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WORKS OF ART



HEAVEN ON EARTH:

A LATE-ANTIQUUE MASTERPIECE AND
THE RISE OF CHRISTIAN CULTURE 300-600 AD

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A Late-Antique Masterpiece and the Rise of Christian Culture 300-600 AD

"...we are increasingly aware of the astounding new beginnings associated with this period: we go to it to discover why Europe became Christian and why the Near East became Muslim..." Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971)

We are grateful to all of the people who have helped to make this exhibition possible, and especially to the private collectors who have so generously loaned their wonderful objects.

All objects in the exhibition are for sale except those from private collections.

Introduction

The three centuries between 300 and 600 AD witnessed the slow decline of the classical tradition and its eventual assimilation into a rising Judeo-Christian culture. Pockets of classical learning remained alive, nevertheless, among the wealthy and aristocratic elite. For the average Roman citizen, however, it was Christianity that provided a sense of community and a glimmer of hope in a turbulent and threatening world. By responding to the needs of the lower classes, the Church continued to gain converts from other competing religions. The conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great to Christianity in 312 was a turning point for the Roman Empire that would in time fundamentally alter the course of Western civilization. As if in anticipation of this critical event, Christianity had already spread its roots deep into the fertile social fabric of early fourth-century life.

Apart from a few periods of religious conflict, Christians and pagans lived together peacefully sharing a common heritage. It was entirely natural, therefore, that Christian artists would rely on established classical images and that gradually these pagan images would be infused with Christian meaning. By the late sixth and early seventh centuries, however, a visual language that was completely new and exclusively Christian came to the fore. The appearance of this new Christian imagery marks a clear break with Late Antique pictorial traditions.

The exhibition begins with a masterpiece of Late Antique metalwork, a fourth-century octagonal bronze chariot fitting weighing over five pounds. On each of the eight sides of this object, colorful metal inlays of silver, red copper and niello form dense tapestry-like scenes evoking the pleasures of rustic country life and the bounty offered by land and sea. This magnificent object with its extensive depictions of the pagan 'Good Life' stands at the center of this show, much like the hub of a wheel whose spokes radiate outward touching each of the objects on view.

The exhibition is organized into three sections:

(I) Abundance & the Good Life: The Late-Antique Inheritance (cat. 1-11)

(II) New Directions: Early Christian Signs & Symbols (cat. 12-15)

(III) From Allegory to Icon: The Christian Church Triumphant (cat. 16-30)

Part I

Abundance & The Good Life: The Late-Antique Inheritance

"What makes the cornfield smile; beneath what star
Maecenas, it is meet to turn the sod
Or marry elm with vine; how tend the steer;
What pains for cattle-keeping, or what proof
Of patient trial serves for thrifty bees;
Such are my themes."
Virgil, The Georgics, 29 BC



Octagonal Chariot
Fitting with Eight Scenes



Mosaic with Hunt Scene



Plaque with Medallion



Relief with Endymion



Quadrangular Weight
with Hunting Scene



Weight with
Hunters



Weight with Cross
and Wreath



Aureus of Licinius



Aureus of Licinius II



Solidus of
Crispus Caesar



Solidus of
Julianus Apostate

1.

Octagonal Chariot Fitting with Eight Scenes

Bronze inlaid with copper, silver and niello

Late-Antique, second half of the 4th century

Diameter: 6 7/8 inches (17.4 cm.)

The Object:

This heavy octagonal fitting probably served as the proper left axle cap of a richly decorated ceremonial chariot, certainly the property of an important figure from Late Antiquity. The eight sides of the fitting gleam with precious inlaid metals configuring a series of scenes: three evoking the bounty of the oceans, three animal hunts representing the abundance of the earth, and two pastoral compositions showing the simple pleasures of rustic country life in the spirit of the bucolic poetry of Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics*.

The fitting belongs to a small, important group of Late-Antique metalwork characterized by the use of multiple precious-metal inlays to create strongly coloristic tones and rich tapestry-like effects. Other examples in this technique are a plaque with hunting scenes (Louvre), a silver vessel with vinescrolls and hunting scenes (Berlin), a bronze throne back with hunting scenes and a plaque with hunting scenes (both Florence) and a plaque with Heracles slaying the Hydra (Princeton). Of these examples none is as complete or as complex as this spectacular fitting.

The Theme and Social Context:

The figure style and the iconography of this group of inlaid metal objects are related to a number of examples of contemporary silver plate decorated with incised scenes and highlighted with gilding and niello. A silver dish found near Cesena (now coll. Biblioteca Malatestiana) features a central roundel with an outdoor banquet above and a horse and groom before a building below. The tondo of the Seaside plate from Kaiseraugst (Römermuseum, Augst, Switzerland) depicts the variety of fish yielded forth to fishermen by the ocean, and on a third plate (Castle Ashby, coll. Lord Northampton) a wealthy landowner named Sevso dines with his hunting party al fresco enjoying the simple pleasures of country life. Around the rims of all three plates are hunt and pastoral scenes like those on the sides of our chariot fitting. The copious bounty of earth and sea and the pleasurable activities of country life are the central themes of these late fourth-century objects.

Late Antiquity witnessed an unprecedented concentration of wealth in the hands of a dwindling but powerful landed nobility. When the newly-converted Constantine moved his court eastward to Constantinople in 330, he isolated the Senators of Rome and the rich landed nobility of the western provinces who had preserved, more than any other social group, the ideals and traditions of classical antiquity.

Sources of Imagery:

Much as Late-Antique manuscripts reduced monumental compositions to the limitations of a small picture space, many of the scenes on the chariot fitting also seem to have been scaled down from larger, more spacious compositions such as frescoes and mosaics. The well-preserved mosaics at Piazza Armerina, Sicily, similar to our leopard and boar mosaic (cat. 2), offer perhaps the best examples of Late-Antique palace floors of the kind that may have been a source of figural compositions for artists in other media. Not unlike our chariot fitting a folio from a manuscript of Virgil's *Georgics* with shepherds (Vatican Cod. Lat. 3867, Fol. 44 verso) also seems to reflect a large-scale composition. Such compositions may well have been recorded in pattern books which were consulted by a variety of artists who worked in different media.

Style:

The loose and sketchy style of the figures and their placement in the picture space, show a lack of concern for depth and space. The boldly outlined figures are scattered over a flat field in a manner reminiscent of floor mosaics and manuscript illuminations. The figures are broken up into different shapes formed by the various metal inlays. The compartmentalized approach to both figure and picture field is comparable to the intarsia marble floor of the basilica of Junius Bassus (after 331) where the figures are composed of pieces of different colored marbles in a manner that recalls the metal inlay technique of the chariot fitting. The division of the human form into compartments is a true departure from the organic naturalism of classical art in favor of more schematic and emblematic representations.

Our chariot fitting is by far the richest and most lavish object of inlaid metalwork to have survived from Late Antiquity. It is only one piece from a large-scale object with mechanical parts, probably a chariot, of astonishing size and complexity. It preserves a cycle of scenes extolling the bounty of earth and sea and the peaceful pleasures of pastoral life, a miniature compendium of themes popular among wealthy late-fourth century landowners and an urban elite. Many of these themes would be borrowed by Christian image-makers as metaphors for Paradise.



Octagonal Chariot Fitting (detail)

2.

Mosaic with Hunting Scene

Stone tesserae

Late-Antique, 5th century AD

Width: 62 3/4 inches (159.5 cm.)



Scenes of men hunting animals or animals hunting one another, quite popular with pagans and Christians, were stock images in Late Antiquity and part of the repertoire of the mosaicist as well as of artists in other media. Hunting scenes evoked the rich bounty of the earth while illustrating a favorite pastime of wealthy landowners. The three scenes of men hunting animals on our chariot fitting (cat. 1) are likely to have been scaled down from larger compositions such as this monumental floor mosaic of a leopard attacking a boar.

3.

Plaque with Medallion

Tinned bronze

Late-Antique, 4th century AD

Height: 2 1/4 inches (5.7 cm.)



This small bronze plaque is nearly identical to a group of six similar pieces in The Metropolitan Museum of Art thought to derive from a box or piece of furniture. While these pieces display the loose, sketchy style in vogue during late Constantinian times, they are best seen as imitations of more costly and elaborate objects like our chariot fitting (cat. 1).

4.

Relief with Endymion

Marble

Roman, 2nd century AD

Length: 27 3/4 inches (70.5 cm.)

Private Collection



This relief preserves the left side of a large sarcophagus illustrating the myth of the beautiful youth Endymion who was visited nightly by the moon goddess Selene while he slumbered with his flock. The shepherd seated on a rocky outcrop with his dog and livestock on our chariot fitting (cat. 1) derives from earlier standardized classical figure types like those on this marble relief. However, in Late Antiquity these stock motifs are put to a new use, with narrative subject matter often giving way to more abbreviated, emblematic representations like those on our chariot fitting.

5.

Quadrangular Weight with Hunting Scene

Bronze with silver inlay

Late-Antique, Constantinople (?)

Late 4th - early 5th century AD

Height: 1 7/8 inches (4.7 cm.)

Private Collection



This weight, with Greek symbols designating its heft at six ounces (actual weight is 5.5 ounces), is engraved with two men on horseback engaged in a hunt. Heads and arms are inlaid with silver in a manner similar to our chariot fitting (cat. 1). Because this and the other weights catalogued below most likely originate in Constantinople, they provide evidence for the Eastern practice of colorful metal-on-metal inlays even though most of the more ambitious pieces (cat. 1) appear to be Western.

6.

Weight with Hunters

Bronze

Late-Antique, Constantinople (?)

5th- 6th century AD

Height: 2 3/8 inches (6 cm.)

Private Collection



The Greek symbols indicate the weight of this piece is one pound, though the actual weight is 11.2 ounces.

7.

Weight with Cross and Wreath

Bronze

Late-Antique, Constantinople (?)

5th- 6th century AD

Height: 3/4 inches (1.9 cm.)



One of the smallest denominations, the symbols on this piece indicate that it weighs a single ounce, though the true weight is about a third of an ounce.

Men Who Shaped Policy

8.

Aureus of Licinius I

Gold

Late-Antique, 320 AD

Minted at Nicomedia

Private Collection



Licinius, co-emperor with Constantine, controlled the eastern provinces. Around 320, Licinius began to persecute Christians despite an agreement to the contrary formed in 313 with the newly-converted Constantine. Constantine's defeat of his co-emperor and rival in 324 allowed him to proceed with sweeping religious reforms that elevated Christianity to the official religion of the Empire and forbade pagan sacrifices. Officials were even dispatched throughout the eastern provinces in order to confiscate treasure from pagan temples that would be put to use in the construction of new Christian churches.

9.
Solidus of Crispus Caesar

Gold
Late-Antique, ca. 324-325
Minted at Antioch
Private Collection



10.
Aureus of Licinius II

Gold
Late-Antique, 320 AD
Minted at Nicomedia
Private Collection



Following several years of armed conflict, in 317, Constantine and Licinius formed what proved to be a short-lived treaty establishing Constantine's sons Crispus and Constantius as Caesars together with Licinius's son. Crispus was a teenager and the other two boys were mere infants. In 325, the victorious Constantine had Licinius and his nine-year-old son murdered despite promises to spare them both. Later, a similar fate befell Crispus who, after being awarded control of the western provinces for his role in the defeat of Licinius, was executed by his father in 326 for adultery.

11. **Solidus of Julianus Apostate**

Gold

Late-Antique, 361-363 AD

Minted at Sirmium

Private Collection



Though his reign (360-363) was relatively short, Julian is one of the most celebrated and industrious of late Roman Emperors, known particularly for his efforts to overturn Constantine's reforms and reinstate paganism as the official religion of the Empire. He did not rely on persecution but instead on his skills as an able administrator and successful and popular general. Julian was a true intellectual and his large body of writings included a comic account of Constantine's arrival at Mt. Olympus. His rejection of Christianity earned him the title 'Apostate'.

Part II

New Directions: Early Christian Signs & Symbols

"And let our seals be either a dove, or a fish, or a ship running with a fair wind...or a ship's anchor, which Seleucus had engraved...For we are not to depict the faces of idols, we who are prohibited from attaching ourselves to them, nor [depict] a sword, nor a bow, since we follow peace...."
Clement of Alexandria, circa 200 AD



Gem with Good Shepherd



Gem with Fish and Inscription



Ring with Anchor



Gem with Jonah Cycle

12.

Gem with the Good Shepherd

Brown chalcedony

Early Christian, 5th century AD

Height: 7/8 inches (2.2 cm.)

Private Collection



This gemstone engraved with an image of the Good Shepherd and the bucolic scenes on our chariot fitting (cat. 1) illustrate the pastoral origins of Early Christian imagery. Such scenes were part of the common artistic language drawn on by both Early Christian and pagan artists. The metaphor of a king or deity as shepherd leading his flock is a very ancient one, as is the image of a shepherd carrying his sheep over his shoulders. To the early Christians the meaning was clear, for Jesus himself said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (*John* 10:11). In the parable of *Luke* 15:3-7, Jesus relates that when the Good Shepherd has found the lost sheep, "he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing", an image according well with the gem. Although shepherds in bucolic settings were common in pagan decorative and funerary arts of the third century (cat. 4), reflecting the concerns for the idyllic Golden Age and the afterlife, the traditional image of the shepherd was appropriated by Christian iconographers and endowed with new meaning, as a reference to Jesus. Gems engraved with this image date from the late third to fifth centuries and were often inscribed with explicitly Christian symbols or inscriptions.

13.

Gem with *ichthys* between two fish.

Carnelian

Early Christian, late 3rd century AD

Width: 9/16 inches (1.4 cm.)

Private Collection



Among the earliest images used by early Christian artists was the fish. The fish had long had symbolic associations in various religions, including Messianic significance in Judaism, but Christians found many further meanings for the symbol. The Apostles were said to be “fishers of men” (*Mark* 1:17), and Jesus performed the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fish (*Matthew* 14: 15-21; *Mark* 6:35-44; 8:1-8). Especially popular in the third century was the use of the Greek acrostic *ichthys*, meaning “fish” but also spelling out the first letters of the Greek words for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”. The image of two fish was frequently used by pagans on gems, often with astrological significance (Pisces), but on this example the Christian meaning is made explicit by the word *ichthys*.

14.

Ring with anchor and fish

Silver

Early Christian, 3rd century AD

Width: 1 5/16 inches (3.4 cm.)

Private Collection



Although ultimately deriving from late Hellenistic prototypes, the fish-and-anchor symbol was adopted by Christian artists as a reference to Jesus (the fish) and Hope in Salvation (*Hebrews* 6:19, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth within the veil").

15. Gem with the Jonah Cycle

Carnelian
Early Christian, ca. 300 AD
Width: 3/4 inches (1.9 cm.)
Private Collection



The most popular of all narrative scenes in early Christian art was the story of Jonah, usually depicted as a compact cycle of episodes, which include Jonah cast from a ship to the waiting “great fish”, who takes the form of the classical sea monster, or *ketos*; spit out by the *ketos*; and asleep under the gourds. The Old Testament story of Jonah was reinterpreted as a reference to Salvation, Baptism, and to the Resurrection of Jesus, who himself explicitly prophesied, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (*Matthew 12:38-40*). The gem was reused by Christians at the end of the third century, with the Jonah cycle carved on the back of an older (late first century BC) intaglio engraved with the image of a butting bull.

Part III

From Allegory To Icon: The Church Triumphant

"Being, as you are, about to construct a large church in honor of the holy martyrs, you inquire of me in writing whether it be fitting to set up their images in the sanctuary...and to fill the walls...with all kind of animal hunts... and also nets being lowered into sea.... In answer to your inquiry may I say that it would be childish and infantile to distract the eyes of the faithful with the aforementioned trivialities. It would be, on the other hand, the mark of a firm and manly mind to represent a single cross in the sanctuary..."

St. Nilus of Sinai (d. circa 430), Letter to Prefect Olympiodorus



Bird Rinceau Mosaic



Pyx with Christ, the Virgin and Two Archangels



Gem with Virgin Orant



Mosaic with Cross Pattern



Pilaster Capital



Plaque with an Apostle

Part III

From Allegory To Icon: The Church Triumphant (continued)



Apostle Spoon



Ampulla with St. Menas



Plaque with St. Thecla



Icon with St. Panteleimon



Cameo with St. Nicholas



Cross with Filigree
Decoration



Cross with Conical Arms



Cross with Faceted
Terminals



Cross with Virgin
and Saints

16.

Mosaic with Two Peacocks and Vines

Stone tesserae

Early Christian, 6th century A.D.

Width: 68 inches (172.8 cm.)

"I am the True Vine... the faithful are the fruitful branches in the Lord's Vineyard"

John 15:1-5

As St. Nilus makes clear in his letter to the prefect Olympiodorus, by the 5th century, some members of the clergy had begun to reject the lavish floor and wall mosaics that had been popular decoration for several centuries. Nevertheless, the custom of covering basilicas with images adopted from the Late-Antique tradition favored by owners of lavish villas continued to thrive.

However, there was a tendency toward a flattening of the composition, a heightened iconization of the figurative elements and more attention was devoted to spatial organization and symmetry. The result is a symbolic composition that is easy to read and identify. The reason for these changes was perhaps the desire amongst the Christian faithful to interpret Late-Antique decorative motifs in an allegorical manner that tied them to scripture.



One particular type of mosaic, the so-called bird rinceau, features different species of birds set within the interstices created by running vine tendrils. To a Christian, the birds could be taken literally as exemplifying God's creations, or they could be taken allegorically as symbolic of blessed souls resting in heaven with the vines evoking God's rule over all living things. The frequent appearance of such vines recalls biblical references to the Lord's vineyard and anticipates the later motif of the Tree of Life. Similar motifs were used in the decoration of imperial funerary architecture and survive to this day in the ambulatory vault mosaics of the mausoleum of Santa Costanza in Rome (ca. 337-351). Built for Constantine's daughter, the princess Constantina, the decoration illustrates well the repertoire of pagan ornamental motifs that was employed by Christian artists.

In many instances the bird rinceaux feature two peacocks flanking an urn from which the vines issue forth. The peacock had been admired since Roman times for its rare beauty and was regarded as a symbol of eternal life. The Christians considered the bird one of God's greatest creations and adopted the practice of using them in funerary contexts to evoke themes of Paradise. The urn, previously a common classical funerary motif, became for Christians a baptismal and eucharistic allegory, particularly when flanked by a pair of animals such as peacocks or deer. The motif, when taken in its entirety, could suggest Augustine's fountain of truth, the desire for eternal life and even the just thirsting for fresh springs of ideology.

Though mosaics such as this one remained a popular part of a church's decorative scheme, vinescrolls and animals -- symbolic of the Late-Antique theme of the 'Good Life' -- became increasingly marginalized. As church leaders learned the value of an unambiguous, iconic approach to Early Christian art, the advancement of overt Christian iconography such as that on the gilt-silver Pyx (cat. 17), relegated the more decorative Late-Antique schemes to the fringes of mosaics, frescoes, manuscripts and architecture.

17.

Liturgical Vessel (a Pyx) with Christ, the Virgin and Two Archangels

Silver with gilding

Byzantine, Constantinople, ca. 600-650 AD

Height: 3 inches (7.6 cm.)

Two control stamps on the bottom

A bearded Christ blessing with his right hand and holding the gospel with his left stands immobile and frontally on a dais. On the opposite side, the Virgin is depicted in a similar frontal pose holding an emblem emblazoned with a cross over her womb, symbolic of her role as the Mother of God. Between them stand Archangels holding orbs and staffs, dressed in richly-embroidered garments, a striking contrast to the simple, austere depictions of Christ and the Virgin.



From the fifth century forwards there is a noticeable trend by Christian iconographers to reinforce and to codify in their images the basic dogmas of Christian faith. The peaceful, pastoral images of the Good Shepherd ministering to his small Christian flock and other themes that derive from allegories popular in Late Antiquity move in the fifth and sixth centuries to more marginal fields in church decoration and in manuscripts. By the seventh century, the theme of the Good Shepherd has disappeared entirely and been replaced by a new type of hieratic image.

On our pyx, Christ appears remote, removed from the physical world like an icon. The message is unambiguous: Christ as a ruler invests the Emperor and the Empire with the almighty power of God. This iconic image marks a clear break from earlier Christian imagery which was more allegorical and open to interpretation. The new imagery borrowed elements from imperial iconography. The frontal, iconic, motionless Christ on this pyx brings to mind a description of Constantine II seen by one observer during a procession in Rome "looking neither to right nor left, as if his head were held in a vice".

18.

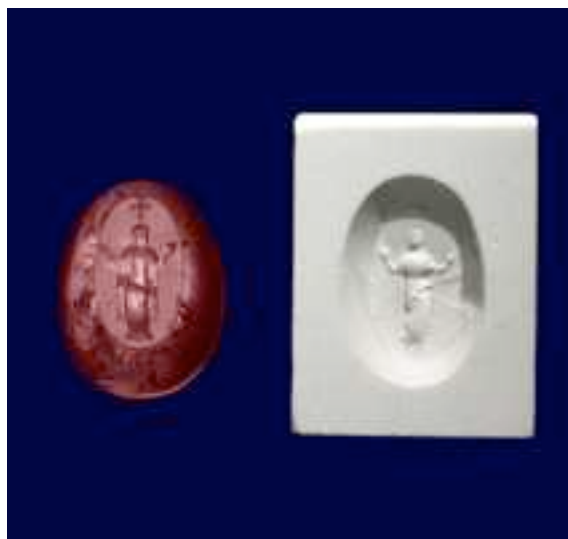
Gem with the Virgin Orant, a cross above

Garnet

Byzantine, ca. 500 AD

Height: 7/16 inches (1.8 cm.)

Private Collection



During the second half of the fifth century, a workshop, probably in Constantinople, specialized in producing engraved garnets (and occasionally sapphires), usually set in fine gold rings. Doves, peacock, and eagles, as well as personal monograms, were popular motifs on these gems, but iconic Christian images were also frequent. Examples survive depicting standing figures of Christ, the Virgin, and angels, as well as the Cross and the *Hetoimasia* (a cross on the throne of Christ, the "Prepared Throne"). The garnet engraved with the Virgin standing as orant, in very fine style, is one of the earliest examples of the image to survive.

19.

Mosaic with Cross Pattern

Stone tesserae

Roman, ca. 300 AD

Height: 26 inches (66 cm.)



This geometric mosaic illustrates well the process by which even seemingly inconsequential decorative motifs from pagan antiquity could be interpreted in a new, Christian light. The complex pattern of geometric shapes could be construed as a hidden pattern of crosses.

20.

Pilaster Capital

Marble

Constantinople (?), 5th century AD

Width: 16 inches (40.6 cm.)



"There is need of as many architects as possible; but since there are none of them, you shall encourage to this study those men...who are about eighteen years old and have had a taste of the liberal arts."

Edict of Constantine to the Praetorian Prefect Felix, posted in Carthage, 334 AD

The design of this pilaster capital derives from Greek and Roman prototypes of the Corinthian order. However, the lacy treatment of the leaves is something new altogether. The effects of light and shade employed by Classical sculptors to emphasize physical presence and monumentality are used here to reduce the volume of this capital almost to the point of abstraction. This new approach to architecture emphasizes the fluidity of a space rather than its definition by rational architectural orders. At Hagia Sophia, for example, the structural elements dissolve into one another to create a fluid and seamless spiritual space.

21.**Plaque with an Apostle**

Ivory

Early Christian, 6th century AD

Height: 3 1/4 inches (8.3 cm.)

Private Collection



This carved plaque preserves a portion of a lidded circular box (*pyx*) on which a draped figure approaches a second figure (fragmentary) seated on a throne. An altar, hanging lamp and *ciborium* depicted at the far left confirm the Christian setting. Such *pyxides* in ivory with mythological or Christian scenes are numerous. It is likely that *pyxides* with Christian and pagan subject matter were produced in the same workshops during the 5th and 6th centuries.

22.

Apostle Spoon

Silver and niello

Early Christian, 5th century AD

Length: 9 7/8 inches (25.1 cm.)



This beautiful silver spoon has been lavishly inlaid with niello in order to create a two-tone effect similar to that used on Late-Antique silver plate and discussed above under the chariot fitting (cat. 1). The bowl is inscribed in Latin "Puritas" (purity) and on the stem "Matteus" (Matthew), probably referring to the apostle. The owner's faith is confirmed by a cross on one side of the disc joining the stem and bowl; the other side displays the owner's monogram.

23.

Ampulla with St. Menas

Terracotta

Early Christian

ca. 610-641 AD

Height: 3 1/2 inches (8.9 cm.)



Within a beaded medallion, the martyred Egyptian soldier, St. Menas, identified by the two flanking camels, stands orant with twin crosses on either side of his head. The tomb of St. Menas, at Abu Mena in Alexandria was the most important pilgrimage site in Egypt during the Early Christian period and this easily identifiable iconic image probably reflects a large-scale relief sculpture housed in the tomb chamber. Such images of the Saint were thought to possess apotropaic properties and similar ampullae, found throughout the Mediterranean world, attest to the widespread popularity of the St. Menas cult. The ampullae were either filled with oil from the lamps over Menas' tomb or with holy water, at which point they became talismanic and bestowed their healing properties on the owner.

24.

Plaque with Saint Thecla

Silver

Byzantine, 5th century AD

Height: 1 1/4 inches (3.2 cm.)



The woman stands frontally in the pose of an orant, while two lions sit at her feet. The Greek inscription *hagia* indicates that she is a saint, although she is not named. There can be no doubt, however, that she is Saint Thecla, who is typically shown standing between the two fierce beasts, which will not harm her.

Thecla was converted to Christianity by St. Paul but became the subject of persecution when a rejected suitor betrayed her to the Roman authorities. After facing a hoard of wild beasts in the arena at Antioch and surviving, Thecla retired to a hillside above Seleucia, in Isauria where she died. By the end of the fourth century, her tomb at this site became an important pilgrimage destination.

The plaque may have served either as a votive offering to the saint or as a miniature icon, perhaps a souvenir of a visit to her shrine in Syria. Images embossed from the same matrix decorate a silver reliquary box discovered in 1957 in Isauria (in southeast Anatolia) and now in Adana, Turkey. The style of the other images on the reliquary suggest a fifth century date.

Some silver plaques from a sixth century Syrian hoard of silver vessels similarly depict a standing female orant, but not accompanied by lions. Also present in the hoard were plaques embossed with human eyes and the Greek inscription, *hyper euches*, "in fulfillment of a vow", indicating that they served as votive offerings.

25.

Icon with St. Panteleimon

Red jasper

Byzantine, 12th century AD

Height: 1 3/4 inches (4.5 cm.)



"How can I worship him if he is not visible, if I do not know him?"

From the Legend of the Woman of Kamuliana

St. Panteleimon, a young physician and member of the *anargyroi*, a group of healing saints who charged no fee for their services, was martyred by the Romans in the fourth century A.D. Here he is depicted holding his medicine box. A faint inscription on either side of the nimbus identifies the Saint.

Eager to distinguish themselves from their pagan contemporaries, the early Christian fathers discouraged the use of anthropomorphic images. Even so, the icon -- a kind of stand-in portable likeness of a martyr, saint or deity -- gradually came to serve an important devotional function. Pilgrimages to holy sites such as the tombs of St. Menas and St. Thecla encouraged an acceptance of divine images. Pilgrims returned home from holy sites with images of saints which they venerated thus fulfilling their devotional needs.

26.

Cameo with St. Nikolaos

Amethyst, set in a gold frame encircled with pearls strung on gold wire
 Byzantine, 10th-11th century AD
 Diameter: 1 inch (2.5 cm.)



A half-length bust of the bearded and nimbate Saint Nikolaos, identified by an engraved Greek inscription, faces frontally, wearing bishop's robes, raising his right hand in benediction and holding the Gospels in his left hand.

Saint Nikolaos, the Bishop of Myra in Lycia who was martyred at the beginning of the fourth century during the reign of Diocletian, achieved an unparalleled popularity both in the East and the West. He was frequently depicted on icons in all media throughout the Byzantine period.

The art of engraving hard stone cameos was revived in Constantinople at the end of the ninth century. Busts of Christ and various saints were the preferred motifs, and such items evidently served as personal icons. The preferred material for fine cameos was green and red jasper (bloodstone), but other cameos were carved from sardonyx, sapphire, rock crystal, and amethyst. The amethyst Saint Nikolaos is of very fine style, and the slightly elongated bust relates it to a series of cameos, many carved in sapphire. The gold and pearl mount is identical to those used to hold small enamel roundels that decorated a variety of luxury objects, including book covers, chalices, and votive crowns, produced in the imperial workshops of Constantinople in the 10th and 11th centuries and now preserved in the Treasury of the Basilica of San Marco in Venice.

27.

Cross with Filigree Decoration

Gold and Pearls

Middle Byzantine

10th – 11th centuries AD

Height: 2 inches (5 cm.)



This elaborate cross with ornate filigree decoration, some in beaded wire, represents the high achievements of Middle Byzantine goldsmiths.

28-30.

A Group of Three Crosses

Already by the second century, Christians were in the habit of crossing themselves, and pieces of the True Cross were used as reliquaries. But the actual wearing of crosses does not appear before the fifth century.

28. Cross with Conical Arms

Gold and rock crystal
Byzantine
6th century AD
Height: 1 5/16 inches (3.4 cm.)



29. Cross with Faceted Terminals

Gold and amethyst
Western Medieval
13th century AD
Height: 1 inch (2.5 cm.)



30. Cross with Virgin and Saints

Silver
Late Byzantine
13th-15th century AD
Height: 1 3/4 inches (4.4 cm.)

