

The Arts of Byzantium

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THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Director's Note

The Metropolitan Museum is justifiably proud of its exceptional holdings of Byzantine and early medieval art, which constitute the preeminent collection in the United States and one of the world's outstanding assemblages of this material. In recognition of the importance of these holdings, we decided several years ago that a new, greatly enhanced space was necessary for their proper exhibition. The results of our efforts, the Mary and Michael Jaharis Galleries for Byzantine Art, opened in November 2000. The installation—in restored and redesigned Beaux Arts spaces, part of Richard Morris Hunt's architectural plan of 1902—includes an intimate, "cryptlike" gallery under the Grand Staircase, featuring the great brick arches and sloping walls that support the massive granite steps rising above. This area, now housing works from Byzantine Egypt, has been inaccessible to the public since it was built. Adjoining it on the north is a gallery primarily devoted to secular art of the Byzantine and early medieval worlds;

and on the south is a gallery for liturgical art of the Byzantine church and Middle to Late Byzantine secular art. The galleries are the first phase of an extensive project that will eventually encompass every aspect of the holdings of medieval art.

The reinstatement was organized by Peter Barnet, the Michel David-Weill curator in charge; Helen C. Evans, curator; and Melanie Holcomb, assistant curator, in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters. The selection of objects and the texts for this publication, presenting a brief survey of the riches of the new galleries, are by Helen C. Evans, with Melanie Holcomb and Robert Hallman, research associate.

Of course, our plans for these magnificent galleries would never have been realized if it had not been for the extraordinary generosity of Mary and Michael Jaharis, whose deep love of and dedication to Byzantine art and culture made them possible.

Philippe de Montebello, *Director*

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Front cover: *Christ on the Cross, with the Virgin and Saint John*, detail of a box reliquary (see p. 39).
Back cover: *Personification of Ktisis (or Foundation)*, detail of a floor mosaic (see p. 17)

Unless otherwise noted, all texts are by Helen C. Evans.



The "cryptlike" space under the Grand Staircase, part of the Mary and Michael Jaharis Galleries for Byzantine Art

The Arts of Byzantium

The empire called Byzantium lasted more than 1,100 years—from the founding of its capital, Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey), in 330 to the conquest of the city by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The image that many have of it today comes from William Butler Yeats’s poem “Sailing to Byzantium” (1928): It is a world filled with objects of “hammered gold and gold enamelling/To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;/Or [to be] set upon a golden bough to sing/To lords and ladies of Byzantium/Of what is past, or passing, or to come.” The citizens of this Byzantium are either “sages standing in God’s holy fire/As in the gold mosaic of a wall” or—according to another popular conception—plotters consumed by complex and disorienting—that is,

byzantine—intrigues. The splendid works in the Metropolitan Museum’s installation of Byzantine art in the Mary and Michael Jaharis Galleries demonstrate, however, that the great empire was not a frozen society but a diverse and vital state. These artworks offer us a profound, nuanced understanding of the Byzantines’ appreciation of beauty, faith, and power.

The Empire’s First Golden Age

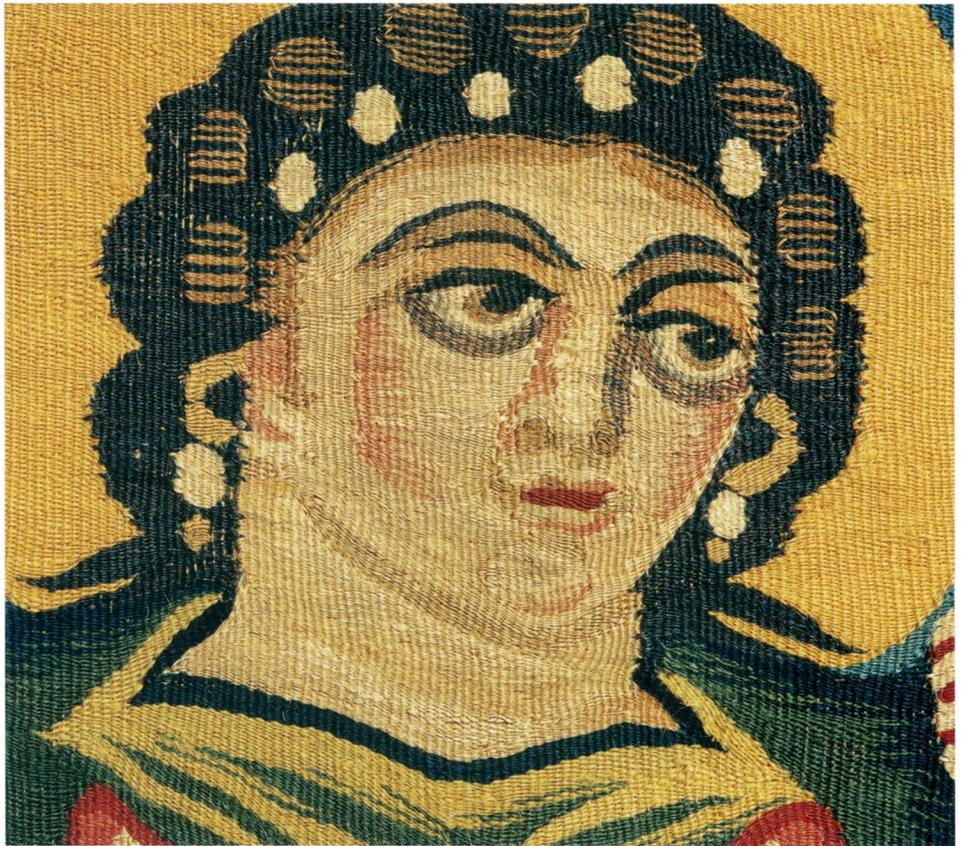
The first golden age of the Byzantine Empire, known as the Early Byzantine period, extended from the founding of Constantinople into the 700s. The emperor Constantine the Great (r. 306–37) selected Byzantium, an ancient Greek city on the Bosphorus, to be the site of the new capital of the Roman Empire in



Portrait of Gennadios, detail of gold-glass medallion (see p. 9)

324. In 330 he transferred the senate and the imperial court from Rome to the former Byzantium, a larger city he named Constantinople (the polis—or city—of Constantine). There, at the juncture of Europe and Asia, where the overland trade routes of the East met the sea routes of the Mediterranean, the emperor believed that he could best protect the valuable Roman provinces in Egypt, the Holy Land, Syria, and the Balkans from the empire's powerful ancient enemy to the east, the Persians.

Constantine was the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire. At the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 he had defeated Maxentius (r. 306–12) for sole control of the empire; Constantine's soldiers are said to have painted the Chi-Rho, or monogram of Christ, on their shields after he beheld a vision that the new faith would lead him to victory. In 313 he acknowledged the divine assistance he had received and made Christianity a legal religion in the empire. Under his rule numerous major churches were built at sites sacred to Christians, including the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (raised at the spot where Christ is believed to have been crucified) and Saint Peter's in Rome, constructed over the cemetery, outside the city walls, where the apostle is said to have been buried. Although Christianity was only one of the creeds that flourished in the culturally and religiously diverse Byzantine state, a Christian church, Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), was erected in the heart of Constantinople, between the imperial palace and the senate. Slowly and with some resistance the gods of antiquity were replaced by the Christian God. During his brief reign, from 361 to 363, the emperor Julian the Apostate attempted to restore the ancient Roman order, including the gods of the classical world. By



Personification of Spring, detail of tunic decoration (see p. 25)

the late 300s, however, Christianity was the official religion of the state. More and more objects richly decorated with Christian imagery were created, for both ecclesiastical and domestic use.

Even as Christianity triumphed, Byzantium's educated elite continued to rely upon Roman law and Greek and Roman culture to maintain a highly organized state centered on its major cities and supported by the wealth and dense population of the eastern territories. Emperors updated the old Roman codes in Latin, which was still the official language of government. There was a resurgence of Greek culture, especially in literature and in the visual arts. Schools taught classical Greek texts, such as Homer's *Iliad*, and important Byzantine writers, like the sixth-century historian

Procopius (act. 550s), modeled their works on classical ones.

In the mid-500s the emperor Justinian I (r. 527–65), the greatest of the early rulers of the empire, regained many of the old Roman lands in the West. Ravenna, not Rome, now served as the western capital of the empire. Trade routes extended from western Europe to China. The artistic traditions of the Byzantine state flourished throughout the empire, including in its southernmost province, Egypt.

Part of the classical world since its conquest by Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.), Egypt was a source of vast wealth for the Byzantines. It provided much of the grain that fed the empire's cities. The finest linen, made from flax, was woven in Egypt, and the



The Virgin, medallion from an icon frame (see p. 45)

most precious porphyry (purple marble) was quarried there. Alexandria, at the mouth of the Nile, became a Christian diocese in 382. (According to tradition, the city's first bishop had been the evangelist Mark [act. before A.D. 70].) The city was one of the five major centers of the church (the others were Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, and Jerusalem). Egypt, where men like Saint Anthony the Great (ca. 251–356) went into the desert to live ascetic lives in contemplation of the divine, was also the source of Christian monasticism. The Egyptian-born Pachomios (ca. 290–346) wrote rules for communal living, once others began to follow holy men into the desert. In 451 internal theological debates at the Council of Chalcedon led the Egyptian church to separate from the church of Constantinople. Ultimately the Egyptian

church came to be called the Coptic church, as it still is today. (The term "Coptic" was introduced by Egypt's Arab conquerors in the mid-seventh century; it is derived from a mispronunciation of *Agyptos*, the ancient Greek word for "Egypt." Indeed, "Byzantium" was coined by the German humanist Hieronymus Wolf [1518–1580] to distinguish the Roman state ruled from Byzantium-Constantinople from the empire when it was ruled from Rome.)

The Early Byzantine World and the Peoples on Its Borders

As early as the 160s Roman armies under Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–80) had clashed with Germanic tribes on the empire's western border, in what is today Romania. In the third century the Franks living along the Rhine and the Goths

settled near the Danube began regularly to attack the Romans. The tribal peoples nonetheless also served as mercenaries in the Roman and Byzantine armies. In 395 the Roman/Byzantine Empire was divided into eastern and western halves ruled by Arcadius (r. 395–408) and Honorius (r. 395–423), respectively, the sons of Theodosius I (r. 379–95), the emperor who declared Christianity the state religion. The border peoples began to establish their own kingdoms in the western provinces, and many received official recognition from Constantinople. Their arts combined Roman and Byzantine elements with Bronze Age and Celtic influences.

The peoples on the western borders began to convert to Christianity, though not always to the church of Rome and Constantinople. In 345 the Goths adopted Arianism, a teaching that had originated in Alexandria and that in 325 had been condemned as heretical by a council of the church. Arians, who included several Byzantine emperors, were opposed to the official church position that Christ was the equal of God the Father, holding instead that he was created by God the Father. When the Anglo-Saxons settled England in the 430s, they created two religious spheres: the Anglo-Saxons in the west became Christians, while those in the east remained pagans. Under King Clovis (r. 481–511), the Franks converted to Christianity about 496. By the 700s the increasing numbers of Christian peoples in the West—descended from Germanic tribes such as the Franks (France), Lombards (Italy), Visigoths (Spain), Anglo-Saxons (England), Vikings (Scandinavia), and others—were growing more and more distant from Byzantium and establishing separate alliances with the church in Rome. In 800 Charlemagne (king 768–814) had himself crowned *imperator Romanorum* (emperor of the Romans) by Pope Leo III (in office

795–816) in Rome. In 812 the Byzantine court recognized Charlemagne as *basileus* (king) of only the Franks.

As independent states developed on the western borders of the empire, attacks by both old and new enemies continued on its eastern borders. The Persians had long threatened the eastern empire. By the fifth century they controlled the Christian lands of Armenia and Georgia and attempted by force to convert the inhabitants to Zoroastrianism, the Persian state religion. In 626 the Persians joined with the nomadic Avars to besiege Constantinople by land and sea, but the capital was saved by its massive double-walled fortifications and by the imperial navy, which broke the sea blockade. Farther south the Persians successfully swept to the Mediterranean, occupying the Holy Land and Egypt from 618 to 629. In the 640s, after having briefly regained the bulk of that territory from the Persians, Byzantium permanently lost most of its southern territories, from Roman Syria to northern Africa, to the rising power in the East, the Arab armies fighting in the name of a new religion, Islam.

Within the empire the Iconoclastic Controversy—an intense debate over the role of images in religious devotions—deeply divided the population. In 726 the Byzantine emperor Leo III (r. 717–41) forbade the use of icons.

The Empire's Second Golden Age

In 843 those in favor of the use of religious images finally prevailed. Icons in all media, from ivory and gems to paint and mosaics, appeared everywhere. A concurrent revival in the economy helped to create a second golden age, the Middle Byzantine period (843–1261), which ended with the Crusades. As in earlier centuries, the state played a dual role as the voice of Christian orthodoxy and as a political superpower. The

emperor continued to reign as Christ's representative on earth. Greek became the dominant official language; classical scholarship remained the basis of the educational system.

As Byzantium entered a new diplomatic era, it developed regular contact with the Islamic caliphates, Christians living in Islamic states, and Western rulers. During this period Byzantium's sphere of influence embraced Kievan Rus' (a state that took in parts of modern

Ukraine, Belarus, and western Russia), Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Syria, the Holy Land, Egypt, Cyprus, Norman Sicily, and southern Italy. The multiethnic culture of Byzantium not only influenced the arts of other nations but also absorbed for its own use elements from the Latin West and the Islamic Near East.

In the east some of the territory lost to the Arabs was regained, through both diplomatic and military efforts. Under the emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025)



Soldiers, detail of Christ Bearing the Cross (see p. 65)

the second golden age of Byzantium reached its zenith; the empire's territories included much of Armenia in the east and Bulgaria to the northeast. In 1071, however, the Byzantine forces were routed at the Battle of Mantzikert, on the empire's eastern border. This defeat marked the beginning of the empire's final loss of its eastern territories to Islam, a process that took centuries.

The empire was more successful in extending its influence northward, to the Slavs, through missionaries sent from Constantinople. Saints Constantine the Philosopher (also known as Cyril; ca. 827–869) and Methodius (ca. 815–885), who undertook the first translations of numerous liturgical texts into Old Church Slavonic, were the most important among these emissaries. Byzantium's proselytizing efforts bore fruit in 988, when the powerful state of Kievan Rus' recognized Christianity as its official religion, under the aegis of the church in Constantinople.

Western states continued to have ambivalent relations with Byzantium. In 962 Otto I (r. 936–62) was crowned *imperator* in Rome. The Byzantines recognized him only as *basileus* of the Franks yet sent the Byzantine princess Theophano to be the wife of Otto II (r. 973–83). Religious tensions between Constantinople and Rome became increasingly complex. In 1054 a papal delegation from Rome argued violently with the patriarch of Constantinople over doctrine; so irreconcilable were their differences that they pronounced anathemas upon each other. This was the beginning of the Great Schism that to this day divides the Eastern and Western churches.

In 1095 Pope Urban II (in office 1088–99) responded favorably, however,

to a request from the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118) for aid against the Muslim occupiers of Jerusalem. Latin-speaking knights from western Europe came east to try to regain the Holy Land. (The First Crusade, in 1099, ended in the recapture of Jerusalem.) The Crusades greatly increased the interaction between Byzantine and Westerner, and a circuit of small Crusader states was established along the Mediterranean coast, including fortresses at sites of strategic importance, such as Montfort and Krac des Chevaliers (in modern Israel and Syria, respectively). Relations between Crusader and Byzantine forces deteriorated, though. During the Fourth Crusade in 1204 the Western knights began to occupy Byzantine territories, and ultimately they took Constantinople. The Latin Empire established there lasted until 1261.

The Crusader presence altered the shape of the Byzantine world. Through alliances with the West, kingdoms like Armenian Cilicia gained independence. Small Byzantine successor states were founded at Trebizond, Nicaea, and Epiros. Many Westerners remained in Byzantine lands, adopting elements of Byzantine culture and patronizing Byzantine arts; others took Byzantine works and learning home with them, where they influenced Western culture. Some of the most prized Byzantine artistic treasures and most famous of Constantinople's Christian relics were brought to western Europe. Among them was the Crown of Thorns, which was sold by the last Latin king of Constantinople, Baldwin II (r. 1240–61), to his cousin Louis IX (r. 1226–70) of France. (Louis built the church of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris to house the crown.)

The Final Flowering of the Byzantine World

In 1261 Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1259–82), a Byzantine nobleman descended from three imperial families, retook Constantinople and established the dynasty that ruled the empire during its last centuries. In this era the arts flourished in spite of a series of military and financial crises that reduced both the empire's territory and its prestige. Internal power struggles, controversies over accepting Rome's terms for repairing the Great Schism, and encroachment on Byzantine territory, especially by the Mongols and later the Ottoman Turks, diminished the authority of the centralized state. Nevertheless, writers, artists, and architects working in urban centers such as Mistra, Thessalonike, Constantinople, and Trebizond continued to enrich Byzantine culture.

The church remained the chief repository of art and intellectual endeavor, and it was through the Orthodox church that Byzantine art and culture lived on in the empire's former territories and in Russia, decades after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Moscow saw itself as the heir to Constantinople; as the Orthodox monk Filofey of Pskov (1465–1542) proclaimed in 1511: "Hear me, pious Czar [Vasily III (r. 1505–33)]. All Christian kingdoms have converged in thine alone. Two Romes have fallen, a third stands, a fourth there shall not be." Icon painters from Crete produced images for both the Orthodox and the Latin church. Byzantine scholars and scholarship traveled as far west as the courts of Italy, France, and Flanders. Long after the empire ended, Byzantine art and culture set a standard for luxury, beauty, and learning that inspired its successors, West and East.

THE EMPIRE'S FIRST GOLDEN AGE

Medallion with Portrait of Gennadios

Gold glass
Roman
Made 250–300, probably in Alexandria,
Egypt
Diam. 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (4.1 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1926 (26.258)

This exquisite portrait head shows a youth from Alexandria, the cosmopolitan Egyptian city that had been founded by Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.) in 331 B.C. The medallion was probably a prize for the winner of a musical contest: the inscription in Greek—the cultural language of the city—identifies the youth as “Gennadios, most skilled in music.” The masterfully naturalistic image, drawn with a fine point on gold leaf, was applied to the upper surface of a dark blue glass disk. A second, clear disk was then placed on top of the first, to seal the image. The beveled edges of the disks suggest that the medallion was meant to be mounted and worn as a pendant.

The medallion dates from a time when the Roman Empire was increasingly aware of the need to better protect such wealthy eastern provinces as Egypt. Gennadios's city, the major port at the mouth of the Nile, would become the third-largest city in the Byzantine Empire, after Constantinople and Rome. Under Byzantine rule it would also continue to be the great intellectual center it had been under the Greeks and Romans.



Box with Sleeping Eros

Silver
Roman or Byzantine, said to have been
found in Tartūs, Syria
Made 300s
W. 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (24.8 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1947 (47.100.33)

This silver box was probably meant for domestic use, possibly as part of a lady's toilet. It attests to the continuing popularity in the eastern provinces of the empire—even as Christianity increased in importance—of images drawn from the cults of the classical world. Worked in high relief, the oval box displays on its lid a charming sleeping Eros, the classical god of love; he reclines on a lion's skin, with his bow in hand. The sides of the box are decorated with playful putti holding garlands with bulls' heads, an ancient symbol of fertility, at each end. These motifs are related to the cult of Dionysos, god of wine, and they persisted in the Byzantine world into the Middle Byzantine era (843–1261). The images may have had a cultic significance for the owners of the objects they adorned.





Sarcophagus with a Greek Physician

Marble; missing the lid and the lower-right front edge

Roman, from near Ostia

Carved early 300s

L. 84 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (215.6 cm)

Gift of Mrs. Joseph Brummer and Ernest Brummer, in memory of Joseph Brummer, 1948 (48.76.1)

The owner of this sarcophagus selected its central image to ensure that his learning and skills would be recognized for eternity. A sitting man carefully studying a scroll is depicted in the pose that in the classical world denoted educated men or philosophers. The contents of the chest before him—a basin for bleeding patients and more scrolls—identify the figure as a physician, perhaps a teacher of medicine. On top of the chest is an open medical kit; the incised depictions of the surgeon's tools are still faintly visible.

Although the sarcophagus was found near Ostia, the port city of Rome, the figure's style of dress and the use of Greek for the inscription suggest that the owner was one of the many Greek doctors practicing in the region. Rather than naming the owner, the inscription

curses the person who might reuse the sarcophagus: "If anyone shall dare to bury another person along with this one, he shall pay to the treasury three times two thousand [the unit of currency]. This is what he shall pay to [the city of] Portus [Ostia], but he himself will endure the eternal punishment of the violator of graves."

During the 300s Christians adopted the philosopher's pose to depict the learned men of their faith, including Christ, the apostles, and leading figures of the church. The undulating motifs, or strigils, on each side of the central sarcophagus image were inspired by the tools used by athletes in the gymnasiums to scrape oil and sand from their bodies; strigils, too, would appear in Christian art.

Fragmentary Base of a Bowl with Jewish Symbols

Gold glass
Roman, probably from Rome
Made 300–350
Max. w. 3½ in. (8.9 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1918 (18.145.1a, b)

This rare example of gold glass decorated with Jewish symbols retains only a portion of its Latin inscription, which translates: “Drink with blessing in preparation. . . .” The images in the top register would have been meaningful to Jewish communities throughout the empire. Still nearly whole, the upper portion of the glass displays an open Torah ark with a gabled roof and six scrolls on its shelves. At each side of the ark are a seven-branched menorah and other ritual implements: to the right, a shofar (ram’s horn) and an unidentified roundel; to the left, a scroll and the remnants of an etrog (citron). While such decoration is usual on Jewish objects of this period, the images in the lower register are less common. Judging by other examples of Jewish gold glass, the lower register depicted a banquet scene—a fish set on a tripod table before the cushioned couch on which the diner would recline. All that survives is a portion of the fish on the tabletop and the cushion of the couch. Together these images are believed to have symbolized the owner’s hope of salvation through the redemption of his or her people.

To make such glass, gold leaf was cut in the form of the design, then placed on top of one piece of glass and covered with another to seal it. Gold-glass medallions, originally the bases of bowls, are found in the tombs of people of all religions from the early 300s. Most have been discovered in Rome and are thought to have been pressed as markers into the mortar of newly sealed tombs.



Bowl with Saints Peter and Paul

Terracotta with green glaze
Roman or Byzantine, found in a catacomb
on the Via Appia, Rome
Made about 350
Diam. 5½ in. (14 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1952 (52.25.1)

On the exterior are four regularly spaced Christograms, formed from the first letters of Christ's name in Greek: chi (X) and rho (P). They are framed in martyrs' wreaths signifying his sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Christograms are among the earliest images of the Christian faith. According to legend, in 312 Constantine's soldiers painted the Chi-Rho on their shields before defeating the army of Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and thus winning control of the Roman Empire.

Inside the bowl Peter and Paul are shown seated, facing each other in animated discussion (see detail). The two saints are often depicted on works made in Rome; both were especially important to that city, as they were said to have been martyred there. Numerous gold-glass medallions with representations of them have been discovered in Christian tombs in Roman catacombs. This bowl was found on one of the city's major roads, the Via Appia, where many tombs of the affluent were located.



Saints Peter and Paul, detail of inside of bowl

Detail of Sarcophagus with Scenes from the Lives of Saint Peter and Christ

Marble; missing the lid; upper portion of the scenes of the life of Christ restored about 1906–7

Roman, from Villa Felice (formerly Carpegna), Rome, and Burrwood, Cold Spring Harbor, New York

Carved early 300s, in Rome

Gift of Josef and Marsy Mittlemann, 1991 (1991.366)

The sarcophagus was carved about the time Christianity was recognized as a legal faith in the Roman Empire. It was brought to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century and installed at Burrwood, the Walter Jennings estate in Cold Spring Harbor,

New York, before it was given to the Metropolitan Museum.

Both ends and one side of the sarcophagus are decorated—the side with scenes from the lives of Saint Peter and Christ. Representations of Saint Peter's Arrest in Rome (center) and of the Miracle of Saint Peter Drawing Water from a Rock in His Jail Cell (left) are carved in powerful, deep relief at the left end of the side. They are among the earliest extant images depicting Peter's special relationship with Rome.

When the sarcophagus was published in 1879, the lower legs were all that survived of the scenes from the life of Christ on the right. Misidentification of the figures led to inaccurate restoration of the upper portion of the four scenes: the Entry into Jerusalem (right), the Cure of the Man

Born Blind, the Multiplication of the Loaves, and the Raising of Lazarus. The soldier to Peter's right and the heavily bearded Christ (an image not found in fourth-century art) entering Jerusalem on an ass are part of the restoration. The colt and the hooves of the ass are original. (See below: Christ is at the right; Peter is the third and seventh figure from the right.)

Roughly carved in very low relief on the ends of the sarcophagus are two Old Testament scenes: the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace (the early church considered their story a foretelling of mankind's salvation through Christ) and Adam and Eve after the Fall, by the Tree of Knowledge (theirs was the sin that Christ redeemed). The Three Hebrews may also reflect the early church fathers' frequent description of Rome as a new Babylon.



**Head of Emperor Constans
(r. 337–50)**

Marble
Byzantine
Carved about 337–40
H. 10¼ in. (26 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1967 (67.107)

The first Christian Roman emperor, Constantine, had four sons. This classically styled head probably represents Constans, the youngest. The head, meant for a statue, is crowned with a pearl-bordered diadem of the type worn by Constantine's family.

A devout Christian, Constans became ruler of part of the western empire—including Italy, Africa, and much of

Greece—in 337, at about age seventeen; he took command of the remainder of the western half of the empire in 340. He defeated the Franks and was the last emperor to visit Britain. In 350, before he was thirty, Constans was killed by the usurper Magnentius (r. 350–53). By the end of the fourth century most of the western empire was no longer under the control of Constantinople.





Two Panels of a Diptych Announcing the Consulship of Justinian

Ivory
 Byzantine
 Made 521, in Constantinople
 Each: 13¾ x 5¾ in. (35 x 14.5 cm)
 Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
 (17.190.52, .53)

These handsome ivory panels announce the election of Justinian as consul and were presented by him to a member of the senate. The rank of consul was once the highest in the Roman state, and in the sixth century it was still an important

honorific. Justinian I (r. 527–65) later became the greatest emperor of the Early Byzantine period.

Eight elegantly carved lions' heads surrounded by acanthus leaves, at the corners of the panels, focus attention on inscriptions written in Latin, the official language of the empire in the early period. The inscriptions across the top of the two panels give the donor's name and titles: "Flavius Petrus Sabbatius Justinianus, noble, officer, and chief of the cavalry and commander in chief of the infantry and consul entering his office at the proper time." Those in the

central medallions read: "These gifts, slight indeed in value but rich in honors, I as consul offer to my senators." The small crosses at the top and bottom of the medallions are the only indication of the donor's religion. Once hinged together, with the names of the other consuls inscribed in wax on the interior, the panels probably served as an invitation to the great public games that new consuls hosted in Constantinople's hippodrome. Earlier consular diptychs, also made of ivory, often displayed events from the games, including animal fights and gladiatorial contests.

Steelyard Weight with Bust of a Byzantine Empress and a Hook

Copper-alloy weight filled with lead; brass hook

Byzantine

Cast 400–450

H. 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (23.2 cm); wt. 5.04 lb. (2.29 kg)

Purchase, Rogers Fund, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, by exchange, and Gifts of George Blumenthal, J. Pierpont Morgan, Mrs. Lucy W. Drexel, and Mrs. Robert J. Levy, by exchange, 1980 (1980.416a, b)

Steelyard weights used to measure heavy goods like grain were often shaped as busts of empresses. The sober images may have been meant to enhance the weights' authority as accurate measures, or they may have served as reminders to the public of the government's duty to maintain *taxis*, or order and harmony in the universe—in part by ensuring the

legitimacy of commercial contracts involving weights and measures. This unusually detailed bust represents a ranking member of the Byzantine court, whose elaborate jewelry attests to the wealth of the state. Her dress and demeanor suggest that she is an empress of the Theodosian dynasty, which ruled between 379 and 450.



Fragment of a Floor Mosaic with a Personification of Ktisis

Marble and glass

Byzantine

Made 500–550; modern restoration

Overall 53 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 33 in. (135.6 x 83.8 cm)

Harris Brisbane Dick and Fletcher Funds, 1998 (1998.69)

Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, and Dodge and Rogers Funds, 1999 (1999.99)

The bust of a richly bejeweled woman stares from this fragment of a floor mosaic that was once part of a large public building. The partially restored Greek inscription near her head identifies her as Ktisis, the personification of the act of generous donation or foundation. To emphasize her role as donor, she holds the measuring tool for the Roman foot. On her right a man extends a cornucopia toward her as if offering a gift; the Greek word for “good” is near his head. Originally a similar figure probably appeared to her left, and an inscription by his head would have completed the legend “Good wishes.”

The classical tradition of personifying abstract ideals continued during the Christian Era in many places around the Mediterranean basin, including Antioch (modern Antakya, Turkey), Cyprus, and North Africa. The carefully arranged and sized marble and glass tesserae forming this floor fragment are typical of the exceptional mosaics created throughout the Byzantine world in the 500s.

The Metropolitan Museum acquired the two figures independently. They were restored in accordance with an old photograph of the mosaic in a dealer's storeroom, showing the figures in their original arrangement before being separated for sale.





Bust of a Lady of Rank

Marble

Byzantine

Carved late 400s–early 500s, probably in Constantinople

H. 20 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (53 cm)

The Cloisters Collection, 1966 (66.25)

This superbly carved portrait bust presents a pensive woman with a compelling gaze who holds a scroll, the symbol of an educated person. Her long fingers draw attention to the scroll, indicating her pride in being among the cultured elite in an era that prized learning for both men and women. The delicate, sensitive carving and the highly polished finish suggest that the figure was made in Constantinople, perhaps as part of the funerary monument of a leading member of the imperial aristocracy.

Pectoral with Coins and Pseudomedallion

Gold with niello

Byzantine

Made about 539–50

Diam. medallion (with beading): 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (5.8 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.1664)

This handsome, imposing pectoral is one of thirty-four pieces of gold jewelry said to have been found at the turn of the twentieth century, possibly at ancient Lycopolis (modern Assiut) or Antinoöpolis (Antinoë; modern Sheikh Ibada), both in central Egypt. (The hoard is now divided among the Metropolitan Museum; the British Museum, London; the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and the Staatliche Museen–Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.) Whether the pieces were indeed discovered together or were assembled from different sites, they represent the standard of luxury among the elite in Egypt under Byzantine rule and



attest to the close connection between the wealthy province and the capital Constantinople.

The pectoral may have been made for an aristocrat or general associated with the Byzantine court. Its large central medallion, formed from two gold sheets worked in repoussé, features an unidentified emperor on the front and the personification of a city, probably Constantinople, on the back. The gold coins date from the reign of the emperor Theodosius II (r. 408–50) to 539, when Justinian I introduced a new style of representing the emperor on coinage. The making of the pectoral may have coincided with that change. A framed, solid-gold imperial medallion of Theodosius I (r. 379–95), from the same hoard (Freer Gallery of Art), probably once hung from the pectoral. As on the diptych of Justinian I (see p. 15), there is a discreet reference to Christianity: crosses in

niello, a black alloy, appear on the two very small medallions either side of the central medallion.

Pair of Jeweled Bracelets

Gold, silver, pearls, amethysts, sapphires, glass, quartz, and emerald plasma

Byzantine

Made 500–700, probably in Constantinople

Diam. 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (8.3 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.1670, .1671)

These elaborately decorated bracelets are two of four from the hoard that contained the pectoral with coins and pseudomedallion, above. Featuring gemstones of different colors framed and enhanced by luminous pearls, they represent one of the most highly prized jewelry types of the Early Byzantine world. On the interiors are sheets of gold pierced to form openwork designs.



Lintel Fragment

Limestone

Byzantine

Made about 400–550, probably in Syria

20 x 19½ in. (49.5 x 17.8 cm)

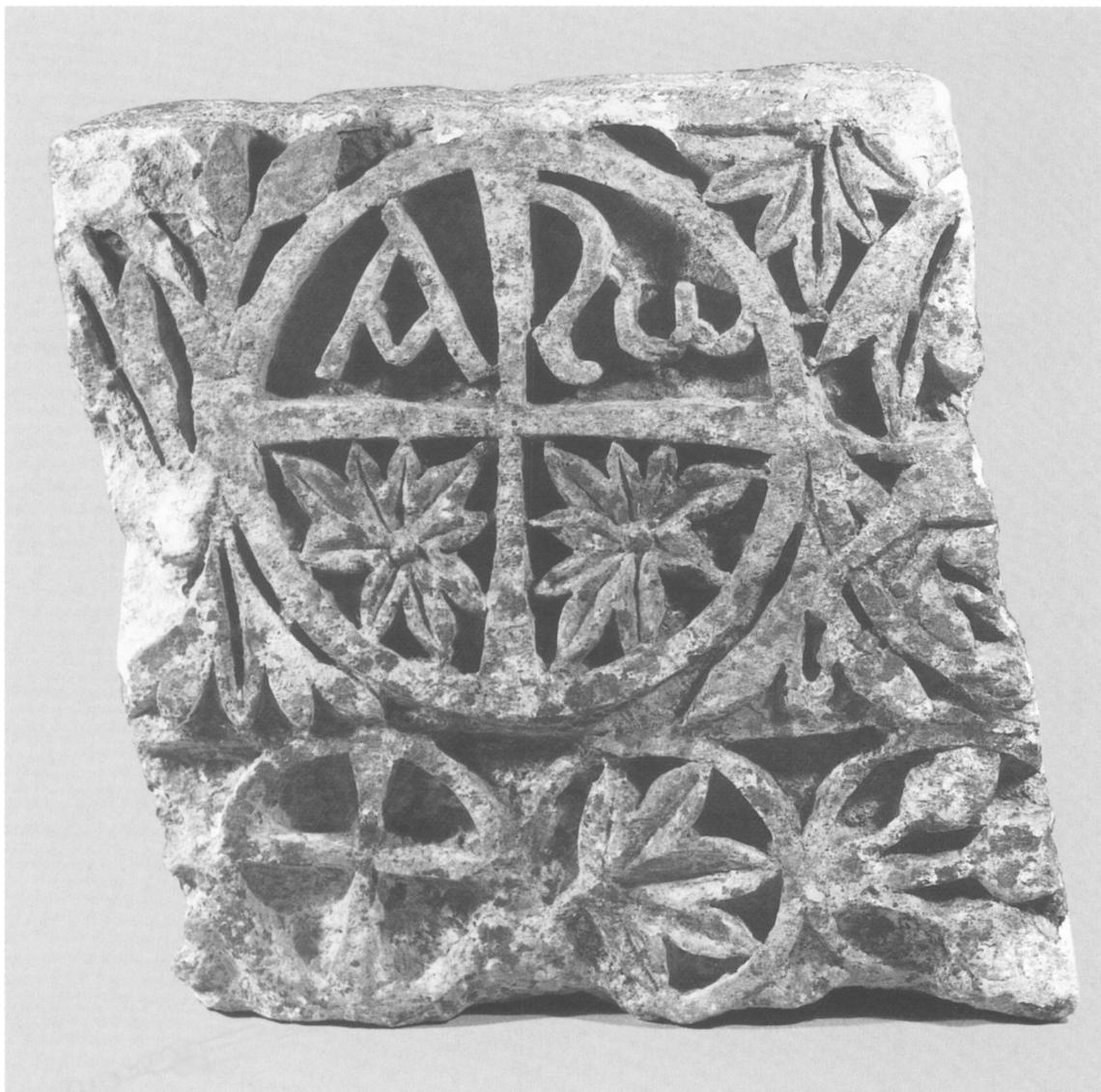
Purchase, Anonymous Gift, 1969 (69.15)

The deeply undercut patterns on this architectural fragment resemble the decoration on lintels from church door-frames in Asia Minor, particularly in the northern regions of Roman Syria. The equal-armed cross in the medallion at the center represents the Greek letter

chi (X); the vertical arm of the cross ends in the letter rho (P). Together they constitute a variant of the Christogram (see p. 12). The Chi-Rho is found wherever Christianity reached, from Gaul in western Europe to Egypt in the south.

The alpha (A) and omega (ω) flanking the cross—the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet—were also symbols widely used by the early church. They

refer to a vision beheld by John the Evangelist on the Aegean island of Patmos, where he had been exiled by the Romans. In a letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor, John described the message from God that was communicated to him by an angel: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).





The Antioch Chalice

Silver cup set in a footed silver-gilt shell
Byzantine, from Roman Syria, possibly
Antioch or Kaper Koraon
Made about 500–550
H. 7½ in. (19 cm)
The Cloisters Collection, 1950 (50.4)

This vessel is one of a group of massive, elegantly worked silver objects called the Antioch Treasure, which testifies to the generous support offered to the early church by Christian communities. When it was discovered in 1910, the treasure was believed to have belonged to a church in Antioch, a wealthy Roman city on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. Saints Peter and Paul were among the earliest followers of Christ to preach in the city, where it is said, the disciples were first called Christians (Acts of the Apostles 11:26). Antioch, along with Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Alexandria, was one of the five great cities that led the early church. More recently, however, it has been argued that the treasure was part of a larger group of silver objects from the church of Saint Sergios in Kaper Koraon (modern Kurin, Syria), a small town under the ecclesiastical control of the church of Antioch.

The silver cup inside the shell was once identified as that used by Christ at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:27–29)—the so-called Holy Grail. The elaborate vine scrolls that form the container for the cup encircle figures seated in the classical philosopher's pose, as well as birds and animals. Two of the figures may be representations of Christ (see detail). The Antioch Chalice may not be a chalice at all, however. In outline it is identical to the standing lamps typically used in churches during the first half of the sixth century.



Detail of Antioch Chalice



Plaques with Saints Peter and Paul

Silver

Byzantine, from Roman Syria, possibly Antioch or Kaper Koraon

Made about 550–600; shown before the latest restoration

10¼ x 8½ in. (27.3 x 21.6 cm) (.1);

10⅝ x 8½ in. (27 x 21.6 cm) (.2)

Fletcher Fund, 1950 (50.5.1, .2)

The plaques, which are part of the Antioch Treasure (see the Antioch Chalice on p. 21), depict two of the most important original followers of Christ. The image of Saint Peter established by the early church was of a man with a round face, short hair, and a beard. Here (above left) he holds a cross and gestures as if preaching. At his waist are the keys to the kingdom of heaven given to him by Christ (Matthew 16:19). The early church represented Saint Paul as a man with a long face, receding hairline, and pointed

beard. Here (above right) he holds a book—an appropriate symbol for the author of much of the New Testament. Both men stand under arches flanked by peacocks. The early church often described heaven in architectural terms; thus, arches are often considered representations of paradise. These two plaques may have framed an image of Christ, composing a tripartite icon for contemplation or veneration.

Ivory Pyxis Depicting Women at the Tomb of Christ

Byzantine

Made 500s, in the eastern Mediterranean
H. 4 in. (10.2 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.57)

The Gospel of Luke (24:1–10) describes a group of women—including the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalen, and Mary, mother of James—at the empty tomb of the risen

Christ. The decoration on the back of this pyxis shows three women standing with their hands outstretched, in the orant (praying) posture used in the early church. Here, on the front, two Marys swing censers as they approach a domed building, where tied-back curtains reveal an altar. In the early church the altar came to be understood as a symbol of Christ's tomb. On the altar is the Gospel book, Christ's word. Above it is a hanging lamp. Narrative scenes such as this made the words of the Gospels visible for the devout, and they established traditions for the depiction of events in the life of Christ that influenced subsequent Christian art.

This finely carved pyxis was worked from a cross section of an elephant's tusk. Such containers may have been used to carry the bread of the Eucharist to those too ill or too elderly to attend church.



Flask with Adoration of the Magi

Silver and silver gilt

Byzantine

Made 500s

H. 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (31.5 cm)

Purchase, Frederick C. Hewitt Fund, by exchange; Rogers Fund and Schimmel Foundation Inc. Gift; Gifts of J. Pierpont Morgan, Mr. and Mrs. Marc B. Rojzman, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr., Lucy W. Drexel, and Anonymous, by exchange; Bequests of Mary Stillman Harkness, George Blumenthal, Gwynne M. Andrews, and Michael Dreicer, by exchange; Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, by exchange; Rogers Fund, by exchange; and The Cloisters Collection, by exchange, 1984 (1984.196)

Some early depictions of events from the life of Christ include details that were omitted from later standard representations of the scenes. The images on this flask, which may have been used by a

Christian community in the East, include examples of such unusual iconography.

At the left the Christ Child is sitting upright in his mother's lap. Above the Christ Child is the star that, according to the Gospel of Matthew (2:1–12), led the three wise men to Christ. The archangel Gabriel is shown dramatically striding forward to present the three Magi (not shown in this illustration) to the Christ Child. Only in the Armenian Infancy Gospel, a popular early text elaborating the Gospels' descriptions of Christ's young life, is Gabriel described as the wise men's guide. At the base of the flask are phoenixes, whose legendary rebirth from the ashes may have been meant to symbolize the salvation offered by Christ's birth.



Arch with Running Vines, Leaves, and Fruit

Limestone

Byzantine, said to be from the Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit, Egypt

Carved 500–600

Max. w. (with capitals): 92 in. (231 cm)

Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1929

(29.9.2a–v)

Two Capitals with Grape-Leaf-and-Vine Pattern

Limestone

Byzantine, said to be from the Monastery of Apa Jeremias, Saqqara, Egypt

Carved 500–700

H. 22½ in. (57.2 cm) (.66); 22 in. (55.9 cm) (.76)

Rogers Fund, 1909–10 (10.175.66, .76)

By the sixth century elaborate monastic complexes had developed at many sites in Egypt, including Bawit, in central Egypt, and Saqqara, near Memphis. By the time the elements of this arch were carved, these monasteries had become part of the Coptic church, the Egyptian Christian church that had begun to separate from the church of Constantinople and Rome after the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

These carvings were probably originally painted in vibrant colors similar to those found on textiles (see pp. 25–27). While the motifs have roots in classical antiquity, the carvers no longer sought to make visible the logic of the architecture. Instead, the carvings form a veil over the stone that denies its solidity and mass—a style popular throughout the Byzantine world in the sixth century. (The most elaborate works of this type are in the great church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul [Constantinople].) With the Arab conquest of Egypt, carvers of elements like these entered the service of the new rulers and influenced the development of Islamic art.



Tunic Decoration: Square with a Personification of Spring

Tapestry weave in multicolored wool
Byzantine, said to have been excavated at
Panopolis (modern Akhmīm, Egypt)
Woven 300–500
9¼ x 9⅞ in. (23.5 x 25 cm)
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890 (90.5.848)

Panopolis, an important weaving center during the pharaonic period, continued under Byzantine rule to be a significant site of textile production. The decoration on many Byzantine-era works from the town is based on motifs popular in the Greek and Roman world. Personifications of the seasons, for instance, are found on domestic art of all types.

This brightly colored square may have been one of a set of four panels representing the seasons that decorated a tunic or, possibly, a domestic textile. The flowers suggest that the woman symbolizes spring. Her elaborate jewelry is a token of the good fortune and prosperity that such personifications were thought to bring to their owners. The careful modeling of the face, particularly of the eyes, is encountered in images in other media, including mosaics. Traces of similar vivid colors are found on architectural sculpture.

Fragment of a Large Hanging with Bird and Basket

Tapestry weave in multicolored wool
Byzantine, excavated in Egypt
Woven 300–400, probably in Herakleia
(modern Anatolia, Turkey)
25¼ x 19¾ in. (64 x 50 cm)
Gift of George F. Baker, 1890 (90.5.153)

The intricately woven depiction of a bird perched on a twig by a basket of grapes is almost painterly. This fragment was part of a large, richly colored textile meant for domestic use. (Another fragment is



in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.) The complete work may have been a wall hanging or a curtain.

Although Egypt was a major center of textile production, exceptional fabrics

were widely imported. This example is thought to have been woven near Constantinople and is representative of the luxury goods available to the elite in the southernmost province of the empire.





Hanging with Heads of a Dionysian Group

Tapestry weave in multicolored wool
 Byzantine, said to have been excavated at
 Antinoöpolis (Antinoë; modern Sheikh
 Ibada, Egypt)
 Woven about 500
 40¼ x 62¼ in. (102 x 158 cm)
 Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1931 (31.9.3)

Even as Christianity became more firmly established in the empire, images of older gods remained popular. Thirteen of the fifteen exquisitely woven medallions on this large wall hanging are at least partially preserved. They are encircled by ivy, a symbol of Dionysos, the ancient god of wine, and contain busts of participants in the Dionysian revelries. Among the horned satyrs and beautiful nymphs and maenads are Herakles (top row, second from left) and Silenus,

Dionysos's bald tutor (bottom row, second from right). The rich jewelry worn by several of the figures is similar to that in the Metropolitan Museum's jewelry hoard said to be from either Lycopolis (modern Assiut) or nearby Antinoöpolis, in Egypt (see the pectoral and bracelets on p. 19).

Tunic with Dionysos and Dionysian Motifs

Plain-weave linen with designs worked in
 linen and purple wool in tapestry weave
 Byzantine, said to be from Panopolis
 (modern Akhmim, Egypt)
 Woven 400–500
 72 x 53 in. (183 x 135 cm)
 Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1926 (26.9.8)

Tunics, usually worn in layers, were the standard dress in the Mediterranean world. Most that survive were found in graves in the dry sands of Egypt, as was this one. The outer tunics of the elite—officials, nobles, well-to-do citizens—were long and elaborately decorated, with long sleeves. The garments were ornamented with woven bands (*clavi*), squares, or medallions—decoration not merely for its own sake but also as amuletic protection for the wearer. Purple was closely associated with imperial power, and its use for the patterns here suggests that the tunic was made for a leading citizen of Byzantine Egypt.

The tunic's richly woven bands and squares are filled with images of the followers of Dionysos celebrating his revelries. Dionysos himself appears in the squares at the shoulders. The god long remained popular in Panopolis.

About the time this tunic was woven, Nonnos of Panopolis (act. early fifth century) wrote a long epic poem, the *Dionysiaka*, on Dionysos's conquest of India, a frequent subject in Egypt, where another conqueror, Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.), had ruled and was buried. It is unclear if the continuing interest in Dionysian themes had any religious significance. (Nonnos, for instance, is thought to have also written a verse paraphrase of the Gospel of John.)



seamen—of the more elaborate garment from Byzantine Egypt shown at the left. With a net cast over his shoulder and a tiller in his left hand, he stands before a weighted bollard—a post around which small boats were tied to a wharf. The cleat used to secure the mooring line is formed by two loops in the shape of fingers protruding from the bollard. Perhaps from a dock in the Italian port city of Ostia, this charming figure exemplifies the small-scale decorative yet utilitarian statues found throughout the Byzantine Empire.

MH



Plaque with an Eros

Bone, with traces of red and blue paint
 Byzantine
 Carved 300–500, probably in Egypt
 3½ x 2⅞ in. (8.9 x 6 cm)
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles D. Kelekian,
 1978 (1978.431)
 Rogers Fund, 1978 (1978.432.1,2)

Ivory and bone plaques were used to decorate small caskets and furniture, such as couches and chests. Many plaques were incised, while others were carved in relief. Carvings of both types frequently appeared on the same object.

Images incised on plaques often featured raised ridges outlining portions of the design, as is the case here. The interior of each section thus delineated was filled with colored wax, so that the plaques resembled the richly colored textiles and painted stone sculptures that were also produced in Egypt about this time (see pp. 24–27). Traces of red and blue paint on the eros's cloak hint at the original vibrancy of this plaque, when bright colors framed and enhanced the creamy whiteness of his body. The

delightfully plump eros is one of the many classical subjects that remained popular as Roman Egypt became Byzantine Egypt, and as the paganism of antiquity yielded to Christianity.

Fragments with Personifications of Victory and the Nile

Ivory
 Byzantine
 Carved 500s, probably in Egypt
 L. (Nile) 2½ in. (6.4 cm); I. (Nike) 4⅞ in. (10.5 cm)
 The Cloisters Collection, 1971 (1971.49.1, .2)

It is possible that these fragments are from an ivory celebrating the annual flooding of the Nile River. The figure who appears to fly, bearing a wreath, is a Nike, or personification of victory. (Images like this one, which are common in classical art, may have been the models for depictions of angels in Christian art.) The

small, childlike figures surrounding the Nike are erotes, who in Egypt symbolized the number of feet the river needed to rise each year to ensure fertility and a good harvest. Eroses also appear beside the superbly carved, longhaired old man who personifies the Nile. The delicate refinement of his face is echoed in the personification of the river found on the surviving floor mosaics of the Great Palace of the imperial court in Constantinople (now in the Mosaic Museum, Istanbul).

Polycandelon with Crosses

Copper alloy
 Byzantine
 Made 500–600
 Diam. 10½ in. (26.5 cm)
 Promised Gift of Miriam N. Rosen

Oil-filled glass vessels were hung from the round openings in this flat, circular



Lamp Handle with Griffin's Head

Copper alloy

Byzantine

Made 500–700

H. 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (17.6 cm)

Gift of Max Falk, 1987 (1987.441)

Standing lamps were widely used in the Byzantine world and were often decorated with Greek and Roman motifs. The griffin, a mythical beast long associated with light and protection from evil, was sacred to the god Apollo. Its ferocious form combined the body of a lion with the wings and curved beak of a bird of prey. Christians adopted the griffin as a symbol both of protection and of royal status, and at times marked images of griffins with Christograms. The strong profile of this griffin and its piercing gaze give it an air of authority and rank. The massive size of the handle suggests that it was fastened to a large standing lamp, possibly one meant for a public building or a palace.

hanging lamp, or polycandelon. Such lamps cast beautiful shadows, magnifying the designs of their disks on walls and floors. The shadows from this lamp, which is decorated with crosses radiating from the center, would have emphasized its Christian symbolism. Enormous hanging lamps may have been used to light the great church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which the poet and courtier Paul the Silentiary (act. sixth century) described in 563: "Thus is everything clothed in beauty . . . no words are sufficient to describe the illumination in the evening; you might say that some nocturnal sun filled the majestic church with light."



THE EARLY BYZANTINE WORLD AND THE PEOPLES ON ITS BORDERS

The Vermand Treasure

Provincial Roman, found in Vermand,
France
Made about 400

Three Mounts for Spear Shafts

Silver gilt inlaid with niello
L. 1 1/8 in. (3 cm) (.143); 3 3/4 in. (9.4 cm)
(.144); 4 3/4 in. (12.2 cm) (.145)
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
(17.192.143–.145)

The Rhine and Danube Rivers defined the borders of the Roman Empire in western Europe. They separated the citizens of Rome from the many peoples who inhabited Germania, as the Romans called the vast area beyond the frontiers. By the fourth century many Germanic tribesmen—whom the Romans referred to as barbarians—had been enticed by money and gifts to serve as mercenary soldiers within the empire. This group of objects—a set of three mounts for spear shafts—was found in the grave of a barbarian warrior stationed in the Roman province of Gaul, where more than 75,000 soldiers safeguarded the Rhine border.

Although the grave had been looted before its discovery by archaeologists in

1885, it remains unsurpassed among barbarian-warrior graves in the number and quality of objects it held. Among the goods were an ax, spears, a sword, and a shield (the boss and handle of the shield are also in the Metropolitan Museum). The exceptional craftsmanship and rich design of the spear-shaft ornaments suggest that they belonged to a high-ranking military leader. The pieces are intricately cast with scrolls, rosettes, and fantastic animals. Their surfaces are gilded, with vivid patterns created by niello inlays. The six-pointed interlaced star prominent on one mount was not a Jewish symbol at this time; it appears as a decorative motif in both Roman and Germanic art.

MH



Buckle

Gold, with garnets

Byzantine, found in Komárom, Hungary

Made 400–500, probably in Constantinople

L. 1 3/8 in. (3.5 cm)

Purchase, Rogers Fund, Alastair B. Martin,

Norbert Schimmel Foundation Inc., and

Levy Hermanos Foundation Inc. Gifts, and

funds from various donors, 1986 (1986.341)

This buckle was discovered near the Danube River, east of Budapest, alongside silver-gilt-and-garnet sheath fittings from a battle dagger and sword (now in the British Museum, London). The buckle and the sheath fittings were probably part of the grave goods of a Germanic tribal leader, but the rich combination of gold and garnets and the buckle's fine workmanship suggest that it was made by a jeweler in Constantinople. Byzantine emperors frequently gave tribal chieftains from outlying regions opulent pieces of jewelry or weapon fittings as signs of friendship and alliance (or as small bribes). Using money often obtained from the Byzantines, Germanic leaders also commissioned pieces from workshops in Constantinople, displaying them as symbols of their wealth and links with the powerful civilization in Byzantium. It is thus probable that this buckle traveled far from its maker before being buried with its owner.

MH



Crossbow Brooch

Gold

Late Roman or Early Byzantine

Made about 430

L. 4 7/8 in. (11.9 cm)

Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1995

(1995.97)

The crossbow brooch, used to secure an official's cloak, was often offered as a political and diplomatic gift by Byzantine emperors. This particularly sumptuous example, like some others of its type, may have been presented to a Germanic king. Of exceptional length and weight (78.4 grams), the elaborate clasp offers a superb example of the openwork technique mastered by Byzantine jewelry makers: tiny perforations punched into gold sheet form an intricate design. Embedded in the lacy pattern of stylized vine scrolls is a Latin cross, an allusion to the empire's power based on its faith. The tip of the cross, enclosed within a circle, forms a Christogram. The Greek letters alpha and omega, symbolizing the all-encompassing nature of God (see p. 20), are suspended from the arms of the cross.

While most ancient brooches employed a simple catch plate to fasten the pin, this piece required the wearer to unscrew the onion-shaped terminal on the right in order to release it. The novelty and relative complexity of the screw mechanism no doubt enhanced the value of this exquisite imperial gift.

MH





The Vrap Treasure

Gold, silver, and silver with partial gilding
Avar or Byzantine, found in Vrap (modern
eastern Albania)

Made 600s–700s

L. (longest belt fitting): 5 in. (12.7 cm);

h. (ewer): 9 7/8 in. (23.2 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917

(17.190.1673, .1678, .1679, .1683, .1686,
.1697, .1704, .1705, .1707, .1708, .1710,
.1711a, .1712a)

The ensemble of objects on these two pages, found together in Vrap, attests to the wealth of the Avars, a nomadic tribe of mounted warriors who inhabited the Eurasian steppes. From the sixth to the eighth century, the Avars maintained a complex relationship with the Byzantine Empire, at times protecting the empire's borders, at times raiding the very lands they had agreed to defend. Tribute payments from Byzantium as well as war booty provided the Avars with enormous amounts of gold and silver. Avar goldsmiths created works of exceptionally high quality and were counted among the tribe's ruling class.

The treasure contains an array of belt fittings, some richly decorated (see above), some unfinished or defectively cast. It also includes several vessels: a ewer with an inscription in Greek ("The

voice of the Lord is upon the waters" [Psalms 29:3]); a sixth-century Byzantine bucket used for drawing water; and simple goblets (see opposite). A more elaborate goblet is decorated with personifications of four ecclesiastical centers in the Byzantine world—Cyprus, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople (for the last, see detail).

Why these varied objects were brought together remains a mystery. Some scholars have suggested that the objects were part of a treasure belonging to an Avar chief; others have speculated that they were the property of an Avar craftsman. Although some have attributed the vessels to a provincial Byzantine artist, it is more likely that most of them were created in emulation of Byzantine works admired from afar.

MH



Personification of Constantinople, detail of a goblet



Plate with Presentation of David to Saul

Plate with Battle of David and Goliath

Silver, cast, hammered, engraved, punched, and chased
 Byzantine, found in 1902 at Karavas, Cyprus
 Made 629–30, in Constantinople
 Diam. 10½ in. (26.7 cm); 19½ in. (49.4 cm)
 Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
 (17.190.397, .396)

A set of nine beautifully worked silver plates was among an impressive hoard of gold and silver objects found at Karavas, a small town near Lambousa (ancient Lapithos), on Cyprus's northern shore. (The plates are now divided between the Metropolitan Museum and the Cyprus

Museum, Nicosia.) Cyprus was an important trading center in the eastern Mediterranean during the Early Byzantine era. The treasure may have been buried by a wealthy person or family in the mid-600s, as Arabs invaded the island and the Early Byzantine period came to an end.

The decoration on the plates illustrates events early in the life of the Old Testament king David—up to his slaying of Goliath and his marriage to Michal, daughter of King Saul. The plates are grouped by size: there are four small plates, four medium-size plates, and one great plate (opposite and detail p. 36). On the medium-size plates events from David's life are presented before an arcaded lintel, an architectural form that

was often used in Byzantine art in depictions of the imperial court. The symmetry of the design is also typical of Byzantine imperial art, suggesting the *taxis*, or harmony and order, that the emperor was supposed to provide for his people.

Above, David is presented to King Saul, as described in 1 Samuel 17:32–34. He stands bravely before the seated ruler, asserting his willingness to battle the giant Goliath.

The David plates, with their naturalistically rendered figures, fall within the classical tradition of elegantly wrought silver for domestic use. Elaborate dishes displayed at banquets in the Byzantine Empire were usually decorated with classical subjects. The David plates may





David Battling Goliath, detail of the large plate

be the earliest surviving examples of the use of biblical scenes on display plates.

Illustrated on page 35 is the largest and most important of the David plates. At banquets the eight smaller plates may have been arranged around it—in the biblical order of the events depicted on them—to form a Christogram.

The story, from 1 Samuel 17:41–51, is told in three registers. At the top David confronts Goliath before a personification of the brook from which he gathered

the stones for his sling. In the middle he battles Goliath with his sling (above); the fluttering ends of his tunic and mantle emphasize his lack of armor. While the heavily armed Goliath seems assured of victory, the startled poses of his comrades at the far right herald a different fate. At the bottom David beholds the fallen Goliath.

In 628–29 the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–41) defeated the Persian general Razatis in single-handed combat,

ending a long and costly war and regaining Jerusalem, Egypt, and other Byzantine territory. The contemporary Frankish chronicler Fredegarius wrote that Heraclius “advanced to the fray like a second David.” The backs of the nine David plates are marked with silver stamps dating from 613 to 629/30, during Heraclius’s reign. Thus the plates may refer to his victory over the Persians.



Girdle with Coins and Medallions

Gold

Byzantine, found in 1902 at Karavas, Cyprus
Made about 583; reassembled after discovery
L. 26 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (67.5 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
(17.190.147)

Purchase, Morgan Guaranty Trust Company
of New York, Stephen K. Scher and Mrs.
Maxime L. Hermanos Gifts, Rogers Fund,
and funds from various donors, 1991
(1991.136)

This incomplete, massive gold girdle was part of the treasure that contained the David plates (see pp. 34–36). It may have been worn as an insignia of office, which suggests that the owner of the hoard was closely connected with the imperial court in Constantinople.

The four medallions depicting the emperor Maurice Tiberius (r. 582–602) probably were minted for him to present as gifts to high officials and nobles when he assumed the office of consul in 583. On the front is a bust of him; he is in imperial dress and holds the *mappa*, or white handkerchief, with which a new consul opened the games that he was required to stage for the populace of Constantinople. On the back of the medallions the emperor is shown in military

dress, standing in a chariot drawn by four horses. He holds a globe surmounted by a small Nike offering a crown of victory. To his side is a Christogram, symbolizing the religion of the Byzantine state.

The girdle also contains thirteen coins, including one from the reign of Theodosius II and four from the brief joint rule in 527 of Justin I (r. 518–27) and Justinian I. Old coins were frequently used for jewelry, since under later rulers their historic value and their worth in gold often exceeded their worth as currency. All the coins and medallions are stamped CONOB, an abbreviation for *Constantinopolis obryzum* (pure gold of Constantinople), indicating that they were minted in the capital.



The Attarouthi Treasure

Silver and silver gilt with copper liners
 Byzantine, from northern Syria
 Made 500–650
 H. (chalices): 6⁷/₈–9³/₄ in. (17.5–24.9 cm)
 Purchase, Rogers Fund, and Henry J. and
 Drue E. Heinz Foundation, Norbert
 Schimmel, and Lila Acheson Wallace Gifts,
 1986 (1986.3.1–.15)

These well-wrought liturgical vessels belonged to a Christian church in the affluent merchant town of Attarouthi, in Syria, while the region was still part of the Byzantine Empire. Byzantium lost the area in the early seventh century, first to the Persians and then to Muslim Arab armies. The works were probably buried in haste as the Byzantine army retreated.

Inscriptions in Greek on the objects indicate that many of them were donated either to Attarouthi's major church, dedicated to Saint Stephen, or to a

smaller church, dedicated to Saint John (probably Saint John the Forerunner, who in the Western church is called John the Baptist). In the inscriptions donors also requested salvation for themselves or for loved ones, thus preserving the names of several citizens of the town: Anastasia; Diodoros; Eudoxia; John, deacon of Saint Stephen; Ertha and Stephen, children of Kyriakos; Kerykos, son of Michaelios; and Martyrios.

The chalices, censers, and strainer were employed in the Divine Liturgy, or Eucharist service, in which Christians take wine and bread in commemoration of Christ's sacrifice and death. The chalices, with their tall foot and large cup, are typical for the early church, and their generous size suggests that a large community of Christians resided near Attarouthi prior to the rise of Islam. As wine was poured into the chalices, the strainer was used to remove impurities.

The censers, which retain their copper liners, held hot coals and incense. One of a deacon's duties was to swing the censers, releasing the perfume of the incense to honor the Gospel, the altar, and the objects used in the service. The dove is unique among the vessels and may be the earliest surviving representation of the Holy Spirit.

Among the figures decorating the works are the Virgin, with her hands raised in the orant pose of the early church; Saint Stephen, one of the first seven deacons of the Christian church and its first martyr; archangels; and—an unusual feature—military saints in armor (those slaying dragons may be the first known depictions of Saint George). Stars and crosses on several of the chalices may represent, respectively, the star of Bethlehem that announced Christ's birth and the cross on which he died.

Box Reliquary of the True Cross

Silver gilt, gold, cloisonné enamel, and niello

Byzantine

Made about 800, in Constantinople

4 x 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (10.2 x 7.4 cm)

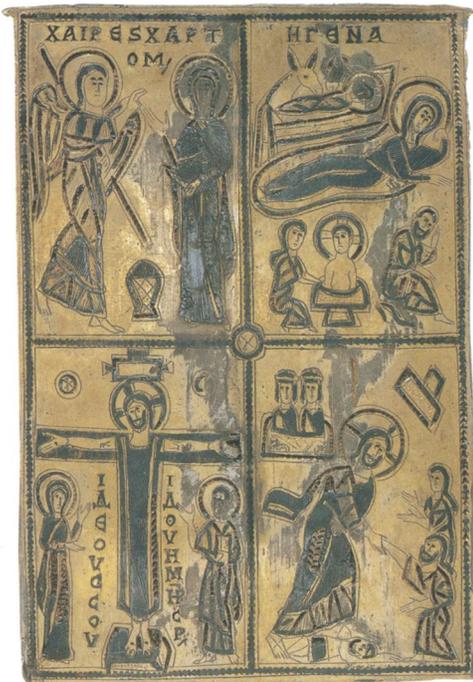
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917

(17.190.715a, b)

The cross upon which Christ was crucified is said to have been discovered in the early fourth century by Saint Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. During the Byzantine period small fragments of the True Cross were distributed as gifts and housed in precious containers where they could be venerated by the faithful. Relics of the True Cross were one of the most important diplomatic gifts offered by the Byzantine court.

This small, finely made cloisonné-enamel box is one of the earliest examples of a *staurotheke*, or reliquary made to contain a fragment of the True Cross. On the front of the lid Christ is shown alive on the cross, wearing the *colobium* (long tunic, usually sleeveless or short-

sleeved) popular in Early Byzantine depictions of the Crucifixion. He is flanked by the mourning figures of the Virgin and Saint John. On the back of the lid, worked in niello, are depictions of the Annunciation to the Virgin, the Nativity, the Crucifixion, and the Anastasis, or Harrowing of Hell. (The Anastasis, showing Christ reaching forward to draw Adam and Eve out of purgatory, was an image that evolved in Constantinople about 800.) Together the images promise eternal life for mankind through Christ's birth and sacrifice on the cross. The lid slides back to reveal five compartments, arranged in the shape of a cross, for housing the relic.



THE EMPIRE'S SECOND GOLDEN AGE



Mosaic Head of Christ

Glass
Byzantine
Made 1100–1200
11 3/8 x 8 1/4 in. (28.9 x 20.9 cm)
Lent by Mary and Michael Jaharis

In 787 the Second Council of Nicaea decreed that churches and houses should be filled, and all manner of objects decorated, with images of God, Christ, the Virgin, the Holy Spirit, and revered angels and holy men. The council reasoned that the more frequently these images—whether painted or in mosaic or other materials—were seen, the more did those who viewed them “remember and long for those [holy

figures] who serve as models, and . . . pay these images the tribute of salutation and respectful veneration.” In 843, with the official restoration of the use of icons, this description of the proper decoration of churches was rapidly realized.

This head of Christ may have been part of a scene that decorated the upper walls of a church. The words of Photios (ca. b. 810, d. after 893), onetime patriarch of Constantinople, may be borrowed to characterize Christ's expression. In the late 800s Photios wrote, describing the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos, in Constantinople: “Painted in color mosaic cubes [is] a manlike figure bearing the traits of Christ. You might say He is overseeing the earth and devising its orderly arrangement and government, so accurately has the painter been inspired to represent, though only in forms and colors, the Creator's care for us.”

Processional Cross

Silver with gilding and silver-gilt medallions
Byzantine
Made about 1000–1050
23 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (60 x 45.1 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1993 (1993.163)

Elaborately decorated crosses were widely used during the Middle Byzantine era in religious, military, and imperial processions. This exceptionally handsome cross is ornamented on both sides with medallions that include inscriptions in Greek, identifying the holy figures depicted. The central medallion on the front shows a bust of Christ. He is flanked on the crossarm by the Virgin and John the Baptist, both of whom raise their hands in supplication to him on behalf of mankind. (Representations of Christ between Mary and John were popular during the Middle Byzantine era. This standard composition is called the Deesis.) Above is the archangel Michael, and below, the archangel Gabriel. They are dressed in the robes of the Byzantine court.

In the central medallion on the plain back is Saint Thalelaios, a physician martyred in the late third century, who carries the symbols of his profession: a medical case and a lancet. At the ends of the crossarm are the popular Byzantine saints Nicholas and John Chrysostom. The archangels Uriel and Raphael appear above and below, respectively. On the base is an inscription in Greek: "Supplication [gift] of Leo, Bishop."

A homily attributed to Saint John Chrysostom describes the cross as a "power for those who are ill" and "the purification of sickness." Thus this cross may have been an offering connected to an illness. Or it may have been meant for a specific site dedicated to Saint Thalelaios. Thalelaios is one of the saints named in the ceremony for the purification of water, and the cross may have been used in that rite.



Base for a Cross

Copper alloy
Byzantine
Made about 1000–1100, probably in Constantinople or Asia Minor
H. 10½ in. (26.7 cm)
Purchase, Max Falk, Alastair B. Martin, Stephen Scher, and William Kelly Simpson
Gifts, in honor of William D. Wixom, 1993 (1993.165)



Base for a Cross

Copper alloy
Byzantine
Made about 1000–1100, probably in Constantinople or Asia Minor
H. 4½ in. (11.4 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1962 (62.10.8)



These bases may have held processional crosses that were carried into and through churches, towns, and cities. They represent in miniature the church type most popular during the Middle Byzantine centuries: a square building topped at the center by a dome. The interior of the structure was designed to suggest an equal-armed cross.

The church was the center of public religious life. Often a bust of Christ looked down on the congregation from the dome. Mosaics (see p. 40) and frescoes covered the upper walls; marble revetments lined the lower walls. Such luxurious furnishings made the church a symbol of paradise.



Decorative Panel

Marble

Byzantine, possibly from Constantinople

Carved 900–1100

27 x 31½ in. (68.6 x 80 cm)

Fletcher Fund, 1947 (47.100.47)

Marble panels of this kind were employed throughout the Byzantine world to define the interior spaces of churches. They were commonly used to form the base of the templon, or barrier, that screened the altar and apse from the nave, where the congregation assembled. They were also combined to make low walls for the galleries around the nave or to frame windows; often the patterns were carved so as to allow the slabs to be mounted

horizontally or vertically. Such panels were widely exported and are frequently found in Italian churches, especially in the area of Venice. Many Byzantine designs were copied outside the empire, at times on marble that had been imported from Constantinople.

Tip of a Pointer

Gold, enameled in the cloisonné technique
Byzantine
Made about 1080–1150, in Constantinople
H. 1 in. (2.5 cm)
Purchase, Louis V. Bell Fund and Henry G.
Keasbey Bequest, 1997 (1997.235)

The Byzantine court delighted in color and intricate design. The complex patterns and the red, blue, white, and translucent green enamels on this tiny masterpiece suggest that it was produced in an imperial workshop (only a small group of surviving enamels can be thus attributed). This tip may have been made for a pointer used during public readings of texts, probably religious ones. Indeed, the tip's motifs and colors echo the decorative patterns in illuminated manuscripts of the period.

The artist employed the cloisonné enameling technique. Compartments are outlined on the metal surface with thin bands (cloisons) of gold or silver, then filled with colored glass paste and fired at a high temperature, so that the melting glass forms a solid surface. The process often requires several firings before the final polishing.



Medallions from an Icon Frame

Gold, enameled in the cloisonné technique
Byzantine, from the Djumati Monastery
(modern Republic of Georgia)
Made about 1100, in Constantinople
Diam. (each): 3¼ in. (8.3 cm)
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
(17.190.670–.678)

These nine medallions with Greek inscriptions identifying the images are among the finest examples of the enameler's art. They are from a group of twelve enameled portraits that once decorated the frame of an icon of the archangel Gabriel. Across the top of the frame three of the medallions formed a Deesis composition—Christ flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist. In descending order on the sides were the busts of the apostles Peter and Paul (left), then those of the four evangelists (only the medallions depicting Matthew, Luke, and John survive, right). Across the base were the portraits of Saints George, Demetrios (now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris), and Theodore (now in the Georgian

State Art Museum, Tbilisi). Peter and Paul still have the attributes found on the Antioch Treasure plaques that bear their images (see p. 22). Both Paul and the evangelists hold handsomely bound manuscripts of their writings. Saint George, in courtly dress, holds a small cross, symbolic of his martyrdom.

The Byzantine emperor Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071–78) was married to Maria of Alania, daughter of the Georgian king Bagrat IV. These medallions may have been sent as a gift from the Byzantine to the Georgian court in connection with the imperial marriage, and they may have helped to inspire the production of cloisonné-enamel medallions in Georgia.





Double-Sided Pendant Icon with the Virgin and Christ Pantokrator

Gold, enameled in the cloisonné technique
 Byzantine
 Made about 1080–1120, in Constantinople
 1¼ x 1 in. (3.3 x 2.4 cm)
 Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1994
 (1994.403)

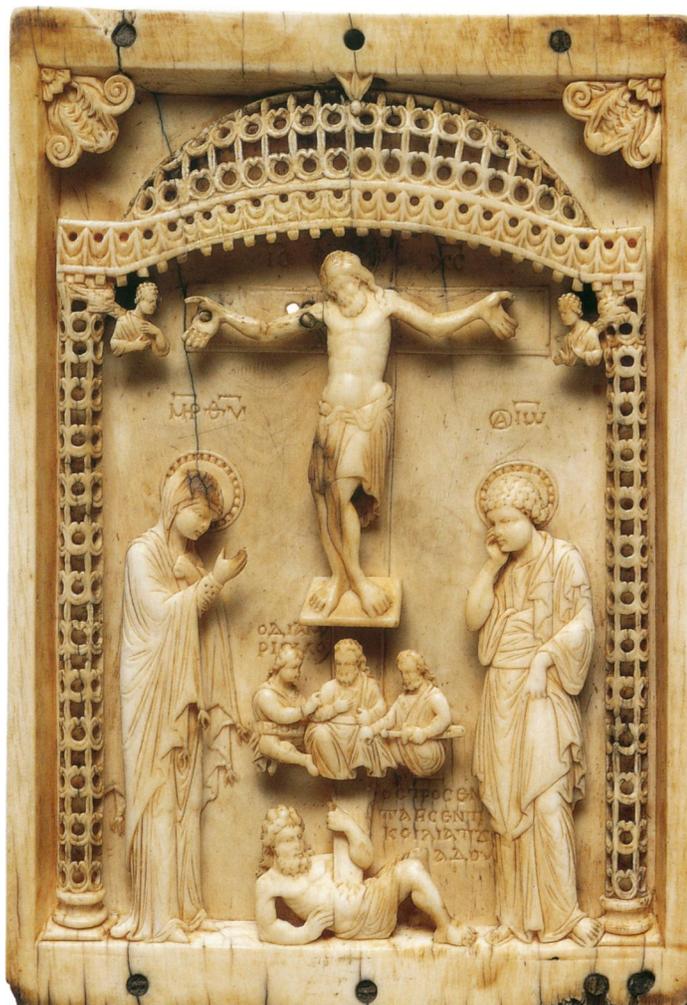
This tiny icon was meant to be worn around its owner's neck and to be used for personal devotions. It is a tour de force of enameling, for the Byzantine artisan has, with exceptional skill, worked both sides of a single gold sheet. Inscriptions, in Greek, identify the figures as "Mother of God" and "Christ, King of Glory." The Virgin, on one side, lifts her arms and looks, as if through the pendant, toward Christ on the other side. Christ, shown as the Pantokrator (Ruler of All), turns his eyes to the right, seemingly looking back at his mother. She is set among the greens and blues of the earth, while he appears in a field of gold—a miniature version of his depiction in the domes of Middle Byzantine churches.

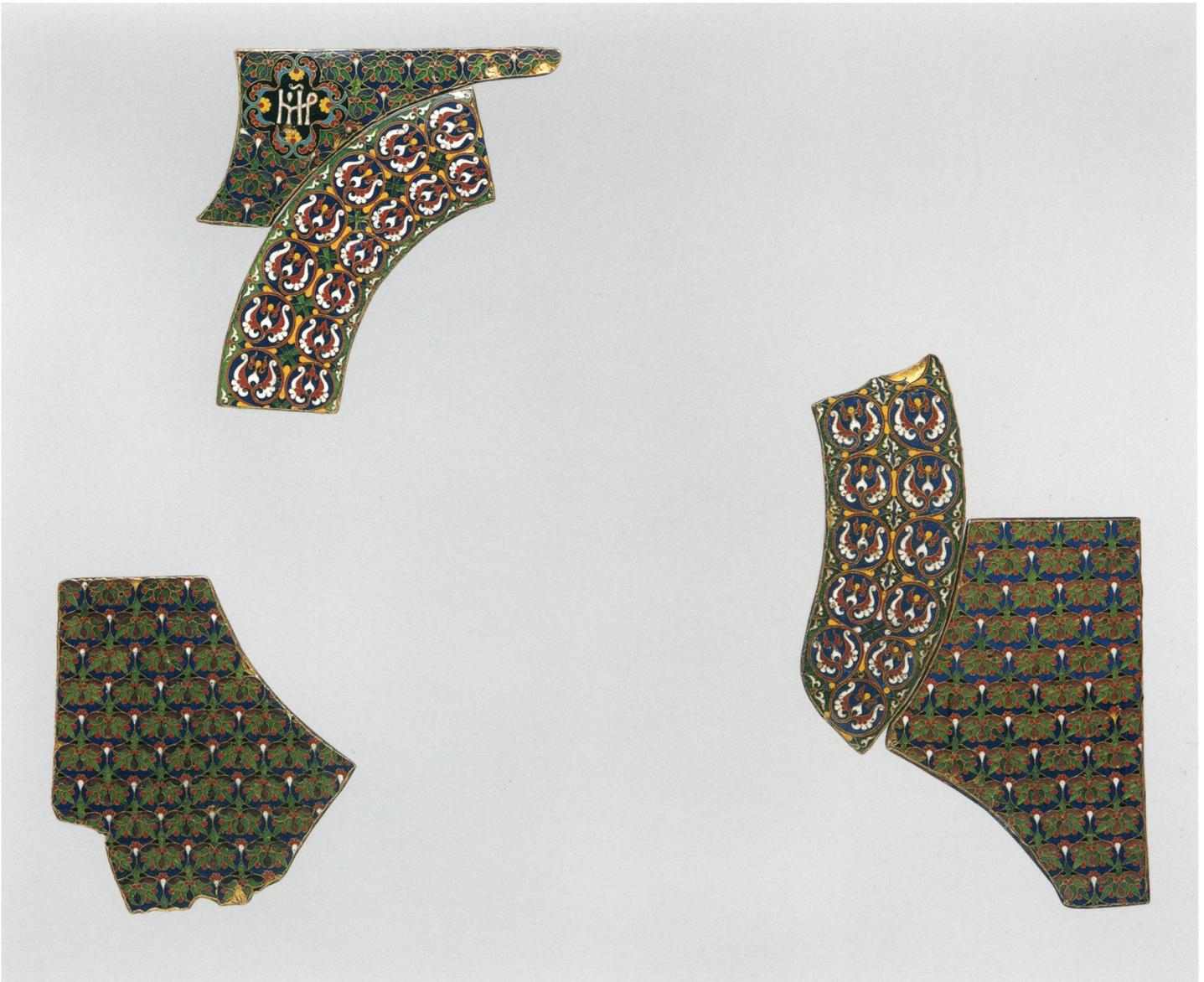


Icon with the Crucifixion

Ivory
 Byzantine
 Carved mid-900s, probably in Constantinople
 5 x 3½ in. (12.7 x 8.9 cm)
 Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.44)

This icon, meant for personal devotions, was once the central panel of a triptych; the two lost wings closed to cover it. The exquisitely carved figures are raised so far from the background that they are almost three-dimensional. The crucified Christ, his body slumped in death, is flanked by the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist, who stand in mourning poses typical of Byzantine art. Below Christ's feet a group of Roman soldiers draws lots for Christ's cloak (the event is identified by an inscription in Greek). Beneath them is a unique image described in an inscription as "the cross implanted in the stomach of Hades." The inclusion of Hades is a visual affirmation of the Christian belief that through his suffering on the cross, Christ won a victory over death.





Revetments from an Icon of the Virgin

Gold, enameled in the cloisonné technique
 Byzantine
 Made about 1100, in Constantinople
 Halo fragments: 5¼ x 1½ in. (13.3 x 3.8 cm),
 5¼ x 1⅞ in. (13.3 x 4.8 cm)
 Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
 (17.190.644–.648)

These intricately worked cloisonné-enamel panels once covered an icon that depicted the Virgin turning to the side with her hands raised in supplication. The same image appears in miniature on the double-sided pendant icon (opposite). The type is called the Hagiosoritissa, or Virgin of the Holy Soros, after the reliquary chest (*soros*) in Constantinople in which the Virgin's mantel was kept. (This relic was used to invoke her aid as protectress of the city.)

Two of the panels are from the Virgin's halo; three are from the background that covered the icon. On the upper-left panel

is an abbreviated inscription in Greek for "Mother of God"; to the left of the panel was a small image of Christ in heaven, to whom the Virgin directed her prayers. The two lower panels define the slope of her shoulders, with a small cutout at the lower left for her upraised hands. Another portion of the frame is in the Musée du Louvre, Paris; other sections are in the Georgian State Art Museum, Tbilisi.



Icon with the Koimesis

Ivory
Byzantine
Carved late 900s, probably in
Constantinople
7 1/8 x 5 7/8 in. (18.7 x 14.9 cm)
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
(17.190.132)

One of the most important new images to develop with the triumph of icons was the Koimesis, or Death of the Virgin, which is first found in Byzantine art in the 900s. This image became one of the most popular in the Middle and Late Byzantine world. It often appeared over the doors of churches, to be contemplated by the faithful as they left the service.

Here, the Virgin is shown lying on a

pallet for the dead. Christ stands behind her, holding up her soul (which takes the shape of an infant) and offering it to angels who will transport it to heaven. The apostles, led by Saint Paul at her feet and Saint Peter behind her head, stand witness. Holes in the ivory suggest that it was used to decorate the cover of a book, probably in the Latin West, where the practice was popular (see p. 61).

Three Panels from a Casket with Scenes from the Story of Joshua

Ivory
 Byzantine
 Carved about 900–1000, probably in Constantinople
 H. 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (6.6 cm) (a); 2 in. (5 cm) (b);
 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (6 cm) (c)
 Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
 (17.190.137a–c)

These three panels and their ornamental borders were once part of a casket illustrated with the Old Testament story of Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land. Each panel is delicately carved in a manner reminiscent of manuscript

illuminations, and each scene is identified by an inscription in Greek. The first panel, designed to fit around a lock plate, shows the conquest of the city of Ai; inscribed on the narrow frame are the words "And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city. . . . And the ambush arose quickly . . . and slew the men of Ai" (Joshua 8:18–21). The second panel shows the captive king of Ai, first bowed in submission before Joshua and then hanged on a forked stake at the far right of the scene. The inscription alludes to Joshua 8:23, 29: "And the king of Ai they . . . brought him to Joshua . . . [and] he hanged on a tree

until eventide." On the third panel emissaries from the Gibeonites approach Joshua. The inscription is adapted from Joshua 9, "The Gibeonites Displaying Their Torn Clothes." Joshua's story was often invoked in the Middle Byzantine period, when the Byzantines frequently identified themselves with God's Chosen People and likened their own military victories and defeats to those of the Jews many centuries earlier.

The portrait heads in profile on the borders may refer to antique coins. Traces of paint indicate that this work originally may have been as colorful as the illuminated manuscripts of the period.





Icon with Saint Demetrios

Ivory

Byzantine

Carved about 950–1000

7¾ x 4¾ in. (19.6 x 12.2 cm)

The Cloisters Collection, 1970 (1970.324.3)

Standing erect, a spear in his hand and a shield at his side, Saint Demetrios is shown ready to protect the Christian faithful. The name of the popular Byzantine military saint is inscribed in two parts in Greek. Martyred in Thessalonike, the second most important city of the empire in the early centuries of the church, he has long been the patron saint of that metropolis. Images of saints in military dress are rare in Early Byzantine art (they appear on the chalices of the Attarouthi Treasure, on p. 38) but typical of the Middle Byzantine period.

The cleft in the base of the frame may have supported a standard for carrying the image in processions or into battle. The holes drilled through the back indicate that it may have been used in the Latin West as a cover for a book (see pp. 48, 61).



Casket with the Deesis, Archangels, and the Twelve Apostles

Ivory, with later copper-alloy-gilt mounts
 Byzantine
 Carved about 950–1000, probably in Constantinople
 7¼ x 3¾ in. (18.4 x 9.8 cm)
 Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
 (17.190.238)

This small casket is a rare example of a work carved from solid panels of ivory, a most valuable material. On the lid, within a central medallion flanked by four others, Christ appears enthroned in majesty. In the upper two medallions are the Virgin and John the Baptist, each identified by an inscription in Greek; together with the image of Christ, they form the popular Middle Byzantine Deesis composition. Two unidentified archangels, the guardians of heaven, appear in the lower medallions, indicating that the figures depicted are in paradise. The same group appears on the front of the silver-gilt processional cross illustrated on page 41. Vine-scroll patterns

similar to manuscript motifs frame the whole panel, and roundels with apostles and evangelists, each identified in a carefully carved Greek inscription, decorate the sides of the casket. Saints Paul, Peter, James, and Andrew are shown on the front; Philip and Thomas, on the right side; Bartholomew and Simon, on the left; and John, Mark, Luke, and Matthew on the back. At one time the casket was covered with paint applied so thickly that it obscured the inscriptions. Recently, Museum conservators removed all the color after they exposed sections of the front and lid in their original unpainted state beneath a late-medieval but not original lock plate.

Two Panels from a Casket with the Story of Adam and Eve

Ivory
Byzantine
Carved about 900–1100, probably in Constantinople
L. 3 ¼ in. (9.5 cm) (.138); 3 ⅞ in. (9.8 cm) (.139)
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
(17.190.138, .139)

These finely carved, thin ivory panels were once attached to the wooden core of a casket decorated with scenes from the lives of Adam and Eve. Both panels show the couple, who are identified by inscriptions in Greek, laboring after their fall and expulsion from paradise. At left Adam and Eve are seen harvesting grain. She wears a long tunic; he, a short one. At right Eve works a bellows as Adam

hammers a metal object on his forge. Two surviving Byzantine caskets that also illustrate the story of Adam and Eve include, among similar scenes of grief and toil, the personification of Ploutos (Wealth), a figure meant to remind the person who stores jewels or money in the casket that prosperity is a gift from God and that God favors those who repent their sins. RH





Casket with Warriors and Dancers

Bone panels

Byzantine

Carved about 1000–1100, probably in Constantinople; copper-gilt metalwork added 1400s, probably in Italy

L. 11 3/8 in. (28.8 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
(17.190.239)

Bone-paneled caskets used at home by the well-to-do were often decorated with classical subjects, for the learning, literature, and images of ancient Greece and Rome remained alive and vibrant in the

East throughout the Byzantine period. The erotes that dance and wage mock battles on the sides of this casket and tame a female panther on the lid recall imagery associated with the ancient cult of the god Dionysos (see pp. 9, 26–27). The enthusiasm for classical learning in the Middle Byzantine era and the effort to reconcile it with Christian theology were effectively described by the writer and teacher John Mauropous in the eleventh century:

If perchance you wish to exempt certain pagans from punishment, my Christ,

May you spare for my sake Plato and Plutarch,
For both were very close to your laws in both teaching and way of life.
Even if they were unaware that you as God reign over all,
In this matter only your charity is needed,
Through which you are willing to save all men while asking nothing in return.

In the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade, when caskets like this reached the Latin West, they were often used in churches as containers for the relics of Christian saints.



Ring of Ioannis (John)

Gold and niello
 Byzantine
 Made 900–1000
 Diam. 1 in. (2.4 cm)
 Gift of Guy and Valerie Tempest Megargee,
 1992 (1992.239)

The incised, stylized vine scrolls on the sides of this ring and the letters on the face are filled with niello, which heightens the contrast with the gold ground. The Greek inscription begins “Lord, help [your] servant Ioannis, imperial *spatharios*. . . .” What follows cannot be readily understood. *Spatharios* (Sword-Bearer) was a title originally reserved for members of the imperial bodyguard. By the Middle Byzantine period, however, it had become an honorific indicating little more than the respectable status of Ioannis, the owner of the ring. He may have used the massive jewel as a signet ring. RH



Signet Ring of Michael Zorianos

Gold
 Byzantine
 Made about 1300
 Diam. $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (2.3 cm)
 Rogers Fund, 1918 (18.145.42)

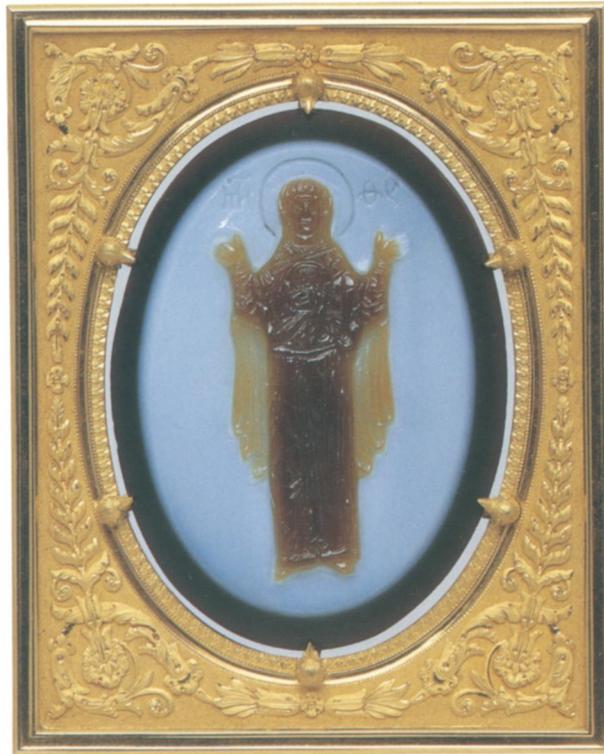
Styles in the rings worn by the aristocratic men of Byzantine society changed slowly. This handsome, heavy gold example, which closely resembles the tenth-century ring at left, is inscribed in Greek, “Seal of Michael Zorianos.” About the year 1300 a certain Michael Zorianos was principal officer of the Despotate of Epiros (in central Greece), one of several Byzantine states that arose during the Latin control of Constantinople. He was also one of the founders of the Church of the Taxiarchai in the town of Mokista. This ring may have belonged to him and have been used to seal official documents. RH

Temple Pendant and Stick

Gold, enameled in the cloisonné technique
 Byzantine
 Made about 1080–1150, in Constantinople
 H. (pendant with loop): 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (4.9 cm);
 h. (stick): 2 in. (5.1 cm)
 Rogers Fund, 1990 (1990.235a, b)

Temple pendants were worn by members of the Byzantine aristocracy. Probably attached by a loop to the hair or to a headdress, they dangled near the temple or the cheek. This intricately worked pendant, which features the head of a man within a medallion on the front and complex patterns on the reverse, may have been made in an imperial workshop. Its colors and designs are similar to those on a pointer in the Metropolitan Museum’s collection (see p. 44). The hollow interior of the pendant probably held a perfumed piece of cloth.





The stick would have been used to guide the cloth in or out of the pendant. Fragments of the metal strips, or cloisons, that outlined the patterns remain on the stick; the now-empty cells were once filled with vividly colored powdered glass and fired to make this miniature cloisonné masterpiece.

Cameo of the Virgin and Child

Agate
Byzantine
Carved about 1050–1100, probably in Constantinople; gold setting made about 1800 by Adrien Jean Maximillien Vachette in Paris
H. (cameo without frame): 1⅞ in. (4.1 cm)
Lent by John C. Weber

Wealthy Byzantines who wore temple pendants may also have worn or carried masterfully carved cameos like this one. The miniature icon displays the Virgin with her arms upraised in the orant pose. Barely visible on her breast is a medallion of the youthful Christ Emmanuel, who represents the preexistent word of God. Such images, which became popular in the eleventh century, are often called the Virgin Blachernitissa, after a famous icon of the type thought to have been housed

in the Blachernai Monastery in Constantinople. The exquisite carving of the agate and the careful arrangement of the design to take advantage of the colors of the stone demonstrate why the demand for Byzantine hard-stone carvings persisted long after the empire was overthrown. The elegant gold setting, crafted about 1800 by Adrien Jean Maximillien Vachette, a leading goldsmith of his day, testifies to the appeal of such Byzantine luxury goods in Napoleonic France.



Temple Pendants (Kolty)

Most in gold or electrum with cloisonné enamel; one in silver with niello
Kievan Rus'; most found in 1842 in or near the Desiatynna (Dormition) Church and in 1906 near Mykhailivs'kyi Zolotoverkhyi (Saint Michael of the Golden Domes), Kiev, Ukraine

Made 1000–1200, in Kiev

Max. h. 2⅜ in. (6 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917

(1917.190.670, .680, .684, .699, .700, .702–.704, .707–.709)

When Kievan Rus', a powerful new state to the north of the Byzantine Empire, accepted Christianity as its official religion in 988, the aristocracy also adopted the manners and dress of the Byzantine

court. Local artists soon produced their own versions of Constantinopolitan fashions. These temple pendants of precious metals worked in cloisonné enamel or niello are local variants of more intricately detailed works made for the Byzantine court (see p. 54). In one pair busts of saints appear silhouetted against a gold ground. In others confronted birds—and one pair of birdlike sirens, each with a feathered tail—flank motifs that may represent the tree of eternal life. One set retains traces of the strands of pearls that may have originally encircled most of these ornaments. On the pair worked in silver and niello, griffins from classical mythology appear in forms that may be related to the arts of the Vikings who founded Kiev. As in

Byzantium, temple pendants may have been worn next to the face by both the men and the women of Rus'. The works shown here were perhaps buried by their owners when the Mongol armies under Batu Khan sacked Kiev in 1240.



Bowl with Fish

Terracotta, white slip, and transparent glaze
Byzantine
Made 1000s–1200s
Diam. 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (25.7 cm)
Gift of Christopher C. Grisanti and Suzanne P. Fawbush, 2000 (2000.322)

Fish were a popular food in Byzantium, and large specimens were often offered as important gifts. Using the sgraffito technique, a potter with a sure hand incised this slyly smiling fish swimming among the reeds into the white slip covering the interior of the bowl. He then applied a transparent glaze over his sketch but did not bother to glaze the exterior of the dish. The inventive economy of line and sense of humor found in this drawing rarely appear in Byzantine art; when they do, it is usually, as here, on humble pottery.

Bowl with Bird of Prey

Terracotta, white slip, and transparent glaze
Byzantine
Made 1000s–1200s
Diam. 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (24.4 cm)
Anonymous Gift, 1984 (1984.302)

Craftsmen of the Middle Byzantine period produced not only elegant goods for the elite but also inexpensive earthenware for household use or export. This simple bowl covered with white slip, into which the pattern was scraped or incised in a technique called sgraffito, has the soft sheen of bone and ivory carvings. The well-executed bird with a hooked beak may be a falcon trained for hunting, a popular pastime of the elite. Constantine Manasses, a writer who lived from about 1130 to 1187, described hunters carrying falcons tied to the back of either hand. They would release the straps when the moment came for the birds to fly up and seek their prey. The Middle Byzantine epic poem *Digenis Akritis*, about a Byzantine-Arab border lord, says

that the dowry of the hero's wife includes "twelve snowy hawks from Abasgia [in modern Georgia], twelve falconers, and the same number of falcons."



THE FINAL FLOWERING OF THE BYZANTINE WORLD



Capital with Bust of the Archangel Michael

Marble
Byzantine, from Constantinople; possibly from the Monastery of the Virgin Peribleptos, now the Sulu Manastir Mosque, Istanbul
Made about 1250–1300, in Constantinople
H. 9¼ in. (24.7 cm)
Purchase, Gifts of J. Pierpont Morgan, George Blumenthal, and Messrs. Duveen

Brothers, by exchange; Bequests of George Blumenthal and Anne D. Thompson, The Collection of Michael Dreicer, Bequest of Michael Dreicer, and Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, by exchange; Rogers Fund and Mr. and Mrs. Maxime L. Hermanos Gift, 1983 (1983.167)

The elegant articulation of the bust on this beautifully carved capital is evidence of the artistic revival in Constantinople after its restoration to Byzantine rule in 1261. The archangel Michael, who is identified by an inscription in Greek, wears a jeweled tunic and a diadem and holds both an orb and a staff. These elements of dress and attributes of authority reflect the long-established connection between archangels, who are the guardians of heaven, and the Byzantine emperor, Christ's representative on earth. This image may have been part of the decoration of the upper section of a tomb built into a niche. It is said to have been found near the ruins of the Monastery of the Virgin Peribleptos (All-Seeing), established in the early eleventh century by the Byzantine emperor Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028–34), who was buried there. In the Late Byzantine period the site remained important, and the imperial court visited its church annually for the Feast of the Presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple, one of the Twelve Great Feasts (Dodekaorton) of the Orthodox Church (see p. 66).

Panel with a Griffin

Marble
Byzantine, possibly from Greece or the Balkans
Carved 1250–1300
23½ x 20½ in. (59.5 x 51.5 cm)
Purchase, Rogers Fund and Jeannette and Jonathan Rosen Gift, 2000 (2000.81)

A number of images that originated in the classical world remained popular throughout the history of Byzantium. For example, griffins were accepted as

Christian symbols in the first centuries of the Byzantine era (see p. 29). They often continued their traditional role as protectors of the dead. As time went on, these mythical creatures were increasingly associated with royalty. Byzantine artists frequently portrayed Alexander the Great in a griffin-drawn chariot, surveying his vast realm from the air. Derived from the

late-third-century *Alexander Romance*, that image of the great ruler has been found as far west as England and on works made for the Muslim states located on the Byzantine Empire's eastern and southern borders.

The elaborate overall patterning of this marble panel and the arrangement of the griffin within a medallion are

reminiscent of designs on silks made for both Byzantine and Muslim patrons. The small crosses on the borders confirm that the work was intended for Christian use. Griffins like this one are found on Late Byzantine tombs, where they may have had the dual function of announcing the royal status of the dead and offering them protection.





Cameo with Christ Emmanuel

Steatite

Byzantine

Carved about 1200–1400

H. 1 1/8 in. (2.9 cm)

Purchase, William Kelly Simpson Gift, 1987 (1987.23)

Steatite, a soft stone that can be rubbed to achieve a fine patina, eventually became even more popular than ivory as a medium for carved icons. An inscription in Greek, “Jesus Christ, Emmanuel,” beside the halo of this steatite image of the young Christ identifies him as a symbol of the Logos, or the preexistent word of God. Typically, his halo contains three arms, representing the cross upon which he was crucified. By contrast with the crisp folds at the neck of his tunic and the tooled ornament on the crossarms, Christ’s facial features are deeply worn, probably the result of repeated touching or kissing of the holy image by the icon’s owners.

The name Manuel, a shortened version of Emmanuel, was a popular choice for Byzantine men. The emperor Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–80) drew attention to his name’s association with Christ by including an image of Christ Emmanuel on many of the coins minted during his reign.

RH



Intaglio with Saint Theodore Teron Slaying a Multiheaded Dragon

Agate

Byzantine

Carved about 1300 or later

H. 1 1/8 in. (3.4 cm)

Gift of Nanette B. Kelekian, in memory of Charles Dikran and Beatrice Kelekian, 1999 (1999.325.227)

Theodore Teron (the Recruit) was one of the most popular military saints in the Late Byzantine era. Like his counterpart Saint George, he is well known for having killed a dragon. On this remarkable, minutely detailed intaglio, the incised carving depicts the event in a style that reflects the revival of classical culture in Byzantium during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In contrast with earlier, more formal and static depictions of saints killing dragons, as on the Attarouthi chalices (see p. 38), Theodore leans dramatically forward on widespread legs to thrust his spear into the fearsome beast. This depiction may deliberately refer to the battle between the classical hero Herakles and the hydra, also a mythical multiheaded monster. The Byzantine court poet Manuel Philes (ca. 1275–ca. 1345) prepared an inscription for an icon of Saint Theodore Teron and Saint Theodore Stratelates (the General)

in which he drew this connection, while emphasizing the superiority of the Christian heroes: “I painted the champions [the two Theodores] armed, so that Satan, humbled, may turn his back and may not assault us boldly. ‘Not even Herakles,’ they say, ‘is a match for two.’”

Carved in reverse, the Museum’s intaglio may have been used for sealing documents. A less carefully carved inscription in Greek on the back of the gem calls upon Christ to help the anonymous owner of this miniature icon.

RH

Book Cover(?) with Byzantine Icon of the Crucifixion

Silver gilt on wood backing, inset with ivory icon, sapphire, glass, and crystal
Icon carved about 1000, in Constantinople; setting made before 1085, at the Monastery of Santa Cruz de la Serós, Jaca, Spain
H. (setting): 10 1/2 in. (26 cm); h. (icon): 5 3/8 in. (13.7 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.134)

Byzantine ivory carvings have long been prized in the West. This icon of the Crucifixion was carved in the empire, probably as the central panel of a triptych meant for personal devotions. It displays a conventional Byzantine arrangement of the scene, with the Virgin and John the Evangelist flanking the crucified Christ and gesturing in recognition of his sacrifice. The Savior’s eyes are closed in death. Beside his head are the busts of two angels, who also gesture toward Christ, and a rayed sun and crescent moon.

Later in the century the panel was brought to the Benedictine monastery of



Santa Cruz de la Serós, said to have been founded by Queen Felicia (d. 1085), wife of Sancho V (r. 1076–94), king of Aragon and Navarre. There the icon was converted into the central panel of a

plaque that may have been the cover for a book (Byzantine ivory icons were widely used as book covers in the West) or as part of a votive work, possibly a reliquary. On the right side of the

plaque is a small Islamic sapphire sealstone with four of the ninety-nine Beautiful Names of Allah inscribed on it.

Incipit Page of the Gospel of John, from an Armenian Gospels

Attributed to the illuminator Sargis; scribe unknown

Pigments and gold on vellum

Made about 1300–1310, at the Monastery of Noravank', Siwnik', Greater Armenia

12½ x 9¼ in. (31.7 x 23.6 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.171.2)

Even as Turkish and Mongol rulers were taking over the territories controlled by Byzantium and neighboring Christian states, the empire's cultural and artistic traditions continued to influence the Christian communities within those borderlands. The Armenian peoples on the eastern frontier of the empire had recognized Christianity as their state religion in the early fourth century. While the Armenian church remained independent, many Armenians chose to become important citizens of the empire, serving as military leaders and even as emperors. Others continued to fight for independence from all overlords. In the fifth century, when much of Armenia was occupied by the Persians, an Armenian alphabet had been developed for the translation of religious texts. Here, on the incipit (opening) page of the Fourth New Testament Gospel, images of birds have been arranged to form the Armenian letters.

This single leaf, originally part of a complete Gospels, was probably illuminated by the artist Sargis, who worked at the Monastery of Noravank' in Greater Armenia. At that time the region was occupied by the Mongols, whose armies in the thirteenth century had swept as far west as Hungary. The format of the page is based on the Byzantine manuscript tradition, as are the floral patterns in the decoration. Unlike most illuminators of Byzantium, however, Sargis chose as his primary decoration the four symbols of the evangelists. Each one appears in the



capital letter that stands at the beginning of the first word—the angel for Matthew, the lion for Mark, the ox for Luke, and the eagle for John. The symbols are repeated in the headpiece, the panel of dense ornamentation suspended over the text: on top angels flank a bust of Christ in heaven framed by a pair of peacocks; within its borders two pairs of confronted lions and oxen flank a pair of eagles.

Page with the Ascension of Christ, from an Ethiopian Gospels

Pigments on vellum

Painted in the early 1400s, in the Lake Tana region

16½ x 11¼ in. (41.9 x 28.6 cm)

Rogers Fund, 1998 (1998.66)

In the Middle and Late Byzantine periods the influence of Byzantine art persisted far to the empire's south, even though the area had come under Islamic control in the seventh century. Axum, a kingdom in northern Ethiopia, had become a Christian state in the fourth century. In the sixth century the Axumites had assisted the Byzantine emperor Justin I (r. 518–27) in his efforts to control the trade routes to the East through the Red Sea, and at that time Greek texts were translated into Geez, the classical language of Ethiopia.

In this fifteenth-century manuscript written in Geez, the depiction of the Ascension of Christ is inspired by the Byzantine tradition. Christ is being carried to heaven in a mandorla as his mother and the apostles stand witness beneath him. He is borne up, however, not by angels, as in Byzantine depictions of the scene, but by the four symbols of the evangelists. These may also have been intended to remind the viewer of the apocalyptic beasts of Ezekiel's vision in the Old Testament, which is the source of the evangelists' symbols (Ezekiel 1:4–14). The image is one of a series of illuminations in a Gospels produced in the Lake Tana region of Ethiopia, which became an important monastic site beginning in the thirteenth century.





models by Italian artists for works such as this one. It has been attributed to Berlinghiero, one of the first painters to work in the Byzantine-influenced Italian style later called the *maniera greca* (Greek manner). This image of the Virgin and Child, in which the mother draws the viewer's eye to her son by the gesture of a hand, is modeled on a Byzantine icon type called the Hodegetria (after the Hodegon Monastery in Constantinople, where the original icon was first kept). The viewer is led to recognize by the gently pointing fingers that Christ is the way to salvation. The Virgin's deeply furrowed brow indicates an awareness of her son's future sacrifice and death. According to legend, this image was first painted from life by Saint Luke. It was the most widely copied icon type for the Virgin in the Byzantine world.

During the Latin occupation of the capital the original icon, which directly or indirectly inspired Berlinghiero's work, was transferred from the Hodegon to the Pantokrator Monastery, then under the control of the Venetians. In 1261, when the emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1259–82) regained Constantinople, he entered the city walking behind the icon. It is said to have been cut into four parts and destroyed when the city fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Christ Bearing the Cross

Nicolaos Tzafouris (act. by 1489, d. 1500)
Oil and tempera on wood, gold ground
Painted about 1489–1500, in Crete
27 ¼ x 21 ½ in. (69.2 x 54.6 cm)
Bashford Dean Memorial Collection, Funds
from various donors, 1929 (29.158.746)

After the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, much of the coastal territory of the empire, including

Virgin and Child

Attributed to Berlinghiero (act. by 1228, d. by 1236)
Tempera on wood, gold ground
Painted about 1230, in Italy
31 ⅞ x 21 ⅞ in. (80.3 x 53.6 cm)
Gift of Irma N. Straus, 1960 (60.173)

In the thirteenth century the Crusader rule of Constantinople, burgeoning commercial trade, and the growing activity in the East of the new Western mendicant religious orders, the Franciscans and Dominicans, led to an increasing awareness of Byzantine art in Italy. Icon types popular in the empire were used as



certain islands, was annexed by the Italian merchant states. This occurrence fostered the interaction of Western and Byzantine artistic traditions. Crete, which came under Venetian control in 1204, developed a style of icon painting intended to appeal to both Orthodox and Latin patrons. Nicolaos Tzafouris was one of many Cretan artists working in the city of Candia (modern Iraklion)

immediately after the fall of Constantinople. He wrote "Nicolaus Zafuri painted it" in large letters, in Latin, across the bottom of this image and perhaps also "[Christ] Being Dragged to the Cross," which is inscribed above the scene in Greek. The use of Greek for the title implied that the image would follow the Byzantine iconographic formula, with Christ shown beside the

cross, being carried to Golgotha by Simon of Cyrene, as described in Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, and Luke 23:26. Instead, the icon follows the Western tradition that shows Christ bearing the cross himself, as stated in John 19:17. Since Tzafouris produced works for export as well as for local use, it is possible that this painting was destined for the Italian market.



The Presentation in the Temple

Tempera on wood, gold ground

Byzantine

Painted 1400–1500

17½ x 16⅞ in. (44.5 x 42.2 cm)

Bequest of Lizzie P. Bliss, 1931 (31.67.8)

The delicately attenuated style of this icon would long remain influential. The event depicted is identified by a Greek inscription as “the Purification.” Painted during the century in which the Byzantine Empire fell, the icon shows the Virgin calmly presenting the Christ Child to Simeon for the customary rite of purification in the temple at Jerusalem. Like Simeon, the prophet Anna, who stands between Mary and Joseph, recognizes the infant’s divinity, as is indicated by the Greek text on the scroll in her hand: “This child created heaven and earth.” On February 2 this important occasion in the early life of Christ is

celebrated as one of the Twelve Great Feasts (Dodekaorton) of the Orthodox Church.

Icons painted on wood have remained the principal objects of religious devotion for Orthodox Christians both within the former borders of Byzantium and wherever the cultural descendants of the Byzantines have settled. Painted icons are used for personal devotions, for display in churches on feast days, and to decorate the iconostasis (partition) developed during the Middle and Late Byzantine periods to separate the congregation in the nave of the church from the sacred altar in the apse.

Chronology

Early Byzantine Period, 330–843	313	Emperor Constantine the Great issues the Edict of Milan, allowing Christians to worship freely within the empire	972	Marriage in Rome of Otto II and Byzantine princess Theophano
Middle Byzantine Period, 843–1261			988	Under Prince Vladimir Kievan Rus' adopts Christianity as its official religion
Late Byzantine Period, 1261–1453	early 300s	Armenian, Georgian, and Ethiopian peoples convert to Christianity	1018–25	Under Emperor Basil II Byzantine Empire reaches peak of its second flowering
	330	Emperor Constantine the Great transfers the capital from Rome to Constantinople	1054	Start of the Great Schism: the patriarch of Constantinople and the pope of Rome excommunicate each other
	410	Sack of Rome by the Visigoths		
	ca. 496	Conversion of Clovis, king of the Franks, to Christianity	1071	Battle of Mantzikert: eastern territories of the empire are lost to Islamic forces
	532–37	Justinian I erects the great church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople	1099	First Crusade establishes the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem
	633–47	Islamic armies conquer the southern territories of the empire—Syria, the Holy Land, Egypt, and Jordan	1204	Fourth Crusade captures Constantinople and establishes the Latin Empire. Byzantine successor states arise in Nicaea, Epiros, and Trebizond
	726	Byzantine emperor Leo III forbids the creation and veneration of icons		
	795	First recorded Viking raids on Scotland and Ireland	1261	Byzantine Empire regains Constantinople under Michael VIII Palaiologos
	800	Charlemagne is crowned emperor and augustus (a title) by Pope Leo III in Rome	1453–61	Constantinople and the remaining imperial lands fall to the Ottoman Turks
	843	Restoration of the veneration of icons is proclaimed		

Acknowledgments

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HCE

