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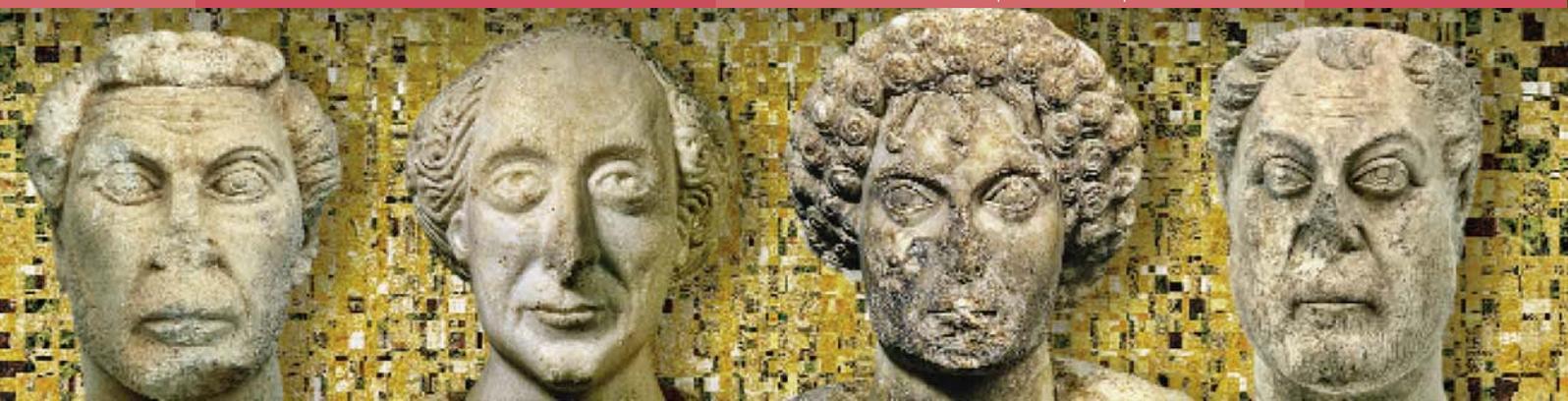
Falko Daim · Jörg Drauschke (Hrsg.)

Byzanz – das Römerreich im Mittelalter

Teil 3 Peripherie und Nachbarschaft

Römisch-Germanisches  
Zentrumuseum  
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R G Z M



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## THE BIRDS ON THE BRAID ORNAMENTS FROM RAKAMAZ: A VIEW FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN<sup>1</sup>

*Csanád Bálint sexaginta quinque annos nato*

*I raised my gaze heavenward  
Where hovered a huge bird  
With motionless wings outspread  
Poised still in the heavens above.  
Sándor Reményik: Monk vulture*

A unique find from Rakamaz-Gyepi földek (com. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, H) reached the Jósa András Museum of Nyíregyháza in spring 1956<sup>2</sup>. The ongoing scholarly fascination with this find can largely be attributed to its uniqueness. The birds portrayed on the two discs undoubtedly contributed to their popularity because animal depictions, a rare phenomenon in Conquest period art, have always had an appeal due to the possibility of perhaps deciphering the meaning of the image.

I have to emphasise that it is not my intention to deconstruct the existing archaeological narratives concerning the meaning(s) of the braid ornaments from Rakamaz. This would be a pointless exercise because, while it would undoubtedly shed light on the intellectual climate and thought of 20<sup>th</sup> century archaeologists who strove to interpret and explain Conquest period art, it would hardly contribute to a better understanding of the genuine nature of 10<sup>th</sup> century art<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, one remark seems in order, especially in view of the fact that the literature quoted here has been largely written by internationally acclaimed scholars in English and German<sup>4</sup>. While certainly incomprehensible that most of the scholars studying the Hungarian Conquest period found nothing unusual in turning to the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century ethnographic material of the Ob-Ugrians for an interpretation of 10<sup>th</sup> century archaeological relics and archaeological phenomena from the Carpathian Basin, it is hardly surprising in view of the traditions of Conquest period research<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, it is unfathomable why A. Alföldi, the erudite scholar of Roman history and archaeology<sup>6</sup>, and Z. Kádár, renowned for his studies on Byzantine art<sup>7</sup>, slavishly followed this path

<sup>1</sup> The polychrome tile in the Louvre (Paris), an important visual stimulus to my interest in the Rakamaz discs, was pointed out to me by M. Takács when I was still a university student. I am grateful to him not only for calling my attention to this find, but also for his insightful comments on the draft version of this study. I am also indebted to my friends and colleagues, Á. Biró, G. Csiky, B. Krémer and T. Vida, who patiently read through and commented on previous versions of this study. I wish to thank R. W. Kory, B. Péterfi, D. Schwarcz and B. Tóbiás, who spared no effort to acquire the many scholarly publications I used in this work. Any mistakes that remain are entirely my own. Finally, thanks are due to F. Daim, who enabled the publication of the study in English.

<sup>2</sup> The finds were first published in: Csallány, Zierscheiben 310-325.

<sup>3</sup> Cs. Bálint has already explored this issue in detail in his study on the Nagyszentmiklós Treasure (com. Timiș, RO): Bálint, Nagyszentmiklósi 136-140; 327-328. – A German version of his book will be published soon.

<sup>4</sup> Alföldi, Creation Myth. – Kádár, Bemerkungen. – Harmatta, Royal Power.

<sup>5</sup> A single note to the reader unfamiliar with the Hungarian archaeological literature: ever since the Finno-Ugrian affinities of the Hungarian language were confirmed and the Ob-Ugrian communities were identified as the closest linguistic cognates of the Hungarians, it has become an axiom of historic and archaeological studies that every element of 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian culture be compared to the culture of the Ob-Ugrian (and, in broader context, of the Finno-Ugrian) peoples. Hungarian research has apparently become oblivious to the fact that language and the dominant spiritual and material culture of a particular period do not necessarily coincide, as well as to the fact that a sufficient corpus of the material culture and beliefs of the Ob-Ugrian peoples enabling these comparisons first became available in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>6</sup> Alföldi, Creation Myth.

<sup>7</sup> Kádár, Bemerkungen.

and did not even attempt a search for possible iconographic prototypes, a basic line of enquiry of the disciplines cultivated by them<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to search for the iconographic parallels and/or prototypes of the bird depictions in question. An understanding of the art of the ancient Hungarians of the Conquest period, a people who left no written record, is in itself rather problematic. The first step must be the identification of the bird species portrayed on the discs, a daunting task. Let us first look at the discs themselves.

## THE RAKAMAZ DISCS

There is no information as to where the pair of discs had lain in the burial. The grave was discovered in May 1956, during sand mining, and the greater part of the burial was destroyed. The discs were taken to the Nyíregyháza museum by the local kindergarten teacher. D. Csallány and N. Kalicz inspected the find-spot, where they found the disturbed remains of the grave. Additional graves came to light the next year, and thus nine burials of the cemetery at Rakamaz-Gyepi földek are currently known. However, nothing is known about the size of the burial ground, or the number of burials destroyed during sand mining<sup>9</sup>.

The two discs<sup>10</sup> (referred to by the numbers shown on **fig. 1** in the following) were made using the same technique: the design on the round silver disc was created with a sharp chisel. The bird figures set against the lavishly gilded background are slightly raised, an effect achieved by careful hammering from the back. The plumage is depicted by dense hatching. Some areas of the wings of the main bird figure are filled with circular punched motifs and a triangular punch was used for creating the body of the two smaller birds held in the talons. The plant held in the beak and the leaves of the foliate motif unfurling from the head are divided by a line with a punched dot at its end, an element typical of the 10<sup>th</sup> century art of the Carpathian Basin. The discs have a diameter of 8.2 cm. They are framed by a plain rim, pierced by a pair of rivet holes on top and bottom. The rivets have only survived on the upper part of Disc 2; the two rivets, however, are not identical. The rivets from the upper part of Disc 1 fell out, but the perforations survive. Judging from the perforations on the lower half of the two discs and the lack of hammer-blows, the rivets had not been hammered into the holes with particular force. The slight difference in the spacing of the upper and lower pair of perforations would suggest that the discs had been attached to a leather or textile band that widened downward<sup>11</sup>.

D. Csallány compared the minute details of the craftsmanship of the Rakamaz discs (silver gilt discs bearing a dense design created by punching) with the then known metalwork of the Conquest period. His conclusion that the discs could be fitted into the series of the other pieces made by the goldsmiths of the 10<sup>th</sup> century is still valid<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The single exception in this respect is a remark made by Kádár, to be discussed below.

<sup>9</sup> For the find circumstances of the two discs: Csallány, *Zierscheiben* 310-312. – For a description of the still unpublished burials: *Ancient Hungarians 162-164* (I. Fodor).

<sup>10</sup> The discs are in the collection of the Jósza András Museum, Nyíregyháza, Hungary (inv. no. 64.875.6-7).

<sup>11</sup> Remains of a downward widening ribbon were found on the back of the discs from Grave 197a of the cemetery uncovered

at Ibrány-Esbóhalom (com. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, H): Istvánovits, *Rétköz* 419-420 fig. 212, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Csallány, *Zierscheiben* 314-317. – It is an entirely different matter that the Nagyszentmiklós Treasure, which Csallány included in his analysis, has conclusively been assigned to the Avar period, cf.: Bálint, *Nagyszentmiklói* (with a critical review of the earlier literature).



**Fig. 1** 1 Disc 1 from Rakamaz. – 2 Disc 2 from Rakamaz. – Jósa András Museum (Nyíregyháza).

One interesting feature of the disc pair is that the two pieces were not crafted at the same time. Csallány correctly noted that the design on Disc 1 (fig. 1, 1) was visibly the creation of a more skilful hand and that the heavily worn gilded background and the bird's plumage indicated that it had been made earlier, whilst Disc 2 (fig. 1, 2) was a later copy of the first disc<sup>13</sup>.

The first disc with its fine, delicate rendering of the central bird figure is undoubtedly an outstanding piece of 10<sup>th</sup> century metalwork from the Carpathian Basin. In contrast to the fine craftsmanship of the central figure, the two birds clasped in the talons are clumsy and coarse, making the entire composition of the disc rather unbalanced.

The minor details of the second disc, such as the awkward rendering of the smaller birds held in the talons, the placement of the leafy branch behind the beak and the slight overlap of the large, central bird's wings from the medallion, indicate that it had been made by another goldsmith. The craftsmanship of the two smaller birds is much poorer compared to Disc 1 and the slight, but nonetheless perceptible distortion of the overall proportions of the composition owing to the crude rendering of the head of the central bird figure, as well as the wings and the bough, indicate that it had been made by a less skilled craftsman. The most obvious sign that Disc 2 is a copy of Disc 1 is that, in contrast to the other 10<sup>th</sup> century braid ornaments bearing an animal depiction, the orientation of the bird on Disc 2 is identical with that on Disc 1. In other words, the craftsman chose to copy the original down to the smallest detail, probably because he was aware of his limited capabilities, despite knowing that the discs would thus be worn asymmetrically and the two birds would be facing in opposite directions on the two sides of the head. It therefore seems prudent to take Disc 1 as the starting point for the study, also as regards the identification of the bird species portrayed on it.

<sup>13</sup> Csallány, *Zierscheiben* 312. – While there is a consensus that Disc 2 is a copy of Disc 1, several suggestions have been made as to why it became necessary to make a copy of the original

disc. This issue is irrelevant regarding the subject of the present study, even more so since it is no more than idle speculation at best.

## THE BIRD FIGURES

There are as many suggestions for the species of the winged creatures portrayed on the disc as there are studies on these finds. Csallány believed that the central bird was a monk vulture (Eurasian black vulture; *Aegypius monachus* L.), identifying the two smaller birds grasped in the talons as some kind of waterfowl<sup>14</sup>. Kádár accepted this identification of the species<sup>15</sup>. In contrast, Alföldi suggested that the larger bird figure portrayed an eagle, while the smaller ones were ducks<sup>16</sup>. Archaeozoologist I. Vörös, who examined the two discs at I. Fodor's request, similarly identified the larger bird as an eagle, but described the smaller ones as »small birds of prey« or »eaglets«<sup>17</sup>. The single description provided by an ornithologist (P. Beretz) was published by Cs. Bálint: »A strongly hooked beak, a topknot-like ornament on the head. While lacking claws, the feet are undoubtedly capable of grasping and have visibly pointed ends. If the wings were outspread, they would have a fairly wide span, of the type not encountered in the case of birds used for hunting. [...] The wings have pointed tips, perhaps an indication that the birds portrayed had sharply pointed wings and were swift birds, perhaps some kind of falcons. With the exception of the thighs, and the greater part of the neck and the head, the goldsmith depicted the body as bare, without any feathers<sup>18</sup>. This circumstance and the relatively long neck, the strongly hooked beak and the blunt talons suggest a vulture. No matter how stylised, this bird can hardly be regarded as a hunting bird. It seems likely that the two smaller birds held in the talons are its offspring. [...] The fact that the goldsmith did not depict longish feathers, but small dots on the neck too confirms that the smaller birds are chicks. They are certainly not waterfowl: they have a hooked beak and no indication of a webbing between the toes«<sup>19</sup>. It is quite clear from the above, as Bálint aptly noted, that »the goldsmith did not strive to create a zoologically accurate portrayal«<sup>20</sup>. One can therefore reasonably ask whether the bird figures perhaps represent a variant or variants of one or more iconographic types. Archaeozoologist E. Gál examined the birds with a view to this possibility<sup>21</sup>. In her view, the most distinctive, and thus most noteworthy feature of the birds was the fact that some bodily parts were left bare, a point noted by the ornithologist quoted above, whereby the craftsman emphasised the bird's vulture-like traits. Gál too interpreted the figure as a vulture. One point that emerges clearly is that this vulture has various traits that led scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century studying the depiction with a more analytical approach to identify it as an eagle. Thus, the search for possible iconographic prototypes suggested above does not necessarily contradict the ornithological classification of this winged creature.

The birds from Rakamaz are unique in the currently known 10<sup>th</sup> century corpus of finds from the Carpathian Basin. Bird depictions are extremely rare<sup>22</sup>: the few known portrayals mostly show the bird from a different view<sup>23</sup>, but even the ones showing the bird(s) from the same view lack the main characteristics of the Rakamaz discs<sup>24</sup>. Depictions of this type are also rare beyond the Carpathian Basin. Whilst I have not

<sup>14</sup> Csallány, Zierscheiben 312-314. – Unfortunately, Csallány did not mention who provided the ornithological information.

<sup>15</sup> Kádár, Bemerkungen 107.

<sup>16</sup> Alföldi, Creation Myth 360, without any indication of whether he had consulted an ornithologist on this matter.

<sup>17</sup> Fodor, Sas 145-146.

<sup>18</sup> This is probably a slip of the pen since it is exactly the thighs, the neck and the head, which are bare, while the body is covered with feathers.

<sup>19</sup> Bálint, Nagyszentmiklósi 328 n. 1030.

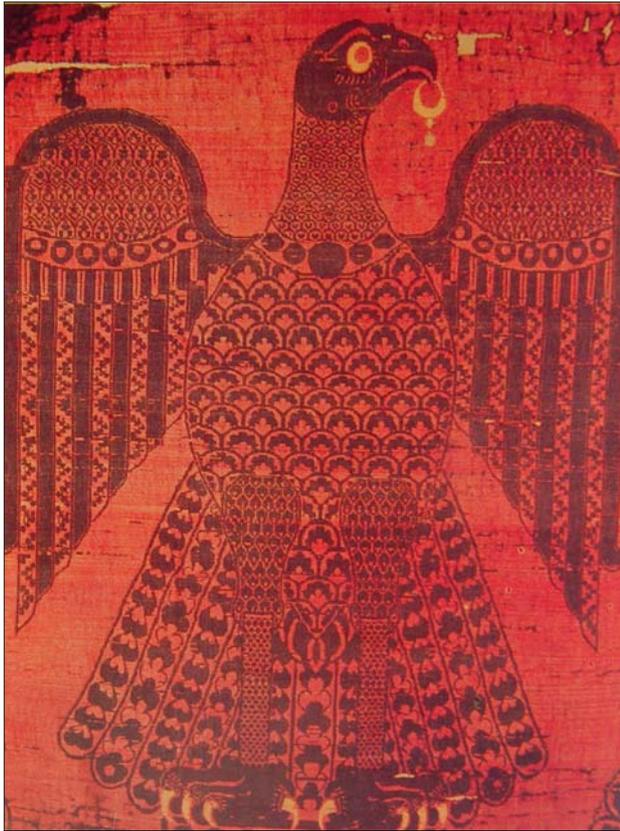
<sup>20</sup> Bálint, Nagyszentmiklósi 328 n. 1030.

<sup>21</sup> I would here like to thank E. Gál for identifying the ornithological species.

<sup>22</sup> The same holds true for the Avar period, cf.: Daim, Gürtelgarnituren 110-126.

<sup>23</sup> Cf., for example, the mounts from Karos on which the wings are shown *en face*, while the head, the feet and the tail feathers are shown in profile. – Ancient Hungarians 84-85 (L. Révész).

<sup>24</sup> The disc from Zemplén (dist. Trebišov, SK) bears a depiction of a heraldically posed bird, but without the leafy branch, the foliate motif unfurling from the head and the smaller birds grasped in the talons. The craftsmanship of the Zemplén disc is much inferior to that of the pieces from Rakamaz. – Budinský-Krička / Fettich, Fürstengrab Abb. 13, 2.



1



2

**Fig. 2** 1 Eagle Silk, approx. 1000. Cathedral Treasury (Brixen). – 2 Byzantine metal panels of the door, approx. 1070. Church of San Paolo fuori le Mura (Rome).

encountered a wholly identical piece down to the smallest detail elsewhere, several details of the depictions have good parallels in the ornamental vocabulary of contemporary Mediterranean art. I shall here focus on four main attributes of the Rakamaz discs in the search for possible models: 1) the heraldic pose<sup>25</sup>, 2) the leaf or branch held in the beak, 3) the element described as a topknot by the ornithologist and 4) the smaller bird figures held in the talons.

### The heraldic pose

The heraldic pose of the bird figures is the least problematic since this image was widespread in many cultures, regions and chronological periods. Its ancestry can be traced to prehistoric times and it is impossible to list them all here. It must be noted that this imagery was very widespread in the broader 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century world known to the ancient Hungarians. It was popular in Byzantium, where this depiction was a heritage of the Roman Age. The most remarkable relics from the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries are the Eagle Silks (fig. 2, 1), which were most likely manufactured in the imperial workshop in Constantinople<sup>26</sup>. We can be

<sup>25</sup> Heraldic pose is here meant to designate that the body, the fanned-out tail feathers and the spread wings beside the body are shown in the frontal view, while the head is shown either in the frontal view or in profile.

<sup>26</sup> Muthesius, *Silk Weaving* 47-50.



**Fig. 3** Stone carvings with heraldically posed eagles: **1** Lips Monastery (Istanbul), 907. – **2** Hagios Haralambos (Maroneia), 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century. – **3** Museo Correale (Sorrento), 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig. 4** Marble panel with eagle.



**Fig. 5** Marble templon screen, 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century. Church of Hagios Ioannis Mangoutis (Athens).

quite certain that eagle depictions occurred not only on these magnificent silks, or exclusively on the products of the imperial workshop<sup>27</sup>, but also on silks produced by other workshops in Constantinople<sup>28</sup>. The »Book of Ceremonies« describes the *skaramangia* worn by the *protospatharioi* bearing eagle figures and the textiles, also decorated with eagles, adorning the palace<sup>29</sup>. According to an

<sup>27</sup> It has been suggested that the Odense Eagle Silk was a Muslim copy of a Byzantine piece: Muthesius, *Silk Weaving* 50. – For a more balanced view: Cutler, *Eagle Silks* 69-70.

<sup>28</sup> Maniatis, *Private Silk Industry* 320; 323, has argued that the diversity of the products turned out by contemporary silk workshops was a result of the demand for them.

<sup>29</sup> Constantinos Porphyrogenitos, *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* II. 15, 577-578; 581; 587. – I would here like to thank A. Patay-Horváth for the translation of the Greek text.



**Fig. 6** Rings with widening bezel decorated with a heraldically posed eagle: **1** Anatolia. Haluk Perk Collection (Istanbul). – **2** Bulgaria (art-dealing). – Rings with widening bezel decorated with the figure of a bird holding a plant in its beak: **3** Anatolia. Haluk Perk Collection. – **4** Odarci (obl. Dobrič, BG).

*ekphrasis* probably dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (most probably on Manuel I Komnenos), »the emperor [...] had white eagles depicted in pearls on his red shoes, so that ‘through the whiteness of the pearls and the high flying of the birds the total elevation of the emperor might be depicted«<sup>30</sup>.

Moving away from the court, heraldically posed eagles appear on contemporary bronze panels made in Byzantium that were used for decorating a church door in Rome (**fig. 2, 2**) and on stone carvings too. Eagles with spread wings on the sides of capitals form a separate group among the carvings<sup>31</sup> (**fig. 3**)<sup>32</sup>. Two carvings must be quoted in this respect. The first is an unprovenanced marble panel in the British Museum (London) bearing a depiction of an exceptionally elaborately carved eagle with spread wings grasping a snake in its talons (**fig. 4**)<sup>33</sup>. Unlike the other, more mediocre carvings, this marble exhibits all the attributes, which would suggest the identification of the bird as an eagle in the case of a depiction as finely crafted as the birds on the Rakamaz discs. The other is the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century carving in the Church of Hagios Ioannis Mangoutis in Athens, showing an eagle bearing a plant or a piece of textile in its beak (**fig. 5**)<sup>34</sup>. This imagery appears on articles used in daily life, for example, on the reverse of trapezoidal buckles<sup>35</sup> and on rings with a widening bezel (**fig. 6, 1-2**)<sup>36</sup>, the implication being that this type of depiction should not be regarded exclusively as an insignia of rank.

Another find with strong links to Byzantine culture is a 10<sup>th</sup> century cast bronze disc (**fig. 7**) from Pacuiul lui Soare (dist. Calarasi, RO)<sup>37</sup>, a fortress on an island in the Lower Danube which had first been part of the First Bulgarian Empire and then of the Byzantine Empire after 971. Comparable depictions can be quoted from the Old Rus and Scandinavia in the north<sup>38</sup>. In the West, this imagery harks back to more ancient times, where, in addition to the Byzantine tradition, there was an »independent« (and sometimes com-

<sup>30</sup> Maguire, *Heavenly Court* 253.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion: Dennert, *Kapitelle* 143-153 Taf. 55-59.

<sup>32</sup> E.g.: Macridy, *Monastery of Lips* fig. 18. – Aliprantés, *Ανασκαφική έρευνα πίν.* 33b. – *I bizantini in Italia* fig. 147.

<sup>33</sup> Buckton, *Byzantium Cat. No. 151* (R. Lowerance).

<sup>34</sup> Mauroeides, *Γλυπτά* Cat. No. 176. – A date restricted to the 11<sup>th</sup> century can be challenged on the testimony of comparable finds.

<sup>35</sup> Mastrokostas, *Παλαιοχριστιανικαι βασιλικαι εκκ.* 5. – Two comparable buckles in the collection of the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz are quoted by: Schulze-Dörrlam, *Mainzer Schatz* 56 n. 151.

<sup>36</sup> The pieces known from the Balkans have been collected by: Grigorov, *Μεταλλι nakiti* 55-56 Obr. 63; 84 (Grigorov's Type III.5). – While the ones from the Carpathian Basin by: Keszi, *Lemezgyűűk* (Keszi's Type A). – The image itself also occurs in Anatolia: *The Remnants* 126.

<sup>37</sup> Cf.: Jotov, *Vikings* 15 (for a colour photo).

<sup>38</sup> Although the heraldically posed bird figures appearing in the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavian material are generally identified as falcons, B. Ambrosiani has correctly pointed out that, even though eagles were generally portrayed in profile, in some cases, a »falcon might be confused with depictions of eagles« Ambrosiani, *Birka Falcon* 12.



**Fig. 7** Cast bronze disc with eagle, 10<sup>th</sup> century, from Pacuiul lui Soare.

might be instructive<sup>41</sup>. It would be useful to explain why peacocks that, from culture to culture, were associated with entirely different beliefs than eagles (or birds of prey in general), began to be depicted in a heraldic pose in Islamic and Byzantine art, and in the cultures influenced by these two civilisations. The distribution of peacocks is more restricted in both time and space than that of heraldically posed predatory birds. Peacock imagery was fairly widespread in the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, as shown by the crescentic earring (fig. 9) of the Preslav Treasure (obl. Šumen, BG)<sup>42</sup>, which had most likely been produced in a workshop of Constantinople working (also?) for the imperial court<sup>43</sup>, on a Byzantine cup from the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries found near Tartu in Estonia (fig. 10)<sup>44</sup>, on a Byzantine bone comb from Šarkel on the Don (dist. Rostov, RUS)<sup>45</sup>, among

peting) Roman tradition or, better said, a tendency to re-create and re-use Roman tradition: the depiction occurs in the Carolingian period, the Ottonian period and also later<sup>39</sup>.

Mention must be made of the depictions in which the figure of a bird of prey shown in a heraldic pose is combined with the imagery of animal combat scenes. The marble panel in the British Museum quoted above can be assigned to this category. The predatory bird, usually an eagle, is shown frozen into static stiffness and grasping a small prey, most often a hare-like creature, in its talons (fig. 8)<sup>40</sup>. This imagery, although slightly unnatural owing to the contrast between the rigid heraldic pose and the dynamism of the combat scene, can be regarded as an independent sub-variant of the iconography of heraldically posed birds.

Eagles or predatory birds were not the single creatures to be depicted in a stiff heraldic pose. A quick survey of peacocks portrayed in a heraldic pose

<sup>39</sup> Schulze-Dörrlamm, Mainzer Schatz 54. – E.g.: St. Stephans's Bursa (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) (Inv. no. XIII. 26). To the best of my knowledge, the reverse of the reliquary from the earlier 9th century is unpublished. I would here like to thank Cs. Bálint for calling my attention to this depiction. The Bursa was later modified and the plate adorning the reverse is later than the 9th century. – Cf.: Elbern, Goldschmiedekunst 43.

<sup>40</sup> E.g.: Byzantine Museum (Athens): Grabar, Sculptures byzantines 1 pl. LXIV. 3. – Thessaloniki: Grabar, Sculptures byzantines 2, 67 pl. XXXVa. – Ohrid (MK): Grabar, Sculptures byzantines 2, 71-72 pl. XLIIa.

<sup>41</sup> Mechthild Schulze-Dörrlamm's remark that »Pfauen wurden in der hochmittelalterlichen Kunst zwar durchaus in Frontalansicht, aber niemals mit gespreizten Fängen und höchst selten mit ausgebreiteten Flügeln dargestellt« (Schulze-Dörrlamm, Mainzer Schatz 54) is not wholly accurate. The heraldically posed peacocks of the Middle Byzantine period were predominantly portrayed with outspread wings beside the body. The peacock-like traits (»Pfauenrad«, »Pfauenkrone«) on the

brooches described as »Adler-Pfaufibeln« are ambiguous to say the least.

<sup>42</sup> Totev, Preslav Treasure 52-53 fig. 15.

<sup>43</sup> For an excellent overview of this assemblage cf.: Totev, Преславското. – An abbreviated English version of this study has also been published: Totev, Preslav Treasure. – In contrast to T. Totev, who argued for the local manufacture of the cloisonné enamelled jewellery pieces, G. Atanasov regarded these items as products of an imperial workshop in Constantinople, which had reached the Bulgars as imperial gifts: Atanasov, Preslav Treasure. – The technical examination of the pieces in question led to the same conclusion, cf.: Bosselmann-Ruickbie, Goldener Glanz. – Bosselmann-Ruickbie, Byzantinisch, Islamisch 97-98. – The issue is discussed at greater length in her forthcoming doctoral dissertation Byzantinischer Schmuck. I would here like to thank her for her kind personal communication on the jewellery items in the treasure.

<sup>44</sup> Evans / Wixom, Glory of Byzantium 223.

<sup>45</sup> Artamonov, Саркел Прич. 51.2. – Bálint, Steppe Abb. 25, 1.



1



2



3

**Fig. 8** Animal combat scenes with heraldically posed eagle with spread wings: **1** Byzantine Museum (Athens), 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century. – **2** From Thessalonica, 11<sup>th</sup> century. Byzantine Museum (Athens). – **3** Cathedral (Ohrid), 11<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig. 9** Crescentic earring from the Preslav Treasure (detail), earlier 10<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig. 10** Silver cup (detail), 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, from Tartu.

the painted animal figures of the Vat. Gr. 354 Tetraevangelium (fig. 11)<sup>46</sup>, and a stone carving from the Lips Monastery (Istanbul) (fig. 12)<sup>47</sup>. The motif was often used in stone carvings, both in the capital (suffice it here to quote another, less skilfully elaborated piece than the one in the Lips Monastery from the Hagios Ioannes Studios Monastery [Istanbul] dated to the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>48</sup>) and in the provinces of the Byzantine Empire (Xeropotamou Monastery [Mount Athos] 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>49</sup>), Church of



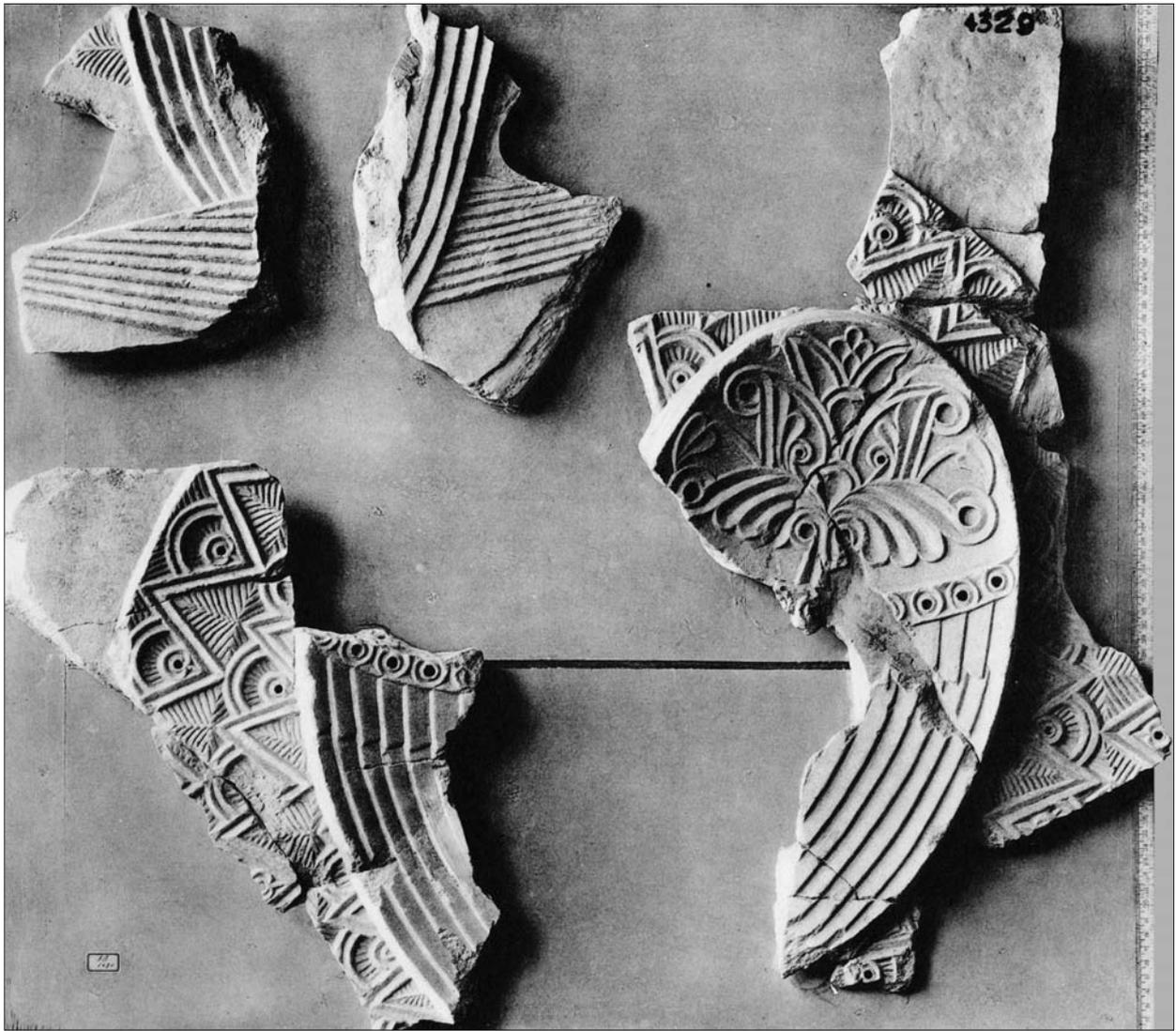
**Fig. 11** Tetraevangelium, Vat. Gr. 354 (detail), 949.

<sup>46</sup> Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines* 1 pl. XLVI, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines* 1 pl. LIII. – Firatli, *Sculpture byzantine* Cat. No. 407-409, 190-191 pl. 115, 407-409.

<sup>48</sup> Firatli, *Sculpture byzantine* cat. no. 332, 166-167 pl. 101, 332.

<sup>49</sup> *Treasures of Mount Athos* 242-243 cat. no. 6.5 (T. N. Pazaras).



**Fig. 12** Marble panel, early 10<sup>th</sup> century. Lips Monastery (Istanbul).



**Fig. 13** Marble panel, 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century, from Stara Zagora. Archaeological Museum (Sofia).



**Fig. 14** Marble slab (detail), late 11<sup>th</sup> century. San Marco (Venice).

Christ Elkomenos (Monemvasia, prov. Laconia, GR)<sup>50</sup>, Cortyne (Crete)<sup>51</sup>, as well as on its fringes, as indicated by the carving found near Stara Zagora in Bulgaria (fig. 13)<sup>52</sup>, variously dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>53</sup> or to the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>54</sup>, and the pieces from northern and southern Italy (Church of San Marco [Venice] [fig. 14]<sup>55</sup>, Church of San Salvatore [Atrani, I] 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>56</sup>). A polychrome tile in the Louvre (Paris) (fig. 15) of uncertain provenance<sup>57</sup> shows the peacock in a heraldic pose with a plant or small piece of textile hanging from its beak<sup>58</sup>. A perfect counterpiece to this tile has been recently published from the collection of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore<sup>59</sup>, reflecting its popularity<sup>60</sup>. An important detail, the plant hanging from the bird's beak, can also be noted in the case of the peacock on the Vat. Gr. 354 manuscript. The versatile use of this motif is reflected by the silk at Beromünster (cant. Luzern, CH) (fig. 16), which A. Muthesius regarded as the product of a private Byzantine workshop<sup>61</sup>.

Peacocks portrayed in a heraldic pose were also popular in the Islamic world, although the available material suggests that this popularity was greater in the western Muslim regions. Suffice it here to quote but a few examples, beginning with a piece from a royal court, namely the ivory casket made for al-Muğīra (968) in the collection of the Louvre<sup>62</sup>. Pieces portraying double-headed peacocks, such as the one on the silk from the relics of St. Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral (fig. 17), which had probably been made in an 11<sup>th</sup> century Hispanic workshop<sup>63</sup>, reached a wider circle.



**Fig. 15** Polychrome tile, 10<sup>th</sup> century. Unprovenanced, Louvre (Paris).

<sup>50</sup> Buchwald, Chancel Barrier Lintels fig. 35. – Unfortunately, there is little evidence for a closer dating of the carving from the Middle Byzantine period.

<sup>51</sup> Coche de la Ferté, Céramique byzantine fig. 7 c.

<sup>52</sup> Now in the Archaeological Museum (Sofia) (inv. no. 316).

<sup>53</sup> Vasiliev et al., Каменна пластика 38-39 and 498 n. 39 (erroneously identified as a phoenix).

<sup>54</sup> Grabar, Sculptures byzantines 2, no. 70.

<sup>55</sup> Marble slab: Haseloff, Vorromanische Plastik Taf. 70B. – Buchwald, Carved Stone Ornament fig. 34. – Marble roundel: Buchwald, Carved Stone Ornament fig. 31. – H. Buchwald attributed the marble slab to a workshop active in the late 11th century, which produced many of the stone carvings of the Church of San Marco, suggesting that it had been copied from an earlier carved roundel (whose location in the church can no longer be established) and placed in its current location in the 13th century. The carved roundel in question was made in the 11th century, probably in the Venice area, and its finer craftsmanship distinguished it from the other pieces made for the San Marco: Buchwald, Carved Stone Ornament 196-197; 206-207. It is also possible that the roundel in question was an imported piece, which transmitted this imagery to the stonecutters of the San Marco. – The Byzantine prototypes of peacock

carvings have been noted by: Grabar, Sculptures byzantines 1, 107.

<sup>56</sup> Haseloff, Vorromanische Plastik 66 Taf. 70 A.

<sup>57</sup> Gerstel, Ceramic Icons 44 identified the piece as coming from the Byzantine church at Prusias ad Hypium/Üskübü (prov. Düzce, TR).

<sup>58</sup> Coche de la Ferté, Céramique byzantine 195-198 fig. 7 c. – Durand / Vogt, Plaques de céramique 38 pl. 3. – Gerstel / Lauffenburger, A Lost Art 281 B.2.

<sup>59</sup> Gerstel / Lauffenburger, A Lost Art 258-259 A.29. and A.30.

<sup>60</sup> Gerstel, Ceramic Icons 44-45 identified these pieces as originating from Üskübü, suggesting that together with the tile in the Louvre, they had been made by the same craftsman.

<sup>61</sup> Muthesius, Lopez and Beyond 290 pl. 82.

<sup>62</sup> For a colour photo see Les Andalouses cat. no. 103 (S. Makariou). – The ivory casket has most recently been analysed by: Prado-Vilar, Circular Visions (with the earlier literature). – Most photos of the pyxis concentrate on the four main scenes and the peacock set between two of these main scenes can only be observed in a side view. The most useful photo can be found in: Al-Andalus 193.

<sup>63</sup> Muthesius, Rider and Peacock Silks 89-93 fig. 12 pl. 50-51 (with a discussion of analogies).

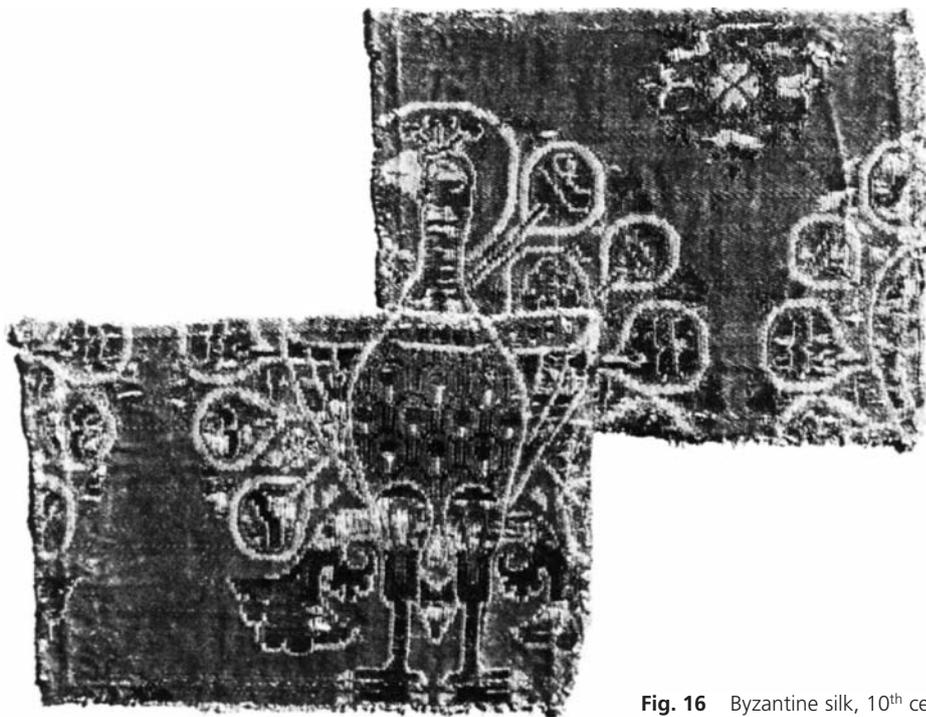


Fig. 16 Byzantine silk, 10<sup>th</sup> century, from Beromünster.

What clearly emerges from the above is that heraldically posed peacocks were widely popular by the 10<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. At this point<sup>64</sup>, a few remarks on the origins of this depiction seem appropriate since it explains the popularity of this motif in 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century Constantinople. Peacocks with a fanned-out tail appear among the depictions adorning the Church of Hagios Georgios in Thessalonica, one of the earliest surviving Christian dome mosaics in the Empire's eastern half dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>65</sup>. Unfortunately, owing to the large-scale destruction of similar relics in the Empire's eastern regions<sup>66</sup>, little is known about the distribution of this imagery. The peacock with fanned-out tail appearing on the mosaic in the San Vitale Presbyterium (Ravenna)<sup>67</sup> certainly suggests that peacock depictions and peacock symbols were quite widespread. This type assumed a peculiar significance in the Byzantine capital<sup>68</sup>. The magnificent church dedicated to Saint Polyuktos, founded by Anicia Juliana and completed between 524 and 527<sup>69</sup>, was adorned with the carvings of thirty such peacocks set in niches<sup>70</sup>. Owing to the fragmentary state of the carvings recovered during the excavations, the figure of the peacocks cannot be reconstructed with certainty<sup>71</sup>, and

<sup>64</sup> I shall not quote comparable pieces predating Antiquity because these are irrelevant in terms of this study. A few earlier occurrences are listed by: Harrison, *Saraçhane* 416.

<sup>65</sup> For the dating of the dome mosaic: Vickers, *Date of the Mosaics*. – Kleinbauer, *Hagios Georgios* 68-107. – For the Theodosian date see: Torp, *The Date*.

<sup>66</sup> For the cultural connection between the ornament of the Church of Hagios Georgios and the Hagios Polyuktos discussed here: Bardill, *A New Temple* 365 n. 107.

<sup>67</sup> Deichmann, *Ravenna Taf.* 342-345.

<sup>68</sup> The peacock niches in Selendi (prov. Selendi, TR) and in the White Monastery in Sohag (gov. Shark, EG) roughly contemporaneous with the ones in Constantinople, suggest that the peacocks of the Hagios Polyuktos were not unique creations. – Sodini, *Les paons* 307 fig. 2. – McKenzie, *Architectural style* fig. 5e.

<sup>69</sup> These two dates were for a long time considered to refer to the construction of the entire church. It has recently been suggested that some parts may have been erected between 508/509 and 511/512: Bardill, *Brick Stamps* 111-116. – Fowden, *Constantine* 275.

<sup>70</sup> For the role of the peacock carvings in the decorative system of the Hagios Polyuktos: Bardill, *A New Temple* 344-345. – The connotations of eternal life and Paradise carried by the carvings have been discussed by: Sodini, *Les paons* 312-313. – Possible imperial connotations by: Kailerich, *The image of Anicia Juliana* 183.

<sup>71</sup> Harrison, *Saraçhane* figs 91-93; 97-98; 102; 108; 261. – Harrison, *Temple* figs 86-91; 98-99; 161.



**Fig. 17** Hispanic silk from the relics of St. Cuthbert (detail), 11<sup>th</sup> century. Durham Cathedral.



**Fig. 18** Marble capital decorated with a peacock, first third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Presumably from the Church of Hagios Polyeyktos. Archaeological Museum (Istanbul).

thus it cannot be established whether they had held anything in their beak. M. Harrison, the excavator of the site, noted that »a chain may have been suspended from the beak«<sup>72</sup>. The single intact capital (**fig. 18**), a stray find from the broader area of the Church of Hagios Polyeyktos, which probably came from the church<sup>73</sup>, belies this possibility: the peacock is shown frontally, its head is not turned to one side, and there is nothing whatsoever in its beak. The perhaps best model for the peacocks appearing in the niches of this church, the peacock in niche 42 of the White Monastery in Sohag, is of little help in this respect because it was found in a strongly damaged condition<sup>74</sup>. The peacock best resembles the birds of Mount Athos and the San Marco, the single difference being that on the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century depictions, the wings are shown frontally beside the bird's body in a raised position<sup>75</sup>. In contrast, the wings are barely raised and rest against the body, while the tail feathers are fanned out behind the bird on the 6<sup>th</sup> century capital. The bird portrayal on the capital can thus be positioned between the types known from Late Antiquity and the imagery current in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. On the Late Antique frescoes and mosaics, the feathers rest against the body and only the tail feathers are raised and fanned out<sup>76</sup>, as on the »Earth and Ocean« mosaic of the East Church in Qasr el-Lebia (gov. Al Marj, LAR) (**fig. 19**)<sup>77</sup>, on the mosaic of the Basilica of Justinian in Sabratha (gov. Al Nuqat al Khams, LAR)<sup>78</sup>, and on a 4<sup>th</sup> century mosaic from Carthage<sup>79</sup>. The same peacock type, shown in half profile, appears on the Wiener Dioscurides manuscript made for Anicia Juliana (the bird does not hold anything in its beak)<sup>80</sup>. In contrast to the above widespread peacock imagery, there are but a few Late Antique depictions portraying peacocks with slightly raised wings of the type appearing on the

<sup>72</sup> Harrison, *Saraçhane* 416.

<sup>73</sup> Strube, *Polyeyktoskirche* 65.

<sup>74</sup> McKenzie, *Architectural style* fig. 5 e.

<sup>75</sup> Coche de la Ferté, *Céramique byzantine 196-198* failed to consider this difference in the study of Late Antique prototypes.

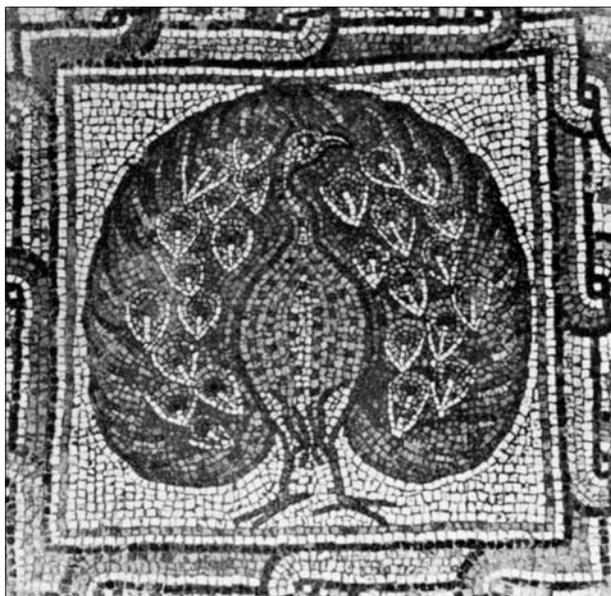
<sup>76</sup> Sodini, *Les paons*, traces the development of this imagery from the 1st century AD.

<sup>77</sup> Alföldi-Rosenbaum / Ward-Perkins, *Mosaic Pavements* 55 pl. 16, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Maguire, *Earth and Ocean* fig. 71.

<sup>79</sup> Coche de la Ferté, *Céramique byzantine* fig. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Vienna, *Nationalbibliothek cod. med. gr. 1. Fol. 1 v*; facsimile edition: Mazal, *Dioskurides*. – Gamillscheg, *Das Geschenk 192*, has challenged the view that the manuscript had originally been made for Anicia Juliana.



**Fig. 19** Nave pavement, probably 539-540. Panel G3, East Church (Qasr el-Lebia).

a like manner echo many elements of the Church of Hagios Polyeyktos, a major edifice of the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>85</sup>. It seems likely that the peacock depictions in Constantinople were part of these cultural resonations<sup>86</sup>. The fact that the Hagios Polyeyktos stood in the city's heart undoubtedly played an important role: according to the »Book of Ceremonies«, the emperor paused at the Hagios Polyeyktos during the procession between the Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Apostles<sup>87</sup>. The fact that the Hagios Polyeyktos was best known for the thirty peacocks, at least in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, is best illustrated by the *ekphrasis* of Paul the Silentiary, who described the apsidal niches on the eastern side of the Hagia Sophia with the following words: »To the east there open the triple spaces of circles cut in half, and above, upon the upright collar of the walls, springs up the fourth part of a sphere: even so, above his triple-crested head and back does a peacock raise his many eyed feathers. Men of the craft in their technical language call these crowning parts *conches*«<sup>88</sup>. C. L. Connor notes that the Church of Hagios Polyeyktos »with the [...] thirty peacock niches would immediately have been evoked in the listeners' imaginations at this mention of peacocks in connection with niches«<sup>89</sup>.

capital from the Hagios Polyeyktos. Interestingly enough, all three depictions known to me originate from Syria and date to the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earliest among them are the peacocks appearing on the mosaic adorning the eastern panel in the nave of the Church of the Holy Martyrs at Tayibal al-Imam (dist. Hama, SYR), which was completed in 447 according to an inscription<sup>81</sup>. The hexagonal silver censer adorned with three peacocks of the Sion Treasure is probably later, coming from the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>82</sup>. A comparable peacock was portrayed on a page (fol. 2 a) of the Rabbula Gospels, dated to 568, written undoubtedly after the completion of the Church of Hagios Polyeyktos<sup>83</sup>.

Irrespective of whether or not some or all of the peacocks in the Hagios Polyeyktos held something in their beak, in view of the cultural trends inspired by 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century prototypes, it is hardly surprising that the Lips Monastery<sup>84</sup> and buildings adorned in

<sup>81</sup> Zaquq / Piccirillo, *Mosaic Floor* 445 fig. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Boyd, »Metropolitan« *Treasure* 22 figs S18, 1-2.

<sup>83</sup> Cecchelli / Furlani / Salmi, *Rabbula Gospel* fol. 2 a.

<sup>84</sup> As early as 1957, A. Grabar argued that the heraldically posed peacocks and eagles, and the strong »Sassanian influence« reflected in the ornamental carvings of the Lips Monastery, could be interpreted as a cultural resonance drawing its inspiration from the Church of Hagios Polyeyktos: Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines* 1, 121. – Cf. also: Mango / Hawkins, *Additional Notes* 304. – Mundell Mango, *Polychrome Tiles* 20.

<sup>85</sup> Its role is discussed from various aspects by: Strube, *Polyeyktoskirche*. – Harrison, *Saraghane*. – Harrison, *Temple*. – Connor, *Epigram*. – Fowden, *Constantine*. – Bardill, *A New Temple*.

<sup>86</sup> A passage in the »Vita Basilii« contains a description of the bed-chamber in the Kainourgion Palace of the Great Palace built by

Basileios I: »In the very center of its pavement by means of the stonemason's art is represented the Persian bird, i.e., the peacock, all of gleaming tesserae, enclosed in an even circle of Carian stone, from which spokes of the same stone radiate towards a bigger circle« see *Vita Basilii* 89 – English translation in Mango, *Sources* 197. – It is unclear from the description whether the peacocks had been portrayed in the frontal view or in profile, although it seems likely that the concentric design of the floor called for frontally rendered peacocks. – For a comparison of the 9th-11th century descriptions of the floors of the Great Palace and the archaeological remains: Maguire, *Medieval Floors*.

<sup>87</sup> Vogt, *Le Livre des Cérémonies* 43-44.

<sup>88</sup> Mango, *Sources* 81.

<sup>89</sup> Connor, *Epigram* 515.



**Fig. 20** Necklace (detail) from the Preslav Treasure, earlier 10<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig. 21** Bracelet or »wrist cuff« (detail) from the Thessaloniki Treasure, 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century.

Even though little is known about the cultural resonations after the 6<sup>th</sup> century, one point clearly emerges, namely that peacocks with fanned out tail feathers shown in the frontal view, heraldic peacocks, as well as heraldic eagles, were not unusual in 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium. The tiles in the Louvre and the Walters Art Museum, the peacocks appearing in the Vat. Gr. 354 manuscript and the eagle on a carving of the Hagios Ioannis Mangoutis in Athens lead us to the next theme.

### The leaf or branch held in the beak

The above-mentioned birds all have a plant or some sort of textile-like article suspended from their beak. The heraldic peacocks of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries hold their head in one of the following two manners: the birds shown in the frontal view (Mount Athos; San Marco) have nothing in their beak (**fig. 14**) and some peacocks shown with the head turned sideways also have an empty beak (**figs 9-10; 13**). The 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century bird depictions on which a leaf or branch is held in the beak portray the bird in profile<sup>90</sup>, as on the cloisonné enamelled pendant of the necklace from the Preslav Treasure (**fig. 20**)<sup>91</sup>, the enamel of the bracelets or wrist cuffs from Thessalonica (**fig. 21**)<sup>92</sup>, the pair of unprovenanced, cloisonné crescentic earrings in the British Museum<sup>93</sup>, a polychrome tile of the Palace Monastery in Preslav (dist. Šumen, BG)<sup>94</sup>, the 10<sup>th</sup> century Patmos cod. 44 manuscript<sup>95</sup> and an early 12<sup>th</sup> century manuscript from Saint Catherine's Monastery at Sinai (**fig. 22, 1**)<sup>96</sup>. The same imagery recurs, albeit in a less carefully elaborated form owing to its medium, on one variant of rings with a widening bezel (although it would seem that these rings bore depictions of different bird species [**fig. 6, 3-4**]).<sup>97</sup> This depiction type has been documented in earlier

<sup>90</sup> I shall here focus exclusively on the attribute of the leaf or branch held in the beak, and neglect the species of the bird portrayed as a possible attribute.

<sup>91</sup> Totev, Preslav Treasure 42-43; 46-49 figs 9; 11; 13.

<sup>92</sup> Evans / Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium* cat. no. 165, with the earlier literature (S. T. Brooks).

<sup>93</sup> Buckton, *Byzantium* cat. no. 142 (D. Buckton).

<sup>94</sup> Tesori 162 cat. no. 55.2b (T. Totev).

<sup>95</sup> Patmos cod. 44 fol. 41 r. – Weitzmann, *Buchmalerei* 19 Abb. 135.

<sup>96</sup> Cod. Sin. 207. fol. 1r. – Weitzmann / Galavaris, *Greek Manuscripts* 116-119 esp. 118 colorplate XIX a.

<sup>97</sup> For its distribution in the Balkans: Grigorov, *Метални накити* 56-57 Obr. 64; 84 (Grigorov's Type III.6). – The pieces from the Carpathian Basin are listed by: Keszi, *Lemezgyűrűk* (Keszi's Type B). – For a slightly differing Anatolian specimen: *The Remnants* 127.



**Fig. 22** 1 Manuscript illumination in Cod. Sin. 207 fol. 1r (detail), 12<sup>th</sup> century. – 2 Painted wood box (detail), Italy, 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig. 23** Byzantine clay jug, 9<sup>th</sup> century, Grave 307/a, from Skalistoe.



**Fig. 24** Strap end, later 8<sup>th</sup> century, from Mikulčice.

periods of Byzantine art, for example on an Italian casket (fig. 22, 2)<sup>98</sup>, on a Byzantine import jug (fig. 23) dated to the earlier 9<sup>th</sup> century from the Skalistoe cemetery in the Crimea<sup>99</sup>, and on an 8<sup>th</sup> century buckle from the same cemetery<sup>100</sup>. The bird appears on a strap-end from Aleppo dating from the mid- or later 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>101</sup> and on a strap-end from Mikulčice in Moravia (dist. Hodonín, CZ) (fig. 24)<sup>102</sup>. It was known earlier too, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by the Byzantine-made clasps from Romanovskaja stanica (dist.

<sup>98</sup> Paludet, Ricognizione 33. – I would here like to thank M. Takács for calling my attention to this piece.

<sup>99</sup> Vejrnar / Ajbabin, Скалистинский 64 Рис. 44.1 (Grave 307a). – A colour photo has been published by: Chochorowski, Koszowniczy Ukrainy fig. 71 (although erroneously associated with the Verhnij Saltov site).

<sup>100</sup> Vejrnar / Ajbabin, Скалистинский 21 Рис. 9.32 (Grave 149); 141 Рис. 104.11 (Grave 641).

<sup>101</sup> Daim, Gürtelgarnituren 110-111 Abb. 30a-b.

<sup>102</sup> For a good colour photo see: Dekan, Moravia Magna fig. 110. – For the Byzantine origins of this strap-end: Daim, Gürtelgarnituren 122-124.



**Fig. 25** Byzantine clasp pair, 7<sup>th</sup> century, from Romanovskaja stanica.

Rostov) in the Ukraine (**fig. 25**)<sup>103</sup> and a buckle from Carthage<sup>104</sup>. However, most of the pieces quoted above do not depict an eagle or a peacock. One striking feature of these early pieces, dating mainly from a period before the later 9<sup>th</sup> century, is the »beribboned neck« of the bird figures, a trait that might bring us closer to the cultural origins of the motif. While the motif itself can be ultimately derived from Sassanian art, a point noted in most art studies, its distribution from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onward was much wider. Drawn from the Sassanian tradition, it became popular both in Islamic art and in the art of Byzantium and Western Europe<sup>105</sup>. It would nonetheless be a mistake to regard this as a Sassanian motif after the 7<sup>th</sup> century since an adoption would hardly have been possible from a source that no longer existed. Although birds holding a leafy branch in their beak appear in Sassanian art, albeit not too often, the depictions known to me lack the beribboned neck. The birds depicted with a leaf or branch in their beak portrayed on Sassanian textiles (**fig. 26**)<sup>106</sup> and metalwork (**fig. 27**)<sup>107</sup>, as well as on gems<sup>108</sup>, do not confirm the suspicion raised by the beribboned neck motif. This assumption is all the less likely because the birds holding a plant in their beak are often enclosed in a medallion in Byzantine art, and while they are not necessarily derived from them,

<sup>103</sup> A colour photo has been published by: Khan Kubrat fig. 108. – For a discussion of the assemblage from Romanovskaja stanica in a European language cf.: Bálint, *Steppe* 60-61 (with the earlier literature). – The clasps were recently published in a catalogue of Byzantine art: Zasetskaya, *Clasp*.

<sup>104</sup> Eger, *Boucles de ceinture* 13 fig. 7 it is apparent from the photo that the leaf or bough is held in the beak. – I would here like to thank Ch. Eger for kindly sending a copy of his study.

<sup>105</sup> The evidence for the distribution of the motif can be found in: Bromberg, *Sassanian Stucco*.

<sup>106</sup> Munster Treasury (Aachen): Muthesius, *Silk Weaving* fig. 34 A. – Vatican: Falke, *Seidenweberei* 1 Abb. 99. – Although the two silks are described as »Sassanian« here, any cultural attribution must take into account the fact that both came to light outside the one-time Sassanian Empire. In the light of its technical traits, the silk in Aachen has been assigned to the Antinoë Silks. – The Antinoë Silks were first claimed to be original Sassanian pieces: Schrenk, *Antinoopolis* 23, with the earlier literature. The Sassanian attribution has been more recently challenged by A. Muthesius, who pointed out that no silks are known from the territory of the one-time Sassanian Empire, and far too little is known about the products of the 5th-7th century silk workshops of Egypt and Syria to be able to reject the possibility that the silks in question had been manufactured there: Muthesius, *Silk Weaving* 81-82. – Although tentatively identifying the silks as Sassanian pieces, S. Schrenk emphasised that: »the textiles mentioned [the so-called Antinoë silks] are

closely related to Sasanian art. Through them we get a clearer idea about Sasanian production of work of art, especially textile production. But whether this idea is conveyed directly from Sasanian artists or indirectly from local Egyptian artists influenced by the Sasanians is still not possible to determine« Schrenk, *Antinoopolis* 33. The Vatican silk, echoing Sassanian models, dates from an age after the fall of the Sassanian Empire. It was probably made in a Muslim workshop. Schrenk's contention that »through [it] we get a clearer idea about Sasanian production of works of art« seems valid in this case too. The radiocarbon dates for some of the silks regarded as Sassanian pieces have confirmed that they were manufactured in the post-Sassanian period, cf.: Verhecken-Lammens / de Moor / Overleat, *Silk Road Samits*.

<sup>107</sup> Trever / Lukonin, *Сасанидское серебро* 115 Tab. 79. – The debate over the date of the bowl echoing Sassanian metalworking traditions is far from over. However, even the earliest possible date in the 7th century proposed for it does not predate the final period of the Sassanian Empire: Splendeur 218-219 cat. no. 70 (B. I. Maršak). – Trever and Lukonin consider a date in the early Muslim period as more likely: Trever / Lukonin, *Сасанидское серебро*.

<sup>108</sup> E.g.: Bivar, *Seals* HF 2. – It is impossible to tell from the published illustrations whether some of the birds hold a leaf or some sort of textile in their beak (the latter was a fairly common motif in Sassanian art, cf.: Bivar, *Seals* HF 8).



**Fig. 26** »Sassanian« silk. Cathedral Treasury (Aachen).



**Fig. 27** Sassanian silver plate (detail), 7<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century, from Pečnigort (dist. Kudymkarskij, Komi-Permjackij Avtonomnyj Okrug, RUS).

the imagery itself no doubt evoked the pecking birds of inhabited scrolls to the contemporary audience<sup>109</sup>. This variant of the inhabited scroll motif became popular with the spread of Christianity since it readily lent itself to a Christian interpretation and it remained popular for a long time. Similarly to earlier and later variants of inhabited scrolls, the bird in the upper medallion of the strap-end from Aleppo feeds on the leaves entwining the medallion, while the leaf held in the beak on the lower medallion dangles more freely. The leaves held by the two bird figures on the Mikulčice strap-end are joined to the medallion with a barely visible line (fig. 24). On some pieces, such as the buckle from Sardinia, the association between the vegetal motif and the frame is so emphatic that it cannot be categorically assigned to this depiction type<sup>110</sup>. In contrast, the plant hangs quite freely from the beak of most birds enclosed in a medallion; comparable depictions of birds holding a leaf or branch set amidst inhabited scrolls are quite frequent on 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century northern and central Italian carvings<sup>111</sup> (fig. 28) and appear also in the illuminated manuscript from the Patmos Monastery (GR). This imagery, even if once related to the inhabited scrolls, often appears inde-

<sup>109</sup> A similar point was made by C. Hicks for the birds with a plant in their beak appearing in Anglo-Saxon art: Hicks, *Animals* 129.

<sup>110</sup> Daim, *Gürtelgarnituren* Abb. 35.

<sup>111</sup> E.g.: Abbey church (Castel S. Elia, prov. Viterbo): Raspi Serra, *Lazio* 150-151 Tav. CXXVI – S. Lorenzo (Rome): Broccoli, *Roma* 151 Tav. LXI, 188. – Sant'Antimo (Montalcino, prov. Siena, I): Fatucchi, *Arezzo* 155 Tav. XCI, 141. – SS. Bonifacio e Alessio

(Rome): Trinci Ceccelli, *Roma* 70-71 Tav. X, 19. – S. Saba (Rome): Trinci Ceccelli, *Roma* 153-154 Tav. LI, 132-133; 233-234 Tav. LXXXIX, 266. – Set in a rectangular frame: S. Saba: Trinci Ceccelli, *Roma* 126-127 Tav. XXXV, 91-92; 147-148 Tav. XLVIII, 121. – S. Maria Assunta Basilica: Tagliaferri, *Aquileia e Grado* 226-227 Tav. C. 339. – Museo Paleocristiano di Aquileia: Tagliaferri, *Aquileia e Grado* 182-183 Tav. LXVIII, 274.



**Fig. 28** Inhabited scroll with birds (detail), 9<sup>th</sup> century. Church of San Saba (Rome).



**Fig. 29** East Frame, North-East Chapel, East Church (Qasr el-Lebia). Probably 539-540.

pendently, as on the mosaic floor of the North-East Chapel of the East Church in Qasr el-Lebia (**fig. 29**)<sup>112</sup>, the Coptic sarcophagus in the collection of Heidelberg University<sup>113</sup>, on the clasp pair from Romanovskaja stanica dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the 8<sup>th</sup> century silk of the Keir Collection in London<sup>114</sup>, the greater part of the cloisonné enamelled ornaments of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and on 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine and Islamic glazed and sgraffito ceramics (**figs 30-31**)<sup>115</sup>. Examples from Italy include a choir screen from Pomposa (prov. Ferrara) (**fig. 32, 1**)<sup>116</sup>, the fragment of a chancel panel<sup>117</sup> and a marble slab<sup>118</sup> from Sorrento (prov. Naples), as well as the choir screen of the Church of San Asperno in Naples (**fig. 32, 2**)<sup>119</sup>; various similar pieces can also be quoted from Western Europe<sup>120</sup>. An amulet found at Moščevaja Balka (dist. Urupskij, Karačaevo-Čerkesskaja, RUS)<sup>121</sup> and a saddle mount dated to the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries from Zmejskaja stanica (dist. Kirovskij, Severnaja Osetija, RUS) in the Caucasus<sup>122</sup> indicate that the depiction was known east of Byzantium too.

The amulet from Moščevaja Balka<sup>123</sup>, reaching the Caucasus from the Islamic world, clearly shows that the image of peacocks or birds with a leaf or bough in their beak was not restricted to the period's Christian

<sup>112</sup> Alföldi-Rosenbaum / Ward-Perkins, *Mosaic Pavements* 137 pl. 62, 1-2.

<sup>113</sup> With a ribbon in the peacock's beak: *L'art Copte* cat. no. 100 (C. Nauerth).

<sup>114</sup> Buckton, *Byzantium* cat. no. 138 (H. Granger-Taylor).

<sup>115</sup> Atil, *Freer Gallery* cat. no. 4, 6 (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century pieces). – Zick-Nissen, *Keramischalen* Taf. 47.1 (10<sup>th</sup> century). – *Schätze der Kalifen* Kat. Nr. 147, 151 (11<sup>th</sup> century pieces). – Evans / Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium* cat. no. 187 (E. D. Maguire). – *The Remnants* 98. – Böhlendorf-Arslan, *Glasierte byzantinische Keramik* Taf. 70, 128; 96, 327-328 (dated to the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century). – Sanders, *Recent developments* fig. 23, 2. 9.

<sup>116</sup> Francesco, *Pomposa* 68 Abb. 50. – I would here like to thank M. Takács for calling my attention to this piece.

<sup>117</sup> Vikan, *Catalogue* cat. no. 35 fig. 35, 3.

<sup>118</sup> Museo Corraale (Sorrento). – Volbach, *Oriental Influences* fig. 5.

<sup>119</sup> Volbach, *Oriental Influences* fig. 6.

<sup>120</sup> Hicks, *Animals* fig. 3, 10. – I would here like to thank P. Langó for calling my attention to this carving.

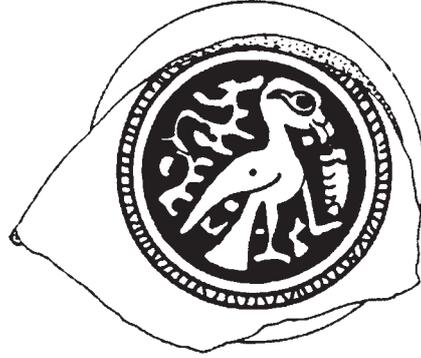
<sup>121</sup> Ierusalimskaja, Moščevaja Balka 85; 126-127 Kat. V.26 Abb. 109, 9.

<sup>122</sup> Попов, *Аланский Всадник* cat. no. 136, 62.

<sup>123</sup> The object reaching the Caucasus as an import and secondarily reused as an amulet bears a Kufic inscription on one side: »Dreimal wiederholen sich die Worte »Allahs Macht: [...] die unterste Zeile besagt »Ich begnüge mich mit Allah«, and a »sasanidische glückverheißende Symbol eines Pfauen mit Halsband, der im Schnabel ein als Pflanzesproßling gestaltetes Pativ trägt« on the other: Ierusalimskaja, Moščevaja Balka 127. – There is no indication of a ribbon around the neck (Halsband) on the published illustration, and there is nothing to justify its identification as a purely Sassanian image.



**Fig. 30** ᵀAbbasid lustre painted jar, 10<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig. 31** Aegean ware, 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century. Unprovenanced.

art. It appears on the jug made for Prince Abū Maṣṣūr al-Amīr Bakhtiyār Būyid (r. 967-978) (**fig. 33**)<sup>124</sup>; the two jugs found in the Perm region, probably made in Iran (perhaps in Chorasān<sup>125</sup>) indicate that this motif enjoyed great popularity both in the eastern<sup>126</sup> and western Islamic world, where its use can be traced as far as Spain, as shown by the pyxis of Sayf al-Dawla (1004-1008)<sup>127</sup>. Made for ᵀAbd al-Malik, on whom the title Sayf al-Dawla («Sword of the State») was conferred in 1004, the pyxis probably came into the possession of Count Don Mendo Gonçalo as a diplomatic gift. The peacocks holding a leaf in their beak depicted on the pyxis and the birds pecking at the inhabited scrolls on the patena ordered by Don Mendo<sup>128</sup> shed light on the remarkable cultural interchange reflected by the decorative objects made in a Christian and Muslim context<sup>129</sup> and undoubtedly contributed to the diffusion of similar images<sup>130</sup>.

The examples presented above are just a few of many and they indicate that, irrespective of the cultural context, the image of a bird holding a leaf or branch in its beak enjoyed widespread popularity in the Mediterranean and adjacent regions during the Early Middle Ages. The uniqueness of the eagle appearing on the Athenian carving and the peacocks on the three Byzantine polychrome tiles lies in their heraldic pose and the halo around the head of the peacocks. The former is hardly an unusual element in Byzantine art, while the latter was less common and can be regarded as a trait more specific to Sassanian art and, later,

<sup>124</sup> Lowry, *Gold Jug* 1-3. – E. Kühnel attempted a closer dating of the vessel: Kühnel, *Kunst Persiens* 84. – But his conclusions were rejected by G. Lowry: *Gold Jug* 106 n. 5.

<sup>125</sup> Marschak, *Silberschätze* 102-104.

<sup>126</sup> Smirnov, *Восточное серебро* Tab. LXXI-LXXII. – Marschak, *Silberschätze* Taf. 126-127. – For a colour photograph cf.: Ettinghausen / Grabar / Jenkins-Madina, *Art and Architecture* figs 196-197.

<sup>127</sup> *Al-Andalus* 202 cat. no. 5 (R. Holod). – *Medieval Spain* 148-149 cat. no. 73 (B. Drake Boehm / Ch. T. Little).

<sup>128</sup> Cf.: *Medieval Spain* 148-149 cat. no. 73.

<sup>129</sup> Cf.: Prado-Vilar, *Circular Visions* 33-35.

<sup>130</sup> Most of the ivory carvings made in the Cordoba workshop reached the Christian world as booty. They were predominantly used as reliquaries, while the imagery on them was set into a Christian cultural context and interpreted accordingly, cf.: Harris, *Leire Casket*.



**Fig. 32** 1 Choir screen (detail), 10<sup>th</sup> century. Abazzia Pomposa. – 2 Choir screen (detail), 10<sup>th</sup> century. Church of San Asperno (Naples).

to the Islamic art inspired by it. Although it must in all fairness be noted that there is a halo around the peacock's head on the Beromünster silk produced in Byzantium. What was the meaning conveyed by the peacock or bird holding a leaf or branch in its beak to the contemporary craftsmen/audiences/users? In his discussion of Islamic imagery, O. Grabar suggested that in all likelihood »[...] it belongs to the category of themes that illustrate royal wealth (birds as inhabitants of princely gardens and with many wondrous properties like carrying precious objects) or else that are supposed to suggest paradise«<sup>130a</sup>. While it is certainly possible that some of the Byzantine and/or Italian depictions were motivated by similar beliefs, the very fact that these creatures retained their appeal for a long time, appearing on a variety of materials (metalwork, silks, carvings, polychrome tiles, illuminated manuscripts) and in the most diverse contexts (tiles adorning the templon<sup>131</sup>, carved stone ornaments enhancing churches, luxurious silks and the artefacts of everyday life, such as belt ornaments and costume accessories) suggests that it would be a mistake to assume that a single specific meaning was attached to these birds. This also holds true for peacock depictions, which were most often regarded as symbols of immortality and eternal life in the Early Christian period. The Church Fathers often described peacocks as »a supreme ornament of God's handiwork«<sup>132</sup>. The text of Canon 82 passed at the Trullo (Quinisext) Council<sup>133</sup> clearly shows that, as a result of the gradual cultural changes preceding the



**Fig. 33** Gold jug inscribed for Abū Maṣṣūr al-Amīr Bakhtiyār (detail), later 10<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>130a</sup> Grabar, *Mediation* 242 n. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Gerstel, *Ceramic Icons* 56-57 presents similar arguments in her discussion of the tiles bearing peacock depictions. – Cf. also: Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines* 1, 106 on the peacock carvings in the Lips Monastery.

<sup>132</sup> *DAcL* 13/1, 1075-1097. – Maguire, *Earth and Ocean* 39-40.

<sup>133</sup> Mango, *Sources* 139-140. – For a modern edition of the Acts of the Quinisext Council cf.: Nedungatt / Featherstone, *Council in Trullo*. – For Canon 82 cf.: Nedungatt / Featherstone, *Council in Trullo* 162-164.



**Fig. 34** Braid ornament, earlier 10<sup>th</sup> century, from Ibrány-Esbóhalom.



**Fig. 35** Braid ornament, earlier 10<sup>th</sup> century, from Karos, Grave II/47.

Iconoclasm and the debates conducted during this period, the employment of various animals as religious symbols and their symbolic interpretation gradually faded from Byzantine art<sup>134</sup>, and thus an interpretation of the peacocks on the polychrome tiles of the Middle Byzantine period along these lines seems unlikely<sup>135</sup>. Still, the presence of this imagery on a templon screen may have carried a connotation of Paradise.

### The topknot-like ornament on the top of the head

Irrespective of whether the distinctive features of the central bird figure on the Rakamaz disc are regarded as being specific to vultures, heraldic eagles or even peacocks, the emphatic topknot-like ornament seems to be at odds with this imagery. What seems certain is that a topknot of this kind would be most unusual for an eagle depiction. Obviously, one cannot exclude the possibility that this motif is a reflection of a characteristic trait of Conquest period animal depictions, namely the dissolution of animal figures into foliate patterns. However, one significant feature distinguishes the animal figures on comparable discs (Karos, Cemetery II, Grave 47<sup>136</sup> [com. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, H.]; Ibrány-Esbóhalom, Grave 197a<sup>137</sup> [com. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, H.]; Aldebrő-Mocsáros, Grave 20<sup>138</sup> [com. Heves, H.]) from the winged creature on the Rakamaz disc: the dissolution affects the entire animal figure. In addition to the foliate element unfurling from the head, the tail and the feet too dissolve into foliage (Ibrány: **fig. 34**) and, in some cases, the entire head is transformed into a foliate pattern, as on the Karos disc (**fig. 35**). In contrast, the bird on

<sup>134</sup> Maguire / Maguire, *Other Icons* 58-96. – The contention that »in the Middle Ages the Byzantines lost much of their ability to view images of animal combat as signs or as symbols of Christian concept« (Maguire / Maguire, *Other Icons* 58) seems valid for the interpretation of animal imagery other than animal combat scenes too.

<sup>135</sup> Anderson, *Tiles*, Books 138 n. 8 rejected the interpretation that the peacocks symbolised eternal life in this case.

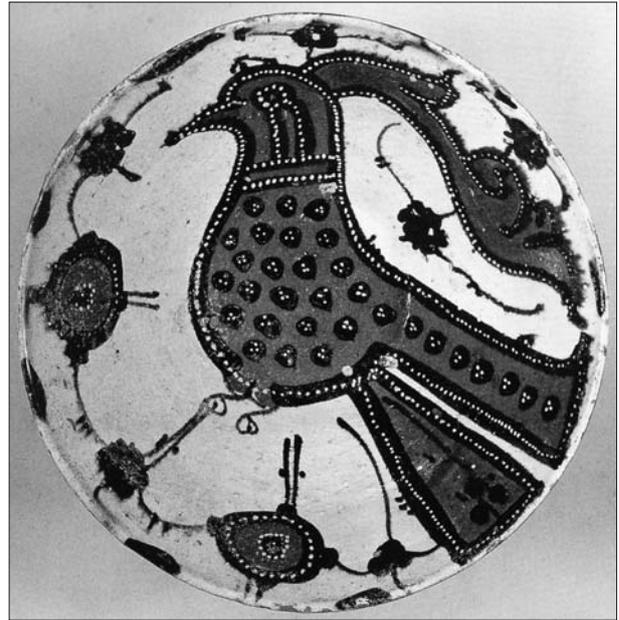
<sup>136</sup> For a colour photo cf.: *Ancient Hungarians* 93 (L. Révész). – For a description of the disc and the burial cf.: Révész, *Karosi* 24-25 pls 62-67.

<sup>137</sup> *Ancient Hungarians* 148-149 (E. Istvánovits). – For a discussion of the disc and the grave, cf.: Istvánovits, *Rétköz* 97-99 pls 93-96.

<sup>138</sup> *Ancient Hungarians* 379; 382-383 (L. Révész).



**Fig. 36** Duck image, Gallone Sacramentary, 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century. Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris) Lat. 12048. Fol 99v.



**Fig. 37** Unglazed slip-painted bowl.

the Rakamaz disc is rendered in a strikingly naturalistic form compared to the other beasts appearing in Conquest period art, and the single element hinting at any dissolution is the topknot. Three possibilities can be considered in this respect:

1) Opting for an explanation of a dissolution into foliage, the feathers atop the peacock's head might be considered. Although a typical feature of peacock depictions, it would be out of place in the case of a bird resembling the one on the Rakamaz discs (figs 14; 28). It would only make sense if the goldsmith making the disc was inspired by a peacock holding a leaf or branch in its beak and wanted to preserve as many details as possible of the original, in spite of replacing the peacock with a vulture-like bird. In this case, we might assume that, by preserving several elements of this imagery (such as the heraldic pose and the leaf in the beak), the craftsman went against the wishes of his patron: the allusion to the peacock was intended to convey some meaning that would be perceptible to one who was capable of recognising the original imagery and its original meaning even though the original bird figure had been replaced with another.

2) We cannot exclude the possibility suggested by some corrupted depictions (figs 29; 36)<sup>139</sup> that the beribboned neck motif had lost its meaning and that the topknot represents the remnant of this motif or its dissolution into a foliate motif. Although this (corrupted) variant was fairly common, birds with a beribboned neck were, to the best of my knowledge, always shown in profile. Seeing that the head of the Rakamaz birds is rendered in profile, this possibility cannot be rejected.

3) Some of the bird images in Sassanian, Byzantine and Islamic art have a similar foliate element unfurling from the bird head (figs 22; 27; 37)<sup>140</sup>. Thus the topknot motif may have appeared in a roughly similar form on the prototype. In most cases, it can no longer be established whether the topknot was all that

<sup>139</sup> On an illuminated manuscript (Gallone Sacramentary): Baldwin, *Sassanian Ducks* fig. 1. – On a fresco (Pandjikent): Marshak, *Zandaniji Silks* fig. 30-31. – On glazed pottery: Atil, *Freer Gallery* cat. no. 4.

<sup>140</sup> Sassanian: Trever / Lukonin, *Сасанидское серебро* Tab. 79. – Islamic: Ettinghausen / Grabar / Jenkins-Madina, *Art and Architecture* fig. 192. – Byzantine: Weitzmann / Galavaris, *Greek Manuscripts Colorplate* XIXa.



**Fig. 38** Islamic ceramic aquamanile, 12<sup>th</sup> century.

remained of the section extending behind the head of the branch held in the beak, as suggested by the Sassanian ducks. An Islamic aquamanile from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 38) has a similar motif, but it is uncertain whether the leafy branch behind the head was originally intended to be held in the beak<sup>141</sup>. A similar feature can be noted on Disc 2 from Rakamaz.

### The creatures held in the talons

The ornithologist examining the Rakamaz discs suggested that the two smaller birds held in the talons were probably the offspring of the large, central bird figure of the composition<sup>142</sup>. While sound arguments were presented in favour of regarding them as offspring (small size, downy feathers), none were put forward as to why they should be seen as the offspring of the central bird. Even accepting this explanation, a closer look at the depictions in which the central, heraldically posed bird figure grasps some other creatures with its claws would be instructive before interpreting the composition as a whole.

In contrast to the leaf or branch held in the beak, the number of visual parallels to this element is considerably more limited. Unlike on the Rakamaz discs, most of the comparable depictions have the bird grasping quadrupeds; these can, in a sense, be regarded as a variant of animal combat scenes. Most of the images in this category can be linked to a well-circumscribed group. They first appeared more or less synchronously in eastern and western Islamic regions. An oriental silk from the 10<sup>th</sup> century shows a creature with a rooster head and an eagle-like body grasping quadrupeds in its claws (identified as griffons by D. G. Shepherd) (fig. 39, 1). A human figure stands in front of the bird, but the human is definitely not held by the bird<sup>143</sup>. The silk was manufactured in Rayy (IR) during the Būyid period (945-1055)<sup>144</sup>. The next occurrence of this imagery on silk is documented in the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century in Spain, on the western confines of the Islamic world (fig. 39, 2). While the silks from Spain lack the human figure of the Būyid textiles, the double-headed birds, visibly eagles, also hold quadrupeds in their talons (Quedlingburg, Lyon, Toledo, etc.)<sup>145</sup>. In addition to Spain, the depiction appears on textiles and frescoes in Sicily during the 12<sup>th</sup> century (with a single-

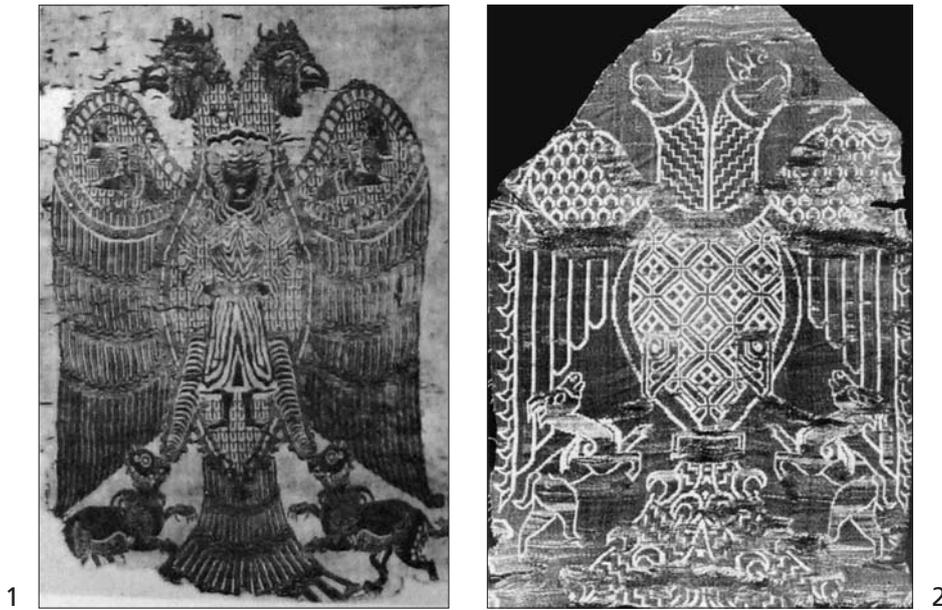
<sup>141</sup> Mekhitarian, *Arts de l'Islam* 36-37 figs 13-14. – That this depiction was not merely a late phenomenon is illustrated by a 6th/7th century Byzantine carving from Egypt: *Ägypten* 109 Kat. 54 (A. Effenberger).

<sup>142</sup> Cf. note 19.

<sup>143</sup> Kühnel, *Kunst Persiens* 85; 89-90 interpreted the image as an Iranian variant of the myth of Ganymedes, suggesting that depictions with a human figure on which the birds grasp quadrupeds in their talons were based on a misconception of the myth.

<sup>144</sup> Shepherd, *Three Textiles* 65-66 fig. 2. – Kühnel, *Kunst Persiens* 89-90 Abb. 24. – Owing to the poor quality of the photo, it is uncertain whether the single-headed bird grasps the two quadrupeds in its talons on a similar piece in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Washington DC): Kühnel, *Kunst Persiens* 89-90 Abb. 25.

<sup>145</sup> For a discussion of the probably Hispanic silks in this group cf.: May, *Silk Textiles* 39-51.



**Fig. 39** 1 Būyid silk (detail), 10<sup>th</sup> century. – 2 Hispanic silk, 12<sup>th</sup> century.

headed bird figure). However, the provenance of the silk known as Charlemagne's Mantle in Metz<sup>146</sup> and the cultural background of the painters of the frescoes in the Capella Palatina (Palermo) is still subject to controversy<sup>147</sup>.

Returning to the pieces from Spain, it must be noted that while there is no evidence that this imagery appeared on silks predating the 11<sup>th</sup> century, it does appear in another art genre of the Iberian Peninsula. Eagles grasping quadrupeds in their talons were carved on the marble trough dating from 997-998 in Madīnat al-Zahrā' (prov. Córdoba, E), made for al-Manṣūr who wielded genuine power during the reign of Ḥiṣām II between 976 and 1002. A similar depiction adorns the marble trough of 'Abd al-Malik, al-Manṣūr's son, now in Marrakesh, but originally made in Spain around 1002-1007<sup>148</sup>. The two troughs furnish ample proof that this imagery was known in 10<sup>th</sup> century Spain (fig. 40). However, little is known about its origins. Shepherd suggested that this imagery was created by the heraldic doubling of the generally known animal combat scenes<sup>149</sup>, while Kühnel derived it from the art of the Ancient Near East (although a series of finds confirming the process leading to its appearance in Islamic art was not presented)<sup>150</sup>. The Būyid silk

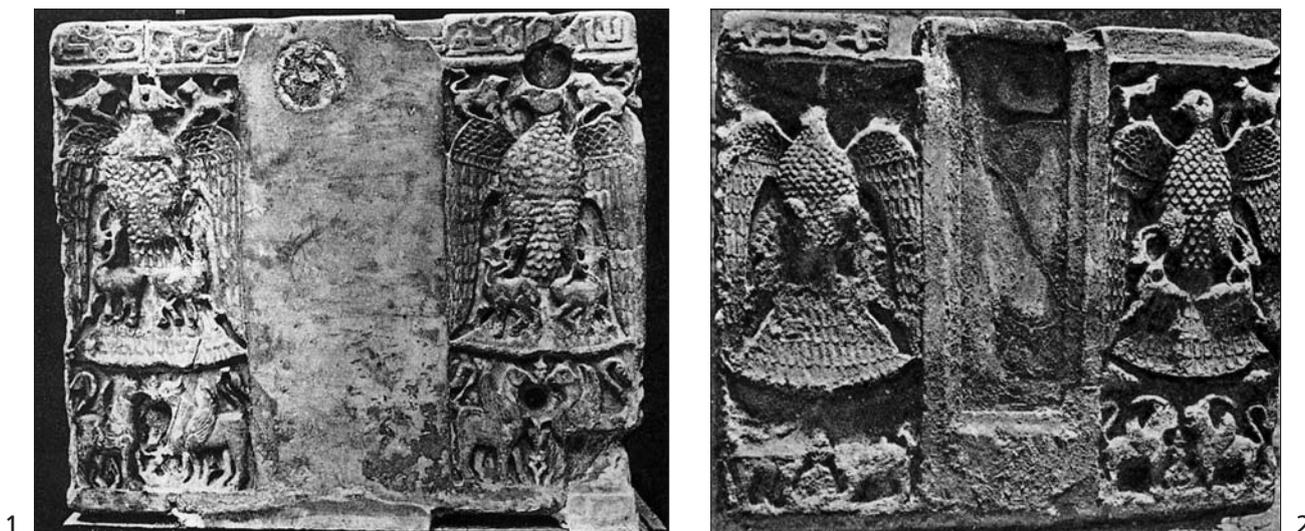
<sup>146</sup> Staufer Abb. 566. – Dating the mantle to the 12th/13th century, R. Grönwoldt argued that the mantle was made in a Sicilian workshop under strong Byzantine influence: Grönwoldt, *Kaisergewänder* 616-617. Her identification of the creatures held in the eagle's talons as snakes (of which only the heads can be made out) is controversial in view of the animal heads on Hispanic silks. A. Muthesius has correctly noted that only one single silk known to have been made in Sicily is currently known, despite the fact that there is ample documentary evidence on the activity of silk workshops in Sicily: Muthesius, *Silk Weaving* 115-116. The Hispanic origin of the silk from Metz was also challenged by Grönwoldt. For the lively trade between Islamic Spain and Sicily from the late 10th century at the latest, cf.: May, *Silk Textiles* 17. – For the current state of research of Charlemagne's Mantle cf.: Bauer, *Zur Geschichte* 89-90.

<sup>147</sup> Grönwoldt, *Miszellen* Abb. 252. – See also: Knipp, *Image, Presence*, for a discussion of the cultural background of the frescoes in the Capella Palatina and the Syrian connections of the painters making them.

<sup>148</sup> Falke, *Seidenweberei* 1, 116 Abb. 182. – Baer, *Islamic Ornament* 112. – *Les Andalousies* cat. no. 133 (M. Bernus-Taylor). – J. Zozaya: *Al-Andalus* cat. no. 43 (the latter two showing 'Abd al-Malik's sarcophagus). – The motif also appears on another sarcophagus from Granada, dated to the early 14th century, cf.: Falke, *Seidenweberei* 1, 116 Abb. 183. For a recent discussion of the two pieces from the 10th/11th century cf.: Baer, *Islamic Ornament* 110-118.

<sup>149</sup> Shepherd, *Three Textiles* 68.

<sup>150</sup> Kühnel, *Antike und Orient* 179.



**Fig. 40** 1 Marble trough of al-Manšūr, 997-998. Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid). – 2 Marble trough of ‘Abd al-Malik, 1002-1007 (Madrasat ibn Yūsuf) from Marrakech.

certainly proves that this imagery was not restricted to Spain, even if little is known about its actual distribution. We know that silks from Baghdad were copied in the silk workshops of Spain<sup>151</sup> and that silks made in Spain reached easterly regions<sup>152</sup>.

The active Byzantine role in the export of Hispanic silks across Europe<sup>153</sup> and the good political relations (and strong cultural contacts) between the Umayyads of Spain and Byzantium in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries raises the question of the mutual influence exerted by the silk products produced by these workshops. In her discussion of the silk from the coffin of Saint Barnard Calvo, Florence L. May noted that the rendering of the eagle on the Spanish silk bears a striking resemblance to the ones on the Eagle Silks of Byzantium, which suggested to her that the image of the single-headed eagle grasping quadrupeds in its claws may have been part of the visual repertoire of Byzantine workshops<sup>154</sup>. Although there is no positive evidence in support of this assumption, it cannot be rejected out of hand<sup>155</sup> since the few known pieces represent but a minuscule portion of the once numerous Eagle Silks (cf. the quoted passage from the »Book of Ceremonies«)<sup>156</sup>. During the course of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Byzantine silks were included in the gifts sent both to

<sup>151</sup> Day, *The Inscription*. – May, *Silk Textiles* 22; 24; 36.

<sup>152</sup> May, *Silk Textiles* 5.

<sup>153</sup> May, *Silk Textiles* 22.

<sup>154</sup> May, *Silk Textiles* 49.

<sup>155</sup> In contrast, A. Cutler argued that »Most eagles on Muslim textiles have nothing to do with Byzantium, being either double-headed (and dating from a period before the bicephalous motif entered medieval Greek art) and/or shown holding a human being in their claws, a type ultimately dependent on Sasanian images of divinity« Cutler, *Eagle Silks* 70-71.

<sup>156</sup> The silk from the coffin of Saint Barnard Calvó, whose fragments are dispersed in Berlin, Paris and Vichy, is noteworthy for two reasons. The first is chronological: the rendering of the eagle holding an earring in its beak is virtually identical with those on the Byzantine Eagle Silks dated to around 1000, suggesting that there must have been some link between them. At the same time, the portrayal of the eagle as a double-headed

creature harmonises with the proposed date of its manufacture in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century. The 150-200 years between the two were in all likelihood »filled« with silks, which have not survived: Byzantine Eagle Silks may have been manufactured well after 1000, while pieces resembling the Hispanic silk may have been produced before 12<sup>th</sup> century (assuming that the silk in question is not a late copy of a Byzantine piece, a unique »Altstück«). The second is iconographic: while adhering to the minute details of the original piece, the Hispanic silk added its own »innovation« by doubling the bird head (together with the earring held in the beak). It seems to me that this silk confirms the suggestion that the double-headed eagles grasping quadrupeds in their claws appearing on Hispanic silks can be derived from the single-headed eagles holding quadrupeds in their talons, depicted also on 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century carvings. For the silk from the coffin of Saint Barnard Calvó cf.: Falke, *Seidenweberei* 2, 17 Abb. 249.

the most important diplomatic partners, such as the ʿAbbāsīd Caliph of Baghdad<sup>157</sup>, and less prominent figures, such as Hugo of Provence, King of Italy<sup>158</sup>.

Obviously, the most intriguing question is whether objects bearing one or a combination of the above four attributes had reached or could have reached the Carpathian Basin in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In view of the artefact types described in the above, the answer is probably in the affirmative: the ancient Hungarians could easily have acquired textiles and jewellery bearing various depictions through trade, as part of the tribute paid to them, or simply as booty. Suffice it here to quote silks bearing images of heraldically posed eagles and peacocks, and jewellery decorated with birds holding a leaf or branch in their beak. The seemingly most problematic is the case of the bird figure grasping some creature in its talons. Let us first explore the question of whether silks of this type could have reached the ancient Hungarians in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Any answer is conjectural at best. While, in view of the 10<sup>th</sup> century carvings, it is quite certain that one variant of this imagery with a single-headed eagle had existed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (and in my view, this was the original form, from which the image appearing on silks had developed after the spread of depictions with double-headed eagles), and the Būyīd silk certainly suggests that eagles of this type were also portrayed on textiles, there is no extant depiction confirming this assumption. The silks of this type possibly known to the ancient Hungarians may have reached them from both the Near East and Spain. A recent study on the silk finds known from the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century burials of the Carpathian Basin (twenty-six fragments from nineteen graves) based on the technical analysis of the tiny fragments and the information contained in the written sources found that most of the silks reaching this region in the 10<sup>th</sup> century arrived through Byzantium and were probably Byzantine products<sup>159</sup>. However, the possibility that some silks perhaps originated from the Islamic world (including Spain<sup>160</sup>) cannot be excluded<sup>161</sup>. This possibility is hypothetically borne out by the difficulties in distinguishing between silks produced in Islamic and Byzantine workshops<sup>162</sup> (it is often virtually impossible to draw any distinction between them<sup>163</sup>), and by the passages in the »Book of the Eparch« describing the import of silks from Syria to Constantinople<sup>164</sup>, whence they reached Bulgaria<sup>165</sup>. Even though the information contained in the written sources and the archaeological record complement each other, it is not possible to state anything with certainty owing to the complete or almost complete destruction of certain segments of the one-time material culture (predominantly artefacts that had either never been deposited in burials or had been destroyed due to the soil conditions), and we are thus forced to rely on circumstantial evidence and conjectures. The same holds true for Spanish silks. While there is nothing to suggest that any one of the twenty-six silk fragments known from the Carpathian Basin

<sup>157</sup> Book of Gifts and Rarities §73, 99-101.

<sup>158</sup> For the English translation of the passage in the »Book of Ceremonies« describing the gifts sent to Hugo of Provence cf.: Haldon, *Theory and Practice* 214. – The Eagle Silks sent to the ʿAbbāsīd Caliph have been discussed by: Cutler, *Eagle Silks* 71-72. – While the other gifts have been treated by M. M. Mango: Mundell Mango, *Hierarchies* 367-372. For the position of the ʿAbbāsīd Caliph and Hugo of Provence in the diplomatic hierarchy as reflected by the gifts sent, see: Mundell Mango, *Hierarchies* 367-372.

<sup>159</sup> Bollók et al., *Textile Remnants*. – Since the publication of that study, new silk fragments have become known from Grave 14 of the cemetery at Kenézlő-Fazekaszug (com. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, H.), which will be published shortly.

<sup>160</sup> None of the small silk fragments from the Carpathian Basin fit the criteria elaborated by D. Shepherd for the identification of silks manufactured in Spain: Shepherd, *Cooper Union*. – Shepherd, *A Thirteenth-Century*. – Shepherd, *A Twelfth-Century*. –

Shepherd, *Another Silk*. – Shepherd, *Diasper Weave*. – Shepherd, *A Dated Hispano-Islamic Silk*. – Shepherd, *A Treasure*.

<sup>161</sup> Bollók et al., *Textile Remnants*.

<sup>162</sup> A. Muthesius, one of the greatest experts on Byzantine and Islamic silk weaving in the Early Middle Ages, noted that »the surviving silks demonstrate a near identical silk production in Islamic and in Byzantine silk weaving centres by the tenth century« Muthesius, *Silk Weaving* 308.

<sup>163</sup> D. Jacoby has correctly noted that, in addition to the migration of craftsmen, the employment of artisans skilled in some much-needed craft, who had been taken prisoner in a military campaign, must also be reckoned with, this being a practice since time immemorial. The slaves labouring in the Egyptian and Byzantine silk workshops were probably Christians and Muslims who had fallen into captivity, cf.: Jacoby, *Silk Economics* 222-226.

<sup>164</sup> *Eparchenbuch* V, 94-94.

<sup>165</sup> *Eparchenbuch* IX. 6., 108-109.

had been manufactured on the Iberian Peninsula, the appearance of silks from that region cannot be entirely dismissed. It has been suggested that Hispanic sericulture had been practiced by the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>166</sup> and there is documentary evidence for the existence of silk workshops from 823<sup>167</sup>. A few passages in the »Liber Pontificalis« suggest that the products from these workshops had made their way to Rome in the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>168</sup>, from where they could have reached the ancient Hungarians from the early 10<sup>th</sup> century (either as booty, as gifts, through the exchange of prisoners, etc.)<sup>169</sup>. The west was not the single possible source of silks. A Hispanic silk came to light from chamber Grave C-301 in Gnězdovo (dist. Tver, RUS), which had been deposited sometime in the later 10<sup>th</sup> century (probably around 970)<sup>170</sup>. The occurrence of silk among the grave goods in Gnězdovo is hardly surprising, given the period's known trade routes<sup>171</sup> and the repeated Viking raids against the Iberian Peninsula from 844<sup>172</sup>. The ancient Hungarians were active players in this extremely dynamic world; they were participants and, at the same time, upholders of the intricate network of contacts. They, too, went on a raiding expedition against the Iberian Peninsula on at least one occasion, in 942, as recounted by Ibn Ḥayyān<sup>173</sup>, and it seems likely that the letter sent by Ḥasdāy ibn Šāprut, minister of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III (912-961), Caliph of Cordoba, to the Khazar ruler in the 950s-960s had been taken to Khazaria by a Jew from Central Europe (presumably living in the Czech Basin or, more likely, among the ancient Hungarians of the Carpathian Basin)<sup>174</sup>.

The picture outlined by the meagre evidence is one of a highly dynamic world in which people and objects, and the images and ornaments borne by the latter, travelled freely from one end of the continent to the other, and from one culture to another many hundreds of kilometres away. The question to be addressed is whether the Rakamaz discs, bearing a depiction of a bird holding chicks, can be associated with the birds grasping a quadruped in their talons portrayed on textiles, assuming that silks of this type may have reached the Carpathian Basin during the 10<sup>th</sup> century (or perhaps the ancient Hungarians during their 9<sup>th</sup> century sojourn on the Eastern European steppe).

Cs. Bálint has already pointed out that the bird figures grasped in the talons on the Rakamaz discs are a variant of a well-known image<sup>175</sup>. The cultural placement of the smaller bird figures poses the greatest difficulty<sup>176</sup>. Even in cases when the central bird figure grasps creatures other than quadrupeds in its talons, the Byzantine and Islamic prototypes can generally be assigned to the category of animal combat scenes. A double-headed eagle vies with writhing snakes on a stone carving dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the

<sup>166</sup> May, *Silk Textiles* 3.

<sup>167</sup> Constable, *Trade and Traders* 177-178. – Evidence for the first Hispanic ṭirāz workshop comes from this period (821), cf.: Serjeant, *Material* 33.

<sup>168</sup> A passage in the »Liber Pontificalis« (103: 11) records that the goods given by Pope Gregory IV (827-844) to the Church of Saint Mark in Rome included »fourteen Spanish veils with silver«. Other passages (105: 9, 67, 86, 97, 105) record that Leo IV (847-855) donated three Spanish veils to Saint Peter's Basilica, a Spanish »cloth« and three Spanish veils to the Church of St. Maria in Porto, twelve Spanish veils to the Church of Saint Petronilla, two Spanish veils to the Church of St. Marcian and one Spanish »cloth« to the church of St. Leo: Davis, *Ninth-Century Popes* 54; 114; 139; 148; 152; 155. Although it is not explicitly stated that these veils and cloths were silks, the passages do indicate that Hispanic textiles were not unknown and were not altogether rare in Italy during the earlier 9<sup>th</sup> century, cf.: Falke, *Seidenweberei* 1, 114. – May, *Silk Textiles* 3.

<sup>169</sup> Bollók et al., *Textile Remnants*.

<sup>170</sup> Avdusin / Puškina, *Chamber Graves* 28, 30-31. – While the reasons for identifying the piece as a Hispanic silk were not specified, V. Fehner, who examined the piece, published his set of criteria for identifying Hispanic silks in another study, in which he discussed the silks from the Kievan Rus (at the time, the pieces from the 11<sup>th</sup> century were the earliest known silks). His criteria more or less correspond to the ones used in Western silk studies, cf.: Fehner, *Шелковые ткани* (see also note 160 for Western studies).

<sup>171</sup> Al-Masʿūdī reports merchants from the Rus traded their wares between al-Andalus, Rome, Constantinople and Khazaria, cf.: Nazmi, *Commercial Relations* 144. – Nazmi's monograph offers a fairly good overview of contemporary trade.

<sup>172</sup> Vasiliev, *Russian Attack* 43.

<sup>173</sup> Czeglédy, *Új arab forrás*. – Elter, *Arab források*.

<sup>174</sup> Dunlop, *History* 136. – Róna-Tas, *Magyarok* 18-19.

<sup>175</sup> Bálint, *Nagyszentmiklósi* 138.

<sup>176</sup> Kádár, *Bemerkungen* 106 interpreted the depiction of the Rakamaz discs as an animal combat scene exactly because of the parallels with the Hispanic silks.



**Fig. 41** Double-headed eagle vying with two snakes, 13<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig. 42** European habitats of the Eurasian black vulture.

Church of Episkopi Ano Volou in Magnesia (**fig. 41**)<sup>177</sup>. On some Islamic textiles, such as a silk from Toledo, the posture of the quadrupeds suggests that the eagles »touch with protective gesture the necks of the captive hinds«<sup>178</sup>. Insofar as the smaller birds can indeed be regarded as the offspring of the large central bird on the Rakamaz discs, the imagery comes closest to this type. An entirely different question – further complicated by the many interpretations of animal combat scenes – is how an image designed to portray a combat scene in its original cultural context preserved its original form after reaching an »alien« culture and passing through various modes of reception, or how some (often basic) elements were transformed. Unfortunately, the little known spiritual culture of the recipients, the ancient Hungarians, offers few reference points for examining this question. Still, the Rakamaz discs, especially the original piece of the pair, might have a story to tell about their maker. Let us return for a moment to the possibility that the bird portrayed is a vulture. Enquiring about a more accurate species identification, the ornithologist suggested that the bird depicted could be a monk vulture. While this bird appears in Hungary as an extremely rare migrant<sup>179</sup>, its European nesting places lie in the southern Balkans, the Iberian Peninsula and the islands of the Western Mediterranean (**fig. 42**)<sup>180</sup>, and it is more common in the Balkans, Italy and Spain. Its habitats include also Anatolia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Even though monk vultures were undoubtedly more frequent guests in the region during the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, suggesting that they passed this way more often than in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, they were hardly a dominant species in the fauna of the Carpathian Basin (most sightings of the bird were reported among the mountains of Transylvania). It seems to me that the interpretation of the Rakamaz discs should be sought in this direction.

<sup>177</sup> Asimakopoulou-Atzaka, Magnesia fig. 84. – The motif of the eagle battling a snake goes back to ancient times. Images of a double-headed eagle vying with two snakes can be regarded as a heraldically doubled variant of this image. For a discussion of the motif, cf.: Wittkower, *Eagle and Serpent* (the errors in this interpretation have been pointed out by Trilling, *Interlace*

*Ornament* 59-60). – For the significance of the motif in Middle Byzantine art, cf.: Maguire, *Little Metropolis* 172.

<sup>178</sup> May, *Silk Textiles* 42.

<sup>179</sup> Peterson et al., *Európa madarai* 92.

<sup>180</sup> Peterson et al., *Európa madarai* map on p. 92.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Insofar as the ornithological species identification is correct, the goldsmith crafting Disc 1 had either arrived from or spent an extended period in a region where monk vultures were common. However, it is equally possible, but less likely that he had been inspired by the image of a vulture. A region, presumably the Mediterranean, where the four characteristic elements discussed in the above, were part of the artistic repertoire either individually or combined with other motifs. We must not necessarily assume that prototypes bearing this image had actually reached the Carpathian Basin, even though objects of this type may easily have arrived there. However, in order to create an object meaningful to the recipient audience, the latter had to have some degree of familiarity with these elements and had to be capable of fitting the composition into their own cultural milieu, in other words, of reading the visual text on the object. (Due to the lack of the knowledge of the set of symbols used, it is impossible to reconstruct the possible reading[s].) The goldsmith created the visual text requested by his patron through the free variation of the elements adopted from various prototypes and by replacing certain elements with others. It seems likely that the »relation« between the craftsman and his patron explains why the central bird figure blends the features of several species: it seems to me that the eagle conformed to the taste of the patron, while the vulture-like traits echo the goldsmith's persona<sup>181</sup>.

Assuming that the two smaller bird figures portray the offspring, the composition was created by discarding the animal combat scene; on the morphological level – at least viewed from the »homeland« of the visual elements<sup>182</sup> – the slightly heterogeneous imagery was no doubt cemented by the semiotic background of the recipient culture. The acceptance of images and/or motifs drawn from various external sources by the recipient culture was made easier by the fact that the disc had been made using a technique known in Conquest period art and by using a few visual elements of this art, such as the rendering of the topknot as a palmette, the lavish gilding of the background, and the like.

The reception of imagery in this form is an excellent example of cultural translation<sup>183</sup>. Settling in the Carpathian Basin, the ancient Hungarians found themselves in an entirely new historical situation and cultural milieu, and adapted to the visual vocabulary of this new milieu<sup>184</sup>. The beginnings of this process perhaps reach back to the final decades of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the Hungarian tribes still lived on the Eastern European steppe; however, owing to the lack of archaeological evidence, this cannot be stated with certainty. Disc 1 from Rakamaz is an excellent example in that its figural design contributes to understanding the nature of this process, which could otherwise only be studied in its totality based on the geometric and vegetal ornament. By ingeniously combining the well-known motifs of Mediterranean art, the goldsmith (catering to the taste of his patron) modified them in a manner not known in the cultural milieu whence they were adopted. Owing to the formal similarities, the visual text became intelligible not only to the patron (and his broader cultural milieu), but also conveyed some message comprehensible to the audience of the source culture.

<sup>181</sup> Although it cannot be proven, the most likely explanation to me is that the goldsmith added the vulture traits to the central bird figure of the disc because of some personal fascination with this bird.

<sup>182</sup> The animal combat scenes do not feature birds with a leaf in their beak in the original cultural context, obviously because the two were semiotically incompatible. No matter how varied the interpretation of animal combat scenes, they were de-

signed to convey a message of strength and power, while a bird holding a leafy branch in its beak had a more peaceful meaning – this is especially true for the Rakamaz discs, if the smaller birds held in the talons indeed represented the offspring.

<sup>183</sup> Cf.: Flood, *The Great Mosque*, with an insightful analysis of this phenomenon.

<sup>184</sup> For a detailed discussion cf.: Bollók, *Ornamental Vocabulary*.

It is not easy to determine which culture had the greatest impact on the patrons of the Carpathian Basin. The conclusions drawn from the study of the non-figurative ornament of the ancient Hungarians seems valid in this case too<sup>185</sup>. Based on formal traits alone, it is impossible to choose even between the Islamic and Byzantine culture provinces because, as illustrated by the examples cited in the above, the number of analogies is very broad in both space and time. It must, in all fairness, be noted that it is the very broad circle that enables us to speak of »Byzantine«, »Islamic« and »Sassanian« culture, regarding them as undifferentiated units. An approach that is feasible in the study of ornament and imagery (although not in the search for some »primordial« prototype), with a perspective on cultures rather than various (regional or social) cultural groups<sup>186</sup>, would be anachronistic and erroneous for contextualising any of the above observations. One case in point is the derivation by some scholars of 10<sup>th</sup> century Conquest period art from Sassanian culture and its interpretation as a late offspring of Sassanian art based on a few parallels, even though we know full well that the Sassanian Empire collapsed in 642; another is the description of various elements mediated by 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century Umayyad/<sup>c</sup>Abbasid (Early Islamic) culture to Byzantium as the impact of Sassanian art on Byzantine culture. In many cases, a focus on a specific source culture is not the most fruitful approach. In his discussion of the artistic elements of 10<sup>th</sup> century royal courts and his analysis of the cultural links between them, O. Grabar noted that »none of these impressive creations [the cup in the San Marco Treasury, the mantle of Roger II etc.] has in fact a geographical or historical, probably not even a temporal, home. They reflect a culture of objects shared by their owners or users into evocations of sensory pleasure. [...] a culture of shared objects implies a certain commonality of court behaviour and of court practices. This commonality seems to me more appropriate than the 'influences' from the East which had, in the past, identified the tenth century«<sup>187</sup>. Set in a broader context, the same also holds true for many image types.

The shared elements linking the visual vocabulary of different »cultures« are apparent from the study of the individual traits of the Rakamaz discs. If trying to identify tendencies, the most we can say is that the central, heraldically posed bird figure with a leaf or branch in its beak points towards Byzantium, while the bird grasping two smaller quadrupeds in its talons evokes Islamic art. The most important clue to the cultural background of the goldsmith crafting Disc 1 is the portrayal of the monk vulture. If asked to choose between the Byzantine and the Islamic world, I would regard the Rakamaz discs as the creations of a goldsmith (perhaps from the Balkans or Byzantium, or trained there) who was familiar with the trans-Mediterranean visual vocabulary, especially in knowledge of the historical circumstances and the cultural milieu surrounding the Carpathian Basin in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Viewed from the Mediterranean, the imagery of the Rakamaz discs reflects a unique blend of everyday visual elements or, in other words, the local adaptation in the Carpathian Basin of a trans-Mediterranean set of motifs, at least on the formal level. The present study has not moved beyond this level because the semiotic level is virtually unreachable owing to the disappearance of the spiritual milieu in which it was conceived, which remains unknown to us. Put differently, there were as many cultural milieus, audiences and contexts as there were possible readings and reflections. To quote Paul de Man: »the temporal factor, so persistently forgotten, should remind us that the form is never anything but a process on the way to its completion. The completed form never exists as a concrete aspect of the work that could coincide with the sensorial or semantical dimensions of the language. It is constituted in the mind of the interpreter as the

<sup>185</sup> Cf.: Bollók, Ornamental Vocabulary.

<sup>186</sup> O. Grabar's studies illustrate the difficulties with examples taken from medieval Islamic art: Grabar, Formation 1-17. – Grabar, Reflections.

<sup>187</sup> Grabar, Shared Culture 126-127. – A recent magisterial analysis of the San Marco cup challenged its association with the circle discussed by Grabar, cf.: Walker, Meaningful Mingling.

work discloses itself in response to his questioning. But this dialogue between work and interpreter is endless. The hermeneutic understanding is always, by its very nature, lagging behind: to understand something is to realize that one had always known it, but, at the same time, to face the mystery of its hidden knowledge«<sup>188</sup>.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG / ABSTRACT / RÉSUMÉ

Im Frühjahr 1956 gelangte ein einzigartiger Fund aus Rakamaz-Gyepi földek in das Jósa András Museum in Nyíregyháza. Die auf zwei Scheiben (Scheibe 1 und 2) dargestellten Vögel sind etwas Einzigartiges in der Kunst der Landnahmezeit. Ziel des vorliegenden Beitrags ist es nicht, die Theoriebildungen zur Bedeutung der Flechtbandornamentik von Rakamaz zu dekonstruieren, dies wäre ein sinnloses Unterfangen; das Hauptanliegen dieses Beitrags ist die Suche nach ikonografischen Parallelen und Prototypen der Vogeldarstellungen.

Nach der ornithologischen Bestimmung (Mönchsgeier) und der Erkenntnis, dass es unmöglich ist, vollkommen identische Parallelen zu finden sowie die Beobachtung, dass verschiedene Elemente der Darstellungen gute Parallelen im Kanon der zeitgleichen mediterranen Kunst haben, konzentrierte sich der Verfasser auf vier wesentliche Attribute: 1. die heraldische Pose, 2. das Blatt oder der Ast im Schnabel des Vogels, 3. das Motiv, das von einem Ornithologen als Haarknoten angesprochen wurde und 4. der kleinere in den Krallen gehaltene Vogel. Während der Mönchsgeier in Ungarn äußerst selten ist, liegen seine europäischen Nistplätze im südlichen Balkan, auf der iberischen Halbinsel und den Inseln des westlichen Mittelmeers; und er kommt häufiger auf dem Balkan, in Italien und Spanien vor. Seine Habitate umfassen außerdem Anatolien, den Kaukasus und Zentralasien. Unter der Voraussetzung, dass die Artbestimmung korrekt ist, muss der Goldschmied, der Scheibe 1 fertigte, entweder aus einer Region gestammt haben, in der der Mönchsgeier geläufig war, oder dort zumindest eine gewisse Zeitspanne gelebt haben: Eine Region, vermutlich der Mittelmeerraum, in der die vier genannten charakteristischen Elemente Teil des künstlerischen Repertoires waren, entweder einzeln oder in Kombination mit anderen Motiven. Der Schmied schuf einen von seinem Auftraggeber vorgegebenen visuellen Text durch die freie Variation von Elementen, die er von verschiedenen Vorbildern übernahm, und durch den Tausch bestimmter Elemente mit anderen.

Die leicht heterogene Bildsprache wurde zweifellos durch den semiotischen Kontext der Empfängerkultur verstärkt. Die Übernahme einer Bildsprache in dieser Form ist ein erstklassiges Beispiel für Kulturtransfer.

Meiner Ansicht nach sollte die Scheibe 1 von Rakamaz als Werk eines Goldschmieds angesehen werden, der vermutlich aus dem Balkan oder aus dem Byzantinischen Reich stammte oder zumindest dort ausgebildet wurde und dem entsprechend das transmediterrane visuelle Vokabular geläufig war, der aber Techniken anwandte, die in der Kunst der Landnahmezeit bekannt waren und einige ihrer Elemente benutzte.

K. K.

A unique find from Rakamaz-Gyepi földek reached the Jóna András Museum of Nyíregyháza in Spring 1956. The birds portrayed on the two discs (Disc 1 and 2) represent a unique phenomenon in Conquest period art. Instead of deconstructing the existing archaeological narratives concerning the meaning(s) of the braid ornaments from Rakamaz, which would be a pointless exercise, the main purpose of this paper is to search for the iconographic parallels and/or prototypes of the bird depictions in question.

After the ornithological species determination (monk vulture) and, after realising that it was impossible to discover a wholly identical piece down to the smallest detail elsewhere, but nevertheless recognising that several details of the depictions have good parallels in the ornamental vocabulary of contemporary Mediterranean art, in the search for possible models, I focus on four main attributes of the Rakamaz discs: 1) the heraldic pose, 2) the leaf or branch held in the beak, 3) the element described as a topknot by an ornithologist and 4) the smaller bird figures held in the talons. While the monk vulture is an extremely rare migrant in Hungary, its European nesting places lie in the southern Balkans, the Iberian Peninsula and the islands of the Western Mediterranean, and it is more common in the Balkans, Italy and Spain. Its habitats also include Anatolia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Insofar as the ornithological species determination is correct, the goldsmith crafting Disc 1 had either arrived from or spent an extended period in a region where monk vultures were common: a region, presumably the Mediterranean, where the four characteristic elements discussed in this article were part of the artistic repertoire, either individually or combined with other motifs. The goldsmith created the visual text requested by his patron on Disc 1 by means of the free variation of the elements adopted from various prototypes and by replacing certain elements with others.

This slightly heterogeneous imagery was no doubt cemented by the semiotic background of the recipient culture. The reception of imagery in this form is an excellent example of cultural translation. In my view, Disc 1 of Rakamaz should be regarded as the creation of a goldsmith, perhaps from the Balkans or Byzantium, or trained there, who was familiar with the trans-Mediterranean visual vocabulary but who used the technique known in Conquest period art, as well as a few visual elements of this art.

Au printemps 1956 une découverte unique parvint de Rakamaz-Gyepi földek au musée Jóna András à Nyíregyháza. Les oiseaux représentés sur deux disques (disque 1 et 2) sont particulièrement unique dans l'art de la période de prise possession du pays. Le but de la présente contribution n'est pas de déconstruire l'ornementation en bande tressée à Rakamaz, cela n'aurait aucun sens. L'objectif principal de cette contribution est la recherche de parallèles iconographiques et des prototypes des représentations d'oiseaux.

D'après les conventions ornithologiques (vautour moine) et la connaissance sur le sujet, il nous semble impossible de trouver des parallèles parfaitement identiques, à savoir que les observations des différents éléments de représentations ont de bons parallèles dans l'art méditerranéen de la même époque. L'auteur se concentrait sur 4 attributs essentiels : 1) la pose héraldique, 2) la feuille ou la branche dans le bec de l'oiseau, 3) le motif qui fut abordé par un ornithologue comme un chignon et 4) le plus petit oiseau retenu dans les serres. Alors que le vautour moine était très rare en Hongrie, ses lieux de nidifications européens se trouvent dans le sud des Balkans, sur la péninsule ibérique et les îles de la Méditerranée occidentale ; il est plus fréquent dans les Balkans, en Italie et en Espagne. Son habitat englobe par ailleurs l'Anatolie, le Caucase et l'Asie centrale. Dans l'hypothèse où la convention artistique soit correcte, l'orfèvre qui a fabriqué le disque 1 devait être originaire d'une région où le vautour moine était courant, ou au moins y avoir vécu un certain temps. Une région, probablement le bassin méditerranéen, dans laquelle se trouvaient les quatre caractéristiques nommées du répertoire artistique, soit seules soit combinées avec d'autres motifs. L'orfèvre créa, d'après un texte visuel préétabli par son donneur d'ordre, par une variation libre d'éléments qu'il reprit de différents modèles et par l'échange d'éléments précis avec d'autres.

Le langage iconographique quelque peu hétérogène fut sans aucun doute renforcé par le contexte sémiotique de la culture du destinataire. La reprise d'un langage des images sous cette forme est un exemple de premier ordre du transfert de culture. A mon avis le disque 1 de Rakamaz devrait être considéré comme l'œuvre d'un orfèvre vraisemblablement originaire des Balkans ou de l'empire byzantin ou au moins formé là-bas et à qui le vocabulaire iconographique transméditerranéen était familier mais qui appliquait des techniques connues dans l'art de la période de prise possession du pays et en utilisait quelques uns de ses critères.

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# BYZANZ – DAS RÖMERREICH IM MITTELALTER

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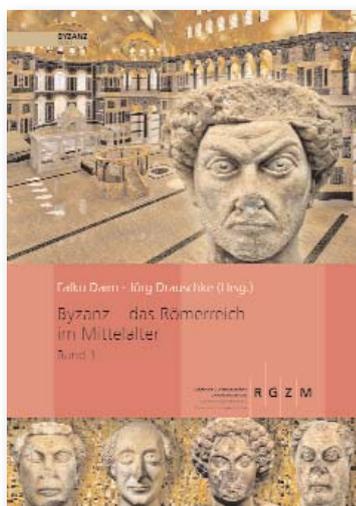
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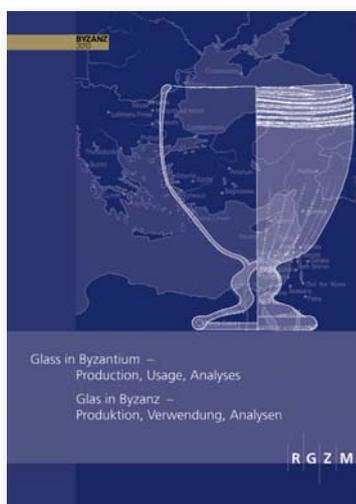
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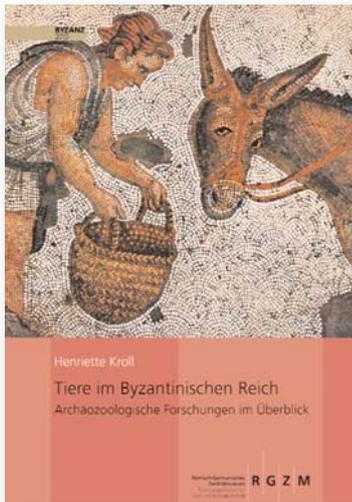
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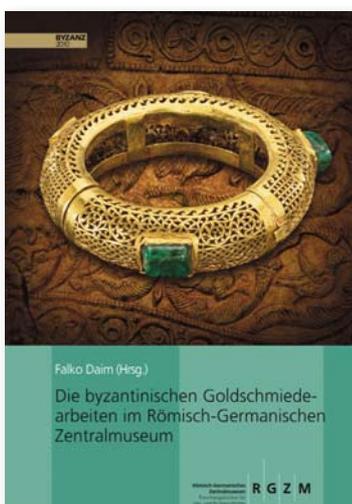
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