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PROFANE AND SACRED IN PRIVATE: IMAGES AND INSCRIPTIONS ON LATE ANTIQUE AND MIDDLE BYZANTINE AMULETS¹

PROFANO Y SAGRADO EN UN ARTE PRIVADO: IMAGINES E INSCRIPCIONES EN LOS AMULETOS BIZANTINOS DE LOS PERIODOS TARDOANTIGUOS Y MEDIEVAL

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the use of sacred and profane elements in daily life in Byzantium. Four amulets from two collections in Istanbul, three of which are unpublished, present these elements together. Two Late Antique and two Middle Byzantine amulets feature culturally-syncretic motifs, pagan images, and magical spells. At the same time, these objects bear Christian signs, prayers, hymns, and invocations. The chronology of these objects demonstrates that certain images and words which were considered profane by the Church survived over several centuries and took their place next to Christian elements on personal objects. This phenomenon is surely rooted in the basic human emotion of fear and the need for protection.

KEYWORDS: Byzantine art, amulets, profane, sacred, images, inscriptions.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora el uso de elementos sagrados y profanos en la vida diaria en Bizancio. Cuatro amuletos bizantinos conservados en dos colecciones en Estambul, de los cuales tres son inéditos, acreditan la conjugación de estos componentes. Dos de estas piezas corresponden al periodo tardoantiguo y otra pareja a la fase medieval. Todos comparten la presentación de

¹ This article derives from the conference paper that I presented at the VII Colloquium Ars Mediaevalis (Sept, 29 2017). I thank the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of the article and their many insightful comments. Of course, any omissions or mistakes are mine.

motivos culturalmente sincréticos, de imágenes paganas y de hechizos mágicos. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, estos objetos contienen signos, oraciones, himnos e invocaciones cristianas. La cronología de estos objetos demuestra que ciertas imágenes y palabras que la Iglesia consideraba profanas sobrevivieron durante varios siglos y alcanzaron una presencia elocuente en objetos personales, en los que las declaraciones paganas se prodigaron junto a expresiones cristianas. Este fenómeno seguramente está enraizado en la emoción humana básica del miedo y la necesidad de protección.

PALABRAS CLAVE: arte bizantino, amuletos, profane, sagrado, imágenes, inscripciones.

In comparison to the studies of Western medievalists, few Byzantinists have drawn attention to the use of profane images in Byzantine art. Henry Maguire makes the observation that “there was no Bernard of Clairvaux to focus our attention on the profane elements in Byzantine art and so these features of Byzantine art have stayed in the margins of our vision.”² The existing studies concerning profane images in Byzantium explore the secular images in church architecture, ecclesiastical manuscripts, and luxury items.³ These studies also connect the use of profane elements in Byzantine art to amusement, ideology, magic, appropriation, nostalgia, triumphalism and historical awareness.

Shifting away from luxury items and objects with strictly Christian iconography, this study will examine profane images in the context of a different artistic media: two groups of amulets from the Late Antique and Middle Byzantine periods. These objects which mostly escaped the attention of scholars due to their modest nature present profane and religious elements together on a single object, a phenomenon which also appears on some manuscripts and luxury items. Although some pre-Christian imagery was adopted by Christianity, such as the image of the holy rider, many were condemned by the Church and therefore considered profane. Several primary sources from the sixth, seventh, eleventh, and thirteen centuries describe the signs which were considered profane by the Church as names of gods, circles, unidentifiable characters and images.⁴ Furthermore, authors such as Alexander of Tralles in the sixth century and Michael Psellos in the eleventh century are apologetic about their knowledge of the art of magic.⁵ Their ready defense of themselves reveals that the usage of these

² H. MAGUIRE, “The Profane Aesthetic in Byzantine Art and Literature,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 53 (1999), p. 189.

³ Some of these studies: A. CUTLER, “On Byzantine Boxes,” *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 42/3 (1984-1985), pp. 32-47. A. IACOBINI, E. ZANINI, *Arte profana e arte sacra a Bisanzio*, Roma, 1995. E. DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE, H. MAGUIRE, *Other icons: art and power in byzantine secular culture*, Princeton, 2007.

⁴ Balsamon, *Commentary on the Canons of the Council in Trullo*. G. A. RHALLIS, M. POTLES, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων Vol. II*, Athens, 1859, pp. 444-47. ALEXANDER OF TRALLES, *Twelve Books of Medicine*, I. T. PUSCHMANN, *Alexander von Tralles: Originaltext und Übersetzung, nebst ein einleitenden Abhandlung: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Medicin Vol. I*, Wien, 1878-79, p. 377. JOHN STAUROKIOS, *Miracles of St. Demetrios*. I. IBERITES, “Ἰωάννου Σταυρακίου Λόγος εἰς τὰ θαύματα τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου,” *Makedonika*, 1 (1940), pp. 340-341. MICHAEL PSELLOS, *Philosophica minora II*. J. M. DUFFY, D. J. O’MEARA, *Philosophica Minora Vol. 2*, Leipzig, 1989, p. 133.

⁵ PUSCHMANN, *Alexander von Tralles*, p. 375. Michael Psellos, *Letter to Patriarch John Xiphilinos*. K. N. SATHAS, *Mesaioune Bibliothekhe Vol. V*, Athens, 1872-94, p. 449.

images was shameful at best and incriminating at worst. Nevertheless, despite the Church's opposition, the usage of certain objects and images continued in Byzantium for centuries, indicating a variety of uses by Byzantine society.⁶ The users of the amulets might have not necessarily considered certain images on the amulets as sacred, but it is certain that they did also not see them as evil. In fact, users believed in their power and protective nature. The existence of Late Antique amulets with combinations of pagan and Christian imagery and magical and Biblical inscriptions and *hystera* amulets from the 10th to 12th centuries which bear magical images with verses from Christian scripture attests to this social phenomenon. The survival of pagan images and their combination with sacred elements indicate a conscious choice on the part of creators and a certain purpose for their usage. The careful study of images, signs, and inscriptions on the amulets designates the purpose of these objects as apotropaic protection and/or healing.

UNPUBLISHED AMULETS FROM TWO COLLECTIONS IN ISTANBUL

Late Antiquity witnessed the usage of hybrid images from different traditions in production of various objects. As a product of this period, an unpublished lead medallion from Haluk Perk Collection in Istanbul is an example of this rich visual culture (Fig. 1). The medallion bears the well-known motif of the holy rider spearing a human figure beneath his horse on its obverse.⁷ The image of a rider spearing a demon, a human figure, or a snake lying beneath



Figure 1. Lead Medallion, Haluk Perk Collection, Istanbul (photo: author).

⁶ For the reaction of the Church, see: *Synod of Laodicea, Canon 36. Synod of Trullo, Canon 61*. P. SCHAFF, H. WALLACE, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*, New York, 1900, pp. 151, 393. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Commentary on the Galatians, Homily XVI, Chapter III, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, Homily III, Homilies on Colossians, Homily VIII*, IX. P. SCHAFF, *Saint Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 24-30, 385-385, 294-300. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oration XL*. P. SCHAFF, H. WALLACE, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Volume VII*, New York, 2007, pp. 365-366. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Lectures IV and XIX*. SCHAFF, WALLACE, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, p. 146.

⁷ Inv. No. M11841. I thank Haluk Perk for letting me study and publish the objects from his collection in this paper.

a horse has been illustrated on numerous objects, such as medallions, rings, armbands, and textiles, throughout the centuries.⁸ The figure of a rider spearing an enemy is common to various cultures in the Mediterranean. The Thracian Horseman spearing a boar was an especially popular heroic figure in the Balkans during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.⁹ Moreover, the Roman sovereigns were often represented on coins as victorious warriors on horseback striking their enemies.¹⁰ The motif of the heroic horseman continued to be one of the most popular amuletic images in Late Antiquity.¹¹ This figure was frequently depicted in Byzantine churches as one of the warrior saints such as St. George or St. Theodore, and was adopted by the Seljuks as well.¹² Although the identity of the hero changed from culture to culture, the image of the rider symbolized the victory of good over evil for people for centuries.

On the reverse of the amulet, a haloed and standing human figure holds a rod with a snake coiled around it in his right hand and a tall staff topped by a cross in his left hand (Fig. 2). The rod with a coiled snake is one of the attributes of Asklepios, the Greek god of healing.¹³ The shrines dedicated to Asklepios were centers of pilgrimage for the sick. There, they could offer sacrifices, sleep in shrines' dormitories intended for incubation, and take healing baths and drugs.¹⁴ The image of Asklepios continued to be used in a medico-magical context during Late Antiquity until Christianity established its own healing cults, such as the cults of St. Symeon the Stylites and doctor saints such as Saints Damian and Kosmas.¹⁵ For instance, a gold ring from the third century bears the image of Asklepios with the word "Health".¹⁶ A fifth-century medical box now in Zurich is decorated with the image of Asklepios holding the rod with serpent.¹⁷ However, to my knowledge, other than the depiction on this amulet, Ask-

⁸ E. MAGUIRE, H. MAGUIRE, M.J. DUNCAN-FLOWERS, *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, Urbana-Champaign, 1989, pp. 1-33. G. VIKAN, "Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands and the Group to Which They Belong," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 49/50 (1991), pp. 33-51. Y. ISRAELI, D. MEVORAH, *Cradle of Christianity*, Jerusalem, 2000, pp. 159-165.

⁹ C. WALTER, "The Thracian Horseman: Ancestor of the Warrior saints?," *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 14 (1999), pp. 659-673.

¹⁰ J. VOGT, *Die Alexandrinischen Münzen: Grundlegung Einer Alexandrinischen Kaisergeschichte*, Stuttgart, 1924, pl. 3.10.

¹¹ G. VIKAN, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 38 (1984), pp. 65-86. B. PITARAKIS, "Bizans'ta Biiyü, Sağliğı Koruma Ve Kötülüğü Kovma Sanatı" *İstanbul Araştırmaları Yıllığı*, 1 (2012), pp. 15-25.

¹² O. PANCAROĞLU, "The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging Paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia," *Gesta*, 43 (2004), pp. 151-164. C. WALTER, "The Intaglio of Solomon in the Benaki Museum and the Origins of the Iconography of Warrior Saints," in C. WALTER (ed.), *Pictures as Language*, London, 2000, pp. 397-416.

¹³ P. ATHANASSIADU-FOWDEN, *Julian and Hellenism*, Oxford, 1981, pp. 166-168. T. GREGORY, "The Survival of Paganism in Christian Greece," *American Journal of Philology*, 107 (1986), pp. 229-242. J.W. RIETHMÜLLER, *Asklepios: Heiligtümer und Kulte. 2 vols.*, Heidelberg, 2005.

¹⁴ E.R. DODDS, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley, 1951, pp. 110-116. J. SCHOUTEN, *The Rod and Serpent of Asklepios, Symbol of Medicine*, Amsterdam, 1967, pp. 23-49. B.L. WICKKISER, *Asklepios, Medicine, and the Politics of Healing in Fifth-Century Greece*, Baltimore, 2008.

¹⁵ L. M. HENDRICKSON, "Magic, Medicine, and the Survival of the Gods," in BROWN UNIVERSITY, DAVID WINTON BELL GAL- LERY, *Survival of the gods: classical mythology in Medieval art: an exhibition February 28-March 29*, Providence, 1987, pp. 141-143. A.M. TALBOT, "Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56 (2002), pp. 153-73. VIKAN, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," pp. 67-73.

¹⁶ HENDRICKSON, "Magic, Medicine," no. 49.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, fig. 42.

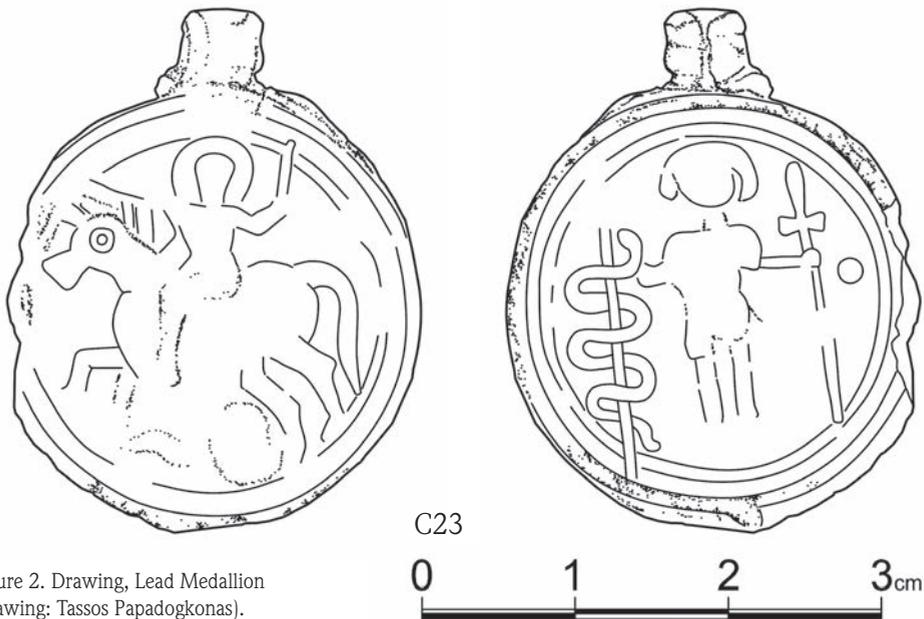


Figure 2. Drawing, Lead Medallion (drawing: Tassos Papadogkonas).

lepios was never illustrated holding a cross and a rod in the Late Antique period.¹⁸ This must have been an attempt to Christianize the image of Asklepios for the continuation of its usage at a time when the veneration of gods was gradually becoming unfavorable and punishable.¹⁹ This object also demonstrates that the images were considered sacred or profane depending on the time and space in which they were used.

Another unpublished example from Late Antiquity which carries an interesting amalgamation of profane images and sacred inscriptions is an oval-shaped silver medallion from the Rezan Has Museum in Istanbul (Fig. 3).²⁰ On the upper part of the object's obverse, a haloed rider spears a figure beneath his horse, which faces an angel. The inscription above the angel's right wing identifies him as the archangel Michael. Beneath the left wing of the archangel, there are two unidentified haloed figures in bust form. There is an inscription dividing the surface of the obverse into two registers. The inscription reads: $\Sigma\Phi[\Lambda\Gamma\Gamma]C$ ΣOLOMON , which translates as "Solomon's Seal".²¹ The ancient image of a rider spearing an enemy was adopted by the cult of Solomon, the Old Testament king of Israel who was praised for his wisdom and

¹⁸ To my knowledge, there is no Christian saint who has the attribute of a rod with a coiled serpent.

¹⁹ C. P. JONES, *Between Pagan and Christian*, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 24-33.

²⁰ Inv. No. 1626. I am grateful to Rezan Has Museum for letting me study and publish the objects from their collection in this paper.

²¹ All the inscriptions in this paper are recorded with orthographic mistakes as they are inscribed on the objects as I believe that these kinds of mistakes help researchers to designate provenance and date of the objects more precisely.



Figure 3. Silver Medallion, Rezan Has Museum, Istanbul (photo: Haluk Perk Collection, with permission).

faithfulness, and whose cult was later adopted by early Christians.²² Solomon was a fitting character for the adoption of the image of the holy rider since the victory over evil was an important part of Solomon's cult. The *Testament of Solomon*, a syncretic source of Judaism and Christianity which is dated between the first and third centuries AD, tells readers how King Solomon came to command the demons with power from a seal/ring sent by God.²³ This literary attestation of Solomon matches the image of him as a holy rider spearing a demon which is found on amulets from the sixth and seventh centuries.²⁴ Furthermore, it is no surprise to find an archangel in the upper register of the object since the archangel Michael was the one who

²² *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, s.v. "Solomon" (Alexander Kazhdan, Johannes Irmischer, John H. Lowden, and Anthony Cutler).

²³ F. C. CONYBEARE, "The Testament of Solomon," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 11 (1898), pp. 23-26. D. C. DULING, "Testament of Solomon," in J.H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Vol 1: Apocryptic Literature and Testaments*, New York, 1983, p. 541. P. S. ALEXANDER, "Contextualizing the Demonology of the Testament of Solomon," in H.L. LANGE, K.D. RÖMHELD (eds.), *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie der israelitisch-jüdischen und frühchristlichen Literatur im Kontext ihrer Umwelt*, Tübingen, 2003, pp. 615-635.

²⁴ G.L. SCHLUMBERGER, "Amulettes byzantins anciens destinés à combattre les maléfices et les maladies, par Gustave Schlumberger," in G.L. SCHLUMBERGER (ed.), *Mélanges d'archéologie byzantine: monnaies, médailles, méreaux, jetons, amulettes, bulles d'or et de plomb, poids de verre et de bronze, ivoires, objets d'orfèvrerie, bagues, reliquaires, etc.*, Paris, 1895, no. 1. D. FEISSEIL, C. MORRISON, J.-C. CHEYNET, B. PITARAKIS, *Trois Donations Byzantines Au Cabinet Des Médailles: Froehner (1925), Schlumberger (1929), Zacos (1998)*, Paris, 2001, no. 9. WALTER, "The Intaglio of Solomon in the Benaki Museum," pp. 397-416. The composition of the holy rider spearing a female saint and facing an archangel finds parallels in different medallions of various materials. T. MATANTSEVA, "Les amulettes byzantines contre le mauvais œil du Cabinet des médailles," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 37 (1994), pp. 110-121.

brought the seal from God to Solomon. The combination of these words and images remind the user of the legend of Solomon and the triumph of God.

Under the dividing inscription referring to Solomon's seal, there is a monogram on the left side that is unfortunately partially unintelligible due to damage. This monogram could reveal the name of a person, which might be an indication of a patron for the object. Alternatively, this monogram might be one of the *charaktêres*, which are symbols and unintelligible letters appearing in different magical texts and numerous amulets.²⁵ A symbol on a papyrus amulet from Egypt dated to the fifth or sixth centuries resembles the monogram.²⁶ Circles, a common feature of *charaktêres*, appear on the edges of this symbol. The text preceding the symbol shows the beginning of the Gospel of John (1:1-11) and a prayer to God and the Virgin Mary for protection from diseases and dangers.²⁷ Although the monogram on the silver amulet presents letters such as X and W instead of circles, the monogram can still be considered as one of the magical symbols due to the images and inscriptions surrounding it.

On the left side of this monogram, there is an inscription, a long-legged bird, and a scorpion. The inscription – ΠΙΟ – is either a corrupted or a subjunctive form of ΠΙΝΩ, which translates to "I drink". Bonner, who studied similar amulets, identifies the bird and the rectangular shape behind the bird as an ibis and an altar, respectively.²⁸ This scene is derived from the amulets produced in Egypt for relieving stomach pains.²⁹ The ibis was depicted on amulets of this sort due to the bird's extraordinary powers of digestion. In addition to the ibis, wild animals such as lions, snakes, and scorpions were frequently depicted in Late Antiquity.³⁰ Various amulets present these animals attacking a large human eye since this image was believed to protect against the Evil Eye, an age-old superstition that the eyes of certain individuals have a powerful glance that can harm people and animals.³¹

²⁵ W. M. BRASHEAR, "The 'Greek Magical Papyri': An Introduction and Survey; Annotated Bibliography," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 18.5 (1995), pp. 3380-3684. R. GORDON, "Signa nova et inaudita: The Theory and Practice of Invented Signs (*charaktêres*) in Graeco-Egyptian Magical Texts," *MHNH: Revista internacional de investigación sobre magia y astrología antiguas*, 11 (2011), pp. 15-44. R. GORDON, "Charaktêres between Antiquity and Renaissance: Transmission and Re-Invention," in V. DASEN, J.-M. SPIESER (eds.), *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Florence, 2014, pp. 253-300.

²⁶ I thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing this example to my attention. F. MALTOMINI, "Amuleto con NT Ev. Jo. 1, 1-11," in M. GRONERWALD, K. MARESCH, C. RÖMER (eds.), *Kölner Papyri (P. Köln)*, Opladen, 1997, p. 85.

²⁷ MALTOMINI, "Amuleto con NT," pp. 82-83.

²⁸ C. BONNER, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, Ann Arbor, 1950, pp. 212-213. SCHLUMBERGER, *Amulettes Byzantins Anciens*, no. 8.

²⁹ BONNER, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 212-213.

³⁰ J. B. CHABOT, *Choix d'inscriptions de Palmyre*, Paris, 1922, pl. XVI, 3. M. I. ROSTOVCEV, A. R. BELLINGER, C. HOPKINS, C. B. WELLES, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters: Preliminary Report of Sixth Season of Work, October 1932-March 1933*, New Haven, 1936, pl. XLII, 3.

³¹ O. JAHN, *Über den Aberglauben des bösen Blicks bei den Alten*, Leipzig, 1855, pp. 31-32. S. SELIGMANN, *Der böse Blick und Verwandtes. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Aberglaubens aller Zeiten und Völker, Vol I*, Berlin, 1910, pp. 2-9. See also: F. T. ELWORTHY, *The Evil Eye: The Origins and Practices of Superstition*, London, 1895. M. M. H. HASCLUK, *The Evil Eye in Some Greek Villages of the Upper Haliakmon Valley in West Macedonia*, London, 1923. A. DUNDES, *The Evil Eye: A Casebook*, Madison, 1992.

To the left rim of the object and above the scorpion is a cruciform monogram. This cruciform monogram, ΣΡΑ, is an abbreviation for a prayer that can be found on jewelry from the early Christian period.³² The repeated appearance of this monogram has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. One possibility is that its meaning can be found in the numeric value of its letters, a practice known as isopsephy. Having studied the monogram, Hadzidakis does not favor this idea since the value of the letters is equal to 6130, a number that he claims is too high to be isopsephic.³³ Instead, he argues that the letters indicates a date, specifically the year 638/9 in the Alexandrian chronological system.³⁴ However, these letters appear in various types of artistic media making it improbable that they all indicate the same date. Moreover, Grumel correctly points out that there are other examples of isopsephy with higher numbers. Grumel suggest that the letters are the isopsephy of the Monophysite Trisagion, a Eucharistic hymn, because the numeric value of the Monophysite Trisagion is also 6130 and the prayer appears on different objects from Syria that also make use of the motifs found on the silver medallion.³⁵ The Monophysite Trisagion – “Holy God, Holy strong, Holy immortal, who was crucified for us, have mercy on us” – differs from the Chalcedonian Trisagion, which reads as “Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us” due to the addition of the clause, “who was crucified for us”. This difference reflects the theological dispute over the nature of Christ. The Monophysite Trisagion addresses Christ while the Chalcedonian version addresses the Trinity. Both of the versions were sung at the beginning of the Eucharists depending on the region from the sixth century onwards and are inscribed frequently on amulets as well as liturgical objects.³⁶

The inscription surrounding all of these elements is Psalm 90 (91) from the Old Testament – “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” It is one of the most common inscriptions on protective objects in Early Christianity.³⁷

³² O. M. DALTON, *Catalogue of early Christian antiquities and objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and mediaeval antiquities and ethnography of the British Museum*, London, 1901, no. 284. M. HADZIDAKIS, “Un anneau byzantin du Musée Benaki,” *Byzantinisch Neugriechische Jahrbücher*, 27 (1944), figs. 1-4. B. Ch. STIEGEMANN, *Byzanz, Das Licht dem Osten: Kunst und Alltag im Byzantinischen Reich vom 4 bis 15. Jahrhundert*, Mainz, 2001, no. IV.55. L. WAMSER, *Die Welt von Byzanz - Europas Östliches Erbe. Glanz, Krisen und Fortleben einer tausendjährigen Kultur*, München, 2004, no. 653. PITARAKIS, *Life Is Short, Art Long - The Art of Healing in Byzantium*, Istanbul, 2015, pp. 248-249, no. 33.

³³ HADZIDAKIS, “Un anneau byzantin du Musée Benaki,” pp. 174-206.

³⁴ It was a system created by an Alexandrian monk, Panodoros, in the fifth century. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, s.v. “Alexandrian Era” (Brian Croke). *Pauly's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, s.v. “Panodoros” (O. Steel).

³⁵ V. GRUMEL, “Isopsephies de ΣΡΑ,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 13 (1947), pp. 515-521.

³⁶ W. K. PRENTICE, “Fragments of an Early Christian Liturgy in Syrian Inscriptions,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 33 (1902), pp. 81-100. V.-S. JANERAS, *Les byzantins et le trisagion christologique*, in *Miscellanea liturgica in onore di sua eminenza il Cardinale Giacomo Lercaro, vol. 2*, Rome, 1967, pp. 469-499. M.M. MANGO, C.E. SNOW, W.T. DRAYMAN, *Silver from Early Byzantium: The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures*, Baltimore, 1986, no. 42a-c.

³⁷ G. VON RAD, “Der 90. Psalm,” in G. RAD, O.H. STECK (eds.), *Gottes Wirken in Israel: Vorträge zum Alten Testament*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1974, pp. 268-283. T.J. KRAUS, “Septuaginta-Psalms 90 in apotropäischer Verwendung: Vorüberlegungen für eine kritische Edition und (bisheriges) Datenmaterial,” *Biblische Notizen*, 125 (2005), pp. 39-73. ID., “Ein byzantinisches Amulett-Armband im British Museum (London) mit Septuaginta-Psalms 90 und der Huldigung der Magier,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 48/49 (2005/2006), pp. 114-127.

It was depicted on various media such as apotropaic medallions and armbands.³⁸ However, it does not solely belong to the domain of portable objects. The popularity of the psalm can also be observed in architectural elements from the Eastern Mediterranean. For instance, it appears on an inscription written on the fragments of a door that may have belonged to a church in Porphyreon, which is located in modern-day Lebanon and dated to the seventh century.³⁹ Another example is from the Necropolis of Gabbari in Alexandria: the graffiti on the wall of the funerary chapel from the fifth and sixth centuries presents the psalm with a cross.⁴⁰ It appears that people wanted God's protection not only on their persons, as illustrated by amulets, but also in their houses and even in their final resting place.

The most interesting aspect of this object is the appearance of the Lord's Prayer which is written on the reverse.⁴¹ The prayer starts in the surrounding area and then continues in the eleven registers at the center. The Lord's Prayer is rarely inscribed on metal amulets. To my knowledge, there is only one other example, which was published by Jeffrey Spier.⁴² Though rarely found on metal amulets, the Lord's Prayer frequently appears on wooden and clay tablets and papyri along with other biblical verses.⁴³ These examples are identified as amulets rather than literary works or memory aids due to the presence of orthographic mistakes and the depiction of particular symbols on them.⁴⁴ The carefully inscribed Lord's Prayer asks God for forgiveness of the believers' sins and protection against temptation and evils.⁴⁵ Various protective images and Christian prayers on the object are combined together to increase the power of the object.

A similar combination of sacred and profane elements is observed in certain amulets, known collectively as *hystera* amulets, from the Middle Byzantine period. These amulets belong to a well-known group of objects which were produced in Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. They bear the image of a head surrounded by serpents and/or a magical inscription.

³⁸ Vikan, "Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands," no. 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 10. Israeli, Mevorah, *Cradle of Christianity*, pp. 162-163.

³⁹ J.-P. REY-COQUAIS, "Inscriptions Grecques Inédites, Découvertes Par Roger Saidah," *Collection de la Maison de l'Orient méditerranéen, Série archéologique* 12, no. 1 (1982), pp. 395-408. D. FEISSEL, "La Bible dans les inscriptions grecques," in C. MONDESERT (ed.), *Le monde grec ancien et la Bible*, Paris, 1984, pp. 223-231.

⁴⁰ H. HEINEN, "Dipinti aus der West-Nekropole Alexandrias, Gabbari," in J.-Y. EMPEREUR, M.-D. NENNA (eds.), *Nécropolis 2, Études alexandrines* 7, Cairo, 2003, pp. 639-652.

⁴¹ Matthew 6:9-13. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil ones."

⁴² J. SPIER, "An Antique Magical Book Used for Making Sixth-Century Byzantine Amulets?," in V. DASEN, J.-M. SPIESER (eds.), *Les saviors magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Florence, 2014, p. 49. My thanks to Jeffrey Spier for providing me with the images of this object.

⁴³ T. KRAUS, "Manuscripts with the Lord's Prayer—They Are More Than Simply Witnesses to That Text Itself," in T. KRAUS, T. NIKLAS (eds.), *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World*, Leiden-Boston, 2006, pp. 227-266.

⁴⁴ T. DE BRUYN, "Papyri, Parchments, ostraca, and Tablets Written with biblical Texts in Greek and used as Amulets: A Preliminary List," in T. KRAUS, T. NIKLAS (eds.), *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, Leiden, 2010, pp. 145-189.

⁴⁵ D. C. SKEMIER, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, University Park, 2006, pp. 75-124.

The standard formula of the inscription – ὕστερα μελάνη μελανομένη, ὡς ὄφις εἰλύεσαι καὶ ὡς δράκον συρίζησε ὡς λέων βρυχᾶσαι καὶ ὡς ἄρνιον κοιμοῦ (Womb, black, blackening, as a snake you coil and as a serpent you hiss and as a lion you roar, and as a lamb, lie down!) – is directed to the womb, which is *hystera* in Greek. The inscription might be slightly different in various amulets, but the meaning and the practice of addressing of the womb stay constant. Spier, whose article is the most comprehensive study on the subject, dates the *hystera* amulets to the Middle Byzantine period, specifically from the tenth to twelfth centuries.⁴⁶ Archaeological data from the Corinth, Saraçhane, and Yenikapı excavations support this dating; the objects bearing the image of a head surrounded by rays or serpents found in these sites came from the levels of the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁴⁷

The motif of a head surrounded by serpents has been studied a great deal by scholars. Early scholars often identified this motif with Medusa, one of the three Gorgon sisters with the power to turn anyone who looked at her to stone, due to the serpents radiating from the head.⁴⁸ Medusa's head was a strong image and widely used as an apotropaic symbol in the Ancient Greek and Roman periods.⁴⁹ For instance, the existence of women's jewelry decorated with Medusa's head on mummy portraits from Fayum indicates a relationship between this motif and women's well-being.⁵⁰ The portraits reflect the reality of their time by presenting a popular style of jewelry that also provided apotropaic protection. However, after exploring the origin of this motif, Spier states that this identification with Medusa is misleading. According to Spier, the motif does not resemble the classical representation of Medusa and there is no real textual support for this explanation.⁵¹

Vikan suggests that this iconography is derived from the image of Chnoubis, which is a decan in Egyptian tradition.⁵² Chnoubis has a serpent body, a radiate head and is related to the health of the stomach and the womb. Pitarakis is in agreement with Vikan and believes that over time, the iconography of Chnoubis was transformed into the motif of a head surrounded by serpents.⁵³ Spier, however, states that Chnoubis was not the master of the womb and that

⁴⁶ J. SPIER, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 56 (1993), pp. 25-62.

⁴⁷ G. R. DAVIDSON, *The Minor Objects, Corinth Vol. 12*, Princeton, 1952, pp. 244-245, no. 1947, 1949, 1950. R.M. HARRISON, *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul Vol. 1*, Princeton, 1986, no. 621. SAKIP SABANCI MUZESI, *From Byzantium to Istanbul: 8000 Years of a Capital*, Istanbul, 2010, no. 148. Z. KIZILTAN, İSTANBUL ARKEOLOJİ MUZELERİ, *Stories from the Hidden Harbor: The Shipwrecks of Yenikapı*, Istanbul, 2013, no. 80.

⁴⁸ C.W. KING, *Antique Gems and Rings 2*, London, 1872, p. 47, pl. 9.3. ID., *The Gnostics and their Remains*, London, 1887, p. 432.

⁴⁹ *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, s.v. "Medusa" (Georgia S. Maas). See also J.-P. VERNANT, "Death in the Eyes: Gorgo, Figure of the Other," in F. I. ZEITLIN (ed.), *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, Princeton, 1991, pp. 111-138. S. R. WILK, *Medusa: Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon*, Oxford and New York, 2000. M. GARBER, N.J. VICKERS, *The Medusa Reader*, New York/ London, 2003. D. A. LEEMING, *Medusa: In the Mirror of Time*, London, 2013.

⁵⁰ S. WALKER, *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*, New York, 2000, no. 90-91.

⁵¹ SPIER, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition," pp. 38-39.

⁵² VIKAN, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," pp. 65-86.

⁵³ PITARAKIS, "Bizans'ta Büyü," pp. 15-30.

⁵⁴ SPIER, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition," p. 41.

the problems of the womb were only peripheral to its function.⁵⁴ Zaleskaia thinks that the motif was inspired by the female demons that were described as inflicting pain on people in the *Testament of Solomon*, an idea that connects the image of the head surrounded by serpents with the textual evidence describing female demons.⁵⁵ In the *Testament of Solomon*, one female demon is described as consisting of only a head with disheveled hair.⁵⁶ Another female demon is described as having bright green eyes and hair that is wild like a dragon.⁵⁷ Finding the interpretation unsatisfactory, Spier emphasizes that such representations of female demons often appear with the image of the rider who spears the demon. Although at times *hystera* amulets feature the image of the rider, the head is never identified with a name of a female demon.⁵⁸

Spier offers a different suggestion for the problem of explaining the origin and meaning of this motif. Focusing on the standard formula, Spier suggests that the motif is not the representation of a demon but an illustration of the womb.⁵⁹ The standard formula – Womb, black, blackening, as a snake you coil and as a serpent you hiss and as a lion you roar, and as a lamb, lie down! – addresses the womb associates it with different animals such as lions and serpents, and orders it to calm down. The *hystera* amulets that combine an image of an aggressive creature and an inscription to soothe it correspond to the notion of the wandering womb. Plato and Hippocrates wrote about the womb as an animated being that would wander around the body due to its desire for childbearing and ultimately cause sickness.⁶⁰ For instance, when the womb is empty, it becomes dry and moves towards those organs with moisture, such as the liver. Hippocrates suggests regular intercourse, childbirth, baths, fumigation, and binding of the body as remedies for this ailment.⁶¹

This belief in the phenomenon of the wandering womb continued throughout Late Antiquity. In the second century AD, Aretaeus of Cappadocia writes that “the womb is like an animal within an animal” and that it can be treated by fumigation.⁶² As men of medicine gradually began to discredit treatments such as fumigation, these treatments seem to have

⁵⁵ N. ZALESKAIA, “Amulettes byzantines magiques et leurs liens avec la littérature apocryphe,” in M. BERZA, E. STINESCU (eds.), *Actes du XIV. Congrès international des études byzantines Vol. I*, Bucarest, 1971, pp. 243-247. CONYBEARE, “The Testament of Solomon,” pp. 23-26.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 29.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 30.

⁵⁸ The names, Abyzou or Gylou, are frequently used for the female demon in Byzantine sources. R. P.H. GREENFIELD, “Saint Sisinnios, the Archangel Michael and the Female Demon Gylou: The Typology of the Greek Literary Stories,” *Byzantina* 15, (1989), pp. 83-142. M. PATERA, “Gylou, demon et sorcière. Du monde byzantin au monde néogrec,” *Revue des études byzantines*, 64, no. 1 (2006), pp. 311-327.

⁵⁹ SPIER, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition,” pp. 44-51.

⁶⁰ R. G. BURY, *Plato with an English Translation VII: Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, Cambridge, 1929, pp. 249-250. A. E. HANSON, “Hippocrates: “Diseases of Women 1””, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1.2 (1975), pp. 567-584.

⁶¹ C. A. FARAONE, “Magical and Medical Approaches to the Wandering Womb in the Ancient Greek World,” *Classical Antiquity*, 30.1 (2011), pp. 1-32. See also ID., “New Light on Ancient Greek Exorcisms of the Wandering Womb,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 144 (2003), pp. 189-200.

⁶² F. Adams, *The Extant Works of Aretaeus, the Cappadocian*, Boston, 1972, pp. 285-287.

⁶³ FARAONE, “Magical and Medical Approaches,” pp. 9-12. H. D. BETZ, *The Greek magical papyri in translation, including the Demotic spells*, Chicago/London, 1997, pp. 123-124.

entered the sphere of healers who also used incantations and amulets for their clients.⁶³ Since animalistic behaviors were often used to describe demons, the womb was believed to have demon-like behavior and needed to be exorcised.⁶⁴ In exorcism, the knowledge of the demon's name is supposed to give power to the exorcist and help him drive out the demon. The image and the name of the womb on the amulets must have had a similar function.⁶⁵ The head motif depicted on the amulets might have been appropriated from the artistic portfolio of Medusa with her disheveled hair ending in snake heads. However, the ancient belief of the wandering womb must have been the inspiration for the creation of *hystera* amulets, which were used to treat womb-related sicknesses.

A well-executed and well-preserved example of this group of amulets is located in the Haluk Perk Collection (Fig. 4).⁶⁶ On its obverse, this lead medallion presents a small head surrounded by seven serpents with animal heads and a cross between the two serpents at the bottom. This image is surrounded by an inscription which reads ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΚΥΡΗΟΣ ΣΑΒΑΟΘ ΠΛΗΡΗΣ ΨΡΑΝΟ ΚΕ ΓΗ and translates to "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of the Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of your glory". This inscription originates from the Sanctus, a hymn which was adapted from Isaiah 6:3 in the Old Testament and chanted from the fourth century onward in the Anaphora during the Eucharist.⁶⁷ In this biblical story, the Prophet Isaiah meets God, who is seated on a throne, and the seraphim, heavenly creatures with six wings, proclaim the words of the inscription. The reverse of the amulet presents the standard *hystera*



Figure 4. Lead Medallion, Haluk Perk Collection, Istanbul (photo: author)

⁶⁴ SPIER, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition," pp. 44-51.

⁶⁵ SPIER, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition," pp. 38-44. A. BARB, "Diva matrix: a faked gnostic intaglio in the possession of PP Rubens and the iconology of a symbol," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 16.3/4 (1953), pp. 210-211.

⁶⁶ Inv. No. M12245. This object was previously published: G. KÖROĞLU, "Byzantine Amulets Illustrated by Examples from the Haluk Perk Collection," *Art and Culture Magazine*, 12 (2004), pp. 12-17. B. PİTARAKIS, "Bizans'ta Büyü," pp. 15-25.

⁶⁷ S. P. BROCK, "The Thrice-holy Hymn in the Liturgy," *Sobornost*, 7.2 (1985), pp. 28-31.

inscription in six registers: ΥΣΤΕΡΑ ΜΕΛΑΝΗ ΜΕΛΑΝΟΜΕΝΗ ΟΦΗΣ ΗΛΕΣΕ ΚΕ ΟΣ ΔΡΑΚΟCΙΠΙΖΙC. The inscription reads “Womb black blackening as a snake you coil and as a serpent you hiss”.⁶⁸ This magical formula is surrounded by the Chalcedonian Trisagion: ΑΓΙΟC Ο ΘΕΟC ΑΓΙΟC ΗCΧΥΡΟC ΑΓΙΟC ΑΘΑΝΑΤΟC ΕΛΕ[ΗCΟΝ ΗΜΑC]. The combination of the magical inscription and Christian hymns on this *hystera* amulet was meant to strengthen the power of the amulet against the medical problems.

Another unpublished example of the *hystera* amulets from the Haluk Perk Collection bears a similar combination of symbols as well as inscriptions (Fig. 5). On its obverse, the lead medallion carries the head motif surrounded by seven serpents with animal heads and vine-scroll designs between the serpents. The head is crowned by a sign with five arms ending with circles. The scene is surrounded by an inscription: ΑΓΙΟC ΑΓΙΟC ΑΓΙΟC ΚΕ ΒΟΙΘΗ ΤΙ ΦΟΡΟΥCΙ ΑΜ, which translates to “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord help the wearer, Amen”. The three words, triple holy, are from the beginning of the Sanctus with an addition of an invocation to God asking for protection. On the reverse of the amulet, the standard *hystera* formula appears in five registers: ΥΣΤΕΡΑ ΜΕΛΑΝΗ ΜΕΛΑΝΟΜΕΝΙ ΟC ΟΦΙC ΗΛΕCΕ [ΟC] ΑΡΝΟC ΚΥΜΗΘΗΤΗ (Womb black blackening as a snake you coil, as a lamb lie down!). Above the formula, there is a six-pointed star with circles at the ends of its points and a *pentalpha*, a five-pointed star.⁶⁹ The *pentalpha* was also considered apotropaic and certain primary sources identify it as the ring or seal of Solomon.⁷⁰ Below the inscription, there is a *Chi-Rho* sign between the apocalyptic letters Α and Ω. The existence of the *Chi-Rho* sign with the apocalyptic letters on an object typically



Figure 5. Lead Medallion, Rezan Has Museum, Istanbul (photo: author).

⁶⁸ This use of simile is also common in spells from the Greek Magical Papyri. BETZ, *The Greek magical papyri in translation*, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁹ VIKAN, “Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium,” fig. 4, n. 67.

⁷⁰ P. PERDRIZET, “Sphragis Solomonos,” *Revue des études grecque*, 16 (1903), pp. 42-61. ID., *Negotium perambulans in tenebris, études de démonologie gréco-orientale*, Strasbourg, 1922, 35ff. J. Russell, “The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period,” in H. MAGUIRE, *Byzantine Magic*, Washington D.C., 1995, pp. 35-50, fig. 8.

indicates a date in the Early Byzantine period since the *Chi-Rho* sign fell into disuse after the seventh century.⁷¹ However, in the case of *hystera* amulets, all the archaeological evidence points to the Middle Byzantine period for the dating of these amulets. Thus, the creator of the object may have used these elements on purpose to archaize the object. As with the previous *hystera* amulet, this object displays the amalgamation of sacred and profane through the depiction of magical characters and images with Christian inscriptions.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of these objects indicates that there was a widespread and continuous use of sacred and profane elements together over the centuries in Byzantium. Despite the Church's condemnation of amulets due to their profane features, these private objects were a part of everyday life in Byzantine society. The subject of the images and inscriptions on amulets, both sacred and profane, were essential to their function of protection since these elements were intermediaries through which believers could communicate with the supernatural. The need for communication with the supernatural emanated from people's desire to receive protection against dangers and healing for their sicknesses, as manifested in the subject matter of the objects. The survival of certain profane images in Late Antiquity and Middle Byzantine period may be explained by the transcendent and universal quality of these basic human needs. Despite the theological disputes, these amulets provide an intimate view of an ordinary person's beliefs and fears and how they use images and words from different sources to overcome their problems.

⁷¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, s.v. "Christogram" (Wolfram Hörandner, and Annemarie Weyl Carr). *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, s.v. "Christusmonogramm" (Klaus Wessel). See also V. GARDTHAUSEN, *Das alte Monogramm*, Leipzig, 1924, pp. 73-107. M. SULZBERGER, "Le Symbole de la Croix et les Monogrammes de Jésus chez les premiers Chrétiens," *Byzantion*, 2 (1925), pp. 337-448. H.I. MARROU, "Autour du monogramme constantien," in J. VRIN, P. PAULHAC (eds.), *Mélanges offerts à Étienne Gilson*, Toronto-Paris, 1959, pp. 403-414. W.B. STANFORD, "The Significance of the Alpha and Omega in Revelation 1.8," *Hermathena*, 98 (1964), pp. 43-44. W.J.P. BOYD, "I am Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 1.8; 21.6; 22.13), *Studia Evangelica*, 2 (1964), pp. 526-531. D. LINCICUM, "The Origin of 'Alpha and Omega' (Revelation 1.8; 21.6; 22.13): A Suggestion," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, 6 (2009), pp. 128-133.