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Byzantine Cutlery: an Overview

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BYZANTINE CUTLERY: AN OVERVIEW*

To the memory of Manolis Chatzidakis

Extant examples of Byzantine spoons, knives, and forks, numerous representations of dining scenes in Byzantine art, and a range of written sources make it natural for us to assume that cutlery was indeed used at the Byzantine table. Characteristically, in the reconstruction of a Late Byzantine table in the kitchens of the palace of Mistra in Greece within the framework of the magnificent exhibition “Byzantine Hours: The City of Mystras” organized in 2001, knives, forks and spoons were arranged on the table along with ceramic eating and drinking vessels¹. Despite this widespread impression, however, we are still unclear as to when, how, by whom, in what combination, and in which context these eating implements were actually used. Due to the limitations of the surviving evidence it may well be impossible to give definitive answers to all these questions. Notwithstanding, and against the backdrop of increased scholarly interest in

Byzantine daily life in general and the eating and drinking habits of the Byzantines in particular, they should at least be considered².

While the study of the typology and function of luxurious Late Roman and Early Byzantine silverware – especially, silver table-spoons – is well-advanced³ and while the cultural, social, and economic implications of the use of flatware in Western Europe from the late Middle Ages onwards are being carefully traced, the history of Byzantine cutlery had, until recently, received relatively little attention. And this, despite the fact that in surveys of the evolution of eating implements in the Medieval and Renaissance West one finds constantly repeated the claim that the use of the table-fork in particular was both known and acceptable in medieval Byzantium, from whence, some tentatively suggest, it was introduced into Western Europe, possibly via Venice⁴.

* A preliminary, short version of this paper, titled “Picking at an Old Question: The Use of Cutlery at the Byzantine Table”, was presented at the 28th Byzantine Studies Conference at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, see *28th Annual Byzantine Studies Conference. Abstracts of Papers, October 4-6, 2002, The Ohio State University*, 78-79. The help of Sharon Gerstel, Ioanna Rapti, Marina Moskowitz, Todor Petev, Anthi Papagiannaki, Tassos Papacostas, Maria Kouroumali, and Marlia Mundell Mango at various stages of this research is here gratefully acknowledged.

¹ Photograph reproduced in “Βυζάντιο. Έργα και Ημέρες”, *Η Καθημερινή - Επτά Ημέρες* (Sunday, 25 November 2001), 9.

² Indicative of this interest is that the production and consumption of food and drink in Byzantium was the central theme of three different international conferences organized within the first years of the 21st century: D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi (ed.), *Βυζαντινὸν διατροφή καὶ μαγειρεῖαι. Πρακτικά Ημερίδας “Περί τῆς διατροφῆς στὸ Βυζάντιο”, Θεσσαλονίκη, Μουσείο Βυζαντινοῦ Πολιτισμοῦ, 4 Νοεμβρίου 2001*, Athens 2005. W. Mayer and S. Trzcionka (eds), *Feast, Fast or Famine: Food and Drink in Byzantium*, Brisbane 2005. L. Brubaker and K. Liaridou (eds), *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry (Luke 12:19) - Food and Wine in Byzantium. In Honour of Professor A. A. M. Bryer*, Aldershot 2007.

³ The relevant bibliography is too lengthy to be cited here in full. One should mention, however, S. Hauser, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische*

Silberlöffel. Bemerkungen zur Produktion von Luxusgütern in 5. bis 7. Jahrhundert, Münster 1992, as well as A. Cahn and A. Kaufmann-Heinmann (eds), *Die spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst*, 2 vols, Derendingen 1984. I. Touratsoglou and E. Chalkia, *The Kratigos Mytilene Treasure. Coins and Valuables of the 7th Century A.D.*, Athroismata 1, Athens 2008, and the interesting discussions of Late Antique cutlery in the work of François Baratte, see F. Baratte, “Vaisselle d’argent, souvenirs littéraires et manières de table: l’exemple des cuillers de Lampsaque”, *CahArch* 40 (1992), 5-20, and F. Baratte et al., *Le trésor de la place Camille-Jouffray à Vienne (Isère). Un dépôt d’argenterie et son contexte archéologique*, Paris 1990, no. 20 (on forks). For a recent survey, see M. Mundell Mango, “From ‘Glittering Sideboard’ to Table: Silver in the Well-appointed triclinium”, *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry*, op. cit., 127-161.

⁴ See, for example, *The Secular Spirit: Life and Art at the End of the Middle Ages*, exh. cat., foreword Th. Hoving, introduction T. B. Husband and J. Hayward, New York 1975, no. 66. B. A. Henisch, *Fast and Feast. Food in Medieval Society*, University Park, PA 1976, repr. 1999, 185-189. P. Marchese, *L’invenzione della forchetta*, Soveria Mannelli 1989, esp. 42-45. J. Amme, *Historic Cutlery. Changes in Form from the Early Stone Age to the Mid-20th Century*, Stuttgart 2001, esp. 17. M. Weiss Adamson, *Food in Medieval Times*, Westport, CT, and London 2004, 160. C. C. Young, “The Sexual Politics of Cutlery”, *Feeding Desire. Design and the Tools of the Table, 1500-2005*, New York 2006, 108-109. D. Goldstein,

The earliest discussions of the use of cutlery at the Byzantine table date back to the 1930s. Phaidon Koukoules was the first to address this question in a pioneering article on dining and feasting in Byzantium⁵. Despite modern criticism of his methodology and the ideological outlook of his work, Koukoules' study remains a useful research tool given that in it are collected numerous references to Byzantine eating practices mined from a wide spectrum of late antique and mediaeval texts. On the other hand, the three other early contributions, which appeared only a few years later, were based almost exclusively on pictorial evidence gathered with the purpose of establishing that the fork and knife were used at the Middle Byzantine table in the tenth and eleven centuries⁶. However, Guillaume de Jerphanion, Georgios Soteriou, and Manolis Chatzidakis were concerned neither with daily life nor with the material culture of food in Byzantium, but with the methodological question of whether depictions of cutlery, along with other *realia*, could be reliably employed for dating Byzantine monumental ensembles of uncertain date in Cappadocia. Still, the lists of depictions they compiled constitute a helpful starting point for anyone interested in tracing the story of Byzantine flatware.

It was only many decades later, as a result of the flourishing of material culture studies and of the rehabilitation of the socio-cultural aspects of food-consumption and its material accoutrements (rather than the economics of food production and distribution) as valid topics of scientific enquiry, that the question of Byzantine cutlery was taken up again by

various scholars⁷. Nicholas Oikonomides, in his seminal article on the contents of the Byzantine house published in 1990, considers the use of flatware at the mediaeval Byzantine table, though very briefly. Based on his investigation of Byzantine inventories of household effects, he suggested that "eating procedures were rather simplified in the average lay household, and that people often, if not always, ate with their fingers from a large serving plate". He is, however, careful to point out that this observation refers to middle- and low-class households located mainly in the provinces of the empire and that it should not be taken to apply to practices in Constantinopolitan households or in the houses of the wealthy and the imperial palace, which Oikonomides does not discuss⁸. For the use of individual sets of knives and forks at the Middle Byzantine table as "a mark of refinement among the upper ranks of Middle Byzantine society" one could turn to artistic representations or so Ilias Anagnostakis and Titos Papamastorakis suggest, within the context of a broader discussion on the possibilities of using the pictorial evidence in the study of Byzantine material culture – in this case, of table-culture – of a given period⁹. The most extensive treatment of cutlery to date is found in the work of archaeologist Joannita Vroom, as part of her attempt to trace the evolution of dining habits in the Eastern Mediterranean from Late Antiquity down to early modern times. The pictorial evidence features largely in her discussions as well, which also take into account the archaeological and the written evidence, without, however, being exhaustive¹⁰.

"Implements of Eating", *Feeding Desire*, op.cit., 117-118. For an alternative albeit purely speculative suggestion unsupported by any evidence that the table-fork arrived in fourteenth-century Central Europe from Lusignan Cyprus, see M. Dembinska, *Food and Drink in Medieval Poland: Rediscovering a Cuisine of the Past*, trans. M. Thomas, revised and adapted W. Woys Weaver, Philadelphia 1999, 42-44.

⁵ Ph. I. Koukoules, "Τεύματα, δειπνα καὶ συμπόσια τῶν Βυζαντινῶν", *ΕΕΒΣ* 10 (1933), 108-110. The section on cutlery in Koukoules' monumental work, *Βυζαντινῶν βίος καὶ πολιτισμός*, vol. 5, Athens 1952, 148-150, is a slightly modified version of this earlier publication.

⁶ G. de Jerphanion, S.J., "Sur une question de méthode: à propos de la datation des peintures cappadociennes", *OCP* 3 (1937), repr. in G. de Jerphanion, S.J., *La voix des monuments. Études d'archéologie. Nouvelle série*, Rome and Paris 1938, 237-254; G. A. Soteriou, *ΕΕΒΣ* 13 (1937), 465-466 [book-review G. de Jerphanion, *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin*, Paris 1936]; M. Hadzidakis, "À propos d'une nouvelle manière de dater les peintures de Cappadoce", *Byzantion* 14 (1939), 110-112.

⁷ In this, Byzantine studies are closely following suit developments in Roman and Western Medieval and Early Modern European studies; see, selectively, M. R. Schärer and A. Fenton (eds), *Food and Material Culture. Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of the International Commission for Research into European Food History*, East Lothian 1998. I.

Nielsen and H. S. Nielsen (eds), *Meals in a Social Context. Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World*, Aarhus 1998. P. Scholliers (ed.), *Food, Drink and Identity. Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages*, Oxford and New York 2001. K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet. Images of Conviviality*, Cambridge 2003. B. K. Gold and J. F. Donahue (eds), *Roman Dining*, Baltimore 2005. D. Alexandre-Bidon, *Une archéologie du goût. Céramique et consommation (Moyen Âge-Temps modernes)*, Paris 2005. T. J. Tomasik and J. M. Vitullo (eds), *At the Table. Metaphorical and Material Cultures of Food in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Turnhout 2007.

⁸ N. Oikonomides, "The Contents of the Byzantine House from the Eleventh to the Fifteenth Century", *DOP* 44 (1990), 212.

⁹ I. Anagnostakis and T. Papamastorakis, "...and Radishes for Appetizers". On Banquets, Radishes, and Wine", *Βυζαντινῶν διατροφῆ καὶ μαγειρείῳ* (n. 2), 148-153.

¹⁰ J. Vroom, *After Antiquity. Ceramics and Society in the Aegean from the 7th to the 20th Century A.C. A Case Study from Boeotia, Central Greece*, Leiden 2003, 313, 317, 321, 323, 328, 329, 332. Ead., "The Archaeology of Late Antique Dining Habits in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Preliminary Study of the Evidence", L. Lavan, E. Swift and T. Putzeys (eds), *Objects in Context, Objects in Use. Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity*, Leiden and Boston 2007, 351-354. Ead., "The Changing Dining Habits at Christ's Table", *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry* (n. 2), esp. 198-201, 204-205.

The present article aspires to advance the on-going exploration of Byzantine table-culture by means of a specialized, diachronic study on the use of cutlery in Byzantium, in which questions of typology, function, and social context of usage will be (re)examined under the light of the available evidence, archaeological, written, and pictorial.

The use of cutlery in Late Antiquity (4th-7th centuries)

Our main source of information on the use of cutlery in Late Antiquity are the objects themselves, spoons, knives, and forks, that have come down to us either as part of domestic silver treasures or as finds from controlled archaeological excavations. To these should be added a number of examples that have reached public and private collections through the antiquities trade, and are, consequently, deprived of context and, often, date and provenance. Relevant references in the written sources are, to my knowledge, exceedingly rare and often ambiguous, found in certain moralizing writings of Christian authors, hagiographical texts, and inventories of movable property, while artistic representations of eating implements in use are next to non-existent. In fact, the only example known to me is a fourth-century mosaic calendar pavement from Carthage in which the month of July in the guise of a young woman is depicted standing – not seated or reclining at a table – and eating berries from a bowl using what could be a spoon¹¹. Though the absence of relevant depictions should not be taken at face value given the positive testimony of the archaeological evidence, it still raises the question as to why cutlery was not chosen for representation as part of the accoutrements of the meal during this particular period. Is this omission to be understood as reflecting actual patterns of usage? Was the use of cutlery not widespread enough to warrant depiction? Could it be that the surviving images were meant to reflect a specific stage of the meal at which cutlery was not used and therefore is not represented? Recent discussions of Byzantine art

as a potential source on daily life and material culture have pointed out that it would be simplistic to look for such specificity in artistic representations and that, though some of their components may be “realistic”, the whole may not be perceived as a “snap-shot” of contemporary life and practices. What was depicted and what was not in terms of the paraphernalia that functioned as attributes of figures or as elements of the setting was dictated primarily by artistic considerations, such as the requirements of the narrative, established iconographic formulae, and symbolic meaning, as well as by the context and envisioned function of the image and the culturally-circumscribed expectations of the intended audience¹². Among cutlery, the spoon seems to have been regularly used at meals – or at least at certain stages of a meal – and did have potential as a symbol of status and sophistication, as the numerous finds of elaborate silver examples, many inscribed with witticisms in Greek and Latin, suggest¹³. Still, it never became part of the established iconography of the meal as this evolved in the Late Antique period, even though this iconography was influenced by the dining habits of the upper classes, which, as we shall see below, also included the use of spoons for the consumption of particular dishes¹⁴. Was it, then, some kind of artistic economy that led to the omission of cutlery? Was flatware deemed superfluous, given that a detailed representation does not appear to have been a major concern and that the idea of a meal taking place could be clearly and adequately conveyed simply by the representation of a large platter of food surrounded by loaves of bread on the often quite small table-surface? Is it possible that the depiction of cutlery even as a potential status symbol, which could be used to mark a distinguished guest or add a certain tenor to an image, never caught on, considering that there were other far more potent signifiers of luxury and rank that would have been easily recognizable to the beholder being, as they were, deeply ingrained both in the artistic traditions of the time and the consciousness of Late Antique society? One has in mind, for example, the

¹¹ E. Dauterman Maguire, H. Maguire, M. J. Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, Urbana-Champaign 1989, 112, fig. 39. It should, perhaps, be noted that representations of cutlery are also rare in Roman art. In addition to the well-known third-century mosaic pavement from the House of the Buffet Supper at Daphne, near Antioch, in which two spoons are depicted on a plate of appetizers, one could mention a relief Roman funerary stele from Tingad, Algeria, depicting a table set for a meal, including one large spoon and a pair of small spoons for eating eggs. See S. Knudsen, “Dining as a Fine Art: Tablewares of the Ancient Romans”, Ch. Kondoleon (ed.), *Antioch. The Lost Ancient City*, Princeton 2000, 183 fig. 1. A. Di Vita, “L’ipogeo di Adamo ed Eva a Gargaresc”, *Atti del IX Congresso Internazionale di*

Archeologia Cristiana, Roma, 21-27 Settembre 1975, vol. II, Vatican City 1978, 250 fig. 34.

¹² Anagnostakis and Papamastorakis, “Radishes for Appetizers”, op.cit. (n. 9), passim. M. G. Parani, “Representations of Glass Objects as a Source on Byzantine Glass. How Useful are They?”, *DOP* 59 (2005), 147-149, with further bibliographical references.

¹³ Baratte, “Vaisselle d’argent”, op.cit. (n. 3), passim. Mundell Mango, “Glittering Sideboard”, op.cit. (n. 3), 134-136.

¹⁴ For a detailed survey of the evolution of dining habits and the iconography of the meal in Late Antiquity, in both secular and religious ritual contexts, see Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet* (n. 7), 141-202.

hierarchical arrangement of the guests on the *stibadium* (semi-circular dining couch) and the presence of servants carrying platters of food, drinking vessels and hand-washing sets, which constitute standard components of Late Antique dining imagery¹⁵. We may never know for certain, though it is hoped that the following discussion might offer some insights regarding the depiction (or not) of cutlery in Byzantine art and the extent to which positive or negative artistic evidence may be used as a probe into socio-cultural aspects of the use of flatware at different periods.

In Late Antiquity, like in Roman times, people often ate using their fingers to cut a morsel and bring it to the mouth, while bread could act as a kind of spoon for stews and sauces¹⁶. As far as cutlery is concerned, the only item that was commonly used and that constitutes a standard compo-

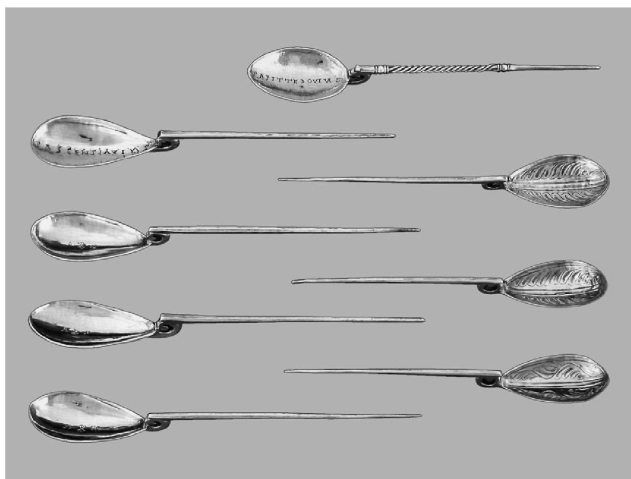


Fig. 1. London, British Museum. Silver spoons from the Mildenhall Treasure, 4th century A.D.

nent of the impressive Late Antique treasures of domestic silver plate is the spoon (Figs 1 and 2)¹⁷. The regular use of the spoon at the table is already attested in Roman times, from the first century A.D. onwards¹⁸. As demonstrated by the large numbers in which they have survived, silver table-spoons, often designed in sets of twelve¹⁹, continued to form

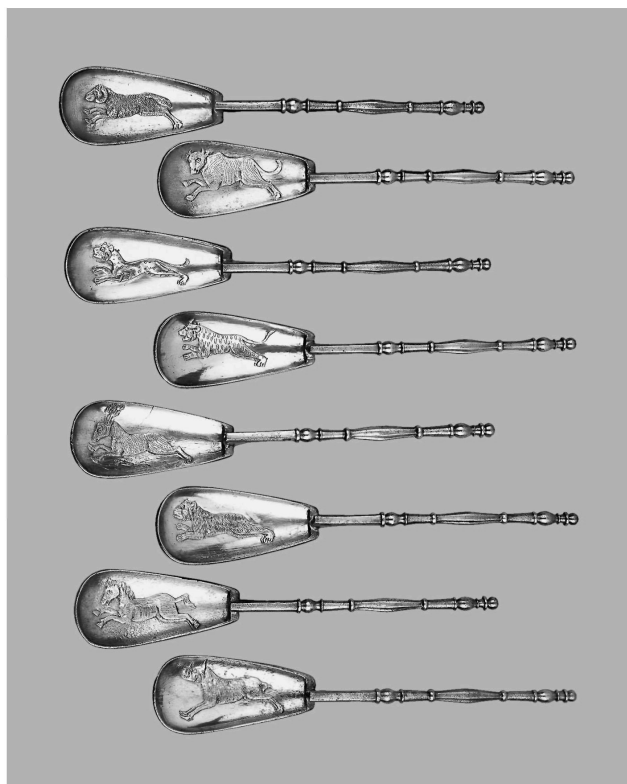


Fig. 2. London, British Museum. Silver spoons from the First Cyprus Treasure, ca. A.D. 600.

¹⁵ S. P. Ellis, "Late-antique Dining: Architecture, Furnishings and Behaviour", R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds), *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, Portsmouth, RI 1997, 41-51. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 150-156. Ead., "The Waiting Servant in Later Roman Art", *Roman Dining* (n. 7), 115-140.

¹⁶ Vroom, "Archaeology", op.cit. (n. 10), esp. 354. It should be noted, however, that eating with one's fingers implies neither simplified nor uncouth table manners. Though the relevant information comes mainly from the Roman period and authors like Plutarch (ca. A.D. 46-A.D. 120) and Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150-before A.D. 215), there were rules about how many fingers to use to consume specific dishes, which hand to use for meat and which for bread, and when to reach out to take a piece according to one's rank; see K. Bradley, "The Roman Family at Dinner", *Meals in a Social Context* (n. 7), 40-41, 42.

¹⁷ The following discussion concerns the use of spoons in domestic con-

texts. For the presence and use of spoons in ecclesiastical/liturgical contexts, see R. F. Taft, S.J., "Byzantine Communion Spoons: A Review of the Evidence", *DOP* 50 (1990), 209-238 (with detailed bibliographical references to earlier treatments of this topic). R. E. Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity. Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries*, Aldershot 2004, 72-82. Cf. B. Caseau, "L'abandon de la communion dans la main (IVe-XIIe siècles)", *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, TM 14, 2002, 79-94.

¹⁸ See D. E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate*, London 1966, 155-156 and 177-178, for a quick overview of the evolution of the various types of spoon in use during the Roman period, down to the early 3rd century. See also, Hauser, *Silberlöffel* (n. 3), 15.

¹⁹ For references to three such sets in an early seventh-century inventory from Gaul, see J. Adhémar, "Le trésor d'argenterie donné par saint Didier aux églises d'Auxerre (VIIe siècle)", *RA* 4 (1934), 52, nos 46-48.

part of domestic plate throughout Late Antiquity²⁰. In terms of types, the earliest part of the Late Antique period, down to the fifth century, evidences greater variety than the latter part. One type comprised spoons with a large oval bowl and a very short curved handle terminating in a swan's or a duck's head, known as the *ligula*²¹. A second type included spoons with a deep circular bowl and a horizontal handle attached to the bowl by means of a scalloped lunate plaque²². To a third type belonged large spoons with a pear-shaped or oval bowl and a straight handle attached to the bowl by means of a vertical openwork scroll ornament (Fig. 1). Throughout the fourth century, the handle of this type of spoon terminated in a point, reminiscent of the Roman *cochleare*, but increasingly from the fifth century onwards the point was replaced by some form of rounded terminal, a baluster or knob²³. It is this latter class of spoon that will become the most common type in the sixth and the seventh centuries (Fig. 2). What distinguishes the later spoons from their antecedents, in addition to their rounded finials, is the solid vertical disc that replaced the openwork element joining the handle to the bowl and their greater weight and length, reaching up to 28 cm²⁴.

Variations in shape and size possibly reflected variety in usage and, on occasion, differences in the age and the gender of the user²⁵, while typological differentiation over time

might be associated with changes in taste or even in diet and eating practices, which are, however, difficult to document. Spoons were employed for eating eggs, liquid foods, desserts, even berries, while examples with a handle terminating in a point could also be used for eating shellfish and snails²⁶. Judging by the horizontal arrangement and the orientation of the letters on numerous inscribed examples, the spoons – in order for the inscriptions to be legible – were held in the right hand²⁷. The largest examples, especially those of the sixth and seventh centuries, may have been rather unwieldy. Perhaps the elaboration of the spoon handles, which could be faceted, spirally fluted, or otherwise decorated with notches or mouldings, was partly intended to provide the user with a more secure grip.

Within an affluent household, the members of the family may have had their own, individual silver spoons, with their names inscribed upon them, as appears to be the case with four of the spoons in the Zakos Collection, Geneva, dated to the fifth century A.D.²⁸. Whether the family would use such spoons on a daily basis or only on formal occasions is not possible to say. At banquets, it would have been the host who provided the silver table-spoons for the guests or so the fact that such items were regularly made in sets of twelve seems to suggest. However, it is rather unlikely that the spoons, which, as we have seen, could be quite bulky, were

See, also, Mundell Mango, "Glittering Sideboard", op.cit. (n. 3), 134-135. F. Baratte, "Des mois et des apôtres: à propos d'une cuillère d'argent inscrite trouvée dans la Saône", *Antiquité Tardive* 15 (2007), esp. 342-343.

²⁰ The most significant addition to the corpus of known examples since the study of Hauser (cf. supra, n. 3) are the 21 silver spoons (including a complete set of twelve), of four different types and belonging to two periods (4th-5th and 6th-7th centuries), in the Janet Zakos Collection, donated to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, in 2004. The catalogue of the silver objects in this collection is being prepared for publication by Marlia Mundell Mango, who has generously given me a copy of the section pertaining to the spoons for which I thank her. For a sixth-century Christian funerary inscription from Phrygia mentioning a spoon-maker (*μονοτομικός*) named Hermes, see W. H. Buckler, W. M. Calder and W. K. C. Guthrie (eds), *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua IV. Monuments and Documents from Eastern Asia and Western Galatia*, Manchester 1933, no. 100. I owe this reference to Sharon Gerstel, whom I here thank.

²¹ Hauser, *Silberlöffel* (n. 3), 16-17. For the find of one half of a two-piece stone mould for casting this type of spoon, see J. Stephens Crawford, *The Byzantine Shops at Sardis*, Cambridge, Mass. 1990, 47, fig. 179. It should perhaps be pointed out that in Roman times the term "ligula" was used to designate a different type of spoon. On the problem of associating the terms "ligula" and "cochleare", used in the sources to design-

nate table-spoons, with specific Late Antique spoon-types, see Hauser, op.cit., 15-20.

²² Ibid., 17-18, and, more recently, F. Baratte et al., *Le trésor de Carthage: contribution à l'étude de l'orfèvrerie de l'Antiquité tardive*, Paris 2002, 58-69.

²³ M. Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium. The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures*, Baltimore 1986, 118, 126; Hauser, *Silberlöffel* (n. 3), 18-19.

²⁴ Ibid., 19. M. Mundell Mango, *Catalogue of the Silver Objects in the Zakos Collection, Geneva* (under publication), no. 13, Table 6. Most modern scholars use the term "cochleare" (*κοχλιάριον* in Greek) to designate these later spoons.

²⁵ As suggested by Mundell Mango à propos spoons nos 8-11 in the Zakos Collection, Geneva, see previous note.

²⁶ Cf. Dauterman Maguire, Maguire, Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers* (n. 11), 112-113, fig. 39. I have found no evidence for the use of spoons for feeding infants at this time, though lack of references need not imply that it was not practiced. On the association of the spoon with birth, see below.

²⁷ Mundell Mango, "Glittering Sideboard", op.cit. (n. 3), 135. Inscribed names, probably of the owner, with a "left-handed" orientation also exist, but they are not so common, see Cahn and Kaufmann-Heinimann (eds), *Kaiseraugst* (n. 3), figs 24, 45, and Mundell Mango, *Zakos Collection*, nos 8-11.

²⁸ Ibid.

set on the table from the beginning of the meal, especially if one takes into account the relatively small size of Late Antique dining tables²⁹. It seems more plausible that the spoons were brought and distributed to the guests along with a course that required their use, to be taken away once they had served their purpose³⁰. Still, as others have observed, within the context of upper-class formal dining, it is unlikely that these expensive silver table-spoons and especially the large, heavy examples were perceived merely as eating implements. The precious metal out of which the spoons were made, their great size and weight, their often elaborate decoration, including personal monograms and images of wild beasts taken from the iconographic repertoire of the hunt and alluding to an aristocratic life-style, were all meant to advertise the host's affluence and social aspirations³¹. In the case of the inscribed examples, it has been argued that the witticisms or the sayings of the Seven Sages that appear on silver table-spoons were meant to entertain and incite conversations in which the guests could display their knowledge and intellect, while at the same time cultivating the image of the host as an individual of culture and refinement, in addition to one of power and wealth³². It would seem that the Christian members of the Empire's elite also chose to employ sets of silver table-spoons to display their social and financial status, as suggested by the occurrence of Christian symbols and the names of the Apostles and the Evangelists on a number of Late Antique examples³³. This they did in conformity with established social custom and despite the ideal of Christian poverty. As has been argued elsewhere, the presence of Christian symbols and inscriptions on secular silver tableware may have been perceived as invoking Christ's blessing both on the house-

hold and on a particular meal, while, more specifically, the use of the so-called Apostle spoons may have been intended to invoke a sense of Christian collegiality among the commensals³⁴.

It should be pointed out that silver spoons probably could have been found in poorer households as well, where they may have also served as an economic investment or perhaps, as a means of advancing the owner's social ambitions³⁵. For those who could not afford silver tableware, but also for the daily needs of every household, there were spoons made of other materials, including wood, which, however, are not well attested in the archaeological record³⁶. One may mention, for example, a lead spoon from Rhodes, as well as a small group of copper-alloy and one bone spoon from the Early Byzantine shops at Sardis, though in the case of the Sardis examples one may not be certain of the spoons' function as eating implements, given that they may have been put to other uses within the context of the shops' artisanal and commercial activities, such as measuring small quantities of substances, like pigments³⁷.

Turning now to the knife, it would seem that during the Roman period, table-knives were not really necessary since the food was brought to the table already cut up in pieces ready for consumption³⁸. Still, Clement of Alexandria (*Paedagogus* II.37.2), when castigating his contemporaries' inclination towards extravagance, speaks of the table-knife (τὸ μαχαίριον τὸ ἐπιτραπέζιον), which need not have a handle adorned with silver nails or made of ivory, nor a blade of "Indian iron" to cut the meat efficiently³⁹. Iron knife-blades were included among other implements in two joined-and-folding sets of eating utensils that date to the second and third centuries A.D., while combination spoons-and-knives,

²⁹ Ellis, "Late-antique Dining", op.cit. (n. 15), 49-50.

³⁰ Cf. Petronius, *Satyricon*, xxxi.3-xxxiv.4, trans. in N. Lewis and M. Reinhold (eds), *Roman Civilization. Selected Readings. II. The Empire*, New York 1990, 159 (1st century A.D.).

³¹ For formal meals and banquets in Late Antiquity as a means of self-promotion and affirmation among the upper classes, all the way up to the emperor, see Ellis, "Late-antique Dining", op.cit. (n. 15), passim. S. Malmberg, "Dazzling Dining: Banquets as an Expression of Imperial Legitimacy", *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry* (n. 2), 75-91.

³² Cf. supra, n. 13.

³³ Baratte, "Vaisselle d'argent", op.cit. (n. 3), 13. Mundell Mango, "Glittering Sideboard", op.cit. (n. 3), 135-136.

³⁴ M. G. Parani, "Silver", A. Kirin, (ed.), *Sacred Art, Secular Context: Objects of Art from the Byzantine Collection of Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., Accompanied by American Paintings from the Collection of Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss*, with contributions by James N. Carder

and Robert R. Nelson, Athens, GA 2005, 88-89.

³⁵ Cf. the comments of St. John Chrysostom regarding the desire for owning tableware made of silver and gold: A. M. Malingrey, *Jean Chrysostome, Sur la vaine gloire et l'éducation des enfants*, Paris 1972, 90-91, and John Chrysostom, *PG* 58, col. 509.

³⁶ Cf. G. Davidson, *The Minor Objects*, Corinth XII, Princeton 1952, 189, commenting on the absence of finds of spoons from the Byzantine levels at Corinth.

³⁷ D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi (ed.), *Καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο*, Athens 2002, no. 382. Crawford, *Byzantine Shops* (n. 21), 91, figs 508-509. J. C. Waldbaum, *Metahwork from Sardis: The Finds through 1974*, Cambridge, Mass. 1983, 60-61 (nos 225-229), pl. 17.

³⁸ Strong, *Greek and Roman Plate* (n. 18), 129.

³⁹ Clément d'Alexandrie, *Le Pédagogue, Livre II*, trans. C. Mondésert, notes H.-I. Marrou, 2nd edition, Paris 1991, 80. Cf. Dauterman Maguire, Maguire, Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers* (n. 11), 112.

i.e. spoons the handles of which terminated in a knife-blade, either fixed or folding, are also attested in third-century archaeological contexts in Britain, France, and Germany⁴⁰. These finds suggest that, in Late Roman times, the use of the knife as a personal eating implement may not have been as uncommon as one usually thinks, at least not among travelers of certain means and standards who, nevertheless, could not always expect to have their food served cut up for them.

In Late Antiquity the profession of the knife-maker (*μαχαίρας*) is attested epigraphically and it is natural to assume that among his products there would have been items for household usage⁴¹. Iron knife-blades with tangs to fit into handles, which would have been made of bronze or some organic material (ivory, bone, wood) but which rarely survive, do come up in excavations of Late Antique sites (Fig. 3)⁴². They are often single-edged, with a straight back and a cutting edge which tapers towards the end, forming a point. Such knives could have served a number of functions within a household, used as tools, in the kitchen, or at the table, though, today, it is seldom possible to determine their primary function. Still, that there were knives especially designed for use at the table is suggested by a rare reference in the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa. The fourth-century Church Father speaks of “slender knives” (*λεπτὰς μαχαίρας*) that the host would place on a well-appointed table and which the guests could use to cut a morsel from the dishes arranged before them⁴³. It would seem then that, on occasion, it was the host that would provide the knives – rather than the guests bringing their own, as was often the case later in medieval Europe – though it is unclear from the text whether each participant was provided with a knife for his personal use or whether the knives were meant to be shared among the participants at the meal. Some inkling of what these elegant table knives may have looked like can be de-

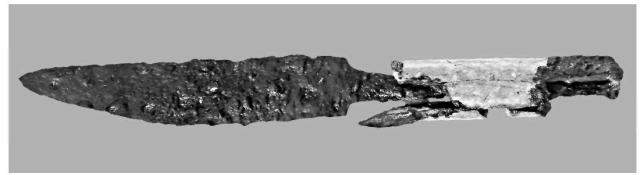


Fig. 3. Thessaloniki, Museum of Byzantine Civilisation. Iron knife with bone handle from Louloudies Kitrous, 6th century A.D.

rived from the sixth-century octagonal silver knife-handle adorned with gold inlay ornament and a Greek inscription from the Eastern Mediterranean, now in the British Museum (Fig. 4)⁴⁴. This knife is said to have formed part of the famous Esquiline Treasure from Rome. However, as a rule, table-knives, in contrast to spoons, do not form part of the great treasures of domestic silver plate that have come down to us from Late Antiquity.

While the spoon and the knife were, one might argue, necessary as eating implements, the third member of what we today have come to consider as a triad, the fork, is not strictly-speaking so. As the historian of cutlery Jochen Ammen has pointed out, “anything that can be speared by a fork can really be picked up in one’s fingers and eaten”, while both knives and the pointed handles of some spoons could serve for spearing

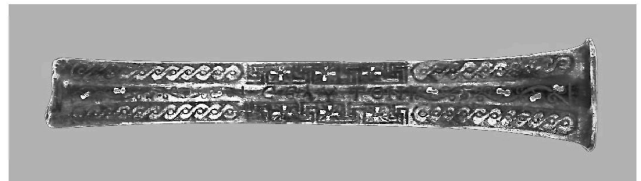


Fig. 4. London, British Museum. Silver knife-handle, Eastern Mediterranean, probably 6th century A.D.

⁴⁰ Cahn and Kaufmann-Heinimann (eds), *Kaiseraugst* (n. 3), 101, 124 fig. 67, pl. 33.1. D. Sherlock, “A Roman Combination Eating Implement”, *AntJ* 68 (1988), 310-311. Id., “The Roman Combination Knife and Spoon”, *JRA* 16 (2003), 331-335. Id., “Roman Forks”, *ArchJ* 164 (2007), 255, appendix 1, A1, A2. I owe the latter reference to Hélène Chew, whom I here thank.

⁴¹ Papanikola-Bakirtzi (ed.), *Καθημερινή ζωή* (n. 37), no. 98 (5th-century funerary inscription from Piraeus of one Isidoros, knife-maker and reader). To my knowledge, there is nothing from the Late Antique period to compare with the 1st-century relief from the tomb of L. Cornelius Atimetus from Rome, on which an assortment of knives, along with other bladed instruments, are depicted on sale at a hardware shop. For a

reproduction of the Roman relief, see Crawford, *Byzantine Shops* (n. 21), fig. 38.

⁴² See, selectively, G. F. Bass and F. H. van Doorninck, JR., *Yassi Ada I. A Seventh-century Byzantine Shipwreck*, College Station, TX 1982, 260, 262, figs 11-21 and 11-22. Waldbaum, *Metalwork* (n. 37), 54 and nos 187-196, pls 14-15. M. Ballance et al., *Excavations in Chios, 1952-1955. Byzantine Emporio*, Oxford 1989, nos F76-F79, fig. 52. Papanikola-Bakirtzi (ed.), *Καθημερινή ζωή* (n. 37), nos 99, 100, 385.

⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, *PG* 44, col. 752.

⁴⁴ D. Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, London 1994, no. 134. Mundell Mango, “Glittering Sideboard”, *op.cit.* (n. 3), 136.

pieces of food which might be sticky or too hot for the fingers⁴⁵. True, the fork does have certain practical advantages: two or more tines are better at securing a morsel than a single point, while, in pre-modern times when the washing of table-cloths, napkins, hand-towels, and garments was a difficult and demanding task, the idea of using an implement that would prevent soiling the fingers may have had an additional appeal⁴⁶. Still, the fact that the use of the fork, though not unknown, does not appear to have been widespread in Roman and Late Antique times implies that, beyond any practical concerns, there must have been other, culturally-induced factors at play determining its presence or not at the table. Within the context of the elaborate table-culture of the Roman and Late Antique periods, the prevalence of simplified eating procedures was certainly not one of them.

The evidence on the use of the table fork in Roman and Late Antique times is mostly archaeological⁴⁷. Written references to the use of table-forks in Late Antiquity are extremely rare. St. Gregory of Nyssa, in the same passage cited earlier in relation to table-knives, also mentions the use of “ἀργυροῖ περόναι” at the table, though he goes on to specify that it was the convex part “at the other end” that was suitable for eating, raising thus the possibility that he might actually be referring to spoons with a handle terminating in a point or another kind of combination eating utensil rather than actual forks⁴⁸. One fork (*fuscina*), adorned with a lion’s head is listed in the seventh-century Auxerre inventory of Late Antique domestic silver plate mentioned above⁴⁹.

Whether this was a serving fork or a table-fork proper is not specified in the inventory. As for artistic representations of Early Byzantine table-forks, these are, as far as I know, non-existent. The bifurcated object in the illustration of the Journey of Joseph’s brothers with Benjamin to Egypt in the sixth-century *Vienna Genesis*, folio 22r, is a kitchen utensil used in the process of cooking depicted in the background and should not be confused with a table-fork⁵⁰.

Regarding the archaeological evidence, forks with three tines formed part of three Roman folding traveler’s sets of eating utensils, two of which were mentioned earlier à propos knives⁵¹. Individual silver and copper alloy forks, with two or three tines have also come down to us from Roman and Late Antique times. Though the numbers of published examples are small, one may begin to distinguish certain general types. One category includes silver and copper-alloy forks with two or three tines, the handle of which terminates in a cloven hoof, a feature that is also encountered on Roman spoons from the first century onwards. One silver example of this type with two tines possibly from Syria and dated to the fourth century is now in the Cleveland Museum of Art (length 14.5 cm) (Fig. 5). Other examples have been reported from Italy, France, and Germany⁵². Similar to the two-tined forks of this group, is a Roman example said to be from southern Italy, the handle of which terminates in a rounded knob rather than a hoof (length 10.5 cm)⁵³. To a different type belongs the elegant silver, three-tined fork with traces of gilding from the third-century silver treasure

⁴⁵ Amme, *Historic Cutlery* (n. 4), 16-17.

⁴⁶ Cf. S. D. Coffin, “Historical Overview”, *Feeding Desire* (n. 4), 37.

⁴⁷ The use of the fork at the Roman table has been discussed recently by David Sherlock, in his article “Roman forks”, op.cit. (n. 40), 249-267, with an informative appendix in which are listed all eating forks and other fork-like utensils known to the author. This catalogue, though comprehensive, is not exhaustive, while some of the alternative functions proposed for certain implements should be treated with caution. Baratte’s treatment of the fork in Roman and Late Antique times, also highlighting the problems of precisely dating the extant examples beyond a general attribution to the Roman or Late Antique periods, still remains valuable, see Baratte, *Le trésor de la place Camille-Jouffray* (n. 3), no. 20. For a summary, see also, Vroom, “Archaeology”, op.cit. (n. 10), 352-353.

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, PG 44, col. 752: «...τὰς ἀργυροῦς περόνας, αἷς ἢ συμπεφυκυῖα κατὰ τὸ ἕτερον μέρος κοιλότης πρὸς τὸ ἔνθος ἐπιτηδείως ἔχειν πεποιήται». For an interpretation of this passage as referring to picks or even tooth-picks, see Vroom, “Archaeology”, op.cit. (n. 10), 352 (instead of Gregory of Nicaea read Gregory of Nyssa). It should, perhaps, be pointed out that the definition regularly given to the term «περόνη» by Byzantine lexicographers is that of brooch or fibula, not an eating implement.

⁴⁹ Adhémar, “Trésor”, op.cit. (n. 19), no. 25.

⁵⁰ O. Mazal, *Wiener Genesis: Purpurpergamenthandschrift aus dem 6. Jahrhundert: vollständiges Faksimile des Codex theol. Gr. 31 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien*, Frankfurt 1980, Bild 43.

⁵¹ Sherlock, “Roman Forks”, op.cit. (n. 40), appendix 1, Group A.

⁵² W. M. Milliken, “Early Christian Fork and Spoon”, *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 44 (1957), 184-186. D. G. Mitten, *Classical Bronzes. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design*, Providence 1975, no. 50 n. 1, no. 54. Sherlock, “Roman Forks”, op.cit. (n. 40), appendix 1, E1, E2, E7, E10, Fl.1-14. I would like to thank Hélène Chew, Conservateur en chef chargée des Collections gallo-romaines, for information on the three-pronged copper-alloy example in the Musée d’Archéologie nationale, Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Additional information on the Cleveland fork, as well as on a second example discussed below, was provided by the Cleveland Museum staff, whose assistance is here gratefully acknowledged.

⁵³ Mitten, op.cit., no. 50. For more examples of two- and three-tined forks with a handle terminating in a knob, see Sherlock, “Roman Forks”, op.cit. (n. 40), appendix 1, E4, E14, Fl.1-7. Special mention should be made of Sherlock’s E14 (not illustrated), a silver three-tined example (length 26.5 cm), today in a private collection in New York, “with monogram on one side and cross within circle on the other”. The fork is given a 7th-century date and is identified as “Byzantine” in Sherlock’s brief description, without further information.



Fig. 5. The Cleveland Museum of Art. John L. Severance Fund 1952.7. Silver fork with animal-hoof finial. Byzantium, Syria(?), 4th century A.D. (L. 14.5 cm).



Fig. 6. Vienne, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Silver fork, with handle terminating in a point, 3rd century A.D.

of domestic silver plate discovered at Vienne in France, which is distinguished by an openwork lyre-shaped plaque between the handle and the tines (length 16.5 cm) (Fig. 6). Comparable lyre-shaped elements can be seen on the three-tined forks of the contemporary folding sets mentioned above. The Vienne fork's handle terminates in a pyramidal point, which could also be used for eating⁵⁴. Yet a different type is attested by a fork that was found in a third-century surgeon's tomb in Paris (Fig. 7). It has three tines and a handle made of twined wires terminating in a trilobed, openwork ornament (length 15.3 cm). As Lawrence Bliquez has pointed out, non-surgical implements do occur in burials of Roman surgeons. Thus, the inclusion of this object among the grave goods of a surgeon should not exclude its use as a fork and may, even, be regarded as an indication of the implement's personal nature⁵⁵.

Finally, reference should be made to an unpublished two-pronged silver fork said to be from Italy and dating to the late fourth or early fifth century, now in the Cleveland Mu-

seum of Art (Department of Greek and Roman art, inv. no. 1987.210) (Fig. 8). It is much larger than most of the examples discussed so far, with a length of 20.4 cm, and has long tines and a smooth handle terminating in an equine head. The animal-head finial brings to mind the fork mentioned in the Auxerre inventory discussed earlier. Furthermore, though much simpler, the Cleveland fork is evocative of certain silver and copper alloy Sasanian forks in terms both of general form and size. One has in mind in particular certain impressive Sasanian examples with spirally-fluted handles terminating in equine heads, and long tines, rhomboidal in section, springing from a stylized, vegetal element at the base of the handle (Fig. 9)⁵⁶. A second type of Sasanian fork of the fifth to the seventh centuries that may be pertinent to a discussion of Late Antique forks is probably related to the previous one and evidences very long tines close together, handles terminating in animal heads, equine or other, and a curving, loop-like or horse-shoe element from which the tines spring (Fig. 10)⁵⁷. Interestingly enough, comparable

⁵⁴ Baratte, *Le trésor de la place Camille-Jouffray* (n. 3), no. 20. Sherlock, "Roman Forks", op.cit. (n. 40), appendix 1, B1. For a comparable fork, see ibid, appendix 1, B2, illus. 2.

⁵⁵ E. Künzl, *Medizinische Instrumente aus Sepulkralfunden der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Bonn 1983, 75, fig. 51, no. 28. Sherlock, "Roman Forks", op.cit. (n. 340), appendix 1, E12. L. J. Bliquez, *Roman Surgical Instruments and Other Minor Objects in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. With a Catalogue of the Surgical Instruments in the "Antiquarium" at Pompeii* by Ralph Jackson, Mainz 1994, 45 n. 147. Amme reports the presence of two similar forks (Roman), one with three and one with two tines, at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, see Amme, *Historic Cutlery* (n. 4), 14, while Sherlock mentions another two-tined example in the Römisch-Germanisches Museum, Cologne, see Sherlock, "Roman Forks", op.cit., appendix 1, Fv.5. On the other hand, a similar fork forms part of the collection of the Musée national de la Renaissance, Ecouen (inv. no. E.Cl.2988), while the type is also included in illustrations of French fork-types of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, see Marchese, *L'invenzione della forchetta* (n. 4), pl. XXXIX. Furthermore, another example that was found in the Thames, was identified as Dutch and ascribed a mid-sixteenth-century date, see Sherlock, op. cit., 252. This might bring the dating of the find from the surgeon's burial, which was excavated in 1880, into question, though a more careful examination of all members of this group and of their contexts is needed before either dating is rejected.

⁵⁶ Parani, "Silver", op.cit. (n. 34), no. 34 (silver fork possibly from Iraq in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C.; length 24 cm). W. Hauser and J. M. Upton, "The Persian Expedition, 1933-1934", *BMMA* 29 (1934), 22, fig. 32, and D. S. Whitcomb, *Before the Roses and Nightingales. Excavations at Qasr-i Abu Nasr, Old Shiraz*, New York 1985, 169, fig. 65j (bronze fork from the Sasanian fortress of Qasr-i Abu Nasr in Iran). Fig. 9 illustrates a similar silver fork from the Sasanian layers at Susa, Iran, which forms part of the collection of the Louvre, Département des Antiquités Orientales, inv. no. Sb 3740 (length 23.8 cm). I am grateful to Béatrice André-Salvini, director of the Département des Antiquités Orientales, for information regarding this fork.

⁵⁷ R. Ghirshman, "Argenterie d'un seigneur sassanide", *ArsOr* 2 (1957) 80, pl. 7, fig. 14. Whitcomb, op.cit., 169, fig. 65f; Sotheby's, *Antiquities, including Western Asiatic Cylinder Seals and Antiquities from the Erlendmeyer Collection. Part II, 12 June 1997*, London 1997, no. 320. Bonhams and Brooks, Knightsbridge, *Antiquities, Auction of 26 April 2001*, London 2001, no. 426. Two more two-pronged Sasanian forks with handles terminating in equine heads formed part of the former Foroughi Collection in Tehran; the summary published description does not specify the manner in which the tines were joined to the handle, see Smithsonian Institution, *7000 Years of Iranian Art, 1964-1965*, Washington, D.C. 1964, nos 503-504 (no illustration). See, also, Sherlock, "Roman Forks", op.cit. (n. 40), appendix 1, FvI.6-9.



Fig. 7. Paris, Musée Carnavalet. Finds from a Roman surgeon's burial, including a bronze, three-pronged fork (top left), 3rd century A.D.

objects in copper alloy do occur in "Roman" contexts, though in most cases they have been identified as surgical implements and, more specifically, as bifurcated probes⁵⁸.

However, as observed by Bliquez, no implement of this type "has ever been indisputably connected with a surgical instrumentarium"⁵⁹. This is affirmed by Ralph Jackson, curator at

⁵⁸ J. S. Milne, *Surgical Instruments in Greek and Roman Times*, Oxford 1907, repr. Chicago 1976, pl. XXII.1-2 (two examples in the British Museum). L. J. Bliquez, *Roman Surgical Instruments and Minor Objects in the University of Mississippi*, Göteborg 1988, no. 99, fig. 13. Í. Uzel, "Les instruments médicaux et chirurgicaux conservés au musée d'Ephèse", H. Friesinger and F. Krinzinger (eds), *100 Jahre österreichische For-*

schungen in Ephesos. Akten des Symposions, Wien 1995, Vienna 1999, 213, pl. 32.37 (no information on context or date is given; the author mentions the existence of two similar examples in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul). Sherlock, "Roman Forks", op.cit., 251 and appendix 1, FVI.1-5.

⁵⁹ Bliquez, op.cit., 67.



Fig. 8. The Cleveland Museum of Art. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Quentin Alexander 1987.210. Silver fork with mule-head finial. Italy, Roman, late 4th or early 5th century A.D. (L. 20.4 cm).

the British Museum and expert on Roman medical instruments, who further points out that these objects “do not correspond to any ancient description of bifurcated probes”, “their form does not clearly lend itself to any obvious surgical application”, and the decoration of their handles “points to a post-Roman date” (pers. comm.)⁶⁰. Under the light of the ongoing discussion, the use of these implements as forks, especially given their Sasanian parallels, becomes a very strong possibility⁶¹. It is unfortunate that the “Roman” published examples, at least those known to me, are deprived of secure context and dating, thus making it impossible to gauge the nature of their relationship to their Sasanian parallels or to trace the direction and character of possible influences⁶².

While the possibility that some of the largest extant examples were serving utensils cannot be excluded, the archaeological evidence, such as it is, does point to the use of the fork as an eating implement during Late Antiquity, both in the lands of the empire and in neighbouring Iran. The straight tines of Late Antique and Sasanian forks indicate that they were used for spearing the food and bringing it to

the mouth, not for scooping it up like present-day forks. In other words, they replaced the fingers with which one usually picked up morsels of food from the plates set before him or her. There is no indication at this period that the table-fork was used as a set with a knife, first to stabilize foodstuffs for cutting and then to bring the cut portion to the mouth. One cannot help but think that when reclining on the semi-circular *stibadium* such an exercise, involving both hands, might have been rather awkward⁶³. On the other hand, certain Roman forks may have been made in sets with spoons, as implied by the fact that they shared certain morphological features with them, such as the cloven hoof finial on their handles, while a rare Roman silver combination implement of spoon and fork of unknown provenance was recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The association of the fork with the spoon, in matching sets, but also in the form of combination implements, is securely



Fig. 9. Paris, Musée du Louvre. Sasanian silver fork with handle terminating in an equine head from Susa (Iran), 5th-7th century A.D.



Fig. 10. Tehran, National Museum of Iran. Sasanian silver fork with handle terminating in a ram's head from Mazandéran, early 6th century A.D.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to Dr. Jackson for generously sharing his opinion on this matter with me, as well as for providing information on three such implements (two of which were published by Milne, cf. *supra*, n. 58) in the British Museum (inv. nos 1847, 0806.141; 1923, 0117.1; 1975, 1106.2).

⁶¹ We shall return to this argument in relation to the discussion of medieval Byzantine forks, cf. *infra*.

⁶² The question of exchanges between the Late Antique Empire and Sasanian Iran in the field of metalwork and especially silverware has been addressed by a number of scholars, though cutlery does not feature in these discussions. See, selectively, P. O Harper, “Sasanian Silver:

Internal Developments and Foreign Influences”, N. Duval and F. Baratte (eds), *Argentierie romaine et byzantine. Actes de la table ronde, Paris 11-13 octobre 1983*, Paris 1988, 153-161. M. Mundell Mango, “Byzantine, Sasanian and Central Asian Silver”, Cs. Bálint (ed.), *Kontakt zwischen Iran, Byzanz und der Steppe in 6.-7. Jh.*, Budapest 2000, 267-284. A. Cutler, “Silver across the Euphrates. Forms of Exchange between Sasanian Persia and the Late Roman Empire”, *Mitteilungen zur spätantiken Archäologie und byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 4 (2005), 9-37.

⁶³ Cf. Goldstein, “Implements of Eating”, *op.cit.* (n. 4), 117-118.

attested in Sasanian archaeological contexts⁶⁴. Whether the fork and the spoon in such sets were meant to be used concurrently for the consumption of specific dishes or whether they were indented as the personal eating implements of an individual, who would use one or the other as the occasion arose, is not possible to say. Much later, in Western Europe, combination implements of spoon and fork, known as “sucket forks”, were employed, from the sixteenth century onwards, for the consumption of fruits preserved in sugar syrup, with the fork spearing the fruit and the spoon gathering up the syrup⁶⁵.

Given the small numbers in which forks have survived, when compared to the more than two hundred Late Antique silver spoons, their use for eating at the table must have been the exception rather than the norm. Yet, they evidence a surprising diversity of types and one may put forward a number of hypotheses to interpret it, such as use for the consumption of different types of dishes (e.g. larger forks for meat, smaller forks for desserts and other delicacies), typological development over time, parallel localized manufacture at different parts of the Empire, or even the co-existence of different traditions (a “Roman” and a “Sasanian” one?). Considering the great lacunae in our knowledge as regards the provenance, archaeological context, and dating of these intriguing objects, at present one can do little more than speculate. We can say even less concerning the people who employed the forks and the way the use of this implement was perceived by their contemporaries. The fact that we have examples in copper-alloy imitating the more expensive silver ones might be an indication that the use of the fork was not confined to the higher strata of Late Antique society. Was, then, the use of the fork a fashion that came and went, adopted by individuals of both sexes who wanted to stand out as much as to avoid soiling their fingers and by those who tended to imitate them? Or, was the fork, because of its relative rarity, regarded as a mark of refinement and distinction rather than affectation within certain circles? Did consider-

ations of hygiene have anything to do with the choice of using a fork instead of the fingers by specific people or in certain situations? Is this why a surgeon or a traveler could have a fork among their belongings? As for the possibility of cultural contacts at various levels with Sasanian Iran affecting practices in certain quarters of Roman society (e.g. members of the upper classes sharing or adopting this style of eating for reasons of prestige), the current state of knowledge regarding the context and the time-frame of the use of Sasanian forks does not leave much room even for speculation. One hopes that future work on either side of the Late Antique Empire’s eastern border might shed more light on the puzzle of the fork.

The use of cutlery in Medieval Byzantium (8th - Mid-15th centuries)

Ptochoprodromos, a twelfth-century poet whose poems are largely concerned with food and, to be more precise, with his lamentable lack of sufficient quantities of it, speaks of the relish with which on one occasion he ate a fish using his hands⁶⁶. This is just one of a number of references encountered in Byzantine sources suggesting that, in medieval times as well, the Byzantines often ate their meals using only their fingers. According to these same sources, the polite way of doing so was to pick up a morsel with only two or three fingers of the one hand. Those who immersed all the fingers and the palm of the hand in the cooking pot or, even worse, used both hands to attack their food became the objects of criticism and ridicule by their more refined contemporaries⁶⁷.

References to the continual use of cutlery at the medieval Byzantine table, though rare, nevertheless do exist and are encountered in a variety of Byzantine and, in one case, non-Byzantine texts and documents. The testimony of the written sources is borne out by the archaeological evidence, which consists mainly of knife-blades and, to a much lesser

⁶⁴ Roman combination implement: Sherlock, “Roman Forks”, op.cit. (n. 40), appendix 1, B5. Sasanian sets of fork and spoon: Parani, “Silver”, op.cit. (n. 34), nos 34-35; Whitcomb, *Before the Roses* (n. 56), 169, fig. 65i-j (bronze); cf. Sherlock, “Roman Forks”, op.cit., appendix 1, C2 (silver, unknown provenance). Sasanian combination spoon and fork: Whitcomb, *Before the Roses*, 169, fig. 65g (bronze); Louvre Museum, Département des Antiquités Orientales, inv. no. Sb 5753 (from Susa; bronze, length 14.5 cm).

⁶⁵ Goldstein, “Implements of Eating”, op.cit., 119, fig. 5.

⁶⁶ H. Eideneier (ed.), *Ptochoprodromos. Einführung, kritische Ausgabe*,

deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar, Cologne 1991, poem IV, line 248-25 (p. 152).

⁶⁷ Ph. I. Koukoules, *Θεσσαλονίκης Εὐσταθίου τὰ Λαογραφικά*, vol. 1, Athens 1950, 230-231. In addition to the sources collected by Koukoules, see also, Nicetas Eugenianus, *De Drosillae et Chariclis amoribus* (ed. F. Conca), Amsterdam 1990, 203, and the references in Anagnostakis and Papamastorakis, “Radishes for Appetizers”, op.cit. (n. 9), 150-152. Cf. a miniature in the famous 12th-century *Madrid Skylitzes*, fol. 85r, in which the future emperor Basil I is shown eating with his hands in the house of the wealthy widow Danielis, V. Tsamakda, *The Illustrated Chronicle of Ioannes Skylitzes in Madrid*, Leiden 2002, fig. 206.

extent, forks; spoons, in stark contrast to the previous period, are hardly ever attested in medieval Byzantine archaeological contexts. Another development characteristic of this later period in terms of the evidence available is the multiplication of depictions of flatware and in particular knives, sometimes accompanied by forks, in artistic contexts from the tenth century onwards. Representations of spoons, on the other hand, remain uncommon throughout the period under consideration⁶⁸. Of course, the well-known methodological problems and interpretative limitations of using Byzantine art – predominantly religious in content and given to the repetition of established iconographic models hallowed by tradition – as a source on Byzantine material culture apply in this case as well. Whether representations of cutlery can be taken to imply a more widespread or regular use of flatware at the time or whether their occurrence was a consequence of a gradually changing attitude towards the iconographic treatment of dining scenes that tended towards the depiction of a greater variety of vessels and victuals are questions which will need to be addressed in what follows, as well as the possibility that the depicted eating implements may have served a symbolic function within the iconography of the meal, beyond that of being markers of the richly appointed table.

Beginning with the spoon, as mentioned above, extant examples from Byzantine medieval contexts are very rare. One may mention the two tenth-century silver spoons that form part of the famous Preslav Treasure and are of probable Byzantine manufacture. Both spoons have oval bowls attached by means of a solid quadrant to straight handles terminating in a duck's (?) head and a knob respectively⁶⁹. Interestingly enough, one of the wooden spoons discovered during the recent excavation of the eleventh-century Yenikapı 1 shipwreck at the Port of Theodosius in Constan-

tinople is very similar to the Preslav spoon with the knob finial, down to the quadrant between handle and oval bowl. A second wooden example from the same shipwreck is plain by comparison, with a large bowl and a thick unarticulated handle with groups of notches along its length. According to the excavator, the wooden spoons, which were found together with wooden plates, must have belonged to the crew of this Middle Byzantine commercial ship⁷⁰. The exciting finds from the Yenikapı 1 seem to provide confirmation for the hypothesis expressed by Davidson, already in 1952, that the spoons used on a daily basis in the average Byzantine household were made of wood rather than metal, which would explain to a large extent their absence from the medieval contexts of excavated Byzantine settlements⁷¹. Furthermore, they indicate that the more precious examples were imitated in cheaper materials for those who wished to emulate their wealthier contemporaries or for those who wished to maintain a certain lifestyle even within a mundane, everyday context. One, of course, need not exclude the possibility that spoons made of copper alloy were also in use. They are certainly attested archaeologically in the Latin and Islamic Middle East⁷², while one example with a very peculiar openwork handle and a bird-shaped finial, dated to the fourteenth century, was found at the church of St. Nicholas Orphanos in Thessaloniki, though its precise function – liturgical or domestic – is unclear⁷³.

The continuous use of the spoon as an eating implement at the medieval Byzantine table, both in monastic and lay contexts, is also evidenced by the written sources. In the ninth century, the sound of spoons tossed on the plates at the end of the midday meal was the signal for ending the reading in the refectory of St. John Stoudios in Constantinople, while in the twelfth century, the monks of the Pantokrator Monastery, also in the capital, after finishing their meal at

⁶⁸ The artistic evidence on cutlery has been discussed recently by Anagnostakis and Papamastorakis, "Radishes for Appetizers", op.cit., 147-153, and by Vroom, *After Antiquity* (n. 10), 313-333, and ead., "Changing Dining Habits", op.cit. (n. 10), 198-199, 200-201. The time-frame proposed by the latter, based on Restle's dating of the Cappadocian so-called Column Churches to the late twelfth-early thirteenth century, differs from the one put forward here, which adopts the more widely accepted view that the said monumental ensembles date to the mid-eleventh century, see C. Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l'abside et ses abords*, Paris 1991, 125 (with detailed bibliographical references).

⁶⁹ V. Pace (ed.), *Treasures of Christian Art in Bulgaria*, Sofia 2001, no. 58.35.

⁷⁰ *Gün Işığında: İstanbul'un sekizbin yılı. Marmaray, Metro ve Sultanah-*

met kazıları, Istanbul 2007, 227, fig. 22. I am grateful to Fryni Chatzichristophi for this reference and Brigitte Pitarakis for translating the relevant passages from Turkish.

⁷¹ Cf. supra, n. 36. In a Cretan icon with the Dormition of St. Ephraim the Syrian, dated to A.D. 1457(?), one can see a monk carving wooden spoons in a cave on the right, H. C. Evans (ed.), *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, exh. cat. New York 2004, no. 80. On the use of spoons in monastic refectories, cf. infra.

⁷² See, for example, G. Ploug et al., *Hama. Fouilles et recherches 1931-1938. IV/3: Les petits objets médiévaux sauf les verreries et poteries*, Copenhagen 1969, 67-71.

⁷³ *Θεσσαλονίκη. Ιστορία και Τέχνη*, exh. cat., Athens 1986, no. 24.3; the reference was found in Vroom, "Dining Habits", op.cit. (n. 10), n. 42.

the refectory, were required to place their plates in one basket and their spoons (κοχλιάρια) in another, so that they could be carried away to be washed⁷⁴. Spoons are also listed in the inventory of the movable property of the small Monastery of Xylourgou on Mount Athos, dated to A.D. 1142, though the material out of which they were made is not specified⁷⁵. In monastic contexts it was apparently the establishment that provided the spoons: sharing is a sociable activity which, nevertheless, can easily lead to some kind of disturbance. In monastic refectories, where any breach of decorum would have been unacceptable, individual eating spoons and plates were employed to ensure that all received equal rations and that there was no cause for disorder⁷⁶.

Spoons are the only pieces of cutlery that appear in Byzantine lists of the movable property of lay households that have come down to us mainly from the eleventh century onwards. Still, references to them are exceedingly rare, occurring, as far as I know, in only two documents. In A.D. 1325, the *skouterios* Theodore Sarantenos, a wealthy member of the provincial aristocracy of the city of Verroia in northern Greece, owned twenty silver spoons, which he bequeathed to his foundation, the monastery of St. John the Baptist of the Petra in Verroia, though not for use at the monastic refectory or at the abbot's table, but so that they could be sold as the need arose towards the expenses of the monastery. In the second document, a patriarchal act of A.D. 1400, the material of the two spoons listed as part of the paternal inheritance of one Andronikos Trichas is not mentioned, but one may assume that they would have been made of metal rather than wood to warrant inclusion in this list⁷⁷. While

Sarantenos was wealthy enough to be able to provide for the needs of a large number of guests, in the household of Andronikos the two spoons were possibly destined for his personal use or that of an honoured guest⁷⁸.

Evidence for the use of spoons in lay households is also provided by a small number of artistic representations dating, with a single exception, to the Late Byzantine period. One group of images in which the spoon appears comprises scenes illustrating the birth of the Virgin or another saintly figure, though never the Nativity. In these images the mother, reclining on the bed, is offered some strengthening broth from a bowl with a spoon, as can be seen at Nerezi (A.D. 1164), the Peribleptos in Ohrid (A.D. 1295), Arilje (A.D. 1296), and Markov Manastir (1376-1381 A.D.)⁷⁹. This iconographic detail, which underlines the exhaustion of the mother after the travail of childbirth, is one more means to bring to the fore the ordinary, human nature of these births, as opposed to the miraculous Nativity, during which the Virgin was spared all physical pain and, consequently, did not require any of the usual care afforded women in childbed⁸⁰. Incidentally, it also intimates the association of the spoon with the nourishment of the infirm, which involved the consumption of liquid foods.

Turning to representations of dining scenes, spoons are only rarely shown being handled, as seen in the Blessing of the Virgin by the High Priests at the Metropolis in Mistra (1272-1288 A.D.)⁸¹. On other occasions they are depicted lying on the table or placed in a bowl that contains some sort of stew, as for example in two Serbian monuments, the church of the Virgin at Peć (ca. A.D. 1330) and the church of St. Andreas at Treska (A.D. 1388/9)⁸². In the absence of enough spoons

⁷⁴ J. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero (eds), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, Washington, D.C. 2000, 1: 109 [28]. P. Gautier, "Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator", *REB* 32 (1974), 51, lines 352-354. Cf. A.-M. Talbot, "Mealtime in Monasteries: The Culture of the Byzantine Refectory", *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry* (n. 2), 113-114, n. 29.

⁷⁵ P. Lemerle, G. Dagron, and S. Ćirković (eds), *Actes de Saint-Pantélémon*, Paris 1982, 75, line 36.

⁷⁶ Cf. Oikonomides, "Contents", op.cit. (n. 8), 212.

⁷⁷ J. Bompaire, J. Lefort, V. Kravari, and Ch. Giros (eds), *Actes de Vatopédi I*, Paris 2001, 355, line 55. F. Miklosich and I. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, 6 vols, Vienna 1813-1891, 2: 406. Spoons are also mentioned in a number of eleventh- and twelfth-century documents from Byzantine and Norman South Italy, see P. Ditchfield, *La culture matérielle médiévale. L'Italie méridionale byzantine et normande*, Rome 2007, 129-130. Lastly, four silver spoons are listed in a marriage contract from the diocese of Ohrid dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, see M. I. Gedeon, "Βυζαντινά συμβόλαια", *BZ* 5 (1896), 115 [for the correct date of the document see review by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *BZ* 8 (1899), 79-81].

⁷⁸ Cf. the fourteenth-century silver spoon inscribed with the name of its owner, one Vladimir, which was discovered in a village in the region of Sofia, E. Bakalova et al., *Trésors d'art médiéval bulgare, VIIe-XVe siècle*, Berne 1988, no. 96.

⁷⁹ V. Djurić, *Byzantinische Fresken in Jugoslawien*, Munich 1976, pl. VII (Nerezi, Birth of the Virgin), fig. 40 (Arilje, Birth of the Virgin). G. Millet and T. Velmans, *La peinture du Moyen Âge en Yougoslavie*, Fasc. IV, Paris 1969, pl. 105.189 (Markov Manastir, Birth of St. Nicholas). Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Photographs Collection, Ohrid, St. Clement, E12 (Birth of St. John the Baptist).

⁸⁰ Cf. H. Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies. Saints and their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton 1996, 166-169.

⁸¹ M. Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς. Η μεσαιωνική πολιτεία και το κάστρο. Οδηγός*, Athens 1989, fig. 16.

⁸² A. Katsioti, *Οι σκηνές της ζωής και ο εικονογραφικός κύκλος του Αγίου Ιωάννη Προδρόμου στη βυζαντινή τέχνη*, Athens 1998, fig. 174 (Peć, Symposium of Herod). Djurić, op.cit., fig. 95 (Treska, Last Supper).

for all the participants at the meal, however, the utensils in these two representations could perhaps be understood as serving rather than as eating implements, shared by the guests to put a mouthful of the watery food on their bread and then consume it. In Byzantine pictorial contexts table spoons are never represented paired with either forks or knives, though they themselves could have been made in matching sets, as suggested by the twenty silver spoons of Theodore Sarantenos.

Continuing with the knife, numerous examples that have been recovered from Middle and Late Byzantine sites in Greece, Asia Minor, Bulgaria, and Serbia and which are thought to have been used in domestic contexts, rather than as weapons or tools, are similar in design to their Early Byzantine antecedents⁸³. Medieval knives may be divided into two broad categories. The first category comprises single-edged knives with a triangular iron blade terminating in a tapering tang that was inserted into the haft of a bone or wooden tubular handle, which, as a rule, does not survive. One-hundred-and-twenty-seven knives recovered from the eleventh- and twelfth-century contexts of the rural settlement of Djadovo near Plovdiv in Bulgaria belong to this category (only the blades survive), and so do a number of examples recovered from the Byzantine layers at Corinth. In the case of some of the Corinthian examples, it is the cylindrical bone handles that have been preserved⁸⁴. The second category comprised knives with a triangular blade and a longer, broad tang on either side of which were attached two strips of bone, wood, or, occasionally, bronze by means of rivets. Complete examples of this type of knife that have preserved the revetment of their handles are rare. One may mention

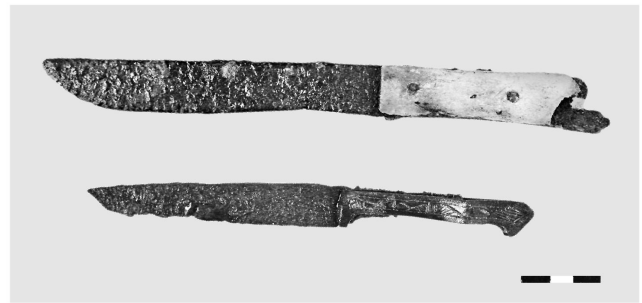


Fig. 11. Athens, 1st Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities. Two iron knives, one with a bone handle and one with a copper-alloy handle, from Thebes, 12th century A.D.

one such knife from the Byzantine layers at Corinth, two twelfth-century ones from Thebes (one with a bone- and one with a bronze-covered handle) (Fig. 11), and a fourteenth-century one recovered during the excavation of the rural settlement of Panakton in Boeotia, Greece⁸⁵. The bone handles of the knives belonging to both categories were often adorned with incised geometric ornament⁸⁶.

Despite the ubiquity of knife-blades in medieval archaeological domestic contexts, knives are not mentioned among the domestic utensils that are listed in Byzantine legal documents like inventories of movable property and wills. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes evident that such documents are very selective in the categories of artefacts they list. Ceramic vessels and glass objects, to mention two characteristic examples, are hardly ever listed at all, despite their ubiquitous presence in Middle and Late Byzantine archaeological contexts. Consequently, the lack of references

⁸³ Cf. B. Pitarakis, "Témoignage des objets métalliques dans le village médiéval (Xe-XIVe siècle)", J. Lefort, C. Morisson, J.-P. Sodini (eds), *Les villages dans l'empire byzantin, IVe-XVe siècle*, Paris 2005, 251.

⁸⁴ A. Fol et al. (eds), *Djadovo: Bulgarian, Dutch, Japanese Expedition. I. Mediaeval Settlement and Necropolis (11th-12th Century)*, Tokyo 1989, 101, fig. 111. Davidson, *Minor Objects* (n. 36), nos 1410, 1415-1419, 1571-1573 (Davidson lists the latter three among the weapons). Other known findspots of this type of knife include Saraçhane in Constantinople, the village of Nichoria in south-western Greece, the fortress of Braničevo on the Danube, as well as the settlement of Păcuil lui Soare in Romania, see M. V. Gill, "The Small Finds", in M. Harrison, *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul, vol. I: The Excavations, Architectural Decoration, Small Finds, Coins, Bones and Molluscs*, Princeton 1986, 251, nos 367-368 (10th-11th century). W. A. McDonald, W. E. D. Coulson and J. Rosser (eds), *Excavations at Nichoria in Southwest Greece. III. Dark Age and Byzantine Occupation*, Minneapolis 1983, 407, nos 522-523; M. Popović and V. Ivanišević, "Grad Braničevo u srednjem veku",

Starinar 39 (1988), fig. 31.7-10. P. Diaconu and S. Baraschi, *Păcuil lui Soare. 2. Așezarea medievală (secolele XIII-XV)*, Bucharest 1977, 185, fig. 28.6-10.

⁸⁵ Davidson, *Minor Objects* (n. 36), no. 1411. Papanikola-Bakirtzi (ed.), *Καθημερινή ζωή* (n. 37), no. 102.a-b. S. E. J. Gerstel et al., "A Late Medieval Settlement at Panakton", *Hesperia* 72 (2003), no. 23 (pp. 163-164). Other known findspots include Djadovo and Tsarevets, Veliko Tarnovo, in Bulgaria, and Păcuil lui Soare, see Fol et al. (eds), op.cit., 102, fig. 102. Ia. Nikolova, "Domashnii bit vŭorŭzhenieto v dvoretsa na Tsarevets spored arheologicheskiia material", *Tsarevgrad Tŭrnov* 2, Sofia 1974, 216-219, figs 33-34. Diaconu and Baraschi, op.cit., fig. 28.5.

⁸⁶ For an ivory knife-handle terminating in an animal figure from the excavations at Anaia (Kuşadası Kadikalesi) in Asia Minor (12th-13th century), see A. Ödekan (ed.), *The Remnants. 12th and 13th Centuries, Byzantine Objects in Turkey*, Istanbul 2007, 74. I am grateful to Fryni Chatzichristophi for this reference.

to knives in these texts is probably indicative of the fact that ordinary domestic knives were considered too common an object – and not valuable enough? – to mention⁸⁷.

Other categories of written sources point clearly to the use of the knife as an eating implement. Ptochoprodromos, for example, at one instance speaks of using a knife to cut pieces of meat and bring them to his mouth⁸⁸. The related episode takes place in the abode of the poet's father during an ordinary daily meal. In A.D. 1208, the bishop of Ephesus Nicolaos Mesarites, on his way to Nicaea, stopped at inn where he was forced to share a room with an unsavoury individual, who, come morning, breakfasted on bread, meat and wine, holding the meat with his left hand and a knife in his right. The man used the knife to cut the meat and the bread in small pieces that would be easier to chew⁸⁹. By the end of that century, one of the many faults of which a monk could be accused was that of being "well-practiced with the small knife", another way of saying that he was a glutton or, perhaps, that he consumed meat when he was not supposed to⁹⁰.

Artistic representations also provide confirmation for the use of the knife as an eating utensil in the period under consideration here. The earliest depiction of a knife known to me is encountered in the Wedding at Cana at Old Tokalı Kilise, in Cappadocia, dated to the first quarter of the tenth century. At least one knife is shown on the rectangular table, on which one can also discern a fork. The knife is set in front of Christ⁹¹. Depictions of knives, sometimes accompanied by forks, multiply during the course of the eleventh century, though they were not consistently represented in all dining



Fig. 12. Göreme, Karanlık kilise. *The Last Supper*, detail, middle of 11th century A.D.

scenes, even within a single ensemble⁹². Notwithstanding, from this century onward, the knife will become the one item of cutlery commonly represented in religious Byzantine artistic contexts⁹³. In Middle Byzantine representations, knives are usually shown resting on the table (Fig. 12). For representations of knives put to use one needs to turn to Late Byzantine art. Thus, in the Wedding at Cana at the Metropolis in Mistra (1272-1288 A.D.), two of the commensals, one of which might be the groom, have a knife in their hands, as does one of the men at the feast that forms part of the Heavenly Ladder composition in the outer narthex of the Vatopedi katholikon (A.D. 1312). In the Wedding at

⁸⁷ Cf. Ditchfield, *La culture matérielle* (n. 77), 131, who notes a comparable lack of references to ordinary knives in legal documents from Southern Italy. Having said this, three knives are listed in the marriage contract from Ohrid mentioned before (second half of the 15th century), but they had handles adorned with semi-precious materials, like mother-of-pearl and green jasper, Gedeon, "Βυζαντινά συμβόλαια", op.cit. (n. 77), 115. Finally, luxurious knives, with handles garnished with gold and precious stones, were listed among the gifts sent by Romanos I to the Abbasid caliph in A.D. 938, but these were not necessarily meant for use at the table. M. Hamidullah, "Nouveaux documents sur les rapports de l'Europe avec l'Orient musulman au Moyen Âge", *Arabica* 7 (1960), 287.

⁸⁸ Eideneier, *Ptochoprodromos* (n. 66), poem III, lines 260-261 (p. 132).

⁸⁹ A. Heisenberg, "II. Neue Quellen zur Geschichte des lateinischen Kaisertums und der Kirchenunion. II. Die Unionsverhandlungen vom 30. August 1206. Patriarchenwahl und Kaiserkrönung in Nikaia 1208", *Quellen und Studien zur spätbyzantinischen Geschichte*, London 1973, 41.11-15. Cf. E. Kislinger, "Τρώγοντας και πίνοντας εκτός σπιτιού", *Βυζαντινὴ διατροφή καὶ μαγειρεία* (n. 2), 51. For the actual discovery of an iron knife-blade, possibly belonging to the inn-keeper, during the excavation of a twelfth-century inn at the Byzantine settlement of

Kitrous in northern Greece, see E. Marke, "Ανασκαφή βυζαντινὸν πανδοχείου στην Πύδνα", *Αρχαιολογικὸ ἔργο στη Μακεδονία και Θράκη* 5 (1991), 190, fig. 11.

⁹⁰ A. Failler (ed.), *Georges Pachymérès, Relations historiques*, III, Paris 1999, 167: ...ὡς τὸ μαχαίριδιον ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ. Cf. Talbot, "Mealtime in Monasteries", op.cit. (n. 74), 114 n. 30, for the suggestion that this implies that the monks were expected to bring their own knives to the table.

⁹¹ A. Wharton Epstein, *Tokalı Kilise. Tenth-century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia*, Washington, D.C. 1986, fig. 27.

⁹² Consider, for example, the eleventh-century gospel-book *Par. gr.* 74, where though no knives are depicted in the multiple representations of the Last Supper (fols 53r, 95r, 156r, 157r, 195r, 196r), they do appear in fols 67v (Christ in the house of Levi) and 132r (Christ in the house of Martha and Maria), cf. H. Omont, *Évangiles avec peintures byzantines du XIe siècle. Reproduction des 361 miniatures du manuscrit Grec 74 de la Bibliothèque nationale*, 2 vols, Paris 1909, pls 63, 117.

⁹³ Secular dining scenes are exceedingly rare in the medieval period. One has in mind especially a number of meal scenes in the *Madrid Skylitzes*. The knife features in some of these scenes, though not all, e.g. in fols 85v and 105v, Tsamakda, *Skylitzes* (n. 67), figs 207, 237.

Cana at St. Nikita, Čučer, a work of the Byzantine artists Michael Astrapas and Eutykhios at the behest of king Milutin of Serbia sometime between 1308 and 1320 A.D., the bridegroom uses the knife in his right hand and the fingers of his left hand to carve the roast chicken in the plate in front of him, while the guest sitting immediately to his right employs a knife to bring a morsel to his mouth. A few decades later, an illuminator working in the Western style depicted one of Job's sons about to carve himself a piece of meat from the common serving platter in the scene of the Banquet of Job's children in the Greek manuscript *Par. gr.* 135, folio 18v, executed at Mistra between 1361 and 1362 A.D.⁹⁴ I am not aware of any Byzantine representation in which the knife is shown in use concurrently with a fork.

The existing evidence does not inform us as to who actually provided the knives at the table on formal occasions. Was it the host, as was occasionally the case in the previous period, or did the guests bring their own, as habit would have it in Western Europe at the time?⁹⁵ People working out of doors and who probably carried a multi-purpose knife with them could have also used it as an eating implement when they found themselves at the table⁹⁶. However, conditions during a formal meal involving guests may have been different. The number of knives depicted on the table in artistic contexts is, as a rule, smaller than the number of participants at the meal and I have been unable to discern any repetitive pattern in their placement other than that Christ, in images where cutlery is depicted, regularly has one on the table in front of Him, sometimes accompanied by a fork. In the early fourteenth-century church of St. Nicholas Orphanos in Thessaloniki, for example, Christ is the only figure with a knife in front of Him both in the depiction of the Wedding at Cana and in the Last Supper⁹⁷. This "discrepancy" in numbers may be an indication that the knives were provided by the host and that the guests were expected to share or, otherwise, that the flatware was meant to be used by the most important guests alone⁹⁸. Alternatively, the number of knives represented and their arrangement on the table may have been dictated by artistic considerations (e.g. as markers of

status or signifiers of the well-appointed table), rather than by a desire to give a faithful rendering of a Byzantine meal in progress. Still, the knife's initial gradual infiltration and consequent establishment in dining scenes seems to imply widespread familiarity with its use at the medieval Byzantine table, though it never supplanted the fingers completely.

In medieval times, by contrast to knives, the use of forks at the Byzantine table appears to have been limited and, at first glance, more exclusive. The best-known and much-quoted piece of evidence we have on the use of table-forks in medieval Byzantium represents them as luxury objects and associates their use with women and the highest echelons of Byzantine society. Petrus Damianus, the eleventh-century author and saint of the Catholic Church (ca. 1007-1072 A.D.), described with obvious disapproval how a Byzantine princess married in Venice insisted upon using "little golden forks" (*fuscini aureis*) to eat her food, which her eunuchs had cut up in small pieces beforehand. The use of the fork replacing the fingers was criticized by the austere monk as a manifestation of vanity and affectation offensive to God: the premature death of the princess of the plague was, therefore, not undeserved⁹⁹. The unfortunate princess is often identified with Theodora Doukas, daughter of Constantine X Doukas and married to the doge of Venice Domenico Silvio (r. 1071-1084 A.D.), though, it seems more likely that she was in fact Maria Argyropoulina, possibly a sister of the future emperor Romanos III Argyros, who married Giovanni Orseolo, eldest son of the Doge of Pietro II Orseolo, and who indeed perished from the plague, along with her husband and their son, in A.D. 1005, i.e. decades before Petrus Damianus recorded the anecdotal story of the use of the fork. All in all, other than suggesting an association with the Byzantine court and providing a general *terminus ante quem* for its usage, Danianus's account tells us more about the negative attitude of Western ecclesiastics towards the table-fork, which was regarded for centuries to come as decadent, effeminate, and an instrument of the devil, than about the context and perception of its usage in Byzantium¹⁰⁰.

Interestingly enough, around the time when the ill-fated

⁹⁴ Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς* (n. 81), fig. 15. E. Tsigaridas, "The Mosaics and the Byzantine Wall-paintings", *The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi. Tradition-History-Art*, vol. I, Mount Athos 1998, fig. 231. M. G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th-15th Centuries)*, Leiden and Boston 2003, pl. 241. Evans (ed.), *Byzantium* (n. 71), no. 33. Exceptionally, in the Wedding at Cana depicted at Kalenik (A.D. 1417/8), the groom uses his knife not to carve the food set before him, but to prick the finger of his young spouse – a reflection, it has been suggested, of a local marital

custom, see S. Radojčić, *Kalenik*, Belgrade 1964, XIV-XV.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Henisch, *Fast and Feast* (n. 4), 176-177.

⁹⁶ Cf. the depiction of the old shepherd in the Nativity scene at Kurbino-vo (A.D. 1191), with his leather belt from which are suspended a comb, a flint-striker, and a sheathed knife, Parani, op.cit., pl. 214.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pls 186, 189.

⁹⁸ Cf. Henisch, *Fast and Feast* (n. 4), 177-178.

⁹⁹ Petrus Damianus, *PL* 145, col. 744.

¹⁰⁰ Marchese, *L'invenzione della forchetta* (n. 4), 42-45. Amme, *Historic*

Maria arrived in Venice, the table-fork, with different connotations altogether, makes its appearance in two other Western contexts, this time in the south of Italy, but still within the sphere of Byzantine cultural influence. There, the fork, far from being the object of moralistic censure, is introduced as a component of the well-appointed table, suitable for use both in a royal palace and in the houses of prosperous city-dwellers. Specifically, on folio 69v of the *Codex Legum Longobardorum* (Cava de' Tirreni, Biblioteca della Badia, ms. 4, beginning of the eleventh century), the Lombard king Rotari, wearing his crown and stately mantle, is depicted at the table. He uses the fork in his left hand to stabilize the food placed in a footed bowl in front of him, while cutting a piece with the knife in his right hand¹⁰¹. Some twenty years later, the table-fork makes a second appearance in the copy of Rabanus Maurus's *De universo*, executed in the famous monastery of Montecassino (ms. Casin. 132; ca. A.D. 1023)¹⁰². On folio 408, two richly attired men are seated at a table in front of an elaborate architectural background. The one on the left holds in his right hand a fork, with which he spears a morsel, while the man across from him uses his fingers instead. This miniature illustrates a passage talking of the "citizens", that is those who chose to live together in a city so that their common life will be both "better furnished" (*ornatior*) and safer. Forks appear also on folio 511, where again two men are seated at the table, eating: the one on the left is in the process of cutting himself a piece using fork and knife, while the other one, holding a fork delicately with the three fingers of his right hand, is bringing a morsel to his mouth. The miniature illustrates the chapter on tables and foodstuffs. It is roughly at the same time, ca. 1000 A.D., that a fork is encountered in southern Italy in a Byzantine context proper: a set of knife and fork can be seen on the table of the Last Supper, in front of Christ, in the church of San Pietro at Otranto, the major Byzantine port in the region at

that time¹⁰³. While it is not possible to distinguish many details of the fork in the hands of King Rotari, the forks in the Rabanus Maurus manuscript as well as that at San Pietro are clearly visible: all four have two straight long tines, springing from a nearly circular (or horse-shaped) openwork element at the base of the handle. This is a type of fork that we have met before and which leads us back to Byzantium and the East¹⁰⁴.

To my knowledge, the earliest evidence we have on the use of table-forks in medieval Byzantium dates to the early tenth century. The reference is to the representation of such implements in two Cappadocian churches, Ballı kilise at Soğanlı (Last Supper), and the Old Tokalı kilise at Göreme (Wedding at Cana)¹⁰⁵. Its introduction into these religious iconographic contexts amply demonstrates that Byzantine attitudes towards the use of the table fork were radically different from those of conservative ecclesiastical circles in the West. The fork illustrated at the Old Tokalı kilise is of particular interest because its long tines and the curvilinear element at their base make it strikingly similar to the Sasanian forks that we discussed in the previous section (Fig. 10). The forks depicted on the table in the Last Supper at Karanlık kilise (Fig. 12) and in the refectory of Çarıklı kilise, as well as in the Hospitality of Abraham at Çarıklı kilise, all located in Cappadocia and dated around the middle of the eleventh century, also evidence the pair of long tines springing from the horse-shoe element at the base of the handle so distinctive of Sasanian forks¹⁰⁶. The possibility that the Cappadocian frescoes – and that at Otranto – reproduce an earlier artistic model, which could explain the inclusion of a Sasanian-looking fork in them, seems to me highly unlikely, first, because, as we have seen, forks did not form part of dining iconography prior to this period, and secondly, because implements of comparable appearance were in use in Byzantine lands in the second half of the Middle Byzantine

Cutlery (n. 4), 16-18. Young, "Sexual Politics", op.cit. (n. 4), esp. 108-110. Cf. Anagnostakis and Papamastorakis, "Radishes for Appetizers", op.cit. (n. 9), 168 n. 13. Perhaps I should note that, despite this early invective, the use of the fork or lack thereof does not occur among the many "errors" related to eating habits of which the Latins accused the Byzantines and vice versa in the following centuries.

¹⁰¹ Marchese, *L'invenzione della forchetta* (n. 4), 41. Ch. Frugoni, *Books, Banks, Buttons and Other Inventions from the Middle Ages*, trans. W. McCuaig, New York 2003, 119, fig. 84.

¹⁰² M. Reuter, *Text und Bild im Codex 132 der Bibliothek von Montecassino "Liber Rabani De originibus rerum"*, Munich 1984, 184-185, 205-

206, pls LXIV.121, LXXII.137; Frugoni, *Books, Banks, Buttons*, 119-120, figs 85-86.

¹⁰³ L. Safran, *San Pietro at Otranto. Byzantine Art in South Italy*, Rome 1992, 44-45, 47, fig. 24.

¹⁰⁴ The Sasanian associations of the fork at Otranto have also been pointed out by Vroom, "Archaeology", op.cit. (n. 10), 353-354.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Jerphanion, "Une question", op.cit. (n. 6), 247-248.

¹⁰⁶ Id., *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin: Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, 2 vols, 3 albums, Paris 1925-1942, II, pls 101.2, 128.1. N. Thierry, "Une iconographie inédite de la Cène dans un réfectoire rupestre de Cappadoce", *REB* 33 (1975), 177-185, fig. 5.

period¹⁰⁷. The best known are the group of cast bronze, bifurcated implements that have been recovered from medieval contexts at Corinth (Fig. 13)¹⁰⁸. These are commonly identified as surgical implements, but, under the light of the evidence presented here, they should be re-identified as forks¹⁰⁹. The tines on all Corinth examples are rhomboidal in section tapering towards a point, while their length varies, with the shortest ones at 4,2 cm and the longest, at around 8 cm, while most seem to have had tines around 7 cm long. According to the type of handle, the Corinth implements fall into two broad categories. The first comprises examples with bipartite handles, with a decorated, flat or polyhedric, lower section attached to the horse-shoe element and a triangular tang at the top, for insertion into a handle made of a different material, ivory, bone, wood, or other¹¹⁰. The forks in the mid-eleventh century frescoes in Cappadocia, with their tines, horse-shoe element and the lower portion of the handle rendered in grayish white indicating metal, and a long, slender handle rendered in black indicating a different material, illustrate this type. As suggested by the illustrations, forks of this sort with their long handles would have been

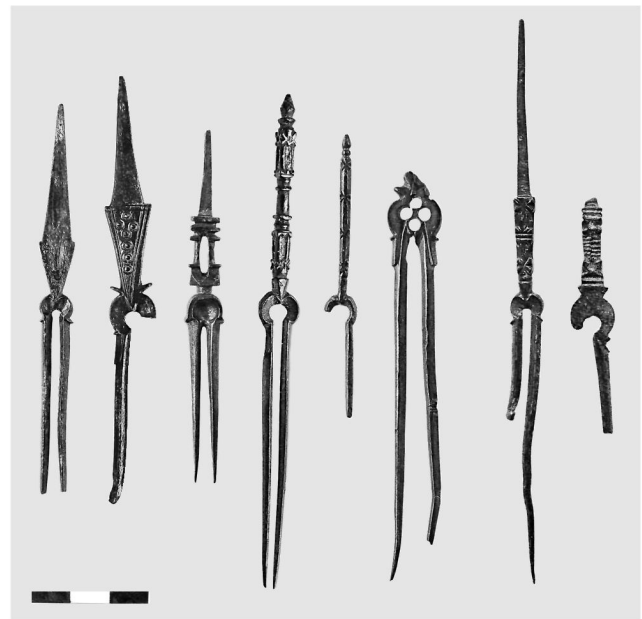


Fig. 13. Corinth, Archaeological Museum. Bronze forks, 9th-12th century A.D.

¹⁰⁷ In the absence of securely dated examples from seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-century Byzantine contexts, the manner of transmission of this antique form encountered again in the tenth century is difficult to trace. On the other side of the empire's eastern border, there is tentative evidence to suggest that some Sasanian-style forks may have continued into the early Islamic period. One has in mind three forks from Susa, one of copper and two of bronze, today in the collection of the Département des arts de l'Islam at the Louvre (unpublished). While the copper example (MAO S. 422) may in fact be late Sasanian, the two bronze ones (MAO S.1231 and MAO S.420) could, according to Louvre archaeologist Rocco Rante, come from early Islamic contexts, though confirmation must await the clarification of the stratigraphy of the nineteenth-century excavations at Susa (pers. comm.). In terms of their typology, the Susa forks are comparable to the published Sasanian examples from Qasr-i Abu Nasr, cf. supra nn. 56-57. I owe special thanks both to Rocco Rante and to Sophie Makariou, Conservateur en chef, Département des arts de l'Islam of the Louvre Museum, for generously providing information and bibliographical references on the Susa forks.

¹⁰⁸ Davidson, *Minor Objects* (n. 36), nos 1377-1383. L. J. Bliquez, "Two Lists of Greek Surgical Instruments and the State of Surgery in Byzantine Times", *DOP* 38 (1984), 188, fig. 1. Papanikola-Bakirtzi (ed.), *Καθημερινή ζωή* (n. 37), nos 77α-β, 78. In addition to the seven examples published by Davidson, there is also an eighth fragmentary example from Corinth, MF 466, illustrated in Parani, *Reconstructing* (n. 93), fig. 218 (last of the bifurcated implements to the right). The Corinth bifurcated implements were probably all recovered during the excavations of the post-Roman occupation levels in the forum area in the 1930s, though information on the context from which two of the objects were found is lacking. As for the dating of the contexts from which they were retrieved, it seems, mainly on the basis of numismatic evidence,

that some may be slightly later than what Davidson originally proposed and could be dated to the late eleventh down to the end of the twelfth century. For the problems of dating involving materials from the old excavations and the chronology of the development of Byzantine Corinth, see G. Sanders, "Recent Developments in the Chronology of Byzantine Corinth", Ch. K. Williams, II and N. Bookidis (eds), *Corinth XX. Corinth, The Centenary, 1896-1996*, Princeton 2003, 385-399. I am grateful to the 37th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, the 25th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, and to Dr. Guy Sanders, Director of the Corinth Excavations, American School of Classical Studies, Athens, for permission to study the Corinth objects and the excavation records. My special thanks go to the Assistant Director of the Corinth Excavations, Dr. Ioulia Tzonou-Herbst, for her invaluable and generous assistance.

¹⁰⁹ Contra Parani, *Reconstructing* (n. 94), 205, fig. 218. None of the Corinth bifurcated objects were found in association with other surgical implements from the same site. Furthermore, to my knowledge, no comparable objects are included in the few known secure finds of medieval surgical implements, nor are they illustrated in medieval medical handbooks from the Islamic East or the Latin West, see, for example, S. K. Hamarneh and H. A. Awad, "Early Surgical Instruments Excavated in Old Cairo, Egypt", *International Surgery* 62 (1977), 520-524. H.-G. Stephan, "Der Chirurg von der Weser (ca. 1200-1265) – ein Glücksfall der Archäologie und Medizingeschichte", *Sudnoffs Archiv* 77 (1993), 174-191. F. R. Hau, "Die Chirurgie und ihre Instrumente in Orient und Okzident vom 10. bis 16. Jahrhundert", *Kommunikation zwischen Orient und Okzident. Alltag und Sachkultur. Internationaler Kongress, Krems an der Donau, 6. bis 9. Oktober 1992*, Vienna 1994, 307-352.

¹¹⁰ Davidson, *Minor Objects* (n. 36), nos 1377, 1379-1381. For a Sasanian antecedent, see Whitcomb, *Before the Roses* (n. 56), fig. 65h.

used in association with knives, to stabilize food, especially meat, for cutting, as well as bringing it to the mouth. The second type of fork attested at Corinth, comprises forks with slender metal handles adorned with mouldings and terminating in a baluster knob. The handles on the two surviving Corinth examples, are relatively short, ca. 4 and 5 cm respectively¹¹¹. Such forks, which can be handled with two or three fingers of one hand, seem better suited for simply spearing morsels of food served in little pieces or sweetmeats, bringing to mind the small golden forks of the Byzantine princess who died in Venice. Coincidentally, to this same type probably belongs the fragmentary example in bronze retrieved from an early eleventh-century context during the excavations at Saraghane in Constantinople (total surviving length 5 cm)¹¹². The Constantinopolitan find is of particular importance as it provides some material evidence for the use of the fork in the Byzantine capital, so far postulated mainly on the basis of Damianus's writings and artistic representations, which are by no means limited to the examples mentioned above. Before, however, turning to take a closer look at Middle Byzantine representations of forks, brief reference should be made to a third type of fork-like implement from Corinth, which was discovered along with iron chain links and a number of iron medieval weapons (arrowheads, spearheads, parts of swords) in a context tentatively dated by Davidson to the eleventh century. It is made of iron and originally had three short tines, of which only two survive. Its shaft, circular in section, would have fitted in a handle made of different material (surviving length 10 cm)¹¹³. Given its context, the use of this implement as a table-fork remains open to question. Artistic representations are not very helpful in this case since, to my knowledge, no Middle Byzantine depiction of a three-tined fork has come down to us. Though other eleventh- and twelfth-century representations are not all as detailed – or well-preserved – as those discussed so far, they occur with such frequency as to sug-



Fig. 14. Mount Athos, Dionysiou Monastery, cod. 587m, fol. 118v. Christ at the house of Martha and Maria, 11th century A.D.

gest that the depiction of table-forks, if not their actual use, had become relatively fashionable at the time (Figs 14 and 15)¹¹⁴. True, forks do not appear in all surviving meal scenes of the eleventh and the twelfth century, even within a single manuscript. Still, that table-forks had become a component, however optional, of Byzantine meal-imagery in the latter part of the Middle Byzantine period is further suggested by the fact that representations of such implements also found their way into western works of art that follow Middle Byzantine models, like, for example, the enamel plaque of the Last Supper in the *Pala d'oro* in Venice (early twelfth century) or three of the meal scenes in the *Hortus Deliciarum*, a now-lost German manuscript executed in the late

¹¹¹ Davidson, op.cit., nos 1382, 1383.

¹¹² Gill, "Small Finds", op.cit. (n. 84), no. 450, pl. 367.

¹¹³ Davidson, op.cit., no. 1461; Vroom, *After Antiquity* (n. 10), 328.

¹¹⁴ Other secure Middle Byzantine representations of forks: the *Barberini Psalter*, fol. 72r (Last Supper), A.D. 1059-1067 [Vroom *After Antiquity* (n. 10), fig. 11.22]; *Laur. gr.* VI.23, fol. 91v (Last Supper), ca. A.D. 1100 [T. Velmans, *Le tetraévangile de la Laurentienne. Florence, Laur. VI. 23*, Paris 1971, pl. 40, fig. 176]; Asinou, Panagia Phorbiotissa (Last Supper), A.D. 1105/6 [Anagnostakis and Papamastorakis, "Radishes for Appetizers", op.cit. (n. 9), fig. 4]; *Vat. gr.* 746, fols 72v (Hospitality of Abraham), 123v (the Pharaoh's banquet), 154v (Moses eats with

Jethro's family), 491r (Sampson's feast), 1125-1150 A.D. [K. Weitzmann and M. Bernabè, *The Byzantine Octateuchs*, Princeton 1999, figs 264, 502, 610, 1500]; Mane, Episkope (cycle of St. George, the meal of Theopistos), ca. A.D. 1200 [N. B. Drandakis, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης*, Athens 1995, pl. 47]. Probable representations of forks: *Par. gr.* 74, fols 67v (Christ in the house of Levi), 132r (Christ in the house of Martha and Maria), 11th century [Omout, *Évangiles* (n. 92), pls 63, 117]; Mount Athos, *Dionysiou* 587m, fol. 53r (Last Supper) [S. Pelekanides et al., *The Treasures of Mount Athos. Illuminated Manuscripts 1*, Athens 1973, fig. 224].



Fig. 15. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1162, fol. 46v. *The Blessing of the Virgin*, 1125-1150 A.D.

twelfth century, the miniatures of which are known to us from copies made from the original¹¹⁵. Consequently, the introduction of images of table-forks into the painted decoration of provincial monuments in Cappadocia, Cyprus, and the Mane in the Peloponnese cannot, on its own, be regarded as evidence that the actual use of the fork was widespread in the Byzantine provinces. The painters responsible may simply have been reproducing a current iconographic theme disseminated from a major artistic centre, such as Constantinople. Fortunately, there is independent evidence to suggest that table-forks were not unknown in the provinces of the empire. In addition to the forks from Corinth, which was a thriving urban centre in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, one has in mind the small iron fork with an adorned bone handle (preserved length 10.6 cm) that was unearthed during the excavation of a twelfth-century agglomeration in the outskirts of the Byzantine fortress of Braničevo on the Danube. It has two straight tines, though the horse-shoe shaped element so distinctive of the Corinth forks is absent¹¹⁶. Both the context and the material of the latter find intimate that the use of the table-fork was not necessarily limited to the upper classes or to major urban centres alone. On the other hand, its pictorial treatment seems to reflect a perception of the table-fork as a luxury object that made it an appropriate – and recognizable – attribute for distinguished or wealthy individuals in art, which are invariably male. In eleventh- and twelfth century artistic contexts, forks appear

paired with knives and are, as a rule, placed in front of the most important participants at the meal, such as Christ and St. Peter in the Last Supper or all three angels in the Hospitality of Abraham. Their arrangement on the table suggests that they were not meant to be shared by all, but only by those in front of whom they had been placed. That some guests might have used a fork while others their fingers is also suggested by the first of the miniatures in the Rababus Maurus manuscript discussed above. Incidentally, the absence of representations of individual plates next to the flatware sets in Byzantine images, does not necessarily imply that the fork-and-knife would have been used to cut food from a common serving platter, since it may be due to the fact that individual plates were simply not represented at the time, rather than to their not being in actual use. Whatever the case, that the table-fork was indeed perceived as a marker of status and wealth is confirmed by its inclusion among the objects chosen to signify riches in the illustration of Job 6:20 in *Vat. gr. 1231*, folio 141v, a provincial manuscript of probable Cypriot origin, which was executed between 1107 and 1118 A.D. for the *protonobelissimos* and *megas doux* Leo Nikerites, a high Constantinopolitan official appointed to Cyprus (Fig. 16)¹¹⁷.

It is reasonable to ask at this point what it was that brought



Fig. 16. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1231, fol. 141v. *Job 6:20*, 1107-1118 A.D.

¹¹⁵ H. R. Hahnloser and R. Polacco (eds), *La Pala d'oro*, Venice 1994, 29, pl. XXXI.56. R. Green *et al.*, *Herrad of Hohenbourg, Hortus Deliciarum*, London and Leiden 1979, 165, 179, pls 84, 99, 162. See, also, the much restored representation of the Last Supper at San Marco in Venice, where there seems to be at least one fork on the table (first half of the 12th century), O. Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice. I. The Eleventh and*

the Twelfth Centuries, Chicago and London, 1984, 97-99, pl. 105.

¹¹⁶ Popović and Ivanišević, "Grad Braničevo", *op.cit.* (n. 84), 162, fig. 32; cf. Vroom, "Dining Habits", *op.cit.* (n. 10), 199.

¹¹⁷ On the manuscript see C. N. Constantinides and R. Browning, *Dated Greek Manuscripts from Cyprus to the Year 1570*, Washington D.C. and Nicosia 1993, 68-70.



Fig. 17. Athens, Benaki Museum. Icon with the Hospitality of Abraham, late 14th century A.D.

about this period of relative popularity for the table-fork in the tenth century and especially the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. The Byzantines now sat, rather than reclined, at the table, and using a fork-and-knife is definitely more comfortable in a sitting position. One might wonder, in fact, how coincidental it is that at Old Tokalı kilise Christ is shown seated at a rectangular table, with a fork and knife in front of Him. Furthermore, the earliest occurrences of the fork, in tenth- and eleventh-century contexts, largely overlap with the period of the production and usage of Middle Byzantine chafing dishes, that is composite ceramic vessels, with a compartment for coals beneath a deep dish or bowl above, designed for serving hot sauces at the table. Using a fork of the type with the very long tines that we have been discussing here to dip a piece of meat or bread in the hot liquid would have protected the fingers from getting burnt as well as keeping them clean¹¹⁸. Indeed, concerns of personal hygiene and cleanliness may also have played a part in the con-

tinuous usage of the fork, even after the cessation of the production of chafing dishes in the late eleventh century. The full-sleeves of eleventh- and twelfth-century garments in the male and, especially, the female wardrobe would have made the use of the fork, protecting as it did the fingers from becoming dirty, appear quite appealing¹¹⁹. Still, though practical considerations such as these might have had some bearing on the development we are trying to trace, they do not explicate it fully. As for the possibility of cultural influences coming from the East, given the “oriental” appearance of many of the Byzantine examples, we know even less about the use of the fork in Islamic lands and the region of the Caucasus to be able to make any useful observations¹²⁰. Though I doubt it will be possible to find a definite answer, I suspect that the “ascendance” of the table-fork could be partly related to a general trend towards a more refined table-culture in Byzantium in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. That there was such a trend is evidenced on the one

¹¹⁸ On the production and function of chafing dishes, see Ch. Bakirtzis, *Βυζαντινά τσουνκαλόαγγα*, Athens 1989, 55-65. G. Sanders, “New Relative and Absolute Chronologies for 9th to 13th Century Glazed Wares at Corinth: Methodology and Social Conclusions”, K. Belke et al. (eds), *Byzanz als Raum. Zu Methoden und Inhalten der historischen Geographie des östlichen Mittelmeerraumes*, Vienna 2000, 165-166. The possible association of the fork with the chafing dish was suggested to me by Charalambos Bakirtzis, whom I here thank.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Anagnostakis and Papamastorakis, “Radishes for Appetizers”, op.cit. (n. 9), 150. I owe the observation regarding the sleeves to Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, to whom I am grateful.

¹²⁰ To my knowledge, two-pronged forks do occur in a small number of

Georgian and Armenian gospel-books, though as far as I can tell, they lack the horse-shoe element between handle and tines, see, for example, G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles*, Paris 1916, fig. 270 [Tiflis, Ethnographical Museum no. 1667 (*Djiroutchi Gospels*), Last Supper, A.D. 936; Soteriou, op.cit. (n. 6), 465, identified one of the objects on the table in Millet's drawing as a fork]. L. A. Dournovo, *Miniatures arméniens*, Paris 1960, pl. 7 [Matenadaran 6201, Last Supper, A.D. 1038; executed in Byzantine territory, though not in Byzantinizing style]. T. F. Mathews and A. K. Sanjian, *Armenian Gospel Iconography. The Tradition of the Glajor Gospel*, Washington D.C. 1991, fig. 156b [Matenadaran 7736, Last Supper, 11th century].

hand by contemporary Byzantine literary sources expressing a delight in the pleasures of the table and, on the other, by the archaeological evidence according to which fine ceramic tablewares became more widespread in use and more ornate in appearance, though admittedly both developments seem to postdate the earliest occurrences of the fork¹²¹.

At this point, one may also ask why sets of forks and knives were introduced into religious Byzantine artistic contexts at this particular period. Is this an indication that they were regarded as fashionable or as a kind of novelty, capturing the artists' attention with their semiotic potential as a status signifier, especially when other such traditional iconographic devices inherited from Late Antiquity, like the sitting arrangement on the dining couch, might have lost their poignancy as dining styles changed? Or was this an early manifestation of a tendency observable from the eleventh and especially the twelfth century onwards to multiply the types of vessels and victuals represented on the table in Byzantine dining scenes?¹²²

Whatever the case, it would seem that the factors that had brought about the greater visibility of the table-fork in the eleventh and twelfth centuries lost their momentum in the Late Byzantine period. One wonders whether changes in the Late Byzantine diet postulated on the basis of changes in the shape of ceramic tablewares, which became smaller in size and deeper, pointing towards the consumption of more liquid foods (and less meat?), had a negative impact on the use of the fork¹²³. Be this as it may, the fact remains that the depiction of forks in artistic contexts becomes rarer. Soteriou reports a two-pronged fork on the table of the Last Supper

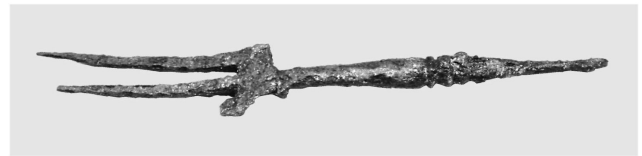


Fig. 18. Mistra Museum, inv. no. 1738. Iron fork, Late Byzantine.

at the Omorphi Ekklesia, Aigina (A.D. 1289), while, according to Katsioti, two-pronged examples can also be seen on the table of Herod's Feast at Panagia Chrysafitissa, Laconia (A.D. 1290)¹²⁴. Three forks, in sets with knives, make a late appearance in the beautiful icon of the Hospitality of Abraham today in the Benaki Museum, Athens (late fourteenth century) (Fig. 17)¹²⁵. These forks may well reflect actual objects in use at the time of the execution of the icon, since their design differs from that of Middle Byzantine examples: their two tines are short and delicate and they have long slender stems of metal, the top third of which is covered by a different material forming a pistol-shaped handle. This type of fork is reminiscent of Western dessert forks as seen in a number of Italian Renaissance paintings¹²⁶. Though actual finds of such forks have not been forthcoming from Late Byzantine contexts, there is one iron example from Mistra, ascribed a Late Byzantine date, with a comparable handle construction. The Mistra fork has three tines, of which only two survive, and a shaft, circular in section, the upper part of which was made to fit into a handle of a different material (surviving length 13.8 cm) (Fig. 18)¹²⁷. Our meagre evidence from the Late Byzantine period does not allow us to say any-

¹²¹ Cf. Anagnostakis and Papamastorakis, "Radishes for Appetizers", op.cit. (n. 9), 163. On ceramic fine wares, see selectively, P. Armstrong, "Byzantine Glazed Ceramic Tableware in the Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts", *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 71 (1997), 4-15. D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi (ed.), *Byzantine Glazed Ceramics. The Art of Sgraffito*, Athens 1999. Sanders, "New Relative and Absolute Chronologies", op.cit. (n. 118), 153-173. By contrast to ceramic wares, we know relatively little on domestic silver plate in the Middle Byzantine period. For a recent summary, see Mundell Mango, "Glittering Sideboard", op.cit. (n. 3), 136-141.

¹²² Parani, *Reconstructing* (n. 94), 242-243.

¹²³ See, for example, Vroom, *After Antiquity* (n. 10), 329-331. D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi, "Βυζαντινά επιτραπέζια σκεύη. Σχήμα-μορφή, χρήση και διακόσμηση", *Βυζαντινών διατροφή και μαγειρεία* (n. 2), 121-123. The investigation of Byzantine diet, including the postulated changes under the impact of Western practices, will benefit greatly by studies of cooking-ware shapes and lipid analyses of cooking-pot fragments, as well as by the study of faunal remains, such as those undertaken at Corinth in Greece and at Sagalassos in Asia Minor, see L. Joyner, "Cooking Pots as Indica-

tors of Cultural Change. A Petrographic Study of Byzantine and Frankish Cooking Wares from Corinth", *Hesperia* 76 (2007), 188-190. A.K. Vionis et al., "A 12th-13th-century Pottery Assemblage from Sagalassos, SW Turkey: An Archaeological Case-study on Typo-chronology, Quantification and Socio-cultural Interpretation of Medieval Ceramics", *Hesperia* (in press). I thank Smadar Gabrieli for drawing my attention to the work at Corinth and Athanasios Vionis and his co-authors for allowing me access to the information in their article, prior to publication.

¹²⁴ Soteriou, op.cit. (n. 6), 466. Katsioti, op.cit. (n. 82), 130. A two-pronged fork can also be seen on the table of the Last Supper in the church of the Apostles at Peć in Serbia (14th century), see R. Ljubinković, *The Church of the Apostles in the Patriarchate of Peć*, Belgrade 1964, fig. 20.

¹²⁵ Evans (ed.), *Byzantium* (n. 71), no. 107.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Goldstein, "Implements of Eating", op.cit. (n. 4), fig. 4 (Sandro Botticelli, *The Wedding Feast*, A.D. 1483).

¹²⁷ Papanikola-Bakirtzi (ed.), *Καθημερινή ζωή* (n. 37), no. 383. Two four-tined forks from Mistra ascribed a Late Byzantine date in the same catalogue (nos 383a-b), seem post-Byzantine to me.

thing other than that the fork continued in use at the Byzantine table, at least in an urban context, though how widespread this use was is impossible to determine. From this period onwards, it is to Italy and Western Europe that one needs to turn for the next chapters in the history of the fork.

The evidence on the use of cutlery at the Byzantine table, whether archaeological, written or artistic, is, as we have seen limited, fragmentary, and with great chronological and geographical gaps in its coverage, which make interpretation difficult. For instance, the fact that the crucial period from the eighth to the tenth century is hardly represented at all poses serious obstacles in evaluating the developments that appear in place in the eleventh and twelfth century. The situation is further complicated by the nature of the artistic evidence consisting principally of depictions of dining scenes in Byzantine religious art, an art which is characterized by its predilection for the repetition of established

iconographic models. As a result, while artistic representations of cutlery have proven informative as regards the use of particular eating implements at the Byzantine table, to their design, and, occasionally, to the particularities of their use, they are far less so concerning the numbers employed during a formal meal and the chronological and geographical distribution of their usage. Nevertheless, certain patterns in the use of cutlery became apparent and it is hoped that future archaeological work and the on-going investigation of Byzantine diet and dining habits will help fill in some of the many gaps in our knowledge. While many aspects of the use of flatware in the Byzantine Empire still remain obscure, an image emerges in which cutlery, far from simply satisfying specific practical needs at the table, be it in the home, the monastic refectory, or the palace, served as a mark of distinction and wealth and as a carrier of a set of cultural values that distinguished the Byzantines from some of their neighbours, while bringing them closer to others.

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BYZANTINA ΜΑΧΑΙΡΟΠΙΡΟΥΝΑ: ΜΙΑ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗΣΗ

Μέσα στα πλαίσια του αυξημένου επιστημονικού ενδιαφέροντος για τη μελέτη των διατροφικών συνηθειών των Βυζαντινών, που παρατηρείται στις μέρες μας, το παρόν άρθρο πραγματεύεται τη χρήση μαχαιροπίρουνων στο βυζαντινό τραπέζι από τον 4ο έως και τα μέσα του 15ου αιώνα μ.Χ.

Κατά την περίοδο της Ύστερης Αρχαιότητας, δηλαδή από τον 4ο έως τον 7ο αιώνα μ.Χ., τα τεκμήρια για τη χρήση μαχαιροπίρουνων στο βυζαντινό τραπέζι είναι κατεξοχήν αρχαιολογικά. Οι σχετικές αναφορές στις γραπτές πηγές είναι ελάχιστες, ενώ αξιοπρόσεκτη είναι η απουσία εικαστικών μαρτυριών. Αν και οι άνθρωποι αυτή την περίοδο, όπως και κατά τους ρωμαϊκούς χρόνους, συνέχιζαν να τρώνε την τροφή τους με τα δάχτυλα, οι εκατοντάδες αργυρών κοχλιαρίων που έχουν σωθεί μαρτυρούν την τακτική χρήση των αντικειμένων αυτών, τουλάχιστον στις οικίες των αρχόντων της εποχής, για τη λήψη τροφής. Πέρα όμως από τη λειτουργική τους χρήση, τα αργυρά αυτά κοχλιάρια, εξαιτίας του πολύτιμου υλικού τους, του εντυπωσιακού τους μεγέθους και της διακόσμησής τους, αποτελούσαν και μέσο επίδειξης του πλούτου, της κοινωνικής θέσης, αλλά και της καλλιέργειας του οικοδεσπότη.

Σε αντίθεση με τα κοχλιάρια, η χρήση επιτραπέζιων μαχαιριών φαίνεται να ήταν περιορισμένη, αν και υπάρχουν σπάνιες γραπτές μαρτυρίες για την παρουσία τους στο πρωτοβυζαντινό τραπέζι. Δεν υπάρχει καμιά ένδειξη ότι την περίοδο αυτή τα μαχαίρια χρησιμοποιούνταν σε συνάρτηση με τα πιρούνια για την κατανάλωση τροφής με τον τρόπο που συνηθίζεται σήμερα. Πάντως η χρήση του πιρουνιού τεκμηριώνεται σφαλώς από τα αρχαιολογικά δεδομένα, αν και ο αριθμός των σωζόμενων δειγμάτων είναι κατά πολύ μικρότερος από αυτόν των πρωτοβυζαντινών κοχλιαρίων.

Τα υστερορωμαϊκά και πρωτοβυζαντινά πιρούνια ήταν κατασκευασμένα από άργυρο ή κράμα χαλκού και διέθεταν δύο ή τρία δόντια. Τα λίγα στοιχεία που έχουμε στη διάθεσή μας δεν επιτρέπουν να γνωρίζουμε πόσο διαδεδομένη ήταν η χρήση τους. Αξιοσημείωτη όμως είναι η ποικιλία μεγεθών και τύπων, συμπεριλαμβανομένων και κάποιων δειγμάτων που μαρτυρούν πιθανές επαφές με τη σασανιδική αργυροχοΐα.

Κατά τη μεσαιωνική περίοδο, από τον 8ο έως τα μέσα του 15ου αιώνα δηλαδή, αν και η λήψη τροφής με τα δάχτυλα εξακολουθεί να παραμένει μια συνηθισμένη πρακτική, η χρήση των μαχαιροπίρουνων στο βυζαντινό τραπέζι συνεχίζεται. Τα δεδομένα όμως φαίνεται να έχουν αλλάξει. Σε αντίθεση με την προηγούμενη περίοδο, οι αρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες για τη χρήση κοχλιαρίων σχεδόν εκλείπουν. Η σχεδόν ολοκληρωτική απουσία κοχλιαρίων από αρχαιολογικά στρώματα είχε οδηγήσει στην υπόθεση ότι τη συγκεκριμένη περίοδο τα κοχλιάρια θα πρέπει να ήταν κατασκευασμένα από οργανικά υλικά και μάλιστα ξύλο, υπόθεση που επιβεβαιώθηκε πρόσφατα από τα αποτελέσματα της ανασκαφής στο λιμένα του Θεοδοσίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Επιπλέον, για τη συνεχιζόμενη παρουσία των κοχλιαρίων στο βυζαντινό τραπέζι διαθέτουμε τόσο γραπτές μαρτυρίες, όσο και απεικονίσεις στην τέχνη της υστεροβυζαντινής, κυρίως, περιόδου.

Όσον αφορά το μαχαίρι, σύμφωνα με τις σχετικές αρχαιολογικές, γραπτές και εικαστικές μαρτυρίες, αυτό χρησιμοποιούνταν τόσο μόνο του, όσο και σε συνδυασμό πλέον με το πιρούνι, για να κόβει κανείς το φαγητό, αλλά και για να το φέρει στο στόμα. Δεν γνωρίζουμε όμως αν οι συνδαιτυμόνες έπαιρναν μαζί τους στο τραπέζι το προσωπικό τους μαχαίρι, όπως συνέβαινε αυτή την περίοδο στη δυτική Ευρώπη, ή αν ο οικοδεσπότης ήταν αυτός που προμήθευε με μαχαίρια τους καλεσμένους του κατά τη διάρκεια επίσημων γευμάτων.

Ο συνδυασμός του μαχαιριού με το πιρούνι μαρτυρείται για πρώτη φορά στην τέχνη κατά το πρώτο μισό του 10ου αιώνα, ενώ ο αριθμός των σχετικών απεικονίσεων αυξάνεται στους δύο αιώνες που ακολουθούν. Ο χαρακτηριστικός τύπος των εικονιζόμενων πιρουνιών, με δύο επιμήκη δόντια που φύονται από πεταλόσχημη διαμόρφωση στη βάση της λαβής, επιτρέπει μάλιστα την ταύτιση ομάδας ευρημάτων από την Κωνσταντινούπολη και την Κόρινθο, που έως τώρα ερμηνεύονταν ως ιατρικά εργαλεία, με πιρούνια.

Σε μεσοβυζαντινές απεικονίσεις, το πιρούνι σε συνδυασμό με το μαχαίρι αποδίδεται κατά κανόνα στους πιο σημαντικούς από τους συνδαιτυμόνες, γεγονός που φαίνεται να υποδηλώνει ότι η χρήση των μαχαιροπί-

ρουνων θεωρούνταν σύμβολο υψηλής κοινωνικής θέσης και πλούτου. Από την άλλη, η ανακάλυψη πικρινών από κράμα χαλκού και από σίδηρο σε βυζαντινά αρχαιολογικά στρώματα αποτελεί ένδειξη ότι η χρήση τους δεν περιοριζόταν απαραίτητα στα μέλη των ανώτερων κοινωνικών τάξεων. Σε αντίθεση πάντως με τη μεσοβυζαντινή περίοδο, η χρήση του πικρινού φαίνεται να περιορίζεται κατά την υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο, ίσως εξαιτίας κάποιας αλλαγής στο βυζαντινό διαιτολόγιο μετά το 13ο αιώνα.

Συμπερασματικά, παρά τα μεγάλα κενά που έχουμε στις γνώσεις μας εξαιτίας της αποσπασματικότητας των πηγών μας, τα μέχρι στιγμής δεδομένα είναι αρκετά για να αναδειχθεί ο ρόλος των βυζαντινών μαχαίροπίρουνων, όχι μόνο ως χρηστικών αντικειμένων τα οποία εξυπηρετούσαν κάποιες πρακτικές ανάγκες, αλλά και ως μέσων για την επίδειξη της κοινωνικής και οικονομικής θέσης των ιδιοκτητών τους και, γιατί όχι, ως φορέων βυζαντινών πολιτιστικών αξιών.