

Brigitte PITARAKIS, Les croix-reliquaires pectorals byzantines en bronze. *Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques*, 16. Paris, Picard 2006. 446 p. ISBN 2-7084-0771-6.

Because of their modest size, material make-up, and often rather crude figural or aniconic decoration, Byzantine bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries have remained an object category long neglected by art historians. They have thus shared the fate of a closely related group of objects, namely pilgrim's ampoules, which were often produced in equally modest materials such as lead and clay from at least the 6th through the 7th century to fulfill the religious and spiritual needs of a growing number of pilgrims visiting the holy sites in Jerusalem and other major cult centers in Syria-Palestine and North Africa. While André Grabar's pioneering study on the *Ampoules de Terre Sainte* (1958) and more recent collection catalogues produced by the Musée du Louvre (C. METZGER, *Les ampoules à eulogie du musée du Louvre*. 1981), the

Liebieghaus – Museum Alter Plastik (G. KAMINSKI-MENSSEN, Bildwerke der Sammlung Kaufmann, 1996), and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst (J. WITT, Bestandskataloge 2/1: Menasampullen, 2002) have begun to address this lacuna for the latter class of objects, no comprehensive study existed to date on the large number of cruciform bronze reliquary pendants that were worn, venerated, and passed down from generation to generation by countless Christians in the Byzantine Empire and beyond. The lack of a book-length study of this material, however, should not be solely attributed to the material make-up and artistic quality of these humble devotional objects. Their large-scale production in workshops scattered throughout the Middle Byzantine Empire, wide geographical dissemination, and modern acquisition by numerous larger and smaller public museums as well as private collectors around the world make the study of this often unpublished and not easily accessible material a major challenge not easily overcome. The history of scholarship on these objects, which has been driven primarily by focused studies on the more precious and artistically ambitious cross-reliquaries in silver and gold, poses additional challenges as the most prominent examples have, over the past century, been variously assigned dates from the 6th/7th to the 10th/11th century and places of origin in various cities and regions of the Eastern Mediterranean. To have taken on these various challenges in order to provide the first comprehensive study of a class of objects that reveals as much about the realities of a specific form of artistic production as it highlights a widespread form of popular piety during the Middle Byzantine period is a major achievement for which Brigitte Pitarakis deserves both credit and praise.

Les croix-reliquaires pectorals byzantines en bronze, which grew out of the author's doctoral thesis at the Université de Paris I (Panthéon-Sorbonne), is divided into two main parts of roughly the same length. The first part of the book provides an in-depth study of the production, use, and decoration of Byzantine bronze pectoral reliquary crosses with frequent references to other objects closely related to them in type, material, or method of production. The second part consists of a fully illustrated catalogue raisonné of some 671 objects, 40% of which were previously unpublished. This catalogue provides not only a solid basis for the assessment of this particular class of objects, but will also serve as an invaluable resource for the study and classification of similar cross-reliquaries coming to light in the future.

The first chapter of the first part of the book is dedicated to an analysis of the basic forms and composition of Byzantine bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries. Like their more precious Early Byzantine predecessors in gold and silver, bronze cross-reliquaries are shown to have survived in a variety of forms, but generally consist of three standard elements: a cruciform pendant that serves as a reliquary container, a suspension ring, and a chain. Based on the material evidence assembled in the catalogue (Part II), the author distinguishes ten basic types of cruciform containers and ten types of suspension rings and observes certain correspondences between the reliquaries' decoration and the forms of cross pendants and suspension rings. The subsequent description of each formal type provides an initial quantitative evaluation of the surviving body of material and a basic overview of the reliquaries' chronological and geographical distribution. While chains have rarely survived, it is assumed that bronze cross-reliquaries were generally suspended from bronze metal chains. However, the occasional use of iron chains and simple leather or fiber cords is likewise probable.

The second chapter examines the materials and casting techniques used in the production of bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries and the various methods of surface decoration employed. The alloy most commonly used for the objects under consideration consists of a high percentage of copper to which are added smaller percentages of lead, tin, and zinc, a combination of base metals that improves their common material properties for casting. As the author's examination of surviving artifacts and molds indicates, Byzantine craftsmen used direct and indirect casting techniques, which facilitated large-scale production. Molds in stone dating from the 10th through the 13th century have been found in Kiev and Cherson, and others in lead and stone are now preserved in Athens and Paris. It can be assumed that clay and sand molds were used as well. Like their more precious relatives in gold and silver, the surfaces of the more elaborate cross-reliquaries cast in bronze were decorated in a variety of techniques, including cloisonné enamel, niello, engraving, and chasing.

The third chapter, which is broken down into three main sections, is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the iconographic programs found on Byzantine bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries. The author begins by tracing the development of the most prevalent iconographic theme found on Byzantine pectoral crosses, namely Christ's crucifixion, from more historical to dogmatic representations between the 7th and 9th century. The tendency towards iconographic experimentation during this period went hand in hand with contemporary debates about the double nature of Christ, and resulted during the 9th and 10th century in a proliferation of cross-reliquaries with cast bilateral decoration in which the crucified Christ, dressed in the *colobium*, is paired with the Virgin and Child of the *Kyriotissa* type to emphasize the redemptive quality of the Passion of Christ incarnate. During the 10th and 11th century, cross-reliquaries begin to show a wide range of iconographic variants of this basic type, which include representations of the Theotokos *en buste*, surrounded by medallions featuring archangels, evangelists, and different combinations of saints. The emergence of cross-reliquaries decorated with Christological image cycles in niello and cast relief is identified as a parallel development that spans from the 9th through 11th century. While the more prominent reliquaries of this type were produced in gold and silver, several examples in bronze have survived at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai (No. 206) as well as in St. Petersburg (No. 207), Rome (No. 17) and Athens (Nos. 15, 16, 18). A new iconographic type featuring Christ wearing the *colobium* and the Virgin *orans* – perhaps ultimately modeled on the famous icon of the Virgin of the Blacherne – started to supplant the older combination of Christ crucified and the Virgin *Kyriotissa* by the 10th century. Cast and engraved cross-reliquaries of this type have survived in vast numbers and can be attributed to regional workshops based on certain iconographic variants. Only by the 11th century, so the author argues, is the type of the crucified Christ wearing a *perizonium* introduced in workshops in Kiev and Asia Minor. The image often appears in combination with the standing Virgin Hodegetria or certain military saints on the reverse. A smaller number of cross-reliquaries of the same period introduce the busts of Christ Pantokrator, the Virgin, and St. John Prodromos in a *deesis* composition on the reverse. The chapter ends with a survey of an extremely widespread iconographic scheme featured by more than 50% of objects in the catalogue, which is, however, limited to cross-reliquaries with engraved decoration. Objects of this type commonly feature an image of the Virgin (with or without child) on the obverse and an associated saint in frontal pose and *orans* gesture on the reverse.

The author's analysis of the various saints represented illustrates not only a certain conservatism in the choice of saints and their images – Sts. George, John, Peter, the archangel Michael, and St. Stephen are among the most frequently represented – but gives valuable insights into the pious practices of the lower strata of Byzantine society which can rarely be observed elsewhere. A brief examination of a final category of reliquaries, namely those decorated with inscriptions and aniconic motifs, concludes the chapter, stressing that the symbolic value of the form of the cross itself and its sacred content can stand on its own merit and does not necessarily require any form of figural decoration.

The fourth chapter focuses on the presumed content of bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries. By scrutinizing the written and archaeological record, the author traces the nature, origin and development of the Christian cult of relics and the history of private devotional practices from the Early Christian through the Middle Byzantine period. Since the second half of the 4th century, well-connected Christians are known to have inserted relics of the True Cross and other sacred substances into precious containers made of gold and silver and to have carried them around their neck as protective tokens. While not always appreciated by theologians, the use of such *encolpia* or *phylacteries*, often cruciform in shape to allude to Christ's triumph over death at the moment of his crucifixion, gained wide popularity during the following centuries and led to an increased production of less costly containers in bronze after the end of iconoclasm. While small fragments of the True Cross are known – through inscriptions (No. 206) and material remains (cat. suppl. No. 17) – to have been enclosed in bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries, relics of saints and places were likewise kept in cruciform containers. Archaeological evidence further suggests the presence of multiple relics wrapped in small pieces of cloth and the use of resinous balm or wax. Whether the latter substances were applied during acts of private devotion or in an effort to protect the relics cannot be determined with certainty. The physical make-up of the reliquaries seems to indicate, however, that direct access to the relics was of prime importance to the wearer and that *encolpia* were frequently opened to touch, kiss, or apply scented oil to the sacred substances therein contained. As much as the cruciform shape of a reliquary pendant is no reliable marker of its sacred content, its iconographic program cannot be taken as an indicator of its relics either. In a single instance (No. 187), in which the relics of a bronze pectoral cross-reliquary are precisely identified as those of Sts. George and Clement, the decorative program features a *deesis* and the bust of St. Theodore. The cross-shape of the container, its iconographic program, and the relics complement each other to jointly serve the protective needs of the wearer.

The wide dissemination of bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries during medieval and modern times has long complicated attempts to establish a firm chronology of production and geography of distribution. The author's decision to include an analysis (chapter V) of those crosses that were recovered during archaeological excavations and thus reveal important clues about their production, distribution, and function as well as valuable information about their owners, adds a significant dimension to the study of this material. It helps to establish a firm chronology for the production of the vast majority of bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries between the 9th and 12th century and for their use into the 13th century. Disseminated throughout the cities, towns, and villages of the Empire as well as its monasteries and fortresses, these crosses served

their various owners – male or female, lay or monastic, saint or sinner – as powerful tokens of Christ's promise of healing and salvation.

The final chapter is devoted to the study of the socio-economic circumstances and the organizational structures that contributed to an increased production of bronze reliquaries in the Byzantine Empire between the 9th and 12th century. After the end of the iconoclastic controversy, a new demand for devotional objects and favorable fiscal policies resulted not only in a widening of the production of bronze objects in the empire's principal commercial centers, foremost among them Constantinople, but also in the establishment of numerous other workshops along the Aegean coast, the Black Sea, and Central Anatolia. In Constantinople, the Chalkoprateia quarter remained an active center of bronze production during the medieval period, but it is not the only district in which activities of copper workers are attested. Inspired by more precious objects in gold and silver, workshops in the capital are considered to be responsible for the production of similarly ambitious cross-reliquaries in bronze. Workshops in Greece, the Balkans, and Kiev soon started to produce and distribute their own lines of bronze pectoral cross-reliquaries. While most workshops were located in the greater commercial centers or in close proximity to major pilgrimage sites, a limited production of bronze cross-reliquaries may also be assumed for monastic centers, whose inmates, together with soldiers, were a prime clientele for objects of this kind.

It follows a richly illustrated catalogue raisonné of 651 objects divided into five main sections according to technique of decoration and iconography, a supplement of 20 objects, which came to the author's attention only after the conclusion of the catalogue proper, and an extensive bibliography. While the objects presented in this study may be considered humble vestiges of Byzantine art and 'material culture', Brigitte Pitarakis has produced a book that will serve as an exceedingly valuable resource for any scholar interested in Byzantine popular piety, the cult of relics, and the history of Byzantine pectoral cross-reliquaries in gold, silver, and, most importantly, bronze.

New York

Holger A. Klein