

26

Some notes on two late-antique gold pendants in the British Museum

by Chris Entwistle¹

During the course of the 1980s the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities substantially increased its collections of jewellery dating from the Late Roman period. Two of the most important acquisitions represented a rare type of object in late antiquity: the double-sided pendant (Gr. ἐνκόλπιον, lit. 'on [or in] the bosom'), of which only eight other examples were known at the time. Neither enkolpion has been the subject of a detailed publication. It seems a most appropriate place, therefore, given both Catherine and Don's fascination with the late antique period, to publish them in the form of an extended note in a volume celebrating their long and prolific tenures at the British Museum.

Form and Technique

This brief paper is not the right place to conduct a wide-ranging review of late-antique pendants so I will restrict myself here to a number of broad generalisations. The various forms of late-antique enkolpion fall into three basic categories. In the first, the central image is a coin or a multiple of a coin which is framed by a simple openwork border with suspension loop. These could be worn singly or in multiples and begin to appear towards the end of the 2nd century². By the mid 4th century coin-set pendants had become both technically and iconographically more complex. The apogee of this style is exemplified by a pendant in the British Museum: this is set with a double solidus of Constantine the Great, has an elaborate *opus interasile* frame, and is additionally embellished with six busts in high relief (Fig. 1)³. Pendants of this type continued well into the 6th century as shown by one example in the Louvre which has a coin of Justinian set in a border of openwork filigree (Coche de la Ferté 1962, pl. VIII). In the second type, the coin is replaced by a single

repoussé sheet bearing either an imperial, mythological or Christian image, sometimes mounted, sometimes not (Fig. 2)⁴. The final type is the double-sided pendant, again decorated with either pagan or Christian scenes, but generally lacking any form of mount. It is to this last category that the two examples acquired by the British Museum belong.

Although the design of these pendants is ultimately inspired by the Roman medallic tradition, it is slightly misleading to describe all of them – as is often the case in the literature – as medallions. Whilst this is perhaps a reasonable description for a coin-set pendant, the technique employed in the manufacture of single and double-sided pendants is different from the typical medallion. In the case of the latter a cast blank would be struck by a metal die bearing the design. The thickness of the blank would militate against any possible damage to the surface caused by forcible striking or hammering. Where the pendants are concerned there seem to be two different techniques employed, both slight variations on embossing. The sheet metal employed in the pendants is of such thinness as to make striking with a metal die inappropriate; indeed most of the double-sided pendants would have had a fill – often sulphur – to support the two sheets when set back-to-back. The sheet metal would have been impressed by either wooden tools or by hammering a wax or lead force over the sheet into a mould into which the design had been engraved in intaglio; alternatively, the sheet could be worked over a former where the design was in relief. A single sheet gold disk in the British Museum, probably intended as one side of a pendant, illustrates this latter technique quite well (Fig. 2). It depicts an emperor in a quadriga holding a mappa and a globe surmounted by a Victory holding a wreath over his head. The design is exceptionally crisp. It is quite clear

¹ Department of Prehistory and Europe, British Museum, London WC1B 3DG.

² For coin-set pendants, see Bruhn 1993, *passim* (with extensive bibliography).

³ Registration number P&E 1984,5-1,1. See Buckton 1994, n° 2.

⁴ For some examples, see Schlunk 1939, nos 54-6; Yeroulanou 1999, n° 115.



Fig. 1 — Gold pendant set with double solidus of Constantine the Great. 4th century AD. British Museum, Department of Prehistory and Europe, P&E 1984,5-1,1. Maximum diameter 92 mm. Photo: © The British Museum.

from the reverse that all the details derive from the former's positive design; there is no evidence at all of chasing, or any tooling for that matter, on the front⁵. In contrast the enkolpion with the Adoration of the Magi and the Ascension is executed in a different fashion (Fig. 3).

The gold sheets employed here are thicker and the figures executed in much higher relief than on either the single disk or the pendant with mythological figures (Fig. 6). The higher relief could be due to two factors: either the mould into which the sheet was impressed was deeper or, more likely, the design was largely worked up free-hand from the back. This would necessitate some additional work done from the front and this is clearly observable in such details as the eyes of the figures and their drapery.

Enkolpion with the Adoration and Ascension

Gold pendant⁶ composed of two embossed sheets set back to back over a sulphur core and edged with beaded wire (Fig. 3)⁷. A suspension loop of ridged gold strip is attached to the top by a single-shackle hinge. On the obverse is the Adoration of the Magi (Fig. 3, a), with the three Magi approaching from the left and the Virgin seated to the right in a high-backed chair with the infant Christ on her lap; Christ holds up his right hand in a gesture of benediction. An angel, with billowing lower drapery, flies overhead and reaches towards Christ's head, beside the Star of Bethlehem. Beneath an exergual line is a Greek inscription in two lines: + KYPIE BOHΘI TH | ΦOPOVC AMHN ('Lord protect the wearer. Amen').



Fig. 2 — Gold disk with an emperor in a quadriga. 6th century AD. British Museum, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities. Maximum diameter 53 mm. Photo: © The British Museum.

⁵ For two very similar plaques in, respectively, the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, and the Louvre, see Ross 1965, n° 2 and Durand 1992, n° 90. For an example of a medallion which could have served as the former, see a gold marriage belt from the second Cyprus treasure, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and dating from the reign of Maurice Tiberius (Stylianou 1969, n° 38).

⁶ Registration number P&E 1983,7-4,1. Auctioned at Sotheby's, *Medieval, Renaissance and Later Works of Art and Related Reference Books* Wednesday and Thursday, 8th and 9th July 1981, London, lot 209. The pendant was briefly published in Tait 1986, n° 501; Shepherd 1996, n° 2, 18.

⁷ Semi-quantitative XRF analysis showed that both sheets are of the same composition: 90% gold, 7% silver, 2.5% copper (British Museum, Research Laboratory File n° 4973).



Fig. 3 — Gold pendant, a...obverse, the Adoration of the Magi; b...reverse, the Ascension. 6th century AD. British Museum, Department of Prehistory and Europe, P&E 1983,7-4,1. Diameter 58.2 mm. Photo: © The British Museum.

The reverse is decorated with the Ascension (Fig. 3, b). In the upper field, framed by a mandorla which is supported by four angels, is Christ with a cruciform nimbus. Below him, in the centre, is the draped figure of the Virgin pointing upwards with her right hand. She is flanked on either side by the eleven disciples and St Paul, all in various poses of astonishment. Beneath another exergual line is a further Greek inscription: ΕΙΡΗΝΗΝ ΤΕΝ ΗΜΕΝ | ΑΦΙΟΜΕ ΥΜΙΝ ('Our peace we leave with you'; John 14: 27). Height (including suspension loop) 67.7 mm; diameter 58.2 mm.

This pendant can be grouped with six others of the 6th or early 7th century AD, all decorated with scenes from the Christological cycle. The most extensive narrative sequences can be seen on two identical enkolpia from Adana in Turkey and now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Talbot Rice 1959, pl. 66). The front and back of each medallion is divided into three registers embossed with the following scenes: front: top register, the Annunciation and the Visitation; middle register, the Child in the Manger and the Flight into Egypt; bottom register, the Adoration of the Magi, all the scenes enclosed by a Greek key pattern; back: top register: the Healing of the Blind Man and the Leper; middle register: the Healing of the Woman with a Haemorrhage, the Healing of the Paralytic and the Healing of the Man possessed by the Devil; bottom register: the Resurrection of Lazarus and the Woman of Samaria; all these scenes are enclosed by a border composed of busts of Christ, the Virgin and the apostles alternating with a stylised scroll.

The remaining five pendants adopt a slightly different formula in that they normally depict only a single scene, again from the Christological cycle, on each side. The commonest scene is that of the Annunciation to the Virgin which appears on three examples: a medallion in Berlin from the so-called Assiut treasure in Egypt (Wamser 2004, n° 484), a medallion found in the 'Jordan valley', now with the Israeli Antiquities Authority (Israeli & Mevorah 2000, 148-9) and finally, one in a German private collection in Munich (Wamser 2004, n° 505). Iconographically, they all follow the biblical tradition according to the Protoevangelium of James: the Virgin is depicted in a high-backed chair with one hand raised in a gesture of surprise, the other holding a skein of wool descending into a basket. The reverses of these three enkolpia show, respectively, the Miracle at the Wedding of Cana, the Baptism of Christ, and a marriage scene in which Christ blesses the bride and groom.

The Dumbarton Oaks Collection in Washington DC contains the fourth example: this has (supposedly struck) on its obverse, a seated Virgin and Child flanked by two angels above various Nativity scenes, with the Baptism of Christ on the reverse (Ross 1965, n° 36). The final and closest example to the British Museum's pendant is unfortunately now lost. An image of it, however, is known from a drawing which was originally part of the collection of the Museo Cartaceo established by the Italian antiquarian Cassiano del Pozzo (1588-1657) and continued by his brother Carlo Antonio. Published as a pen and ink drawing in Pozzo's *Mosaichi Antichi* the original drawing



Fig. 4 — Drawing of gold medallion with the Ascension. From Cassiano del Pozzo's *Mosaichi Antichi*. Reproduced by courtesy of the Royal Collections Picture Library.

is now part of the Royal Collection at Windsor (Osborne & Claridge 1998, n° 284). The pendant was described as gold(?) and Bianchini's notes give its provenance as 'from a Christian cemetery'⁸. It depicts on one side the Flight into Egypt, but on the other a representation of the Ascension (Fig. 4). Like the British Museum's example, Christ is shown within a mandorla supported by four angels, but Christ is depicted on the lost pendant as bearded and without a cruciform nimbus; in addition, the upper two angels are shown with wings whilst those on the Museum's example have been conflated to two heads. Although a similar number of figures are depicted below Christ, the illustrator has clearly misunderstood the central figure of the Virgin who is represented as a bearded male! The disciples on both examples are arranged in two registers; those on the lost pendant are not so clearly differentiated and there are marked differences in their poses. On the Pozzo enkolpion four of the five background figures hold their hands above their heads in gestures of amazement, whilst the fifth merely looks heavenwards; they are all shown in profile. In contrast only one of the figures on the Museum's example (the one at the extreme right) is shown in profile, and he is also the only figure gesticulating upwards. The other four figures are shown frontally with the figure on the extreme left holding his right hand to the side of his face, the figure adjacent to him holding out both hands in an orant

gesture, the figure next to him holding up one hand, and the final disciple merely looking straight ahead. On the Museum's medallion the Virgin (as on the obverse curiously not nimbate) stands to the right with one hand upraised and flanked by the bald-headed figure of Paul and St Peter holding a cross aloft. On the Pozzo medallion the Virgin stands to the left with both hands raised imploringly to Christ. Beneath the figures' feet on the lost pendant there is a blank space; whether this was because the draughtsman could not reproduce Greek or whether there simply was not an inscription cannot be proved. The existence of the inscription on the Museum's pendant may perhaps explain why the bodies and wings of the upper two angels are truncated.

Similar variations in depictions of the Ascension are found in other media. Folio 13b, for instance, in the Rabbula Gospels depicts an elaborate version of the Ascension according to Acts 1. 9-11. This Syriac manuscript, executed by the monk Rabbula at the monastery of Beth Mar John of Beth Zagba, north of Apameia, was completed by February 586 (Cecchelli *et al.* 1959, 71-2). In this more detailed version of the Ascension Christ is shown standing in a mandorla supported by four angels, the lower two offering crowns; above and below the mandorla are the hand of God and the tetramorph, symbolic of Ezekiel's vision. In the lower register, the Virgin stands in orant pose, but unlike the Pozzo and the British Museum's enkolpion, she is flanked by two angels as well as the disciples and St Paul.

A not dissimilar composition to this is found on the lid of a reliquary box from the Treasure of the Sancta Sanctorum and now in the Museo Sacro in the Vatican (Morey 1926, *passim*; Cavallo *et al.* 1982, 343, 408-9). The lid is painted with five scenes with the Crucifixion in the centre, the Resurrection and Ascension above, and the Nativity and Baptism below. In the Ascension the Virgin is shown in the lower register, in the centre, in orant pose; above her is a seated Christ in a mandorla supported by four angels. The two angels which flanked the Virgin in the Rabbula Ascension are, however, omitted and the disciples are portrayed reacting in a much less frantic manner: none point upwards and the only visible signs of agitation is that the group to the right of the Virgin is depicted moving gently away from her with backward-turned heads.

The iconographic variations noted above are replicated on the only other group of objects which bear close comparison to the Ascension on the Museum's pendant: the over thirty tinned-lead ampullae kept in the cathedral treasuries of Monza and Bobbio in Italy⁹. These cast flasks are decorated with a variety of Christological scenes, with the Ascension appearing on the reverses of

⁸ Professor John Osborne has kindly commented: 'The brief note in the Latin version of the inventory applies very broadly to a group of objects, and not this one specifically. That said, most of the Early Christian objects in the Paper Museum are of local provenance, at least where this can be verified. There is certainly a high probability of a Roman, or at least Italian, find spot. But no guarantee!!' (pers. comm. 2/12/2004).

⁹ The standard publication on these ampullae is Grabar 1958, but the best photographs are to be found in Vitali 1966.

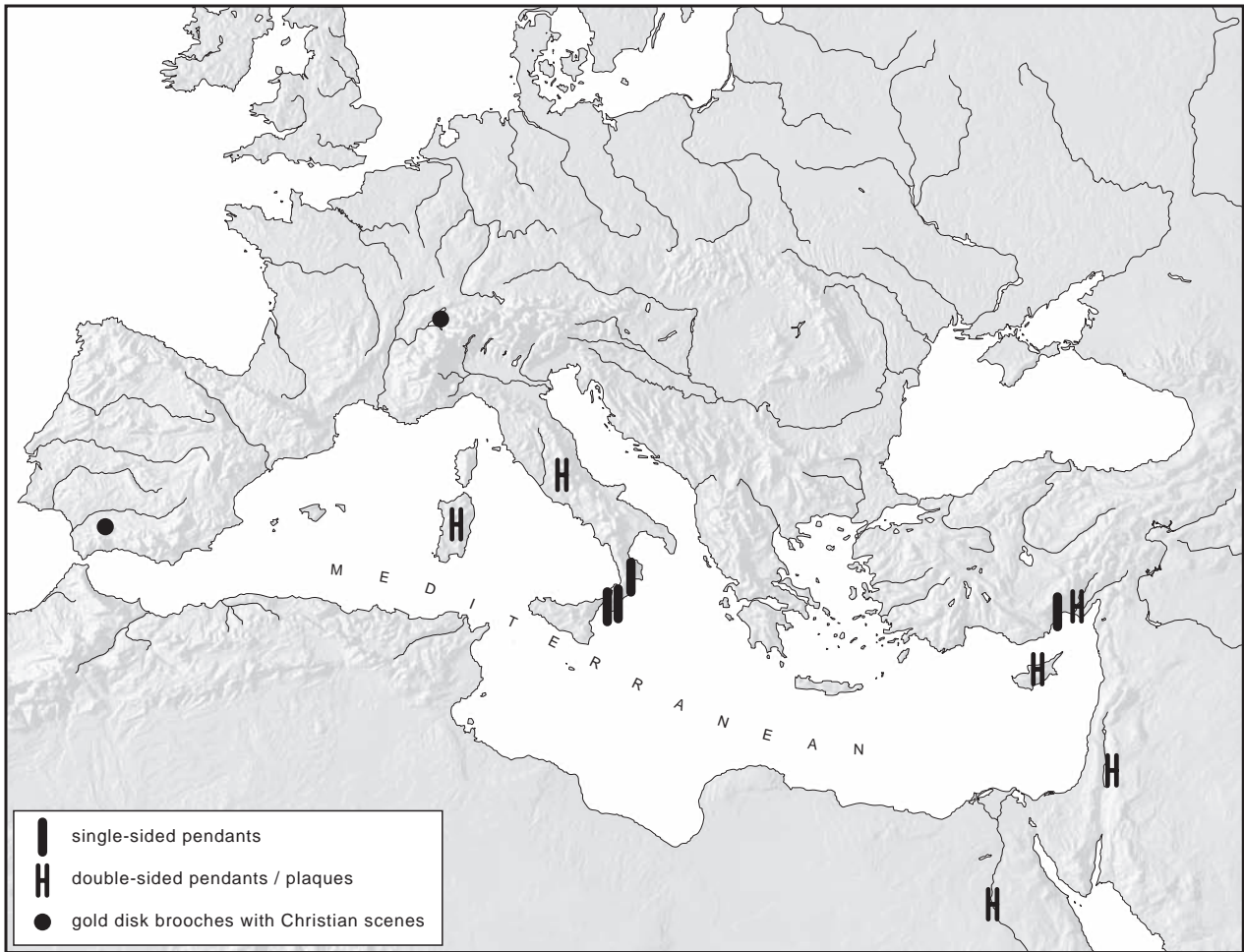


Fig. 5 — Distribution map of pendants and related material. Drawing: Stephen Crummy; © The British Museum 2005.

six of the *ampullae* in Monza (with one exception [the Adoration] they all have the Crucifixion above the Women at the Tomb on their obverses), and in abbreviated form, on two of those from Bobbio. The standard schema, which is represented by three examples in Monza all from the same mould (Vitali 1966, n^{os} 11, 21, 29), depicts the bearded figure of Christ seated within a mandorla holding a book in his right hand and raising his left in a gesture of benediction. Four angels support the mandorla, the upper two with truncated bodies. Below, the Virgin stands to the right with both arms upraised. Flanking her, in two groups of six, are the eleven disciples and St Paul: the front row in each group is standing and the rear group, shown only as half-figures, is in profile. Enclosing the scene is a Greek inscription resolving as: ‘Emmanuel, God with us’. The remaining three *ampullae* deviate from the basic type in minor details only. On all three the Virgin is shown frontally in orant pose, instead of in profile, with in one instance a dove above her head (Vitali 1966, n^o 27). Christ is depicted on all three examples with a cruciform nimbus and on one example, as on the Rabbula folio, the bodies

of all four angels are shown in full (Vitali 1966, n^o 33). The greatest differences are to be observed in the physical orientation of the figures and their mannerisms, and in the lack of inscriptions. On the two Bobbio *ampullae* the Ascension only appears as an abbreviated scene in a medallion along with other scenes from the life of Christ.

Two different pictorial formulae were employed for the Adoration of the Magi in late-antique art. In the west the format was heavily influenced by the conventions of *adventus* derived from Roman imperial art. Of particular relevance is the depiction of Persians submitting themselves before imperial authority, as seen for instance on the obelisk base of Theodosios in Istanbul, where they are portrayed wearing Persian costume and Phrygian caps, kneeling in submissive pose, and with their right hands extended and bearing gifts. This format was largely adopted for representations of the Adoration in both monumental and the minor arts. It was particularly popular on the fronts and lids of sarcophagi whose rectangular forms lent themselves naturally to the fluid portrayal of profile figures in motion (Weitzmann 1979, n^{os} 357 and

417 for two examples in the Vatican). The ovoid bodies of silver flasks and the fronts of silver reliquaries also lent themselves to this rhythmic version, as can be evidenced by a flagon from the Traprain Law treasure in Edinburgh (Weitzmann 1979, n° 389), and a casket in the Louvre (Buschhausen 1971, n° B 14), both probably early 5th century in date. Perhaps the finest, and certainly one of the latest, depictions of the Adoration in the western empire can be seen in the church of St Apollinaire Nuovo in Ravenna. One of the mosaics on the north wall, probably erected towards the end of Justinian's reign, shows the three magi richly attired in cloaks, tunics and trousers, moving elegantly towards the Virgin.

In the eastern Mediterranean the portrayal of the Magi advancing in profile was in some instances abandoned in favour of a more rigid, hieratic interpretation. Two ivories, both probably Syro-Palestinian and 6th century in date, illustrate this difference quite succinctly. On the first, an ivory plaque in the British Museum (Volbach 1976, n° 131), the Virgin is depicted seated frontally with the Christ child on her lap. Both stare directly at the viewer. The Virgin is flanked by the three magi and an angel bearing a cross. Two of the magi stand in static poses with their arms extended and holding a gift; the third magi is reduced to an almost half-length figure who seems to be peering over the left shoulder of the Virgin. This composition is replicated on another ivory plaque, which was once the central plaque of a five-part diptych, in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester (Volbach 1976, n° 127). All three of the ampullae at Monza decorated with the Adoration follow the 'eastern' format (Vitali 1966, nos 30, 36, 38). Although they come from three different moulds their similarities outweigh their differences. On each the Virgin is seated frontally on a high-backed chair with the infant Christ on her lap. To her left are the three magi dressed in Persian costume, either standing or kneeling with their gifts. To the Virgin's right are three shepherds, two of whom point to an angel above them. The 'eastern' connection is further emphasised by the Greek inscription which appears on all of them: 'Blessing of the Lord from the holy places' i.e. Palestine. It is only in abbreviated Nativity scenes on metalwork items that the 'western' format is employed as can be seen on a gold medallion in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection Washington DC (Ross 1965, n° 36). This is decorated on its obverse with a frontal Virgin and Child flanked by two angels with below, in the bottom right corner, an abbreviated representation of the Adoration with the Virgin and Child seated at left looking towards the three magi who approach in profile from the right. The depiction shares an unusual feature with the Museum's pendant in that the middle magus is depicted looking backwards at the third magus and also gesticulating upwards. The Adoration also appears on the lower register on the obverses of both the Adana medallions (Talbot Rice 1959, pl. 66). Here though the magi approach from the left and there is a shepherd(?) behind the Virgin's chair.

Among the best parallels for the Museum's Adoration are a number of gold and copper-alloy disk brooches from Spain and Germany. An example of the former, from a grave in Turruñuelo near Medellín in Spain, and now in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, shares many features with the Museum's pendant including a similar amuletic inscription: ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΒΟΗΘΙ ΤΗ ΦΩΡΟΥΣΑΙ ΑΜΗΝ (Schlunk & Hauschild 1978, pl. 49). This inscription is replicated on a double-sided disk brooch in the Demirjian collection in New York, although here the Adoration is also enclosed with a wreath and a repoussé border of diamond shapes (Demirjian 1991, n° 190). A gilded copper-alloy plaque from Attalens, now in the Fribourg Museum (Besson 1911, 185), copies the Museum's pendant very closely, although the inscription is abbreviated to ΚΕ ΒΟΗΘΙ ('Lord, protect'). Finally, mention should be made of two gold plaques from southern Italy. One, now in the Museo Nazionale, Reggio Calabria, was found in 1886 in a Byzantine tomb in Siderno, the other was discovered in Tiriolo and is now in the Museo Provinciale in Cantanzaro (Cavallo *et al.* 1982, nos 212, 215). Both replicate the basic 'western' format although the scene on both plaques is reversed and there are no inscriptions.

Because of their iconographic links with other objects decorated with scenes from the Palestinian Christological cycle, these pendants have often been ascribed to the Holy Land and classed with that group of artefacts known as eulogiae (Gr. Εὐλογία, 'blessing'). In some instances, the monumental wall-paintings and mosaics which decorated the most prominent churches in Palestine have been invoked as the iconographic sources for much of this material: thus it has been argued that the Ascension in the Rabbula gospel may reflect a similar monumental composition in the church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. With regards to the Adoration: a petitionary letter supposedly addressed to the emperor Theophilus at a conference held in Jerusalem in 836, mentions that there was a representation of the Adoration of the Magi on the façade of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and that its portrayal of the Magi in Persian costume was why the Persians spared the church from destruction when they invaded Bethlehem in 614. Grabar on the other hand has argued for a Constantinopolitan source for both the Monza ampullae and for some of the pendants. There is not the space here to go into the merits of either argument, but it is worth pointing out that the particular representation of the Adoration on the Museum's pendant seems to owe more to the western tradition of depicting this scene than the hieratic composition found on Syro-Palestinian ivories and indeed on the Monza ampullae. A distribution map of these pendants reveals little other than that they were dispersed surprisingly widely throughout the Mediterranean (Fig. 5).

Eulogiae – a large class of objects which include gold, silver and bronze rings, bracelets, ampullae and pilgrim tokens of various materials – have primarily been regarded as 'mementoes' of holy places to be taken away



Fig. 6 — Gold pendant, a...obverse, Artemis; b... reverse, Herakles and Omphale. 6th century AD. British Museum, Department of Prehistory and Europe, P&E 1986,6-1,1. Maximum diameter 65 mm. Photo: © The British Museum.

by pious pilgrims. Although their medicinal properties are widely acknowledged in the literature, their prophylactic qualities are sometimes under-stressed. This is certainly true for a number of the pendants discussed in this paper. Although some may have been made in the Holy Land explicitly as souvenirs for wealthy pilgrims, in some instances their inscriptions and in others their iconography, suggest they functioned primarily as amulets. This is particularly true of those enkolpia and brooches decorated with the Adoration of the Magi – a scene which seems to have had especial protective qualities. This is emphasised by the juxtaposition of this particular scene with the typical late-antique, apotropaic inscription in Greek ‘Lord, protect the wearer’ or ‘Holy Mary, protect the wearer’: this can be observed not only on the Museum’s pendant but on three of the disk brooches found in western contexts alluded to above. Grabar also considers the unusual inscription accompanying the Adoration scene on the Adana medallions to be essentially prophylactic. The inscription reads ‘here is the basileus (i.e. emperor)’, an non-biblical utterance which nevertheless carries echoes of imperial and hence divine power. Indeed the iconography of the Adana medallions is

perhaps more specific than most. The selection of images for the reverses of both pendants is idiosyncratic: beginning with the Healing of the Blind Man and ending with the Woman of Samaria they all represent Christ’s healing miracles and imply strongly a curative function for these two pendants.

By association with the Rabbula gospels, dated to 586, to the Monza and Bobbio ampullae, traditionally associated with the Lombardic Queen Theodelinda, and to the enkolpia from the Assiut treasure, a date of around 600 would seem appropriate for the Museum’s pendant.

Enkolpion with Artemis and Herakles and Omphale

Gold medallion of two embossed sheets set back to back over a sulphur core and edged with hollow beaded wire (Fig. 6)¹⁰. The medallion is fastened to a double biconical clasp by a single-shackle hinge. Attached to each end of the clasp is a simple chain, each link consisting of two circular strips brazed together at right angles. At the end of each chain is a small disk, one with a wire

¹⁰ Registration number P&E 1986,6-1,1. Unpublished. Semi-quantitative XRF analysis of the two sides: 90.1% gold, 6.5% silver and 3.4% copper. The presence of a number of tiny silvery coloured platinum group metal grains in some components proved to be of the iridium/osmium/low ruthenium type, strongly suggesting unrefined gold from a placer deposit as the source of the metal (British Museum, Research Laboratory File n° 5393).

hook, the other with a corresponding loop. On the obverse, within a border of two concentric circles, is a female figure wearing a triple diadem and holding a bow in her left and an arrow in her right hand (Fig. 6, a). By her right foot is a lion, and by her left a leopard. Enclosing this central composition is a border composed of alternating ibexes with backward-turned heads, speared quadrupeds and crouching lions(?) with frontal heads.

On the reverse (Fig. 6, b) is a heavily muscled, bearded male, nude and standing with legs slightly flexed and apart. His left arm is held stiffly against his side, whilst his right appears to be threaded through the arm of a nude female figure on whom he appears to be relying for support. She stands slightly contraposto with her right arm foreshortened as if crooked under her elbow; her left arm appears to rest on her hip. This scene is enclosed by a similar border to the obverse, although slight buckling of the gold sheet has made it difficult to read. Maximum diameter 65 mm; length of each chain 215 mm.

The identification of the figure on the obverse is straightforward. This is a typical rendering of Artemis/Diana about to engage in the hunt. She is dressed in the traditional mantle and chiton and is seen in the act of drawing an arrow for her compound bow. The two figures on the reverse are more problematic, but probably represent Herakles and Omphale. After stealing the tripod from the Pythia in Delphi, Herakles was condemned by the oracle to a year's slavery. Omphale, Queen of Lydia, bought Herakles when he was offered for sale as a nameless slave. Omphale forces Herakles, when drunk, to exchange both clothes and roles with her. The scene on the reverse captures this moment. Unfortunately due to the buckling of the sheet the details are not that clear. It does seem likely, however, that the area immediately below Omphale's left arm rather than being drapery is in fact meant to depict Herakles' lion-skin. At the bottom of this area, almost extending to below Herakles' left foot, is what may be the tail of the lion-skin.

This depiction of Herakles and Omphale is to the best of my knowledge unparalleled in early Byzantine art. The latest representation of it in Roman art seems to be on a 3rd- or 4th-century mosaic from Thina, now in the Bardo museum, Tunis (LIMC VII, I, n° C30, 48). The figure of Artemis is, however, much easier to parallel, especially on textiles of the period. A number of examples will suffice here. A 4th-century textile from Egypt in the Abegg-Stiftung, Berne, has Artemis similarly portrayed, but instead of a lion or a leopard at her feet there is a deer (LIMC II, 1, n° 9, 767). Artemis also appears in multiple scenes on textiles, as on a 6th-century example in Stanford University Museum of Art, where she is juxtaposed with animals in roundels (LIMC II, 1, n° 10, 767), or on a medallion on a 6th - to 7th -century linen tunic in the Museum für Kunsthandwerk in Frankfurt where she is shown in a scene from Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Tauris* (LIMC II, I, n° 33, 769). The best parallel can be seen on a square medallion which forms part of a 5th-century

shawl from Antinoe, now in the Louvre (LIMC II, 1, n° 31, 769). Although Artemis does appear on silver vessels, such as the Corbridge lanx in the British Museum and on the Kuczurmare situla in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, she is not depicted in a hunting pose.

Only three other gold pendants with mythological scenes have survived from Late Antiquity, although in each case they also have strong 'imperial' connotations. The first, which was part of the Mersin treasure now in the Hermitage, St Petersburg, was published by Grabar (1951, *passim*). This, a single-sided medallion, is embossed with the figure of an emperor holding a globe, flanked by representations of the sun and moon, and enclosed, like the Museum's pendant, by a border of animals. It was suspended from a chain of 20 disks, each stamped with two imperial busts flanking a central cross and the Greek inscription ΥΓΙΑ ('health'). A double-sided medallion in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, bears on its obverse the profile bust of an emperor holding a victory and with a bungled Latin inscription (which possibly identifies the emperor as Anastasius) in the field. On the reverse is the standing figure of Dionysus flanked by two satyrs. The god holds a staff and pours wine into the mouth of a panther with his other hand. Enclosing this scene is a border composed of two urns from which emanate vine scrolls enclosing various figures including putti, a bird and a hare. The final medallion is in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond (Kondoleon 1987, *passim*). Constructed of two very thin gold sheets mounted over a substantial resin core, its obverse is decorated with a winged female bust holding fruits: the figure has been convincingly identified as Ge, the personification of earth. Around is a border of twelve small medallions, four of which enclose crosses, eight an imperial bust in profile. Regrettably the busts are too stylised to allow identification. On the reverse is a foliate pattern.

Nevertheless the imperial busts on the Richmond pendant and the links which form part of the chain of the Mersin pendant are not inconsistent with a 6th-century date. The Mersin hoard also included an elaborate gold buckle and seventeen belt tabs one of which bears in its centre a cruciform monogram resolving as 'Lord, protect'. Monograms of this form are generally dated to the second half of the 6th and first half of the 7th century AD. Despite the presence of purely pagan figures on the Museum's pendant, I would favour a late 6th century date for it. It is well worth recalling that many silver vessels found throughout the empire in the late 6th and 7th centuries (indisputably dated through their silver stamps), were similarly decorated with scenes or figures drawn from the classical iconographic repertory. Objects dating from the reigns of Heraklios (AD 610-41) and Constans II (AD 641-68) include two trullae decorated with figures of Poseidon, a situla with six Greek gods and goddesses, two plates with Meleager and maenads, and a ewer with nereids (Dodd 1961, nos 50, 56, 57, 70, 75). Literary pretensions were also catered for on early Byzantine silverware. Four of the

six spoons from the Lampsacus treasure in the British Museum are engraved and nielloed with quotations from the Sayings of the Seven Sages (*Palatine Anthology*, IX.366); the other two bear Latin verses from Virgil's *Eclogues* (Buckton 1994, n° 133). It has been argued recently that the persistence of interest in the motifs of classical culture, as manifested in particular in silverware, is due to the continued adherence by the educated elite to the notion of *paideia* – a term that in the Hellenistic and Roman world equated with education. Leader-Newby remarks (2004, 181): 'the continuity of the structures and substance of traditional Graeco-Roman education in Byzantium makes the use of classical subjects to decorate silverware in the 6th and 7th centuries less surprising than it at first appears. It also suggests that the role of traditional education as an instrument of elite self-definition and cohesion, which could be projected through the luxury art of the domestic sphere, lasted longer in the Byzantine world than some scholars have allowed'. Whether one accepts this proposition as an all-embracing explanation for the ubiquity of pagan motifs in an avowedly Christian culture, it is indisputable that the use of mythological motifs permeated many aspects of late-antique art and a 6th-century date for the Museum's pendant is not inconsistent with the existing evidence.

Although the four pendants discussed above may have had a general amuletic function, three of them also have intriguing links with either literary or pictorial allusions to the subject of marriage. Artemis, for instance, although symbolic of the violent hunt, also exemplified chastity (*παρθενεία*), a state ranked even higher than marriage by the church, and a prerequisite to marriage. Herakles though dominated by his passions, which led him into humiliating circumstances such as his subservience to Omphale, was nevertheless a symbol of fortitude. Dionysos, who appears on the reverse of the Dumbarton Oaks medallion, does not at first sight appear to be symbolic of any of the virtues of marriage – except perhaps fertility. That he appears on objects which played a central role in the nuptial chamber before the actual ceremony is evidenced by two marriage belts, one in the Louvre (Durand 1992, n° 89), the other in Dumbarton Oaks (Ross 1965, n° 38)¹¹. Both belts are composed of two large circular plaques illustrating the *dextrarum iunctio*: Christ stands in the centre flanked by the bride and groom who join their right hands before him. Connected to these two plaques are either 20 or 21 smaller

plaques, each decorated with a variety of dionysiac figures. Both the central medallions are inscribed. The inscriptions on the Louvre's belt proclaim: 'Carry in good health' and 'the grace of God'; on the Dumbarton Oaks belt the formula is slightly different: 'From God, concord, grace and health'. The use of the word YΓΙΑ (health) on both belts provides a direct link with the Mersin medallion. Each of the 20 links which comprise its chain is stamped with two frontal male and female busts flanking a central cross and with the inscription YΓΙΑ. This format is reminiscent of one of the standard types of early Byzantine marriage rings as seen for instance on three examples in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Ross 1965, nos 52, 67, 68), although these are generally inscribed in Greek 'Concord' and are often accompanied by a bust of Christ¹². The other standard type of 6th- or 7th-century marriage ring recalls the *dextrarum iunctio* iconography found on the marriage belts: these are normally engraved and nielloed on the bezel with the central figure of Christ, sometimes accompanied by the Virgin, blessing the bride and groom; often they have octagonal hoops engraved with both scenes from the life of Christ and amuletic inscriptions. In the context of the Mersin pendant it is worth recalling that one of these rings formed part of the hoard from which the pendant originated (Bank 1977, n° 103).

Literary sources reveal that it was not only marriage belts and rings that were involved in the gift exchanges that accompanied the marriage ceremony. As Deckers has pointed out: 'people used to swear by medallions and exchange them as 'confirmation of contract'. Relatives of a newly-married couple would also exchange medallions at a wedding as a sign of unalterable acceptance and support of the marriage contract'¹³. Perhaps the Museum's pendant with its classical allusions to chastity and forbearance – essential virtues both before and after marriage – should be seen as a gift between members of the cultural élite in celebration of marriage.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ralph Jackson and Gill Vardell for their comments, Noel Adams for discussing Omphale, and Steve Crummy for doing the distribution map at very short notice.

¹¹ Ross quotes the examples of St Alexios who gave his bride a belt and a ring in the nuptial chamber before the ceremony (Ross 1965, 39).

¹² On marriage rings in general, see Vikan 1990.

¹³ Quoted in Vassilaki 2000, 291.

Bibliography

LIMC = *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zurich/Munich).

- Bank, A. 1977. *Byzantine art in the collections of Soviet Museums* (Leningrad).
- Besson, M. 1911. 'La fibule d'Attalens', *Revue Charlemagne* 1, 185.
- Bruhn, J-A. 1993. *Coins and costume in late antiquity*, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection Publications 9 (Washington, DC).
- Buckton, D. (ed.). 1994. *Byzantium: treasures of Byzantine art and culture from British Collections* (London).
- Buschhausen, H. 1971. *Die spätrömischen Metallschreine und frühchristlichen Reliquiare* (Vienna).
- Cavallo, G., Falkenhausen von, V., Campanati, R.F., *I Bizantini in Italia* (Milan).
- Cecchelli, C., Furlani, G. and Salmi, M. (eds). 1959. *The Rabbula Gospels* (Olten/Lausanne).
- Coche de la Ferté, E. 1962. *Antique jewellery from the second to the eighth century* (Berne).
- Demirjian, T. 1991. *Treasures of the Dark Ages in Europe* (New York).
- Dodd, E.C. 1961. *Byzantine silver stamps* (Washington, DC).
- Durand, J. (ed.). 1992. *Byzance. L'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* (Paris).
- Grabar, A. 1951. 'Un médaillon en or provenant de Mersine en Cilicie', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 6, 27-49.
— 1958. *Ampoules de Terre Sainte* (Paris).
- Israeli, Y. & Mevorah, D. (eds). 2000. *Cradle of Christianity* [Weisbord Exhibition Pavilion Spring 2000-Winter 2001, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem] (Jerusalem).
- Kondoleon, C. 1987. 'A gold pendant in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41, 307-16.
- Leader-Newby, R. 2004. *Silver and society in late antiquity. Functions and meanings of silver plate in the fourth to seventh centuries* (Aldershot).
- Morey, C.R. 1926. 'The painted panel from Sancta Sanctorum', *Festschrift z. 60. Geburtstag von Paul Clemen*, 150-67 (Bonn/Düsseldorf).
- Osborne J. & Claridge, A. 1998. *The Paper Museum of Cassiano dal Pozzo. Series A – Part II. Early Christian and medieval antiquities 2: other mosaics, paintings, sarcophagi and small objects* (London).
- Ross, M.C. 1965. *Catalogue of the Byzantine and early medieval antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection 2: jewelry, enamels, and art of the Migration Period* (Washington, DC).
- Schlunk, H. 1939. *Kunst der Spätantike im Mittelmeerraum. Spätantike im byzantinische Kleinkunst aus Berliner Besitz* (Berlin).
- & Hauschild, T. 1978. *Hispania Antiqua. Die Denkmäler der frühchristlichen und westgotischen Zeit* (Mainz am Rhein).
- Stylianou, A. & J. 1969. *The treasures of Lambousa* (Nicosia).
- Tait, H. 1986 (ed.). *Seven thousand years of jewellery* (London).
- Shepherd, R. 1996. *We three kings: the Magi in art and legend* (Aylesbury).
- Talbot Rice, D. 1959. *The art of Byzantium* (London).
- Vassilaki, M. (ed.) 2000. *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine art*, exhibition catalogue, Benaki Museum 20 October 2000-20 January 2001 (Athens).
- Vikan G. 1990. 'Art and marriage in early Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44, 145-63.
- Vitali, L. (ed.). 1966. *Il tesoro del Duomo di Monza* (Milan).
- Volbach, W.F. 1976. *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz).
- Wamser, L. (ed.). 2004. *Die Welt von Byzanz – Europas östliches Erbe – Glanz, Krisen und Fortleben einer tausendjährigen Kultur*, exhibition catalogue, Archäologische Staatssammlung München – Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, München vom 22.10.2004 bis 3.4.2005 (Munich).
- Weitzmann, K. (ed.). 1979. *Age of spirituality. Late antique and early Christian art, third to seventh Century* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).
- Yeroulanou, A. 1999. *Diatreta. Gold pierced-work jewellery from the 3rd to the 7th century* (Athens).