
Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας

Τόμ. 24 (2003)

Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 24 (2003), Περίοδος Δ'. Στη μνήμη του Νίκου Οικονομίδη (1934-2000)

Διπλωματικά δώρα του Ρωμανού Α' (935 και 938)

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doi: [10.12681/dchae.395](https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.395)

Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

MUNDELL MANGO, M. (2011). Διπλωματικά δώρα του Ρωμανού Α' (935 και 938). *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 24, 365–374. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.395>



ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

Hierarchies of Rank and Materials: Diplomatic Gifts
Sent by Romanus I in 935 and 938

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Τόμος ΚΔ' (2003) • Σελ. 365-374

ΑΘΗΝΑ 2003

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HIERARCHIES OF RANK AND MATERIALS: DIPLOMATIC GIFTS SENT BY ROMANUS I IN 935 AND 938

Nikos Oikonomides has provided Byzantinists with fundamental information regarding a very Byzantine subject, that of rank or status. He also published documents and commentaries relating to material culture and its production – shop leases from tenth-century Constantinople and inventories of household goods. This short note aims to acknowledge his contribution to contextualising medieval Byzantine art by drawing on related material. It concerns the Byzantine diplomatic hierarchy as reflected in the Byzantine hierarchy of materials. In particular it examines two lists of diplomatic gifts sent from the Byzantine court by Romanus I Lekapenos just three years apart, but in opposite directions. The first gifts were sent in 935 to the king of Italy as briefly recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies*¹. The second set of gifts, sent to the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad in 938, is recorded in fuller form in the accompanying letter which lists each item and gives a short description². A comparison of the two lists says something about both the diplomatic relationship of the courts concerned and Byzantine court art in the tenth century.

The inherent value of a diplomatic gift was based partly on the cost of the materials and partly on the appearance of the object itself, acting as an imperial statement. The gold coins, medallions, rings and bullae bearing the imperial effigy which were sent abroad by Roman and, later, Byzantine emperors had a propaganda value. The recipient saw the likeness imprinted on (and therefore controlling) what was considered the most valuable material in the Empire³. Constantine VII sent to the Caliph of Spain a silver box encrusted with plaques and his portrait in glass⁴. A very Byzantine form of art, *cloisonné* enamel for example, could in itself al-

so be exploited for propaganda purposes abroad (a form of “flying the flag”). The diplomatic gift could deliver further messages. Among the Middle Byzantine crowns the emperor sent “as a claim to suzerainty” to the Khazars, the Hungarian Turks, the Russians and other barbarian kings, the surviving crown of Hungary has its enamel plaques arranged to indicate the political and diplomatic relations in force in 1074-77 between the emperor and the Hungarian king: Michael VII appears in the centre placed above both his son and king Geza I⁵. While a diplomatic gift of, say, carved onyx set in gold embellished with *cloisonné* enamel flattered the recipient that the emperor regarded him as important enough to be sent so costly a gift, it also reminded him that the emperor commanded the resources to import the materials and make the object. Exotic beasts sent as gifts served a similar purpose: telling the recipient that imperial territory or might extended to their wild habitat. Attractive art could hold an appeal that exceeded mere monetary value. The *De administrando imperio* relates the story of a wealthy cleric attached to the Nea church, one Ktenas, who, wishing to be promoted to *protospatharios*, sent the emperor 40 pounds of gold and a friend to intercede for him. When the friend reported on the emperor’s reluctance, the cleric finally won favour by increasing his gift, not by more cash, but by adding a pair of earrings worth 10 pounds and a silver table decorated with gold animals in relief, also worth 10 pounds. The emperor then granted his wish and one is left with the impression that the attractive character of the gifts was perhaps more persuasive than would have been additional money⁶. Another story in the same work tells of the carefully calibrated

1. *De ceremoniis*, Bonn ed., p. 661.

2. M. Hamidullah, Nouveaux documents sur les rapports de l’Europe avec l’Orient musulman au moyen âge, *Arabica* 7 (1966), p. 286-288 (hereafter: Documents).

3. M. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450*,

Cambridge 1985, p. 276-278.

4. J. Ebersolt, *Les arts somptuaires de Byzance*, Paris 1923, p. 64 and note 7.

5. E. Kovacs and Z. Lovag, *The Hungarian Crown and other Regalia*, Budapest 1980, p. 18-42.

6. *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravesik-Jenkins, 50.235 ff.

ed gift of tunics and bronze vessels worth 10 pounds, rather than the gold and silver requested⁷.

Both sets of gifts under consideration here were sent by Romanus as diplomatic efforts made in the interests of foreign policy with Italy and Baghdad. The gifts in the first list were conveyed by the *protospatharios* Epiphanius to Italy in 935 when Romanus cultivated an alliance with Hugh of Provence, king of Italy, directed against Byzantium's troublesome vassals, the Lombard princes (of Capua, Salerno, etc.) and against Hugh's rival Alberic who controlled Rome. Later, in 941 further diplomatic efforts resulted in the marriage of Romanus' grandson Romanus II to Hugh's daughter Bertha (Eudokia) which took place in 944 after the *strategos* of Langobardia accompanied the bride to Constantinople together with "great riches" (unspecified) for Romanus I⁸. The gifts in the second list were taken by an embassy in 938 to al-Radi Billah, the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad (934-40). The mission sought a truce to recent warfare in the east, official recognition of Byzantine conquests by John Curcuas and an exchange of prisoners. Romanus perhaps also wished an alliance with Baghdad against the Hamdanids of Mosul⁹. These gifts were recorded in an accompanying Greek letter written in gold and an Arabic translation written in silver; only the latter text survives. The two sets of gifts may be tabulated as follows¹⁰:

1 onyx cup	4 crystal flasks with gilded silver and precious stones
3 items of gilded silverware	3 gold cups with precious stones
	1 gilded silver amphora with precious stones
	1 gilded silver ewer with precious stones*
	1 gilded silver bowl with precious stones
	1 gilded silver octagonal casket, precious stones
	1 silver tray with precious stones*
	4 silver cups with precious stones, 2 gilded, 2 with handles
	4 knives with handles in silver, gold, precious stones
	other silver
	1 nargis (?)*
17 glass vessels	112 pieces of silk and other textiles
many silk cloths	4 furs
incense and unguents	

* inscribed

Both lists include numerous silk cloths; otherwise there are some striking differences between them. Aside from incense and unguents, the gifts going to Italy included one onyx cup, three articles of gilt silver and 17 pieces of glassware. The gifts going to Baghdad included four crystal flasks, four gold items and about a dozen objects of gilt silver. The most noticeable differences concern the gold and silver – no gold to Italy and four times the amount of silver to Baghdad – and the crystal and glass – crystal to Baghdad and glass to Italy. The objects sent to Baghdad were undoubtedly secular. While Byzantine emperors sent objects of church use to popes (Michael III to Benedict III and Nicholas I¹¹), it is inconceivable that Romanus would have sent ecclesiastical objects to the Moslem caliph. To Arab ambassadors at Tarsus in 946 and to the Russian Olga in 957 Constantine VII sent gold plates (*skoutellia*) embellished with precious stones¹². To visualize and otherwise characterize the objects on the 935 and 938 lists, contemporary Byzantine items preserved in Venice and elsewhere offer comparisons. Although most if not all of these latter objects are normally considered ecclesiastical, individual pieces may be identified as secular, particularly on consideration of their inscriptions or lack thereof. Three objects on the 938 list have inscriptions, two of which are given and confirm that the objects inscribed are not ecclesiastical. That on the gilded silver ewer ornamented with jewels and pearls read "The voice of the Lord sounds on the waters" (Ps. 29.3), unsurprisingly a common text used on Byzantine ewers regardless of church or secular function¹³. Unfortunately those that survive are of copper alloy (Fig. 1)¹⁴ but may be viewed as debased copies of costlier versions, such as that sent by Romanus. The 938 silver platter garnished with gems was inscribed "May God make powerful the emperor Romanus". In Venice this may be compared with the text on the silver gilt mount of an al-

7. *Ibid.*, 43.123 ff.

8. S. Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign*, Cambridge 1963, p. 191-201 (hereafter: *Romanus*).

9. A.A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes. II.1: La dynastie macédonienne (867-959)*, Brussels 1968, p. 273-282; Runciman, *Romanus*, p. 141-143.

10. *De cer.*, p. 661; Hamidullah, *Documents*, p. 286-88; Vasiliev, *op.cit.*, p. 278 and note 1.

11. *Liber pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, II, Paris 1892, p. 147, 154.

12. *De cer.*, p. 585, 597-598.

13. On the inscribed text see D. Feissel, *Inscriptions grecques en Vénétie, Aquileia Nostra* 47 (1976), cols 167-172.

14. G. Davidson, *Corinth XII*, 1952, p. 73-74, nos 557-558 and Feissel, *op.cit.*, cols 168, 171 note 11.

abaster bowl, a related invocation: “Mary mother of God, help the emperors”¹⁵. This type of text – “Lord [or Mary] help so-and-so” – dates from at least the sixth century on objects of personal use such as jewellery, signets, even cooking vessels. While being pious, it is not ecclesiastical. It differs both from a liturgical text and a text which dedicates an object to a church, such as “in fulfillment of a vow”, “for forgiveness of sins”, “for the repose of a soul”¹⁶.

Regarding form, we shall consider comparanda in turn for the metal vessels, those in stone and the glassware. Similar comparisons could be made for the silks listed in 938.

Metalware. Little secular silver survives from medieval Byzantium with which to compare the silver items on the two diplomatic lists. Objects made entirely of silver are limited to the gilt silver ink pot made for Leo the calligrapher, now in Padua¹⁷ and the series of silver dishes inscribed in Greek that have been found in Russia¹⁸. The silver bowl, ewer and amphora (“ewer with two handles”) mentioned together in the 938 list could have formed part of a washing set typologically comparable to the gold *cherniboxeston* in use in the palace in this period (*De cer.* 9.18), while the silver tray recalls the gilded silver tables cited there also at this time¹⁹. Most items in the 938 list were encrusted with precious stones, of the type adorning the composite objects in Venice of which the silver component serves merely as a mount for carved stone or glass.

The stone vessels mentioned in the two lists are the onyx cup (935) and the four crystal flasks (938). Such materials – marbles, semi-precious and precious stones – were highly valued in Byzantium. The use of some stones in jewellery was regulated by law²⁰ and writers praised the “meadows of marbles” which covered the inside of buildings. In one of the Byzantine treatises on the virtues of stones Michael Psellos writes, for example, that onyx is good against toothache and nightmares and that sardonyx cures melancholy and prevents miscarriages²¹. In between small-scale gemstones and large-scale architectural revetments were the medium-sized ves-

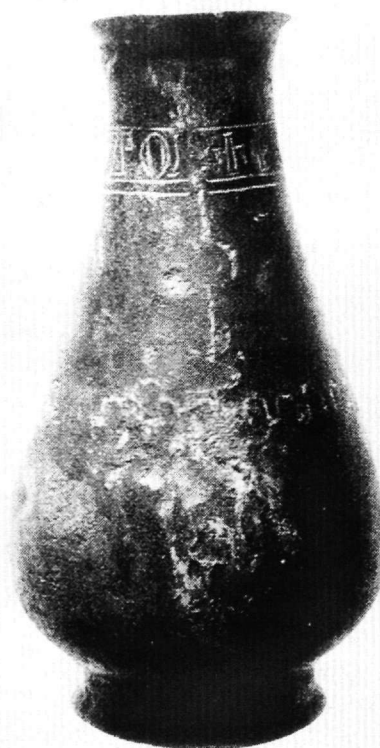


Fig. 1. Copper alloy flask (H 16.5 cm) inscribed with Ps. 29.3. Present location uncertain.

sels carved from a range of stones, some of which were favoured. White alabaster, a granular form of the mineral gypsum and therefore a form of marble, was used for vessels²², of which two Middle Byzantine patens and a dish are extant in Venice²³. More rarely used was costly lapis lazuli, a relatively soft stone with a fine granular structure²⁴. Survivals include the disc with Crucifixion (11th-12th c.) in

15. *The Treasury of San Marco Venice*, ed. D. Buckton, Milan 1984, no. 25 (hereafter: *Treasury*).

16. M. Mundell Mango, *The Significance of Byzantine Tinned Copper Objects in Θυμίαμα στη μνήμη της Λαοσαράνας Μπούρα*, ed. A. Delivorrias, Athens 1994, p. 223.

17. H. Maguire, *Epigrams, Art and the 'Macedonian Renaissance'*, *DOP* 48 (1994), p. 112-114.

18. V.P. Darkević, *Svetskoe iskusstvo vizantii. Proizvedeniya vizantiiskogo chudozhestvennogo remesla v vostochnoi Evrope X-XIII veka*, Moscow 1975.

19. N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséances byzantines des IXe siècles*, Paris 1972, p. 196 note 209.

20. *Codex Justinianus*, XI.xi.1.

21. Psellos on stones, *De lapidibus*, ed. Boissonade, p. 36-43.

22. R. Webster, *Gems. Their Sources, Descriptions and Identification*, London 1962, p. 239-241 (hereafter: *Gems*).

23. *Treasury*, nos 18, 25. *Il Tesoro di San Marco*, ed. H.R. Hahnloser, II, Florence 1971, nos 67-68, 70 (hereafter: *Tesoro*).

24. Webster, *Gems*, p. 200-203.

San Marco and the two-sided plaque (12th c.) at Saint-Denis, both objects embellished with gold inlay²⁵. Steatite, a soft, greasy and brittle stone²⁶, was also rarely used for vessels in Byzantium; a tenth-century (?) paten and a twelfth-century incense dish survive²⁷. The stones featuring in the 935 and 938 lists are types of quartz, a mineral consisting of silica, which takes the form of agate, rock crystal, chalcedony, amethyst and jasper, as well as sand used for making glass and porcelain²⁸. Of these, agate and rock crystal were used for vessels. Most attribution of stone vessels to Middle Byzantine craftsmen is based on modern connoisseurship. Daniel Alcouffe has made the most notable contribution to this study²⁹. The carvings preserved in Middle Byzantine mounts, are variously judged to be ancient, late antique or medieval.

Agate, onyx and sardonyx. Agate is composed of alternating layers of variously coloured fine grained quartz³⁰. From the Middle Byzantine period survive the Stoclet paten in Brussels, a bowl in Venice, one cup in Florence, one in Copenhagen, one inlaid with gold in the Hermitage, three cups in the Louvre, which also has a shell-shaped vessel tinted to look like sardonyx³¹. Agate with two-coloured bands of white and black is known as onyx and that with white combined with red or brown as sardonyx. This was the stone most commonly used in medieval Byzantium. Fifteen of the Middle Byzantine chalices in San Marco have agate or sardonyx cups³². Some of these, like those of the two chalices of Romanus (II) are earlier cups reused. Middle Byzantine sardonyx cups include seven in Venice (Fig. 2), two in Florence, five in the Louvre, and one in New York³³. Other contemporary sardonyx vessels include two lobed dishes from Saint-Denis, Paris and shell-shaped ones in the Louvre, Venice, Aachen and Munich³⁴.

Rock crystal. The other type of quartz prized for vessel carving was rock crystal considered one of the costliest materials used in the Roman and medieval worlds. In 1070-71 Nasir al-Dawla Abu 'Ali al-Hasan b. Hamdan sent to Romanus Diogenes "rare vessels among which were five in rock crys-



Fig. 2. Chalice of the Patriarchs. San Marco, Venice.

tal, very precious and without compare of an incalculable price"³⁵. In the 938 list are four rock crystal flasks sent to Baghdad. A crystal vessel encrusted with gold and gems was given by Basil I to Louis II the German in 872³⁶. While Roman and Late Roman crystal carvings are known and the craft well attested in those periods, very little has been identified as medieval Byzantine. Exceptions include a lobed cup set in a Middle Byzantine mount, a contemporary goblet containing six panels of rock crystal, both in Venice³⁷, and, possibly a two-handed cup recently on the antiquities mar-

25. *Treasury*, no. 36. *Le trésor de S. Denis*, ed. D. Gaborit-Chopin, Paris 1991, no. 39 (hereafter: *S. Denis*).

26. Webster, *Gems*, p. 286-287.

27. *Treasury*, no. 43. *Tesoro*, no. 69.

28. Webster, *Gems*, p. 178-182.

29. *Treasury*, p. 73-76 and *passim*. *S. Denis*, nos 1-2, 23-31, 50; *Byzance. L'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises*, ed. J. Durand, Paris 1992, p. 289-291; nos 42-43, 205-215 (hereafter: *Byzance*).

30. Wester, *Gems*, p. 158-164.

31. *Byzance*, nos 205, 210, 212. *Treasury*, figs 2f, 18a.

32. Alcouffe in *ibid.*, p. 159.

33. *Treasury*, nos 15-17, figs 16a-b. *Tesoro*, nos 17, 43-44, 47, 49, 56. *Byzance*, nos 206, 211, 213-215; p. 292 fig. 1; p. 299 figs 1-3; p. 300 fig. 1.

34. *Byzance*, nos 207-209; p. 295 figs 1-3. *S. Denis*, no. 24.

35. Hamidullah, *Documents*, p. 291-292.

36. Ebersolt, *Les arts somptuaires*, p. 61.

37. *Treasury*, no. 22, fig. 43j.

ket³⁸. Rock crystal *cabochons* are set into the mount of the alabaster dish in Venice³⁹. In the 938 list two of the four crystal flasks covered with silver gilt have a crystal lion on their stoppers, which recalls the zoomorphic thumbpieces (not stoppers) on an early fifth-century ewer in the Sevso treasure⁴⁰ and on a series of six Fatimid tenth/eleventh-century rock crystal ewers⁴¹.

In view of the rarity of medieval Byzantine rock crystal carving, how does one explain the rock crystal diplomatic gifts of Basil I and Romanus I? The other gifts sent by Romanus to the caliph were clearly of Byzantine manufacture, three having Greek inscriptions, one at least mentioning Romanus himself. In other words, do the vessels in the 938 list represent an otherwise unattested medieval Byzantine production of rock crystal carving? As it is inconceivable that the emperor would send the caliph ecclesiastical vessels, so it would be hard to imagine him sending foreign objects. Concerning the choice of diplomatic gifts, the Egyptian emir Muhammad ibn Tuğ al-Ihsid stated in 936 in a letter to Romanus I, “we ourselves chose especially products of our capital or of the interior of the country”⁴². The emperor could, of course, give ancient heirlooms, like the saddles (*selles*) of Alexander the Great said to have been sent by Michael IV Stratiotikos to the son of the mother of the Fatimid caliph Al-Mustansir in 1056-7⁴³.

Fatimid caliphs collected rock crystal vessels. Four of the six Fatimid rock crystal ewers mentioned above – one preserved in Paris (Fig. 3), two in Venice, one in Fermo, one in Florence and one in London – are inscribed in Kufic⁴⁴. Two in Venice and Florence name the Fatimid caliphs al-Azziz-Billah (975-96) and Husain ibn Jawbar (1000-08, 1010-11). The ewer from Saint-Denis reads “Blessing, satisfaction and [lacuna] to its owner”. The six ewers are all similar in shape and decoration: the body has a Tree of Life flanked by birds or animals; the handle has a zoomorphic thumbpiece. Other Abbasid and Fatimid rock crystal vessels include bottles,

flasks, cups and plates, many decorated with scrolls or animals, often in relief⁴⁵.

A Byzantine bronze flask (tenth/eleventh century) said to have come from Eleusis and now at Dumbarton Oaks (Fig. 4)⁴⁶ bears an interesting resemblance to both one set of Romanus’ rock crystal flasks and to the Fatimid ewers. Like the second pair of 938 Byzantine flasks it has a medallion (here with an archangel) in the centre of one side. In shape it generally recalls the Fatimid ewers; its medallion is flanked by birds resembling those on the Saint-Denis ewer; on its neck is a Kufic inscription, “Full blessing and happiness”, a text similar to those on the Saint-Denis and other Fatimid ewers. The bronze flask belongs to a group of Middle Byzantine objects and buildings displaying Kufic or Kufesque inscriptions, none of which are necessarily directly based on Islamic models⁴⁷. However, other decorative details of the flask could suggest more direct influence which may have been via a Fatimid metal copy of Fatimid rock crystal. Only one example of oriental rock crystal decorative style, a clear glass cup copy (?) of Abbasid type in Venice, is now in a Middle Byzantine mount (Fig. 5)⁴⁸; the Fatimid vessels are in other types of mounts. This could indicate that they passed into Venetian or other European hands directly in the eastern Mediterranean rather than via Byzantium. This leaves open the question of Byzantine carving of rock crystal. What is taken to be Abbasid work has geometric decoration while Fatimid work is more Graeco-Roman-Byzantine in inspiration⁴⁹. Between the Abbasid and earliest dated Fatimid work (975-96) stand Romanus’ four flasks (938). Further observations would be pure speculation.

Glass. The final type of gift from the diplomatic lists to consider is the glass sent to Italy in 935. As with rock crystal, scholarly questions surround Byzantine medieval production of glass, which has often been denied or at least questioned by archaeologists who have postulated its importation⁵⁰. As in the Roman period, glassware in use in Byzan-

38. At Charles Ratton and Guy Ladrière, *Burlington Magazine*, January 1996, p. vii.

39. *Treasury*, no. 25.

40. M. Mundell Mango and A. Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure. Part I*, Ann Arbor 1994, no. 8.

41. See below.

42. Text of Ibn Sa’id. Vasiliev, *Byzance II. Dynastie 2. Extraits des sources arabes*, Brussels 1950, p. 212 (hereafter: *Byzance II*).

43. Hamidullah, *Documents*, p. 290.

44. *S. Denis*, no. 26. *Treasury*, nos 31-32, figs 31a-c. C.J. Lamm, *Mittelalterliche Gläser und Steinschnittarbeiten aus den Nahen Osten*, Berlin

1929-30, p. 192-196, pls 65.4, 66, 67.1-4, 7 (hereafter: *Gläser*).

45. Lamm, *Gläser*, tenth-twelfth centuries: p. 190-240, 509-521, pls 64-88; Alcouffe in *Treasury*, p. 207-208, 221, nos 22 (foot), 30, 37; figs 30a, 31e-f, 32b. *S. Denis*, nos 25, 30.

46. M.C. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, I, Washington, DC 1962, no. 52.

47. G. Miles, Byzantium and the Arabs: Relations in Crete and the Aegean Area, *DOP* 18 (1964), p. 1-32.

48. *Tesoro*, no. 63, pl. LVI.

49. Cf. Alcouffe, *Treasury*, 207-208.

50. One of two medieval factories excavated at Corinth has been alter-



Fig. 3. Fatimid rock crystal ewer from Saint-Denis. Louvre, Paris.

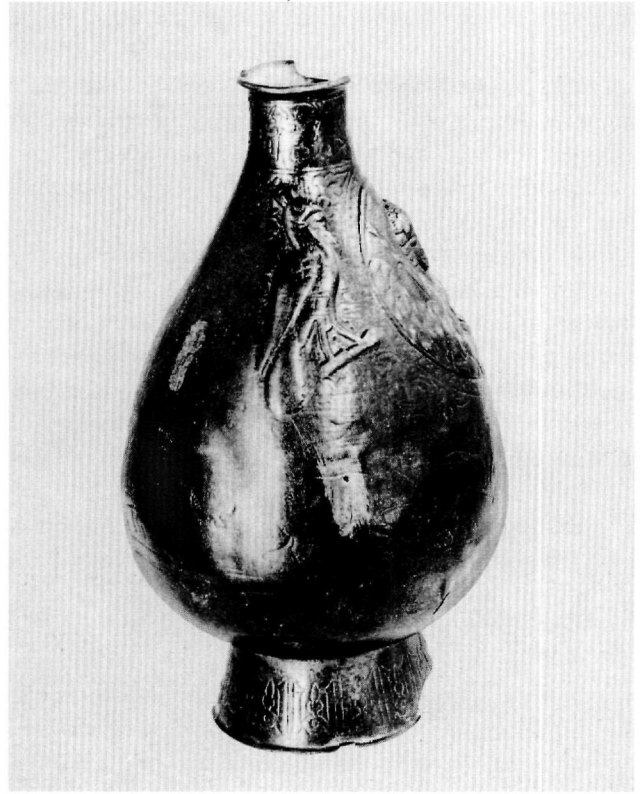


Fig. 4. Copper alloy flask from Eleusis (?). Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, DC.

tium (whether imported or local) divides into utilitarian (usually of bluish or greenish tint) and luxury types. In medieval Byzantium luxury glass – as was surely that sent to the king of Italy – appears in two types: a group made of clear (“bleached”) glass and another of usually dark glass with enamel decoration. While the most outstanding example of the latter group – the bowl now in Venice – may be dated to the tenth century⁵¹, other dark glass is usually placed in the twelfth⁵². The dating and attribution of the clear glass is con-

troversial. Axel van Saldern has argued that the carved and other clear glass preserved in Byzantine mounts in San Marco (Fig. 6) is not of contemporary Byzantine manufacture, but Sasanian heirlooms preserved in imperial circles in Constantinople before being taken off by the Venetians in 1204⁵³. Lamm considered them to be Byzantine work of the seventh to eighth centuries⁵⁴. Others consider them Byzantine work of the tenth, contemporary with the mounts that hold them⁵⁵. Van Saldern himself acknowledges differences

nately interpreted as Fatimid or Frankish in origin or operation. But, a glass factory is now known to have existed at medieval Constantinople, possibly in the tenth century, when, a text informs us, it caught fire. See J. Henderson and M. Mundell Mango, *Glass at Medieval Constantinople: Preliminary Scientific Evidence in Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. C. Mango and G. Dagron, Aldershot 1995, p. 333-356.

51. *Treasury*, no. 21.

52. E.g. *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, ed. D. Buckton, London 1994, no. 186.

53. A. Van Saldern, The so-called Byzantine Glass in the Treasury of San Marco, *Annales du IV^e Congrès International d'études historiques du verre*, Liège 1969, p. 124-132.

54. Lamm, *Gläser*, p. 55 ff., 144-146, 148-49, pls 12.7; 27.11; 52.1-2, 8-9; 53.2-3.

55. A. Grabar in *Tesoro*, nos 58, 65, 79-81. Idem, La verrerie d'art byzantine au moyen âge, *Mon Piot* 57 (1971), p. 89-127. *Treasury*, nos 24, 26-27. J. Philippe, *Le monde byzantin dans l'histoire de la verrerie (Ve-XVII^e siècle)*, Bologna 1970, p. 125-141.

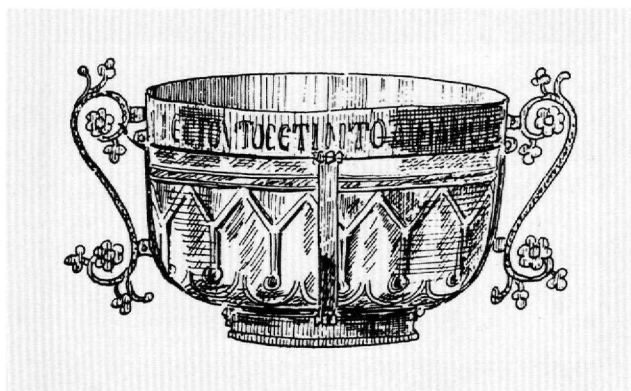


Fig. 5. Glass cup in Byzantine gilded silver mount. San Marco, Venice.

between the glass in Venice and Sasanian glass excavated in Iraq. The honeycomb glass in Byzantine mounts in Venice and at Beauvais (now lost)⁵⁶ continues a Roman type⁵⁷. Similarly, it could be suggested that the disc decoration on other pieces in Venice evolved from Roman glass decoration⁵⁸.

The list of 935 may offer proof of high-quality Byzantine glass manufacture, as that of 938 may attest to Byzantine carving of rock crystal. Both types of material lead to questions of production including the organisation of raw materials and technology. For the rock crystal it concerns materials and trade, for the glass technology.

Concerning technology, even by the ninth century some of it had made a comeback, if in fact it had ever suffered a severe decline⁵⁹. While one of the imperial lion silks is signed with the formula "In the reign of the Christ-loving sovereigns Constantine and Basil" (868-9), the Earth and Ocean silk introduced into St Cuthbert's tomb in the tenth century has recently been dated to the first half of the ninth century and preserves the traces of what may be the earliest extant imperial factory inscription⁶⁰. The apse mosaics of Saint Sophia, set up in 867, within 20 years of the end of Iconoclasm, represent a level of technical perfection not matched again until the Deesis mosaic put up in the same building nearly four centuries later. During Iconoclasm this skill had probably

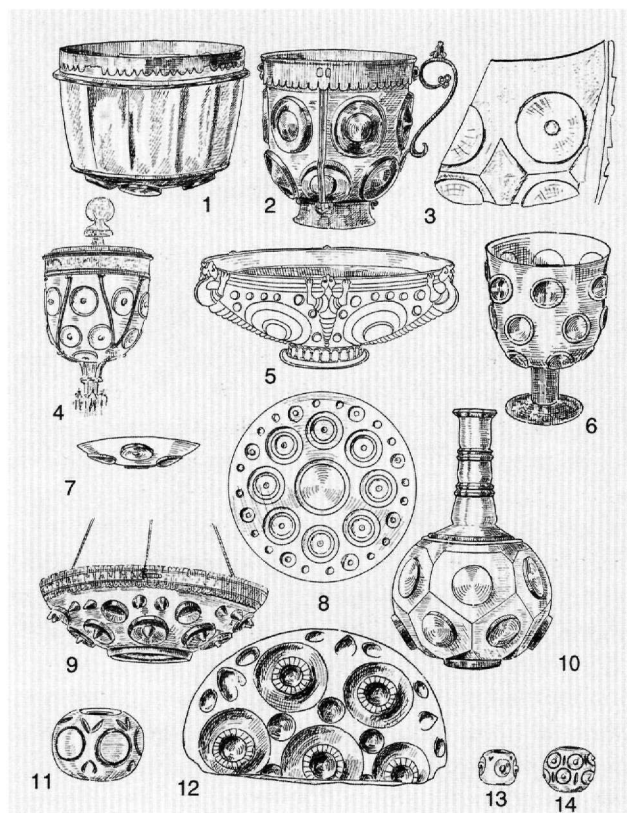


Fig. 6. Glass vessels: Nos 1-2, 8-9. San Marco, Venice; 3. Fustat; 4. Halberstadt; 5. Freising; 6. Nara, Japan; 7, 11, 14. Berlin; 10. Rome; 12. Susa; 13. Mit Rahina; 15. Madinat al-Zahra. Nos 1-4, 8-9 considered by C.J. Lamm to be Byzantine (c. 650-750), the others to be oriental.

been practiced in the imperial palace where several refurbishments and expansions included lavish decoration⁶¹. Byzantine glass production capability is probably best attested by its successful response to the technical demands of creating the wide colour range of mosaic tesserae. This technology matches that of the coloured and bleached luxury glass known in Middle Byzantine contexts.

At least some of the carved rare stones are materials obtained only by foreign trade. While steatite was obtainable in

56. *Treasury*, no. 26. *Byzance*, no. 216.

57. *Glass of the Caesars*, ed. D. Harden, Milan 1987, nos 102-103.

58. *Ibid.*, nos 110, 113.

59. See recently, L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680-850): The Sources. An Annotated Survey*, Aldershot 2001,

p. 37-115.

60. *Byzance*, no. 372. *Byzantium*, no. 139.

61. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453. Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1972, p. 160-165.

Cappadocia, the Aegean islands, Cyprus and Egypt⁶², and the primary source of white alabaster was north Italy⁶³, the origin of other stones was more exotic. In antiquity onyx came chiefly from India and rock crystal from either India or Africa, rather than from the Swiss Alps⁶⁴. Lapis lazuli was obtained in Afghanistan near a tributary of the Oxus or at the south end of Lake Baikal in Central Asia⁶⁵. In Roman and Byzantine times, agate, onyx, rock crystal and lapis lazuli all entered or reached the empire via Alexandria (as did ivory), where they were often carved⁶⁶.

Adjoining late antique workshops for rock crystal and glass have been excavated in Alexandria⁶⁷. While rock crystal was an important import from the East, glass was a favoured export to the Far East⁶⁸. The specialist manufacture of both crystal and glass apparently continued at Alexandria after the Arab conquest of 641. In 903-6 (?) Arethas of Caesarea remarks in a short letter to Leo VI that accompanied gifts, "The books from my native place, the fruit from the country from which I am an incomer, the glass (ὑάλος) that is named after the imperial city of Egypt..."⁶⁹. It is impossible to say whether the glass was obtained in Egypt or was merely of a certain style. Byzantine commercial transactions in Egypt are attested in the tenth century. The 936 letter of the emir of Egypt to Romanus I cited above refers to the Byzantine ambassadors who were allowed to "faire commerce des marchandises que tu as envoyées à cette intention, et nous leur avons permis de vendre et d'archeter tout ce qu'ils souhaitaient..."⁷⁰. After the Fatimids took Egypt in 969 rock crystal was carved at Cairo⁷¹ and, as noted above, one of the six extant ewers is inscribed with the name of the caliph who reigned soon after (975-6). While the appearance of the Byzantine (?) rock crystal flasks sent by Romanus in 938 remains a mystery, it is possible to speculate that the quasi-Roman/Byzantine decorative appearance of the Fatimid ewers may be explained by a continuing

tradition maintained in Alexandria (Fustat?) and then Cairo. The crystal and the glass are thus the most interesting items of the diplomatic lists viewed within the context of the tenth century. Because clear glass is traditionally considered a cheaper substitute for very expensive crystal⁷², it would represent a lower level of gift in diplomatic terms. The question of rock crystal versus glass leads to consideration of the Byzantine hierarchy of materials which operated in the middle period. Metalware provides good illustrations. Running parallel to court production of *cloisonné* enamel and elaborate composite objects like the chalices of Romanus was a production catering to various lower levels of society. Sometime from the ninth century on hammered vessels of tinned copper imitating silver plate were introduced⁷³. In the ecclesiastical sphere were processional crosses made in the same designs in a range of materials from gilded and inlaid silver, through solid silver to silver sheets over iron, to a variety of copper alloy⁷⁴ – all suited to purses of varying size.

The Byzantine hierarchy of materials reflected the hierarchies of bureaucratic and diplomatic rank. The *Kletorologion* of 899 lists 18 types of honorary titles, and eight for eunuchs, for which the emperor presented insignia. For the ranks of *nobilissimus*, *curopalates* and *magistros*, were a purple, red or white tunic, a mantle and a belt, while the *Zôstê patrikia*, patrician or *praepositus* were given ivory tablets and *vestitores* a fibula⁷⁵. Some insignia (fibulas, torques, and belts) were already in use in the early period.

The same principle applied in the world of diplomacy. The *Book of Ceremonies* (II ch. 48) lists the bulla weights and titles of address extended to foreign powers by the Byzantine emperor in the mid-tenth century. The gold seal with the imperial effigy, applied to imperial documents, came in different sizes depending in the case of diplomatic correspondence on the importance of the addressee, as follows:

62. I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Byzantine Icons in Steatite*, Vienna 1985, p. 70.

63. *Gems*, p. 241.

64. E.H. Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, 2nd ed. London and New York 1974, p. 239-241, 245-246. Nasir-i Khusraw (mid-eleventh century) states that the rock crystal carved in Cairo that came from the Red Sea (probably arriving from further east?) was better than that from the Maghreb; Lamm, *Gläser*, p. 511.

65. *Gems*, p. 201-202.

66. Warmington, *op.cit.*, p. 239, 246.

67. M. Rodziewicz, *Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie à la lumière des fouilles polonaises à Kom el-Dikka (Alexandrie III)*, Warsaw 1984, p. 249-251, pls 51-52.

68. M. Mundell Mango, *Byzantine Maritime Trade with the East (4th-7th Centuries)*, *ARAM* 8 (1996), p. 150-151, 161.

69. *Arethae scripta minora*, ed. L.G. Westerink, I, Leipzig 1968, no. 43 p. 304. I thank my husband for bringing this text to my attention.

70. Vasiliev, *Byzance II*, p. 213.

71. Lamm, *Gläser*, p. 511. Alcouffe in *Treasury*, p. 207.

72. M. Vickers, *Rock Crystal: the Key to Cut Glass and Diatreta in Persia and Rome*, *JRA* 9 (1996), p. 48-65. Cf. E.M. Stern, *Glass and Rock-crystal: a Multifaceted Relationship*, *JRA* 10 (1997), p. 192-206.

73. Mundell Mango, *op.cit.* (supra n. 16), p. 221-227.

74. J.A. Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, Washington, DC 1994, p. 56-64.

75. Oikonomides, *op.cit.* (supra n. 19), p. 88-98, 124-128.

4 coin weight	caliph of Baghdad
3 coin weight	sultan of Egypt khan of the Khazars king of Armenia the 3 eastern patriarchs
2 coin weight	khan of S. Russia king of Georgia doge of Venice kings of France and Germany emirs of north Africa
1 coin weight	pope of Rome

Although sent by the same emperor, the diplomatic gifts given in the two lists of 935 and 938⁷⁶ differ in quality and quan-

tity. The third list, of diplomatic bullae, may throw light of these other two. While the caliph of Baghdad received the four-coin weight, the king of Italy probably fell into the two-coin weight group together with the kings of France and Germany or into the one-coin bracket with the pope. These relative rankings could explain the corresponding gifts of rock crystal and glass.

Anchoring court art of the Macedonian Renaissance in its contemporary context, opens up questions extending from use to manufacture to supply of materials. The exotic material fashioned into a Byzantine object was sent abroad into another exotic milieu with the stamp of the Empire upon it. In its precise form it encapsulated some important aspects of the Empire in this period, its hierarchy of materials and its hierarchy of status.

76. On the 938 list see also G. al-Hijawi al-Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf)*. Cambridge, Mass. 1996, p. 99-101, 286-289. O. Kresten, Zur Chrysographie in den Auslandsschreiben der byzantinischen Kaiser, *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 40 (1998), p. 157-160 (I owe this reference to Jonathan Shepard). A. Cutler, Les échanges de dons entre Byzance et l'Islam (IXe-XIe siècles), *JS* 1996, p. 60-62.

PROVENANCE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Fig. 1. After L. Alexander Wolfe (Jerusalem) and Frank Sternberg (Zurich), *Objects with Semitic Inscriptions 1100 B.C.-A.D. 700. Jewish, Early Christian and Byzantine Antiquities*. Auction XXIII. 20 November 1989, lot 417.

Fig. 2. After K. Wessel, *Byzantine Enamels from the 5th to the 13th Century*, Shannon 1969, pl. 20.

Fig. 3. After *The Treasury of San Marco Venice*, ed. D. Buckton, Milan 1984, fig. 31b.

Fig. 4. After M.C. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, I*, Washington, DC 1962, pl. XXXVI.A.

Fig. 5. After J. Philippe, *Le monde byzantin dans l'histoire de la verrerie (Ve-XVIe siècle)*, Bologna 1970, fig. 55.

Fig. 6. After C.J. Lamm, *Mittelalterliche Gläser und Steinschnittarbeiten aus den Nahen Osten*, Berlin 1929-30, fig. 52.

Marlia Mundell Mango

ΔΙΠΛΩΜΑΤΙΚΑ ΔΩΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ Α' (935 ΚΑΙ 938)

Ο Ρωμανός Α' απέστειλε διπλωματικά δώρα στο βασίλειό της Ιταλίας το 935 και στο χαλίφη της Βαγδάτης το 938. Από τη σύγκριση των δύο καταλόγων, όπου αναγράφονται τα δώρα που ο αυτοκράτορας απέστειλε, αντλούμε πληροφορίες για τη σχέση ανάμεσα στα παραπάνω κράτη, καθώς και στοιχεία για τη βυζαντινή αυλική τέχνη κατά το 10ο αιώνα.

Η εγγενής αξία ενός διπλωματικού δώρου έγκειτο εν μέρει στην πολυτέλεια του υλικού του και εν μέρει στην

τέχνη του, και λειτουργούσε ως επικύρωση της αυτοκρατορικής εξουσίας.

Μία αξιοσημείωτη διαφορά ανάμεσα στους δύο καταλόγους αφορά το γυαλί που εστάλη στην Ιταλία και στην ορεία κρύσταλλο που εστάλη στη Βαγδάτη, διαφορά που αντικατοπτρίζεται στα σχετικά χρυσόβουλλα ταξιθέτησης που αναφέρονται στο *Περί βασιλείου τάξεως* βιβλίο.