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Επισμαλτωμένο πλακίδιο στη συλλογή του  
Dumbarton Oaks

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# ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΗΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

## A Silhouette Enamel at Dumbarton Oaks

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## A SILHOUETTE ENAMEL AT DUMBARTON OAKS

This inquiry focuses on a sprightly enamel figure in the Byzantine Collection at Dumbarton Oaks (Fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>. It has a human torso, a feline body and a serpentine tail that ends in a feral head. Published once before, it was described as a “winged sphinx-like creature” and attributed to the twelfth century<sup>2</sup>. Two uncertainties were noted at that time: its cultural domain was tentatively classified as either “Byzantine or Islamic”, and the object in front of the figure’s chest was hesitantly designated as “a book (?)”. There has been no subsequent study of this exceptionally fine enamel and so these initial uncertainties remain.

I shall demonstrate that the creature is not only composite in terms of species, but also in terms of its artistic components. Whereas the designation “Byzantine or Islamic” implies a clear dichotomy between the arts of the two cultures, the enamel is in fact a blend of the two. By parsing the enamel, its constitutive elements, iconographic, technical, and cultural, can be identified, elucidating the figurative and craft traditions from which it emanates<sup>3</sup>.

### Description

The enamel figure measures H: 2.5 cm. W: 2 cm. D: 1 mm. The head was originally in a slightly more upright position, indicated by a crease in the gold foil on the back of the neck. In its original position, the tip of the cap would not have been touching the top of the wing, as it now does. Preservation of the enamel is uneven with enamel entirely missing from some places, fully exposing the interior of the cloisonné compartments. There is also an uneven distribution of surface incrustations.

The creature is composed of a human head, torso and arms joined to a winged feline body with a long tail ending in the head of a serpent. The tail is arched gracefully over the figure’s back allowing the serpent’s head to bite across the narrow wing, of which the tip is curled backwards. The figure wears a soft-peaked cap divided into an inner green compartment, triangular in shape, and an outer border, missing all of its surface enamel but originally dull orange or possibly red. The face, neck, hands and cuffs are pinkish-white and show irregular pitting, iridescence and corrosion. These conditions appear elsewhere, most likely the result of burial, and prevent, in some instances, a definite determination of color. The hair is dark blue as were, most likely, the eyebrows and irises while the mouth appears to be the same reddish color as used on the cap. The clothed human torso is dark blue as is the feline body, including the wing and the tail, which are dappled with white spots. Emerald green is used for the object in front of the chest and for the uppermost and the lowest lunate compartments at the base of the wing. The serpent’s head and iris appear to be black.

The fully human torso of this figure differentiates it from the standard sphinx, which has only a human head on a feline body. In Greco-Roman art, the sphinx was often shown with wings. Also differentiating this figure from a traditional sphinx is its serpent-headed tail, associating it with the chimaera. This ferocious beast of Greek mythology was itself a fantastical composite creature, “a thing of immortal make, not human, /lion-fronted and snake behind, a goat in the middle”<sup>4</sup>.

Like the chimaera, the enamel creature belongs to a rare

1. Acc. no. 63.21; acquired in 1963 from T. Zoumboulakis, Athens.

2. *Handbook of the Byzantine Collection, Dumbarton Oaks*, Washington, D.C. 1967, no. 263, with illustration.

3. The results presented here will appear in very abbreviated form in the reprint of M. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, II: Jewelry, Enamels, and Art of the Migration Period* (forthcoming), Addendum No. 200.

4. *The Iliad*, trans. R. Lattimore, Chicago 1951, Bk. 6, l. 180f. The im-

age of the chimaera in Byzantine art was inherited from Greco-Roman models, showing a goat’s head emerging from the back of a feline body with a serpent-headed tail; cf. the early Byzantine *à jour* ivory plaque in the British Museum (K. Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1979, no. 143) and the middle Byzantine manuscript illumination in Pseudo-Oppian’s *Cynegetica*, Biblioteca Marciana, cod. gr. 479, fol. 8v (K. Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art*, Princeton 1951, fig. 112).



Fig. 1. Cloisonné enamel silhouette figure. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

genus in ancient and medieval art, the tripartite figure, what I shall also call a trimorph. Part human, part winged feline, and part serpent, it is, taxonomically speaking, unequivocally monstrous. The figure's bestial character, however, is mitigated by its self-contained, benign pose and somewhat wistful gaze. The enamel figure projects a sense of delicacy and charm, reflecting its docile movement, its diminutive size and its assured handling of the coloristic enamel work.

### Technique

The figure is executed in the cloisonné enamel technique. The gold cloisons, set at right angles to the gold back, are of two extremely fine, but distinct, widths. The thicker cloisons

(0.2 mm.) determine the external contour and major internal divisions, including the face, the ribs, and the tear-drop ornament on the hip; the thinner cloisons (0.03-.05 mm.) define all other details, such as the facial features, the hands, details of the wing, and the spots. The nose and eyebrows are formed from a single cloison, as is each eye.

At several points, short strips of gold have been added to strengthen potentially weak joins. These strips overlap the serpent's head and the wing<sup>5</sup>, the tail and body<sup>6</sup>, the raised leg and chest, and the two hind legs. The subdivisions of the anatomy are decorative but simple, especially when compared to the elaborate partitioning of another composite figure, the cloisonné griffin on a gold medallion in the Louvre<sup>7</sup>. The figure is executed as a silhouette, rare in medieval Byzantine enamel work. It is an example of the *Vollschmelz* technique, in which enamel covers completely the surface of its background support, so that the edges of the enamel and the support coincide. The back and external contour are entirely smooth with no trace of the manner in which the small figure might have been displayed. Possibilities for its utilization will be discussed at the end of this study.

### Iconography

There are images of composite creatures in Byzantine art that are related in a general way to the Dumbarton Oaks enamel. These are found in manuscripts, such as the music-playing siren and centaur in the headpiece to a canon table<sup>8</sup>, in sculpture, such as the sphinxes on two reliefs on the exterior of the Little Metropole in Athens<sup>9</sup>, and occasionally in the decorative arts, such as the sphinxes and sirens on a silver-gilt bowl in the Hermitage<sup>10</sup>, and the griffin-like creature on another silver bowl in the Hermitage<sup>11</sup>. In enamel work, the most relevant comparison is between the crested serpent head at the end of the tail on our figure and the snake heads of the Medusa on a cloisonné enamel in the Louvre<sup>12</sup>. These fantastical and mythological figures are

5. The outside contour where the wing joins the muzzle; the inside contour where the wing joins the serpent's crest; and the outside contour where the serpent's jaw crosses the wing.

6. The tail is strengthened by strips along the back and the thigh.

7. Musée du Louvre, Département des Objets d'art, D. 926; Diam: 4.2 cm. *Byzance. L'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises*, exh. cat., Paris 1992, no. 124, dated to the eighth-ninth century (J. Durand) (hereafter: *Byzance*).

8. Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, ms. palat. 5, fol. 7r; V. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina*, Turin 1967, pl. 240. I thank Jeffrey Anderson for

pointing out a number of Byzantine manuscripts where related figures appear.

9. A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines du moyen âge, II: (11e-14e siècle)*, Paris 1976, no. 81, pl. 69b, c, eleventh century.

10. A. Banck, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums*, Leningrad 1977, no. 215, twelfth century.

11. Banck, op. cit., no. 213, eleventh century.

12. Musée du Louvre, Département des Objets d'art, OA 6276; Diam. 6.8 cm. *Byzance*, no. 244, early twelfth century (J. Durand).

combinations of two creatures and, on the whole, appear only occasionally in Byzantine art.

This situation contrasts sharply with the zooanthropomorphic imagery in Islamic art, which forms a significant portion of its decorative vocabulary. Although no twin to the Dumbarton Oaks enamel figure can be cited, comparisons are bountiful. Sphinx-like creatures are often seen in similar poses. Examples are found on a glazed ceramic bowl, a "Lakabi" dish, considered Persian<sup>13</sup>, where the figure with human torso also has the detail of a back-turned wing tip; and on a min'a'i cup, said to be Persian, probably from Rayy<sup>14</sup>, with spots on both its body and wing. Few sphinxes have a serpent's head at the end of their tail, but examples of this motif are seen, for example, on an Iranian brass casket inlaid with niello<sup>15</sup>, and on a ceramic figure from Raqqa, Syria<sup>16</sup>.

Rarer still is the representation of any type of figure with a theriomorphic head at the end of its tail biting the wing of its own body. However, this motif is seen on the lid of an Islamic ivory casket, dated to the eleventh century and attributed to southern Italy (Fig. 2)<sup>17</sup>.

Except for the last example, the figures referred to are, strictly speaking, sphinxes. To be sure, trimorphs are found within the Islamic menagerie. One such figure with a human torso, a feline body and a long tail ending in an animal head appears on the interior of a glazed bowl from Raqqa, Syria<sup>18</sup>. The figure's blue body is covered with white spots like our figure while its hands, in contrast, are empty and merely gesturing towards its tail. A pair of tripartite figures appears on the back of a steel mirror in Istanbul (Fig. 3)<sup>19</sup>. In the wide band framing a mounted falconer, the trimorphs – having human torsos, feline bodies with narrow wings, and tails ending in serpent heads – are hunters wielding bows and arrows. These figures could well be described as aggressive alter egos of the pacific Dumbarton Oaks figure, with the dif-

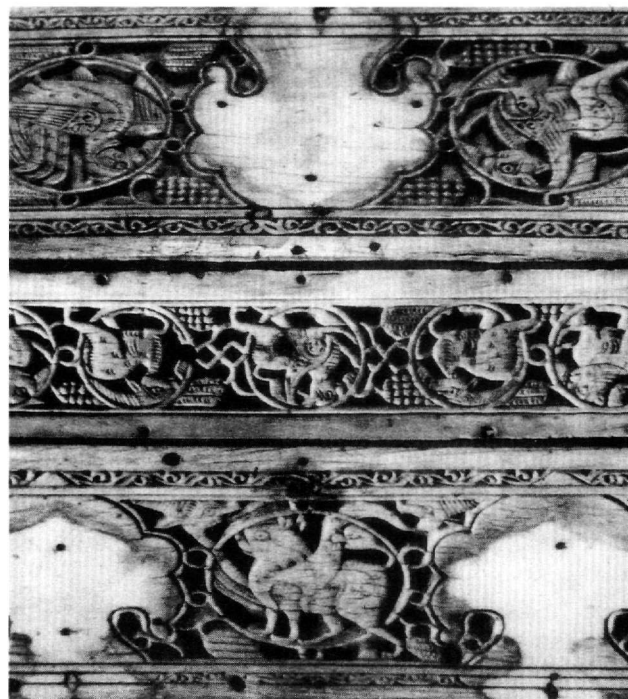


Fig. 2. Fantastic beast on an ivory casket. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

ference that the serpents' heads on the archers' tails are open-mouthed and menacing rather than biting the wing. These few examples are indicative of the widespread appearance of composite figures, including trimorphs, in Islamic art. Such hybrids flourished in many media and were shown engaged in a far-reaching number of activities. However, carrying a book is not among those occupations. An analytical look at the object in front of the figure will reveal its true identity.

13. E. Baer, *Sphinxes and Harpies in Medieval Islamic Art. An Iconographical Study*, Jerusalem 1965, fig. 17, thirteenth century (hereafter: *Sphinxes*).

14. Op.cit., fig. 40, early thirteenth century.

15. E. Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art*, Albany 1983, fig. 54, twelfth century (hereafter: *Metalwork*).

16. Copenhagen, the David Collection, Isl. 56; K. von Folsach, *Islamic Art, the David Collection*, Copenhagen 1990, no. 129, second half of the twelfth century (hereafter: *Islamic Art*); cf. Baer, *Sphinxes*, fig. 19 (this example) and fig. 29.

17. E. Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen, VIII.-XIII. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1971, no. 83, pls 87, 83b (Leningrad, Hermitage). The animal-headed tail was a popular motif on Islamic ivory caskets; cf. Kühnel,

ibid., two further examples on no. 83, pls 88, 83c; three examples on no. 82, pls 84, 82e; and two on no. 84, pls 84, 84a.

18. Copenhagen, the David Collection, 54/1966; *Islamische Keramik*, exh. cat., Hetjens-Museum, Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf 1973, no. 205 and von Folsach, *Islamic Art*, no. 134, early thirteenth century.

19. Istanbul, Treasury of the Topkapi Sarayi Museum (2/1792); E. Akurgal, C. Mango, R. Ettinghausen, *Treasures of Turkey*, Geneva 1966, fig. on p. 165. *Art Treasures of Turkey*, exh. cat., Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 1966, no. 168, thirteenth century; H. Evans and W. Wixom, (eds), *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843-1261*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1997, no. 282 (P. Soucek), first half of thirteenth century (hereafter: *Glory of Byzantium*).



Fig. 3. Steel mirror, back with figures. Topkapi Sarayi Museum, Istanbul.

When classified by its construction, it is seen that the object has four sides formed by the wider gauge of wire, while its interior is divided vertically by thinner wires into several divisions. When classified by the placement of the hands, it is seen that the figure's fingers in front of the object are rendered with extreme precision, both stretched out and turned under, as they reach across the vertical wires. These positions do not correspond to the way hands would be holding an object, but rather the way fingers would be represented

when playing a stringed instrument. The artist, in fact, succeeds in capturing the actual strumming and plucking of strings, in effect, representing the very act of music making. Numerous representations of musicians exist in both Byzantine and Islamic art. Among the various kinds of plucked and strummed instruments are harps, lyres and zithers. None of these, however, are held or played in the way the enamel instrument is shown.

Superficially similar to the enamel figure's instrument in Islamic art is one found on the muqarnas ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo<sup>20</sup>. Shown twice, the instrument is relatively the same size, square, held in front of the chest and played by extending the fingers across it. However, the instrument is lacking strings and is held on a diagonal to the player's body. It is identified as a tambourine or small drum (*tamburello*).

A more suggestive comparison is an instrument represented on a Syro-Mesopotamian candlestick, identified as a square cithar<sup>21</sup>. The instrument is close in shape and relative size to the enamel image and, like it, is held up in front of the chest to be played. However, the strings are in a horizontal position, formally differentiating it from the enamel. To my knowledge, no representation closer to the enamel instrument than these occurs in Islamic art.

In Byzantine art, many musical instruments are found, especially, as might be expected, in illustrations to the Psalms. David is the archetypal musician, shown playing an assortment of instruments<sup>22</sup>. He is also often shown accompanied by performing musicians and in one case, in the frontispiece to a Psalter in New York, a musician holds an instrument that very closely resembles the enamel one (Fig. 4)<sup>23</sup>. It is small, square, and held in front of the chest with the strings in a vertical position. A similar instrument is seen in the frontispiece to the Bristol Psalter<sup>24</sup>, where it is held slightly more to the musician's side. These are representations of the Byzantine five-string psalter<sup>25</sup>. The Dumbarton Oaks instrument is so much like them in size and manner of playing that it must be identified as the same instrument. Even when shown without a player, this type of psalter is recog-

20. G.M. D'Erme, *Contesto architettonico e aspetti culturali dei dipinti del soffitto della Cappella Palatina di Palermo*, *BdA* 92 (1995), pl. 2a-b.

21. Philadelphia, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, inv. no. NE-P12; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 223, thirteenth century (?), fig. 184b.

22. The instruments David plays fall into two basic categories: plucked, like a harp, and bowed, like a viol.

23. New York Public Library, Spencer cod. gr. 1, fol. 1v; A. Cutler, *The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium*, Paris 1984, no. 34, early-to-mid-thir-

teenth century, fig. 205 (hereafter: *The Aristocratic Psalters*).

24. London, British Library, Add. 40731, fol. 7v; S. Dufrenne, *L'illustration des psautiers grecs du moyen âge: Pantocrator 61, Paris grec 20, British Museum 40731*, Paris 1966, 53, described as "un luth"; early eleventh century, pl. 47.

25. J. Braun, *Musical Instruments in Byzantine illuminated manuscripts*, *Early Music* 8 (1980), p. 320.



Fig. 4. King David with musicians, Frontispiece to Spencer Collection, Ms. 1, psalterium gr. New York Public Library.

nizable. Examples appear hanging from trees in illustrations of Psalm 136 (137): 2, "In the willows there we hung up our lyres"<sup>26</sup>, e.g., in Vatopedi 760<sup>27</sup>, and in a Psalter in Jerusalem, written at the Monastery of Ephoros in Constantinople<sup>28</sup>. The five-string psaltery is also placed in David's own hands, once where he is represented as a shepherd and once as a king, although in both cases he is shown holding rather than playing the instrument<sup>29</sup>.

26. Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version; the Greek *ta organa* has also been translated as "harp".

27. Cutler, *The Aristocratic Psalters*, no. 54, twelfth century, fol. 243r, fig. 381.

28. Jerusalem, Patriarchal Library, Cod. Taphou 53, dated 1053-54, fol. 189r; Braun, *Musical Instruments* (n. 25), p. 318f., fig. 3a.

29. S. Der Nersessian, *L'illustration des psautiers grecs du moyen âge, II: Londres, Add. 19.352*, Paris 1970, fig. 49 (fol. 28r, as shepherd), and fig. 325 (fol. 207v, as king).

30. A feature of middle Byzantine enamel work pointed out to me by David Buckton, whose generosity in sharing his knowledge of Byzantine

To review briefly the data gathered thus far: no close analogy to the tripartite form of our enamel figure is found in Byzantium, whereas the five-string psaltery is an integral pictorial element in Byzantine art. Conversely, many analogies to the trimorph exist in Islamic art, but the specific type of musical instrument does not. Does this evidence indicate an Islamic work incorporating a Byzantine detail, or a Byzantine work adapting Islamic iconography?

A look at some characteristic features of the craft of enamel making in the two artistic traditions will provide the answer to the questions of origin and direction of influence. Although cloisonné enamels were made in both the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic world, the surviving material is neither equally distributed nor of the same level of skill. There are many times more Byzantine enamels extant than Islamic ones, and the highly refined handling of the medium in Byzantine art is not present in Islamic art. A significant characteristic of the Dumbarton Oaks enamel is the adroit use of wider and thinner cloisons in fabricating the figure<sup>30</sup>, a procedure occurring regularly in other Byzantine works, while it is not seen in Islamic enamel work. Two gauges of cloison appear, for example, on the image of the Archangel Michael and the Feast plaques of the Pala d'Oro<sup>31</sup>. On these plaques, contours of figures, major divisions of drapery, and some interior details are demarcated by wider cloisons, while facial features and the fine web of drapery folds are indicated by thinner cloisons. This use of two gauges is also seen on a small oval pendant inscribed with a cross in the Benaki Museum<sup>32</sup>. The cross with its tangent circles, as well as the framing edge of the pendant, are rendered with a wider cloison; the finer gauge is used for interior details of leaves, spirals and "gems".

Another technique found in Byzantine practice, but not among extant Islamic enamels, is the silhouette, or cut-out, form of the figure. Other Byzantine works in this category are small crosses, e.g., a fragment at Dumbarton Oaks<sup>33</sup>, and the multi-figured "Queen Dagmar's" cross in Copen-

enamels during an earlier stage of my research is gratefully acknowledged. 31. H.R. Hahnloser (ed.), *Il Tesoro di San Marco, I: La Pala d'Oro*, Florence 1965, p. 39-43, nos 79-84, middle of the twelfth century (W.F. Volbach), pls 43-48.

32. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 8837; H: 3 cm. W: 2.2 cm.; *Byzantine and Post Byzantine Art*, exh. cat., Old University, Athens, Athens 1985, no. 196, tenth-eleventh century (L. Bouras).

33. Acc. no. 53.12.20; preserved H: 1.7 cm. W: 1.6 cm.; M. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, II: Jewelry, Enamels, and Art of the Migration Period*, Washington, D.C. 1965, no. 157, eleventh-early twelfth century.

hagen<sup>34</sup>. Although neither cross has the exterior curvilinear contours of the enamel musician, they do display a similar bravura handling of the *Vollschmelz* technique on a very small scale. A modified silhouette technique is used for the figures on a Crucifixion icon in the Treasury of San Marco<sup>35</sup>. The mourning figures of Mary and St John, the two angels, and the crucified Christ on Golgotha are simplified contoured and raised shapes attached to the flat background. These technical characteristics—the use of two widths of cloison and silhouette shapes as independent units—point to Byzantium as the source of the Dumbarton Oaks figure. Such a conclusion is not contradicted by the Islamic evidence. Although a corpus of medieval Islamic enamel work does not exist, the extant material known is fairly limited. Most enamels are dated to the Fatimid period and attributed to workshops in Egypt or its immediate sphere of influence. The works are small and simple geometrical shapes, which bear a narrow range of motifs. Examples are lunate pendants, such as one at Dumbarton Oaks, on which a round, white face is flanked by confronted birds with twigs (?) in their mouths<sup>36</sup>. Similar lunate pendants decorated with confronted birds are in the Metropolitan Museum<sup>37</sup> and the British Museum<sup>38</sup> and a related example with one bird in the Keir Collection<sup>39</sup>. All these lunate enamels are

dated into the eleventh century. Another standard type of Fatimid jewelry is the elaborate earring composed of curved bands and circles of enamel, also displaying birds with twigs (?) in their mouths, such as the two singletons and one pair in the Stathatos Collection<sup>40</sup>. The singletons are said to come from Crete, and the pair, so similar to them, reputedly has the same provenance. These four earrings bear Arabic inscriptions with the same invocative formula, attesting to their Islamic patronage<sup>41</sup>. They are dated into the later tenth century and may have emanated from the burgeoning workshops producing luxury goods for the Fatimids and their dependents after the court was established at Fustat-Cairo in 969. It must be remembered that these earrings share the same models with or echo examples made in Byzantium, which used the same shapes and decorative motifs, and apparently the same construction techniques<sup>42</sup>.

Pendants and earrings such as those just mentioned are typical of the enamel output of Islamic artisans. The craft seems neither to have developed to the high technical degree it reached in Byzantine workshops nor to have produced works in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. The possible exception is a shallow copper bowl in Innsbruck with cloisonné enamel covering both its interior and exterior surfaces<sup>43</sup>. Among Islamic enamels, it is unique in size, its extensive

34. Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark, inv. no. 9088; H: 3.4 cm. W: 2.8 cm.; K. Wessel, *Byzantine Enamels* (trans. I.R. Gibbons), Greenwich, CT 1967, no. 59, ca. 1200. J. Fleischer et al. (eds), *Byzantium: Late Antique and Byzantine Art in Scandinavian Collections*, exh. cat., Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen 1996, no. 96 (Ø. Hjort), ca. 1000. *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 335 (H. C. Evans), early thirteenth century (?). This cross and the Dumbarton Oaks cross are related structurally, being made of two shallow *Vollschmelz* crosses attached back to back. Another small enamel cross, H: 3.07 cm. W: 2.32 cm. in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, is related in style and miniaturist aesthetic; in this case, however, the two sides of the cross are applied to the same back piece: K. Ciggaar, Een geëmailleerd Byzantijns kruisje in het Rijksmuseum, *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 32.4 (1984), p. 179-188, with English summary, p. 230-231. I thank Gertie van Berge of the Rijksmuseum for providing me with a copy of the article and for giving me the opportunity to examine the cross *in situ*.

35. D.T. Rice, *The Art of Byzantium*, London 1959, pl. 138, called a bookcover and dated eleventh c.; H.R. Hahnloser, ed. et al., *Il Tesoro di San Marco, 2: Il Tesoro e il Museo*, Firenze 1971, p. 27f., no. 18 (A. Grabar), pl. 22, possibly twelfth century.

36. Acc. no. 52.14, Gift of Royall Tyler; Ross, *Catalogue* (n. 33), no. 163; *Das Reich der Salier, 1024-1125*, exh. cat., Historisches Museum der Pfalz, Speyer, Sigmaringen 1992, p. 165 (Raum 2, Vitrine 4, 18) (M. Schulze-Dörrlamm). The enamel crescent was worked as a separate unit and inserted into its gold filigree frame.

37. Acc. no. 30. 95.37; M. Jenkins and M. Keene, *Islamic Jewelry in the*

*Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 1982, 80, no. 47, Egypt, fig. on p. 81. *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 278, Egyptian (M. Jenkins-Madina).

38. Acc. no. OA 1925.5-12.2-3; H. Tait, *Seven Thousand Years of Jewellery*, British Museum, London 1986, fig. 335.

39. M.-M. Gauthier and G. François, *Medieval Enamels. Masterpieces from the Keir Collection* (ed. and trans. N. Stratford), London 1981, no. 44. 40. Athens, National Archaeological Museum; E. Coche de la Ferté et al., *Collection Hélène Stathatos. Les objets byzantins et post-byzantins*, p. 18-26, nos 4A, 4B and 5 (E. Coche de la Ferté), pls 2, 2bis.

41. Op.cit., 4A, “[blessing] of God”, 4B, “to its owner (feminine) A’isha;” 5A, “Blessing of God”, 5B, “to its owner (masc.) Zaynab”. The masculine possessive on 5B is considered a minor mistake of orthography, p. 24.

42. Cf. 1) British Museum, M and LA AF 338, dated to the second half of the tenth century, *Das Reich der Salier* (n. 36), 158 [Raum 2, vitrine 4, 3], or the first half of the tenth century, D. Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture*, exh. cat., British Museum, London 1994, no. 142 (D. Buckton); 2) two examples from the Preslav Treasure, dated to the first half of the tenth century, *Glory of Byzantium*, nos 228A, B (J. D. Alchermes); and 3) one example in Herakleion, Historical Museum, no. 327, dated to the tenth-eleventh century, *Byzantine Art, an European Art*, exh. cat., Zappeion Exhibition Hall, Athens 1964, no. 440.

43. Innsbruck, Austria, Tyroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Diam. 26.5 cm.; van Berchem, M. and J. Strzygowski, *Amida*, Heidelberg 1910, p. 348-354. The bowl is the only enamel object included in J. Sourdel-Thomine and B. Spuler et al., *Die Kunst des Islam* (PKg. 4), Berlin 1973, p. 303f., no. XLII and colorplate, dated between 1114-1144.



amount of enamel decoration, and its wide range of imagery. The bowl has an Arabic inscription around the inner rim and, although interpretation of some titles and names are debated, there is unanimity in associating it with the Artuqid dynasty during the first half of the twelfth century<sup>44</sup>. The interior has an image of the Ascension of Alexander in the center surrounded by a peacock, eagles, an animal combat, female dancers, acrobats, and palm trees. On the exterior, there is an all but illegible Persian inscription on the rim and six medallions with animal combats, a musician, and a pair of wrestlers, separated by palm trees, musicians and a sleeve dancer<sup>45</sup>. The attribution to the Artuqid court has been challenged on the basis of a scrupulous re-reading of the Arabic inscription and recognizing the extremely close relationship of the bowl's iconography to Byzantine enamel work<sup>46</sup>. The poor quality of the calligraphy along with genealogical references that make little sense and other questionable aspects betray a lack of familiarity with the language of the inscription, while the Persian is veritably unreadable. To explain these lapses, it has been suggested that the bowl had been made in a place where both Arabic and Persian were not native languages<sup>47</sup>. This is corroborated by the figural and decorative imagery, all the elements of which can be documented in Byzantine art in many media, including enamels. This situation allows the bowl to be shifted from being considered a product of the Artuqid realm to being a work made outside its borders, and most probably from a polity within the Byzantine cultural sphere. The most convincing interpretation is that the bowl was made as a diplomatic gift from the Georgian court for presentation to the Artuquids on one of the many embassies between these

neighboring, rival powers<sup>48</sup>. With its extensive repertory of secular imagery, the bowl was eminently appropriate as a gift to an Islamic court<sup>49</sup>.

If the Innsbruck bowl can no longer be accepted as an Artuqid product, then the corpus of Islamic enamels remains essentially a Fatimid phenomenon. Dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries, it comprised simple, geometrical shapes for use in jewelry, usually pendants, earrings, and ornaments, with a repertory limited essentially to birds, flowers, animals, and rinceaux<sup>50</sup>. The repertories of shape and subject matter of Islamic enamels are circumscribed in the extreme in contrast to the dynamic, middle Byzantine tradition with its broad vocabulary of figures and decorative motifs, its wide variations in size, and its highly developed technical proficiency.

Although there are no precise analogies to the Dumbarton Oaks figure, a few comparisons will show that it has a place in the Byzantine tradition of small-scale figural enamels. For example, there are five enamel medallions with secular subjects attached to the lower edge of the Pala d'Oro in San Marco, Venice (Fig. 5)<sup>51</sup>. These represent an Ascension of Alexander, a view of the world as seen by Alexander from on high, and three royally dressed equestrian falconers<sup>52</sup>. The mounted falconers and their steeds bear a strong resemblance to our psaltery player in pose and animation; and, if imagined as silhouette figures, they would reproduce the contours of the Dumbarton Oaks enamel to a striking degree.

"Queen Dagmar's" cross is another example of the very high level of skill attained by Byzantine enamellers when working in miniature<sup>53</sup>. The size of the figures<sup>54</sup> and the precision

44. van Berchem and Strzygowski, *Amida* (n. 43), p. 121-128; S. Redford, How Islamic is it? The Innsbruck Plate and its Setting, *Muqarnas* 7 (1990), p. 119-135, esp. 119-124. L. Richter-Bernburg, Zu den Inschriften der Alexanderschale des Artuqidemirs Rukn ad-Daula Da'ud b. Sökmen, in T. Steppan (ed.), *Die Artuquiden-Schale im Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum Innsbruck: Mittelalterliche Emailkunst zwischen Orient und Occident*, Munich 1995, p. 39-44.

45. R. Ettinghausen and O. Grabar, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 650-1250*, Harmondsworth 1987, p. 362f., fig. 384, considered this plate "the *chef d'oeuvre* of Islamic cloisonné enamel", made for a son of Artuqid Da'ud (1114-44), dated twelfth century (third-quarter).

46. Redford, op.cit. (n. 44), passim.

47. van Berchem, *Amida* (n. 43), 125. Redford, op.cit. (n. 44), p. 119-124. *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 281 (P. Soucek).

48. Redford, op.cit. (n. 44), p. 127-132. T. Steppan, Die Artuquiden-Schale. Emailkunst im Spannungsfeld byzantinischer und islamischer Kultur, in T. Steppan (ed.), *Die Artuquiden-Schale* (n. 44), p. 34-35,

prefers to interpret the bowl as Constantinopolitan.

49. It has also been suggested that the bowl derives from a twelfth-century Holy Land workshop; M. Frazer, The Alexander Plate in Innsbruck and its Companion-pieces: East of Byzantium?, *Jewellery Studies* 3 (1989), p. 86 (Résumés of papers given at the Seventh British Museum Colloquium on Materials and Techniques of Enamelling, 1985).

50. The white face on the Dumbarton Oaks pendant is, as far as I know, unique among Islamic enamels. It can be compared to the white, usually round face of Adam that appears at the foot of Christ's cross in Byzantine enamels. The disembodied form of the head further relates the images to each other. This relationship might shed light on the cultural background of the Fatimid enamellers.

51. Hahnloser, op.cit. (n. 31), p. 67E., nos 148-152 (W.F. Volbach), pl. 57.

52. Of the three medallions with falconers, two measure Diam. 4.4 cm. and one Diam. 3.8 cm. The figures on these, approximately 2.5-3 cm. in height, are very close in size to the Dumbarton Oaks enamel.

53. See n. 34.



Fig. 5. Equestrian falconers, cloisonné enamel roundels on the Pala d'Oro. San Marco, Venice.

with which facial features, fingers and details of clothing are rendered indicate that the Dumbarton Oaks figure and “Queen Dagmar’s” cross were produced within the same artistic culture.

For these reasons, the Dumbarton Oaks enamel should be recognized as one of the many highly articulated works belonging within the corpus of Byzantine cloisonné enamel production. In view of the dates of both the Byzantine and Islamic comparisons used to situate it, which range from the early eleventh century to the first half of the thirteenth century, a date within the eleventh-twelfth century is the most likely one for it.

### Conclusion

Sources of inspiration for the Dumbarton Oaks trimorph are readily found in Islamic art, with representations of related figures in metalwork, ivory and ceramic. From a technical point of view, however, Islamic evidence of a highly developed craft skill is lacking. Conversely, the enamel is associated with Byzantine art by the presence of the psalter, and

it can be placed squarely within the Byzantine technical tradition by its silhouette shape, the use of two widths of cloison, and the high degree of proficiency in rendering details of faces, hands and clothing. The synthesis of predominantly Islamic iconography with unmistakably Byzantine technique suggests that the enamel can justly be considered a blend of Byzantine and Islamic components. It is a refined example of the Byzantine response to Islamic secular imagery and the skill with which such an unusual figure could be domesticated within the Greek realm.

Finally, the intended use of the enamel deserves some consideration. Any evidence of attachment has been removed or never existed, thus leaving its original purpose open to question. The following suggestions, based on artistic or textual evidence, must remain hypotheses, although each is a realistic possibility.

a. The enamel figure could have been an element in a piece of jewelry. If attached to or placed within a circular frame, it would resemble a number of *à jour* fibulae known from both European and Byzantine contexts. Examples are a gold griffin fibula from Capua<sup>55</sup>; a gold lion fibula from Preslav<sup>56</sup>; and two gold fibulae with eagles in enamel from a royal treasure found in Mainz<sup>57</sup>. At least one Islamic example of this type of jewelry is known, with a striding cervid executed in filigree within an openwork frame<sup>58</sup>.

b. The enamel may have been intended for attachment to a support by solder or glue. If it were, it would be related to silhouette figures such as those on the Crucifixion icon in the Treasury of San Marco mentioned above. As with the icon, the figure would have been part of a larger ensemble unified by a common theme as well as by a common background.

c. The enamel could have been sewn onto a fabric or leather support, combined with other ornaments, and worn as part of an elaborate costume. This use is suggested by an Islamic document recording a large number of personal effects sent by the emperor Leo VI as gifts to the Sajid emir Muhammed Afshin b. Abi’s-Saj, governor of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Among the items inventoried were robes of Greek purple (i.e., imperial) brocade, and a belt attached to a wider sup-

54. The cross is H: 3.4 cm., making the figure of Christ approximately 2.5 cm. high, the height of the Dumbarton Oaks enamel.

55. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles (Legs De Luynes, Donation 1862, no. 550); G. Cavallo et al., *I Bizantini in Italia*, Milan 1982, p. 337, fig. 261, caption no. 191 on p. 406.

56. Preslav, Archaeological Museum; *La Bulgarie médiévale*, exh. cat., Grand Palais, Paris 1980, no. 233. M. Schulze-Dörrlamm, *Der Mainzer*

*Schatz der Kaiserin Agnes aus dem mittleren 11. Jahrhundert*, Sigmaringen 1992, p. 58, tenth century, fig. 39.

57. Schulze-Dörrlamm, op.cit., p. 51ff., figs 32-33, pl. 9.

58. Jerusalem, L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art; Diam: 3.7 cm.; R. Hasson, *Early Islamic Jewellery*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 87, no.

113. Schulze-Dörrlamm, op.cit. (n. 56), 33, fig. 13.

port, probably of silk, which was incrustated with enamel appliqués. The robes were said to have belonged to the emperor himself<sup>59</sup>. This information not only suggests a sartorial use for small enamel appliqués, but also provides documentary evidence that Byzantine enamels were being sent to the Islamic world as gifts of the highest status. An eleventh century source also documents the gift-giving of imperial enamels to the Fatimid court<sup>60</sup>.

If we were to imagine the enamel ornament sewn onto a broad silken background and combined with other ornaments repeated in registers, that fabric might resemble the textile-like treatment of two folios in the Codex Aureus (Golden Gospels) of Echternach with their repeated registers of griffins, lions, beribboned parrots and decorative motifs (Fig. 6)<sup>61</sup>. Such a textile may well have had its decoration woven, embroidered or applied<sup>62</sup>. If the figural and geometric elements are imagined as enamels, the multicolored, scintillating surface of the Dumbarton Oaks figure can only hint at the shimmering effect that such an ensemble might have produced.

The Dumbarton Oaks enamel fits into the framework of the adaptation of Islamic motifs into Byzantine art first traced by André Grabar fifty years ago<sup>63</sup>. Whether our precisely rendered enamel musician played a role in the larger context of diplomatic gift-giving or in the private exchange networks of social prestige during the densely eventful years of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it may now be understood as a document whose artistic connotations far surpass its diminutive size.

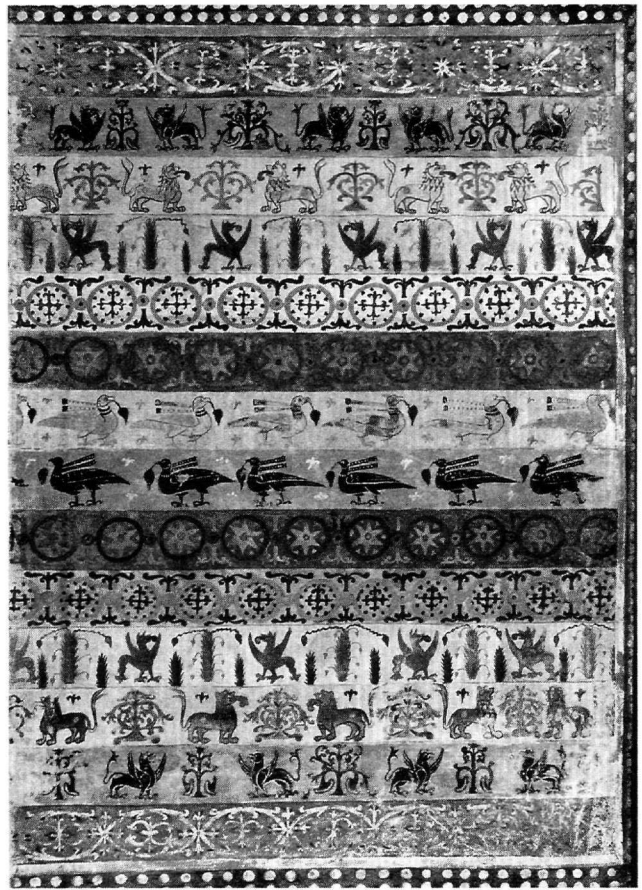


Fig. 6. Decorative page from the Golden Gospels of Echternach, Germanisches Landesmuseum, Nuremberg.

59. M. Canard, Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes, *DOP* 18 (1964), p. 54, cited from Al-Rashid b. Al-Zubayr, *Kitâb adh-dhakhâ'ir wa'l-tuhaf* (ed. M. Hamidullah), Kuwait 1959, p. 45.

60. *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 278 (M. Jenkins-Madina) cited from G.H. Qaddami, *A Medieval Islamic Book of Gifts and Treasures: Translation, Annotation, and Commentary on the "Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf"* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1990), p. 90, no. 97.

61. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Ms. 2<sup>o</sup> 156142, fols 52v-53r; H: 44.2 cm. W: 33.1 cm.; L. Grodecki et al., *Die Zeit der Ottonen und Salier*, Munich 1973, before 1039, fig. 170. H. Fillitz et al., *Das Mittelalter I* (PrKg, 5), Berlin 1969, no. 56, about 1030 (fol. 53r).

62. J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, The Art of Byzantium and its Relation to Germany in the Time of the Empress Theophano, in A. Davids (ed.), *The Empress Theophano*, Cambridge 1995, p. 229, notes that the images "belong to the Byzantine repertory" and believes that the model for the Echternach folios would have been a silk textile sent as a gift from a Byzantine emperor to a western ruler.

63. A. Grabar, Le succès des arts orientaux à la cour byzantine sous les Macédoniens, *MünchJb*, 3. Folge, 2 (1951), p. 32-60. The Innsbruck plate, p. 46, and the Pala d'Oro medallions, p. 47ff., were featured in his discussion of this topic.

#### PROVENANCE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Fig. 1. The Byzantine Collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.  
Fig. 2. After E. Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, Berlin 1971, pl. 87, no. 83b.

Fig. 3. After E. Akurgal, R. Ettinghausen, C. Mango, *Treasures of Turkey*, Geneva 1966, p. 165.

Fig. 4. Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Fig. 5. After H.R. Hahnloser (ed.), *La Pala d'Oro*, Florence 1965, pl. 57, nos 148, 150.

Fig. 6. After H. Fillitz et al., *Das Mittelalter I*, Berlin 1969, pl. 56.

S.R. Zwirn

## ΕΠΙΣΜΑΛΤΩΜΕΝΟ ΠΛΑΚΙΔΙΟ ΣΤΗ ΣΥΛΛΟΓΗ ΤΟΥ DUMBARTON OAKS

**Η** παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει πλακίδιο περικεκομμένο και διακοσμημένο με περίκλειστο σμάλτο (cloisonné), όπου εικονίζεται φανταστικό ον με ανθρώπινα, ζωικά και μυθολογικά στοιχεία. Σκοπός της μελέτης είναι να εξακριβωθεί αν το αντικείμενο είναι βυζαντινής ή ισλαμικής προέλευσης. Με βάση την τυπολογική ανάλυση η εικονιζόμενη μορφή εντάσσεται στη θεματική της ισλαμικής τέχνης, αλλά από άποψη τεχνικής το έργο ανήκει

αναμφισβήτητα στη βυζαντινή παραγωγή περίκλειστων σμάλτων (cloisonné). Επιπλέον, το αντικείμενο που το φανταστικό ον κρατεί στο χέρι του ταυτίζεται για πρώτη φορά με μουσικό όργανο.

Η εικονιζόμενη μορφή είναι ένα ακόμη δείγμα της συνεχιζόμενης εισροής ισλαμικών θεμάτων στη βυζαντινή τέχνη κατά τον 11ο και το 12ο αιώνα.