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Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West

HOLGER A. KLEIN

Among the many eastern objects that reached western Europe between the seventh and the fifteenth century by way of gift-giving, theft, or trade, sacred relics hold an important, if somewhat unusual, position.¹ Unlike other commodities and luxury goods such as silk, gold, ivory, and precious stones, whose inherent value is intimately tied to their material worth, a relic’s value is not as easily quantifiable and tends to resist a definition in purely monetary or economic terms.² Rather, as Patrick Geary pointed out, its value rests on the communal acceptance of a set of shared beliefs that determine its authenticity and efficacy in a particular social and cultural environment.³ If a relic’s value is thus not defined by material worth, but is the result of complex social, cultural, and religious interactions, one may ask, how, in the specific case of eastern relics, their value was constructed—or rather reconstructed—in the social and cultural environment of western medieval Europe.⁴ Likewise, one may ask in what ways a relic’s value was affected by the circumstances of its acquisition and mode of transfer, to what extent it was tied to an attested or alleged eastern provenance, and in what ways it could change as the result of an increasing western knowledge of and familiarity with its eastern cult history or place of origin. If one accepts Georg Simmel’s more general definition of the construction of value and calls “those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them,”⁵ one may further ask how


² Despite the fact that a complex system for the evaluation and assessment of gifts and goods of all kinds existed in Byzantium and formed an integral part of the diplomatic process, the only instance in which a specific monetary/economic value is assigned to a relic is found not in a Byzantine, but in an Arabic source, Yahya b. Sa’id Antaki’s Ta’rikh or Chronique universelle, ed. and trans. I. Kratchkovsky and A. Vasiliev, PO 22 (Paris, 1932), 770. For a discussion of this and related sources, see Cutler, “Gift and Gift Exchange,” 252. For the Byzantine evaluation and assessment of luxury goods as specified in the Book of Ceremonies, see ibid., 257–58.


⁴ On the social construction and reconstruction of the value of relics, see ibid., 174–81 and 186–87.

⁵ G. Simmel, The Philosophy of Money, 2d Eng. ed. (London, 1990), 67; original German edition: Die Philosophie des Geldes, 2d rev. ed. (Leipzig, 1907), 13 (further references to the German edition are in square brackets).
an increasing western knowledge of and desire for these sacred objects affected their value and status as items of economic and noneconomic exchange. It is the aim of this study to explore these and related questions by examining, on the one hand, the literary evidence for the transfer of relics and reliquaries from Byzantium to the Latin West and, on the other hand, the artistic responses they prompted in the new social and cultural environments in which they were placed. While eastern relics, particularly fragments of the True Cross, are known to have reached western Europe as early as the fourth century as sacred souvenirs and personal gifts, the time frame chosen for this study stretches from the Arab conquest of Jerusalem in 637/38 to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Such a choice is warranted by the fact that it was during these centuries that the Byzantine emperor established and asserted himself as the safekeeper, defender, and distributor of the most sacred relics of Christendom, namely, those associated with the Passion of Christ, the Virgin, and certain eastern saints. It was the possession of these relics that confirmed the emperor’s close ties with the divine powers, guaranteed his victoriousness in battle, and lent his office a political and spiritual prestige that other Christian rulers could hope to acquire only if they themselves gained possession of these precious, and truly priceless, objects.

Sacred Gifts and Priceless Treasures

I begin with a brief historical narrative or, rather, a piece of historical fiction, recorded in Arnold of Lübeck’s early thirteenth-century Chronicle of the Slavs. The passage in question describes the visit of Henry the Lion, duke of Saxony and Bavaria, at the court of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos on the occasion of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Like other western noblemen and pilgrims before him, the duke had arrived in Constantinople in early April 1172, shortly before Easter, and planned to continue his journey by boat from the Byzantine capital. Upon his arrival, the duke presented the emperor, as was customary in his native lands, “with many and splendid gifts, beautiful horses with saddles, Value, according to Simmel, “is never a quality of the objects, but a judgement upon them which remains inherent in the subject”; ibid., 63 [8]. For the construction of value, see ibid., 59–101 [1–29]. For an analysis of Simmel’s concept of “value” in the context of “commodities” and their exchange, see A. Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in Social Life of Things (as above, note 3), 3–63.

7 The earliest record for the dissemination of relics of the True Cross is contained in the works of Cyril of Jerusalem, who in his fourth Katechisis claims that “small fragments of the wood of the cross meanwhile filled the whole world.” See Cyril of Jerusalem, Opera Omnia, ed. W. K. Reischl and J. Rupp, 2 vols. (Munich, 1848–60), 1:100 (= PG 33:469). The earliest transfer of a relic of the True Cross north of the Alps is attested to the years 402/3 when Paulinus of Nola sent “part of a small fragment of the wood of the divine cross” to his friend Sulpicius Severus in Gaul. See Paulinus of Nola, Epistolae, ed. W. von Hartel, CSEL 29 (Vienna, 1894), 268.


10 For a detailed analysis of Henry’s pilgrimage as recorded in Arnold’s chronicle, see E. Joranson, “The Palestine Pilgrimage of Henry the Lion,” in Medieval and Historiographical Essays in Honor of James Westfall Thompson, ed. J. L. Cate and E. N. Anderson (Chicago, 1938), 146–225.
cuirasses and swords, as well as robes of scarlet and vestments of finest linen.” Henry, in turn, was invited to participate in the courtly festivities arranged to celebrate the holy feast of Easter and was given a splendid reception at court. On this occasion, the duke and his entourage were presented with precious counter-gifts. While Empress Maria supplied Henry with “enough velvet to clothe all his knights and also added for each knight various pelts and a small sable skin,” the emperor provided the duke with “a strong ship copiously supplied with all things necessary” to carry him and his men to Acre.

Thus far, Arnold’s account of the duke’s reception and treatment at the Byzantine court contains nothing unusual, neither in terms of the types of gifts exchanged nor in terms of the way they were distributed. However, Arnold’s description of Henry’s second encounter with Manuel—after his return from the Holy Land—deserves closer attention. “Much delighted about the duke’s return,” thus records our chronicler, “Manuel gently urged him to stay for another couple of days, presenting him with fourteen mules loaded with gold, silver, and silken garments. The duke thanked him greatly, but refused the gift by saying: ‘My lord, I have much if I only find favor in your eyes.’ Since the emperor kept urging the duke no less than the duke kept refusing the gifts offered, Manuel finally gave him many of the saintly relics he had requested earlier. He also added much glory of precious stones. Thus released, the duke departed in peace and went on to Nîs.”

Despite the fact that the historical reliability of Arnold’s account has justly been questioned in recent scholarship, his description of the duke’s double encounter with the Byzantine emperor is nonetheless of importance since it reveals much about the relative value attributed to specific types of gifts and the complex mechanisms that governed their exchange.

11 Arnold of Lübeck, Chronica 18: “Premiserat autem dux munera multa et optima iuxta morem nostrum, equos pulcerrimos sellatos et vestitos, loricas, gladios, vestes de scarlacco et vestes lineas tenuissimas.”


13 Similar exchanges of gifts and counter-gifts are described in other contemporary sources. King Amalric, for instance, received “an immense weight of gold and quantities of silken fabrics together with most excellent gifts of foreign wares . . . while upon his retinue, even to the youngest, presents without stint were showered.” Translation quoted after William of Tyre, A History, 2:383.


15 Compare, for instance, the gifts brought and received by Liutprand of Cremona and other western embassies in the middle of the 10th century. See Liutprand of Cremona, Opera Omnia, ed. P. Chiesa, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 156 (Turnhout, 1998), 147–50.

exchange. Henry's refusal of Manuel's initial gift—the size of which seems deliberately exaggerated by the western chronicler—betrayed more than the duke's moral integrity. It shows, at least in the fictional context of Arnold's account, a mutual awareness of the fine line that separates the "good" gift from the bribe: both the outspoken intentionality and the lavishness of the emperor's gift seem to make it at first unacceptable for Henry. Manuel in turn substitutes for his initial gift one that is characterized less by its monetary value than by its spiritual significance and restricted accessibility. In fact, the emperor now offers his guest a gift the duke had requested on an earlier occasion (not further specified by the chronicler) and was thus more likely to accept. It follows the logic of Arnold's account that it is only after the separation of the "gift" from the "request" that the emperor adds to the relics "much glory of precious stones," a gesture that can now be read as an act of Manuel's generosity rather than a blunt attempt to purchase a favor.


19 While the chronicle leaves no doubt that Henry had previously asked for a donation of relics, the duke never asked for precious stones as implied by Fried, "Jerusalemfahrt," 134. Considerations about the Byzantines’ usual treatment of foreign emissaries and the reasons behind Manuel’s gift-giving miss the point. Manuel’s behavior follows the logic of Arnold’s narrative and reflects the chronicler’s understanding of the practice of Byzantine gift-giving, not its reality. This, of course, does not mean that there was no gift of precious stones. On the contrary, one is reminded of a similar present Frederick I Barbarossa allegedly received from Manuel a few years later. According to Albert of Stade, *Annales Stadenses*, ed. J. M. Lappenberg, MGH, SS 16 (Hannover, 1859; repr. 1994), 349, Manuel had sent the emperor “munera preciosa, inter quae fuit cantarus smaragdineus, capiens sextarium balsami pistici, et plurimae gemmae preciosae.”

20 A different view is presented by Joranson, "Palestine Pilgrimage," 213, who stresses that “the precious stones which Manuel added to the relics, and the velvet and furs presented by Empress Maria... assume the aspect of a reciprocation.”


22 Godfrey of Viterbo, *Gesta Friderici*, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH, SS 22 (Hannover, 1872; repr. 1976), 332. Godfrey’s accusation, of course, should not be seen as an immediate result of Henry’s alleged failure to reciprocate Manuel’s gifts. Considering the deteriorated state of relations between the Byzantine and German em-
While one may be inclined to doubt the usefulness of Arnold’s account for the purpose of defining the realities of gift exchange between Byzantium and the West in the later twelfth century, I would insist that it can nonetheless be taken as a reliable indicator of the most common western attitudes, perceptions, and—perhaps more than anything—misconceptions of the Byzantine Empire and its splendor. Like Henry, many western dignitaries before him had passed through Constantinople on their journey to the Holy Land longing to see with their eyes what they had previously only heard of through accounts of pilgrims, travelers, and ambassadors to the imperial city: namely, the opulence of its palaces, the ingenuity of its craftsmen and architects, and the many saintly relics housed in its churches. According to Odo of Deuil, chaplain of King Louis VII of France and later abbot of St. Denis, it was those churches, “unequal to Saint Sophia in size but equal to it in beauty,” that most attracted the attention of western visitors. The privilege of seeing the most sacred treasures of the empire, however, was a favor granted only to the most distinguished foreign visitors. King Louis himself, who passed through Constantinople in 1147 on his way to the Holy Land, was fortunate enough to have been granted such an honor. Surprisingly, it was not Odo who recorded the king’s visit to the imperial relic chamber, but the Byzantine historian John Kinnamos. He states that, after the king had been received in the imperial palace—the reigning emperor is again Manuel Komnenos—and “had heard what was proper,” he was taken “to the palace in the southern part of the city to investigate the things there worthy of awe and behold the holy things in the church there: I mean those things which, having been close to the body of Christ, are signs of divine protection for Christians.”

Knowledge of what the king could expect to see during his visit had, by that time, already spread through much of western Europe by way of the pries and the proverbial treacherousness of the Greeks, the mere fact that Henry had accepted gifts from the Byzantine emperor—a practice after all not unusual in the diplomatic process—would have been enough of an allegation to question his loyalty. See also T. Loughis, “Die byzantinischen Gesandten als Vermittler materieller Kultur vom 5. bis ins 11. Jahrhundert,” in Kommunikation zwischen Orient und Oktzident. Alltag und Sachkultur. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Kl. 619, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 16 (Vienna, 1994), 49–67.

One may recall Abbot Suger’s famous statement that he “used to converse with travelers from Jerusalem . . . to learn from those to whom the treasures of Constantinople and the ornaments of Hagia Sophia had been accessible whether the things here could claim some value in comparison with those there” and that “from very many truthful men, even from Bishop Hugues of Laon, [he] had heard wonderful and almost incredible reports about the superiority of Hagia Sophia’s and other churches’ ornaments for the celebration of Mass.” See Suger of St. Denis, De rebus in administratione sua gestis, in Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis and Its Art Treasures, trans. E. Panofsky, 2d ed. (Princeton, 1979), 65. For slightly earlier descriptions of the wonders of Constantinople, see Fulcher of Chartres, Historia Hierosolymitana, ed. H. Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913), 176–77, and his Gesta Francorum expugnantium Ierusalem, ed. C. Bongars, RHC HOcc 3 (Paris, 1866), 494. Odo of Deuil, De profectione 64–65: “Multas quoque habet ecclesiae sanctae Sophiae magnitudine imparas non decore, quae sunt admirables pulchritudine sic sunt etiam numerosis sanctorum pignoris venerandae. Ad has intrabant qui poterant, alii curiositate videndi, alii devotione fidelii.” Translation after Berry in ibid., 65–67.

Johannes Cinnamus, Epitome verum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenos gestarum, ed. A. Meineke, CSHB (Bonn, 1836), 83: ἐπειδὴ τὸ εἴσοδον τῶν ἀνακτόρων ἤδη ἐγέρθη τὸ ἐνθα βασιλείας ἐπὶ τοῦ μετέχον καθήκοντο, λόγοι τοῦ σύνθετο ἐξόντων ἐκ τῆς ἱερωτοῦ ἐνομίσαντον λήθαιρον . . . ὅλα ὡς ὑπέρ τοῦ μᾶρτυρος τῆς πόλεως σὺν τῷ βασιλείᾳ ἡδέν ἀνάκτορα, ἱστορίσαν όσα τῇ ἐνταύθᾳ θαυμάσια δίκρα καὶ τὰς ἐπὶ τῶν τῆς νεόν ἐντευεθέμενος ἱερας· ἤμισυ ὃς τῶν σοφοῖς Ἡρῴδη πελάσαντα σῶματι Χριστιανοῖς ἐστὶ πυθακτήρα. Translation adapted from Brand, Deeds, 69.
famous letter allegedly written by Alexios I to Robert of Flanders:27 “the column to which Christ was bound, the lash with which he was scourged, the purple robe in which he was arrayed, the crown of thorns with which he was crowned, the reed which he held in his hands in place of a scepter, the garments of which he was stripped before the Cross, the larger part of the wood of the cross on which he was crucified, the nails with which he was affixed to it, [and] the linen cloths found in the sepulcher after his resurrection.”28 These and other more accessible eastern relics were the objects a distinguished visitor to Constantinople desired to see and to behold—this was the Byzantine stuff of which western dreams were made.

While few western travelers could expect to be shown the emperor’s sacred treasures, even fewer could hope to obtain such highly prized and truly priceless objects during their stay in Constantinople. If at all, they could be received as gifts, which—as Arnold of Lübeck’s story shows—were difficult to ask for and, once received, almost impossible to reciprocate with even the most splendid western counter-gifts. As much as the creation of a stage-set atmosphere that never allowed foreign visitors to look behind the elaborate scenes put up for their receptions, the giving of such rare gifts formed part of the Byzantine diplomatic ritual and stressed, more than anything, the emperor’s superiority over his western visitors.29 Gifts of relics, however, were not restricted to visiting dignitaries and ambassadors to the Byzantine court. Already during the late antique period relics were sent to the West as imperial gifts. One of the earliest such gifts is a relic of the True Cross allegedly given by Emperor Constantine the Great to the church in the Sessorian palace in Rome.30 Following Constantine’s example in the later sixth century, Emperor Justin II sent relics of the True Cross from Constantinople to both Rome and Poitiers in Gaul.31

What is particularly interesting about the latter donation is that it was apparently granted

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28 Epistula Alexii 134: “statua ad quam fuit ligatus; flagellum, a quo fuit flagellatus; chlamys coccinea, qua fuit indutus; corona spinea, qua fuit coronatus; harundo, quam uice sceptri in manibus tulit; uestimenta, quibus ante crucem exspoliatus fuit, pars maxima ligni crucis, in qua crucifixus fuit; clau, quibus adfixus fuit; linetamina, post resurrectionem eius inuenta in sepulcro . . .”


31 For the relic sent to Rome, see A. Frolow, La relique de la Vraie Croix (Paris, 1961) 180–81, no. 34. While Frolow suggested Pope John III as the recipient of the cross, the ambiguous phrase “dat Romae” in the reliquary’s dedicatory inscription seems to indicate that the circumstances of the donation might have been more complex. For an analysis of the reliquary’s present state of preservation and original makeup, see C. Belting-
in response to a direct request of Queen Radegunde, the widow of King Clothar I, and that her counter-gift consisted of a poetic homage paid by Venantius Fortunatus, whose famous hymns in honor of the Cross were composed for the solemn reception and translation of this very relic. Considering the pricelessness of the emperor’s gift, the value of which superseded any worldly treasure, such an ephemeral counter-gift seems most fitting indeed.

It was this same notion of pricelessness and restricted accessibility that made relics a particularly powerful gift on Byzantine diplomatic missions to the Christian rulers and heirs of Charlemagne’s empire in the West. For unlike precious silks and other luxury objects that could be obtained by way of commerce, the distribution of relics, especially those of Christ, the Virgin, and certain eastern saints, was strictly controlled by the Byzantine emperor and thus out of reach for most western rulers. Inevitably, western recipients of such sacred treasures must have found themselves in a position of inferiority—a reaction undoubtedly intended by the giver as part of his political message. Several Byzantine embassies are recorded to have reached Carolingian rulers already in the eighth century, but it is not until the ninth century that relics are specifically recorded among the gifts carried by Byzantine diplomatic delegations. One of the earliest gifts of this sort is


For the relic sent to Poitiers, see Frolow, La relique, 179, no. 33. For the later history of the relic and its middle Byzantine container, see J. Durand, “Le reliquaire de la vraie croix de Poitiers. Nouvelles observations,” BullSocAntFr (1992): 152–68.

For the poem in honor of the imperial couple, see Venantius Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. F. Leo, MGH, AA 4.1 (Berlin, 1881; repr. 2000), Appendix 2, 277; for the hymns in honor of the cross, ibid., 1:27; 2:27–28; 6:34–35.


For a short assessment of the role of relics as Byzantine diplomatic gifts, see Mergiali-Sahas, “Byzantine Emperors and Holy Relics,” 47–48. Byzantium was, of course, not the only source for relics during the Carolingian period. Despite papal hesitancy, Rome played an important role in the “production” and dissemination of holy relics across the newly Christianized areas of northern Europe. On the changing modes of the production and distribution of Roman relics, see J. M. McCulloh, “From Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change in Papal Relic Policy from the Sixth to the Eighth Centuries,” in Pietas. Festschrift für B. Kötting, ed. E. Dassmann and K. S. Frank (Münster, 1980), 313–24. See also P. Geary, Forta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages (Princeton, 1978).

The Byzantine emperor’s role as guardian of the most important relics of Christendom is the result of a historical development that seems to have gained momentum during the reign of Emperor Justin II, who not only rebuilt the churches of the Virgin in the Blachernai and Chalkoprateia in order to create new settings for the veneration of her most prized relics, her robe and girdle, but can also be credited with the removal of the acheiropoietos icon of Christ from Kamouliana and the relic of the True Cross from Apamea. During the reign of Heraclius, the Persian and Arab conquests of Jerusalem necessitated a more permanent translation of dominical and other eastern relics into the Byzantine capital. On the emperor’s role as the guardian of relics of Christ’s passion, see most recently H. A. Klein, “Constantine, Helena, and the Cult of the True Cross in Constantinople,” in Byzance et les Reliques du Christ, ed. B. Flusin and J. Durand (Paris, 2004), 31–59; Mergiali-Sahas, “Byzantine Emperors and Holy Relics,” 43–48. On the accessibility of Byzantine silks in the West, see Liutprand of Cremona, Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana, in Chiesa, ed., Opera Omnia (as above, note 15), 211–12; and Jacoby, above, 197–240.


For earlier Byzantine missions and the gifts they carried, see J. Herrin, “Constantinople, Rome, and the Franks in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries,” in Byzantine Diplomacy (as above, note 29), 91–107, esp. 100–107.
mentioned in Andrea Dandolo’s thirteenth-century *Chronicon Venetum*, which states that “Doge Agnellus, a catholic man, received from Emperor Leo the body of St. Zachariah the prophet, a particle of the wood of the Cross, and vestments of Christ and his mother, with many treasures.” But already in the ninth century, the *Annals of Fulda* record that a Byzantine embassy sent to King Louis the German by Emperor Basil I arrived in Regensburg in January 872 with equally precious gifts, among them “a crystal of miraculous magnitude, decorated with gold and gems, and a not modest part of the lifegiving Cross.” As is attested by the unusual specificity of the Fulda chronicler’s account, the lavishness of the Byzantine gifts was not lost on their western recipients. Whether relics were again among the gifts brought to Germany by a Byzantine delegation that arrived in Regensburg in November 873 under the leadership of a certain Archbishop Agathon is not recorded in the *Annals*. It can, however, not be ruled out with certainty either.

Sending sacred relics along with other precious gifts to western rulers remained a Byzantine diplomatic custom well into the Ottonian and Salian period. A short reference in the early twelfth-century *Chronicon S. Andreae Castri Cameracesii* may suggest that relics of the apostle Andrew reached Germany by way of a Byzantine embassy sent to Emperor Henry II in the early years of his reign. More Byzantine relics seem to have reached western Europe between 1025 and 1028. According to the early eleventh-century history of Rodulfus Glaber, Bishop Odelricus of Orléans, passing through Constantinople on his way back from Jerusalem, received from Emperor Constantine VIII not only a great number of silken hangings, but also “quite a large part of the venerable Cross of our Lord the

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39 *Annales Fuldenses*, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH, SS 1 (Hannover, 1826; repr. 1976), 384: “Mense Ianuario circa epiphaniam Basili, Graecorum imperatoris, legati cum munerebibus et epistolis ad Hludowicum regem Radasbonam venerunt, atque ei inter caetera exenia cristallum mirae magnitudinis, auro gemmisque praeciosis ornatum, cum parte non modica salutiferae crucis obterulerunt.”

40 For this embassy, see *Annales Fuldenses*, 337–415, esp. 384. See also Dölger, *Regesten*, 1:59, no. 489.

41 For Basil’s second embassy to Louis the German, see *Annales Fuldenses*, 387, and Dölger, *Regesten*, 1:59, no. 491. For the role of ecclesiasts as leaders of Byzantine embassies to the West, see Loughis, *Les ambassades*, 335–45.

42 For the diplomatic contacts in this period, see Loughis, *Les ambassades*, 215–37.


Savior" which he was asked to deliver to his master, King Robert the Pious of France (996–1031). The same emperor is said to have granted a relic of the True Cross to Count Manegold of Werd, the secular leader of an embassy sent to the Byzantine court by Emperor Conrad II in 1027. Similarly, Conrad II himself is said to have received relics as gifts from the Byzantine emperor—at least they are recorded as such in a later charter issued by his mother, Adelheid. A final example may show that relics of the True Cross were by no means the only category of relics presented to western rulers in the course of the diplomatic process. Alexios I’s letter to Henry IV, cited at length in Anna Komnene’s Alexiās, is one of the few cases in which a Byzantine source provides a detailed list of gifts sent to a western ruler. The letter records that Alexios, in a final attempt to convince Henry to take action against Robert Guiscard, had sent 144,000 nomismata and 100 silken garments to Henry and further reveals that he was to receive another 261,000 nomismata as well as other payments once he had sworn an oath to support the emperor’s case against Robert. After a lengthy discussion of the more specific details involved in the settlement of the affair, the letter ends with an expression of hope for future military and family ties. As if to stress the sincerity of his wishes, the letter concludes: “For now we are sending your Highness as a token of our friendship a golden pectoral cross decorated with pearls, a golden container with relics of several saints, each of which identified by an attached card, a chalice of sardonyx, a crystal goblet, a bloodstone set in gold, and some opobalsamon.”

It is interesting to note, especially with regard to Arnold of Lübeck’s account, that within Alexios’s letter this so-called “token of friendship” is carefully distinguished from the money and the silken garments offered to Henry as a stimulus and prize for his campaign against the Normans. Gifts of relics such as those just mentioned were of course not restricted to imperial recipients. This is attested by a number of ecclesiastical documents that record the exchange of gifts and letters between the patriarchs of Constantinople and the popes in Rome. In 811, when Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople sent a synodal letter to his colleague

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46 For a discussion of the circumstances in which Manegold received the sacred gift, see below.

47 Wirtembergisches Urkundenbuch, ed. Königliches Staatsarchiv Stuttgart, 11 vols. (Stuttgart, 1849–1913), 1: 254–55, no. 215. See also Frolow, La relique, 265–66, no. 204. Apart from the relic of the True Cross, none of the relics mentioned in Adelheid’s charter are likely to be gifts from the Byzantine emperor. For a discussion of the circumstances in which Conrad seems to have received the cross relic, see B. Schwineköper, “Christus-Reliquien-Verehrung und Politik,” in Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte 117 (1981): 183–281, esp. 224–33.


49 Anna Komnene, Alexiās 1:134.

50 Anna Komnene, Alexiās 1:135: Τῇ μέντοι εὐγενείᾳ σου ὑπεστάλησαν δεξιωματών ἐνέκεν ἑγκόλπων χρυσῶν μετὰ μαργαριτάριων, ὦθησε διάχρυσος ἐχοῦσα ἐνόν τιμήμα τιμάρων ὁμάν, ὅπως ἐκεῖνον διὰ τὸ τοῦ εὐ ἐκάστω ἀντίου ἑνεθέντος χαρίτον γνωρίζεται, καθὼς παρόδουχον καὶ ἑμπότης κρίος, ἀστροπέλεκτιν δεδεμένων μετὰ χρυσιζήν καὶ ὕποβαλίσσων.

51 The role of relics and other luxuries as “sweeteners, addenda to the specie that constituted the major portion of a gift,” has recently been stressed by Cutler, “Gift and Gift Exchange,” 251.
Pope Leo III in Rome, he enclosed with it a “golden enkolpion containing particles of the glorious wood.”\(^9\) As the letter further indicates, the enkolpion was decorated on one side with crystal and on the other with images of Christ’s Passion in niello. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to assume that the gift resembled the so-called Pliska Cross and other enkolpia of its kind.\(^3\) About two generations later, in 880, Patriarch Photios sent a similar gift “as a sign of his friendship” to the bishop and future pope Marinus of Cери, who had visited Constantinople on at least four occasions as a papal diplomat and had participated in the eighth ecumenical council of 869.\(^2\) Northern bishops, too, claimed to have received particles of the venerable wood from the Byzantine emperor. The *vita* of the late eleventh-century bishop Anno of Cologne (d. 1075), for instance, records “that the legates he had sent to the king of Greece with letters had come back with quite a large particle of the wood of the Lord and other kinds of royal gifts the king had presented to them.”\(^5\) Although attempts to identify a Byzantine cross relic in the treasury of Cologne Cathedral (Fig. 1) as the one allegedly received by Anno must be treated with caution, there can be little doubt that relics of the True Cross were indeed presented to western ecclesiastical diplomats.\(^6\) The relics contained in two Byzantine reliquary triptychs (Fig. 2), incorporated in the larger Stavelot Triptych, may serve as a prominent example.\(^7\) While there is no direct evidence to support the assumption that Wibald of Stavelot received these reliquaries as gifts during one of his diplomatic missions to Constantinople, the workmanship

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\(^6\) Grumel and Darrouzès, *Regestes* (as above, note 52), 147, no. 554 [523]. See Frolow, *La relique*, 223, no. 110.


1 Cologne, Cathedral Treasury, cross relic, 11th century (photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv, Cologne)
2 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Stavelot Triptych (detail), enkolpia, 11th–12th century (photo: courtesy of The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York)
3 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Stavelot Triptych, ca. 1160 (photo: courtesy of The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York)
Reims, Cathedral Treasury, Talisman of Charlemagne, 9th century (photo: A. Münchow, courtesy of the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich)
5 Munich, Treasury of the Residence, cross reliquary of Henry II, early 11th century (photo: Bayerische Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Munich)
Donauwörth, Pädagogische Stiftung Cassianum, staurotheke (front), 11th century (photo: Wolf-Christian von der Mülbe; Pädagogische Stiftung Cassianum, Donauwörth)
7 Donauwörth, Pädagogische Stiftung Cassianum, *staurothek* (detail), 11th century (photo: Wolf-Christian von der Mülbe; Pädagogische Stiftung Cassianum, Donauwörth)

8 Formerly Donauwörth, original lid of *staurothek* (photo: after C. Königsdorfer, *Geschichte des Klasters zum Heiligen Kreutz in Donauwörth* [Donauwörth, 1819])
9 Kala, St. Kvirike (on loan from the Museum for History and Ethnography of Saventia), staurotheke, 11th century (photo: after L. Khuskidze, “La staurothèque byzantine de la Svanéti,” in Byzantine East, Latin West. Art-historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann, ed. C. Moss and K. Kiefer [Princeton, 1995], Fig. 1)
10 Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art, arm reliquary, 12th century (photo: courtesy of The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland)
11 Hildesheim, Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, reliquary cross of Henry the Lion, 12th century (photo: courtesy of the Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, Hildesheim)
12 Limburg, Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, Limburger Staurothek, 968–985 (photo: Jutta Brüdern, Braunschweig; courtesy of the Dom- und Diözesanmuseum Limburg)
13 Trier, St. Matthias, Treasury, cross reliquary, ca. 1230–40 (photo: Rita Heyen; Amt für kirchliche Denkmalpflege, Trier)
14 Mettlach, St. Petrus und Lutwinus, cross reliquary, ca. 1220–30 (photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv, Cologne)
of the framing Mosan triptych (Fig. 3) makes such a scenario indeed highly likely, as has long been argued on technical and stylistic grounds. Art historical considerations about the Stavelot Triptych’s patronage are further supported by the fact that friendly ties had been established between Wibald and the Byzantine emperor long before the abbot’s first mission to Constantinople. As revealed in his letters, Wibald had received a costly silken garment from the emperor already in 1151. The assumption that Wibald received two precious reliquary triptychs during his later visit to Constantinople thus gains plausibility. What seems to have made relics, particularly those of the True Cross, a highly effective diplomatic gift was not only their significance as powerful tokens of Christ’s promise for salvation, but that they could serve a variety of different purposes and appealed to a wide range of potential western recipients: emperors, kings, and dukes, as well as popes, bishops, and abbots.

It is worth noting, however, that the artistic impact of those Byzantine reliquaries known to have reached the West between the middle of the ninth and the beginning of the twelfth century seems to have been rather limited—a fact that may largely be due to their relatively small size and intended personal rather than liturgical use. Of all surviving reliquaries produced in the West during the Carolingian period, there exists only one object that was likely created with the intention to emulate such Byzantine imports, namely, a rock crystal pendant formerly in the possession of Aachen Cathedral but now preserved in the Cathedral treasury of Reims (Fig. 4). However, the fact that the reliquary’s design recalls the description given for the Byzantine reliquary received by Louis the German in 872 does not suffice to corroborate such an assumption. Perhaps surprisingly, the situation does not seem to have changed dramatically during the Ottonian period, traditionally considered a first climax of Byzantine artistic “influence” in western Europe—

58 Wibald visited Constantinople twice, in 1155 and 1157, as Frederick Barbarossa’s ambassador to the court of Manuel I Komnenos. His diplomatic missions are mentioned in both western and Byzantine sources, notably in Otto of Freising, Gesta Frederici seu rectius Cronica, ed. E.-J. Schmale, 4th ed. (Darmstadt, 2000), 362–63, 382–83, and John Kinnamos, Epitome, 135. For the political circumstances of Wibald’s embassies, see F. Chalandon, Les Comnènes. Études sur l’Empire byzantin au XIe et au XIIe siècles, 2 vols. (Paris, 1912), 2:343–75, esp. 346–52, 374–75. For Wibald’s patronage of the Stavelot Triptych, see The Stavelot Triptych, 10–11.


61 The date of the pendant, which originally contained relics of the Virgin’s hair and milk, is controversial, but must generally be assigned to the 9th century. Although 17th-century sources record that it was one of three enkolpia found around Charlemagne’s neck during the opening of his tomb by Emperor Otto III, such an identification is not supported by the account of Thietmar of Merseburg, the earliest witness of the event. Attempts to date the reliquary with regard to the 17th-century tradition must therefore be taken with caution. For the passage in Thietmar’s chronicle, see Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korrektur, ed. R. Holtzmann, MGH, Scriptores Germ. n.s. 9 (Berlin, 1955; repr. 1996), 186–87; for the 17th-century tradition, see Petrus a Beeck, Imperium ecclesiærum Aquis in B. Mariae canonici... Aquissagium (Aachen, 1620), 75; Joannes Noppius, Aacher Chronik (Cologne, 1643), 11.
especially after the arrival of Princess Theophano, the Byzantine bride of Otto II and future regent for Otto III. While Ottonian artists developed an increasing interest in the use of Byzantine spolia and the adoption and adaptation of Byzantine techniques, pictorial motifs, and iconographic formulae, there are few sources—and even fewer objects—that would suggest an active western interest in copying Byzantine reliquary forms or adopting certain liturgical or ceremonial practices. One such source, the tenth-century consuetudines of the abbey of St. Emmeram in Regensburg, specifies that during processions on Sundays and certain feast days “the priest should carry around his neck the phylactery with the Lord’s wood.” Whether this means that the monastery possessed a larger Byzantine staurotheke and consciously emulated what was perhaps considered Byzantine liturgical practice is hard to tell. Similarly, it is difficult to interpret a notice in Thangmar’s Vita Bernwardi, which records that the bishop himself created a “container (theca) richly decorated with gold and precious stones” for a particle of the True Cross he had received from Emperor Otto III as a gift. While the unusual term theca may be taken as an indication that Bernward’s reliquary was in some way based on a Byzantine exemplar, the miracle story that follows in Thangmar’s account rather points to a cruciform reliquary, fragments of which may still form part of the so-called Bernwardkreuz.

The only Ottonian reliquary that has been considered to derive in its form more or less directly from a Byzantine model is the panel-shaped cross reliquary associated with Emperor Henry II in the treasury of the Residence in Munich (Fig. 5). Attempts to reconstruct the reliquary’s original ap-

62 For a cautious assessment of the impact of Byzantine minor arts on western artistic production during the Ottonian period, see H. Westermann-Angerhausen, “Did Theophano Leave Her Mark on the Ottonian Sumptuary Arts?” in Empress Theophano: Byzantium and the West at the Turn of the First Millennium, ed. A. Davids (Cambridge, 1995), 244–64.
63 Consuetudinum sacri XI/XI/XIII Monasteri moncluniacensis, ed. K. Hallinger, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 7.3 (Siegburg, 1984), 208: “In processione uero illa nihil aliud feratur nisi aqua benedicta, crux, missalis ante presbiterum et ipse sacerdos in collo suo phylacterium cum ligno domini gerat.”
64 In fact, the word “phylacterium” seems to indicate that it was rather a reliquary enkolpion. Whereas the use of imported Byzantine enkolpia is attested in both the Latin East and West in a military context, the use of such a reliquary in a liturgical procession is, to my knowledge, unique.
65 Thangmar, Vita Bernwardi Episcopi Hildesheimensis, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH, SS 4 (Hildesheim, 1841; repr. 1982), 762: “Nam venerabilis pontifex Bernwardus thecam auro gemmisque lautissimam, in qua vivificum lignum includeret, paravit, et cum ex tribus particulis sancti ligni quartam si fieri posset excidere temptaret, ut per singulas abside absides singulas conderet portiones, . . . . ecce subito inter manus ipsum antistiti quarta particular sacrautissimi ligni angelico ut creditur ministerio delata apparuit. Mox igitur praesul laetus lignum sanctum per quatuor absides paravit.”
66 Hildesheim, Domschatz, inv. no. DS L109. The surviving Ottonian fragments of the (extensively remodeled) cross suggest that the original was cruciform in shape and richly decorated with gold filigree and precious stones, i.e., purely western in concept. See Bernward von Hildesheim und das Zeitalter der Ottonen, ed. M. Brandt, exh. cat., Domuseum Hildesheim (Hildesheim–Mainz, 1993), no. viii–xiii, 587–89 with bibliography. The so-called “Silbernes Bernwardkreuz,” while reflecting Byzantine traditions at least in its shape, was decorated with neither gold nor precious stones and thus cannot be identified with the theca mentioned by Thangmar. For this cross, see Byzanz. Die Macht der Bilder, ed. A. Effenberger and M. Brandt, exh. cat., Domuseum Hildesheim (Hildesheim, 1998), no. 72, 138 and 159; Bernward von Hildesheim, no. viii–xiii, 578–81, both with bibliographies.
pearance, however, have proved to be difficult and do not permit the identification of a specific Byzantine prototype.\textsuperscript{69} Considering the often attested Ottonian practice of dismantling Byzantine ivory triptychs for their inclusion on book covers and other liturgical objects, one may be inclined to doubt that the occasional Byzantine reliquary that reached German lands during the tenth and eleventh centuries was spared a similar fate and instead used as an artistic model for the production of similar \textit{vasa sacra}. The form and decoration of Emperor Conrad II's famous \textit{Reichskreuz}\textsuperscript{69} in Vienna at least suggest that German artists and their patrons remained generally conservative in their tastes even after the alleged advent of more and larger particles of the True Cross from Constantinople.\textsuperscript{70}

Whereas there exists, to my knowledge, not a single work or document that would prove an immediate artistic response to the arrival of Byzantine reliquaries in the West during the remainder of the eleventh century, there can be no doubt that western interest in the Byzantine ceremonial and liturgical use of relics, especially relics of Christ, started to increase considerably during the Salian period. This is suggested by the eleventh-century \textit{Ordines Coronationis Imperialis} and a passage in Benzo of Alba's famous panegyric in honor of Emperor Henry IV, which, for the first time, mention the presence of a relic of the True Cross during the procession that precedes the emperor's coronation.\textsuperscript{71} As Berent Schwineköper has shown, it must have been during the early years of Salian rule that the relic of the True Cross—most likely the one enclosed in the \textit{Reichskreuz}—assumed a status similar to that held by the Holy Lance ever since Otto I's defeat of the Magyars at Birten when it became a prime symbol of imperial power and victory.\textsuperscript{72} That Byzantine customs and practices need to be considered as possible sources for these changes is suggested by other passages in Benzo's panegyric. In the preface to Book VI, for instance, he reflects upon the military tactics of the "Byzantine king Nikephoros [i.e., Nikephoros II Phokas], a man wise and experienced in war, who surrounded Antioch with a siege wall and terrible

\textsuperscript{69} Fillitz, "Kreuzreliquiar," 23–30. Although Fillitz's proposal for the Ottonian reliquary's original form is generally convincing, his formal comparisons with Byzantine \textit{staurothekai} remain rather vague. His arguments for a conscious adaptation of Byzantine reliquary forms and ceremonial practices are, for the most part, based on developments not documented in the West before the early Salian period.

\textsuperscript{69} See H. Fillitz, \textit{Die Schatzkammer in Wien} (Salzburg–Vienna, 1986), 166–67, no. 2; Schramm and Mutherich, \textit{Denkmale}, 170, no. 145.

\textsuperscript{70} Schwineköper, "Christus-Reliquien," 224–47. While Schwineköper states "Es kann also kein Zweifel daran bestehen, daß Konrad II. durch ein Geschenk des byzantinischen Kaisers in den Besitz eines Kreuzpartikel gelangt ist," he admits "daß darüber bisher keine über die . . . Öhringer Quelle hinausgehenden schriftlichen Nachrichten vorliegen." His conclusion, "daß also die heute in Wien aufbewahrte Kreuzreliquie als Geschenk des byzantinischen Kaisers nach dem Westen gekommen sein muß" should be treated with caution, especially considering its enormous size (31 cm).


\textsuperscript{72} For the king's use of the lance during the battle, see Liutprand of Cremona, \textit{Antapodosis} 111: "Rex denique tantam suorum constantiam non sine divino instinctu esse considerans . . . , cum populo lacrimas fundens ante victoriferos clavos, manibus domini et salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi adfixos sueaque lanceae interpositos, in orationem dedit."
machines for seven years. Twice a week he went around the city with many of his people, as once in Jericho. And a cross with the Lord's wood preceded him, through which he hoped to gain victory.”

How closely the new western interest in the military and ceremonial role of the True Cross and other relics of Christ was linked to the reception of Byzantine gifts is expressed only slightly later in the same book: “The basileus,” records Benzo of Alba, “sent him [Henry] many saintly things, necessary in churches as much as in wars—no gift on earth equals them: [fragments] of the shroud, of the cross, and of the crown of thorns, through which the vineyard that turned bitter deluded its king. Such a treasure is not corrupted by the moth.”

Considering the increasing western interest in the military and ceremonial use of relics of Christ's Passion, it may not come as a surprise that distinguished visitors to the Byzantine capital were particularly eager to obtain such rare and incorruptible gifts. Unfortunately, the arrival of Byzantine relics in the West is only rarely attested during the eleventh century. A notable exception is, as already mentioned, a relic of the True Cross said to have been brought to Germany by Count Manegold of Werd during a diplomatic mission in 1027/29. The mere fact of Manegold's acquisition of the relic “decenter auro et gemmis ornata, tunc ab autocratore Constantinopoleos nomine Romanos dono data” is documented in a papal bull issued by Leo IX on 3 December 1049 on the occasion of the pope's consecration of a convent founded by Manegold to safeguard the sacred relic. It is only through the twelfth-century account of a certain monk Berthold, sent to Constantinople by his abbot Dieterich to research the facts surrounding Manegold's acquisition, that we have contemporary evidence for this embassy, sent to Constantinople by Emperor Conrad II in the fall of 1027, is scant. See Wipo, Gesta Chonvanni imperatoris, in Die Werke Wipos, ed. H. Bresslau, MGH, Scriptorium 61, 3d ed. (Hannover, 1915; repr. 1993), 1–62, esp. 42; P. Jaffé, Regesta (Paris, 1885–88), I:535, no. 4207 (3202); Annales Augustani, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH, SS 3 (Hannover, 1839; repr. 1886), 125. For an evaluation of the sources and an assessment of the reasons for Conrad's embassy, see most recently H. Wolfram, “Die Gesandtschaft Konrads II. nach Konstantinopel,” MittlÖG 100 (1992): 161–74; O. Krenst, “Correctiones fœcundæ zu Auslandsschreiben byzantinischer Kaiser des 11. Jahrhunderts,” Aachener Kunstblätter 60 (1994): 143–62, esp. 143–44. See also H. Bresslau, “Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis von Konrads II. Beziehungen zu Byzanz und Dänemark,” Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte 10 (1870): 606–13; idem, Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reiches unter Konrad II. Erster Band: 1024–1031 (Leipzig, 1879), 234–36, 271–75.

According to later sources, the relic was first kept in a chapel built around 1034 inside the precinct of Manegold's castle. The chapel was destroyed shortly after its consecration, and Manegold II rebuilt the church and a convent outside the castle walls. At the beginning of the 12th century, Manegold III reformed the monastery and, with the help of Bishop Gebhard III of Constance, refounded it with twelve monks from the Benedictine abbey of St. Blasien. The events surrounding the refoundation are recorded in a papal bull issued by Innocent II on 19 June 1135. See Jaffé, Regesta 1:867, no. 7719 (5507); PL 179:240. For a summary of the history of the monastery of the Holy Cross, see A. Steichele, Das Bistum Augsburg. Dritter Band: Die Landkapitel Dillingen, Dinkelsbühl, Donauwörth (Augsburg, 1872), 827–32.
learn more about the circumstances in which Manegold is said to have received the imperial gift. The report can be summarized as follows: After much maltreatment by Byzantine officials, Manegold, the secular leader of the diplomatic mission, is able to gain the attention of the Byzantine emperor [Constantine VIII]. Soon he wins his friendship and is allowed to enter and leave the Byzantine palace as he pleases. One day, in a moment of weakness, the emperor promises Manegold to grant him whatever he wished. Manegold immediately asks for an imperial relic of the True Cross he had seen on an earlier occasion. At first the emperor refuses to grant the gift, stressing that the relic played an important role in the Byzantine coronation ritual, but, realizing that he is bound by his word, the emperor finally honors Manegold’s request. Shortly thereafter the emperor falls sick and dies. During the preparations for the coronation of his successor [Romanos III], the reliquary is discovered missing. Immediately Manegold, whose close ties to the previous emperor had already aroused suspicion, is accused of theft and his quarters are searched. Since Manegold had already secretly sent the reliquary back to Germany, he is able to convince the new emperor of his innocence. He declares his mission to be finished and returns to his native lands, where the precious relic has long since arrived.

Although Berthold’s account is as fantastic in its assessment of the historical details as it is revealing of the most common western stereotypes concerning the Byzantine court and its rituals, it generally confirms what earlier sources—especially the papal bull of 1049—outlined as a likely course of events: Manegold received a relic of the True Cross, richly decorated with gold and precious stones, while serving on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople sent by Emperor Conrad II to negotiate a marriage between his son Henry III and a yet unnamed Byzantine princess. In one important detail, however, Berthold’s account differs from the information given in the bull of Pope Leo IX. According to Berthold, Manegold received the relic not from Romanos III, as recorded in the bull, but from Constantine VIII, whose untimely death in 1028 not only forced Manegold to smuggle his sacred treasure out of Constantinople, but also led him to break off the marriage negotiations he had come to conduct. Following the course of events as they are recorded by Berthold, scholars usually assume Constantine VIII to be the donor of the relic, thus suggesting an error on the part of Leo IX. Considering the early date of the

78 See Bertholdi narratio quomodo vivifica crux Werdam pervenit, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH, SS 15.2 (Hannover, 1888; repr. 1991), 767–70. The date of Berthold’s account is much debated. C. Königsdorfer, Geschichte des Klosters zum Heiligen Kreuz in Donauwörth, 2 vols. (Donauwörth, 1819), 392, assigns a date of 1122 based on a notice in the early 17th-century chronicle of the monastery’s prior Georg Beck according to which Berthold left Donauwörth in 1113. The date is now usually given as “before 1155.” For a discussion of the date, see Bresslau, “Beitrag,” 605–606 with nn. 1 and 2. For information on Abbot Dieterich, see Steichele, Bistum Augsburg, 843–44.

79 Although Berthold never mentions Constantine by name—he calls him “rex Constantinopolitanus”—the general chronology of events recorded in his account leaves no doubt that Constantine VIII was considered to have granted Manegold the relic. See Wolfram, “Gesandtschaft,” 168.

80 For an assessment of Berthold’s account and his knowledge of Byzantine sources, see Bresslau, “Beitrag,” 607–10.

81 Constantine VIII died 11 November 1028, shortly after Bishop Werner of Straßburg, who died 28 October. For the date of Constantine’s death, see P. Schreiner, Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken, CFHB 12, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1977), 141; see also Kresten, “Correctiusculariae,” 154 n. 10.

82 An error on the part of Pope Leo IX was first suggested by Bresslau, “Beitrag,” 610: “Die Echtheit dieser Bulle selbst zu bezweifeln, ist kein Grund vorhanden. . . . Auffällig könnte nur sein, daß Leo den Kaiser Romanos statt Constantin [als Adressat der Gesandtschaft] nennt, aber nachdem 20 Jahre seit jener
bull and the fact that Leo IX was present at Donauwörth for the consecration of the convent of the Holy Cross, such an assumption seems not at all warranted. Indeed, the wording of the bull is misleading in that it conflates Manegold’s receiving the relic of the True Cross “ab autocratore Constantinopoleos nomine Romanos” and the original goal of his mission “cum ad eum missus esset ab imperatore Chuonrado, ut filiam suam nuptum traderet eius filio.” Especially the passage “ut filiam suam nuptum traderet” seems to indicate that Leo was well aware that the original addressee of the embassy was Constantine VIII and not Romanos III, who had only sisters to offer for a potential marriage. Since it is highly unlikely that the name of the relic’s imperial donor had already been forgotten at Donauwörth in 1049, I would suggest that it was Romanos III who granted Manegold the particle of the True Cross before he departed from Constantinople. Such an assumption is further suggested by Berthold himself, who stresses that Manegold, after having been offered the new emperor’s sister as a potential bride, returned home “magnis a rege illo [Romanos III] honoratus munieribus.”

This, however, is only half the story—the part told by the literary sources. The other half is told by the relic of the True Cross itself and its panel-shaped container (Fig. 6), both still kept in the church originally founded for its safekeeping and veneration. Although Manegold’s reliquary has suffered from extensive loss, remodeling, and restoration, neither the surviving sheets of gilded silver that decorate the reliquary’s sides with bands of intricate floral medallions (Fig. 7), nor the reliquary’s sliding lid (Fig. 8), lost during the middle of the seventeenth century, but recorded in a late sixteenth-century painting and an early seventeenth-century description, leave any doubt about the Byzantine provenance of the ensemble as a whole. Especially the reliquary’s lid with its precious enamel decoration recalls the arrangement and iconographic program of similar Byzantine staurotheke, datable most likely to the late tenth or early eleventh century. The general composition of the reliquary’s interior with its incised cruciform decoration finds its closest parallel in a Byzantine staurotheke formerly kept in the convent of Sts. Quiricus and Julitta in Svanetia (Fig. 9), but the somewhat simple and unrefined decoration of Manegold’s reliquary seems puzzling and may contradict its alleged imperial provenance.

Until a more detailed study of these two reliquaries’ physical makeup and decoration reveals further clues to determine their provenance, we are left with the information pro-

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84 Bertholdi narratio 770.45–48.

85 Donauwörth, Pädagogische Stiftung Cassianeum. For a short summary of the state of research on the reliquary and a full bibliography, see my catalogue entry in Rom und Byzanz. Schatzkammerstücke aus bayerischen Sammlungen, ed. R. Baumstark et al., exh. cat., Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (Munich, 1998), 131–36, no. 27.


vided by the literary sources. What these, especially Berthold’s fairy-tale account of Mane-
gold’s adventures, reflect most clearly is the almost mystical quality that Constantinople 
had acquired in the eyes of most westerners by the beginning of the twelfth century. More 
than the liberated Jerusalem, it was the imperial palace in Constantinople where western 
travelers could hope to obtain authentic relics of Christ and his saints. It was there that the 
most important relics of Christendom were known to be kept, and it was there that relics 
of Christ’s Passion were known to play an essential role in the rituals and ceremonies of the 
court. What Berthold’s story further reveals is the western eagerness and willingness to 
gain possession of these same relics and their precious containers even by cunning and 
trickery.

Around the same time, western artistic responses to the arrival of such Byzantine 
treasures become more clearly measurable in the West. This is attested not only in Abbot 
Suger’s famous chalice, a work that reflects the knowledge of similar *vasa sacra* in Byzant-
tium, but also in reliquaries such as the Stavelot Triptych (Fig. 3), which utilizes the “Byzan-
tine” triptych format in an innovative and otherwise unattested way. Although the exact 
circumstances of its commission are uncertain, the workmanship and style of the reli-
quary’s champlevé enamel and repoussé decoration suggest that it was created in a Mosan 
workshop shortly before or around 1160. It was conceived as a precious frame for the two 
so-called “Byzantine” triptychs, which, in their turn, function as shrines for the sacred 
relics they contain. To utilize the functional qualities of the Byzantine triptychs’ format as 
well as their images, the Mosan artist did not hesitate to dismantle the original Byzantine 
reliquaries available to him. He carefully took them apart and rearranged them in a man-
ner inspired by their original appearance. The importance of this observation, which is 
supported by the 1973 examination of the Stavelot Triptych, can hardly be overestimated, 
since it proves that the western artist consciously used the devotional quality inherent in 
the reliquaries’ triptych format to set the stage for the relics’ display and veneration. The 
re-creation of the reliquaries’ original appearance further suggests that the Byzantine

89 As recently pointed out by A. Cutler, precious objects and luxury goods shared in the mystique of the 
Byzantine capital and could function as tokens or visual reminders of its splendor when placed in a different 

90 Whereas Benzo of Alba’s account of the military use of relics of the True Cross by Emperor Nikephoros 
II Phokas derives from the study of texts, as he himself indicates, distinguished western visitors to Constanti-
tinople are often attested to have witnessed important religious or secular ceremonies. Apart from Bishop Arb-
cull’s early eyewitness account of the veneration of the True Cross on Good Friday, we know that Liutprand of 
Cremona witnessed the public veneration of the True Cross on 14 September 996. For Arcull’s account, see 
234, esp. 228–29. For Liutprand’s participation in the feast of the Exaltation of the True Cross, see Liutprand 

91 That westerners did not hesitate to steal sacred relics from the imperial palace is attested by the Chronic-
icle of Monte Cassino, which states that a certain man from Amalfi, who entered the monastery during the ab-
bacy of Desiderius, donated to St. Benedict “partem non exiguam ligni salutifere et vivifice crucis auro et la-
pidibus preciosis ornatam et in auro ycona locatam, quam ipse de palatio Constantinopolitano abstulerat in 
coniuratio, que contra Michaelem [VII] imperatorem facta est.” See Chronica monasterii Casinensis, ed. H. 
Hoffmann, MGH, SS 34 (Hannover, 1980), 436. See also Schwinkeöper, “Christus-Reliquien,” 192–93, with 
n. 45.

92 Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Widener Collection, inv. no. 1942.9.277 [C-I]. For Suger’s 
chalice, see most recently The Glory of Byzantium, 457–58, no. 296. For a comparable Byzantine chalice, see ibid., 
71, no. 31.
parts were not merely incorporated as a visible proof of the relics’ eastern origin and authenticity, but that they were designed to play an active role in the enactment of the holy. Functioning as a means of concealing and revealing the precious relics, the Byzantine triptychs enhanced the cult value of these sacred objects by limiting and controlling their display and veneration. The rhetoric employed in the visual exegesis of the relics’ historical and eschatological meaning relied on the combined use of the Byzantine triptychs’ original images and the two newly created picture cycles on the western triptych’s interior wings. Using both western narrative and Byzantine iconic images, the Stavelot Triptych was designed to accompany and guide its viewer while he unfolded the various triptychs and drew nearer to the sacred relics that lay at the core of his devotional desire. By subjecting the dismembered and rearranged Byzantine reliquary fragments to a larger western frame, the designer of the Stavelot Triptych moreover created a theatrical stage for the liturgical veneration of objects originally intended for personal use.

Such a sophisticated and creative response, however, seems to have been an exception in the second half of the twelfth century. Little is known, for instance, about the artistic impact of another sacred treasure, namely, the arrival of Henry the Lion’s relics in Saxony. Arnold of Lübeck merely records that Henry “ditavit domum Dei reliquis sanctorum, quas secum attulerat, vestiens eas auro et argento et lapidibus pretiosis”—a statement that seems to indicate that most, if not all, relics arrived in Brunswick without a precious Byzantine container. Where reliquaries survive, as is the case with an arm reliquary from the Guelph Treasure (Fig. 10) and a cross reliquary donated to the monastery of the Holy Cross in Hildesheim (Fig. 11), their type and decoration usually follow a decidedly western tradition and show little or no sign of Byzantine artistic impact.

**Priceless Gifts and Sacred Booty**

With the fall of Constantinople in 1204, the modes and realities of the transfer of relics radically changed. Before the Latin conquest, as we have seen, a rather limited number of relics, most of them enclosed in small-scale reliquaries intended for personal rather than liturgical use, reached the West as sacred gifts, granted by Byzantine emperors and patriarchs in grand gestures of generosity that left no doubt about the superiority of the giver over the recipient. After the conquest, a great number of large-scale and most precious Byzantine reliquaries fell into the hands of Westerners, were divided among them and then taken to their countries of origin. That the “treacherous Greeks,” in fact, did not de-

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93 Considering the provenance of the Stavelot Triptych and its assumed association with the abbey of Stavelot, there seems little doubt that it was created for a male audience.
97 For Byzantine reliquaries of a similar type, see I. Kalavrezou, “Helping Hands for the Empire: Imperial Ceremonies and the Cult of Relics at the Court,” in *Byzantine Court Ceremonies 829–1204*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, D.C., 1997), 53–79.
98 *Chronica Regia Coloniensis (Annales Maximi Coloniensis)*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, *Scriptores Germ. 18* (Hannover, 1880; repr. 1999), 203: “Capta igitur urbe, divitia interiuntur inestimabiles, lapides preciosissimi et incom-
serve better was a prejudice deeply rooted in the western psyche since at least the days of Liutprand and nourished by the political developments that led to the failure of the Second Crusade. Thus it is hardly surprising that western nobles and clergymen felt little remorse when looting Constantinople in 1204 to deprive it of its sacred treasures. The righteousness of the western attitude is most clearly expressed in Gunther of Pairis’s early thirteenth-century *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, in which he states:

> If we are not mistaken, God so arranged it that the army of Christ would triumphantly break into this faithless city on the very day on which Christ, arriving for the triumph of his Passion, entered the Holy City. Break in! Now, honored soldier of Christ, break in! / Break into the city that Christ has given to the conqueror. / Imagine for yourself Christ, seated on a gentle ass, / The King of Peace, radiant in countenance, leading the way. / You fight Christ’s battles. You execute Christ’s vengeance, / By Christ’s judgment. His will precedes the onslaught . . . / Christ wished to enrich you with the wrongdoers’ spoils, / Lest some other conquering people despoil them. . . . / Immediately upon the enemy’s expulsion from the entire city, / There will be time for looting; it will be proper to despoil the conquered.

While Godfrey of Villehardouin and other Latin chroniclers give us a clear idea of how the Constantinopolitan booty was assembled and split up among the emperor-elect, the Venetians, and the French contingent of the Crusader army, little is known about the realities of looting proper. There is, of course, Niketas Choniates’ vivid account of the behavior of the western invaders, or Gunther of Pairis’s description of the actions of his abbot Martin, who, upon threatening an old Orthodox monk with immediate death, “quickly and greedily stuffed the sacred sacrilege into the folds of his habit.” But how, for instance, Henry of Ulmen gained possession of the magnificent Limburger Staurothek (Fig. 12) and other important relics is still a mystery. Despite the fact that Villehardouin

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99 Compare, for instance, the verses Liutprand of Cremona claims to have inscribed on a table before he left Constantinople on 2 October 969: “Argolichm non tuta fides; procul esto Latine, / Credere, nec mentem ver- / bis adhibere memento! / Vincere dum possit, quam sancte peierat Argos!”. Liutprand of Cremona, *Relatio de Legatione* 2.13


lists Henry of Ulmen among the “mult bone gent de l’empire d’Alemaigne,” he was hardly more than a minor player in the grand scheme of things. Considering the harsh punishment of Latin thieves immediately following the sack of Constantinople as well as Henry’s late return to Germany in 1207, it seems quite unlikely that he himself stole the splendid imperial objects that formed part of his treasure. More likely, as was first suggested by Hans-Wolfgang Kuhn, he received them a year or two after the conquest, and not in Constantinople but Thessalonike, as a reward and payment for his services in the retinue of his overlord Boniface of Montferrat. According to the sources, such “rewards” or “payments” were not at all unusual in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade and attest to the notoriously thin boundaries that existed among payment, gift-giving, and theft. For his services to the later Latin emperor Baldwin of Flanders, for instance, Count Hugh of Beaumetz was rewarded with a reliquary of the True Cross. Similarly, Baldwin’s brother and successor on the throne, Henry of Hainault, bestowed a tear of Christ on Count Bernard of Moreuil in reward for his service. Other relics formerly kept at the Boukoleon palace were sent to Henry’s brother Philip of Namur—“fraterne dilectione affectum” as the surviving letter records. They included “a golden container with a part of the Wood of the Lord in the form of a cross, mounted and decorated in gold” as well as relics “of the thorns of the crown of the Lord, of the purple vestment of Jesus Christ, of the swaddling clothes of the Savior, of the linen with which he girded himself at the Supper, of the girdle of the Virgin, [and] of the head of St. Paul and St. James the Younger.” The list of objects looted from the churches and palaces of Constantinople and subsequently bestowed upon the subordinates, friends, and relatives of the leaders of the Fourth Crusade could easily be expanded. However, the examples cited here may suffice to show how
quickly sacred relics could be transformed in status, being at one time sacred loot, and commodities and gifts at another.\textsuperscript{111}

Apart from more personal acts of gratification and gift-giving, it is interesting to note that the new Latin rulers of Constantinople continued the Byzantine tradition of sending relics as gifts to western rulers, bishops, and popes. Already shortly after his election on 9 May 1204, Baldwin of Flanders, for instance, sent gifts to Pope Innocent III as a sign of his reverence. Unfortunately, the emperor’s present, which consisted of “two icons, one worth three gold marks, the other ten silver marks, with the wood of the life-giving Cross and many precious stones,”\textsuperscript{112} was captured by Genoese pirates and in turn given to the commune of Genoa.\textsuperscript{113} A letter addressed to the podestà of Genoa preserves the pope’s bitter complaint about the incident and his request for the immediate return of the sacred relics.\textsuperscript{114} What is interesting here is not so much that such a high price was placed on these icons, whose worth is, perhaps surprisingly, measured in purely monetary terms, but that the “priceless” relic is listed here amid objects that are clearly and unambiguously defined by their economic value.\textsuperscript{115}

Other sacred objects sent to the West in the wake of the Latin conquest suffered a fate similar to that of the emperor’s present to the pope. A cross relic from the Venetian booty, for instance, decorated with “Greek letters (littere grece’) and stripes of silver, gold, and pearls,” was stolen by Genoese pirates while on its way to Venice.\textsuperscript{116} According to Jacopo de Voragine, the pious robber, a certain Dodeus (or Deodedelo), presented this so-called Relic of St. Helena to the commune and to the church of St. Lawrence, where it is still kept today. The land route was apparently not much safer. A shrine with “relics and a golden cross, which comprised [a fragment] of the wood of the Lord,” sent to Rome by Benoît de Saint-Suzanne, bishop of Porto and papal legate to the Crusader army, for instance, was stolen in Hungary. Again the pope intervened and, in a letter to King Andrew, demanded the return of all sacred treasures.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{111} Such transformations in status may be described as markers of distinct phases in the “career” or “biography” of objects as they pass from one social and cultural context into the other. As in the case of relics, the attested “biography” or “career” of such objects could play an important role in the process of authentification and the reconstruction of value in the new social and cultural environment. For the notion of a “biography of things,” see I. Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in \textit{The Social Life of Things} (as above, note 3), 64–91. For the relevance of this approach in the realm of relics, see Gear\textquotesingle, “Sacred Commodities,” 181–90.

\textsuperscript{112} Riant, \textit{Exuviae}, 2:56: “Duas iconas, unam habentem tres marcas auri, et aliam decem marcas argenti, cum ligno vivifiche Crucis et multis lapidibus pretiosis.” It cannot be decided with certainty whether the objects described here were painted icons with precious frames, or themselves made of gold and silver; the latter seems more likely.


\textsuperscript{114} A. Potthast, \textit{Regesta Pontificum inde ab anno post Christum natum MCXCVIII ad annum MCCXCV} (Berlin, 1884–85), 1:199, no. 2318; PL 115:434.

\textsuperscript{115} On the construction of value and the “pricing of the priceless,” see Kopytoff, “Biography of Things,” 73–83.

\textsuperscript{116} Frolov, \textit{La relique}, 381–82, no. 449.

\textsuperscript{117} Jaffé, \textit{Regesta}, 1:220, no. 2567; PL 115:703: “unum scrinium, ubi erant reliquiæ et crux aurea, in qua erat de ligno Domini.”
The enormous artistic impact that the dissemination of some of the most precious Byzantine objects had on the development of contemporary western, especially Mosan and Rhenish, art has long been recognized and is far too complex to be rehearsed here in detail. However, I would like to revisit one of the most prominent western responses to the arrival of a Byzantine reliquary, namely, the creation of two western staurothekai closely modeled on the so-called Limburger Staurothek (Fig. 12), which is believed to have arrived in the Eifel region near Trier in the spring of 1208. Less than two decades after the reliquary’s arrival and subsequent donation to the convent of Stuben, where Henry’s sister Irmgard was prioress, the Benedictine abbeys of St. Matthias (formerly known as St. Eucharius), one of the most prestigious and powerful monasteries of Trier, and Sts. Peter and Luitwinus in Mettlach, a lesser-known seventh-century Benedictine foundation, commissioned two precious cross reliquaries—presumably in the same Trier workshop—that leave no doubt about their artists’ conscious use of the same Byzantine model.

While the reliquary commissioned for the abbey of St. Matthias (Fig. 13) features a lengthy inscription that identifies Henry of Ulmen as the donor of its sacred relic, thus revealing a clear link to its Byzantine model, the triptych commissioned for Mettlach (Fig. 12) bears no such inscription. One can either assume that the latter reliquary was made

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120 The Mettlach reliquary is usually dated around or shortly after 1220. The dating of the reliquary from St. Matthias is more complex. P. Becker, Die Benediktinerabtei St. Eucharius-St. Matthias in Trier, Germania Sacra. Das Erzbistum Trier 8 (Berlin, 1996), 63–64, assigned a date after 1246; Henze, Kreuzreliquiare, 90, for different reasons, a date before 1222.


123 The text of the inscription reads: ANNO AB INCARNATIONE DOMINI MCCVII HENRICVS DE VLMEA ATVTL LIGNVM S(AN)C(T)AE CRUCIS DE CIVITATE CONSTANTINOPOLITANA ET HANC PORTIONEM IPSVIS SACRI LIGNI ECCLESII(AE) SANCTI EVCVARII CONTVLIT.
to house a relic already in the monastery’s possession or that it had recently received a relic, perhaps without a proper container.\textsuperscript{124} In both instances it is interesting to observe how and to what extent the artists followed their Byzantine model. They not only adopted the Byzantine tradition of arranging the particles of the relic in the form of a patriarchal cross, but also copied very closely the formal disposition of the Byzantine \textit{staurotheke} itself with its twenty characteristic \textit{loculi} for secondary relics. Moreover, both western reliquaries were made in such a way as to permit the main relic to be taken out and used separately in a liturgical or ceremonial context.

It is interesting to note that the artist in charge of the reliquaries’ execution did not copy his model slavishly, but introduced several features that betray a close adherence to western artistic traditions. While the Limburger Staurothek, a flat, panel-shaped box with a sliding lid, follows a reliquary type common in Byzantium at least since the ninth century, the reliquary for St. Matthias features no lid, but presents the relic openly in a splendid setting adorned with gems, precious stones, and filigree work. The secondary relics are not hidden behind small doors but made visible behind small pieces of rock crystal.\textsuperscript{125} In the case of the reliquary for Mettlach, the artist decided to take a different approach. Although the Byzantine \textit{staurotheke}’s proportions and formal disposition are clearly replicated, the artist transformed the Byzantine panel into the central part of a triptych, flanked on both wings by the repoussé figures of the monastery’s patron saints Peter and Luitwinus. Closely following its model, the central relic of the True Cross is surrounded by secondary relics. However, these are not made visible under rock crystal, as is the case with the reliquary for St. Matthias, but hidden behind small doors, each showing the full-length figure of the saint whose relic was concealed behind it.

Although the leaders of the Fourth Crusade had taken immediate and careful measures to restrict access to the more important churches and palaces as well as to their sacred treasures, the charters, necrologies, and inventories of many western churches, abbeys, and other religious foundations attest to the flood of relics that swept over much of western Europe immediately following the sack of Constantinople. However, not all participants in the Fourth Crusade who claimed to have come into the possession of sacred relics were necessarily credible. This is reflected perhaps most clearly in a decree of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which admonished that “some people try to sell saintly relics and show them around everywhere. This belittles the Christian religion. To prevent this for the future, we declare by this decree that old relics may not be exhibited outside of a container or exposed for sale. And let no one presume publicly to venerate new ones unless they have been approved by the Roman pontiff.”\textsuperscript{126}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{124}] Unfortunately, little is known about the presumed donors of the relic, a certain \textit{custos} Benedict and a cleric named William, both represented jointly with a patriarchal cross at the feet of Christ on the reliquary’s back. Of the two, Benedict is attested in the monastery in 1222. See Sauer, \textit{Fundatio et Memoria}, 310 with n. 381.
\item[\textsuperscript{125}] In making the relics visible, the Trier artists followed a trend attested in western art from the later 12th and early 13th century onward.
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In order to prove the authenticity of a relic, it was particularly helpful if it was still preserved in its original container—a fact often stressed in contemporary sources by descriptions such as “opere greco factum” or “litteris grecis ornatum.” This was, in fact, true for the relic that Henry of Ulmen donated to the convent in Stuben, and for a large number of other relics that were brought to the West by bishops, abbots, and noblemen directly involved in the conquest. But what about relics that reached the West as mere splinters or pieces without a proper reliquary, as was likely the case with the cross relics that arrived in Trier and Mettlach? In both instances, the decision was made to provide the relic and its precious container with a Byzantine, or rather “eastern,” appearance for which the reliquary in Stuben provided the model. For the reliquary in St. Matthias it was furthermore decided to insert a lengthy inscription that associated the relic with the name of its donor, whose authority could hardly be questioned since he had brought back a great number of relics which he in turn donated to such prestigious convents as St. Pantaleon in Cologne, Maria Laach, Heisterbach, and Münstermaifeld. In terms of effectiveness, however, the visual authentication of both relic and reliquary was perhaps even more important than the literal one, since it enabled people traveling from one cult center to the next to recognize the close similarity and ultimate connection between the objects presented. The form of the patriarchal cross, which, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, was clearly associated with relics that had been imported from either Jerusalem or Constantinople, and the formal disposition of the “eastern” reliquary were consciously used by the Trier artists to reassure a potential Western viewer of the authenticity of the sacred relic displayed.

While it was in the patrons’ interest to prove the authenticity of the relics in their possession, it was certainly in the artists’ interest to engage in an artistic competition with the imported Byzantine objects, which were undoubtedly greatly admired for their refined material quality and workmanship. However, as the reliquaries from St. Matthias and Mettlach show, these western artists attempted to emulate and supersede their Byzantine model by employing their own techniques and working methods. That they succeeded in their ambitious task is revealed not only by the artistic quality of their work, but also by the numbers of pilgrims they were able to attract with it well into the sixteenth century and beyond.

PRICING THE PRICELESS: RELICS AS COMMODITIES

Byzantine relics and reliquaries continued to arrive in western monasteries as gifts or bequests of former participants in the conquest of Constantinople for several decades, but the modes that had governed their acquisition and transfer in the early years of the Latin Empire soon began to change. This development was largely due to the increasing mil-

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127 For Henry’s various donations, see Kuhn, “Heinrich von Ulmen,” 69–71, 85–86.
128 In the early 16th century, the cult of the relic had grown so popular at St. Matthias that a relic chamber was installed in the church’s northern transept. In 1514 it was dedicated to “the holy cross and all other saintly relics contained in the tablet.” See F. Ronig, “Die Schatz- und Heilumskammern,” in Rhein und Mos (as above, note 121), 1:137; N. Irsch, Die Triers Abteikirche und die trierisch-lotthringische Bauentgruppe, Germania Sacra Abt. Rhenania Sacra B, Rhenania Sacra Regularis 1, Die Abteien und Canonien A, Die Benediktinerklöster, vol. 1 (Augsburg, 1927), 254–58. See also Sauer, Fundatio et Memoria, 313 n. 395, and Henze, Kreuzeliquiare, 30.
129 Like Bishop Conrad of Halberstadt, who donated a number of relics and Byzantine vasa sacra to the cathedral of Halberstadt only three years after his return from Constantinople, many Crusaders—for instance, the above-mentioned Bernard of Moreuil—parted from their treasures only with delay. For a detailed
itary and financial pressures faced by the new rulers of Constantinople. By the time Baldwin II ascended the imperial throne in 1240, the distribution of relics can no longer be described in terms of either gift-giving or theft, but must rather be considered in terms of sale and purchase as an immediate result of the empire’s dire economic situation. The circumstances that led to King Louis IX’s acquisition of the relic of the Crown of Thorns reflect this change from noncommercial to commercial transfer quite well. According to the contemporary account of Archbishop Gauthier of Sens, the Latin Empire’s desperate financial situation had led Baldwin II—who had stayed in Paris between 1237 and 1239—to offer this most precious imperial relic to his relative, the king of France, in exchange for financial help to defend his empire. When the Dominican monks Andrew and James, sent to Constantinople “pro complendo negocio,” arrived in the capital, however, the barons of the empire had already pawned the crown to the Venetian banker Nicola Quirino in exchange for funds to ward off the approaching armies of Bulgarians and Greeks. The monks were thus asked to accompany the relic to Venice, where it was safeguarded in the treasury of San Marco until the necessary sum of money was brought to redeem the relic and permit its *translatio* into France. In the following years, King Louis was able to secure two additional lots of important relics by way of purchase. The first, which had previously been pawned to the Order of the Templars, consisted of a relic of the True Cross, which had been brought from Syria by a certain knight named Guido, together with several other precious relics including “the most holy blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the vestments of his infancy, a large fragment of the Lord’s Cross not arranged in the form of a cross, . . . the blood that miraculously flowed out of the beaten image of the Lord, the chain that had tied Christ [to the column], a panel which kept the imprint of his face, when he was taken from the cross, [and] quite a large stone of his sepulcher.” The second lot was acquired in Constantinople by two Franciscans, who arrived in Paris probably in early August 1242 with a sacred treasure consisting of “the most glorious iron of the lance, a medium-size, but no less virtuous cross, which is called ‘triumphant,’ the purple robe, in which the soldiers clad the Lord to mock him, the precious rod, the sponge, a

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153 The original document issued in Constantinople on 4 September 1238 has been preserved in Paris at the Centre Historique des Archives Nationales, J 155, Sainte-Chapelle-du-Palais, no. 1 (AE III 187). For a short bibliography, see *Le trésor*, 44, no. 6.

piece of the sudarium, the linen cloth girded with which the Lord, performing an act of humility, washed the feet of his disciples . . . , and finally a piece of the veil of the most glorious Virgin and the rod of Moses.”

While the commercial character of these transactions was explicitly noted by contemporaries such as the English monk and chronicler Matthew Paris, the official transcript of the events reads somewhat differently. Although the emperor, in a chrysobull issued at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in June 1247, acknowledged that the relics had previously been pawned to the Venetians “out of urgent necessity” and then bought back by Louis “for a large sum of money,” he nonetheless stressed that all this was done according to his own “will and permission.” He continued by saying that it was only now that he conceded the relics to Louis, not out of necessity, but as a “spontaneous and free gift.” In my view, such a statement reveals more than just an emperor’s misjudgment of the political and financial realities of the day; it reveals a desperate need to disguise, if only in words, the commercial nature of a practice that had become a necessity and basis for survival: the commodification of the empire’s most sacred treasures.

It may be seen as an irony of history that a practice introduced by the Latin rulers of Constantinople would find a close parallel in the last century of Byzantine rule in the capital. On 28 May 1359, Andrea Gratia, a syndic of the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, and Pietro di Giunta Torrigiani, a Florentine-born merchant residing in Constantinople, came together in Venice to sign a contract stipulating the conditions of the transfer of a collection of relics and other precious objects recently acquired in Constantinople. While it may be surprising to note that western interest in the acquisition of eastern relics had not entirely faded after the end of the Latin occupation and the successive dispersal of the most prized relics of Christendom, it is perhaps less surprising to notice that the tactics to disguise the commercial character of such transactions remained valid. The surviving textual records of the Venetian relic purchase and its Constantinopolitan prelude offer a rare insight not only in the way western expectations and attitudes toward Byzantium had changed following the looting and deportation of its most sacred

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treasures, but also in the way Byzantine rulers had to adjust to new economic and political realities.140

Information concerning the provenance of Torrigiani’s relic collection is provided by a document that may well have accompanied the Venetian contract of 1359 as some kind of authentication.141 Issued at Pera on 15 December 1357 by the Apostolic nuntio to Constantinople, the Carmelite Pier Tommaso, and witnessed by three other Latin bishops as well as the Dominican inquisitor Philip de Contis, the document recounts that the nuntio, having heard about Torrigiani’s relic collection, had visited the residence of the Venetian bailo to examine with eyes and hands “the precious relics, among which there were to be found even those of Christ and the True Cross, on which he had hung.”142 The document further states that in order to assure the authenticity and provenance of the relics, Tommaso had sent two of the bishops and the inquisitor to the Byzantine empress—most likely Irene, wife of John VI Kantakouzenos—who in turn testified that the relics had indeed come “from the imperial palace,” that they had been put up for sale in the Loggia of the Venetians “out of necessity,” and that there were no relics more precious in the whole empire than these.143 After presenting a list of the relics examined, Tommaso asserts that “it seems as if the Lord Jesus Christ himself had led the aforementioned Peter [i.e., Torrigiani] to Constantinople in order to take the relics out of the hands of the schismatics and bring them to a holy place just as the children of Israel were led out of Egypt by divine mandate.”144 The document concludes with the plea that Torrigiani may “bring the relics to our Lord the pope and the most serene prince and Lord emperor of the Romans, since such priceless objects suit them best.”145

Although the original purpose of this document is somewhat difficult to determine, it may nonetheless serve as an indicator of how radically the status of Constantinople, and the Byzantine emperor as the most prominent distributor of sacred relics, had changed.146 Not only had Constantinople ceased to be regarded as a locus sanctus by westerners, the distribution of relics was also no longer an act of imperial favor but an act of economic necessity. The consequences of this development for the western recipient of the sacred

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140 For a short assessment of the political and economic situation that led to the relic’s sale, see Hetherington, “A Purchase,” 18.
141 Siena, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Spedale Santa Maria della Scala, no. 120, fols. 10r–11 v. For a transcript of the document, see Derenzini, “Le reliquie,” 72–73; Hetherington, “A Purchase,” 28 (app. 1).
142 Derenzini, “Le reliquie,” 72: “nos ibi perspeximus oculis et tractavimus manibus tam pretiosas Sanctorum Reliquias immo quedam quae ad ipsum Dominum Nostrum Jesum Christum pertinent et de ipsa vera Cruce, in qua Ipse peependit, quae in mundo non possunt esse pretiora.” For the names of the other people involved in the inspection, see ibid., 67–69.
143 Ibid.: “et misimus duos de predictis Episcopis tum Inquisitores [sic] hereticae pravitatis ad imperatricem uxorem Cathecuzinos, ut scirent ab ea si fuerant de domo imperiali, et assuerit cum grandissimo singultu, cordis dolore, quod pro necessitate fuerunt expositae venditioni in Logia Venetorum, et quod imperium iocalia non habebat tam pretiosa, nec de perdizione aliqua tantum dolebat, quantum de alienatione earum.” Thus already remarked by Cutler, “Loot to Scholarship,” 244–45.
144 Derenzini, “La reliquie,” 73: “enim venerabilem virum dominum Petrum predictum videtur Dominus Jesus Christus in Constantinopolim posuisse ut de manibus scismaticorum tam dignas afferret Reliquias et ad loca transferret sancta, prout filii Israel de mandato Domini Egiptiorum portaverunt bona.”
145 Ibid.: “et rogavimus eum quod ad dominum nostrum Papam et ad serenissimum principem dominum Imperatorem Romanum portaret, vel faceret deportari, quia talia eos decent, quae sunt caeteris digniora.”
146 As the document itself clearly shows, the future of Torrigiani’s relic collection was still uncertain at the time it was drawn up. This was first noted by Hetherington, “A Purchase,” 18.
commodity are complex. On the one hand, it created the need for institutional authentication, in this case, by the former Byzantine empress and the apostolic nunzio; on the other hand, as we have seen, it developed the need to disguise the commercial nature of the transaction. Instead of “purchase,” for instance, the Venetian contract between Torrigiani and the Ospedale—not the emperor or pope as Tommaso had hoped—repeatedly speaks of a “donatio” despite the fact that the merchant was to receive a purely monetary compensation of 3,000 gold florins and a lifetime residence in Siena as stated in the hospital’s “Libro Vitale.”

As regards the distributors of relics, and here I restrict myself to the imperial sphere, Byzantine rulers soon faced the same difficulties as the Latins before them. After Empress Anna of Savoy, in 1343, had signed away the Byzantine crown jewels to the Republic of Venice for 30,000 ducats to pay off her debts, the selling and pawning of relics became once again a last resort to secure the financial and military survival of the empire. On 9 December 1395, after having experienced more than a year of siege by the Turks, Emperor Manuel II was ready to offer the tunic of Christ and other relics as securities for a loan he hoped to receive from the Serenissima. Venice, however, as we know from surviving documents, refused the emperor’s offer, arguing that the transfer of such exquisite and revered objects might result in violent popular protests in Constantinople, a concern, true or not, that the Byzantine emperor himself apparently did not share.

Four years later, when Manuel embarked on his famous voyage to the West, he took with him the very relics Venice had previously rejected. Once settled in Paris, Manuel immediately started to send out ambassadors with letters and presents to the various courts of Europe in an effort to muster financial and military support against the Turks. Probably in order to give his pleas more weight, Manuel decided to add gifts of relics to his letters. According to these letters and other surviving records, King Martin I of Aragon received a relic of St. George already in June or July 1400, the authenticity of which he, at first, mistrusted. In early October, Manuel’s envoy Alexios Branas appeared in person before the king, carrying a chrysobull and two more relics, namely, a fragment of the bluish

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147 Siena, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Spedale Santa Maria della Scala, no. 120, fols. 33r–36r. For a transcript of the document and the list of payments, see Hetherington, “A Purchase,” 30 (app. 3). For an evaluation of the evidence, see ibid., 20–21; Derenzini, “Le reliquie,” 70–71. For the money value, see W. M. Bowksy, A Medieval Italian Commune: Siena under the Nine 1287–1355 (Los Angeles, 1981), xvii and 184–259, as already cited in Hetherington, “A Purchase,” n. 55.


150 For Manuel’s voyage to the West, see Barker, Manuel II, 123–99; A. Vasilev, “Puteshestvie vizantijskago imperatora Manuila Palaeologa po zapadnoi Evrope,” ZhMNIP n.s. 39 (1912): 41–78, 260–304.

tunic of Christ that had healed the woman with the issue of blood and the sponge of Christ’s Passion.\(^{152}\) From the court of Aragon, Alexios Branas continued on to the court of King Charles III of Navarre, where he arrived probably in early 1401 with another chrysobull, a particle of the True Cross, and a piece of the same tunic of Christ that King Martin had already received.\(^{153}\) According to a somewhat uncertain tradition, Manuel sent yet another chrysobull to King John I of Portugal on 15 June of the same year, this time accompanied by a larger number of relics: a particle of the True Cross, a piece of the already mentioned tunic of Christ, a piece of the Holy Sponge, and relics of Sts. Peter, Paul, and George.\(^{154}\) During the same month of June, the emperor’s envoy Alexios Branas delivered letters and yet another particle of the bluish tunic of Christ to the anti-pope Benedict XIII.\(^{155}\) One month later, to keep all options open, another particle of Christ’s tunic was sent to Pope Boniface IX.\(^{156}\) Although it is hard to believe, there was apparently still enough left of the bluish tunic of Christ for Manuel to send a last piece to Queen Margaret of Denmark in November 1402, shortly before he returned to Constantinople.\(^{157}\) But even then the dispersal of relics did not stop. In two letters, both dated 17 August 1405, King Martin of Aragon, who had already received several relics in 1400, addressed both the patriarch and the emperor with a request for more relics, which were to be entrusted to Pere de Quintanes, a merchant functioning as the king’s envoy in this matter.\(^{158}\) It is only through Manuel’s much-delayed response, dated 23 October 1407, that we hear what happened to the king’s request.\(^{159}\) Having taken counsel with the patriarch as well as the barons and magnates of the empire, Manuel had decided to send Martin several relics associated with Christ’s Passion as well as a relic of St. Lawrence.\(^{160}\) However, instead of sending the relics back to Spain with Pere de Quintanes—who incidentally drowned in a storm

\(^{152}\) Although Manuel’s chrysobull itself has not survived, the gifts are mentioned explicitly in the king’s response, dated 16 October 1400. For the text, see Rubió i Lluch, *Diplomataris*, 686–87, no. 660.

\(^{153}\) Manuel’s bilingual chrysobull, dated 30 August 1400, is preserved in the archives of the cathedral of Pamplona. For the text, see Marinesco, “Du nouveau,” 422–23 (Latin), 424–25 (Greek). See also Dölger, *Regesten*, 5:87, no. 3282.


\(^{155}\) About a year later, 20 June 1402, Manuel issued a chrysobull to certify the relic delivered by Branas. Both chrysobull and relic are preserved at the cathedral of Palma de Mallorca. For the text, see Marinesco, “Du nouveau,” 428–30, and S. Cirac Estopañan, “Ein Chrysobull des Kaisers Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425) für den Gegenpapst Benedikt XIII (1394–1417/23) vom 20. Juni 1402,” *BZ* 44 (1951): 89–93. The circumstances of the donation are somewhat obscured by the fact that Marinesco, “Un nouveau,” 427, and Barker, *Manuel II*, assume that the relic had been sent together with the chrysobull. However, the text of the bull leaves no doubt that the pope had received the relic on an earlier occasion, in July 1401. See Dölger, *Regesten*, 5:88, no. 3285, and, 88–89, no. 3290.

\(^{156}\) The chrysobull itself is lost, but a copy of its Greek text is preserved in the Gennadius Library in Athens. See G. Dennis, “Two Unknown Documents of Manuel II Palaeologus,” *TM* 3 (1968): 397–404, esp. 402–4.

\(^{157}\) The bilingual chrysobull, dated 20/23 November 1402, is preserved in the Escorial, Cod. Scorial. gr. o–1V–19. For the text, see Dennis, “Two Unknown Documents,” 399–401.

\(^{158}\) See Rubió i Lluch, *Diplomataris*, no. 687, 711 and no. 688, 711–12. For the role of merchants as carriers of precious gifts, see most recently Cutler, “Gifts and Gift Exchange,” 266.

\(^{159}\) Rubió i Lluch, *Diplomataris*, no. 694, 716–18.

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 717: “videlicet de columna in qua ligatus fuit Salvator noster; de lapide super quem Petrus incumbens post trinam Xpi. negacionem amarissime levit; de lapide in quo post deposicionem a Cruce ut ungereatur positus fuerat humani generis liberator, ac etiam de canticula super quam sanctus Laurencius fuit assatus.”
on his way back from Constantinople—the emperor had intended to entrust them to an embassy led by Manuel Chrysoloras, who left the capital with much delay in late October 1407. The relics Chrysoloras carried to Spain seem to have been among the last ones sent to the West by a Byzantine ruler before the empire’s collapse.

One may legitimately categorize Manuel’s presents to western rulers as diplomatic gifts, but there can be no doubt that the character of diplomatic exchange between Byzantium and the Latin West had dramatically and irrevocably changed by the beginning of the fifteenth century. In a radical reversal of the Byzantine diplomatic ritual that had once rendered King Louis VII of France, Duke Henry the Lion of Saxony and Bavaria, and other western visitors to Constantinople inferior to the Byzantine ruler, the journey of Manuel Palaiologos to the West and his splendid receptions at the courts of Milan, Paris, and London now rendered him a petitioner and hopeful recipient of western gifts and favors.161 What he brought to the West as tokens of his friendship and imperial favor were, as in earlier centuries, eastern relics, next to books and ancient learning the last truly priceless yet still affordable Byzantine gift.162 At least in theory, one might add. For the relics the emperor had to offer no longer carried the mystique that had once defined their value. Deprived of their aura by the historical events that had led to the destruction and dissemination of Constantinople’s most sacred treasures, such objects had long lost their universal appeal. There was no point in presenting the king of France, who was already in the possession of the most important remains of Christ’s passion, with further and much less important relics.163 Instead, Manuel offered his gifts to potentates on the fringes of western Europe, regions that had profited little or not at all from the wave of eastern relics that had swept over large parts of western Europe in the aftermath of the Latin conquest of Constantinople.164 The fact that the emperor’s gifts were met with considerable skepticism in both Spain and Avignon reveal how much the Byzantine emperor’s reputation as a trusted keeper and distributor of relics had suffered from the developments of the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Unfortunately, there is no way of telling whether Manuel’s gifts arrived in precious Byzantine containers. If they did, their artistic impact in the cultural environments in which they were placed remained immeasurable, as was in fact true for other sacred treasures that reached the West as Byzantine gifts and commodities during the same period.165

163 We know that Manuel sent presents to Charles VI through his uncle Theodore Palaiologos Kantakouzenos already in 1398, but the emperor’s letter does not specify which kinds of gifts were handed over. We do know, however, that Charles himself presented his guest “auro, vasis sumptuosis, tam materia quam artificio admiracione dignis, olosericis quoque mire estimacionis.” See Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denis, 559–63. For more information on the embassy, see Barker, Manuel II, 154–56.
164 The gifts for Pope Boniface IX and anti-pope Benedict XIII fall into a different category altogether and should not be considered along the same lines as gifts for secular rulers.
165 For the relic collection of Pietro Torrigiani, this was first pointed out by Hetherington, “A Purchase,” 23, and again stressed by Cutler, “Loot to Scholarship,” 244. For the illuminated copy of the works of Dionysios
CONCLUSION

The transfer of sacred relics between Byzantium and the Latin West followed, as we have seen, mechanisms that also governed the exchange of other precious commodities and luxury items originating in the East: gift-giving, theft, and trade. Although the biographies of some of the objects treated in this study suggest that the boundaries among these categories could be fluid at times, certain historical trends are nonetheless visible. From the time Byzantine emperors assumed the role of safekeepers, defenders, and distributors of the most sacred Christian relics in the late fifth and early sixth centuries until the end of the twelfth century, gift-giving on a decidedly personal and rather high social level was by far the most common means of transfer of sacred relics between Byzantium and the Latin West. Incidents of cross-cultural relic theft are recorded only rarely and can thus be considered an exception rather than the rule. With the beginning of the Crusades and the increase in pilgrimage traffic to the Holy Land, Latin sources attest to a rising western interest in eastern relics, particularly those in the possession of the Byzantine emperor. However, until the beginning of the thirteenth century, gift-giving remained the only means by which western rulers, noblemen, or church officials could legitimately gain access to such priceless tokens of victory and salvation.

The Crusader conquest of Constantinople and the plundering of its churches and palaces mark a clear turning point in the historical development. One of the most obvious results of the systematic looting of Byzantine sacred treasures was the transfer of a large number of Byzantine religious objects, most notably relics and reliquaries, into the various regions of France, Belgium, Italy, and Germany, from which the more prominent participants in the Fourth Crusade had come. Here the newly acquired relics had to prove their authenticity and effectiveness. They did so in part through the oral or written testimony of their carriers, and in part through their precious eastern containers, which not only referenced their earlier cult history, but also reaffirmed their inherent economic and emblematic value.

Although the gifting of relics remained a common practice among the Latin rulers of Constantinople and the leaders of the Venetian and Crusader contingents, the plundering of the Byzantine capital and instant commodification of its most valued secular and ecclesiastical treasures deeply affected the ways in which eastern relics were acquired, evaluated, and exchanged in subsequent years and decades. The exchange of relics for money or other commodities must have started fairly early as an immediate result of the large-scale plundering of smaller Byzantine monasteries and churches, but it was the Latin Empire's dire financial situation that led to the pawning and outright sale of the most important eastern relics. However, as efforts to hide the purely monetary character of these

transactions reveal, there was a certain hesitancy and unease that accompanied the outright commodification of the holy.

While late Byzantine attitudes toward the gifting, pawning, and sale of sacred relics may be considered a mere extension of the social and economic practices established by the Latin rulers of Constantinople, western attitudes toward eastern relics dramatically changed during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As eastern relics and reliquaries failed to resist western desires to acquire and possess them, they gradually lost their mystique and priceless value.

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