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THE IMAGE OF THE STAG IN
LITERARY AND ICONOGRAPHIC
TRADITIONS OF THE MIDDLE
AGES

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ABSTRACT

The thesis studies a number of associated iconographic motifs and narrative Types featuring the stag in medieval literature and art. After preliminary discussion of the methodological problems involved in identifying and classifying motifs, archaeological evidence is examined which suggests that the stag may have a totemic or symbolic function in early religions. The allegorisation of the belief, found in classical zoology, that the stag prolongs its life by eating snakes is shown to have had a rich development in Patristic writings, Islamic sources, Bestiaries and encyclopaedias, ecclesiastical art and Renaissance emblems. The legend of the Oldest Animals also affirms the stag's longevity, and is associated with concepts of universal time and dynastic history in folklore and in texts from Hesiod to John Donne. The legend of Caesar's deer is interpreted as a dynastic myth, associated with ideas of imperial renovatio, and the version in which the deer is depicted as a winged stag carried these into French royal heraldry and poems of political prophecy, in which there are also traces of the stag as a symbol of justice. The white hart which acts as a miraculous guide in saints' legends and romances is shown to preserve traces of primitive fertility and royalty symbolism. The continuity and transformational variety of the various motifs and traditions is affirmed.

Preface

This thesis had its origins some years ago in a footnote to Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles (see Chapter Four). Since then my guiding principle has been to follow this stag wherever it led. The pursuit very quickly took me out of any territory in which I could claim to have any prior authority or expertise, and to keep up with my deer I have had, in the time I could spare from teaching modern English literature, to familiarise myself with many specialised areas of study. In attempting to find my bearings I have drawn copiously on the generosity and advice of many better-qualified scholars who have allowed their brains to be picked. Their help has allowed me to avoid some errors and mistakes of emphasis which would otherwise have gone undetected.

I can safely claim that ^onone before me has brought together so much information on the lore and literature of the stag. Various studies have approached aspects of this lore - the principal ones are discussed in the Introduction which follows - and it has often happened that I have hunted my deer in primary sources, only to find that there were secondary writers who had been before me. I hunted the legend of the Oldest Animals (Chapter Three) initially in shameful ignorance of Eleanor Hull's article on the subject, and some years later Sir Kenneth Blaxter wrote to confess that he had pursued the same quarry in ignorance of my own published research. We were, I think, delighted to discover how closely we had corroborated each others' findings. Similarly I had already reached tentative conclusions about the white harts of the Arthurian cycle (Chapter Six) before realising how closely R.S. Loomis's writings on

the Celtic sources tied together the contexts in which the stag appeared. My notes and references to this chapter look as though my primary debt is to Paton and Loomis. In a sense it is, but in fact the chapter was substantially complete before I recognised their importance to my argument.

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I am grateful to the Librarian and staff of the Andersonian Library of the University of Strathclyde for obtaining much out-of-the-way material, to Glasgow University Library, the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, the National Library of Scotland, the British Library, Dr. W. Ryan of the Warburg Institute Library, the Bodleian Library, particularly Mr. W.O. Hassall of the Department of Western Manuscripts, and the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Introduction

Thus the study of the history of imagery is one of the main problems common to all students of the humanities. Yet in our ordinary university teaching it is of very little concern to us and we have little or no opportunity to talk about its general features. My own field is the history of art and I shall therefore choose my examples from this field. But what can be demonstrated here can be demonstrated in all other fields: namely, that images with a meaning peculiar to their own time and place, once created, have a magnetic power to attract other ideas into their sphere; and that they can suddenly be forgotten and remembered again after centuries of oblivion. This is perhaps not quite obvious but it is certainly no revolutionary observation. Few students have had any inducement to think on these lines, and yet it seems to me essential that we should do so in order to be systematic historians.¹

These words of Fritz Saxl are probably the best introduction to the aims and methodology of this thesis. The lecture, entitled "Continuity and Variation in the Meaning of Images", was given at Reading University in 1947, and went on to study briefly the life-cycle of three images through the ages: the god or goddess holding snakes aloft, the image of a man killing a bull, and the winged angel. The lecture showed how each image became classic in a characteristic form which, once fixed, was preserved, forgotten, and subsequently revived, and also how each image was liable to variation. Such concretion in a fixed form is largely what art historians mean by iconography. At the same time Saxl examined the changing ideological content of such images, justifying the belief which he shared with Aby Warburg that the study of images was a humane discipline which offered some answer to the barbarism of Nazi Germany. Through iconography we are led to an understanding not

1 Fritz Saxl, A Heritage of Images (Harmondsworth, 1970), p.14.

only of the forms of earlier civilisations, but equally to an understanding of their beliefs, their habits of thought, liberating us from the tyranny of our own historical situation.

My aim in this thesis is to explore the continuity and variation in a number of images of the stag in order to demonstrate the transmission and concretion of formal characteristics, and to penetrate, as far as possible, the motivating ideas on which they are based and for which they become vehicles. My object is not simply to facilitate the interpretation of particular works of art - paintings, sculptures, or poems - though this should be a useful by-product, but to propose the inherited image as an object of study in its own right, having an existence independent of the particular works in which it occurs. The distinction is, I suppose, Saussurian, for the individual works are only the parole; the image itself is part of the iconographic langue. Guy de Tervarent has described iconography as "un langage perdu", and art historians have long recognised that the visual arts periodically develop their own iconographic vocabularies.² If such vocabularies amount to a language, the dialects which they use have at times been shared with writers, theologians and the people at large. For this reason the study of inherited symbols has never been the exclusive province of the art historian, but has been approached from their own angles by literary critics, anthropologists, psychologists and historians generally. But because for each of these the study of images is subservient to their own discipline it has seldom been undertaken

² Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane, 1450-1600, dictionnaire d'un langage perdu (Geneva, 1958).

for its own sake in a way which would allow equal standing to the artistic, anthropological, religious, political and literary uses of the same image. The problem of any interdisciplinary approach is that it must take account of the interpenetration of each of these contexts, whilst recognising the special technical demands of each discipline and each medium. Discussion of the literary uses of an image demands some awareness of the disciplines of literary criticism, and should beware of discussing a painting as though it were an anthropological document. It demands an awareness of the history of ideas, but should not treat complex works of art merely as documents to illustrate intellectual assumptions.

The science of iconography distinguishes itself from art history in that it is not concerned with questions of artistic value, but is purely taxonomic or hermeneutic. On the one hand iconography is the servant of art history, enabling us to identify the subject of a work of art, to localise it and to date it in many instances. But, as Louis Réau points out, it is more, since through it one can illuminate the history of civilisation of human thought and religious feeling. There is what Réau calls a 'sémantique iconique': "Rien de plus attachant que de suivre la naissance, la vie et la mort des thèmes iconographiques: car les images, qui sont une forme du langage, vivent et meurent comme les mots."³ The creation of a systematic discipline of iconography was uniquely the product of French scholarship in the nineteenth century. Indeed, it is hardly an exaggeration to trace its origins to a single book, and a work of

3 Iconographie de l'art chrétien, 6 vols (Paris, 1955) I, p.9.

literature at that, Victor Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris in 1831.⁴ Hugo's intuition that in the Middle Ages "men had no great thought that they did not write down in stone" foreshadows the whole archaeological effort of nineteenth-century France. The Romantic reappraisal of French medieval architecture, its gradual restoration, preservation and systematic recording, began in the 1840's with the establishment by Guizot of the Commission on Historical Monuments, and was continued by Prosper Mérimé and Viollet le Duc. The need for accurate cataloguing and description of the monuments which so richly decorate French churches of the Middle Ages quickly precipitated in the methodical French mind a systematic discipline capable of classifying decorative detail, of interpreting it and of identifying by their attributes the prophets and saints who are depicted in gothic statuary.

The foundation of the discipline is attributed to Adolphe-Napoléon Didron, whose unfinished Iconographie chrétienne, histoire de Dieu appeared in 1843 with a prefatory dedication to his friend Victor Hugo. Didron perceived that the art of the cathedral was to instruct on an encyclopaedic plan, and he saw in the Specula of the Middle Ages the key to the iconographic organisation of a cathedral such as Chartres; the cathedrals of the thirteenth century were encyclopaedias in stone. This perception was to dominate iconographical thinking until well into the twentieth century. Didron founded the Annales Archéologiques with Charles Cahier, a militant

4 For the history of iconography as a discipline see Réau, op. cit. I, pp. 12-26, also Harry Bober's Foreword to the new Bollingen edition of Emile Mâle, Religious Art in France: the Twelfth Century (Princeton, 1978).

Jesuit who with Arthur Martin was also responsible for the series of Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire et de littérature. In 1856

Abbe Corblet founded the Revue de l'art chrétien and in 1877 wrote a Vocabulaire de symboles et des attributs employés dans l'iconographie chrétienne.⁵ Much research on specific monuments and symbols was contained in individual articles in these journals, but books dealing with Christian symbolism in general began to appear, and the study was no longer confined to French scholars.

In the twentieth century the field has been dominated by the figure of Emile Mâle, whose trilogy on French religious art in the thirteenth, fourteenth and twelfth centuries appeared in that order between 1898 and 1922.⁶ The earlier volumes vindicated fully Didron's view of the encyclopaedic scope of a cathedral such as Chartres. Mâle brought a new rigour to the fanciful excesses of some of his predecessors by insisting on documentary evidence to support the interpretation of particular symbols. The symbolic meanings of thirteenth-century sculptures are shown to derive their authority from such codifications of medieval symbolic thought as Honorius of Autun, Vincent de Beauvais or the Glossa Ordinaria. Whilst such sources are adequate for the unified vision of High Gothic art, however, an increasing awareness amongst modern scholars of Romanesque,

5 See Réau, I, p. 13, for details of these writers and I, pp. 21-26 for a bibliography of works on iconography in general to 1955.

6 Emile Mâle, L'art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France (Paris, 1898); L'art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France (Paris, 1908); L'art religieux du XIIe siècle en France: Etude sur les origines de l'iconographie du moyen âge (Paris, 1922). The English translation of the 1898 volume is familiar to English readers in several editions under the title The Gothic Image.

Byzantine and paleo-Christian art led Mâle in his final volume to recognise the more eclectic sources of medieval symbolism. In the twelfth century no single Speculum will do as a summary of the medieval world-picture, and no simple transposition from Speculum to architecture is adequate. The origins of early-medieval symbolism - and particularly animal symbolism - have to be sought in such esoteric sources as Arab textiles, Armenian manuscripts, and Near-Eastern cylinder seals.

In Mâle's later work this extension of iconography from being merely a codification of High Gothic art to a wider exploration of the concretion and transmission of artistic symbols goes hand-in-hand with the development generally of iconographic study in the twentieth century. In this development the work of art historians has been complemented by the thinking of anthropologists and historians of religion. The work of Mircea Éliade will perhaps stand as representative of the latter school.⁷ According to Éliade symbolic thinking, as it is manifested in religious iconography and in art and literature, is a fundamental and universal aspect of human nature and culture. "The symbol reveals certain aspects of reality - the deepest aspects - which defy any other means of knowledge. Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they respond to a need and fulfil a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being."⁸ Alongside homo erectus, tool-making man, and homo ludens we must now set homo symbolicus, man the maker

7 See particularly A History of Religious Ideas (London, 1979); Images and Symbols (London, 1961).

8 Images and Symbols p. 12.

of symbolic images.

Éliade assumes that man lives by images, and he has explored a number of those images; the lost paradise; the world centre; the eternal return; which seem to be universal in all times and all cultures. One does not need to seek the sources of such myths in any single culture, or trace their diffusion thence into others. Such images are, we say, archetypal. Most of the images which have this degree of universality have also a degree of generality (though their structure may be quite complex) - images of the sun, moon, earth, sky and the primordial tree. In my view it is doubtful whether the image of the stag has this degree of universality, and the evidence for it as an archetypal symbol remains, finally, unconvincing, though the case is not closed. As a symbol of time or longevity the stag image almost reaches the level of universality which, I suppose, would justify an archetypal status, with examples ranging from Celtic Europe to China, but I think it is true to say that none of the examples I have discovered occurs in a culture which has not been open to diffusionist influence from other cultures in which the stag is found as a symbol of time. The question of universality is vexed in this case by the variety of species. Though our examples occasionally include the unantlered hind or doe, it is the nobly-antlered stag that in the temperate climes of Eurasia annually renews its horns

which is our fundamental image.⁹ If we were to look for a stag archetype in Africa or South America, we should be looking at an essentially different animal. Even so we shall occasionally have to recognise other Eurasian subspecies - the reindeer or the antelope - to which our symbolism has adhered.

To say that the stag is probably not an archetypal symbol in the sense understood by Éliade, however, is not to say that it has not functioned as a symbol in "primitive" religions, or that it has not been associated with the types of primordial symbolism which are characteristic of religious thought. On the contrary, as we shall see in our first chapter, early stag symbolism is most plausibly interpreted in the light of totemistic, shamanistic, seasonal and solstitial symbolisms of early societies. The stag certainly figures in the hunting mythologies of Palaeolithic man, as it does in the fertility symbolism of neolithic farming cultures. The annual renewal of its antlers is the most probable explanation for its early association with ideas of seasonal renewal.¹⁰ Its transition to a

9 The red deer, cervus elaphus, is the most widespread species of European deer. The fallow deer, cervus dama, common from prehistoric times in southern Europe, was probably introduced to Britain by the Romans. It is usually impossible to tell which species is intended in early representations, though there is a difference between the tined antlers of the red and the palmate antlers of the fallow deer. A stippled pattern may indicate the fallow, though there are wide variations, seasonal and other, in the colour and markings of deer. The other European species is the roe, cervus capreolus. In matters of terminology it is correct to speak of antlers rather than horns; the male and female of the red deer are designated stag (or hart) and hind, of the fallow and roe deer buck and doe. The Latin for roe deer, caprea, was liable to confusion with caper, capra, goat.

10 The suggestion has been made by Marija Gimbutas, The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe (London, 1974), p. 171.

symbol of time and longevity would seem to be a natural extension of this. There is no way of either proving or disproving such hypotheses, however, and they recommend themselves solely on the basis of their plausibility. It is certainly true that, throughout the various traditions we shall be examining, the idea of renewal remains the most constant symbolism underlying the stag image, whether it is the baptismal renewal of the Christian neophyte, the psychopomp which translates the soul to the next world, or the medieval renovatio of empire.

Analogies between the study of iconography and various theories of language are suggestive. The continuity and variation of images inevitably suggests a diachronic approach, but their development is not merely linear, since related images coexist at any particular period. They have, so to speak, a horizontal as well as a vertical structure; they have a semiology as well as an etymology. The process of transformation can be as much influenced by the structure of contingent images as by any changes in Weltanschauung or artistic mode. This is demonstrably the case with various images of the stag, where, for instance, the formula of the Oldest Animals is occasionally picked up by other traditions of the long-lived stag, including the legend of Caesar's deer. It ought to be possible, therefore, to write not simply the history of a particular motif, but something approaching a transformational grammar of the associated symbols. This claim may be unduly ambitious, but it has at least some heuristic advantages in explaining the problems of classification which we run into in most of the orthodox dictionaries of artistic symbols. The problems of classification of animal motifs

in such dictionaries are difficult to solve because of the transformational fluidity of particular motifs. None of the dictionaries I have seen arrives at a common system of classification for the different iconographic traditions in which the stag figures. Guy de Tervarent (1958), for instance, finds the following types of the stag in fifteenth-century secular art: attribute of Diana; attribute of Prudence; sexual ardour; promptitude; melancholy; attribute of hearing; attribute of lyric poetry; attribute of Cybele, of Eve and of History.¹¹ Whilst a case may be made out for all of these, it is notable that a different emphasis could be put on several of them which would support a quite different scheme. For instance de Tervarent finds the attribute of promptness of action in the winged stag on the basis of the sixteenth-century motto, cursum intendimus alis, which Paulo Giovio in the sixteenth century attaches to the heraldic badge of the Connétable de Bourbon.¹² Though the fame of Giovio's catalogue of imprese will support de Tervarent's interpretation for later sixteenth-century artists, it has no authority at an earlier date, and it is possible, as I argue later, to see the essential significance of the winged stag in a quite different light. The truth is that the symbolism of received motifs is much more flexible, closer to transformational grammar than to the fixed meanings which such iconographic dictionaries suppose. The very identity of a motif is likely to change, depending on the particular aspect of its received iconography one chooses to stress.

11 De Tervarent, col. 65-69.

12 *ibid.* col. 67.

Charbonneau-Lassay's taxonomy (1940) of Christian stag symbolism distinguishes the following motifs: emblem of Christ's battle with evil (the stag vanquishes the serpent); the stag as symbol of light; the stag as object of a marvellous quest (St Eustace); emblem of abundance (Cernunnos); emblem of the apostles; emblem of the Christian soul thirsting for divine grace; symbol of longevity; eucharistic emblem; Christian soul pursued by the hounds of earthly sin (in a local tradition of Merovingian terra-cotta plates); as the faithful soul.¹³ A different scheme emerges, however, if, instead of classifying symbolic meanings one distinguishes symbolic attributes. This is Marcelle Thiébaux's approach (1974) as she confidently distinguishes five iconographic types: the thirsting stag, the serpent-slaying stag, the nobly antlered stag, the harried stag and the transpierced stag.¹⁴ Several of these five types go back to the classical accounts of the serpent-eating stag and are differentiated only by the particular aspect of that traditional combat which they happen to emphasise.

The variety of these schemes of classification is to some extent attributable to the fact that each takes different types of source or confines itself to a particular period. We should not expect perhaps to find the same set of symbolic motives in fifteenth-century paintings that we find in medieval narrative literature. But we may be excused from suspecting that there is evidence of some wider taxonomic confusion. Perhaps we should limit

13 L. Charbonneau-Lassay, Le bestiaire du Christ (Milan, 1940), pp. 241-264.

14 Marcelle Thiébaux, The Stag of Love (New York, 1974), pp. 40-41.

the definition of iconographic motives to instances where a few clearly-identifiable objects show indisputable signs of influence. Merovingian terra-cotta plates, showing a stag fleeing a group of hounds towards a crucifix, clearly form a single iconographic type (Plate 1). Thirteenth-century capitals showing a stag confronting a centaur, which are found in a number of French churches, are equally clearly-defined (Plate 2). Late-fifteenth- and sixteenth-century pictures of the stag as a symbol of earthly life or the lover of secular poetry being pursued by hounds named "Desire", "Thought" or "Disdain", form a distinct group, not obviously influenced by or cognate with the Merovingian plates, which one might otherwise classify with them under the heading of the hunted stag (Plate 3).¹⁵ Though there is much to be said for this narrowness, however, it evades, rather than solves some of the more interesting problems. The confronting stag and centaur, for example, though it is an identifiable motif in its own right, cannot be entirely divorced from monuments in which each animal is featured separately; it draws on the received symbolism of both stag and centaur, and it is difficult to believe that it can be adequately understood without looking at

15 E. Picot, "Le cerf allégorique dans les tapisseries et les miniatures", Bulletin de la société française de reproductions de manuscrits à peintures (1913), pp. 57-67, studies examples of this iconographic type. Plate 3 shows an example from Fregoso's poem La Cerva Bianca (1525); the lover is pursued by the hounds Desio and Pensier. This allegorical love chase has its literary equivalents, which are studied by Thiébaux, op. cit. pp. 144-246. These include the anonymous thirteenth-century Li dis dou cerf amoureux; Le dit du cerf blanc, attributed to Machaut; Jean Acart de Hesdin's L'amoureuse prise; and Hadamar von Laber's Jagd and its successors. For details of these, see Bibliography. In Shakespeare's Twelfth Night Orsino confesses on first beholding Olivia, "That instant was I turned into a hart/And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,/E'er since pursue me" (1.1.21-23). The image is a speaking picture which readily calls Fregoso's frontispiece to mind.

other confronting animals of different species which are found on Gothic capitals. Indeed "confronting animals" exist as an iconographic pattern with a long and interesting history quite independent of any individual species.¹⁶

Of previous studies of the iconography of the stag there are two or three which are sufficiently wide-ranging to deserve preliminary discussion, particularly since we shall want to refer to them from time to time in the ensuing discussion. All iconographic studies proceed by assembling as many documents as possible, putting them side-by-side, and seeing if they will stand up, rather like a children's zoo. The value of a study may thus be quite independent of its general theory or hermeneutic argument, resting instead on the sheer plenitude of the sources it is able industriously to unearth. Criticism of the theoretical basis or interpretive thesis of my predecessors in the study of cervine symbolism does not, therefore, diminish my indebtedness to their labours, or undermine the continuing value of their research.

Félicie d'Ayzac's two long articles on the symbolism of the stag, subtitled "Étude de zoologie mystique et monumentale au moyen âge", appeared in the Revue de l'art chrétien in the 1860's.¹⁷ They

16 See e.g. Mâle, Gothic Image (New York, 1972) p. 346. The stag and centaur on the Porte Rouge of Notre-Dame have been discussed by Jean Bayet, "Le symbolisme du cerf et du centaur à la Porte Rouge de Notre-Dame de Paris", Revue Archéologique, 44, pp. 21-68. This contains a useful resumé of cervine iconography. Other examples are to be found at Saint-Aignan, Saint-Parize le Chatel, Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, and Melle, Sèvres. See Plate 2. See V.H. Debidour, Le bestiaire sculpté au moyen âge (Paris, 1961), pl. 289, p. 207.

17 Revue de l'art chrétien, 1st ser., 8 (1864), pp. 541-557, 568-594.

were intended to form part of the Traité de Symbolique which remained unfinished at the end of her life. Mme d'Ayzac had the misfortune to be savaged by Emile Mâle, and her reputation has never recovered. She is singled out as chief among those of his predecessors who are found guilty of inventing fanciful symbolic meanings for what were purely decorative details in gothic sculpture: "True symbolism holds too large a place in medieval art to make it necessary to look for it where it does not exist," he urges, and dismisses Mme d'Ayzac's work as "ingenious but sterile".¹⁸ Such criticisms are largely irrelevant however to her two articles on the stag, which are not, as it happens, concerned with church sculpture at all, but rather with the texts from patristic writings on which she was an authority. Early fathers and medieval theologians take the classical description of the stag that preserves its life by eating snakes as the basis of a variety of ingenious allegorisations. Mme d'Ayzac's articles show admirably not only the primary allegorical traditions but also the variety and inventiveness of individual writers. For instance alongside the common anagogical identification of the stag with Christ, for which there is evidence from the catacombs onwards, there is a particular variant, found in a single manuscript, in which the stag which drives out serpents by the breath of its nostrils is compared to Christ driving out the demon Legio in the episode of the Gadarene swine.¹⁹ Other writers justify the general anagogical symbolism in different ways, for instance by playing on the homonymy of cervus and servus

18 Gothic Image, p. 51.

19 d'Ayzac, pp. 549-551.

the latter epithet for Christ derived from Philippians, 2.7. This pun justifies Philippe de Vitry's allegorisation of the myth of Actaeon in the Ovide Moralisé, in which Actaeon is identified with Christ, who was both serf and cerf. Actaeon, who saw Diana bathing naked, was changed into a stag and devoured by his own hounds, symbolises Christ; the hounds are the Jews who persecuted him, and the naked Diana, somewhat unexpectedly (but anything is possible for a writer who is determined to find Christian mysteries in pagan myths) turns out to be the naked godhead, which cannot be seen without a veil.²⁰ In its allegorical interpretation the stag could symbolise the apostles, for a variety of reasons, some of which depend on the allegorical ingenuity of the individual writer, others of which concrete into a glossatorial topos. Among the latter is the fact that in Genesis, 49.21, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, called Naphtali, is compared to "a hind let loose, who preaches goodly words". Other iconographic traditions, which influenced the visual arts, describe the thirsting stag drinking at the fountains of pure doctrine, or fleeing to the high hills, whence cometh our help.²¹

The richness of these variants casts some doubt on Emile Mâle's view that owing to the imitativeness of medieval writers a single source will usually tell us all we need to know about a particular topic. His confident assertion that "it was almost entirely through

20 *ibid.*, pp. 554-556. The improbable allegorisation of the Actaeon myth does not seem to have had much of a following, though I believe it will account for the miniature in a late-fifteenth century Book of Hours from Amiens in the Bodleian Library which depicts a stag with a crudely-drawn wing, and the name ACTEON. MS Douce 152, fol. 73v.

21 *ibid.* p. 569.

Honourous of Autun that the teaching of the Bestiaries reached the medieval clergy" is questionable.²² The current version of this attitude, that one need seldom look further than Vincent de Beauvais to discover what the Middle Ages believed about the natural world, is convenient but dangerous. Like any other period of history, the Middle Ages developed by a combination of tradition and innovation, authority and dissent, and its artistic codes are a mixture of imitation and invention, received topoi and individual conceits. These, after all, are the conditions of artistic creativity in any period.

Medieval religious symbolism as expounded in Patristic writings is also the subject of Herbert Kolb's 1971 study of the stag that eats snakes.²³ Kolb writes as a Germanist, and takes as his starting point a rather minor commentary on the Psalms by Notker of St Gall. Notker's commentary on Psalm 41 explains that the stag that eats snakes and hurries to the water signifies the Christian who has swallowed the venom of sin and hastens to refresh himself at the fount of Christ, the fons refectionis. Kolb notes the principal sources for this association of holy writ with ancient natural history in psalm commentaries from Augustine onwards, and he traces the parallel transmission of the same belief in the encyclopaedists, from Isidore of Seville to Hrabanus Maurus and Vincent de Beauvais. He goes on to examine the ways in which techniques of exegesis which had been applied to the Bible were brought to bear on the allegorical

22 Gothic Image, p. 43.

23 "Der Hirsch, der Schlangen frisst", in Medievalia litteraria: Helmut de Boor Festschr., edited by Ursula Hennig and Herbert Kolb (Munich, 1971), pp. 583-610.

interpretation of nature, giving us a mystica descriptio natura cervi. Twelfth-century writers propose that nature might serve as a text book of moral instruction for the illiterate, who could not read the lingua sacra of Latin. Thus Hugo von Fouilley's twelfth-century tract On animals and various things is addressed ad aedificationem illiterati. Kolb's study is useful in clarifying the beliefs and habits of thought underlying medieval iconography, particularly the allegorical reading of nature which is nowhere better illustrated than in the lore of the stag, but he is less successful in vindicating his belief in the importance of viewing medieval literature in the light of a comprehensive review of particular themes, for his own review is less than ideally comprehensive, and needs to be amplified by a number of sources which he ignores.²⁴ It is rather surprising that he nowhere mentions the popular medieval Bestiaries, which provide a fertile fund of sources for the serpent-eating stag, preserving the essential traditions and commonly alluding to Psalm 41, whilst frequently varying allegorical emphasis in a variety of ways. He does not mention Félicie d'Ayzac's articles on the same subject, nor does he discuss the use of the motif as it is found portrayed on ecclesiastical monuments, or in the literature and art of the East. Comprehensiveness is an ideal more easily aspired to than achieved.

Whilst Félicie d'Ayzac and Herbert Kolb explore the symbolic traditions which the stag image developed in medieval exegetic texts, a quite different range of symbolic motifs is uncovered by two scholars who have written independently on the stag in medieval

24 *ibid.*, p. 589.

secular and vernacular literature. Carl Pschmidt and more recently Sergio Cigada have examined the range of narrative motifs in which the stag plays a role in medieval folktales, legends and romances.²⁵

The classification of narrative motifs, which has been notably advanced in our own day by the work of Stith Thompson, throws up many of the same taxonomic problems which we have recognised in iconographic studies of the fine arts. A similar fluidity imperils the definition of narrative Types to that which affects iconographic motifs. Indeed, throughout this thesis we shall be studying the periodic concretion, diffusion and interaction of narrative Types, iconographic motifs and rhetorical topoi. If something of the complexity of this process can be demonstrated, then it may not be unduly immodest to claim that the interest of our study extends beyond anything it can reveal about the particular images of the stag which are our immediate subject.

Carl Pschmidt's doctoral dissertation of 1911 identifies in its title a single folktale Type to which all the narrative variants he discusses are related. Die Sage von der verfolgten Hinde traces the evolution of narrative motifs, in which the deer is characteristically pursued by an earthly hunter across water, back to a hypothetical primitive Indo-European solar myth. Pschmidt's method is strongly influenced not only by nineteenth-century theories of comparative mythology but also by the techniques of philological analysis which

25 Carl Pschmidt, Die Sage von der verfolgten Hinde (Greifswald, 1911); Sergio Cigada, "La leggenda medievale del Cervo Bianco", Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (Memorie Classe di scienze, morale, storiche e filologiche), Ser. 8, vol. XII (1965), pp. 1-120.

are associated with the name of Max Müller. In support of the solar hypothesis the etymological association between Semitic word for light, qaran, and the word for deer, qeren (cf. lat. cornu, ir. corn, thus Cernunnos, "the horned one"), is adduced to support his thesis that the Ceryneian hind which Hercules hunts across the river Keladon is based on an archetype in which the siderial/moon hind is hunted across the sky by the sun stag.²⁶ Pschmidt sets great stress on the detail of the golden horns of the deer which some versions mention, urging that they ought to have a mythic meaning and are not mere poetic licence. Hebrew and Arabic texts speak of the hind as a symbol of light, and there is further evidence quite independent of the etymological arguments Pschmidt brings forward that the stag functioned in several early cultures as a sun symbol.²⁷ In the Middle Ages this primitive or Indo-European archetype issued in two main folktale patterns. The first of these is comprehended by a group of tribal migration legends in which the deer leads hunters across or into a lake or water, typical of which is a tale in Procopius.²⁸ The second comprehends the Hindenfeesage proper, the folktale of the deer which is really a fairy woman who enchants the hero away from his companions. Various subtypes of this narrative type are distinguished. The St Eustace legend is identified as a type of the Hindenfeesage on the grounds that in both the hero is separated from his companions. We may wonder whether this detail is not incidental rather than essential, however. Pschmidt acknowledges that in the St Eustace

26 Pschmidt, p. 23.

27 See p. 30 below.

28 Pschmidt, p. 31. The Procopius tale is discussed below, p. 39.

legend the element of enchantment is lacking, and he recognises that the vision of the stag has been contaminated by the received Christian symbolism in which the stag represents Christ, as we know from the iconography of the serpent-eating stag. The corrupting influence of this rival tradition will account, Pschmadt believes, for the fact that in the St Eustace legend the animal is unambiguously identified as an antlered male stag.²⁹ Plausible though this is, it seems to betray the weakness of Pschmadt's approach. He is committed to stress that the deer is female for the not very good reason that he wishes to take the Hindenfee Type, in which the deer is identified with a fairy maiden, as normative. The truth is, however, that, whereas there is a more-or-less distinct Type in which the deer is associated with a maiden, fairy or otherwise, in a great many of the medieval romances the deer is clearly a stag, identified by its antlers. The classical legend of the Ceryneian hind is, in fact, rather exceptional in attributing, against all zoological evidence, antlers to the female deer. Pschmadt's thesis, erudite and suggestive though it often is, runs up against the danger which confronts all attempts to construct a hypothetical archetype for the miscellaneous varieties of a particular tale. Like those words which philologists change, even though there is no written record of their existence, Pschmadt's *Hindenfeesage ought always to be thus preceded by an asterisk.

Much the same is true of Sergio Cigada's "leggenda medievale del Cervo Bianco" (1965), for just as Pschmadt's title singles out the definitive sex of the female deer as essential to the narrative

29 *ibid.* p. 33.

Type, so for Cigada it is the colour of the deer which is definitive. Cigada takes as his starting point the Arthurian romances featuring a white stag, and he attempts to draw some general conclusions about the transmission of Arthurian narrative material from the evolutionary patterns suggested by the handling in various texts of this detail. His argument is that the legend of the white stag does not go back, as Loomis argued, to some lost Celtic source, but developed in parallel from various sources and in several distinct traditions. He shows that the earliest White Hart episode in Arthurian romance is not antedated by any known Celtic source, and that many of the later Celtic uses of the White Stag are manifestly indebted to French sources, rather than to any autochthonous, primitive Celtic archetype.³⁰ The fact that the White Stag appears as a miraculous guide in Carolingian epics long before it makes its appearance in the Arthurian cycle, and that stag guides appear as early as the sixth century in Gregory of Tours and Jordanus also argues against assuming a unique Celtic source for the motif.

It should be clear, however, that the arbitrary selection of a particular detail as the definitive aspect of a symbolic motif can be highly misleading, suggesting analogies between essentially different motifs. Cigada's title indicates that he assumes that there is a single legend of the White Stag in the Middle Ages for which the attribute of whiteness is definitive. Despite his unquestionable success in showing a common symbolism underlying a large number of

³⁰ The transformations of this material will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

Arthurian romances it becomes clear even from within his own sources that there is not one legend here by several. When one adds to his impressive list from French literature a large number of white stags from very different traditions which he does not mention, it becomes clear that what is at stake is not a single narrative Type or motif but a variety of literary and iconographic traditions, taking in not just French romances, but folktales, saints' legends, and heraldic symbols, which have probably influenced each other. The shared iconography of the symbol depends, in fact, on a variety of attributes whose metamorphosis in particular texts is seldom predictable. The pattern which emerges depends, like the pattern in T.S. Eliot's carpet, very largely on one's point of view, or on the iconographic detail which one chooses to emphasise.³¹ Even Marcelle Thiébaux's "Stag of Love" is less a literary Type than a loosely-defined species, containing many sub-species, not to mention hybrids and lusus naturae.

This initial review of some of the most noteworthy literature on our subject may have served to suggest what seem to me to be the main methodological problems of a study of images. As I see it these are largely problems of identification and classification. The identity of a symbol depends very largely on which of its attributes one chooses to select, and despite occasional fixities, it is always likely to change. My chapter headings select the attributes which I

31 To be fair Cigada seems to acknowledge this, p. 29, where he recognises that the White Stag may be less "una entita autonoma" than "una tessera di mosaico favolosa che pui collegarsi ad altre particolari immagini, pure autonome, per costruire (a seconda della fantasia e della capacita di uno scrittore) una completa sequenza narrative".

choose to emphasise in order to suggest a certain relationship between various documents, but very often different groupings and relationships will suggest themselves between the same material. A premature synthesis based on an unrepresentative selection of material is an ever-present danger, though it is one which can never be wholly overcome if only because surviving sources and documents are only a part of what must originally have existed. The further one goes back the truer this is, the more tentative must be the putative connections between similar images, and the more often we must have recourse to the hypothetical asterisk.

CHAPTER ONE

Origins

The first paintings of deer are among the earliest examples of human art (Plate 4). They date from pre-pastoral cultures when man was still a hunter, and no doubt the art of the Lascaux caves reflects the life of a society which depended for its survival on its hunting skills.¹ It is commonly assumed that these exquisitely painted animals served some ritual or totemic function, that they would be thought to bring success to the hunter or power over the hunted animal on which life depended. What we see on the cave walls at Lascaux is the impression made on men by herds of migrating animals, including cattle, horses, ibex and bison as well as deer. The Valley of the Vézère was probably the thoroughfare for immense reindeer herds migrating in spring towards the pasture lands of Auvergne. The herds might be ambushed or driven over a cliff, as in the cave painting from Valltorta in Spain (Plate 5). What never ceases to amaze us about these paintings at Lascaux is their liveliness; there is nothing stylised about these animals; they seem as if drawn from life. In this they are very uncharacteristic of most primitive art, indeed the usual connotations of the word 'primitive' make it quite inappropriate for art of such subtlety and refinement.

1 For a critical bibliography of scholarship on prehistoric rock art see Mircea Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas, vol. 1: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries, translated by Willard Trask (London, 1979), pp. 380-382.

None of the cave art found elsewhere in southern France can compare for splendour or interest with the Lascaux paintings. The Grotte des Trois Frères near Ariège is its closest rival but it belongs to a different age and a different world. Lascaux is Aurignacian, twenty or even thirty thousand years B.C.; the Grotte des Trois Frères is some ten to fifteen thousand years later in the period known as Magdalenian. Lascaux man is not much removed from Neanderthal man; Magdalenian man is homo sapiens. Lascaux art is notable for the virtual absence of human figures, but in the engravings of the Grotte des Trois Frères it is clear that the animals relate to a more developed cult in which there are not only naturalistically portrayed animals, as at Lascaux, but humanoid figures dressed up in animal masks. The engravings are jumbled, superimposed and impossible to make out from a photograph, difficult even with the naked eye, and it is usual to rely on the careful drawings made by the pioneering investigator, Abbé Breuil. These reveal two humanoid figures including a bison-headed, ithyphallic man who is springing or dancing and possibly playing on a bow. The other figure is known as the Sorcerer and he is antlered (Plate 6). He is the cave's only painted figure, isolated from the other engravings high up on a rock so that he seems to preside over all the other beasts, a Master of the Animals. Attempts to interpret his significance must be pure conjecture; we cannot know whether he is a sorcerer, a shaman, a god or a man, or even whether such concepts and distinctions were available to the society which produced him. But unlike the lifelike animals of Lascaux, he and his confrère are products not of observation, but of imagination. Only a culture

which is capable of concepts, capable of abstracting various attributes of animals and men and recombining them into new and hybrid forms is capable of such art. And whatever our scepticism we ought to admit that it may not be pure coincidence that this antlered figure seems to be a prototype of various antlered deities in the prehistoric period in the West. Abbé Breuil's interpretation is still worthy of note: "He is the most important figure in the cave ... which we judge to represent the Spirit ruling over the abundance of game and the hunt's success."²

It is only in the latest stage of prehistory with the art of the Bronze Age, when European societies had developed a pastoral culture, that it becomes possible to argue that the stag figure came to have any special totemic or ritual significance, in the last millennium B.C., and then the proliferation of stag motifs in a variety of cultures is such that it has led some scholars to generalise the idea of a prehistoric deer-cult, and even to use the apparent diffusion of stag motifs as evidence of tribal migration or cultural influence.³ Pastoral cultures, it is thought, are anxious about the fertility of their crops, the continuity of the tribe and the processes of death and regeneration. Anthropology suggests that these processes are often not held as discrete. It seems plausible to suggest that

2 See Georges Bataille, Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art (Lausanne, 1955), p. 120.

3 J.G. McKay, "The Deer-cult and the Deer-goddess cult of the ancient Caledonians", Folklore, 43 (1932), pp. 144-174. Josef Weisweiler, "Vorindogermanische Schichten der irischen Heldensage", Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie, 24 (1953), pp. 10-55, 165-197.

in the annual renewal of the stag's horns early pastoral societies found a symbol for this overriding preoccupation. And if this is the case we shall see how much of the later symbolism of the stag which has been preserved and developed in historical times has not entirely lost touch with such a primitive root meaning, for the stag remains predominantly a token of prosperity, immortality and renewal whether as a psychopomp in the funerary art of the Romans, a symbol of baptismal regeneration to the early Christians or of imperial renovatio for the medieval kings.

In Anatolia about 2,500 B.C. a civilisation flourished which buried its kings in grave-mounds or Huyuks containing metal sun-discs, weapons and figures of bulls and stags. These tombs contain ornaments called standards, because they were probably mounted at the end of a pole for use in funeral processions (Plate 7). We find in these artefacts a developed iconography which includes abstract irradiating, intersecting and swastika-like patterns which Hamit Kosay interprets plausibly as sun symbols. We find a stag in one instance inside the spiral disc where Kosay finds that the stag undoubtedly represents the sun, and in another disc two fawns and a stag with sun-like antlers. In a final plate the solar disc has vanished "to be replaced exclusively by the totemic animal", as Kosay says. Fragmentary recollections of this use in a very early culture of the

stag as a sun symbol are found in later times and at various places.⁴

It is not in Anatolia, however, but in the art of the northern nomads which flourished from about 1000 B.C. until the beginning of the Christian era from Mongolia across the Russian Steppes to the Baltic that we should look to find the prehistoric sources of the stag motif. Highly conventional in its iconographic vocabulary the Scythian animal style influenced the art of the migration period at the beginning of our era and thus provides a basis for considering collectively the animal motifs and to some extent the animal legends of such diverse peoples as the Celts, the Avars and the Vikings, though these cultures were open to a variety of other influences, of course, particularly Oriental and classical. Although Scythian animal style includes other animals such as the boar, the bear, the ibex, the goat and an indeterminate feline species, it is the stag

4 Much of the evidence for the stag as a solar symbol was assembled by Carl Pschmidt. We might add the eleventh-century Icelandic "Song of the Sun": "I saw the sun-stag travelling south; two men bridled his bridle; his feet were still held by the ground, but his antlers stretched to the sky" (trans. C.V. Pilcher, 1950, verse 55). According to Alfred Salmony the Chinese Shang symbols for the word deer include the character for fire and sun, Antler and Tongue: An Essay on Ancient Chinese Symbolism, Artibus Asiae (Ascona, 1954) p. 19. The Hungarian scholar Sebastian Gyula records a myth of a miraculous stag which comes down from the clouds in a path of light, carrying the sun on its forehead, and the moon on its sides. On earth it haunts rivers and lakes, and tells earthly hunters that it is a celestial envoy. I have not been able to examine Gyula's sources for this myth, which appears to have analogues in the foundation legend recorded by Procopius (8.6) and the legend of Hunor and Mogor, who follow a mysterious deer. A. Alföldi believes that there is a connection between the stag legends of prehistoric central Asia and the culture of Anatolia. H.Z. Kosay, "Disques solaires d'Alaya-Hoyuk", Annual of the British School at Athens, 37 (1936-37), pp. 16-165; H.Z. Kosay, Les Fouilles d'Alaca Hoyuk (Ankara, 1951), p. 186n cites Gyula, Regos Enekek (Ankara, n.d.), p. 1186 (not seen) and Andras Alföldi in Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 12, ed. J.B. Bury (1939).

figure which predominates, and does so in a highly characteristic posture. The crouching stag, with its legs carefully folded beneath its belly, its outstretched head, and timorously staring eye, is undoubtedly vigorous and suggestive, and yet utterly typical and formalised (Plate 8). This particular stag attitude is reduplicated over a period of more than six hundred years from as far apart as Mongolia and Crimea. Variations on this characteristic pose are also found in which the stag may be either half standing, his hind legs folded, and fore legs extended, as though caught in the act of scrambling to his feet, or else wholly standing. Another type shows the head reverted, but all of these variant attitudes form particular iconographic types, illustrated by more than one example, and there are very few Scythian stags which do not conform to an established type.⁵

Archaeological finds provide evidence for a plausible guess as to the functions of stags in Scythian culture. Modern excavations have confirmed the essential accuracy of Herodotus's account of their funeral customs. After a long procession from tribe to tribe the embalmed body of the chief was interred in a tomb round which numerous horses were sacrificed.

They take out their entrails, clean them, fill them with chaff and sew them up. Then they put half the rim of a wheel with the hollow side upwards on two stakes, and the other half-rim on two others, fixing many such frames, drive stout stakes lengthwise through the horses to their necks

5 See E.H. Minns, "The Art of the Northern Nomads", Proceedings of the British Academy, 27 (1942), pp. 47-99; Gregory Borovka, Scythian Art, trans. V.G. Childe (New York, 1928); N.L. Tchlenova, "Le cerf scythe", Artibus Asiae, 26 (1963), pp. 27-65, plates I-V. Tchlenova's plates show clearly the range of attitudes which the stag assumes in Scythian art.

and hoist them onto the rims. The front rims support the horses' shoulders and the rear ones their thighs and bellies, while both pairs of legs hang free. They put reins and bridles on the horses, draw them forward and tie them to pegs.⁶

A tomb discovered in the Altai mountains at Pazyryk had its contents marvellously preserved by refrigeration. The horses in it were wearing reindeer saddles and masks of felt and leather representing reindeer (Plate 9). It seems that there at least the antlered deer was conceived as the appropriate mode of transport for the dead chief to the other world. The fact that many of the stag figures in wood or metal found in Scythian tombs have been identified as pole-terminals also fits in with this funerary significance, for such poles are associated exclusively with burial sites, and must have formed part of the impedimenta of the funeral procession. Borovka (1928) noted that a distinct variant showed the stag not as crouching, but with the legs hanging down (Plate 10). I say 'hanging down' advisedly since the hoofs are not shown flat on the ground, but pointing downwards as if the stag were "suspended in air" - Borovka's expression.⁷ Is it not Herodotus who explains this detail in the words "both pairs of legs hang free"? If this correspondence is significant we should conclude that such deer are not representations of living animals, but specifically the sacrificed deer which accompanied the dead chief to the other world. They are not "suspended in air", although that is the way they appear on ornamental plaques, but suspended on some elaborate contrivance such as the structure of stakes and wheels described by Herodotus. The possibility that other deer images in Scythian art were thought of as psychopomps, conducting the soul of

⁶ Herodotus, 4.82.

⁷ Borovka, p. 100.

the dead chief to the other world, cannot be dismissed.

It will be remembered that the name of Hrothgar's hall in Beowulf is Heorot, which means Hart. Earlier editors supposed it might refer to the antler-shaped gable-ends or beams, but the discovery of a bronze stag on an iron ring among the treasures of the Sutton Hoo ship burial has inclined opinion towards the view that the hart was a royal symbol (Plate 11). The Sutton Hoo stag has traditionally been referred to as the royal standard, as it was originally thought that it was attached to the iron standard found with it, but subsequent examination has shown that it belongs with the carved stone known as the whetstone, which would fit comfortably onto a royal knee, where it would function as a sceptre. The provenance of the bronze stag is not known, but it is unique in the Germanic world, and is thought to originate from distant parts and possibly from an earlier period. Even Alaca Huyuk has been canvassed, but the Scythian pole terminals seem to offer a closer analogy.⁸

The use of stags as psychopomps seems to be picked up by a number of early representations of stag-chariots, most notably among which is the Strettweg model wagon, which shows a yoke of stags harnessed to an elaborate funerary wagon (Plate 12). In Greek myth the goddess Artemis is often associated with stag-drawn carriages. Pausanias describes the annual festival in Patrai in honour of the goddess during which an altar was built and a procession held in which the sacred maiden rode on a car drawn by a yoke of stags.⁹

8 R. Bruce-Mitford, Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology (London, 1974), pp. 6-15, 61n, 63n.

9 Pausanias, 7.18.7. A.B. Cook, "Animal worship in the Mycenaean Age", Journal of Hellenic Studies, 14 (1894), pp. 81-196, pp. 133-138, "The Cult of the Stag".

As part of the festival all kinds of animals were sacrificed. Artemis was, of course, always associated with the stag - it was her constant companion. Her transformation into Diana the huntress in Roman religion is simply a rationalisation of this attribute. She was sometimes known as the Keeper of the Animals, and her special province was the world of living things. A common epithet for Artemis in Greek is Elaphaia or Elaphobolus, "Stag-eater", and as Frazer pointed out, whenever a god is described as eater of a particular animal, the animal was originally the god himself. Plutarch mentions a festival called the Elaphobolia at Hyampolis at which cakes in the shape of stags were offered to Artemis, and at Athens in the month of Elaphobolion deer were sacrificed to her. Artemis may be identified with Taygete, the Ceryneian hind, whose capture constitutes the third labour of Hercules.¹⁰ Indeed according to this legend the hind was one of five with golden horns which Artemis had hunted. The other four she had already captured and harnessed to her chariot. The detail of the golden horns betrays the legend's corruption of its sources, whatever they were, since, apart from the reindeer, there is no species of deer of which the female bears horns. The hind with the golden horns is a biological monstrosity. Antlered deer are shown suckling fawns in a number of archaeological documents, including Luristan bronzes and Greek intaglios (Plate 13). It is difficult

10 Taygete was one of the Pleiades, daughters of Atlas. To escape the pursuit of Zeus she was changed by Artemis into a doe, and in gratitude she later consecrated a doe to the goddess, inscribed with Artemis's name on its collar. Pindar, Olymp., iii; Callimachus, Hymn, iii; Apollodorus, Library, 2.5.3.

to know whether to attribute this motif to zoological ignorance, or to follow E.H. Minns in believing that it shows the lingering influence of northern nomadic traditions of reindeer. In the case of Artemis we should reflect that the sex of the deer simply corresponds to that of the goddess whose apotheosis it is.¹¹

An equally important stag god is the Celtic deity known as Cernunnos. In the famous panel of the Gundestrup cauldron he appears as a Master of the Animals (Plate 14). His most definitive attribute is the set of antlers on his head. In his left hand he holds a ram-horned serpent, in his right a torque. Next to him stands a stag with antlers just like his own, and surrounding him are a variety of other animals, including a boy riding what was once thought to be a dolphin but has recently been identified as a sturgeon. The panel is only one of several on the large cauldron, which was found buried in the peat in 1891, all of which raise numerous problems of style, provenance and interpretation.¹²

The conjunction of serpent and stag has a particular interest from our point of view, and it is this which has led to the identification of the Gundestrup horned god with other pictures of horned deities in Celtic sculpture. The earliest of these is a rock carving from Val Camonica in northern Italy showing a standing figure with tall antlers. On one arm is a torque, on the other a blurred shape which has been positively identified as a snake. For the name

11 Minns, pp. 57-58.

12 P.P. Bober, "Cernunnos: Origin and Transformation of a Celtic deity", American Journal of Archaeology, 55 (1957), pp. 13-51; H.R. Ellis Davidson, "Mithraism and the Gundestrup Bowl" in Mithraic Studies, edited by John R. Hinnells, 2 vols. (Manchester, 1975) II, pp. 494-506.

Cernunnos we are indebted to the discovery of a pagan altarpiece dating from the time of Tiberius beneath the choir of Notre Dame in Paris. This altar, which has been broken into four quadrangular blocks, contains a variety of carvings of Gallo-Roman gods, not all of whom can be identified with any assurance. Among them is a figure, dressed in a tunic, with antlers from which two torques are suspended, and above him the inscription: CERNUNNOS (Plate 15). His identity with the figure on the Gundestrup bowl and the Val Camonica carving depends on the horns and torques, and the fact that, though the lower part of the block is damaged, he appears to be squatting in the same "tailor's seat" position. It is convenient, therefore, to adopt the name Cernunnos for all such figures, but we should not be too confident that this name applies to all of them, nbr even that what we are describing is necessarily a single god. At all events he was a god with a variety of attributes who underwent a number of transmutations, particularly under Roman occupation. His association with the ram-headed serpent is by no means inevitable, for this motif is found in association with a variety of other gods in both Celtic and Greek sculpture. On the Paris altarpiece the snake is not associated with Cernunnos but with a nude, bearded figure wielding a club, with the name SMERTULLOS. No one knows who Smertullos was, and those who have identified him with Cernunnos on the basis of his association with a snake (which is not evidently ram-headed) are building bricks with very little straw. Later Roman statues of the horned god show a development in which he may be associated with a female figure, a cornucopia, a pomegranate, a tri-cephalic figure, or with ram-headed snakes. In one carving a stream of coins pours

from a sack in the lap of the stag-god, whilst a bull and stag stand at the base of his throne (Plate 16). In another the coins pour from the mouth of the stag.

Any interpretation of the meaning of the stag in prehistoric cultures remains largely speculative, and this despite the fact that so many representations of stags from so many different archaeological sites and periods have been discovered. The very multiplicity of these has led some writers to speak of a prehistoric stag cult, but we should beware of generalising. The most important distinction for an understanding of the probable place of animals in primitive religion would seem to be between hunting societies and the agriculturalists who largely succeeded them. An agricultural society enjoys a rather different relationship to the natural world from that which is typical of hunters, and seems to show a discernible development of religious ideas. Anthropologists have noted that modern communities of primitive hunters tend to regard animals as similar to men, though endowed with supernatural powers; they believe, as Mircea Éliade points out, that men can change into an animal, and vice-versa; that the souls of the dead can enter animals, and that certain individuals may have a mysterious relation with particular animals.¹³ The use of animal names and the belief in animal ancestors amongst Germanic and Celtic tribes would seem to be a survival of such beliefs. Thus Beowulf is a kenning for bear; Oisín is the little deer; and names like Wulfstan or Ethelwulf explain themselves. Personal names are supported by the evidence of tribal

13 Éliade, p. 7.

names such as the Bibroci or beaver-folk of south Britain, the fox and goat clans of Dalraidic Scots, or the name Saka, meaning stag, by which Iranian nomads were known. The Salva of the Upper Punjab preserved the tradition of a sacred stag called Sarabha to which the people were bound by religious parentage to the extent that they became mythically identified with it.¹⁴ Heroic literature preserves elements of such belief in a tribal totem. Hunting scenes depicted on Pictish memorial slabs suggest that hunting the stag had a special meaning. The animal hunted is invariably a stag or hind, and in some cases the hunter is a woman possibly referring to the fact that in the royal clans of the Picts descent was reckoned from the female line.¹⁵ In Irish literature which we shall examine later the hunting of the stag leads the hero to a symbolic marriage with a woman known as the Sovereignty of Ireland. The legends of Caesar's deer and the cerf volant seem to preserve a strong echo of this totemic symbolism.

In heroic tales the hero is generally claimed to be of divine descent, sometimes, as with Finn, Beorn Berensune, Conaire ('bird'), or Cuchulain ('hound'), from a totem-animal. In folktales heroes are frequently forbidden to hunt the animal from which they are descended, though in other cases the hero is bound to hunt his animal namesake. Arthur as 'the boar of Cornwall' hunts a magic boar Twrch Trwth in the Mabinogion. There is some evidence, as

14 Salmony, p.23.

15 Francis Klingender, Animals in Art and Thought (London, 1971), p. 126.

Francis Klingender argues, that the hunting of the totemic animal was regarded as an initiation, the most appropriate trial of strength or prerogative.¹⁶ Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and a large number of medieval tales spring to mind, of which we shall have more to say when the time comes. The pursuit and killing of a wild animal are often, as Éliade suggests, the model for the conquest of a territory and founding of a state.¹⁷ The tale in Procopius of two Cimmerian princes, each of whom gives his name to the tribe descended from him, who follow a magic hind across a lake at the head of the River Don, where they found a settlement, will stand as a model for such foundation myths.¹⁸ The role of the animal guide in such legends is no doubt connected with animal totemism. The reverence for mythical ancestors seems to be characteristic of hunting societies and is part of the mythology of origins which remains an inseparable part of the developed iconography of the stag well into modern times.

Characteristic of the gods worshipped by hunting communities is a deity usually described as Master of the Animals whose function is to protect hunters and their game. The antlered Great Magician of the Trois Frères caves can most plausibly be interpreted in this role, as can the Celtic horned god Cernunnos, particularly as he appears on the Gundestrup bowl. Artemis/Diana as protectress of wild nature would appear to be a female version of the same deity.

16 *ibid.* p. 129.

17 Éliade, p. 36.

18 Procopius, 8.6.

An incised slate slab discovered near Lourdes shows a man wrapped in a deerskin, with a horse's tail, and head surmounted by antlers.¹⁹ Mesolithic hunters (c. 7,500 B.C.) from Starr Carr, near Scarborough, thinned and hollowed red deer horns until they were light enough to be tied to the head. The horns were attached to a plate of bone, whose underside was smoothed and holes drilled in it. These horns were certainly worn as a ritual disguise, and similar horns have been found at other Mesolithic sites in Britain and Germany. In China carved antlers were fitted into wooden statuettes, usually showing a head with a long protruding tongue (Plate 17). In such remains we almost certainly have the origins of a tradition of ritual animal disguise which has an extremely long history.²⁰ A Mycenaean gem stone shows a stag with human legs (Plate 18).²¹ Though the evidence points to the origin of these rituals in the earliest hunting cultures, in later times they became strongly associated with the seasonal and solstitial festivals which are characteristic of agricultural societies. The Church fathers repeatedly mention the persistence of pagan rituals involving mummers in animal costume and stag dancers whom they condemn in such phrases as cervulum facere and in cervulo vadere. In the fourth century a bishop of Barcelona describes the rites of cervus; Caesarius of Arles refers to pagans and Christians disguising themselves at the January calends in skins and masks, playing cervulus, performing the "filthy wickedness" of

19 Éliade, p. 18.

20 E.C. Cawte, Ritual Animal Disguise (London, 1978).

21 Cook, fig. 17.

"the little hind", putting on the habits of wild beasts and becoming like a wild she-goat or doe (caprea) or stag.²² Similar customs are recorded throughout the Middle Ages, as we see in the marginal illustration to a Gothic manuscript which shows a group of mummers dancing to a gittern (Plate 19). The five dancers hold hands; a nun, a woman and three men in costume with headpieces of a stag, a hare and a boar. Another fourteenth-century illustration shows a dancer accompanied by a bagpiper. The dancer's costume consists of a head-piece with antlers and a long robe with a wavy pattern indicating fur. Most suggestively there is a hole in the front out of which the face of the performer peers. Clearly this is no imaginary grotesque but something the artist had actually seen.²³ The ritual is possibly not quite dead even today, for the villagers of Abbot's Bromley in Staffordshire still perform their stag dance.

The association of these dances with seasonal and solstitial festivals betrays their origins in the beliefs of early agriculturalists who no doubt saw in the annual renewal of the stag's antlers a sign of that renewal which was essential to the fertility of crops. For agricultural societies the fertility of crops is bound up with the

22 A.T. Hatto, Eos: An enquiry into the theme of lovers' meetings and partings at dawn in poetry (The Hague, 1965) pp. 816-818. Principal sources are P.L. 13, col. 1081; 39, cols. 2001, 2003, 2239. J.G.D. Clark, et al., Excavations at Starr Carr (Cambridge, 1954, repr. 1971) pp. 92, 168-75.

23 Erasmus described ceremonies in the sixteenth century at St Paul's held in June in which a deer's head and antlers were fixed on a pole and taken to the cathedral by men blowing hunting horns. Images of Diana have been unearthed, suggesting that the cathedral stands on a Romano-British pagan site, see R. Harris, "The White Stag in Chrétien's Erec et Enide", French Studies, 10 (1956) pp. 55-61, n. 25.

discovery of time, of annual recurrence, and feminine fecundity. It is probably significant that in northern countries the annual rut of the deer coincides with the winter solstice, for cultivation and renewal are often assimilated to the sexual act. The religious ideas of the agriculturalists are distinguished from those of the early hunters by a preoccupation with ideas of periodicity and renewal and a host of ritual analogues for such processes, including, of course, Frazerian gods who die and return to life.²⁴ The association of Cernunnos with fecundity, of coin or corn, is intelligible on these lines, as is the orgiastic element which the Fathers condemned in the rites of cervus. Fertility symbolism is evident in late-Cucuteni bowls showing stylised deer with comb-like udders, transformed to fantastic crescent-shapes, their heads like circling moons, bodies striated like rain-clouds, through the middle of which a snake winds, or a moon spins, round a cross signifying the four cardinal points of the world.²⁵ A bronze Hallstatt urn from Yugoslavia shows funeral games, and a pattern of cervids with extended tongues, spotted to indicate that they are supplicants for rain (Plate 20).²⁶ The complex of imagery associated with cosmic serpent, water and rain-cloud is very old, and it has been shown that a symbolic system based on the moon's phases and meander patterns was already used by Paleolithic hunters.²⁷

24 Éliade, p. 40.

25 Gimbutas, p. 172.

26 Salmony, p. 35.

27 Éliade, p. 23.

The two splendid stags which flank the eagle on the large copper panel from the Sumerian temple of Ninkhursag at Tell-el Obeid, near Ur, are almost certainly there because of a similar association of fertility with rain in the near-East (Plate 21).²⁸ There are no stags in the written records of Babylonian mythology, but the lion-headed eagle, Imdugud, which figures on this panel was the personification of the fertile rainstorm which follows a drought, and his outstretched wings symbolise the storm clouds. The goddess Ninkhursag, with whom he is identified, nourished those chosen to be kings with her sacred milk, justifying the claims of earthly rulers to divine origin. Milch deer have a similar role in northern folklore. The association of divine kingship with the prosperity and fertility of the land is, of course, the universal agrarian myth which J.G. Frazer investigated in The Golden Bough, and we recognise a conjunction of ideas which we find recurring in other contexts in which the stag appears. The dual association of the stag with ideas of sovereignty can be adequately accounted for within the terms of the familiar Frazerian hypothesis. It is therefore possible that the royal stag which manifests itself as Caesar's deer or which guides future kings to the Sovereignty of Ireland, or which is associated with Anatolian and Scythian royal burials is in origin the same as the stag which, in the guise of Cernunnus, of pagan solstitial ceremonies, or on Cucuteni bowls, is primarily a fertility symbol.

28 See Felix Guirand in New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology (London, 1959) pp. 49, 55-6. Roger Hinks suggests that the pattern of the el Obeid panel conforms to the type of Greek and Persian composition in which the central figure flanked by symmetrical beasts is a Master or Mistress of the Animals, "Master of the Animals, Warburg Journal, 1 (1937-38) pp. 263-266.

CHAPTER TWO

The Serpent-eating Stag

The belief that stags eat snakes was universal until the seventeenth century. It is a belief which has no basis whatsoever in zoological fact or in the observable behaviour of deer. The tenacity of received opinions is such that as late as the nineteenth century a supposedly scientific writer asserts that the belief is confirmed by the fact that snakes abound on those islands in Loch Lomond where there are no deer.¹ The history of such ideas, which descended from classical writers such as Pliny the Elder to the medieval encyclopaedias and Bestiaries, is a chapter in the history of science, or at least in the history of what the Enlightenment saw as human credulity. One may trace the growth of scientific scepticism from the later Middle Ages in the reservations with which a few writers such as Albertus Magnus report the received opinions on the habits of the deer.² In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries such reservations become more and more

1 C. Stewart, Elements of the Natural History of the Animal Kingdom, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1817), I, 173.

2 Albertus cites Pliny on stags rejuvenating themselves by eating snakes, and adds: et hoc puto ego verum non esse. The age of a stag, he says, shows itself in the number of teeth; as they grow older they lose their teeth, De animalibus, lib. 26. In the Quaestiones super De animalibus, lib. 7, questions 11-14, 31, he records that stags eat snakes and draw them through their nostrils before drinking water, so that their antlers and hair fall off, thus renewing them. See Kolb, pp. 604-605. Hardouin de Fontaines-Guérin at the end of the fourteenth century in rehearsing the received opinion on the stag's longevity adds that he does not know whether to believe it: "Ne sey se bien croire m'ozes", Trésor de Venérie, edited by M.H. Michelant (Metz, 1856), p. 91.

frequent, until, in books such as Sir Thomas Browne's Vulgar Errors, the huge weight of authority which so many learned writers had given to such beliefs about the stag is finally repudiated.³

If, following Browne's example, we seek to account for the origin and persistence of such groundless beliefs, we shall surely find them not in any curiosity about the natural world, but in the mythopoeic and image-making needs of the human imagination. Whatever the origins of the belief in the serpent-eating stag (and it probably descended from the territory which we surveyed in the previous chapter), it owed its persistence through the Middle Ages to the fact that it became a metaphor for Christian mysteries; like so much of the inheritance of classical science, it was allegorised by the fathers of the Church to yield a spiritual and moral meaning. The history of the belief thus becomes part of the history of religion.

What do the classical writers on natural history say about stags? Their beliefs may be briefly summarised.⁴ Stags, they say, are lustful, but they are long-lived. They are susceptible to music, and may be captured by a cunning bagpiper.⁵ Pliny repeats Aristotle's claim that the hunted stag will frequently pause and look back due to a pain in the gut. Stags are amphibious and swim in a long line each

3 Vulgar Errors, chapter 9, "Of the Deer" in Works, edited by Geoffrey Keynes, 4 vols. (London, 1928), II, 180-187.

4 The principal sources are: Aristotle, Historia Animalium, 6.29; Pliny, 8.50; 9.115; 28.42; Oppian, Cynegetica, 2.176-292; Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, 6.762-766; Aelian, Animalia, 2.9; 5.56; 6.5,13, 58; 11.6,7; 12.46; Dioscorides, De Materia Medica, 3.73,80; Martial, Epigrams, 12.29.

5 Aelian, Anim., 12.46.

resting its head on the rump of the one in front. When the leader is weary he retires to the rear and the next takes over as pilot. Oppian compares this piece of social co-operation to human navigation, commenting that their legs resemble oars and their antlers sails, whilst Aelian claims that the deer of Syria swim as far as Cyprus in their longing to reach the rich meadows there which, as any Cypriot will tell you, provide rich pasture. On land deer are notable for speed and their common epithet is "fleet-footed", "wing-footed", alipes. Oppian knew that deer have large sub-orbital glands or spiracula which he takes to be a second pair of nostrils. In fact they are facial glands which are capable of producing a gummy substance which was valued medicinally, and which some later writers mistook for the famed bezoar stone, which was in fact a calculus from the stomach or gut. In the Renaissance period the familiar image of the weeping deer may owe something to the spiracula and their gummy excretions.⁶ That other favourite iconographic device of the transpierced stag with an arrow in its side, emblem of the stricken Renaissance lover, owes something to the belief, found notably in Tertullian, that when wounded by arrows the stag eats the herb called Dittany which has the effect of making the arrow heads fall out and instantly healing the wounds. The plant was accordingly highly valued as a salve. Dioscorides says that this is the same plant known as Cervi ocellum ("Hart's eye"). The deer was associated with other medicinal herbs; for instance Pliny says that pregnant hinds eat

6 See p. 81 below.

dittany and seseli before and after birth, either to ease their labour or to flavour the milk. He shares with Oppian the view that when stags cast their horns, which they do annually, they dig a trench in the ground and hide them so that men will not find them.

These and other details are found with varying regularity in the principle classical zoological texts, but almost universal is the belief that stags eat serpents.⁷ This extraordinary process received perhaps its most graphic description in a passage of Oppian's Cynegetica, a Greek poem on hunting from about 200 A.D.

All the race of Snakes and Deer wage always bitter feud with one another, and everywhere in the mountain glens the deer seeks out the bold serpent. But when he sees the snaky trail woven with long coils, greatly exulting he draws nigh to the lair and puts his nostrils to the hole, with violent breath drawing the deadly reptile to battle. And the compelling blast hales him, very loth to fight, from the depth of his lair. For straightway the venemous beast beholds his foe and raises high in the air his baleful neck and bares his white teeth, bristling sharp, and snaps his jaws, blowing and hissing fast. And immediately in his turn the Deer, like one who smiles, rends with his mouth the vainly struggling foe, and while he writhes about his knees and neck, devours him amain, and on the ground are shed many remains, quivering and writhing in death ...

Oppian goes on to give a different version of the same struggle, which he now locates in Libya, where there are large numbers of deadly spotted snakes. When the stag lies down they all rush upon it. The stag retaliates by biting the snakes and trampling them underfoot until the ground is covered with their carcasses.

But he, knowing the gift that he hath gotten from heaven, seeks everywhere for the dark stream of a river. Therefrom he kills crabs with his jaws and so gets a self-taught remedy for his painful woe. And speedily the remnant of the snakes fall from his hide of their own motion beside his feet, and the wounds of their teeth on either side close up.

7 Pliny, 8.50; Aelian, 2.9; Lucretious, 6.262-266.

8 Oppian, 2.176-287.

The stag, moreover, lives a long time, and of a truth men say that he lives four lives of a crow.⁹

The fact that Oppian gives two versions of this agon is itself significant, for we will not find anywhere two accounts of the struggle between serpent and stag which are the same. The differences and confusions are themselves often revealing, and indeed when they were taken over at a later date by the Christian allegorists they provided scope for the illustration of different and specific allegorical purposes.¹⁰

The main areas of divergence in classical sources centre on the mechanics of the operation whereby the stag entices or forces the snake from its hole. Does it suck, or does it blow? Does it squirt water down the hole? Is the snake driven out by its revulsion for the stag, or is it attracted by the smell? In one case the snake cannot resist the breath which is like a magic charm,¹¹ in another the stag rubs its antlers against a rock, thereby producing a smell which is so odious to the snake that it rushes out of its hole into the stag's mouth.¹² The other ground of contention is over what the stag does after it has eaten the snakes. In this, Oppian's accounts are not representative of classical opinion generally. More usually it is claimed that after eating snakes the stag must run to drink water to

9 2.288-291.

10 These are well summarised by Henri-Charles Puech, "Le cerf et le serpent: note sur le symbolisme de la mosaïque découverte au baptistère de l'Henchir Messaouda", Cahiers archéologiques, 4 (1949), pp. 17-60, see particularly pp. 26-30.

11 Aelian, 2.9.

12 Aelian, 2.9.

counteract the venom. If it succeeds in this it gains a new lease of life, otherwise it dies. Sometimes it is stressed that the stag only eats snakes when it is very old - some say fifty years, some say five hundred. Sometimes the eating of the snake and the drinking of water bring about a renewal of skin, or coat or antlers, and in this detail classical zoology picks up the ancient regenerative symbolism of the stag. We might detect a faint echo of this belief where Oppian says that the stag recognises "the gift that he hath gotten from heaven" - it is the gift of renewal, of immortality, or of longevity which these concluding remarks allude to, and to which we shall return. Oppian's detail of the crabs is also extra-canonical, so to speak, and no other classical source associates crab-eating with snake-eating. Oppian probably borrowed the rare detail of the crabs from Aristotle.¹³ Aristotle, incidently, almost alone of classical zoologists, has nothing to say of stags eating snakes.

Oppian's description of the snakes falling from the stag's hide "of their own motion" and of the wounds closing appears to be attributing to this case the curative properties which were more commonly associated with the eating of dittany; we seem to hear an echo of a different tradition. Other variants of the struggle between serpent and stag may be briefly recorded. Sometimes we are told that the snake venom, far from being poisonous, is actually innocuous to the stag.¹⁴ Some late versions have it that, rather than rushing to the water to preserve its life, the stag must

13 Historia Animalium, 5

14 Theophrastus, De Causis Plant., 4.9.2.

actually abstain from drinking however great its thirst.¹⁵ A corrupt conflation of two traditions would appear to account for the view that the stag purges itself by eating herbs and little snakes,¹⁶ while a simple transference will explain why we are told in one source that stags eat crabs as a cure for tarantula stings.¹⁷

The transmission of this piece of classical zoology to the Middle Ages was not a simple nor a single process. Throughout the Middle Ages and beyond it remained a piece of natural history and it is as such that it features in the writings of Solinus, who follows Pliny, of St Isidore of Seville, whose great etymological encyclopaedia, accounting for the whole of creation, provided a compendium of the inheritance of ancient science which it made available to Christian moralists and allegorists.¹⁸ Subsequent encyclopaedists such as Hrabanus Maurus, Bartholomeus Anglicus, Vincent de Beauvais or Albertus Magnus preserve much of the classical deer-lore, which is amplified in due course by the Renaissance writers with fresh access to the original Greek and Roman texts.¹⁹ Natural history finds its place in these Specula of the natural world with titles such as Picinelli's Il Mondo Symbolico revealing an interest not so much in material fact as in the hieroglyphic or

15 See p. 78 below.

16 See Puech, p. 30.

17 Aristotle, Hist. Anim., 9.5.611.

18 Solinus, 19.18 in Opera, ed. Mommsen (Berlin, 1895); Isidore, Etymologia, lib. 12, "De Ceruo", in P.L., 82, col. 427.

19 Hrabanus Maurus, P.L., 111, cols. 199-200; Vincent de Beauvais, Speculum Naturalis, book 19, chaps. 34-43, De Ceruo.

iconographic meanings of natural objects.²⁰ The rare attempts at scientific objectivity from Aristotle to Sir Thomas Browne are easily overlaid by other kinds of interest which animal lore has traditionally held.

Thus it happens that the vehicles for the transmission of the classical belief in the serpent-eating stag were not the worldly "scientific" writers such as Pliny so much as the other worldly exegetic writings of the fathers of the Christian church. Why, we might ask, should St Augustine, St Jerome or the Venerable Bede be interested in the idea that stags eat snakes.²¹ The answer lies almost wholly in the first verse of Psalm 41 (A.V. 42), beginning Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ... ("As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God") (Plate 22). The early Fathers saw in the thirst of the stag an allusion to the received natural history of the animal and explained that this thirst arose from the stag's habit of eating snakes. John Henry Newman, of course, got this wrong in the familiar hymn. The hart pants for cooling streams not because it is heated in the chase, but because it has dined on serpents, but a Victorian congregation could not be expected to know that.

The most influential source in the transmission of this piece of natural lore to the Middle Ages was a work which combines both

20 Filippo Picinelli, Mundus Symbolicus (Cologne, 1695). Pp. 363-370 treat of the Renaissance symbolism of the deer, cf. Giovanni Valeriano, Hieroglyphica (Basel, 1556, enlarged 1567 and Lyons 1626), lib. 6, "De Cervo".

21 Augustine in P.L., 36, cols. 464-465; Jerome in P.L., 26, col. 949 and P.L., 40, col. 1205; Bede in P.L., 93, col. 702.

the scientific and the Christian-homiletic traditions, an extraordinary book known by the title given to its otherwise unidentified author, Physiologus, "The Naturalist". The Physiologus consists of a collection of traditional animal lore written down perhaps in the fourth century, possibly in Syria, and subsequently translated into various languages.²² There are versions in Greek, Syriac, Armenian and Ethiopian. The Latin version dates from the eighth century. The distinctive innovation of the Physiologus is that it takes the visible behaviour of animals as a revelation of the invisible. Everything reminds us of the supernatural struggle between the forces of God and the Devil for the soul of man. Zoology therefore becomes an allegory in which spiritual and moral truths are acted out. Behind the readiness of Physiologus to attribute spiritual and moral meanings to animals we recognise something akin to the characteristic medieval belief that nature is a revelation of God, and that natural science is therefore a branch of theology. St Isidore's encyclopaedic approach represents what we might call the 'naturalistic' branch of this belief: the world is a sign of God's infinite creativity, everything has its proper nature, and its proper name, which its etymology reveals. In this intrinsically Aristotelian view, Adam's naming of the animals is the primordial act of human intelligence, and the recognition of science is of divine order and at least potentially of that universal fitness and harmony to which later philosophers from Alain de Lisle to William Paley were to respond.

22 F. Lauchert, Geschichte des Physiologus (Strasburg, 1889).

The allegorical reading of nature is significantly a different process. It extends to the interpretation of Nature the habits of exegesis which had hitherto been reserved for the Book. For Physiologus, no less than for Roland Barthes, all is sign. Just as God has put a hidden sense into his divinely inspired word, which is open only to Biblical exegesis, so he has also placed a deeper meaning in his creation and creatures. The allegorising homilists and encyclopaedists accordingly apply to natural creatures the terms significat, significare which more properly belong to the technical vocabulary of exegesis as Herbert Kolb has shown.²³ This view of nature is eloquently put by Hugh St Victor, Omnis natura Deum loquitur. Omnis natura nomen docet. Omnis natura rationem parit, et nihil in universitate infecundum est. Elsewhere he says, Universus enim mundus iste sensibilis quasi quidem liber est scriptus digiter Dei. The universe is a book written by God's creating finger, outstretched, perhaps, like that on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Such a view helped to reconcile Nature to the dualistic thinking of the early church, for the book of Nature could thus be seen as addressed not to the corrupt outward senses but to the inner understanding. At the end of the twelfth century Alain de Lisle gives the idea its most interesting formulation, in which the traditional image of the book or written word as mirror, speculum, an image which goes back to the earliest theories of literature as mimesis, is given a novel twist, as nature itself becomes the mirror held up to God,

23 Kolb, pp. 590-595.

Omnis mundi creatura
 quasi liber et pictura
 nobis est et speculum:
 nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis,
 nostri status, nostrae sortis
 fidele signaculum.²⁴

The whole creation is a book, a picture, or a mirror of man's life and death, a true symbol of his fate and his estate. In Alain's conflation of the three images book-picture-mirror (liber-pictura-speculum) we have a fertile source for the development of the ut pictura theory of poetry which was ultimately derived from Horace's Ars Poetica and a justification for insisting that graphic and literary sources should be studied together.

A wide scope for possible allegorisation of the topos of the serpent-eating stag was guaranteed by the variations of detail in the inherited zoological lore. Physiologus's account is worth giving in extenso for this reason.

Physiologus says of the Hart that he is very thirsty, and the reason of his thirst is this, that he eats snakes. For the snake is an enemy of the Hart. When the snake goes to its hole in the earth, then the Hart seeks the spring and takes a deep draught of the spring water, and fills its mouth, and spits it into the earth-hole, and drives the snake out and kills it. In like manner will the great snake the Devil be driven out by the waters of godly learning. So was the Lord also able to destroy ... the Devil through the heavenly water, namely through godly learning. Now the snake cannot come near the Hart, nor can the Devil approach the excellent words of the Lord ... And if thou discoverest any evil in thyself, spit it out, and thou wilt destroy that wickedest of all dragons, the Devil. And when the Lord suffered the water and blood to stream out of his side, he destroyed the power of the dragon over us through the bath of his second birth and took from us every devilish influence.

In another way the Hart resembles the eremites of the desert, who spend virtuous and painfully troublous lives, and who,

24 Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse, selected and edited by F.J.E. Raby (Oxford, 1959), p. 369.

when they become thirsty, hasten to the spring of salvation bringing repentance, and through virtue of tears extinguish the glowing darts of the Evil One, and crush under their feet and destroy the great dragon the Devil.

Another attribute has the Hart, for it resembles the wild gazelle and has antlers with three branches after their third renewal. The Hart lives for fifty years, and at the end of that time it runs like a strong runner through the wooded valleys and down the ravines of the mountains, and it scents the holes of the snakes, and forthwith lays its nostrils to the entrance of the hole and holds its breath. Thereupon the snake rushes out and goes into the mouth of the Hart, and the Hart swallows the snake, and therefore he is called "Ελαφς because he drew the snake out of the depths. Then with the snake he runs to the water-brook, for unless he drinks water within three hours thereafter, he dies, but if he finds water then he lives again, another fifty years. Therefore said David "Quemadmodum desiderat cervus .../As the hart panteth after the water-brooks ..."

And thou too, pious man, hast three renewals in thee: baptism of immortality, the mercy of adoption as a son, and penance.

And when thou catchedst the snake which has entered thy breast, that is sin, thou run at once with it to the water-course of scripture and of prophecy. Enlightened by these, drink of the water of life, that is the holy gift, and renew thyself with penance and thy sins are destroyed.²⁵

It can be seen from this that the allegorical possibilities are quite complex. The water is not only the water of baptism, and the water of holy writ, but also the blood and water which streamed from Christ's side. It could also be the communion wine. The hart is potentially both Christ and also his followers, either the "pious man" generally, or more specifically the hermit or by implication the catechumen. Indeed Physiologus has to do a double-take, as it were, to cover all the possibilities, and as with Oppian, we are given two versions of the conflict.

25 Translation by James Carlill in The Epic of the Beast, edited by William Rose (London, n.d.), pp. 97-198. The Latin text can be found in Lauchert, op. cit. and in F.J. Carmody's Physiologus Latinus (Paris, 1939), p. 50.

We can see how Physiologus has drawn on variant zoological accounts. In his first paragraph he has the stag spurt water from its nostrils into the snake's hole, which has the inherent objection of sending the stag to the water twice, once before killing the snake, and again afterwards to expel the poison. In Physiologus's second account the stag simply holds its breath and the snake rushes out. The trampling of the snake underfoot is an action which we find also in Oppian. I suppose that the Biblical prophecy to Adam is picked up, at least by implication: "... thy heel shall bruise his head". "The glowing darts of the Evil One" recalls the arrows which the dittany-eating stag traditionally expelled. The bit of false etymology is explained by Isidore, who claims that Elaphos means helien tous opheis ("sucks out snakes").²⁶ Such games with names have had an influence in the development of animal lore which can hardly be exaggerated; long before Isidore, Adam's naming of the animals was conceived as the primary linguistic act, and animal names consequently, more perhaps than any other names, were felt to have that exact correspondence between name and thing which was traditionally felt in Judaeo-Christian thinking to be essential to all language. As T.S. Eliot puts it, "The naming of cats is a serious matter ...". A recent scholar has even suggested that the whole business about stags eating snakes might go back to a confusion in Pliny between Elephas and Elaphos, "elephant" and "stag". Certainly some such muddle will explain why Pliny asserts at one point the elephants' breath sucks

26 Isidore, op. cit., lib. xii.

out snakes, whereas stag's breath burns them: Elephantorum anima serpentes extrahit, cervorum urit.²⁷

It will be seen from Physiologus's description of the serpent-eating stag that not only the received lore, but also the allegorical possibilities of that lore, are quite varied, and although one will find a great deal in the medieval commentaries which is derivative (mostly from Isidore), one will also find a great deal which is inventive and original. Writer after writer, for instance, will be found repeating Isidore's comment that stags are sensitive to music ("mirantur autem sibilum fistularum"), which derives ultimately from Pliny, but Physiologus's allegorisation of the renewal of the antlers in the three years it takes a stag to reach maturity seems to have had few followers. Occasionally one finds a medieval writer introducing a piece of information which has no basis in the familiar sources, and giving it what looks like an inventive allegorical meaning. Vincent de Beauvais does this when he says that naturalists allege that the stag which has been vanquished by one of its rivals in the herd will not again face its opponent, but remains subdued in abject servitude.²⁸ This piece of

27 Pliny, 11.115. Kolb, p. 589, cites the suggestion of one of Pliny's modern editors, E. Ernout (Paris, 1952), that the whole snake-eating business might have its roots in an aetiological myth about the elephant's trunk and its resemblance to a snake, which has become associated with the stag purely through this etymological confusion. The theory is ingenious but implausible, since a belief that stags eat snakes is too widespread to be attributable to a simple classical howler.

28 Félicie d'Ayzac, p. 554, cites Speculum Mor., 11, 19.

animal behaviour, which as far as I know has no authority in zoological writings of the Middle Ages but plenty in the observable behaviour of deer during the rut, is interpreted as an allegory of the sinner who becomes an abject servant (servus/cervus) of the Devil.

It would be possible to trace in detail the transmission and evolution through the Middle Ages of particular details of stag-lore and the allegorical topoi which became attached to them, but this is a more exacting and laborious task than I intend to undertake in this chapter: I propose rather to look at a few of the more interesting or more influential of the medieval texts and documents which mention the serpent-eating stag. These comprise the Encyclopaedists on the one hand, and the Biblical and particularly Psalm commentaries on the other, but beyond these a host of miscellaneous sources which are liable to pick up the allegorised lore of the stag from a variety of different motives. In addition to the more celebrated Psalm commentaries which mention the serpent-eating stag, namely Jerome, Augustine, Bede, Cassiodorus, Hugh St Victor, Pierre Lombard, Thomas Aquinas and Remigius of Auxerre²⁹, there is a large number of other patristic texts which allude to it, usually with reference to Psalm 41, though occasionally in connection with other Biblical texts

29 Cassiodorus, P.L., 70, col. 301; Hugh St Victor, P.L., 177, col. 64; Pierre Lombard, P.L., 191, col. 415-416; Aquinas, Opera Omnia, edited by S.E. Frettté, 34 vols. (Paris, 1871-80), 18, p. 487; Remigius of Auxerre, P.L., 131, col. 362.

which mention the deer, such as Job 39, 4-7; Psalms 17, 34; 28, 9; 103, 18; Proverbs 5, 19; Canticles 2, 9; 3, 9.³⁰

Augustine's commentary on Psalm 41 was preached before a congregation in 414 A.D., possibly in Carthage.³¹ The opening of the Psalm, Augustine says, is the voice of the catechumens themselves, who, having fought the serpent of sin in the solemn vigil which precedes the rite of baptism, now hasten with great heat and thirst to the fountain of truth, that spring in which our word "font" has not quite lost its source. The opening verse refers, then, not just to the thirst of the stag, but to something else: "Audi quid est aliud in cervo". This "something else" is the fact that it kills snakes, and then hurries to the water. The snakes symbolise our sins, Serpentes vitia tua sunt, and the water is the fount of truth, fontem veritatis. Augustine's are occasional sermons, much of the significance of which would have depended on the solemnity of the precise moment in the liturgy at which they were delivered. Psalm 41 was sung on Easter Day and at Pentecost, at two of the most centrally significant moments of the Christian year. These were the traditional occasions for celebrating the rite of baptism. The curious piece of pseudo-scientific lore which is our subject was thus drawn right into the heart of Christian mysteries. St Ambrose

30 The hart is the cervus amicitiarum of Proverbs, 5.19; it is the hinnulus cervorum of Canticles, 2.9, the "young hart" who is the lover of the Song, and traditionally identified with Christ. A major influence stems from Psalm 104.18, "The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats ...". The Vulgate's wild goats were commonly identified with the hart of Psalm 41, which is frequently found fleeing to the hills.

31 P.L., 36, col. 464-465. On the date of the sermon Puech, p. 40, cites S.M. Zarb in Gregorianum, 13 (1936), pp. 106, 108, (not seen).

linked the scansion of the liturgical year with the accepted divisions of the Psalter, and Psalm 41 not only had a significant place in the liturgical year but also marked a turning point in the divisions of the Psalter, the first book of which normally ended with Psalm 40, the conclusion of which alludes to the Passion. (The revised numeration of the Authorised Version obscures this division.) The second book opens with the mysteries of renovation and with the call to the sacrament of baptism which the beginning of Psalm 41 announces. Zeno of Verona quotes the Psalm as he exhorts the candidates to fly to the font with the speed and ardour of a stag.³² Pierre Lombard tells us that during the night before Easter or Pentecost the singing of Psalm 41 accompanied the procession of the initiates to the font.³³ Thus for many centuries innumerable Christians dramatised their initiation into the Christian communion by solemnly identifying themselves with the serpent-eating stag, whose unnatural but vividly-realised behaviour thus became the basis not only for allegorical writings and (as we shall see) icons, but also for a piece of dramatic ritual.

Jerome similarly mentions the stag in a sermon preached during the Paschal vigil of the neophytes, in which he explains that it is the nature of stags to despise snake-venom.³⁴ They drag them out of their cavernis by the breath of their nostrils and tear them to pieces. The venom makes them burn and long for water. Likewise the

32 In his Invitationes ad Fontem, P.L., 11, col. 482-483.

33 P.L., 191, col. 415-416.

34 P.L., 40, col. 1205.

Christian, once he has killed the Devil, longs for the springs of the Church and the Godhead. The waters of baptism are the same waters which, in a fairly well-known topos, cut off Pharaoh and his army from Egypt. In a separate commentary on Psalm 41 Jerome says that when the man of the Church, homo Ecclesiae, sees the sins of the world he desires to come the Christ, the fons luminis, and with baptismal ablution accept the remission of sins.³⁵ If he is not thus renewed by the water and the holy spirit he will not have eternal life. Though the snakes are not mentioned in this interpretatio, the emphasis on baptismal regeneration picks up the fundamental regenerative symbolism of the serpent-eating deer, and it is difficult to believe that it is not strongly implied. The classical sources, after all, had almost invariably stressed that the reason the stag eats snakes is to gain a new lease of life.

Bede's commentary is indebted to Augustine's, but with significant departures.³⁶ For Bede, as for Augustine, the serpents symbolise our sins, and the water is the fontem veritatis - he uses Augustine's phrase. There is, however, "something else" that he knows about stags ("Est etiam aliud quod et de cervis dicitur, et in cervis videtur") and his "something else" is not Augustine's "something else", for he describes how when stags wish to cross the sea, each rests the burden of its head on the rump of the stag in front, thus illustrating the Apostle's injunction that we should bear each others' burdens, Alter alterius onera portate. For Bede

35 P.L., 26, col. 949.

36 P.L., 93, col. 702.

the voice which speaks through the Psalm is not, as with Augustine, that of the catechumens, but that of Christ himself, exhorting us to follow his example in the Resurrection, and seek out that well, or fount, or font in which mortality becomes immortality: Horum cervorum, imo cervi cervorum, id est, Christi vox est. Bede thus elegantly links the renewal of the initiates in Baptism, with the Resurrection of Christ, and the stag represents not just, as with Augustine, the catechumen, but Christ himself, the stag of stags.

In general subsequent writers follow the broad outlines of the symbolism laid down by Augustine, Jerome or Bede, with variations of emphasis. A number of extra-canonical details, so to speak, occasionally intrude, some of which go back to Isidore. Most of these are conveniently brought together in Pseudo-Hugh St Victor's twelfth-century "De Cervorum Natura", which forms part of his De Bestiis et Aliis Rebus.³⁷ Like Oppian and Physiologus before him, Hugh St Victor is driven by the inconsistencies of different accounts of the snake-eating stag to give two differing accounts of the symbolism, as he explains that there are two kinds of stag. The first is the kind which drives the snake out of its hole, strikes it on the neck before eating it and running to water, where, on account of the swelling, it changes its skin and horns. This stag resembles the penitent man who persecutes his sins and flees to the fount of pure doctrine. The other kind of stag, if it happens (as it were, in passing) to meet a snake, kills it, and after its victory seeks the hills. This is like the man who feels the devil pouring the poison

37 P.L., 177, col. 64.

of evil doctrine into his veins, and kills him with the Grace of God, before going up to the mount of Christ, which is the source of our spiritual food. The stag is not only the Christian, however, but also Christ, who slew the Devil with the breath of divine wisdom, and won a renewal for us in our sinful infirmity and old age.

Hugh St Victor's idea that the stag's renewal means that it changes its skin and renews its antlers simply spells out something which remains at best implicit in the classical accounts of the serpent-eating stag, where the implication is normally that somehow it gains a new lease of life. Hugh St Victor is not the only writer to spell this out, however, for Pierre Lombard's commentary on Psalm 41 compares the stag to the catechumen who, seeing grow up in himself the venom of sin contracted on earth, longs for the waters of baptism and lays down the hair of his sins and the horns of his pride, vitiorum pilos atque superbiae cornua deponit.³⁸ He then becomes a new man, et sic rejuvenescit factus novus homo. As the stag draws out the serpent from its hole and kills it, so the faithful, having consumed within himself his sins, desires the fount of contemplation whence he is remade, ubi reficiatur. Thus the catechumen goes to the fount of living water, namely Christ. To this Pierre Lombard adds the note that we sing this Psalm at Easter and Pentecost, when baptism is celebrated.

The way in which a creative cross-fertilisation of symbols from different sources can take place is nowhere better illustrated

38 P.L., 191, cols. 415-416.

than by the way Pierre Lombard's and Hugh St Victor's description of the stag renewing its skin is taken up by writers whose primary concern is not Christian exegetics, but, improbable as it may seem, Arthurian romance. Thus Malory writes:

And well ought oure Lorde be signified to an harte. For the harte, whan he is olde, he waxith yonge agayne in his whyght skynne. Ryght so sommyth agayne oure Lorde frome deth to lyff, for He lost erthely fleysse, that was the dedly fleysse whych He had takyn in the wombe of the Blyssed Virgyne Mary. And for that cause appered oure Lorde as a whyghte harte withoute spot.³⁹

This is a direct translation of a passage from the Old French Queste del Saint Graal (early thirteenth-century) which, as is characteristic of the Vulgate Arthurian romances, gives a Christian interpretation to the White Hart motif whose origins, as we shall see, lie in Celtic legend.⁴⁰ The idea that the stag's renewal involves a change of skin or of pelage undergoes a further curious development in one of the versions of the Bestiaire d'Amour. The better-known version of this, which is attributed to Richard de Fournival and dates from the thirteenth century, does not include the stag in the list of animals whose received attributes are interpreted as allegories not of Christian mysteries but rather of the theology of love. However, the anonymous Bestiaire d'Amour Rimet, of which at least seventeen manuscripts survive, includes not only the orthodox account of the snake-eating stag, but also a piece of stag-lore which appears to be unique. According to the Rhymed Bestiary of Love, when the stag grows old it renews its skin by

³⁹ The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, edited by Eugene Vinaver (London, 1954), p. 718.

⁴⁰ See p. 206 below, n. 44.

lying in an ant heap. Miniatures in several of the manuscripts illustrate this curious activity.

Quant li cerf est en grant viellesce,
 Et il vient venir en juvenesce
 Et sa vieille pel devestir
 Et nouvele pel revestir,
 Si se courche en la fourmiere;
 Lors saillent devant et derriere
 Li fourmion et sus li queurent
 Sa vielle pel, et desous celle
 Li revient apres la nouvele.⁴¹

Thus, says the lover, when I despised love I was thrown onto the ant heap where the ants pricked me with the pricks of love, which are sharper than arrows, and I lost my old haughty manner, and discovered a new one, quite the opposite.

It might look as though this is an original piece of otherwise unrecorded stag lore, but in fact it has a source in Vincent de Beauvais, who gives the orthodox account of the stag which eats snakes and runs to drink water to expel the poison. At least his account is orthodox except for one detail. Orthodox accounts usually suggest that stags snuff snakes out of their holes. Vincent, or his source, clearly did not understand what is meant by snakes' holes, or else he knew of some other piece of animal lore which associates snakes with ant heaps. At any rate, what he says is that the stag seeks out snakes in an ants' nest, Cervus quando vult renovari et

⁴¹ Richard de Fournival, Bestiaire d'Amour, edited by Hippeau (Paris, 1887). The Bestiaire d'amour rimé has been edited by Arvid Thordstein (Lund, 1941); the passages on the stag occupy lines 1117-32 and 1239-45 of the poem. MS fr. 1951 in the Bibliothèque Nationale has miniature illustrating the stag lying in the ant heap, with ants crawling over its skin.

cornua sua ponderosa deponere, quaerit in nido formicarum serpentem.⁴²

That phrase in nido formicarum is undoubtedly the origin of the novel process of rejuvenation which we find described and illustrated in the Bestiaire d'Amour Rimet. I can think of no better demonstration of the process of inventive misunderstanding through which the un-Natural History of animals has been developed.

Hugh St Victor relates the familiar statements that stags swim in a co-operative line, and that they expel arrows by eating dittany. He also repeats the ancient belief that they like music. Aelian had reported that the inhabitants of Etruria went hunting not with hounds but with pipes. The deer were so entranced that they left their homes and offspring and fell into the traps set for them.⁴³ Pliny supplied Isidore and a number of writers who follow him with the idea that stags will wonder at any whistle, mirantur autem sibilum fistularum, and that their hearing is acute when their ears are raised. Hugh St Victor repeats Isidore's very phrase. In the Gesta Romanorum the hunted deer which stops to listen to the belling of the hounds signifies the soul that stands still listening to worldly thoughts.⁴⁴ Plate 23 illustrates this homiletic point, showing the deer fleeing to the hills, whose symbolism Hugh St Victor has conveniently explained for us, pursued by a canny bagpiper. Its turned head shows that it has not yet cast behind it all worldly thoughts. The stag's delight in music is one received trait which seems to have some basis in fact, for a modern deer farmer is

42 Spec. mor., I.iii, Distinctio 4. Cited by d'Ayzac, p. 583 (not seen).

43 Animalia, 12.46.

44 The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum, edited by S.J.H. Herrtage, EETS ES (London, 1879), 33: 320. Cited by Thiébaux, p. 45

reported to be in the habit of leaving a transistor radio in his window; the deer invariably gather to listen. Apparently they prefer Radio One.⁴⁵

It would be difficult to exaggerate the extent of medieval writers' familiarity with the allegorisation of the serpent-eating stag. In addition to the sources mentioned, we commonly find it in the popular Bestiaries and the Encyclopaedias. The latter add to it a variety of other received beliefs about stags, most of which we can recognise: they expel arrows by eating dittany; they are bemused by a whistle; they swim in line; are less afraid of man than of other animals; the hind purges herself in labour by eating medicinal plants; it eats herbs to help lactation; when hunted the stag pauses and looks round until the hunters catch up; it hides its horns in a trench; it rubs its new horns against a tree to test their strength; it lives to a great age; the bezoar stone is found in its stomach.⁴⁶ Even the young Luther, as he comes to cervus in his commentary on the Psalms, glosses it vexatus a canibus persecutoribus vel post comestos veneno estuans, "worried by persecuting dogs or, after eating snakes, burning with the poison".⁴⁷ The two alternatives rather nicely balance his indecision as between empirical common sense and received authority.

45 Reported in Now magazine, 25 Jan., 1980, p. 69.

46 These are all in Bartholomaeus Anglicus. See Batman uppon Bartholome, his Booke De Proprietatibus Rerum (London, 1582), book 18, chap. 30, pp. 357-358.

47 Noted by Kolb, pp. 602-603, who cites Luther's Werke, (Weimar, 1885) vol. 3, pp. 232-233 (not seen).

It would be rather surprising if a subject which leant itself so readily to graphic treatment as the serpent-eating stag had not been used in church decoration from an early date, and in fact the iconography of the stag in Christian art is largely associated with the baptismal symbolism as expounded in the patristic writings we have already looked at. In early Christian art we find the stag associated predominantly with baptismal monuments - on fonts and in baptistries. Examples are to be found in the catacombs, in churches at Rome, Ravenna and Naples, in baptistries in North Africa and Italy, and on fonts in Germany and England. In the catacombs of Ponziano in Rome a sixth-century wall painting depicts the baptism of Christ in the Jordan (Plate 24). John the Baptist stands on the bank, and an angel holds Christ's white garment, performing a function which in baptismal ceremonies fell to a deacon. In the left foreground a stag quenches his thirst in the river. Other catacomb paintings show different scenes. In the Catacombs of St Agnes a fresco shows a standing stag, and in the fourth-century cemetery of St Callixtus we find a scene which recurs many times in early Christian art in which two stags drink from water which flows from a mound, from which grow tree-like herbs (Plate 25). The same subject is found on the silver box from Henchir Zirara in the Vatican (Plate 26). A stag and hind drink from four rivers which flow from a mound which is surmounted by a Christos monogram. Also from North Africa is a lead bucket, found in Tunisia, with miscellaneous subjects such as a Nereid on a sea-horse, a bear, the Good Shepherd, a deer hunt, but also stags drinking from four rivers flowing from a rocky mount supporting the cross. A quotation from Isaiah, 12.3

on the bucket must refer to this scene: "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation".⁴⁸ In the baptistry at Oued Ramel two stags are shown drinking at four springs. At Bir Ftouha a stag and hind flank a hillock from which four rivers flow. The basilica at Upenna shows a stag and hind drinking. A mosaic at St John in Fonte, Naples, shows two stags framing the Good Shepherd and drinking from a stream flowing from a rock.⁴⁹

In other early monuments we find not the four rivers but other details. This is the case with the fifth-century baptistry at Henchir Messaouda in Tunisia, where a mosaic shows two stags facing each other on either side of an umbrella shaped tree, with pendant fruits (Plate 27). Beneath it grow plants and herbs, and in the right hand corner a dove descending. Each stag has a snake in its mouth, the body of which is wound round its leg or shoulders. The mosaic was just in front of the doorway to the baptistry, leading down to a sunken font in which the catechumen would be immersed.⁵⁰ On mosaics on the sides of the vaults at the fifth-century Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna two stags drink at a spring (Plate 28). New excavations have recently revealed that this so-called mausoleum

48 C.R. Morey, Early Christian Art (Princeton, 1953), pp. 100-101. The bucket is described and illustrated in G.B. De Rossi, Bull. arch. crist., V (1867), pp. 77 ff. (not seen).

49 For these and the following monumental sources, see Puech.

50 Puech's article remains the most exhaustive and thorough examination of the serpent-eating stag, taking the Henchir Messaouda baptistry as its starting point. An earlier article on the baptistry is still worth consulting, G.L. Feuille, "Une mosaïque chrétienne de l'Henchir Messaouda", Cahiers Archéologiques (1949), 4, pp. 9-15.

was in fact a baptistry.⁵¹ In St John Lateran the water flows into the font from the mouths of seven stags. At St Julian, Viviers, it flows from one bronze stag's mouth. A fresco at Bawit shows a stag encircled by a snake, whose head he bites, and a pavement from the Imperial Palace at Constantinople shows the same scene.⁵²

Although we might distinguish these motifs from an iconographic point of view according to whether the stag is associated with serpent, rivers, mound or tree, it should be clear that they are all related, all are but different stages in a single drama. Though the drinking stags do not show any snake, they are drinking because they have eaten snakes. Though those fighting snakes are not drinking, they soon will be, and their significance is as baptismal as the others. The four rivers which flow from the mound are the four rivers, Pison, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates, which flow from Eden, and the mound is Eden itself. The tree is the Tree of Life. The regeneration of baptism reverses the ruin of our first fall, and these stags pasture in a reconstituted Eden.

One of the most interesting documents for the early Christian iconography of the stag is the eucharistic mould or matrix in which the communion wafer was stamped from Djebeniana in Tunisia (Plate 29). It shows a stag, a tree and a bunch of grapes, surrounded by the motto EGO SUM PANIS VIVUS QUII DE CELO DESCENDI, "I am the living bread come down from heaven". It is clear from this that the image of the stag was put into the mouths of the communicants on the very

51 Gertrud Schiller, Iconography of Christian Art, 2 volumes (London, 1971), I, p. 131.

52 Puech, figs. 6 and 7.

sacrament itself. The stag is Christ himself, the celestial food of the Eucharist. In a common typological identification the tree of Paradise was the body of Christ on the Cross, and the rivers were the blood which flowed from Christ's side. Thus on a mosaic from Bir Ftouha in the Louvre the deer slake their thirst at the four rivers, and yet on the mound from which they flow stands the chalice containing the blood of Christ (Plate 30).⁵³ The suggestion that the water flows from the chalice is irrepressible, as is the uncertainty as to whether the deer are about to drink from the rivers or the cup. In a sense it does not matter, for they are the same thing. The four rivers flow from the foot of the cross, fons vitae from arbor vitae. The source of life is notably identified with the baptismal water where the catechumen casts off the old Adam and is renewed. The common association of the stag with this imagery will explain why deer are so often shown in illustrations of the Fountain of Life, as in the Carolingian Gospels of Saint-Médard-de-Soissons (Plate 31). Early baptism rituals apparently sometimes included not only a spargation or sprinkling (the baptism itself was by immersion), but also occasionally two extraordinary symbolic acts known as halatatio and sputatio, breathing and spitting, in which the priest blew into the face of the candidate, who in turn spat in the presumed direction of Satan.

53 Puech, fig. 2.

These curious rites appear to relate to the traditional actions of the serpent-eating stag.⁵⁴

A Romanesque font from Wurtemberg shows a stag which has eaten snakes and purged itself by eating herbs from the Tree of Life, vomiting out the poison, with the inscription EVOMIT INFUSUM HOMO CERVUS AB ANQUE VENEUM (Plate 32). Fonts from the Romanesque and early Gothic period often display fighting beasts, swallowing and regurgitating each other, in a symbolism which refers either generally to the conflict of good and evil, light and darkness or God and Satan, or more specifically, as Gertrud Schiller suggests, to baptismal rites in which the catechumen challenges the darkness of Satan, is thrice immersed and spiritually reborn.⁵⁵ Sometimes this conflict between animals which are often zoologically unidentifiable picks up the conflict between stag and snake. This is evidently what has happened on the carved stone font at Melbury Bubb in Dorset, on which the animals are interlaced in a complex pattern which looks back to Germanic animal style (Plate 33). The ribbon interlace which links all the animals is deliberately ambiguous, leaving one uncertain at many points whether it is part of a tail, part of a snake or simple decoration. The part which passes through the mouth of an antlered stag, however, ends shortly afterwards in an unambiguous snake's head. None of the other

54 Puech, p. 49, citing F.J. Doelger, Der Exorzismus im altchristlichen Taufritual, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums, vol. III (Paderborn, 1909), pp. 118-130 and F.J. Doelger, "Heidnische Begrüssung und christliche Verhohnung der Heidentempel: Despuere und exsufflare in der Dämonbeschwörung" in Antike und Christentum, III (Münster, 1932), pp. 192-203 (not seen).

55 Schiller, p. 140.

animals can be identified with any certainty, and it is probable that their symbolic significance is simply that of other unidentifiable fighting beasts. Curiously, all the animals on the font are upside down. Like several other English fonts of the Saxon period this was originally the base of a sculptured stone cross, and was adapted to its baptismal purpose by being inverted and hollowed.⁵⁶ We may suspect that the symbolism of the serpent-eating stag might have prompted such an adaptation. Fighting beasts also decorate the early twelfth-century font at Freudenstadt on which a stag drinks at a spring. The accompanying inscription describes this as HOMO CERVUS or man-stag.

In addition to these examples of the stag on Christian monuments there are a number of stags whose relation to the main iconographic traditions remains a little obscure. Stag-hunting scenes are not uncommon on Roman pavements, but they seldom have any symbolic significance. However the stag-hunts which decorate the sides of both parts of the Romano-British pavement from Hinton St Mary, Dorset,^{MS} in the British Museum, may refer to the Christian iconography of the stag (Plate 34). Other parts of the pavement show Bellerophon slaying Chimera, an established Christian allegory of good triumphing over evil, a bust of Christ with Chi-rho monogram and pomegranate, and the four evangelists. Since every other part of the pavement has theological significance, it would be rather odd if the stag-hunt scenes did not also. The significance of the deer

56 J. Stevens Cox, "The Cross-in-Hand, Batcombe Down, and the Font at Melbury Bubb, Dorset", The Thomas Hardy Yearbook (1970), 1, pp. 70-81; Royal Commission on Historical Monuments: Dorset, 2 vols. (London, 1952) I, pl. 15.

which is shown extracting a snake from its hole at the bottom of a silver plate from the Mildenhall treasure is rather more puzzling, since the subjects on the rest of the plate appear to be wholly pagan - Pan playing his pipes and a girl with an Aulos, and a reclining woman (Plate 35).

Another unexpected source for the serpent-eating stag is on a number of Viking coins from the ninth and tenth centuries. A motif found on a number of these shows a stag with grid-like antlers facing a snake with a curled tail (Plate 36). In some cases the snake is actually in the stag's mouth. On different coins these are accompanied by familiar motifs from Viking coinage of triskele, pearl ring and bewhiskered human face. The minting of coins was not a traditional practice of the Vikings; the royal currencies of Scandinavia were often issued as a sign of royal power and authority, as with Knut the Great, and they often followed soon after the conversion of a Viking kingdom to Christianity. We might suppose that the stag motif on these coins made symbolic reference to such conversion. It does not appear to have any prototype in Carolingian coins, though these influenced the Christian and royal iconography of the Viking mints.

The influence of the classical lore of the serpent-eating stag extends far beyond Christian iconography, however. Indeed it is doubtful whether the classical texts will stand as the source for a large number of Eastern treatments of the motif.⁵⁷ Arab scholars'

57 Richard Ettinghausen, "The 'snake-eating stag' in the East", in Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr., edited by Kurt Weitzmann (Princeton, 1955), pp. 272-286 and plates.

familiarity with much of Greek and Latin science will account for the occurrence of the snake-eating stag in Arab natural histories of the Middle Ages, some of which are clearly indebted to classical sources. It is less plausible that Sassanian carvings of the motif have the same origin, and when we find our snake-eater in the Avesta and in Hindu manuscripts, we may feel less than certain that the idea has its source in Pliny or Oppian. It seems more likely that Pliny and Oppian were in fact recording what they had heard of a belief in the appetite for snakes of various animals, chief among which are deer, and that this belief was more extensive than we might suspect. It seems that in some places the serpent-eating lore of the stag is associated with various species of goat. The largest of all species of goats, capra megaceros, which inhabits mountainous regions from Bokhara through Afghanistan to the Himalayas is known as the Water-goat or as the Markhor, which means "snake-eater".⁵⁸ It has the reputation of eating snakes, though in fact it is highly unlikely that it actually does so, and there is nothing in the behaviour of any species of goat which would justify such a belief. Strangely enough goats are also believed to be adept at killing adders in Scotland, far away from the home of the Markhor, and a Gaelic adage, Cleas-na gooiths githeath na nathrack, means "As the goat eats the viper".⁵⁹

Eastern manuscripts of all periods confirm that a quadruped identified variously as mountain goat, stag or antelope was thought

58 Ettinghausen, p. 283.

59 Christopher Lever, The Naturalised Animals of the British Isles (London, 1977), p. 205.

to eat snakes and was associated with water. A number of Sassanian seals and a stucco relief show the familiar conflict (Plate 37). In the art and literature of the Islamic period the belief is further developed. For instance the thirteenth-century encyclopaedia The Wonders of Creation written by al-Quazwini, known as "the Arab Pliny", contains an entry for a species identified both as a mountain goat, (iyyal) and as an antelope, but which a Persian version translates as "stag" or "deer" (Plate 38).⁶⁰ This animal, we are told, eats snakes when sick. This makes him thirsty, but he must refrain from drinking water until he has eaten crabs, when he drinks to counteract the poison. These details clearly go back to classical sources. Al-Quazwini then, like Oppian and Physiologus, gives another version of the process as he tells us that when the antelope reaches the snake's hole, he puts his nostrils to it and sucks it out. A different account of the suction process is given in another late-thirteenth century Persian manuscript which states that the "mountain ox" extracts the snake by squirting water into the hole. In this case, we are told, water is not dangerous to the quadruped, and it eats not only crabs, but also crab-apples to counteract the venom. In the late fourteenth century the Zoological lexicon of al-Damiri makes some significant additions to this material.⁶¹ The iyyal, or mountain goat, he tells us, is addicted

60 Ettinghausen, pp. 274-276 sets out the parallels between al-Quazwini and the western accounts of the serpent-eating stag.

61 Ettinghausen, p. 280. Ettinghausen points out that the iyyal was otherwise known as the "bezoar goat" and is frequently featured in Luristan bronzes. Al-Damiri's is one of the earliest accounts of the bezoar, whose Western name is a corruption of a Persian word which means "protecting against poison".

to snakes.

If it is bitten by any of them, tears flow down from its eyes to the hollows which are under the sockets of its eyes, and which are deep enough to admit a finger. The tears get congealed and become lustrous, like the sun, in which state they are used as an antidote for snake poison, and are known as the animal bezoar stone.

The best bezoars, he says, are yellow.

The bezoar stone, prized by apothecaries throughout the ages, was more usually a fatty lump or calculus commonly found in the stomachs, but also in other organs, of deer and of goats. It was valued as an antidote against poison, and good examples fetched high prices. At one time it became the fashion to have them elaborately mounted in gold or silver filigree and attached to a bowl by a chain (Plate 39). The bezoar could then be dipped into the royal drink to thwart the evil intentions of regicides. The lore of the bezoar stone is undoubtedly indebted to the reputation of the stag as the enemy of snakes, indeed the whole traditional pharmacology of the stag seems to reflect this belief, for it was primarily as an antidote against poison that various parts of the stag were medicinally valued. Its horns might be consumed in various ways, or might be burned as an antidote, as shown in a miniature in a manuscript of the writings of the Greek poet Nicander in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Plate 40). Nicander's two surviving poems, written in the second century B.C., describe various remedies for the bites of venomous animals and antidotes to poison. The miniature shows a man effecting a fumigation to expel snakes by holding a deer's antlers in the flames of a fire on a small altar. Two snakes flee to the right of the picture. A Persian Dioscorides manuscript, now in Kansas, has a miniature illustrating the plant

Cytissus (Plate 41). The plant has no connection with stags, but the illustrator appears to have associated it with other plants which Dioscorides mentions as antidotes against snake-bite, for his painting shows a stag biting a serpent, which is coiled round its neck, behind a large trefoiled plant.

A nineteenth century shah-nahmeh manuscript, painted in India, contains a miniature showing the defeated tyrant Zahhak, who is identified as a snake in the Avesta, being chained to a rock (Plate 42). He had usurped the throne of Iran, and made a pact with the Devil. The painter thus introduces the mountain goat as an allegory of the purgation of the land of its poisonous serpent, Zahhak the tyrant. Even further from Western sources is a non-Muslim snake-charmer's raga from India, the Asvari Ragini (Plate 43). The title Asa vari means "against serpents", and illustrations show snakes coming down from the trees, overpowered by the song. One miniature discovered by Richard Ettinghausen shows a goat eating a snake, and two peacocks doing the same.

Al-Damiri quotes some verses, datable from the early tenth century, in which the poet compares the combination of ardent desire and aversion of the anguished lover to the state of the stag that has eaten serpents, and though burning with thirst must refrain from water.

I have deserted thee not from any abhorrence on my part,
 But because I find that love can only be retained by turning
 away,
 Like the desertion of the thirsty ones, of water
 When they see that there is death in their coming to drink it;
 Their souls are enraged from the ardent desire they have for it,
 But are afraid of death,
 For they look at it from a distance,
 And turn away their faces from the hated water,
 Whilst they look at it with the glance of love.

Al-Damiri explains this as a reference to the burning thirst of the iyyal who has eaten snakes, but dare not go to water.⁶² Thus that rather rare variant in the zoological lore, which forbids the stag from slaking its thirst makes a notable contribution to the cervine imagery of love poetry common in both eastern and western texts from the Song of Songs onwards.

The quality of restlessness which is a feature of the stag which has consumed snakes recommends it through the ages to poets who wish to emblematised the restless lover, and may perhaps cast a new emphasis on an old but familiar topos. At the opening of Book Four of Virgil's Aeneid, for instance, the restless Dido is smitten with love for Aeneas in terms which irresistably suggest the image of the transpierced, dittany-eating deer.

At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura
 Volnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni.
 Multa viri virtus animo multusque recursat
 Gentis honos: haerent infixi pectore voltus
 Verbaque, nec placidam membris dat cura quietem.

But the queen, long since smitten with a grievous love-pang, feeds the wound with her life-blood, and is wasted with fire unseen. Again and again the thought of her hero's valour and his glorious lineage came forcibly back to her, and his countenance and words stayed imprinted in her bosom, and the pang withholds calm rest from her limbs.

Though Virgil does not say that Dido is a deer at this point, he makes the latent metaphor explicit some fifty lines later, when the love-stricken Dido is compared to a "hind, smitten by an arrow, which, all unwary, amid the Cretan woods, a shepherd hunting with darts has pierced from afar, leaving in her the winged steel,

62 Ettinghausen, p. 276

unknowing ..."⁶³ She is a stricken deer for whom no Dittany is in sight. Her restlessness, her burning fire await a remedy which is not available, and so her story ends tragically, as she is consumed on the funeral pyre at the end of the Book. The conceit reached the Renaissance emblematisers via a sonnet of Petrarch's (I dolci colli ...) in which the lover is compared to a stag wounded by an arrow: the more it seeks to escape, the more the wound smartens. There are emblems on this theme by Scève, Junius and Vaenius, who borrows the motto Nullis Medicabilis Herbis from Ovid (Plate 44).⁶⁴ Heinsius has an emblem of the stag which slakes its thirst, with the motto Solatum non Auxilium, and Whitney has an emblem of the aspiring soul which is drawn to heavenly virtue as iron is drawn by a loadstone. A detail shows a stag slaking its thirst at a stream, and the gloss quotes Psalm 41. Reusner makes a less conventional use of the serpent-eating stag in an emblem where the stag which draws snakes from their holes and kills them emblematises the need for violent remedies against desperate crimes: we should drag them out and punish them (Plate 45). Renaissance editions of the Hieroglyphics of Horapollo give the stag as an emblem of longevity (because it renews its skin), as an emblem of the man who, though agile, is easily put to flight (as the stag flees the snake), and as an emblem of the man deceived by flattery (since the stag is easily beguiled by pleasant music) (Plate 46). All three of these emblems are indebted to the received lore of the stag, though they show how

63 IV. 66. Loeb translation.

64 Heroides, 5.149.

it can be misunderstood - though traditionally timid, the stag is not frightened of snakes.

Renaissance writers very rarely pick up the traditional lore of the serpent-eating stag. Instead we find them using received ideas which are only indirectly related to the main tradition of Christian iconography. There is, however, a distinct topos of the weeping deer which no doubt owed its vogue to the lachrimose imagery, the eyes and tears conceits of the Baroque period, and this turns out to have an unexpected connection with the tradition that the stag eats snakes. The topos goes back to Bartholomaeus's statement that the hunted hart will flee to a river or pond, where it "roareth, cryeth and weepeth when he is taken". Batman's addition to this transfers the weeping by the waterside from the hunted to the serpent-eating stag:

As Gesner writeth when the Hart is sicke, and hath eaten manye Serpents for his recoverie, he is brought into so great a heate, that he covereth his body, unto the very eares and eyes, at which time, distilleth many teares, from the which, the sayd stone is gendred.⁶⁵

This lachrimose source of bezoars is also supported by the appeal which is made by the hart which speaks in The Noble Art of Venerie:

O cruell, be content, to take in worth my teares,
Which grow to gumme and fall from me: content thee with my
heares.
Content thee with my hornes; which every year I mew,
Since all these three make medicines, some sickness to eschew.
My teares congealed to gumme, by pieces from me fall,
And thee preserve from pestilence, in pomander or ball. ⁶⁶
Such wholesome teares shedde I, when thou persewest me so.

65 Batman uppon Bartholeme (London, 1582), p. 358.

66 Quoted by T F Thistleton Dyer, Folk Lore of Shakespeare (repr. Toronto, 1966), p. 170.

It is, no doubt, with Batman's Bartholemew in mind that Hamlet says, "Let the stricken deer go weep" and that Jacques in As You Like It describes the weeping stag:

a poor sequester'd stag,
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,
Did come to languish; and indeed, my lord,
The wretched animal heaved forth such groans,
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat
Almost to bursting; and the big round tears
Coursed one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chase: and thus the hairy fool,
Much marked of the melancholy Jacques,
Stood on th'extremest verge of the swift brook,
Augmenting it with tears.⁶⁷

Drayton in Polyolbion ends the description of a deer hunt with the stag weeping its own fate, and adds the note: "The hart weepeth at his dying: his tears are held precious in medicine", and Lyly, Greene and Sidney all use the same motif of the wounded deer shedding tears.⁶⁸ In most of these literary version of the motif it is the hunted stag rather than the snake-eating stag which weeps by the water, though Antonio Ludovico's De Occultis Proprietatibus makes the connection which Batman suggests as he tells how, when stags have eaten snakes, they go to rivers and submerge, leaving only their mouths above water. However great their thirst, they do not drink, but stand there until the poison is sweated in tears through their eyes. These tears fall in balls and are gathered up by natives and used as antidotes, called bezoars.⁶⁹ The image of the weeping deer

67 2.1.

68 See W.M. Carroll, Animal Conventions in English Renaissance non-Religious Prose (New York, 1954), p. 98.

69 De Occultis Proprietatibus (Lisbon, 1540) III, ch. 33, quoted in Ettinghausen, p. 280 (not seen).

lingers on in La Fontaine, who has two fables in which the stag's tears do not save it from its fate.⁷⁰

The image clearly has its source in speculation about the function of the conspicuous sub-orbital glands which can be seen on most species of deer. Gilbert White called these glands spiracula, and thought they were used for breathing:

When deer are thirsty they plunge their noses, like some horses, very deep under water, while in the act of drinking, and continue them in that situation for a considerable time: but to obviate any inconveniency, they can open two vents, one at the inner corner of each eye, having a communication with the nose ...⁷¹

In fact these glands are not connected to the nostril and are no use for breathing, but they do secrete a waxy material which oozes out in quite large quantities and is often rubbed off on trees to serve as a mark.

Throughout its history, then, the classical zoological lore of the stag has combined pieces of pseudo-science with elements which have at least some basis in natural history. Any particular element is always liable to associate itself with some other piece of lore with which it has no essential connection. If this does not lead to much scientific enlightenment, it provides fertile ground for various traditions of allegory and emblem.

70 Fables 15, "Le Cerf et la Vigne" and 21, "L'oeil du Maitre".

71 Natural History of Selborne, 1789 (London, 1937), p. 52.

CHAPTER THREE

The long-lived Stag

Oppian's graphic description of the struggle between serpents and stags, quoted in our previous chapter, ends with a curious formula: "The stag, moreover, lives a long time, and of a truth men say that he lives four lives of a crow". Several other classical accounts of the stag mention its longevity, and, as we have seen, the whole snake-eating process was traditionally associated with a renewal or prolongation of the stag's life after a period variously estimated at from fifty to five hundred year. It is this process of renewal which presumably made it a particularly appropriate symbol for the Christian convert or catechumen and perhaps for the revered manes of Scythian kings and medieval emperors. Traditions of the longevity of stags are various in several cultures, but perhaps the most curious, and indeed the most influential and important, is that which is picked up by Oppian's concluding formula. To recognise that this is a formula, that is to say that it is conventional and literary, we need only quote the ancient precept, widely known to classical writers, and attributed to Hesiod under the title

The Precepts of Chiron:

A chattering crow lives out nine generations of aged men, but a stag's life is four times a crow's, and a raven's life makes three stags old, whilst the phoenix outlives nine ravens, but we, the rich-haired Nymphs, daughters of Zeus the aegis-holder, outlive ten phoenixes.¹

1 Loeb translation, p. 75.

The incremental pattern displayed by this proverb, in which the stag is associated with other creatures, readily provides a formula by which it can be identified even after it has been adapted to different literary purposes. Thus, besides Oppian's formula, which alludes directly to the Hesiodic fragment, we find Cicero remembering how, on his deathbed, Theophrastus was said "to have reproached nature for having bestowed a long life on stags and crows, creatures to whom such a gift made no difference, whereas mankind to whom it made the greatest difference had so short a time of life bestowed on them ..."² Plutarch picks up the formula when he notes that "every crow, if her mate dies, remains a widow, not merely for a short time, but for nine generations of men"³, and in Ovid's Metamorphoses Aeson is rejuvenated by a magic potion mixed by Medea. Among other ingredients this includes a "stag's liver (for stags live to a great age) and the head and beak of a crow more than nine generations old".⁴

If these sporadic allusions testify to a general familiarity with the Hesiodic proverb amongst classical writers, the late Latin version of it by Ausonius in the fourth century A.D. suggests a particular emphasis.

Ter binis deciesque super exit in annos
iusta senescentum quos implet vita virorum.
hos novies superat vivendo garrula cornix
et quater egreditur cornicis saecula cervus.
alipedem cervum ter vincit corvus et illum
multiplicat novies Phoenix, reperabilis ales.

2 Tusculan Disputations, 3.28.70.

3 Moralia, 989.

4 Metamorphoses, 7.273-275.

quem nos perpetuo decies praevertimus aevo,
Nymphae Hamadryades, quarum longissima vita est.

Three times two and nine times ten complete the tale of years whereto the life of men who live to the fullness of years attains. Nine times the chattering crow passes this limit in her span of life, while the stag passes through four times the lifetime of the crow. Thrice the raven outstrips the swift-footed stag in length of years; while that bird which renews its life, the Phoenix, multiplies ninefold the raven's years. But we, the Hamadryad Nymphs, the longest-lived of living things, pass through ten lifetimes of the Phoenix in continuous span.⁵

The other creatures associated with the stag in this classical proverb deserve some comment. Both Hesoid and Ausonius distinguish between two species of the crow family, identified as cormorants, ravens or choughs by various translators (we need not enquire too closely into the exact identification). Classical writers support the wider evidence of folklore for a belief in the longevity of crows, indeed the familiar legend relating to the ravens at the Tower of London has come down to our own time. The Phoenix's appearance in this catalogue is almost predictable, as a familiar symbol of longevity and renewal. The varying accounts of its method of propagation, and the complex symbolism which surrounded it, even before Shakespeare and D.H. Lawrence appropriated it to their own purposes, cannot even be summarised here, but one tradition which has a certain bearing on the Hesiodic proverb deserves to be identified. Different classical sources give varying estimates of the lifespan of the phoenix - from fifty to five hundred or to several thousand years.⁶ One of the oldest traditions, however,

5 De Aetatibus Animantum. Hesiodon, 1-8. Loeb translation.

6 See A.F. von Pauly, G. Wissowa, et al., Real-Encyclopadie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft (Stuttgart, 1894 ---), s.v. phoinix.

associates the age of the phoenix with the Magnus Annus, or Great Year, the period within which all the celestial bodies would return to their original positions, after which "The world's great age begins anew", as Shelley has it. The phoenix was associated with the sun, of course, and, in some accounts, at the moment of its immolation the sun, or time, stood still. This association of the phoenix with universal time seems to have influenced subsequent interpretations of the legend of the oldest animals, and provides us with the most reliable key to the uses to which it was put in later literature. For example, a single codex of Ausonius contains a passage immediately following on from the animal proverb which runs as follows:

This limit bounds the lives of living creatures. As for the rest, God, the disposer of all hidden time, knows what periods Mercury and what ages Saturn have to roll, what orbits Mars and the benignant fires of Jupiter must yet fulfil, or in what revolutions kindly Venus hastens on her way, or how long are the toils that yet await the moon and sun, before that which they call the Great Year reaches its close, and the wandering stars come back again in their ancient courses as they stood at the beginning of the ordered universe.⁷

Ausonius's editors wondered what on earth this passage had to do with the animal proverb which preceded it and doubted its authenticity, but in fact it has everything to do with it, is the key to its meaning, both here and in other sources. The temporal series which the successive animals establish extends to universal time, and it is as a legend of universal time that the proverb of

7 Lines 9-17.

the Oldest Animals (for thus we should identify it) is used in the literature of Ireland and Wales, and in the folklore of Europe of all periods.⁸

In a Gaelic version of this proverb, recorded in the nineteenth century, the series ends with the oak tree, recalling the Hamadryads of the Hesiodic verses, for these were the nymphs of trees which were, as Pindar put it, "Allotted a term as long as the years of a tree".

Thrice the age of a dog, the age of a horse;
 Thrice the age of a horse, the age of a man;
 Thrice the age of a man, the age of a deer;
 Thrice the age of a deer, the age of an eagle;
 Thrice the age of an eagle, the age of an oak-tree.⁹

Versions of this proverb were recited in the Highlands of Scotland within living memory, sometimes varying the details of the catalogue, in one instance ending with a sea-monster. It is also known in Ireland as a folk-proverb, recorded within the last hundred years in a version which preserves some further essential details.

8 Versions of the proverb were first published in the correspondence columns of The Academy (1888), pp. 241-242, 258, 274, 356. Eleanor Hull examined it in "The Hawk of Achill, or the Legend of the Oldest Animals", Folklore, XLIII (1932), pp. 376-409. Michael Bath, "Some ancient traditions of longevity in Animals", Journal of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History, VIII (1977), pp. 249-258. Sir Kenneth Blaxter, "Cervinus annos vivere: An account of opinion about the length of life of the deer", British Veterinary Journal, 135 (1979), pp. 591-599.

9 Alexander Nicolson, A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs (Edinburgh, 1881), pp. 371-372. The lines were earlier printed by William Scrope, Days of deer stalking in the Forest of Atholl, with some account of the nature and habits of the red deer (London, 1847), p. 25. Scrope records several Highland stories of deer living to a great age. A slightly different version of the proverb can be found in Alexander Forbes, Gaelic names of beasts ... birds ... fishes (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 132.

Three wattles (or stakes) equal a hound's life,
 Three hounds a steed;
 Three steeds a man;
 Three men an eagle;
 Three eagles a salmon;
 Three salmon a yew tree;
 Three yew trees a ridge;
 Three ridges from the beginning to the end of the world.¹⁰

It is notable that this contains both the tree and the reference to universal time which we found in the classical versions. The initial detail of the wattles, or stakes, may prove puzzling, but the peasants who recited this explained that this word (Erse, cuaille) referred to the stakes put in a hedge to fill a gap. The ridges at the end (eitre) were the old very wide ridges used in plough land in ancient times, which, as Eleanor Hull says, "left an almost indelible mark in the ground".¹¹ This initial reference to a fence or enclosure is found in versions of the proverb from all over Europe. A German version runs: fence, hound, horse, man, ass, wild goose, crow, stag, raven and phoenix. The Portuguese version has: fence, dog, horse, man, stag and elephant.¹² A Spanish version is similar, whilst another German version from the early seventeenth century runs town, dog, horse, man, ass, wild goose, crow, stag, raven, phoenix.¹³ In all these examples each animal lives three

10 Hull, p. 381.

11 Hull, p. 381.

12 The Academy (1888), p. 274.

13 The Academy (1888), p. 356. German versions can be found in an early-seventeenth century book on the properties of the deer, Johannes Agricola, Cervi cum Integri et Vivi, Natura et Proprietas (Amberg, 1617), pp. 2-6.

times the age of its predecessor. We might speculate that the initial hedge, stake, or town referred to the idea of human settlement, a suggestion which some of the literary applications to which this proverb was put will confirm. In the Book of Fermoy there is a poem which simply amplifies this initial image:

A year for the stake by right,
 Three for the field in its green bearing
 In fallow and in second fallow,
 And the third in its third fallow.¹⁴

The Book of Ballymote gives us:

Three fields to a tree,
 Three trees to a hound,
 Three hounds to a horse,
 Three horses to a human being,
 Three human beings to a deer,
 Three deer to a chain,
 Three chains to a salmon,
 Three salmon to a yew,
 Three yew trees to an age, ever-living, God.¹⁵

A manuscript in the British Museum has the series winter (no doubt three winters equals three years - winter is the season which provides the greatest test of endurance), fence-stake, dog, man, stag, eagle, male salmon, and "Three salmon to the end of the world".¹⁶

In addition to these records of what are undoubtedly oral and folk versions, there are a number of more elaborate, literary versions which deserve mention. Of these the most remarkable is the mosaic on the floor of the sanctuary, before the High Altar of Westminster Abbey. This consists of a series of circles, lozenge shapes, and rectangles, suggesting an astronomical diagram, with

14 Hull, p. 382.

15 Hull, p. 258.

16 Hull, p. 382.

some fragments of an inscription. The mosaic was completed in the time of Henry III and was the work of an Italian artist called Odericus. The Latin inscription was fortunately recorded by William Camden before it became illegible, and it turns out to be a version of our proverb of the Oldest Animals.

If the reader considers carefully everything that is set down here he will discover the end of the primum mobile. The hedge is threefold (? lasts three years), you add dogs, horses and men, stags and crows, eagles and huge whales. Whatever follows multiplies by three the passing years of the earth. This spherical globe shows the spherical microcosm. In the year of Christ one thousand two hundred and twelve, with sixty minus four (1268) King Henry the Third, the City, Odericus and the Abbot joined together these porphyry stones.¹⁷

Camden explains that the figures on the pavement "represent the time of the world's duration, or the time in which the primum mobile, according to the Ptolemaic system, was going about." Once again, then, the sequence of Oldest Animals leads up to a concept of universal time.

In Irish literature the proverb of the Oldest Animals was adapted for use in a number of tales which purport to account for the origins of Ireland. We can see why this should be so when we recognise that the concern with universal time which the proverb had from antiquity easily lends itself to tales which deal with what in the Middle Ages is called universal history. In these tales certain animals survive, or certain men survive in the shape of animals for a definite purpose, admirably defined by Eleanor Hull: "They are historians, surviving the Deluge and undergoing all sorts of hardships and miseries for the single purpose of carrying down to

¹⁷ Britannia, edited by John Gough, 3 vols. (1789), i, p. 24. My translation.

later days the early traditions of the race."¹⁸ Noteworthy in these tales is a syncretism of Christian and pagan elements, for whilst some preserve the names of kings and heroes of Irish tradition which were part of the pagan, legendary history of Ireland, they are characteristic of universal histories in that they assimilate this to the Biblical account, taking in the Flood, and the birth of Christ. In some instances, too, they resemble those other universal histories of the Middle Ages which sought to comprehend not only local tradition and Biblical history, but took in classical legend as well. Thus the ethnogenic fables of the Middle Ages such as Fredegar's Chronicle of the Franks, or Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Britons not only traced national origins back to Noah (there is no point in going back beyond the sons of Noah, since the Flood cut off all other lines of descent - we are as much sons of Noah as we are sons of Adam) but also claimed a Greek or Trojan hero as ancestor of the race. The impulse of universal history is always towards comprehensiveness, it is instinctively syncretic. Whilst the Irish tales which concern us are infinitely less sophisticated and less comprehensive than the celebrated universal histories of the Middle Ages, they spring from the same roots, have the same instincts, and cannot be understood unless some of the conventions of the genre are recognised.

The tale of Tuan mac Cairill recounts the history of Ireland

18 Hull, p. 386.

through the mouth of Tuan, a pagan warrior of Donegal.¹⁹ Saint Finnian persuades the old warrior to visit his new monastery at Moville, after hearing that Tuan knows the history of all the races who had inhabited Ireland. Tuan tells of the successive invasions by Partholan, Nemedh, the Firbolg, the Tuatha de Danaan and the Milesians, and he explains that he knows all this history not from tradition, but at first hand, for he himself had been among the oldest inhabitants of Ireland, having settled there after the Flood. He alone was spared when the plague carried off all his contemporaries. He lived twenty two years alone, running from hill to hill, until he became old and lodged in holes and caves, and grew a mane and claws. One night when he was asleep he saw himself changed into the shape of a stag, and in this shape he was restored to youth and health. On his head grew antlers with sixty tines. Then he became leader of all the herds of Ireland. Eventually old age again overtook him, and he became successively a wild boar, a hawk and a salmon. Each of these shape changes corresponds to one of the successive invasions of Ireland. In his final apotheosis as a salmon he is carried to King Cairell. Out of the King's body he was reborn, Rabelaisian fashion, as Tuan Cairell's son, experienced the conversion of Ireland to Christianity, was baptised, and told St Finnian (a historical Saint, d. 579) his story.

The syncretic elements in this tale are noteworthy. The mention of the Flood is not adventitious, but has a dynastic bearing.

19 Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt, The Voyage of Bran (London, 1897), II, pp. 285-301. The tale is summarised by Hull, pp. 387-388, and discussed together with other versions of the Oldest Animals by Josef Weisweiler, "Vorindogermanische Schichten der irischen Heldensage", Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie, 24 (1953), pp. 165-197.

The Polycrates ring motif is extraneous to the story and adds a damaging inconsistency. If the old man was the sole survivor, and the progenitor of all the Irish, as surely the original purpose of the legend had it, whence came King Cairell? Or the invaders? The difficulty reflects a confusion over the role of Tuan, who is both original progenitor, and surviving witness, or historian. The ancient Tuan mac Cairell becomes the son of the younger Tuan Cairell - the oldest man in Ireland becomes in this fishy rebirth the son of one of the youngest: the child is father to the man. Finally, the plague which carries off all but Tuan is surely only an Irish recapitulation of the Biblical flood. Tuan is Noah.

In the shape-shifting series in which Tuan witnesses the history of Ireland we recognise the stages of the proverb of the Oldest Animals. We find it again in the Colloquy of Collum Cille, a tale dating from the late eighth or early ninth century, in which the historical saint, Collum Cille alias St Columba (d. 597) meets a youth who tells him that he had been the stag of stags, and then in turn a salmon, a seal, a wolf and a man.²⁰ The saint asks a question about the origins of Ireland, to which the youth replies, enigmatically, "Some say it was Mongan, son of Fiachna". The latter was a pagan Irish sea god who was known as a notably protean shape-shifter. Brief though this anecdote is, its combination of pagan and Christian elements, and its association of a series of the Oldest Animals with a question about historical origins conforms to the pattern of the Tale of Tuan mac Cairell.

20 Weisweiler, pp. 171-172.

A similar pattern can be made out in the poem from a manuscript of the early sixteenth century, "The Hawk of Achill", which takes the form of a dialogue between two of the Oldest Animals in which each tells of its involvement in the history of Ireland since the Flood.²¹ The first of these is a bird, identified variously as a hawk and a crow, which inhabits the lonely island of Achill, off the coast of Mayo. The ancient bird has witnessed the deaths of many of the legendary heroes of Irish history, since it has preyed and grown fat on their corpses; it is thus that it can recount the history of Ireland. The other speaker in the poem is Fintan, the oldest man in Ireland. He was one of the companions of Cessair, grand-daughter of Noah. Cessair had besought Noah to give them a place in the ark, but Noah refused and told them that if they journeyed to the western corners of the world, they would come to a country (Ireland) which, since it was unpeopled, was without sin, and would thus escape the Flood. Cessair reached Ireland after seven years of wandering, but in spite of Noah's prediction, the Flood caught up with them even there, and all were drowned except Fintan who was saved. We can recognise in this syncretic ethnogenic legend, calculated to account for the origins of Ireland, but Fintan does not become the common ancestor of the Irish, instead he becomes a salmon, the blind salmon of Assaroe, thus assuming the identity of another of the Oldest Animals. In this guise he inhabits all of the rivers of Ireland in a passage of the poem which, even in

21 Hull, pp. 389-409.

translation, marvellously captures the wonder of the metamorphosis. The verses take the form of an Irish Polyolbion, in which the immolation in the Biblical Flood naturally suggests, or is transformed into the struggles of the migrating salmon. Anyone who has watched salmon migrating up a highland stream will recognise the realism of the description.

At the black outpouring of the Flood,
The Lord put me, to my misery,
Into the shape of a salmon at every spring.

Short, methought, was my stay on the Boyne
After my coming over the ocean,
In the Bush, the Bann, the brown Bru,
On the Suck the Suir, and the Shannon.

* * * *

At the Shannon, the Dael and the Dubh,
In the Sligo and the river Monad,
Until I came without trouble hither
To the waterfall of the estuary of the Erne.

I passed a night in the Northern wave,
And I at Assaroe of the seals,
Never felt I a night like that
From the beginning of the world to its end.

I could not stay under the waterfall,
I took a leap, but it did not help me,
The ice came like clear blue glass
Between me and the falls of the Mac Modiurn.

In the shape of the salmon of Assaroe he has an eye pecked out by a crow, who turns out to be none other than the Hawk of Achill. He passes five hundred years as a salmon, fifty as an eagle, a hundred as a falcon, and finally "the King of the Sun" takes pity on him, and returns him to human shape. This shape-shifting series is no doubt indebted to the legend of the Oldest Animals. Each of the speakers recounts his knowledge of the legendary history of the tribes and heroes of Ireland, but in Fintan's account, one episode

stands out. It is an episode which is known elsewhere in Irish literature. It tells how when King Coning was seated in Tara a mysterious lofty stranger approached and seated himself amongst the company. He spoke Greek and said he came from Eden. In the prose version of the episode he is God Himself, or an angel, and it is the very moment of the Crucifixion. In his hand in both versions he bears a branch which bore three different fruits - nuts, apples and sloes, the Irish food of immortality. When the stranger departs, he leaves the branch, and Fintan plants each of the seeds, which grow into the three ancient trees of Ireland, the Yew of Ross, the Mighty Tree of Mughna, and the Tree of Tortan, each of which is celebrated in Irish legend. The poem ends with the Hawk expressing repentance for its sins, and the ancient Fintan promising him absolution and a heavenly immortality.

The purposes of this poem are rendered a little confusing because of its dialogue form and because it employs not one, but two witnesses to the historical events, which it handles in an allusive manner, demanding a reader who will recognise the familiar names of Irish legendary history. At the same time the poem gains a certain tension, which one must suppose deliberate (it is certainly effective) from the uncertainty which it fosters as to the real relation between the Hawk and Fintan. In some senses antagonistic (the hawk is fierce, predatory, whereas Fintan the salmon is mild-mannered) they are yet to be identified. Perhaps one is the antitype of the other. Each assumes the guise of one of the Oldest Animals in order to act as witness to the history of Ireland, and though there is no stag in the poem, we should perhaps recognise in

the episode of the immortal fruit a digression which, indebted though it may be to alien traditions, nevertheless brings in with the oldest trees another item which we recognise from the Hesiodic proverb.

Welsh writers also made use of the legend of the Oldest Animals. Iolo Goch, one of the most celebrated bards of the fourteenth century, has a poem on the ages of animals in which each lives three times the age of the last in the series alder branch (no doubt used as a fence stake), dog, horse, man, stag, thrush, oak, and earth.²² The legend is adapted to more complicated purposes, however, in a more famous Welsh tale in the Mabinogion.²³ The tale of Culhwch and Olwen consists largely of a number of impossible tasks which the hero, Culhwch, has imposed on him by the giant, Ysbaddaden, to win the hand of the giant's daughter, Olwen. The chief task is the hunting of the monster, Twrch Trwyth; but there is a Catch 22 to each of the tasks imposed, since Twrch Trwyth cannot be caught except by a hound, Drudwyn, almost as difficult to find as Twrch Trwyth itself, and Drudwyn the hound cannot be held except on a magic leash, which first has to be found, and he cannot be hunted except by Mabon son of Modron, whose whereabouts are unknown. Though Culhwch conspicuously fails to fulfil the larger number of the tasks assigned him, he sets particular store by the finding of Mabon son of Modron,

22 Ludwig Stern, "Iolo Goch", Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie, 2 (1899), p. 174. E.B. Cowell, "The Legend of the Oldest Animals", Y Cymmrodor, 5 (1882), pp. 169-172, despite its promising title discusses very few versions of the legend but concentrates on a Buddhist legend in which various animals claim to have the longest memory, which seems to me to have little connection with our topic.

23 Translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London, 1949), p. 124 ff.

and it is in this quest that the legend of the Oldest Animals is introduced. It seems likely that the incremental series of impossible tasks suggested the incremental proverb, for it is this incremental pattern which dominates the structure of the tale. In the quest for Mabon son of Modron each of the Oldest Animals is asked in turn if he knows that huntsman's whereabouts, on the principle that the Oldest Animals will have the longest memories, and will have witnessed most things, for, as Ysbaddaden stresses, no-one has seen Mabon for a very long time. The first animal to be interrogated is the blackbird of Cilgwri, who replies that although he is very old, there is an animal God made before him, the Stag of Rhedynfre. The Stag replies to their question that although when he came there there was only one tine on his antlers, and there was only a single oak sapling, which grew to have a hundred branches (i.e. a hundred years - the branches are marvellously identified with the antlers) and is now but a red stump (the two details of the stag and the oak tree from the proverb are conflated in this episode), he has never heard of Mabon son of Modron. There is, however, an older animal than he, namely the owl of Cwm Cawwyd, who, though he has witnesses three woods growing up, has not seen Mabon. There is, of course, a yet older creature, to whom they are referred, the Eagle of Gwernabwy, who in turn refers them to the Salmon of Llyn Llyw, who as it turns out, just happens to have migrated up the Severn, past Gloucester, where Mabon son of Modron happens to be imprisoned. His release is, of course, achieved, and the heroes go on to tackle the next of their tasks.

The legend of the Oldest Animals lends itself to the narrative purposes of the tale largely because of its series structure. As each animal in turn, despite its fantastic age, disclaims any knowledge of Mabon, so the difficulties of the task increase, and the gloire earned in its successful completion is magnified. The successively greater ages of the animals also satisfy that bragadoccio delight in exaggeration which both the hero and the teller of this tale display. Though the Oldest Animals as they appear in the tale of Culhwch do not appear to have any very clear association with origin-myths, the identity of Mabon, son of Modron may nevertheless preserve a shadow of such symbolism. Mabon is one of three supreme prisoners of Britain in the Red Book of Hergest, and his name has been derived from the Celtic god Maponus, found on Romano-British inscriptions, sometimes shown as a hunter, always as a youth. Modron is the Celtic mother goddess Matrona, who gave her name to the river Marne, always shown in sculpture in groups of three. She became identified with the Irish tripartite goddess Morrigan, and serves, as Loomis has shown, as an intermediate figure between these and Morgan le Fay, the fairy queen of Arthurian romance. Both Modron and Morgan are sometimes shown as being not a beautiful damsel, but a hideous hag, with crow characteristics, suggesting a possible connection with the transformed hag who represents the Sovereignty of Ireland in legends featuring white stags to be discussed later. Celtic mother-goddesses were conceived as presiding over gods and mortals and over the land with which they were particularly concerned. Mabon son of Modron means,

simply, 'Son, son of Mother', as Anne Ross points out.²⁴

Although the legend of the Oldest Animals testifies to a widespread belief in the longevity of the stag, it would be false to claim that the stag occupied any especially privileged position in it vis à vis the other animals whose longevity it celebrates. In this proverb the stag is only one among several ancient beasts. But other traditions exist which suggest that the stag had a particular role to play in European folklore as a long-lived animal associated with dynastic or racial origins. In Fenian legend deer play a prominent role. Finn's birthname Demne probably means 'little stag', and his wife is changed into a doe. Their son is Oisín (Ossian), which means likewise "little stag".²⁵ Combatting armies in Irish myth are frequently compared to bellowing deer-herds, and this comparison becomes a virtual topos or commonplace in the Irish battle descriptions. In the Irish versions of Virgil and Lucan the armies of the Trojans, Etruscans, of the Rutili or of Caesar are described as deer herds (damraidh), to the extent that the epithet becomes an epic-formula. No doubt it was facilitated, if not suggested by the similarity between the Irish word for deer herd (dám-rad) and the etymologically distinct term for an army or host (dām-rad). The difference is only one of accent, so that evidently there are occasions when confusion might arise as to which of these nearly homophonic terms was meant. The stag metaphor is not confined to the whole host, however, but can be used of the individual warrior, as in the Tale of Congal,

24 R.S. Loomis, Wales and Arthurian Legend (Cardiff, 1956), p. 119 ff., p. 147; Anne Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain (London, 1967), pp. 208-209, p. 215.

25 See Weisweiler, pp. 35-55.

where the two heroes are compared to two stags, or the Irish version of the Iliad, where Hector's roaring is compared to that of a stag in rut. This is not the only case where the raging warrior becomes a type of the rutting stag.²⁶

The "deer's cry" or fith-fath in Gaelic is a charm which makes men invisible or changes them into deer. It is preserved in Irish in the legend of St Patrick which recounts how once, when the Saint was travelling through Ireland with his youthful companion Benignus, he was intercepted by a party of heathen. St Patrick pronounced a magic charm or prayer over his companion which caused the eyes of their enemies to become bewitched, so that they saw in place of the Saint and his young companion, a stag and fawn. The prayer which caused this miracle is preserved as a hymn bearing the title faeth fiada or "deer's cry".²⁷ It was through such a cry that Oisín's mother was transformed into a hind. St Patrick is often associated with the Fenians, and with stags. A stag and fawn were said to have drawn his hearse after his death. Other Irish saints, too, are associated with stags.²⁸ St Cairan had a tame stag which went to school with him, and he used its antlers as a bookrest. Some legends resemble that of St Giles in telling of saints who afford protection to hunted stags. St Finnian, at the command of his superiors, put two stags under the yoke in order to draw wood from the forest, and St Mungo, alias St Kentigern, yoked a stag to the plough. A distinct

26 Weisweiler, pp. 177-181.

27 Weisweiler, pp. 173-177.

28 Mary Donatus, Beasts and Birds in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints (Philadelphia, 1934), p. 140.

tradition can be distinguished in those legends which tell of saints and hermits who are sustained by milch-does supplied by divine Providence. In Irish legends a deer came daily to the cell of St Cainneth to be milked, a doe came to Ruadan the Fair each evening to be milked, and each morning appeared some distance away at the dwelling of Colman Ela for the same purpose. Bishop Erc advised his foster son Brendan to pray for milk, as they kept no cow, and a hind appeared with its fawn each day in response. After MacGreiche had fasted forty days and forty nights, a doe came and dropped milk into his bowl. When famine struck the nunnery of St Withberga at East Dereham, Norfolk (the location suggests an onomastic origin for the legend) God provides two milch-does which supply the needs of the whole nunnery.²⁹

It is difficult to know whether one ought to connect such pious legends with the tales of secular heroes who are suckled on hind's milk, such as Ossian, or Sigurd, or Scott's Conachar mac Ian in The Fair Maid of Perth, or whether one should follow Josef Weisweiler, who sees such heroic legends going back to a Germanic or Celtic deer cult. A Gaelic lullaby seems to refer to this secular tradition:

On milk of deer I was reared,
 On milk of deer I was nurtured,
 On milk of deer beneath the ridge of storms,
 On crest of hill and mountain.

Weisweiler has pointed out that at some time a semantic shift has taken place in Irish similar to that which we observe in the English

29 Richard Taylor, Index Monasticus (London, 1821), p. 12.

word 'deer', which in Old English means animals generally. Thus in Irish the words which mean 'cattle' in the Ulster cycle, in the Finn cycle mean 'deer'. At some stage the original Irish word for stag, derived from an Indo-European root, died out, and the word for cattle was borrowed.

Tales of the longevity of stags abound from Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland. Tales are told in the Highlands of stags which have escaped the gun and are seen for a large number of years in particular districts, outliving lairds and chieftains, or surviving from one generation of stalkers to the next.³⁰ In 1826 the Earl of Glengarry, it is said, shot a stag in the Garth of Glengarry which was found to have a mark on his left ear. When one of the gillies was asked what the mark was, he replied that it was the mark of Ewen-mac-Jan-Og, who had been dead for 150 years, and who had been in the habit of marking thus all the young fawns he could catch. The White hind of Lochtreig was similarly known to a certain Macdonald of Lochaber, who died in 1776, for fifty years, and had been known to his father equally for fifty before him, and to his grandfather sixty years before that. A large stag was known for 200 years in the mountains between Badenoch and Inverness. At the time of writing this, newspaper reports have been exciting attention throughout Scotland of a white hart on the Isle of Arran. Local tradition has it that the last sighting of a white stag on the island signalled the death of the laird and speculation is rife at the moment as to whether this stag bodes ill for the current heir. Similar traditions

30 Scrope, p. 23 ff.

are heard of in other parts of Scotland, and were evidently known to Scottish novelists such as Walter Scott and James Grant, who make symbolic use of the white stag in their novels in ways which conform with what appears to be its folklore significance.

For instance The Fair Maid of Perth (1828), like all Scott's fiction, is concerned with the Caledonian division between Highland and Lowland, romantic, legendary north, and mercantile, practical south. The city of Perth stands as a trading outpost between the two. The fortunes of the Highland party are intimately bound up with those of Conachar mac Ian, the young highlandman, heir to the chiefdom of the clan Quhele. His birth, in mysterious circumstances in the forest where he is suckled by a white doe, deprives him of his chiefdomship, since a prophecy had foretold that the clan would decline through the deeds of a boy born under the holly, and suckled by a white doe. At a significant point in the action of the novel a white doe is hunted and killed, against Conachar's advice, by his foster-father Torquil. The deed bodes ill for the highland clan, which is utterly annihilated in a feud with its neighbours, largely through Conachar's cowardice. At the end Conachar commits suicide, or, since his body is never found, perhaps flees to lead a solitary life in the hills, like a wild creature. Scott makes it clear that Conachar's identity with the deer symbolises his cowardice, but it is also evident that he was drawing on the symbolism which the deer had in Scottish folk traditions, for the prosperity and continuance of the clan Quhele, and by extension of the highlands as a whole, is bound up with the life of the mysterious white doe. Conachar no less than Oisín or Finn is a "little deer" - he is

described as a "wild roebuck", as the "foster-son of the White Doe" and in the clan combat his southern rival, Henry the Smith, "hunted him through the whole field".³¹ The deer symbolises Conachar's inheritance as chief, and its life is coterminous with that of the chief and of the clan.

The decline of the Highlands is also involved with the mysterious appearance of a white deer in a novel by the Scottish writer James Grant (1822-87). Laura Everingham is concerned with the Highland clearances, in particular the Mac Innons of Glen Ora, who are driven from their land by the new whig landlords. The death of the elder Mac Innon, the hero's father, is first signalled by the appearance of the white stag of Loch Ora, white as snow, which is said to be enchanted, "it never dies, and never appears but as a harbinger of evil!" As the hero and his friend watch the last survivors of the highland community departing by steamer to begin their emigrants' voyage to America, the two reflect, "We are literally the last of the clan."³² At the end of the novel the huge stag reappears, pursuing the heroine down the mountainside, in an act of symbolic, but futile vengeance for the destruction of the highlands, and is killed by the hero, who is himself about to depart from Glen Ora for ever, the last of the line. Once again the stag is identified with the continuance of the clan, though Grant extends its implications to include the wholesale destruction of the Highland communities in the clearances of the nineteenth century.

31 The Fair Maid of Perth (1828), edited by Andrew Lang, Border Edition (London, 1894), pp. 481, 483, 485, 547.

32 (London, 1862), p. 166.

An ancient belief is thus given a new topicality.

We may wonder whether this strong association of the stag with clan fortunes in Gaelic tradition looks back to a wider and perhaps prehistoric use of the stag as a clan totem. We shall see how in the legend of Caesar's deer a number of other European cultures take the survival of the stag as a pledge of continued national identity, and how, in the guise of the cerf volant the stag became the symbol of the kings of France in a developed and sophisticated heraldic iconography. The spread of these traditions can be almost wholly attributed to the universality of a belief in the stag's longevity. According to Chinese tradition the deer is the only animal that has been able to find the fungus of immortality. At the age of a thousand years the deer turns blue, when it passes 1,500 it turns white, at 2,000 years it turns black. A man who eats a piece of its flesh at any of these stages will live to the age represented by the colour.³³

Or there is the curious anecdote to be found in the writings of Roger Bacon, the thirteenth-century philosopher, about the mysterious Lady of Formerey in Great Britain, who having sought a white hart, obtained an ointment which the guardians of the forest used to anoint themselves with, except for the sole of her foot. She lived for three hundred years without bodily corruption, except

33 First recorded in the fifth century and widely thereafter. I am grateful to Professor Edward Schafer of the Department of Oriental Languages at the University of California for information on this. The account of the colour phases of the deer can be found in Gertrude Jobses, Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols (New York, 1961), s.v. deer.

for her foot, which, of course, aged normally, and proved her undoing.³⁴ I have no idea who the Lady of Formerey was, but the association of the white hart with an immortal ointment speaks for itself. The detail of the sole of the foot picks up an interesting folkloric motif, familiar to us from Homer in the shape of Achilles' heel. Thetis made Achilles invulnerable by dipping him into the waters of the Styx, but she held him by the heel, and, presumably not wanting to get her fingers wet, omitted that part, which became proverbial for every one's weak spot, and lent its name to medical science. Siegfried took a bath in dragon's blood, which gave him an invulnerable coating of scales, but he had a leaf sticking to his back, and that proved his undoing. Jason of the Golden Fleece was also protected by a magic ointment. Gyula László has noted that in Hungarian folktales magic animals can only be wounded in the pastern, that on Ordos bronzes and Hungarian church frescoes two fighting horses are shown biting each other's pasterns, and that in the legend of St Ladislav two invulnerable combatants, the Saint, and a pagan horseman, struggle over an abducted girl. Since both are invulnerable, they eventually lay down their arms, but the girl kills the pagan horseman by cutting his Achilles tendon, and marries the victor. The hero, alias Ladislav is apparently, always white, the pagan warrior black.³⁵

34 Roger Bacon's account is recorded in his namesake Francis Bacon's discussion of the longevity of deer, see The Works of Francis Bacon, edited by Ellis, Heath and Spedding, 14 vols (London, 1851-74), II, p. 158. The editors' note to this quotes Roger Bacon's anecdote.

35 Gyula László, The Art of the Migration Period (London, 1974), pp. 113-119.

The latter detail might recall a detail from the legend of the Oldest Animals. A feature of several Irish versions is a blackbird or Ouzel. A late version of the legend has a series which includes the Great Stag who survived the Deluge, the White blackbird of Clonfert, and the blind salmon of Assaroe, who is none other than our old friend Fintan. This white blackbird is probably to be identified with the blackbird which figures in a short poem from the British Museum, in which an ancient bard asks a blackbird with a white wing what had whitened the wing on its side, to which the bird replies that it was Christ, who had made him old, who had whitened him. It seems plausible that we have in these instances a series of references to a whole body of unrecorded animal and beast lore in which only certain fragmentary motifs can now be made out.³⁶

If a belief in the longevity of stags has its roots in such primitive and irrational soil, its history, like that of the serpent-eating stag, with which it is associated, becomes involved with the development of scientific zoology and empirical science. If Aristotle's Natural History had been more influential this ancient piece of lore would have died an early death, for Aristotle gives no countenance to it. Aristotle initiates a long and honourable tradition of scientific scepticism à propos of the age of stags. He notes that stories have been told of the longevity of deer, undoubtedly just such stories as those we have been examining, but he insists that none of them has been established as true. Aristotle was fascinated by the processes of generation and growth

³⁶ Hull, pp. 403-404.

in living things, and it is on these grounds that he denies the longevity of deer, for he remarks that the period of gestation and growth in all animals bears a fixed proportion to their lifespan. An animal which reaches maturity in only two to three years is unlikely to live for a hundred.³⁷

Generally, however, the force of received opinion was too strong, and tales of long-lived stags were used as evidence by zoological writers such as Pliny the Elder to support their belief in cervine longevity. From time to time, however, such a view was challenged. Albertus Magnus, for instance, though he does not deny the doctrine of longevity outright, shows a scepticism influenced by the rediscovery of Aristotle. In his De Animalibus he sets down that the stag rejuvenates itself by eating snakes, but he denies that this shows itself in the skin of the animal, et hoc puto ego verum non esse, he says, "Myself, I think this is not true".³⁸ The best sign of the age of a stag, he says, is the number of its teeth. But such scepticism is rare, and we have to wait until the seventeenth century before there is any real challenge to received opinion. Edward Topsell in his Historie of Foure Footed Beastes repeats the whole of received lore, including the verses from Ausonius on the Oldest Animals, though he misattributes them to Virgil. He calculates that for them to be true the phoenix would have to live for 57,524 years, "The which I have set down (not for truth) but for report, leaving every reader to the chiefest matter of credit,

37 Historia Animalium, 6.29.

38 De Animalibus, lib. 26.

as in his own discretion he conceiveth most probable."³⁹ In 1617 a German writer, Johannes Agricola, cites all the familiar anecdotes in favour of the longevity of deer in his book on the properties of deer, and he includes a number of modern Latin redactions of the Hesiodic proverb, and says that he is inclined to credit their evidence in favour of longevity.⁴⁰

In his Historia Vitae et Mortis, planned as part of the Instauratio Magna, Francis Bacon takes issue with various fanciful preparations which have been thought to prolong human life, using such things as gold, least corruptible of metals, or gemstones, on account of their clear and occult properties, or the possibility of extracting the fifth essence of animals, mixing the flesh of snakes and stags to renew life, since the one changes its skin, the other its horns, or the ointment mentioned by his namesake Roger Bacon which the Lady of Formerey prepared. All such preparations are dismissed as fraudulent superstition.⁴¹

It is Sir Thomas Browne, however, who finally assaults the received doctrine on the life of stags. He singles out the belief in the longevity of stags specifically as one of those vulgar errors deserving condemnation and, following Topsell, he rehearses the best-known examples of the legend.⁴²

39 (London, 1607), p. 130.

40. Cervi cum Integri et Vivi, Natura et Proprietas (Amberg, 1617), p. 6.

41 Works, II, p. 158.

42 Pseudodoxia Epidemica, 3.9. "Of the Deer", edited by Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1928), pp. 180-187.

The common opinion concerning the long life of animals, is very ancient, especially of crows, choughs and deer; in moderate accounts exceeding the age of man, in some the days of Nestor, and in others surmounting the years of Artepheus or Methuselah. From whence antiquity hath raised proverbial expressions, and the real conception of their duration, hath been the hyperbolical expression of many others.

Browne denies the longevity of deer on two counts, firstly because, as Aristotle had pointed out two thousand years before, its period of gestation and growth are comparatively short, and secondly because of its salacity "and almost unparalleled excess of venery,"

Certainly a confessed and undeniable enemy unto longevity, and that not only as a sign in the complexional desire and impetuosity, but also as a cause in the frequent act or iterated performance thereof. For though we consent not with that philosopher, who thinks a spermatical emission unto the weight of one drachm, is aequivalent unto the effusion of sixty ounces of blood; yet considering the exolution and langour ensuing that act in some, the extenuation and marcour in others, and the visible acceleration it maketh of age in most: we cannot but think it much abridgeth our days.

We detect here one vulgar error overcoming another. Browne traces the origins of this error to the Egyptians, whose hieroglyphics expressed longevity in the stag symbol (no doubt he had been looking at Horapollo),⁴³ and finds it compounded by the fragment of Hesiod, which he correctly attributes in its Latin form to Ausonius, and renders thus:

To ninety six the life of man ascendeth,
 Nine times as long that of the chough extendeth,
 Four times beyond the life of deer doth go,
 And thrice is that surpassed by the crow.

43 Renaissance versions of the Hieroglyphics of Horapollo, a book which was erroneously supposed to contain the secrets of ancient Egyptian symbolism, state that the Egyptians symbolise the idea of longevity by the stag. The emblem of the stag and snake is misunderstood as an emblem of timidity: when the stag sees the snake it runs away without looking where it is going, and the stag which is beguiled by music is taken as an emblem of the man who is seduced by flattery. See Plate 46.

The vulgar error was not extirpated overnight, however, and even in the next century Oliver Goldsmith found it necessary to refute a belief in the longevity of deer, "What therefore is reported concerning the life of this animal, has arisen from the credulity of ignorance".⁴⁴

It is clear that from the time of Hesiod onwards the legend of the Oldest Animals led a more-or-less simultaneous existence as a piece of popular and of learned lore. Though Browne describes it as a "vulgar", i.e. popular error, most of the sources he cites are learned writers. What is the relationship between these two? Were the learned writers merely drawing on a piece of well-known folklore? Was there any influence in the other direction? Perhaps the most interesting example of the legend has yet to be mentioned. It occurs not in a folktale or popular proverb, but in one of the most sophisticated and learned poems of the seventeenth century, John Donne's First Anniversary. Donne's poem is an extended meditation or argument on the received idea of the decay of the world. The idea itself is an interesting one which preoccupied many of Donne's contemporaries. It was confuted in a book by George Hakewill some years after Donne wrote, and by Milton in an early Latin poem arguing that Nature does not suffer decay.⁴⁵ Part of the argument

44 An History of the Earth and Animated Nature, 3 vols. (London, 1818), II, p. 95.

45 George Hakewill, An Apology of the Power and Providence of God in the Creation, or an Examination and Censure of the Common Error Touching Nature's Perpetual and Universal Decay (1627). See George Williamson, "Mutability, Decay and Jacobean Melancholy", English Literary History, 2 (1935), reprinted in his Seventeenth Century Contexts (London, 1960).

involved the belief which St Augustine had denied and St Bernard of Chartres had re-affirmed that the ancients were of greater stature than the puny moderns.⁴⁶ The Bible sanctions the belief that the Patriarchs before the Flood lived to a great age, with Methuselah as the oldest; it tells us moreover that "There were giants in those days". Archaeological excavations renewed speculation on this ancient belief.⁴⁷ It is in this context that Donne invokes the legend of the Oldest Animals, as he argues that

There is not now that mankinde, which was then
When as the Sunne, and man, did seeme to strive,
(Ioynt tenants of the world) who should survive.
When Stag, and Raven, and the long-liv'd tree,
Compared with man, dy'de in minoritee.⁴⁸

Donne's verse continues with what, in the light of ^{the} Westminster Abbey mosaic and several other versions of the proverb we now recognise as a wholly appropriate allusion to the Magnus Annus,

When, if a slow-pac'd star had stolne away
From the observers marking, he might stay
Two or three hundred years to see't againe,
And then make up his observation plaine.⁴⁹

Josephus has been noted as the source for a view which by the seventeenth century had become a commonplace that God afforded the ancients a longer term of life because of the good use they made of it in astronomical observation.⁵⁰ They thus had leisure to observe

46 R.F. Jones, Ancients and Moderns (London, 1936).

47 See D.C. Allen, "Donne among the Giants", MLN, LXI (1946), pp. 255-260.

48 First Aniversary, lines 112-116. All references are to John Donne: The Anniversaries, edited by Frank Manley (Baltimore, 1963). See my "Donne's Anatomy of the World and the legend of the Oldest Animals", Review of English Studies (in press).

49 Lines 117-120.

50 The Anniversaries, p. 136.

the whole cycle of the universe, and were vouchsafed a more complete and accurate knowledge of things than the Moderns, who in the seventeenth century had been perturbed by the appearance from nowhere of new stars, and perplexed by new astronomical theories, whose "quaint opinions wide" were to provoke God's laughter in Paradise Lost. Donne thus accommodates the legend of the Oldest Animals, itself a piece of traditional learning, to the great seventeenth-century debate about the sources of human knowledge.⁵¹ Indeed this allusion occurs in the passage which is leading up to the famous lines which register the shock of the New Philosophy which "calls all in doubt". Ancient learning and Baconian science confront each other here as they do nowhere else in our literature. Indeed it is remarkable how many seventeenth-century discussions of the new learning concrete around this piece of ancient lore. Hakewell invokes it in his Apology, as does Jean Bodin in his sixteenth-century Methodus for establishing a scientific historical method.⁵²

The association of the Oldest Animals with the debate about the Ancients and Moderns had been made long before the seventeenth century, however. Walter Map's twelfth-century Book of Courtiers Trifles opens with an account of the sources of human knowledge which pays tribute to ancient wisdom. The ancients were giants, and lived much longer than their puny successors. They were thus better able

51 Book 5, chapter 6 of Raleigh's History is, significantly, "Of the the Patriarchs delivering their knowledge by Tradition ...".

52 Hakewell, p. 30. Jean Bodin, Method for the Easy Comprehension of History, translated by Beatrice Reynolds (New York, 1945), p. 109.

to discover the useful arts and fathom the secrets of nature:

They determined, in due accordance with the course of the constellations, the life of animals, of birds and fish, nations and treaties, the natural habits of grasses and seeds. They allotted a hundred years to the crows, a thousand to the stags, and to ravens length of days passing belief. And yet it is fitting to believe them, especially in their statements about wild animals, because these did abide with them, before the eating of flesh, unafraid, just as with us dwell now dogs, whose comradeship never fails us.⁵³

Map goes on to explain that ancient wisdom descends to us from our more enlightened ancestors not only in their writings, but also through oral traditions. It is a distinction which nicely describes the dual descent of the legend of the Oldest Animals.

It really is remarkable that Donne and Map should both use the legend in much the same way to refer to the argument about ancient and modern learning. There is no possibility that Donne could have read Map. It seems clear that we are dealing not so much with a piece of folklore as a literary topos, a formula whose application to particularly complex intellectual ideas and issues is the common property of educated men over a long period of time. We are now in a position to understand the richness of the conventions underlying Donne's reference to "Stag and Raven, and the long-liv'd tree". Donne assumed that he could take his reader's familiarity with the topos for granted, indeed he was later to use it again in a sermon which assumes equally casually (in a parenthesis) that everyone will know what he is talking about, as he argues that through the gift of immortality mankind has life more abundantly than any other creature,

⁵³ De Nugis Curialium, translated by F. Tupper and M.B. Ogle (London, 1924), p. 4.

"howsoever Oakes, and Crowes, and Harts may be said to out-live him".⁵⁴

The set of conventions surrounding this verbal formula thus take in ideas of human longevity, of universal history, of the Magnus Annus and universal time, of the sources of human learning, and of racial or dynastic origins. Moreover much of this complex of what are, after all, fairly sophisticated concepts crops up more than once both in versions which may be attributed to learned writers and in popular versions. The legend was orally recited within living memory. It would be difficult to say whether the primary mode of existence of this formula was as a piece of folklore or as a literary topos. I am not at all sure that we should automatically assume that the folklore is primary, and that learned men simply borrow it for their own purposes. The earliest recorded version, after all, occurs in a literary text. Perhaps in making this distinction we are the prisoners of our own Romantically-influenced terminology, for in such cases as this it seems clear that many of the suppositions upon which learned writers have based their beliefs, or at least their conceits, up until what we may loosely call the Enlightenment, have rather strong analogies with what elsewhere we should have no hesitation in calling folklore. Does the lore of the folk in such cases not include the lore of the learned? Donne's place in this is not difficult to account for, since Metaphysical poetry typically articulates the detritus of Medieval learning.

The legend of the Oldest Animals is only one of the received traditions which affirms the longevity of the stag. Other traditions,

54 John Donne, Sermons, edited by E.M. Simpson and G.R. Potter 10 vols. (California, 1953-61), 9, p. 149.

including the eating of snakes, or stories of deer with inscribed collars which were thought to live for hundreds of years, were often associated with it, and brought together by such writers as Topsell and Thomas Browne. At the end of the fourteenth century there is a poem on hunting written by a Frenchman, Hardouin de Fontaines-Guérin, which similarly brings together much of the traditional evidence for the longevity of the stag.⁵⁵ A hedge, he says, lasts three years, a dog three times as long, a horse three dogs, a man three horses, a crow three men, and a stag three crows. It should not surprise us that he manipulates the sequence in a book on hunting to give the crowning place to the stag. Hardouin records an otherwise unknown religious tradition concerning the stag when he states that on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, which was celebrated on the 14th September, the heart-bone of the stag becomes marked with the sign of a cross. He goes on to recite the legend of Caesar's deer, according to which a stag was found wearing a gold collar on which was written "I am one of Julius Caesar's stags", Des cerfs Julius Cesar sui, which must have been several hundred years old, but he says he does not know whether to believe this story, Ne sey se bien croire m'ozes. He thus takes us to the subject of our next chapter.

55 Hardouin de Fontaines Guérin, Tresor de Vénerie, edited by Michelant (Metz, 1856), pp. 89-93.

CHAPTER FOUR

Caesar's Deer

A few miles east of the town of Sherborne in Dorset there is a small village with the unusual name of King's Stag. The village lies in the Vale of Blackmore, also known as the Vale of the White Hart, which in medieval times was a royal deer forest. Outside the village inn there used to hang a sign displaying a white hart with a gold collar. On the reverse was the following rhyme,

When Julius Caesar landed here
I was then a little deer;
When Julius Caesar reigned king
Round my neck he put this ring.
Whoever shall me overtake
Spare my life for Caesar's sake.¹

This image of the inviolable deer preserves a tradition and the verses a formula which are both ancient. What is Caesar doing in the heart of Dorset? Associated with these verses and the place name is a local tradition which is conveniently summarised by Thomas Hardy in Tess of the D'Urbervilles,

The Vale was known in former times as the Forest of White Hart, from a curious legend of King Henry III's reign, in which the killing by a certain Thomas de la Lynd of a beautiful white hart which the king had run down and spared, was made the occasion of a heavy fine.²

The tradition was first recorded by William Camden in the reign of Elizabeth I in his great topographical and historical survey of Britain.

1 J. Hutchins, History of Dorset, third edition, 3 vols. (London, 1861), III, pp. 737-738; see my "King's Stag and Caesar's deer", Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 95 (1974), pp. 80-83.

2 (1891), chapter 2.

At the spring head of Frome, where the soil is most fruitfull, the forrest of Blackmore sometimes thicke, and full of trees, but now thinner growne, yeldeth plentiful game for hunting. This by a more common, and better known name is called the Forrest of White Hart. The reason of which name, the inhabitants by tradition from their forefathers report to be thus. When King Henry the Third came hither to hunt, and had taken other deere, he spared a most beautifull and goodly White-Hart, which afterwards T. de la Lynde a gentleman of the countrey with others in his company tooke and killed: but how perilous a matter it was to be twitching (as they say) of a lion they soone found and felt. For the king conceived great indignation and high displeasure against them, put them to a grievous fine of money for it, and the very lands they held pay even to this day every yeare by way of amercement a piece of money into the Exchequer, which is called White Hart silver.³

This might look like an onomastic legend to explain the name of the Vale, but it seems to have at least some basis in fact since the fine of White Hart silver is known to have been paid. Thomas Fuller, in his Worthies of England, complains "Myself hath paid a share for the sauce, who never tasted any of the meat; so that it seems king's venison is sooner eaten than digested".⁴ Fuller was Rector of the parish of Broadwindsor in Dorset during the 1630's, which is presumably when he paid for the sauce. Indeed the fine was paid into the exchequer as late as the mid-nineteenth century by certain Dorset estates, and was finally commuted to a lump sum about 1880, when no doubt the Victorian revenue authorities in a fit of reforming zeal finally decided that enough was enough.

But what of Caesar? For the answer to the question we have to look beyond the parochial boundaries of local history, for what the

³ Britannia, translated by Philemon Holland (London, 1637), p. 213. Drayton borrows the anecdote from Camden in his Polyolbion, 2, lines 72-80, in Works, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1961), 4, p.31.

⁴ Fuller, Worthies of England, edited by P.A. Nuttall, 3 vols. (London, 1840), I, p. 461.

inn sign records is but one manifestation of the medieval legend that the Roman emperor put a collar on a stag which lived to a miraculous age, and was subsequently recaptured. On its collar it bore an inscription dedicating it to Caesar and plaintively prohibiting its pursuit. Caesar's was the most notable example of the cervus reservatus, of the inviolable deer, whose reappearance is recorded in several local traditions in a formula resembling the verses at King's Stag, as well as more widely over the centuries in Europe as a whole.

For instance, in 1661 the celebrated naturalist, John Ray, visited Yorkshire on one of his Itineraries. On the third of August he was near Leeds,

Then we rode through a bushet or common, called Rodwell Hake, two miles from Leeds, where (according to the vulgar tradition) was once found a stag, with a ring of brass about its neck, bearing this inscription:

When Julius Caesar here was king,
About my neck he put this ring:
Whosoever doth me take
Let me go for Caesar's sake.⁵

As far as I know there is no tradition at Rothwell Haigh, now a suburb of Leeds, of any infringement of the forest laws, no beautiful white hart or poaching fine associated with this rhyme. Ray does not tell us the nature of his source, and we have no means of knowing how such verses might have been disseminated. That they had a wide currency is suggested by the fact that some two centuries before Ray visited Yorkshire a medieval monk called Nicholas Upton was writing a book on heraldry. Like most medieval clerks he tends to set down

⁵ Memorials of John Ray, edited by Edwin Lankester, Ray Society Publications (London, 1846), pp. 139-140.

everything he knows, and thus when he comes to discuss the heraldic properties of various animals he summarises not only their heraldic symbolism, but also their known zoology. In discussing the deer as a device he therefore paraphrases the information which had come down to the Middle Ages through Isidore and Pliny, and then goes on to supply a piece of original information for which there is no authority in the ancient auctors.

I have often heard about a stag which was killed in Windsor Forest at the stone called Besastine near Bagshot, which stag had a golden collar, on which was written,
 Julius Cesar quant jeo fu petis⁶
 Ceste coler sur mon col ad mys.

Upton does not pause to consider how Caesar came to write in Old French, indeed with an engaging ingenuousness he translates the motto into Latin for the benefit of his modern readers. If we in turn translate it into modern English we get something which is immediately recognisable as another version of the King's Stag verses:

When I was a little deer
 Caesar put this collar here.

It seems remarkable that this verbal formula should be recorded in such widely separate locations over a period of five hundred years or more. There must be further examples in other parts of Britain waiting to be discovered. We have to posit the existence of a popular tradition which preserved the legend of Caesar's deer in the shape of a rhyme, the words of which are those of the stag itself, or perhaps more likely represent the actual inscription from the collar.

⁶ Nicholas Upton, De Studio Militari, edited by Sir Edward Bysse (London, 1654), p. 159.

Before we look at the better-known examples of this legend in the Middle Ages it would be as well to examine its origins, for the collared deer was not the product of the medieval imagination. Before any medieval king had claimed to recapture Caesar's deer, the ancestors of the Romans had themselves claimed to recapture mysterious stags with ancient inscriptions on their collars. There is an example in Pausanias's Description of Greece. Pausanias records that at Lycosura in Arcadia there was seen "the sacred deer of the Mistress (Despoina)"

The deer was old and frail, and on its neck there was a collar, and on the collar were these words:-

I was caught as a fawn when Agapenor was at Troy.⁷

This story shows, says Pausanias, that a deer is a longer-lived animal than even an elephant.

This somewhat unexpected anecdote requires a gloss. We might think that the mysterious and fascinating Arcadian goddess called Despoina, "The Mistress"; held the key to its meaning, for we know that she was associated with animals, and a statue of her was found during a modern excavation at Lycosura showing a mantle decorated with dancing figures in animal masks. A more certain clue to the meaning, however, is the figure of Agapenor. The Greek cities and states habitually traced their origins to Homeric ancestors, who might be thought of as semi-divine. Homer marked for the Greeks the beginnings of history; before Homer was the age of myths, which deal not with heroes, but with gods. The compilation of king-lists, of an unbroken series of ancestors, whether historical, legendary or

7 Arcadia, 10.10.

wholly fictitious, helped to develop that sense of continuity with the past in which we see the origins of universal history. Agapenor is a minor Homeric hero, but the fact that he was identified by Homer as the leader of the Arcadian contingent against Troy was sufficient to furnish him with adequate credentials for the role of dynastic ancestor. Desponia's deer thus preserves a link with the earliest origins of the tribe.

The same is true of another collared deer, recorded in classical times on the mainland of Italy. The Italian colonists, whether we think of them as Greeks or as Romans, preserved the pieties which attached to the traditional ancestor cult. The Greek settlements on the Italian mainland looked back to their Homeric origins all the more keenly for having been expatriated. They found in the legends of the westward travels of the Homeric heroes after the end of the Trojan war an adequate basis for their claim to heroic ancestry. We may think of the wanderings of Ulysses as the archetype of such journeys, but the Odyssey was only one of a host of legends of the Mediterranean wanderings of the heroes in the aftermath of the war. Among those who were thought to have settled in Italy the Trojan Aeneas will be the most familiar, but the legend of Aeneas, which Virgil did not invent, was certainly not the earliest.⁸ Indeed it seems likely that the Romans only developed their claim to descent from Aeneas as a counter to that of the colonists of Magna Graecia - those Greek-speaking settlements of southern Italy. It was the legendary Diomedes who was celebrated throughout Magna Graecia, but

8 See Henriette Boas, Aeneas's Arrival in Latium (Amsterdam, 1938).

particularly in the south-east, in Apulia, as the national ancestor. And it was Diomedes who put a collar on another deer.

The tradition is preserved in a splendidly disreputable source, attributed to Aristotle, though spurious, under the title De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus, which one ought to translate as "The Wonders of Hearsay". It belongs to that fascinating and unstudied genre of literature known as *Mirabilia*, or collections of wonders, a genre which has satisfied the perennial demands (as Sir Thomas Browne might have said) of human credulity. The De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus, composed about the time of Hadrian, is a classic of the genre, in which everything is proudly declared to be mere hearsay, nothing whatever is disbelieved, and every paragraph begins "They say ..."

They say among the Peucetini there is a temple of Artemis, in which is dedicated what is called a bronze necklet, bearing the legend 'Diomedes to Artemis'. The story goes that he hung it about the neck of a deer, and it grew there, and in this way being found later by Agathocles, king of the Siciliots, they say that it was dedicated at the temple of Zeus.⁹

Diomedes may have had a special significance for ethnogenic fables of the Greeks in view of his most famous Homeric exploit, which was stealing the Palladium, the sacred statue of Pallas Athene upon which the fortunes of the city were thought to depend. The Romans particularly set great store by their own possession of the original statue, despite the fact that they claimed descent from the dispossessed Trojans. There is plentiful evidence of a cult of Diomedes amongst the Greek colonies in Italy. At the very head of the Adriatic was a famous shrine, the Timavum, which was dedicated to

9 Aristotle, De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus, 110, in Minor Works edited by W.S. Hett (Loeb edition).

him. Both Aelian and pseudo-Aristotle give versions of a legend that there was a temple to Athene of Troy in which the actual arms of Diomedes and his companions were dedicated. It was protected by a pack of racialist dogs which could discriminate instinctively between Greeks and Romans, or Greeks and Trojans, for they would attack any foreigners who approached, but would fawn on any Greeks.¹⁰ Pseudo-Aristotle gives an obviously cognate legend about some equally discriminating birds surrounding the shrine of Diomedes on the islands called Diomedea - the modern Trimetus islands - which would permit Greeks to land quietly, but flew up and attacked all approaching "barbarians". "The legend is that these birds are descended from the companions of Diomedes, who were wrecked near the island, when Diomedes was treacherously murdered by Aeneas, the king of those parts at the time."¹¹ This is not the only reference which connects the names of Diomedes and Aeneas as legendary opponents in Italy. The Greek point of view is noteworthy in this account, with its description of the Latins as barbarians, and the reference to Aeneas as though he were a figure about whom little was known. There may be some confusion here, since an alternative legend of Diomedes in Italy tells how he became the ally of King Daunus, eponymous founder of Daunia, in modern Apulia, but after a quarrel was treacherously murdered by the native king. The analogy between such legends and those, familiar from Virgil, of Aeneas's struggles with the indigenous kings of Latium will be apparent. Indeed Virgil provides further evidence for linking the two names in Italy, for in Aeneid, viii, 9, 10. Aelian, Anim., 11.5; Aristotle, De Mir. Ausc., 109.

11 De Mir. Ausc., 79; cf. Aelian, Anim., 1.1.

Turnus sends "to the city of Diomedes" for help against Aeneas. Servius in his commentary identifies this as Argyrippa, one of several cities founded by the Homeric refugee.

It appears that Diomedes played a role in Greek tradition on the Italian mainland analogous to that played by Aeneas in the more familiar legends of the Trojan descent of Rome. It is even probable that the Roman legends of Trojan descent were developed in response to those of the Italian Greeks. Diomedes is the antitype of Aeneas. It was during the third century B.C. when Rome was engaged in battles with the colonies of Magna Graecia to secure its hegemony on the Italian mainland that the legends of Trojan descent sprang up. If the Greeks were claiming descent from the Greek Diomedes, then the Romans, who had hitherto been regarded as Greeks themselves, would develop their own counter-claim to descent from Diomedes's legendary opponents, the Trojans. The strength of this traditional antagonism is suggested by a prophecy recorded in several Latin authors, that the Romans would suffer a notable defeat "on the plain of Diomedes". Strabo identifies this as the plain near Diomedes's city of Argyrippa, but it is Livy who gives the precise occasion as one of the celebrated moments of Roman history. He records that before the Roman defeat by Hannibal at Cannae a seer called Marcius warned the Romans, as "descendants of Troy" to avoid doing battle on "the plain of Diomedes". The Roman general, Varro, ignored the advice, with disastrous results, as every schoolboy knows, for the Romans were defeated on their own soil.¹²

12 Strabo, 6.3.9; Livy, 25.12.

There is further evidence for the persistence of these legends in Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Dionysius links the names of Diomedes and Aeneas in a passage which claims to account for the Roman custom of sacrificing with averted face. When Aeneas landed in Italy, he says, he was about to sacrifice an animal, when he caught sight of one of the Greek heroes, his enemies, approaching, either Ulysses, on his travels, or "Diomedes, when he came as an ally to King Daunus". Wishing to avert the evil omen of seeing his enemy approach at the time of sacrifice, Aeneas veiled his head and turned his back. His posterity have done so ever since.¹³

This rather long excursus may help to illuminate something of the association which the name Diomedes would have held in the De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus, a Greek text dating from Imperial times. We can recognise that this collared deer is associated with a type of ethnogenic tradition which resembles and has connections with the fable of Aeneas. But what of Agathocles, who recaptured this deer? He was a historical figure, a tyrant of Sicily who, after an adventurous life spent fighting the Carthaginians, became the ally of the colonies of Magna Graecia in their doomed struggle to resist the expanding power of Rome in the third century B.C. His successor in this role was the better-known Pyrrhus, after whose ambivalent victory there was no remaining opposition to Roman expansion in Italy.¹⁴ The colonisation which the legendary Aeneas

13 Dionysius Halicarnassus, 12.16.22, Loeb edition, p. 235.

14 See Leon Homo, Primitive Italy and the Beginnings of Roman Imperialism (London, 1927), pp. 202-220.

had begun was complete. Pyrrhus regarded himself as a reincarnation of Alexander the Great, and traced his descent from Achilles. He married Agathocles's daughter, and it is not too fanciful to suggest that he shared some of his imperial aspirations with his father-in-law. Perhaps these imperialist traditions supply the clue to the meaning of the collared deer. To capture Caesar's deer, or Diomedes's deer is to lay claim to his empire, to revive his glory, and to reenact the imperial myth.

The next classical example confirms the pattern established in the case of Agapenor's and Diomedes's deer. Silius Italicus records that in Capua there was a kind of a rare colour - whiter than snow. When the eponymous founder of the city, Capys, was tracing out its walls with his plough, he had adopted this deer as a fawn. It was reared by the matrons of the city, who combed its fur and bathed it regularly. It became a deity of the city, dedicated to Diana. It was long-lived, indeed, "it was fortunate to prolong a green old age through a thousand years of activity, and numbered as many centuries as the city founded by the Trojan exiles". However, death came to it at last, when the city was under siege, and a fierce pack of wolves entered the city one night. The startled deer fled from the city at early dawn, and the soldiers gave chase, and killed it.¹⁵

Although this deer has no collar, it clearly belongs in the same tradition, moreso than a number of other classical stories of domesticated deer. There is, for example, the story of Sertorius's deer. Plutarch tells how the Roman general Sertorius tamed a fawn

15 Silius Italicus, 13, 115-137, Loeb edition, II, pp. 212-215.

which one of his soldiers had captured out hunting. He pretended that the deer was a gift from Diana with miraculous powers of prophecy, and played on the superstitious nature of the surrounding barbarian tribes. Plutarch treats this as simply a cunning piece of deception on the general's part.¹⁶ There is Silvia's stag in the Aeneid, which was captured as a fawn by the sons of Tyrrhus for their sister, who rears it as her pet. Ascanius hunts this stag and wounds it, so that it takes refuge in its mistress's house. The conflict which ensues between the hunters and the outraged animal lovers is the spark of those wars between Aeneas and the indigenous peoples which forms the second half of Virgil's epic.¹⁷ There are a number of classical legends, too, which associate an animal with the foundation of a city, and may thus seem to resemble the story of the Capuan hind. Cadmus followed a cow and founded the city of Thebes where she lay down. Aeneas followed a sow, and founded Rome on the same principle. The large number of analogous legends in which the foundation of a city is determined by an animal guide - and the species include crows, eagles, doves, wolves, sows, dogs, stags, goats, hares, rats, cows and bulls - may have their roots in primitive totem-worship, but are not really analogous with the legends of collared, long-lived deer.¹⁸ In such legends the role of the animal is exhausted once the city is founded, whereas in the tale of the Capuan deer it is clear that the deer is associated with

16 Lives, "Sertorius", 9.

17 Aeneid, 7.475-492.

18 Francis Vian, Les Origines de Thèbes (Paris, 1963), ch. 3.

the continuing prosperity of the city or state.

What made the deer a particularly suitable species for this role was the universal belief in its longevity. As Pliny says,

Stags are commonly acknowledged to have a long life, some having been caught a hundred years later with gold necklaces that Alexander the Great had put on them already covered up by the hide in great folds of fat.¹⁹

As Pliny puts it, the legend is taken as evidence of longevity, rather than the longevity accounting for the legend. Pausanias draws the same conclusion from Despoina's deer, although on the traditional chronology of Trojan history, his deer would have had to be not one hundred but, like Capys's, something over a thousand years old. It is little wonder that, as he says, the deer was "old and frail". Pliny's authority and influence insured that this was the motif of the collared deer which came down to the Middle Ages, where it is frequently noted by writers on deer. Nicholas Upton mentions Alexander's deer shortly before supplying his own account of the Windsor Forest stag. Well into the seventeenth century writers will be found affirming that stags live to a great age and citing Alexander's deer, on Pliny's authority, as evidence.

Despite Pliny's influence, however, it is doubtful whether the persistence of the legend of the collared deer in the Middle Ages can be wholly attributed to his authority. Pliny tells us less about his deer than any of the other classical sources, and it seems clear that he is merely reporting a piece of folklore which had come to his attention, and mistaking it for zoology. He mentions no inscription on the collars, and he claims not one deer but several. Perhaps

this plurality is to be explained by the hypothesis that Pliny was aware of a number of claims to have recaptured Alexander's deer, or several versions of the legend, and concluded, rationally enough, that there was not one deer but several. It is a simple step from learning that there are several stories about a miraculous deer to concluding that there are several deer. In claiming semi-divine status, in founding cities, and establishing the prototype of the Roman empire, Alexander might easily be thought to conform to the pattern of those earlier Homeric founders who had collared deer. It is possible that Pliny's is a misunderstood record of popular traditions, current in imperial times, which were an updated version of earlier Greek legends of collared deer. That such traditions persisted into modern times with an existence independent of any literary transmission is perhaps clear from the examples current throughout the Middle Ages, which owe little or nothing to Pliny or any other classical example, though frequently conforming to the pattern which we can now recognise.

Although the records of Caesar's deer in the Middle Ages are not always open to unambiguous interpretation there is enough evidence to suggest that the essential bearing of the legend in modern as in ancient times had to do with imperialist or with ethnogenic myths. Just as Agathocles recaptured Diomedes's deer, so Charlemagne was crowned Carolus Augustus as successor to the first Caesars, Henry the Lion united feudal Germany in the name of Frederick Barbarossa and thus reenacted briefly Charlemagne's achievement, which was a religious act, if not an act of piety in the Virgilian sense, since his empire embodied the unity of

Christendom. Napoleon later identified himself with Alexander and Charlemagne. Imperialism is always reactionary, it feeds on the myths of its predecessors, it recreates and renews the past. As we follow the collared deer into the Middle Ages it becomes a symbol of the Roman Empire; it is Caesar's deer, a pledge of the survival of the imperial ideal. Whatever the political fragmentation of actual empire, the ideal of empire is continuous and unbroken; the Palladium is always handed on, the Penates jealously protected; the deer is sacred to Caesar, it must not be killed, or to quote the inscription most memorably inscribed on its collar, Noli me tangere Caesaris enim sum.

Besides the ideal of imperial renovatio, the Middle Ages also preserved and developed independent genealogies and king-lists. Early Irish literature preserves indigenous genealogies, but elsewhere and in the course of time such native traditions absorbed and incorporated classical and Biblical genealogies in a syncretic expansion which lays the basis for universal history. It became fashionable for emerging nation-states to name a classical hero or demigod as ancestor of a whole people. The earliest medieval chronicle to advance a claim for an eponymous Trojan ancestor is thought to be the tenth-century Chronicle of Fredegarius, which traces the descent of the Franks to Priam of Troy, through one Francus. A collateral line takes in Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great. The early Danish genealogies similarly trace the line of their kings to Priam, whose son Tor is identified with the euhemerised Norse god Thor. Geoffrey of Monmouth traced the British descent through Arthur, through various

dimly-recollected Celtic deities and kings to Brut, and Troy. London became Troynovant, a renovatio of Homeric empire in the Middle Ages.²⁰

Among the best known versions of the legend is that associated with Charles VI of France. The early annalists record that in 1380, the year when he came to the throne, Charles was at Senlis when a deer was captured with a collar bearing the inscription Caesar hoc mihi donavit. Thereafter the King adopted the winged deer as his badge, le cerf volant couronné d'or. What contemporary and later French writers and painters made of this motif is the subject of our next chapter where its place in the ceremonial iconography of the French kings will be discussed. First recorded by the monk of Saint Denis, from whom it was copied by Juvenal des Ursins, the story was repeated as late as the sixteenth century in the Chronicles of France written by Robert Gaguin.²¹ Froissart incorporated a version in his chronicles with fanciful elaborations, recounting how, on losing his hawk at Senlis, Charles dreamed he saw a marvellous winged deer on whose back he mounted and flew up into the heavens to retrieve his hawk.²² This is probably only a flight of fancy in the writer's part to account for the unexpected detail of the wings on Charles's well-known badge, and it is more likely that the wings were added to the collared deer as a conventional iconographic device symbolising

20 See Beryl Smalley, Historians in the Middle Ages (London, 1974).

21 Juvenal des Ursins, edited by Michaud in Nouvelle collection de mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France (Paris, 1857), 2, pp. 343-344. Robert Gaguin, Rerum Gallicarum Annales (1577), 9.3, p. 165.

22 Froissart, edited by Lettenhove, 29 vols. (repr. Osnabrück, 1967), 10, pp. 68-71.

the attribute of swiftness; thus at least a seventeenth century writer on emblems interprets the wings added to stags, "the adjunct emphasises their natural swiftness".²³

Occasionally the recaptured deer is not dedicated to Caesar, but to one of his successors. Indeed Robert Gaguin argues in his Grandes Chroniques de France, which was a principle source of French history in the sixteenth century, and at least one edition of which shows the cerf volant on its title page, that the stag captured at Senlis could not possibly have been that captured by Julius Caesar, since deer do not live that long. It behoves us therefore, he says, to attribute the reference to some other emperor, "whoever might have borrowed his title and authority from the first Caesar" - a remark which comes close to recognising the legend as a symbol of imperial descent.²⁴ John Anstis was later petulantly to take a French author to task, no doubt Gaguin, who "thinking this could not be Julius Caesar abuses his leisure by an enquiry which of the emperors of Germany was in France that might give this collar to this hart."²⁵ The version of the legend from Lübeck attributed the stag to Charlemagne.

According to an inscription on the walls of Lübeck Cathedral, Charlemagne put a collar round the neck of a stag which he had captured in the woods of Holstein. Four hundred years later, in

23 Ercole Tasso, Della Realtà e Perfezione delle Imprese (Bergamo, 1612), p. 403. Cited by Mario Praz, Studies in Seventeenth Century Imagery (Rome, 1964), p. 69.

24 Gaguin, p. 165.

25 John Anstis, Register of the Garter, 2 vols. (London, 1724), I, p. 113n.

1172, this stag was killed by Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony, who built the cathedral on the spot.²⁶ The inscription dates from 1646 and occupies two pointed blind windows on the south wall. One shows a stag with a golden collar and above its forehead a golden crucifix, the other shows Henry the Lion aiming his bow at the deer. The story of the foundation of the Cathedral is told in the accompanying legend, according to which Charlemagne had once captured a swift-footed stag whilst hunting on the edge of the forests of the Vandals. On its neck he put a golden collar with an inscription. Four hundred years later Henry the Lion noticed how this stag habitually haunted a particular place, the destined site of the new Cathedral. He ordered it to be captured, and its gold collar to be scrutinised. He also noticed (we are told, as a kind of afterthought) that it had a crucifix between its horns, and it was this detail which moved him to a spirit of piety in which he undertook to build the new church.

It should be clear that what we have here is a composite story, in which several different strands have become confused. What we might wish to regard as the original legend of Caesar's (or Charlemagne's) deer has been overlaid with pious accretions. The original has been adapted to serve as a foundation legend for the cathedral, and it has been confused with the more familiar and popular legend of St Eustace and the cruciferous stag, which serves not as a messenger of the Lord; not a link with the past, but a token from

²⁶ The inscription has been printed in Lebermann, Die beglückte und geschmückte Stadt Lübeck (Lübeck, 1697), pp. 164-167. I am indebted to Herr Walter Wegener for information and sources on Lübeck Cathedral.

heaven.²⁷ The large number of legends in which the stag functions as divine messenger or spiritual guide will be discussed in a later chapter as types of the St Eustace legend. We may safely presume that the legend of the collared deer, which is what concerns us at the moment, once had an independent existence in this part of Germany which the elders of the Cathedral have merely adapted to their own purposes. That this is so is suggested by the fact that a double of the Lübeck deer was found not so far away at Magdeburg where there used to stand in the city square opposite the Roland statue a stag with a golden collar which local tradition claimed Charlemagne had hung on it (Plate 47). On the collar was a cross and the words,

Lieber Jäger, lass mich leben,
Ich will dir mein Halsband geben.

(Dear huntsman, let me live, and I will give you my collar.)

The stag was recaptured in the time of Frederick Barbarossa.²⁸

In the case of the Magdeburg stag we have less to go on than we had with the Lübeck story. The legend does not record who it was that was supposed to have recaptured this particular stag, indeed it is not entirely clear that there was a real stag as opposed to a statue. The association with other statues, however, may not be

27 A further accretion of the same type has adhered to at least one of the later accounts of Henry the Lion's miracle. According to this version Henry saw the stag drinking at a well, and decided to build the Cathedral where the vision had come to him. But he was unable completely to subdue the well, and it can still be heard bubbling up beneath the Cathedral floor. Ernst Deecke, Lübische Geschichten und Sagen (Lübeck, 1956), p. 23.

28 The legend is recorded in Grimm, Deutsche Sagen (Berlin, 1818), section 445 (Munich, 1956, p.128).

entirely fortuitous, and may provide the clue to the significance of this Magdeburg stag. The Roland statue which is mentioned as standing opposite it has a particular significance in several north German cities, which adopted statues of Charlemagne's most famous companion as symbols of their civic freedom and independence. Dietrich Schubert writes that the original wooden statue of Roland was erected at Magdeburg at about the same time as the statue of St Maurice in the Cathedral, circa. 1240 or 1250. The cult of St Maurice was itself bound up with Charlemagne, for Charlemagne was thought to have carried the saint's banner with him in his campaigns against the Saxons. When Otto I made Maurice the patron saint of the eastern archbishopric which he founded, he was indulging in a piece of Carolingian renovatio, and St Maurice is shown on coins of the late twelfth century, as he is on the Magdeburg statue of St Maurice, with the erect sword of justice which is characteristic of north German Roland statues. (Plate 48).²⁹ The remarkable congruence of this symbolism with the received symbolism of the collared stag will surely explain why the two statues of the Roland and the stag stood opposite each other in Magdeburg square. The motto of the Magdeburg statue will be new to us, but it is not unique. On the remarkable German broadsheet (Plate 49) from the early seventeenth century which Alastair Stewart has described, the anecdote of Alexander's deer from Pliny is retold, but the motto which is given is a version of that at Magdeburg,

29 Dietrich Schubert, Von Halberstadt nach Meissen (Cologne, 1974), pp. 294-295. I am indebted to Mrs Ursula Edge for this source.

Mein lieber Jäger lass mich leben,
Alexander hat mich frey gegeben.³⁰

It would seem that there was in Germany, as in England, a popular and indigenous tradition of Caesar's deer, with its own verbal formula for the inscription on the collar.

Obviously the story of a stag collared by Charlemagne and recaptured "in the time of" Frederick Barbarossa was not confined to Lübeck, where it was adapted to account for the foundation of the city's cathedral. Notice, however, the insidious intrusion of the pious detail of the cross, even in the Magdeburg statue. Any attempt to reconstruct the significance of this legend must be largely circumstantial. Henry the Lion was, of course, a prolific founder and patron of north German cities. At one time his possessions stretched from the North sea to the Adriatic. It is not difficult to see why Henry might be identified with Charlemagne, even though Charlemagne's legitimate successor was not Duke Henry but the Emperor Frederick, first of the Hohenstaufen. Frederick's own imperial aspirations are well-known, indeed one of the reasons why Henry was left to rule in Germany was because Frederick left his country in order to receive the imperial crown in Rome. As Robert Folz has shown, the Hohenstaufen period saw a strong revival of the idea of empire.³¹ Frederick claimed to be the successor of Charlemagne and through him of the first Caesars. This revival of imperial ideology

30 Alastair Stewart, "Monarch of the Glen", Aberdeen University Review, 163 (1980), pp. 307-313. The text of this German poem in the shape of a stag has been transcribed by Professor Leonard Forster. I am grateful to Dr Stewart for allowing me to see a copy of Professor Forster's transcript.

31 Robert Folz, The Concept of Empire in Western Europe (London, 1969), p. 195.

culminated in the canonisation of Charlemagne in 1165. It is surely in the light of this imperial revival that we should see Henry's claim to have recaptured Charlemagne's deer.

The tendency of the religious symbolism of the deer to overlay any imperial meaning can be seen in a passage in which the sixteenth century theologian St François de Sales speaks of the natural inclination of the human heart to love God. Such love, he says, binds us to God just as the inscribed collars bind deer to those great princes who have captured them and set them free. Such collars allow those who recapture them not only to recognise who the prince was whose arms they bear, but also serve as a sign that they are reserved still. "It was thus" he writes, "that the great age was known of a stag which was refound, as several historians tell us, three hundred years after the death of Caesar, since it bore a collar on which there was Caesar's device, and the words: "Caesar set me free."³² St François apparently knows several stories of deer set free by great princes, and yet at the same time he assumes that there was one particular deer which was set free by Caesar. He has no sense of any ethnogenic bearing to the legend. The collared deer provide him with an appropriate figure for the purposes of his argument, original in its application, but indebted to the alternative tradition, which would be more familiar to someone of St François's background, in which the deer is a symbol of the human soul. Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ...

32 Oeuvres, (Annecy, 1894), IV, p. 84.

Whereas in these examples the essential bearing of the collared deer is overlaid with meanings derived from religious iconography, in the Italian examples of Caesar's deer it is the symbolism of love poetry, of the amorous chase and the stag of love which obscures the root meaning of the legend. The popularity of this legend in Renaissance Italy is almost wholly due to a famous sonnet in which Petrarch had compared Laura to a white hind, inviolable because she is dedicated to Caesar. The sonnet inspired imitations by Romanello and Sir Thomas Wyatt, whilst the commentaries of Petrarch's early editors occasionally show some familiarity with the legend and its written sources. It is clear that in Petrarch's poem the deer has lost any imperial significance which it may have had. Its meaning is closer to the Ovidian and the religious traditions, for the white hart has not only changed its sex, but Caesar, as most of the commentators recognise, is God. The motto in Petrarch's poem is given in Italian, but his editors quote a Latin formula which was to become extremely well-known, and whose origins I cannot discover, Noli me tangere, Caesaris enim sum. In this Renaissance literary tradition it is the elusiveness and inviolability of the deer which is stressed; its whiteness is emblematic of purity, its collar of fidelity and chastity. We have entered into a more conscious and sophisticated iconographic world.

In view of Petrarch's influence it would perhaps be tempting to assume that this Italian tradition derived wholly from Petrarch, and that his sonnet was the fons et origo of the legend in Italy. But there is an overwhelming reason why this explanation will not work, and that is that Petrarch does not give the Latin formula but an

Italian version which is far removed from it, Nessun me tocchi ...
Libera farmi a mio Cesare parve, "Touch me not ... It has pleased
 my Caesar to set me free". His editors however unerringly identify a
 legend which is not identical with any of those we have surveyed, and
 quote the Latin Noli me tangere formula which is quite unprecedented.
 None of them gives a source for it, but simply allude to "that hind"
 or "those hinds" which Caesar captured. My impression is that the
 legend and the Latin motto were part of a popular tradition whose
 written sources, if any, had been forgotten.

Two of the editors identify sources which we can now recognise,
 for Gesualdo speaks of the ancient custom of putting collars on deer,
 such as those which Alexander the Great had ringed, and Daniello da
 Lucca quotes the whole of Robert Gaguin's account of Charles VI's
 deer at Senlis from the Gesta Francorum.³³ According to one editor
 the Noli me tangere motto became proverbial by the sixteenth
 century, and John Anstis further records that "the family of Pompei
 in Italy use two harts for their supporters collared with the
 letters N.M.T. in memory of one taken, on whose collar as is said,
 were these words Nemo me tangat, Caesaris sum."³⁴ Although both of
 these statements appear to be affirming a tradition independent of
 Petrarch's sonnet, there is no way of proving that Petrarch was not
 a primary influence in assuring the popularity of the legend.

33 Petrarcha, Opere, edited by Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo (1553) fol.
 236 r.-v.; Daniello da Lucca, Sonnetti, Canzoni, e Triomphi di ...
Petrarcha (Venice, 1541), fol. 120v.

34 Anstis, I, p. 113.

Una candida cerva sopra l'erba
 Verde m'apparve, con duo corna d'oro
 Fra due riviere, a l'ombra d'un alloro,
 Levando'l sole, a la stagione acerba.
 Era sua vista si dolce superba,
 Ch'i' lasciai per serguirla ogni lavoro;
 Con diletto l'affanno disacerba.
 "Nessun mi tocchi," al bel collo d'intorno
 Scritto avea di diamanti e di topazi;
 "Libera farmi al mio Cesare parve".
 Et era'l sol gia volto al mezzo giorno;
 Gli occhi miei stanchi di mirar, non sazi;
 Quand'io caddi ne l'acqua, et ella sparve.

Petrarch's vision of the mysterious hind which appears at dawn and vanishes as the sun declines is reminiscent of the visionary deer which appear before the saints. But whereas in the saints' legends the deer leads the visionary to conversion or baptism, here it simply vanishes, after delivering a message which is more enigmatic than revelatory. Or the hind may suggest what it more clearly does in Wyatt's imitation, what Gesualdo in his commentary calls "L'amorosa caccia". It is of some interest to see what models Petrarch's editors identify in their attempts to explicate the symbolism of the sonnet. There is a general consensus among them that the deer stand for chastity and that her flight is from carnal passion, from which she is set free. Because of their hardness the diamonds are identified as symbols of constancy: Per il diamante qual e patra durissima, intende la durezza sua in resister contra le cose fuor d'honesta e per esso significa il Petrarcha la continentia, says Venaphro.³⁵ Caesar, however, gives some difficulty. Venaphro affirms that Caesar is God, Imperatore e signor dell tutto, which

35 Il Petrarcha col Commento di M. Sylvano Venaphro (1533), fol.142r.

Vellutello supports.³⁶ Squarciafico, however, believes that Caesar is the lady's husband and Gesualdo elaborates what Patricia Thomson calls the "fantastic notion" that the reference is to the law de adulteris promulgated under Julius Caesar.³⁷ With a fine disregard for the text he then goes on to dedicate the deer to Diana, goddess of chastity, which he supports by paraphrasing two anecdotes from classical literature about deer, neither of which has anything to do with Petrarch's poem. The first is the story of Iphigenia at Aulis in which Artemis substitutes a deer for sacrifice in place of Iphigenia; the second is the story of Sertorius's deer from Plutarch. It is the attribute of whiteness which misleads him into considering these analogues. In its whiteness Petrarch's hind picks up that characteristic which has perennially distinguished the cervus reservatus from classical times onwards. The whiteness of Petrarch's hind is emblematic of its purity. But what of its golden horns? None of the editors makes anything of these, though they have classical precedents, nor has anyone pointed out the anomaly that in no species of deer does the female have horns. Petrarch may have been led astray by the Cerynian hind hunted by Hercules as his third labour. This was known as "the doe with the golden horns" in Pindar, and it bore the inscription (none of the classical sources mentions a collar, though it is not easy to see where else a deer can carry an

36 Le Volgari Opere del Petrarca con la espositione di Alessandro Vellutello da Lucca (1525), fol. 149v.

37 Sir Thomas Wyatt and his Background (London, 1964), pp. 196-200.

inscription) Taygete dedicated me to Artemis.³⁸ Taygete was one of the Pleiades whom Artemis changed into a doe in order to enable her to escape the pursuit of Zeus. On returning to human form Taygete consecrated a doe to the goddess, which Hercules had to capture without harming it. The chase took him a whole year and led him to the Hyperboreans. This legend has more attraction as an analogue for Petrarch's poem than some of the other legends cited by the early editors.

A more familiar meaning for the deer is identified by at least two of the editors. Venaphro glosses the Nessun mi tocchi inscription thus: Havendola figurata cerva, quale animal fugace, signifying Laura's flight from carnal passion.³⁹ The semantics of the Italian fugace hit precisely the dual sense of fleetness and shyness which were traditional attributes of the deer. A favourite classical epithet was the interesting and innately iconographic word alipes - "wing-footed" - the epithet of Mercury, messenger of the Gods.⁴⁰ It was no doubt this attribute which prompted the addition of wings to the cerf volant of the kings of France. Daniello da Lucca also isolates this sense, La cerva e fuggitiva di natura.⁴¹ It has further been noted that the formula Noli me tangere quotes the words of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene. However, striking as this is,

38 Olympian Odes, 3. In Theocritus, Idyll 11, Cyclops promises Galatea, "I will raise for you eleven fawns, all collared (torquatas omnes)."

39 Ed. cit., fol. 142r.

40 Thus Lucretius, 6.765.

41 Ed. cit. fol. 149v.

it is certainly irrelevant, since the only one of these poems to quote it is Wyatt's, and such an allusion is quite foreign to the spirit and meaning of his poem. Petrarch, as we have seen, has a different Italian formula, and Romanello follows him in Italianising this part of the motto.

The fifteenth-century imitation of "Una candida cerva" by Giovanni Antonio Romanello appeared in his Rhythmorum Vulgarum c. 1480 and was included in early editions of Giusto de' Conti's anthology La Bella Mano.

Una cerva gentil, che intorno avvolto
 Al suo bel collo aveva un cercio d'oro,
 A me s'offerse a pie d'un sacro alloro
 Mentre era a contemplar nel'ombra accolto.
 Tanto piacer mi parse il suo bel volto
 Ch'abandonai il mio degno lavoro
 Sprezzando l'ombra et ogni altro ristoro
 Col cor d'ogni pensier apogliato e sciolto
 E qual falcon po'la selvaggia fera
 Volando corsi, e quando a lei fu giunto
 Si volse indietro, e disse in voce altera,
 Toccar non lice la mia carne intera;
 Caesaris enim sum, et al quel punto
 La cerva sparve, e fece il giorno sera.

Romanello forgets the purpose of the deer's collar, which is to record Caesar's message, and he makes the deer speak in a voce altera, a "haughty voice". His collar is merely decorative. He borrows Petrarch's final time reference, but the sense of a unique visionary episode lasting a single day which is so carefully carried through Petrarch's sonnet is missing. He preserves the detail of the laurel, although it no longer has any point - in Petrarch it is a favourite pun on Laura's name. He drops Petrarch's image of the miser seeking his treasure, and with it the agnominatio on lavoro/l'avarro, but in its place he supplies an image from falconry more in keeping with the venatorial metaphor.

This metaphor from venery, so foreign to Petrarch's poem, is strongly developed in Sir Thomas Wyatt's.

Who so list to hount, I knowe where ~~he~~ is an hynde,
 But as for me, helas, I may no more:
 The vayne travaill hath weried me so sore.
 I ame of theim that farthest commeth behinde;
 Yet may I by no meanes my wearied mynde
 Drawe from the Diere: but as she fleeth afore,
 Faynting I followe. I leve of therefore,
 Sins in a nett I seke to hold the wynde.
 Who list her hount, I put him owte of dowbte,
 As well as I may spend his tyme in vain:
 And graven with Diamonds, in letters plain
 There is written her faier neck rounde abowte;
Noli me tangere, for Cesars I ame;
 And wylde for to hold, though I seme tame.

In Wyatt's poem a sense of strangeness quite different from either the visionary pietas of Petrarch, or the courtly stiffness of Romanello's deer, with her haughty voice and untouchable flesh, seems to make itself felt. The poem seems to convey a characteristically authentic bewilderment, which the mysterious Latin motto, which Wyatt alone quotes in this form, reinforces. Noli me tangere holds a veiled menace which neither Petrarch's Nessun mi tocchi nor Romanello's toccar non lice convey. It has been suggested that Wyatt's Caesar is not Julius, nor Augustus, nor God, but Henry VIII, and that his hind is Anne Boleyn, with whom he is rumoured to have had an affair. Love leads Petrarch through every toil (ogni lavoro), whereas it entices Romanello from his duty (degno lavoro). Wyatt puts a less brave face on it; love itself is for him a "vayn travail". Such a recognition might lead one to assent to Patricia Thomson's view that Wyatt's sentiment is "arrogant and cynical", that love is dismissed as a waste of time, and that the poem aims a blow at the foundation of the sentiment of courtly love. However Alastair Fowler's

hermeneutic scepticism over modern attempts to judge the tone of the poem should also be recognised.⁴² We have seen confirmation in the editors of Petrarch for the view that the diamonds can only be taken as a tribute to the lady's chastity, and one must accept his assertion that in this genre wildness connotes not looseness and promiscuity, but shyness and reserve. Her seeming tameness again should not be taken as an indication of affectation or flirtatiousness, but rather of courtly condescension, which in no way compromises her chastity. The sense of achieved weariness in the tone and cadence of Wyatt's poem may equally be seen not as cynicism but as tributes to the lady's power. The alliteration of Wyatt's "faynting I followe" seems to pick up the breathlessness of Petrarch's affanno. Wyatt's sonnet expresses particularly well the ambivalence which Marcelle Thiébaux had identified as a standard topos of the love chase, that of the raptor raptus, for despite the hunting metaphor, it is clear that it is the hunter in Wyatt's poem who is the victim. Suffering and danger do not threaten the deer, who remains remote and inviolable, but they do threaten the lover. He is caught within the net of his own alliteration, "but as she fleeth afore/ Faynting I followe". Of course all huntsmen may become tired without breeding metaphysical paradoxes, but it is an aspect of the competitiveness of hunting which opponents of blood sports are unlikely to recognise that the roles may seem reversed.

With the tale of the Emperor's pike we return from the world of courtly love to the realm of folklore, for this fishy story seems to reflect some of the features of that ancient folktale known as

42 Conceitful Thought (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 2-8.

the Ring of Polycrates, where in endless retellings the ring swallowed by a fish is recovered and presented to the king. The story of the Emperor's pike was recorded by the great naturalist Conrad Gesner in 1558.⁴³ According to Gesner, citing Conradus Celtis, in the year 1495 a pike was caught in a pool near Heilbrunn. In its gills was found a ring of copper, carrying an inscription in Greek, which read, "I am that fish which was first put into this lake by the hands of the Emperor of the world Frederick the Second, on the fifth of October, 1230." Six smaller rings were believed to signify the imperial electors. Gesner seems to have had no doubt what this story meant, for he says that it is clear that Frederick must have been imitating Alexander the Great who put collars on deer, according to Pliny, whom he quotes verbatim. Various ponds claim the honour of preserving the Emperor's pike, the celebrity of which is suggested by the fact that paintings were made of it, one of which is still to be found in the Department of Zoology at the British Museum. Valenciennes records that the skeleton of this fish, measuring nineteen feet, was long preserved in the Cathedral at Mannheim. It was examined by a German anatomist who found that it had too many vertebrae for a natural fish, and pronounced it a fake.⁴⁴

That this should turn out to be a fisherman's tale does not matter for our purposes, for whether Frederick had anything to do with this fish is less important than the fact that at some time or

43 Historia Animalium (Lausanne, 1558), "Epistula Nuncupatoria", p.5.

44 J.R. Norman, "The Emperor's Pike: A Fish Story", Natural History Magazine, 2 (1930), pp. 179-183.

other this collared animal was attributed to him. Frederick did not recapture Caesar's deer, but he might have been thought to imitate the first Caesars in putting a collar on an animal which was known to be long-lived. We are surely safe in affirming that this pike represents a pledge of the enduring fame of a great medieval emperor. To say that after his death the Emperor lives on in the shape of a fish is to hint at a bizarre form of metempsychosis, but I find the suggestion irrepressible.

It is in connection with legends of genealogical origins that the final examples of the collared deer occur. In the reign of King Christian IV of Denmark, who reigned from 1596 to 1648, a hart was recaptured which King Frode had caught. On its neck was a costly ring on which Frode had written the words Freg mig! Frode freded' mig!, "Protect me! Frode protected me!"⁴⁵ It is remarkable that this late version from seventeenth-century Denmark should preserve complete and unfragmented the essential features of the very earliest classical legends of collared deer, for Frode is none other than Frothe, or Frotho the Peace King, one of the legendary kings of Denmark. For evidence of his existence one has to go back to the early dynastic rolls of the Danish kings, rolls which take us back to Germanic legends of the time of Beowulf. There we find his reign dated as contemporary with the birth of Christ. He is claimed to have subjugated all the surrounding kingdoms as far as Greece, and was reputed to have created such a respect for law and order in the

45 J.M. Thiele, Danmarks Folkesagn (Copenhagen, 1843), I, p. 16.

kingdom that he hung costly bracelets in several places over the public highway which were never stolen, hence his title, Pacificus. Frode is one of several kings of the same name in the early Danish histories, of which that of Saxo Grammaticus is the best known. All inhabit that misty territory on the borderline between history and legend.⁴⁶

We appear to have a pattern here which confirms the essential bearing of the legend of the collared deer, a bearing which had become fragmented or obscured in the records of so many of the intermediate examples. Evidently the seventeenth-century Danes who propagated the story of Frode's hart knew what the collared deer signified, even though none of the written sources, as far as I can tell, had spelled it out. It seems unlikely that the seventeenth-century Danes were imitating such ancient texts as the De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus or the story in Pausanias, both of them Greek works which remained very little known. Pliny they might well have known, but what Pliny says about Alexander's deer does not provide any basis for associating the deer with ethnogenic or dynastic legends.

Not only did those who propagated this story know what it meant, they also went to extraordinary lengths to authenticate it. A taxidermised stag claiming to be the one which Frode actually collared passed into the Royal collection and is still preserved in a Danish museum (Plate 50). Its neck still shows unmistakable marks of a collar. Although we have hitherto discussed Caesar's deer as a

46 J. Langebeck, Scriptores Rerum Danicarum mediæ ævi (Copenhagen, 1772-1878), I, pp. 2, 21, 68, 153.

legend, it has to be recognised that kings and princes may well have captured and released stags with collars, acting out a dynastic myth. It is certainly the case that a later Danish Queen, Sophie Magdalene, in the year 1740 succoured a starving stag which came into the garden of the royal palace at Hirschholm during winter. It was kept in the stable until the spring, when it was released with a brass collar on which the Queen had engraved some verses in which the stag told its story, and complained of the "sweet slavery" of its captivity, wherefore "My Queen gave me my freedom". This stag was killed many years later, and its collar is still apparently exhibited in another Danish museum.⁴⁷

We are surely justified in connecting the legend of the collared deer with the process which Thomas Mann has called "mythical identification", in which men in the past have identified themselves with their great predecessors, a process to which ambitious emperors are particularly prone. Pyrrhus, Pompey and Caesar all consciously imitated Alexander, and later emperors have persistently regarded themselves as the reincarnation of their most celebrated predecessors. Napoleon is perhaps the latest example. He is alleged to have regretted that in Mann's words, "Modern consciousness did not allow him to give himself out as the son of Jupiter-Ammon, as Alexander had done."

But we need not doubt that he confounded himself mythically with Alexander at the time of his expedition to the East, and later when he decided on an Empire of the West, he declared

47 My source for this is a cutting from a Danish magazine, Frederiksborg Amts Avis, V, dated 28.3.1963, kindly supplied by Mr Knud Paludan, curator of the Hørsholm museum.

"I am Charlemagne". Be it noted that he did not say, "I recall Charlemagne", nor "My position is like Charlemagne's", nor even "I am as Charlemagne", but simply "I am he". This is the mythical formula.⁴⁸

Convinced of the imperial bearing of the legend of Caesar's deer I had long wondered whether any version of it would ever turn up connecting it with Napoleon. And sure enough there is a Napoleonic version of the legend. It is recorded in a book on red deer written in 1899 by a German writer who claims to be quoting from a Berlin journal of 1870.

In 1808, the Emperor Napoleon organised a great deer hunt with hounds in the Imperial forest of Vincennes to honour his (then) consort Josephine. During the chase, a 22-pointer was flushed out of the forest and pursued by the courtly company of hunters until it was driven into a previously prepared enclosure where, exhausted by the long run, it collapsed into the waiting nets. Amid general rejoicing and the usual congratulations, there was soldered round the neck of the weary deer a collar of gilded brass which bore the inscription "The Empress Josephine gave this stag its life on the 8th September 1808". According to the unanimous judgement of the attendant experienced Imperial forest officers, the deer was then, judging by its antlers, at least 20 years old. In 1836, Louis Napoleon also organized a hunt in the Vincennes forest and on this occasion a strong powerful stag with amazing antlers was killed. Round its neck it bore a weathered blackened ring, and when the ring was cleaned, the inscription (given above) was clearly seen. From this, it was certain that the same deer had already found itself in the same danger in 1808 and, according to the evidence, was a dignified 50 years old. Even today this collar is preserved in a French Museum.⁴⁹

I think we have to posit the existence of some kind of popular tradition, lasting from at least the second century B.C. to the eighteenth century of our era, in which the collared deer was

48 Quoted in C. Kerényi, The Religion of the Greeks and Romans (London, 1962), p. 28, from Thomas Mann, Freud and the Future (1936), p. 33.

49 F.F. von Raesfeld, Das Rotwild (Berlin, 1899), p. 71 (not seen), quoted by Sir Kenneth Blaxter, British Veterinary Journal, 135 (1979), p. 595.

understood in several European countries as a symbol of dynastic continuity, as a pledge of the survival of the heroic figures of the past in their modern successors, or a token of enduring fame. It was undoubtedly the universal belief in its longevity which fitted the stag for this symbolic role, whether that longevity was secured by eating snakes, or by other means. The extremely sporadic appearance of the collared deer confirm its elusiveness and inviolability; fugace, as Venaphro puts it. It seems that it is in the field of dynastic myths, of ethnogenic origins and perhaps of imperial renovatio that we must find the field which gives the symbol its essential register. Like other symbols it was occasionally used in the mouths of those who spoke a different dialect, for whom it had a different range of collocations and expectations. By and large these are the more literate and the more learned, and it is in their writing that the most familiar instances of the collared deer have come down to us, so that its root meaning has become obscured. The stag is a symbol of time, of the endurance of the past, and perhaps of national continuity. In classical times the Palladium had much the same symbolism. Whatever the accidents of history the Palladium must be handed on, the Penates jealously protected. Aeneas is pius above all because he does just that. The deer must not be killed, its life is sacred: Noli me tangere, Caesaris enim sum.

CHAPTER FIVE

Le Cerf Volant

And there is an old tale enhances for the imagination the grandeur of the woods of France, and secures you in the thought of your seclusion. When Charles VI hunted in the time of his wild boyhood near Senlis, there was captured an old stag, having a collar of bronze about his neck, and these words engraved on the collar: 'Caesar mihi hoc donavit'. It is no wonder if the minds of men were moved at this occurrence and they stood aghast to find themselves thus touching hands with forgotten ages, and following an antiquity with hound and horn. And even for you, it is scarcely an idle curiosity that you ponder how many centuries this stag had carried its free antlers through the wood, and how many summers and winters had shone and snowed on the imperial badge. If the extent of solemn wood could thus safeguard a tall stag from the hunter's hounds and horses, might not you also play hide-and-seek, in these groves, with all the pangs and trepidations of man's life, and elude Death, the mighty hunter, for more than the span of human years?

Thus R.L. Stevenson explained in the 1870's how our legend summed up the romance of the great forests of France.¹ For all the Victorian flavour of Stevenson's "Forest Notes" his account is not out of touch with the authentic spirit of the legend, for the belief that one had come across a living relic of antiquity must have generated a sense of wonder which guaranteed the popularity and endurance of the legend. Stevenson's intuition that the stag stood as an intimation of immortality may also be in touch with the authentic symbolism of the legend of Caesar's deer, for the stag lives on not only as a pledge of the enduring fame of the great kings and emperors of antiquity, but as a token of their enduring presence.

1 R.L. Stevenson, Essays of Travel (London, 1905), p. 173, chapter five, "Forest Notes, 1875-6".

We have seen how this tale of the stag at Senlis originated in the writings of the early chroniclers of the time of Charles VI, who told it partly to account for the adoption by the French kings of the heraldic badge of the cerf volant or winged stag. The use which is made of this heraldic motif in French literature and painting, and accounts of its ceremonial use, will tell us a great deal about its significance and meaning after its adoption; they will show us what the King's subjects and successors made of it, but they will not tell us much about the motives behind its adoption. In fact the accounts of its origins are somewhat confused and contradictory. According to the chroniclers the badge originated with Charles VI, but there is good reason for doubting their testimony. Not only is the account of the marvellous collared stag at Senlis a patent example of mirabilia (most plainly in Froissart's fanciful story of the King's dream vision) which we can now recognise as no more than a traditional topos, but there is clear evidence that a stag of some form had already been adopted by Charles's predecessor, Charles V.

There are a number of documents which confirm that Charles V had erected a large wooden statue of a stag in the Grande Salle of the Palais Royale. Even after the Palais was destroyed by fire in the early seventeenth century, the building which replaced it preserved the name of the 'Arcade du Grand Cerf'.² A manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal records a payment made to the painter Jean d'Orleans for painting the stag in the Grande Salle of the Palais in the year 1364, the year Charles V came to the throne, and a curious

² Adrien Blanchet, "Cernunnos et le cerf de 'Justice'", Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique: Lettres, 35 (1949), pp. 316-328.

anecdote recorded in the eighteenth century claims that at one time Charles VI melted down all the bullion in the royal treasury and made it into a stag of the same size as the one then to be seen in the Grande Salle of the Palace. It was a sign, either of the poverty of the royal exchequer, or of the size of the stag, that there was only enough molten metal to form the head and neck.³ Strange though this may seem, it may yet preserve a grain of truth, for before the age of international banking it was not unusual for rich nobles in time of need to convert **their** wealth into jewelry and works of art which could be melted down or converted into specie in time of need.

Adrian Blanchet has argued that the French stag symbolised the idea of Justice in a rather specialised sense of exagia, or financial equity, and he takes it back to Gallo-Roman carvings of the Celtic stag god, Cernunnos, who is portrayed on the Reims bas-relief with coins pouring out of a sack. Though the links with Cernunnos seem to me to be doubtful, there is overwhelming evidence, as we shall see, to connect the cerf-volant badge of the French kings with ideas of monetary equity, and with broader ideas of Justice.

Though there is nothing which suggests that Charles V's stag was a version of Caesar's deer, another and almost contemporary imitation of it is specifically identified by later chroniclers as Caesar's stag. At the end of the fourteenth century Jean de Berry, brother of Charles V and celebrated patron of artists, placed a large stag in the arcade before the door of the Sainte Chapelle at Bourges, which he had built in imitation of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris.

³ Blanchet, p. 325, cites MS Arsenal 6362, fol. 45 (not seen).

This stag was a large wooden statue which carried de Berry's shield suspended from a collar, on which was an inscription attributing to it three centuries of age. Jean Chaumeau, the sixteenth-century historian of Berry, says that this collar bore "de Cesar l'écriture", a piece of information which, in the light of what we have seen, we should have no reason to doubt.⁴ A drawing of the Sainte Chapelle at Bourges survives, showing the stag beneath the arcade (Plate 51). Beneath the same arcade de Berry placed statues of his royal ancestors, suggesting that the stag may have had the dynastic significance which we have recognised as the essential implication of the collared stag.⁵ The painter Jean d'Orléans who decorated the royal stag in 1364 and who later became pictor regis may be the same as the Jean d'Orléans who from about 1371 was patronised by de Berry.⁶ If this is so the connection between the royal stag in the Palais and de Berry's stag at Bourges could be closer than we might otherwise think. Though neither stag is described in any of the sources as a winged stag, it is worth recalling that before his coronation Charles VII lived at Bourges, where he completed de Berry's work of decorating the Sainte Chapelle, and would thus have been familiar with de Berry's stag and its significance. We shall see how it was in his

4 Jean Chaumeau, Histoire de Berry (Lyon, 1566), p. 231.

5 Chaumeau takes the ancestry of the princes of Bourges back to Gomer Gaulois, descendant of Nimrod.

6 Millard Meiss, French Painting in the time of Jean de Berry: The late Fourteenth Century and the Patronage of the Duke (London, 1967) pp. 34, 44, 50, 100-102. Meiss believes that the Jean d'Orléans who decorated the funerary chapel in which de Berry's body lay after his death in 1416 was a different painter.

reign that the widest propagation of the cerf volant device took place.

The stag statues which adorned the royal palace and the chapel at Bourges are undoubtedly to be connected with various model stags which play a significant part on ceremonial occasions during the reign of Charles VI and his successors. These model stags are invariably winged and designed as automata, so that various parts of them could be articulated by machinery to make symbolic gestures. Research into the origins of such automata has shown that they probably came from the East; they were well-known in Constantinople before it fell to the Turks, and from there they made their way westwards into courtly entertainments.⁷ The earliest mention of the cerf volant automaton occurs in the entry of Isabeau de Bavaria into Paris in 1389, and Juvenal des Ursins describes it as being as large as the stag in the Palais Royale (it is significant that he should make this comparison; we are surely entitled to conclude that the two stags were felt to be connected), made artificially, all white, its horns gilded (like those of the white hart on the Wilton Diptych) and a crown round its neck from which a shield of fleurs de lis was suspended.⁸ The stag was displayed in a tableau consisting of a blue tapestry of fleurs de lis got up to represent a lit de justice. In the middle of this lit was the stag which was manipulated by a concealed operator who articulated its eyes, horns, mouth and limbs.

7 Anthony Luengo, "Magic and illusion in The Franklin's Tale", JEGP, 77 (1978), pp. 1-16.

8 Nouvelle Collection de Mémoires relatifs à l'Histoire de France, edited by Michaud and Poujoulat, (Paris, 1857), II, p. 378.

There was a large sword near the stag which it took up with its right forehoof and held erect as the Queen passed. Juvenal tells us that so great was the interest aroused by this ingenious display that the king wished to examine it more closely and to this end disguised himself and a companion and made his way to the scene outside the Chatelet. The crowd was so pressing around the cerf-volant, however, that sergeants-at-arms had to resort to some rough treatment to keep order, and the king himself, not being recognised beneath his disguise, was beaten about the shoulders. That evening he joked about the treatment he had received. Sixty years later we meet the same automaton when Charles VII entered Rouen. Two maidens held it on a lead, and as the king passed the stag knelt down.⁹ In 1498 Louis XIII entered Paris and was met by a cerf volant about twenty-five feet high led by a girl called Bonne Voullenté, sewn with louis d'or and jewels, rising suns and fleurs de lis. The girl presented the stag to the king with the words:

A vostre venue excellente
 Le cerf volant vous presente
 Affin que la Ville desserve
 Vostre amour à vous se rend serve
 Et de tous biens obediante.¹⁰

The play on cerf and serve became commonplace; we meet it again in the royal entry into Rouen in 1508, when there was a stag opposite a

9 Described in Mathieu de Coussy's chronicle, Collection des Chroniques, edited by J.A. Buchon, (Paris, 1875), X, pp. 205-206. The entry is also described by Martial d'Auvergne, Poésies, 2 vols. (Paris, 1724) II, p. 78, which mentions the cerf volant.

10 B. Guinée and F. Lehoux, Les entrées royales françaises (Paris, 1968), p. 132, pp. 160-162.

unicorn and suspended between them a shield arranged so that the animals could bow down before the king. The tableau bore the following inscription:

Quant la licorne et le grand cerf
Larmarye tiennent ensemble,
Il n'est ennemy qui ne tremble
Et qu'ilz ne rend à eux serf.¹¹

Something of the flavour of such royal entries can be gained from Martial d'Auvergne's description of the 1447 entry into Paris.¹² This included a performance by a group of Wild Men, representing the seven virtues and the seven deadly sins. A child dressed as an angel offered the king a fleur de lis. The king advanced beneath the solemn baldachin previously reserved, as M.G.A. Vale notes, for the Host in religious processions; it was a sign of his sacramental kingship.¹³ The procession included the Escuier leading four horses covered with cerfs volants. Though the part they play in the ceremony is not a prominent one, they nevertheless occupy a natural and unobtrusive place among the symbolic icons surrounding the person of the king. Curiously enough a record has survived which records the ceremonial trappings which were used on these occasions. An inventory of the Grande Écurie, dated February 1421, mentions several saddles of crimson velvet "à cerfs volans", a standard of red, white and black satin with an embroidered cerf volant with a crown round its neck, sewn with broom cods, and an ornamental saddle in crimson

11 P. le Verdier, L'Entrée de Louis XII et de la Reine Anne à Rouen, 1508 (Rouen, 1900).

12 Les Vigilles de Charles VII, 2 vols. (Paris, 1724), I, pp. 156-158.

13 Charles VII (London, 1974), p. 200.

velvet with cerfs volants "à la devise du roy d'Angleterre".¹⁴ This last remark, to which we shall return, is curious and may be an allusion to the white hart badge of English king Richard II.

That there was a special connection between the cerf volant and the ceremonial of royal lits de justice can be inferred from the celebrated painting by Jean Fouquet which shows Charles VII holding a lit de justice at Vendôme in 1458 (Plate 52).¹⁵ The painting forms the frontispiece to the Munich Boccaccio manuscript, with the subject matter of which it has no evident connection.¹⁶ The occasion which it represents was the trial of Jean, duc d'Alençon, who was accused of having conspired with the English, was found guilty and condemned to death. The painting is remarkable for the realism and animation of the throng of figures in the foreground, some of whom are evidently being restrained in their eagerness to witness the proceedings. Contrasting with this bustle is the formality of the robed officials sitting in the privileged rhombus at whose apex sits the king. Contemporary documents permit us to identify some of these public personages. They included the poet Charles d'Orléans, the young prince Charles, later Charles VIII, Gaston de Foix, and among the

14 I owe this reference to a letter from M. René Herval in the Archives of the Musée des Antiquités, Rouen. M. Herval cites the Choix de Pièces inédites relatives au règne de Charles VI published by the Société de l'Histoire de France (Paris, 1864), p. 393. I am grateful to curator Elisabeth Chirol for drawing my attention to this.

15 Paul Durrieu, Le Boccace de Munich (Munich, 1909), pl. 1, pp. 51-55.

16 Unless, as Durrieu suggests, p. 51, the condemnation of the duc d'Alençon which it depicts is to be taken as a contemporary instance of the "Cas des nobles hommes".

ecclesiastics, Jean Juvenal des Ursins, author of the chronicle which is our source for the legend of the collared deer of Senlis.¹⁷ The picture captures the very moment when, the case having been heard and the accused persons led away, the sentence is pronounced by the justiciary who is shown before the king, reading the sentence. The whole painting has to do with the relation between the king and his subjects and with the nature of his authority, in short with the idea of justice. The lit de justice was the occasion when the king registered the authority of his edicts, and the two pairs of winged stags which dominate the upper register of the painting, surely help to define the role and status of the royal person whom they flank.

There is, in fact, a subtle gradation between the lower and upper registers of the painting, between the bustle and disorder of the realistic throng in the foreground, the ordered solemnity of the seated court in the middle, and the emblematic and ideal register of the background: if the foreground insists on the reality of the occasion, the background insists on its symbolic dimension. It is difficult to be quite sure from the painting that these stags are embroidered on the hangings which cover the rear walls of this theatrum, but though they seem to stand out from their background they are clearly not automata. Nevertheless they probably give us a fairly accurate impression of what such automata looked like. They stand upreared on their hind legs, with small shields of fleurs-de-lis supported between their forehoofs.

17 Durrieu, p. 53

It is not only in the ceremonial iconography of this period that one finds the cerf volant, however, for it was quickly taken up by a number of writers, who recognised in it a symbol for the French king and for his authority. There was a vogue in the late Middle Ages for political allegories, and particularly for political prophecies in which the identities of the actors are disguised beneath animal symbols. There are innumerable examples of this, such as the poem, circa. 1370, known as "John of Bridlington's Prophecy" which figures the kings of England, France and Scotland as bull, cock and crab respectively, and describes itself as an "occultatio prophetia".¹⁸ The author of the Régale du Monde compares his animal symbols with the creatures of the Apocalypse, as he alludes to political events "Par estranges figurez et couvertes", testifying to his sense that animal allegory had a cryptic and occult significance.¹⁹ No doubt the cerf volant symbol was picked up by writers of this period because it answered to the vogue for such symbolism.

It is thus that we find it in Philippe de Mézières' Songe du Vieil Pélerin, written in his old age and addressed to the young king Charles VI.²⁰ In this poem Philippe describes a prophetic dream in which the French king in the guise of cerf volant undertakes the reform of domestic ills preparatory to leading a united western world to Jerusalem (Plate 53). This dream of France leading a united

18 Political Poems and Songs, edited by Thomas Wright (London, 1856), vol. I, (Rolls Series).

19 Régale du Monde, l.365. I owe this reference to a paper on his forthcoming edition of the poem which Professor J.C. Laidlaw read to the conference of the International Reynard Society, Münster, 1979.

20 Edited by W.C. Coopland (Cambridge, 1969).

Christian empire is millennial and Ghibeline in its emphasis, and it cloaks the identity of the most prominent figures in the real politik of contemporary Europe in an elaborate Sibylline allegory, in which the Old Black Boar is John of Gaunt, the Young White Boar is Richard II, and the kingdom of France is the Great Park of "Blanches Fleurs Dorées", or fleurs-de-lis. The landscape of the poem takes on some of the dream-like artificiality of a tapestry, and indeed we shall find tapestries sharing some of its iconography. It is possible that we should see the significance of the stag in Philippe's poem, in view of the emphasis which he places on France's universal and quasi-imperial mission, as a token of imperial renovatio. For what he is calling the French king to do is little short of the unification of Christendom, a reconstitution of the achievement of Charlemagne.

In the poetry of Eustache Deschamps the cerf volant is also connected with poems of political prophecy couched in animal symbolism.

Trente deux ans ara le cerf volant
 Des grans forets de Gaule et de Bourbon,
 Au chief legier, et au corps remuant;
 A .xiii. cors fera craindre son renom
 Qu'il destruira, ce dist la lettre escripte,
 L'isle au geans et l'asne, vueille ou non,
 Tele est de lui la prophecie ditte.

Onques n'yssit de son lieu nul plus grant
 Que cilz sera qui l'asne au pie de plom
 Et son bestail yra tout destruisant,
 L'isle aux fourmis, entour et environ,
 Mettra la fin, tout ce qui leur profite,
 Mort y aura et grant destruction:
 Tele est de lui la prophecie ditte.

Après yra, ses grans saulz poursillant,
 En Orient, sur les pors de Mahom;
 Cel ort bestail yra tout subjugant
 Et la mettra en sa subjection;
 ,xx. et .viii. cors ara lors le faon
 Qui rendre doit la sainte terre quitte,
 Et acroistre sur touz sa region:
 Telle est de lui la prophecie ditte.

L'Envoy

Ori, occi, midi, septemptrion,
 Princes seront au cerf par sa merite;
 L'aigle ara d'or, ains sa finicion:²¹
 Tele est de lui la prophecie ditte.

The prophecy is couched in an elaborate animal symbolism. The chronology of the events predicted is expressed through references to the "cors" or horns of the stag. The stag renews its antlers each year, and thus the number of "cors" signifies the number of years of the king's life. Since in the first line the cerf volant is thirty two years old, the poem can be dated with some confidence to 1400 (Charles was born in 1368). In line 4 the thirteenth cor takes us to 1381, the date of the war in Flanders, and in line 21 the twentieth cor alludes to the abortive preparations to invade England in 1388, and the twenty-eighth cor takes us to 1398, the date of the Battle of Nicopolis. The beast allegory remains fittingly cryptic, despite the ingenuity of Deschamps' editors. Britain is not only the Isle of Giants, on account of Corineus and his companions, but also of the Donkey, this being the unflattering title assigned to Richard II. The English bestail or cattle lay waste the Isle of Ants, which is Deschamps' habitual title for Flanders. The corbeaulx gris remain unexplained, despite the suggestions of the editors, and in the third verse the prophecy sends Charles on a crusade to conquer the Mahomedan pigs (a particularly insulting choice of epithet). In the Envoi the extension of Charles's authority is foreseen not just east, but west, north and south to comprehend the universal mission of empire, symbolised finally by the golden eagle.

21 Eustache Deschamps, Oeuvres Complètes, edited by de Queux de Saint Hilaire, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 11 vols. (Paris, 1878-1903) I, pp. 164-165.

In another of these prophecies, Deschamps laments that the once noble forest has been overturned, in a mundus inversus image, by the destructive boar and his ally the fox. But the cerf volant will secretly return (par la senté couverte) and drive out the boar to establish his rightful dominion over the forest.

En la forest jadis noble et deserte
 A le sanglier vermillié la fouchiere,
 Le lis destruit et le glan mis a perte,
 Les arbres haulz versez en la royere,
 Ce qui plain fut est tourné en bruiere;
 Li jeusne arbre ne puent revenir,
 La forest va ce que devant derriere:
 L'en n'y scet mais quele voie tenir.

Lyons lieppars ne loups, c'est chose aperte,
 Levriers, mastins, n'ony levee leur chiere,
 Mais au sanglier ont laisié voie ouverte
 Et au renart qui est de sa banniere,
 Tant que du bois ont tout chacié arriere
 Ce qui devoit la foïest soustenir;
 Du recouvrer n'y voy nulle maniere,
 L'en n'y scet mais quelle voie tenir.

Mai venir doit par la senté couverte
 Le cerf volant a la teste legiere
 Qui aux faintis doit rendre leur desserte,
 Et passera du sanglier la riviere.
 L'asne pesant mettra dessoubz la biere;
 Soubz lui se doit la fourest resjouir,
 La cessera de dire la matiere:
 L'en n'y scet mais quele voie tenir.

L'Envoy

Prince, on tendra la venue treschiere
 Du cerf volant, de sa lignie chiere
 Qui a vingt cors doit l'asne conquerir
 Et recouvrir sa pasture premiere;
 Mais s'il ne vit, chascun son salut quiere:
 L'en ne scet mes quele voie tenir.²²

The S.A.T.F. editor dates this poem 1400, but the symbolism of the cors would argue in favour of 1388, when Charles was twenty.

The return of the cerf volant would then allude to the hopes attendant on the attainment of the king's majority, and would make sense of the central image of the voie (the voie ouverte which animals have left for the marauding boar, the senté couverte by which the cerf volant may return, and the voie of the refrain, which the bewildered subjects have lost). The boar is probably the Black Prince, whose campaign in 1355 had reduced large tracts of France to desert. The imagery of this Ballade contrives to be both emblematic and naturalistic. If the lis suggests the flowered carpet of a tapestry, or the emblem of France, the glan refers not so much to any allegoric fruits as to the natural mastage, the acorn-harvest, on which the prosperity of the forest economy depended. The reversion of the forest to heath and waste is something Deschamps must have witnessed. The Sanglier's action is brought to life with the verb vermillié which means literally "rooting about, as a boar roots for worms". The fox, Renart, symbolises Charles the Bad, King of Navarre. After the wars in Normandy in 1364 between Bertrand du Guesclin and the forces of Charles the Bad, a peace treaty was agreed from which Charles omitted his signature. It was known as "la paix renard". The title denotes his untrustworthiness. These depredations by the Boar and the Fox took place in the reign of Charles V, of course, but the cerf volant is the young Charles VI. The teste legiere refers to his youth (a young stag has smaller antlers, or perhaps has grown a lesser number of cors) and the whole poem is prognosticating an improvement in France's fortunes on the advent of the new reign.

Deschamps takes the line describing the teste legiere from this poem and uses it as the refrain of another poem of prophecy in

which the cerf volant, it is foretold, will reassert its rule over the other animals of the forest. In this poem, however, the prophet is identified as not Merlin, but the Sybil. The Cumaean Sybil had been placed in the rank of the prophets by St Augustine²³ since, as Deschamps notes, she was thought to have foretold the birth of Christ, and she was accepted as such by the church. If we are surprised to find her standing in for Merlin, we might remember how Edmund Spenser sends Britomart to Merlin's cave in the Faerie Queene to learn the future destiny of the British race, and is told of the glorious lineage out of which a royal virgin will come to restore peace. Britomart's visit recapitulates Aeneas's visit to the Cumaean Sybil in the Aeneid, when the glorious consummation of the Roman line in Augustus is foretold. As for Spenser, Merlin could stand as the British Sybil; so for Deschamps, when it came to a choice of oracles, there was little to choose between the Latin and the British prophet.

Je, Sebile, prophete, la Cumayne,
 Q'en.,xii. vers parlay de Jhesu Crist
 Par avant ce qu'il preist char humaine
 En la Vierche qui nostre rachat fist,
 Et fut tout voir ce que ma bouche en dist,
 Aussi sera la clause derreniere
 Des corps lever, vueil reciter mon dit
 Du cerf volant a la teste legiere.

Après le temps qu'en la haie foraine
 Yert du sanglier le lyon desconfit,
 Prins et mené devers la Grant Bretaigne
 Et que chascuns ara Gaule en despit,
 Yert l'asne blanc saiges par son edit
 Ses pastures recouvrera arriere
 Sur le sanglier, lors venra le proufit
 Du cerf volant a la teste legiere.

23 City of God, 18.23.

Sur les froumis aura victoire plaine
 Ains .xiiii. ans ou lac plain de delit,
 Lors destruira mainte beste vilaine
 Et regnera mieulx qu'onques cerfs ne fist,
 Et conquerra pluseurs bestes, s'il vit;
 L'asne pesant querra en sa bruiere
 Qui se rendra pour la paour fuitif
 Du cerf volant a la teste legiere.²⁴

The symbolism of this Ballade becomes more subtle if we read it in the light of the received symbolism of the stag as we now understand it. The initial reference to Christ's incarnation might lead us to entertain the notion that the renewal which the poem prophecies might pick up some hint of the Christian symbolism of the stag, and particularly of Malory's allegorisation of the white hart which renews its skin. Indeed, though the ants of stanza three are Deschamps's favourite designation for the Flemish, I wonder if there is not some hint in this of Vincent de Beauvais's and the Bestiaire d'Amour Rimé's allegorisation of the stag that renews itself in the ant heap.

Christine de Pisan was an admirer of Eustache Deschamps. In 1404 she wrote him a long epistle lamenting the times, to which Deschamps replied, thanking her warmly and praising her as a woman unique in her kind in all France. In that he was not wide of the mark. The daughter of Charles V's favourite astrologer, she was a woman of extraordinary character, who after the death of her husband and a decline in her fortunes with the accession of the new king, had set herself single-mindedly to support herself and her family by her pen. She maintained the equality and intelligence of her sex against all the prejudices of medieval habit. Most of her poetry is in the

24 Deschamps, II, p. 9.

form of short pieces on the theme of courtly love, some of them written, a little unconventionally, from the woman's point of view, but in later life she turned to the composition of several poems on the fortunes of France. The very last of these is the Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc, a poem in praise of France's national heroine, to whom Christine was drawn as much by her feminist convictions as by her patriotism. It is in this late poem, written in seclusion in 1429, that we find a reference to the cerf volant.

Christine welcomes Joan's restoration of the king, Charles VII, to the throne of France,

Car ung roy de France doit estre
 Charles, filz de Charles nommé,
 Qui sur tous rois sera grant maistre.
 Propheciez l'ont surnommé
 "Le Cerf Volant" et consommé
 Sera par cellui conquereur
 Maint fait (Dieu l'a à ce somé)
 Et en fin doit estre empereur.²⁵

It is noteworthy that Charles's identity with his father and predecessor is emphasised in the repetition of the name Charles, and indeed the syntax would almost allow us to attach the title cerf volant to the father instead of the son. It was, as we have seen, Charles VI whom prophets Merlin, Sybil and Bede, alias Eustace Deschamps, had nicknamed ("surnommé") cerf volant. Charles VII certainly revived the title, but the combinations of title and the allusion to prophecies suggests very strongly that Deschamps was Christine's source for this stanza. Indeed in a later stanza she

25 Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc, edited by A.J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty, Society for the Study of Medieval Language and Literature (Oxford, 1977), p. 43.

spells out the prophetic theme in a way which recalls Deschamps closely, and identifies his three favourite prophets, Merlin, Sybil and Bede, who, she says, foretold in their writings the coming of Joan of Arc.²⁶ Finally it may be of some significance that in the stanza in which she alludes to the cerf volant Christine proceeds naturally to an allusion to Charles's claims to be emperor. Again we wonder whether the cerf volant ever lost the association with ideas of imperial renovatio which it had in the legend of Caesar's deer.

From the time of Charles VII the cerf volant emblem never quite disappears from the iconography of his successors. There seems to have been a particularly marked revival of the badge towards the end of the fifteenth century. We find it in the splendid tapestry of the winged stags at Rouen which dates from the reign of Charles's son Louis XI (Plate 54). This shows three cerfs volants on a parterre sprinkled with flowers. The central stag is seated in a pallisade of interlaced branches. It holds a standard showing St Michael and the dragon. The two flanking stags, also winged, face each other, with collars from which hang shields bearing the arms of France. In the foreground are two leopards, one on each side of a larger shield of the French arms. We may accept Emile Picot's interpretation that this tapestry was probably executed in 1469 or 1470 symbolising the reconciliation between the king, figured as the cerf volant, and

²⁶ Kennedy and Varty point out that a large number of prophecies were circulating in 1429 in Paris, and that the expectations of a French imperial renovatio was "long-established and continually revised", see p. 63n of their edition. On medieval prophecy see Marjorie Reeves, The Influence of Prophecy in the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1969).

Charles, Duc de Berry, son of Jean the patron, figured as the leopard of Guyenne. The banner is the standard of the Order of Saint-Michel, recently founded by the king.²⁷

Charles VII is represented by the winged stag on a stained-glass window in the cathedral at Évreux, with the motto En Bien (Plate 55). The letter K on the adjacent pane stands for Karolus and perhaps recalls Charles's Carolingian namesake. Perhaps there is a hint of renovatio about this window. There is another stained-glass cerf volant of unknown provenance in the Musée Cluny in Paris. Charles VII is symbolised as a winged hart of forty years and his successor, Louis XI, as a cerf volant of twenty in a Ballade by the poet Henri Baude, and Louis is again symbolised as the cerf volant in two anonymous Ballades of this period.²⁸

In sculpture we find two winged stags prominently displayed over the original entrance to the Palais de Justice in Rouen (Plate 56). We find two more carved over the doorway to the palace which Jacques Coeur built for himself at Bourges (Plate 57). Jacques Coeur was a business man who became financier to Charles VII, "argentier du Roi". He is specifically mentioned as being in attendance in the official account of the royal entry into Rouen in 1445, when he would have witnessed the automaton of the cerf volant which was a prominent

27 E. Picot, "Note sur une tapisserie à figures symboliques à Rouen", Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Normandie (1911), pp. 111-120. See also R. Delsalle, "Rouen et l'iconographie du cerf", Revue des Sociétés Savantes de Haute-Normandie, 81 (1976), pp. 2-26.

28 Henri Baude, Oeuvres, edited by Quicherat (Paris, 1856), pp. 109-110. LeRoux de Lincy, Recueil de chants historiques français depuis le XIIe siècle (Paris, 1841-1842), pp. 368-374.

part of the display on that occasion.²⁹ This recurrent association of the stag with ideas of finance and justice lends some support to the thesis argued by Adrien Blanchet that one of the enduring meanings of the stag, from those early representations of the Celtic Cernunnos pouring coins from a sack with attendant stags to the Grande Cerf which immobilised the royal exchequer of Charles VI, had to do with ideas of royal prosperity and largesse.

Towards the end of the century the iconography of the cerf volant becomes a little diffuse. This can be largely attributed to the accession of the House of Orleans to the throne. Louis XII adopted not the winged stag but the more famous porc epic, the porcupine, as his emblem, described by Jean Lemaire as "armez de nature", and with the motto: "Qui s'y frotte s'y pique". The stag, thus displaced as the royal badge (though we still find it in the Rouen entry of 1508) became the emblem of the dispossessed Bourbons. We find it, with the familiar wings, dominating the balustrade of the funerary chapel built by Cardinal Charles de Bourbon in Lyons cathedral in 1485 (Plate 58). It is surrounded by a banderole with the motto ESPERANCE, the motto of the order of chivalry which Louis de Bourbon had founded in 1369. It is particularly well-known as the motto of Charles, Connétable de Bourbon during the reign of François Ier. Thus a Ballade attributed to Jean Lemaire des Belges rejoices in the downfall of Charles de Bourbon under the guise of cerf volant.³⁰ The

29 Guenée and Lehoux, p. 160.

30 Oeuvres, edited by J. Stecher, 5 vols. (Louvain, 1882-91), IV, p. 358.

poem makes iconographic play with the details of wings and collar. The Connétable is compared to Icarus who sailed too close to the sun and lost his hope ("esperance") and his wings, despite his alliance with the eagle of empire - an allusion to Charles's treasonable liaison with Charles V immediately before the battle of Pavia in 1525. In a similar spirit is the poem by Pierre Gringoire, Les Fantaisies de la Mère Sotte, written after the peace treaties of 1516 on the accession of François Ier.³¹ This takes the form of a series of moralised exempla from the Gesta Romanorum. The Prologue is an elaborate animal allegory referring to contemporary events (Plate 59). Charles de Bourbon is the cerf volant. He figures also in this guise in a poem by Maurice Scève. Later in the sixteenth century the Italian emblemist Paulo Giovio interpreted the Connétable's device as a Renaissance impresa with the motto Cursum intendimus alis, "We pursue our course with wings" (Plate 60). Thus presented the winged stag becomes a "speaking picture"; device and motto reciprocally interpret each other with that "simultaneity of apprehension" which the followers of Alciati were to value so highly.

During the sixteenth century the cerf volant badge remained well-known. Robert Gaguin's version of the Chronicles of France which appeared under various titles provided a prime source for French history in this period, and recounted the story of Charles VI's stag at Senlis. At least one edition features two cerfs volants on its title page (Plate 61). The de Gourmont family of publishers in Paris in the early sixteenth century adopted a colophon which shows their

31 Edited by R.L. Frautschi (Chapel Hill, 1962).

arms supported by two cerfs volants (Plate 62). A tudor manuscript which belonged to John Cocke, Lancaster herald in the mid-century, shows the arms of France as a banner of three fleur de lis supported by a blue stag with wings.³² A fountain in the courtyard of the royal palace of the kings of Scotland at Linlithgow, Stirlingshire, was built in 1538 to celebrate the marriage of James V of Scotland to Mary of Guise, a match which sealed the alliance against Henry VIII of England. The fountain is carved with flying buttresses, figure sculptures and heraldic devices. Two unicorns support the arms of Scotland; a lion the arms of Mary of Guise; and a winged stag supports the royal arms of Scotland impaled with those of France.

The most unexpected recurrence of the winged stag, however, is not in France but in England, where it crops up on an illuminated title page to the household accounts of Queen Elizabeth the First (Plate 63). These annual accounts had title pages drawn in pen and ink showing moral and allegorical subjects. That for 1578 has a picture of a stag springing up on its hind legs, a crown round its collar, and another above its head. It has fully feathered wings, and a scroll from its mouth with the inscription Hoc Caesar me donavit. These are the very words which the early chroniclers found on the collar of Charles VI's stag at Senlis, the very escriture de Caesar which established the longevity and identity of the royal stag. But what is the badge of the French kings doing on the title page of Queen Elizabeth's household accounts? It could be, quite

32 Lord Howard de Walden, Banners, Standards and Badges from a Tudor MS in the College of Arms (London, 1904), p. 58.

simply, an allusion to the traditional claim of the English crown to the throne of France, a claim which goes back to Crécy and was not abandoned until Hanoverian times. The title page, indeed, describes Elizabeth as "By the grace of God, Queen of England, France and Ireland", the usual formula.

But it is possible that the English sovereign had a better claim to the hart badge than this. We have seen how the French inventory of the previous century identified the cerf volant on a royal saddle as the "devise du roi d'Angleterre". Puzzling though this is, it is just possible that it is an allusion, not to the winged hart of France, but to the English white hart of Richard II. It is indeed remarkable that at almost exactly the time that the French king Charles VI adopted the cerf volant as his personal badge, the king of England should also have adopted the stag as his device. There was, in fact, considerable correspondence between the two courts, and it is inconceivable that either king was ignorant of the stag device of his counterpart. Indeed it is known that on the occasion of Richard's marriage to Charles's daughter Isabella in 1396 the two kings wore each other's badges. The account of the wedding tells us that Charles wore on his breast the white hart, the livery of the King of England, and he presented to Richard a livery collar of boom cods, which gave its name, plants à genets to a dynasty of English kings.³³

³³ On the white hart badge and the Wilton Diptych see M.V. Clarke, Fourteenth Century Studies (Oxford, 1937); Francis Wormald, "The Wilton Diptych", Warburg Journal, 17 (1954), pp. 191-203. John Gough Nichols's article in Archaeologia, 29 (1840) is still worth consulting.

According to the Monk of Evesham the white hart badge was first distributed to Richard's followers at a tournament at Smithfield in October 1390, though brooches of the white hart, set with rubies, turn up in a list of royal jewels as early as September, 1380. It has been claimed, and frequently repeated, that Richard inherited the device from his mother, the Maid of Kent, but this claim, which dates from the time of Henry VIII, should be treated with considerable scepticism. The truth seems to be that in 1390 Richard brought into official prominence a device which had previously been used, perhaps purely decoratively, in some of the royal jewelry. Livery badges had hitherto been distributed by powerful lords as a means of identifying their supporters and retainers. Richard had been petitioned by the commons to curb the abuses which arose from lords who gained pardons for miscreants who were apprehended wearing their livery. In 1390 Richard acceded to the commons' request to make illegal the granting of liveries and badges by the feudal lords. This prerogative was henceforth reserved to the king, who in that very year, made the first distribution of his own badge of the white hart. The result is described by the author, possibly William Langland, of the poem Richard the Redeless, from which it appears that the King's retainers became greater miscreants than those who had worn the baron's liveries, and regarded their badge as a sign that they were above the law. The poet protests against those followers of the King who thus wear the white hart livery who have turned, by their misdeeds, scores of more humble hearts against the king.

The most famous representation of the white hart of Richard II is on the painting, now in the National Gallery, known as the

Wilton Diptych (Plate 64). Its two panels are painted on both sides. The reverse shows beautifully-drawn white hart, lodged on some grass, the antlers faint now, but originally golden. Opposite are the arms of England and France, the Cornish choughs and the cross fleury of the Conqueror. The front panels show the king kneeling in prayer, in what is known as the "domator" position. He wears a collar of broom cods, decorated with pearls, and on his breast a white hart badge, the antlers tipped with pearls. He is dressed in a gown richly sown with a pattern of white harts encircled with broom collars, each in gold. This fashion of forming a heraldic badge into the running pattern of state robes was described by the contemporary term "powdering", poudré. It is nowhere better seen. Behind the king stand the three figures of the king's patrons, St John the Baptist, a Lamb cradled in his left hand, next to him St Edward the Confessor holding a ring, referring to the legend that he gave his ring to a pilgrim who was really St John the Evangelist, and to his left stand St Edmund of East Anglia holding the Danish arrow which killed him. Behind the figures is a dark wood. The facing panel shows the Virgin holding the infant Christ, surrounded by eleven angels. The significance of the number is not known. Each angel wears a chaplet of roses, a collar of broom cods, and the badge of the white hart. One holds a banner with the red cross of St George on a white ground.

The picture belongs to a tradition of pictures in which a celebrated figure is presented to a heavenly recipient by his patron

saints.³⁴ Its subject is Richard's reception into heaven, and the scene shows an occasion which is not of this world. The Diptych is remarkable for its unity of conception. Though the panels are two, the picture is one. The heavenly flowers answer the selva obscura behind the kneeling king. The gesture of the infant Christ answers that of the supplicating Richard. Of the four figures on the left hand panel each has his badge. Richard, though his hands are empty in prayer, is marked by the badge of the white hart. Indeed as he kneels the badge appears between his hands, as though he were offering it to the Virgin. He will join her sodality, perhaps. The angels seem already to have accepted his offer, for each wears his badge. The direction of regard of the left-hand figures is to the right where the Virgin and child wait to receive the King. The inclination of the Virgin's glance is beautifully significant, and is echoed, though not uniformly, by that of her attendant angels. There are no less than twenty-six hands in the picture, each of which is a study in itself.

We do not know who painted this picture, nor, indeed, when it was painted. Though it celebrates the king's heavenly apotheosis, there is no need to assume that it was not painted until after his death. Indeed, though there was a brief attempt to revive the badge in the early fifteenth century, one of the striking facts about the white hart badge of Richard II is that, by contrast with the cerf volant badge of his French counterpart, which enjoyed a long and iconographically rich history, it did not long outlast him. Its

34 See Michael Levey, Painting at Court (London, 1971), chapter 1.

subsequent history is not in courtly regalia or mystical heraldry, but on humble English inn signs (Plate 65). The sign of the white hart, shown characteristically with collar of gold and chain attached, perpetuates throughout Britain the badge of Richard II. Like many such inn signs it was borrowed quite arbitrarily from the heraldic armoury. To the best of my knowledge no contemporary document identifies the white hart as Caesar's deer, but it is inconceivable that in adopting it Richard was not aware of the traditional significance of the stag wearing a collar. The familiar white hart of English inn signs thus preserves the shadow of a very ancient meaning.

A short tailpiece. Nobody knows why French children to this day call the kite that they fly on the end of a string a cerf volant. The current theory of the word's etymology, however, has a certain piquancy from our point of view. The proposed etymon or origin of the word is serpe volant, flying serpent or dragon. In German the kite is still called Drache, "dragon", as in several other languages, alluding to the characteristic shape of this toy which sails in or swoops down from the sky. The theory supposes that this was confused with its paronym, the identically pronounced cerf volant, a term in general currency for the royal badge. (In modern French it also means the Stag Beetle, Lucanus cervus, Lucanus elaphus, identifiable by its prominent antlers.)³⁵ Thus, we might think, the etymology of the word unfolds the secret attraction which binds together those two ancient enemies the serpent and the stag. St Isidore would have understood.

35 Trésor de la Langue française, Dictionnaire de la Langue (Paris, 1971 -) V, s.v., cites H. Poige, Romania, 93 (1972), pp. 563-567.

CHAPTER SIX

The White Hart

The legend of St Eustace supplies a stable model for the stag hunt as a narrative device, the transformations of which are the subject of this chapter. His legend was one of the most popular in medieval hagiography. The story of his conversion whilst hunting through the agency of a miraculous stag with a crucifix between its antlers lent itself to both literary and graphic treatment. The cruciferous stag became the attribute by which the saint might be identified in artistic representations of him, and yet his identity is the least certain thing about him. Of all the saints, including Saint George, he seems the one for whom it would be most futile to seek a human or historical origin. His identity not only changes within the legend itself, where the Roman soldier Placidus becomes the Christian martyr Eustace, but also his stag conversion motif was borrowed by a variety of other minor and local saints who thus become identified with him; St Hubert, St Theodore, St Julian, St Meinulph, St Fantin, St Felix of Valois all borrow his defining motif in some form. The miraculous stag which leads these saints to conversion is a brother of the deer which led such men as King David of Scotland, Henry the Lion of Germany, the Duke of Ansgise, St Patrick, or St Giles to the foundation of abbeys, and such foundation myths are themselves only varieties of and variations on the ubiquitous guiding-animal theme of folklore.¹ Stags

¹ Alexander Krappe, "Guiding Animals", Journal of American Folklore, 5 (1942), pp. 228-246.

frequently guide medieval heroes across rivers and they intervene in the action of medieval romance to guide the hero towards some kind of knowledge, test, or initiation. Placidus/Eustace/Hubert/Meinulph/Fantin/Theodore is but a composite personality, a hydra-headed manifestation of a single folk-tale motif. That motif is our real subject.

The legend of St Eustace is itself a composite incorporating three distinct narrative strands. Its three parts treat successively his conversion, his sufferings and his martyrdom.

Placidus was a virtuous heathen; a Roman general of the time of Trajan. One day out hunting he finds a large and beautiful stag which leads him away from his companions to a place where it leaps onto an inaccessible rock or hill from which it confronts him. Between its antlers he sees a vision of the crucified Christ and, in accents which recall Balaam's ass or the conversion of St Paul, the stag asks why Placidus is persecuting him. It tells the soldier to take his wife and children to the bishop to be baptised, and in most versions Placidus is told to return next day for further instructions. He is told that he will be tested.

Eustace (as he is now called) then suffers a series of tribulations which resemble Job's. First of all his livestock and his servants are killed by a plague. The poverty-stricken family flee to Egypt, but his wife is abducted by a lascivious sea-captain, and his sons are carried off by wild beasts. Eustace lives in seclusion until the emperor gets round to sending out a belated search party for his missing general some fifteen years later, whereupon Eustace resumes his military career. Meanwhile his sons have enlisted in the army, and recognise each other in a conversation which their mother, who happens to be in the same house, overhears. The happiness of the reunited family is cut short, however, on the accession of the emperor Hadrian, a severe persecutor of Christians, who requires them to sacrifice to Apollo. Their refusal precipitates their martyrdom. After surviving the attacks of a lion in the arena, they are martyred in a furnace

made in the shape of a brazen bull, though their bodies are found to be miraculously unharmed.²

The adventures following the conversion conform to a folktale pattern known as "the man tried by fate" which does not concern us, and can be conveniently forgotten. It is not known where the legend originated. The earliest mention of St Eustace is in the De Imaginibus of St John of Damascus in 726, which has the conversion part of the legend, though it also refers to the martyrdom. The legend was soon translated into Latin, and each successive century produced at least one new version in prose or verse and in most of the principle European languages, including several in English from Aelfric onwards. It is to be found in the standard collections of saints' lives such as Jacobus de Voragine's Golden Legend and collections of exemplary tales such as Vincent de Beauvais and the anonymous Gesta Romanorum.

The popularity of the legend owes something to its adaptability to particular homiletic purposes. St John of Damascus was drawn to the miraculous stag episode because of his anti-iconoclastic purposes, for the stag is an image of Christ Himself. Later in the Middle Ages the tribulations of Eustace in remote and geographically indeterminate regions of the globe recommended the legend to writers anxious to find Christian alternatives to the popular secular romances. The miraculous episodes are supported not just by echoes of familiar

2 Thomas J. Heffernan, "An analysis of the Narrative Motifs in the Legend of St Eustace", Medievalia et Humanistica, n.s. 6, (1975), pp. 62-89. Hippolyte Delahaye, "La Légende de Saint Eustache" in Mélanges d' Hagiographie Grèque et Latine: Subsidia Hagiographica, 42 (Brussels, 1966), pp. 212-239.

Biblical events such as Balaam's ass, Job's trials, or Saul's conversion, but by conscious echoes of the Vulgate language. Thus the stag confronts the hunter with the plangent quotation, "Placidus, Placidus, quid me persequeris" in the ninth century text, echoing Acts, 9.4.³ Saul's conversion stands behind Placidus's as the most familiar and authoritative type of Roman conversion. The characterisation of Placidus received its definitive form early on. In the earliest versions he is described as a virtuous heathen - good evangelical material, one is led to think. The combination of soldier and hunter might have suggested a different characterisation, indeed this combination is the most authentic aspect of Placidus's identity, since hunting was peculiarly the strenuous occupation of Roman soldiers. However this military aspect is never stressed, but on the contrary, his humility tends to be emphasised, as in the thirteenth-century French verse Life in which the hunter becomes himself hunted, the raptor raptus, and is caught in a net made out of "Une corde d'umilité/0 trois cordens de charité", the net of his own virtues. It is the presence of such dramatic tensions, rather than the simple element of mirabilia, which must have ensured the legend's popularity.⁴

The mysterious identity and status of the stag are clearly also features which hold the centre of imaginative interest in the

3 Heffernan, p. 85.

4 La vie de Saint Eustace: poème français du xiii^e. siècle, edited by Holger Petersen, Classiques français du Moyen Age (Paris, 1928). Marcelle Thiébaux, pp. 62-65, shows how Aelfric exploits the same narrative tensions in the OE Passion of St Eustace.

legend. In the same thirteenth-century French Life it is clear that the stag is an elusive and magic beast, which mounts a rock so steep that "No living thing could climb it" (N'i peust monter riens vivant).⁵ Logically we should conclude that the stag was supernatural. The vision of the crucified Saviour is often depicted in early illustrations of the scene not in the shape of the familiar pietà or crucifix which later became conventional, but rather in the form of an aureoled head of Christ (Plate 66). It is thus we find it in the tenth-century Greek Psalter fragment in the Bibliothèque Nationale and in a number of gothic marginalia (Plate 67). In the later Middle Ages the cruciferous stag takes over, and the legend of St Hubert appropriates the conversion motif. Unlike Eustace, Hubert was a real person, a bishop of Liège from 705 A.D. to 727 who was responsible for the conversion of much of eastern Belgium to christianity. The legend which attached itself to him characterised him as a fierce and ungodly hunter who was warned by a cruciferous stag to repent or be damned. In the late Middle Ages he became the patron saint of hunters who venerate him to this day. Characteristic of treatments of this subject is the panel from the Werden altarpiece in the National Gallery (Plate 68), in which the elaborately dressed Saint kneels with an expression of profound devotion and penetration, whilst a rough-looking groom holds his horse. In the background the hunt is in full cry. A companion panel from this altarpiece shows the Mass of St Hubert illustrating an unfamiliar episode according to which an angel descended with a stole for the

5 Lines 255-256.

Saint whilst he was being consecrated bishop. Other accounts have the stole presented at the moment of conversion, as we see it in the recently discovered Flemish woodcarvings (Plate 69).

The more celebrated illustrations of the conversion are the less conventional. Pisanello's masterpiece dates from 1436. Its Saint is usually identified as Eustace, though this is no routine hunting scene, but a reconstituted garden of Eden (Plate 70). The forest is dissolved into a visionary landscape, a place apart. In addition to the cruciferous stag which confronts the richly caparisoned knight there are two others, browsing peaceably in the background, and a variety of other fauna. The accompanying hounds seem quite uninterested in the miraculous stag, and the greyhound at the foot of the picture which is chasing a rabbit seems engaged on a hunt which is essentially innocent. As Kenneth Clarke has said, Eustace appears here as a Master of the Animals, and certainly the painting seems to have more to say about the animal kingdom than the kingdom of God. Jan Breughel would also seem more interested in the animals and the woodland scene than in any narrow homiletic point. (Plate 71). His stag does not even bear the familiar crucifix.

The stag which leads Placidus to a confrontation with his destiny is only one example of the numerous deer which act as guiding animals or divine messengers in medieval chansons de geste and romances. The connection of guiding animals with foundation legends is an ancient one.⁶ Cadmus followed a cow to the site of Thebes, a white sow shows Aeneas and his companions the site of future Rome,

⁶ Francis Vian, Les Origines de Thèbes: Cadmos et les Spartes (Paris, 1963), pp. 79-93.

and there are innumerable other foundation legends employing every imaginable species of fauna. It is difficult to say whether the choice of the stag as the appropriate guiding animal in several medieval foundation legends has any significance, for the choice of founding animal in such legends often seems quite fortuitous. But in several cases we might suspect that the received iconography of the stag would recommend it as the appropriate guide. It was, as we have seen, a cruciferous stag which led Henry the Lion to found the cathedral at Lübeck. A tale of David I of Scotland, which tells how whilst hunting he was confronted with a white stag and presented with a cross by a mysterious hand, accounts for the foundation of Holyrood Abbey.⁷ Both tales are clearly indebted to the St Eustace legend. The Abbey of Fécamp was built on the site of a chapel which the Duke of Anségise founded when he hunted a snow-white stag which fled to a fig tree in which a reliquary of the holy blood was found.⁸ After the destruction of the Abbey of St Wandrille by the Normans, a knight called Torsting was led whilst hunting to the site of the ruined altar, where his stag stood at bay. He took this as a sign that the monastery be rebuilt.⁹ According to a thirteenth-century chronicle Charlemagne was led to the hot springs

7 K.G.T. Webster, Guinevere (Milton, Mass., 1951), p. 103 cites Chambers, Old and New Edinburgh, p. 21 as the source for this anecdote.

8 Pschmidt, p. 58, cites Leroux de Lincy, Essai sur l'Abbaye de Fécamp (Rouen, 1940) which I have not seen.

9 L-R. Delsalle, "Rouen et l'iconographie du cerf", Revue des Sociétés Savants de Haute Normandie: Lettres et Sciences, 81-82 (1976), p. 8. The episode can be found in the Chronicle of Fontenelle, see Gesta Sanctorum Patrum Fontanellensis Caenobii, édition critique par L. Lohier et J. Laporte published by the Société de l'histoire de Normandie (Paris, 1936) (not seen).

at Aachen, where he founded the Minster of Our Lady, by a stag. The event is commemorated in the Office of St Charles, composed by a monk of Aachen:

Jubilemus Altissimo
 In athleta fortissimo
 Cuius missa per spiritum
 Cervae duxit exercitum.¹⁰

There are, in fact, a remarkable number of legends, of various dates, associating Charlemagne with stag guides. Not all are foundation legends, for several belong to a distinct Type in which a river-crossing is important. Perhaps the most famous is the onomastic legend which accounts for Frankfurt-am-Main, according to which Charlemagne was led by a deer to the only safe crossing of the river. Recorded c. 1000 in Thietmar's Chronicle, the legend combines both the river-crossing and foundation motifs.¹¹ In the late thirteenth-century Karlamagnussaga Charles is shown the way across the river Gironde by a white hind.¹² An interpolation in the Saintonge version of Pseudo-Turpin has it that it was Roland who thus crossed the Gironde after he had separated from the main army of Charles, whilst earlier in the Karlamagnussaga it was a herd of deer which showed Turpin and Oliver the way across the Rhine.¹³ In an episode from Ogier the river-crossing motif disappears as Charles is shown the way across the Alps by a stag,

10 Pschmidt, pp. 40-43 cites Mon. Germ. Hist., 26, p. 725.

11 Cigada, p. 55.

12 Pschmidt, p. 42.

13 C. Meredith Jones, "The Chronicle of Turpin in Saintonge", Speculum, 8 (1938), pp. 160-179.

"blans comme nois", which he takes as a sign from God: "Vei li message que Dex envoie".¹⁴ These legends of Charlemagne are all antedated by an archetypal episode in Gregory of Tours, which tells how, when Clovis reached the flooded river Vienne with his army he was at a loss to know how to cross. He prayed to God for some sign which would reveal a ford, and next morning an enormous doe entered the water, "as if to lead them at God's command". Once across the soldiers followed a Biblical pillar of fire.¹⁵

The river-crossing motif links these legends with the similar theme in the Romances, where the deer which leads the hero to an encounter with a fairy-mistress frequently crosses water. It has often been suggested that in Arthurian romance such river-crossings indicate the boundary between this world and the Otherworld. Whilst such symbolism is occasionally patent in the later Romances, it is hardly appropriate to the Chansons de Geste, which are on the whole earlier in date. It seems more likely that the river-crossings in Gregory of Tours and Carolingian legend comprise a motif whose symbolism was transformed when it was taken into Arthurian romances which had absorbed elements from Celtic traditions where, as in the Voyage of Bran and numerous other examples, the Otherworld is often reached by crossing water. In such Celtic-derived traditions the association of a deer guide with the water-crossing is by no means inevitable. Here as elsewhere it seems safest to assume a composite

14 Le Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche, ed. Barrois (Paris, 1842), pp. 11-12.

15 Historia Francorum, 2.37. See Lewis Thorpe's translation (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 152.

influence on Arthurian romance, rather than following Cigada, who argues that the priority of the stag motif in French sources such as Gregory of Tours undermines Loomis's case for a Celtic source, or Pschmidt, who sees the river-crossing as an essential ingredient in the Hindenfeesage. Pschmidt goes so far as to take the hot springs motif at Aachen as an indication that this foundation legend may be a version of the Type of tale in which a stag maiden lures the hero across water to an Otherworld encounter, though there are, of course, actual hot springs at Aachen. We should surely recognise, however, that churches and abbeys are often founded at the site of wells, probably because such springs were already venerated in pagan and Celtic religion. Although examples can be found where deer are associated with such sites, the association is far from inevitable, and probably has nothing to do with the Hindenfeesage.

The deer hunt provides an archetypal pattern for amorous pursuit, and it is in such hunting episodes that the courtly romances exploit the fullest implications of the stag messenger. Hence a consideration of St Eustace leads us inevitably to profane fables of chivalry and love; hagiography leads to romance. In such love-hunts the ambiguous identity of the stag provides scope for sophisticated treatment of the questing theme. The identity of hunter and hunted may be reversed, as it sometimes is in versions of the St Eustace legend, the deer may be both the guide and the goal of the quest, or be taken as a surrogate for lover or mistress. Thus in Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan King Mark is led to the marvellous cave of love, in which the two lovers lie, by a strange

white stag, der vremede hirz. The hunting of the stag is a figure for his pursuit of the lovers, and indeed the epithet vremede is throughout the poem applied to Tristan himself.¹⁶ Characteristically in other Romances the white hart leads the hero to a meeting or liaison with a lady who is the real object of his quest, and yet is identified with her, is simply her other identity. Thus Chrétien de Troyes sends Erec with the other Round-Table knights on the customary hunt of the white hart for the prize of a kiss. Although he is the least ardent of hunters, lingering with Guinevere in the rear of the party, he is nevertheless led on an adventure which brings him to the discovery of Énide. It is Arthur who slays the stag, declares Énide the fairest and takes from her the kiss which is the hunter's prize. A number of details, however, give the clue to Énide's identity with the stag. As the stag is white, so Énide, the mysteriously poor and unfavoured girl whom Erec brings back from his anti-quest dressed in rags, is described as la pucelle au chainse blanc, the white dress indicating not only her poverty but her identity with the stag.¹⁷ The quest for the white hart leads on to the Sparrowhawk episode in which Erec is identified with the hawk. At the end the love which both types of chase have won is consummated in terms which confirm the figure, for, as Marcelle Thiébaux admirably shows, the desire of each for the other is

16 The point is made by J. Rathofer, "Der 'wunderbare Hirsch' der Minnegrotte", Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum, 95 (1966), pp. 27-42. See Thiébaux, pp. 141-142.

17 Thiébaux, p. 112.

compared to the hunted stag which pants to slake its thirst, and the sparrowhawk which hungers for the lure.¹⁸ Similarly in Chaucer's Book of the Duchess the hart which is hunted by the emperor Octovien in the woodland setting of the narrator's dream makes a comment on the quest of the bereaved Man in Black for his lost mistress. Although the colour of the Emperor's hart is not specified it is clearly to be identified with Blanche, the lady whose name is "White" (Chaucer's play on the word 'herte', a term which occurs almost forty times in the poem, makes this clear). In a sense it is another hunt for the white hart. There are chequered contrasts of black and white throughout the poem.¹⁹

The love chase may not only involve the question of defining the status of the hunted animal, but frequently poses problems of identity for the hero himself. It is remarkable how many medieval hunts lead the hunter to a crisis, a riddle or a test involving a challenge to his own identity, a recognition of his true situation, or an initiation into a new state in which the experience of love may play a central role. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Gawain has to solve the riddles of etiquette posed by the lady's bed-chamber luf talkynge, whilst he is all the time answerable to Bertilak's interrogations on his return from successive hunts. Gawain appears as the ingenu, the naive lover whose responses in

18 Thiébaux, pp. 109-115.

19 The adaptation of the hunting motif to the elegaic theme of The Book of the Duchess is well discussed by Marcelle Thiébaux, pp. 115-127. See also John Leyerle, "The heart and the chain" in L.D. Benson, ed., The Learned and the Lewd (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 113-145.

this perilous game, whose rules he hardly understands, will determine his fitness and his fate. The idea of the hunt as a test and a challenge may account for that curious digression in the Grail quest when Perceval plays a magic game of chess with an invisible opponent as a prelude to the hunt of a white hart. This episode in the Second Continuation of Chrétien's Perceval runs as follows,

Perceval comes by chance on a castle which appears to be totally devoid of inhabitants, but where he finds laid out a set of chessmen. He idly moves one piece and finds his move answered by one of the pieces on the other side. The game continues and to his disgust Perceval is checkmated. After this has happened three times Perceval loses his temper, and is about to throw the pieces out of the window into the moat below, when a beautiful girl rises out of the water. He agrees not to throw out the chessmen if she will come up and join him. When she does so he falls in love with her, but she refuses to submit to him until he can bring her the head of the white hart from the adjoining forest, for which purpose she lends him her white hound or brachet. Perceval soon slays the stag, but unfortunately both the head and the brachet are stolen from him and it is not until after many adventures that he eventually returns to the chessboard castle to be requited by the lady.²⁰

The game of chess is clearly only a prelude to the hunt, like it a test in which the knight has to earn his reward. The ease with which Perceval kills the stag is belied by his inability to win at chess, and thus the victory turns out to be illusory, or at least ambiguous, and the intervention of a train of adventures which prevents him from collecting his reward from the lady is not just one of those indirections which so often make medieval Romance such a frustrating experience for the modern reader, but a deliberate suspension of the terms of the quest. Like Gawain, Perceval is

20 Perceval le Gallois, edited by C. Potvin, 6 vols. (Mons, 1865-71), IV, pp. 82-331. See Cigada, pp. 12-16.

playing a game in which his opponent invents all the rules. We should recall that Chaucer's Book of the Duchess also combines the love chase with a game of chess, and Blanche is not only the lost white hart, but also the lover's fers or chesspiece.

Frequently the stag-mistress is no ordinary woman but, as in the Perceval digression, a fairy whose connection is with the Otherworld. If the white harts of medieval Romance share a common theme, it has to do not just with initiation into experience, but into the mysteries of the Otherworld. Primitive initiation rituals are normally regarded as profoundly secret, deriving their power and authority from the world beyond. Although they may fit the initiate to take his full place in this world, he only achieves this by being brought into contact with the mysterious powers of the next. In Celtic mythology, and it is predominantly in Celtic myth that medieval romance has its roots, the Otherworld is not simply the hereafter, but an omnipresent realm with which contact may be made on this side of the grave. Hence although in some of the later romances the hero disappears after the white hart to some region from which return is impossible, more frequently his encounter with a fairy bride does not remove him permanently from the story. The encounter may transform him or illuminate him, but it seldom incapacitates him completely, unless like Keats's Belle Dame, she is quite without

Merci.²¹

21 The fairy abduction theme was exhaustively studied by Lucy Allen Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance (1903), second edition, with a survey of scholarship on the Fairy Mythology since 1903 by R.S. Loomis (New York, 1960); K.G.T. Webster, Guinevere, A Study of her Abductions (privately printed, Milton, Massachusetts, 1951).

Chrétien describes the hunt of the white stag as a customary hunt, "l'usage Pendragon" - the custom of Arthur's father, Pendragon - and the phrase has occasioned much scholarly dispute.²² It has been noticed that one of the very earliest Arthurian romances, the verse Lanzelet of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, c. 1200, associates the rape of Guinevere with the "old custom" of hunting the white stag. Although the stag hunt plays only a minor part in this, the whole tale is worth summarising, since it suggests a plausible interpretation of this customary hunt.

King Valerin of the Tangled Wood lived in a shining sunbright castle on a mountain surrounded by mists and a serpent-haunted forest. The single road was defended by monsters. One day Valerin rides to Cardigan and tells Arthur that Guinevere, Arthur's queen, rightfully belongs to him, since she was pledged to him before she reached marriageable age. The claim is put to the test of a duel in which Valerin is defeated, and departs, promising not to molest the queen. However one day when Arthur was keeping up the ominous old custom of hunting the white hart he is attacked by Valerin and the queen is abducted. Although Valerin's castle is gay the queen is not happy there. Arthur seeks the help of an enchanter Malduc whose castle can only be reached after a perilous journey through the Shreiking Moss and Dodinell's wilderness, crossing over an invisible bridge. Malduc bespells the monsters which prevent access to Valerin's castle, allowing Arthur to storm it and rescue his queen, who has to be roused from a deep slumber. In the process he slays Valerin, which we are told, was a pity, since if the queen had gone of her own free will such a thing need not have happened.²³

This story has been recognised as a version of the classical rape of Proserpine, and we need not doubt that the customary hunt has its roots in an ancient fertility myth. Valerin is a British Pluto, a

22 See Webster, p. 91n; R.S. Loomis, Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes (New York, 1949), pp. 68-70.

23 Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, Lanzelet, edited by K.G.T. Webster, with an introduction and additional notes by R.S. Loomis (New York, 1951), p. 215, n. 202.

god of the underworld whose castle cannot be approached without supernatural help, and Guinevere shares with Morgan le Fay and Enid some of the characteristics of a chthonic bride. The many abductions of her throughout Arthurian romance are probably, as H.C. Webster has argued, relics of raids in which the Otherworld attempts to reclaim its own. The rescue of such fairy maidens often involves the crossing of a supernatural barrier, such as a river, and it may employ what Lucy Allen Paton called a "fairy induction"; a stag hunt or a magic boat.²⁴

Since the days of Nitze, and Paton and Jessie Weston, Arthurian studies have moved on, and it is no longer fashionable to write as though the unique interest of Arthurian material lay in the establishment of hypothetical archetypes, or the hunting of sources and analogues. We may welcome the current recognition that the texts we have are probably at least as interesting as those which we have lost, but a comparative approach to Arthurian material is likely to remain inescapable if only for the reason that Arthurian writers are so often handling material whose original significance they themselves did not fully understand. The Arthurian material often retains the fossilised remains of a kind of mythic sediment of earlier beliefs, some of which go back to Celtic or Gallo-Roman roots. The white hart flits in and out of some of the most tantalisingly sedimentary of such material. In some cases the probable significance of an episode in which the stag figures is only supplied by analogous material in which it no longer figures, or figures in a different guise.

24 Webster, Guinevere, pp. 126-127; Paton, p. 15.

Such is the case with the early ritual poem in Welsh, commonly, though erroneously, known as a dialogue between Arthur and Guinevere.²⁵ The poem is remarkably un-self-explanatory even by Arthurian standards, referring to events and ideas which can only be supplied from outside. It refers to an episode in Chrétien's Lancelot in which Guinevere is abducted by Meleagant, who holds many captives in his dungeons. He appears at Arthur's court and issues a challenge the terms of which are that the captives' release is dependent on a combat in the forest with one of Arthur's knights. A condition is that Arthur must allow Guinevere to accompany the knight. Keu takes up the challenge, is wounded, and Meleagant makes off with the Queen to his castle. In the Welsh poem Melwas (= Meleagant) appears at court and reveals that he comes from the Isle of Glass, the celebrated otherworldly abode of Celtic and Arthurian tradition; Gwenhwyfar (= Guinevere) thinks she recognises him (perhaps recalling her fairy origins), and a boasting match ensues between Melwas and Cai which ends with a challenge and a fight. In the 'A' version of the poem Melwas, who has some of the attributes of a neophyte in an initiation rite, says:

Gwenhwyvar of the deer's glance
Do not despise me although I am young
I would stand up to Cai alone.

The "deer's glance" is inexplicable except as an allusion to the cervine identity of the chthonic bride, and Mary Williams rightly recalls Fianna literature where the Goddess regularly changes into a

25 Mary Williams, "An early ritual poem in Welsh", Speculum, 13 (1938), pp. 38-51; Kenneth Jackson in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: a collaborative History, edited by R.S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), pp. 18-19.

deer.²⁶ Arthurian tales of the fille-biche type, in which the fairy maiden is to be identified with the guiding beast which leads to her would provide a closer analogue. Melwas, whose role in the German Lanzelet has been taken over by Valerin, is another Celtic Pluto, whose story retains sedimentary evidence of a vegetation myth both here and elsewhere. (In the ritual poem Guinevere thinks he comes from Devon, but just as the Isle of Glass was identified by false etymology with Glastonbury, so the Summer Land of which Melwas was king in the original seasonal myth, was interpreted as early as Caradoc with Somerset, with at least some geographical consistency. When Lancelot comes to Guinevere's rescue, the first three combats remain indecisive, and Meleagant demands another after the lapse of a year. It takes place in a green, fresh meadow which knows no change of season.)²⁷

There is no need to recapitulate the evidence which R.S. Loomis assembled for believing that Melwas was a Summer King, that Arthur himself was sometimes a leader of the Wild Hunt, or that primitive seasonal myths underlie much of this material, which Loomis believed took in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and the Welsh Mabinogi of Pwyll.²⁸ In the latter the details of the stag-hunt and the strange hound are strongly reminiscent of their counterparts in Arthurian tales.

26 p. 46.

27 See R.S. Loomis, Wales and the Arthurian Legend (Cardiff, 1956), pp. 83-84.

28 Loomis, Wales and the Arthurian Legend, pp. 77-90.

Pwyll, king of Dyfed, out hunting, is separated from his companions. In a clearing he meets a strange hound, which puts up a stag. Pwyll calls his own hounds to join the chase. The owner of the hound appears. He is Arawn, king of Annwn (the 'Other World') and is dressed in grey and rides a grey horse. He explains that he is being oppressed by Summer White ('Hafgan'). It is arranged that Pwyll will spend a year sharing the bed of Arawn's beautiful wife, though he will not make love to her, at the end of which he will take Arawn's place in the combat with Summer White at a ford by night, in the presence of all their nobles. Arawn will spend the year as lord of Dyfed. The arrangement goes according to plan, and Pwyll deals Summer White one fatal blow before returning to Dyfed.²⁹

Loomis has pointed out the resemblances with the temptation and beheading tests in Gawain and the Green Knight.

The possibility that the unnamed wife of Arawn in Pwyll can be identified with the Celtic goddess Modron, of whom we shall have more to say later, raises the prospect of tying together a great deal of this elusive material. Loomis points out that Modron is described in one Welsh source as "goddess from Annwn", and he cites the episode of the Perilous Ford from the Didot Perceval, in which the hero who takes Pwyll's role in a closely analogous episode, spends a year with Morgan le Fay who is Modron's Arthurian counterpart, before the combat at the ford.³⁰ As he says, "The association of Modron with a river-crossing is perhaps older than any other feature of her story, for Celtic mythologists are agreed that her name is derived from that of the goddess Matrona, who was widely worshipped from Cisalpine Gaul to the Rhine Valley and who gave her name to the Marne and other rivers in Gaul".³¹

29 Mabinogion, translated by G. and T. Jones (London, 1949), pp. 3-7.

30 Loomis, Wales and the Arthurian Legend, pp. 99-104.

31 p. 99.

If indeed the presence of Modron, who is one of the great mother-goddesses of Celtic tradition, is more pervasive in the romances than the very infrequent references to her might suggest, then it might help to account not only for the Perilous Ford motif, but also for the frequency with which other fairy abductions are associated with water crossings. It is perhaps not pure coincidence that the two most common types of fairy induction singled out by Miss Paton should be the stag hunt and the magic boat. Though they look like different motifs, and are indeed frequently found in isolation, they are sometimes associated, as in the Prose Tristan, where we have an episode in which Tristan follows a stag in the chase and meets a maiden, who induces him to go with her to the bank of a stream, where she shows him a marvellous vessel called the Nef de Joie, made by Merlin, and destined to carry him to Logres. When Tristan has successfully completed two adventures, the vessel appears and carries Tristan and Iseult across the water to the castle of Mabon the enchanter, who explains that he needed Tristan's help in performing a scheme, and had engineered the whole thing to this end.³² What little we know of Mabon is largely supplied by Culhwch, where he is the son of Modron, Like his mother he almost certainly has a Gallo-Roman identity as the 'Divine Youth' Maponus. His brother is Owain, and his father Urien.³³ In Partenopeus it is a boar hunt

32 Paton, p. 17; Le Roman en Prose de Tristan is summarised by E. Loeth (Paris, 1891), paras. 323-325. There is no modern edition of the text.

33 Loomis, p. 13

which leads to the magic boat.³⁴ In Floriant and Florete the two motifs are separated, as Morgan uses a magic boat to convey her fosterling away from the otherworldly abode where he has been brought up on the mountain Mongibel to commence his life of adventure at Arthur's court, and at the end of the story she employs a white stag to lead him back to her mountain hideout to enjoy a postumous immortality. Though the two methods of induction are separated by the intervening adventures, they nevertheless correspond. It is as though they were the two most available means of getting an Arthurian hero into or out of the otherworld, and the use of the one motif naturally suggested the other.³⁵

The inference is supported by Marie de France's Guigemar, a perfect knight who does not care for women. Out hunting he finds a great stag, but as his companions pursue it, he remains behind, and finds beneath a bush a hind with its fawn. It is all white, with stag's antlers on its head: 'Perches de cerf out en la test' (1.93). When Guigemar wounds the hind in the foot, the arrow rebounds and wounds him in the hip. The hind prophesies that his wound will not be healed until dressed by a woman who has suffered for him in love. He rides off until he comes to the shore, where a beautiful ship lies at anchor with no one on board. It carries him in a deep sleep to a land where the jealously-guarded queen dresses his wounds and falls

34 Pschmidt, p. 96, Paton, p. 17. Loomis's Arthurian Literature ... A collaborative History (1959), p. 436, gives R. Palgen, Der Stein der Weisen (Breslau, 1922), pp. 54 ff. for the text of this (not seen).

35. Floriant et Florete: an anonymous poem of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, edited by H.F. Williams, University of Michigan Publications, 23 (Ann Arbor, 1947). See Cigada, pp. 38-39.

in love with him. The zoological difficulty of describing an antlered hind can be attributed to the confusion caused by associating the traditional stag-guide with the fille-biche. The same difficulty doubtless accounts for the awkwardness of the hunting motif for whilst his companions chase what looks like the guiding animal out of sight Guigemar, like Erec, lingers behind and discovers its female double under a bush.³⁶

Whereas in these fairy inductions the stag hunt simply leads to the fairy maiden, who is largely the passive object of the quest, and the deer remains primarily a guiding animal, there are a number of cases in which the maiden assumes a more active role as huntress, and in which the capture of the stag and return with a trophy are a quest on which the hero is sent. In these episodes the maiden is herself a huntress, "la demoiselle cacheresse" as the Suite du Merlin calls her.³⁷ In the Suite du Merlin she appears at court dressed rather like a medieval Diana in a short green robe with an ivory horn and a bow and arrows in her hand. She pursues a white stag through the hall, until first her favourite brachet and then she herself are seized by strange knights and carried off. In three separate quests three of Arthur's knights bring back the stag's head, recover the brachet and release the maiden before reuniting them all at Camelot. The maiden reveals that she is Niniane. Though the maiden in Perceval's chessboard castle is never described as a

³⁶ ^{Warnke} K. Warnke, Die Lais der Marie de France, 3rd ed. (Hulle, 1925).

³⁷ Paton, pp. 228-247.

huntress, she also demands that Perceval bring back her white brachet and the head of the white stag.³⁸ In some of the versions in which the knight pursues a stag for the sake of a trophy he is subsequently robbed of it by a rival.

Niniane or Viviane is more celebrated in Arthurian romance as the maiden who beguiles Merlin into teaching her the magical arts in order to turn them against him by making him her prisoner. These tales have nothing to do with stags, except that in some of them there is clear evidence that, whatever her origins, Niniane became associated with the Roman goddess Diana. In the Suite du Merlin her castle is beside the Lac de Diane, and she is elsewhere known as the Dame du Lac. In Froissart's Meliodor the knight hunts a white stag which plunges with him on its back into a lake where three beautiful maidens await him. They identify themselves as nymphs of Diana. Paton, Loomis and, more recently, R. Harris have assembled plenty of evidence to show that a cult of Diana persisted throughout the Middle Ages.³⁹ Several late classical writers allege that pagans worshipped a goddess called Diana, and later writers repeatedly identify her as a fairy. A fourteenth century writer reports that common people claim to have seen the beautiful queen Diana, who is a pagan goddess, and her followers who are known as elves "que in nostro vulgari dicuntur 'elves'". R. Harris remarks that the Rumanian

38 In the Welsh Peredur the hero has to hunt a stag with unicorn horn and gold collar which has been devastating the forest. A maiden offers him a spaniel, and he cuts off the stag's head, but a knight steals it from him, Mabinogion, trans. Jones (London, 1949).

39 Paton, pp. 234-247 and p. 298; R. Harris, "The White Stag in Chrétien's Erec et Énide", French Studies, 10 (1956), pp. 55-61.

word for fairies, zana derives etymologically from the Latin Diana. His theory that the old custom of hunting a white stag for the reward of a kiss which Arthur describes as "L'usage Pendragon" is a relic of the ancient Attic Festival of Elaphobolion or month of stag hunting, in which deer were sacrificed to Diana in a classical spring festival, deserves to be taken seriously. The crucial piece of evidence in its favour is an ancient Celtic calendar found in France which interprets March/April as ELEM̄BIVOS, "the month of the stag". The word is derived from the same root as the Greek Ελεφθολιωνη.

As the Dame du Lac Niniane appears to have at times been associated with motif of the enfance féerique, the child, typically a king's son, who is brought up by the fairies. Lancelot is the best Arthurian example⁴⁰ but the Lay of Tyolet shows its connection with the stag hunt motif and includes a number of other details which have wide motivic ramifications.

Tyolet lives in the forest, where he learns the art of whistling to attract wild animals to him. His mother asks him to hunt a stag, but when he finds one, it flees from him, despite his whistling, across a river, where it changes into a knight who explains to Tyolet, who meantime has found a roe-deer, the arts of chivalry. Thus instructed he leaves his mother for Arthur's court. At court there is a beautiful daughter of the king of Logres who will only marry the man who brings her the white foot of the stag with the "gleaming" (i.e. probably white) skin, which is guarded by seven lions. She has a brachet which she offers to the suitor, but none will follow it across a dangerous stream, except Tyolet. When he finds the stag guarded by the seven lions, he attracts it by whistling, and cuts off its foot, before killing the lions. A stranger robs him of his trophy, the white foot, and wounds him, but the brachet leads Gawain to where Tyolet lies. The maiden appears on a mule and leads Tyolet to the Black Mountain where she heals his wounds. Tyolet is avenged on the trickster and marries the princess of Logres.⁴¹

40. Paton, p. 185.

41 Edited by Gaston Paris, Romania, 8 (1897), pp. 40-50. See Pschmadt, p. 105; Cigada, pp. 24-25.

We can hardly doubt that the Papageno motif was influenced by what all the medieval encyclopaedias say about the musical appetite of stags: mirantur autem sibillum fistularum.⁴² The story is primarily indebted to the same source as Niniane in her guise as demoiselle cacheresse. Later versions of it forget any pagan origins it may have had and turn it into a Christian allegory. In the Vulgate Prose Lancelot Lancelot sees a white stag in the "forest perilleuse" which has a gold collar and is guarded by four lions. He wonders at the unity of predators and prey, and a hermit tells him that only good knights see such a vision.⁴³ In the Vulgate Queste del Saint Graal three knights are led by a white hart which is accompanied by four lions to a hermitage in a valley, where the lions turn into the four evangelists. They enter through a window without breaking it, thus emblematising the mystery of the Incarnation. "Et bien doit estre senefiez par le cerf. Car tot ausi come li cers se rajunist en lessant son cuir et son poil en partie, tout aussi revint Nostre Sire de mort à vie."⁴⁴ Malory borrowed this passage directly "And well ought oure Lorde be signified to an harte. For the harte, whan he ys olde, he waxith yonge agayne in his whyght skynne. Right so commyth agayne oure Lorde from deth to lyff ..."⁴⁵ In the Vulgate Estoire del Saint Graal Joseph of Arimathea leads the Christian

42 See above, p. 66.

43 The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, edited by H.O. Sommer, 8 vols. (Washington, 1909-1916), V, pp. 249, 277, 280. See Cigada, pp. 30-31.

44 La Queste del Saint Graal, edited by A. Pauphilet (Paris, 1949), pp. 234-236. See Cigada, pp. 32-33.

45 See above, p. 64.

people on a grail quest. On approaching a river "qui moult estoit perilleuse à passer" they pray, and a white stag is revealed, protected by a golden collar. It shows them the way across and into the forest of Darnantes without wetting them. The attributes of the stag are allegorised: its rejuvenation by skin-change signifies Christ's resurrection and our renewal; its white skin virginity; its gold chain humility; the four lions are the evangelists.⁴⁶

If the allegorisation of these details owes more to the homiletic traditions of Christian iconography of the stag, the detail of the white foot in Tyolet probably retains its contact with more popular traditions. It is taken up in the Low German Lancelot en het hert met de Witte voet ("Lancelot and the hart with the white foot"),⁴⁷ and it may be picked up in Roger Bacon's curious allusion to the Lady of Formerey, whose immortality was assured by an ointment made of stag parts, except for her foot, which decayed. The enfance féerique is more surely in touch with popular traditions, for there are numerous folktales of children being brought up on hind's milk in the forest, including the tale of Genovefa, and Thidreks Saga in which Sigurth is nurtured by a hind.⁴⁸ Conachar in Scott's Fair Maid of Perth has a similar upbringing, and his status as clan-chief, and

46 L'Estoire del Saint Graal in The Vulgate Version ..., ed. Summer, I, p. 257. See Cigada, p. 34.

47 Edited by M. Draak (The Hague, 1979). I am indebted to Willem Gerritsen for this reference.

48 Die Legende von Genovefa, edited by F. Brüll (Prümm, 1898-1899), cited by Pschmidt, p. 62 (not seen). Mon. Germ. Hist., Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, III, p. 860. See Cigada, p. 55.

indeed the fortunes of the clan, are bound up with the appearances of the mysterious white deer.⁴⁹ Though we should beware of reading primitive cult origins into nineteenth-century novels, it may well be that Scott's novel is in tune with the original significance of the enfance féerique. We might recall that the little we know about Modron/Maponus, the Divine Youth to whom Romano-britons built altars in Northumberland, and whose name is commemorated in such place names as Lochmaben, Dumfriesshire, suggests that he was a hunter who was taken from his mother in childhood.⁵⁰ His mother, Modron/Matrona brings us to the Sovereignty legends with which we can conclude our Arthurian hunt.

Throughout Irish history a belief has flourished that sovereignty involved marriage between the rightful heir and the goddess Eriu, representing the land of Ireland. One version of this portrays the goddess in the form of a witch, the source of a folklore motif known as the transformed hag: an aged crone who, on marriage to the rightful heir turns into a beautiful maiden. In all the early versions of the Sovereignty legend the transformed hag motif is associated with a hunting motif. It is the pursuit of a white animal, normally a stag, which leads the claimant to the witch goddess who embodies the Sovereignty.⁵¹

The legend of Lugaid Laigde is found in a book called The Fitness of Names, onomastic legends accounting for the names of

49 See above, p.105.

50 Anne Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain (London, 1967), pp. 208-209.

51 Rachel Bromwich, "Celtic Dynastic themes and the Breton lays", Études Celtiques, 9 (1961), pp. 439-474; Loomis in Paton, pp. 299-304.

traditional Irish characters. Lugaid Laigde is one of five sons of King Daire, all of whom are called Lugaid because it had been prophesied that a son called Lugaid would obtain the sovereignty of Ireland. The hero of the tale is distinguished by the cognomen "Laigde", which means "of the fawn", and the tale purports to account for this. Having hedged his bets by calling all his sons Lugaid, the father is in the awkward dilemma of having to ask a Druid to prophecy which one is the destined sovereign. He is told that a golden fawn will come to the assembly, and the destined sovereign is he who succeeds in catching it. When the fawn appears a magic mist separates the sons from the rest of the men of Ireland. Lugaid Laigde captures it, and all the brothers assist in preparing it for a feast, each winning a distinguishing title from the way he prepares the meat, these titles purporting to account for the names of different peoples in Munster, Leinster and Connaught. The brothers hunt again, and come to a house, in which there is a huge old woman wearing a diadem. Each brother in turn refuses the invitation to lie with her until it comes to Lugaid Laigde. As he makes love to her, she is transformed into a beautiful woman who announces that she is the Sovereignty of Ireland. Next morning the brothers awake on a bare plain with their hounds beside them. This tale is undoubtedly based on a myth of the origins of one of the most important of the pre-Goidelic inhabitants of Ireland. Daire was the mythical ancestor of the people known as the Erainn who inhabited most of southern Ireland until they were displaced in historical times by Goidelic stock. The people known as the Laigde in Country Cork were a branch of the Erainn, claiming descent from

Lugaid Laigde, who is probably the god Lug from whom the Irish commonly traced their mythical ancestry.⁵²

An obviously cognate legend which does not specify the animal hunted identifies a different set of brothers, ancestors of the O'Neill dynasty who flourished in the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁵³ The motifs are further preserved in the fifteenth-century English metrical romance The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell in which Arthur is hunting a great, beautiful hart in the forest, when he is separated from his companions, but kills the hart. Suddenly he is confronted by a monstrous knight called Gromer Somer Joure who accuses Arthur of having wronged him by giving his lands away to Gawain. Arthur, being unarmed, is at the stranger's mercy, but is spared on condition that he return at the end of a year bringing an answer to the question "What is it that women most desire?". If he fails that test, Gromer will slay him. Arthur spends a year without finding an answer, and on returning to the wood he meets a hideous hag who promises to supply the answer if Arthur's companion, Gawain, will sleep with her. Gawain agrees, and the answer is given that women require mastery over men. This answer satisfies Gromer. Gawain is married off to the hag, who changes into a beautiful girl on the wedding night, when she explains that her stepmother had cast a spell on her that she would remain ugly until the best man in England should

52 Bromwich, pp. 446-448. There are several different versions of this tale in Irish literature, the earliest dating from the twelfth century. They are conveniently summarised in G.H. Maynardier, The Wife of Bath's Tale: Its Sources and Analogues (London, 1901), chapter 2.

53 Bromwich, p. 446.

wed her. Thereafter she has the choice of whether to remain fair by day and foul by night, or vice-versa. Gawain leaves the choice to her, thereby granting the sovereignty which is all that is required to release her completely from the curse, and she remains fair always.⁵⁴

In this version the idea of sovereignty has lost its original dynastic application and has been transformed into an allegory of sexual politics, which is why Chaucer found it handy in the Wife of Bath's Tale. Not all subsequent developments of the White Hart and Transformed Hag motifs lost their dynastic application, however. A Fenian legend which took its final shape only in the eighteenth century tells how Finn and his companions hunt a white doe, which eludes them. They later meet a beautiful woman, then an ugly hag wearing a golden crown. Finn recognises her as the doe, and refuses to marry her. Different versions of the story vary the details, for instance in one the doe is white on one side and black on the other, and the lady is discovered feasting in a hall full of maidens. She is identified as the King of Greece's daughter, on an unexpected visit to Ireland. She is the ugliest woman ever seen, and hails Finn as "King of the Fianna" and says she has kept herself pure especially for him. Finn recognises her as the doe, and indignantly refuses her. After a lot of confused adventures, the Princess of Greece dies, and in her dying speech protests that she once was a beautiful girl, but her father had put a spell on her. Had she married a great prince

54 Printed in D.B. Sands, Middle English Verse Romances (New York, 1966), see Bromwich, pp. 444-445.

she would have been born a son who would have ruled the world, and would have resumed her proper shape.⁵⁵

The ambivalent nature of the Fair/foul woman seems preserved by various details in these different legends, whether it is the black/white deer of the Fenian legend, or the narrowly-avoided fate of the transformed maiden in the tale of Dame Ragnell who might be fair by day and foul by night, or vice-versa. It is almost too tempting to speak of a chequered hag or a chequered stag, but should we not think of a Proserpina myth and wonder if such details do not preserve something of the seasonal pattern of an original chthonic myth? In French versions of the ballad known in English as Leesome Brand the maiden is a stag by night and a girl by day. Her brother ignores the warning not to hunt the white hart with tragic consequences.⁵⁶ Proinsias mac Cana has noted that the underlying tradition envisages the goddess espoused to the rightful king, but it also regards her as the mother of such a king, and ancestress of the royal line, and gives his opinion that the idea of the queen

55 Maynardier, pp. 35-37.

56 Child, II, p. 183. The French and Scandinavian analogues are well set out in Cigada, pp. 57-67. A legend from Argyllshire tells of a forester who is called White from the colour of his hair who is followed when he joins the Jacobite army in 1745 by a fairy sweetheart in the shape of a white hind. When this is ordered to be shot, the bullet kills the marksman, not the deer, (George Henderson, Survivals in Belief among the Celts (Glasgow, 1911), p. 124.) Similarly in Marie de France's Guigemar the arrow fired at the white hind with stag's antlers rebounds and wounds the hero. Giraldus Cambrensis tells of an antlered hind shot in Wales, the head of which was sent as a rarity to Henry II of England. The man who shot it went blind and was paralysed, Urban T. Holmes, "A Welsh motif in Marie's Guigemar", Studies in Philology, 34 (1942), pp. 11-14.

changing her form and her raiment when she is without her proper spouse "enshrines the ancient belief that the land gained or lost fruitfulness and prosperity as it gained or lost its rightful king".⁵⁷ Traces of seasonal and fertility symbolism cling to the earliest version, written by a poet of Westmeath who died in 1027, in which the goddess is a monstrous hag who guards a well. When approached in turn by five of the sons of Eochaid, king of Ireland, who had been hunting, she refused to let them draw water except in return for a kiss. When the last son, Niall, agreed to embrace her she is transformed into a beautiful damsel whose face bloomed like crimson lichen, whose hair was the colour of buttercups and whose mantle was a matchless green. She was the Sovereignty of Ireland, and Niall is proclaimed heir to the kingship.⁵⁸

Loomis has shown that there is a connection between the Sovereignty legends and the Grail legend, where the Sovereignty is one and the same with the beautiful bearer of the Grail. In the tenth-century tale The Phantom's Ecstasy King Conn is invited to a feast at the castle of a phantom horseman who turns out to be Lug. A crowned maiden, the Sovereignty of Ireland, acts as hostess, asking "For whom shall I pour this cup?". She is instructed to pour it for Conn and then for each of his royal successors to the throne. The similarities with Chrétien's account of the actions of the grail-bearing maiden in the Fisher King's castle leave little doubt

⁵⁷ "Aspects of the theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature", Études Celtiques, 7 (1955-1956), p. 84.

⁵⁸ Loomis in Paton, p. 300.

of the connection between the two. Other versions of the Grail feast, notably Peredur, preserve elements of the Transformed Hag motif.

Loomis's conclusion on the probable significance of the Sovereignty legends sums up the position with admirable clarity:

In all the stories of the transformation of the Sovranty of Erin which we possess she is represented as an allegorical figure the possession of whom forecasts the achievement of the kingship of Ireland. But there is an accumulation of evidence that behind the allegory lay a myth. Recently studies of Irish literature have come to see that behind the personification of royal rule lay an earlier concept of Eriu as a divine incarnation of the Emerald Isle. This is why the Sovranty of Erin after her metamorphosis by union with a future king of Ireland wore a mantle of green, why her countenance was like crimson lichen, and her locks like buttercups. Though it was her function to become the spouse of every king of Ireland, it seems that she was originally wedded to Lug, for she appears as a crowned damsell in his palace, taking the part of hostess while he is the host. Moreover, Rhys quoted a passage which referred to the great feast of the Lughnasad as instituted to celebrate Lug's wedding of the kingship, presumably the Sovranty of Erin. Lug, though in Irish pseudo-history euhemerized as one of the early kings of Ireland, is revealed by many converging pieces of evidence to have been in origin a god of the sun, and he has been accepted as such by many connoisseurs of Irish literature.

Once the Lug of mythology is revealed as the personified sun, and the Sovranty of Erin as the goddess Eriu, personifying Ireland, then it becomes obvious why the union of the successors of Lug with the goddess brought about such a glorious transformation. The stories of the Sovranty of Erin are the euhemeristic survivors of a pagan myth which interpreted the miracle of spring as a charm operated by the mating of the sun with the earth.⁵⁹

If this conclusion is credible, and it seems to me inescapable, then we may begin to understand why the guiding animal which figures in several of the versions of the Sovereignty legend should turn out to be a stag, for the legend brings together the preoccupation with

59 Loomis in Paton, p. 304.

dynastic continuity, with kingship, with ancestral piety, and with seasonal and fertility symbolism which we have recognised as adhering to the stag in so many different traditions. The case is strengthened by the example of some of the Breton lays. In the lay of Graelent the hero is led by a white hart to a meeting with a fairy-mistress bathing in a pool. Later, when the king of Brittany calls on all the court to declare the pre-eminent beauty of his queen, Graelent refuses, saying he knows a fairer woman than the queen. As he is about to pay the penalty for not making good this claim, the fairy-mistress rides into court, and amazes everyone with her beauty. She leaves again with Graelent following, and they cross a deep river to her own land, where Bretons say they are both living. The lay has evident connections with Chrétien's Erec, and though it does not retain any hint of the Sovereignty theme, this is supplied by other lays which evidently share the same material. Marie de France's Lanval gives it an Arthurian setting, omitting the stag chase and the bathing episode. The hunt motif is restored in Guingamor, where it is a magic boar which leads to the pool, and Guingamar, where a white doe, which like Placidus's can speak, leads to the love-making episode.⁶⁰

Though these tales owe their general resemblance to the widespread motif of abduction by a fairy mistress, the names they contain suggest that they may be based on legends which had a fundamental connection with the Sovereignty theme. Rachel Bromwich points out that Guigemar is a Breton form of the name borne in the

60 Pschmidt, pp. 73-80; Cigada, pp. 22-29.

eleventh and twelfth centuries by the Counts of Léon, and indeed Marie de France tells us that Guigemar was son of the Lord of Liun. Graelent is a version of the Breton Grallon, or Grallon Mor, traditional founder of the kingdom of Cornouailles in the sixth century. In these stories the pursuit of a magic white animal which retains traces of its origins as a transformed fairy is the prelude to an Otherworld visit. The names Guingomar and Gralemuer crop up in Erec and Énide, identified as brothers. Rachel Bromwich points out that Erec himself, the hero of Chrétien's romance, and Énide, his heroine, may preserve some dynastic significance, for Erec may plausibly be derived from Weroc, the name borne by the founder of the dynasty of the eastern Breton kingdom of Vannes, which in turn supplanted the Veneti of the land of Wened.⁶¹ Could it not be that the tatterdemalion appearance of Chrétien's Énide on her journey to court, and her subsequent transformation into the Fairest, preserve some trace of the Transformed Hag motif?

In the Breton lays there is no prospect of the hero returning from union with his fairy mistress to claim sovereignty over a kingdom, indeed he appears to be led to a kingdom from which there is no return. The Celtic otherworld is ambivalent, a world from which on some occasions illumination, power and authority may be sought, and on others a mysterious realm from which return is impossible, as in the thirteenth-century romance of Floriant and Florete, in which the hero, taken as a baby and brought up by Morgan le Fay, subsequently achieves fame and glory in numerous knightly adventures before

61 Bromwich, pp. 462-466.

marrying the Emperor of Constantinople's daughter and becoming king of Palermo. A white stag, encountered out hunting, however, leads him back to Morgan's castle Mongibel, where the fairy tells him that he will die if she lets him remain any longer on earth, and the stag has been sent as a messenger to lead him to a realm where he can remain immortal. Queen Florete, whom he loves, is allowed to join him.⁶²

Though the association of the white stag with the numerous fairy abductions which take place in Arthurian romance is by no means inevitable, the received symbolism of the stag, as we have established it in the preceding chapters, coincides with what seems to be the significance of some of the most puzzlingly sedimentary episodes of Arthurian legend, and it is this correspondence which helps to explain why the stag motif should so often have been drawn into this material. I do not myself share Cigada's assumption that there is a single "Legend of the White Hart" in the Middle Ages; rather there appears to have been a composite body of stag symbolism which is developed both within and outside the Arthurian cycle. Behind this we may dimly perceive what look like the remnants of Frazerian seasonal, fertility and kingship myths, in which contact with the Otherworld, with legendary ancestors, untamed nature, the ancient Celtic mother goddess and her son, are important. It should surely be clear how several of the historical stag traditions which we have traced in preceding chapters could be accommodated to this primordial symbolism. The Oldest Animals, though it incorporates cosmological symbolism, is also a myth of origins, and one of its versions

62 Edited by H.F. Williams, University of Michigan Publications, 23 (Ann Arbor, 1947).

(surprisingly, the one which at first sight looks most anomalous) tells us most of what we know of Mabon and Modron. Caesar's deer and its cousin, the winged stag, remain symbols of dynastic continuity or of national prosperity. For the nation to flourish, you have to have the right king. The collared stag is sent as a messenger by a dynastic ancestor to indicate who that should be.

Afterword

From the evolution of the various symbolic stags which we have traced we can see how, even though the meaning of a particular motif may remain constant, even over an unexpectedly long period of time, iconographic styles vary. From Scythian pole terminals to Irish genealogical legends we may suppose that the primary symbolism was totemistic, though in both there is an impulse toward elaboration and pure decoration as we see it in the elongation of the antlers in Scythian art or in the elaboration of the narrative for purely formal ends in, for instance, Culwch and Olwen, or in the use of the folk tale motif of the transformed hag in legends of Irish sovereignty. By contrast the Christian symbolism of the stag is indebted to those typological and allegorical habits of reading the sacred texts which have their roots in Christian and Judaic hermeneutics. The rapprochement of classical zoology and Christian symbolism in the early use of the serpent-eating stag is an exemplary instance of that allegorical reading of nature as God's book which helped to reconcile iconoclastic and neo-Platonic thought to the use of images drawn from the corrupt world of fallen nature. A similar sense that the whole of nature, and particularly the world of animals, was a system of intelligible signs accounts for the esoteric and learned impulse of the Renaissance mythographers to interpret nature as a mystical hieroglyph. The stag has its part in that, too. With the royal badges of fourteenth-century France we may seem closer to the pomp and circumstance of heraldic emblems, political badges and banners, but we may wonder whether such emblems, used as they were for

reasons of real-politik and power, did not gain much of their political force because they retained their roots in the ancient rituals of folk lore and the traditions of racial memory. It is certainly suggestive that the image of the collared stag should have led a simultaneous existence over a period of a thousand years and more as both a popular tradition and a courtly device. The poets in their turn have drawn on this symbolism for purposes which both exploit the inherited and invested meanings of the symbol, and go beyond them for purposes of their own. For many the venatorial metaphor suggests the venereal - the love chase. But the rich symbolic undergrowth of cervine lore suggests a wide variety of different emphases which can be placed on this archetypal metaphor. Thus Petrarch exploits the religious iconography to capture Laura's remoteness and inviolability, Wyatt the tensions and ambiguities of Caesar's deer. The different tensions and ambiguities of the thirsting stag that must refuse water are exploited by the Arab poet. A different and varied series of deer images are found in the thirteenth-century Gallician lyrics of Piero Meogo. All of Meogo's nine surviving songs use deer imagery. Their themes include the stags of the mountain that go to water, stags that trouble the water, the lover (in a familiar topos) compared to a wounded stag, a girl who converses with does, a girl in a meadow among stags and does awaiting her lover, and a girl who tears her dress at a dance which has the refrain, "Since the stag comes there, follow the river well."¹

1 A.H. Hatto, Eos: An enquiry into the theme of lovers' meetings and partings in poetry (The Hague, 1956), pp. 815-818; Aubrey F.G. Bell, "The hill songs of Pero Moogo", Modern Language Review, 17, (1922), pp. 258-262.

The real iconoclasm comes not in the ninth century but in the seventeenth, when the empirical philosophers of the Baconian school start attacking the zoological fallacies which were the very basis of the symbolic traditions. Once traditional beliefs in the great age of stags, in their serpent-eating powers, had been exposed as vulgar errors, and an accurate interest in their real habits and characteristics had been aroused, it became increasingly difficult to take them as potent symbols for inherited meanings. The image of the weeping deer lingers on in Shakespeare's As You Like It and in La Fontaine, who has a couple of fables in which the stag's tears do not save it from its fate. The topos has at least some basis in scientific fact, and appealed clearly to the taste for lachrymose imagery, the eyes and tears conceits of the Baroque period. But from the end of the sixteenth century such bits of animal lore, particularly the more fantastic and improbable ones, are likely to be exploited by writers only as the basis for conceits, part of the detritus of medieval learning out of which seventeenth-century poets elaborated their analogies. The Metaphysical conceit, though it may use inherited images, does not deploy their inherited meanings, since originality and invention are the essence of the style. Even a poem like Andrew Marvell's "Nymph complaining for the Death of her Fawn", though it seems to reverberate with indefinable echoes of the symbolic and domesticated deer of classical and Christian tradition, remains teasingly aloof from any of the inherited meanings. Nothing emerges more clearly from D.C. Allen's

assemblage of supposedly analogous deer in his article on the poem.²

Throughout its history it seems that it is the wildness of the deer that has caught men's imagination. With the exception of the Laplanders' reindeer, deer have remained, unlike the cow or the horse, resistant to domestication, though recently we have seen experiments in the Scottish highlands and elsewhere to farm deer on a significant scale.³ The deer has thus remained comparatively remote and elusive, slightly mysterious and unknowable. A fable of Aesop seems to recognise this distinction, telling how a stag came to share a meadow previously grazed only by a horse. As the stag's encroachments became more greedy, the horse went to a man and asked him to help turn the stag out of the meadow. The man agreed, but explained that to do so he would have to mount on the horse's back and put a bridle in its mouth. Thus mounted he easily turned the stag out of the pasture, but the horse found that he had a master for good, whilst the stag remained a free denizen of the forest. It is because of this association with untamed nature, with the forest and wilderness that legends of the domestication of the deer, of the tame deer, the reserved deer, or the deer in harness, have had a perennial fascination.

The same is true of the phenomenon of albinism.⁴ It is a

2 D.C. Allen, Image and Meaning (Baltimore, 1968), pp. 93-114.

3 Fallow deer have, of course, been kept in parks from the early Middle Ages. See D. and N. Chapman, Fallow Deer: their history, distribution and biology (Lavenham, Suffolk, 1975), pp. 51-68, 229-230.

4 True albinism is rare, but white pelage is not uncommon, though rarer in red deer than in fallow. Herds of pure white fallow have been bred in parks, see Chapman, pp. 25, 28.

feature which readily lends itself to symbolic interpretation, but it has a real basis in nature. The Capuan deer of Silius Italicus was described as white as snow; the guiding animals of medieval romance are persistently distinguished by their whiteness, as is Petrarch's cerva bianca; the cerf volant of the French kings is often singled out as being white. Chaucer's duchess, we have suggested, may be identified with the hart that is being hunted on the evidence of her name, Blanche, alone, quite apart from the more celebrated puns on 'hart' and 'heart'. King Richard's badge is distinguished by its whiteness; that is its definitive feature. So pervasive is this detail in the stags of medieval literature that it often seems quite fortuitous whether it is mentioned or not. In the Scottish tales of sightings of white deer over successive generations we are perhaps closer to the factual basis of this motif, and even of the more universal belief in the stag's longevity. Wherever albinism occurs in nature it is a feature likely to attract attention. It is an obvious means of identifying a particular stag. Even today the sighting of a white deer tends to attract attention in the local press. A few years ago a white stag was protected in the New Forest, and reported in newspapers, until local youths shot it. A white deer on an island nature reserve in Loch Lomond is attracting naturalists and tourists as I write this. In past times such sightings would surely have been the origin of local folktales and traditions. It is only out of the rich fermentation of such observations, tradition, elaboration, sophistication and corruption that symbolic patterns such as those we have been exploring finally emerge.

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45. p. 80 Fig. 1, Reusner's emblem of the thirsting stag; fig. 2, shows the stag with snakes clinging to its sides running to the water; God is our help, photos Henkel and Schöne.
46. p. 80 Emblems based on the Hieroglyphics of Horapollo, a Greek MS of which was purchased by a Florentine priest in 1419 and aroused humanist interest. The numerous editions vary in content, but figs. 1 and 3 go back to the original, which dates from the fifth or possibly the second century A.D. The woodcuts here are from the edition by Jacques Kerver (Paris, 1543), the French translation by Jean Martin.
47. p. 137 The statue of Charlemagne's stag at Magdeburg, drawing by Pomarius, alias Johann Baumgart, vicar of the church of the Holy Ghost in Magdeburg during the sixteenth century, photo Dietrich Schubert, Von Halberstadt nach Meissen (Cologne, 1974), p. 295.
48. p. 138 Roland statues from north German towns; fig. 1 shows what is thought to be the oldest surviving Roland statue, at Halberstadt, dating from 1433; fig. 2 from Belgern-am-Ems, dating from 1550. The erect sword of justice is characteristic.

49. p. 138 German broadsheet printed in Ulm, 1625, by the printer Jonas Saur; the stag shape is made up of the text of an otherwise unrecorded poem in which the stag stresses its usefulness to man. One starts reading near the mouth. The poem summarises a number of traditional themes, including the story of Alexander's collared deer from Pliny, an account of a famous battue of deer by the Duke of Atholl in 1529, summarises the traditional pharmacology of the deer, and gives the Hebrew Ajal as the name which Adam had given to the deer. I am indebted to Dr Alastair Stewart of Aberdeen for a transcription of the text of the poem prepared by Professor Forster from the unique copy of the broadsheet which is preserved in the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel. Photo Alastair Stewart.
50. p. 151 Taxidermised remains of a stag in the Jagd-og Skovbrugs-museet, Hørsholm, Denmark, fig. 2 showing marks of collar. Photo courtesy of Jagd-og Skovbrugsmuseet, Hørsholm.
51. p. 158 Sainte Chapelle, Bourges. Drawing by Hazé from a contemporary photograph. Source Meiss.
52. p. 162 Jean Fouquet, Lit de Justice de Vendôme, 1458, frontispiece to Munich Boccaccio MS, Cas des nobles hommes et femmes, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Photo Levey.
53. p. 164 Miniature of the cerf volant from Philippe de Mézières, Songes du Vieil Pelerin, MS Arsenal 2682-3, fol. 34r. Photo Coopland.
54. p. 172 Tapestry of the winged stags, Musée des Antiquités, Rouen. Photo Giraudon.
55. p. 173 Cerf volant in stained glass, Évreux cathedral. Photo Arch. Phot. Paris.
56. p. 173 Tympanum from Palais de Justice, Musée des Antiquités, Rouen. Photo Giraudon.
57. p. 173 Tympanum of the Palais Jacques Coeur, Bourges. Photo Giraudon.
58. p. 174 Balustrade of the Bourbon chapel, Lyon Cathedral. Photo Musée des Monuments Français.
59. p. 175 Politico-allegorical woodcut from Pierre Gringoire, Les fantaisies de mère Sotte (1516). The fleur de lis nourishes the porc epic (Louis XII), the ermine (Anne of Brittany), the salamander (François I) and is supported by the cerf volant (Charles de Bourbon).

60. p. 175 Paulo Giovio's version of the device of Charles, Connétable de Bourbon, from his Dialogo dell'impresa militari et amorse (Lyon, 1574), p. 14.
61. p. 175 Robert Gaguin, Compendium super francorum gestis (1500), titlepage. Photo British Library.
62. p. 176 Colophon used by the de Gourmont family of publishers in the early sixteenth century. The arms of the de Gourmont are supported by cerfs volants.
63. p. 176 Queen Elizabeth I's household accounts for 1580, titlepage. Bodleian Library MS Douce bl. Photo Bodleian Library.
64. p. 179 The Wilton Diptych, Photo National Gallery, London.
65. p. 181 Inn signs of the white hart, fig. 1, from Witley, Surrey, reputedly the oldest, repainted c. 1857, photo Larwood and Hotton; fig. 2, elaborate carved sign from Scole, Norfolk, erected 1655, the mythological figures included Actaeon and Diana. Engraving of 1820, reproduced in Larwood and Hotton, The History of Signboards.
66. p. 186 St Eustace. MS Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds grec 20, f.5v. Tenth century psalter fragment. Photo Omont.
67. p. 186 St Eustace in miniatures from the margins of MSS. Photos Lillian Randall.
68. p. 186 Conversion of St Hubert, Werden Altarpiece. Photo National Gallery, London.
69. p. 187 Conversion of St Hubert. Flemish woodcarving, c. 1500, sold at Phillips auctions, February 1979. Photo Daily Telegraph.
70. p. 187 Pisanello, Visions of St Eustace. Photo National Gallery, London.
71. p. 187 Jan Breughel, St Hubert. Photo Prado, Madrid.
72. p. 188 The legend of St Giles, Master of St Giles, c. 1500. Photo National Gallery, London.

Plate 1



fig. 1



fig. 2

fig. 3



Plate 2

fig. 1



fig. 2

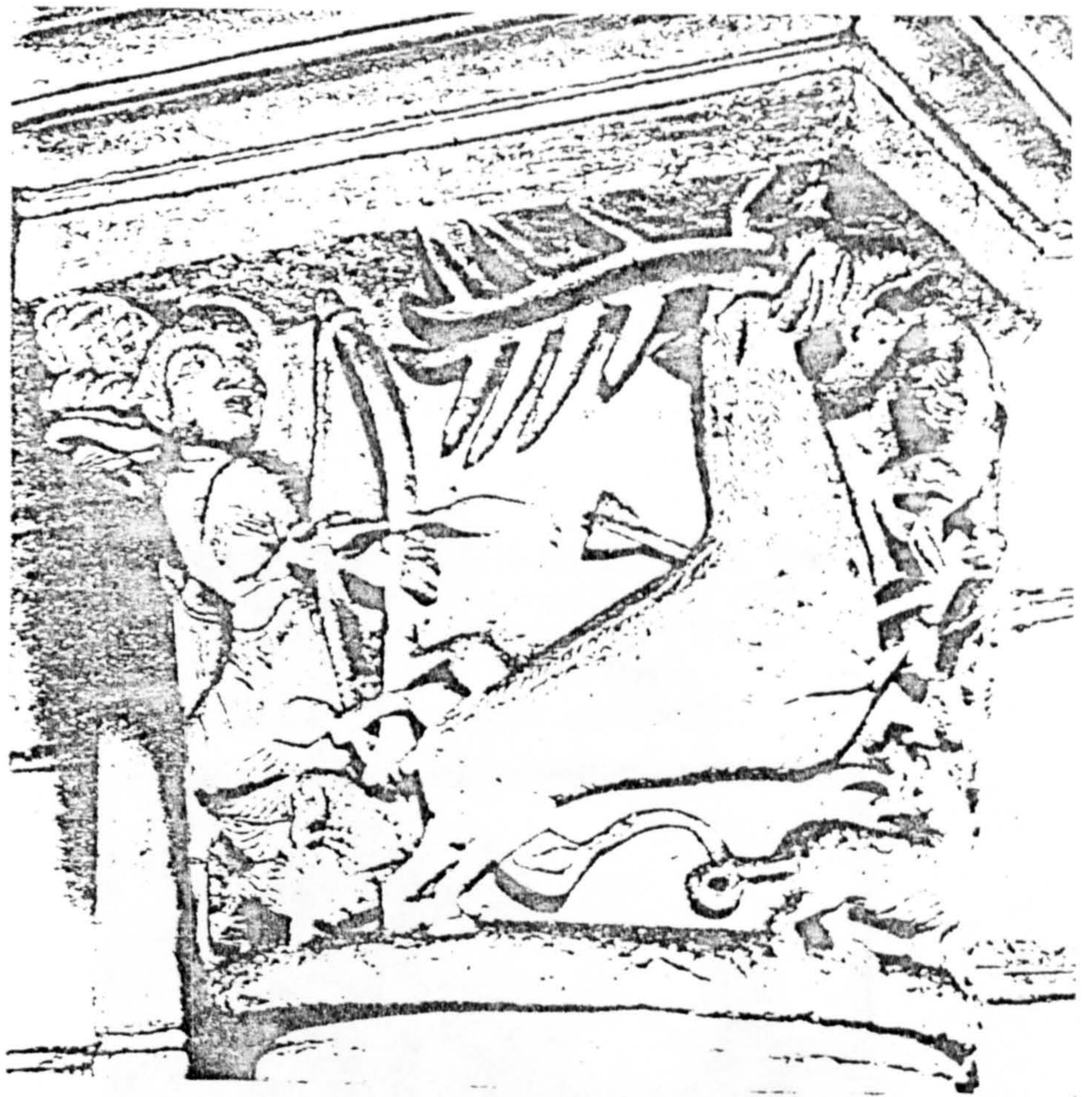


fig. 3



OPERA NOVA DEL MAGNIFICO CA
VALIERO MESSER ANTONIO PHI
LAREMO FREGOSO INTITVLA
TA CERVA BIANCHA.
CORRETTA NOVAMENTE.





fig. 1



fig. 2

fig.3



fig.4



Plate 5

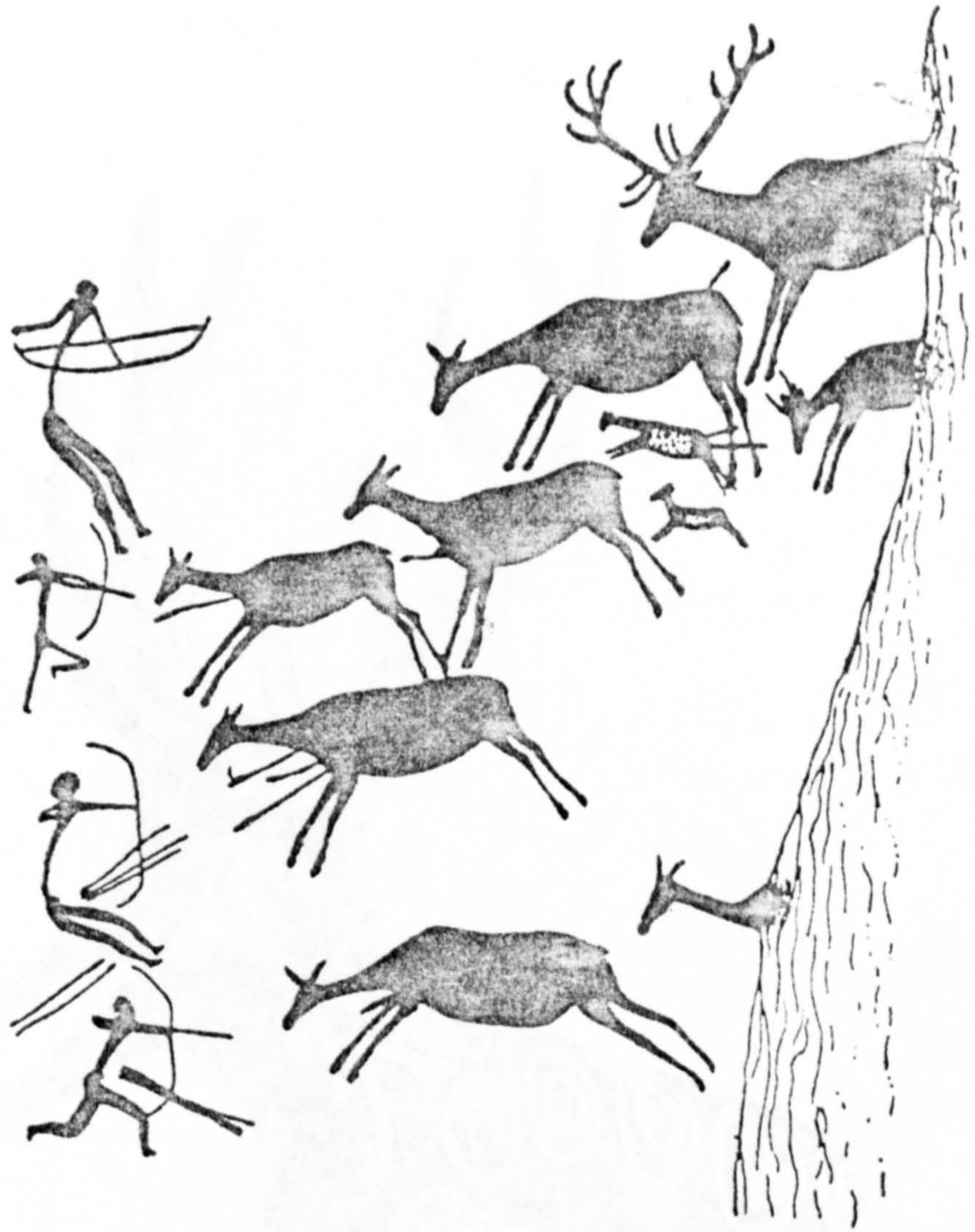


Plate 6





fig. 2

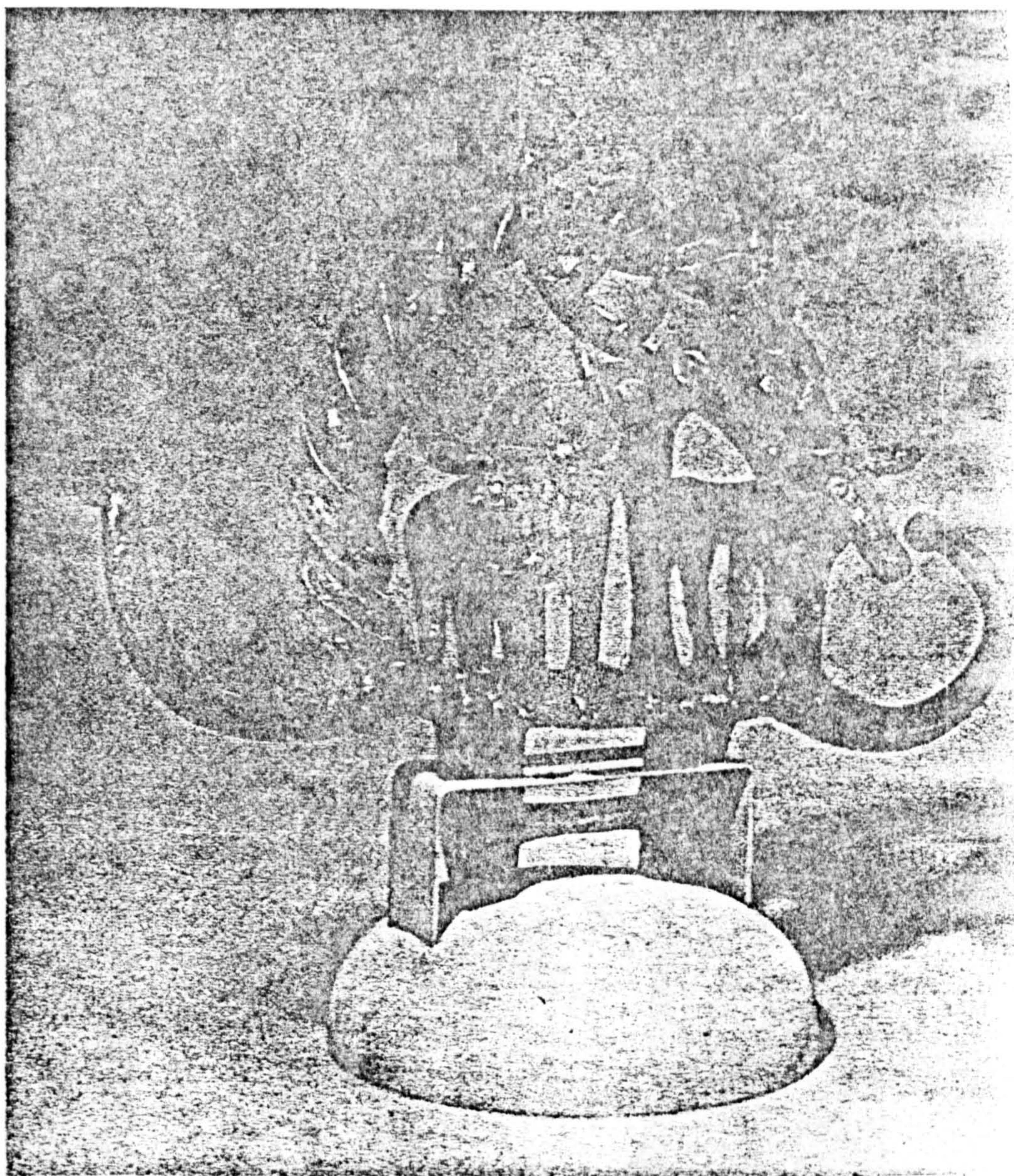


fig. 3

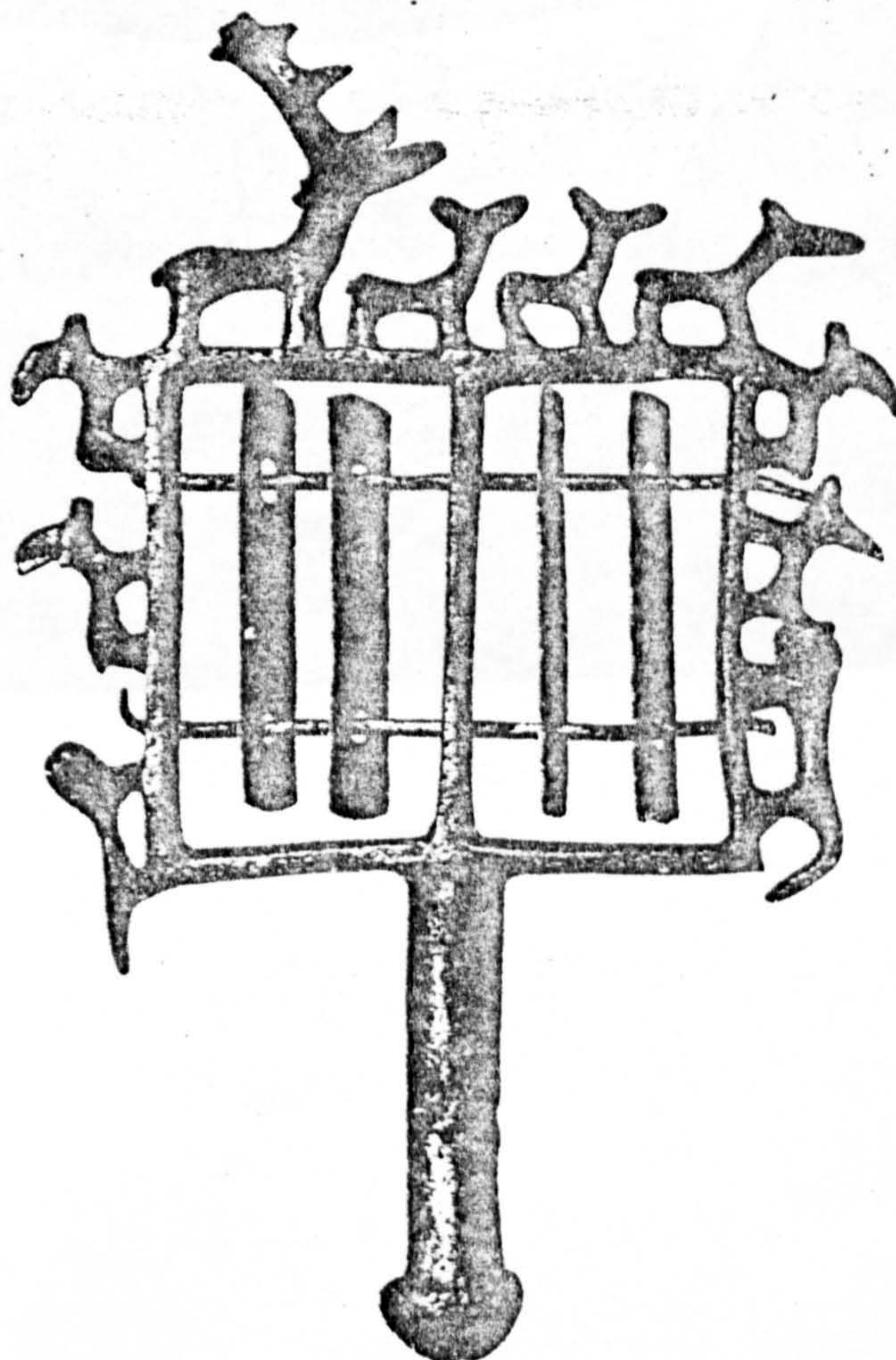


fig. 4

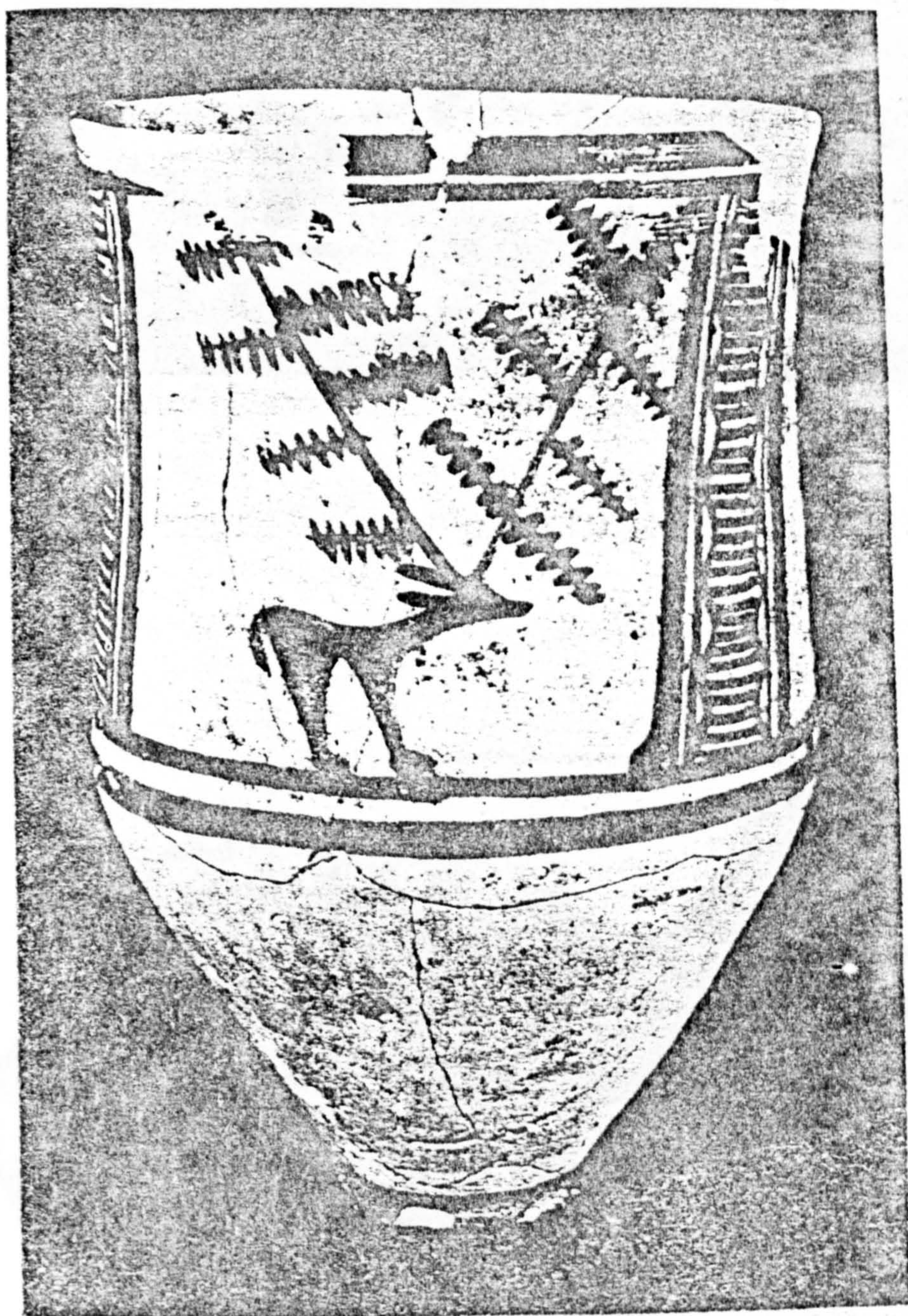


fig. 1

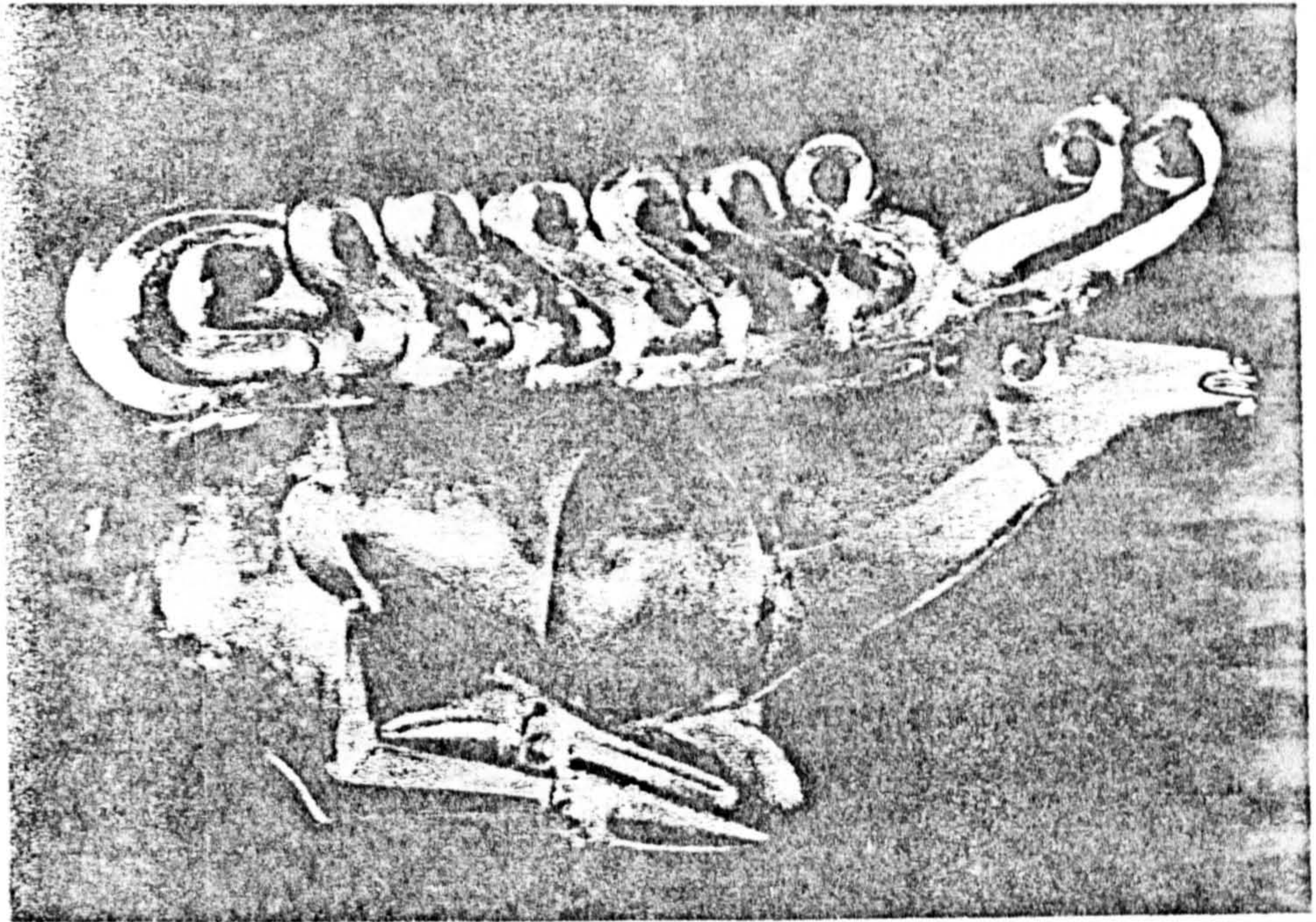


fig. 2

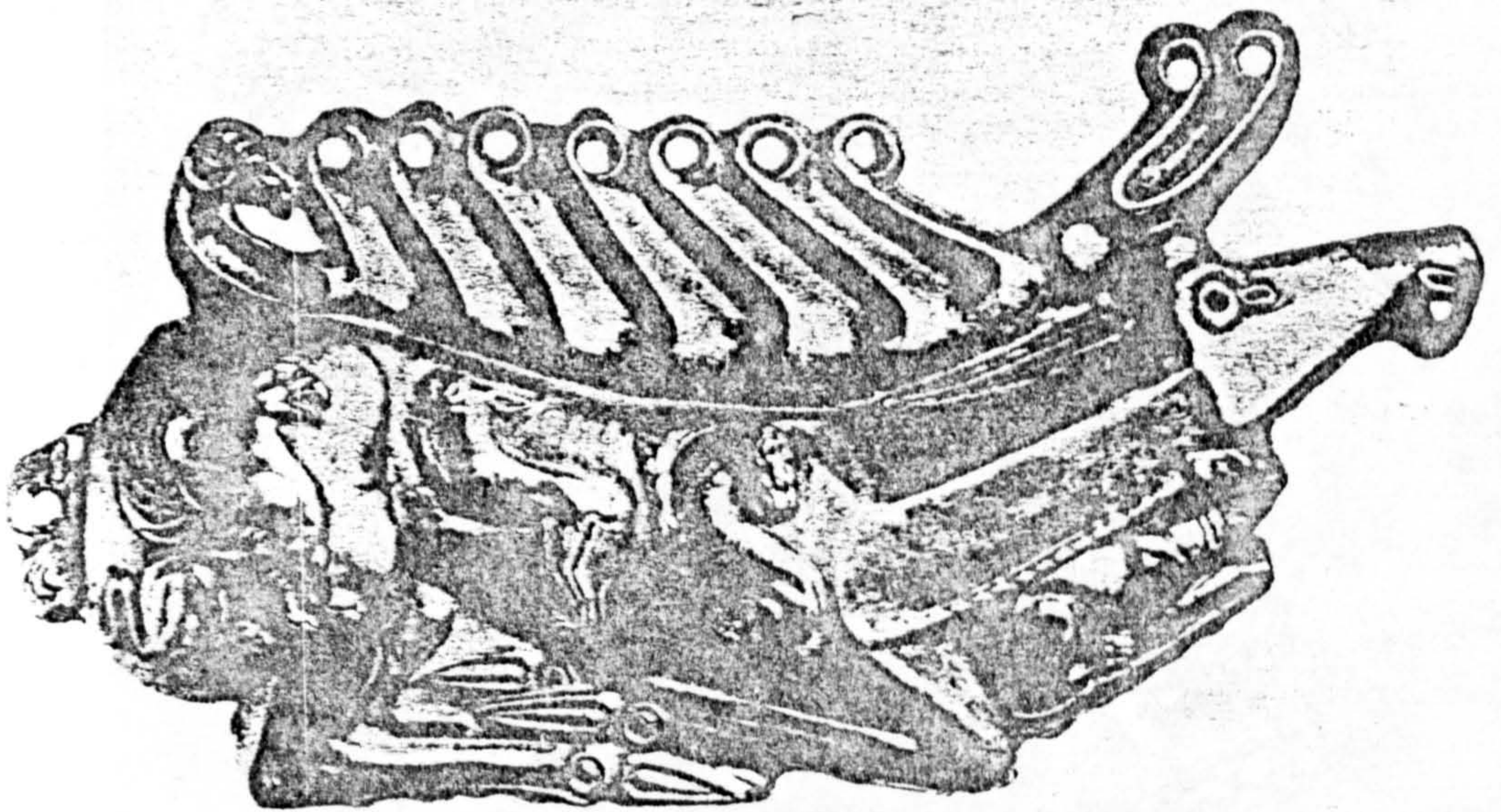


Plate 9

fig. 1



fig. 2



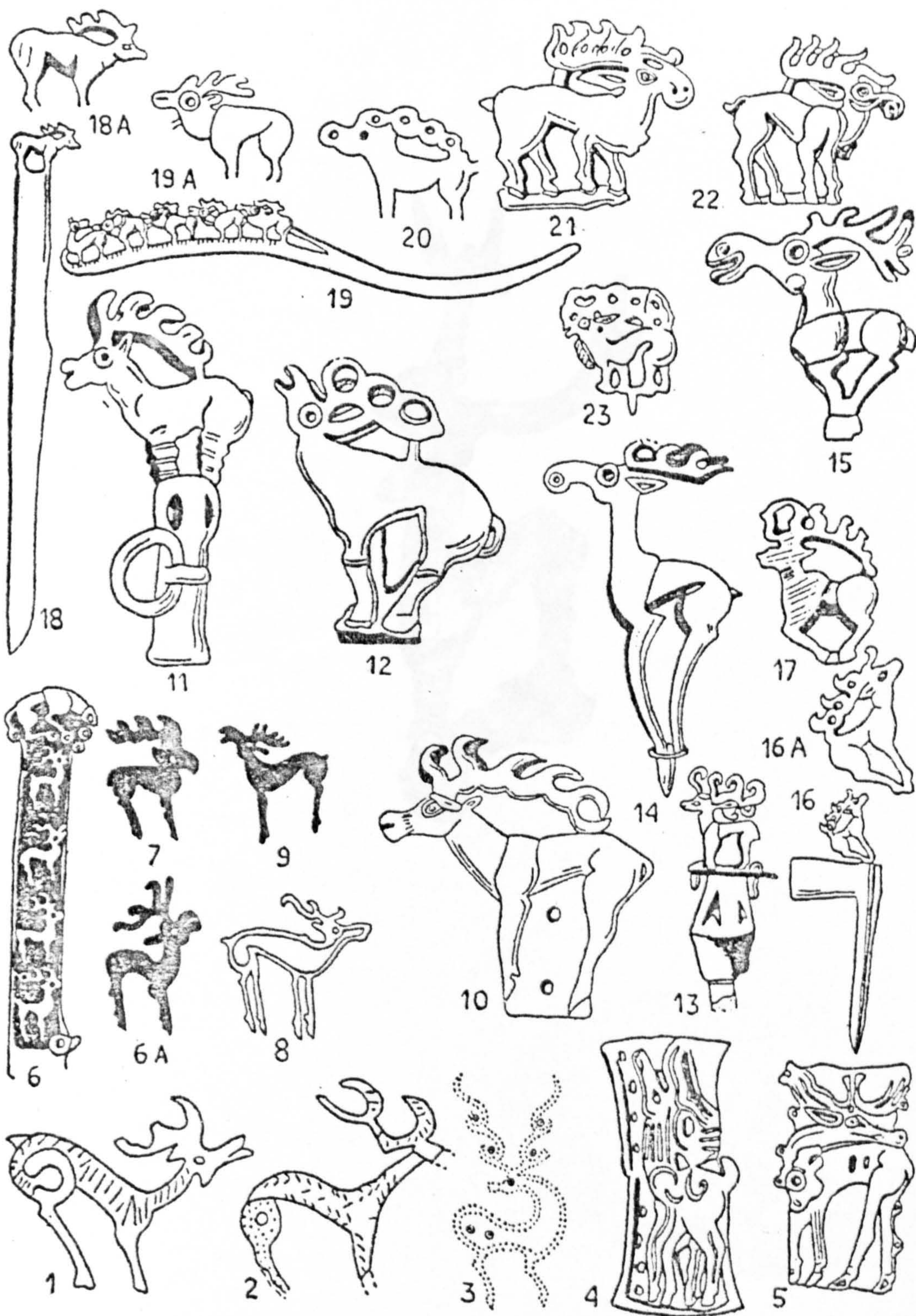


Plate 11



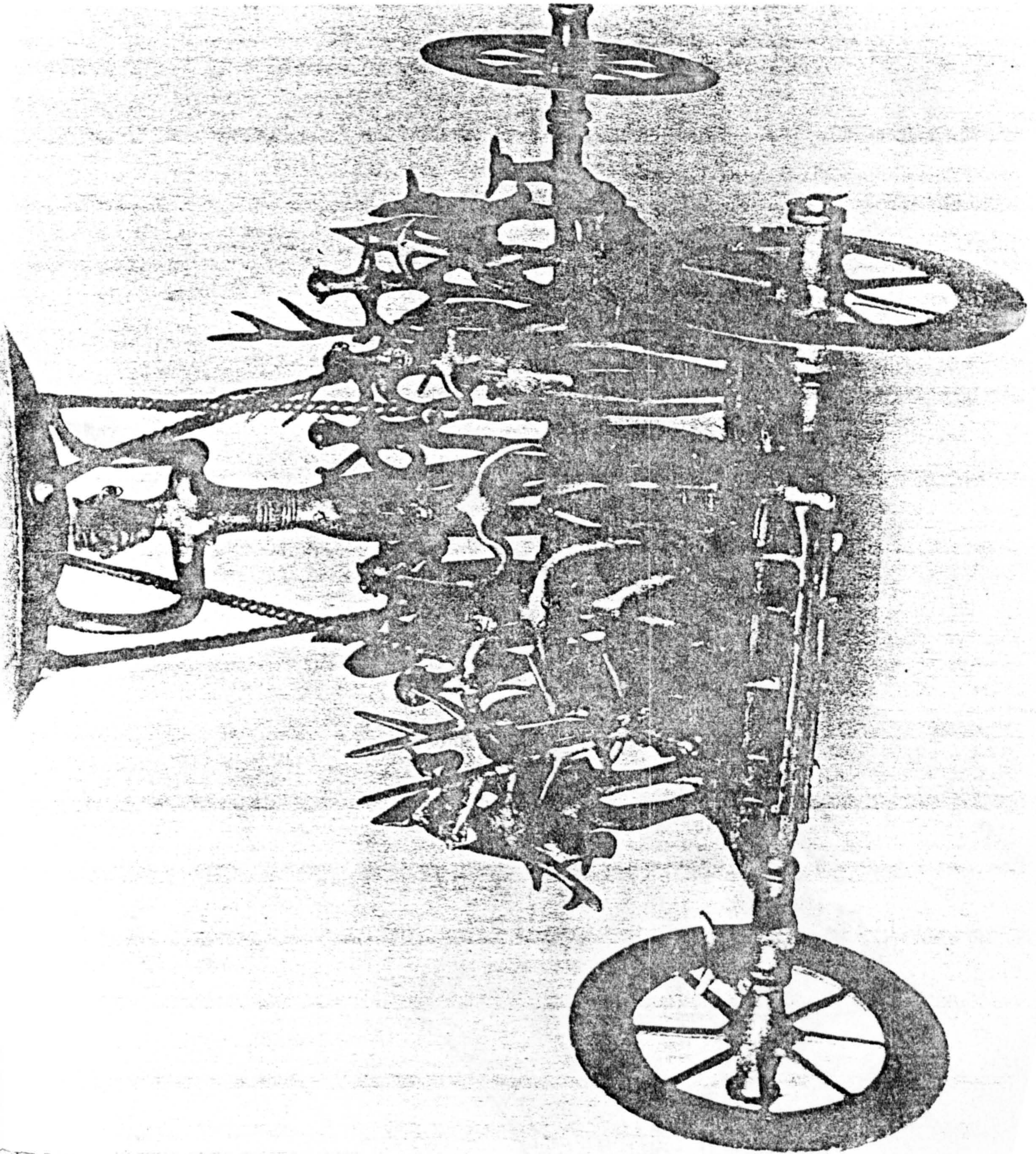


Plate 13

fig.1



fig.2

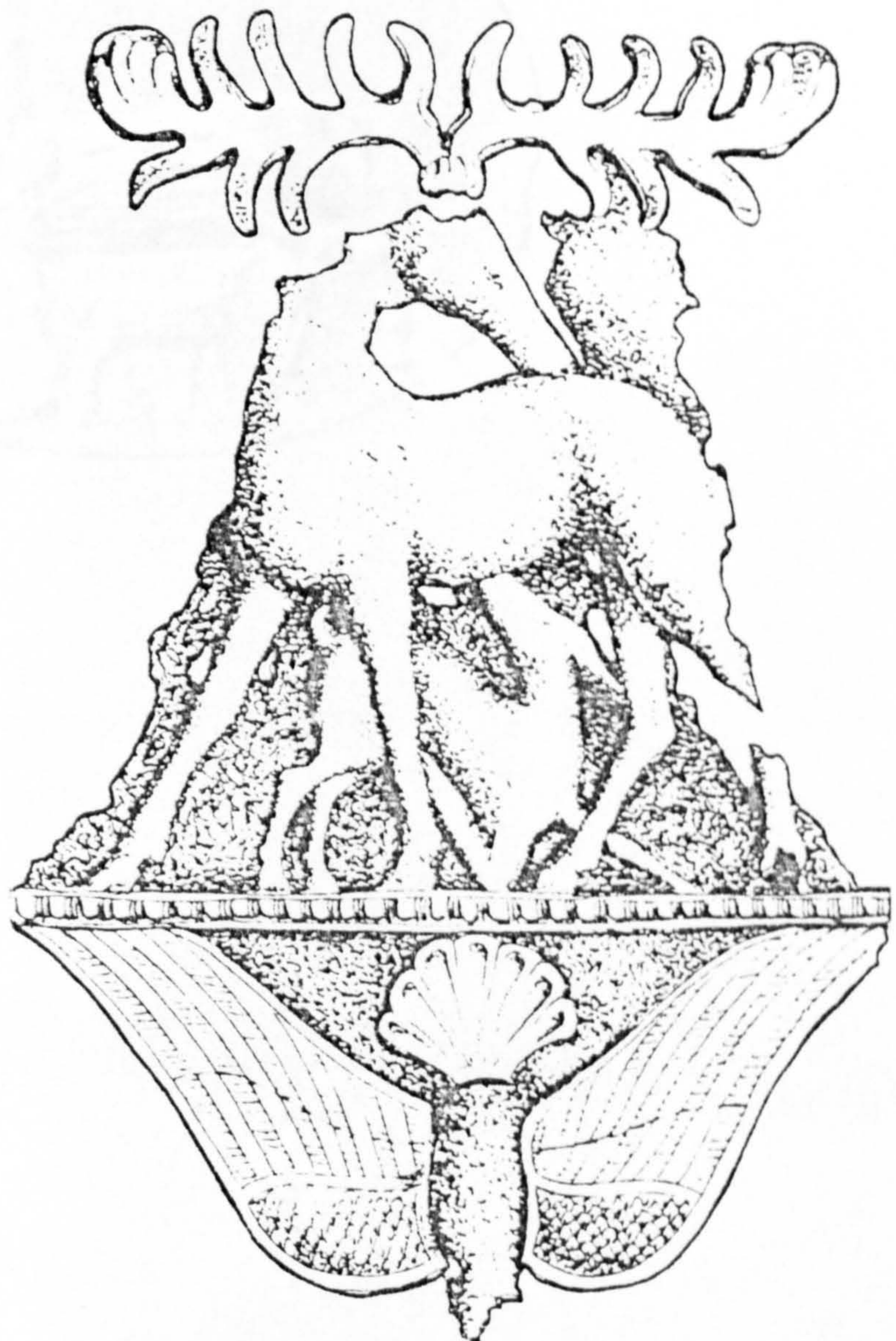


fig.3



Plate 14

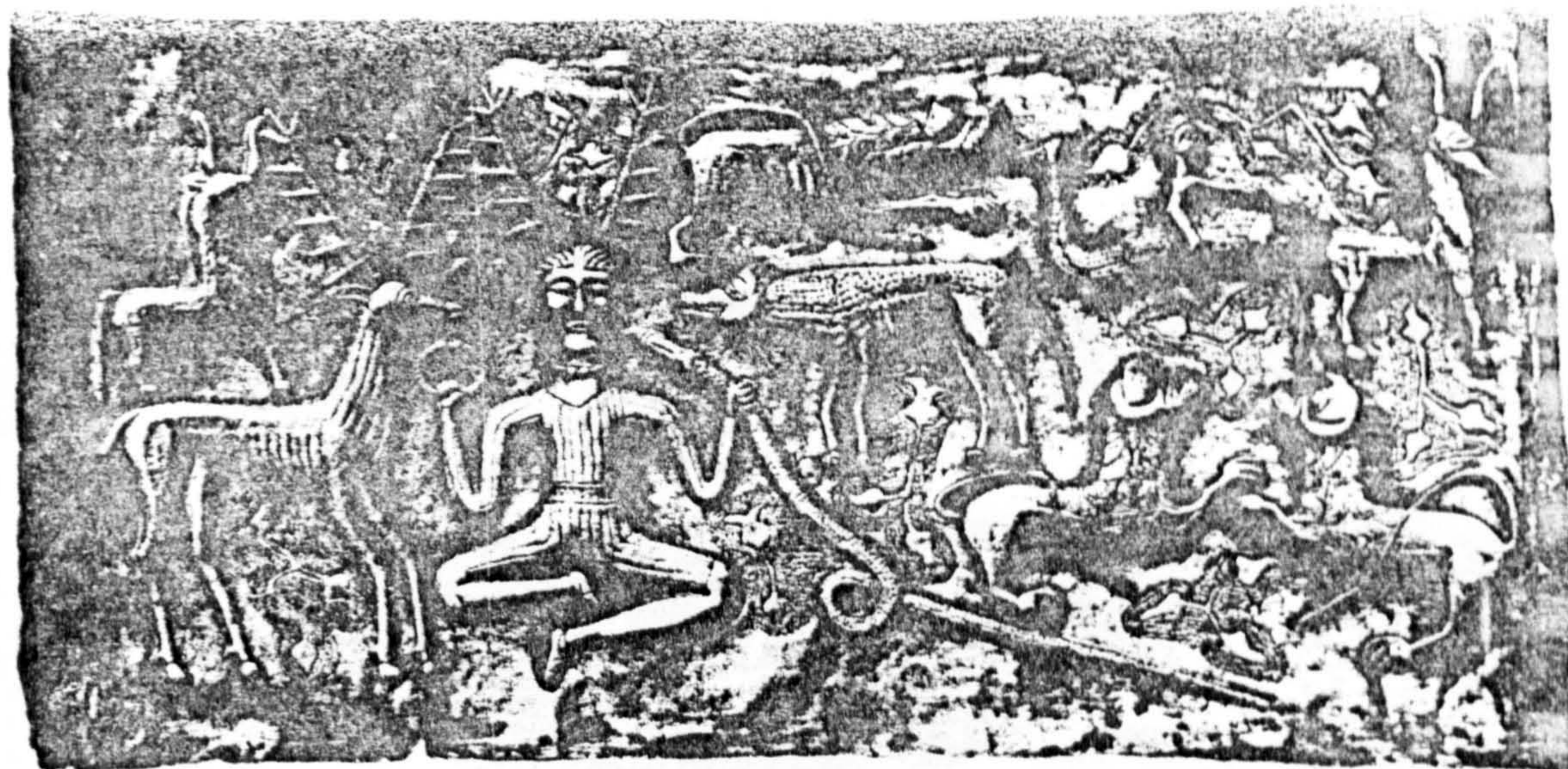


Plate 15

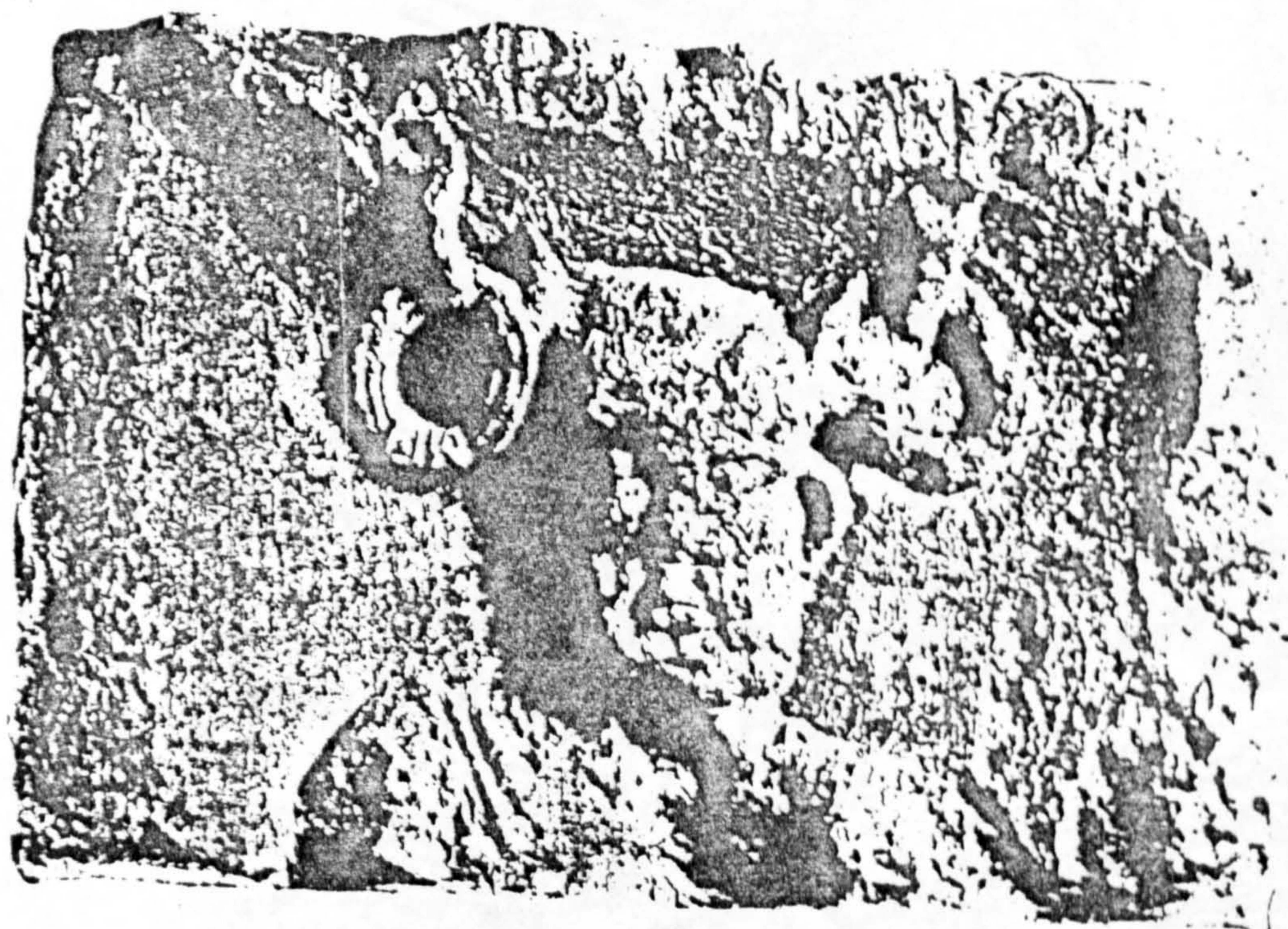


Plate 16



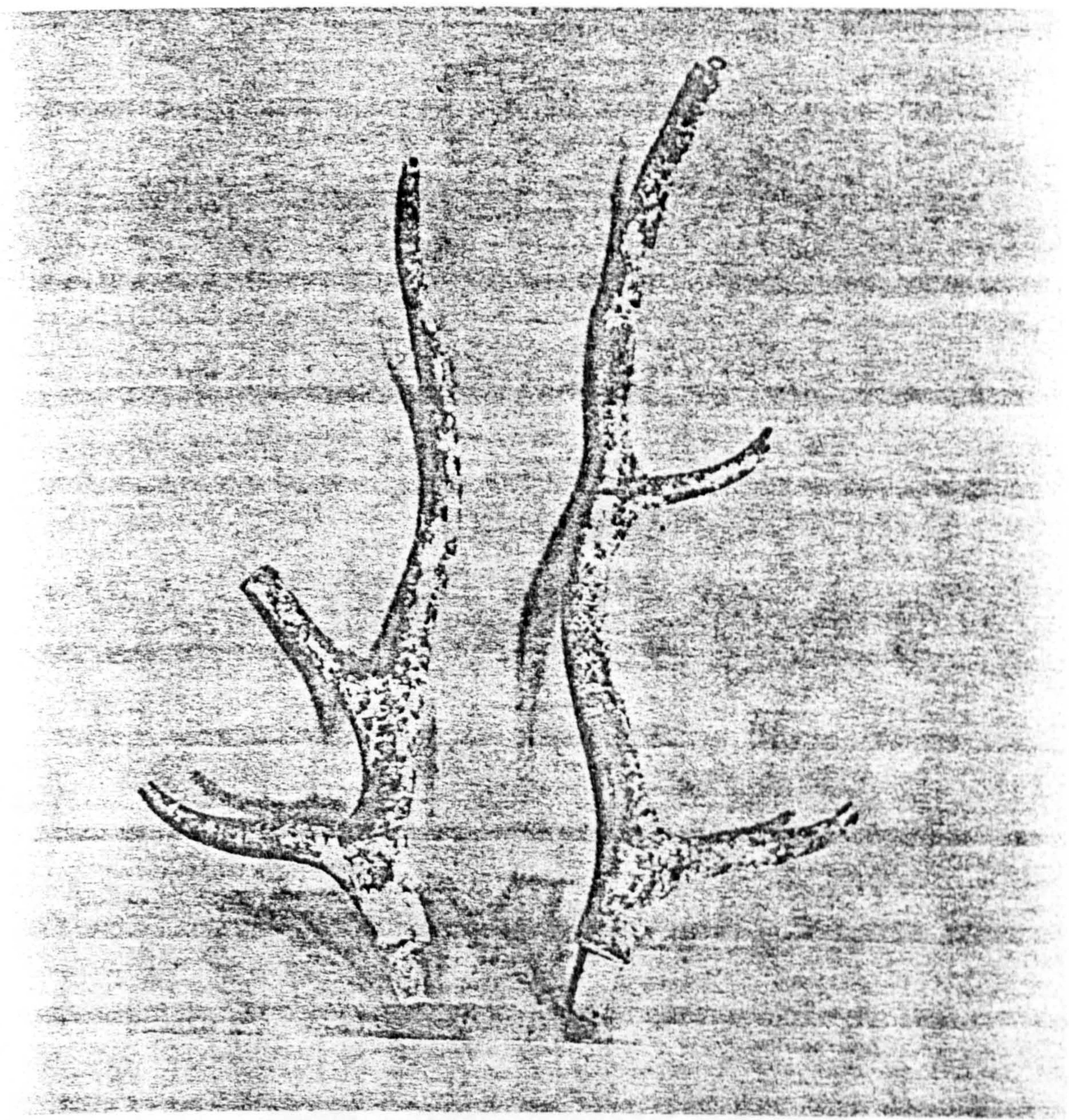


Plate 18



Plate 19 fig. 1

us arant sencaut li courtes
idour de aus aparier et si
s dirous de merlin et de ses
ites coment il ouura main
actuelle.



Plate 19, fig. 2



fig. 3



Plate 20

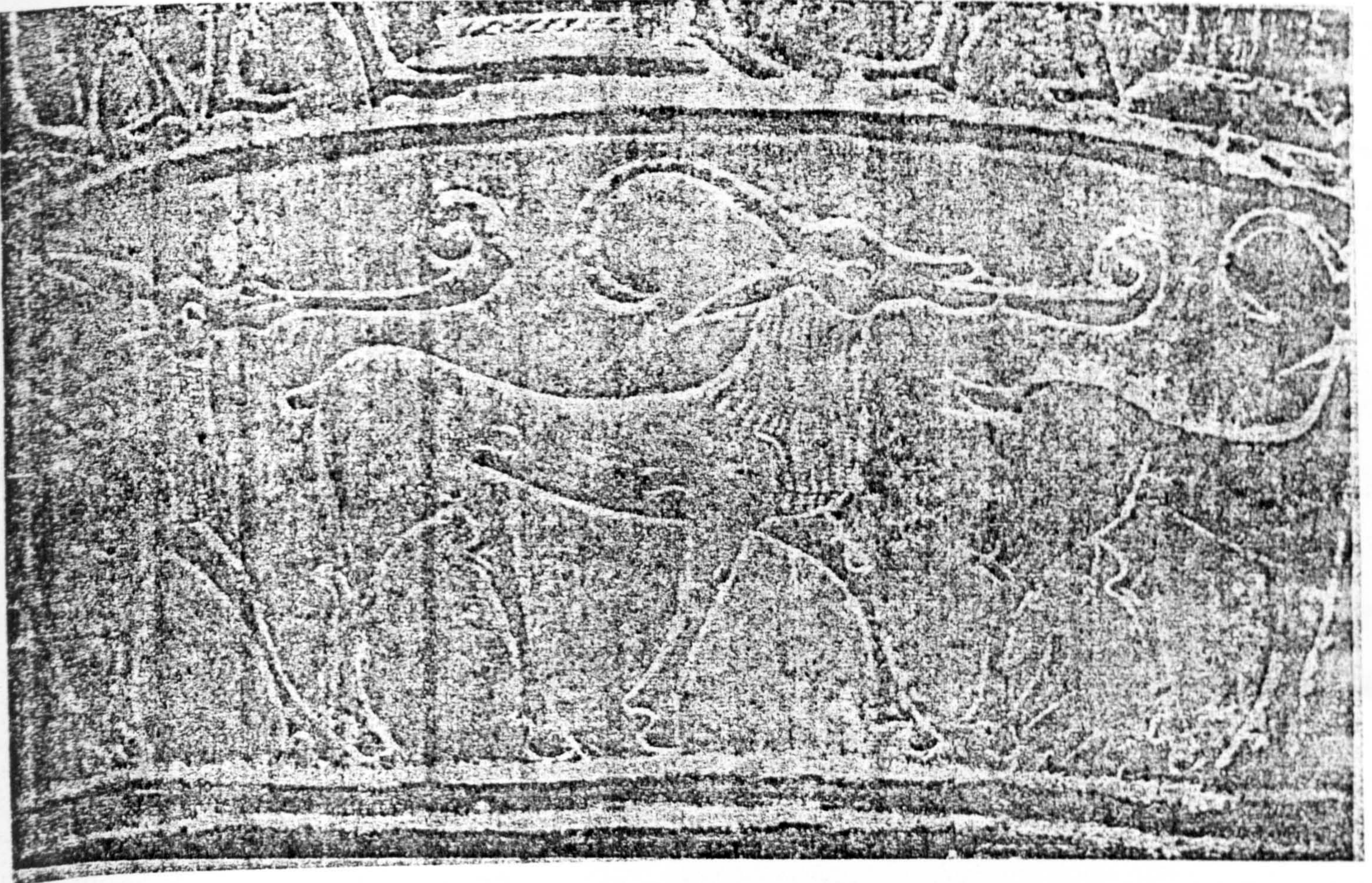


Plate 21

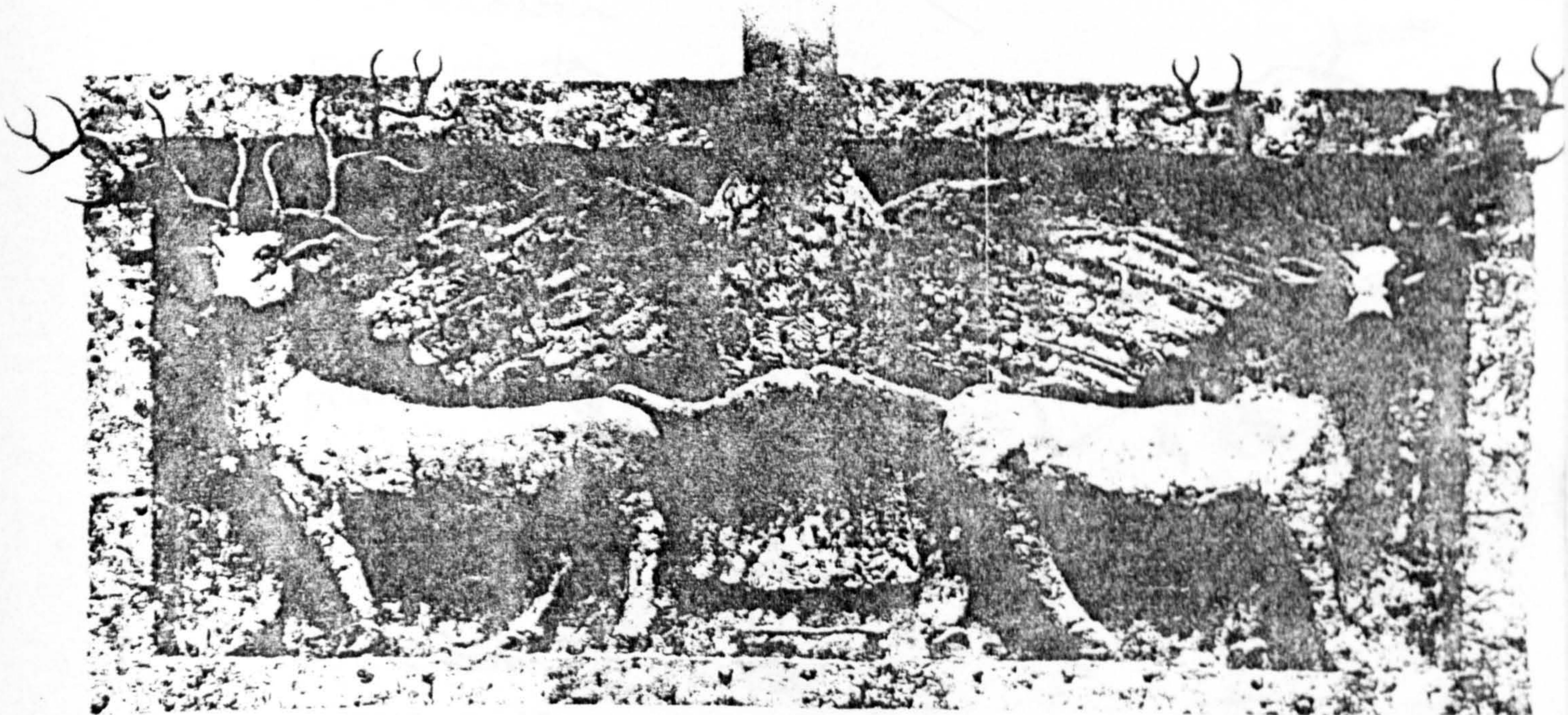


Plate 22

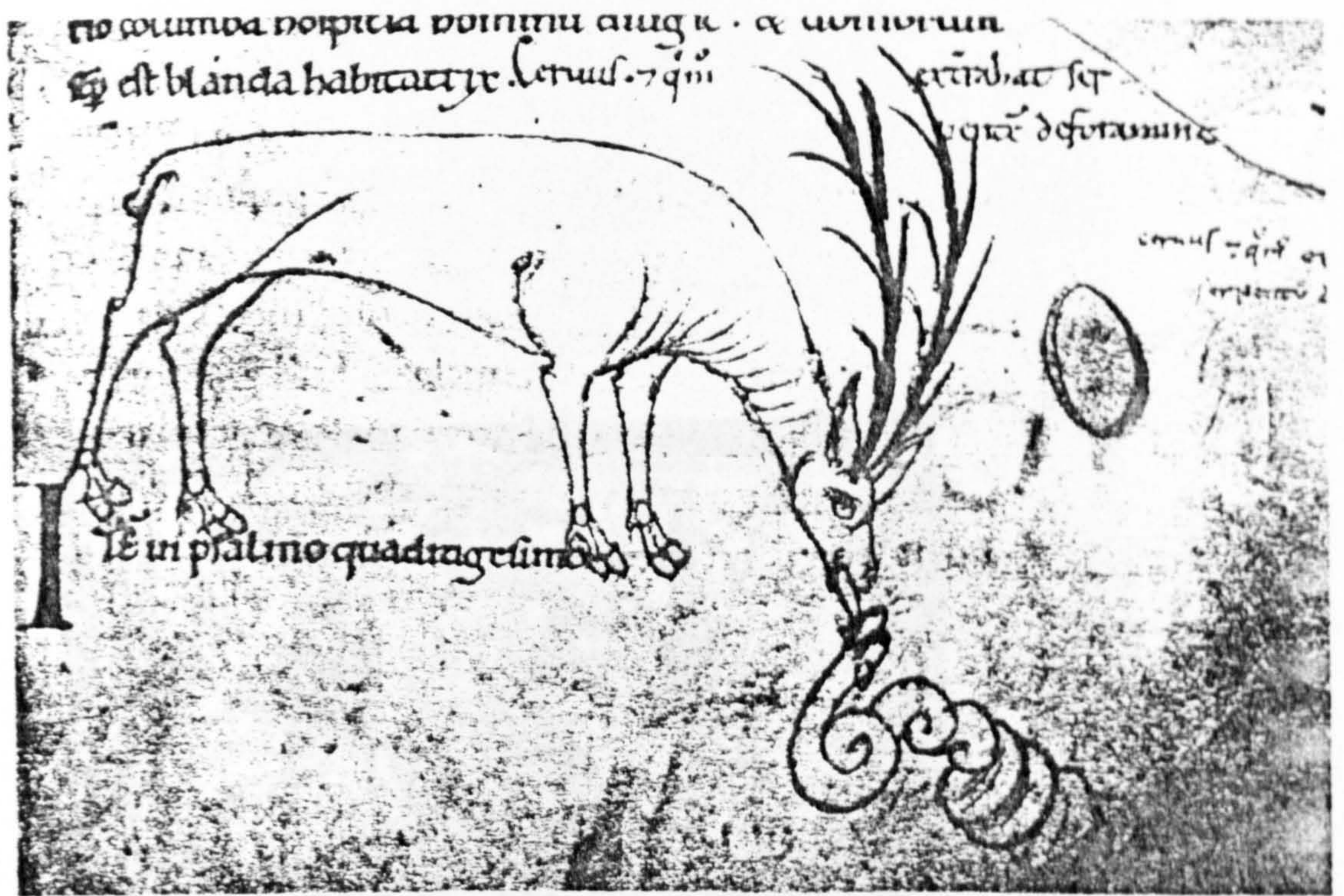


Plate 23

de cana e sona
 mēte lolaetta
 a popalare
 axona
 ilgiare
 et epiaque
 peuo
 ue languē
 el ceuo
 ch gnoscetuo
 a liresetuo
 pietet ceue



Plate 24



Plate 25

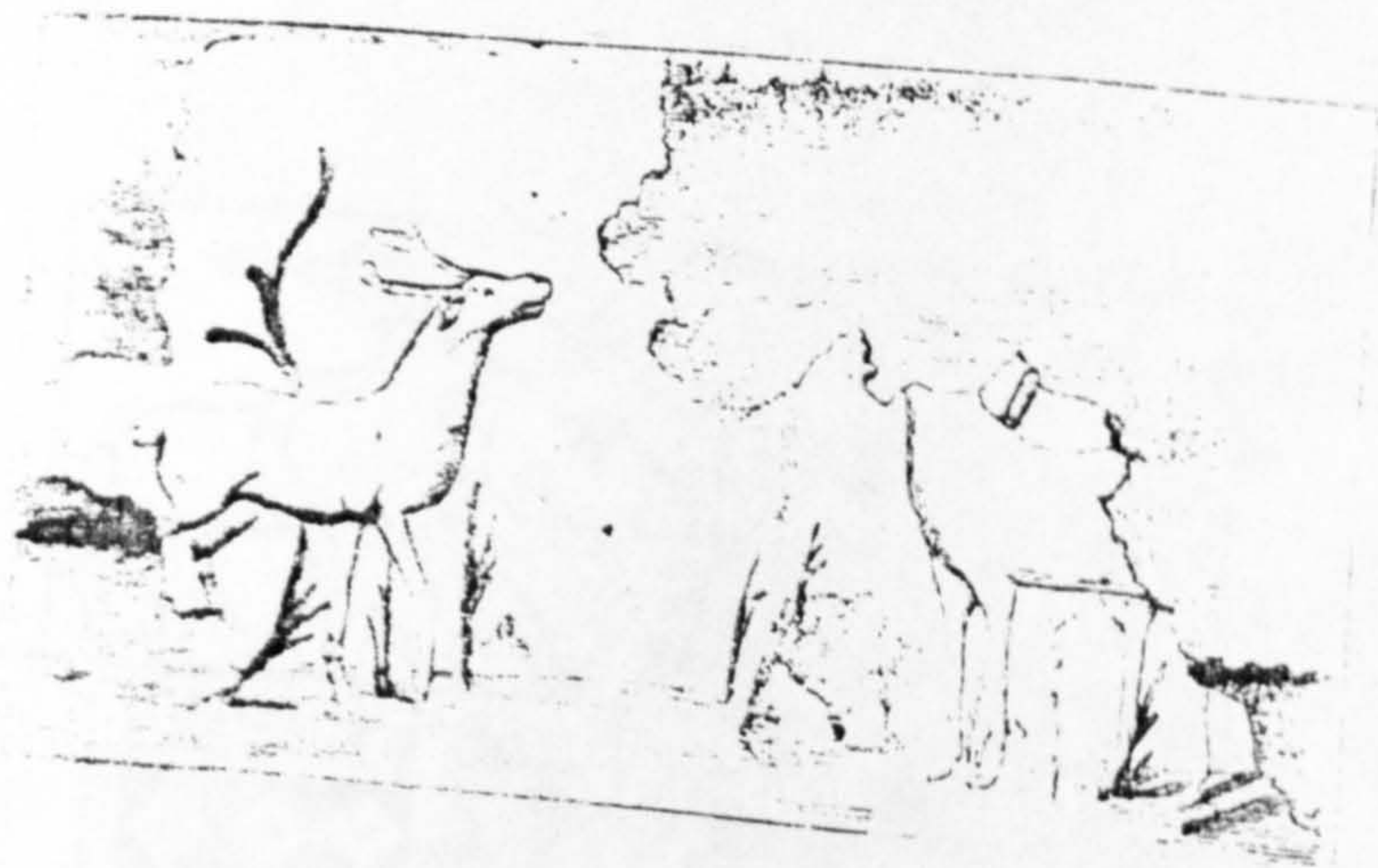


Plate 26

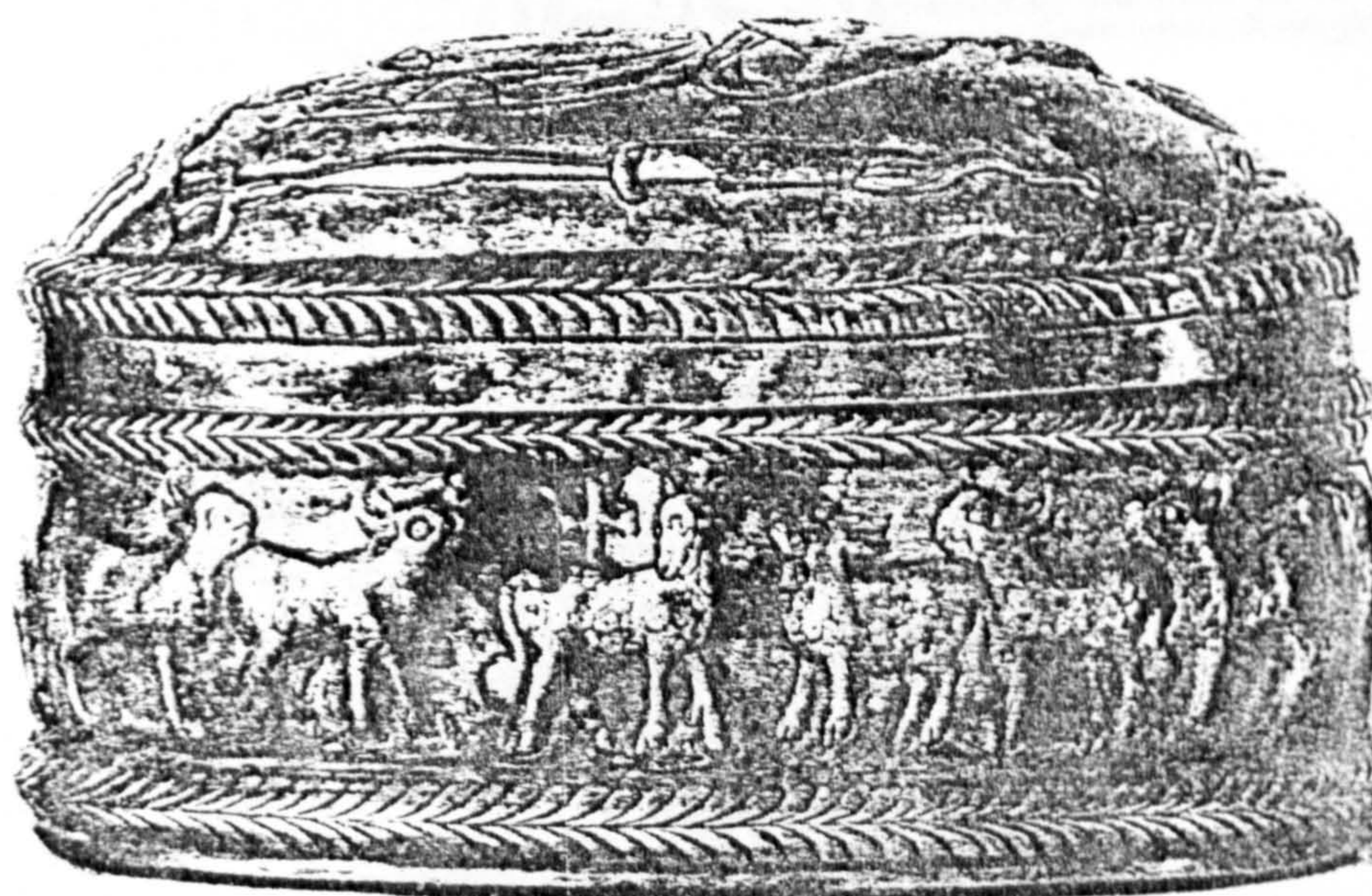


Plate 27

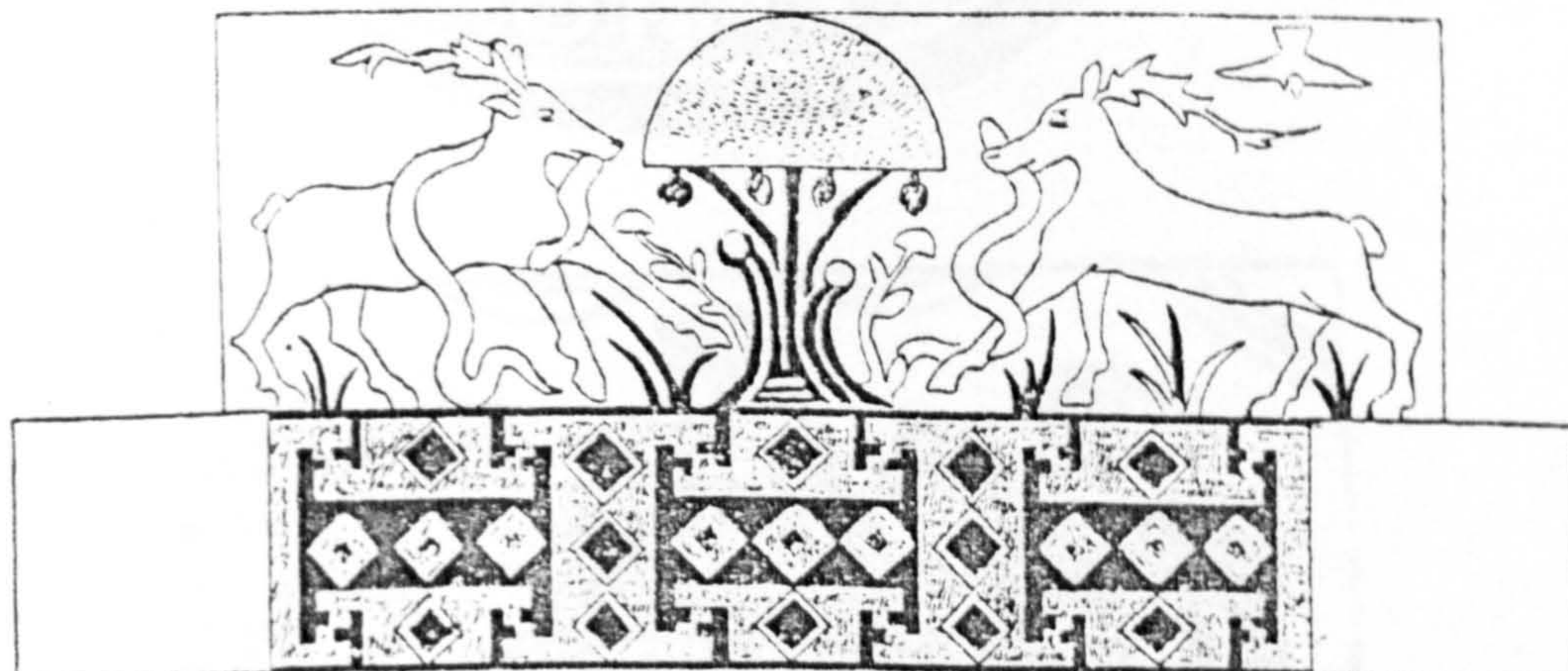




Plate 28



Plate 29

Plate 30



Plate 31



Plate 32



Plate 33

fig. 1



fig.2

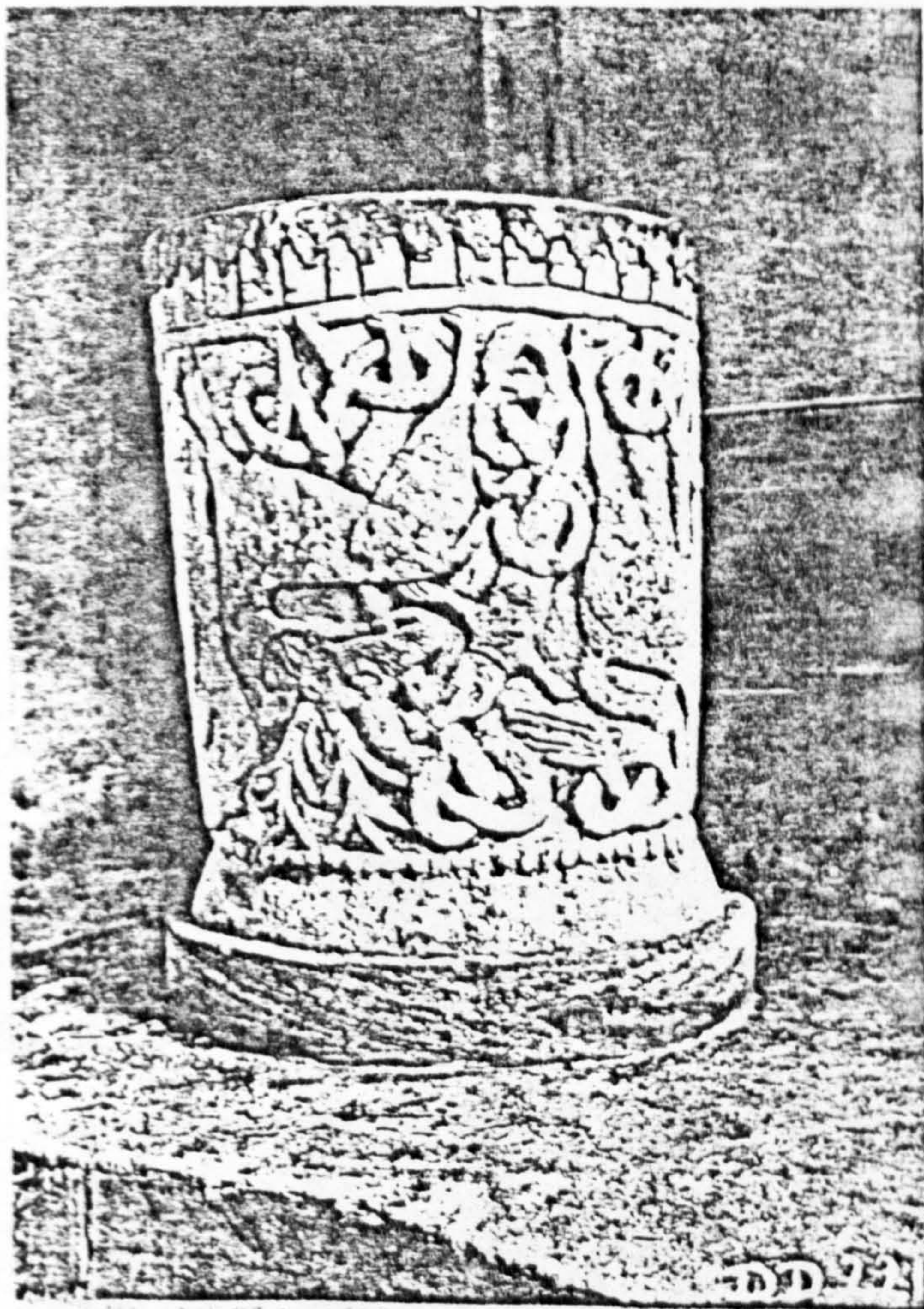


fig.3



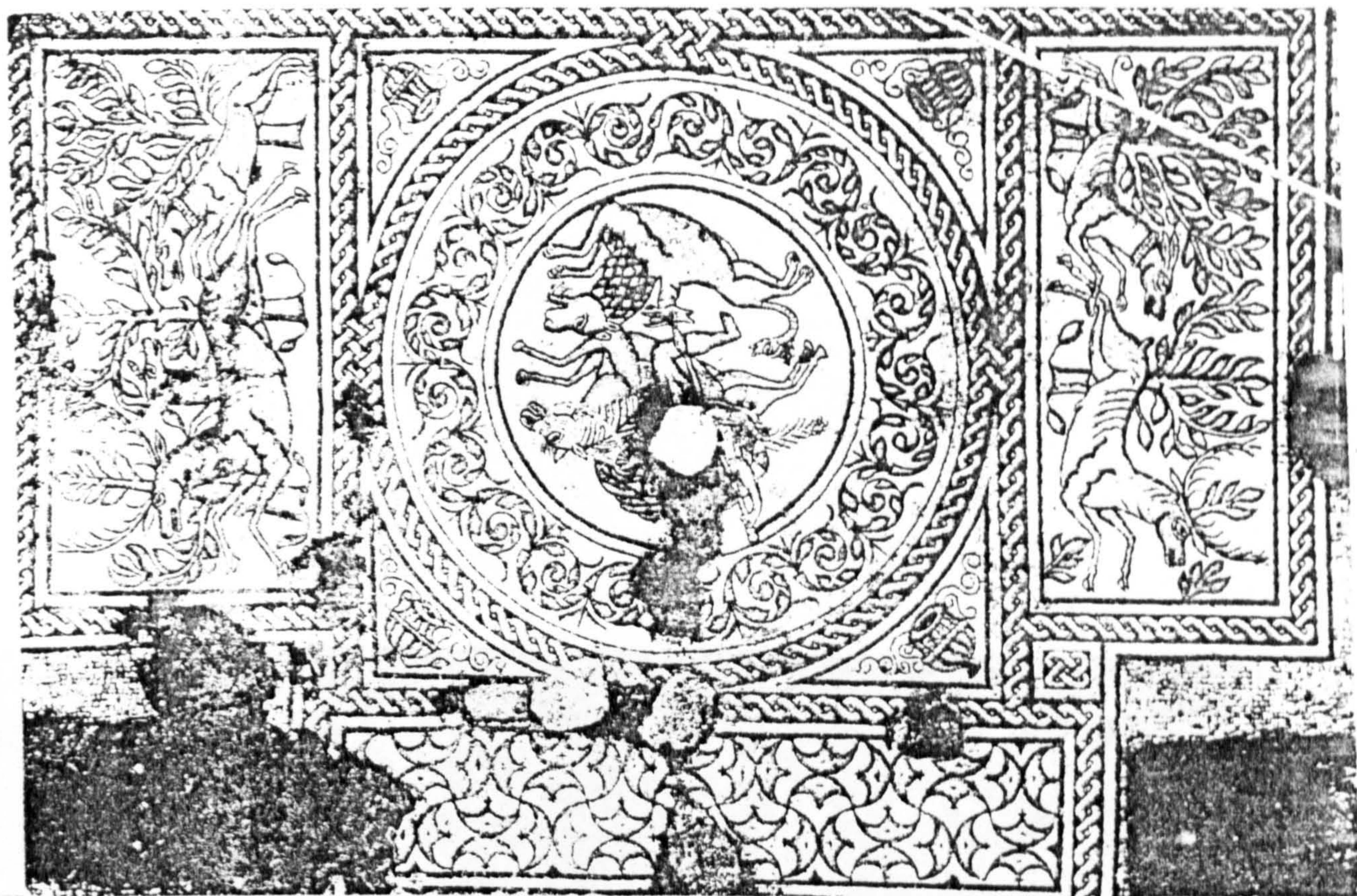
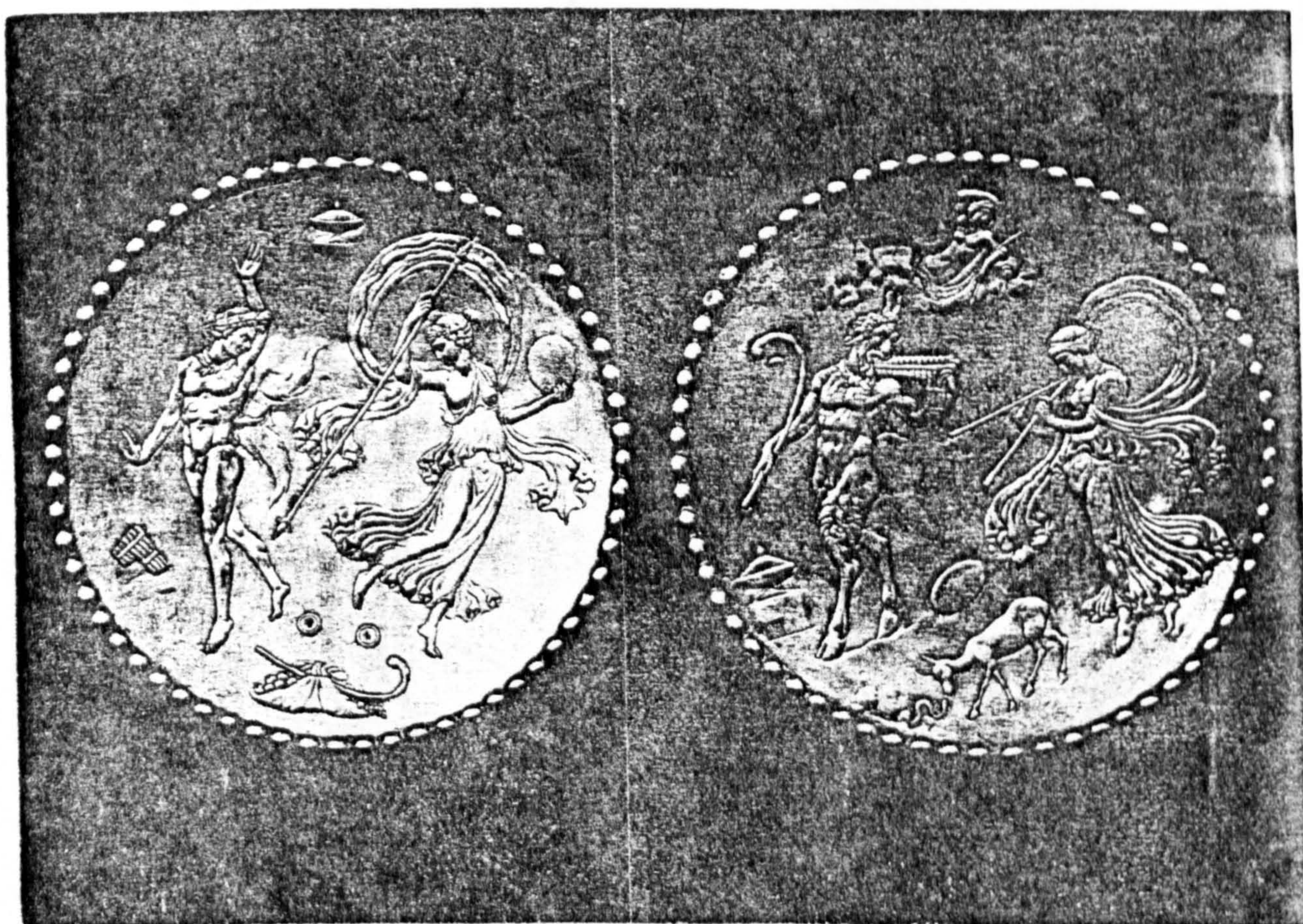


fig. 2



fig. 3





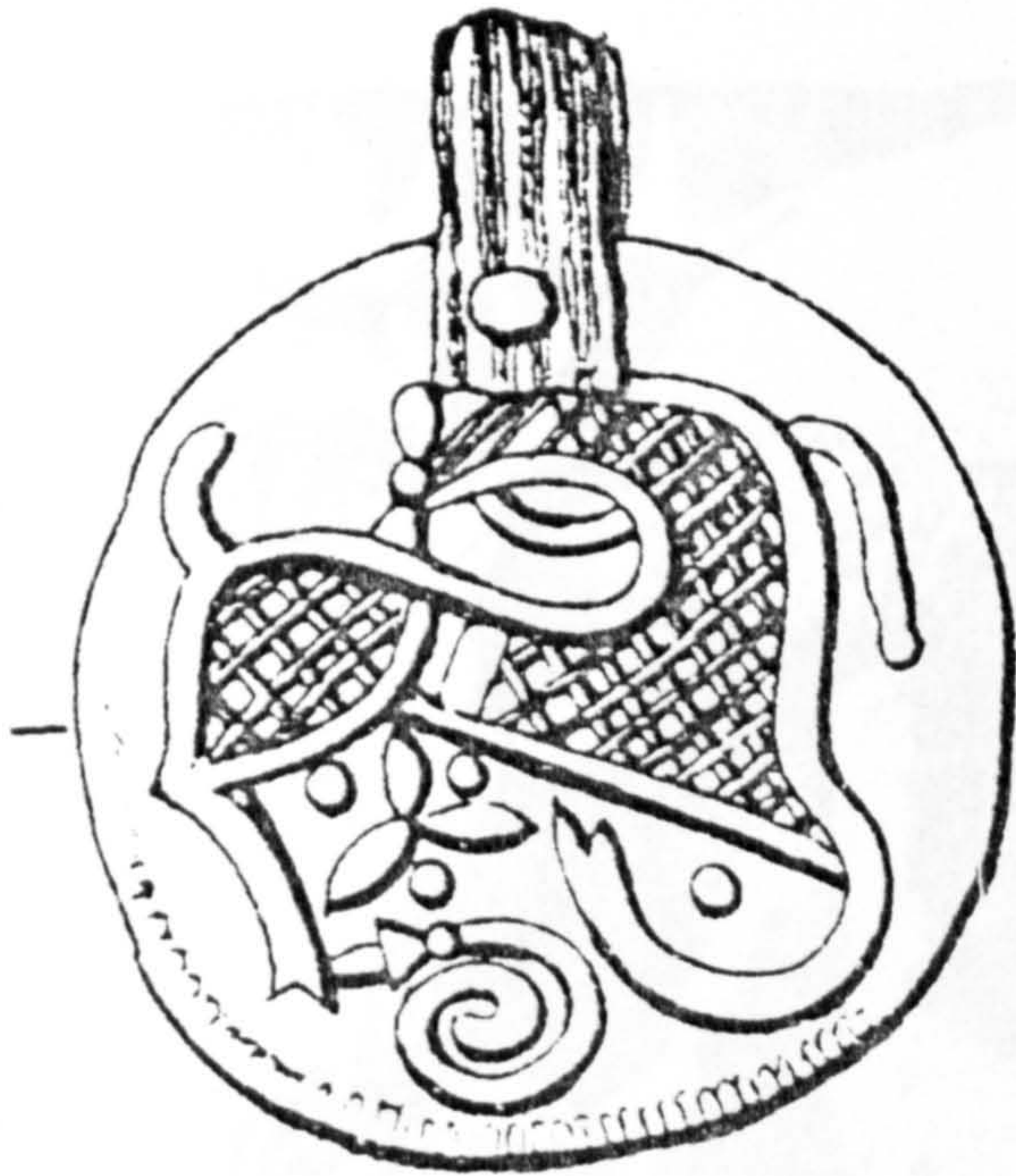
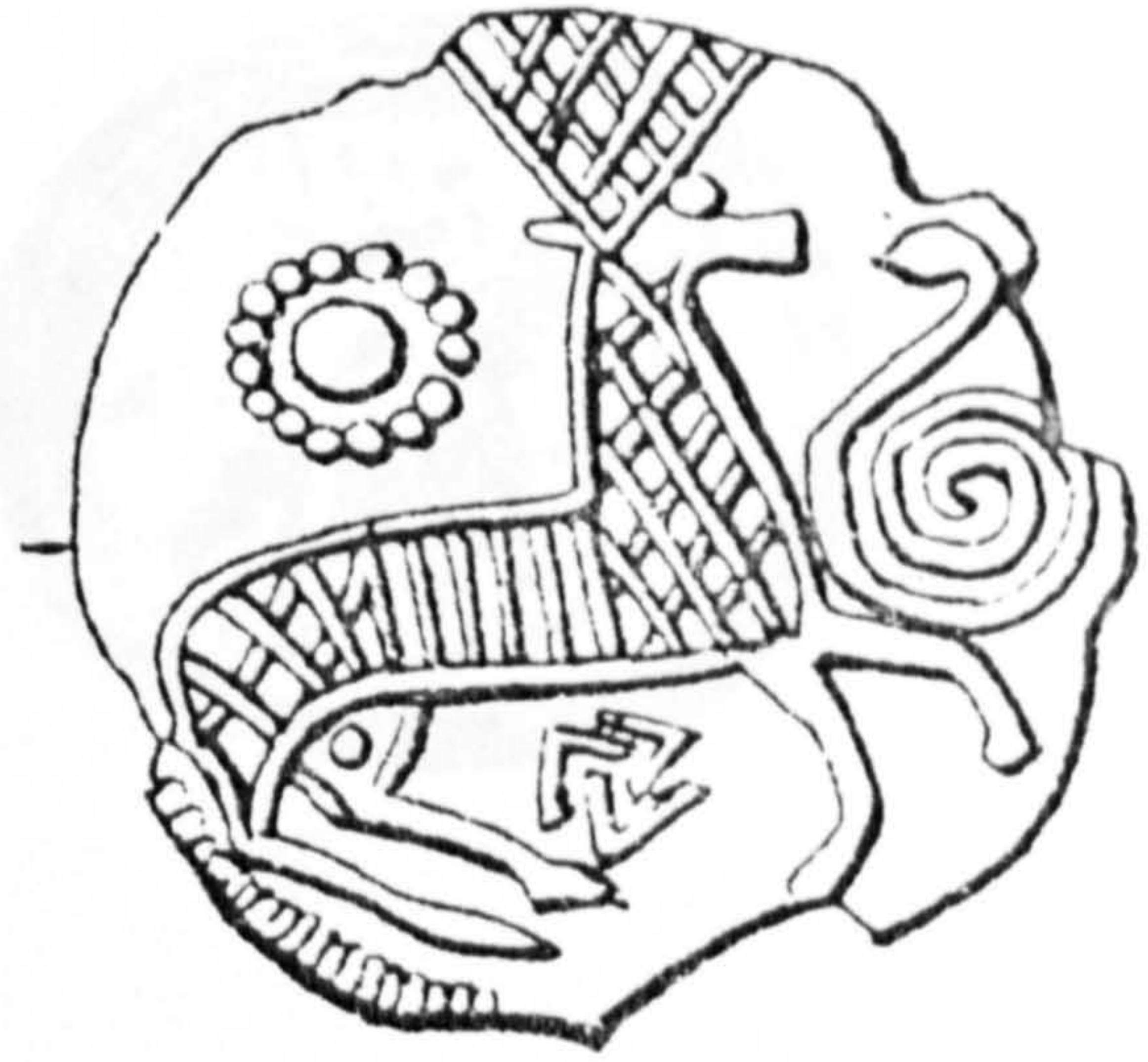




fig. 1

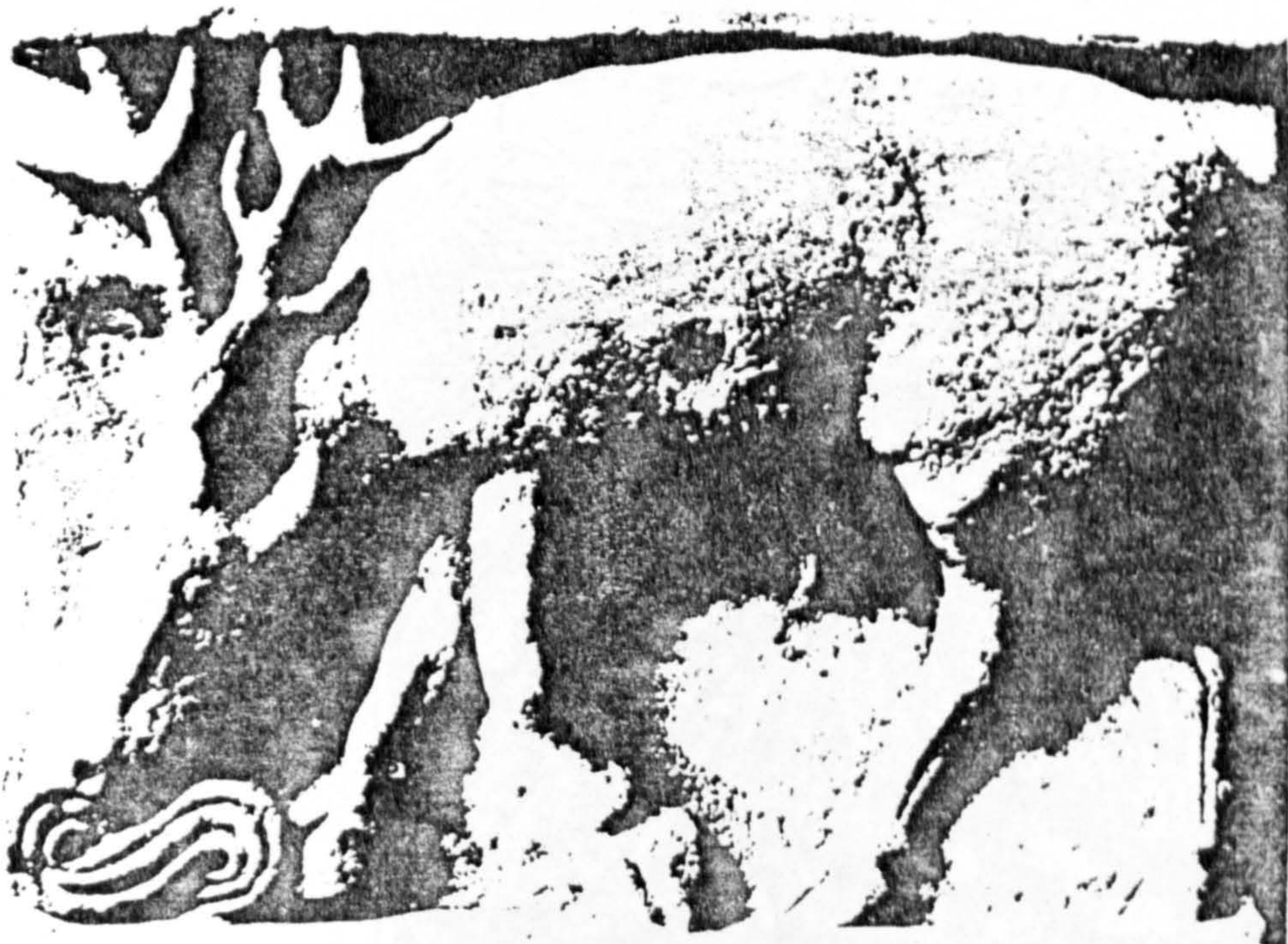
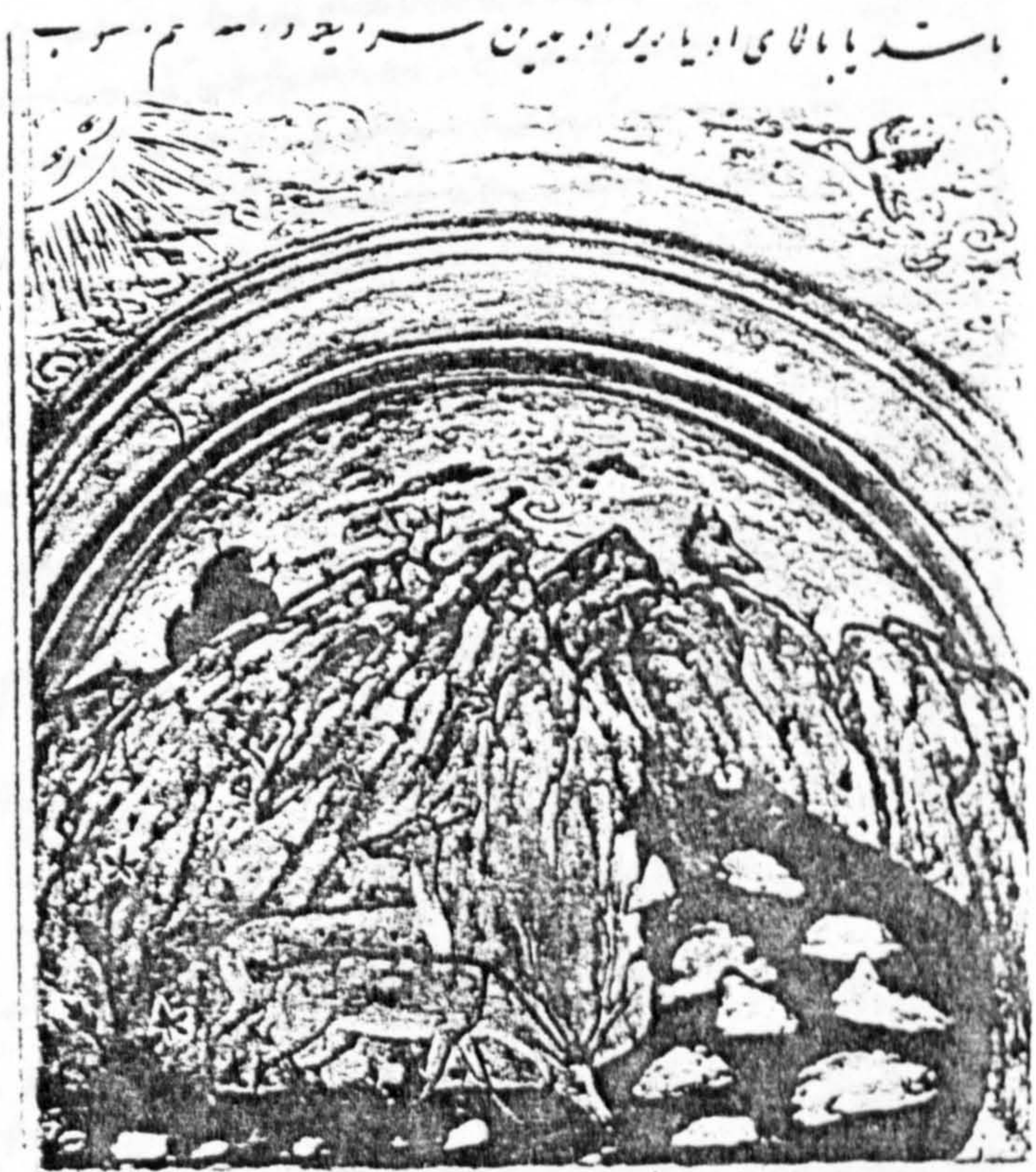
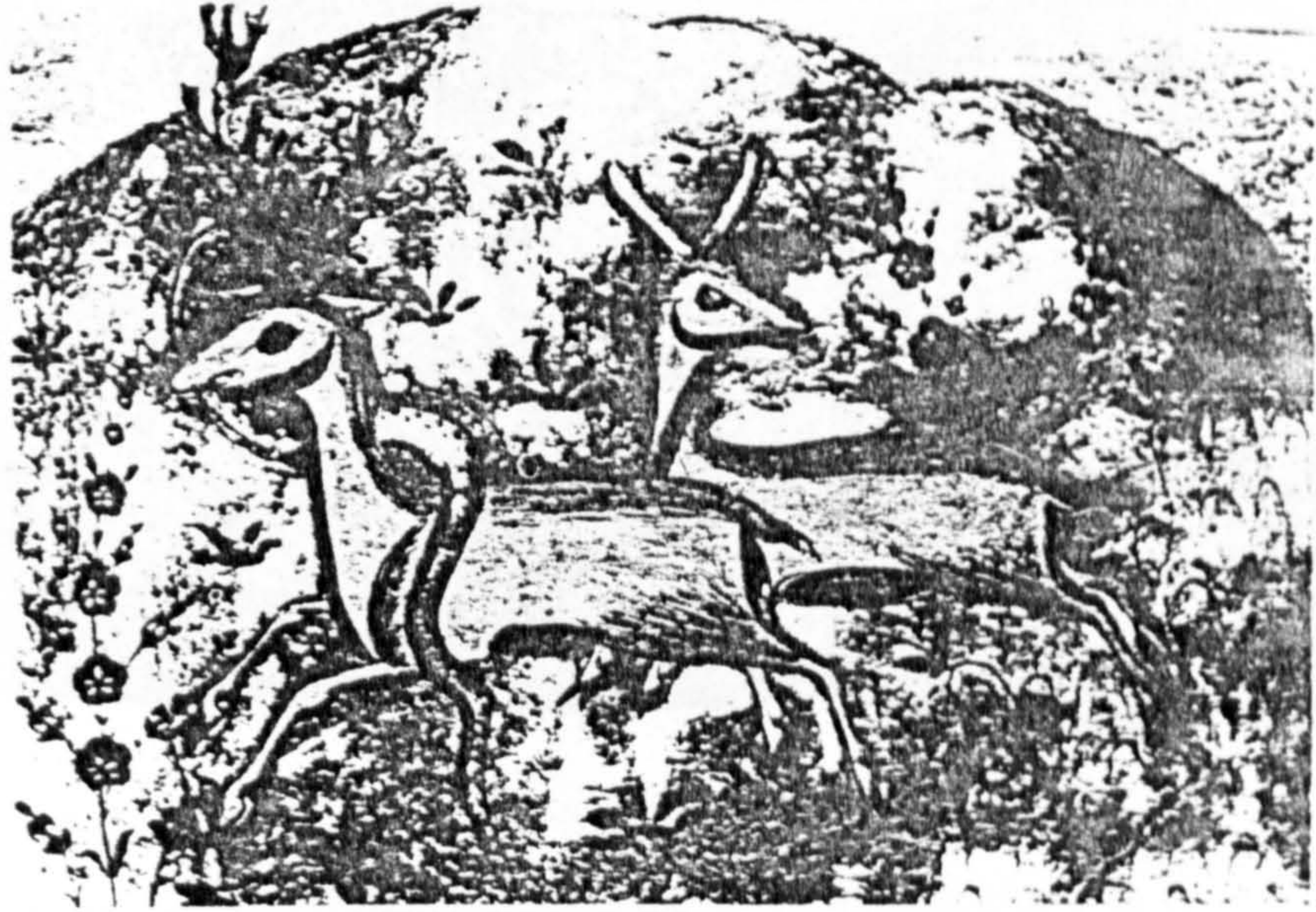


fig. 2



آفت که کرده که چک باشد شکل مرایی جهان نماید که در خارج باشد در

الذي فاعله طويقتن الا انه اصغر منه وفي وسطه شئ نائي من
الوزق شبيه بالصلب من ظهر الانسان واذا فرك الوزق فاجت
منه رائحة الورد وطعمه شبيه بطعم الجوز المصري الطري والوز

ت
د
نوراس



هذا النبات قوم بزره واذا دق دقا ناعما وظظها الخس
وضمده الازام السليبه في ايتدا كونها حلهما ع ع
• • ذكر الخندق في المصري • •



Plate 43

fig. 1

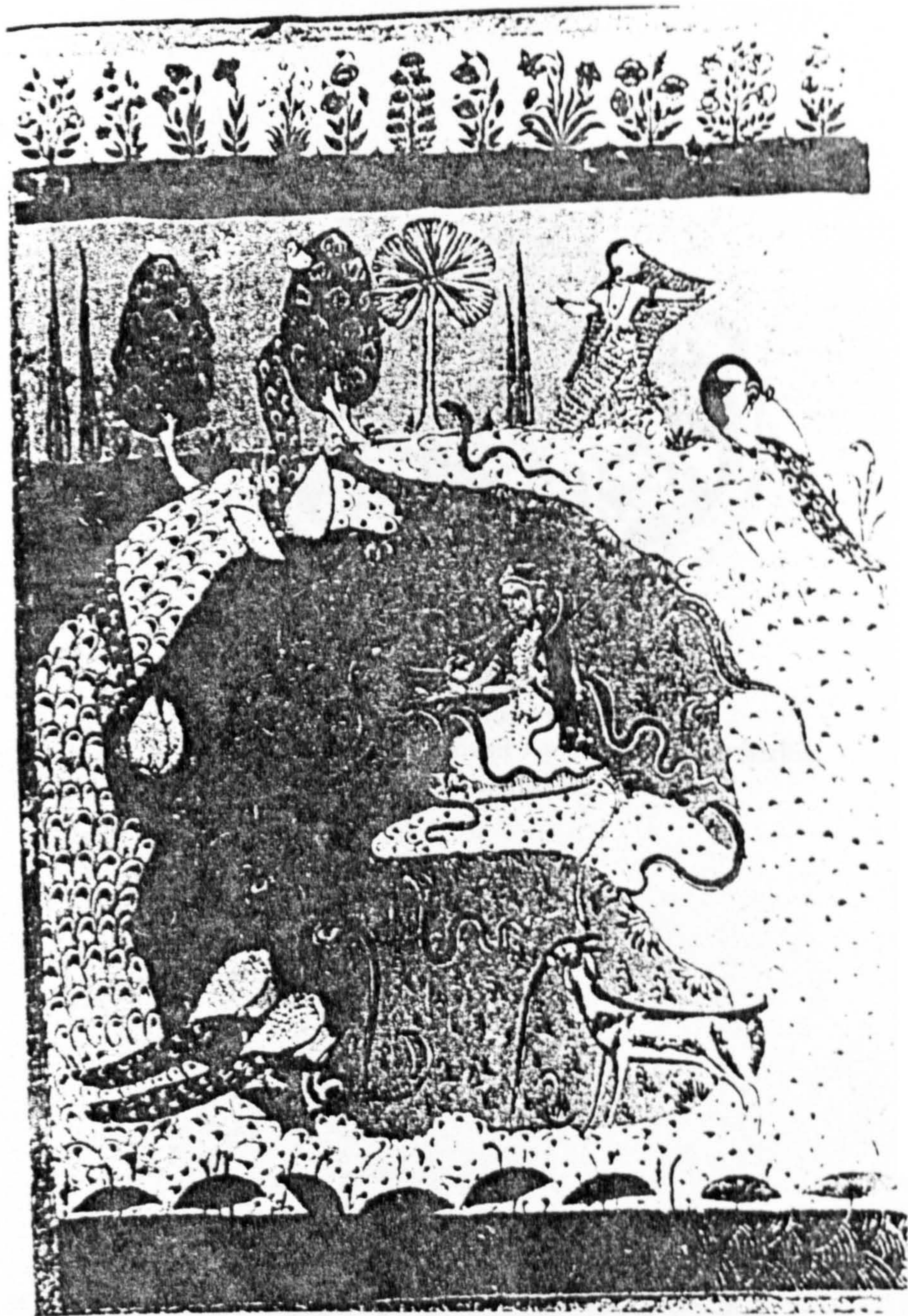


fig. 2

कचितोत्रमहारवनाथकास्यवनतयावाचरखुगणाप्रार
सयमजुलतासकोतिः। आनतरासि



fig. 1



Cerua venenato venantum saucia ferro
Dyctanno quaerit vulneris auxilium.
Hei mihi, quod nullis sit Amor medicabilis herbis,
Et nequeat medica pellicet arte malum!

fig. 2



Mens immota manet.

43

To Sir ROBERT IERMYN Knight.



Pſalm. 41.
 Quemadmodum
 deſiderat Cereus
 ad fontes aquarū:
 Ita deſiderat ani-
 ma mea ad te
 Deus, &c.

By vertue hidde, behoulde, the Iron harde,
 The loadestone drawes, to poynte vnto the ſtarre:
 Whereby, wee knowe the Seaman keepes his carde,
 And rightlie ſhapes, his courſe to countries farre:
 And on the pole, dothe euer keepe his eie,
 And withe the ſame, his compaſſe makes agree.

Which ſhewes to vs, our inward vertues ſhoulde,
 Still drawe our hartes, althoughe the iron weare:
 The hauenlie ſtarre, at all times to behoulde,
 To ſhape our courſe, ſo right while wee bee heare:
 That Scylla, and Charybdis, wee maie miſſe,
 And winne at lengthe, the porte of endleſſe bliſſe.

Virg. in Æna.
 Eſt meritò pietas ho-
 mini cuiuſq; virtus.

Conſcia mens recti fame mendacia ridet.

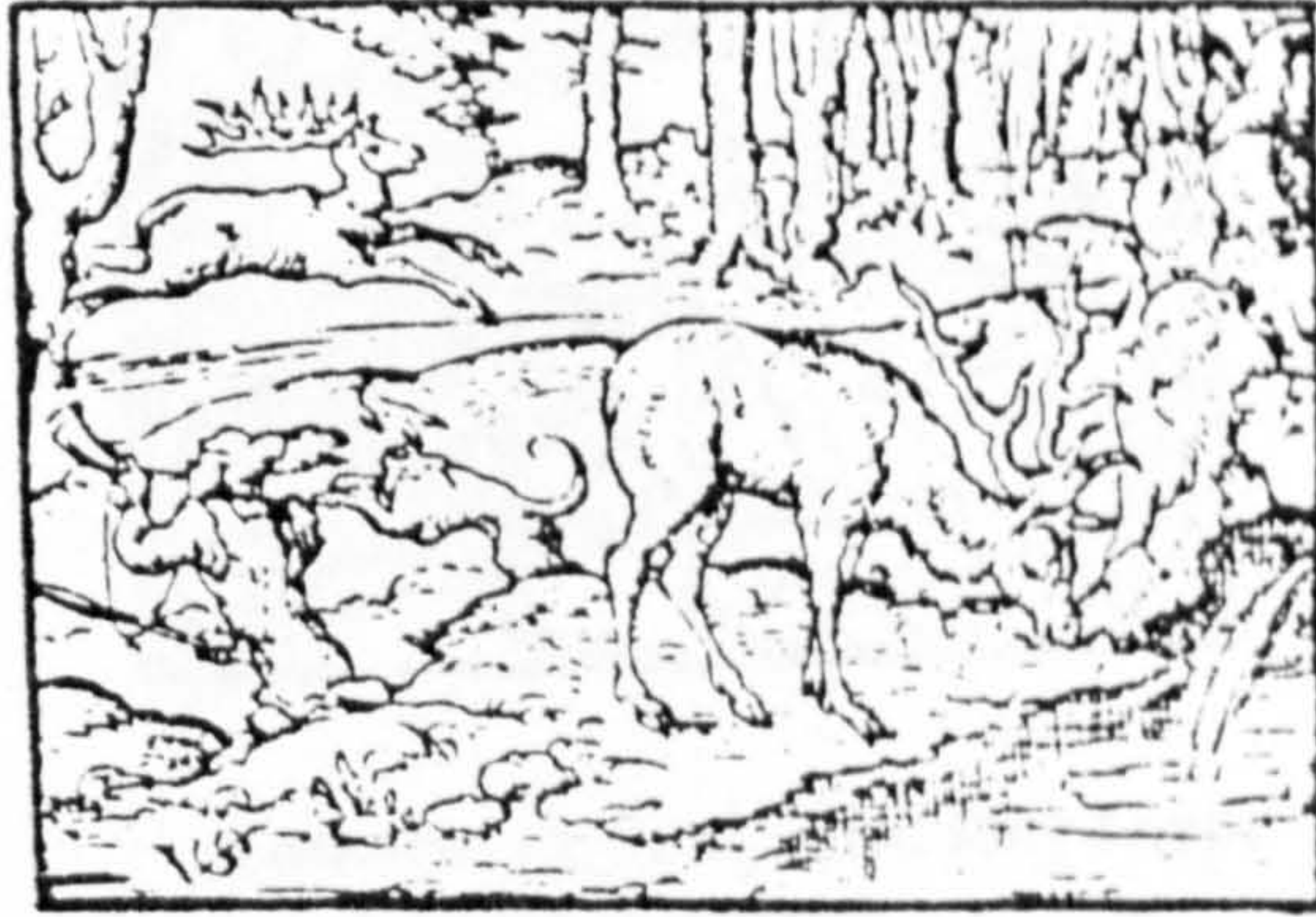
Ouid. 4. Faſt.

*Sufficit & longum probitas perdurat in æuum,
 Perq; ſuos annos hinc bene pendet amor.*

*Ouid. de medic.
 faciei.*

ENSE RECIDENDUM.

Ad Georgium Obrechtum Iuriconsultum.



Corniger e latebris serpentem protrahit atrum
Cervus: et enectum protinus ore vorat.
Tollere caede malos, ferroque domare nocentes;
Iudicis est virtus magna, ducisque boni:
Qui finem statuit cupidinis, atque timoris:
Et rectum paruo tramite monstrat iter.
Culpam poena premit comes: immedicabile vulnus
Chirurgus ferro sanat, et igne, bonus.
Parcere si cupit huic; iam pars sincera trahetur:
Tristia supplicium crimina triste decet.
Crimen vbiq; frequens, si laudi noxia iuncta est:
Tunc virtus, et honos, resque, salusque perit.

VNA SALVS.



Vna salus DEVS est, pia mens solam hanc cape pressa
Aerumnis, sitiens cervus ut ardet aquas.

APOLLO.

Plate 46

fig. 1



*Comuent ilz signifoient long temps
ou uiure longuement.*

*Ilz paignoient le cerf a qui tous les ans les cor
nes repullulent & renouellent.*

g ij

APOLLO.

fig. 2



*Comment ilz signifoiet l'home legier a se
mouuoir mais se mouuant inconsideremēt
& sans raison.*

*Voullans signifier l'homme legier & hastif a se
mouuoir mais sans cause & inconsiderement il
paignoient vng cerf & vng serpent pource que
le cerf senfuyt quant il veoit le serpent.*

l iij

fig. 3

APOLLO.



*Comment ilz signifioient unz homme
deceu par flaterie.*

Quant ilz signifioient lhomme deceu par fla-
terie ilz paignoient vng cerf & vng menestrier
ou ioueur dinstrument de musique car le cerf
prent plaitir ala douceur du chant tellemēt quil
soublie & se laisse prendre rauy de lharmonie.

Plate 47

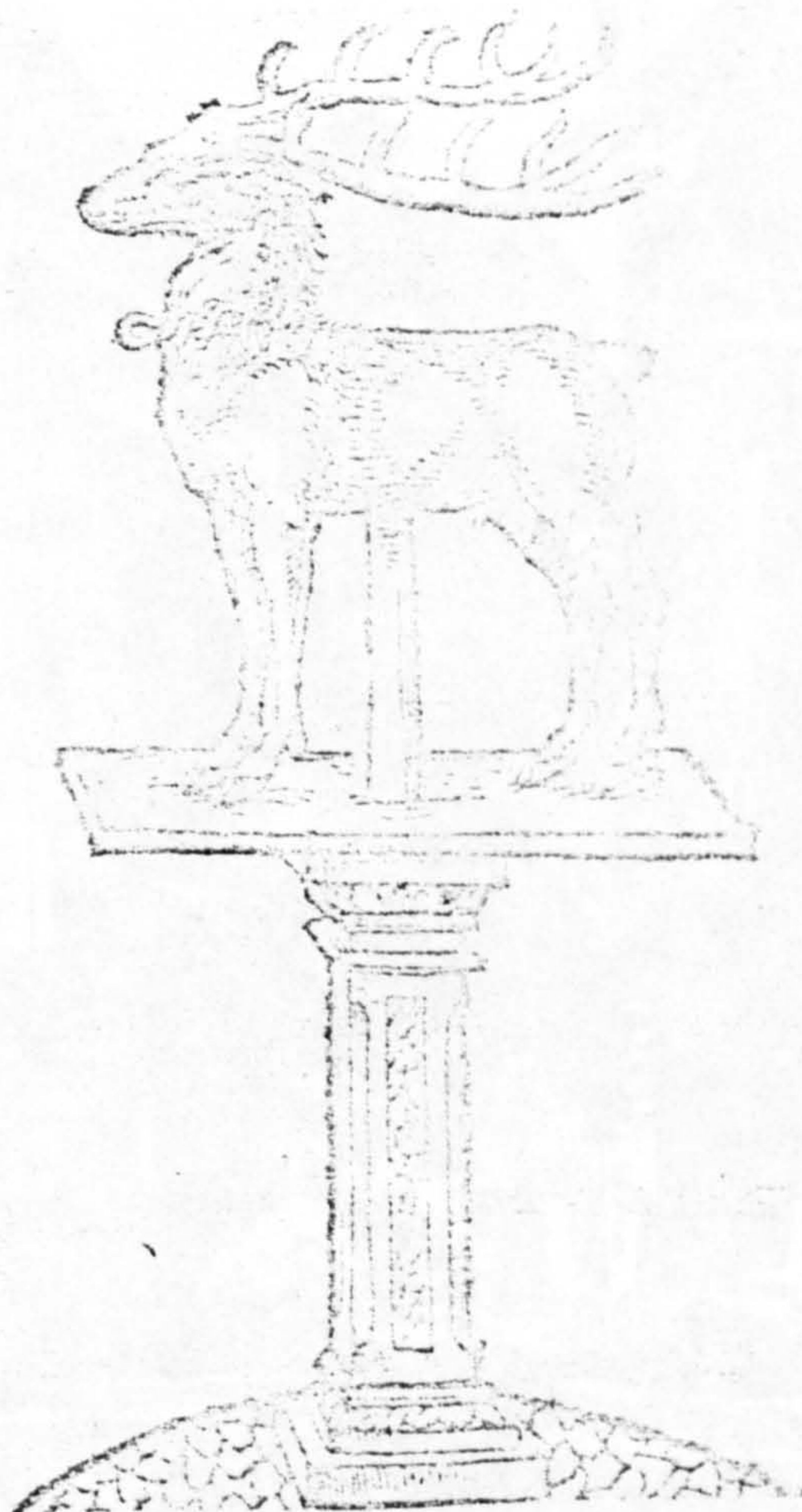


Plate 48

fig.1



fig.2



Plate 50

fig.1

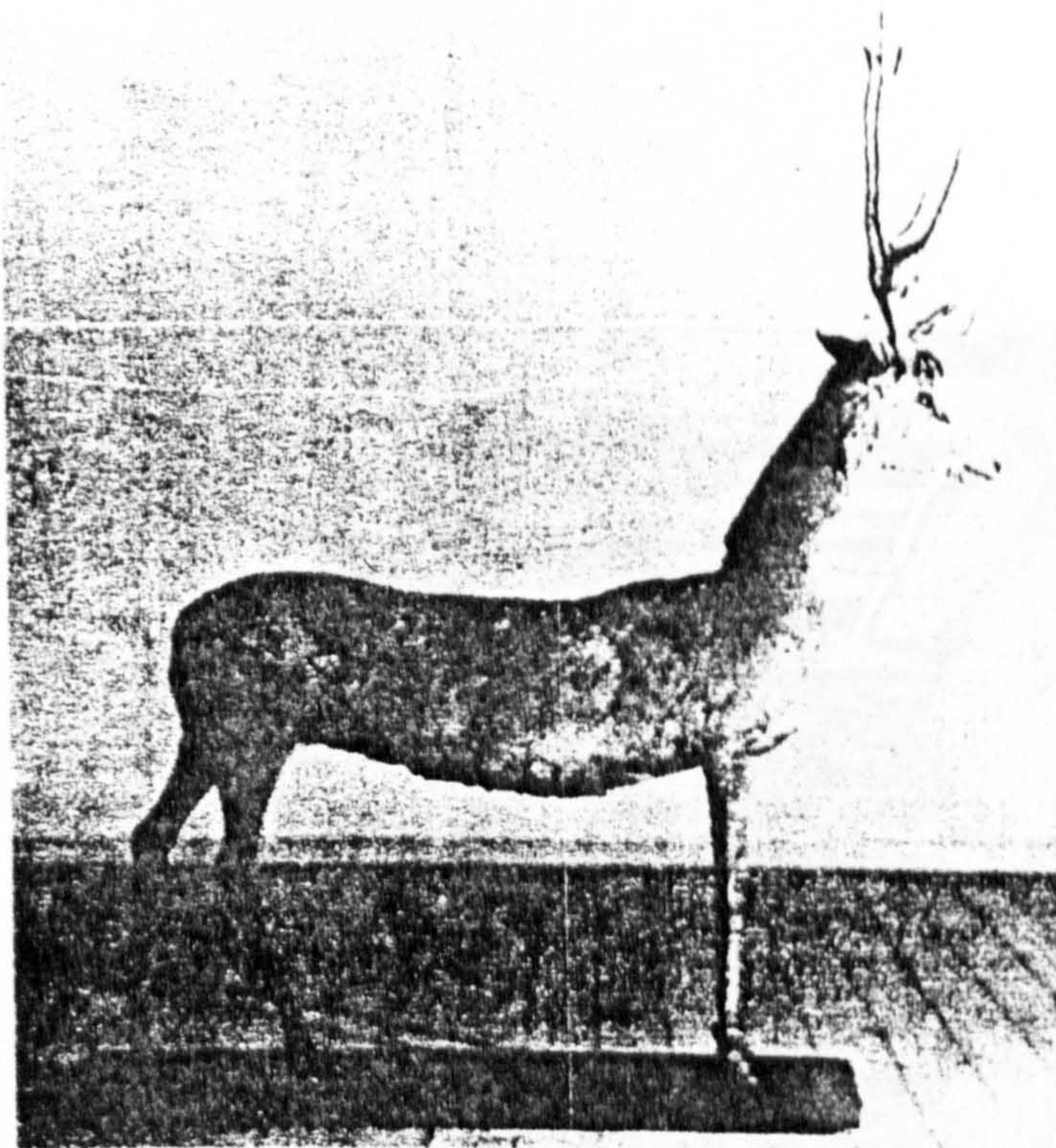
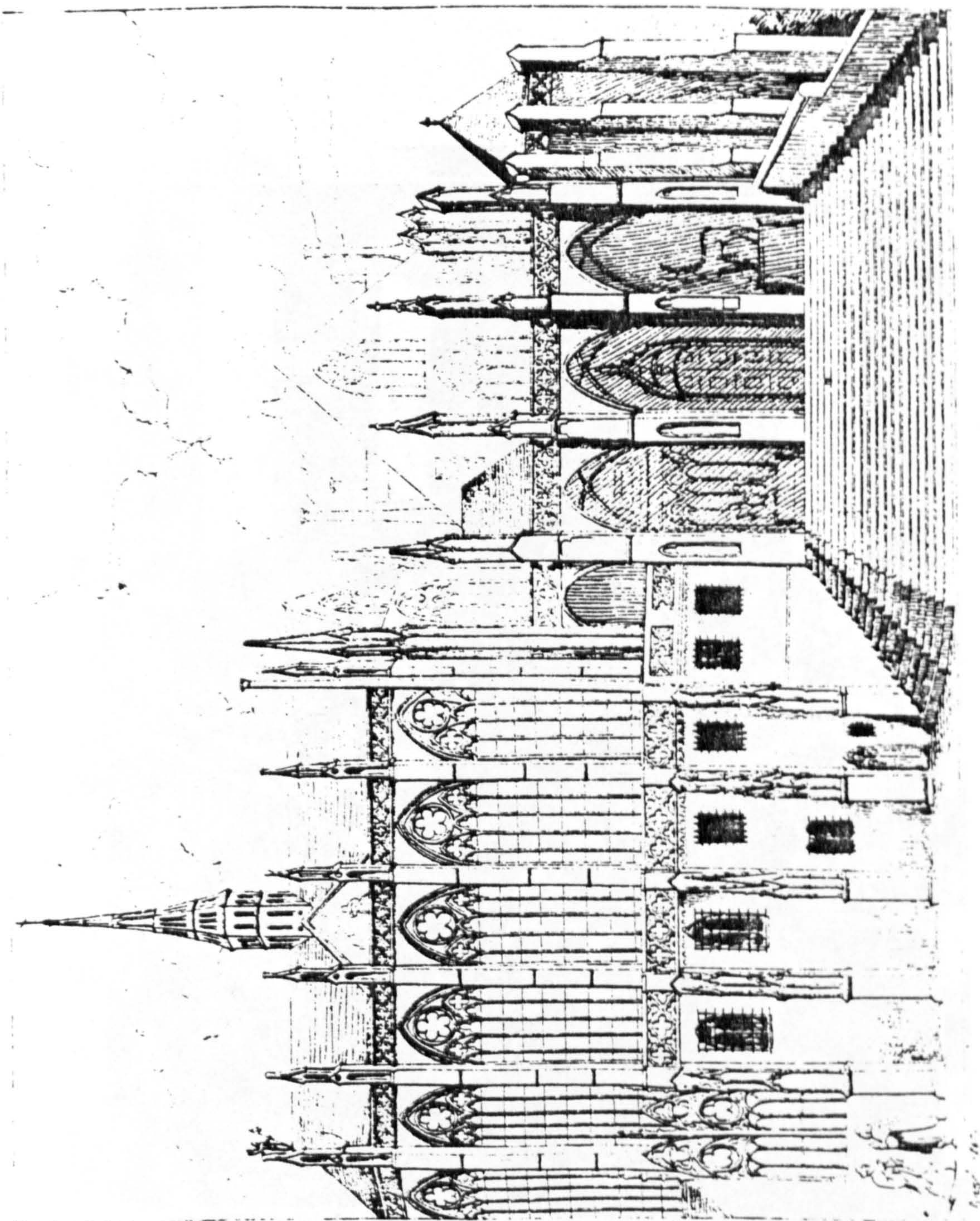
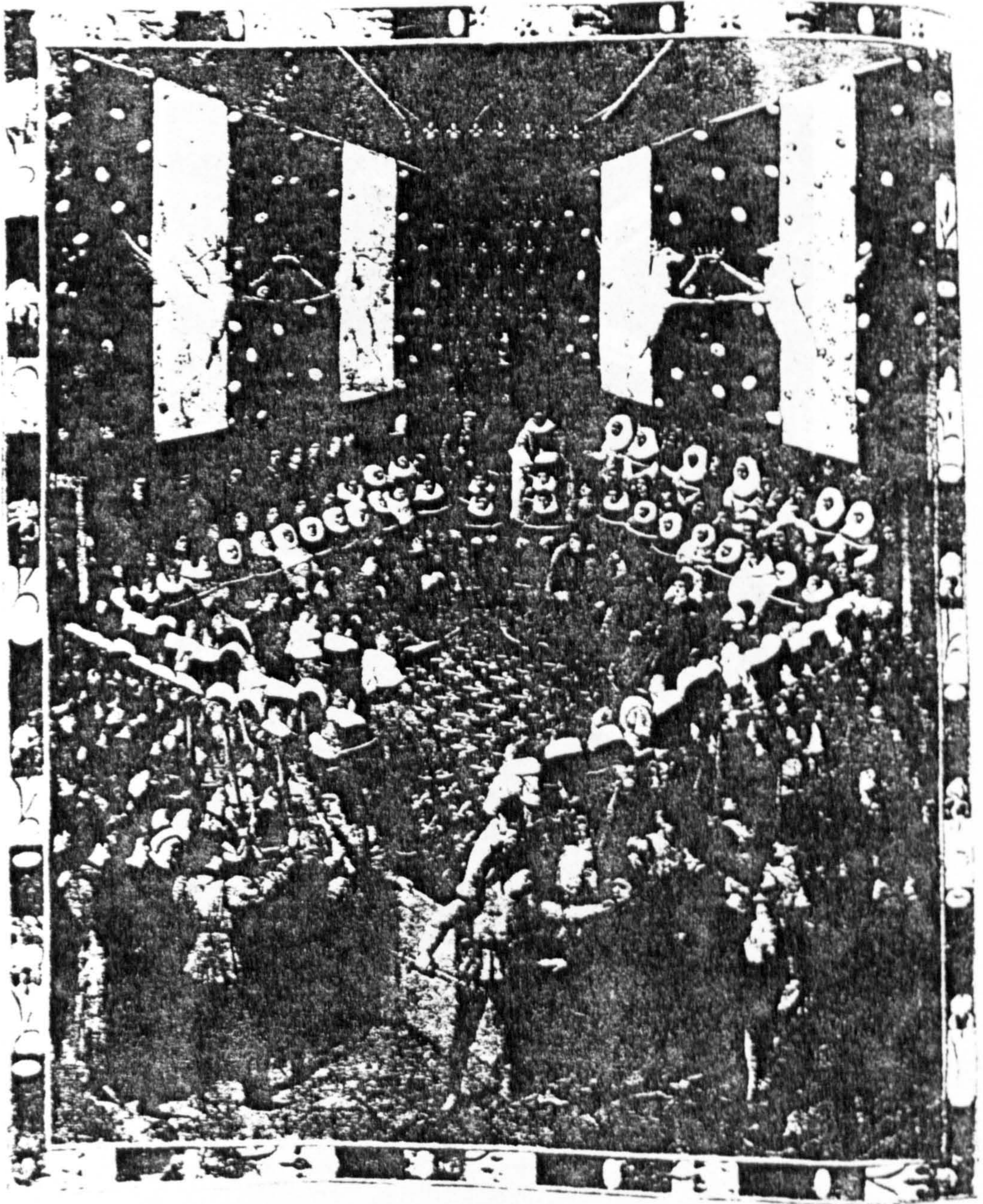


fig.2





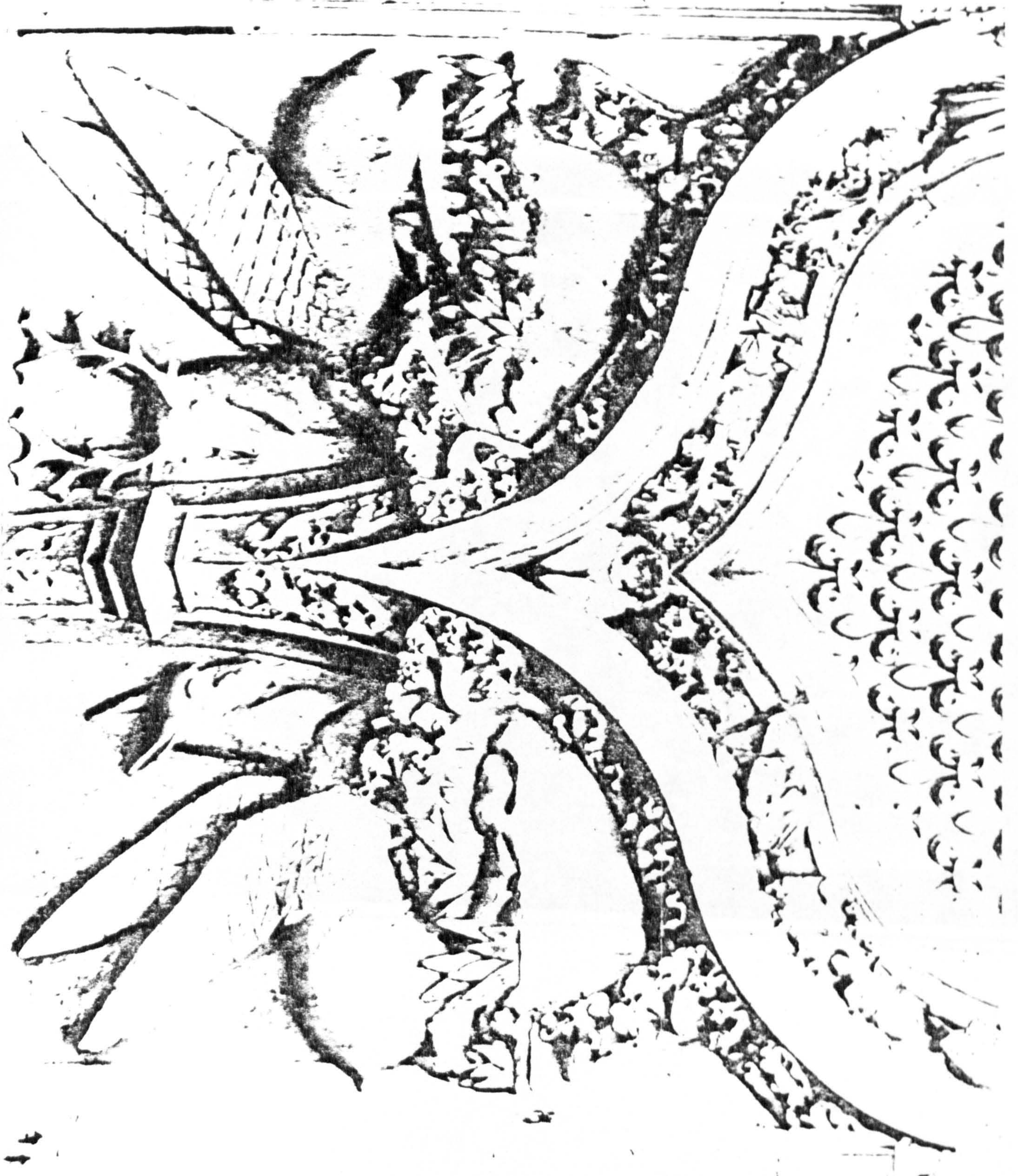


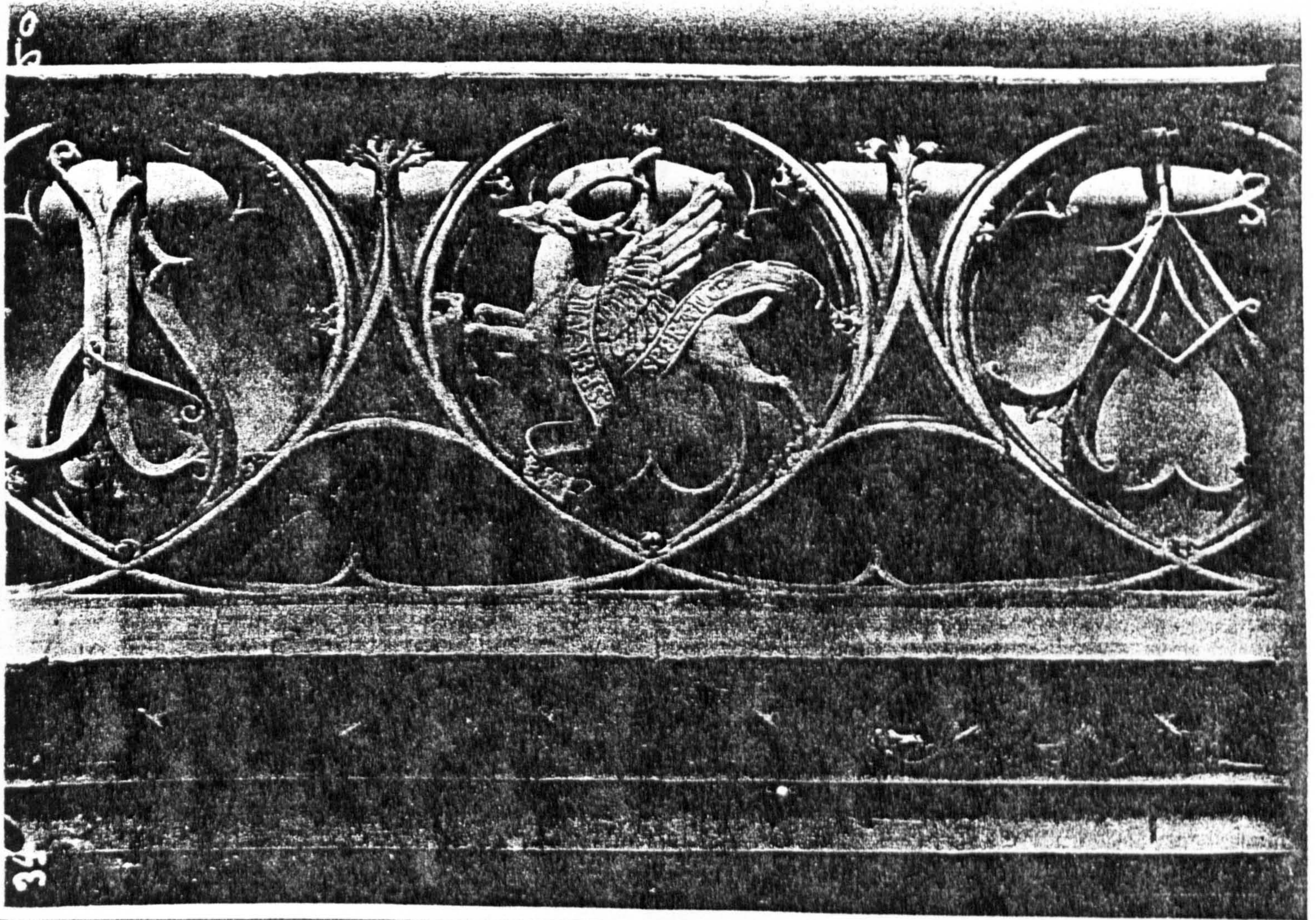






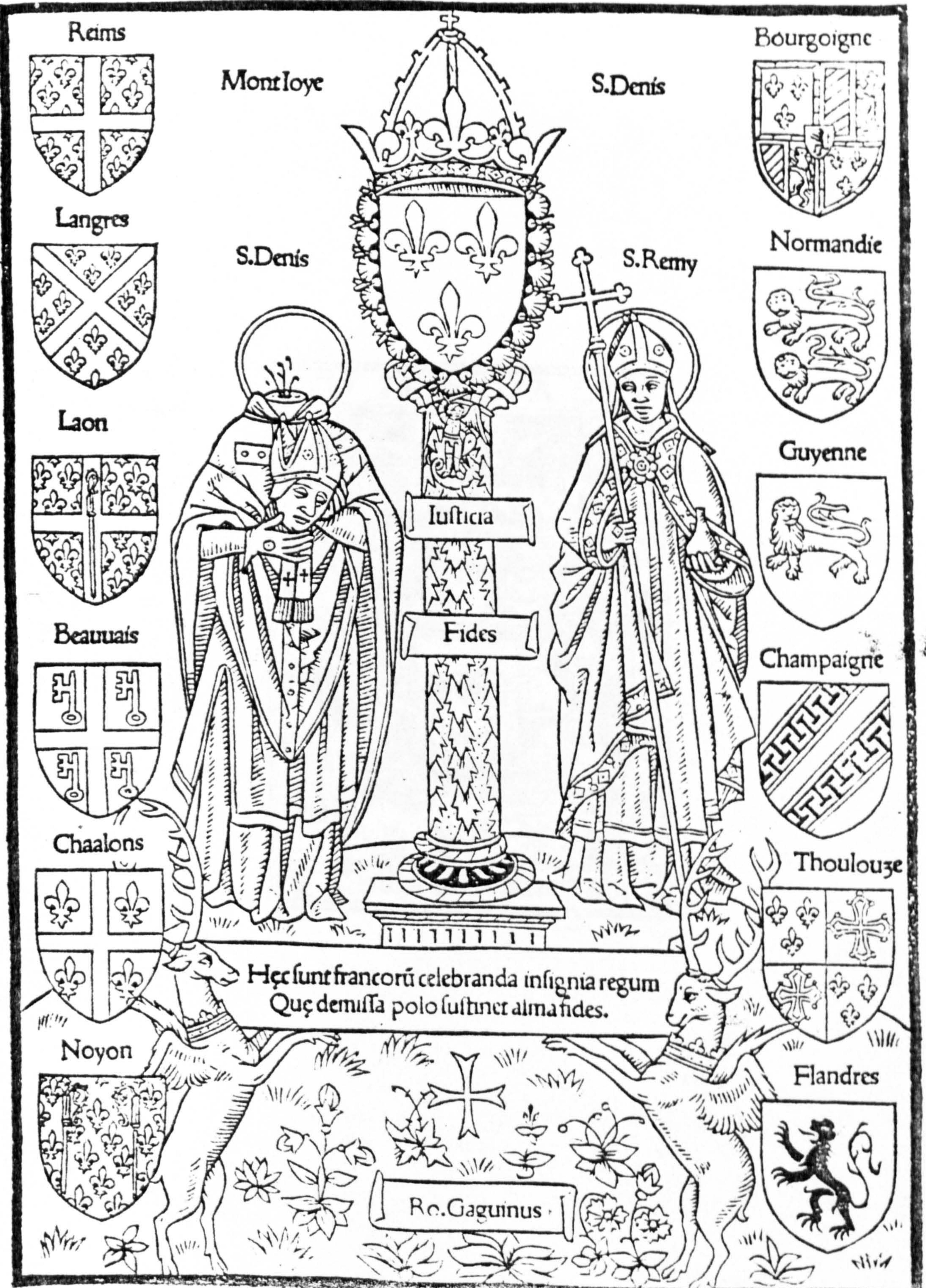














Edm. 1. R. Elizabeth



III Comptroloroylamenti
 Jacobi Croftes militis Comyt
 Hospicu Illustrissime ac
 metuentissime Ducis nre
 Elizabethæ Dei gratia Anglie
 Francie et Hibnie Regine
 Fidei defensor &c. Super
 Comvutun dutho: Erque
 ac nup Coffery et Custod
 Magni Garderobe Hospicu
 Denariorij sumis pro
 de Allocacionibus
 pro vno anno. Integro. viz
 Dec. Duc. Regine
 Anno vni eiusdem Ducis
 plenius contineatur

predet. Tam de omibz et singulis
 expens. Hospicu ddet sup. i. m. onat. dca. de Allocacionibus
 abolitionibus torundem fact. pro vno anno. Integro. viz
 ultimo Die Septembris anno vni Dec. Duc. Regine
 ultimo Die Septembris Anno vni eiusdem Ducis
 Regine ut in Libro sequent. plenius contineatur

Plate 64 fig.1



fig. 2



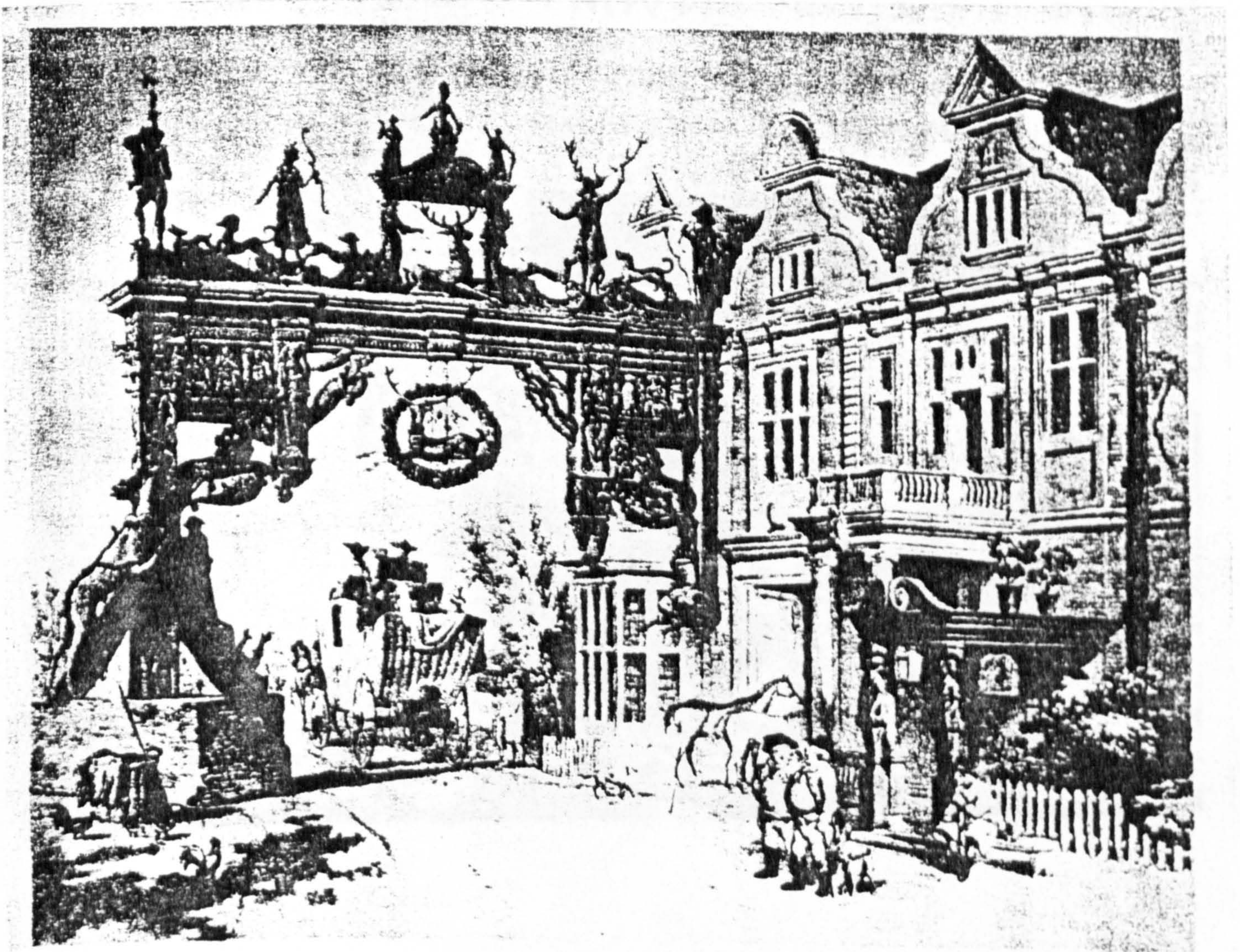
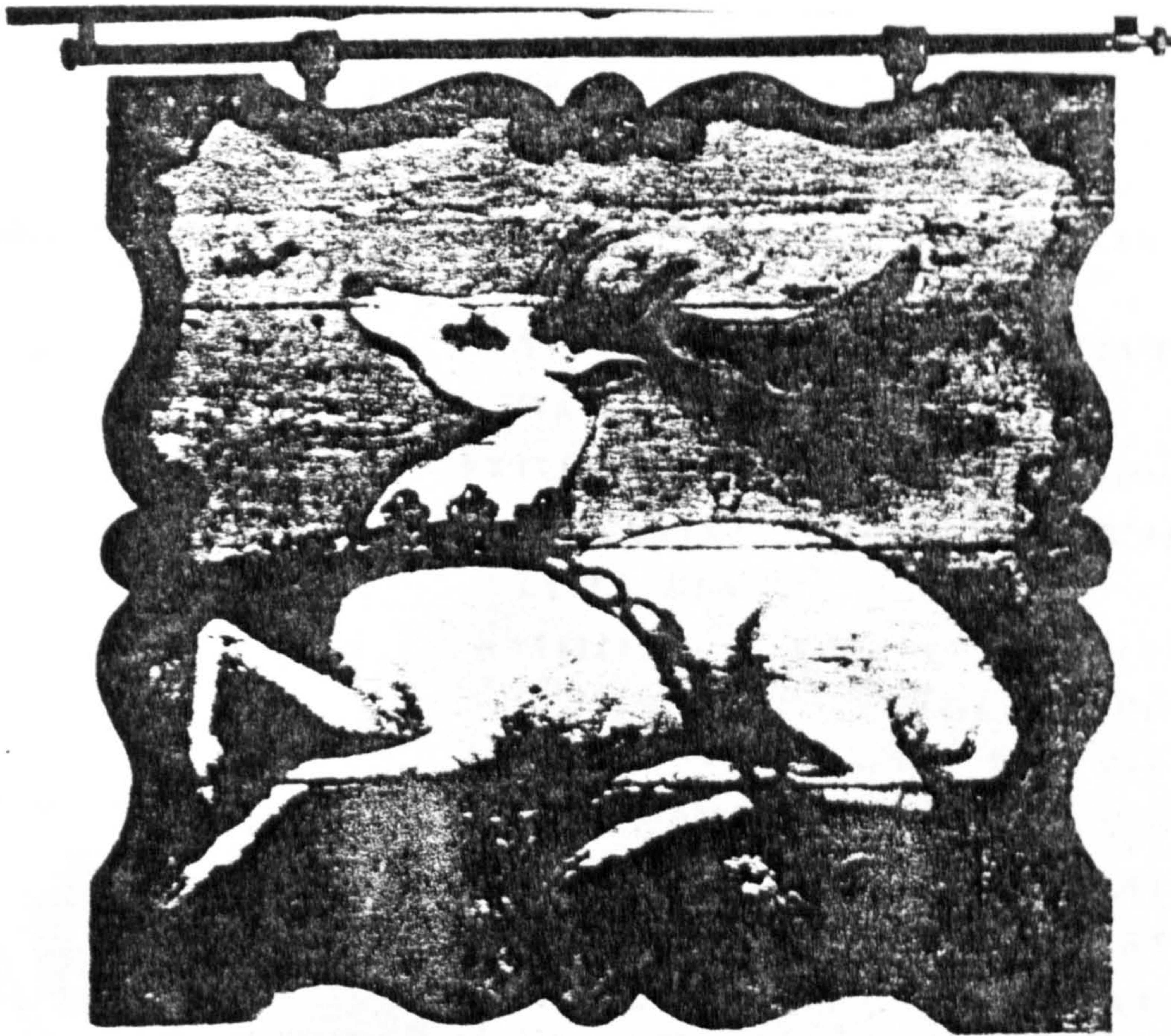


fig. 2

ΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΣ

ΑΙ ΟΙ ΑΝΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΚΥΝΗΣΑΤΕ ΑΥΤΟΝ
ΠΙΝΤΕΣ ΑΙ ΤΡΑΟΙ ΑΥΤΟΥ :

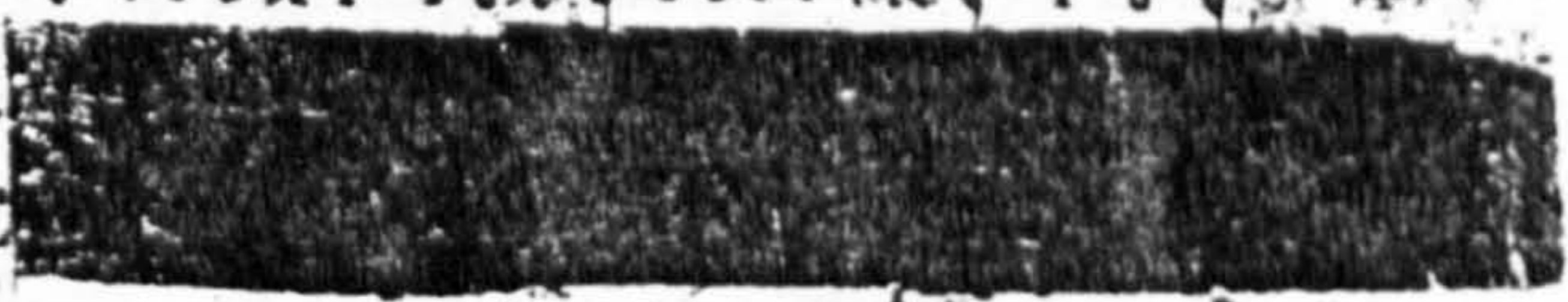
Η ΚΙΝΟΥΣΙ ΚΑΙ ΕΝ ΦΡΑΝΘΗΙΩΝ ΚΑΙ
Η ΓΑΛΛΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΕΝ ΘΑΙΟΥ ΓΑΤΕΡΕΣ ΤΗΣ
ΙΟΥΔΑΙΑΣ :

ΕΝΙΚΕΙΝ ΤΩ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΟΥΚ ΕΣΤΙ
ΕΝΙΚΕΝ ΤΩ ΕΝΕΝ ΕΠΙ ΠΑΣΑΙ ΤΗΙΣ ΤΗΙΣ
ΕΦΘΑΡΑΝ ΤΟΥ ΨΩΦΗΣ ΕΝΕΡ ΠΑΙ
ΓΑΣΤΟΥ ΕΣΤΕ :

ΕΙ ΓΑΡ ΩΝ ΤΗ ΕΝ ΟΜΙΣΗ ΜΙΣΕΙΤΕ
ΠΟΤΗΡΑΙ ΟΥΚ ΕΣΤΙ ΚΕΤΑ ΕΨΥΧΑΙ
ΤΩΝ ΔΕΙΩΝ ΑΥΤΟΥΝ : ΕΙΣ ΧΕΙΡΟΣ ΑΜΙΑΡ
ΤΩΛΟΥΡΝ ΣΑΙΤΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΥΝ :

ΩΣ ΑΝ ΕΤΕΙ ΑΕΝ ΤΩ ΔΙΚΑΙΩ : ΚΑΙ
ΤΟΙΣ ΕΝ ΦΕΙΤΗ ΚΑΡΔΙΑ ΕΝ ΦΡΟ
ΣΥΝΗ :

ΕΝ ΦΡΑΝΘΗ ΤΕ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΙ ΕΝ ΤΩ ΚΩ :
ΚΑΙ ΕΞΟΜΟΛΟΓΗΣΘΕ ΤΗ ΜΗ ΜΗ
ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΕΝ ΑΥΤΟΥΝ :



ΑΙ ΑΤΕ ΤΩ ΚΩ ΑΙΜΑ ΚΑΙ ΝΟΝ :



ΕΣΤΙΝ ΤΩ ΕΝΕΝ
ΕΝΕΝ ΤΩ ΕΝΕΝ
ΕΝΕΝ ΤΩ ΕΝΕΝ

ΕΝΕΝ ΤΩ ΕΝΕΝ
ΕΝΕΝ ΤΩ ΕΝΕΝ





fig. 1



fig. 2





Plate 69

Plate 70

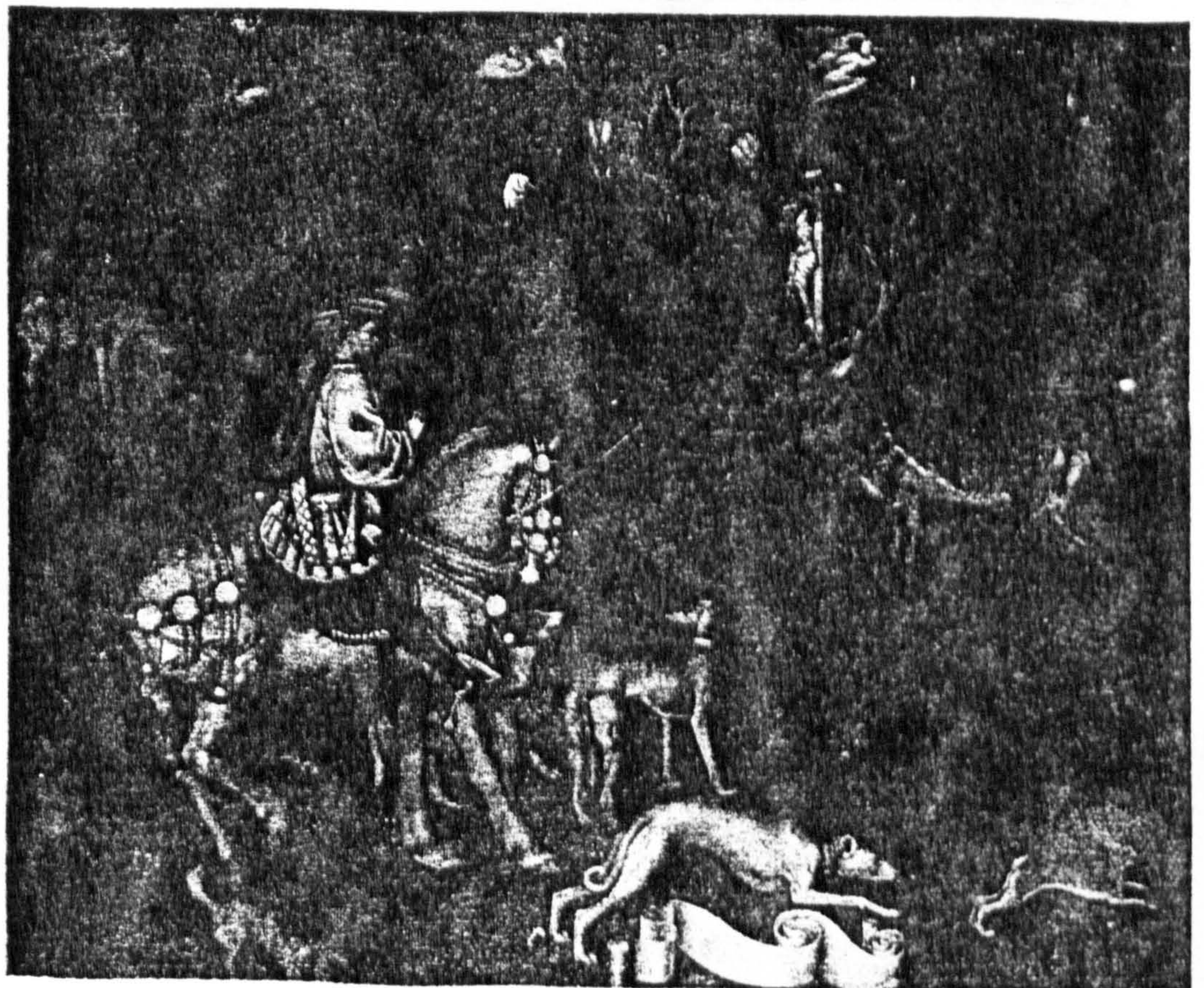


Plate 71



