144.

celebrate a wedding. The images of unadulterated enjoyment, with dancing and drunkenness, personify the nuptial celebrations, and presage future entertainments in the dining room.

Dionysos's attribute of the vine was used as a metaphor for marriage by writers such as Virgil and Ovid, and later exploited by Christian writers such as John Chrysostom.²²² With his ability to personify fertility coupled with the pleasures of wine drinking, Dionysos remained the ideal god to preside over what became ostensibly Christian wedding festivities, and he was frequently invoked in epithalamia (nuptial songs or poems). In the sixth century, on the occasion of the wedding of Count Callinicus to Theophile, Dioscorus wrote:

Bridegroom, may your wedding be filled with the dancing of the Graces; may it ever seek the help of Wisdom after Beauty [...] You raise up the honey-sweet grape cluster, in its bloom of youth; Dionysus attends the summer of your wedding, bearing wine, love's adornment, with plenty for all.²²³

Like Dionysos, Herakles was also associated with weddings. He appears on a fourth-century gold glass bottom of a drinking vessel, now in the British Museum, standing between the bride and groom and acting as *pronubus*, the unifier and solemniser of the marriage (plate 98). The inscriptions read '*ACERENT INO FELICES BIBATIS*' and '*ORFITVS ET CONSTANTIA IN NOMINE HERCVLIS*', which Buckton translates as 'Orfitus and Constantia: live happily in the name of Herakles, Conqueror of the Underworld'.²²⁴ However, another translation may be 'Orfitus and Constantia, may you live/drink in happiness in the name of Hercules of Acerantia'.²²⁵ The function of this object and the hero's association with Dionysos and wine all point to this latter sentiment being

²²² Shorrock, *The Myth of Paganism*, p. 113.

²²³ Νυμφίε, σεῖο γάμοι χαρίτων πληθουσι χορεῖς, σωφροσύνης μετὰ κάλλους αἰεὶ μεθέπουσιν ἀρωγὴν [...] κυπρισμῶν νεαρῶν μελιδέα βότρυν αἰεῖρεις ἐκ σέθεν ἀμφεκόμισσε γάμων Διόνυσος ὀπώρην, οἶνον, ἔρωτος ἀγαλμα, μετ' εὐθηνίας πόρεπᾶσιν. Dioscorus, *Epithalamium for Count Callinicus* in MacCoull, ed. and trans., *Dioscorus*, p. 89.

²²⁴ Buckton suggests the most convincing reading is *Orfitus et Constantia. In nomine Herculis Acerentini felices vivatis*, in Buckton, ed., *Byzantium*, pp. 31-32.

²²⁵ Daniel Howells, 'Late Antique gold glass in the British Museum' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2011), pp. 145-146.

more apt. Herakles is mentioned in at least one of Dioscorus's epithalamia: 'I have seen you as another bridegroom [...] resembling Heracles in strength and bold to look upon'.²²⁶

These nuptial poems and songs were created in praise of the bride and groom, and as a prayer for prosperity. Menander, the fourth-century rhetor, was more blunt:

[...] for the bedroom speech is an exhortation to intercourse. So let us take up Herakles or some other figure who has shown courage in marriage, not indeed treating all Herakles' heroic deeds, but only his achievements in his unions with women or nymphs, so that the speech may give an impression of charm.²²⁷

When discussed in terms of a wedding gift or dining room vessel, the Mildenhall Great Dish needs to be considered in conjunction with some of the other objects from the Mildenhall Treasure. This hoard includes two smaller platters bearing imagery which echoes that on the larger dish and, although made by a different hand, their same beaded borders and shared subject matter ensure they match (plate 99). One depicts the figures of a satyr and maenad dancing, and on the other Pan and a maenad are shown playing musical instruments. At the top of the second plate, above the two principals, is the figure of a river personification, suggesting a rural location; in the foreground a fawn bends its nose to touch the head of a snake that wriggles towards it. Snakes were associated with maenads, and it was a widely held belief in Late Antiquity that deer hunted and killed them; this was transformed into a Christian allegory of Christ triumphing over Satan, or the soul battling with evil.²²⁸ These two companion plates indicate that the original owners were following current fashion in owning a set of matching silver, albeit on a relatively modest scale.

As can be seen, the Mildenhall Great Dish cannot be studied in isolation, as it is but one object from a group of items. In the Mildenhall Treasure there are six further dishes, eight

²²⁶ Νύμφιον ἄλλον ἴδον σε [...] ἵκελον Ἑρακλῆϊ μένος καὶ θάρσος ἰδέσθαι. Dioscorus, *Epithalamium on Zacharias* in MacCoull, ed. and trans., *Dioscorus*, pp. 123-4.

²²⁷ [...] γὰρ ὁ κατευαστικὸς προτροπὴ πρὸς τὴν συμπλοκὴν. ἐν τούτοις τοίνυν τὸν Ἑρακλέα παραλαμβάνωμεν καὶ ἕτερον εἴ τις ἀνδρείος περὶ γάμους γέγονεν, οὐ τῇ πάσῃ ἐπεξιόντες τοῦ Ἑρακλέος ἀλκῇ, ἀλλὰ τοῖς περὶ γάμων αὐτῶν καὶ γυναικῶ καὶ νυμφῶν πεπραγμένοις, ἵνα χάριτας ὁ λόγος ἔχειν δοκῇ. Menander Rhetor, *Division of Epideictic Speeches*, 2.405.23-29 in *Menander Rhetor*, ed and trans. by D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp.146-47.

²²⁸ J. Trilling, 'The Soul of the Empire: Style and Meaning in the Mosaic pavement of the Byzantine Imperial Palace in Constantinople', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 43 (1989), p. 59.

spoons and five ladles, some of which display evidence of pagan-Christian syncretism. These items appear to be a collection of domestic rather than ritual objects. Three of the spoons bear the *Chi-Rho* symbol and two have personal names, Pascentia and Papittedo, along with the word *VIVAS* – ‘may you live’ – which was a good luck invocation frequently used in Late Antiquity, often by Christians (plate 100). The most well-known example of this sentiment appears on the Projecta casket – *SECUNDE ET PROIECTA VIVATIS IN CHRISTO* – where the Christian message is fully spelled out (plate 101). It has been suggested that this casket might have been a wedding gift, and the same argument could apply to the Mildenhall Treasure.²²⁹ Decorative plates bearing Dionysiac imagery, coupled with more practical items, would have been most desirable to aristocratic newly-weds, who were expected to entertain both colleagues and friends in style.²³⁰

Thus far, Dionysos has been seen as a personification of conviviality, fertility and, along with Herakles, a bringer of nuptial bliss, but he could trigger further connotations. I next address the central marine imagery on the Mildenhall plate, and start with an epithalamium which twins Dionysos and Poseidon, who might be the subject of the central mask-face.

The Marine *Thiasos*

Strong Athanasius [...] I have beheld (you) as another new Dionysus; for truly those who look upon the wine, Love’s adornment, passing it closely in goblets to one another, have prayed to Poseidon the Nurturer for you, O bridegroom.²³¹

So wrote Dioscorus in his epithalamium for Athanasius, duke of the Thebaid, in c. 566-570. The strong link between Dionysos and Poseidon went back to ancient times, and they shared an attribute, the pine. Plutarch reasoned that it was the wood most suitable for shipbuilding and provided pitch and resin for waterproofing, hence its link to the god of the

²²⁹ Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure*, p. 33.

²³⁰ Katherine Dunbabin, ‘Dining’, in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. by G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), p. 409.

²³¹ Ἀθανάσιον [...] ὡς νέον ἄλλον ἴδον Διονύσιον’ ἀτρεκέως γὰρ ἀπρίξ ἐν δεπάρρδδιν ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοισιν ἰδόντες οἶνον, ἔρωτος ἄγαλμα, πολυτρεφεῖ Ποσιδῶι χερσὶν ἀειρόμενόν σεο, νυμφίε. Dioscorus, *Epithalamium for Athanasius* in MacCoull, ed. and trans., *Dioscorus*, pp. 86-87.

sea.²³² This same pitch was used to seal wine vessels, and pine resin was added to wine to sweeten it and add body, so thus it connected to Dionysos through the motif of the pine cone at the end of the *thyrsus*. By Late Antiquity, Poseidon started to lose his direct association with the sea and became conflated with Oceanos, who personified the waters of the world and was a very potent force. At the turn of the fifth century, in his *Address on Vainglory and How to Bring up Children*, John Chrysostom invoked his image thus:

Then, as the ambitious man who has brought them together enters in the sight of all, they stand up and as from a single mouth cry out [...] and they call him the Nile of gifts. Others, flattering him still more and thinking the simile of the Nile too mean, reject rivers and seas; and they instance the Ocean and say that he in his lavish gifts is what Ocean is among the waters, and they leave not a word of praise unsaid.²³³

The central head of Oceanos dominates the surrounding scenes on the Mildenhall dish, and is on a much larger scale than all of the figures in both *thiasoi* (plate 70). His eyes are noticeably crossed, and it is possible that this is deliberate. At that time many believed in an active eye. The science of vision was not properly understood and it was thought that sight was achieved by intromission, whereby rays from the object hit the eyes, or alternatively extramission where rays left the eyes, caressed the subject and then returned carrying an essence of the viewed item.²³⁴ Either way, vision involved a physical exchange, with the human body absorbing something of the object. This meant that representations of eyes had an added power, and were not to be trifled with, hence the concept of the evil eye. This was to become more noticeable later with the creation of icons, all of whom possess large staring eyes looking directly out in order to make contact with the viewer; later in Byzantine art, the faces of the apostles were shown frontally apart

²³² Plutarch, *Moralia*, 675.

²³³ Εἴτα μεταξύ τῶν πάντων μείβονι παραβάλλουσιν αὐτὸν ποταμῷ τὸ τῆς φιλοτιμίας ἄδρὸν καὶ ἐκκεχυμένον τῇ τῶν Νειλῶν ὑδάτων ἀφθονία συγκρίνοντες, καὶ Νεῖλον αὐτὸν εἶναι φασὶ τῶν δωρεῶν. Οἱ δὲ μᾶλλον αὐτὸν κολακεύοντες μικρὸν νομίσαντες εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ ὑπόδειγμα, τὸ τοῦ Νεῖλου, ποταμοὺς μὲν ἀγιάσι καὶ θαλάσσας, τὸν δὲ Ωκεανὸν εἰς μέσον ἀγαγόντες, τοῦτο αὐτὸν εἶναι φασιν, ὅπερ ἐκρίνον ἐν ὕδασι, τοῦτον ἐν ταῖς φιλοτιμίαις· καὶ σὸδὲν ὅλως εἶδος εὐφημίας ἀπολιμπάνουσιν. John Chrysostom, *Ἑλληνες Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας. Τομ. 30*, in in *San Juan Crisóstomo: De la vanagloria y de la educación de los hijos; Homilia sobre Job*, ed. by Julio Fantini (Salamanca: Colegio de San Estanislao, 1959), p. 9. *De inani gloria*, 4, trans. by Max L.W. Laistner, *An address on Vainglory*, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1951), pp. 87-88.

²³⁴ Daryl Lehoux, 'Observers, Objects and the Embedded Eye: or, Seeing and Knowing in Ptolemy and Galen', *Isis*, 98.3 (2007), pp. 451-52.

from Judas, who was shown in profile in order to avoid possession.²³⁵ On this dish the gaze of the god is averted, perhaps to avoid engaging directly with the observer who might then be forced to constantly avert their own eyes in deference.

In this context, the Mildenhall head can be compared to a mosaic panel from Ain-Témouchent, near Sétif in north-eastern Algeria (*terminus post quem* late fourth century AD), which contains a huge head of Oceanos with lobster-claws and antennae on his forehead (plate 102). He is shown with the same seaweedy beard and full lips, and flanked by nereids, but the most noticeable feature is a similar pair of large staring eyes which here look straight out. Beneath is an inscription which confirms that this mask has a protective magical force, resident within this bold stare, against hostile superhuman beings.²³⁶

invida sidereo rumpantur pectora visu . cedat et in nostris / lingua proterva locis
hoc studio superamus avos gratumque / renidet aedibus in nostris summus apex
operis . feliciter.

Let envious breasts be burst by starry sight and let the pert tongue yield in our
places with this study/enthusiasm. We surpass our ancestors and there glitters
pleasingly in our halls the very summit/peak of work.²³⁷

Bedazzlement was a characteristic quality of the gods. This image had specific apotropaic powers invested in its gaze that guarded against misfortunes engendered by envy; it has been dated to no earlier than the late fourth century and thus demonstrates the continuing belief in the influence of Oceanos. The representation of Oceanos on the Mildenhall Great Dish may have carried similar protective powers, guarding the owner of the plate and bringing good fortune.

Yet another mosaic representation of Oceanos, this time third century and from Carthage in North Africa, is in the British Museum and it has the seaweed beard, plump lips and interestingly the same staring eyes, drooping down at the outside edge and with a squint (plate 103). It must not be forgotten that Oceanos was the god of both salt and fresh water, and so his presence in a more arid country might also be associated with need for water. It

²³⁵ Csapo, 'Riding the Phallus', p. 256.

²³⁶ Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 152.

²³⁷ Translation by Melissa Neckar, Kings College London, 14 July 2010.

has been suggested that the Mildenhall Treasure originated from this part of the world. If this were the case, then the marine imagery on the Mildenhall Great Dish could have had an additional significance and carried a prayer for much-needed rain.

Entangled in the hair and beard of Oceanos on the dish are four dolphins. This was creature closely connected to Dionysos, as it represented his triumph over the pirates of the Tyrrhenian Sea. After they tried to hold him captive he turned them into dolphins:

[...] your enemies threw off their human shape and intelligent mind and changed their looks to senseless dolphins wallowing in the sea – still they make revel for Dionysos even in the surge, skipping like tumblers in the calm water.²³⁸

The contemporary viewer would certainly have made the connection between dolphins and Dionysos. The dolphin motif is found within various hoards of silver plate, and the Mildenhall Treasure contains a set of five ‘ladles’, actually spoons with deep round bowls and straight handles, which depict them (plate 104). Like various other motifs of pagan imagery, the Dionysiac dolphin managed to cross over to Christian iconography. The Hoxne Hoard includes a set of twenty ladles on each of which a pair of outward facing dolphins frame a circle containing a monogram cross (plate 105). Similarly, on the intrados of the western arch that opens from the chancel into the apse of the sixth century basilica of S. Vitale in Ravenna, there is a series of medallions with busts of Christ, twelve apostles and two saints framed by green, entwined dolphins (plate 106). The dolphin also frequently represented the whale in the story of Jonah, and came to symbolise salvation and resurrection. These examples demonstrate how completely a once-pagan motif could be absorbed into Christian decorative art.

Like the dolphins in his hair, the image of Oceanos himself was appropriated by the Christian community. He appears in the bottom section of an apse mosaic in Hosios David, Latomou Monastery, Thessaloniki, depicting Christ as a young man, which has been dated

²³⁸ Βροτένθου δὲ φυὴν καὶ ἐχέφρονα βουλὴν δυσμενέες ρίφαντες ἀμειβομένσι προαώπου ἀφραδέες δελφινες ἐνιπλιόυσιν θαλάσσει· εἰσέτι κωμάζουσι καὶ ἐν ῥοθίοις Διονυσῶ, οἷα καθιστητήρες ἐπισκαίρουσι γαλήνη. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, 44.248, in Rouse, ed. and trans., pp 315-6.

to c. 500 AD (plate 107).²³⁹ In this context, he represents the waters flowing into the world from the Four Rivers of Paradise at Christ's feet.

Life and death

It is possible that the representations on the Mildenhall Great Dish could have been perceived as an allegory of the afterlife. Some Dionysiac imagery could act as the allegory of a better life after death, and thus scenes of the *thiasos* frequently appeared on sarcophagi. Dionysos himself personified life and death; life in enjoyment, and death in the way that in the early days of his cult, followers gloried in wilful slaughter. He was always associated with the afterlife, and in the earliest texts that describe him, the fifth century BC Herodotos equated him to Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld and the dead.²⁴⁰ Osiris was traditionally depicted holding a crook and a flail (plate 108), and on the Mildenhall dish it can be seen that this link was maintained in Dionysiac imagery; the *silenos* holds a flail, which was a ritual object utilised in the cult of Dionysos, and the crook appears as the *pedum* held by the god's male followers. In the fourth century BC, Dionysos was associated with Hades, god of the underworld, a logical connection as one of the many myths about him tells how he went to the underworld to reclaim his deceased mother, Semele. Dionysos was also conflated with Orpheus, who too had visited the underworld (unsuccessfully, to fetch his wife Eurydice), and was said to have shared the founding of the Dionysiac Mysteries with him.²⁴¹ Through these associations Dionysos could act as an allegorical figure, symbolising the link between life and death.

This was a positive rather than a negative aspect of his persona, as by Late Antiquity his imagery was associated with pleasure, rather than carnage resulting from wild rampages, and both he and Herakles were understood to be a force for good. The pagan emperor Julian I wrote to Themistios (317 - c.390), the rhetorician, philosopher and statesman:

²³⁹ Efthymios N. Tsigaridas, *Latomou Monastery (The Church of Hosios David)* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1998), p. 35.

²⁴⁰ Herodotos, *Histories*, 2.123.

²⁴¹ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1.3.2.

You say that God has placed me in the same position as Heracles and Dionysus of old who, being at once philosophers and kings, purged almost the whole earth and sea of the evils that infested them.²⁴²

Dionysos therefore became connected with the idea of a happier life in the netherworld, and his imagery sometimes carried connotations of the resurrection.²⁴³ This was not a Christian version of life after death with resurrection on the Day of Judgement, but more an understanding that the followers of Dionysos were promised a life of eternal enjoyment in the Other World.²⁴⁴ There was no promise of an improvement in status, just what seemed like a continuous party.²⁴⁵ During the early part of Late Antiquity representations of Dionysos and his retinue started to appear frequently on the panels of stone coffins, and the *thiasos* became a popular decorative choice for sarcophagi.²⁴⁶ Initiates of his cult would have believed that because he had saved his mother Semele from the underworld, he could perform a similar service for them. He was known to be 'twice-born', as during gestation he was carried first by his mother, and then on her death sewn into the thigh of his father Zeus, until he was fully formed, which explains his association with resurrection. The burgeoning popularity of Dionysiac themes on sarcophagi from the second century indicated a new kind of belief or hope for the future, and this continued with the rise of Christianity. Further examples of syncretism were the evergreens such as ivy which appeared on tombs, and pine cones were employed in funerary art as a symbol of immortality.²⁴⁷

It is possible that some of the Dionysiac images depicted on the Mildenhall Great Dish refer to this idealised and other-worldly future, as here there is a Dionysiac *thiasos* coupled with a marine *thiasos* and a personification of Oceanos. Imagery relating to Oceanos and

²⁴² ἐν ταύτῃ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τετάχθαι με τῇ μερίδα λέγων, ἐν ἣ πρότερον Ἡρακλῆς καὶ Διόνυσος ἐυενέσθην φιλοσοφοῦντες ὁμοῦ καὶ βασιλεύοντες καὶ πᾶσαν σχεδὸν τῆς ἐπιπολαζούσης κακίας ἀνακαθαίρομενοι γῆν τε καὶ θάλατταν. Julian, *Letter to Themistios* in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, ed. and trans. by Wilmer Cave Wright, 3 vols (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1913-23), vol. 2, pp. 202-5.

²⁴³ *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 631.

²⁴⁴ Martin Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 131.

²⁴⁵ Susan Guettel Cole, 'Voices from beyond the Grave: Dionysus and the Dead', in *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. by Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Fararone (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 293.

²⁴⁶ Alan Cameron says this type of imagery may have reflected family festivals taking place at the tomb, in Alan Cameron, *Last Pagans of Rome*, p. 699.

²⁴⁷ Alan Cameron, *Last Pagans of Rome*, pp. 727-30.

his followers also had connotations of the journey to the underworld: when Odysseus wanted to visit Hades he asked Circe, ‘who can pilot us on that journey? Who has ever reached the house of death in a black ship?’ She told him to, ‘beach your vessel hard by the Ocean’s churning shore and make your own way down to the mouldering House of Death.’²⁴⁸ Furthermore, the sea monsters on the lids of sarcophagi have been seen as suggesting the journey to the Isles of the Blest.²⁴⁹ In this context, the iconography of this plate may refer to death and the afterlife, as well as joy and pleasure in life.

It is notable that the classical imagery used on funerary objects was considered to be equally suitable for tableware and display objects. So, for example, an undated late-Roman marble statuette of Dionysos found buried with its owner at Spoonley Wood villa, Gloucestershire, UK, and now in the British Museum, would have been equally at home on display in the dining room or reception hall of a villa (plate 109). This standing Dionysos is shown leaning against a vine-covered tree trunk, kantharos in hand and a panther at his feet looking up at him. This may have originally been a decorative object, but because of associations with the afterlife it must have been considered to be an appropriate burial item, and treated as such. There was no specifically designated funerary imagery prior to the arrival of Christianity.

All of this reflects a completely different view of life compared to today. In the Late Antique period, everyone was ‘religious’ in some way, and there was no recognition of the concept of atheism as we understand it. Religion permeated every aspect of daily life, and there was a familiarity with the gods as stories of their bickering and love affairs abounded. The line between this world and that of the gods was blurred, and there was not the divide between life and death that we have in twenty-first century Western society. Until the introduction of Christianity, religion was based around group observance and the performance of rituals to appease the gods, rather than introspection by the individual, and the concept of one god as a loving father. However, Christian imagery which was to supplant that of Dionysos on sarcophagi did not appear on domestic silver plate. For

²⁴⁸ Homer, *Odyssey*, 10.550-563.

²⁴⁹ Fergusson, *Religions of the Roman Empire*, p. 138.

example, Jonah and the whale was a popular Christian subject for funerary objects, church mosaic pavements (plate 110) and freestanding statuary, but it was not reproduced on silver in the home.²⁵⁰ This is possibly because it might have been perceived as blasphemous, or the subject matter was not considered suitable for a domestic setting, but the tendency of the private individual to choose imagery from the classical repertoire remained.

This continuing popularity of pagan imagery on silver plate reflected a desire for continuity. Because they had received an education based on *paideia* and wished to maintain the status quo, the aristocracy continued to favour pagan practices and imagery long after the introduction of Christianity as the official religion. In this period of syncretism between the old religions of Rome and the new Christianity, it would have been extremely advantageous to have imagery which was open to more than one interpretation by a viewer, depending on their beliefs. Silver with pagan representations such as the Mildenhall dish could be freely displayed as the owner could, if desired, argue that it held allegorical meanings with a Christian message.

To summarise, this chapter focuses on Dionysiac imagery, using as its case study the Mildenhall Great Dish. This was the most popular form of imagery on Late Antique silver, and it also appeared in other media such as mosaics and textiles, and in quite different contexts, for example on sarcophagi. Dionysiac imagery on tombs gives an indication of what those in Late Antiquity envisaged might occur after death. On the plate, Dionysos and his followers not only personified pleasure and conviviality, but further, group scenes of the *thiasoi* could be read as an allegory of a much desired afterlife. Dionysos himself was a personification of fertility, and although his companion Herakles on this plate represents the frailty of man, elsewhere he can stand for heroic virtues. Both of them were invoked at nuptials because of these desirable qualities. The central medallion containing Oceanos could be viewed as part of the overall theme of enjoyment in both life and death, but the bold stare of this god suggests he might have imbued this object with apotropaic power. Furthermore, despite its apparently pagan iconography, it could have held a

²⁵⁰ See Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, pp. 152-156 on representations of Jonah.

Christian ethos. Therefore, this dish is not just a scene of merrymaking, but to the contemporary viewer it would have been alive with a variety of meanings and connotations.

Chapter 4 - The Art of Dining

Continuing the theme of the domestic role of personifications, in Late Antiquity the dining room was where the public and private areas of upper-class life collided. The rich, those in power, entertained both friends and clients at lavish meals, and the surrounding décor was thus very important. Silver plate was part of this, which raises the question of the role it played within the decorative scheme and how personifications may have operated at the dinner table.

In the previous chapter, I described how Dionysiac imagery on silver plate could be viewed as a form of allegory, and the ways in which individuals from the *thiasos* could act as personifications. Most of the surviving vessels bearing these types of representations were associated in some way with drinking in the dining room, and so I now focus on eating, where again silver plate with figurative imagery that included personifications functioned in the serving of a meal. My subject is a small, fourth to fifth-century *piperatorium* from the Hoxne Hoard, known as the ‘Empress’ pepper pot (plate 111). This is an apt case study for a number of reasons: it can be located at the dining table; it is polyvalent and provides a wide variety of connotations; it offers the viewer a choice of meaning depending on their personal ethos; and it has an unquestionable provenance.

I will explore the possible identities of this object, all of which will have a bearing on its function as a personification. I will show that because of the costume and distinctive hairstyle, it could portray an aristocratic woman. It may personify a generic empress in the manner of empress steelyard weights of the period, or it may represent a specific empress. I will try to ascertain whether it might depict Mary, mother of Christ, because an established image of her had not then been formed, and she was on occasion shown as a Roman princess. It is known that the owners of the Hoxne Hoard were Christian, and so the pepper pot would then have had religious significance, especially when placed alongside other items of tableware from the same hoard, some of which bear Christian inscriptions.

Alternatively, the Empress pepper pot may have had mythological associations, as although the Roman Empire was officially Christian by the late fourth/early fifth century, pagan worship and beliefs continued alongside the state religion. There are arguably associations with the earth goddess Ge, and as part of a lavish table setting it might have been seen to personify wealth and abundance. Because of the excellence of the material and workmanship this was a high status object, and its owners would have been wealthy, probably well-educated and from the Roman élite. It would have been a very prestigious piece to have standing on the dinner table, and could have been a conversation piece.

I start with a description and then examine the iconography of the pepper pot, firstly as representing a person and secondly as a personification. I finish with its role as part of the larger work of art that was the Late Antique dining room.

The Empress pepper pot

The *piperatorium* is 10.3 cm high and weighs 107.9 g.²⁵¹ It is hollow and made of ninety-seven percent pure silver which has been extensively gilded. It depicts the half-figure of a woman with a very elaborate hairstyle now called the *scheitelzopf* style, which is held in place by four hairpins, three at the front and a fourth on the top centre of her head. She wears a tunic with patterned borders over a sleeved undergarment. This is a version of the male Roman tunic called a *dalmatica*, which is known by the generic name of dalmatic, and it became fashionable for women in the late-third and early-fourth centuries.²⁵² This garment was worn indoors, and a *palla* (mantle) thrown over the top when going outside. It has been suggested by Catherine Johns that this apparel might symbolise her private, domestic role.²⁵³ However, as élite dining often had a public function, the figure is simply appropriately dressed for her place in the dining room. Round her neck is a large beaded necklace, and she wears sizeable almond-shaped earrings which cover the entire area of the

²⁵¹ Johns, *Hoxne Late Roman Treasure*, p. 219.

²⁵² A.T. Croom, *Roman Clothing and Fashion* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2000, repr. 2002), p. 83.

²⁵³ Johns, *Hoxne Late Roman Treasure*, p. 83.

ears. The index and middle finger of the right hand point to a *rotulus* (scroll) held in the left hand.

A rope motif runs around the bottom of the bust, and the figure is fixed to a separate rectangular base on four small baluster feet, which contains the dispensing mechanism for the spice (plate 112). Two heart-shaped apertures flank a central turning catch attached to an internal disc, which has two large arcs and two sets of perforations cut out from it. This disc can be turned to three positions: open to allow for filling with ground pepper, set to sprinkle or completely closed. A *piperatorium* in the form of an ibex from the same hoard also has these distinctive apertures, as does a third-century spice box, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.²⁵⁴ The shape may refer to Dionysiac imagery, which uses a heart shape to represent ivy leaves. For example, a frieze around a dish from the third-century Caubiac treasure includes a maenad mask with heart-shaped leaves of ivy in her hair (plate 113). This small detail might have linked the Empress pepper pot decoratively to other vessels in the dining room that were used in conjunction with wine, and which could have borne imagery relating to Dionysos, such as vines and ivy.

We do not know who this small bust was supposed to represent, a person or personification, but there are a number of possible options, and I start with a brief study of two specific characters who are contenders.

The Empress pepper pot as a person

Within the nearly two hundred small gold and silver objects (excluding coins) found in the Hoxne Hoard, the *Chi-Rho* appears on twenty items, encompassing jewellery, ladles and spoons; this indicates that the owners were of the Christian faith. If the Empress pepper pot was intended to represent a well-known woman, the most plausible subject would have been the Empress Helena (c. between 250 and 257 – between 330 and 336), mother of Constantine the Great who established Christianity as the official religion of the Roman

²⁵⁴ For details of the latter see *Trésors d'Orfèvrerie Gallo-Romains*, ed. by François Baratte and Kenneth Painter (Paris: Musée du Luxembourg, 1989), p. 220.

Empire. Helena was the first imperial Christian woman, and famed for her discovery of the True Cross in Jerusalem. Her memory entered Byzantine culture and was perpetuated by imperial women who came after, and who replicated her Christian acts.²⁵⁵ The iconography of the *piperatorium* complies with the way she was depicted at that time. Helena lived to the age of eighty, and was depicted with mature features on coins, and the pepper pot's face is also that of an older woman (plate 114). Some early coin portraits show Helena without a diadem, and others depict her with a similar hairstyle to that of the silver vessel (plates 115 and 116). Additionally, there are numerous fourth-century images of women wearing the dalmatic and they tend to be Christian.²⁵⁶ The pepper pot uses the two forefingers of her right hand to indicate the *rotulus* held in her left; it is therefore important and may represent some kind of religious text. All these factors signal that the Hoxne pepper pot could be a representation of Helena, a model Roman woman and a Christian.

The other notable female whose popularity was developing at that time was Mary, mother of Jesus, but it is unlikely that the pepper pot was intended to represent her, although initially this seems possible. The iconography for the Virgin Mary showing her with blue robes and red shoes had not then been established, and some representations portrayed her in imperial dress. In the upper register of the fifth-century mosaic of the Ascension at the apse end of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome, for instance, a figure believed to represent Mary portrays her as an aristocratic woman, *Maria Regina* (plate 117).²⁵⁷ She is dressed in robes of gold, wears large earrings and has a form of the *scheitelzopf* hairstyle, complete with three jewelled hairpins to hold it in place. Furthermore she wears a dalmatic, so there are resemblances to the pepper pot. In one of his sermons, the fifth-century Pope Leo I made especial reference to Mary being 'of the royal blood of David's race', and thus it was perhaps natural that at the moment of the Annunciation she should be depicted dressed like

²⁵⁵ Leslie Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', in *Women, Men and Eunuchs*, ed. by Liz James (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 61-62.

²⁵⁶ Croom, *Roman Clothing and Fashion*, p. 83.

²⁵⁷ Mary Stroll, 'Maria Regina: Papal Symbol', in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Anne Duggan (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997), p. 175.

the daughter of a king.²⁵⁸ The Maria Regina version of the Virgin also appears elsewhere: for example, on a mosaic that was originally part of the decoration of an oratory at St. Peter's, and is now in S. Marco, Florence; on the icon of Madonna della Clemenza in S. Maria in Trastevere in Rome (plate 118); and as part of a mid-sixth century fresco belonging to the third layer of the 'palimpsest' wall in S. Maria Antiqua.²⁵⁹ In all these cases Mary is dressed as a Byzantine empress with a large jewelled necklace and crown with *pendilia*, so there is a precedent for portraying her garbed as an imperial figure. However, the church and the dining room are two vastly different types of space, and it would have been considered sacrilegious to use her likeness in the context of the dining room. It is therefore extremely unlikely that the Hoxne *piperatorium* is a representation of the Virgin Mary.

The Empress pepper pot as a personification

The Hoxne pepper pot is more likely to be the personification of a high-status female, rather than the portrait bust of a specific woman. This can be partly attributed to one of the most noticeable features of this small statuette, its ostentatious *scheitelzopf* hairstyle, indicative of an aristocrat (plate 119). The hairdo of an élite female had huge significance, signalling not only prosperity and beauty, but also virtue. Hairdressing scenes appeared frequently on women's tomb reliefs.²⁶⁰ A complicated style connoted a woman with time and wealth enough to have maidservants to dress her hair. Empresses created elaborate coiffeurs so they might appear fashionable and wealthy, while also endeavouring to suggest they possessed the qualities of the ideal Roman woman. Public images of women were used to invoke the other private world, and emphasise the importance of family life as the foundation of imperial stability.²⁶¹ Thus their distinctive hairstyles were making political, social and dynastic references, and women who chose to imitate them were consciously or

²⁵⁸ Joanne Deane Sieger, 'Visual Metaphor as Theology: Leo the Great's Sermons on the Incarnation and the Arch Mosaics at S. Maria Maggiore', *Gesta* 26.2 (1987), pp. 84-86.

²⁵⁹ Suzanne Spain, "'The Promised Blessing': The Iconography of the Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore", *The Art Bulletin* 61.4 (1979), p. 530.

²⁶⁰ Elizabeth Bartman, 'Hair and the Artifice of Roman Female Adornment', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 105.1 (2001), p. 5.

²⁶¹ Nathalie Boymel Kampen, 'Between Public and Private: Women as Historical Subjects in Roman Art', in *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. by Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill, NC: University of Northern Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 219-220.

unconsciously signalling their nationalism and allegiance to the imperial family.²⁶²

Because of the ornate style of the hair, the pepper pot certainly personified an élite woman and possibly a generic empress type.

When the Hoxne Hoard was first unearthed, this *piperatorium* was identified as ‘the bust of a late-Roman Empress’ because of its resemblance to bronze steelyard-weights of the period (plate 120).²⁶³ It has been argued that in Late Antiquity these weights were personifications of a generic empress type, as the difference between a representation of an empress and a personification could at times be indistinguishable.²⁶⁴ So, if it was supposed to depict an empress, the pepper pot might act as a personification in a similar way to these weights, rather than being the bust of a specific imperial personage. Bronze counter-weights, which were made for use with steelyards, were introduced by the Romans, and were in the form of busts depicting either an empress, the goddess Athena-Minerva or, less commonly, an emperor.²⁶⁵ Although the empress weights are larger and more crudely constructed than the pepper pot, there are stylistic resemblances. Like the pepper pot, the weights tend to depict the upper torso down to around the waist area, resting on a plinth, and the figure often has the same Late Antique stare, wears a necklace and holds a *rotulus*. They were used throughout the Empire, and symbolised an imperial structure capable of setting and maintaining a system of fixed weights and measures. Despite the absence of women in public life in this predominantly misogynist society, a representation of the empress could carry an authority of its own as an assurance of accuracy and good measure.²⁶⁶ Because of its resemblance to these weights, the pepper pot may have connoted similar high values.

Empresses were frequently depicted on coinage of this era, and there is a close resemblance between the pepper pot and these numismatic imperial female portraits, which show a

²⁶² Diana E.E. Kleiner and Susan B. Matheson, eds, ‘Introduction; her parents gave her the name Clavdia’, in *Clavdia II: Women in Roman Art and Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), pp. 11-12.

²⁶³ Roger Bland and Catherine Johns, *The Hoxne Treasure: an Illustrated Introduction* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), pp. 25-26.

²⁶⁴ Liz James, ‘Who’s that girl; Personifications of the Byzantine empress’ in ed. Entwistle, *Through a Glass Brightly*, p. 52.

²⁶⁵ G. Vikan, ‘Weights’, *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 2194.

²⁶⁶ Judith Herrin, ‘The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium’, *Past and Present*, 169 (2000), p. 9.

profile female head with an ornate hairstyle. Representations of empresses on coins symbolised the continuation of a dynasty, the health of the nation and the virtues of family life.²⁶⁷ We do not know where the Hoxne pepper pot was manufactured, but it is possible that the silversmith chose to copy coins and/or weights, both of which were portable and ubiquitous, when creating this vessel, which by contrast is today unique.²⁶⁸ Conversely, by copying this type of imperial imagery, the maker reveals that in acting as a type of ‘pattern book’, these coins and weights were therefore an extremely efficient form of imperial propaganda through art.

Though there are a few other examples of figurative *piperatoria* from this period, none resembles the Hoxne Empress. Some are in the form of a chubby boy. The British Museum holds a third-century pepper pot modelled on a sleeping African slave, as well as the Hoxne Herakles and Antaeus pepper pot. The only comparable objects are not *piperatoria* but a pair of silver chair-ends in the form of empress busts, now in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Trier, and dated to the same period (plate 121). Each half-figure rests on a large leaf and holds her right arm across the body, elbow tucked into her *palla* in philosophical fashion. The key similarity to the Empress pepper pot is the hairstyle, as dress and jewellery differ, the figures are not gilded, and stylistically they look different.²⁶⁹ They were placed on the arms of a chair and their role could have been ceremonial, akin to that of the Esquiline tyche statuettes, discussed in Chapter Six. The Roman Empire was a patriarchal society and yet, as has been demonstrated by all these disparate objects, weights, coins and chair ornaments, the image of an empress personified an official, legitimising authority, and could symbolise both national and private dynastic continuity. It is therefore possible that the Empress pepper pot would have carried resonances of this power.

This *piperatorium* might be a representation of ‘wealth-bringing woman’, a definition coined by Henry Maguire to describe the generic image of a personification in the form of a

²⁶⁷ Kampen, ‘Between Public and Private’ in Pomeroy, *Women’s History*, p. 242.

²⁶⁸ Personal communication, Richard Hobbs, Curator of Romano-British Collections, British Museum, London, 25 June, 2008.

²⁶⁹ For details see Peter La Baume, *Römisches Kunstgewerbe* (Braunschweig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1964), pp. 230-33.

female bust, which appeared in many places and a variety of media, including textiles.²⁷⁰ Late Antique examples have been preserved in Coptic fabrics from Egypt, dating from the fourth century onwards. The Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, holds a square of tapestry with a propitious portrait which is thought to have originally been part of a curtain or wall-hanging (plate 122). A rosy-cheeked woman looks directly forward, and bleached white wool serves to emphasise her protective stare. The inner border represents a garland, and roses and leaves fill the outer border. There is no clear indication of who she was supposed to represent, but this figure appeared on fabrics with a range of uses including as an attachment to clothing, where it would have had an apotropaic as well as decorative function. Another example in the same museum is a sleeve band with a propitious portrait and flower buds (plate 123), and again the large eyes are emphasised. Maguire states that some of these busts may have been intended to personify the earth goddess, Ge, but they could also have other identities such as the Hearth, or Good Fortune.²⁷¹ He suggests that this generic image carries with it the beneficial associations of all wealth-bringing personifications. The Hoxne pepper pot has a marked wide-eyed stare and the eyes and sockets are gilded; it may therefore have been designed to represent a generic personification which carried with it good fortune.

Its function must not be overlooked. It was designed to contain and dispense pepper, then a costly and highly desirable spice. The vessel could have dispensed other spices, but pepper had long been a favourite with the Romans, who used it on all types of foodstuff, so a container made of gilded silver would have been appropriate for this luxury condiment. By Late Antiquity, pepper had become a form of currency, and so prized that in 408 Alaric (395-410), leader of the Visigoths who were blockading the city of Rome, was paid a ransom which included three thousand pounds of pepper.²⁷² Of the nearly five hundred recipes compiled by the Roman gastronome Apicius, and published in the late fourth/early fifth-century cookery book *De Re Coquinaria*, over ninety percent required the addition of

²⁷⁰ Maguire, 'Mantle of Earth', *Illinois Classical Studies* (1987), p. 227.

²⁷¹ Maguire, 'Mantle of Earth', *Illinois Classical Studies* (1987), p. 227.

²⁷² J. Innes Miller, *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire: 29BC to AD 641* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 25.

spices, predominantly pepper. It was even added to wine to produce a spiced beverage.²⁷³ According to an archaeobotanical survey, pepper was not adopted in civilian households but tended to be associated with military sites, so this may indicate that the owners of the pepper pot were connected to the army.²⁷⁴

Its very function may have carried associations with Ge. The Greek herbal of Dioskorides, *De Materia Medica*, prescribed the addition of pepper to a variety of medicinal potions and ointments as ‘an easer of pain and healing’, as well recommending it as an appetiser in sauces.²⁷⁵ The *Herbal of Apuleius*, thought to have been prepared from a Greek original in the fourth century, included prayers and incantations invoking Mother Earth.²⁷⁶

Earth, divine goddess, Mother Nature [...] Whatsoever herb thy power dost produce, give, I pray, with goodwill to all nations to save them and grant me this my medicine. Come to me with thy powers, and howsoever I may use them, may they have good success [...] Those who rightly receive these herbs from me, do thou make them whole, goddess, I beseech thee.²⁷⁷

This quotation shows there was a belief that herbs (which included what we today term ‘spices’) were a gift of the earth goddess, who endowed them with healing powers. Images of the ‘wealth-bringing woman’ could connote Ge, which was why they had apotropaic powers. The appearance of the pepper pot is similar to this characterisation of the goddess, and in addition it would have contained a precious spice which came from Ge. Although there is no reason to suppose it was a ritual item, because of these associations this distinctive *piperatorium* could have seemed a very potent object to contemporary diners who chose to view it this way.

The personification of Ge as ‘wealth-bringing woman’ was frequently represented by a well-dressed female figure bearing a crescent shaped shawl filled with fruit, which

²⁷³ John Edwards, *The Roman Cookery of Apicius* (London: Random Century Ltd, 1988, repr. 1990), p. 2.

²⁷⁴ Corrie Bakels and Stefanie Jacomet, ‘Access to Luxury Foods in Central Europe during the Roman Period: The Archaeobotanical Evidence’, *World Archaeology*, 34.3 (2003), p. 553.

²⁷⁵ *The Greek Herbal of Dioskorides*, 2.189.

²⁷⁶ C. Singer, ‘The Herbal in Antiquity and Its Transmission to Later Ages’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 47 (1927), p. 38.

²⁷⁷ Pseudo-Apuleius, *Herbarium Apulei Platonici Madaurensis*, trans. by C. Singer in ‘The Herbal in Antiquity and Its Transmission to Later Ages’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 47 (1927), p. 48. Latin text unavailable.

appeared on mosaics, textiles, and silver. This figure appeared on jewellery too, an example being the Richmond pendant now in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (plate 124). Likewise, a silver plate found in Russia and formerly in the Alin collection (present location unknown) depicts just such a woman (plate 125). Her hands are held out, each clasping the end of a huge scarf which contains produce, and ranged along the top are eleven fruits including two pomegranates and an ear of corn. A vine leaf hangs over the centre of the scarf, flanked by bunches of grapes. She wears some form of dalmatic over an undertunic. On her head is a large wreath, and she sports big dangling earrings in the form of grape clusters. The presence of stamps on the underside date the dish to AD 567-78. She was originally identified as Euthemia or Abundantia, that is Prosperity or Abundance.²⁷⁸ However, this figure more plausibly represents Ge, as she has been found actually named as such on mosaics in a fifth-century villa in Hebron, and three sixth-century churches in Jordan.²⁷⁹ The Hoxne pepper pot holds a scroll rather than produce, and therefore she does not directly represent Ge, but situated in the dining room of a wealthy family surrounded by a lavish spread of food and wine, she could have been identified with the bounty of Ge in her guise of 'wealth-bringing woman'.

This *piperatorium* was but one object in a very valuable hoard of small items, and it is reasonable to suppose that originally it might have been part of a collection of silverware which included larger vessels. Élite dining involved pre-determined rituals and rankings, and so the choice of silverware was a careful and deliberate one. It was commonplace for wealthy households to own two large sets of silverware, *argentum escarium* for eating and *argentum potorium* for drinking.²⁸⁰ A large third-century mosaic from the House of the Buffet Supper in Antioch (plate 126) pictures all the courses of a meal laid out in order around the edge of a *stibadium*. It depicts the full range of silver vessels needed, from the very large *kraters* to the smallest eggcups. Interestingly the silver looks rather tarnished,

²⁷⁸ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 39.

²⁷⁹ Christine Kondoleon, 'A Gold Pendant in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), pp. 307-308; Maguire, 'Mantle of Earth', p. 223.

²⁸⁰ David Sherlock, 'Silver and Silversmithing' in *Roman Crafts*, ed. by Donald Strong and David Brown, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 1976), p. 11.

and it has been suggested that the Romans preferred their silverware to be in this state.²⁸¹ In ancient Greece, silver, and in particular gilded silver, was allowed to tarnish until it was almost black, to provide a stark contrast to any gold detailing. One can equate it to our modern preference for retaining a green patina on bronze.²⁸² The British Museum restricts the frequency of cleaning silver for conservation reasons, and the Hoxne pepper pot certainly looks strikingly different when it is heavily tarnished, rather like a negative version of its clean self, blackened with the gold detailing coming to the fore (plate 127). The facial features, in particular the eyes with their bold stare, really stand out, and I have already described the significance of the powerful gaze this object possesses. It may therefore have appeared in this state when being used by its original owners.

Wealthy Romans displayed their table silver on a special stand, the *abacus* or *mensa vasaria*.²⁸³ A first-century wall painting from the tomb of one Caius Vestorius Priscus in Pompeii shows a *ministerium* (set of silverware) formally laid out (plate 128). Although the fresco was painted prior to Late Antiquity, it is feasible that this form of display could have continued throughout this era, as most of the objects depicted were in use during the period. The poet Prudentius (348- c. 413) described how choice items adorned an aristocratic villa:

The rich man's house is adorned
With many beautiful things set all about:
Goblets of the brightest gold,
Basins of hammered bronze, polished copper bowls,
Plain jars made of earthenware,
Great heavy trays made of the purest silver,
Delicate things patiently
Carved from fine ivory and serving dishes
Whittled out of oak or elm.
All things there, whether precious or cheap,
Are there because the master
Has bought them and set them aside for his use.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Sandra Knudsen, 'Dining as a Fine Art: Tablewares of the Ancient Romans', in *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City*, ed. by Christine Kondoleon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 182.

²⁸² Michael Vickers, 'The Influence of Metal Work on Athenian Painted Pottery', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 105 (1985), pp. 109-111.

²⁸³ Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, p. 86.

²⁸⁴ *Multa divitis domo sita est per omnes angelos supellex: fulget aureas scyphus nec aere deficit expolita pelvis, est olla fictis gravisque et ampla argentea est parapsis, sunt eburna quaeipiam, nonnulla quercu sunt cavata et ulmo. Omnes vas fit utile quod est ad usum congruens erilem; instruunt enim domum ut empta*

Here, he emphasises the functionality of these items, and notes that each has been particularly chosen by the master. Objects such as the Empress pepper pot would have been carefully selected and held significance for their owners.

The Empress pepper pot certainly personifies an educated female, as she points with the two forefingers of the right hand to a *rotulus* held in the left hand (plate 129). In images from Late Antiquity two fingers held up can represent speaking or blessing, but here they are very clearly drawing our attention to this object. It is a roll of some sort, and represents either a scroll or a *mappa*, a rolled ceremonial napkin. The *mappa* was the white napkin used by the consul to start the circus games, and was thus a badge of consular authority.²⁸⁵ On both consular diptychs and coinage the *mappa* was depicted as a rolled cloth, and the subject usually held it in his right hand, as for example on the diptych of the Constantinopolitan consul for 513, Flavius Taurus Clementinus (plate 130). It is extremely unlikely that a woman, even an empress, would have been granted this symbol of imperial power, but there were many images of females holding scrolls in Late Antiquity.

The form of personification most associated with the scroll as an attribute was the Muse. Two of the nine Muses were shown holding a scroll: Calliope, Muse of epic poetry, and Clio, Muse of history. If the Hoxne pepper pot was supposed to represent a Muse, then of the two Clio would be the most likely candidate, as Calliope was frequently depicted with a tablet and stylus rather than a scroll. Yet the Muses were by nature youthful and always shown as nubile. The pepper pot portrays an older, more matronly woman, and thus on grounds of age alone it is unlikely to be the representation of a Muse.

The *piperatorium* could certainly have personified an idealised educated Roman female. There were many images of learned women holding scrolls in Late Antiquity. For example, the central scene of a late fourth-century pavement mosaic in Antioch shows a women's funerary banquet (plate 131). Six women are gathered around a dining table

mango, sic parata ligno. Prudentius, *Epilogus*, 13-24, in *Prudentius*, ed. and trans. by H.J. Thomson, 2 vols (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1952), vol 2, pp. 372-3.

²⁸⁵ Kazhdan, 'Mappa', *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 1294.

bearing a roasted fowl; the seated female in the foreground is presumed to be the guest of honour or host, and thus the deceased herself.²⁸⁶ She is looking up from reading a scroll, which she holds open with both hands. Two other élite women elegantly recline on a *stibadium*, and they are being waited on by three female servants. A survey of this scene reveals numerous indications of wealth and status. This mosaic clearly illustrates that learning, as symbolised by the open scroll, was considered to be a high-status female activity worthy of commemoration in a funerary mosaic. Female portrait busts with this attribute appeared frequently on sarcophagi of the late third century, and eventually more females than males were depicted holding scrolls.²⁸⁷ Another example can be found on the top panel of the Projecta Casket, which depicts its namesake grasping a scroll, here identified as a marriage contract (plate 132).²⁸⁸ This attribute could have signalled a basic level of learning with the accompanying social status, and it might have been used somewhat gratuitously as an artistic convention.²⁸⁹ However, it does establish that despite living in a patriarchal society, it was acceptable for women to be considered in terms of their intellectual abilities, and not just for their beauty and domestic skills. The presence of a scroll signified that the figure represented was an educated, and thus aristocratic, although not necessarily imperial, woman. Consequently the *rotulus* in the left hand of the Empress pepper pot signals that she personified a cultivated élite woman.²⁹⁰

Up to this point it has been assumed that the pepper pot was situated in the dining room, but silver vessels sometimes had a ritual use, and it may have been used in a different context. The partaking of food and drink was strongly associated with funerary imagery, and tomb paintings, mosaics and sculptures show processions of servants offering sustenance to the deceased. These figures, depicted as youthful, elegant and often bearing elaborate silver dishes, reflected the status achieved by the deceased in his or her lifetime.²⁹¹ Tombs might be provided with masonry couches where banquets could be celebrated by members of the family on feast days and anniversaries. Paintings in both pagan and Christian tombs show

²⁸⁶ Becker and Kondoleon, *The Arts of Antioch*, p. 199.

²⁸⁷ Huskinson, 'Women and Learning' in Miles, *Constructing Identities*, p. 197.

²⁸⁸ Shelton, *Esquiline Treasure*, p. 27.

²⁸⁹ Huskinson, 'Women and Learning' in Miles, *Constructing Identities*, pp. 197-202.

²⁹⁰ Margaret Frazer in Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, p. 46.

²⁹¹ Katherine M.D. Dunbabin, 'The Waiting Servant in Later Roman Art', *The American Journal of Philology* 124.3 (2003), p. 453.

these rites, and although they might refer to activities in the afterlife, they also portray what was happening in contemporary life. I have previously described a tomb fresco in Pompeii depicting a display of silver plate (plate 128). Christians would celebrate at the tombs of martyrs, as well as their own families.²⁹² Silverware used in this context would have taken on a ritual function, but we have no way of knowing whether the Hoxne pepper pot was employed in this way. However, as it was part of a cache that included everyday items such as sets of spoons and other *piperatoria*, it seems likely that it would have been used primarily in the home.

The art of the dining room

Up to now, it has been established that the Empress pepper pot does not represent the Virgin Mary but certainly personifies a high-status female, possibly an empress, even perhaps Helena, and can also be seen as a ‘wealth-bringing’ woman. However, the pepper pot should not be viewed in isolation, as in the dining room it would have been part of a larger decorative scheme. The upper classes entertained their friends and business associates at banquets, and these offered the opportunity for displays of wealth in the form of luxurious furnishings, lavish food and drink, expensive tableware, and extensive entertainment. By Late Antiquity, the dining room had evolved into something resembling a stage set where mosaics, frescoes, textiles and silver plate combined to create an atmosphere of wealth and power. The relatively large number of personifications depicted in this décor, suggests attempts to create a world of mythology and philosophy. Just inside the door the buffet and *amphorae* of wine would have been set out, and places for the couches were marked out at the far side, in the apse area.²⁹³ Classical allusions would remind visitors of the long traditions of Rome and its empire. The free space in front of the dining area offered the host an excellent chance to display his wealth and stage entertainments. Plays and mimes would have been performed for the amusement of the guests, and indeed these performances might have been depicted on silver plate. There was often a complicated decorative scheme of floor mosaics and frescoes on both walls and

²⁹² Dunbabin, ‘Dining’, in eds Bowersock, Brown and Grabar, *Late Antiquity*, p. 410.

²⁹³ S.P. Ellis, ‘Late Antique Dining: Architecture, Furnishings and Behaviour’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Supplement 22 (Portsmouth, RI, 1997), p. 44.

ceilings, although not always with a thematic connection.²⁹⁴ This was enhanced by textiles and furnishings, lighting, water features and plants, plus of course the glittering silver both on display and in use.²⁹⁵ The pepper pot in the guise of ‘wealth-bringing woman’, surrounded by opulence, could have been the personification of bounty.

The little Empress *piperatorium* could have been passed round the dining room, and so handled by guests who could examine it closely, and its distinctive appearance may have acted as the stimulus for lively debate.²⁹⁶ At the heart of formal dining there remained the idea of the *convivium*, a small group of friends relaxing together over a meal.²⁹⁷ Much emphasis was placed on the art of conversation and *hilaritas*, good humour, as well as classical knowledge acquired through *paideia*.²⁹⁸ Friendships were forged, philosophical discussions took place and influential guests were entertained. Late Antique upper-class houses had not only a private but a public function, as often business was conducted from home, and therefore reception rooms provided the dual purpose of entertaining both friends and business contacts. Outside Rome, provincial aristocrats, Roman bureaucrats and military men could meet and develop cultural and political links. Local government started to decline in the fourth and fifth centuries and the wealthy élite became the main power in the provincial cities.²⁹⁹ The local poor would seek help from high-ranking patrons, and patronage was effected through gatherings of clients in their luxurious villas, as public assemblies declined.³⁰⁰ During this period, the size of dining rooms increased, as aristocrats used the trappings of wealth to maintain their power and influence.³⁰¹ Discussion was all important, and in the fifth century Sidonius described it thus:

²⁹⁴ Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, n. 3, p. 249.

²⁹⁵ Sidonius’s ‘nitens abacus’, ‘glittering sideboard’ is an example of this, *Letters*, 2.2.11.

²⁹⁶ ‘[...] it is the hallmark of boorishness in men not to await life patiently like the course of a meal, brought round for us to help ourselves’. Synesius of Cyrene (370-415), *De providentia*, 107A, trans in Alan Cameron, Jacqueline Long and Lee Sherry, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 365.

²⁹⁷ Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, p. 174.

²⁹⁸ Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 282.

²⁹⁹ For more details of this see Ellis, ‘End of the Roman House’, pp. 573-77.

³⁰⁰ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1971, repr. 2004), p. 37.

³⁰¹ Ellis, ‘End of the Roman House’, pp. 565-576.

As we sat over our wine there were short stories, for amusement or instruction, they were started in two sets, bringing mirth and edification respectively. To sum up, our entertainment was elegant, moral and profuse.³⁰²

Seneca (c. 4 BC – AD 65) had long ago declared that ‘no one judges himself to be the dinner guest [*conviva*] of a man giving a banquet, any more than he imagines himself the house guest [*hospes*] of an innkeeper.’³⁰³ These customs extended to the edges of the Empire. The military would take their silver plate with them when out on campaign, and it travelled into battle. This is borne out by the discovery of hoards such as the Traprain Treasure and Kaiseraugst Treasure, found on the sites of Roman military bases in Scotland and Switzerland respectively. In Britain, hoards of silver treasure such as the Mildenhall Treasure, the Thetford Treasure and the Hoxne Hoard provide evidence of this lavish form of hospitality. The Hoxne pepper pot would surely have played its part, both in maintaining the status of its owners, and through its intriguing iconography personifying a powerful aristocratic female at the dinner table.

In this chapter, I have used one example of silver plate to demonstrate how the art of personification operated in the dining room in a multiplicity of ways. The Hoxne Empress pepper pot was an expensive and unusual, possibly unique, object which would have reflected the wealth and taste of its owners, and shown them to be highly cultivated. Even though it is small, it could have had a powerful role in the dining room because of what it symbolised. It certainly personified an educated, aristocratic female. As a noble woman, possibly an empress, it would have reminded diners that although they were in an outpost of the Empire, they were still very much part of it. It would have lent an official air to the dining ritual and signalled that the hosts still paid allegiance to the imperial family. If it was designed to be a bust of Helena, a role-model for Christian women, then it would have had Christian connotations, especially when used in conjunction with items such as the spoons bearing the *Chi-Rho* symbol. It might have been seen as the personification of

³⁰² Inter bibendum narratiunculae, quarum cognitu hilararemur institueremur, quia eas bifariam orditas laetitia peritiaque comitabantur. Quid multa? sancte pulchre abundanter accipiamur. Sidonius, *Letter to Donidius*, 2.9.6, in Anderson, ed. and trans., *Sidonius*, vol. I, pp. 456-57.

³⁰³ Nemo se stabularii aut cauponis hospitem iudicat nec conuiuiam dantis epulum. Seneca the Younger, *De Beneficiis*, 1.14, in the Latin Library, trans. by John D’Arms, ‘Performing Culture: Roman Spectacle and the Banquets of the Powerful’, in *The Art of Ancient Spectacle*, ed. by Bettina Bergmann and Christine Kondoleon (Washington: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 301.

bounty, in the same way as the busts of ‘wealth-bringing woman’, which appeared in various media. It could have been linked to Ge, goddess of earth, particularly when taking into account its function as a pepper container and dispenser. It would also have been part of the larger decorative scheme of the dining room, the theatre for both private and public occasions where business and pleasure were mixed. It could have stimulated conversation and given both hosts and guests the chance to display their skills mastered through *paideia*. What is particularly noteworthy, is that this was the polyvalent representation of a powerful female within a strongly patriarchal society.

This little silver vessel would have been just one object among many in the élite *stibadium*, yet it was not just a functional item, but because of its potential to act as a personification it carried an added power. The extent of this would have depended on how the viewer chose to see it. There would probably have been other imagery containing personifications in the dining room. The silver associated with wine drinking might have borne Dionysiac scenes, and there could have been figurative depictions on the floor, walls, and ceiling, tapestries and curtains. It is therefore likely that the Late Antique diner would have encountered a variety of personifications during the course of a meal, the Hoxne *piperatorium* being just one among many. However, in order to use it, he or she would have had to pick it up and engage closely with it, and therefore despite its small size, it would have always had a high visible presence and potency.

Chapter 5 - The Power behind the Throne: Personifications on Imperial Silver

Shifting the ground from the domestic, this chapter explores the role of personifications on silver plate bearing imperial figurative imagery. Firstly, I will examine the statuette of the genius of an emperor (plate 133) which, rather like the ‘Empress’ pepper pot in the previous chapter, is a ‘stand-alone’ personification in three-dimensional form. I will then look at three dishes, each depicting within their decorative scheme an emperor and a personification. These are thought to portray Constantius II (337-361) with Nike (victory), Valentinian I or II (364-375 or 375-392) also with Nike, and Theodosios I (379-395) with Ge (earth) (plates 134-136). It should be noted that a representation of an emperor was a personification in itself, as he personified the Roman Empire, but here my focus is on these three particular emperors and the manner in which they interacted with and used classical personifications. By good fortune, each dish also shows a different important duty that fell to an emperor at that time: the *adventus* (ceremonial arrival); leading the army; and performing courtly duties. Although these vessels may have been displayed in a domestic setting, they had an official function and served to promote the power of the emperor.

The silver genius statuette provides a useful introduction to the imperial cult. In order to appreciate the power of associated personifications, it is necessary to understand how deeply this cult was embedded in society at that time. This silver figure had a ritual role and, as with the plates, serves as an indicator of the continuing vitality of this cult in Late Antiquity, and its reliance on pagan rituals and imagery. By close analysis of these three plates, I will demonstrate that far from being a marginal figure, the personification was mandatory at each event being depicted. I will also show that this was a symbiotic relationship, and there was a reciprocal infusion of power flowing between the subject emperor and the personification.

Statuette of the genius of an emperor of the second tetrarchy

The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore holds a small silver statuette of the genius of an emperor of the second tetrarchy (plate 133). This free-standing figure is 9.3 cm in height and very slim, 2.3 cm, indicating that it was originally designed to stand in a shallow niche.³⁰⁴ He is barefoot and wears a knee-length short-sleeved tunic with a short cloak, which is fastened by a brooch on the right shoulder. He holds a *patera* (shallow bowl for pouring libations) in its outstretched right hand, and the left grasps an ornamental cornucopia, both attributes of a *Lar*, a guardian spirit; the diadem on his head indicates he is imperial. A similarity in dress to the porphyry figures of the four tetrarchs now at the cornerstone of the Basilica S. Marco in Venice (plate 137), has led to this figure's identification, and its dating to the fourth century. This object does not have a full provenance as it was acquired at auction by the museum. It has signs of corrosion suggesting burial.

The attributes held by this figure, the cornucopia and *patera*, combined with its costume, identify it as an imperial genius; Vatican Museums have a statue of the genius of Emperor Augustus (27 BC – AD 14) in the same mode (plate 138), and so by Late Antiquity, this particular concept was long established. At that time one's 'genius' was understood to be the personification of a cross between what we today would call the life force and a guardian spirit.³⁰⁵ All living beings, animals as well as humans, and also places, were each understood to have their own genius. The historian Ammianus Marcellinus wrote how every man was assigned a genius at birth, which stayed with him until he died; this was the equivalent of a guardian angel, and a demonstration of the syncretism between pagan and Christian conviction:

Divines believe that a particular spirit of this kind is assigned to every man at birth to direct his course, as far as the decrees of fate permit, but that it is visible to very few, in fact only to those of unusual merit... these spirits are joined to the souls of men and nurse them as it were in their bosoms as long as fate allows, initiating

³⁰⁴ Dimensions provided by The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

³⁰⁵ Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, third edition revised (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 630.

them into higher truths if they find that they are pure and have kept themselves spotless and free from the pollution of sin during their association with the body.³⁰⁶

This belief certainly continued into the fifth century, as Macrobius testified:

For the sun, as the source of the breath of life and of heat and of light, is the creator and the guardian of a man's life and is therefore believed to be the Genius, or god, of a newborn child.³⁰⁷

Only one genius was honoured in each household, that of the *paterfamilias*, and it was especially invoked at occasions such as private banquets and weddings.³⁰⁸ The emperor Augustus had used this tradition in his reforms to link Roman citizens closer to the imperial personage, by incorporating his genius into imperial ritual.³⁰⁹ The personification of the guardian spirit of the emperor thus became part of the imperial cult. It appeared in roadside shrines and temples as well as in the *lararia* of imperial families, alongside the household *Lares*. There is evidence of domestic altars and niches for these figures all over the Empire, some dated as late as the sixth century.³¹⁰ All this indicates that the silver statuette represented a very potent personification, as it was infused with imperial power.

In order to understand the power of this figure, it needs to be contextualised within the imperial cult. After the conversion of Constantine, an emperor was no longer officially worshipped as a god himself, but instead became God's divinely appointed vice-regent. However, in both popular and official phraseology the emperor and everything connected with him continued to be sacred or divine, and emperors did not hesitate to qualify any opposition to their will as sacrilege.³¹¹ When an emperor died, he was apotheosised and

³⁰⁶ Ferunt enim theologi in lucem editis hominibus cunctis salva firmitate fatali huius modi quaedam velut actus rectura numina sociari, admodum tamen paucissimis visa, quos multiplices auxere virtutes [...] quibus primordiis hi genii animis conexi mortalium eas tamquam gremiis suis susceptas tuentur, quoad licitum est, docentque maiora, si senserint puras et a conluvione peccandi immaculata corporis societate discretas. Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, 21.14.3, in the Latin Library, trans. by Hamilton, p. 228.

³⁰⁷ Quod sol auctor spiritus caloris ac luminis humanae vitae genitor et custos est, et ideo nascentis δαίμων, id est deus, creditor. Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, 1.19.17, in von Jan, ed., trans. by Davies, pp. 135-6.

³⁰⁸ Inez Scott Ryberg, 'Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 22 (1955), pp. 53-59, 80.

³⁰⁹ *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 630.

³¹⁰ MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, pp. 61-62, and n. 99.

³¹¹ Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, vol. 1, p. 321.

received the title of *divus*, ‘deified’.³¹² Deceased emperors continued to be called *divus* until Anastasios I (491-518) in 518, although their funerals after Constantine were Christian, with the possible exception of the pagan emperor, Julian the Apostate; he was originally interred in Tarsus, Turkey, after falling in battle, but later reburied in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, and so he may then have had some form of Christian burial.³¹³ The personification of the imperial genius therefore allowed for the indirect veneration of the emperor, who could not be directly worshipped in his own lifetime, only after death.³¹⁴

Imperial representations in Late Antiquity sprang from the cult of the emperor. Temples were erected to him and his family, and imagery was deliberately employed to enhance his power. So, for example, in around 333-335, Constantine allowed the construction of a temple at Hispellum, Italy, dedicated to his family, on the condition that no sacrifices took place within it.³¹⁵ The image of the emperor appeared throughout the Empire on coins, statues and paintings, and in all official buildings, both civic and religious, and he was often depicted nimbed to emphasise his unique status.³¹⁶ Some coins from the third and early part of the fourth century show the emperor with a representation of his genius, complete with attributes and the inscription ‘GENIO’, on the reverse side (plate 139). The anonymous author of *De Rebus Bellicis*, written later, in the second half of the fourth century, noted:

As we have remarked, coins of this sort [bronze] were more durable because of their weight; but mighty kings, in their prodigal way, stamped their own portrait only upon the gold and silver, which portrait, inspiring awe for the figure it represented, served no useful purpose, but remained a perpetual tribute to the royal glory.³¹⁷

³¹² Simon Price, ‘From noble funerals to divine cult: the consecration of Roman Emperors’, in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremony in Traditional Societies*, ed. by David Cannadine and Simon Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 102.

³¹³ Simon Price, ‘Imperial Cult’, in eds Bowersock, Brown and Grabar, *Late Antiquity*, p. 510.

³¹⁴ Harold Mattingly, ‘The Roman “Virtues”’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 30.2 (1937), p. 111.

³¹⁵ *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae (ILS)* 705, 46-48, quoted in Bowersock, Brown and Grabar, eds, *Late Antiquity*, p. 510.

³¹⁶ Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, pp. 54-58, 84.

³¹⁷ *Illic enim, solitudine suffragante, integra fides monetæ præstabitur, nec erit fraudi locus ubi nulla est mercis occasio. Verum ut qualitas futuræ discussionis appareat, formas et magnitudinem tam æreæ quam aureæ figurationis pictura prænuntiante subieci. De Rebus Bellicis* [anonymous], 1.3, ed. by R. Ireland, trans. by E.A. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952) pp. 109-11.

Up until the time of Theodosios I, prayers were addressed to the emperor:

I shall say what is permitted for a man to have comprehended and uttered: such ought he to be who is adored by the nations, to whom private and public prayers are addressed over the entire world, from whom a man about to make a voyage seeks a calm sea, a man about to travel a safe return, a man about to enter battle a happy omen.³¹⁸

Bishop Gregory of Nazianzos described the cult of the emperor, detailing how homage should be paid to imperial portraits and images, and these sentiments would apply to the silver genius statuette under discussion:

It is an axiom of royal practice, observed, if not by all other men among whom royalty exists, certainly by the Romans, that their rulers should be publicly honoured by their statues. Neither their crowns and diadems and bright purple, nor the number of their bodyguards, nor the multitude of their subjects is sufficient to establish their sovereignty [*basileia*]; but they need also adoration [*proskynesis*] in order to seem more supreme; not only the adoration directed to them personally, but also that made to their images and portraits, in order that a greater and more perfect honour be rendered to them. Emperors vary in what they like to see represented with their likenesses in these portraits: some love to see themselves with the more prominent cities offering them gifts; others, with victories crowning their heads; others, with the magistracies adorned with the insignia of office adoring them; others, in the act of killing animals in feats of archery; others with subjugated barbarians lying prostrate under their feet or being exterminated in various ways. It is not that they love only the reality of deeds of which they are so proud, but also their representation [in works of art].³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Illud dicam quod intellexisse hominem et dixisse fas est: talen esse debere qui gentibus adoratur, cui toto orbe terrarum privata uel publica uota redduntur, a quo petit nauigaturus serenum peregrinaturus reditum pugnaturus auspicium. Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, *Panegyric of Theodosios*, III (XI), 6.4, ed. and trans. by C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers, in *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 455-6, 650.

³¹⁹ Est hoc in regio more positum, haud quidem scio an apud omnes quoque alios homines, qui imperio subsunt, caeterum apud Romanos studiosissime observatum, ut publicis statuibus imperatores ornentur. Nec enim coronae ac diademata et purpurae nitor, et numerosi satellites, et subditorum multitudo, ad constituendum ipsis imperium sufficiunt: verum adorationem quoque accedere oportet, per quam augustiores appareant: non eam solum qua adorantur ipsi, sed eam etiam quae in imaginibus picturesque praestetur, quo cumulator ipsis perfectiorque veneratione reddatur. His porro imaginibus alii imperatores aliud quiddam preaterea appingi gaudent; quidam clarissimas quasque urbes dona offerentes; alii victorias, caput eorum conona cingentes; nonnulli magistratus adorantes, et dignitatum notis exornatos; alii ferarum caedes et scitas jaculationes; alii ferarum domitorum, atque ad pedes jacentium, aut caesorum varias multiplicesque figuras. Neque enim rerum earum, ob quas magnifice de se sentiunt, veritatem solum amant, sed earum quoque simulacra. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Oration 4.80*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 35, pp. 606-7, trans. by C.W. King in *Julian the Emperor* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888), p. 48.

Representations of the emperor were ubiquitous and appeared everywhere. In an anonymous panegyric to Constantius I, the orator declaimed ‘... madman, he, who did not know that wherever he might flee, the power of your divinity would be everywhere that your images, everywhere that your statues, are revered’.³²⁰ An image of the emperor was an official document and had to be treated as if the viewer was in his live presence; Bishop Severianos (d. before 430) of Gabala in Syria, wrote in c. AD 400:

Since an emperor cannot be present to all persons, it is necessary to set up the statue of the emperor in law courts, market places, public assemblies, and theatres. In every place, in fact, in which an official acts, the imperial effigy must be present, so that the emperor may thus confirm what takes place. For the emperor is only a human being, and he cannot be present everywhere.³²¹

Athanasios (295-373), Christian theologian and Bishop of Alexandria, described an encounter with an imperial portrait, and stated that a viewer who venerated an image of the emperor, was by association venerating the emperor himself:

And we may perceive this at once from the illustration of the Emperor’s image. For in the image is the shape and form of the Emperor, and in the Emperor is that shape which is in the image. For the likeness of the Emperor in the image is exact; so that a person who looks at the image, sees in it the Emperor; and he again who sees the Emperor, recognises that it is he who is in the image. And from the likeness not differing, to one who after the image wished to view the Emperor, the image might say, ‘I and the Emperor are one; for I am in him, and he is in me; and what thou seest in me, that thou beholdest in him, and what thou has seen in him, that thou holdest in me’. Accordingly he who worships the image, in it worships the Emperor also; for the image is his form and appearance.³²²

If an emperor was subsequently disgraced, it was usual to destroy images and statues of him:

At this time, by command of Constantine, the statues of Maximian Herculius were thrown down, and his portraits removed; and, as the two old emperors were

³²⁰ Demens qui nesciebat, quacumque fugeret, ubique ium uestrae diuinitatis esse, ubi uultus uestri, ubi signa colerentur. Anonymous, *Panegyric of Constantius I*, VIII (V), 15.6, presumable at Trier in 297/8, ed. and trans. in Nixon and Rodgers, *The Panegyrici Latini*, pp. 136, 550.

³²¹ Severianos of Gabala, *On the Creation of the World*, 5.5, trans. in Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, p. 54.

³²² Athanasios, *Contra Arianos: Against the Arians*, 3.5, in *Select Works and Letters*, ed. by Philip Schaff, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.txt>> [accessed 9 August, 2009].

generally delineated in one piece, the portraits of both [Maximian and Diocletian] were removed at the same time.³²³

All of this goes to show that the silver statuette personifying the genius of an emperor was therefore an extremely potent object, as it reflected the power of the ruler himself. It allowed its owners to venerate the living emperor, and reinforced their connection to the might of what was then a vast empire.

Despite the advent of Christianity, the imperial cult continued in Late Antiquity, particularly in the East, and its potency should be borne in mind when reading the following section. Here, I will be appraising the role of personifications within this cult through their representation on three silver plates, depicting the emperors Constantius II, Valentinian I or II and Theodosios I respectively. At the time these objects were made, the image of the emperor was all important and far-reaching, and it signified his absolute authority.³²⁴ On the emperor's part, there was an awareness of the power of imagery and how it could be used to manipulate and influence events far from the centre of government. Yet significantly on all three dishes, the emperor is not shown acting alone, but with the support of a personification.

Representations of Nike

I start by looking at two representations of Nike, the personification of victory known to the Romans as Victoria, and assess the significance of her inclusion; she appears on both the Constantius plate and the Valentinian plate. On the former vessel she is depicted as being almost the same size as Constantius, but on the Valentinian dish she is reduced to a small figure atop a globe held by this emperor. Her role there is also different, as will be evinced in the forthcoming discussion. Ausonius, tutor to Valentinian I's son Gratian, described her thus: 'Victory, down-swooping in dizzy flight, deck with a two-fold diadem an unknitted

³²³ Eodemque tempore senis Maximiani statuae Constantini iussu revellebantur et imagines ubicumque pictus esset, detrahebantur. Et quia senes ambo simul plerumque picti erant et imagines simul deponebantur amborum. Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum: On the Death of the Persecutors*, 42, in the Latin Library, trans in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

³²⁴ Christopher Kelly, 'Emperors, Government and Bureaucracy', *Cambridge Ancient History*, v. 13, p. 143.

brow; bring garlands, those which are gifts in peace, those which are prizes in fight'.³²⁵ Her appearance on the two plates epitomises these opposing states of peace and war. On the Constantius dish, Nike's role is to combine with the emperor to increase his power in a ceremonial situation, and to celebrate the triumph of victory.³²⁶ On the Valentinian dish, she accompanies the emperor and his army into battle, to assure them of victory.

The plate with a portrait of Constantius II (plate 134) bears the scene of an imperial *adventus*, which is a ceremonial arrival; it can be identified as such by comparison with an *adventus* medallion of Constantine I, which on the reverse shows him mounted on a horse led by Nike holding a wreath, with *Roma* following behind (plate 140). It is not possible to be sure which particular *adventus* this dish commemorates. The plate is 24.9 cm in diameter and weighs 599g. It was found in 1891 in the Gordlikov Grave, a cemetery of the fourth and fifth centuries, in the Crimea.³²⁷ There is no inscription, but it is always identified as depicting Constantius II because of the date of the find-site, established through coin deposits, coupled with the presence of two other dishes in the same cemetery bearing imperial busts with similar features and inscribed with his name (plate 141).³²⁸ Although he is the most likely candidate, it should be noted that it could be the representation of another emperor of the period from Constantius II to Valentinian II (337-392). However, my analysis will proceed on the assumption that it is Constantius II. Various suggestions have been made as to the site of manufacture – Rome, Antioch, or the northern Black Sea Coast – but there is no hallmark and so this also remains an unknown factor.³²⁹

Of the three figures shown on the plate, the largest is that of Constantius seated on his horse, galloping from left to right, and looking directly out of the picture with large staring eyes. The significance of the forward stare, which communicates directly with the viewer,

³²⁵ [...] tu quoque ab aërio praepes Victoria lapsu, come serenatum duplici diademate frontem sera ferens, quae dona togae, quae praemia pugnae. Ausonius, *Epigram on Augustus*, 26.1-4, ed. and trans. by Hugh G. Evelyn White, 2 vols (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1921), vol. 2, pp. 168-9.

³²⁶ Frank and Sutcliffe, eds, *Road to Byzantium*, p. 147.

³²⁷ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 27.

³²⁸ Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, pp. 20-23.

³²⁹ Kent and Painter, eds, *Wealth of the Roman World*, p. 25; Althaus and Sutcliffe, eds, *Road to Byzantium*, p. 147; Alice V. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums*, trans. by Lenina Sorokina (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1977, repr. 1985), p. 14.

has already been discussed in the section on Oceanos in Chapter Three, and will continue to be highlighted. The emperor is dressed in military field uniform, and the diadem and nimbus around his head confirm his status. The imperial attribute of a halo became increasingly popular during the fourth century.³³⁰ Emperors were frequently shown nimbed, a motif of divinity that was subsequently applied to representations of biblical figures and saints. An anonymous third-century orator put it thus:

Your triumphal robes and consular fasces, your curule thrones, this glittering crowd of courtiers, that light which surrounds your divine head with a shining orb, these are the trappings of your merit, very fine indeed, and most majestic.³³¹

The presence of a nimbus removed the subject from natural time to eternity as a haloed person, being divine, will never die.³³² Representations of nimbed emperors served to emphasise their distance from earthly life, as they took on the attributes of gods. They became symbols of the Roman Empire and thus political rather than human figures. In imperial iconography a representation of the emperor underwent a transformation, and his image became a personification of the Empire.

Under the galloping hooves of Constantius's mount, there is an upturned shield which symbolises the defeated enemy; this bears secular imagery, in contrast to the shield of the soldier standing on the left, which displays a Christian symbol.³³³ The warrior's head is inclined in deference, and he is dressed in a similar fashion to the emperor, except that around his neck he wears a torque. This type of pairing continued throughout Late Antiquity and also occurs, for example, on the sixth-century Barberini ivory where the mounted emperor and a military figure in the left panel, sometimes identified as a consul, are dressed in a very similar way (plate 142). On the Constantius Plate, the soldier holds a lance in his right hand, and his left arm supports a large shield bearing the familiar *Chi-Rho*

³³⁰ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, p. 165.

³³¹ Trabeae uestrae triumphales et fasces consulares et sellae curules et haec obsequiorum stipatio et fulgor, et illa lux diuinum uerticem claro orbe complectens, uestrorum sunt ornamenta meritorum, pulcherrima quidem et augustissima. Anonymous, *Panegyric of Maximian*, X, 3.2, in Nixon and Rodgers, *The Panegyrici Latini*, pp. 57-8, 524-5.

³³² Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 84.

³³³ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 27.

symbol. This Christian motif contrasts with that of the shield being trampled by the horse, and symbolises the triumph of Christianity over pagan forces. The soldier is shown in non-combat mode: that is without armour or helmet but with shield and spear. Non-Roman troops were commonplace in the army and this soldier has been identified as a barbarian bodyguard, which suggests the dish might have been designed for presentation to a non-Roman.³³⁴

On the right, standing on some rocks behind the galloping forelimbs of Constantius's horse, is the winged figure of Nike, personification of Victory. She is dressed in a sleeveless tube-dress with a long over-fold, fastened with a brooch at each shoulder and belted under the bust. This was not contemporary fashion, but rather the way the Nike was traditionally garbed, and goddesses can be seen on the Parthenon (400 BC) dressed in a similar manner.³³⁵ Her bare right arm is raised, and she clasps a victory wreath to crown the emperor; her left hand holds a *tropaeum* (victory trophy) in the form of a palm branch. She is moving forward to the right, but turns to look back towards the emperor, although like the bodyguard she bows her head in order to avert her eyes.

The *adventus*, a formal entry into a city, was a carefully choreographed event and the emperor played his part. Ammianus described in detail the arrival of Constantius in Rome in 357 (see appendix 1). In the parade the emperor seems to have cut a solitary figure, consciously distancing himself from all around him, and throughout his life he maintained this separation. According to Ammianus:

he gave other evidence too in his personal life of an unusual degree of self-control, which one was given to believe belonged to him alone [...] his habit throughout his reign of never allowing any private person to share his carriage or be his colleague in the consulship.³³⁶

³³⁴ S. MacCormack, 'Change and Continuity in Late Antiquity: The Ceremony of "Adventus"', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 21.4 (1972), p. 739.

³³⁵ Croom, *Roman Clothing and Fashion*, p. 16.

³³⁶ quae licet adfectabat, erant tamen haec et alia quaedam in ceteriore vita patientiae non mediocris indicia, ut existimari dabatur, uni illi concessae. quod autem per omne tempus imperii nec in consessum vehiculi quemquam suscepit, nec in trabea socium privatum adscivit, ut fecere principes consecrati, et similia multa, Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, 16, 10.11-12, in the Latin Library, trans. by Hamilton, p. 101.

Yet in visual representations, he was rarely shown alone but usually accompanied by deities, thus emphasising his own divine status. This neatly circumvented the problem of imperial divinity in a Christian empire, as this imagery did not expressly depict the emperor as a god but rather suggested it through the iconography. So, on this plate he is shown alongside Nike, associating himself with a very powerful and ancient deity who personified victory, whilst Constantius himself personified the Empire.

This partnership of emperor and Victory appeared frequently in imperial art. A second-century panel, later placed on the north side attic of the fourth-century Arch of Constantine, depicts the conclusion of the *adventus* of Marcus Aurelius entering Rome in 176 on his return from a successful campaign (plate 143). He is shown being welcomed by *Roma* while Nike flies above him, crowning him with garlands. On the east side of the same monument, a contemporary panel depicts the entry of Constantine into Rome, and a winged Nike holds the reins of his carriage (plate 144). The shared use of this personification establishes a sense of continuity and demonstrates the unwavering potency of Nike over the centuries. She testifies to the power of the Roman Empire in crushing its foes. It was commonplace for triumphant emperors to want to be depicted in the company of Nike, and they were frequently paired on coins and medallions.

On the Constantius plate, the figures of Nike, the soldier and the horse are depicted in natural and coherent poses, and on a slightly smaller scale to that of the emperor. This size difference may be either to indicate rank, or to add depth to the scene by placing the ruler in the foreground and thus closer to the viewer. The silversmith has deliberately manipulated the stance of the emperor, depicting his head and shoulders in a full frontal pose, whilst the lower part of his body astride his mount is seen in profile, as is the horse itself. This is a precursor to the flatter style of representation, seen on the *Missorium* of Theodosios. Constantius was also represented elsewhere as a triumphant equestrian, on a gold medallion where he is shown more naturally, totally in profile along with the horse (plate 145). On the dish both emperor and horse are completely gilded, unlike the other two figures, whose flesh remains silver. These differences serve to emphasise the imperial personage. Yet Constantius, who we know prided himself on his personal autonomy, is shown in the

company of both the army and Nike. This can be partly attributed to the need to demonstrate that the emperor was in control of these forces, but it also shows that despite his power, he could not act alone, but required their support.

There was a peculiar irony in depicting Nike alongside Constantius. It was after his *adventus* into Rome in 357 that Constantius ordered the removal of the Altar of Victory from the *Curia* (Senate House), where it had been established by the Emperor Octavian (later Augustus) in 29 BC. This altar bore the statue of a winged Nike, holding a palm and descending to present a laurel wreath to the victorious, in other words looking exactly like the representation of Nike on the plate. Constantius deemed it extremely inappropriate that he should speak in a *Curia* containing an altar on which sacrifices had been performed for hundreds of years. The altar was later restored by his successor, Julian, under whom the ancient cults continued in Rome. It was finally permanently removed by Gratian in 382, and there will be further discussion of this in relation to the *Missorium* of Theodosios, below. Perhaps the Constantius plate was commissioned by a member of the pagan élite as a comment on the whole affair.

This dish is an example of how the relationship between Constantius and Nike was a symbiotic one. Despite his opposition to the presence of the altar of Victory, there are coins from this period bearing the image of a winged Victory crowning Constantius with a wreath. This could represent an actual victory, or the symbolic conferring of imperial office upon him. Either way, it seems as if Constantius needed the support of this particular personification, and saw no contradiction in the imperial art of the time portraying her on his *largitio* (imperial largess) and currency. Having evicted Nike from the senate building in Rome, he continued to utilise her power elsewhere, and she in turn maintained her vigour through the constant use of her image. The Constantius plate exemplifies their co-dependence.

Nike appears in quite a different form on the plate of Valentinian I or II (plate 135), where she is shown as a small figure atop a globe held by the emperor. This dish depicts the emperor in his role as head of the army. It is a concave plate with a simple roll-moulding,

and is much worn. It has a diameter of 27cm, weighs 1050 g and was found in 1721 on the banks of the river Arve, near Geneva.³³⁷ This is the only one of the three dishes under discussion that can categorically be stated to be imperial *largitio*, as around the upper border of the scene, in double-stroke letters, runs the inscription *LARGITAS DN VALENTINIANI AVGVSTI*.

An emperor stands on a shallow plinth in the centre, noticeably taller than the other figures ranged on either side of him. He faces frontally and wears a *chlamys* (cape) and a muscled cuirass (protective armour for the torso). A nimbus with a *Chi-Rho* and an alpha and omega surrounds his head. In his raised left hand he grasps a *labarum* (Roman military standard bearing the monogrammed cross), which may have originally been inscribed with a Christian motif. Valentinian proffers his right hand, holding a globe surmounted by the small figure of Nike, who faces him in profile and offers a crown or wreath. The inscription on the plate identifies the emperor as ‘Valentinian’ and this dates the plate to the second half of the fourth century. It is believed to be Valentinian I (364-375).³³⁸ The possibility that it is his son, Valentinian II (375-392), seems less likely, as although emperors were often depicted as soldiers, he was not known as a military man. In contrast, Valentinian I was elected by the army and had a strong military background; for example, nearly all his consulships went to the generals in his army.³³⁹ His reign was a period of constant warfare, and he died while on campaign, after suffering a seizure brought on by a fit of temper.

On the plate, the emperor is flanked by three soldiers on each side in serried lines; their heads, shoulders and feet appear from underneath the large shields they hold up in front of themselves. Each wears a plumed helmet and carries an upright spear. The presence of helmets indicates they are portrayed in combat mode, unlike the soldiers on the other two plates who are bareheaded. On two of the shields are twin-headed animal insignia which correspond with those of barbarian units illustrated in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. All six shields would have originally displayed insignia, which might have indicated

³³⁷ Toynbee and Painter, ‘Silver Picture Plates’, p. 27.

³³⁸ Baratte and Painter, eds, *Trésors d’Orfèvrerie Gallo-Romains*, p. 272.

³³⁹ Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 139-143.

commemoration of a specific battle. A shield, a sword in its scabbard and a helmet lie in the foreground in front of the emperor, symbolising the conquered enemy. The fact that this plate is so worn and smoothed suggests that it was owned, polished, and displayed or used for a considerable time prior to its loss, burial or concealment.

The representation of Valentinian on the plate is analogous with one of the emperor Honorius (393-423), portrayed on a consular ivory diptych (plate 146). This emperor is shown in a mirror image to the figure on the dish, holding a globe topped with Nike in his left hand, and an upright *labarum* in his right. He is similarly attired, wearing a cuirass and tunic, and nimbed. The same iconography can also be seen on *solidi* of Valentinian I (plate 147). It is significant that coins of Valentinian II do not show him as a military figure, thus increasing the chances that the plate refers to Valentinian I. On the latter's coins the *labarum* displays the *Chi-Rho* symbol, and it is therefore likely that this was also the case with the *labarum* on the plate, now polished away. Significantly on all three of these objects, the dish, the diptych and the coin, the personification Nike accompanies a Christian emperor, indicating that to the Romans victory was of prime importance over, say, peace or justice, which we might favour in Western society today.

The presence of the personification of Nike on the Valentinian plate is central to the iconography and imbues it with meaning, as she holds the power of victory. Although a much smaller figure, she is raised slightly above the level of the emperor who holds her himself. There had long been a tradition for expressing the existence of the divine through pairings of gods who were linked by some common factor, but not necessarily related through kinship or marriage, and deities might share a temple, for example that of Sulis Minerva in Bath. This extended to pairing in order to link the divine to the human, and here the emperor is partnered with spirit of victory. This imagery very much reflects his tolerant attitude to pagan deities, as although a devout Christian, Valentinian is shown here engaging with a symbol of a much older belief system.

It is important to consider how a pagan personification such as Nike could appear alongside a Christian ruler. Valentinian, like Constantius, was known to be a deeply-committed

Christian, and the church historian Sozomen (400-450) illustrates this with an anecdote.³⁴⁰ When he was serving in the army under the pagan emperor Julian and acting as his bodyguard, he went with the ruler into a pagan temple where a drop of sacred water splashed Valentinian's cloak; he immediately cut the piece of fabric off, despite the presence of the emperor. Yet Ammianus was to praise Valentinian for his religious tolerance:

[...] his reign was distinguished for religious tolerance. He took a neutral position between opposing faiths, and never troubled anyone by ordering him to adopt this or that mode of worship. He made no attempt to fasten his own beliefs on the necks of his subjects, but left the various cults undisturbed as he found them.³⁴¹

The combination of a Christian ruler and Nike illustrates one of the arguments of this thesis: that personifications acted as a form of common subliminal language. In order to demonstrate that they had victory on their side, both Valentinian and Constantinius were obliged to include a pagan personification within their imagery. Christians obviously did not feel this mixture of imagery to be a contradiction, but rather accepted that they were adopting a well-tried visual channel in order to communicate an abstract concept by the best possible means. This could indicate that in Late Antiquity Nike had lost some of her pagan associations. However, as has been previously demonstrated, during this period people continued to be surrounded by secular and mythological imagery, and so it seems likely that the figure of Nike would have held resonances of her original status as the Greek winged goddess of victory.

Here, she appears on an élite object, the Valentinian plate, and to gauge the significance of this dish, it is necessary to understand its ceremonial role. It is inscribed as *largitio*, a term that designated all kinds of generosity, although in this context it refers to the formal distribution of gifts, especially by the emperor. A special department of largess existed under the *Comes Sacrarum Largitionum* (hereafter *CSL*), a high ranking government

³⁴⁰ Sozomen, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 6.6.

³⁴¹ moderamine principatus inclaruit quod inter religionum diversitates medius stetit nec quemquam inquietavit neque, ut hoc coleretur, imperavit aut illud: nec interdictis minacibus subiectorum cervicem ad id, quod ipse coluit, inclinabat, sed intemeratas reliquit has partes ut repperit. Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, 30.9.5, in the Latin Library, trans. by Hamilton, p. 407.

official, which dealt with the distribution of silver plate and coins. The ceremony of *sparsio* (scattering of coins) for events such as the emperor's birthday, a succession or a triumph, took place frequently. A page from the *Calendar of 354* depicts Constantius II performing this act of *sparsio* (plate 148). Sozomen recorded how money was distributed to the troops on 'the anniversary of some festival among the Romans, such as that of the birth of the emperor, or the foundation of some royal city'.³⁴² On special occasions silver *largitio* plates, such as the one under discussion, and bowls filled with coins were handed out, a practice that went on from the fourth to the seventh century.

Senatorial magistrates and consuls were also allowed to present *largitio*, but the emperor presented largess on far more occasions, notably regnum anniversaries with which most surviving *largitio* is associated, and to a wider audience which included army and court officials as well as the aristocracy. Consular silver (as opposed to that relating to the emperor himself) is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter on city-tyches. The Valentinian plate could be commemorating the *Quinquennalia* or the *Decennalia*, the fifth or tenth anniversary of his reign. There was a difference between senatorial and imperial largess, as the laws of Theodosios limited the value of the former, although consular *largitio* remained exempt from this.³⁴³ It seems to have been a question of nuance as to what was private and what was imperial in the case of the emperor's *largitio*. There were two kinds of largess, the first given to individuals or institutions he honoured with his goodwill, and these were issued from the *largitiones privatae* connected to the service of the *res privatae*. The second type was sacred largess, handed out from an official list and presented in ceremonies according to regulations and traditions, and it was this that was dealt with by the *CSL*.³⁴⁴ The emperor placed his *largitio* into the hands of the recipients, which they covered with their robes to prevent direct physical contact, a gesture enacted by

³⁴² Συγγνώμης ἐχτὸς χολάσειν, ὡς περὶ τὰ ἔθνη Ῥωμαίων νεωτερίζοντας, καὶ εἰς πολιτείαν καὶ βασιλείᾳ ἐξαμαρτάνοντας: se absque ulla venia in illos animadverserum, utpote qui, contra mores atque institute Romanorum. Sozomen, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 5.17, in *Patrologiae Graecae*, ed. by J.P. Migne, vol. 67, pp. 1265-66, trans in <<http://www.freewebs.com/vitaphone1/history/sozomen.html>> [accessed 17 August, 2009].

³⁴³ *Theodosian Code*, 6.4.24/25, 15.9.1/2.

³⁴⁴ Roland Delmaire, 'Les Largesses Impériales et l'Émission d'Argenterie du IV^e au VI^e Siècle', in ed. Baratte, *Argenterie Romaine et Byzantine*, p. 113.

the petitioner on the *Missorium* of Theodosios, discussed in the next section.³⁴⁵ A fourth-century panel on the Arch of Constantine illustrates this ceremony (plate 149), and many aspects of the imperial cult, such as receiving objects from the emperor in this manner, were to become absorbed into Byzantine Christian ritual.³⁴⁶ As *largitio* the Valentinian plate would have passed through the hands of the emperor himself, and therefore this was a very high-status object, whose imagery would have been carefully chosen. Designs for objects such as coins were produced with imperial approval, and this selection process might also have applied to imperial *largitio*.³⁴⁷

These plates and vessels were not only given out on ceremonial occasions but were made especially to mark them. There seems to have been different levels of craftsmanship on *largitio* plates, a ranking system also seen on ivory diptychs from the period; these carved panels were also given as *largitio*, often in conjunction with silver plate.³⁴⁸ The most elaborate ivories show a full, figurative scene, and may have been presented by and to the highest status individuals.³⁴⁹ The middle range bear a central medallion containing a bust of the consul holding the mappa, and in the lower range there is just an inscription in the centre. This form of decorative ranking can be applied to imperial silver plate, with the three plates under discussion in this chapter all falling into the top, highly decorative level. Other *largitio* plates with a central bust motif or an inscription have survived, and these would have come into the middle or lower categories. A silver dish with a portrait bust of Constantius in the central medallion (plate 141), which would rate as ‘middle category’ was discovered alongside the Constantius plate discussed above. However, although there is more detailed imagery on the latter, it was arguably the weight of the object rather than the amount of decoration that was of prime concern when considering the status of the recipient.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁵ Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, p. 18.

³⁴⁶ Michael McCormick, ‘Imperial Cult’, *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, pp. 989-90.

³⁴⁷ Price, *Rituals and Power*, pp. 172-4.

³⁴⁸ Antony Eastmond, ‘Consular Diptychs, Rhetoric and the Languages of Art in Sixth Century Constantinople’, *Art History*, 33.5 (2010), p. 751.

³⁴⁹ According to A. Cutler, ‘The Making of the Justinian Diptychs’, *Byzantion*, 54 (1984), p. 110-12, although Eastmond, ‘Consular Diptychs’, pp. 752-3, contends this was not necessarily the case.

³⁵⁰ Eastmond, ‘Consular Diptychs’, p. 750.

The personification of Nike which appeared on these two *largitio* plates was a popular motif, and would have held significance to both donor and recipient whatever the weight of the object. She continued to appear throughout Late Antiquity; for example, a papyrus fragment of a circus programme discovered in Egypt, and dated to the sixth century, displays her versatility as it describes statues of victory being paraded at the head of a circus procession.³⁵¹ She was also depicted in a transitional stage; on gold solidi of Aelia Flaccilla (d. 385/6), wife of Theodosios I, a winged Nike is portrayed in the act of inscribing the *Chi-Rho* symbol on a shield (plate 150). She was eventually fully absorbed into Christian art, and Augustine unwittingly described how the figure of Nike morphed into an ἄγγελος νικοποιός, a victory-giving angel:

They may allege that Jupiter sends Victory, and that she comes at his bidding to those of his choice in obedience to Jupiter as king of gods and takes her place on their side. This could truthfully be said not of Jupiter, who is fancifully imagined as the king of gods, but of the true King of Ages, who sends – not Victory, who has no real existence – but his angel, and gives the conquest to whom he will. And his design may be inscrutable; it cannot be unjust.³⁵²

Another personification who maintained her power and status throughout the period was Ge, and I now address her appearance on the *Missorium* of Theodosios.

Ge

Like Nike, Ge, the personification of earth, appeared frequently in Late Antiquity in various media, and her image was enlisted to support the emperor. Personifications such as these provided a link to the perceived glorious heritage of a past golden age. There was no desire to sever this connection to the past, which was why they were eventually absorbed into Christian iconography, where they retained their potency. So for example, a female river personification appears in a picture of Rebecca and Eliezer in the sixth-century Vienna

³⁵¹ Anonymous, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 34.2707. quoted in Luke Lavan, ‘Pagan statues in late urban space: Continuities of urban function’, unpublished.

³⁵² An forte dicunt, quod deam Victoriam Iuppiter mittat atque illa tamquam regi deorum obtemperans ad quos iusserit ueniat et in eorum parte considat? Hoc uere dicitur non de illo Ioue, quem deorum regem pro sua opinione confingunt, sed de illo uero rege saeculorum, quod mittat non Victoriam, quae nulla substantia est, sed angelum suum et faciat uincere quem uoluerit; cuius consilium occultum esse potest, iniquum non potest. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 4.17, in the Latin Library, trans. by Bettenson, *City of God*, p. 156.

Genesis (*cod. theol. gr.31*), and she is shown on the same scale as the two protagonists, indicating her importance (plate 151). The top section of the largest of the seventh-century David plates, depicting the battle between David and Goliath, shows the pair ranged either side of a male personification, in this instance representing the river Terebinth; the latter looks larger than the principals, and thus significant to the viewer (plate 53). Throughout Late Antiquity, personifications were used to both impart information and add a divine resonance. This is clear on the *Missorium* of Theodosios, where the presence of Ge at the feet of the emperor informs the viewer of his domination of the world, and its submission to his will.

The personification of Ge appears in the bottom section of the *Missorium* of Theodosios, where she is shown reclining, accompanied by three *erotes* (plate 136). This dish is dated to c. AD 388 and depicts court ceremonial, another duty of an emperor. It is considerably larger than the previous two plates, being 74 cm in diameter and weighing 1535g; they have diameters of around 25-27cm.³⁵³ The site of manufacture is unknown, but there is a dotted inscription in Greek on the inner side of the foot-ring which records the original weight, fifty Roman pounds, that is about sixteen kilos. It was discovered in 1847, near Almandralejo, which is 11 km from Emerita (today Merida) in the province of Badajoz, Spain. The dish was found folded in half with the decoration on the inside, which has helped preserve the surface detail. However, a large, jagged crack, which runs from top left to bottom right, resulted after it was divided into two pieces in an early attempt to unfold it. Because the plate is cast it may not have been unique, but one of several produced for the occasion, maybe in different metals, and presented to high ranking officials around the Empire.³⁵⁴ This gives an indication of the scale of imperial largess; this is a big, heavy, valuable vessel, and yet it would have been just one of a large number of silver bowls and plates distributed to members of the élite.

The decoration is divided into two tiers, the upper section covering approximately two thirds, and the bottom section approximately one third of the plate. There is a Latin

³⁵³ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', pp. 27-28.

³⁵⁴ Kiilerich, *Late Fourth Century Classicism*, p. 25.

inscription around the upper section next to the rim, stating that it was presented on the occasion of the *decennalia* (tenth anniversary of rule) of Theodosios I (379-95), which was commemorated on 19th January, 388: *D[OMINUS]N[OSTER] THEODOSIVS PERPET[UUS] AVG[VSTVS] OB DIEM FELICISSIMVM X* (Our lord Theodosios, emperor for ever, on the most happy occasion of his *decennalia*).³⁵⁵ This was probably celebrated in Thessalonica, where he was from September 387 to the end of April 388. It would have been necessary to commission the plate well in advance of the anniversary in order to allow manufacturing and delivery time. Imperial anniversaries were frequently celebrated in advance due to the often tenuous position of the emperor, and Kiilerich favours dating the plate to early 387 and Constantinople.³⁵⁶ Unlike the provinces where Greek was used, Latin remained the official language of the central administration in Constantinople until mid sixth century. Greek was the spoken language of the court by 450 but the process gained momentum only after 395, and Constantinople in the fourth and early fifth centuries was bi-lingual.³⁵⁷ This means that the plate could have been produced in the capital of the Eastern Empire, and this is borne out by the weight notation in Greek on the reverse, although the inscription is in Latin.

The upper section is given over to imperial imagery and depicts an official presentation ceremony. The largest, central figure of Theodosios sits within an archway which is in the centre of a four-columned façade with a gabled pediment. In each of the two corners of the gable, a winged *eros* flies towards the centre bringing gifts of flowers and fruit, and thematically they link to the lower section. The emperor is seated on an ornate throne, feet resting on a decorated footstool. His *chlamys* is secured at the right shoulder by a large *fibula* (brooch), over a long-sleeved undergarment heavily embroidered at the shoulder and wristband; an embroidered cloth, possibly a *tablion* (cloth bearing insignia of office), is laid across his right thigh and lap. He wears a diadem and is nimbed. He hands a document to the considerably smaller figure of a dignitary, possibly the *codicilli*, a diploma which

³⁵⁵ Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, p. 50, n. 8.

³⁵⁶ Kiilerich, *Late Fourth Century Classicism*, p. 26.

³⁵⁷ John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court AD 364-425* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, repr. 1990), p. 106.

confirmed this official's status and proximity to the emperor, and his legislative powers.³⁵⁸ The man's hands are covered by his robe as he takes the scroll, in order to prevent any physical contact with the emperor. He would have been of extremely high rank in order to receive an honour directly from the emperor, and could be either the recipient or commissioner of the plate.³⁵⁹

Theodosios is flanked by two imperial figures who are smaller than him, although still larger than the other figures in this section. They are Valentinian II, then aged seventeen and *augustus* of the Western Empire, who sits on his right [viewer's left] and Arkadios (383-408), elder son of Theodosios and joint emperor since 383.³⁶⁰ All three wear diadems, which defines them as the three *augusti* of 388, and not Theodosios with his two sons, as has been suggested elsewhere.³⁶¹ We know this because if any one of a plurality of emperors was younger than about fifteen, he was represented as a smaller figure, and as both sons were then under this age they would have been shown the same size.³⁶² Arkadios was eleven and Honorius was four or five. Valentinian II was then 17, and the *augustus* on the viewer's left is larger than Arkadios on the right.

The presence of Valentinian, representing the Western Empire, reinforces the power of the Theodosian dynasty. The two junior *augusti* each hold an orb in their left hand, and are dressed in a similar manner to Theodosios. Valentinian II holds a sceptre and Arkadios performs a gesture with the other hand. Like the principal figure, they sit on decorated thrones and footstools. At each end of the imperial tableau, a pair of soldiers holding lances and large decorated shields stand guard, their heads slightly inclined towards the centre. These are Germanic imperial guards, dressed in short tunics, *bracae* (leather trousers) and *campagi* (soldiers' shoes), each with a torque around the neck, and resemble those depicted on the base of the Theodosian obelisk in Constantinople.³⁶³ This whole

³⁵⁸ Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, p.235.

³⁵⁹ Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, p. 85.

³⁶⁰ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 28. Also Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, p. 14.

³⁶¹ Kiilerich, *Late Fourth Century Classicism*, p. 22.

³⁶² Alan Cameron, 'Consular diptychs in their social context: New eastern evidence', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 11 (1998), p. 385.

³⁶³ Kiilerich, *Late Fourth Century Classicism*, p. 20.

ensemble appears to be resting on a platform or stage which is defined by four horizontal bands.

The bottom section of the plate contains mythological imagery. In the centre of the exergue is the lounging figure of Ge, resting on her elbow, a familiar pose for this particular personification (plate 152). She was known by a variety of names; as well as Ge she could be called *Tellus*, *Gaia*, *Terra Mater* or Earth. Worship of nature predates all the organised religions of the world, and Ge is arguably the oldest of the named goddesses. According to Hesiod, the original Ge was the creator of the world, and thus an extremely powerful personification.³⁶⁴ On the plate, she is placed below the feet of Theodosios, symbolising his control of the known world, yet her pose is one of relaxed abstraction rather than subjugation. Her head is not bowed in submission, and a smile plays on her lips as she looks up towards the imperial group above her.

Although not as big as the emperor, Ge is portrayed on a larger scale than any of the other figures on the plate, including the two other *augusti*, a clear indication of her importance. She wears a loose flowing robe with a full, embroidered hem, and has a wreath of flowers on her brow. She reclines in what appears to be a field of corn, as shoots with broken leaves and ears of corn are dotted around this section, symbolising the natural world. A large cornucopia is tucked into her bent elbow. Three winged *erotes*, similar to the two on the pediment, fly up towards Theodosios bearing gifts. They are Ge's small attendants known as the *Karpoi* (fruit bearers), and are often depicted with her. One is poised above the lap of Ge, holding a gift up to Theodosios, a second hovers in the area above her extended left foot and a third is in the damaged right-hand corner of the plate. This representation of Ge is very similar to one which appears on the Parabiago Plate (plate 180), the subject of Chapter Seven, and also on the bottom section of the cuirass of the Prima Porta statue of Augustus, now in the Vatican Museum (plate 153); perhaps the portrayal of Theodosios accompanied by Ge is being aligned with that of Augustus displaying her on his body armour. Even though this plate was produced towards the end

³⁶⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 116-133.

of the fourth century when the new, Christian empire was becoming more established, it demonstrates that those in power continued to require the support of the old gods.

There are further personifications on the dish, as Ge is accompanied by five not four *Karpoi*, who thus cannot be said to represent the Four Seasons, as they can do elsewhere; here they personify earth's fruitfulness. Kiilerich writes that in view of the importance of number symbolism in Late Antiquity, they might refer either to the five years that had passed since the *quinquennalia* of the emperor or to the five years to come until his *quindecennalia*.³⁶⁵ However, she prefers to interpret them as representing the dioceses that made up the *pars Orientis* of the Empire, namely Oriens, Aegyptus, Asiana, Pontica, and Thrakia. This would be particularly apt if, as she suggests, the official receiving the honour from the emperor is the *praefectus praetorio per Orientem*. It would mean that the plate could indicate the jurisdictional state of the two parts of the Empire before September 387. But this was a time of uncertainty due to the positioning of the old prefecture of Illyricum, the control of which moved between East and West at different times around this period, and Kiilerich's interpretation depends on an exact date of production, which is unclear. There has been no other interpretation offered regarding a group of five *erotes*, therefore the knowledge of whether these particular *Karpoi* personified something other than fecundity is now lost to us.

There is a marked difference in the way the figures are rendered in the two sections of the plate. The representations of the faces and hands of human figures, the emperors and the soldiers, have a solidity and plasticity, as they are moulded out of silver. The personifications Ge and her *Karpoi* have been created in a linear style and consequently look far more ethereal. The mythological world extends into the imperial court through the two *karpoi* who float above the emperors, in a space occupied by Christian angels in later imagery. The iconography of this plate records a cross-over point between Roman and Byzantine art as defined by art historians of today. In the exergue, the classical motif of Ge reclining, surrounded by fruit and flowers and attended by three *Karpoi* dates back to antiquity. Above, the court scene with the static, front-facing emperors is in the more

³⁶⁵ Kiilerich, *Late Fourth Century Classicism*, p. 24.

abstract, flat style that was to become more regularly employed, and it makes the distinction between the ‘real’ world and the divine.

Changing styles and personifications

This phenomenon of representing imperial figures in a different style to classical subjects also occurs on the Constantius dish and has been described above; additionally, it was a means of emphasising the power of the emperor in the here and now. The panels on the Arch of Constantine in Rome provide another clear example, as again the two styles are juxtaposed (plate 154). Finely carved medallions from an older monument have been placed alongside a contemporary frieze, whose roughly carved figures with disproportionally large heads pay court to the emperor, who is positioned in the middle, facing the viewer. On all of these Late Antique examples, the three silver imperial plates and the marble panel, the emphasis is on placing the emperor in the centre square-on, so he faces directly out of the picture. This is so he can dominate and his eyes can engage with those of the viewer. The significance of the gaze has already been discussed in conjunction with the face of Oceanos on the Mildenhall Great Dish. Here it is used to empower the ruling emperor and reinforce his hold over his subjects, and the flat, direct style emphasises that this is no archaic representation, but very much of the present day.

Personifications were to survive this change in style, and their continuation and traditional appearance provided a vital link to past glories. Art historians have tended to see the move away from classic forms of representation as a symptom of artistic decline. In his book on early medieval art, Ernst Kitzinger regarded it as a transition period, ‘the transformation of a classical style into a transcendental, abstract style’ which occurred in the Middle Ages.³⁶⁶ However, this change was not transitional, but a new form that was deliberately engineered to be more literal and potent, and capable of transmitting clear information. The means by which the two smaller emperors shown alongside Theodosios can be identified, is an example of this. By Late Antiquity the ruling classes had become very sophisticated in their use of imagery in order to inform and control a vast empire. There is no reason to

³⁶⁶ E. Kitzinger, *Early Medieval Art* (London: the British Museum, 1940), pp. 7-15.

suppose that there was a dearth of craftsmen able to work in the older, more traditional manner. The new so-called 'Byzantine' style would have symbolised confidence and power in what was then the modern world.

Kitzinger saw the rejection of the classical style and the adoption of the style of the 'sub-antique' as an attempt to identify with a social class that had previously been rejected.³⁶⁷ However, artists and patrons alike did not reject the classical style but perpetuated it, as it provided them with a reminder of their illustrious past history. By the fourth century, the government of the Roman Empire was maintained by a complex structure of military, bureaucratic, educational, economic and legal institutions. This created new criteria of status outside of the aristocracy who had inherited their high positions, and encouraged social mobility. So, for example, Libanios, a teacher of rhetoric in Antioch, was made an honorary praetorian prefect, and generals could be promoted to the senate.³⁶⁸ Emperors actively employed men of lower class, as they were less of a threat than the aristocracy, and more dependent upon their imperial patron. Some emperors themselves came up through the ranks, Justin I (518-527) in the fifth century being an example of this form of upward mobility. Furthermore the trend among aristocratic families was to restrict the number of children to a maximum of three, and because of high mortality rates they, in effect, did not fully replace themselves.³⁶⁹ All of these factors contributed to creating a ruling class containing members who had not received a privileged upbringing. The inclusion of personifications such as Nike and Ge, who were ubiquitous and therefore known to all levels of society, provided recognisable classical imagery to those in power who had not had the benefit of *paideia*. The mixture of the old classical style and the new Byzantine style, as shown on the Constantius and Theodosios plates, exemplifies the changing nature of society of Late Antiquity. Representations of personifications were to maintain their integrity through this transition, as they were the link between the old world and the new, as well as being a convenient and shorthand way of communicating abstract values.

³⁶⁷ E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1977, repr. 1995), pp. 12-13.

³⁶⁸ *Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 1222: Keith Hopkins, 'Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire', *Past and Present*, 32 (1965), p. 19.

³⁶⁹ Hopkins, 'Élite Mobility', 12-26

When a personification was shown alongside the emperor there was a two-way exchange. So the personification of Ge on the Missorium of Theodosios would have both enhanced and been enhanced by the presence of the emperor. As the churchman John Chrysostom said:

But frequently now when we see a king, attended by a large bodyguard, enter the palace, we count those happy who are near him, and have a share in his speech and mind, and partake of all the rest of his glory.³⁷⁰

This partnership of personification and emperor was a symbiotic relationship, and one that was mutually beneficial. The emperor received support from the divine world, and indicated his long ancestry and links to the glorious past through the use of classical imagery. The personifications received imperial and official approval and remained so potent that some were eventually translated from deities into Christian ciphers. The old gods were outlawed yet their influence lingered on through the deployment of personifications.

This chapter has examined the ways in which personifications were used to validate and reinforce imperial power. It demonstrates that they were knowingly used by emperors to enhance their potency. The silver statuette representing the personification of the genius of the emperor, provided an introduction to the cult of the emperor in Late Antiquity. Although Christianity did not allow a ruling emperor to be treated as divine, representations of his genius enabled veneration of the emperor to continue within the imperial cult.

Three surviving silver plates depict an emperor carrying out three different imperial duties, and on each occasion he is supported by a female personification. Nike appears alongside the emperor on two of the plates in differing roles: on the Constantius dish she joins this emperor in a celebration of victory, and on the Valentinian dish she goes into battle with him. This illustrates her dual identity as a desirable ally in both peace and war. The

³⁷⁰ Nunc certe cum regem videmus frequenti cum satellitio regiam adeuntem, clients eius, sermonis, consilii et gloriae participes, beatos praedicamus, nosque miseros, etsi infinitis bonis abundemus, quorum sensum non percipimus, eorum gloriam intuentes. John Chrysostom, *Patrologiae Graecae*, ed. by J. P. Migne, 161 vols (Paris: 1857-1866), vol. 47, pp. 291-94. An Exhortation to Theodore after his Fall (Ad Theodorum Lapsum), 1.12, John Chrysostom, On the Priesthood; Ascetic Treatises; Select Homilies and Letters; Homilies on the Statutes, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109html>> [accessed 17 May, 2008].

personification of earth, Ge, sits beneath the feet of the emperor Theodosios, ostensibly demonstrating his sway over the known world. However, rather than being in thrall to him, she supports him and through her *Karpoi* offers him gifts. On each dish, the personifications are depicted working in partnership with the emperor, and there is a mutual exchange of power. All three emperors were Christian, and yet they still required the presence of these particular personifications.

Unlike some of the personifications discussed in previous chapters, Nike and Ge were commonplace and would have been recognised by contemporary viewers from all levels of society. It was therefore advantageous to integrate their traditional images into the new Byzantine and Christian style of representation, where they could communicate concepts such as victory or the span of the known world, while maintaining a subliminal link to the past glories of empire. In this way, personifications maintained their power through repeated representation on official imagery. It should be further noted that on imperial imagery the figure of the emperor was effectively a personification, as he stood at the apex of the Empire and thus represented its overarching might.

As can be seen, certain personifications became official symbols in Late Antiquity, and worked with the emperor to their mutual benefit. However, the most potent and widespread official personification then was that of the city-tyche, a figure who acted autonomously; the next chapter is devoted to the role it played within society.

Chapter 6 - City-Tyches: Official Personifications

A city-tyche was ostensibly that most straightforward of personifications: a female figure who represented a specific city. *Τύχη* is a feminine Greek noun, hence the gender. There seems to be only one probable example of a male city-tyche; a series of first and second century statues show Aristaios, one of the founders of Cyrene in North Africa, in that guise.³⁷¹ In this chapter, I focus on the official and imperial role of the city-tyche through four case studies of silver vessels: a set of chair ornaments, a group of stamped pieces and two plates, all of which display the image of a city-tyche (plates 155-161). *Τύχη*, or in Latin *Tyche*, was originally the goddess of fate and chance, and her image was adopted by municipalities in order to secure good fortune; all cities in Late Antiquity shared this concept.³⁷² Within this definition, city-tyches can be placed into one of two types: firstly, those who carry very particular attributes and can be assigned to one particular city, such as Antioch or Rome; and secondly, a mass of generic tyches bearing generic attributes, who require further identification. In media such as mosaics, this was usually achieved by writing their name alongside the figure.

In Late Antiquity, the city-tyche was predominantly a symbol of imperial might, as her image was used in an official capacity to represent centres of power such as Rome and Constantinople. She stood for continuity from the ancient world to the present, and the contemporary viewer would have been aware of associations with the original goddess *Τύχη*, who guaranteed the fortunes of a city. Her image had flexibility and so, for instance, when Constantinople became the capital of the Eastern Empire it was possible to design a new and appropriate city-tyche. It was ubiquitous and appeared on all manner of imperial objects such as silver plate and consular diptychs; when applied as a stamp it conferred an official guarantee of value on the item. Placed alongside each other, individual city-tyches could connote different and complex messages.

³⁷¹ Susan B. Matheson, 'The Goddess Tyche', in Matheson, ed., *An Obsession with Fortune*, p. 28.

³⁷² Georgina E. Borromeo, 'Tyche – Fortuna: The Personification of Chance and Imperial Cities', in Bonde, ed., *Survival of the Gods*, p. 80.

The city-tyche occasionally appeared outside of the world of officialdom, where she acted as the cipher for a city within a narrative as, for example, with the city-tyche in the Phaedra and Hippolytos section of the frieze on the Sevso Meleager plate. Here, she probably represented Athens, the prime location in the story. Furthermore, it is possible that an actor representing such a city-tyche might have been present in a dramatic enactment of the tale, in order to locate the action. As this facet of the role of the city-tyche has already been examined, I will not deal with it any further in this chapter.

The city-tyche was a female image with immense power, as I will now demonstrate. I start with the Esquiline tyche statuettes, followed by a small group of hallmarks in the form of city-tyches. I then offer a new interpretation of iconography of the Anastasios dish from Sutton Hoo – this dish bears representations of two city-tyches – and finish with the *Missorium* of Ardabur Aspar on which a pair of city-tyches is also portrayed.

The four City-Tyches of the Esquiline Treasure

These four chair ornaments, each depicting a city-tyche, form part of the Esquiline Treasure, a hoard of silver plate excavated in Rome at the end of the eighteenth century. They are dated to the second half of the fourth century AD, and are now in the British Museum.³⁷³ Each is in the form of a female statuette, approximately 14 cm high, resting on a rectangular socket, and weighing between 706 and 732 g.³⁷⁴ They were probably intended to cap the ends of a piece of furniture. They are in Roman dress and bear a variety of attributes, which has led to them being identified as representing the cities of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria.³⁷⁵

Both the goddess *Tύχη* and the notion of each city having its own personality and female representative, originated in ancient Greece. Here, *Tύχη* personified chance or fortune, both good and bad, and was paired with *Nemesis* (righteous indignation), who would bring

³⁷³ Shelton, *Esquiline Treasure*, pp. 53-55.

³⁷⁴ O. M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East; In the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography of the British Museum* (London: by order of the Trustees of the British Museum, 1901), p. 74.

³⁷⁵ Dalton, *Catalogue*, pp. 74-75; Shelton, *Esquiline Treasure*, p. 86.

about the downfall of those who omitted to sacrifice to the gods or provide for others less fortunate than themselves. *Tύχη* was known to be extremely capricious, and petitioners were careful to avoid courting bad luck in any form, so most Greek cities dedicated temples specifically to *Αγαθή Τύχη*, Good Fortune. The earliest mention of *Tύχη* can be found in the *Theogony* of Hesiod, written around 700 BC. He records that she was one of the many daughters of Oceanos and Tethys.³⁷⁶ In the sixth/fifth century BC, Pindar (c. 518-438 BC) prayed to *Tύχη* as the daughter of Zeus, not Oceanos, in one of his Olympian Odes.³⁷⁷ Although there is no hint of specialisation in the earliest writings by Homer and Hesiod, Pindar spoke of *Tύχη* as ‘*φερέπολις*’, ‘she who holds up the city’.³⁷⁸ In the sixth century BC the first recorded statue of *Tύχη* was carved in the city of Smyrna by Bupalos (fl.c.540 - c. 537 BC), and it depicted her with a ‘heavenly sphere’ upon her head and carrying a cornucopia.³⁷⁹

During the Hellenistic period the Greek *polis* (city) took shape, and the city-tyche became established as a distinct class of personification, separate from the goddess *Tύχη*.³⁸⁰ In many cities a cult was established around their individual city-tyche, upon which the fortunes of the population were believed to depend. Miniature tyche figures with both amuletic and apotropaic properties were manufactured (plate 162). The depiction of cities and countries personified by a female wearing a mural crown can be seen on coins dating from the fourth century BC, and by the second century AD this form of representation was commonplace.³⁸¹ The Romans in turn fused the Greek *Tύχη* with *Fortuna*, their fertility goddess, and so she continued to represent chance or fortune, and to control individuals, cities and events.³⁸² By Late Antiquity, the symbol of the city-tyche had evolved further, and these figures were not worshipped as goddesses but recognised as personifications of administrative districts. However, their imagery maintained a connection with the original

³⁷⁶ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 337-365.

³⁷⁷ Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 12. 1-12a.

³⁷⁸ According to the second-century geographer, Pausanias, *Descriptions of Greece*, 4.30.6.

³⁷⁹ Πρῶτος ἐποίησεν ὧν ἴσμεν πόλον τε ἔχουσιν ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ τῇ ἑτέρᾳ χειρὶ τὸ καλούμενον Ἀμαλκθεΐας κέρας ὑπὸ Ἑλλήνων. Pausanias, *Descriptions of Greece*, 4.30.6, ed. and trans. by W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod, 4 vols (London: William Heinmann Ltd, 1926), vol 2, pp. 338-9.

³⁸⁰ Percy Gardner, ‘Countries and Cities in Ancient Art’, *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 9 (1888), p. 80.

³⁸¹ J. Pollitt, ‘An Obsession with Fortune’, in Matheson, ed., *An Obsession with Fortune*, pp. 14-15; Gardner, ‘Countries and Cities’, p. 79.

³⁸² Susan B. Matheson, ‘The Goddess Tyche’, in Matheson, ed., *An Obsession with Fortune*, p. 23.

Τύχη, and still carried connotations of chance and fortune. Therefore, to the contemporary viewer in Late Antiquity, the city-tyche personified luck as well as the city itself.

The city figurehead was always female, and this came about through a collaboration between art and text, with each reinforcing the other. The gender can be partly attributed to linguistic roots, as the word for ‘city’ in both Greek - *πολις* (*polis*) – and Latin – *urbs* – is a feminine noun, and thus cities were understood to be female, rather in the way we think of ships today. It was an age of rhetoric, not silent reading; when we look at images of city-tyches, it is necessary to be aware that the contemporary viewer would often have also experienced some form of speech personifying the city verbally, and thus engaged with city-tyche imagery aurally as well as visually. For example, in AD 379 Themistios welcomed the newly elected emperor, Theodosios, to Constantinople, telling him that:

[...] the Fair City is preparing the crown of riches for that day on which she shall place it on his brow [...] ‘the two mother cities of the world – I mean that of Romulus and that Constantine [...] If you, O divine eminence, should dedicate such prizes of victory to the great senate, then truly shall your city be a second Rome.’³⁸³

This coronation of the emperor by *Constantinopolis* is depicted on a fourth-century cameo, now in the Hermitage Museum (plate 163).

Each of the Esquiline city-tyches would have been perceived to possess its own personality. Throughout this thesis, the links between images of personifications and their place in literature and rhetoric have been addressed, and the figure of the city-tyche is no exception. Menander Rhetor, in his fourth-century treatise on epideictic oratory (set orations adapted for display), included a long and detailed section on how to praise a city.³⁸⁴ The speaker was expected to relate the biography of a city, linking it to its founding, ideally by Hellenic settlers in ancient times, although newer cities could be seen as holding great promise for

³⁸³ Τὸν μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ πλούτου στέφανον εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην ἢ καλλιπολις εὐτρεπίζεται [...] καὶ τῶν γε δυοῖν μητροπόλεων τῆς οἰκουμένης – λέγω δὲ τῆς Ῥωμύλου καὶ τῆς Κωνσταντίνου [...] ὃ θεία κεφαλὴ, τῇ μεγάλῃ βουλῇ νικητήρια, τότε ἀληθινῶς ἔσται Δευτέρα Ῥώμη σὲ πόλις. Themistios, *Oration* 14, 181d-183d, in *Themistii Orationes*, ed. by W. Dindorf (Leipzig: 1832), trans. by Peter Heather and David Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), pp. 226-27.

³⁸⁴ Menander Rhetor, *Treatise 1*, Books 2 and 3, in Russell and Wilson, ed. and trans., pp. 33-75.

the future.³⁸⁵ Some cities were founded after an event such as a marriage or victory in battle, and some had a famous founder, Alexandria being a prime example. Cities were valued for their accomplishments, the Thebans were excellent flute players, for example, or their branches of knowledge, artistic skills or athletic prowess. Some such as Athens had been highly honoured by the gods, and so we can gauge that there existed a ranking system of cities and by extension their *tyches*. This construction of an individual identity meant that each city was believed to have a distinct personality, of which the city-*tyche* was the physical manifestation. All of this knowledge would have come into play when the contemporary viewer engaged with the image of a city-*tyche*. The four differing Esquiline statuettes are a surviving reminder of this once commonplace aspect of Late Antique urban culture; that such personifications had their own histories and characters.

The Esquiline *tyches* may well have been displayed on the poles of a *sedes gestatoria*, a ceremonial chair (plate 164).³⁸⁶ They can be paired, as the unsightly weldings for their pin chains are on opposite sides of their respective sockets, two on the left and two on the right, and thus would have been concealed on the inner side (plate 165a and 165b). The two leading cities, Rome and Constantinople, would have been matched, leaving Antioch and Alexandria as the second pair. The decorative leaves that hang underneath are hinged, allowing them to swing, and in an ambulatory situation they would move and catch and reflect the light, as well as making a chinking noise (plate 165c). They thus appealed to both sight and sound. Had they been designed for a static chair such as a *sella curulis* (backless chair used by officials), it would not be necessary for the leaf to be hinged. The socket and pin arrangement is crude but suitable for easy removal, as these were valuable items which needed to be kept safe when not in use. The Esquiline city-*tyches* are very robust and all protuberances that might get bent or knocked have been reinforced by stems, which again suggests public display on a *sedes gestatoria*. Between them they represented a huge area of the Empire, and as *tyches* would have been seen as expressing the good fortunes of these imperial cities.

³⁸⁵ καὶ ὅτι μετὰ πλείονων καὶ βελτιόνων ἐλπίδων οἰκεῖται. Menander Rhetor, 1.2.355.7-8, in Russell and Wilson, ed. and trans., pp. 50-51.

³⁸⁶ Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, pp. 139-140.

City-tyches had a singular power, and their statues were understood to contain this force. In Late Antiquity there was a popular belief that statues were animated.³⁸⁷ The fifth-century account of Mark the Deacon describes how as a procession of Christians entered the city of Gaza, the demon within a statue of Aphrodite came forth out of the marble, and the work crumbled, killing two pagan believers.³⁸⁸ This idea of such objects containing the living essence of their subject was to transmute into the way worshippers related to Christian icons, the difference being that pagan statues were seen as evil in opposition to the godly Christian images. The city-tyche was frequently represented in statue form, as here, and used in both pagan and Christian ritual. The eighth or ninth century *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* describes how during the reign of Constantine:

[...] a new little statue of the Tyche of the city was escorted in procession carried by Helios. Escorted by many officials, it came to the Stama and received prizes from the Emperor Constantine, and after being crowned, it went out and was placed in the Senate until the next birthday of the city.³⁸⁹

City-tyches transcended the categorisation by Christians of pagan statues containing only ill.

Three of the Esquiline tyches, *Roma*, *Constantinopolis* and *Alexandria*, wear tunics and mantles, and sit on their hollow support as if on a chair, their booted feet swinging below. The fourth, *Antioch* (plate 157), differs considerably, as this figure conforms to a unique iconographic type. Early in the third century BC, the sculptor Eutychides established the iconography for the tyche of Antioch, when he carved her sitting on a rock representing nearby Mount Silpion, holding ears of corn and resting her feet on a personification of the river Orantes as a young man (plate 166). Her stance is *contrapposto*, with her cloak wrapped around her shoulders, and on her head is a turreted headdress. This latter attribute is said to have originated in the East and clearly links the wearer to a city, as the detail can

³⁸⁷ Cyril Mango, 'Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963), p. 59.

³⁸⁸ Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza*, 59-61.

³⁸⁹ Τοῦ δὲ Ἡλίου ἄρματος κατενεχθένιος ἐν ᾧ Ἱπποδρομίῳ, δορυφορούμενον εἰσῆει στηλίδιον χαινόν, παρὰ Κωνσταντίνου χατασχευασθέν, ὑπὸ Ἡλίου φερόμενον, Τύχῃ πόλεως· ἐν βραβείοις πλείστοις εἰς τὸ στάμα εἰσῆει καὶ ἔλαβεν ἄθλα παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Κωνσταντίνου, καὶ στεφανωθὲν ἐξῆει | καὶ ἐτίθετο ἐν τῷ Σινάτῳ ἕως τῶν <ἐπιόντων> γενεθλίων τῆς πόλεως. *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, 38.7-14, in *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, ed. and trans. by Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), pp. 102-3.

include brick walls, towers and gates, as on the Esquiline figure.³⁹⁰ The statue of Antioch was the original image of a city-tyche wearing a mural crown, and her distinctive headgear was adopted by subsequent representations of tyches of other cities, although it was not mandatory.

The statuette of *Roma*, the city-tyche of Rome, also displays attributes unique to her city, as she is the only tyche who is consistently depicted bearing weapons (plate 155). Rome was always portrayed as a warrior, and sometimes as an Amazon with bared right breast, although not in this instance. This figurine has a shield by her left side, a staff in her right hand, and she wears a centurion's helmet. In his poem, *The War against Gildo*, Claudian, the fourth to fifth-century poet, used this unique iconography when he personified Rome, initially as a weak, tired old woman:

Feeble her voice, slow her step, her eyes deep buried. Her cheeks were sunken and hunger had wasted her limbs. Scarcely can her weak shoulders support her unpolished shield. Her ill-fitting helmet shows her grey hairs and the spear she carries is a mass of rust.³⁹¹

However, eventually:

[...] her former strength returned, and her hair put off its grey of eld; her helmet grew solid, upright stood the plumes, the round shield shone once more, and gone was every trace of rust from her wingèd, gleaming spear.³⁹²

The latter part of the description fits well with the iconography of the Esquiline statuette.

The personification *Roma*, although originally a cult figure, very successfully survived the transition from pagan to Christian empire, maintaining the link between the emperor and Rome, and the concept of what it meant to be part of Rome's long imperial history.³⁹³ She

³⁹⁰ Shelton, 'Imperial Tyches', *Gesta* (1979), p. 30.

³⁹¹ Vox tenuis tardique gradus oculique iacentes interius; fugere genae; ieiuna lacertos exidit macies. umeris viz sustinet aegris squalentem clipeum; laxata casside prodit canitiem plenamque trahit rubiginis hastam. Claudian, *The War against Gildo*, l. 21-25, in Platnauer, ed. and trans., pp. 100-101.

³⁹² Contiuo redit ille vigor senique colorem mutavere comae. solidatam crista resurgens erexit galeam clipeique recanduit orbis et levis excussa micuit rubigine cornus. Claudian, *The War against Gildo*, l. 209-212, in Platnauer, ed. and trans., pp. 114-15.

³⁹³ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, p. 178.

was depicted on coins, either alone or with the *tyche* of Constantinople, who was also known as *Néa Póμῆ*, *Nea Roma*, New Rome (plate 167). This partnership of *Roma* and *Constantinopolis* continued throughout Late Antiquity; they were depicted as a pair on the sixth-century diptych of Flavius Taurus Clementinus, for example (plate 130). The *tyche* of Rome also appears on the right-hand side of the fifth-century triumphal arch in S. Maria Maggiore in Rome, where scenes from the childhood of Christ are depicted in mosaic (plate 168). The temple in which Christ's presentation is taking place is that of *Roma*, as on the pediment this city-*tyche* is clearly shown. She wears a helmet, has a sceptre or spear in her left hand and a globe topped by a personification of victory in her right, and at her side is a large round shield.³⁹⁴ Originally a Greek goddess personifying the Roman state, *Roma* maintained her power through transformation to a city-*tyche*, whose support was solicited by both the emperor and the church.³⁹⁵

The Esquiline statuette of *Constantinopolis* wears a helmet in the same style as that of *Roma*, with a massive plume and raised cheek pieces in the form of opposed volutes (plate 156). Constantinople is the only other city whose *tyche* was on occasion depicted with a helmet, but she was usually shown wearing a mural crown. The helmet signified that she was New Rome, but at this time she was never shown with weapons, although later she was shown with a helmet and shield on some coins. The figure's left arm is wrapped around a large decorated cornucopia overflowing with sheaves of grain, grapes and larger fruit, and her right hand offers a *patera*, the dish used for libations.

Of the four Esquiline figures, Alexandria is the only one that could be described as a generic *tyche*, as there is not an attribute that would be recognised as peculiar to that one city (plate 158). She holds sheaves of grain and fruit in her hands, on her head is a turreted crown and her feet rest on a ship's prow. In the Hellenistic period one of the attributes of the goddess *Tyche* was a ship's rudder resting on a wheel symbolising her power to guide and control, and this symbol was later adopted by the Roman *Fortuna*. A city-*tyche* was

³⁹⁴ Toynbee, 'Roma and *Constantinopolis* in Late-Antique Art from 312-365', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 37, p. 271.

³⁹⁵ Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), vol. I, pp. 158-160.

often shown seated, particularly on coins, resting her foot on a prow; this was a metonym for the wheel and rudder emblem, and not necessarily the symbol of a port city.

The identification of Alexandria is open to debate. This particular grouping of the four cities of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria was not a recurring motif at that time. There are images of various groups of city-tyches dating to the Late Antique period, but they do not conform to a set pattern and the cities represented vary. For example, four tyches appear in the *Calendar of 354* but they are Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople and Trier; Henri Stern states that the standard group is six and includes Antioch and Carthage.³⁹⁶ On the fourth to early fifth-century *Tabula Peutingeriana*, only three city-tyches are depicted: Rome, Constantinople and Antioch. Therefore, it is uncertain that the 'Alexandria' statuette does indeed represent that particular city, as in the fourth century there were many other possible candidates for the role. She could be the city-tyche of Trier, the centre of Roman administration in Gaul at that time, the residence of Constantine's father, the original seat of the emperor Valentinian I, and which had its own mint. She may stand for Milan, Ravenna or Sirmium (near modern-day Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia), as they were all imperial capitals in the fourth century, and the Western imperial court actually relocated from Rome to Ravenna in 402. Indeed, had the Esquiline figures of Constantinople and Antioch not been found, but just Alexandria and *Roma*, the former would unquestionably have been immediately identified as representing Constantinople. Therefore this statuette could represent any one of a number of cities, and its identity is open to different interpretations.

However, assuming that the identification of Alexandria is correct, then as a group the four Esquiline statuettes may have held Christian connotations. By the second half of the fourth century, in the newly Christian Roman Empire four patriarchates had been created: Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria. Jerusalem, the fifth, was not added until AD 451. Alan Cameron, as an aside when trying to establish a later date for the Esquiline treasure,

³⁹⁶ H. Stern, *Le Calendrier de 354. Etude sur son texte et ses illustrations* (Paris: Geuthner, 1953), pp. 124-144, cited in Michele Renee Salzman, *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 27-28.

indirectly associates these statuettes with the patriarchates.³⁹⁷ He suggests that the reason that *Constantinopolis* wears a helmet rather than a crown reflects the decision by the Council of Constantinople in 381 to elevate the see of Constantinople, as the New Rome, to second place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy after Rome. He says that this distinguishes it from the other two lower ranked patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch. That this group of statuettes represented the four Christian patriarchates seems even more likely when they are placed in the context of the rest of the Esquiline Hoard, which includes the Projecta Casket (plate 101), whose inscription urges its owners to ‘live in Christ’. Therefore, as well as signalling the extent and the might of the Roman Empire, the four statuettes probably held religious significance for Christian followers.

As has been demonstrated, the four Esquiline tyches may have had a religious purpose in promoting the four great strongholds of Christianity, and they certainly had some form of official function. Hallmarks in the form of a city-tyche also performed as symbols of imperial authority, and I now examine their role in promoting the power of the Empire.

City-Tyches as hallmarks

On rare occasions, the motif of a city-tyche appeared as a stamp on the base of silver vessels, where it had the straightforward official function of guaranteeing quality (plate 161). Here, these symbols are analogous with bronze empress steelyard weights, discussed in Chapter Five. Monograms and imperial busts were the principal motifs in hall-marking, but there are four surviving examples of stamps in the form of a city-tyche on three bowls and a vase from the fourth and fifth centuries.³⁹⁸ These tyche hallmarks are square or rectangular, and found on the base of the object, and have been dated by comparison with coins.³⁹⁹ A stamp on a deep bowl with a beaded rim found in Syria (plate 161a) depicts a tyche seated *en face*, wearing a helmet and holding a globe in her left and a staff in her right. It is dated to the end of the fourth century, and underneath is the inscription

³⁹⁷ Alan Cameron, ‘The Date and Owners of the Esquiline Treasure’, *American Journal of Archaeology*, 89.1 (1985), p. 141.

³⁹⁸ Erica Cruikshank Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Trustees for Harvard University, 1961), pp. 230-239.

³⁹⁹ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, p. 5.

ABAAATOC CΦPAΓCEN, Abalatos being the name of the official who applied the seal.⁴⁰⁰ Another bowl from the same period from Sulin in Russia, shows a similar stamp (plate 161b). Additionally, there is a cross on top of the tyche's globe, and the letters TIM(otheou), the genitive form of the stamping official's name, are written underneath and Φ or Θ to the right of the figure. A fourth to fifth-century small fluted bowl from Romania bears a square stamp showing a tyche seated in profile to the left (plate 161c). She has her right foot on a prow, wears a helmet and holds a cornucopia [?] in her left arm and an unidentified object in her extended right hand. There is a cross in the left corner, and underneath are the letters CONS, signifying that the vessel originates from Constantinople. This is the only one of these vessels to give the place of origin. Along the left side is written ΔIO(medou), Diomedes, [which translates as 'from the gods'], again the genitive form of an official's name.⁴⁰¹ A tall late-fourth to fifth-century vase depicting the nine Muses, found in a grave in a village in Russia and now in the Oruzheinaia Palata Museum, has been stamped twice with a single rectangular stamp showing a seated tyche figure holding a sphere (plate 161d).

During Late Antiquity, the process of hallmarking vessels made of precious metal as an indication of their value was introduced, although only a small amount of silver plate was stamped. In fact, tests have shown that there is no significant difference in the purity of stamped and unstamped objects, as both tend to be of very pure quality silver.⁴⁰² The earliest of these stamps were applied to gold and silver ingots, and no stamps have been found on items dating to prior the fourth century.⁴⁰³ By the end of the fourth century officially stamped ingots were relatively common, as the Treasury required large sums to pay its soldiers and officials; there was a practice of presenting pounds of silver on occasions such as imperial accessions and five-year anniversaries, which can be related to the distribution of silver plate as *largitio*, such as that of Constantius, Valentinian and

⁴⁰⁰ Susan A. Boyd and Marlia Mundell Mango, eds, *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1992), p. 206.

⁴⁰¹ Boyd and Mango suggest these initials represent the abbreviated genitive form of the official's name, *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate*, p. 206.

⁴⁰² Pieter Meyers, 'Elemental Composition of the Sion Treasure and Other Byzantine Silver Objects', in Boyd and Mango, eds, *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate*, p. 171.

⁴⁰³ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, p. 3.

Theodosios, described in chapter five.⁴⁰⁴ Stamping was controlled by the office of the *Argentarii Comitatusenses* which was a department of the *CSL*, the high-ranking official who oversaw all aspects of revenue and expenditure in coin and precious metals.⁴⁰⁵ It is thought that silver plate was taken to be stamped after it had been formed but prior to decoration. Some objects have a recognisable group of five imperial stamps including the monogram of the ruler, and these are understood to have been embossed in Constantinople, although they may have been subsequently decorated elsewhere. Other vessels bear stamps which were used in centres outside the capital and do not belong to the imperial series, but the actual stamping location of these is often unknown.⁴⁰⁶ Not only Rome and Constantinople but many other cities such as Carthage, Ravenna, Antioch, Trier, and Milan housed workshops producing high-class silverware.⁴⁰⁷ This system of silver stamping was fairly short-lived. In the early part of the seventh century a huge amount of silver plate was donated to Heraclios (610-641) to help fund the Persian Wars, and it was melted down and turned into coinage. This resulted in the hallmarking system eventually falling into disuse under Constans II (641-668), as by then more silver was used for coins and less for vessels. The tyche hallmarks on the dishes described are all single stamps rather than part of a group, and so it seems that their function was to confer official approval and confirmation of quality.

A comparable example of the way the tyche hallmark was used to confer official status can be found in a sixth-century mosaic floor from Madaba, Jordan which includes a representation of three city-tyches, indicating that there was an official or municipal use for the building (plate 169). Mosaic inscriptions tell us that the tyches represent *PWMH*, *ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΑ* and *ΜΗΛΑΒΑ*: Rome, Gregoria and Madaba. The inclusion of *Roma* in this Eastern province is thought to reflect the policy of the then emperor Justinian, of reintegrating conquests in Italy and the west into an empire now ruled from Constantinople.⁴⁰⁸ Despite the diminished status of Rome by this period, her tyche with its

⁴⁰⁴ K. S. Painter, 'A Late-Roman Silver Ingot from Kent', *Antiquaries Journal* 52 (1972), p. 85.

⁴⁰⁵ Strong, *Greek and Roman Plate*, p. 183.

⁴⁰⁶ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, pp. 23-35.

⁴⁰⁷ Strong, *Greek and Roman Plate*, p. 183.

⁴⁰⁸ Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 199.

connotations of glorious empire still maintained its authority. *Roma* is one of three city-tyches who appear at the top of what was once a large mosaic pavement containing a series of mythical figurative scenes; this was the floor of a grand hall within a mansion. It has been badly damaged by a wall later built right through the centre, but the scenes that remain depict the story of Hippolytos and Phaedra, also a popular subject on silver plate, and Aphrodite and Adonis. The somewhat ramshackle iconography of the city tyches is probably down to local craftsmanship being executed a long way from the centre of empire. Because this site was on the outskirts of the Empire, artisans would have had less exposure to standard forms of imagery, and could improvise without much constraint.

Like the Esquiline tyches and tyche hallmarks on silver plate, these Madaba figures acted as imperial symbols of authority. The identity of the city of Gregoria has presented problems, and there have been various suggestions as to its location.⁴⁰⁹ There is now no trace of a town of this name, but the figure is shown in between two other tyches, in the same pose and wearing the turreted crown of the city-tyche, and so there can be no doubt it represents a city that once existed. The presence of the three tyches signifies that the building was used in an official capacity. The owner was probably a high-ranking bureaucrat, who indicated this through the display of the tyches of Rome and Madaba, the former giving him imperial authority and the latter designating the area for which he was responsible. Perhaps the wealthy owner of the villa originally came from Gregoria, and employed his home tyche to show his own history. As I have shown throughout this thesis, personifications operated as language, conveying information, both official and personal, although today we cannot always be sure to interpret it correctly.

In this section I have considered the motif of the city-tyche as a form of official symbol that conferred imperial authorisation and guarantee. I have shown that, once again, a female image could carry huge authority within the patriarchal society of Late Antiquity. The tyche hallmarks are all embossed on the underside of the vessels, but a comparable stamp

⁴⁰⁹ See for example, R. Avner-Levy, 'A Note on the Iconography of the Personifications in the "Hippolytos Mosaic" at Madaba, Jordan', *Liber Annuus*, 46 (1996), pp. 370-73; Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, p. 85.

has been used as part of a decorative scheme on the face of the Anastasios plate, and this is discussed next.

The Anastasios Plate

A small figure in the form of a seated city-tyche appears twice as a decorative motif on the face of a large, late-fifth to early-sixth century silver dish known as the Anastasios plate, now in the British Museum (plate 160). Its diameter is 71.8 cm and it weighs 5640 g.⁴¹⁰ It has a flat rim decorated with lightly incised geometric and foliate designs in two bands, one on the rim and one on an inner border. Both bands are quartered by small figured medallions (plate 170). The roundels on the rim each contain a running putto, and the four on the inner border depict two running female figures with flowing drapery alternating with two seated city-tyches. The position of these roundels is not quite equidistant and the border decoration on both bands differs in each section. In the centre of the plate is a medallion containing a bird, possibly an eagle, within an eight-pointed star.

This dish was found in the tomb of a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon king, discovered at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk.⁴¹¹ It was a ritual burial and the body had been placed in a specially constructed chamber inside a longship that was then buried. This plate was one of several silver vessels recovered along with many differing objects, some of great value and others of practical use. The footring bears four control stamps of the emperor Anastasios I (491-518), which indicates that the dish was an antique at the time of its burial in around 624-5. The find-site offers no information about the significance of this plate. We can, however, conclude that it was traded or presented as a gift across Europe and across cultures, that it was not melted down despite its considerable value in weight, and that it was considered by its last owners to be an item of status, worthy of interment with a king.

There has been no attempt to view the figurative representations on the dish as forming a meaningful scheme, although there has been much academic debate about the quality of its

⁴¹⁰ Angela Care Evans, ed., *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, Vol. 3.1 (London: British Museum Publications Ltd, 1983), pp. 7-24.

⁴¹¹ Evans, ed., *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, vol. 3.1 (1983), pp. 1-6.

workmanship and unusual decoration. Kitzinger states that the differing sections of border demonstrate the fundamentally unclassical character of this plate, and that although there is a tendency to regard this type of decoration as Eastern, this had by the fourth century become an international style.⁴¹² Bernice Grohskopf suggests that because of the design, it is possible that the dish dates to *c.* 400 and was stamped at a later date.⁴¹³ However Susan Youngs, who has conducted a detailed study of the manufacture, believes that the normal process was followed, and it was stamped prior to decoration.⁴¹⁴ She also comments on the lack of regard for symmetry but says that this type of large dish was designed as a flamboyant showpiece, and was not expected to receive close scrutiny. Angela Evans argues that the small scale decoration and careless method of execution suggest that this object was produced by a second-rate silversmith, and does not come from one of the key workshops in the Empire.⁴¹⁵ None of them has seen the figurative imagery as a coherent scheme. Yet despite their small scale, the personifications depicted combine to convey a very powerful message.

Two seated city-tyches appear on the inner band at opposite points and occupying the full depth, within small medallions that are more like oval cartouches, as they are not true circles (plate 171a and 171b). They are similar, as each figure wears a helmet, holds a staff/spear in his or her right hand and a globe in their left, and has a shield on the right. Although initially they appear to have been stamped, closer examination reveals that they were produced by chasing. They have been identified as probably representing Rome and Constantinople; Toynbee says that they ‘presumably’ represent the two capital cities, as they are based on coin and medallion types of *Roma* and *Constantinopolis* from that period.⁴¹⁶ Dodd plumps for a pair of Constantinoples because of their resemblance to the figure on the fifth-century square hallmark stamps discussed above; however, these hallmarks do not show a shield with the tyche.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹² Kitzinger, *Early Medieval Art*, p. 45.

⁴¹³ Bernice Grohskopf, *The Treasure of Sutton Hoo* (London: Robert Hale & Company, 1970), p. 108.

⁴¹⁴ Susan M. Youngs, ‘The Manufacture of the Sutton Hoo Silver’, in Evans, ed., vol. 3.1, *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial* (1983), pp. 176, 173.

⁴¹⁵ Angela Care Evans, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial* (London: The British Museum Press, 1986), p. 57.

⁴¹⁶ J.M.C. Toynbee, ‘*Roma* and *Constantinopolis* in Late-Antique Art from 365 to Justin II’, in Mylanos, ed., *Studies presented to David Moore Robinson*, p. 276.

⁴¹⁷ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, p. 58.

This copying of motifs from official imagery, such as coins and medallions, on to silver plate has been replicated elsewhere: for example, in the Archaeological Museum in Munich there is a fourth-century imperial *largitio* plate with a frontal portrait of the Emperor Licinius II that can be matched with a virtually identical coin type now in the British Museum.⁴¹⁸ It seems likely that the city-tyches on the Anastasios plate have been copied from coins. Theodosios II (402/408-450) was depicted on coins with both the pairing of *Roma* and *Constantinopolis*, and a sole *Constantinopolis*, who by this later date had acquired a shield, staff, globe and helmet (plate 172). Although by the reign of Anastasios I (491-518), coins tended to show the emperor with winged Christianised Victorys rather than city tyches, they did still appear on the coinage; as late as the end of the sixth century, Justin II (565-578) showed a preference for the seated *Constantinopolis*, the last time she was to appear on coins.⁴¹⁹ Numismatic evidence therefore suggests that the two city-tyches on the Anastasios plate do indeed represent Rome and Constantinople.

This pair of city-tyches should not be viewed in isolation, as they are part of a decorative scheme involving six other figurative motifs. On the decorative frieze around the rim are a further four medallions, also irregular and oval, containing the running figures of winged *erotes* (plate 173). Similar figures appear on the battered remains of a fourth to fifth-century silver flagon, part of the Traprain Treasure hoard (plate 174), and their pose is like that of the three *Karpoi* who surround Ge on the bottom section of the fourth-century *Missorium* of Theodosios (plate 136).⁴²⁰ However, close inspection reveals that three of them are naked and the fourth is draped, which immediately indicates that they are the Four Seasons.

The depiction of the Seasons as three naked and one clothed boy appeared on medallions from the time of Hadrian, although it was not until the reign of Commodus (177-192), at the end of the second century, that they appeared on coins.⁴²¹ Conventionally, only Winter was clothed, and carried a reed, duck or hare, Spring had a basket of flowers, Summer held

⁴¹⁸ Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, p. 20.

⁴¹⁹ Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1999), pp. 6-7, 32.

⁴²⁰ A.O. Curle, *The Treasure of Traprain* (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson & Co., 1923), p. 23.

⁴²¹ J. M. C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions* (New York: The American Numismatic Society, 1986), p. 90.

a scythe and Autumn bore grapes or fruit. It is difficult to distinguish details of the attributes of the *erotes* on the dish, but Summer, holding a curved object, and Winter, who is the only one cloaked, do appear opposite each other on the plate, and likewise Spring, who carries what appears to be a square basket, and Autumn who holds grapes or fruit. The motif of the Four Seasons as running *erotes* appeared in various media in Late Antiquity, as the following examples show. They can be compared to four similar running putti as the Seasons depicted on a third-century sarcophagus, now in the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome (plate 175). Here the putti are positioned on a fictive door carved into the main panel of the coffin, and flanked by four larger versions of these same personifications. Running *erotes* as Seasons appear at the corners of a third-century mosaic floor in the House of the Red Pavement, one of the many Antiochian mosaics now in the museum at Antakya in Turkey (plate 176), and a pair of *erotes* run around a third-century pyxis in the British Museum (plate 177). An early sixth-century mosaic pavement in a Christian building in Greek Thebes provides a later illustration; it depicts two pairs of months (July, February: May, April) rushing towards each other, offering seasonal tributes in exactly the same way as the *erotes* on the dish (plate 178). All the evidence therefore indicates that the four *erotes* on the Anastasios Plate represent the Four Seasons.

Returning to the inner border, it can be argued that the two unidentified females running between the city tyches are Nike and Fortuna (plate 171c and 171d). Again, these motifs can be found on coins, which show Nike holding a wreath and Fortuna, by now conflated with *Tyche*, holding a rudder, or with a prow under her foot, and often representing a city; here the artist has made a commonsense choice and, due to her running pose, shown Fortuna carrying the entire vessel. Finally, the central medallion contains a stylised eagle, yet another coin motif and an imperial one. It therefore seems likely that the silversmith copied the various figures from Roman coins, which gives the design imperial and official connotations. If this was the case, then the Anastasios plate contains a fascinating combination of images relating to the imperial past of the Roman Empire. The Four Seasons guard the outer edge and bring fecundity and wealth. On the inner band, Victory and Fortune rush between two cities, Constantinople and Rome, and in the centre is the

eagle, symbolising the might of the entire empire. Brought together, these symbolise a desire for all that is good for the Roman Empire.

A pair of city-tyches also appear on the Missorium of Ardabur Aspar, another official object, but one with a different function, that of consular *largitio*.

The *Missorium* of Ardabur Aspar

This large dish depicts the consul Flavius Ardaburius Aspar (d. 471) and his son, with two city-tyches (plate 159). Many examples of consular ivory diptychs have survived, but this *missorium* is the only example of consular (rather than imperial) *largitio* silver still in existence at the time of writing.⁴²² The plate has a diameter of 42 cm (weight unavailable), and dates to *c.* AD 434, the year of Aspar's consulship.⁴²³ It commemorates his appointment by the emperor to the post of consul, and would have been presented as a formal gift by Aspar to another member of the élite. I have already described the process of distribution of *largitio*, and its function in securing the loyalty of the recipients in the previous chapter. The inclusion of two large-scale representations of city-tyches on such a dish indicates their importance within official imagery and, as will be demonstrated, this was a high-status object.

Around the rim of the plate, within a band defined by a double line, is an inscription in Latin, which runs clockwise from the symbol of a Christian cross which is at the top centre; again there is a mixture of Christian and pagan imagery, the latter in the form of the tyches. The lettering reads: *FL[avius] ARDABVR ASPAR VIR INLVSTRIS COM[es] ET MAG[ister] MILITVM ET CONSVL ORDINARIVS*. This translates as 'Flavius Ardabur Aspar, illustrious man (a high rank of senator), companion (one of the emperor's close retinue) and military commander and regular consul (a consul who entered his office at the regular time of 1 January would have his name associated with that particular year, in this case AD 434)'.⁴²⁴ Consulship was an office held for one year by emperors and members of

⁴²² Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, p. 46.

⁴²³ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 28.

⁴²⁴ My translation.

the élite. It involved the bearers in considerable expense, as during their term they were expected to host a banquet and lay on public games, as well as dispense largess.

Distribution of valuable gifts was principally carried out by the emperor, but consuls would give their colleagues, friends and relatives commemorative ivory diptychs, and presented along with this was often a commemorative plate or silver vessel containing gold *solidi*.⁴²⁵

In the words of the writer and statesman Symmachus:

It is a solemn and delightful obligation for quaestors *candidati* to present the customary gifts to people of consequence (*potissimis*) and close friends (*amicissimis*), in which number you are naturally included. So I offer you an ivory diptych and a small silver bowl (*canistellum argenteum*) weighing 2 pounds in my son's name, and I beg you to accept this token of respect with pleasure.⁴²⁶

Symmachus was said to have spent 2000 pounds of gold on his son's praetorian games, and the aristocratic senator Petronius Maximus (396-455) double that amount on his own.⁴²⁷

Alan Cameron speculates that Aspar may have had 'a couple of dozen *missoria* made for the important folk, and a couple of hundred two-pound bowls made for the rest'.⁴²⁸ It is arguable that the reason no other consular silver plates have survived, despite their wide distribution, is because they were later melted down and reworked by the recipients, perhaps even for their own later presentations.⁴²⁹

The decoration is in three zones, consisting of a large central section plus two smaller areas above and below. In the centre, the consul Ardabur Aspar is depicted sitting on a cushioned throne which stands on a raised dais, his small son standing by his side. Aspar's right arm is raised and he brandishes the *mappa*, the rolled ceremonial napkin with which he is about to start the games that mark his accession. In his left he holds a sceptre, on top

⁴²⁵ *Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, p. 1179.

⁴²⁶ Religiosum atque uotiuum est ut a quaestoribus candidatis dona sollemnia potissimis atque amicissimis afferantur, quo in numero iure censemini. Offero igitur uobis eburneum diptychum et canistellum argenteum librarum duarum filii mei nomine qui quaestorium munum exhibuit et inpendio precor ut hanc honorificentiam dignemini gratanter amplecti. Valet. Symmachus, in *Symmaque: Lettres*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Callu (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995), p. 85. *Letters*. 7.76, trans. in Alan Cameron, 'Observations on the distribution and ownership of late Roman silver plate', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 5 (1992), p. 180.

⁴²⁷ Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, p. 537.

⁴²⁸ Alan Cameron, 'Observations', p. 182.

⁴²⁹ A. Cutler, 'The Right Hand's Cunning: Craftsmanship and the Demand for Art in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', *Spectrum*, 72.4 (1997), pp. 983-984.

of which are two small busts representing the reigning emperors of the East and West, Theodosios II and Valentinian III (425-455). In the top section of the plate is a pair of medallions containing portrait busts of his father Ardabur and father-in-law Plina, both previous consuls, holding similar sceptres. In the lower section are strewn dishes and palm leaves, prizes for the victors.

The consular pair is flanked by the figures of two city-tyches who stand at ground level. It is highly significant that they are on the same scale as the consul, an indication of their high status. On the *Missorium* of Theodosios, the emperor is shown considerably larger than those surrounding him, and this ordering of scale was common on representations of important people. Here, the cities that the consul represents are depicted as being of equal importance to the man himself, emphasising the official nature of his position. In their right hands they hold *fascies* in the form of a long single curved rod, with a decorated standard representing the traditional axe-head. The tyche on the viewer's left can only be *Roma*, as she is helmeted and depicted as an Amazon in a short tunic, baring her right breast and holding a globe, symbol of imperial power, in her left hand. The tyche on the right has been identified as *Constantinopolis* shown as *Anthousa*, because she does not wear a turreted crown but one wreathed with leaves, flowers and fruit, and also holds a spray of flowers and fruit or corn in her left hand, instead of the usual overflowing cornucopia.⁴³⁰ An early account tells us that when Constantine dedicated his new city of Constantinople in 330, 'he also offered a bloodless sacrifice and conferred the name *Anthousa* on the tyche of the city he had renewed'.⁴³¹ The name *Anthousa*, meaning 'the flourishing one', was sometimes substituted for the more clumsy *Constantinopolis*, and it certainly describes a burgeoning prosperous city.⁴³² Whether she is Constantinople is a matter for some discussion.

⁴³⁰ Toynbee, 'Roma and Constantinopolis', p. 272.

⁴³¹ Τὴν δὲ τύχην τῆς πόλεως τῆς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἀνανεωθείσης ποιήσας θυσίαν ἀναίμαχτον ἐχάλεσεν Ἀνθοῦσαν [Anthousa]. Anonymous, *Chronicle Paschale* vol. I, p. 528, ed. by L.A. Dindorf (Bonn: Eduard Weber, 1832), trans by Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 7.

⁴³² *Anthousa* translates as 'flourishing', and in modern Greek *Ανθοῦσα* means blossom. For further discussion of the name *Anthousa*, see Alan Cameron, 'Consular diptychs', pp. 394-6. The *Theodosian Code* 7.8.14 refers to Constantinople as a 'flourishing city'.

In assessing the city-tyches on this dish, it is helpful to examine the career of the subject of the plate, as this has a bearing on their identity. Aspar was an Alan who started his military career in the Roman army in his youth; records show that he was a *magister militum* (senior officer) by 434, and probably before then. He was sent to Africa with the Eastern army in 431 to command a campaign to help Boniface, the *comes Africae*, against the Vandals. They were defeated in early 432 and Boniface returned to Italy, but Aspar stayed on. He was in Carthage when he was proclaimed consul on 1 January 434 and he then returned to the East. A consulate was one of the highest honours in the late Roman Empire, and the position was awarded to aristocratic men of wealth and public spirit, who were prepared to fund the hugely expensive games traditionally provided by every incumbent. Two consuls were appointed annually, one for the East and one for the West. They gave their names to the year of their administration, and these were used for dating documents throughout the Empire. The position ceased in Rome in 534, and seven years later in Constantinople, where Flavius Anicius Faustus Albinus Basilius was the last subject to hold the consulate.⁴³³ It seems that Aspar was the more prestigious consul for the West, as in western sources he is named first and in eastern sources second, after his opposite number Flavius Areobindus (d. 449).⁴³⁴ This is particularly noteworthy as he was a German, and as such would have been regarded as a barbarian and inferior by some at court.⁴³⁵ He was eventually suspected of treason and he and his son, also Ardabur, were murdered in 471 by the palace eunuchs on the orders of Leo I (457-474). On his death he was a senior member of the Senate, and one of the *magistri militum praesentalis*.

Despite the manner of his death, Ardabur Aspar spent his life in service to the Empire, and it would therefore seem plausible that the iconography of his consular *largitio* silver plate would reflect his dutiful career. It is certain that the figure on the left is the personification *Roma*, and it has long been assumed that the other city-tyche is *Constantinopolis*; representations of the twinned city-tyches of Rome and Constantinople frequently appeared on the ivory diptychs that were given out by consuls as *synetheiai* (fees paid to officials) to

⁴³³ Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 532-3.

⁴³⁴ K. S. Painter, 'The Silver Dish of Ardabur Aspar', in E. Herring, R. Whitehouse and J. Wilkins, eds, *Papers of the Fourth Conference of Italian Archaeology 2: The Archaeology of Power, part 2* (London: Accordia Research Centre, 1991), p. 78.

⁴³⁵ Painter, 'Dish of Ardabur Aspar', p. 77.

mark the start of their period of office. It seems logical that in the fourth century the personifications of the twin western and eastern capitals of the Empire, Rome and Constantinople, were paired as *Roma* and *Constantinopolis*, the former a city now in decline and the latter in the ascendant.⁴³⁶ Alan Cameron argues that the upstart *Constantinopolis* could not stand alone and represent a thousand years of history, but needed the support of *Roma*, which was why they regularly appeared together.⁴³⁷

However, a case can be made that the two city-tyches depicted on the *largitio* plate reflect Aspar's personal history, as on this dish there is an argument for the right-hand figure being a representation of Carthage, the city where Aspar was residing when he was proclaimed consul.⁴³⁸ Her attributes, a floral headdress and a spray of flower and fruit, are not those normally associated with depictions of *Constantinopolis*, but they can be assigned to the city-tyche of Carthage, *Karthago*. Coins of Severus II, which dates to the beginning of the fourth century, depicts the tyche of Carthage; she wears a wreath instead of a turreted crown and holds fruit in both hands (plate 179). *Karthago* was considered to be a personification of some substance, as Augustine in one of his sermons delivered around this time, singled her out and spoke specifically against this tyche: 'It is no god, you will say; because it is the tutelary genius of Carthage. As though if it were Mars or Mercury, it would be a god.'⁴³⁹ He was referring to a stone statue, but from his remarks we can judge that he considered this city-tyche to be a threat. The tyche of Carthage was thus a powerful figure, and one worthy of imperial association.

On the Ardabur Aspar dish, it is therefore highly possible that the tyche on the right represents Carthage, particularly if the plate was made here. Carthage at that time was one of the principal cities of the Roman Empire, although five years after Aspar's consulate it was to fall to the Vandals. The region was very wealthy and Prokopios of Caesarea noted:

⁴³⁶ S. MacCormack, 'Roma, Constantinopolis, the Emperor and his Genius', *The Classical Quarterly*, 25.1 (1975), p. 147.

⁴³⁷ Alan Cameron, 'Consular diptychs', p. 396.

⁴³⁸ J. W. Salomonson, 'Kunstgeschichtliche und ikonographische Untersuchungen zu einem Tonfragment der Sammlung Benaki in Athen', *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving*, 47 (1973), pp. 64-71, has argued that although the figure appears to be Carthage, the intended city was Constantinople.

⁴³⁹ Augustine, *Sermo*, 12.10, trans. by R.G. MacMullen, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 6, ed. by Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888).

‘For the Vandals had plundered the Roman domain for a long time and had transferred great amounts of money to Libya’.⁴⁴⁰ A silver mint in the city had ceased to operate by the end of Constantine’s reign, but later the Vandals went on to re-establish bronze and silver mints, which were eventually taken over by Justinian on reconquest.⁴⁴¹ So although there was not a mint there at the time of Aspar, there was certainly a tradition of silversmithing in the area. Carthage was a centre for silver production, and it is presumed that much of the metal was imported, probably from Spain where the Romans mined most of their silver during that period. It is therefore possible that this particular plate was produced here, which would make it even more likely that the city-tyche standing on the right represents Carthage, not Constantinople, as cities at the far reaches of the Empire were less influenced by traditional iconographies; the mosaic with the three tyches in Madaba has already provided an example of this. If it is indeed *Karthago*, then it makes this presentation gift from the consul Ardabur Aspar a personal one, reflecting the circumstances of the donor.

This question of identity demonstrates the unique properties of the city-tyche symbol. It could both represent a city and, when displayed alongside a known personage, it could inform and enhance their status in a personal as well as official way. However, in order to relate to the life history of Ardabur Aspar, the city-tyche first has to be recognised by the viewer as representing Carthage. This act of identification exemplifies a fundamental problem with these figures; in order to properly comprehend the original intent, it is necessary to classify them correctly. Rome, Antioch, and usually Constantinople could, and can still, be straightforwardly identified, but other city-tyches can be ambiguous. This point was made earlier in the discussion about the statuette of Alexandria in the Esquiline Treasure, and it applies equally to the right hand figure on the Missorium of Ardabur Aspar. If this tyche is Constantinople as *Anthousa* then the dish is an official and highly formal item which could belong to any consul, but if it represents Carthage, then the plate becomes a personal object, the iconography relating specifically to one man and his life. The identity of the city-tyche controls the meaning of the object and its power in relation to the subject.

⁴⁴⁰ Οἱ τε γὰρ Βανδίλοι ἐκ παλαιοῦ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ληισάμενοι συχνὰ χρήματα ἐς Λιβύην. Prokopios of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, 4.3.25, in Dewing, ed. and trans., *Prokopios*, vol. 2, pp. 232-33.

⁴⁴¹ Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, p. 437.

Postscript

The city-tyche, with its combination of classical, pagan, and imperial connotations, became an extremely potent image in the newly emerging Christian Byzantine Empire. Elizabeth Gittings describes the power of its image thus: ‘In the culturally diverse cities of the time, she [the city-tyche] was an official symbol of communal identity and prosperity around which citizens could rally, whatever their religious beliefs’.⁴⁴² There is an argument that the Virgin Mary supplanted the city-tyche of Constantinople. Judith Herrin states that in fifth-century Constantinople, the figure of the Virgin Mary took over the role of *Tyche* and became protector of the city, and Sabine MacCormack also argues that *Constantinopolis* and Mary became twinned.⁴⁴³ This is quite possible; this belief may have been consolidated after the siege of Constantinople by the Avars in 626. It was later recorded that the emperor was away and the patriarch Sergios (610-638) led the population around the walls carrying icons and invoking the intercession of the Virgin Mary; a female figure later identified as Mary herself was seen on the battlements, and the city was saved. The Akathistos hymn, sung by the thankful citizens after this event, refers to Mary as among other things, ‘the blossom (*anthos*) of incorruption’, the ‘unshakable tower of the church’ and the ‘unbreachable wall of the Kingdom’, recalling the mural crown and attributes of *Constantinopolis* as *Anthousa*.⁴⁴⁴ In Constantinople, which called itself *Theotokoupolis*, City of the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary came to perform the apotropaic functions of the city-tyche.⁴⁴⁵

To sum up, in this chapter I have looked at how the image of the city-tyche was employed in a variety of official capacities. The four Esquiline city-tyche statuettes were ceremonial objects that would have been viewed in the public arena. They would have been seen by many people, and those close enough would have observed that they represented four

⁴⁴² Elizabeth A. Gittings, ‘Women as Embodiments of Civil Life’, *Byzantine Women and their World*, ed. by Ioli Kalavrezou (London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 44.

⁴⁴³ Herrin, ‘The Imperial Feminine’, p. 14. MacCormack, ‘Roma, Constantinopolis’, p. 149.

⁴⁴⁴ Χαίρε το άνθος τής αφθαρσίας: χαίρε τής Εκκλησίας ο ασάλευτος πύργος: χαίρε τής βασιλείας το απόρρητον τείχος. Ακαθιστος Ύμνος, *Akathistos Hymn*, chants 7.5, 12.12-13 in <<http://www2.cytanet.com.cy/gogreek/akathistos.htm>> [accessed 16 August, 2011].

⁴⁴⁵ Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 13-14.

different cities, three of which could be easily identified by their attributes, the fourth being a generic type. They not only symbolised great cities which spanned the Empire, but could have been used to personify the four patriarchates should the occasion be a Christian one. Like these statuettes, tyche hallmarks were figures of imperial authority, and their appearance on silver plate was akin to the use of so-called empress steelyard weights. Both were a guarantee of imperial standards and quality, and would have been seen throughout the Empire. It is especially worth reaffirming that their female imagery possessed high authority and power, despite prevailing misogynist attitudes towards women in Late Antique society.

Two plates each depict a pair of city-tyches but on vastly differing scales. The Anastasios Plate is a remarkable survivor whose seemingly insignificant decoration assumes a powerful meaning on closer inspection. Although the city-tyche figures have been identified by previous scholars, the iconographic scheme as a whole has not been considered. But I have shown that it combines an assortment of symbolic figures, probably copied from coins, and together they present a strong message of imperial might and good fortune. Ardabur Aspar chose to be portrayed on his *largitio* plate being supported by a pair of city-tyches, who are rendered the same size as him; one is certainly *Roma*, but the identity of the other is open to debate and could be either *Constantinopolis* or *Karthago*. If it is the former, then Aspar is complying with official iconography. However, if the city-tyche is that of Carthage, which is equally likely, then this plate becomes a personal statement as well as a show of consular status. This is an example of how the image of a city-tyche could control the meaning of the surrounding iconography.

All of these objects demonstrate how the city-tyche was brought in to buttress the subject matter, and infuse it with imperial power. The image of this figure reached far back into the ancient past, and although it was used in an official capacity in Late Antiquity, it continued to stand for the good fortune of both the city and the Empire. It provided a link between pagan beliefs and the new Christian ethos. It was ubiquitous, appearing in all walks of life, from consular *largitio* to the coinage of the day. Most significantly, it was always female, and thus depicted a woman with imperial power.

Chapter 7 - The Parabiago Plate: Pagan Presence in a Christian Age

This final chapter is a case study of one vessel with figurative imagery which demonstrates the culmination of the art of personification; the fourth-century Parabiago Plate (plate 180). Although there have been various writings about different aspects of the dish, this survey brings them together and provides a comprehensive analysis of its complex iconography. The Parabiago Plate is silver with traces of gilding, has a diameter of 39 cm, weighs 3555 g, and shows the goddess Cybele and her consort Attis sitting in a chariot drawn by four lions.⁴⁴⁶ They are surrounded by twenty figures, most of whom are personifications; unlike in mosaics, they do not have their names alongside, but can be identified from their appearance, attributes and groupings. There have been various debates as to the ownership and function of the plate, but here I focus in detail on the personifications and the way they work together as organs of communication.⁴⁴⁷ I have gone into some detail about the evolution of these figures, as this reveals the often multiple connotations they would have held in Late Antiquity. I will demonstrate how a contemporary viewer with sufficient knowledge could have read the plate like a book, and understood that it commemorated the spring festivals of Cybele and Attis. He or she would have been reminded of the story of Attis, and how he killed himself on the banks of a river, and the whirling Corybantes would have corresponded to the Galli (priests of Cybele) performing their ceremonial dances in the streets of cities at that time.

All the evidence suggests that in the fourth and fifth centuries this couple and their cult were well-represented in popular culture, and we know from Augustine that they were depicted in the theatre:

When I was a young man I used to go to sacrilegious shows and entertainments. I watched the antics of madmen; I listened to singing boys; I thoroughly enjoyed the most degrading spectacles put on in honour of gods and goddesses – in honour of the Heavenly Virgin, and of Berecynthia [a title of Cybele from Mount

⁴⁴⁶ Painter and Toynbee, 'Silver Picture Plates', pp. 29-30.

⁴⁴⁷ Leader-Newby sets out the arguments of ownership and function, citing Adreas Alföldi, Luisa Musso and Alan Cameron, *Silver and Society*, pp. 151-2.

Berecynthus, centre of her worship in Phrygia], mother of all. On the yearly festival of Berecynthia's purification the lowest kind of actors sang, in front of her litter, songs unfit for the ears [...] Yet they performed them in the presence of the Mother of the Gods before an immense audience of spectators of both sexes.⁴⁴⁸

[...] the Great Mother displayed hideous cruelty in her ceremonies [...] We would quote the evidence for these scandals from books, were it not that they are daily rehearsed in song and dance in the theatres.⁴⁴⁹

In previous chapters I have noted the links between the popular theatre of the day and the figurative imagery on many of these silver vessels, and this is again applicable to the Parabiago Plate with its depiction of a procession centred around Cybele and Attis.

It would have been owned by a wealthy and possibly aristocratic person, and as I have demonstrated before, among the élite there was a reluctance to instigate change, as it was felt that traditional ways ensured the continuing success of the Empire. The cult of Cybele continued well into the fifth century, despite the increasing domination of Christianity. It is unknown whether the Parabiago Plate had a ritual function or was simply displayed.

Although it may not have been utilised in an actual ceremony, I will show how this plate directly relates to particular pagan festivities. Clues in the iconography indicate that it commemorates the festivals of Cybele and Attis, which were held in March and April. These festivals were eventually supplanted by Easter, which is similarly a remembrance of death and rebirth, and a celebration of spring. Moreover, the later cult of the Virgin Mary may have incorporated the mythology of the virgin Cybele and Attis who, like Jesus, died and was resurrected. The imagery here is that of a dying cult, remnants of the ideology of which percolated into Christian worship.

⁴⁴⁸ Veniebamus etiam nos aliquando adulescentes ad spectacula ludibriaque sacrilegiorum, spectabamus arrepticios, audiebamus symphoniacos, ludis turpissimis, qui diis deabusque exhibebantur, oblectabamur, Caelesti uirgini et Berecynthiae matri omnium, ante cuius lecticam die sollemni lauactionis eius talia per publicum cantitabantur a nequissimis scaenicis, qualia, non dico matrem deorum, sed matrem qualiumcumque senatorum uel quorumlibet honestorum uirorum, immo uero qualia nec matrem ipsorum scaenicorum deceret audire [...]quam per publicum agebant coram deum matre spectante atque audiente utriusque sexus frequentissima multitudo. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2.4, Latin Library, trans. by Bettenson, *City of God*, pp. 51-52.

⁴⁴⁹ [Matri Magnae] ista in sacris deformem crudelitatem [...] veneris lasciua, supra ac turpitudines ceterorum, quae proferremus de libris, nisi cotidie cantarentur et saltarentur in theatris. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 7.26, Latin Library, trans. by Bettenson, *City of God*, p. 286.

On this plate, the personifications act in their most direct form: there are lots of them, they are all different and named individuals, and they combine to convey a complex message. They personify time in all its aspects, night and day, the twelve months of the zodiac, the seasons, and eternity, in conjunction with the natural world in the form of Ge representing earth, Oceanos representing the waters of the world, and the heavens, represented by the sun, moon and stars. Together they demonstrate Cybele's dominance over the three realms of land, sea and sky, as well as emphasising her control over time and space. The overall scheme encapsulates the Late Antique pagan conviction that in order to maintain the successful status quo, achieved over hundreds of years, the old gods must continue to be venerated. As long as it was in circulation it would have been highly valued for its imagery, and this lasted until it was buried intact with its final owner.

I will start by outlining the provenance and dating of this plate. I will then piece together the significance of the various personification groups, in order to demonstrate how they combine to create a representation of the cycle of life and death, set within a seasonal and cosmic framework. In order to understand the themes of this plate it is necessary to know the basic mythologies relating to its main subjects, and these are given where appropriate. Finally, I will look at the operation of the cult throughout the given time period, and then conclude.

Provenance

The Parabiago Plate was found in 1907, beside the river Olona in Parabiago, a village on the outskirts of Milan, and is now in the city's Archaeological Museum.⁴⁵⁰ The site was originally a Roman cemetery, and this in itself is interesting, as it could have been buried with a member of the cult of Cybele and Attis, which was active in this area at the time. Milan in the late fourth century was in the centre of religious controversy. In 382, the Western emperor Gratian had ordered the removal of the Altar of Victory from the Senate in Rome. The pagan statesman Symmachus appealed against this in 384 and was opposed by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (373/4-397). Symmachus was tried in Milan for torturing

⁴⁵⁰ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 29.

Christians but was able to prove his non-involvement.⁴⁵¹ Vettius Agorius Praetextatus (c. 315-384) was praetorial prefect in Milan at that time, and he was not only a personal friend of the late Emperor Julian and one of the leaders of the pagan groups, but also had an interest in the Oriental cults of which the Phrygian Cybele, principal figure on the plate, was one.⁴⁵² So, while we have no way of establishing the site of production of this object, its presence in Milan at that time is unsurprising, given the presence of high-ranking pagan followers of the cult of Cybele.⁴⁵³

Prior to unravelling the complex iconography of this dish, it needs to be placed in context, as the significance of this object hinges on reasonably accurate dating. If it was manufactured in the early part of the fourth century, before the Roman Empire's adoption of Christianity as the official religion had become established, then it was just a cult object, albeit a high-class one by the nature of its medium, silver, which suggests an élite owner. If however it was created towards the end of the fourth century when active legislation against pagan cults was being enforced, then it symbolised something far more important: the movement among the pagan aristocracy to withstand the introduction of the new Christian religion and maintain their own beliefs.

There seems to be consensus among scholars that it does indeed originate from the late fourth century. H. P. L'Orange notes that it cannot be earlier than the second half of the third century as Sol is raising his right hand, a gesture by this god that did not appear in imperial art until that time, and he dates it to the second half of the fourth century through comparison to imagery on the Arch of Constantine.⁴⁵⁴ Toynbee and Painter concur with this date, calling it late fourth-century, as does Lucia Stefanelli.⁴⁵⁵ Shelton also settles for late fourth-century, because of technical and stylistic details which link it to other pieces of

⁴⁵¹ Herbert Bloch, 'A New Document of the Last Pagan Revival in the West, 393-394 AD', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 38.4 (1945), p. 215.

⁴⁵² John Matthews, 'Symmachus and the Oriental Cults', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 63 (1973), p. 180.

⁴⁵³ Although Sheldon associates it with the Esquiline workshop in Rome, on grounds of style, *Esquiline Treasure*, pp. 60, 63.

⁴⁵⁴ J.M.C. Toynbee's review of 'Der Spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogen by H. P. L'Orange and A. von Gerkan', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 31 (1941), p. 192.

⁴⁵⁵ Toynbee, and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 29; Lucia Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli, *L'Argento dei Romani* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1991), p. 217.

fourth-century silver, such as items from the Esquiline treasure.⁴⁵⁶ Strong opts for even later, with a fourth or even early fifth-century dating on grounds of form and decoration.⁴⁵⁷ Leader-Newby categorically states it is fourth or fifth-century, as a result of modern study techniques: for example, the plate's shape can be matched to others in both silver and pottery from this period, and they have shared methods of embellishment.⁴⁵⁸

Cybele and Attis

Cybele was originally the Phrygian personification of Mother Earth, dating back to at least 1300 BC, and she can be recognised by the lions who attend her. She was in love with Attis, a young shepherd, but when he betrayed her with a shepherdess she caused him to castrate himself or she castrated him, depending on various accounts. He died, but Zeus allowed Cybele to bring him back to life. The fourth-century pagan philosopher Salloustios understood the myth of Attis to be an allegory for the soul coming from heaven into the body, the subsequent separation from the material body, rebirth and then return to the gods.⁴⁵⁹ Attis is generally shown as youthful and effeminate, and the priests of his cult were voluntary eunuchs, known as Galli.

The central cross-section of the plate is dominated by the image of Cybele and Attis riding in a *quadriga* drawn by four lions. On the side of this chariot is a personification of Nike, her arm raised (plate 181). Although small, this little figure indicates that the scene is one of victory, perhaps over death. Cybele inclines towards her young lover Attis, who gazes at her. She holds a staff/sceptre, and wears a *chiton* and *himation*, which drapes over her head, on which there is a mural crown or diadem. In her lap rests a rounded object with criss-cross markings, which looks rather like a skein of wool (plate 181).⁴⁶⁰ It could reference weaving, one of the activities of a virtuous aristocratic woman, but it is more probably supposed to represent a pouch containing coins for distribution as *sparsio* during the festivities. As her inferior, Attis is shown as being smaller than Cybele, an

⁴⁵⁶ Shelton in Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, p. 185.

⁴⁵⁷ Strong, *Greek and Roman Plate*, p. 198.

⁴⁵⁸ Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, pp. 146, 167, n. 83.

⁴⁵⁹ Salloustios, *On the Gods and the World*, 4. See Appendix 2 for full text.

⁴⁶⁰ Alda Levi, *La Patera d'Argento di Parabiago* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1935), p. 16.

iconographic convention dating back to Hellenistic art.⁴⁶¹ He wears his typical costume of a Phrygian cap and trousers, and holds a *syrinx* and a *pedum*, here the attributes of the shepherd he indeed was. Around them dance three Corybantes (armed dancers), all bearing shields on their left arms and short swords in their right; they are on a similar scale to Cybele. She was traditionally attended by these sons of Apollo and Thalia; dressed in armour they celebrated festivals by whirling around to the beat of a drum, clashing their spears and shields.

The imagery on the Parabiago Plate is closely linked to spring festivities held in honour of Cybele and Attis. A group of festivals known as the *Canna Intrat*, *Arbor Intrat*, *Sanguem*, *Hilaria* and *Lavatio*, took place in Rome between the fifteenth and the twenty-eighth of March, the vernal equinox being on the twentieth. They symbolically commemorated the death of Attis and his resurrection by Cybele; this corresponded to the subsequent Christian festival of Easter.⁴⁶² Like Easter, there was an additional fertility aspect, as according to the fourth-century astrologer Julius Firmicus Maternus, 'his death they interpret as the storing away of collected seeds, his resurrection as the spouting of scattered seeds in the annual turn of the seasons'.⁴⁶³ These led into the fete of *Magna Mater* (Great Mother), the *Megalesia* or *Megalanasia*, celebrated from the fourth to the tenth of April, which commemorated the arrival of Cybele in Rome on 6 April 204 BC, in the form of a black meteorite stone. The festivities ended with a celebration on the eleventh of April, in remembrance of the establishment of Cybele's temple on the Palatine Hill in Rome.⁴⁶⁴ The groups of personifications on the Parabiago Plate directly relate to this month-long series of festivals, as I will now demonstrate by working my way round the dish in a clockwise manner, starting with the Aiôn group.

⁴⁶¹ Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1977), p. 94.

⁴⁶² Ferguson, *Religions of the Roman Empire*, pp. 29, 239.

⁴⁶³ Mortem ipsius dicunt, quod semina collecta conduntur, vitam rursus quod iacta semina annuis vicibus reconduntur. Iulius Firmicus Maternus, *De Errore Profanum Religionum*, 3.2, ed. by K. Ziegler (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1905), p. 8, trans. by Clarence A. Forbes, *The Error of the Pagan Religions* (New York: Newman Press, 1970), p. 48.

⁴⁶⁴ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, p. 87.

Aiôn group

To the right of the group of dancers circling the chariot containing Cybele and Attis in the centre of the Parabiago Plate, a naked man rises out of the ground, with only the top half of his torso visible (plate 182). His arms are lifted to support a massive, oval-shaped band which is balanced on his head. Doro Levi identifies him as Atlas, and David Parrish too calls him an ‘Atlas-like figure’, comparable to the figure named *Polum* (the pole) in a second to third-century cosmological mosaic in Mérida, Spain (plate 183).⁴⁶⁵ On the plate, signs of the zodiac are carved around the edge of this ring, and inside stands the upright figure of a youth wearing a *himation*; this attribute of a year-band means that the young man is Aiôn, personification of time or eternity.⁴⁶⁶

His image appeared frequently, and would have been immediately recognised by the contemporary viewer. Although in Late Antiquity he tended to be portrayed as a bearded older man, Nonnos tells us that Aiôn could look young: ‘[Time] would put off the burden of age, like a snake throwing off the rope-like slough of his feeble old scales, and grow young again bathed in the waves of Law [time]’.⁴⁶⁷ He is present as an adolescent in John of Gaza’s hexameter poem written in the early sixth century, describing a now-lost painting of a *tabula mundi* on the wall of a bathhouse in Antioch or Gaza, where Aiôn was portrayed with the bloom of youth:

And self-sown Aiôn was represented in blooming splendour leading toward another running circle of the much-whirled years, the forefather, surrounded by the ever running-roads; he, who, preserving the generation in an intellectually perceptible rotation, and lifting the whirling helm of Harmony, herds the year of twelve months turning it around, and causes one year to discharge itself into another, then noiselessly creeps away.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵ Doro Levi, ‘Aion’, *Hesperia* 13.4 (1944), p. 297; D. Parrish, ‘The Mosaic of Aion and the Seasons from Haïdra (Tunisia): An interpretation of its meaning and importance’, *Antiquité Tardive*, 3 (1995), p. 186.

⁴⁶⁶ Parrish, ‘Mosaic of Aion’, p. 177.

⁴⁶⁷ ὥς ὄφιν ἀδρανέων φολίδων σπείρημα τινάξας, ἔμπαλιν ἡβήσσειε λελουμένος οἶδμασι θεσμών. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, 41.180, in Rouse, ed. and trans., pp. 208-9.

⁴⁶⁸ Καὶ πολυδινήτων ἐτέων αὐτόψπορος Αἰὼν ἀμφιθαλὴς μορφοῦτο περίδρομον ἐς πόλον ἄλλον, πατροπάτωρ, περίμετρος ἀλωφῆτοισι κελεύθιος, ὃς νοερῇι στροφάλιγγι βιότοιο φυλάσσω, Ἄρμονις οἴηκα παλιονδίνητον ἀείρων, ποιμαίνει λυκάβαντα δωδεκάμηνον ἐλίσσω καὶ χρόνον εἰς χρόνον ἄλλον ἐρεύγεται ἄσποφος ἔρπων. John of Gaza, *Ἐκφρασις τοῦ Κοσμικοῦ Πινάκος*, in *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius*, ed. Friedländer, pp. 139-40, trans. by Doro Levi in ‘Aion’, *Hesperia*, 13.4 (1944), p. 311.

On the Parabiago Plate, Aiôn supports himself by holding on to the edge of the band, his right hand placed between Aries and Taurus, the period over the months of March-May, when festivities relating to Cybele and Attis took place. His depiction as a youth rather than a mature man relates to the season being honoured.

The word ‘*aiôn*’ can translate as ‘a long period of time’, an eon, and a good contemporary definition is provided in the third-century *Birthday Book*, compiled by the scholar Censorinus:

About the ‘Eon’, the largest single period of time, I am not going to say much at present. It is immeasurable, without origin, without end. It was and always be the same duration. It does not affect one man more than another. It is divided into three periods: past, present, future. Of these, the past lacks a beginning, the future lacks an end, and the present, in between them, is so thin and ungraspable that it has no length and seems to be nothing other than a meeting point of what has been and what will be. It is so unstable that it is never in the same place.⁴⁶⁹

Personifying eternity, Aiôn stood in contrast to Chronos (not shown here), who personified empirical time, and was often represented as a snake with the head of a lion or a bull. Past, Present and Future were collectively personified as the Chronoi. Aiôn was a complex personification who stood for both the abstract and philosophical values of the concept of time, and was associated with the annual rituals of death and revival. He was connected to the Egyptian god Osiris, Serapis god of the dead, Adonis and various solar cults, and he guaranteed the perpetuity of Rome.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ Tempus autem non diem tantum modo vel mensem vel annum vertentem appello, sed et quod quidam lustrum aut annum magnum vocant, et quod saeculum nominant. Ceterum de aevo, quod est tempus unum et maximum, non multum est quod in praesentia dicatur. Est enim immensum, sine origine, sine fine, quod eodem modo semper fuit et semper futurum est, neque ad quemquam hominum magis quam ad alterum pertinet. Hoc in tria dividitur tempora: praeteritum, praesens, futurum. E quibus praeteritum initio caret, exitu futurum; praesens autem, quod medium est, adeo exiguum et inconprehensibile est, ut nullam recipiat longitudinem, neque aliud esse videatur, quam transacti futurique coniunctio, adeo porro instabile, ut ibidem sit numquam, et, quidquid transcurrit, a futuro decerpit et adponit praeterito. Censorinus, *De Die Natali*, 16.2-4, ed. by Ivan Chododniak (St. Petersburg: Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1889), trans. by Holt N. Parker, *The Birthday Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.33.

⁴⁷⁰ Levi, ‘Aion’, pp. 276-278. Bowersock, *Hellenism*, pp. 23-27. See also Jarl Fossum, ‘The Myth of the Eternal Rebirth: Critical Notes on G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*’, *Vigiliae Christianae*, 53.3. (1999), p. 314.

On the Parabiago Plate, Aiôn's power is reinforced by the presence of an obelisk standing next to him. Around this column a huge serpent twists upwards in a clockwise direction, symbolising the circle of life, as each time it sheds its skin it is reborn; both obelisk and snake were symbols of eternity.⁴⁷¹ Aiôn can be viewed as a performer, a ringmaster, ordering the zodiac, the seasons and the Chronoi. On a late third-century mosaic from Hippo Regius, Algeria, he is shown framed by female musicians and dancers (plate 184). Kondoleon suggests that here he can be seen 'in a theatrical context as an impersonator of time', and along similar lines Parrish argues that he could be a patron of the stage, guaranteeing its worldly success.⁴⁷² Yet again, there is a theatrical connection between personifications and performance.

Representations of Aiôn appeared over a large geographical area and a long timespan; he was frequently depicted on mosaic pavements, indicating that throughout the Roman Empire he was a very popular and familiar personification. In Libya, the second to third-century floor of a villa at Silin shows him holding the zodiac hoop to allow the (female) Four Seasons to pass through it (plate 185). Each of the Seasons clutches a small *eros* and so perhaps this is the origin of the Seasons as small boys; to the right sits Ge. In Syria, a mosaic dating to the second half of the third century found at Shahba-Philippopolis, shows a complex allegorical scene which includes Aiôn (plate 186). The taste for personifications and allegories also appeared in Antioch in the third century and became commonplace throughout the East during the next two centuries. A third-century mosaic from the House of Aiôn, Antioch, now reburied, shows four male figures reclining at dinner: the three Chronoi and Aiôn (plate 187). The latter sits apart holding a zodiacal band, and thus the viewer can see transient time alongside eternity.⁴⁷³ Another third-century floor mosaic pavement, this time at Sentinum, now Sassoferrato in Umbria, shows Aiôn accompanied by Ge and the Four Seasons, a grouping discussed below (plate 188). In Cyprus, Aiôn's bearded figure is present in a fourth-century mosaic pavement in Paphos, depicting the beauty contest with Cassiopia (plate 189). He also appears in an early fourth-

⁴⁷¹ Parrish, 'Mosaic of Aion', p. 186.

⁴⁷² Christine Kondoleon, 'Timing Spectacles: Roman Domestic Art and Performance', in Bergmann and Kondoleon, eds, *Art of Ancient Spectacle*, p. 329; Parrish, 'Mosaic of Aion', p. 180.

⁴⁷³ Kondoleon, 'Timing Spectacles:', in Bergmann and Kondoleon, eds, *The Art of Ancient Spectacle*, p. 325.

century mosaic from Haïdra, Tunisia, now in the United Nations Building in New York, surrounded by the Four Seasons with seasonal birds and plants, personifying the fruitful year (plate 190a).⁴⁷⁴ As well as indicating Aiôn's far-reaching popularity, these examples demonstrate how a specific personification was carefully chosen to convey a particular message. The iconography differs on each pavement, and yet in every case it corresponds to the sentiment of the passage of time.

This widespread presence of the image of Aiôn indicates that there was interest in the concept of time, and its relationship with eternity, and this was also evident in literature where, for example, the poet Claudian described time as a wheel:

O year [...] begin thou to turn the laborious wheel of Phoebus' four-fold circle.
First let thy winter course pursue its course, sans numbing cold, not clothed in
white snow nor torn by rough blasts, but warmed with the south wind's breath:
next, be thy spring calm from the outset and let the limpid west wind's gentler
breeze flood thy meads with yellow flowers. May summer crown thee with harvest
and autumn store thee with luscious grapes.⁴⁷⁵

As is evident in this quotation, it was understood that Aiôn did not work alone but in conjunction with the Four Seasons, the subjects of the following section.

The Four Seasons

The Four Seasons are depicted in the centre of the lower section of the Parabiago Plate (plate 191). They are portrayed as *erotes*, and I have touched on this form of representation previously, in relation to the *Missorium* of Theodosios and the Anastasios Dish. The Seasons were not thought of as gods, they were not supplicated or shown nimbed, but were perceived as manifestations of the power of the associated god with whom they were depicted. Nevertheless, they did have personalities. In the fourth century Libanios, in his *Oration in Praise of Antioch*, described the different temperaments of the Four Seasons,

⁴⁷⁴ Parrish, 'Mosaic of Aion', pp. 170-77.

⁴⁷⁵ O annus [...] incipe quadrifidum Pheobi torquere laborem. prima tibi procedat hiems non frigore torpens, non canas vestita nives, non aspera ventis, sed tepido calefacta Noto; ver inde serenum protinus et liquidi clementior aura Favoni pratis te croceis pingat; te missibus aestas induat autumnusque madentibus ambiat uvis. Claudian, *Panegyric on the Consuls Probinus and Olybrius*, 267-275, in Platnauer, ed. and trans., pp. 20-23.

and posited that the extremes of Summer and Winter desired to be more like the milder Spring and Autumn (appendix 3).⁴⁷⁶ By the time Libanios was writing there was a trend towards awarding personifications a certain amount of individual character.⁴⁷⁷ So despite not being cultic figures, representations of the Four Seasons carried an element of human, as well as divine, connotation to the contemporary viewer in Late Antiquity.⁴⁷⁸

On the dish, the naked Summer, a sickle in his right hand and a sheaf of corn slung over his left shoulder, kicks and bounds towards the right, where stands Autumn. Facing frontally, he brandishes a bunch of grapes in his right hand, and a cape is draped over his left shoulder, alluding to the *nebris* worn by the wine-drinking followers of Dionysos. Next to him, legs splayed apart, is Spring, wearing a short tunic and with a lamb across his shoulders. Finally Winter, wrapped in a long cloak with head covered, strides to the right, carrying two ducks and a gnarled branch, possibly from an olive tree, as olives were one of his attributes. Usually only Winter was shown clothed. The fact that here three of the four wear some sort of clothing could imply that the plate originates from a relatively temperate zone, say Milan, rather than Rome, but this is merely a tentative suggestion.

The anomaly in dress is further amplified, as the Seasons are also not in chronological order. This is a new construct, and there is no apparent reason for it. It is very odd, as the Seasons were well-known personifications who represented order, universal laws and the power of the divine. It contradicts the established policy of continuity which meant reproducing images to a set formula. There is a minor precedent for this disorder. Parrish argues that personifications of the seasons could have a social distinction which was defined by their positioning; in certain African mosaic floors Spring and Autumn were paired because they related to aristocratic pursuits when the élite visited their country villas.⁴⁷⁹ By contrast Winter and Summer had a more plebeian character, as their owners would be elsewhere, in town in the winter and by the sea in the summer, avoiding the heat.

⁴⁷⁶ Libanios, *Oration 11.29-31*.

⁴⁷⁷ George M.A. Hanfmann, *The Season Sarcophagus in Dumbarton Oaks* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 2 vols, vol.1, p. 159.

⁴⁷⁸ Hanfmann, *Season Sarcophagus*, vol.1, p. 225.

⁴⁷⁹ D. Parrish, 'Two Mosaics from Roman Tunisia: An African Variation of the Season Theme', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 83.3 (1979), pp. 279-285.

However, this iconography refers to the local customs and climate of that particular area, and they are in logical pairs. I can find no explanation for the unconventional dress and ordering of the Seasons on the Parabiago Plate.

Furthermore, the Seasons on the dish could have held an additional, and imperial meaning relating to the rule of the current emperor. Like Aiôn, they were strongly associated with time, and on Roman coins the words *felicitas temporum*, happy, fortunate times, often appeared with seasonal figures, referring to the state of the Empire. The Seasons originated in Hellenistic Greek art where collectively they were known as the *Horae*, and they were female.⁴⁸⁰ It was during the late second/early third century that the male version became fashionable, probably because of the influence of Roman imperial art.⁴⁸¹ The Seasons appeared on sarcophagi, and it has been suggested that this motif may have become popular following their incorporation into imperial imagery on coins and the Arch of Trajan.⁴⁸² Certainly their portrayal as infant boys appeared periodically on medallions from Hadrian onwards.⁴⁸³ This depiction of the Four Seasons thus began as a fashion set by the imperial court, and through their appearance on coins they retained this association.

On the Parabiago Plate, the Seasons are shown in conjunction with other seasonal indicators. Early Roman writers on agriculture, such as Varro in the first century BC, mention the Four Seasons in relation to the course of the sun, and the personification *Sol* also appears on the plate.⁴⁸⁴ The authors Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, and Calpurnius all refer to the Four Seasons. Astrology, with its principle tenet that the stars influence life on earth, was brought into agriculture for such purposes as predicting the best time to plough or reap, and so the signs of the zodiac became associated with the appropriate season.⁴⁸⁵ There is an example of this on the plate, where Aiôn pointedly grasps the ring between Aries and Taurus, spring zodiac signs. And in the remains of the Palace of Theodoric in Ravenna, a sixth-century inscription on a mosaic containing busts of the Four Seasons urges the reader:

⁴⁸⁰ D. Parrish, *Season Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1984), pp. 12-13.

⁴⁸¹ Parrish, *Season Mosaics*, pp. 20-22.

⁴⁸² Hanfmann, *Season Sarcophagus*, vol.1, p. 231.

⁴⁸³ Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, p. 90.

⁴⁸⁴ Varro, *De Re Rustica*, 1.27.

⁴⁸⁵ For details see Hanfmann, *Season Sarcophagus*, vol.1, pp. 120-121.

Sume quod autumnus quod/ ver quod bruma quod estas/ alternis reparant et/ toto creantur in orbe, which translates as ‘select what autumn, spring, winter and summer each produce and create in the world’.⁴⁸⁶ This makes it clear that representations of the Four Seasons related to the seasonal gifts they provided, as well as personifying fertility and fecundity.

On the Parabiago Plate, they are shown in the company of Ge (plate 192a), a partnership which originated with imperial Roman artists under Hadrian, and continued into the fourth century.⁴⁸⁷ Their group symbolism varies depending on context, and so for example, when they are depicted on sarcophagi they act as a reminder of the body’s return to the earth from whence it came (plate 193).⁴⁸⁸ On coins, they symbolised the bounty achieved under imperial rule, and reflected Rome’s control of a vast empire.⁴⁸⁹ Here on the plate they seem to be a clear expression of time, of a year passing, and with all the gifts the different seasons have to offer, which come from the fertile earth.

Ge

In chapter four, *The Art of Dining*, I demonstrated how Ge could at times represent ‘wealth-bringing woman’; in this section I look at the more straightforward aspects of this personification, as a representation of earth and its fruitfulness.

On the Parabiago Plate, Ge lounges along the bottom right-hand section, on the same picture plane as the Four Seasons (plate 192a); this reclining position was common to nature-divinities.⁴⁹⁰ A virtual mirror image of this same pose appears on the *Missorium* of Theodosios (plate 192b), where Ge was deployed to display and reinforce imperial power. Although Cybele was known as ‘the Great Mother’, the added presence of Ge on the Parabiago dish demonstrates a perceived difference in their roles. According to Macrobius:

⁴⁸⁶ Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 120.

⁴⁸⁷ Hanfmann, *Season Sarcophagus*, vol.1, p. 119.

⁴⁸⁸ Hanfmann, *Season Sarcophagus*, vol.1, p. 235.

⁴⁸⁹ Hanfmann, *Season Sarcophagus*, vol.1, p. 235.

⁴⁹⁰ Eugénie Strong, ‘Terra Mater or Italia?’, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 27.1 (1937), p. 115.

[...] the Mother of the Gods [Cybele] is beyond question to be regarded as the earth, and the impetuous strength and ardour of the lions which draw her car are properties of the sky which encloses and surrounds the air that carries the earth as in a car. And to the sun, under the name of Attis, are given the emblems of a shepherd's pipe and a wand [...]⁴⁹¹

However on the Parabiago Plate, the figure of Cybele is a goddess, around whom the natural and cosmic world revolves, and Ge retains her position as the personification of the earth itself, along with her power of creation.

Ge is accompanied by two *καρποι*, *Karpoi*, small boys personifying fruits, and again we have seen this grouping on the *Missorium* of Theodosios. She is often shown with two, sometimes three of these chubby infants, and Eugénie Strong describes her as 'fruit-bearing' (*καρποφόρος*, *karpophoros*) and 'boy-rearing' (*κουροτρόφος*, *kourotrophos*).⁴⁹² If there are four then, according to Hanfmann, they represent the Four Seasons, although this is not always the case.⁴⁹³

John of Gaza's hexameter poem includes a description of Ge that bears a remarkable resemblance to the image on the Parabiago dish (see appendix 4).⁴⁹⁴ He describes one of her *Karpoi* as 'reaching his tiny hand into the air', in much in the same way as the figure does on the plate, where behind Ge and almost resting on her right hip, a *Karpos* points upwards. In John's poem, the passage about Ge and the *Karpoi* is but one small part of a vast ensemble of over fifty personifications, and modern attempts have been made to reconstruct the iconography of this mural in a bathhouse from the poem (plate 194).⁴⁹⁵ However, it was written as an *ekphrasis* rather than a factual description, and so we cannot know for sure what the mural looked like. There was a central cross, and John mentions seven figures of angels but these may have been winged personifications. It indicates that a

⁴⁹¹ Quis enim ambigat Matrem Deum terram haberi? Haec dea leonibus vehitur, validis impetu atque fervore animalibus, quae natura caeli est cuius ambitu aer continetur qui vehit terram. Solem vero sub nomine Attinis ornant fistula et virga. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.21.8-9, in von Jan, ed., trans. by Davies, p. 142.

⁴⁹² Strong, 'Terra Mater', p. 115.

⁴⁹³ Hanfmann, *Season Sarcophagus*, vol.1, p. 220.

⁴⁹⁴ John of Gaza, *Description of a Tabula Mundi*, 7-44.

⁴⁹⁵ Paul Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius* (Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1912); Rina Talgam, 'Johannes of Gaza's Tabula Mundi Revisited', in *Between Judaism and Christianity: Art Historical Essays in Honour of Elisheva (Elizabeth) Revel-Neher*, ed by Katrin Kogman-Appel and Mati Meyer (The Netherlands: Brill, 2008), fig. 2.

Christian scholar could still, even at this late date, write sympathetically in the classical mode on classical culture, and that this type of art continued to be appreciated despite its predominantly pagan content. This mural was in the secular setting of a bathhouse but nevertheless it contained Christian symbols. This is yet another example of pagan and Christian syncretism. Here the personifications created an idealised model of how the universe worked controlled by a Christian God, a concept that was adopted by Theodosios on his *missorium*, who needed to show that he ruled the earth (see chapter five). On the Parabiago Plate the world revolves around Cybele and Attis.

On the dish, Ge gazes up directly towards Cybele, imbuing her with power. Her left arm is wrapped around a large cornucopia, on top of which sits a tiny *Karpos* pointing up towards Atlas. Bunches of grapes spill from the top of the horn and are nibbled by the snake which encircles it. The creature winds round the vessel in an anti-clockwise direction, in opposition to the huge serpent entwined clockwise around the obelisk; both are in a similar pose with their heads pointing upwards. There seems to be no evidence of any significance in the direction of a snake's movement, although Macrobius tells us that the Assyrian Ge had a serpent as an attribute, imitating the serpentine course of the sun.⁴⁹⁶ A snake in association with Ge also appears in the Sentinum mosaic (plate 188), where it winds around her neck, and there is a similar rendition on a late second-century Season sarcophagus now in the Vatican Museum (plate 195), and a fifth to sixth-century mosaic from the House of Aiôn, Antioch (plate 196).⁴⁹⁷ In his poem, John of Gaza also described Ge with a cornucopia entwined by a snake. Without doubt, this association was common throughout the whole of Late Antiquity. On the plate, Ge rests her right hand on the serpent's tail; this is after all a creature of the ground, and thus an appropriate attribute for the personification of earth.

Directly above Ge, with no attempt at scale, are depicted a lizard and an insect that is either a grasshopper, cricket or locust. Because of its chirping, the grasshopper symbolised music and song, and according to Plato acted as a conduit to the Muses:

⁴⁹⁶ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.17.69.

⁴⁹⁷ See Hanfmann, *Season Sarcophagus*, vol. 2, p. 19 and fig. 38, and Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, p. 356 and plate 84.

The story goes that these locusts were once men, before the birth of the Muses, and when the Muses were born and song appeared, some of the men were so overcome with delight that they sang and sang, forgetting food and drink, until at last unconsciously they died. From them the locust tribe afterwards arose, and they have this gift from the Muses, that from the time of their birth they need no sustenance, but sing continually, without food or drink, until they die, when they go to the Muses and report who honours each of them on earth.⁴⁹⁸

The Romans believed that the lizard hibernated annually, and as it also had the ability to shed its tail and grow a new one, it came to symbolise death and rebirth. It appeared in Dionysiac imagery, and the image of Dionysos dangling a lizard from a thread was a known motif (plate 197). The grasshopper and lizard were certainly paired iconographically on occasions, and appear together, for example, on a third century vine pavement from El Djem (plate 198).⁴⁹⁹ On this mosaic, an *eros* runs towards a large lizard that is about to catch the grasshopper hovering between them. On the Parabiago Plate the pair seem to have been arbitrarily placed in a convenient gap and this, coupled with the odd order of the seasons, can lead to conjecture that the silversmith was more concerned with ‘getting everything in’ rather than achieving a correct and pleasurable aesthetic composition. However, it was probably an attempt to show them in conjunction with Ge, as like her they are of the earth. Every figure on the plate is there because of what they each connote, and how they interact with one other. On balance, this may suggest that the dish was created primarily for ritual rather than display purposes, as a cult follower would have expected to see all of these figures in the correct combinations, and been able to read them in a way that is no longer accessible to us today.

⁴⁹⁸ οὐ μὲν δὴ πρέπει γε φιλόμουσον ἄνδρα τῶν τοιούτων ἀνήκοον εἶναι. λέγεται δ’ ὥς ποτ’ ἦσαν οὗτοι ἄνθρωποι τῶν πρὶν μούσας γεγονέναι, γενομένων δὲ Μουσῶν καὶ φανείσης ᾧδῆς οὕτως ἄρα τινὲς τῶν τότε ἐξεπλάγησαν ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς, ὥστε ἄδοντες ἡμέλησαν σίτων τε καὶ ποτῶν, καὶ ἔλαθον τελευτήσαντες αὐτούς: ἐξ ὧν τὸ τεττίγων γένος μετ’ ἐκεῖνο φύεται, γέρας τοῦτο παρὰ Μουσῶν λαβόν, μηδὲν τροφῆς δεῖσθαι γενόμενον, ἀλλ’ ἄσιτόν τε καὶ ἄποτον εὐθὺς ἄδειν, ἕως ἂν τελευτήσῃ, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐλθὼν παρὰ μούσας ἀπαγγέλλειν τίς τίνα αὐτῶν τιμᾶ τῶν ἐνθάδε. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 259, in *Platonis Opera*, ed. by John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), p. 259, trans. by Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1973), p. 70.

⁴⁹⁹ Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 180.

Water personifications

On the opposite left-hand side of the dish to Ge is a semi-clothed male river personification holding a river reed, his left elbow resting on an upturned vessel which spills out water (plate 199). He could personify either the river Gallos, in whose reeds Attis was abandoned as a child, or the river Sangarios, as he later killed himself on the banks of one of these two rivers.⁵⁰⁰ Statues of Attis sometimes show him in conjunction with a river god. Although male water personifications tend to be bearded, this river personification is clean-shaven, which might allude to Attis's eunuch priests, the Galli, and identify him as representing the river Gallos. The particularly large reed he holds prominently may relate to the cycle of holidays celebrating the cult of Attis, which commenced on the fifteenth of March with the festival *Canna Intrat*, when a procession of reed-bearers commemorated these events.⁵⁰¹ It would have reminded the viewer of these rituals, and linked in with the overall iconography of the plate as a commemorative and cultic object.

Behind this river personification is a female personification holding a bloom, and seemingly in conversation with him. This offers us a further clue to the meaning of the plate's decorative scheme. Although she has not previously been identified as such, she may be another personification of Spring, serving to emphasise the time of year. The most common attribute of this season in African mosaic pavements was the rose.⁵⁰² For example, Spring is depicted as a naked, nubile girl holding a bloom in the second century Neptune mosaic from Chebba, Tunisia (plate 200). Elsewhere in Tunisia, a rose is depicted alongside Spring in a mosaic from Achollo, (plate 201), and Spring in the Zodiac mosaic from Haïdra also holds just such a blossom (plate 190b). The Greeks represented the seasons as the *Horae*, three not four young women, as they merged summer and autumn, and so on the plate this personification could be the *Hora* of spring. This would certainly correlate with other seasonal indications - the hand of Aiôn and timing of festivities relating to Cybele and Attis.

⁵⁰⁰ Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 94.

⁵⁰¹ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, p. 166.

⁵⁰² Parrish, *Season Mosaics*, p. 34.

In the bottom centre of the dish are the figures of Oceanos, personifying the waters of the world, and Tethys (plate 202). They are extremely similar to a third to fourth-century mosaic depiction in the courtyard of the House of Menander in Antioch, which Levi identified as being of Oceanos and Thetis. This is perhaps why Toynbee and Painter have identified this figure on the plate as Thetis.⁵⁰³ However, Tethys, not Thetis, is the partner of Oceanos, and she personifies the fecundity of the sea, as exemplified by the four large fish surfacing beneath the couple. There is an echo here of the four rivers of Paradise, which were starting to appear on Christian imagery.⁵⁰⁴ Both personifications are shown from the chest upwards. Oceanos has crab or lobster claws in his hair, and Tethys sports longer lobster antennae, rather than claws. Their heads are angled in order to view the scene above their heads, and Tethys looks straight up at Cybele. Oceanos clasps a rudder in his left hand, and both indicate adoration with raised open palms on their outside hands, in a form of the *orans* gesture.⁵⁰⁵ The early Christian writer, Tertullian (160-220), described it thus: 'Moreover we shall the rather commend our prayers to God by worshipping with restraint and humility, not even lifting the hands too high but raising them temperately and meetly'.⁵⁰⁶ We thus know from their gestures that the waters of the world and their inhabitants are in thrall to Cybele and Attis.

Heavenly personifications

The heavens, too, are represented on the Parabiago Plate. The movement of the planets was believed to have an impact on human beings, as the fourth-century Latin writer Sallustius tells us:

Therefore, to believe that human things, especially their material constitution, are ordered not only by celestial beings but by the celestial bodies is a reasonable and

⁵⁰³ Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, vol. I, pp. 214-5, vol. 2, plate CLIX; Toynbee, and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 30.

⁵⁰⁴ See for example the paten with angels in Bank, *Byzantine Art*, pl. 78.

⁵⁰⁵ Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy, 1963), pp. 23-24.

⁵⁰⁶ Atqui cum modestia et humilitate adorantes magis commendabimus deo preces nostras, ne ipsis quidem manibus sublimius elatis sed temperate ac probe elevates. Tertullian, *De Oratione Liber*, 17, in *Tertullian's Tract on the Prayer*, ed. by E. Evans (London: SPCK Publishing, 1953), trans. by Rev. S. Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III.

true belief. Reason shows that health and sickness, good fortune and bad fortune, arise according to our deserts from that source.⁵⁰⁷

Notwithstanding their high status, the divinities of light in the top section of the plate are shown much smaller in scale, perhaps in an attempt to indicate distance (plate 203a). Their placement emphasises the movement of the heavens and the cyclical theme that is so pervasive on this dish. The Sun rises upwards on the left, his chariot drawn by four horses galloping to the right (plate 203b). He has a halo and is seen in profile, his cloak flowing out behind him and raising his right arm, the characteristic salute of Sol Invictus, the Roman Helios.⁵⁰⁸ He is placed directly above Cybele and significantly is the only nimbed figure on the plate, which indicates his divinity, despite his small size. A winged figure flies ahead, looking back at him, naked apart from a loosely draped mantle, and he holds up a large torch in both hands. This is Phosphorus, the personification of the morning star.⁵⁰⁹ The torch reaches to the highest point at the top of the plate, indicating that the sun is rising. Descending down from the centre and again moving to the right is the chariot of Selene, the moon, drawn by two oxen (plate 203c).

To the moon they dedicated a bull which they call Apis, which also is more black than others, and bears symbols of sun and moon, because the light of the moon is from the sun. The blackness of his body is an emblem of the sun, and so is the beetle-like mark under his tongue; and the symbol of the moon is the semicircle, and the gibbous figure.⁵¹⁰

Selene's cloak billows out behind her in a bow shape, echoing the crescent she wears on her brow, and she looks back at Sol. Ahead of her, another figure wearing a hanging mantle lowers his torch as night is fading, and dives down over the figure of Aiôn. This is

⁵⁰⁷ Τὸ μὲν ἦν μὴ μόνον ἐκ Θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκ τῶν θείων σμμάτων διοικεῖσθαι τὰ ἀνθρώπινα πράγματα, καὶ μάλιστα τὴν σωματικὴν φύσιν, εὐλογόν τε ἐστὶ καὶ ἀληθές, καὶ διὰ τῆτο ὑγίειάν τε καὶ νόσον, ἐντυχίας τε καὶ δυστυχίας κατ' ἀξίαν ἐκεῖθεν γίνεσθαι ὁ λόγος ἐνρίσκει. Sallustius, *On the Gods and the World*, 9, in Sallustios, *Theon kai Kosmou*, ed. by Orelli, p. 32, trans. by Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 253.

⁵⁰⁸ Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, p. 93.

⁵⁰⁹ Toynbee and Painter, 'Silver Picture Plates', p. 30.

⁵¹⁰ Lunae vero taurum dicarunt, quem Apim nominant, nigrum ipsum quoque prae caeteris, quodque luna suum a sole lumen accipiat, solis praeterea lunaeque insignia praeferebant. Ac solis quidem insigne est, cum ipsius corporis nigror, tum etiam is, qui sub lingua haeret, scarabaeus. Eusebius of Caesarea quoting Porphyry, *Evangelicae Praeparationis*, 3.13, in *Patrologia Graecae*, vol. 21, p. 211, trans. by E.H. Gifford, *Preparation for the Gospel* <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_pe_03_book3.htm> [accessed 4 October, 2010].

Hesperus, the personification of the evening star, and to the Romans a lowered torch was a symbol of death.⁵¹¹ This upper area of the plate personifies the passage of cosmic time.

The cult of Cybele and Attis

Although this plate is a cult object, it is unclear whether it was used in an actual ceremony or simply displayed. The historian Herodian (c. 170-240) says:

Every year, on a set day at the beginning of spring, the Romans celebrate a festival in honour of the mother of the gods. All the valuable trappings of each deity, the imperial treasures, and marvellous objects of all kinds, both natural and man-made, are carried in procession before this goddess.⁵¹²

As these same parades were still being enacted at the end of the fourth century, it seems feasible that objects such as the Parabiago Plate would have continued to be used in the rituals. The celebrations accorded to Cybele in the *Megalanasia* were national holidays, fixed in the Roman calendar and listed in the *Calendar of 354*, whereas those commemorating the Attis myth were confined to committed worshippers. The Phrygian Attis was regarded as an Eastern cult, some of whose wilder practices challenged the Roman norm of order and self control, but it was tolerated because of the popularity of Cybele.⁵¹³ Roman holidays meant abstaining from work and honouring the gods by performing certain rituals, a task undertaken by priests. The law courts were closed and there would frequently be a banquet and games.⁵¹⁴ Both the imperial government and the Roman senatorial aristocracy were aware of the importance of supporting paganism in order to avoid dissent, and hence festivals, games, holidays and circuses were financed by

⁵¹¹ Alan Cameron, *Last Pagans of Rome*, p. 718.

⁵¹² ἥρος ἀρχῇ ἐκάστου ἔτους ὀρισμένης ἡμέρας μητρὶ θεῶν πομπὴν τελούσι Ῥωμαῖοι· καὶ πάντα ὅσα παρ' ἐκάστοις πλούτου σύμβολα κελμήλιά τε βασιλέων ὕλης τε ἢ τέχνης θαύματα, τῆς θεοῦ προπομπεύει. Herodianus, *History of the Roman Empire*, 1.10.5, in *Herodian*, ed. and trans. by C.R. Whittaker, 2 vols (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1969-70), vol. I, pp. 64-65.

⁵¹³ Mary Beard, 'The Roman and the Foreign: The Cult of the "Great Mother" in Imperial Rome', in *Shamanism, History and the State*, ed. by Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphry (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 185-7; Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 177.

⁵¹⁴ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, pp. 118-119.

the state. These helped to maintain the imperial cult, and Christians could join in and celebrate the long cultural heritage.⁵¹⁵

There was an attempt to promote the cult of Cybele and Attis by the emperor Julian the Apostate, which might explain the existence of the Parabiago Plate with its late fourth-century dating. Despite receiving a Christian upbringing, Julian rejected the newly official religion of Christianity and tried to introduce Neo-platonic paganism. Deeply influenced by Mithraism, he wanted to revive the cults of the pagan gods. He produced a large volume of works, and his *Oration V*, is entitled ‘*Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*’. Although it was addressed to Cybele, the focus of his attention was her consort, Attis. He considered him to be a god with generative powers and he saw Cybele as ‘the source of the intellectual and creative gods, who in their turn guide the visible gods’.⁵¹⁶ She was in control of every form of life and the cause of all generation, hence her appellation ‘the Great Mother’. Julian rated a ‘soul undefiled and pure’ as the highest form of being, and superior to any physical element. He gave the example of Herakles who now that he had returned ‘to his father one and indivisible’ was more in control, in contrast to his time on earth when he had a body. This was also the case with Attis, who had descended to the depths in his physical relationship with a nymph which happened in a deep cave, but redeemed himself by self-castration, after which he went up to the Mother of the Gods. This tale was the basis of the festival days around the vernal equinox.

He has set in order the chaos of our world through his sympathy with the cycle of the equinox, where mighty Helios controls the most perfect symmetry of his motion within due limits [...] then the goddess keeps him by her side [...] forever is Attis the servant and charioteer of the Mother.⁵¹⁷

Julian went on to point out that the season of rites had not been devised irrationally; proof of this was that Cybele chose as her province the cycle of the equinox, and ‘the end and aim

⁵¹⁵ Salzman, *On Roman Time*, p. 197.

⁵¹⁶ Ἡ τῶν κυβερνώντων τοὺς ἐμφανεῖς νοερῶν καὶ δημιουργικῶν θεῶν πηγή, ἢ καὶ συνοικοῦσα τῷ μεγάλῳ Διὶ θεός: ψυχῆς ἀχράντοθ καὶ καθαρᾶς: ῥάων ἢ τούτων. These phrases are all from Julian, *Oration 5*, 165-66, in Wright, ed. and trans., vol. 1, pp. 462-67.

⁵¹⁷ Καὶ τὸ ἀκόσμητον τοῦτο κοσμέσαντα διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὸν ἡσημερινὸν κύκλον συμπαθείας, ἵνα ὁ μέγας Ἥλιος τῆς ὀρισιμένης κινήσεως τὸ τελειότατον κυβερνᾷ μέτρον [...] μᾶλλον δὲ παρ’ ἐαντῇ [...] ἀεὶ μὲν Ἄττις ἐστὶν ὑπουργὸς τῇ Μητρὶ καὶ ἡνίοχος. Julian, *Oration 5*. 171, in Wright, ed. and trans., vol. 1, pp 478-9.

of the rite of purification is the ascent of our souls'.⁵¹⁸ He concluded with a prayer for happiness, knowledge of the gods and the continuation of the Empire for many thousands of years.

After Julian's death there remained a tolerance towards paganism which lasted until 382, when the emperor Gratian withdrew the funds that maintained public cults and ordered the removal of the Altar of Victory from the Senate. The statesman Symmachus appealed against this and was opposed by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who eventually triumphed. In the early 390s Valentinian II, ruler of the Western Empire, banned pagan sacrifices and attendance at temples. After his death in 392, the pagan consul, Virius Nichomachus Flavianus (334-394), oversaw a restoration of pagan rites under the auspices of the Emperor Eugenius (392-394). The consul was certainly a follower of Cybele as he underwent the *taurobolium*, the ritual cleaning by the blood of a freshly slaughtered bull.⁵¹⁹ The city of Rome was ceremonially cleansed and the festival of the *Megalensia* once more took place. However this was but a brief respite until the Christian emperor in the East, Theodosios I, took control of the entire Empire in 394.

Despite this, the cult continued to be active. Dunbabin describes an unpublished mosaic from Carthage, probably a religious calendar, dated to the late fourth century.⁵²⁰ It is centred around the figure of Ge, and one section depicts the veneration of Attis, indicting continuing pagan resistance to Christianity in North Africa at that time. The cult was officially suppressed in 415, and yet in 417 Augustine described the Galli collecting on the occasion of the *Megalensia*.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ Αὐτῆς δὲ τῆς ἀγγελίας φαιμέν τὸν σκοπὸν ἄνοδον τῶν ψυχῶν. Julian, *Oration 5*, 171-78, in Wright, ed. and trans., vol. 1, pp. 488-9.

⁵¹⁹ Ferguson, *Religions of the Roman Empire*, p. 31.

⁵²⁰ Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 144.

⁵²¹ Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. by Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), p. 74.

They were to be seen until just the other day in the streets and squares of Carthage with their pomaded hair and powdered faces, gliding along with womanish languor, and demanding from the shopkeepers the means of their depraved existence.⁵²²

In the late fifth century, Marinus of Neapolis (c. 450-500) described how his tutor, the Neo-Platonist philosopher Proclus (c. 410 to 412-485), ‘every month sanctified himself according to the rites devoted to the Mother of the Gods by the Romans’, and later added:

If anyone desires to know with what favour he was attached to this goddess, let him read Proclus's book on the Mother of the Gods, and it will be seen that with inspiration from on high he has been able to expound the whole theology relative to the goddess, and to explain philosophically all that the liturgical actions and the oral instructions mythically teach us about the goddess, and Attis, so that they will no longer be troubled by those seemingly absurd lamentations [for Attis] and all the secret traditions related in her ceremonies.⁵²³

In the sixth century, one of the last Neo-Platonist philosophers, Damascius (c. 458– after 538), recorded an overnight visit to the Phrygian Hierapolis, when he dreamed that he became Attis and at the instigation of Cybele was celebrating *Hilaria*.⁵²⁴ He took this to mean that he had been saved from spiritual death. So, although the rituals were no longer publicly enacted, it seems this cult endured for a substantial period of time in philosophical circles. Meanwhile, the role of Cybele as the Great Mother, and described by Julian as a ‘maiden [...] inspired with a passionless love for Attis’, was woven into the cult of the Virgin Mary.⁵²⁵

In summary, this chapter has been an examination of the iconography of the Parabiago Plate, in order to demonstrate the way in which personifications could act together to

⁵²² qui usque in hesternum diem madidis capillis facie dealbata, fluentibus membris incessu femineo per plateas uicosque Carthaginis etiam a propolis unde turpiter uiuerent exigebant, Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 7.26, Latin Library, trans. by Bettenson, *City of God*, p. 286.

⁵²³ Quod si quis defiderat etiam in his qualis fuerit cognoscere, eius librum de matre Deum evoluat oportet, ex quo intelligent, Philosophum non absque divina ope omnem Deae illius theologiam in lucem protraxisse, et praeterea, quaecunque cum de eadem tum de Atti in fabulis aguntur dicuntur, philosophico more explicasse, ut cessent denique posthac aures turbari perceptis lamentationibus caeterisque quibus illa personant plenius mysterii. Marinus of Samaria, *Marini Vita Procli*, ed. by Joh. Franc. Boissonade (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1966), Latin p. 58, Greek p. 27. *The Life of Proclus or Concerning Happiness*, 19, 33. trans. by Kenneth Guthrie,

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/marinus_01_life_of_proclus.htm> [accessed 8 February, 2011].

⁵²⁴ Damascius, *Difficulties and Solutions of First Principles*, 352.

⁵²⁵ Πρόνοιαν ἔρωσ μὲν ὑπαθῆς Ἀττιδος. Julian, *Oration 5*, 166 in Wright, ed. and trans., vol. I, pp. 462-63.

convey complex information, in this case pertaining to the spring festivities of Cybele and Attis. They worked on several levels. They personified the three-way interdependence of man, the gods and the universe and, through presence of personifications that also appeared on imperial imagery, they connoted the imperial power controlling the then known world. They provided an acknowledgement of the rituals and patterns of human life and the inevitability of death, with its hope for an afterlife. Furthermore, a broader examination of some of the personifications on the plate shows that their connotations could change according to context, and because of their long history they often carried multiple meanings.

The way they have been presented on the Parabiago Plate assumes a degree of knowledge on the part of the viewer of the cult of Cybele and Attis, as well as a broad understanding of the personifications on the plate. It indicates that at the end of the fourth century, despite the ubiquity of figures such as the Four Seasons, there continued to be a need for specific personifications, in order to convey more complex information. Thus Aiôn and Spring emphasise the time of year, and the extent of Cybele's influence over the entire world is forcefully hammered home by the presence of Sol, Selene, Ge, Oceanos and Tethys, personifications of the heavens, the earth and the waters of the world. There is a philosophical level as well, with the inclusion of the lizard acting as a reminder of the possibility of life after death. This carefully-planned iconography implies that there would have been people who could have read it. However, this imagery may have had the effect of being exclusive, the finer details, such as the order of the Four Seasons, only comprehensible to members of the cult, and thus the personifications acted as a way of binding followers together with a shared knowledge which excluded non-believers.

One final note: my focus is of necessity on the personifications, but it is clear that the Parabiago Plate is additionally a symbol of the way different religions from all over the empire were absorbed into Roman culture, and it relates to the manner in which the Romans controlled their vast empire by assimilation.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to establish the extent to which the use of personification was embedded in the culture of Late Antiquity, and what it might say about society at that time. The means by which I chose to do this was through an examination of related imagery on silver plate from this period, although my enquiries then extended into other media such as mosaics, sarcophagi and textiles. Each chapter focussed on one particular area, such as literature, the theatre or imperial imagery, but I also concentrated on several overarching themes: pagan-Christian syncretism, elements of self-fashioning, the need for *paideia*, and the potency of female imagery in patriarchal Late Antique society.

The concept of personification originated in literature and rhetoric, and this was the subject of my initial chapter, *Setting the Scene: Aristocrats and Allegory*. Ownership of the type of silver plate examined in this thesis was confined to the wealthy upper classes, who were the beneficiaries of a classical education known as *paideia*, and this was often reflected in the imagery depicted thereon. So, for example, bucolic scenes could evoke the work of Virgil, and depictions of the hunt could connote a wide range of values, including valour, courage, and the trials of life, extending to the battle between life and death. These are examples of personification being used allegorically, but objects such as the Corbridge Lanx include an instance of a more direct form of personification, as here one of the five figures depicted on the dish proves to be a geographical personification of the island of Ortygia. Again, a knowledge of the classics among the Late Antique audience was essential in order to fully interpret the significance of the scene.

Similarly, on the Muse Casket of the Esquiline Treasure, eight of the nine Muses are depicted: as well as being goddesses, they acted as personifications of the arts. Erato, the Muse of lyrical poetry, whose name translates as ‘Lovely’, is missing, and may be represented instead by the image of a young woman in the central medallion on top of the lid. This might have been a way of positioning the owner of the casket as the ninth Muse, as there was a precedent for this form of iconography on sarcophagi from the period.

Representations of the Muses demonstrate the ambivalence surrounding Late Antique attitudes towards women; on the one hand women in society were oppressed and had few rights, and yet on the other hand, female personifications such as the Muses were valued for inspiring and controlling the minds of men.

In the studies in Chapter One, the art of personification was used to communicate often complex messages and ideas, and the need for *paideia* was paramount. Personification and allegory thus acted as a form of demarcation, as they were a means of determining a person's education, and therefore status; interpretation of such imagery could result in the exclusion of the lower classes and those less educated, while at the same time binding the élite, with their shared schooling, throughout the Empire.

The following chapter, *Dramatis Personae: Personification and the Theatre*, addressed two different forms of figurative representation, both of which were connected to the Late Antique theatre, and both of which utilised personification. I used as my case study the Meleager Plate from the Sevso Treasure. I first conducted an examination of the Bacchic mask motif, which was used primarily on this and other examples of silver plate to divide up sections of figurative friezes. These Dionysiac heads were not just a convenient decorative device, but significant in themselves. With their connotations of pantomime masks, they provided a connection to Dionysos, god of the theatre, and all that he personified in terms of pleasure and enjoyment. Furthermore, on some friezes, they point the viewer to the more vivid scenes, such as those depicting violent actions, which contrast with accompanying pastoral views. On the Meleager Plate, they frame the vignettes, which may represent theatrical performances; similar masks decorated theatres at that time, and so they would have added an authentic note to these tableaux.

The second section of Chapter Two returned to the link between personifications and literature, and considered how this concept was realised in the Late Antique theatre. As well as being represented in written works, the tableaux portrayed on the Meleager Plate can be related to contemporary enactments, and I argued that they can give us an indication of how these productions might have appeared. These were popular stories, and a number

of personifications appear within these depictions, their presence often the key to identifying the particular tableau. By extrapolation, this use of personification perhaps applied equally to live stage performances where, for example, actors might have played the part of cities or rivers, in order to clarify the action taking place. The contemporary audience was familiar with the concept of personification, albeit at differing degrees according to their level of education. All would have identified the city-tyche, personification of a city, as this motif appeared on their coinage. Meanwhile, the better educated would have been able to recognise more subtle forms of personification; they would have known, for example, that Hippolytos personified self-control, temperance and virginity. The images on the Sevso Meleager Plate provide examples of the differing levels of personification, and demonstrate how interpretation could depend on the education of the viewer. The tableaux evidence the likelihood that actors may have taken the part of personifications alongside other characters, in enactments of these same scenes.

Chapter Three, *Drunk and Disorderly: Dionysiac Imagery on the Mildenhall Great Dish*, focussed on what appears to be the most popular form of figurative representation on Late Antique silver plate, that relating to Dionysos. Widespread ownership of this type of expensive silver indicates the popularity of the drinking culture among the upper classes. The Mildenhall Great Dish carries allegorical meaning, and depicts individual figures who could act as personifications. Dionysos personifies conviviality, fertility and nuptial bliss, and Herakles personifies the frailty of man when compared to the gods; elsewhere in his sober state, he would have personified strength and determination. Oceanos is the personification of the waters of the world, and his bold stare might have been thought to have a protective element for the owner of the plate. This apotropaic quality also occurs elsewhere, and underlines the continuing belief in magic throughout Late Antiquity. The presence of Dionysiac imagery on tombs indicates that people were concerned about their fate after death. As a group, the *thiasos* of Dionysos on the Mildenhall plate could have acted as an allegory of a desirable afterlife, as this motif appeared on sarcophagi of the period. What appears to be light-hearted and frivolous imagery held, in Late Antiquity, a deep allegorical import and personified a range of different values.

The imagery in Chapter Three was centred round the drinking culture of Late Antiquity, and the next logical step was therefore to look at how the art of personification could operate in the dining room, in a chapter entitled *The Art of Dining*. I took as my case study a small *piperatorium* in the form of a female bust, the ‘Empress’ pepper pot from the Hoxne Hoard, as its unique iconography offers a raft of different connotations. This figure certainly personifies an educated woman, as she holds a scroll. Because of her resemblance to an empress, she also undoubtedly personifies an élite female, possibly Helena, the first Christian empress. Through her imperial likeness, she acted as a personification of the Roman Empire when originally in use, indicating that imperial imagery was both popular and an extremely effective means of propaganda.

The Empress pepper pot can also be linked to the figure of ‘wealth-bringing woman’ who personified bounty, and whose at-times similar image appeared in various media at that time. This object’s function as a pepper container and dispenser, coupled with an association with bounty, provide a link to Ge, personification of earth. This *piperatorium* possesses a polyvalency, and could have demonstrated a wide range of meanings to its contemporary owners and users, as well as stimulating intellectual conversation. This exploration of Late Antique dining culture also demonstrated the widespread presence of personifications in the dining room in a variety of media, as well as those on silver plate.

Chapter Five, *The Power behind the Throne: Personifications on Imperial Silver*, moved into the realm of the imperial court, where the power held by female personifications such as Nike and Ge was manifest. In Late Antiquity, despite the introduction of Christianity, the cult of the emperor endured, as exemplified by a small silver statuette of a personification of the genius of an emperor. Through such objects, it remained possible to continue to venerate the ruler despite his official loss of divine status. The perception of the emperor as a god-like figure persisted, yet rather than acting autonomously, he chose to be shown alongside carefully chosen personifications on his official imperial imagery, in order to buttress his power. Additionally, the image of the emperor himself acted as a personification of the Roman Empire.

On each of three *largitio* plates depicting respectively Constantius performing an *adventus*, Valentinian going into battle and Theodosios carrying out courtly ceremonial duties, a personification is shown assisting the imperial ruler. Nike celebrates victory alongside Constantius, and she also sustains Valentinian and his army in war, and Ge offers her support to Theodosios, ruler of the then known world. All three were Christian emperors, and these plates provide a good example of pagan/Christian syncretism. These images exemplify the symbiotic relationship between ruler and personification, and one that was mutually beneficial, with each reinforcing and enhancing the other's power. The use of these particular personifications was a propaganda tool in promoting the imperial cult, as they were essential in proving the emperor's link to the divine. They were recognisable to all levels of society, and they show that there was a desire for continuity, as they provided a reminder of a glorious past harking back to ancient Greece.

Continuing the imperial theme, in *City-Tyches: Official Personifications* I examined the role of the city-tyche, a potent and widespread female personification representing the fortunes of both city and empire. The city-tyche is an indicator of contemporary attitudes towards urban conurbations, in that each city was understood to have a distinct identity, represented by their tyche. This would suggest that a sense of civic pride prevailed in Late Antiquity. Furthermore, the fact that the inhabitants felt a consistent need for divine protection shows that they lived with a feeling of being threatened, either by outside forces or natural events. In these contexts, the image of the city-tyche held enormous potency, as it was capable of guarding against all ills.

This figure was also a guarantee of excellence, as it appeared on coins and as a hallmark on silver plate. A pair of tiny city-tyches, in appearance similar to those found on coinage, form part of a decorative scheme on the Anastasios dish. When considered in conjunction with other small motifs on the plate, they appear to personify Rome and Constantinople, and thus are part of a design which embodies a message of good fortune for the whole of the Empire, both East and West. Certain cities had their own distinctive tyche, for example *Roma* with her helmet, shield and weapon, or the contrapposto Antioch whose feet rested on a personification of the river Orantes. Other city-tyche representations are not so easily

identifiable and this has led to ambiguity. On his *largitio* plate, the consul Ardabur Aspar is shown flanked by a pair of city-tyches, one of whom is clearly Rome. Yet her partner is not necessarily the initially obvious choice of Constantinople, but may instead represent Carthage. Thus, the imagery on this plate represents a personal statement about this consul, who served in North Africa, rather than simply following the official format for consular largess. A similar question arises over the identity of Alexandria, one of the four silver Esquiline tyche statuettes, the other three undoubtedly representing Rome, Constantinople and Antioch. The former could symbolise any one of a number of imperial centres at that time. However, if the four statuettes represent the four Christian patriarchates that had been established at that time, then the figure is incontrovertibly Alexandria. This, in turn raises a further issue: by representing these apostolic sees, the figures assume a Christian significance. These examples indicate both the flexibility of the city-tyche personification, and the importance of correct identification, which can have a bearing on the intended meaning.

My final chapter, *The Parabiago Plate: Pagan presence in a Christian Age*, was an examination of the dying pagan cult of the goddess Cybele, as represented on the Parabiago Plate. This cultic object was made in the late-fourth century, well after the introduction of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. However, the Church's establishment was far from smooth, hence the presence of this vessel, which fortuitously falls within my time frame and offers a means of studying the art of personification as depicted in purely pagan iconography. Apart from Cybele, her consort Attis and her Corybantes, all the figures depicted on the Parabiago Plate are personifications, and they combine to disseminate a body of information. As a group they evoke the passage of time, the cycle of nature and the changing seasons, and the movement of the stars and planets. They indicate that this dish commemorates specific festivities which took place every spring. These are complex themes, here easily conveyed simply through the use of personifications. Imagery such as this, which shows a carefully plotted group of figures, gives an indication of the earlier, more vibrant role of personifications, some of whose likenesses became standardised as they started to be used in a more piecemeal fashion in Late Antiquity.

Throughout the thesis, the syncretism between pagan and Christian imagery is apparent, despite the fact that personifications were perceived as a threat by the newly-emerging Christian church, who found them powerful and, at times, threatening figures. However, personifications and pagan allegorical scenes survived through their acceptance and absorption into Christian iconography. The Virgilian pastoral idyll of the shepherd and his flock, as depicted on a fourth-century silver bowl, came to represent the Good Shepherd, and the allegory of the hunt symbolised the Christian struggle to overcome the trials of life. Similarly, Hippolytos, a popular figure who was depicted on the Meleager Plate, assumed the Christian values of self-control and virginity, and Phaedra acted as a warning of the dangers of unnatural passions. Dionysos's attribute of the vine was directly copied into Christian imagery, and the allegorical use of his imagery to symbolise life after death aligned with Christian beliefs. There is a possibility that the Hoxne 'Empress' pepper pot could have represented Helena, the first Christian empress, particularly as spoons from the same hoard bear the *Chi-Rho* symbol, indicating its owners were Christian.

Elsewhere, three Christian emperors chose to be unambiguously depicted alongside the pagan personifications of Nike or Ge; eventually Nike was to make the successful transition into a Christian angel. City-tyches retained their power throughout Late Antiquity, and the four Esquiline statuettes may have represented the four Christian patriarchates, as well as four great cities. Their function in protecting the city was later assumed by the Virgin Mary. Even the apparently totally pagan Parabiago Plate can be linked to a Christian festival, as the spring festivities it commemorates share aspects of death and rebirth with Easter. Personifications undeniably survived the transition to Christianity, and remained a potent force.

All the silver plate under discussion would have been owned by the wealthier element of Late Antique society, and often it was used to self-fashion. This is clearly the case with the Muse Casket, as it was designed for public display when visiting the bathhouse. Its almost certainly female owner would have displayed her erudition and indicated her love of the classics, through the personifications of the Muse figures on the casket. She might have considered herself to be Erato, the ninth missing Muse of lyrical poetry who also

personified love and loveliness. The Sevso Hunting Plate, with its deprecating inscription, makes it clear that the imagery is designed to reflect the wealth and position of Sevso and his family. The central group personifies an idealised household, one that either already existed or to which Sevso aspired. The Meleager Plate, with its theatrical-style tableaux, suggests that its owners were conceivably aristocratic theatregoers, as this was a popular activity among the upper classes, and they perhaps wanted to vaunt this cultural aspect of their lives by owning and displaying this type of plate.

Within the imperial silver discussed in this thesis, there often appears an element of self-fashioning as, for example, on the consular *largitio* dish of Ardabur Aspar. If the city-tyches he chose to be shown with represented Rome and Carthage rather than the more conventional Constantinople, then they made a clear and very personal statement of autonomy. Even the little ‘Empress’ pepper pot may have been chosen by its owners to display their loyalty to the Empire from their outpost in far-flung Britain, and show that they remained good, loyal Romans.

Another theme that runs throughout this thesis is the need to have *paideia* to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the object being surveyed. So, while most contemporary viewers would have had no trouble identifying Nike on the imperial silver, far fewer would have been able to recognise Ortygia on the Corbridge Lanx, or some of the figures in the tableaux on the Meleager Plate. Possession of a classical education and thus a shared common knowledge of this type of imagery, was another form of self-fashioning; it had the effect of excluding those from the lower classes, while at the same time reinforcing the bonds between those in power. Personifications operated at different levels in Late Antiquity; the arts of personification and allegory functioned as a subliminal language, and through this acted as a means of class distinction.

The most striking aspect of my study of personifications, however, has been to reveal how potent female imagery could be in the art of Late Antiquity, despite this being a patriarchal, often misogynist society. My study of the Muse Casket described the huge power these female personifications of the arts were understood to hold over poets, to the extent they

were shown on mosaics alongside illustrious figures such as Homer and Virgil, and appeared on sarcophagi. In imperial art, the power of the female personification reached its zenith. Previous studies have focussed on depictions of the emperor, but once one starts to examine the personifications surrounding him it becomes apparent that they are predominantly female. This stems from linguistic gendering, but nevertheless it means that in the art of Late Antiquity women were granted a strong public persona. On all three imperial *largitio* plates used as case studies, the emperor has deliberately chosen to be supported by either Ge or Nike; this partnership extended to the coinage of the Empire, and through this millions of people would have been exposed to images of powerful female figures. Most of those living in the Empire would also have been familiar with the figure of the female city-tyche, which had official status, and which again appeared on coins. Not only did these personifications represent all of the cities of the Empire, but the tyche motif could act as a guarantee of excellence when used as a hallmark. It performed a similar function to the ‘empress’ steelyard weights, another symbol of official authority. Throughout, in secular, religious and imperial spheres, female personifications carried immense power.

Across the chapters certain common themes have emerged. This thesis has highlighted the power and high status of personifications in all modes of representation, and demonstrated that they were deliberately utilised in a number of ways. They often brought with them very positive qualities such as victory, good fortune and protection. Their appearance within a visual programme could signify a required level of education on the part of the viewer, depending on the scheme, yet certain personifications were ubiquitous and familiar to all. Their reach stretched from rich to poor: all emperors wished to be depicted alongside them on imperial silver and coinage, and at the opposite end of the social scale, small woven pieces of cloth depicting the same personifications were attached to clothing for apotropaic purposes. The concept of ‘the way the art of personification worked’ was embedded in society, and thus it operated as an efficient means of communicating often quite complex information and concepts.

My thesis has focussed on the appearance of personifications and allegorical figures on silver plate, and this élite metal necessarily excludes a large portion of Late Antique society by way of its value. For the upper classes, silver plate was seen as a form of currency, both in terms of monetary worth, and as a medium for conveying education and rank. Thus it was de rigour for emperors and consuls to distribute bowls and plates to those in power alongside them. Silver plate was very much part of the gift-giving culture among the aristocracy, and considered to be eminently suitable as a wedding present. We know it was displayed, and the objects on show would have encompassed the secular, imperial and religious spheres, depending on their owners. With its references to the classics, some plate would also have acted as a stimulus for conversation in the dining room, and I have argued that certain of the representations depicted thereon may illustrate theatrical performances. It was certainly used to self-fashion by both sexes, albeit in the case of women it may have been perceived as a reflection of their male partner's status as well as their own. Therefore, as a medium silver plate carried with it all the associations of wealth and power and this, combined with potent images of personifications, means that the objects discussed in this thesis provide us with a superb entrée into the aristocratic world of Late Antiquity.

Appendix 1

Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae a Fine Corneli Taciti*, 16.10.5-12

Cumque urbi propinquaret, senatus officia reverendasque patriciae stirpis effigies ore sereno contemplans non ut Cineas ille Pyrri legatus in unum coactam multitudinem regum sed asylum mundi totius adesse existimabat.

Unde cum se vertisset ad plebem, stupebat, qua celeritate omne quod ubique est hominum genus confluerit Romam. et tamquam Euphratem armorum specie territurus aut Rhenum altrinsecus praeceuntibus signis insidebat aureo solus ipse carpento fulgenti claritudine lapidum variorum, quo micante lux quaedam misceri videbatur alterna. Eumque post antegressos multiplices alios purpureis subtegminibus texti circumdedere dracones hastarum aureis gemmatisque summitatibus inligati, hiatu vasto perflabiles et ideo velut ira perciti sibilantes caudarumque volumina relinquentes in ventum. Et incedebat hinc inde ordo geminus armatorum clipeatus atque cristatus corusco lumine radians, nitidis loriceis indutus, sparsique cataphracti equites, quos clibanarios dictitant, [personati] thoracum muniti tegminibus et limbis ferreis cincti, ut Praxitelis manu polita crederes simulacra, non viros: quos lamminarum circuli tenues apti corporis flexibus ambiebant per omnia membra diducti ut, quocumque artus necessitas commovisset, vestitus congrueret iunctura cohaerenter aptata.

Augustus itaque faustis vocibus appellatus minime vocum lituorumque intonante fragore cohorrui, talem se tamque immobilem, qualis in provinciis suis visebatur, ostendens. Nam et corpus perhumile curvabat portas ingrediens celsas, et velut collo munito rectam aciem luminum tendens nec dextra vultum nec laeva flectebat tamquam figmentum hominis: non cum rota concuteret nutans, nec spuens aut os aut nasum tergens vel fricans, manumve agitans visus est umquam. Quae licet adfectabat, erant tamen haec et alia quaedam in citiore vita patientiae non mediocris indicia, ut existimari dabatur, uni illi concessae. Quod autem per omne tempus imperii nec in consessum vehiculi quemquam suscepit, nec in trabea socium privatum adscivit, ut fecere principes consecrati, et similia multa, quae elatus in arduum supercilium tamquam leges aequissimas observavit, praetereo memor ea me rettulisse cum incidissent.

Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae a Fine Corneli Taciti*, the Latin Library
<<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ammianus.html>> [accessed 7 August, 2012]

Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (AD 354-378)*, 16, 10.5-12 The arrival of Constantius II in Rome in 357

As he approached the city he let his eye dwell without expression on the senators paying their humble duty and the venerable images of the patrician families. It did not occur to him as it had to Cineas, the celebrated envoy of Pyrrhus, that he was beholding an assembly of kings; his thought was rather that here was a place of sanctuary for the whole world, and

when he turned towards the populace he was amazed to see in what numbers people of every race had flocked to Rome. His own appearance might have been designed as a show of strength to overawe the Euphrates or the Rhine; a double line of standards went before him, and he himself was seated on a golden car gleaming with various precious stones, whose mingled radiance seemed to throw a sort of shimmering light. Behind the motley cavalcade that preceded him the emperor's person was surrounded by purple banners woven in the form of dragons and attached to the tops of gilded and jewelled spears; the breeze blew through their gaping jaws so they seemed to be hissing with rage, and their voluminous tails streamed behind them on the wind. On each side marched a file of men-at-arms with shields and plumed helmets, whose shining breastplates cast a dazzling light. At intervals were mailed cavalymen, to so-called Ironclads, wearing masks and equipped with cuirasses and belts of steel; they seemed more like statues polished by the hand of Praxiteles than living men. Their limbs were entirely covered by a garment of thin circular plates fitted to the curves of the body, and so cunningly articulated that it adapted itself to any movement the wearer needed to make.

The emperor was greeted with welcoming cheers, which were echoed from the hills and river-banks, but in spite of the din he exhibited no emotion, but kept the same impassive air as he commonly wore before his subjects in the provinces. Though he was very short he stooped when he passed under a high gate; otherwise he was like a dummy, gazing straight before him as if his head were in a vice and turning neither to right nor left. When a wheel jolted he did not nod, and at no point was he seen to spit or to wipe or rub his face or nose or to move his hand. All this was no doubt affectation, but he gave other evidence too in his personal life of an unusual degree of self-control, which one was given to believe belonged to him alone. As for his habit throughout his reign of never allowing any private person to share his carriage or be his colleague in the consulship, as many deified emperors have, and many other similar customs which his towering pride led him to observe as if they had all the sanctity of law, I will pass them by because I am conscious that I have reported them as they occurred.

Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (AD 354-378)*, trans. by Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986, repr. 2004), 100-101

Appendix 2

Sallustios

Περὶ Θρωῶ καὶ Κοσμου

Κφ. δ.

Ἐὶ δὲ δεῖ καὶ ἕτερον μῦθον εἰπεῖν, τὴν Μητέρα τῶν Θεῶν Φασὶ τὸν Ἀττιν παρὰ τῷ Γάλλῳ κείμενον ἰδέσαν ποταμῷ, ἐραθῆναί τε καὶ λαβέσαν τὸν ἀστεριθτὸν αὐτῷ περιθεῖναι πῖλον, καὶ τῷ λοιπῷ μεθ' ἑαυτῆς ἔχειν. Ὁ δὲ Νῆμφης ἐραθεὶς τὴν Θεῶν μητέρα ἀπολιπὼν, τῇ Νύμφῃ συνῆν, καὶ διὰ τῆτο ἡ μήτης τῶν Θεῶν ποιεῖ μανῆναι τὸν Ἀττιν, καὶ τὰ γόνιμα ἀποκοψάμενον ἀφεῖναι παρὰ τῇ Νύμφῃ· πάλιν δὲ ἀνελθόντα αὐτῇ συνοικεῖν. Ἡ μὲν ἔν μήτηρ τῶν Θεῶν ζωογόνος ἐστὶ Θεὰ, καὶ διὰ τῆτο μήτηρ καλεῖται· ὁ δὲ Ἀττις τῶν γενομένων καὶ φθειρομένων δξμεργός, καὶ διὰ τῆτο παρὰ Γάλλῳ λέγεται ἐυρεθῆναι ποταμῷ· ὁ γὰρ Γάλλος τὸν Γαλαζίαν ἀνίττεται κύκλον, ἀφ' ἧ το παθητὸν ἔρχεσθαι σῶμα. Τῶν δὲ πρώτων Θεῶν τελειήντων τῆς δευτέρης, ἐρᾷ μὲν ἡ Μήτηρ τῷ Ἀττεως, καὶ ἐρανίεις αὐτῷ δίδωσι δυνάμεις· τῆτο γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ πῖλος· ἐρῷ δὲ ὁ Ἀττις τῆς Νύμφης· αἱ δὲ Νύμφαι γενέσεως ἔφοροι· αἶν γὰρ τὸ γινόμενον ῥεῖ. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔδει στῆναι τὴν γένεσιν, καὶ μὴ τῶν ἐσχάτων γενέσθαι τὸ χεῖρον, ὁ ταῦτα ποιῶν δημιουργός, δυνάμεις γονίμες ἀφείς εἰς τῶν γένεσιν, πάλιν συνάπτεται τοῖς Θεοῖς. Ταῦτα δὲ ἐγένετο μὲν ἐδέποτε, ἔστι δὲ ἀεί. Καὶ ὁ μὲν νῆς ἅμα πάντα ὁρᾷ, ὁ δὲ λόγος τὰ μὲν πρῶτα, τὰ δὲ δεύτερα λέγει. Οὕτω δὲ πρὸς τὸν κόσμον οἰκείως ἔχοντος τῇ μύθῃ, ἡμεῖς τὸν κόσμον μιμήμενοι, (πῶς γὰρ ἂν μᾶλλον κοσμηθῆμεν;) ἐορτὴν ἄγομεν διὰ ταῦτα· καὶ πρῶτον μὲν αὐτοὶ πεσόντες ἐξ ἡρανῆ, καὶ τῇ Νύμφῃ συνόντες ἐν κατηφείῳ ἐσμέν σίτη τε καὶ τῆς ἄλλης παχείας καὶ ρυπαρᾶς τροφῆς ἀπεχόμεθα· ἐκάτερα γὰρ ἐναντία ψυχῇ· εἴτα δένδρη τομαί, καὶ νηστεία, ὥσπερ καὶ ἡμῶν ἀποκοπτομένων τὴν περαιτέρω τῆς γενέσεως πρόοδον· ἐπὶ τήτοις γάλακτος προφή, ὥσπερ ἀναγεννωμένων· ἐφ' οἷς ἱλαρεῖω καὶ στέφανοι, καὶ πρὸς τῆς Θεῆς δῖον ἐπάνοδος. Μαρτυεῖ δὲ τήτοις καὶ ὁ τῶν δρωμένων καιρὸς· περὶ γὰρ τὸ ἔαρ καὶ τὴν ἰσημερίαν δρᾶται τὰ δρώμενα, ὅτε τῇ μὲν γίνεσθαι παύεται τὰ γινόμενα, ἡμέρα δὲ μείζων γίνεται τῆς νηκτὸς, ὅπερ οἰκεῖον ἀναγομέναις ψυχαῖς. Περὶ γῆν τὴν ἐναντίαν ἰσημερίαν ἢ τῆς Κόρης ἀρπαγὴ μυθολογεῖται γενέσθαι, ὃ δὴ κάθοδος ἐστὶ τῶν ψυχῶν. Τοσαῦτα περὶ μύθων εἰπῆσιν ἡμῖν αὐτοὶ τε οἱ Θεοὶ, καὶ τῶν γραψάντων τῆς μύθης αἱ ψυχαὶ ἴλεω γένοιντο.

Sallustios, *Theon kai Kosmou*, ed. by Johann Konrad Orelli (Zurich: Orelli, Fuesslini et Soc., 1821), pp. 14-18.

Salloustius

On the Gods and the World, 4

To take another myth, they say that the Mother of the Gods seeing Attis lying by the river Gallus fell in love with him, took him, crowned him with her cap of stars, and thereafter kept him with her. He fell in love with a nymph and left the Mother to live with her. For this the Mother of the Gods made Attis go mad and cut off his genital organs and leave them with the nymph, and then return and dwell with her.

Now the Mother of the Gods is the principle that generates life; that is why she is called Mother. Attis is the creator of all things which are born and die; that is why he is said to have been found by the river Gallus. For Gallus signifies the Galaxy, or Milky Way, the point at which body subject to passion begins. Now as the primary gods make perfect the secondary, the Mother loves Attis and gives him celestial powers. That is what the cap means. Attis loves a nymph: the nymphs preside over generation, since all that is generated is fluid. But since the process of generation must be stopped somewhere, and not allowed to generate something worse than the worst, the creator who makes these things casts away his generative powers into the creation and is joined to the Gods again. Now these things never happened, but always are. And mind sees all things at once, but reason (or speech) expresses some first and others after. Thus, as the myth is in accord with the cosmos, we for that reason keep a festival imitating the cosmos, for how could we attain higher order?

And at first we ourselves, having fallen from heaven and living with the nymph, are in despondency, and abstain from corn and all rich and unclean food, for both are hostile to the soul. Then comes the cutting of the tree and the fast, as though we also were cutting off the further process of generation. After that the feeding on milk, as though we were being born again; after which come rejoicings and garlands and, as it were, a return up to the Gods.

The season of the ritual is evidence to the truth of these explanations. The rites are performed about the Vernal equinox, when the fruits of the earth are ceasing to be produced, and day is becoming longer than night, which applies well to spirits rising higher. (At least, the other equinox is in mythology the time of the rape of Kore, which is the descent of the souls.)

Sallustius, *On Gods and the World*, trans. by Gilbert Murray in *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1925), 241-267 (section 4, pp. 243-247)

Appendix 3

Libanii Oratio XI

Antiochikos

‘Υπὲρ δὴ τοιαύτης τῆς ἡμετέρας τῆς αἰ ὧραι χερεύουσιν ἐμμελῶς οὐ διαφθείρουσαι τὴν ἀπὸ ταύτης χάριν τῷ παρὰ σφῶν ἀηδεῖ· οὔτε γὰρ ὁ χειμὼν ὑπὸ πλεονεξίας ἐπιλαμβάνει τὸν τοῦ ἥρος χρόνον μεθαρθόττων εἰς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐχέινου τερφιν οὔτε τὸ θέρος ταυτὰ ποιῶν ἐχτείνεται πρὸς τὸν χειμῶνα τὴν αὐτοῦ τε κάκεινου μέσσην ὥραν ἐχβάλλον, ἀλλ’ ἐκάστη τε ἐν ὧραις μένει καὶ τοῦ ἔτους ἴσον ἀποτέμενεται μέτρον καὶ τῆς δευτέρας προσιούσης ἐξίσταται. καὶ τὸ μέγιστον, αἱ γὰρ ἐκ τῶν ὑπερβολῶν ἀνιαραὶ τοῖς σώμασιν, ἡ μὲν τοῦ φύχους, ἡ δὲ τοῦ θάλπους τὸ ὑπερβάλλον δεῦρο χολάζουσιν ταῖς ἡμερωτέραις ἐοικέναι βούλονται.

καὶ μοι δοκοῦσι καθάπερ πρὸς ἀλλήλας συνθέμεναι τῆς ἀλλήλων μεταλαμβάνειν δυνάμεως, ὁ μὲν χειμὼν μετουσίαν τινὰ θέροθς ἐμφαίνειν τῷ προσηγεῖ καὶ ἀλύπῳ, τὸ δὲ θέρος παρ’ ἐκαίνου δέχεσθαι τοσοῦτον, ὅσον ἐμελλεν εἶναι κώλυμα τῷ λυποῦντι τῆς θέρμης.

καὶ ὁ μὲν | ὄμβρους ἄχρι κόρου παρέχει τῇ γῇ φυχὸς ἀφελών, ἡ δὲ ἀνίησι λήια καὶ θεριναῖς αὔραις ἐχτρεφεθ ῥυομέβαθς τά τε σώνατα ξαὶ τοὺς ἀστάχους τῆς ἐκ τοῦ καύματος ζημίας. ὥστε μόνοις ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει τῇ παρούσῃ τε ἀεὶ τῶν ὥρῶν ἡδεφθαι καὶ τὴν δευτέραν ἀσμένως δέχεσθαι διὰ τὸ πάσαις ἐνεῖναι τι κεκραμένον καὶ εὐχαρι.

Libanii Opera, ed. by Richard Foerster (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1903), pp. 446-7

Libanius

Oration 11: The Antiochikos: In Praise of Antioch, 29-31

29. Over so fair a land as ours the Seasons dance harmoniously and do not spoil its charm by any unseemly conduct on their part. For neither does winter out of jealousy encroach upon the time of spring, claiming that season's charm for itself, nor does summer, in the same fashion, stretch out into winter, turning out the season which comes between the two; but each remains within its bounds and divides up an equal measure of the year, and gives place when the next season approaches. And the greatest thing is that those which are in their extreme forms grievous to the body, the one by reason of excess of cold, the other through excess of heat, seem among us to be chastened and to wish to resemble the milder seasons.

30. It seems to me as though they had made an agreement with each other to share each other's characteristics, so that winter shows a certain element in common with summer, in its mildness and harmlessness, while summer on the other hand has received from winter enough of its character to serve as a defence against distressing heat.

31. And while winter provides rain to satiety for the earth, taking away the cold, the heat makes the wheat spring up and fosters it with the summer breezes which save both our bodies and crops from damage from burning heat. Thus for us alone is it possible to enjoy whichever of the seasons is present and to receive the coming one with pleasure, since in all of them there is a certain temperateness and gracefulness.

Libanius, *Oration II*, trans. by Glanville Downey, in 'Libanius' Oration in Praise of Antioch (Oration XI)' in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 103.5 (1959), p. 658.

Appendix 4

John of Gaza

Description of a Tabula Mundi, 7-44

Γαῖα δὲ θηλύνασα φύσιν θρέπτειραν ἀμάλλης
 ἐκ λαγόνων γονόεσσαν ἀνηκόντιζε γενέθλην·
 καὶ ῥαχίην καὶ νῶτον ἐπικλίνουσα χαμεύνη
 διχθαδίῳ κλιντῆρι δέμας κούφιζεν ἀγοστῶι
 νηδὺν ἀνευρύνουσα βιοσσόον· ἐκ δὲ λοχείης
 ἡδυτόκων ὥδινε συνωρίδα δίζυγα Καρπῶν,
 ἄρσενα μαῖαν ἔχουσα τανύπτερον Ἀγγελιώτην,
 ὃς μεθέπων παλάμησι λεχώϊα γούνατα Γαίης,
 στηρίζων ἐκάτερθε κεχηνότα μηρὸν ἀλήτην,
 ἀρμονίῃ σοφίης μαιώσατο μαιάδι τέχνῃ,
 λύσας μυριόκεντρα μογοστόκα λύματα λιμοῦ.
 ἡδὲ φερεσταχύων πλοκάμων ἐπέτασεν ἐθείρας
 ἐκταδίην ῥίψασα παρήγορον αὐχένι χαίτην
 νῶτον ἐπιθρώσκουσιν ὀπισθοπόροις κελεύοις,
 καὶ γονίμη παλάμη κέρας ὄμπνιον ἰσόθι τείνει
 ζωτοκόου Δήμητρος ἐπιπλήσασα γενέθλης.
 καὶ στάχυες κομόωσι· μέλας δὲ τις αὐχένα αὐρῶν
 μηκεδανὸς τριέλικτος ἔλιξ ὄφιν ἐς κέρας ἦεν
 σημαίνων, ὅτι Γαῖα φερέσταχυς οὐκ ἀπολήγει
 ἀνθοκόμους τίκτουσα καὶ ὠδίνουσα κορύμβους.
 καὶ τροχαλοῖς μελέεσσι φορεῦμενος ὀλκὸν ἐλίσσει
 ψυχρὸς ὄφιν νεότητι παλίμπορος αἰὲν ἀδελφὸν·
 ἀλλὰ πάλιν βραδύγουνος ἐσύρετο νηθρὸς ὀδίτης
 καὶ ψαφαρὸν μετέπειτα γέρον ἀπεσεῖσατο γῆρας.
 Γαῖα δ' ἀμαλλοτόκεια συνήθεα καρπὸν ἀέξει
 καὶ πολὺν γεγαῶτα παρέθρισεν εἰς γένυν ἄρπης·
 Ἥ δὲ φερεζῶων μελέων ὥϊζεν ὀχῆας
 καὶ διδύμους λοχίης διδυμητόκος ἔβλυσε Καρπούς
 ἀρτιγόνοθς μεθέπουσα νεήλυδας οἶά τε παῖδας.
 τῶν δ' μὲν ἀνθερεῶνι περίλοκος ἡδὲ δεσμῶι
 μητέρι χεῖρας ἔλιξε συνήγορος αὐχένι Γαίης
 τερπωλῇ φιλότητος· ἀειρομένου δὲ καρήνου
 Καρπὸς ἀνέζητο καὶ εἰς στόμα χεῖλος ἐρείσας
 Παιδοκόμῳ πέχυνε φιλήματι μητρὸς ὀπώην.
 ὃς δὲ πολυρραθάμιγγος ὀπιπεύων χύσιν ὄμβρου
 βαιὴν χεῖρα τάνυσσε περισσῶτον ἡέρι πέμπων,
 καὶ παλάμην ἐδίηνε χυτὸς ῥόος ἐκ νεφελῶν
 δίψιον ἐκ νιφετοῖο διάβροχον ἄνθος ἀέξων.

But Gaia, showing her fertile nature, which makes the grain to grow, caused to shoot up from her womb her fruitful offspring; and leaning her back and spine on the ground, she raised her body on the couch with both hands, stretching her life-giving womb; she brought forth from her travail the twin Karpoi, a sweet offspring, having one male nurse, a long-winged angel, who, holding with his hands the knees of Gaia as she gave birth, and supporting from each side her opened thighs, spread them, and, with the midwife's craft, assisted her in the birth with the skill of his art, destroying the grievous pangs of hunger with countless stings.

But she spread the locks of her hair, filled with spikes of grain, throwing it in folds so that the tresses hung about her neck, flowing down her back in succeeding waves, and with her fruitful hand she raises the bountiful horn on high, filling it with the increase of life-giving Demeter. And the sheaves grow; but stretching its neck about the horn, a long, black, winding snake was wound about it three times, showing that fruitful Gaia does not cease to bear and bring forth variegated fruits. And the cold snake bears it coils along with its winding body, moving ever with renewed youth; but when it creeps more slowly, having become old and sluggish, it casts off its crumbling skin. Fruitful Gaia brings forth the wonted harvest and, when it is ripe, cuts it with the sickle.

But she opened her life-giving body and from two-fold travail brought forth twin Karpoi, caring for them, when they were just born, as one does small children. One of them, clinging to her neck in a sweet bond, pressed his lips to those of his mother, clinging to Gaia's throat in the pleasure of love; for as he lifted his head he rose up, and pressing his lips on her mouth, he embraced with childish kiss his mother's beauty. The other, seeking the stream of the many-dropped rain, stretches his tiny hand into the air, and through his palm there flows the steam poured from the clouds, causing the thirsty flowers to grow with its moisture.

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