

Does "upon this rock" refer to Peter, Peter's confession, or to Christ in Matthew 16:18?

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That leaves unanswered the question, is Christ speaking with Peter about one of these two kinds of foundations (person or doctrine), or as a third kind of foundation? Because the common arguments that the foundation cannot be Peter falter on Eph. 2:20, and the word "this" (near demonstrative pronoun) in "upon this rock" seems more naturally to be a reference to Peter as an immediately prior antecedent alluded to via "petra" than to work as a switch reference device to refer either to Christ or to Peter's confession as a less immediately prior antecedent contrasted with "petros," it seems Peter is the referent of "this petra."

Regarding the gender of the Aramaic word, it appears the Aramaic word is the same as the Hebrew keph (masculine singular, but nonexistent in the OT) / kephim (masculine plural), which according to BDB is thought to be a loanword from Aramaic. BDAG confirms this, saying regarding Petros: "Fr. the beginning it was prob. thought of as the Gk. equivalent of the Aram. keipha = [Gk.] kephas: J 1:42; cp. Mt 16:18 and JWackernagel, Syntax II ² 1928, 14f." In that case, the Aramaic original behind petra appears masculine. BDAG also notes that the masculine petros was used in Greek literature to refer to a "stone," though it appears to be the less common use of the masculine. This leads me to think that Christ used the Aramaic "keipha" to refer to Peter, who was also called the name of Aramaic origin spelled "Cephas" in Greek (I don't know the Aramaic spelling of the name), and that Matthew used the common feminine form of the petr- root so the fact that Christ made a pun would be clearly evident. "You are Petros, and on this Petros I will build my church" would not necessarily be a pun, and if not taken as a pun, it would be awkward to insert the word "this" as Jesus did, and it might not be possible to explain a good reason for doing so.

So, in my opinion the best interpretation is that the rock to which Christ refers is Peter--which by the way is an interpretation held not only by Catholics but also by many Protestants.