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Introduction

In the third century, Christ was perceived exclusively as the Son of God in human form, as teacher, physician, and fount of life for the faithful. In his outward appearance, he resembles an unassuming philosopher. With his miracles, he puts into practice and demonstrates the truth and power of his doctrine of brotherly love and nonviolence. His simple garments are white, as a rule. His divinity is apparent from his deeds and does not have to be indicated with a nimbus. He does not carry a scepter-like staff in the form of a cross, and when he addresses his followers he is not seated on a golden, gem-encrusted throne.
During the first three centuries of Christianity, it would presumably have struck the faithful as blasphemous for the emperor to base his authority on Christ after receiving his help in killing his enemies. Why did the unprecedented imperialization of the images of Christ and of Christian churches—so contrary to the faith’s doctrines of peace and modesty—continue after the reign of Constantine?¹

This quote by art historian Johannes Deckers represents a sentiment that pervades scholarship on Early Christian art, pitting the allegedly grassroots, anti-imperial Christ of catacombs and sarcophagi against that of the triumphant, enthroned Christ of apse mosaics—a distinction that is often accompanied by evaluative statements about the presumably wholesome humility and charity of the early church in contrast with the wealth and power of the corrupted post-Constantinian church.² The present essay challenges this false dichotomy and instead suggests that these two types—the Good Shepherd and the enthroned Christ—are in fact not so very different. As we will see, a figure need not be gilded and gem-encrusted to carry connotations of power and rule.


A narrative that is entwined with this valorization of the humble, grassroots Good Shepherd, and has also persisted in much of art history, is that of the so-called “Emperor Mystique.”³ Also referred to, more generously, by Robin M. Jensen as “imperial style theory,”⁴ this theory holds that post-Constantinian images of Christ—such as the apse mosaic from San Vitale, in Ravenna (Fig. 1)—adopted imperial iconography in order to emphasize the divinity of Christ, and associated Christ with the emperor, and vice versa.⁵ In 1993, Thomas Mathews famously problematized this theory in his

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controversial work *The Clash of Gods*. In it, Mathews argued that these early Christian images were in fact borrowing iconography not from the Roman government, but from the Greco-Roman pantheon, and in so doing successfully asserted the superiority of Christianity over paganism. In the twenty years since its publication, *The Clash of Gods* has received much attention, in the form of both high praise and criticism, and, perhaps most importantly, it has instigated a reevaluation of the prevailing assumptions about the relationship between imperial iconography and Christianity. Regardless of whether it was the emperor or Greco-Roman deities (or both, which seems more likely) that inspired the magisterial iconography of these images, it was the Good Shepherd motif that the enthroned Christ gradually supplanted.

At first glance, the Good Shepherd motif (e.g., Fig. 2) stands in stark contrast to that of the enthroned Christ. His humble shepherd’s tunic pales in comparison to the glittering garment of the enthroned (god/emperor) Christ (e.g., Figs. 2 and 6). The shepherd is accompanied only by goats or sheep and sometimes rests on a rock, while the enthroned Christ sits on an orb or a bejeweled seat and is flanked by the exalted company of angels and saints. The shepherd’s attributes include a milk bucket, staff, and small bag; conversely, the enthroned Christ holds books, scrolls, or laurels (e.g., Fig. 1). Indeed, when taken at face value, these two sets of images do appear

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to be significantly distinct. However, I argue that these two motifs are in fact not as different as they initially appear and thus the transition between and coexistence of the two posed no significant theological or ideological problems for their viewers. That is, the Good Shepherd and the enthroned Christ do not represent a clean distinction between pre- and post-Constantinian Christianity.

**Fig. 2.** Good Shepherd, Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome. Photo: Josef Wilpert, La Pittura delle Catacombe Romane, Rome, 1903.

**Fig. 3.** Good Shepherd Lunette Mosaic, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna. Photo: Robin M. Jensen.
The Good Shepherd mosaic in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (Fig. 3) has been identified as a unique representation of a turning point not only from pastoral to imperial imagery, but also from the naturalism of classical art to the stylized spiritualism of early medieval art. The composition of this fifth-century Good Shepherd mosaic mimics portrayals of Orpheus, while Christ’s purple and gold garments evoke regal and divine attributes. However, I suggest that we read this image not as the beginning of an imperial Christian iconography, but as consistent with—and a bit more explicit than—the pastoral images of Christian art that came before it. That is, the apparently humble Good Shepherds of the Roman catacombs were capable of denoting power just as much as later images of the bejeweled and enthroned Christ.

In striving to understand the image of the Good Shepherd, it is essential to remember that it is just that—a singular theme. As such, the Good Shepherd must be considered as but one among a multiplicity of symbols in Christianity’s long tradition of analogical language. Indeed, this principle is carried forward a few centuries later, when Pseudo-Dionysius writes about the application of metaphors to God in his *Mystical Theology*:

> Since it is the Cause of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to being, and, more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being. Now we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of the affirmations, but rather that the cause of all is considerably prior to this, beyond privations, beyond every denial, beyond every assertion.  

The Good Shepherd in and of itself is not capable of encapsulating...

the nature of God. Like most images, the strength of the Good Shepherd is its flexibility. Its meaning not only fluctuates over time but also in different contexts. Furthermore, as a symbol, it is able to evoke multiple and even contradictory meanings. In his discussion of literal and figural interpretation in biblical exegesis, Augustine notes, “But since there are many ways in which things may resemble other things, we should not imagine that there is a hard and fast rule that a word will always have the meaning that it has in a particular place.”

He continues, “The various meanings of a particular thing may be either contrary or just different. By contrary I mean cases in which a particular thing is used sometimes in a good sense and sometimes in a bad one. . . . There are other things too which signify not just single ideas but, taken individually, two or often more ideas, depending on the contexts in which they are found.”

While Augustine is speaking here in terms of language, and not images per se, he demonstrates a consciousness, even in the fourth century, of the fluidity of meaning. As will be demonstrated below, shepherd imagery was used in both positive and negative senses. Moreover, the images of Christ as the Good Shepherd were capable of communicating more than one meaning at a time.

In considering the morphology of meaning and possible imperial connotations of Good Shepherd images, it is also useful to recall Dale Kinney’s article on the imperial and Christian associations of the basilica, in which she notes, “The debate over whether the early church basilica was ‘imperial’ is bound up with many other questions, including the origins of the building type, and whether building types have fixed or only contingent associations.”


summarizes the theoretical considerations: “Recent advances in semiotic theory offer a way around this impasse, by suggesting that the ‘basilica’ is a discursive rather than a formal category, determined neither purely by form nor purely by use, but by a cultural and linguistic understanding.” By analogy, the meaning of the Good Shepherd motif is determined not simply by its formal iconographic details, but also by the various cultural contexts (pagan, imperial, Christian) in which it was created and viewed. Indeed, these meanings influenced one another. Because of its long history of application to rulers and deities, the Good Shepherd motif carried connotations of both gentle caretaking and protection by violence into its Early Christian spaces. Therefore, the Good Shepherd and the enthroned Christ are both images of power.

The “Prehistory” of the Good Shepherd

The motif of the Good Shepherd is ancient, predating Christianity by thousands of years. Shepherding was an essential aspect of the agrarian and pastoral societies in the Ancient Near East, as flocks were valuable sources of food and clothing. One of the shepherd’s central responsibilities was to protect his flock from theft and predators; in this regard, his tools were a crook or staff, a sling, a bag of stones, and often a sheepdog. The shepherd’s lifestyle rendered the staff as a cultural symbol of guidance and protection. Pastoral language became an effective tool in political propaganda as this motif had cultural cachet throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, surveyed below.

Mesopotamia

The earliest references to a king-as-shepherd date back to at least the Old Akkadian period (2335–2193 BCE) and possibly as early as 3000 BCE. Numerous Mesopotamian rulers employed this appellation, describing themselves with phrases such as “born for shepherding,” “the shepherd of the city,” and “the shepherd of the country.” On his infamous law code stele, which is the oldest extant legal compendium, recording legal judgments, a list of territories, and embodying his authority, King Hammurabi (d. 1750 BCE) refers to himself as “the shepherd,” “the shepherd of the people,” “a shepherd who brings peace,” “whose shepherding the god Marduk gave to me.” Indeed, a popular Assyrian saying quipped about the necessity of rulers: “A people without a king [is like] a sheep without a shepherd.”

While there is ample textual evidence of a shepherd motif in early Mesopotamia and an association of that motif with kings, it does not seem to have been the iconographic predecessor of the

Christian Good Shepherd. The most visually similar depictions from Mesopotamia date to about 1000 BCE, but are of men carrying gazelles, not sheep on their shoulders. Relatedly, sculptures of male figures carrying a lamb or ram in their arms date as far back as 3000 BCE, but have been interpreted to be worshipers carrying their sacrifice and not shepherds—as seen, for example, in an eighth-century relief portrait of the king Sargon II, now at the Louvre. Some votive statues from the period also depict worshipers holding animals clasped to their chests.

Egypt

Mesopotamia had some degree of influence on Egyptian art and culture—enabled by pre–dynastic trade routes, possibly by way of Palestine. Whether or not the Egyptians gleaned their concept of the shepherd-king from the Mesopotamians in particular, the earliest shepherd motif in Egypt seems to have manifested as an understanding of some gods as shepherds and protectors of the pharaoh. This protection gradually came to apply to all Egyptians, and then to all people, as shepherd imagery also influenced Egyptian conceptions of kingship. The shepherd motif was introduced into ruler’s propaganda in the First Intermediate Period (2175–1975 BCE), at a time when it was common for the head of the army and head of the state to be the same person.

A cursory consideration of Egyptian art reveals its frequent use of the shepherd’s crook and flail in depictions of gods and pharaohs. Osiris, the god of the afterlife, was pictured in statuettes, relief carvings, and papyri as wearing a crown, holding the crook and flail, with his legs bound in mummy wrappings. His crook and flail were absorbed from Anedjti, a minor agricultural god, and in Lower Egypt, Osiris was also identified with the ram. Worshiped as both the “king of the gods” and “king of the living,” Osiris was believed to judge the soul after death. Due in part to an origin story that identified him as a historical king, Osiris came to be associated with the deceased pharaoh. This connotation is discernible, for example, in the presence of the crook and flail on the now-iconic tomb of Tutankhamun (r. 1355–1346 BCE).

Greece

The shepherd-king was also ubiquitous in Ancient Greek culture, which some scholars suggest had direct relations with Egypt from at least the seventh century BCE on. Again, the precise origins of the Good Shepherd motif in Greek culture are unknown, but the earliest...
textual references are found in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Homer’s two epic poems, composed in the late eighth or early seventh century BCE, contain dozens of references to shepherds and their flocks and apply the motif to designate both good and bad leadership. For example, in *The Iliad*’s account of the Trojan War, Homer uses the vocabulary of shepherding to describe the negligence of a leader, as when Diomedes and Odysseus take the Thracian camp at night while the king sleeps, “As a lion springs on flocks unguarded, shepherd gone, / pouncing on goats or sheep and claw-mad for the kill.”

Similarly, Apollo and the Trojans corner the Achaeans, who are described as “Routed like herds of cattle or big flocks of sheep,” with “the shepherd off and gone.” This imagery is especially poignant, as it is a vivid inversion of Apollo’s previous service as a shepherd to the king of Troy’s flocks. However, even more frequently, leaders such as Agamemnon, Nestor, and Diomedes are also positively described as “shepherd of the people” throughout Homer’s poem. Indeed, this incredibly violent tale is teeming with pastoral language, but not in reference to peaceful idyllic pastures; rather, “shepherd” is applied to the key figures of *The Iliad*—warriors, gods, and rulers—who are also the agents of its violence.

31. Homer, *The Iliad*, LCL 170, e.g., 1.263; 2.87, 105, 254, 772; 5.514; 7.469; 10.73, 406; 11.598; 13.411; 22.278; 23.389. Cf. *The Iliad*, trans. Fagles, e.g., 1.307: 2.101, 123, 298, 877; 5.593:7.542; 10.84, 472; 11.705; 13.477; 22.327; 23.438. There are at least forty instances of this appellation in *The Iliad*. N.B., the Greek term in these cases is *poimēn laōn*. While most translate this as “shepherd of the people” (e.g., Peter Jones, Richmond Lattimore, Alexander Pope), Robert Fagles translates it as “marshal of armies” (and elsewhere just “marshal”), which is curious given that he mentions the phrase “shepherd of the people” in his introduction (p. 16). Robert Fitzgerald also translates the term as “marshal.” For a more detailed analysis of Homer’s use of this phrase, see Johannes Haubold, *Homer’s People: Epic Poetry and Social Formation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially 14–46.
The Odyssey, which follows Odysseus’ long tumultuous journey back home to Ithaca after having fought in the Trojan War, also uses pastoral language throughout the poem; it applies “shepherd of the people” about a dozen times to leaders and rulers.32 Odysseus and his men are delivered to safety via a flock of sheep: after blinding the Cyclops Polyphemus, they are able to escape the cave by hanging from the bellies of the Cyclops’ lambs, which they then triumphantly divvy up and slaughter on the beach.33 When Odysseus returns to Ithaca, the first person he appears to is Eumeaus, the swineherd who has remained faithful during Odysseus’ years of absence and to whom the entirety of book 14 is dedicated.

The extensive influence of The Iliad and The Odyssey is evident more than three centuries later in Plato’s Minos, in which Socrates specifically references Homer’s use of the phrase “shepherd of the people.”34 Additionally, while attempting to articulate a definition of “law,” Socrates likens rulers to shepherds: “Then it is the laws of the

shepherd that are best for the sheep. . . . And whose laws are best for human souls? Isn’t it those of the king?"\(^{35}\)

Furthermore, in Plato’s *Republic*, written around 380 BCE, Socrates repeatedly uses shepherding as an allegory in the evaluation of rulers. Discussing the nature of justice, he states:

Shepherding is concerned only to provide what is best for that which it is set over. . . . That’s why I thought it necessary for us to agree before that every kind of rule, insofar as it rules, doesn’t seek anything other than what is best for the thing it rules and cares for, and this is true both of public and private kinds of rule.\(^{36}\)

The shepherd’s duty to guide and guard his flocks was consistently applied over the course of centuries to the responsibilities of both actual and theoretical rulers to govern and protect their subjects. The trope of the lazy or incompetent shepherd was used to denigrate poor rulers; conversely, a ruler’s subjects were often implicitly likened to a herd of mindless or expendable sheep, as Plato describes purging troublemakers from society as a shepherd purges sick or weak animals from a herd.\(^{37}\) Plato also compares gods to shepherds in terms of their rule. For example, in *Critias*, the speaker likens the gods to shepherds in terms of their guidance, but contrasts their amiable persuasion with the physical force employed by shepherds.\(^{38}\)

Among the earliest visual depictions of the shepherd-type in Greece is a terracotta *kriophoros* (ram-bearer) statuette dating to about the seventh century BCE, now housed in the Cleveland Museum. It is unique in that the figure is a warrior, complete with helmet, breastplate, and the distinctive warrior’s belt. Nearly contemporary

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with Homer, the statuette is a visualization of the shepherd imagery applied to warriors throughout *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. For example, book 18 of *The Iliad* centers on a description of Achilles’ shield, which bears images of cities, plowed fields, weddings, conflicts, as well as farmers, cattle, shepherds, and sheep:

> And the famous crippled Smith forged a meadow deep in a shaded glen for shimmering flocks to graze, with shepherds’ steadings, well-roofed huts and sheepfolds.\(^{39}\)

These pastoral images accompany Achilles into battle to avenge Patroclos’ death.

Greek gods were also depicted as shepherds: Hermes, who was known as the god who guided souls to the underworld and the patron of flocks and herds, was often represented as Hermes *kriophoros*, carrying a lamb or a ram in his arms or on his shoulders. Images of Orpheus are found in mosaics, relief-carvings, statues, and frescoes, which present him as a musician, poet, philosopher, and guardian.\(^{40}\) This son of Apollo made his own trip to Hades, attempting to retrieve his lost love; his enchanting music was known to tame wild animals, and he is thus frequently depicted in a Phrygian cap, holding his lyre and surrounded by animals.

More than two thousand years before the emergence of Christianity, there was already an established tradition that linked the concept of a good shepherd with that of a good ruler. The shepherd of the Ancient Near East and ancient Greece also carried

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connotations of death and resurrection, as in the figures of Osiris and Orpheus.

**Shepherds in the Hebrew Bible**

A product of Ancient Near Eastern culture, the Hebrew Bible contains several significant references to the idea of a shepherd-leader, including anecdotes characterized by kingship and/or violence.\(^\text{41}\) These biblical accounts tend to be more positive than those found in Homer: the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all portrayed as ideal shepherds, as is Joseph (e.g., Gen. 13:2; 26:14; 30:29; 37:2).

Notably, Moses’ first encounter with God—in the form of the burning bush—occurred while he was tending sheep (Exod. 3:1), a moment that initiated his leadership of the Israelites. Psalm 77:51 describes Moses: “And he took away his own people as sheep: and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.”\(^\text{42}\) In asking God for a leader to take over, Moses echoes the Assyrian adage mentioned above: “May the Lord the God of the spirits of all flesh provide a man, that may be over this multitude: . . . lest the people of the Lord be as sheep without a shepherd” (Num. 27:16–7). As the leader of a nation, Moses protects his “sheep” from danger, leading them out of the sea, as commemorated in Ps. 77:19–20 and Isa. 63:11.

The prophet Isaiah also likens God’s provision and guidance to that of a shepherd:\(^\text{43}\) “Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (Isa. 40:10–11). As in so

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42. All biblical quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version.
many other examples, the shepherd imagery of this passage combines connotations of rule and provision.

Ezekiel 34 addresses the kings of Israel as “shepherds” and chastises them for failing to care properly for the weak sheep of their flock. Because of their failure God must intervene as the true caring—and judging—shepherd. That is, the shepherd-leader theme is often about governance as much as it is about grassroots guidance. The prophet writes, “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken” (Ezek. 34:23-24).

This brings us to David, who is perhaps the ultimate example of the shepherd-ruler. When King Saul incredulously asks for his qualifications to fight Goliath, David offers his experience as a shepherd:

But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth; and if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him and killed him. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” And David said, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you!” Then Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a helmet of bronze on his head, and clothed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword over his armor, and he tried in vain to go, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot go with these; for I am not used to them.” And David put them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in his shepherd’s bag or wallet; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.44

44. 1 Samuel 17:34-40.
It was the violent nature of shepherding that prepared David for battle with a giant. The self-sacrifice required of the shepherd mirrors that required of a warrior and is later transposed onto the understanding of Christ as the Good Shepherd. Even as a king, David continues to be described as a shepherd, as when God instructs Nathan to prophesy: “Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel’” (2 Sam. 7:8).  

**The Good Shepherd in the New Testament**

Building on the foundation of the Hebrew Bible, the authors of the Christian New Testament adapted the shepherd-king imagery in their portrait of Jesus. This was a relatively easy task, given Christ’s self-description as such in John 10, where we read, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (v. 11). At the start of Jesus’ ministry, Matthew describes his compassion on the people, “because they were distressed, and lying like sheep that have no shepherd” (Matt. 9:36), to which Mark adds, “and he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34). Christ guides the believer and seeks out the lost soul (e.g., Luke 15:3–7). Matthew’s “little apocalypse” has Christ the shepherd-king judging and sorting his subjects: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left” (Matt.

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45. Expanded upon in Ps. 77:70–72: “He chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from tending the ewes that had young he brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob his people, of Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he tended them, and guided them with skilful hand.”  

46. For an analysis of this chapter, see Cachia, *The Image of the Good Shepherd*, 113–79.
25:31-33). The reader of the New Testament is addressed as one of these sheep, as in 1 Pet. 2:25, “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

Through these passages, a picture is painted of Christ the Good Shepherd, who knows, protects, seeks, provides and sacrifices for, and also judges his sheep.\(^{47}\) John 21 records Jesus’ third post-resurrection appearance to the disciples, in which he commissions Peter to “feed my sheep.” Such statements do not merely express sentiments of spiritual nourishment and guidance; they also build on a long biblical—and extrabiblical—tradition of describing leaders as shepherds and their followers as flocks of sheep.

**The Good Shepherd according to the Church Fathers**

The church fathers then took up the task of reconciling the shepherd imagery of the Hebrew Bible with that of the New Testament. Not surprisingly, they often did this by interpreting the former through the lens of the latter.\(^{48}\) For example, Clement of Alexandria compares Moses and Christ as shepherds and lawgivers:

> It is the wise man, therefore, alone whom the philosophers proclaim king, legislator, general, just, holy, God-beloved. . . . As then we say that it belongs to the shepherd’s art to care for the sheep; for so “the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep,” so also we shall say that legislation, inasmuch as it presides over and cares for the flock of men, establishes the virtue of men. . . . And if the flock figuratively spoken of as belonging to the Lord is nothing but a flock of men, then He Himself is the good Shepherd and the Lawgiver of the one flock . . .\(^{49}\)

\(^{47}\) See also Cachia, *The Image of the Good Shepherd*, 73–112. The Greek word in these passages is the same as that used by Homer and Plato; see footnote 32 above. *Poimen/poimainein* is also used in the ruling sense in Matt. 2:6 (which quotes Mic. 5:2); Rev. 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; 19:15.

\(^{48}\) E.g., Chromat., *Serm.* 23, 2; Tertullian, *De fuga* 11, 1; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* I, 9, 2–3; Cyprian, *Ep.* 8, 1–2; Augustine, *Serm.* 46 and 47; Jerome, *In Ezech.* XI.

Moses and Christ are both conceived of as superior to any secular legislator; while Christian authors appropriated pastoral and political language from their contemporary culture, they did so with a higher purpose. These vocabularies exist among a multitude of others that all serve in the impossible but irresistible effort of articulating the nature of God.

But patristic exegesis of pastoral passages was not limited only to the explication of biblical content, but also to its application in the contemporary lives of the faithful. For example, Ephrem of Syria hymns Christ as a kingly shepherd in a baptismal context:

The crowds in the desert were like unto sheep that have no shepherd. The Merciful became their shepherd and multiplied to them the pasture of bread. Yea, blessed are ye that are perfect, that are sealed as lambs of Christ, that of His Body and Blood are made worthy; the Pastor Himself is become pasture for you! . . . The sheep of Christ leaped for joy, to receive the seal of life, that ensign of kings which has ever put sin to flight. The Wicked by Thy ensign is routed, iniquities by Thy sign are scattered. Come, ye sheep, receive your seal, which puts to flight them that devour you!50

The anointing oil of baptism is thus conceived of in terms of both a royal signet ring and a shepherd’s brand. Indeed, some of the earliest descriptions of Christian art include signet rings with images of the

Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd is also depicted in several early baptismal environments, discussed below.

In De Fide, Ambrose interprets the shepherd-king of the Ezekiel 34 passage (“And I will set up one shepherd over them,” quoted above) as a prefiguration of Christ: “Now David the Son of Jesse was already dead. Therefore he speaks of Christ, Who for our sakes was made the Son of a handmaiden in the form of man.” From the lineage of the earthly shepherd-turned-king David, Christ’s shepherding and ruling are instead spiritual and eternal. Patristic authors interpreted the shepherds of the Hebrew Bible as pointing to the future shepherd—Christ.

Like his teacher Ambrose before him, Augustine of Hippo also describes Christ as the Shepherd, though he did so in an explanation of the heavenly and earthly cities. Trying to make sense of the recent sack of Rome, in City of God, Augustine juxtaposes Cain, the Jews, and the earthly city with Abel, Christ, and the heavenly city:

For the vice of envy increased in [Cain], and he lay in wait for his brother and slew him. Such was the founder of the earthly city. He also prefigures the Jews by whom Christ was slain, the Shepherd of the flock of men, who was foreshadowed in Abel, the shepherd of the flock of sheep.


53. In a move perhaps characteristic of the proverbial black sheep of the early church, Origen intentionally pushed the concepts of shepherd and king apart. In his commentary on John, he distinguished between believers’ perceptions of Christ as shepherd or ruler: “Now as there are some to whom Christ is a shepherd, as we said before, because of their meek and composed nature, though they are less guided by reason; so there are those to whom He is a king, those, namely, who are led in their approach to religion rather by the reasonable part of their nature. And among those who are under a king there are differences; some experience his rule in a more mystic and hidden and more divine way, others in a less perfect fashion.” Origen, Commentary on the Gospel of John, 1.30.314, trans. ANF. This follows a chapter on Christ as the Door and as the Shepherd, which similarly describes Christ’s perceived attributes in terms of the state of the faithful.

54. Augustine of Hippo, City of God, 15.7. Translation from Augustine, The City of God Against the
His disillusionment rings loud and clear: earthly governments are riddled with violence and corruption. In contrast, only the founder of the heavenly city, Christ, can establish eternal peace—prefigured in Abel, the shepherd-victim.

Some centuries later, Pope Gregory the Great employed shepherd imagery to evaluate both good and bad leadership in the church, in a passage that is reminiscent of Plato’s Republic one thousand years prior. In book two of his Pastoral Rule, Gregory reflects that

this very diversity [of merit], which is entered upon through vice, is then dispensed by the divine judgment, so that some [men] are directed by others, since not all can stand equally. Therefore, those who preside over others should consider not their rank, but the equality of their condition. Moreover, they should revel not in ruling over others but in helping them.

For indeed, our ancient fathers are not remembered because they were rulers of men, but because they were shepherds of flocks.55

While his treatise was novel for encouraging ordination, it nevertheless presented firm opinions about the necessary qualifications for church leadership. As the title of the treatise hints, pastor (“shepherd”) was among the terms Gregory used to describe a good spiritual director.56 But even in discussing church affairs, he references the ruling legacies of ancient societies.

The biblical vocabulary of shepherding carried powerful connotations of divinity, leadership, kingship, and judgment, which the church fathers employed to describe not only Christ, but also the spiritual leaders among their ranks. As will be shown below, this


56. Other descriptions of church leaders as “Good Shepherds” include: Clement of Alexandria, Paed. 1, 6, 37, 3; Origen, Hom. 12 in Le. 2; Cyprian, Unit. Eccl. 8; Ep. 69, 5; Ambrose, In Luc. VII, 50; John Chrysostom, Hom. 60 in Joh. 1.
vocabulary was then available to be employed by Christian rulers with great effect.

**Bucolic Imagery and the Roman Upper Class**

In addition to the above-mentioned Ancient Near Eastern, Greco-Roman, and biblical precedents, Late Antique bucolic scenes are also relevant in establishing the iconographic context of the Good Shepherd. Bucolic scenes were not only employed symbolically, as in serene depictions of the afterlife, but also to characterize typical Roman pastimes, articulated in the Latin abstract term *otium.*

While it may seem natural to associate the bucolic scenes from which the Good Shepherd emerged with the lower class, the motif actually had high-culture connotations. The most obvious is the simple fact that the majority of these images were commissioned by wealthy patrons, from the emperor himself to freedmen such as Aulus Vettius Conviva and Aulus Vettius Restitutus. Bucolic scenes appear in a variety of media, such as mosaics, sculpture, frescoes, textiles, and glassware, and include iconographic motifs that would have been associated with the upper class. For example, in contrast with small apartment or tenement buildings (*insula*), the urban *domus* was constructed around a colonnaded, open-air garden (*peristylium*), the dramatic effect of which was often enhanced through the illusion of nearby frescoes.

Gardens were also a staple of great country estates, and were complete with pools and fountains, terraces, and trellises.

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58. The ideal proportions of the *paristylium* are specified in Vitruvius, *De architectura* VI.3.7; examples, such as the House of Verti, have been excavated and reconstructed at Pompeii. For a discussion of *paristylium*, see, for example, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *House and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 20–28.
These country estates were often a place of leisure for the wealthy, where they participated in recreational activities such as hunting and fishing. Originally a necessity for survival, hunting was transformed by the upper classes into an expensive pastime that was only available to those who could afford to maintain horses, dogs, and slaves, and was a common iconographic motif in Late Antique art; dozens of examples are found on extant sarcophagi, floor mosaics, wall paintings, and silver plates. Outdoor picnics concluded such excursions and often appear at the center of hunting compositions, as depicted for example on Seuso’s Hunting Plate and the Room of the Small Hunt mosaic in the Villa de Casale, at Piazza Armerina, Sicily, both of which date to the early fourth century CE.

While there is some evidence for the existence of small farms in the Roman Empire, it seems that mid-size villae rusticae and large latifundia dominated the farming industry. In these cases, the actual agricultural work of farming was performed by slaves and some free farmers; however, the upper- and middle-class owners of such properties were the beneficiaries of their labors, making farm images implicitly linked to the wealthy and powerful. Indeed, farming was also theorized in works such as Cato’s De Agricultura, which describes an ideal farm, and Pliny the Elder’s Naturalis Historiae—especially Book 18, which begins by tracing several Latin terms for wealth back to their origins in farming, such as pecunia (money) from pecus (cattle).

In other words, the Good Shepherd motif emerged from a context of high-culture bucolic imagery, thereby linking the figure’s apparently humble guise to the wealth and power of the upper class.

Early Christian Images of the Good Shepherd

The Good Shepherd was ubiquitous in Early Christian art—probably, at least in part, on account of its ready availability in Greco-Roman culture; in the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Henri Leclercq lists more than three hundred instances and likens the popularity of the motif to that of the crucifix for modern Christians. Well over two hundred of these examples are found in funerary art such as catacomb frescoes, sarcophagi, and epigraphs. The Good Shepherd also appears in several floor and wall mosaics, more than twenty statuettes, and dozens of terracotta lamps, engraved gems, and painted glass. While it is difficult to know whether many of these early images were intended to be Christ or merely another personification of philanthropy, as found in Greco-Roman art, Christ was associated with visual depictions of the Good Shepherd as early as the late first century. For example, in *The Shepherd of Hermas* the author describes the guiding Christ-figure of his visions as “a man of glorious aspect, dressed like a shepherd, with a white goat’s skin, a wallet on his shoulders, and a rod in his hand.” A century later, Tertullian describes the common occurrence of depictions of Christ as the Good Shepherd on cups. On the other hand, Paul Corby Finney notes that one can only speculate as to whether Christians owned any of the more than one hundred extant terracotta oil lamps that bear the shepherd motif (c. 175–225 ce).

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61. As Robin M. Jensen has noted, symbolic motifs such as the Good Shepherd are not so much portraits of Christ as they are images of a particular aspect of Christ—in this case his guidance and provision. Jensen, *Face to Face*, 23. In this regard, the context of a particular image is essential in understanding its intended meaning—the presence of the Good Shepherd in a Christian catacomb, often paired with orant figures and Daniel in the lion’s den, is distinct from the dazzling mosaic of the Good Shepherd in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia.
At least half of the extant Good Shepherd images are found in Roman catacombs dating to the third and fourth centuries. In these funerary contexts, the shepherd is naturally a figure of deliverance and guidance to the afterlife, drawing on the traditions of Hermes and Orpheus. In fact, Orpheus, identifiable by his lyre and Phrygian cap, is also found in several examples of early Christian funerary art, and was likened to Christ by patristic authors such as Clement of Alexandria. Christ the Good Shepherd also has a dominant position in the baptistery of the house church at Dura Europos, where he is pictured in the lunette above the baptismal font. As Robin M. Jensen has observed, the Good Shepherd motif was likely used in baptismal contexts on account of the recitation of the twenty-third psalm in the rite of initiation.

The iconography and context of these initial images do indeed appear to be consistent with the humble ethos of the early church and if anything, draw upon the images of the Greco-Roman pantheon. However, the extensive royal history of the motif, outlined above, along with its use by Christian emperors, discussed below, indicates that there is another side to the iconographic story.

The Christian Emperor and the Good Shepherd

Constantine

One of the most striking invocations of the Good Shepherd motif in an imperial context is that written by Eusebius in his biography

of Constantine. Among the beautifications of the imperial building campaign, Eusebius mentions that in Constantinople, “You would see at the fountains set in the middle of squares the emblems of the Good Shepherd, evident signs to those who start from the divine.”

But more to the point, Constantine spoke of himself as a shepherd to the people. In the third book of the *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius presents Constantine as an attentive and gentle leader in the context of the fourth-century religious disputes. In one of Constantine’s letters to Antioch, which Eusebius includes in its entirety, Constantine seems to make reference both to himself and to church officials when he writes, “Teeth appear in the character and strength even of sheep, when the attention and care of the shepherd disappears and they are deprived of the direction they had before.”

Eusebius even more explicitly likens Constantine to Christ in *De Laudibus Constantini*: just as Christ, “as the good shepherd, drives far away from his flock, like savage beasts, those apostate spirits . . . so this friend . . . subdues and chastens the open adversaries of the truth in accordance with the usages of war.”

Christ the Good Shepherd is Constantine’s model for philanthropy, humility, and self-sacrifice:

> Wholly devoted to him, he dedicates himself as a noble offering, a first-fruit of that world, the government of which is entrusted to his charge. This first and greatest sacrifice our emperor first dedicates to God; and then, as a faithful shepherd, he offers, not “famous hecatombs of firstling lambs,” but the souls of that flock which is the object of his care, those rational beings whom he leads to the knowledge and pious worship of God.

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70. Eusebius, *De Laudibus Constantini*, 2.3. Translation from NPNF 1:583.

71. Ibid., 2.6. Translation from NPNF 1:583–84.
Constantine is thus praised as both a political and spiritual leader.

Whether his Christian subjects would have regarded Constantine as a shepherd-figure to the degree that Eusebius pushes the concept, we can only speculate, and to my knowledge, there are no visual representations of Constantine that invoke the Good Shepherd motif. Book four of the *Vita* presents the piety of the Christian emperor, both in his personal devotion and his public policies and actions. In one of the final chapters of the book, Eusebius describes the overwhelming reaction to Constantine’s death: “Tribunes and centurions wept aloud for their Saviour, Protector and Benefactor, and the rest of the troops suitably mourned like flocks for their Good Shepherd.”

In the tradition of David and Christ, Constantine—he who bankrolled the early church and according to some historians contributed to its corruption—was memorialized as a shepherd to his subjects.

**Galla Placidia**

Now let us return to the fifth-century Good Shepherd mosaic from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (Fig. 3). Embodying a climactic moment in the transition from the Good Shepherd to the Enthroned Christ in early Christian iconography, the mosaic is noteworthy as the last Good Shepherd image of early Christianity, with the next example not appearing until the fourteenth century.

About a century after Constantine, during the reign of Theodosius II, this unique, royally commissioned Good Shepherd image is found in the north lunette mosaic of the so-called Mausoleum of Galla Placidia. The placement of the scene above the building’s entrance

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may have been intended to invoke Jesus’ words of John 10:7-9, “I am the door of the sheep. . . . By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved: and he shall go in, and go out, and shall find pastures.”

The mausoleum is “so called” because the small cruciform building was most likely constructed to be an oratory, originally attached to the nave of Santa Croce. Although she commissioned the building, Augusta Galla Placidia was never actually buried there.

The lunette is a peaceful, bucolic scene, the composition of which recalls both Christian and pagan precedents. However, it differs significantly in its depiction of the person of the Good Shepherd: unlike the ambiguous identity of the shepherd figures in most iconographic antecedents, this figure clearly is meant to be Christ. His youthful, beardless face is highlighted by a gold halo, and his shepherd’s crook has been replaced with a gold cruciform staff (perhaps a processional cross), upon which he leans. In contrast to his usual humble garb, this Good Shepherd wears a gold tunic (dalmatica) with deep blue stripes (clavi) and a purple mantle (pallium) that drapes over his shoulder and lap. The purple of his mantle is an unmistakable reference to the imperial purple. In this dazzling garb, Christ seems to be overdressed for the occasion of sitting on a rock surrounded by six attentive sheep, variously posed in a rocky landscape.

74. In addition to the usual Good Shepherd passages of John 10:11-21 and 21:15-17.
75. Doreen Yarwood, Illustrated Encyclopedia of World Costume (London: Dover, 2011), 340. Purple clavi were an indication of senatorial status. See also Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, Ravenna in Late Antiquity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 79–80. This garb has contributed to both imperial and divine interpretations of the figure. See, for example, Clementina Rizzardi, “Il Mausoleo nel mondo culturale e artistico di Galla Placidia / The Mausoleum in the cultural-artistic world of Galla Placidia,” in Il mausoleo di Galla Placidia a Ravenna, ed. Clementina Rizzardi and Patrizia Angiolina Marinelli (Modena, 1996), 121; for a divine interpretation of Christ’s gold clothing, see Mathews, The Clash of Gods, 101–3.
The composition of the lunette and Christ’s dress and gesture in particular bear a remarkable resemblance to a Turkish mosaic of
Orpheus dating to the third or fourth century (Fig. 4). Another likely influence for Christ’s wardrobe, closer to home, is found in the late fourth-century apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana in Rome (Fig. 5). Enthroned among the disciples, Christ is dressed in a golden tunic, with the same vertical deep blue stripes. Thomas Mathews has argued that both the gold of the garment and the imposing throne are attributes of Roman divinity, not empire. But why must images such as these be pegged as being under the influence of either pagan or imperial imagery? Why not both? It is worth mentioning that the Good Shepherd mosaic of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia is conspicuously absent from Thomas Mathews’s *The Clash of Gods*. In fact, his only mention of the building is limited to one sentence about a different mosaic. It is difficult not to interpret his silence on this Good Shepherd mosaic as an indictment and an indication of its imperial imagery.

The north lunette of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia is the ultimate visualization of the imperial connotations that were already present in the Good Shepherd motif, embodying a convergence of the iconographic elements of Good Shepherd, Empire, and Pantheon—of guidance, power, and divinity. This mosaic is a singular pinnacle—the crest of the wave of Good Shepherd images that had been building in Early Christian art and for thousands of years before. Here, the Good Shepherd peaks, gilding and all, and gives way to the Enthroned Christ of apse mosaics.

78. Mathews’ statement that “the citizens of Late Antiquity did not see their commander-in-chief in so positive a light as to clothe their new God in his likeness” is not convincing. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 191. Could not the same be said about their attitude toward the pagan gods? And could not his argument that the Christian images supplanted pagan images be just as easily applied to imperial images? That is, through its visual art, Christianity asserted itself as superior to both the pagan pantheon and to the secular government (and to the philosophers, and so on).
Agnus Dei: Sheep and Shepherd

As early as the fourth century, visual depictions of the Good Shepherd began to decline in popularity, even as the Good Shepherd continued to be referenced in theological treatises and sermons. Meanwhile the visual motif was gradually supplanted by others. For example, Christ came to be depicted more frequently as the agnus dei, which illustrated his paradoxical identity as both shepherd and sheep. This concept is founded upon biblical passages such as Revelation 7:17, which reads: “for the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them and guide them to springs of living water.” In his tractate on John, Augustine draws together several biblical texts to substantiate this paradox:

The sheep, of course, is under the shepherd; yet he is both shepherd and sheep. Where is he a shepherd? Look you have it here. Read the Gospel: “I am the good shepherd.” Where is he a sheep? Ask the prophet: “As a sheep he was led to the slaughter.” Ask the friend of the bridegroom: “Behold! The Lamb of God. Behold! He who takes away the sin of the world!”

Thus, another relevant iconographic theme for our present discussion is that of the *agnus dei*, or the Lamb of Revelation. In such images, he is often depicted standing on the rock from which issue the four rivers of paradise, flanked by saints or, as in the apsidal mosaic from the sixth-century basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian (Fig. 6), by sheep-disciples. The main scene of the apse is that of Christ descending on a flurry of apocalyptic clouds; he is flanked by Peter and Paul, Cosmas and Damian, and Felix and Theodorus. Immediately below Christ is his *agnus dei* doppelganger, a composition that visually equates the two figures. As on the arch of the same apse, the Lamb often sits on a gem-studded throne. His attributes frequently include the seven-sealed scroll and the cruciform staff. In these types of images we see a collapsing of the two

81. Augustine, Tractate on John 46.3, quoted in Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, 40–41. Translation from J. W. Rettig, Fathers of the Church Series, 88 (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1993). Similarly, in Ephrem of Syria: “But ye, who are the new flock, have put off the doings of wolves, and as lambs are made like to the Lamb. One by changing has changed all; the Lamb to the wolves gave Himself to be slain; the wolves rushed and devoured Him and became lambs; for the Shepherd was changed into a Lamb; likewise the wolf forgot his nature.” Fifteen Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany 3.26. Translation from NPNF 13:271.


83. A very similar composition is found on the eighth-century apse mosaic of Santa Prassede and on the ninth-century apse mosaic of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, both in Rome.

84. N.B., *agnus dei* images do not occur in the East and are infrequent in the West until the thirteenth century, possibly because of the ruling of the Council of Trullo in 692. Canon 82 prohibited portraying Christ as the lamb, “so that all may understand by means of it the depths of the humiliation of the Word of God, and that we may recall to our memory his conversation in the flesh, his passion and salutary death, and his redemption which was wrought for the whole world.” Translation from NPNF 14:401. Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2 in Trullo habitum (Concilium Quinisextum), ed. Heinz Ohme, Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum,
metaphors of shepherd and sheep as Christ-as-the-lamb rules from an exalted position, be it throne or rock.

Like the lunette mosaic from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, the apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana in Rome (Fig. 5) may also present a conflation of the pastoral and imperial Christ. Along with that of Santa Costanza, this is the oldest Christian apse mosaic, dating to about 402 ce. It depicts Christ seated on an elaborate throne while teaching the apostles, who are all dressed in senatorial togas. Christ’s toga is distinctly golden with purple trim. The group is flanked by female personifications of the Jews and Gentiles, who crown Peter and Paul. The cityscape in the background can be identified as Jerusalem by the jewel-encrusted cross in the mound directly above Christ; this references the cross that was erected on Golgotha by Theodosius, while the presence of the tetramorph in the sky implies that the scene actually takes place in the Heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation. Unfortunately, the bottom edge of this image, which makes it relevant for the current discussion, was cut off by Baroque renovations. Originally an *agnus dei*, accompanied by sheep-apostles, was pictured directly below the enthroned Christ, similar to the composition in the basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian. Furthermore, the inscription of the open book held in Christ’s left hand identifies him as the “protector of the church of Pudenziana.”

While Thomas Mathews cited the original presence of the sheep in his argument that this is not an imperial image, I suggest that

Series Secunda II: Concilium Universale Constantinopolitanum Tertium, Pars 4 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013).

85. “Dominus conservator ecclesiae pudentiniae.”

86. “The lowest register of the composition, now missing, reinforced this meaning [i.e., that ‘the victory over Arianism was a vindication of the freedom of the Church from imperial control’] by showing the Church of Christ in symbolic form. The rows of lambs that once converged on the Lamb of God represented the faithful who fall in line like sheep behind their leader. The mosaic is propaganda not for the imperial aspirations of Christ, but for the divine origins of ecclesiastical authority.” Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 114.
the sheep and the title “conservator” could actually be taken as participating in the long-established association between shepherd and ruler.87

The north niche mosaic in the mid-fourth-century Mausoleum of Santa Costanza in Rome (see Jefferson chapter, Fig. 7) similarly combines royal and pastoral elements.88 The scene is the traditio legis: Christ seems to hover over a mount from which sprouts the four rivers of paradise, a position typically occupied by the agnus dei.89 He is flanked by Peter and Paul, who are in turn framed by two small brick buildings, perhaps representing Bethlehem and Jerusalem (the gentile and Jewish origins of the church), as depicted, for example, in the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore. Two palm trees bend over the buildings with the curvature of the niche. With his left hand Christ gives a scroll (which currently reads, “dominus pacem dat”) to Peter. Christ is dressed in a gold tunic with blue clavi just as in the lunette mosaic of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia; he is only missing his purple mantle. A pair of sheep separates Christ from each of the two apostles and so, in effect, this golden-clad Christ takes the place of the agnus dei, in yet another combination of shepherding and ruling.

Conclusion

With this backdrop of shepherd as ruler, guide, and deity, let us briefly consider what visual connections early viewers might have

87. For example, the term “conservator” is applied to protectors of the city, state, or homeland several times by Cicero (e.g., For Sestius 24.53, 45.98; Letters to Atticus 8.9.3, 9.10.3; On the Responses of the Haruspices 27.58) and Tacitus (Annales 15.71).

88. While it is possible that this and the mosaic of the south niche were original to the construction of the mausoleum, they were crudely restored at a later date. J. Wilpert and W. N. Schumacher, Die römischen Mosaiken der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV–XIII. Jahrhundert (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 46–58, 299–301, cited in W. Eugene Kleinbauer, “Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome: The Patronage of Emperor Constantius II and Architectural Invention,” Gesta 45, no. 2 (2006): 135.

89. In the apse mosaic at San Vitale, Christ is enthroned on an orb that rests atop the mount and four rivers; however, no sheep are in the vicinity.
made when presented with depictions of Christ as the Good Shepherd. Jewish Christians, or anyone familiar with the Hebrew Bible, would have easily made a connection between Jesus the Good Shepherd and his ancestor David, the shepherd-turned-king. This association is bolstered by the prophecies concerning the Davidic line and the salvation of Israel (e.g., 1 Kgs. 9:4-5)—that is to say, the Jewish Christian viewer would have seen an image of the Messiah. Similarly, a Greek or Roman Christian would have seen not only the humble grassroots Jesus, but would first and foremost have been confronted with the salvific and guiding power of the Savior, as signified by the presence of the Good Shepherd on so many surfaces of funerary art. Like his iconographic predecessor Hermes, Christ the Good Shepherd guides the faithful soul to the afterlife and has the power to influence one’s fate. Like the shepherd of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, he is also the judge of hirelings and sheep. Furthermore, these interpretations were iconographically intertwined with the established visual bucolic vocabulary of the Roman elite.

Of the early Christians, Thomas Mathews himself writes, “To them [Christ] was still utterly mysterious, indefinable, changeable, polymorphous. In the disparate images they have left behind they record their struggle to get a grasp on him; the images were their way of thinking out loud on the problem of Christ. Indeed, the images are the thinking process itself.”90 The early Christian’s viewing experience was not a static thing; the rich religious, theological, and visual context of Late Antiquity offered a complex context in which to create and view images. In this chapter, I hope to have challenged previous reductionist interpretations of early Christian iconography that unnecessarily pit the Good Shepherd against the

enthroned Christ. We should not continue to interpret the Good Shepherd as simply an anti-imperial image, but rather as another dimension of imperial iconography.91

91. This article is but a first step. Indeed there is much more work that can be done to further nuance the assertions set forth here; topics that might be explored include: the use of shepherd imagery by rulers into the Late Middle Ages, the relationship between the agnus dei and the Good Shepherd, a comparison of occurrences of their images with the use of shepherding and ruler vocabulary in contemporaneous sermons.