

THE BATHING OF THE INFANT JESUS
IN THE JORDAN RIVER AND HIS BAPTISM IN A FONT:
A MUTUAL ICONOGRAPHIC BORROWING IN MEDIEVAL ART

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This paper examines some unusual scenes of the Bath of the infant Christ and his Baptism in medieval art. These Bath scenes present motifs from the Baptism of Jesus and, conversely, the Baptism scenes present motifs from the Bath. While research has so far dealt with representations of the Bath and the Baptism separately,¹ I shall look at the reciprocal borrowing of motifs. The borrowing is not obvious; no theological or liturgical relation between the events has been fully or clearly expressed in exegetical writings. I suggest that the peculiar iconographic similarities reflect a typological relation between the two events in the life of Christ and the sacrament of baptism, already current in ecclesiastical and popular *milieux*.

The first part of the paper will examine some selected scenes of the Bath of the Child and the Baptism that express this typology, focusing mainly on twelfth century northern Spain and southern France, two areas closely connected politically, culturally and ecclesiastically, where the Bath of the Child seems to have enjoyed special popularity at that time.² Medieval Spain also produced a large part of the smaller number of Baptism scenes presenting motifs from the Bath; in the Catalan-Aragonese monarchy, known as the Crown of Aragon, we can in effect see the Bathing of the infant Jesus in the Jordan River and his Baptism

1. See especially V. Juhel, «Le bain de l'Enfant-Jésus. Des origines à la fin du deuxième siècle,» *Cahiers archéologiques*, 39 (1991), 111-132, esp. 128, 130; P.A. Patton, «'Et Partu Fontis Exceptum': The Typology of Birth and Baptism in an Unusual Spanish Image of Jesus Baptized in a Font,» *Gesta*, 33 (1994), 79-92.
2. Juhel, 120ff, 128, 130. On the close links between Catalonia, Provence, the Rhone Valley and Aragon in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries see B.F. Reilly, *The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain 1031-1157* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), esp. 174ff, 210ff. The interchange of motifs was not exclusive to this area.

in a font. The second part will discuss theological and liturgical aspects of the Bath and the Baptism of Christ, and the sacrament of baptism, that may explain the typology found in the works of art.

1. THE MUTUAL ICONOGRAPHIC BORROWING BETWEEN THE BATH AND THE BAPTISM

The Bath and Baptism of the Christ Child

The Bath of the Child, a frequent scene in Romanesque Nativity cycles, first appeared in Byzantium in the sixth century. The event is not mentioned either in the New Testament or in the Apocrypha. Its source is the bath of the newborn in birth scenes that open the life cycle of an infant in Hellenistic and Roman art. The motif of the bath appears in depictions of the birth of divine infants like Dionysos and Alexander the Great, or of heroes like the Roman princes or of ordinary mortals.³ The bath is usually given beside the mother who is reclining on a couch. A midwife holds the child gently while another woman pours water into the basin. Christian versions usually kept the general scheme and genre-like details, sometimes adding expressions of tender care like testing the temperature of the water or holding the newborn's garment ready to dress him quickly.⁴

There are also medieval images of the Bath of the infant Jesus that present peculiar motifs, taken from the Baptism of Christ and the sacrament of baptism. Among the most common is a baptismal font instead of an ordinary basin (fig. 1), associating the Bath of the infant Jesus with the baptism of an ordinary newborn. Exceptional motifs are a dove hovering over the Christ Child, like the image of the Holy Spirit at his Baptism (Matt. 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32) (fig. 1), and the basin standing in the waters of the Jordan River (fig. 2) – a motif that has not yet been studied. Lastly, some Bath scenes present inscriptions clearly referring to the Baptism.

Contrary to the first bath, the Baptism was a central event in the life of Christ and is recorded in the four Gospels (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34). The Gospels describe Christ's Baptism by

3. P.J. Nordhagen, «The Origin of the Washing of the Child in the Nativity Scene,» *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 54 (1961), 333-337; A. Grabar, *Les voies de la création en iconographie chrétienne, Antiquité et Moyen Age* (Paris, 1979), 97, figs. 71-72; Juhel, 115.
4. The testing of the water can be exemplified by the scene in the Capella Palatina in Palermo, dated c.1143, and the motif of the robe by that in Saint-Pierre-les-Églises (fig.10), near Chauvigny, dated to the tenth century. See G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, I (London, 1971), fig. 159 and Y.-J. Riou, «Saint- Pierre-les-Eglises,» in: *Les peintures murales de Poitou-Charantes* (Centre international d'art mural, Abbaye de Saint-Savin, 1993), fig. p. 51, respectively.

John the Baptist during a general baptism of the people, so that many would have been present. At the moment when Jesus came out of the water, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended over him in the image of a dove. The synoptic Gospels bear witness to the voice that spoke from heaven proclaiming: «This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.»⁵ Matthew and Mark specify the Jordan River as the site of the sacred event, while Luke implies it.⁶

The description of the event in the Scriptures is the source of the basic visual scheme of the Baptism, which includes John the Baptist, Christ immersed in the water, and the dove hovering over him. This scheme was followed in Christian art of all periods from the third century on.⁷ The scene became a proof of Jesus' divine origin as well as an iconographic interpretation of the Trinity.⁸

In the light of its scriptural source, it is surprising to find clear deviations in some medieval scenes of the Baptism. The most outstanding is the depiction of Christ being immersed in a font instead of the waters of the Jordan (fig. 3). Although only a small number of such scenes are known, the departure from the sacred source is nonetheless significant. Like the Bath scenes borrowing motifs from the Baptism, this peculiar type of Baptism draws a typological association between the two events not explicitly stated in the exegetical literature. In addition, an angel, unexpectedly assisting in the sacred event in many depictions, can suggest a theological and liturgical relation between the Baptism of Christ and the baptism of the newborn Christian.

Baptismal motifs in scenes of the Bath

A most common baptismal motif in depictions of the Bath of the Child is a basin that looks like a chalice-shaped baptismal font, as in Saint-Trophime d'Arles (fig. 1), Notre-Dame-des-Tables,⁹ Saint-Martin-des-Puits,¹⁰ Montsaunès,¹¹ Sant Pere de Sorpe,¹² Vals¹³ and Le Boulou,¹⁴ to name only a few examples from the region we are focusing on.

The artist and the patrons of Saint-Trophime d'Arles were not content with bathing the infant Jesus in a baptismal font. In the scene of the

5. Matt. 3:17. In Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22 the voice addresses Jesus.

6. Luke 3:3 and 4:1.

7. Schiller, I, 127ff.

8. A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography. A Study of its Origins* (Princeton, 1968), esp. 115 (Bollingen Series XXXV.10); Schiller, I, 128, note 3.

9. Juhel, fig. 27.

10. Ibid., fig. 28.

11. Ibid., fig. 30.

12. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Also J. Sureda, *La pintura románica en Cataluña* (Madrid, 1981), 90.

13. Juhel, fig. 21.

14. Ibid., fig. 25.

Bath on a corbel of the west portal (fig. 1), the dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit descends towards the Child as in the Baptism of Christ.¹⁵

A similar motivation – to further stress the association of the Bath with the Baptism of Christ – may explain the mural painting in Sant Pere de Sorpe (fig. 4). In this Catalan church, the inscription EM-MANUEL emphasizes the divine nature of the Child, which is suggested in Matt. 1:23 following the prophecy of Isaiah (7:14). Thus, the name Emmanuel refers to a typological relation between the Bath and the Baptism, testifying to the presence of God at the washing of the Child as in the epiphany at the Baptism (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).

The depiction of the infant Jesus solemnly blessing, while taking his first bath, also reminded believers that the Child was the Son of God incarnated, and evoked the mystery of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ This motif occurs, for example, in St.-Trophime d'Arles, St.-Martin-des-Puits and Sant Pere de Sorpe.

The Jordan River, a most unexpected baptismal motif in an image of the Bath, has passed unnoticed by scholars. This prominent motif appears in the Bath scene in Sant Esteve de Polinyà (fig. 2) and most probably also in Santa Maria de Barberà del Vallès (fig. 5), two neighboring churches in the Vallès Occidental, whose mural paintings are dated to the second half of the twelfth century. In both churches, the infant Jesus is immersed in a barrel, a genre motif reflecting the bathing of a child.¹⁷ In the Polinyà Bath, the barrel clearly stands in the waters of a river. In the light of the baptismal motifs in scenes of the Bath and the connection between the baptism of believers and the Baptism of Christ, which we have already seen, this river is obviously the Jordan, the site of the Baptism of Christ. In addition, in the Bath scenes in both churches the women place their hands on the Child's breast and shoulder in a gesture similar to that of John in the Baptism of Christ.¹⁸ Also, the erect, ceremonial posture of the Child immersed in the washing tub, and the symmetrical composition,¹⁹ are typical of Baptism images. In the Barberà church the lower part of the scene was lost, and the restorer completed it according to his imagination. Strong iconographic similarities between the mural paintings of the two churches suggest that in Barberà,

15. The Bath of the Child figures twice in Saint-Trophime: as an individual scene on a corbel of the west portal, and as a motif in a Nativity scene on a capital in the cloister. See Juhel, fig. 32.

16. Matt. 28:19. Also M. Righetti, *Historia de la Liturgia*, II (Madrid, 1956), 625, 627-628, 635-636.

17. The Bath of the Child in a barrel appears also on a capital in the Gargilesse church (Indre) and on the portal of Notre-Dame d'Etampes. See Juhel, p. 124, fig. 24.

18. See, for instance, below, the scene of the Baptism in San Juan de la Peña (fig. 6), Huesca, and San Salvador in Ejea de los Caballeros (fig. 3), Zaragoza.

19. For example at Vals, Le Boulou, Polinyà, Barberà, Saint-Martin-des-Puits, Montsaunès, Gargilesse and Arles.

as in Polinyà, the barrel stood in a river - the Jordan.²⁰ We may conclude, therefore, that the scene of the Bath in the Polinyà and the Barberà churches associated the Bath with the Baptism of Christ, and both sacred events with the baptism of ordinary newborn children.

We should note that the typological links between the Bath of the infant Jesus and his Baptism are not exclusive to our region. In the depiction of the Bath on a baptismal font from Bjäresjö in Sweden, dated to the late twelfth century, an otherwise unrecorded inscription appears: «JOHANNES TOBIESUS...» – John baptizes Jesus...²¹

Bath motifs in scenes of the Baptism

The Catalanian image of the Bath, where the basin stands in the Jordan River, is a reversal of a Spanish type of Baptism, in which Christ is equally unexpectedly immersed in a baptismal font instead of the Jordan River, as stated in the synoptic Gospels. This type of Baptism appears on the archivolt of the north portal of San Salvador in Ejea de los Caballeros, Zaragoza (fig. 3), and on a capital in the cloister of nearby San Juan de la Peña, Huesca (fig. 6), both dated to the late twelfth century.²² A closely related and even more surprising version of the Baptism depicts Christ immersed in a baptismal font standing in the Jordan River. Three examples of this version are known, two of them from medieval Spain. One, the Baptism scene in the Beatus of Turin (Biblioteca Nazionale, ms. I.II.1, fol.136) (fig. 7), was produced in the scriptorium of the Cathedral of Gerona or a nearby center, in the first half of the twelfth century. The second, the scene in the iconographic source of the Turin Beatus — the mozarabic Beatus produced in Leon in 975 — has belonged to the Cathedral of Gerona (ms. lat. 7, fol.189) (fig. 8) since the eleventh century.²³ We should note that in the Beatus miniatures, as well as in the Aragonese reliefs of the Baptism, John the Baptist places his hand on the Savior's breast in a gesture very similar to that of the midwives in some of the images of the Bath that I have discussed. The third, the earliest known example of the Baptism of Christ taking place in a baptismal font standing in the Jordan River, is an ivory from Tournai,

20. L. Arad, *The Church of Santa Maria de Barberà del Vallès: Iconography and Iconology of the Mural Paintings* (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 36, 38, 44ff (in Hebrew).

21. F. Nordström, *Medieval Baptismal Fonts. An Iconographic Study* (Umeå, Stockholm, 1984), 98, fig. 58.

22. M. Melero Moneo, «El llamado 'taller de San Juan de la Peña,' problemas planteados y nuevas teorías», *Locus Amoenus*, 1 (1995), 47-60, esp. 50, 52f.

23. C. Cid and I. Vigil, «El Beato de la Biblioteca Nacional de Turín, copia románica catalana del Beato mozárabe leonés de la Catedral de Gerona», *Anales del Instituto de Estudios Gerundenses*, 17 (1964-1965), 272-277, pl. XVII, figs. 30-31. In both miniatures inscriptions clearly identify the scene and the site.

dated c. 900 (fig. 9).²⁴ In the light of the cultural and ecclesiastical links between the Carolingian Empire, Galia, Catalonia and Hispania,²⁵ a Carolingian iconographic or written source could be at the origins of this compound scheme of the Baptism.

The depiction of Christ baptized in a baptismal font, but not standing in the Jordan River, is even earlier. It figures in two eighth century Anglo-Saxon ivories.²⁶ Other examples of this unusual motif decorate, in addition to the Aragonese churches, four Romanesque baptismal fonts: a twelfth century one from West Haddon, England,²⁷ and three from Sweden, dated to the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries.²⁸

The type of Christ baptized in a baptismal font obviously draws a parallel between this event in the life of the Savior and the rite of baptism.²⁹ A most telling feature appears in the Baptism miniatures in the Gerona and the Turin Beatus (figs. 7, 8): John the Baptist is dressed in full-length sacerdotal garments³⁰ instead of the more usual lappeted fur garment or tunic.

Moreover, the representation of Christ standing in a baptismal font at his Baptism also conveys a typological relation between his first Bath and his Baptism. As we shall see below, the baptismal font was identified with the Jordan River. Therefore it was often adopted to depict the Bath of the Child in order to show this as a prototype of his Baptism. Only eleven examples of this peculiar type of the Baptism of Christ are known, and they belong to mostly unrelated iconographic groups.³¹ The independence of these groups can only attest to the strength of the theological and liturgical association between the Bath of the infant Jesus and his Baptism, and the rite of baptism, in both the clerical and the popular *milieux*.

The San Juan de la Peña Baptism (fig. 6) presents an additional motif that may be drawn from the scene of the Bath: an assistant pouring wa-

24. A. Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser*, I (Berlin, 1914, repr. 1969), no. 159.

25. F. Soldevila, *Historia de España*, I (Barcelona, 1959, 1961), esp. 120ff; R. D'Adabals i de Vinyals, «La Hispània visigòtica i la Catalunya carolíngia,» in: *Dels visigots als catalans* (Barcelona, 1974, 2nd ed.).

26. J. Beckwith, *Ivory Carvings in Early Medieval England* (London, 1972), 23-24, figs. 18-19, 20.

27. Nordström, esp. 100, fig. 17.

28. At Bjäresjö, Grovare and Hillared. See *ibid.*, 98-101.

29. Nordström, 100; Patton, 84, 85. Earlier, Beckwith (Ivory Carvings, 24) suggested that the Baptism in a font, in the Anglo-Saxon ivories, was an error.

30. The liturgical garment was already noted by Cid and Vigil, 274. However, they are not aware of other examples of the Baptism in a font (*ibid.* 277).

31. One group includes the two Anglo-Saxon ivories. The Tournai ivory has features in common both with these ivories and with the Beatus miniatures that depict the Baptism in a baptismal font standing in the Jordan River. A second group is that found in the Crown of Aragon in the twelfth century, to which we can link the mozarabic Beatus miniature and also possibly the Tournai ivory. A third group includes the three Swedish baptismal fonts dated to the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. Another unrelated example is the English baptismal font. See Patton, 88.

ter into the font, like the midwife assisting in the washing of the infant Christ (fig. 10). Though a personification of the Jordan River pouring water from an urn often appears in early Christian, Byzantine and medieval Baptism scenes,³² the position of the assistant beside the font on the Aragonese capital suggests an association with the midwife pouring water into the basin.

Some of these uncommon scenes of the Baptism of Christ in a baptismal font include another sort of assistant who, on the contrary, is very commonly found in depictions of the Baptism taking place, as expected, in the Jordan River. This assistant is an angel. He figures in the Tournai (fig. 9) and the two Anglo-Saxon ivories, and in the West Haddon baptismal font that we have already seen. A Catalanian example of an angel assisting in a canonical Baptism of Christ, in the Jordan River, occurs in a mural painting in Santa Eulàlia d'Estaon, dated to the third quarter of the twelfth century.³³ In the West Haddon baptismal font, the Tournai ivory, the Estaon church and in other Baptism scenes, the angel holds a towel-like cloth or a tunic. The presence of an angel at the Baptism of Christ is mentioned neither in the Gospels nor in the Apocrypha. Most probably, the source of the motif is the liturgy of the sacrament of baptism, in which the deacon assisting the bishop or the *patrini* dry the newly baptized infant or hold the white garment to be worn after the rite.³⁴ Thus, images of an angel holding a cloth or a tunic can also support the proposal that visual representations of the Bath and the Baptism of Christ reflect a typological association between the two events, and between them and the sacrament of baptism.

Lastly, a schematic way of making a typological link between the scenes was used by the sculptor of a baptismal font at Simris in Skåne, Sweden. In the Simris font, the scene of the first bath of Jesus is placed immediately below the scene of his Baptism.³⁵ This juxtaposition should not be considered as incidental. It was certainly intended to link the two events in the life of Christ and associate them with the sacrament of baptism.

32. Medieval examples are several Carolingian ivories, a miniature in the Benedictional of St. Ethelwood, and a miniature in the Hortus Deliciarum. See Schiller, I, figs. 366, 368, 369, 371, 364.

33. N. de Dalmases and A. José i Pitarch, *Els inicis i l'art romànic s. IX-XII* (Barcelona, 1990), fig. p. 278 (Història de l'Art Català, I); M. Pagès i Paretas, «A propos des saints peints sur l'abside de Sainte-Eulalia d'Estaon, en Catalogne,» *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuixà*, 29 (1998), esp. 96-97.

34. On the drying of the newly baptized by sponsors or *patrini*, see Tertullian, in Righetti, II, 703. On the *sabanum*, the cloth, and its precious value, see *ibid.*, II, 704. On the white garment worn by the newly baptized: *ibid.*, II, 637, 707-709, 720. A relevant example of such a scene in our area appears in the San Juan Bautista church, Uncastillo (Zaragoza). See J. Sureda, *La pintura románica en España (Aragón, Navarra, Castilla-León y Galicia)*, Madrid 1985, 1989, fig.p. 372.

35. Nordström, 102.

2. THEOLOGICAL AND LITURGICAL LINKS BETWEEN THE BATH AND THE BAPTISM, AND THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The Bath of the Child

Two main reasons may account for the absence in theological literature of clear and fully expressed typological associations between the Bath of Jesus and his Baptism. One reason, which I have already noted, is that the Bath of the infant Jesus is not mentioned either in the Scriptures or in the Apocrypha. It first appeared in theological literature in the ninth century. The other reason is that the bath/baptism of the newborn Christian was traditionally interpreted as a physical and spiritual cleansing.

From a dogmatic point of view, the episode of the bath of the infant Jesus was questionable. The Child was pure, as was his mother. Irenaeus stated the dogma: «Purus pure puram aperiens vulvam quam ipse puram fecit.»³⁶ Exegetical literature emphasized the supernatural and mysterious aspects of the birth of Christ *ex utero clauso*.³⁷ Ambrose explicitly spoke of the immaculate virginal birth and of Christ as the new Adam, quoting I Cor. 15:45-47,³⁸ and Leo the Great frequently explained Christ's birth from a Virgin in association with rebirth or moral renewal through baptism.³⁹ The apocryphal sources as well expressed the supernatural aspects of the birth. The Latin Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 13:3 insists on the astonishment of the experienced midwife on seeing the physical purity of the Child. According to Pseudo-Matthew the midwife attested: «... there has been no spilling of blood in his birth... A virgin has conceived, a virgin has brought forth, and a virgin she remains.»⁴⁰

Apocryphal writings proceed to relate the story of the doubting Salome, which was soon associated with the realistic motif of the Bath of the Child. The Protoevangelium of James 19-20 and the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 13:3-5 tell that even after the midwife proclaimed the virginal nature of the birth of Jesus, Salome refused to believe unless she could verify it. Salome examined Mary and as a punishment for her faithless conduct her hand withered. She was healed only after she re-

36. *Adversus heresiae*, IV, 1v, 2.

37. For instance, John of Damascus, *De fide orth.*, IV, 14 (PG 94/1161 A,B). John Chrysostom interpreted the virginal birth similarly (PG 49/359). See E. Kitzinger, «The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art,» *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 17 (1963), esp. 103-104.

38. *De institutione virginis*, 98: «quem ut Maria virgo conciperet, inusitato quodam novoque Incarnationis mysterio, sine ulla virilis semine admixtione, divinae gratia dispositionis, quod erat carnis, assumpsit admixtione ex Virgine, atque in illa novissimi Adam immaculati hominis membra formavit (PL 16/329 A). See G.M. Lukken, *Original Sin in the Roman Liturgy* (Leiden, 1973), 281. For this concept in the canon of the mass: *idem*, 284ff.

39. Lukken, 285ff and see discussion below.

40. «Nulla pollutio sanguinis facta est in nascente...» in: *Los evangelios apócrifos*, edición crítica y bilingüe, ed. and trans. A. de Santos (Madrid, 1963), 209.

pented and touched the Child, as instructed by an angel.⁴¹ The story of the midwives appears in various versions in theological writings from the third century on.⁴² Jerome's protest that the Virgin did not need the help of any midwife⁴³ did not prevent the spread of the popular story that proved the virginity of Mary at birth.

The story of the doubting Salome appeared in art in the sixth century.⁴⁴ At about the same time the realistic motif of the Bath of the Child was included in Nativity scenes in the Byzantine East, and in the seventh century also in the West.⁴⁵ The process of the gradual association between the two episodes and the introduction of the Bath motif into Nativity scenes is illustrated by early depictions of the doubting Salome. In an ivory now in Bologna, dated to the seventh or the eighth century, the doubting woman stands next to the basin, which is ready for the bath of the newborn.⁴⁶ In a mural painting in the catacomb of San Valentino in Rome, also dated to the seventh or the eighth century,⁴⁷ and in an icon from Sinai, dated to the eighth or the ninth century,⁴⁸ one of the midwives washing the Child is identified by an inscription as Salome. The identification of the servants washing the Child with the midwives of the apocryphal stories must have helped to legitimize the inclusion of the Bath in the iconography of the Nativity. From the ninth century on, the depiction of the doubting Salome became less frequent and by the eleventh it had disappeared. From then on, only the Bath was included in Nativity scenes.⁴⁹

The worship of the *locus sanctus* of the first bath of the Child, already established in the seventh century, probably influenced the introduction of the scene into the visual arts as well as the exegetical and liturgical literature. Adamnan of Iona (679-704) tells about the bath of the infant Jesus in his account of Arculf's pilgrimage to the Holy Land (c. 670), «De locis sanctis.»⁵⁰ Adamnan reports that Arculf washed his face in the pure water that miraculously still flowed from the rock over which the water

41. Protoevangelium of James 19-20, in de Santos 167-170; Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, 13:3-5, in idem, 208-210. Ps. Matt. 13:4 specifies that Salome was a midwife as well.

42. For instance, Prudentius in the Catherinon, hymn. XI (PL 59/898) and Zeno of Verone in the Tractatus, I, II, tr. VIII (PL 414) tell about two midwives, while Clement of Alexandria in the Stromata, I, VII, c. XVI (PL 9/529) tells about one. See Juhel, 111.

43. Contra Helvidium, X (PL 23/202).

44. For instance, in the cathedra of Maximian bishop of Ravenna and in an ivory from Syria-Palestine. See Juhel, fig. 1 and E. Kitzinger, *Early Medieval Art* (London, 1983), fig. 13, respectively.

45. Juhel, esp. 111-117.

46. Ibid., fig. 3.

47. Ibid., fig. 4.

48. K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Icons* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976), I, no. B 41, p. 68, pls. 27, 95.

49. Juhel, 111.

50. De locis sanctis, II, ch. III, C.S.E.L., XXVIII, 256.

from the Child's «sacred washing» had been emptied, at the site of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The belief that the *loca sancta* could confer *eulogia* – miraculous spiritual and physical blessings – on those who came into physical contact with them,⁵¹ must have led Arculf to wash in the water from Christ's first bath. Arculf also saw the stone basin in which the Child had been bathed beside the Nativity grotto.⁵² In a ninth century Old English martyrology, the brief account of the Nativity in the entry for Christmas specifies: «by the bath in which Saint Mary washed the Child many sick men were healed.»⁵³ This remark may have been suggested by one of the martyrology's sources, Adamnan's «De locis sanctis.»⁵⁴

In the Christian version of the bath of the newborn, the more genre-like the elaboration of the theme the better it expressed the dogma of the incarnation and the two natures of Christ, human and divine, inseparably joined in one person.

The Baptism

Properties of physical and spiritual cleansing, renewal and rebirth have traditionally been associated with baptism, the sacrament intimately related to the birth of Christ. The earliest patristic writings on baptism often describe it in terms of ritual washing, and at times explicitly refer to its cleansing properties. In the second century, Tertullian, whose treatise «De baptismo» is the earliest surviving monograph on the properties and significance of this sacrament, repeatedly used the terms *lavacrum* (bath), *aqua* (water, bath), and *tinguere* (to wash off, or immerse) in discussing the ritual. Tertullian considered baptism a preparatory cleansing, which makes believers ready to receive the Holy Spirit. For him, baptism is essentially the *bathing* of the newborn Christian.⁵⁵ Isidore of Seville expressed a similar concept of baptism as both a literal and a metaphorical washing. He compared the external cleansing of the body during the rite with its purification of the soul, saying that we approach baptism «filthy with the ugliness of sin, to be made pure by the baptismal waters.»⁵⁶

51. G. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington, 1982), esp. 5-6, 8-10, 11-13.

52. P. Maraval, «Pèlerins des premiers siècles à Bethléem,» in *Aux origines du christianisme*, ed. P. Geoltrain (Paris, 2000), 536.

53. *An Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. G. Hertzfeld, Early English Text Society, original ser., 116 (1900, repr. New York, 1973), pp. 4,5.

54. R. Deshman, «Servants of the Mother of God in Byzantine and Medieval Art,» in *World and Image*, 5:1 (1989), 33.

55. «Non quod in aqua spiritum sanctum consequimur, sed in aqua emundati sub angelo spiritu sancto praeparamur» in *De Baptismo* VI and XX. See *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, ed. and trans. E. Evans (London, 1964), 14, 42 and Patton, 85, 86.

56. «Nam sicut aqua purgatur exterius corpus, ita latenter eius mysterio per Spiritum sanctum purificatur et animus. Cuius sanctificatio ita est» (*Etymologiae* VI, 19, 48) and: «Prius enim foedi eramus deformitate peccatorum, in ipsa tinctione reddimur pulchri dealbatione virtutum...» (*Etymologiae* VI, 19, 44). Quoted in Patton, 85.

The interpretation of the sacrament of baptism as a cleansing of the soul and as a spiritual rebirth is based on John 1:12-13 and especially 3:3-7, quoting Jesus' words: «Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.» Baptism was essential in order to enter Heavenly Jerusalem at the end of days. The Epistle to Titus 3:5-7 says: «He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost... That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.»

Numerous passages in the New Testament say that the sacrament of baptism washes sins away, an essential requirement to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. John the Baptist baptized and preached the baptism of repentance «for the remission of sins» (Mark 1:4).⁵⁷ Medieval theological and liturgical texts frequently express this central concept.⁵⁸ Christ's virgin birth was considered a type of liturgical baptism that cleanses men of all sins. The Virgin, impregnated by the Holy Spirit, gave birth to Christ in her womb. Likewise, the womb of Mater Ecclesia, the baptismal font, was infused by the Holy Spirit to produce a new member of Christ's mystical body, the newly initiated Christian. Augustine equated the baptismal water to the womb of the Mother, saying: «Vulva matris, aqua Baptismatis.»⁵⁹ Leo the Great, who like Augustine greatly influenced theological thinking throughout the Middle Ages, expressed similar ideas in his Homilies for the Nativity: «the water of baptism is an image of the virginal womb, whereby the same Holy Spirit that impregnated the Virgin impregnates the font. Just as the sacred conception casts out sin in that place, so here mystic ablution takes it away.»⁶⁰ Leo added: «The same kind of origin which He took on in the womb of the Virgin, He has placed in the fountain of baptism. He gave the water what He gave the Mother; the power of the Most High and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit that made Mary give birth to the Savior, enable the water to regenerate the faithful.»⁶¹ Through his incarnation in the

57. «In remissionem peccatorum.» Also Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38; 10:43; 22:16; I Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:36; Heb. 9:14; 10:2-22; I Pet. 3:21.

58. Lukken, 292-293, note 115 adduces examples from the *Sacramentarium Gelasianum Vetus*, the *Sacramentarium Gregorianum Cameracense*, the *Missale Romanum* and others. Also idem, 382-384, 294-295 and Righetti, II, 639ff, 643ff.

59. Augustini Opera Omnia, V (PL 38/674).

60. «Terra enim carnis humanae, quae in primo fuerat praevaricatore maledicta, in hoc solo beatae virginis partu germen edidit benedictum, et a vitio suae stirpis alienum. Cujus spiritalem originem in regeneratione quisque consequitur; et omni homini renascenti aqua baptismatis instar est uteri virginalis, eodem Spiritu sancto replente fontem, qui replevit et virginem; ut peccatum quod ibi vacuavit sacra conceptio, hic mystica tollat ablutio.» In *Nativitate Domini IV*, sermo 24,3 (PL 54/206 A). See Lukken, 290-291.

61. «Originem quam sumpsit in utero virginis, posuit in fonte baptismatis: dedit aquae, quod dedit matri; virtus enim Altissimi et obumbratio Spiritus sancti, quae fecit ut Maria pareret Salvatorem, eadem facit, ut regeneret unda credentem.» In *Nativitate Domini IV*, sermo 25,5 (PL 54/211 C). Also Sermo 63, 6 (PL 54/356 B); Sermo 29, 1 (PL 54/227 B); Ep. 31,3 (PL 54/792 B). See Lukken, 291.

immaculate womb of the Virgin, Jesus wished to give a new origin to the existence of believers, and through the virgin womb of baptism the faithful came to share in the new existence that began in Christ. Baptism brings about the death of the sinful self and the initiate's rebirth in Christ.⁶² Augustine explained baptism as «Secunda nativitatis ex Deo et Ecclesia.»⁶³ Similarly, Bede said that the Church generates Christ in the soul of the faithful by means of the sacrament of baptism and the sermon.⁶⁴ These doctrines were equally valid in the twelfth century, as we can see, for instance, in Rupert of Deutz's «De operibus Spiritus Sancti.»⁶⁵

Thus, the interpretation of the baptism of the faithful as a spiritual cleansing and renewal, an actual rebirth, explains why the baptized person adopts the role of a newborn child, for whom the baptismal immersion effectively doubles as the natal bath.

Moreover, we should notice that from a very early period, both in the Western and the Eastern Church, the baptismal water and the font were regarded as identical not only with Mary's immaculate womb and the fountain of life in Paradise,⁶⁶ but also with the Jordan River.⁶⁷ This is an old concept, widely held throughout the Middle Ages. For instance, Ambrose declared that each font was equivalent to the Jordan,⁶⁸ and Timothy, bishop of Alexandria (381-385), said that the Jordan River «is the water of the baptismal fonts.»⁶⁹ In the same spirit, Sophronios, patriarch of Jerusalem (634-638), observed that all baptismal fonts in Alexandria were called Jordan.⁷⁰ Thus, the exchange of the bathing tub for the baptismal font, in scenes of the Bath of Jesus, links these two events in the life of the Savior. It also relates them to the sacrament of baptism, especially since already at the beginning of the Middle Ages Christian parents had their children baptized in early infancy.⁷¹

As already noted, patristic literature does not explicitly draw a typological link between the Bath and the Baptism of Jesus. However, the re-

62. The New Testament and patristic writings compare the baptism of the faithful to the death and resurrection of Christ. For example Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:10, 12. Also Augustine, *Opera Omnia*, VI (PL, 40/256), VIII (PL, 42/744) and Leo the Great, *Sermo* 63,6 (PL, 54/357 A). See also Lukken, 290; Righetti, II, 633-634, 643-645.

63. Augustini Opera Omnia, V (PL 38/680).

64. In Lucam, I, 2 (PL 92/330 D).

65. III, 9 (PL 167/1648 B). See P.A. Underwood, «The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 5 (1950), 75; Nordström, 89.

66. See the inscription in San Giovanni in Fonte in Laterano, dated 440: «Fons hic est vitae, qui totum diluit orbem» (This is the Fountain of Life, which purifies the whole world). Nordström, esp. 11-20. On additional symbolism of the baptismal font in the Middle Ages see idem, *passim*.

67. *Ibid.*, 100-101.

68. *Sermo* 38/2, quoted by Nordström, 100.

69. II Quaest. 8 (Pitra, *Spicilegium Solesmense complectens Sanctorum Patrum Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum*, I, 640).

70. *De mirabilibus sanctorum Cyri et Iohannis*, 436 Mai. See Nordström, 100.

71. See J. Daniélou, A.H. Couratin and J. Kent, *Historical Theology* (Middlesex, 1969), esp. 198-210 (The Pelican Guide to Modern Theology, 2).

lation seems to have been recognized in the early Church, as suggested by the view of the Nativity and the Baptism as complementary epiphanies.⁷² Both the Bath and the Baptism of Jesus express his dual nature. In both epiphanies, Christ submitted himself to a purification rite unnecessary for the Son of God and thus fully assumed his human nature. Until the fourth century, both feasts were celebrated on January 6, often in a single ceremony. The wish to emphasize Christ's humanity at the Nativity resulted in the separation of the feasts, the Nativity being celebrated since then on December 25th.⁷³ The same aim can explain both the depiction of the Bath in Nativity scenes and the worship of the *locus sanctus* since the seventh century, that I have already discussed.

Likewise, controversies regarding the incarnation, the dual nature of Christ, the virginal birth and Mary's role as the mother of Christ, in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries,⁷⁴ may have motivated the spread of the Bath image in Nativity cycles as a means to strengthen the dogma. Artists and their patrons adopted the motif of the bath, traditionally associated with birth scenes, as an additional symbol of the incarnation and the human nature of Christ, the Son of God. The inclusion of baptismal motifs in the Bath scene draws a typology between the two events. It presents the Bath of the infant Jesus as a prefiguration of his Baptism, at which his divine nature would be revealed.

CONCLUSIONS

The typological relation between the Bath and the Baptism of Christ, and between these events and the sacrament of baptism, is not explicitly stated in written sources. However, as we have seen, it is evident in medieval art. The numerous and varied examples strongly suggest that the association is not incidental. We may take a step beyond the interpretation of these images as the invention of an artist who might base his experiment on the formal similarity between the two scenes and a theological tradition.⁷⁵ The mutual iconographic borrowing, especially striking in the political, cultural and ecclesiastically linked areas of northern Spain and southern France in the twelfth century – Catalonia, Aragon, Roussillon, Provence and Languedoc – points to the relevance of the association. In Catalonia and Aragon, the theological and liturgical rela-

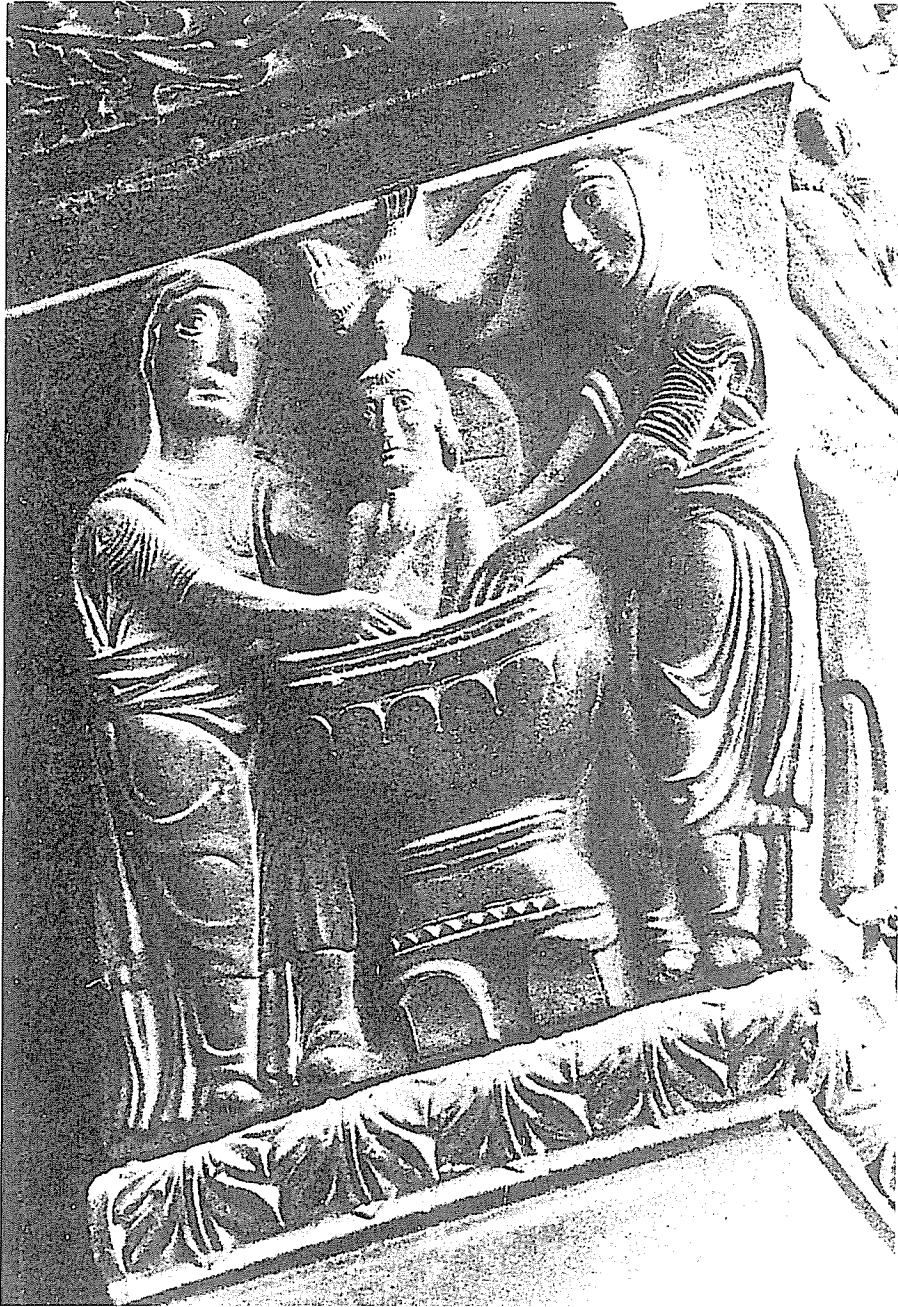
72. Patton, 86.

73. M. Righetti, *Historia de la Liturgia*, I (Madrid, 1955), 716.

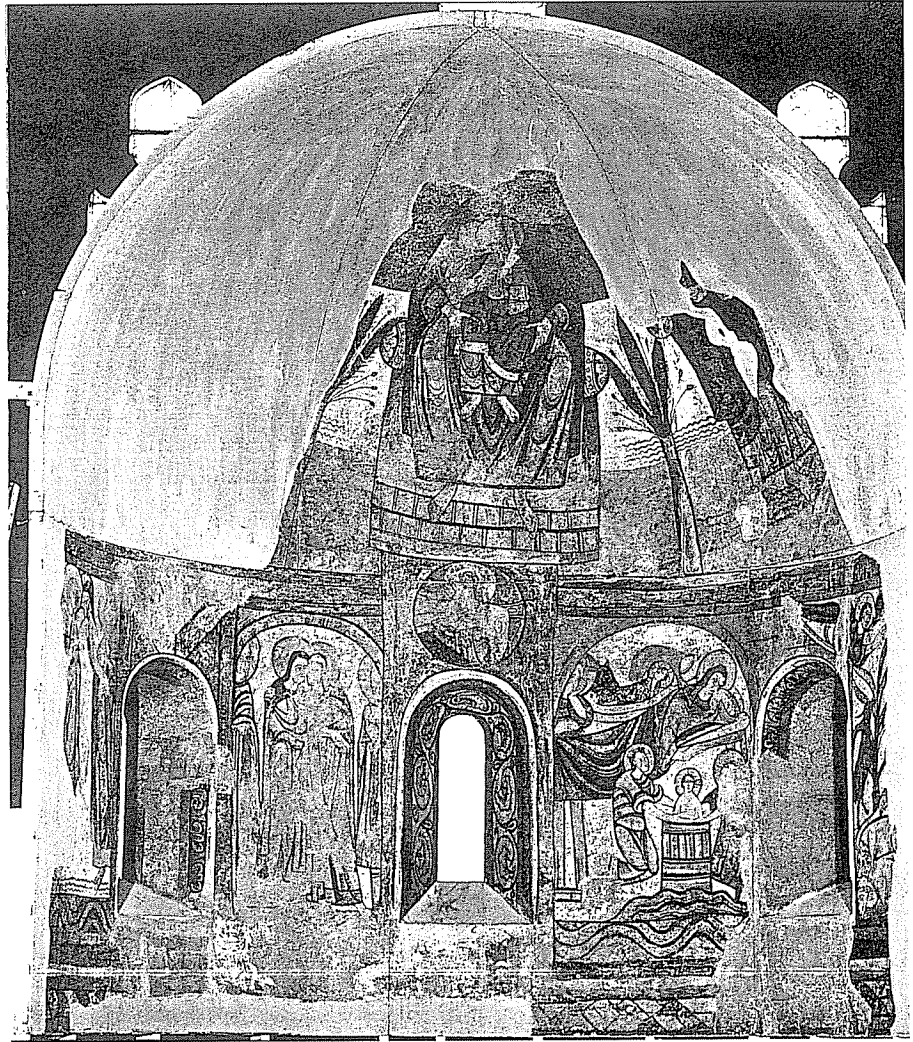
74. I.M. Resnick, «Peter Damian on the Restoration of Virginity. A Problem for Medieval Theology,» *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 39 (1988), 125-134, esp. 131ff; H.O.J. Brown, *Heresies. The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* (New York, 1984), 239ff.

75. Patton, 88, unaware of the compressed iconography of Catalonian depictions of the Bath in a basin standing in the Jordan River.

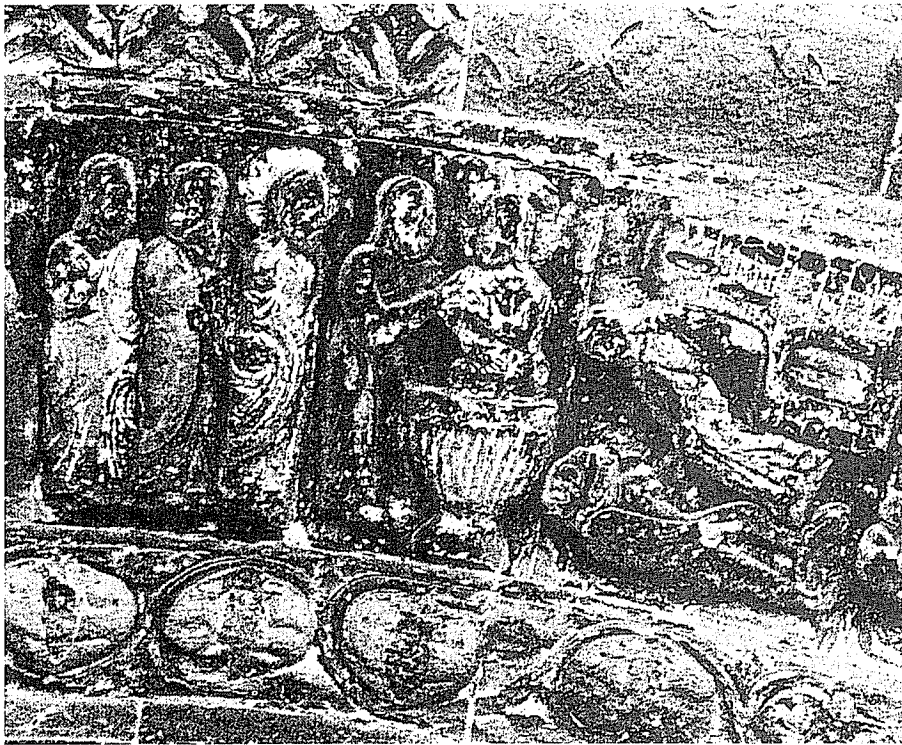
tion between the Bath and the Baptism of Christ, and the rite of baptism, resulted in the depiction of the bathing of the Infant Jesus in the Jordan River and his Baptism in a font. The Gerona Beatus and its copy, and the Tournai ivory, present the Baptism in a baptismal font standing in the Jordan, a scheme which may point to a Carolingian visual or written source. The first washing of the Child in a bathing tub standing in the Jordan is most surprising. This deviation reveals a bold manipulation of geography – Bethlehem being transported to the Jordan River or, alternatively, the Jordan changing its course to flow through Bethlehem – in order to express the typological association between the two events. The borrowing of motifs from the Bath to depict Baptism scenes is less dramatic. Nonetheless, it is even more significant, since the image of the Baptism has an explicit and canonical source in the Gospels.



1. Saint-Trophime d'Arles, corbel of the west portal, detail: The Bath of the Child
(after Patton, fig. 9)



2. Sant Esteve de Polinyà del Vallès, apse wall, detail: The Bath of the Child
(Museu Diocesà de Barcelona)



3. San Salvador at Ejea de los Caballeros, archivolt of the north portal, detail:
The Baptism of Christ
(Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic)



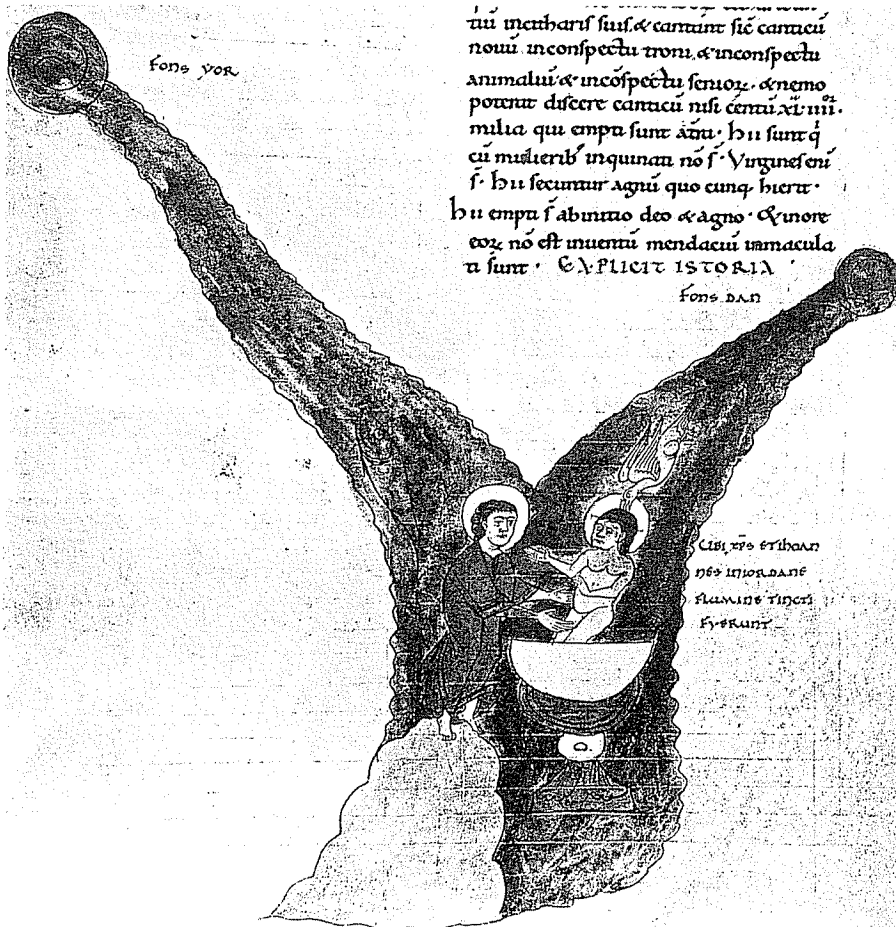
4. Sant Pere de Sorpe, nave wall, detail: The Bath of the Child
(Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya)



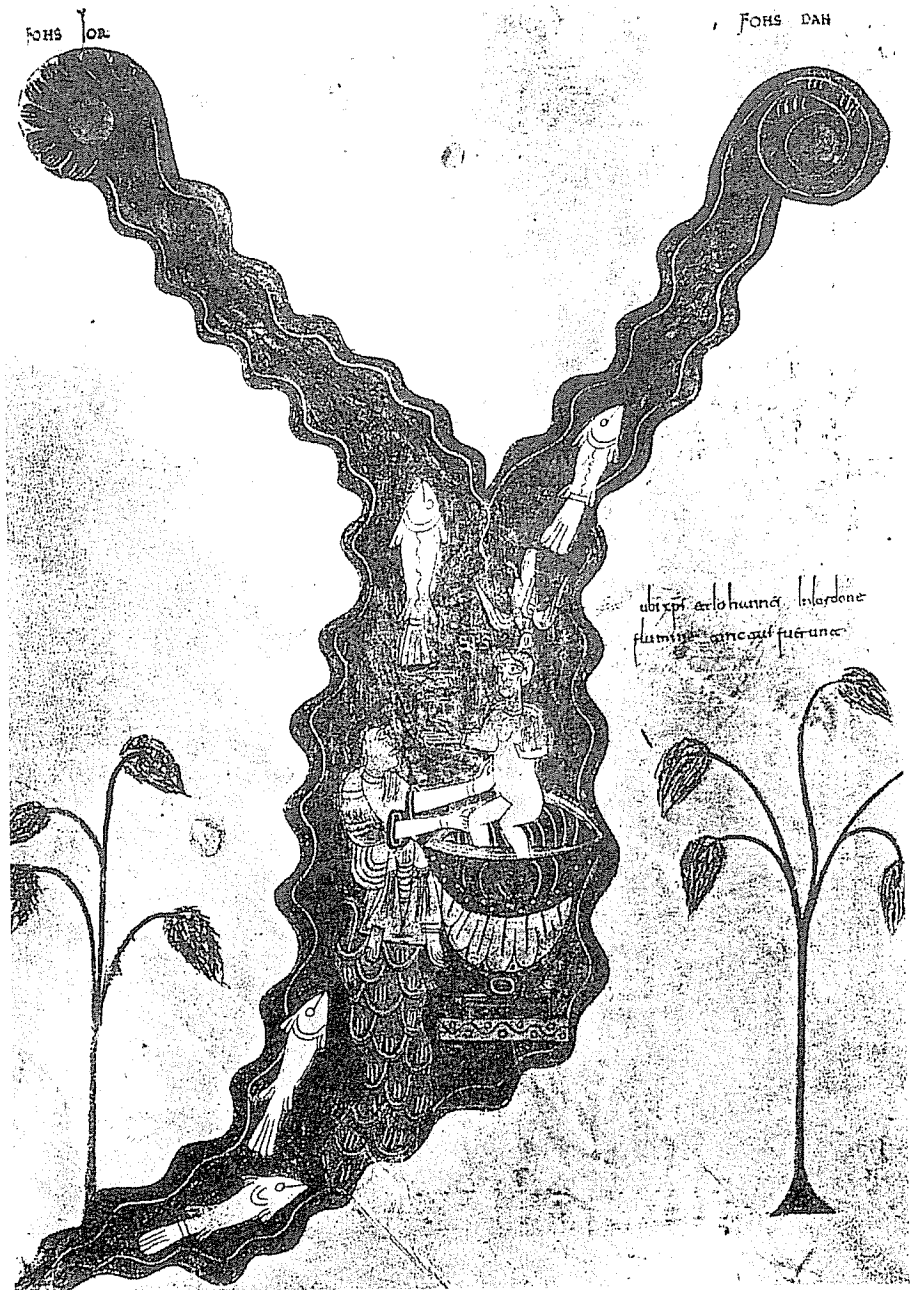
5. Santa Maria de Barberà del Vallès, central apse wall, detail: The Bath of the Child (author)



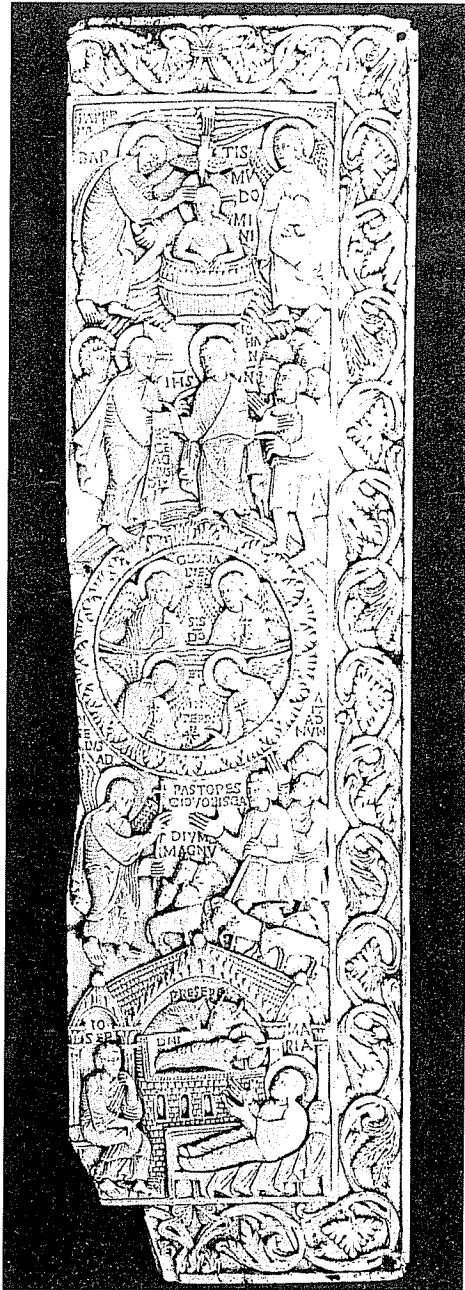
6. San Juan de la Peña, capital in the cloister: The Baptism of Christ
(Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic)



7. Turin Beatus, Turin National Library, ms. I, II.1, fol. 136: The Baptism of Christ (Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic)



8. Gerona Beatus, Gerona Cathedral, ms. lat. 7, fol. 189: The Baptism of Christ
(Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic)



9. London, BM, I.C.53, OA 3065, leaf of ivory diptych: The Baptism of Christ (after Goldschmidt, I, no.159)



10. Saint-Pierre-les-Églises, apse wall, detail: The Bath of the Child
(after Riou, fig. p. 51)