

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your email. Your information about the discovery of the bowl obviously derives from an article on msnbc.com by Jennifer Viegas. Unfortunately, Ms Viegas wasn't very precise in her report and has made some false statements.

Here is some information that might be of interest for you:

There is no proof whatsoever that the bowl with the engraving is in fact the earliest reference to Christ. Also important: Franck Goddio and his excavation team haven't done any interpretations on the engraving on the bowl themselves. As an underwater archaeological team they have discovered and dated the bowl but haven't done any epigraphical interpretations. This has been falsely reported in the article "Earliest reference describes Christ as 'magician'" by Jennifer Viegas on msnbc.com and has been in parts corrected now, see <http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2008/10/01/jesus-bowl.html> !!!

Fact is: A couple of scientists have studied the engraving and have come to different conclusions. The one hypothesis that Christ (in relation to Jesus-Christ) is mentioned on the bowl comes from Prof. André Bernard, epigrapher and Professor emeritus of French Universities.

But as I said, this is just one interpretation out of others. For a summary of the interpretations please see document attached. The study of the bowl by scientists is still ongoing. Let's see what new interpretations we might get.

Kind regards,

Katrin Wollgast
Public Relations for Franck Goddio Society



Ceramic Bowl
Alexandria
Roman times (1st Century BC and 1st Century AD)
Alexandria Maritime Museum (C1_3557)

by David Fabre, Doctor in Egyptology, member of the
European Institute of Submarine Archaeology

This bowl was discovered on the last IEASM archaeological mission in the *Portus Magnus* in Alexandria, close to the modern Corniche, at the foot of the peninsula that stretches towards the island of Antirhodos on the former coastline now submerged.

Bowl C1_3557 was found in an even context of the first half of the 1st century AD, associated with oriental sigillated, thin-walled goblets and imported culinary ceramic. This thin-walled ceramic, however, dates back to the 1st century BC. It is a careened cup with handles, well preserved. Close forms are present in Pergamon, for production between the late 2nd century BC and the early 1st century AD. Bearing in mind the technical characteristics and



type of this specimen, this jug very likely comes from a workshop in the west of Asia Minor.

This bowl is engraved with *DIA CHRSTOU O GOISTAIS* made after baking as the incisions have taken away the slip. This inscription is at least enigmatic; it dates back either to the 1st century BC (dating of the ceramic) or the first half of the 1st century AD (dating of the occupation) and offers different hypotheses of reading.

Different hypotheses of reading

For Pr. Bert Smith of Oxford University, it might be a dedication or a present made by a certain Chrestos belonging to an association (maybe religious) called *Ogoistais*. In this sense, Pr. Klaus Hallof, director of the Institute of Greek inscriptions in the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of inscriptions believes that it is necessary to connect “*ogostai*” to known Greek denominations of religious associations such as *Hermaistai*, *Athenaistai*, *Isiastai* which gathered worshippers of the god Hermes or the goddess Athena and Isis. “*Ogo*,” according to this hypothesis, would be a divine form of expressing the god Osogo or Ogoa of whom Strabon and Pausanias talk with regard to a divinity worshipped in Milas, in Caria.



The goet?

According to the interpretation of Pr. André Bernand, Professor emeritus of French Universities, *Goistais* might be a mistaken graphic of *goes*, the “*goet*”, that is, the “*magician, the sorcerer, the charmer, the magus*”. This hypothesis becomes even more seducing as the expression introduced by “*dia*” is typical of these casters of chance and soothsayers well-known by the classical texts. According to this supposition, the writing could then be translated either as “*by Chrestos/Christos the magician*”, or “*the magician by Chrestos/Christos.*”

Having said this, is it possible to specify the nature of the practised magic ritual with the help of this bowl?

A lecanomancia?

A certain number of elements lead us to imagine that this bowl was used by a magus to tell the future by evoking gods or the dead, questioning about the content of the vessel. This hypothesis could therefore be based on lecanomancia which is one of the oldest forms of artificial divination. It has been known in Mesopotamia probably since the 3rd millennium BC; the soothsayer interprets the forms taken by the oil poured into a cup of water in



an interpretation guided by manuals. There is one “hallucinating” variant: the medium, or the soothsayer themselves, goes into a kind of trance when studying the oil in the cup. They therefore see the divinities or supernatural beings appear that they call to answer their questions with regard to the future. Two Egyptian earthenware statuettes, dating from the Middle Empire, might be the first signs of lecanomanzia in Egypt¹. They show a kneeling child leaning his chin on a jug he is holding with his two hands. The shape of the vessel is very similar to that of the bowl discovered in the Portus Magnus in Alexandria (a bowl with two handles and careened belly). The position of the seer performing his art illustrates the practices described in the demotic and Greek scrolls.

Chrestos/Christos and Christ?

If Chrestos is a widely accepted name in Greek onomastics, *chrestos* or *christos* is the Greek word that translates the Hebrew *māšīah*, “*messiah*”, “*Christ*” of the would refer to Jesus-Christ to legitimise his magic abilities. Transformation of

¹ One is conserved in the Royal Museum of Art and History in Brussels (former Mac Gregor Collection, E. 7421), and the other to the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York. This comes from the Licht’s searches (no. 22.I.124)



water into wine, multiplication of loafs, miraculous curing, resurrection... The story of Christ must have been veritable manna for the magician who could find (mythical) precedents to his questions and concerns.

To resort to “Christ” to support a magical practice does not mean belonging to the Christian religion. A pagan might appeal to the Christian God, new to them, simply because of his strangeness and the power attributed to him.

It should be remembered that in Alexandria paganism, Judaism and Christianity never evolved in isolation. All of these forms of religiousness came into magical practices that seduced both the humble layers of the population and the most well-off classes. It was in Alexandria where new religious constructions were made to propose solutions to the problem of man, of God’s world. Cults of Isis, mysteries of Mithra, early Christianity bear witness to this.

