

# Early Christians Held Pagan Wake

*Archaeology*

## Feasted at Grave; Gave Corpse His Share

EVIDENCES of a half-pagan "wake" held by early Christian citizens of Cologne at the grave of a departed companion have been turned up in an extensive excavation of an ancient Roman estate at Cologne-Müngersdorf, under the direction of Dr. Fritz Fremersdorf of the Wallraf-Richartz Museum of Cologne. The find shows, in the opinion of the discoverer, that the early converts along the Rhine were not quite sure of their new religion, and maintained a sort of pagan "rear guard" in their minds when it came to the serious matter of dealing with the dead.

The Roman estate at Cologne-Müngersdorf had its own cemetery, in which were a number of stone sarcophagi. Several Christian symbols, especially two large spoons inscribed "Deo gratias," attest to the religion of the occupants. But outside of one of the sarcophagi, at the

foot of the grave, was a collection of bottles, cups and dishes which show pretty plainly that a regular "wake" was held at the open grave, and that the feasting mourners gave the corpse his full share. The cups show rings, where the wine or other beverage slowly dried to the bottom, and in several of the bowls there are pieces of bone.

In one of the bottles Dr. Fremersdorf found the skulls of two field mice and seven shrews, which are small, mouse-like animals that live on insects. At first he was inclined to believe that the animals had crawled into the bottles to get at the contents and then found themselves trapped. But this theory failed to hold water; no skeletal bones were there, nothing but the skulls; moreover, the shrews, being insectivorous, would not have been attracted by any kind of prepared food or drink. Quite evidently the skulls were placed there, but for what

superstitious reason there is as yet no hint.

Another bit of evidence of lingering paganism was found under another of the sarcophagi. Before the heavy stone coffin was lowered into the earth, a fowl was sacrificed and laid upon the bottom of the grave, together with a short, broad-bladed knife, a glass cup and a pottery saucer. This is reminiscent of the "foundation sacrifice" of a fowl, practised widely in pagan Europe whenever a new house was built. It survived through the middle ages, and some traces of it persist in isolated localities to the present day, Dr. Fremersdorf says. The usual incantation was, "Let all the harm that might come to this house be laid upon this hen," and it is quite likely that something of the kind was done at the edge of a new grave outside of Cologne fifteen centuries ago.

*Science News-Letter, July 19, 1930*

### New Fish Highways

IT HAS been an accepted theory among sportsmen and commercial fishermen that salmon always return to spawn in the river where they were hatched and from where they traveled out to sea. Of course they usually do.

Last year a six-mile commercial aqueduct was opened; it empties into Grays Harbor, Wash. At the spawning time this spring numbers of salmon entered the great pipe at the point where it pours its fresh water into the bay and they traveled the six miles to where the pipe begins in an artificial lake. The fish were seen entering the pipe and were later found in the lake. There was no other way for them to have gotten there. According to the water superintendent there are now thousands of baby salmon in the lake.

*Ichthyology*

*Science News-Letter, July 19, 1930*

### The Answer Is

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### Twister Poses

PERHAPS the finest photograph ever taken of a tornado—certainly at any rate a most unusual one—was obtained by Ira B. Blackstock, a Western railroad executive, at Hardtner, Kansas, on Sunday, June 2, 1929, at about 4:30 p. m. Mr. Blackstock let the windy monster approach as closely as he dared, standing with one foot in the entrance of a cyclone cave while he waited for the right moment to snap the shutter. The white spots at the bottom of the picture, as reproduced on the cover of this issue of the SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER, are very large hailstones that accompanied the storm.

*Meteorology*

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