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## INDEX

Christer Bruun	Some Comments on Early Claudian Consulships . . . . .	5
Iiro Kajanto	Poggio Bracciolini and Classical Epigraphy . . . . .	19
Mika Kajava	Some Remarks on the Name and the Origin of Helena Augusta . . . . .	41
Klaus Karttunen	A Miraculous Fountain in India . . . . .	55
Saara Lilja	Seating Problems in Roman Theatre and Circus . . . . .	67
Bengt Löfstedt	Zu einigen lateinischen Hippokrates–Übersetzungen . . . . .	75
Outi Merisalo	Le prime edizioni stampate del <i>De varietate fortunae</i> di Poggio Bracciolini . . . . .	81
Teivas Oksala	Zum Gebrauch der griechischen Lehnwörter bei Vergil. II. Interpretationen zu den <i>Georgica</i> . . . . .	103
Olli Salomies	Senatoren und Inschriften . . . . .	125
Timo Sironen	Un graffito in latino arcaico da Fregellae . . . . .	145
Heikki Solin	<i>Analecta epigraphica</i> XCIV–CIV . . . . .	155
Antero Tammisto	Representations of the Kingfisher ( <i>Alcedo atthis</i> ) in Graeco-Roman Art . . . . .	217
Maija Väisänen	Prevalse davvero la comunicazione scritta e letta su quella orale ed aurale durante l'età ellenistico-romana? . . . . .	243
Veikko Väänänen	<i>Itinerarium Egeriae</i> 3,6. Une méprise consacrée . . . . .	251
De novis libris iudicia . . . . .		255

## REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) IN GRAECO-ROMAN ART

Antero Tammisto

### Kingfisher as a marine bird

Among the mosaics found in Pompeii, now in the Museo Nazionale of Naples, there are two well-known *emblemata* presenting fish in the sea, MN 889 (earlier 9997) and MN 888 (earlier 120177), hereinafter referred to by the abbreviations A and B.<sup>1</sup> Their similarity is so evident that they have from the beginning of research been known as two variants of a common model.<sup>2</sup> Both depict an octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) strangling a lobster (*Palinurus vulgaris*) as the central figure surrounded by about twenty different species of fish and some smaller marine animals. To the left of the central image there is a small group of rocks upon which sits a small bird. The majority of the species depicted and their location within the composition, is virtually the same for the two mosaics. They are depicted in a very naturalistic way and, although

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations are used since F. Winter – E. Pernice, *Pavimente und figürliche Mosaiken. Hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji VI*, 1938, in which we find also the most detailed description. For measures and bibliography, see P.G.P. Meyboom, *I mosaici pompeiani con figure di pesci*, MNIR 39 (1977) 51–52. Mosaic A comes from the *triclinium* (room 35) of the Casa del Fauno VI 12,2–5, and mosaic B from the house VIII 2,16. About the confusion of its exact provenience, see Meyboom, note 46; MN is in the following used for the Museo Nazionale di Napoli and the number is the inventory number. Instead of unclear black and white photographs I have made drawings where the colours are indicated. Colour photographs are not given because most of the pieces treated are well-known and already published in colour.

<sup>2</sup> This was attested already by W. Leonhard, *Mosaikstudien zur Casa del Fauno in Pompeji*, 1914, 9ff. who was the first to study these mosaics.

they are not always perfectly represented in a zoological sense, they can all be clearly identified.<sup>3</sup>

All but one of the species depicted belong to Mediterranean marine fauna. The exception in which we are interested in the following study is the little bird on the rocks. In B it can easily be identified as the kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis hispida*)<sup>4</sup> on the basis of its *habitus* and its typical way of lurking the prey, both strikingly well represented (here fig. 1). The olive green of the upperpart of the bird, and the yellow ochre of the lower with just a touch of red in the breast and tail, create the general impression of the kingfisher's plumage, though in reality it is splendid blue and chestnut red. The light grey *tessellae* in the neck depicting the white colouring of the kingfisher is a detail, not found in later representations, which would imply that the model is based on a first-hand observation of the species. This is confirmed by the white *tessellae* in the upper wing coverts representing the glitter of light in the splendid plumage. The bird in A is clearly taken from the same model, though it is executed less accurately and with an overemphasis of its features (here fig. 2). It is a kingfisher, even if the less characteristic *habitus* and the too long tail and motley plumage, at first sight resemble another exotic looking bird, the bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*).<sup>5</sup>

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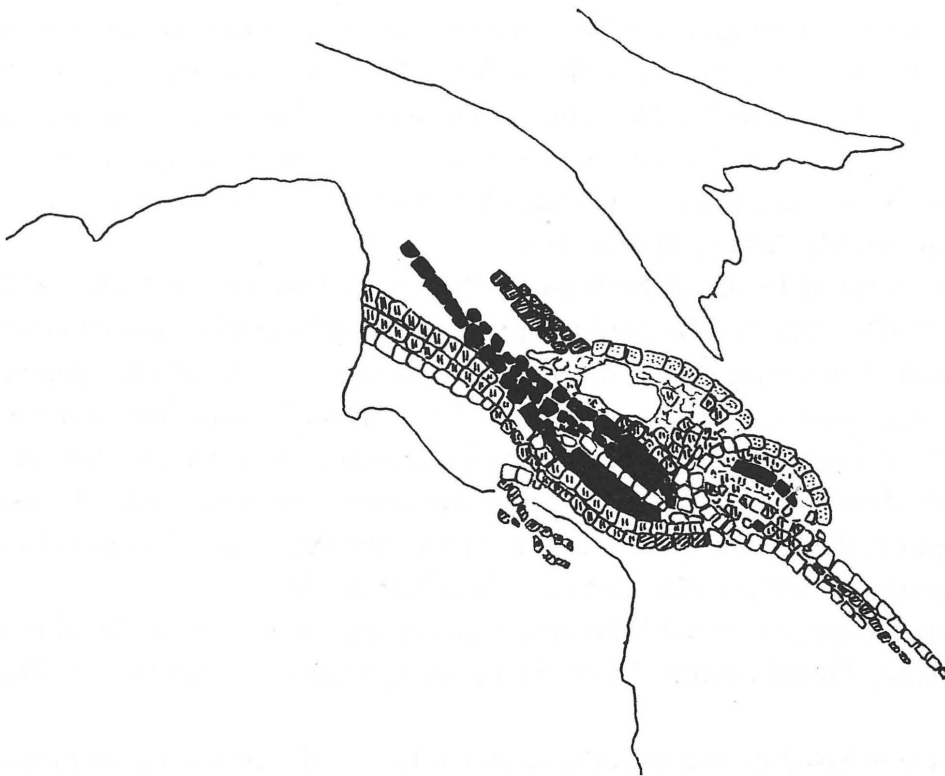
<sup>3</sup> For the identifications and more detailed descriptions I refer to the most recent study regarding these mosaics by Meyboom, 51–52, 78 and Pl. 46 figs. 1–1a and Pl. 47 figs. 2–2a. A brief survey of the previous studies is also given (*ibid.*, 49–50). To these we have to add a study concerning fish mosaics in general by R.D. De Puma, *The Roman Fish Mosaics I–II*, University Microfilms Inc. Ann Arbor, Michigan 1969 (Diss.).

<sup>4</sup> Kingfisher refers in the following to this species, for the other two species of the family *Alcedinidae* appearing in the Mediterranean, see here note 36. The Latin names of the modern taxonomy are here given without the third name indicating the subspecies.

<sup>5</sup> Besides the bee-eater's plumage being different, the species is totally out of question in this context. A more suitable species here would be the Smyrna kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*). It has a longer tail and its plumage gives a motlier impression, but does not correspond to this representation. In comparison to B, the bird in A is dominated by the yellow colour having less greenish blue. The greenish blue is closer to the real colours of the kingfisher than the olive green in B. In B the surrounding water is represented with black *tessellae* from which the olive green is more easily



*Fig. 1.* Detail from the fish mosaic B from the house VIII 2,16 (Pompeii), MN 888 (drawing from photograph). Scale 1/1. Key to colours: ■ olive green, ▨ red, ▤ brown, ▥ ochre yellow, ☒ light grey, □ white.



*Fig. 2.* Detail from the fish mosaic A from the Casa del Fauno VI 12,2–5 (Pompeii), MN 889 (drawing from photograph). Scale 1/2. Key to colours: ■ greenish blue, ▨ red, ▥ ochre yellow, ☒ light grey, □ white.

Already in the earlier publications these birds have been identified as kingfishers. However, no attention has ever been paid to the fact that the kingfisher is not a marine bird. Because it feeds by suddenly swooping or plunging upon fish or other living prey, it can seldom be found near violent or fast flowing waters, but instead near small fresh water bodies along which banks' it also breeds. When not breeding it can sometimes be found near brackish or salt waters but certainly not be lured by the kind of prey depicted in the mosaics.<sup>6</sup> As there are numerous other fish-preying marine birds, the kingfisher at first appears to be out of context in this clearly marine scene.<sup>7</sup> In the following we explain its presence here and study the other surprisingly rare representations of it in Graeco-Roman art.<sup>8</sup>

We start from the mosaics A and B and those related to them, in which we refer to the most recent study on the subject by Meyboom: A and B, as well as two smaller Pompeian fish mosaics (in which the rock with the bird is absent) and also the fish mosaic from Palestrina,

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distinguished than the darker greenish blue. White is used as stripes, not only in the neck, but also in the wing and tail. Also the beak is white instead of the black of the real kingfisher (dark brown in B). The white stripe seem to have been a mannerism of the *musarii* working for the Casa del Fauno as it is found in the wings of some of the passerines in the so called Katzenmosaik (MN 9992) from the same house, for further references, see Meyboom, 88 note 274.

<sup>6</sup> C. Harrison, *An Atlas of Birds of the Western Palearctic*, London 1982, 180. W.G. Arnott, *JHS* 99 (1979) 192: "in the Mediterranean the kingfisher is predominantly a winter visitor and a maritime bird. When I have seen it, it has always perched overlooking the sea (once on a mooring-rope in Cos harbour!), and then flown out to sea." Arnott's observations confirm that the kingfisher can be seen at the coast, but they do not allow to describe it as a predominantly maritime bird. My own observations support the contrary, i.e. that it is a predominantly fresh water bird also in the Mediterranean, which is confirmed in various handbooks.

<sup>7</sup> Many of the various species of the following families appear also in the Mediterranean: *Diomededidae*, *Procellariidae*, *Phalacrocoracidae*, *Sterninae*, *Alcidae*, cf. Harrison.

<sup>8</sup> The present article is based on the material collected for the dissertation I am preparing on the bird motifs in Romano-Campanian wall paintings. In the following, preliminary remarks on this material are made without presenting all the possible evidence.

all have a common model.<sup>9</sup> The Palestrina mosaic, being more detailed than the Pompeian ones, can be considered their direct forerunner in the iconographic and artistic sense. Though it is for the most part destroyed, it still shows, in addition to the fish, which is clearly the main subject, a rocky shore with a turtle and what remains of some human figures and a sanctuary for Poseidon. The column represented as being made of porphyry and the acanthus form of the capital, reveal the Alexandrian provenience and suggest the original to be dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC.<sup>10</sup> The date and origin are confirmed by the pendant Nile mosaic, which has been shown to illustrate the Nile expedition, realized about 280 BC under the rule of Ptolemaios II. Therefore, even the original model for the fish mosaics which must have been a monumental painting, was probably an illustration of scientific texts – somewhat like the later Oppianus' *Halieutica*, perhaps in relation to the Mouseion in the Alexandrian library.<sup>11</sup> It represented a view of a bay with fish swimming in the water and probably a boat or two sur-

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<sup>9</sup> Mosaic A, dated to 100–90 BC is better in the artistic sense and also older than the "meno equilibrata" mosaic B, dated to 90–80 BC. However, the latter is more realistic in some details (Meyboom also rightly notes here the better representation of the kingfisher) and has also some fish not found in A. Thus it is not a mere copy of A (Meyboom, 53–54). The two smaller Pompeian fish mosaics are further derivations of B. Mosaic C which Meyboom dates "al 70 circa" is in the Casa dei Capitelli dorati o di Arianna (VII 4,51) and the mosaic D, dated to 80–70 BC in the house VII 6,38 (ibid., 52–53, Pl. 48 fig. 3–3a and 4–4a). Meyboom, 72 wants to see all the four mosaics as products of one and the same workshop. On the basis of the same materials (*tessellae* from the surroundings of Vesuvius) and models, Meyboom further thinks that it is "allettante pensare a una sola bottega che fabbricò sia i mosaici di Palestrina che quelli della Casa del Fauno." This is possible, but the evidence presented is not sufficient.

<sup>10</sup> Meyboom, 63–72.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; For the Nile mosaic of Palestrina, see K.M. Phillips, jr., *The Barberini Mosaic: Sunt hominum animaliumque complures imagines*, Princeton University 1962 (Diss.) and A. Steinmayer-Schareika, *Das Nilmosaik von Palestrina und eine ptolemäische Expedition nach Äthiopien*, Bonn 1978. Steinmayer-Schareika's view of the exclusively narrative character of the Nile mosaic is too categorical. The influence of landscape painting and cartography cannot be entirely excluded. She dates the mosaics from Palestrina either to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> half but not before the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC, Meyboom, 76–77 instead: "poco prima del (o intorno al) 100 a.C."

rounded by a landscape with a rocky shore, on which there was a sanctuary, some fishermen and minor animals. The fact that the kingfisher would have been included among the animals in the monumental painting is reinforced by the fact that it is present in a mosaic from Ampurias (Spain), which is the only preserved later variation, showing similar landscape elements.<sup>12</sup>

Of the mosaic found in Ampurias, only the upper part, about one third of the estimated original size, is preserved, but it is sufficient to enable us to consider it as a variant of the same theme of the Paestrian fish mosaic and A and B.<sup>13</sup> It seems to have been an even more summary version than A or B, as the size and number of fish included is smaller. However, on the other hand, we find here more accurate details, which are evidence of an independent variation and observation. The muraena (*Muraena helena*) is better represented than in mosaics A and B, and the kingfisher on the rock also shows elements not found in them. The bird sits here, not to the left but to the right of the central group, on a rock towards which a crab is climbing. The kingfisher does not look down to the water, but is in an upright position holding a shrimp in its beak. The identification is clear, though in this case as well, we do not find the typical blue and chestnut red colours of the plumage. We do find the similar greyish upper and a yellow ochre lower part. There are fewer colour details than in A and B but, on the other hand, the primaries and tail feathers are emphasized.

In the presumed original monumental painting, the kingfisher is represented as a member of the coastal fauna and if there were no other birds, as the exponent of coastal avifauna. It is a typical side motif of Hellenistic painting and playfully refers to the theme of the fishermen with a "fisher in Nature". At the same time it enlivens the landscape and illustrates the balance of Nature with its interdependent and predatory relationships. In later Roman mosaics and wall paintings such side

<sup>12</sup> For other mosaics and the reconstruction, see Meyboom, 56–72, Pl. 54 fig. 16a, cf. here notes 13 and 15.

<sup>13</sup> A. Balil, *Arte Hellenístico en el levante español: mosaico con representación de peces hallado en Ampurias*, *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 96,2 (1960) 267ff. The mosaic is published in colour by E. Ripoll Perelló, *Ampurias. Description of the ruins and monographic museum*, 1972, Pl. 14, cf. Meyboom, 58, Pl. 58 fig. 13.



motifs tend to disappear or become schematized and independent subjects. They are no longer sophisticated details in part of a larger whole.<sup>14</sup> The fighting couple of sea animals becomes the central motif in the mosaics and the landscape elements gradually disappear. Thus the importance of the kingfisher increases in the reduced versions, as it becomes first the primary and then the only exponent of coastal fauna and, finally, *pars pro toto*, the coast. However, in the numerous later variations of the theme showing fish with a fighting couple or triplet (octopus-lobster-eel) in a more or less central position, all landscape elements, including the kingfisher, are absent.<sup>15</sup> Nor is there any trace of the kingfisher in other Roman fish mosaics with or without landscape elements, in which the eventual birds are usually ducks or herons.<sup>16</sup> Kingfisher representations in later Roman art are rare, but not absent, and though differing from the aforementioned two of these show the bird among marine subjects.<sup>17</sup>

The first is a mosaic in the vestibule of the Casa di M. Caesius Blandus (VII 1,40) in Pompeii. The mosaic – renewed "*ab antiquo*",

<sup>14</sup> In wall paintings we do not find traces of such Hellenistic landscapes as the reliefs known in three versions which show a rocky landscape and a tree with birds (probably raptors) at their nest. A snake is climbing up to this nest and nearby an eagle is eating a hare. For these, see H.v. Steuben, *Helbig I*<sup>4</sup>, 75 n. 99, 445 n. 565, 726 n. 1012. The hare eating eagle is an old motif which certainly not occasionally, is used in Roman sarcophagus reliefs (B. Andreae, *Die römischen Jagdsarkophage*, ASR I,2, Berlin 1980, 49ff., 149–150 n. 41, Pl. 26,7). This among other similar motifs merits a special study in order to fathom the individual content of each.

<sup>15</sup> Meyboom, 56–71, 74–77. The only known variation of the theme with landscape elements and without a kingfisher is the so called mosaic AA 1941, the authenticity of which is not definitely ascertained. Meyboom, 60–63, Pl. 53 contrary to many others, considers it authentic.

<sup>16</sup> De Puma, *passim*. The *horror vacui* may lead to marine scenes overcrowded with fish, birds and/or other sea creatures and figures. Indicative of the schematization in Roman art is the fact that the widespread motif of a heron picking up or at a snake, becomes a substitute for other possible preying bird representation (like our kingfisher) also found in many marine scenes.

<sup>17</sup> W. Richter, *Kleine Pauly* 2, 220 "Eisvogel" still erroneously repeats that: "Darstellungen in der Kunst fehlen." This may go back to Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt* II, Leipzig 1913, 56ff, 393, who did not notice the kingfisher in the mosaic B even if he was among the first ones to publish this mosaic.

but presumably not relevantly changed<sup>18</sup> – is contemporary with the floor mosaics and wall paintings of the private bath of the house. According to Beyen, the wall paintings belong to the stage IIa of the II style, circa 40–30 BC.<sup>19</sup> The bath's floor mosaics show swimmers, marine creatures and objects alluding to water and the sea, which were popularly used motifs in both public and private baths.<sup>20</sup>

This is also the case with the somewhat still-life-like representation in the vestibule, which shows a trident crossed by a rudder, around which two dolphins and a hippocampus are swimming. These are all fairly widespread motifs which allude to the marine world<sup>21</sup> and the little bird standing on the rudder, though rare, is no exception. Its *habitus* and pose are so characteristic that there can be no doubt of its identification as a kingfisher. The green in the wing and back and the red on the breast and stomach create an impression of the distinguishing features of the kingfisher's plumage (here fig. 3).

M. Della Corte wanted to see the bird as a *picus martius* which it cannot be, no more than the *pica marina* suggested by G. Fiorelli.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> M. Blake, *The Pavements of the Roman Buildings of the Republic and Early Empire*, MAAR 8 (1930) 76, 85, 106, 121, Pl. 26,2; cf. H.G. Beyen, *Die pompejanische Wanddekoration vom zweiten bis zum vierten Stil I–II*, Den Haag 1938 & 1960, 252.

<sup>19</sup> Beyen, *Wanddekoration II*, 238–259.

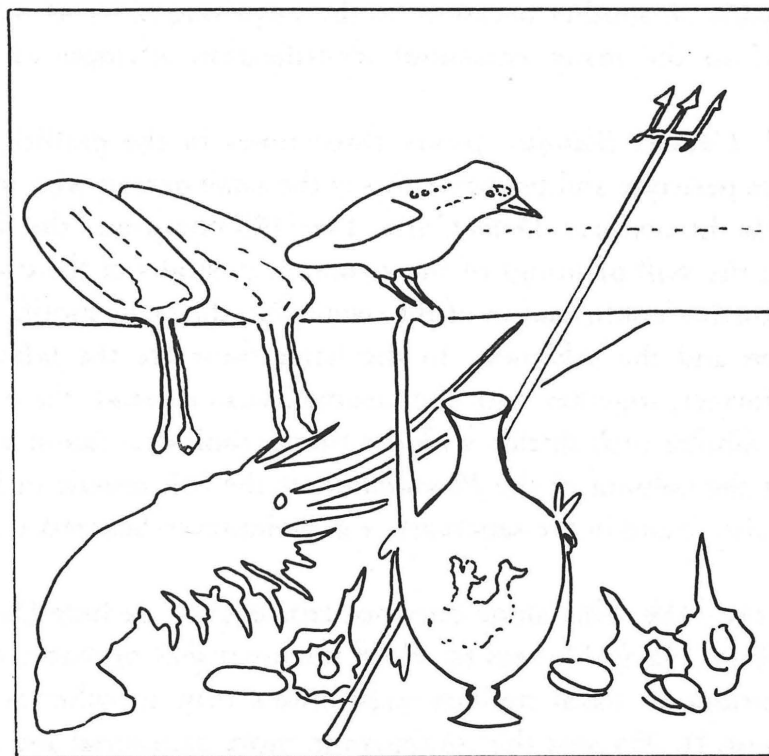
<sup>20</sup> Of the private ones we mention the baths of the Casa del Menandro (I 10,4), the floor mosaics of which are very similar to the ones treated here, see Beyen, *Wanddekoration II*, 251–259 with further references.

<sup>21</sup> For further references *ibid.*, 253 note 1. Particularly the hippocampus and the dolphins (often precisely the two) are very common in later Pompeian wall paintings (especially in IV style).

<sup>22</sup> According to M. Della Corte, *Casa ed abitanti di Pompei*, Napoli 1965 (3.ed.), 186–188 n. 354–355 the colours of the plumage were black and red, which together with the "posa caratteristica, sono decisivi argomenti per l'identificazione" as a *Picus martius*, the great black woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*). Even if the colours were black and red, they would not correspond to those of the great black nor any other woodpecker species. Also T. Warscher, *Uccelli di Pompei*, Roma 1942 (unpublished typed manuscript in the D.A.I., Rome), 64 follows the identification of Della Corte. I have not found the identification as a sparrow, which Beyen, *Wanddekoration II*, 253 note 1 corrigates without reference; G. Fiorelli, *Descrizione di Pompei*, Napoli 1875, 172–173.



*Fig. 3.* Detail from the mosaic in the vestibule of the Casa di M. Caesius Blandus VII 1,40 (Pompeii; drawing from photograph). Scale 1/4. Key to colours: ■ dark green, ▨ red, □ white.



*Fig. 4.* Still-life from Herculaneum, MN 8644 B (drawing from photograph).

The reason for Della Corte's identification is the willingness to see here a symbol of war, which the *picus martius* clearly is.<sup>23</sup> This supported his interpretation of the vestibule mosaic as an allusion to a marine conquest expedition which the house owner was presumed to have made and therefore permitting the owner to be identified as the *centurio coh(ortis) VIII pr(aetoriae) M. Caesius Blandus*. There are reasons for the latter identification, but whether the decorative motifs mentioned by Della Corte are in this respect significant is doubtful.<sup>24</sup>

The marine emblems in the vestibule correspond thematically to those of the baths. Here M. Blake notes: "All the few ornamental thresholds which have been preserved from the earlier period at Pompeii have some connection in subject with the sea, perhaps because the inspiration came from Delos, where the dolphin, the anchor and the trident are still to be found serving the same capacity."<sup>25</sup> We cannot judge whether the combination of the marine emblems with the subject of the city wall situated above is meaningful, as Della Corte assumed, but at any rate the kingfisher is not a bellic symbol.<sup>26</sup> Neither is it only

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<sup>23</sup> I intend to return on another occasion, to the surprising rarity of woodpecker representations and to the many erroneous identification attempts of these important augural birds.

<sup>24</sup> The name *M. Caesius Blandus* occurs three times in the graffiti scratched in the columns of the peristyle and probably this is the same person who in a fourth graffiti is mentioned as the *centurio*. Della Corte, 186–188 interpretes the figures of the two medallions on the wall paintings of the *atrium* as portraits of the owner and his wife and sees as a further confirmation of the ownership the bellic motifs of the mosaics in the *vestibulum* and the *tablinum*. In the latter these are the *fulmen* altering with arms, in the former, together with the assumed *picus martius*, the oval shields above the city wall. Similar oval shields with the thunderbolt decoration are represented to have hung on the column of the *Poseidonion* of the fish mosaic in Palestrina, where the trident is also found in the sanctuary, e.g. Steinmayer-Schareika, 156 fig. 54.

<sup>25</sup> Blake, 121.

<sup>26</sup> Della Corte, 186–188. This alone does not enable us to exclude Della Corte's interpretation entirely. Navigable seas to which the kingfisher probably alludes here were not less important to naval military expeditions than to other sea traffic. Beyen, *Wanddekoration II*, 254 sees the combination more occasional and at any rate more recent than the combination of the city wall and a labyrinth in the mosaic of the so called Casa del Labirinto which he considers clearly meaningful.

a "komische Note" as Beyen wanted to see it.<sup>27</sup> The fact that it here sits on the rudder, a natural emblem of navigation, (in Pompeii, specially known as an attribute of the *Venus Pompeiana*) must in my opinion be an allusion to the Halcyon days, when the kingfisher was believed to breed and the seas to be calm and navigable (see later p. 229–234).

The mosaic with its silhouette-like impression is almost black and white because other colours are used for minor details only.<sup>28</sup> Given this and given the small size of the bird, it cannot be a very detailed work. The fact that the five white *tessellae* in the upper wing coverts, which evidently correspond to those in mosaics A and B, are to be found in a mosaic of this simplicity, denotes all the more that it is a feature considered essential.

This is confirmed by the second representation showing a kingfisher among marine subjects. One of three still lifes, now in the Museo Nazionale of Naples under inventory n. 8644, all said to come from Herculaneum, shows a bird standing on the high handle of a fine profiled vase, and surrounded to the left by a lobster and to the right by various shells. Behind the vase, decorated with a relief presenting an eros riding a ketos, is a trident resting against a shelf, above which, on the left, are two *saepia* (here fig. 4).<sup>29</sup>

The bird can be identified by the fairly well depicted *habitus* and, above all, by the blue colour. The fact that we find the blue colour also in the under parts instead of the chestnut red colouring, would imply, however, that the painter had not ever seen a real kingfisher. Either he had used his model liberally or the model had become inaccurate. The latter is probably the case and this would also explain the exaggeratedly long feet which resemble those of an average passerine bird, as would the bird's pose and the too short beak. Similar inaccuracies are found in

<sup>27</sup> Beyen, Wanddekoration II, 252–253 rightly identifies the bird as a kingfisher which is "zweifellos den reinen Bildmosaiken (Emblemata) des ersten und des frühen zweiten Stils mit Meerdarstellungen wie dem in der Casa del Fauno entnommen."

<sup>28</sup> In addition to the red and green in the kingfisher there is some red, green and yellow in the shields.

<sup>29</sup> H.G. Beyen, *Über Stilleben aus Pompeji und Herculaneum*, Den Haag 1928, 77–78. J.M. Croisille, *Les natures mortes campaniennes*, Bruxelles 1965, 39–40, n.43, Pl.81 fig. 158 with further references.

the porphyryon (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) represented in the still life to the left of MN 8644, which, according to Beyen, was done by the same painter.<sup>30</sup> Such details apparently were not important to the evidently very able painter, whose capacity is evidenced e.g. in his diligent depiction of the reflection of light, particularly in the lobster's shell and in the kingfisher's plumage. The white points in the bird's neck are especially marked and clearly representing the glitter of light and not white feathers, of which there is no trace.

Because of the similar size and the probable attribution to the same hand, the still-life with the kingfisher was in connection with the two other ones of MN 8644, representing a porphyryon and a glass vase (now to the left), and a rabbit with vegetables and a hanging partridge (*Alectoris sp.*; now to the right). Because nothing more of its context is known, it is not possible to judge whether the representation of the kingfisher had here some special allusive function, perhaps representing winter, as suggested by N. Schumacher.<sup>31</sup> Beyen has suggested that the vase and the trident might be "Poseidonische Weigheschänke".<sup>32</sup> This is possible as the religious origins of *xenia* are undeniable. Naturally, this generalization can not be true for all still-lives, but yet in those representing attributes of gods the allusions are clear. These still-lives are usually small, situated in the middle zone and, represented in groups on walls of the same or nearby rooms each depicting various

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>31</sup> W. Schumacher, *Zwei Becher aus Boscoreale*, MDAI(R) 86 (1979) 249–269 has shown that the *xenia*-like representations of two cups can be seen as symbolizing *tempora anni* and suggests that this might be the case also in similar representations in wall paintings. However, the arbitrary and hypothetical reconstruction proposal presented in note 136 is not good here as it is based on misleading sources. Schumacher takes the still-life with the kingfisher (MN 8644 B) from Reinach, RPGR, 373,4 erroneously as a vanished piece, and suggests that it might have represented winter among the still-lives of the great frieze from the *triclinium* of the Praedia di Iulia Felix (II 4), Pompeii. The kingfisher as such might allude, not only to the Poseidonian world, but also to winter because the so called Halcyon days were considered to have taken place during the winter solstice (see here p. 229–234); cf. Meyboom, 83 note 120.

<sup>32</sup> Beyen, *Stilleben*, 77–78.

attributes of the major divinities. Among examples conserved in the wall paintings of Pompeii, there seems to be no piece which illustrated the attributes of Poseidon. Among the many vanished paintings, there is however, reported to have been one in the Casa dei Capitelli figurati among pictures denoting the attributes of major deities.<sup>33</sup> The "specht-artiger Vogel", which W. Helbig claims stood on a vase to the right of which was a trident and a dolphin, must have represented a kingfisher.

Though other representations depicting the kingfisher as the attribute of Poseidon, are not preserved, the described ones further confirm that the bird indeed was an allusion to the Poseidonian sphere, in other words, a marine bird.

#### The myth of Alcyon and the kingfisher in literary sources

The marine character of the kingfisher in representations here-to-fore described is not the only quality to be revealed, but before studying other representations we have to explain why it is considered a marine bird. The explanation is to be found in the literary sources where, contrary to the visual evidence, the kingfisher is often the subject of many curious stories and features.<sup>34</sup> The bird which in literary sources is called (*h*)*alcyon*, is identified as the kingfisher. It must, however be stressed that an ornithologically trustworthy identification of it as this species can, in fact, be made only by the description in Arist. hist.anim. 616a 13–18 and, in the version of Plin. nat. 10,89. Pliny's notes on the kingfisher are a combination of those given by Aristotle which in fact contain nearly all of the ornithological information known of the spe-

<sup>33</sup> W. Helbig, Wandgemälde der vom Vesuv verschütteten Städte Campaniens, Leipzig 1868, 49 n. 173, the other deities were Zeus (n. 106), Demeter (n. 179), Artemis (n. 242), Athene (n. 268b) and Hermes (n. 365).

<sup>34</sup> For the (*h*)*alcyon* in literary sources, see Thompson, A Glossary of Greek Birds, London 1936 (2. ed.), 46ff., TLL VI,3, 2514 "(*h*)*alcyon*", M. Wellmann, RE V,2, 2152–2153 "Eisvogel" (cf. Richter, 220); For ornithological discussion especially, see F. Capponi, Ornithologia latina, Genova 1979, 51–58, cf. W.K. Kraak, De alcyonibus, Mnemosyne 7 (1934) 142–147. Further references are found in these and in the following.

cies by ancient literary sources.<sup>35</sup> The description of the plumage refers explicitly to the kingfisher but in the comparisons to the second kingfisher species, some confusion is made among the three different kingfisher species found in the Mediterranean.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Arist. hist.anim. 542b 4 ff., 593b 10 f., 616a 14–33; Plin.nat. 10,89–91, cf. ibid., 2,125; 18,231; 32,86. According to Capponi's interpretation of Pliny's description it would be more exact than the one of Aristotle which does not mention the white colour of the neck quoted by Pliny. F. Capponi, *Le fonti del X libro della "Naturalis historia" di Plinio*, Genova 1985, 152–158 repeats this view and also shows in other quotations about the kingfisher, that Pliny did not directly use Aristotle as his source. These observations were, however, made already by W.G. Arnott, CQ 14 (1964) 249 note 1. For description of the plumage, cf. Schol. on Theocr. 7,57 and Dion. ixeut. 2,8.

<sup>36</sup> Arist. hist.anim. 593b 8 ff. tells that there are two species of kingfishers: one lives in the reeds and sings, the other is bigger and silent. Both have a blue back. Plin. nat. 10,89 puts this shorter: *alterum genus earum magnitudine distinguitur et cantu: minores in harundinetis canunt*. In addition to the common kingfisher which Pliny identifies with the minor species of the *loci* cited, in the Mediterranean are found also the mainly Asiatic Smyrna kingfisher and the African and Asiatic lesser pied kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*). Both of these species are bigger than the common kingfisher, that is true, but neither of these can be defined as silent in comparison to the kingfisher, which has the most modest voice of them all. (For ornithological descriptions and distribution, see Fitter-Heinzel-Parslow, *The Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*, 1972, family *Alcedinidae*). The fact that both are said to have a blue back makes it clear that the other *alcyon* species must refer to the Smyrna kingfisher which has some blue in its back. The lesser pied kingfisher can not have been meant, as suggested by D. Lanza – M. Vegetti, *Le opere biologiche di Aristotele*, 1971, 437 because its plumage is black-and-white spotted blue colour being completely absent. Capponi, *Ornithologia latina*, 51–52, 56 identifies the second species as the lesser pied kingfisher, but though referring to this in his later work (Capponi, *Le fonti*, 154 note 206) he says that it may be either the lesser pied kingfisher or the Smyrna kingfisher. Of the kingfisher's "song" he says only that the quotation in Pliny does not point to the silence of the other species but to a different voice. For Thompson, 47 the "whole matter" remained "obscure" because according to him none of the species could sing, though the kingfisher, in fact, has a thrilling whistling song. As the kingfisher sings only rarely and with a modest voice, I do not think, as Pollard (*Birds in Greek Life and Myth*, Plymouth 1977, 98) does that the *loci* cited would refer to the song of the kingfisher. More probably it is a confusion with the lesser pied kingfisher, which is known to prefer reeds and to be often in noisy crowds, or the influence of the stories of the marked voice ascribed to the *alcyon* by other authors (cf. here note 37). In Roman art, representations of the



This is, however, a minor feature. The most well-known characteristics ascribed to the kingfisher are the lamenting voice,<sup>37</sup> the breeding in a floating nest during the so called Halcyon days around the winter solstice, when the sea was said to be calm,<sup>38</sup> the following of ships and the sudden disappearance. Indeed, the whole characterization of the kingfisher as a sea bird is like a puzzle, a composition of the ascribed features of various sea birds to the one bird, called *alcyon*. Only later was the *alcyon* exclusively identified as the kingfisher.<sup>39</sup>

This dates back to Greek mythology where Alkyone is known as a sea creature which in literary sources is related to several sites and thereby to various genealogies.<sup>40</sup> The *alcyon* myth can be divided into

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Smyrna kingfisher or lesser pied kingfisher have not been ascertained, though the pied kingfisher, very naturalistically depicted in Egyptian art, is suggested to have been aimed at with the birds perched on the water flowers in the Nile mosaic from the Casa del Fauno. For the lesser pied kingfisher in Egyptian art, see M.C. Gaillard, *Quelques représentations du Martinpêcheur pie sur les monuments de l'Égypte ancienne*, Bull.Inst.fr.Caire 30 (1930) 249–271. Beyen, Stilleben, 79 suggested that the birds on the Nile mosaic were possibly kingfishers. This species is out of the question, but it is not impossible that they refer to the lesser pied kingfisher, as suggested by Meyboom, 88 note 274. They rather resemble some passerines but this may, however, be due to the somewhat clumsy stylization of the animals of the above mosaic. In other Nile mosaics which represent similar passerines perched on water flowers the birds are clearly not any of the kingfisher species (see e.g. the mosaic found in Priverno, *Archeologia laziale* VI, 1984, 181–183 fig. 6). In the numerous river scenes of wall paintings the avifauna is solely formed by ducks, sometimes swans or geese, and herons or ibises, all passerines being absent.

<sup>37</sup> See *loci* collected by Thompson, 47. The voice of the *alcyon* is described as lamenting already in Il. 9,562f. (for translation problems, see G.K. Gresseth, *The myth of Alcyone*, TAPhA 95 [1964] 88–98 with preceding literature). Verg. georg. 3,338 used the *alcyon*'s voice as the emblem for the coastal avifauna. When Verg. georg. 1,398–399 says that: *non tepidum ad solem pennas in litore pandunt/dilectae Thetidi alcyones*, he may have had in mind the *Phalacrocoracidae* species for which the drying of wings is particularly typical.

<sup>38</sup> Wernicke, RE I, 1583 s.v. Alkyonides; cf. the literature mentioned above in note 31.

<sup>39</sup> The first quotation where *alcyon* might mean the kingfisher could be the Simonides quotation by Arist. hist.anim. 542b 10 which calls its plumage as *ποικίλος*. Cf. the literature above in note 31, especially Capponi.

<sup>40</sup> Wernicke, RE I, 1579–1581 s.v. Alkyone lists four sites.

two parts, and, in fact, it is a combination of two myths which are now thought to have comprised (around the VII-VI c. BC) the *alcyon* myth in its final shape.<sup>41</sup> The first part is a well-known type of a love story and metamorphosis. In the metamorphoses, which are said to have gotten their literary form in the *ornithogonia* of Boios, the mythological figures are changed into birds.<sup>42</sup> The best-known versions are those presenting Alkyone as the wife of Keyx.<sup>43</sup> Also Keyx is from Hom. Od. 15,477–479 onwards described as a sea bird. The name was certainly used for several sea or water birds which cannot be specifically identified. However, the Scholiast reference to a swallow-like bird must be a tern (*Sterna sp.*).<sup>44</sup> The name is an onomatopoeia, referring probably to the call note of the little tern (*Sterna albifrons*).<sup>45</sup> The name is also used for both the female *alcyon*<sup>46</sup> and the male one,<sup>47</sup> and in addition to that as a synonym of *kerylos*.<sup>48</sup> *Kerylos* was another sea bird, probably also an onomatopoetic name referring to the call note or

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<sup>41</sup> Gresseth, 88–98 in particular 89–90.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.; cf. M. Wellmann, *Hermes* 26 (1891) 515f. and Wilamovitz-Moellendorf, *Hermes* 18 (1883) 419f.

<sup>43</sup> Alkyone is presented as the wife of Keyx, king of Thracis. When they began to call themselves Zeus and Hera the loving pair was changed into birds because of the envy of the gods. In another version Alkyone is changed into an *alcyon* because she laments her dead husband. This connection to "Gattenliebe und liebender Klage" can already be seen in the above Iliad quotation and later it is revealed in stories telling how the females carry the old males on their backs, see above note 37 and Wernicke, RE I, 1579–1582 s.v. Alkyone, Alkyoneus, Kroll, RE IX,1 372–374 s.v. Keyx.

<sup>44</sup> This was pointed out already by Thompson, 133; Cf. Capponi *Ornithologia latina*, 145–146.

<sup>45</sup> This is suggested by A.L. Peck, *Arist. hist.anim.* IV-VI (Loeb), 1970, 370. However, also the black tern (*Chlidonias niger*) makes similar calls and some calls of the *Larus ridibundus* and *Larus minutus* also resemble these. Capponi *Ornithologia latina*, 146 suggested that the quotations in Dion. ixeut. 2,7 refers to some *Laridae* species; Also in the only Latin *passus* mentioning *ceyx*, Plin. nat. 32,86 names it together with the *alcyon*.

<sup>46</sup> Dion. ixeut. 2,8.

<sup>47</sup> Apollod. 28 ad Lucian. 1,178.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

alarm call of the common or arctic tern (*Sterna hirundo/ Sterna paradisaea*), or still another name for the *alcyon*.<sup>49</sup>

As for the voice of the *alcyon* F. Capponi says that we do not know "una realtà ornitologica dalle immaginazioni fantastiche dell'antica poesia." In my opinion, however, the above quotations show that the ornithological reality is to be sought in the calls of sea birds, most probably the terns.<sup>50</sup>

Thus *alcyon* originally referred to some sea bird(s), and it was connected and confused with *keyx* and *kerylos*, which also referred to various sea birds. The calls of most noisy and frequently seen coastal sea birds, the terns and gulls, became assigned to the *alcyon*. Only later was the *alcyon* identified exclusively only with the kingfisher, thus becoming the sole representative of coastal avifauna and as such regarded as "the" marine bird. What ultimately establishes its marine character is the myth of the so called Halcyon days, a period around the winter solstice when the bird was assumed to breed in its floating nest on the sea. This was believed to calm the sea(s).<sup>51</sup> This belief is

<sup>49</sup> *Kerylos* is connected with *alcyon* already in Alc. frg. 26 P = 94 D and also in Arist. hist.anim. 593b 12. Aristoph. av. 251 uses it for the male *alcyon* and so does Claud.Ael. nat. anim. 7,17 telling that *alcyones* carry the aged *keryloi* on their backs. Cf. Peck, 370.

<sup>50</sup> Capponi, *Ornithologia latina*, 55. Also the sea-swallow (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) has, during the breeding period, a prominent call which very well might be interpreted as lamenting. However, Verg. georg. 3,338, *litora que alcyonem resonant*, shows clearly that the *alcyon*'s call referred to that of the coastal birds and certainly to the most often heard terns and gulls. When describing such an auditive image it was not important to distinguish between specific species. Some quotations eloquate the kingfisher as an excellent singer and in these *loci* we may assume a confusion with other species too, probably to some of the able singers like the *Sylviidae* species found among reeds. Keller, 59 suggests the *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, but there are other possibilities, too.

<sup>51</sup> Peck, 369ff. rightly notes that in Aristotle there is, in fact, no reference to the nest being necessarily on the sea. In Arist. hist.anim. 593b 8 ff. the *alcyones* are described as birds living beside the water and in hist.anim. 616a 33 it is also said to go up inland rivers. In these passages the breeding at winter solstice is not mentioned. The only fabulous feature is in the Simonides quotation. Plin. nat. 10,89 mentions the breeding period and describes the nest, but neither does he say it is found on the sea. Capponi *Ornithologia latina*, 54–58 sees in the nest description of Aristotle the influence of

thought to be related to the Pleiad Alkyone which in mythology was Poseidon's mistress.<sup>52</sup> Already Thompson showed that "the story originally referred to some astronomical phenomenon" and that the bird might have been in some way symbolic of the sun. G.K. Gresseth further develops this idea and sees it as part of a wider folkloristic tradition. As the sun in comparative myth is often symbolized as a bird and as birds in mythology often renew themselves, he sees the myth of the *alcyon* as a synthesis of these, which "form a story of the rebirth of the sun at the time of the winter solstice." It is otherwise difficult to explain the curious story of the *alcyon's* nest. The kingfisher's splendidly coloured plumage would well explain its association with the sun.<sup>53</sup>

#### Kingfisher, a sun bird? Kingfisher, a fresh water bird

Its splendid colours would account for the kingfisher's appearance in two still-lives which in no other way show any connection to water. Both are found in tomb paintings but they do not seem to have any specific sepulchral meaning. Both kingfishers are surrounded by other colourful, splendid and/or exotic birds. In the paintings of the Colombario di Villa Doria Pamphili, dated to the Augustan age and contemporary with those of the Villa Farnesina and the Casa di Livia on the Palatine (i.e. about 20 BC), there are, together with the Egyptianizing landscapes and some mythological scenes, a great number of bird motifs among which there is a still-life with a kingfisher and a hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). There are also two other still-lives with rare or

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nests like those of the *Panurus biarmicus*, *Aegithalos caudatus* and *Remiz pendulinus*, whereas Peck suggests the background to be in the floating nests of e.g. the black tern (floating nests are particularly characteristic of grebes).

<sup>52</sup> Keller, 59.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, 49–50; Gresseth, 93ff.; Thompson is "inclined to take the Bird on the Bull's back in coins of Eretria, Dicaea, and Thurii for the associated constellation of the Pleiad." This is possible, but the problem demands further study. Into account have to be taken also the other representations of a bird on a bull's or another beast's back (cf. J.L. Benson, *Horse, Bird & Man. The Origins of Greek Painting*, Amherst 1970, 20–31, 60–76). At any rate the bird in the coins can ornithologically not be identified as a kingfisher.

unique birds in Romano-Campanian wall paintings. In addition to this there are, apart from the garden paintings of Livia's Villa at Prima Porta, no other paintings so rich in various bird motifs.<sup>54</sup>

The four still-lives with colourful birds and fruit in the vault decoration the tomb of the *Panocratii* at Via Latina (Rome) can be considered a reduced and condensed Hadrianic echo of the above overflow.<sup>55</sup> Common in both paintings is also the somewhat summary execution of the details of the birds' plumage, a fact which illustrates that the paintings were done either from memory or from imprecise models. Therefore the influence of other common bird motifs can be seen in the *habitus*. The tail is rightly stumped but otherwise the body resembles that of a quail or a partridge, the head being too small and the neck too long and

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<sup>54</sup> The paintings were published by G. Bendinelli, *Le pitture di Colombario di Villa Doria Pamphili*, Roma 1929, who rightly identified the kingfisher and the hoopoe in the picture IX on the wall B (Bendinelli, 10, Pl. 4,3). In addition to these there is a picture with a *Numida meleagris* and a *Platalea leucorodia* (ibid. Pl. 9,1) and another picture with a *Pelecanus sp.* (ibid., Pl. A,1). The two latter species are so far not found elsewhere in Romano-Campanian wall paintings, and also the hoopoe and the guinea-fowl are fairly rare. Neither is the motif of a cat catching a hen known elsewhere in paintings (ibid., Pl. 5,3; for the subject in mosaics, see Meyboom, 88 note 274). A comparable overflow of bird motifs in mosaics is found in the black-and-white floor mosaic of the *atrium* of the Casa di Paquius Proculus o di Cuspius Pansa (I 7,1) in Pompeii. In the numerous squares representing almost exclusively various birds there is one which, on the basis of its long beak and stump, body, might represent a kingfisher. The identification can, however, not be ascertained because there seems to be some occasional variation of features in the bird motifs of the mosaic. Even if it were a kingfisher the representation does not add anything to its iconography.

<sup>55</sup> Each of the four still-lives shows four birds. The kingfisher is together with two peacocks and a passerine, which resembles a bee-eater but instead of its colourful plumage is greenish grey (I doubt whether this would refer to the *Merops superciliosus* or the *Tichodroma muraria*). The hoopoe is found here – in another still-life – together with a *Oriolus oriolus*, *Athene noctua* and a small passerine, perhaps a finch (*Fringilliadae sp.*). Other identifiable birds are the *Hirundo rustica*, *Garrulus glandarius*, and *Psittacula krameri*. A colour photo is published by M. Henig (ed.), *A Handbook of Roman Art. A Survey of the Visual Arts of the Roman World*, Oxford 1983, Pl. 30, dated to 150 AD (ibid., 107). Cf. H. Mielsch, *Römische Stuckreliefs*, MDAI(R) *Ergänzungsheft* 21 (1975) 171–172, n. K 115 Pl. 82 (with further references) dates to 165–170.

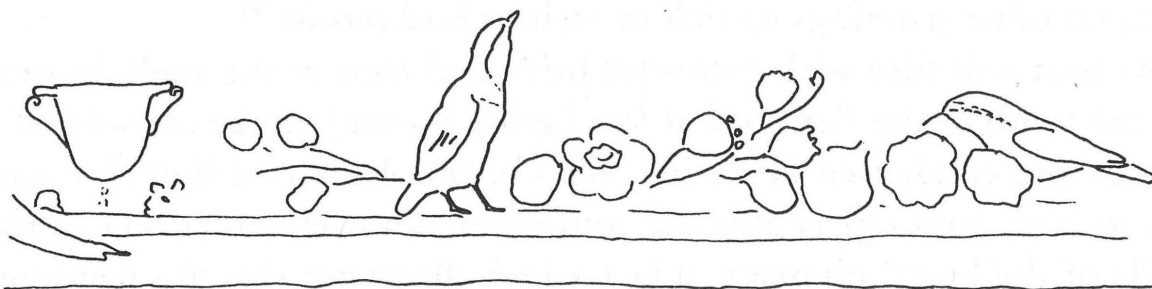


Fig. 5. The right half on a still-life in the vault paintings of the tomb of the *Pancratii* at the Via Latina (Rome; drawing from photograph).

marked. Only the bird of the Villa Doria Pamphiliij has a stronger beak than that of the average passerine but it is still too small for a kingfisher. The colours of the bird in the tomb of the *Pancratii* give the general impression of the kingfisher's plumage with greyish blue above and yellow below, but all details are missing (here fig. 5). This seems to be the case also with the bird from the Villa Doria Pamphiliij, a fact that, however, was not possible to ascertain.<sup>56</sup> Inaccuracies as observed above are to be found also in the other bird motifs in both paintings.<sup>57</sup>

Whether it were the painters or their cartoons used for the Villa Doria Pamphiliij paintings that came from Alexandria, cannot be judged, but at any rate this influence is evident in many subjects.<sup>58</sup> The representing of the kingfisher together with the hoopoe – another bird possibly connected with the sun – might originally have had such

<sup>56</sup> I was kindly permitted to see the paintings in the magazines of the Museo Nazionale Romano in spring 1985. Unfortunately the paintings waiting restoration were in a state which did not allow a closer study and it was not possible to check the colours which Bendinelli's description does not mention.

<sup>57</sup> A detail in the bird motifs of the Villa Doria Pamphiliij showing more accurate observation than is usual for Romano-Campanian wall paintings, is the properly depicted legs: there are, indeed, three toes forwards instead of the usual two.

<sup>58</sup> Bendinelli, 37 suggested Alexandrian painters, admitting that it is difficult to prove. The bird motifs mentioned above in note 54 might support this view but by no means imply it. Except for the birds, the paintings from the Villa Doria Pamphiliij do not differ from other contemporary paintings dominated by Egyptian elements.

allusive content. In addition to scientific observation, all kinds of beliefs flourished in the Hellenistic Alexandria.<sup>59</sup> In this respect the bird in a landscape painting from the Temple of Isis (VIII 7,28) in Pompeii is interesting because the painters decorating the temple – after the earthquake in 62 AD – seem to have been well aware of Egyptian beliefs and their representation. The painting shows a temple on an island in a landscape where the only living creature is a little bird standing on a rocky shore. Though some doubts remain, I think it is to be identified as a kingfisher on the basis of its *habitus* and position.<sup>60</sup> Some doubts also remain in the identification of the temple's deity, but if it was Isis-Hathor, we might further speculate that the species would allude to the sun connection of Hathor.<sup>61</sup>

Landscapes in Romano-Campanian wall paintings only rarely show birds and there usually is some reason for it beyond the enlivening of the landscape.<sup>62</sup> In the series of landscapes in the Temple of Isis, to

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<sup>59</sup> Thompson, 96ff. Only little remains from Alexandrian painting and though one of the few bird motifs represents a hoopoe in a tomb painting from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC, we cannot judge whether its assumed sun connection can be supported, see B.R. Brown, *Ptolemaic Paintings and Mosaics and the Alexandrian style*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1957, 59–60 n. 37, Pl. 30. An interesting fragment from an Alexandrian mosaic presenting a pygmy in a boat among reed, on which is perched a hoopoe is now published by W.A. Daszewski, *Corpus of Mosaics from Egypt I. Hellenistic and Early Roman Period*, 1985, 167–168, n. 44, Pl. 37 dated: "Late Hellenistic, probably still within the first half of the first century BC." Neither here can we find any connection to the sun, but the presentation supports the view of the hoopoe being an Egyptian motif.

<sup>60</sup> The landscape is now in MN 8574. The paintings from the Temple of Isis were published by O. Elia, *Le pitture del Tempio d'Iside*, Roma 1941, where the Pl. C,1 shows the referred landscape in colour. The colours of the bird are difficult to ascertain but the greyish and greenish blue and yellow which can be seen (the red is absent?) are too motley resembling an exotic looking bird in general. However, the round body with its long beak and short tail point to the kingfisher. Elia, 31–32 as well as V. Tan Tam Tinh, *Le culte d'Isis à Pompèi*, Paris 1964, 140–141 n. 42 left the bird unidentified.

<sup>61</sup> Elia, 31–32, cf. Tran Tam Tinh, 140–141. F. Dumas, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie (LÄ)2* (1977) 1024–1033. s.v. Hathor.

<sup>62</sup> This is true mainly as far landscapes with a mythological scene are concerned; in Nile and garden paintings birds are standard elements. I hope to treat their scarcity and

which the referred piece belongs, there was a bird also in three other landscapes. One of these is a phoenix – a sun bird par excellence – and another an ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*) attribution to Thot.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately the third bird is known only from a drawing which is inadequate for positive identification. Yet the bird which seems to have been in a similar position might have represented the same species.<sup>64</sup> The importance of the sun in the cult of Isis and the allusions of the phoenix and ibis in this context, point to the possibility of the kingfisher here as an allusion not only to water, but also to the sun. However, the bird primarily seems to emphasize the coast and the presence of water in a more sophisticated way than the usual ducks. The landscape is not quite a marine one, but rather a riverside; yet the similarity of the rocks and the bird with those of the aforementioned fish mosaics is so striking that the detail might well have been taken from the famous Hellenistic original or perhaps the composition of the rocks and the bird as such, may have been circulated in cartoons.

Some uncertainty remains in the identification of the kingfisher in the famous grotto scene in the II style paintings of the *cubiculum* from the Villa di P. Fannius Synistor.<sup>65</sup> The presumption that the bird sitting on

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role in another occasion. Here we only mention the vault mosaic in the fountain of the house IX 7,25 in Pompeii which shows a rare scene of the birth of Venus. In the marine landscape to the left there is a greyish blue bird sitting on a rock. It is, however, not a kingfisher, but most probably a dove (*Columba sp.*) as the attribute of the deity. Published in colour by W. Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum and the Villas destroyed by Vesuvius*, New York 1979, 43, fig. 73.

<sup>63</sup> Elia, 33–34, Pl. C,2. Elia calls the bird in the MN 8570 a "sparviero sacro", but that it, in fact, is a phoenix is suggested by Tram Tam Tinh, 142–143, 146, Pl. 10,2, cf. R. Van den Broek, *The myth of the Phoenix according to classical and early Christian traditions*, Leiden 1972, 242, 427, Pl. 4–5 and my forthcoming article on this particular bird. For the ibis, see Elia, 30–31, Pl. 1. Cf. A.-P. Zivie, *LÄ* 3 (1980) 115–121 s.v. Ibis.

<sup>64</sup> Elia, 35 fig. 31 speaks of an "anatroccolo (o oca di Egitto)", but her identifications are generally erroneous.

<sup>65</sup> The grotto scenes are in the side panels of the rear wall of the alcove of the *cubiculum*. The left is partly destroyed by a window and only two small passerines remain. The right panel shows five birds in all. For descriptions and identification, see Ph.W. Lehmann, *Roman Wall Paintings from Boscoreale in the Metropolitan Museum of*



the brim of a fountain basin is a kingfisher is, however, supported by its presence in a IV style garden painting from the Casa di Adone ferito (VI 7,18) in Pompeii (here fig. 6). There should be no doubts about its identity here, even though the kingfisher is not sitting directly on the brim of the half-circled basin. The kingfisher is, however, near it and next to the feet of a young satyr who is resting among the bushes and flowers, which are enlivened by the presence of many birds.<sup>66</sup> The

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Art, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1953, 204. Cf. W.J.T. Peters, *Landscape in Romano-Campanian Mural Painting*, Assen 1963, 12–19, especially 14. It is most unfortunate that the splendid frescoes now in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art have not yet received adequate publication in colour which urgently is needed. The only published colourphoto known to me is in M. Henig, Pl.6. In the identifications Lehmann follows those by Dr. E. Mayr for Beyen, *Wanddekoration I*, 187–188, in which the bird is suggested to be a kingfisher. This identification is supported by the bird's position and colours (greyish blue upper and red under parts). However, the bird might represent some other drinking passerine, perhaps a *Sylvia sp.* which its *habitus*, in fact, more resembles. (It is very similar to the *Sylvia sp.* above to the right.) The beak is not prominent and because of the position, the tail can not be evaluated. Further, the colours here are not necessarily a feature pointing to one particular species, because they are used also for two other birds in the panel. These represent exotic looking birds in general which are in a prominent position among the bird motifs of the II style wall paintings. In the room 14 of the Casa di Obellius Firmus (IX 14,4) in Pompeii the colours of the birds are very similar. Cf. also the birds in the rooms 14–15 of the Villa di Oplontis and especially the seven splendid fantasy birds in the II style paintings which decorated tomb in Minturniae (in the lunette of the alcove n. 1, see A. Laidlaw, *Archeology* 17,1 (1964), 33–43, fig. 10 and cover in colour). The left-most bird has, in fact, a splendid blue upper part and a chestnut red under part, and a strong beak just like the kingfisher. It has, however, a long tail and a curlicue crest, which reveal its fantastic character confirmed by the other similar birds (clearly not kingfishers). – Near the basin in the grotto scene from Boscoreale is a small statue of Hecate, the moon goddess. There is, however, nothing to support the view of the kingfisher as Hecate's thematic counterpart alluding to the sun.

<sup>66</sup> Published in colour by Jashemski, 66 fig. 107. The colours of the painting are somewhat faded, but the greenish blue of the upper part and the chestnut red (darker than in reality) can be clearly seen. The main features are correct, even though also the wings are red instead of blue. The whitish yellowish colour is used to emphasize the upper wing coverts, and not the neck or throat. Though the beak is yellow instead of black as are the legs (instead of red) and slightly too slim, the *habitus* is otherwise fairly well depicted. Thus the identification as a *Monticola saxatilis* can be excluded.

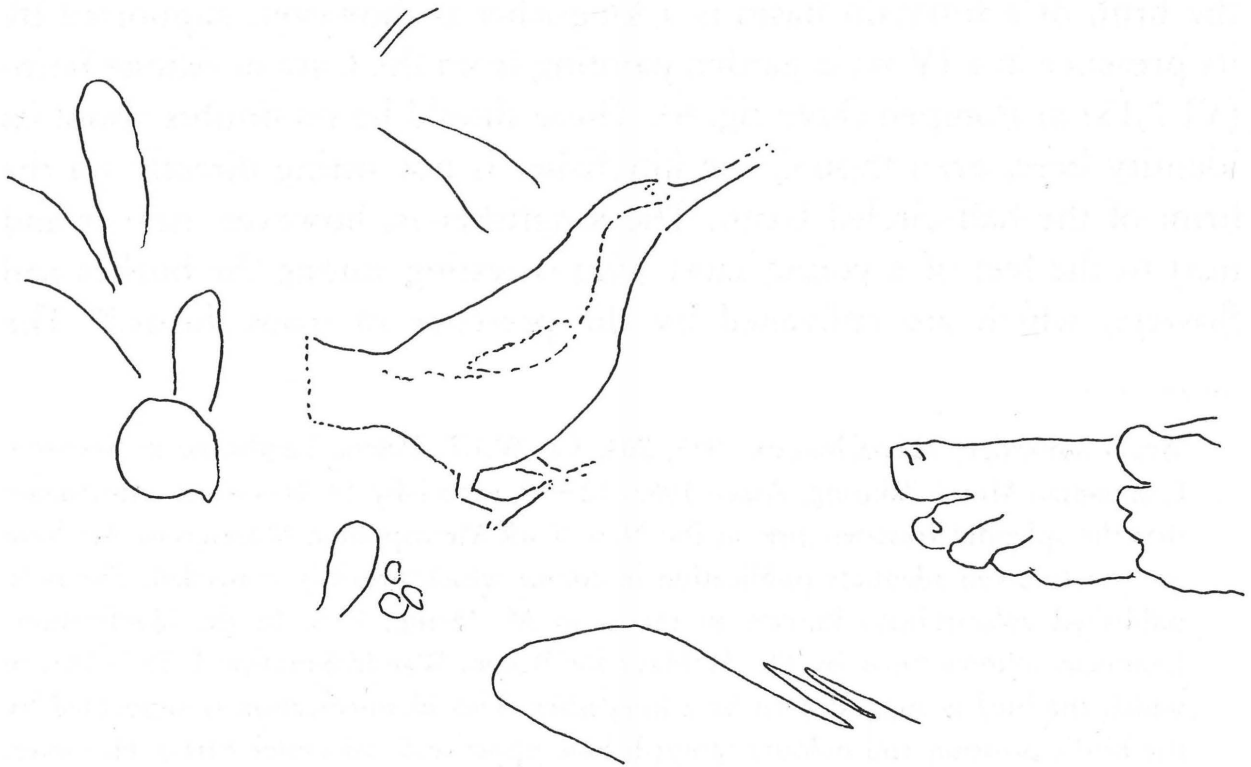


Fig. 6. Detail from the garden painting in the Casa di Adone ferito VI 7,18 (Pompeii; drawing from photograph). Scale 1/4.

kingfisher is a *unicum* among the various birds represented in the garden paintings of Romano-Campanian wall paintings and so is the male pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) positioned at the other side of the satyr. Their rarity is their common feature and this, to my mind, would imply that they are not present for their allusive suggestiveness, but rather that an ambitious and probably somewhat ornithologically orientated painter populated his garden paintings with seldom represented species.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> The *Phasianidae* species are a standard element of garden paintings and though sometimes rare species are represented (like in the house IX 8,3), I have so far not found a pheasant elsewhere. The only other pheasant in Romano-Campanian wall paintings is the female in the II style paintings of the Villa di Oplontis. The male in this garden painting is not quite correctly depicted, but has features of the usual peacock. The painter probably had seen a pheasant but when painting it from mem-

The grotto scene from the Fannius villa has been described as a sort of an illustration of the Theocritean view of the subject. The relationship is evident and not disturbed by the fact that in the preserved poems of Theocritus, the kingfisher is mentioned as the calmer of the seas and dearest to the Nereids "of all birds that have their prey from the sea", thus bringing us back to the Poseidonian world from which we started.<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusions

We have made the first attempt to bring together and analyze all representations of the kingfisher in Graeco-Roman art in the light of the quotations of the species from literary sources. The identifications of the eight published representations were discussed and three new identifications were made. Of the eleven identifiable representations (two of which with reservations) four are preserved in mosaics and six in paintings (one since destroyed). Three of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC mosaics are variants of a monumental Hellenistic painting presumably from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. Alexandria. In this painting, probably an illustration of some ichthyological work, the kingfisher was represented as the exponent of the coastal avifauna. One mosaic (about 40–30 BC) and two still-lives from IV style wall paintings show the bird among marine subjects which confirms that it was alluding to the Poseidonian world. The

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ory, was no longer sure of all the details. This is also true for the kingfisher which is well, though not exactly, depicted. The ambitions of the "ornithologically minded" painter are further shown by the representation of the porphyrio (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) in an exceptional pose and from a view difficult to execute. The above explains the presence of the kingfisher and there is no need to try to see in it any allusion to "Gattenliebe und liebender Klage" referring to the famous megalography (in the panel to the left) with Aphrodite and the wounded Adonis cured by amorines.

<sup>68</sup> The quoted translation is from G. Segal, *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral. Essays on Theocritus and Virgil*, Princeton 1981, 216; K. Schefold, *Neue Forschungen in Pompeji*, Recklinghausen 1975, 56 suggests that pictures like this were exact copies of stage pictures imported from Alexandria (cf. however Lehmann's, 204 observation of the "Italian" trellis which speaks for modifications). This would be in accordance with the observed correspondence, and I cannot agree with Schefold's view of the grotto scene: "Die Naturauffassung ist überraschend verschieden von allem Abendländischen durch das unromantische, objektive."

marine character was shown to be the result of ascribing the combined features of various sea birds to the (*h*)*alcyon*, which only later was identified solely as the kingfisher. Originating in Greek mythology, this confusion entered into literary sources and lived beyond observations of its real character.

The myth of the Halcyon days which ultimately establishes the bird's marine character, was presumably influenced by the myth of the birth of the sun. In a IV style landscape painting from the Temple of Isis in Pompeii, in which the representation of the kingfisher is similar to that of the fish mosaics, there might also be some connection to the sun. Traces of other features ascribed to the *alcyon* in literary sources could not be confirmed in the representations. A grotto scene in the II style paintings from Boscoreale and a IV style garden painting represented the bird as it is in reality living near calm and or small bodies of water. In two still-lives in sepulchral paintings, one from Augustan and one from Hadrian's time, in which the relationship to water was absent, the kingfisher was represented among other splendid, colourful birds.

The rarity of kingfisher representations gives a certain exclusive character to this motif, which after Hadrian's time is not preserved in Roman art. However, it does reappear in an illustration of a Byzantine manuscript of the *Ornithiaca*, a fact that points to its living on, at least in zoological illustrations.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Z. Kadar, *Survivals of Greek Zoological Illumination in Byzantine Manuscripts*, Budapest 1978, 80ff. Pl. 125,2 and colour Pl.3. As an epilogical remark on the *Nachleben* of the myth of the *alcyon* we can mention a sleeping pill called *Halcion* which some years ago was advertised with the story of *Alkyone* and *Keyx* printed on a leaflet the cover of which showed a kingfisher, here in a colour photograph!