

THE HOLY LAND AMPULLA OF SANT PERE DE CASSERRES – A LITURGICAL AND ART-HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

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INTRODUCTION

The ampulla found in the main altar of the Monastery of Sant Pere of Casserres (fig. 1a-b), now part of a private collection, is a small flask typical of the Holy Land in its form, measures, material and decoration. Cast in an alloy of iron,¹ it has a round and slightly convex body measuring 7.5 cm in height and 5.7 cm in width, and a wide neck from which extend a couple of round handles. Its concise decoration is a clear reference to a *locus sanctus*: on its obverse it presents the crucified Christ with Greek inscriptions in the spaces above and below the arms of the Cross, while on its reverse side it shows a Greek cross with flared arms, both images inscribed in a circle. Undoubtedly, like other metal, clay and glass flasks, as well as reliquaries from the Holy Land, it must have originally contained material relics from the *loca sancta* – pilgrimage sites sanctified by association with a sacred event or a saint's remains.² The ampullae are usually decorated with images related to specific holy sites, and with inscriptions that often inform us that the flask contains either sanctified oil, water, or soil from the holy place depicted on it, or quotes from the scriptures and the liturgy celebrated when the pilgrims who acquired the ampullae were visiting. The ampulla from the Mo-

1. Examination of the material aspects confirms a possible origin in Syria-Palestine at the discussed period. I owe this information to Mn. Miquel Gros i Pujol.
2. A. Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte*, Paris 1958, pp. 63 ff.; K. Weitzmann, *Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28, 1974, pp. 31-55; J. Engemann, Palästinensische Pilgerampullen im F.J. Dölger-Institut in Bonn, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 16, 1973, pp. 5-27; idem, Palästinensische frühchristliche Pilgerampullen, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 45, 2002, pp. 133-169; G. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, Washington D.C., 1982, pp. 19f., 22 ff., 40 f.; idem, «Guided by Land and Sea.» Pilgrim Art and Pilgrim Travel in Early Byzantium, in: R. Ousterhout, ed., *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, Urbana 1990, pp. 74-92. For a selection of eulogiae from the Holy Land, see also: B. Bagatti, *Eulogie Palestinesi, Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 15, 1949, pp. 126-166.

nastery of Sant Pere de Casserres may therefore have originated in Jerusalem, perhaps even in a workshop related to the Church of the Anastasis (Resurrection). The images do not represent the biblical events and sites at the time they took place: in fact, these are schematic images combining biblical events with elements from the liturgy and the *loca sancta*, as they looked at the time the pilgrims visited those holy places and took part in the cult.

The relics from the Holy Places, combined with the images of the holy events that took place at these sites and the inscriptions decorating the reliquaries, are a tangible document which enshrines the holiness of the place. The reliquaries, both in content and decoration, become the carriers of *eulogia*, an apotropaic blessing, in and of themselves.³ Pilgrims carried ampullae home, probably wearing them around their necks as phylacteric amulets. These and other reliquaries could transport the apotropaic benefits of the cult at the Holy Places in the Holy Land, rendering the blessings accessible to those who could not perform the cult at the *locus sanctus* by coming in contact with the vessel enshrining the grace and power of holiness in its content and images.⁴

The style of the Holy Land ampullae is characteristic of popular crafts in the area, including objects produced for mass distribution in workshops in Jerusalem and other centers of pilgrimage. It is a schematic style, without any attempt at a realistic depiction of space, time, scenes and figures. The technique is also characteristic: a rather rough, very low and flat relief and incised lines. As minor pilgrim art these objects addressed religious needs of pilgrims, the consumers of *eulogiae*, and in particular their wish to encapsulate in those reliquaries the special blessings of the holy places they visited and of their prayers there, and to ensure their lasting power and effect.

The miraculous properties of *loca sancta* *eulogiae* may explain the history and function of the ampulla of the Monastery of Sant Pere de Casserres as a reliquary in the main altar of the church. The ampulla was found during restoration works in 1952, next to a round glass vessel, its neck broken. Both objects were used as lipsanotiques. To this purpose, the ampulla was pierced at its bottom to insert the holy bone, as it was found.

In 1984, Eduard Carbonell i Esteller and Jordi Vigué⁵ pointed to a general similarity between the ampulla of Sant Pere de Casserres and

3. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, pp. 10 ff. and passim.

4. At the same time, the perception of images as carriers of divine power before the end of the seventh century encouraged the independent use of the *loca sancta* pictorial cycle on other types of amuletic objects such as marriage rings and magical bracelets. See G. Vikan, *Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38, 1984, pp. 65-86; idem, *Two Unpublished Amuletic Armbands and the Group to Which They Belong*, *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 49-50, 1991/2, pp. 33-51.

5. *Catalunya romànica*, vol. 2: Osona 1, Barcelona 1984, p. 385.

the well known Holy Land ampullae at Bobbio and Monza, dated to the second half of the sixth or the early seventh century, as well as to similarities with the ampulla of St. Menes from Egypt dated to the fifth century, which was found in Empurias.⁶ Consequently, they presented the Sant Pere de Casserres ampulla as a Holy Land pilgrimage object dated to the early seventh century. More recently, in a study of the monastery, Antoni Pladevall i Font⁷ kept with a Holy Land origin for the ampulla, however suggested a date in the early eighth century, yet, like Carbonell and Vigué, with no discussion of the different views and possibilities. Pladevall also suggested an Islamic origin around the year 1000 for the glass vessel.⁸ In addition, he proposed that in lack of any documents regarding the introduction of both the ampulla and the glass vessel to the primitive altar of the church, they may have been placed there at the consecration of the church, sometime in the mid eleventh century. Most likely, he adds, the two were transferred to the modern altar, now dismantled, possibly at the time the Jesuits remodeled the presbiterium.

The Holy Land origin for the ampulla of Casserres, and a date in the early eighth century or even later, up until the tenth century, are quite likely, as I will argue. As for the introduction of the ampulla to the altar of the church at the time of its consecration – it is a proposition requiring further study.

ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Eduard Carbonell i Esteller and Jordi Vigué described the Crucifixion image on the ampulla with «the haloed Christ... as he were standing before the Cross because his arms are not nailed to it» and added that he «seems to be wearing a perizonium, though it could also be a short tunic.» As for the Greek inscriptions in the spaces between the arms of the Cross and the surrounding circle, Carbonell and Vigué read, in a diagonal arrangement, the first part of the monogram of Jesus - IC, above the left arm, completed by XC for Christ below the right arm, as well as an A for alpha (the first letter of the Greek alphabet) above the right arm of the cross and a W for omega (the last letter) below the left arm:⁹ Jesus Christ as the beginning (A) and the end (W).¹⁰

A further examination of the Crucifixion image leaves no doubt as to Christ wearing a perizonium rather than a tunic: a knee length garment

6. P. de Palol, Una ampulla del santuari de Sant Menes, de'Egipte, a les col.leccions emporitanes del Museu de Girona, *Miscel.lania arqueologica a Josep. M. Recasens*, Tarragona 1992, pp. 91-95.

7. *Sant Pere de Casserres o la presència de Cluny a Catalunya*, Barcelona 2004, p. 82.

8. Pladevall i Font, pp. 82-83.

9. *Catalunya romànica*, vol. 2, p. 385.

10. For instance in Rev. 21:6, and 22:13, following Is. 41:4 and 44:6.

covering only the hips and thighs, leaving the upper part of the body uncovered. In my view, however, the inscriptions read differently, in the more conventional horizontal arrangement. The inscriptions in the spaces above the arms of the cross clearly read IC XC, with the XC retrograde. The inscription in the left space below the arms also clearly reads NI for *nika* (conquer). The one on the right space below could be BA for *basileuei* (king), or alternatively either a retrograde AB for the same word, or a poorly made retrograde AK as part of the word *nika*. Any of these possibilities reinforces a date in the eighth, or even up until the tenth century for the ampulla, based on iconographic and stylistic analyses of the images.

VISUAL IMAGES OF THE CRUCIFIXION

The Crucifixion, the sacred event sanctifying the Sant Pere de Casseres ampulla, became a frequent subject in the decoration of *loca sancta* objects in the mid sixth century, probably the result of a growing interest in the pictorial documentation of the life of Christ and its soteriological power.¹¹ Therefore, in Holy Land eulogiae of that period, we find the Crucifixion paired with the Resurrection in the image of the Holy Women at the Tomb,¹² in order to demonstrate the historical, theological and liturgical realities of Christ's saving death. Moreover, in most of the known Holy Land ampullae from the sixth to seventh century the Crucifixion of Christ appears in a symbolic image showing the Cross, often as the Tree of Life, crowned by a bust of Christ with a Cross halo. Yet most of the symbolic images in ampullae appear conflated with historical ones – in the case of the Crucifixion the historical elements would be the two thieves at the sides of Christ (fig. 2)¹³ – and often additional figures. Only few ampullae present the crucified Christ in his entire figure (fig. 3).¹⁴ In this case, as in all icons, manuscripts, amulets, encolpia, portative crosses, censers and other objects of the Early Byzantine period, the body of Christ stands perfectly upright. In all ampullae the crucified Christ holds his head upright in the same axis of his body, whereas in some images in other media he may be slightly turning his head. Lastly, in representations of the Crucifixion in all media of that time, Christ is clad in a colobium – a long sleeveless tunic down to his ankles.¹⁵

11. A. Kartsonis, *The Emancipation of the Crucifixion*, in: A. Guillou, ed., *Byzance et les images*, Paris 1994, p. 158.

12. The pairing of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection became the norm in Byzantine art. See Kartsonis, *The Emancipation*, p. 156.

13. For example, Monza 11. See Grabar, *Ampoules*, pp. 35, 56f.; Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage*, pp. 40f.

14. For example, Monza 13, in idem.

15. A paradigmatic depiction of a historic crucifixion appears in the Sancta Sanctorum reliquary box in the Museo Sacro, dated to the late sixth century. See Vikan, *Byzantine*

The image of the Crucifixion in the ampulla of Sant Pere de Casserres is similar to images from the sixth to early seventh century, in ampullae and other devotional objects from the Holy Land, in several iconographic features, such as the upright frontal position of Christ's body and head, which present him as *Christus triumphans*, triumphant over death. It does, however, differ in many others:

Primarily, in the Casserres ampulla the Crucifixion appears as an abbreviated image, not historical in the sense that only the crucified Christ is depicted, with neither biblical images at his sides such as Mary and John, the two thieves and the two Roman soldiers, nor typical *loca sancta* motifs such as two pilgrims praying at the foot of the Cross,¹⁶ which complement many of the sixth to seventh century historical, theological and liturgical images. We should also recall that while the Casserres Crucifixion is not a historical image, it is not the symbolic Crucifixion characteristic of the time, showing only the bust of Christ on top of the Cross: on the contrary, Christ's entire figure is depicted.

Moreover, the garment of the crucified Christ in the ampulla of Casserres differs from the usual one in sixth to early seventh century ampullae, as well as other pilgrimage, devotional and liturgical objects from the Holy Land at that time – the colobium.¹⁷ In the ampulla of Casserres Christ is clad in a perizonium – a short garment covering the hips and thighs, often knotted in the front.¹⁸ The perizonium became the general garment of Christ on the Cross in the ninth century, with the partly bare body alluding to his death as a man. In the Middle Byzantine period the perizonium is usually slit and knotted in the front, falling evenly over Christ's hips,¹⁹ a detail that in the ampulla is difficult to discern and may have been altogether omitted.

Lastly, the design of the image of Christ in the ampulla of Casserres differs as well, mainly in its proportions – a thickset figure instead of the

Pilgrimage Art, pp. 18 ff. Typical of liturgical objects are the bronze censers produced in the seventh to early eighth century. See C. Billod, *Les encensoirs Syro-Palestiniens de Bâle*, *Antike Kunst* 30, 1987, pp. 39-56, who dates them from the sixth to eighth century.

16. For the more elaborated type of Crucifixion with praying pilgrims see Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, pp. 20 ff., 40 ff.
17. For instance, the already mentioned images in the reliquary of the Sancta Sanctorum and the bronze censers (fig. 4). Another well known example is the Crucifixion in the Rabbula Gospel, written by the monk-scribe Rabbula in the Monastery of St. John of Zaghba in Syria in the year 586 (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Cod. Plut. I, 56, f. 13), which is discussed in Weitzmann, *Loca Sancta*, pp. 37 f., fig. 9.
18. This is not the brief loincloth covering the hips of the crucified Christ in the fifth century ivory in the British Museum, or in the wooden doors of Santa Sabina in Rome, illustrated, among others, in G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, London 1971-1972, vol. 2, figs. 323, 326 respectively.
19. K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, vol. I: *From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*, Princeton 1976, p. 80. Weitzmann notes some exceptions and adds that at other times and milieu, such as the Carolingian period, the perizonium is slit over the left hip.

lighter one in the earlier ampullae - and the hieratic pose that is reinforced by the pleats of the garment. The Casserres figure is closer to that of the Crucified in the Holy Land bronze censers that may date to the seventh or early eighth century (fig. 4).²⁰

In light of the similarities and differences with the sixth and early seventh century ampullae, the ampulla of Casserres may represent an intermediate stage in the development of the image of the crucified Christ between the Early and the Middle Byzantine Period. As in many Byzantine images of the Crucifixion from the seventh century onwards, including some from the Holy Land, the image of the Crucifixion in the ampulla of Casserres has too become an emblem, «a symbolic icon, and an iconic symbol.»²¹ The sole image of the crucified Christ recalls the historical events, the theological exegesis of the death on the Cross that was much discussed at the time - from the early seventh century until the end of the iconoclastic controversy -²² and the liturgy that took place in the *locus sanctus*, in this case the Church of the Anastasis. The theme of the Crucifixion was particularly topical in the East, where it served to distinguish the various positions of theologians and church officials in the conflict over the definition of the person of Christ.²³

Since the production of devotional and pilgrimage eulogiae in the Holy Land decreased during the early Muslim period (635-1099), and the iconoclastic decrees affected the use of figurative decoration, it should not come as a surprise that very few of these objects depicting the Crucifixion have been found. It is because of the scarcity of images that the presence of iconographic similarities between some of these Crucifixion images and the image on the ampulla of Casserres is of significance that may support the date proposed here.

A Syrian bronze cross dated to the tenth century, now at the Benaki Museum in Athens (fig. 5),²⁴ belongs to a close milieu and presents significant iconographic similarities to the ampulla of Casserres. In the Syrian bronze cross the crucified Christ is flanked by the Virgin and John as busts inscribed in roundels at the ends of the horizontal arms, and St. George in a similar arrangement on the vertical arm. This compositional arrangement, clearly emphasizing the image of Christ on the Cross in relation to historical elements of the Crucifixion such as the Virgin and John, recalls the independent image on the ampulla of

20. See illustrations of the other censers in Billod.

21. Anna Kartsonis, referring to cross-shaped encolpia decorated with the abbreviated image of the Crucifixion, dated to the seventh century. See: idem, *The Emancipation*, pp. 162-163.

22. For a brief exposition see A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis, The Making of an Image*, Princeton 1986, pp. 35 ff., 40 ff., and passim; H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago and London 1994, pp. 120-121, 144 ff.

23. Belting, pp. 120-121.

24. J.A. Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, Washington, D.C. 1994 (Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection Publications, 10), fig. 18a, pp. 42-43.

Casserres. As in the ampulla of Casserres, the body of Christ in the Syrian bronze Cross is erect, yet the head turns slightly to the right - a position that as noted above was used in the Early Byzantine period.²⁵ Another significant common feature is the garment, a perizonium. Differences between the Crucifixion in the Syrian bronze cross and the ampulla reside mainly in the style and technique: the engraving, in the Syrian cross, compared with a flat relief in the ampulla, allowing for more free lines and details. For instance, while the perizonium in the ampulla is highly schematic, the garment draped in heavy parallel folds, in the Syrian cross it is clearly knotted on the front and the folds, although worked out in schematic parallel lines, point down from a central vertical fold over each leg, by that giving a certain illusion of volume. Lastly, in the Syrian cross the Crucifixion itself is more elaborated and narrative. One small detail is a suppedaneum on which the legs of the crucified rest: a more significant one is a schematic depiction of the Golgotha hill from which rises the Cross and in its center the skull of Adam can be seen, conveying a concept which was already common in the mid fourth century, of the Golgotha as the omphalos of the world.²⁶ Moreover, it presents the Sun and the Moon above the arms of the Cross - cosmic symbols that originated from the image of the Veneration of the Cross and had already been part of the *crux invicta* image in the fourth and fifth centuries, as in the Passion sarcophagi of the Constantinian and the Theodosian periods.²⁷ In its iconic simplicity, the ampulla of Casserres, like the more narrative tenth century Syrian bronze cross, presents traditional iconographic elements together with new, developing ones.

The same phenomenon characterizes the Crucifixion in a small pectoral bronze cross that has been labeled as Byzantine and dated to the sixth to eighth century (fig. 6), now in the Freising Diocesan Museum.²⁸ Similar to the ampulla of Casserres, the image in this Byzantine pectoral cross is not historical, yet it differs from the ampulla and resembles the Syrian cross by presenting the traditional images of the Sun and the Moon; and as in the ampulla of Casserres, the body of the crucified Christ is erect, yet the head is slightly inclined as in the Syrian cross. Significantly, in all three depictions of the Crucifixion Christ is clad in a knee length perizonium. In the Byzantine pectoral cross the skirt is pleated and has an awkward lower part that recalls the slit falling evenly

25. For instance, in the Crucifixion miniature in the Rabbula Gospels. In historical representations, Christ turning his head to the right would be looking at his Mother. See Weitzmann, *Loca sancta*, fig. 9.

26. See St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in his baptismal Catecheses. MPG 33 col. 805A.

27. The reverse bears an image of the Virgin orans surrounded by portraits of four physican saints: Kosmas, Damian, Hermolaos and Panteleimon.

28. H.J. Arnold, ed., *Kreuz und Kruzifix, Zeichen und Bild, im Diözesanmuseum Freising 20. Februar bis 3. Oktober 2005*, Lindenberg im Allgäu 2005, no. II.4.5., pp. 173-174, with no discussion.

over the hips in depictions of the Crucifixion in the Middle Byzantine period. In place of the frontal knot, the perizonium in the Byzantine bronze pectoral cross is adorned with a wide belt. Although the position of Christ follows earlier traditions, the perizonium and the emblematic, non-narrative image, both correspond more closely to the later date proposed for the pectoral cross, namely the eighth century.

The representation of the Crucifixion in an icon in the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai (fig. 7), dated to the first half of the ninth century, also presents similarities with the ampulla of Casserres and contains both traditional features and new contemporary ones. It depicts the traditional erect Christ with his head slightly inclined, as well as newly conceived imagery such as shut eyes, to convey his complex nature as a human and God in his sacrificial death.²⁹ Similarly to the Crucifixion on the ampulla of Casserres, the Syrian bronze cross and the Byzantine pectoral cross, Christ wears a perizonium, yet in the Sinai icon the perizonium is shorter and slit over the right side, baring the upper thigh. Differing from the ampulla, the icon presents a historic Crucifixion, showing the Cross rising from a cube-like Golgotha, with the Virgin and John standing farther from the hill, and the two thieves rendered on a very small scale in order to fit them into the composition; three angels emerge above the rim of the sky, with the Sun and Moon filling the upper corners. Weitzmann³⁰ points to the stylistic influence from Constantinople and to the difficulty in identifying the precise site of origin for the icon, and adds that on account of its style and iconography this Crucifixion «stands at the crossroads between the Early and Middle Byzantine periods, showing traditional features and at the same time some details that point to the future but do not yet conform to the types established after the end of iconoclasm.» Christ's eyes, shut as opposed to open - to proclaim his triumph over death, and his garment, the perizonium, are among the contemporary iconographic motifs.

Parallel to the historical image of the Crucifixion that appeared in the late sixth and seventh century, an emblematic icon of the Crucifixion developed and consolidated in Byzantium during the ninth and tenth century and became general in the West, in Carolingian and specially Ottonian representations: the crucified Christ flanked by the Virgin and St. John. The Early Byzantine crucified Christ, erect and alive on the Cross, appears with a curved body and gradually more inclined head showing the suffering on the Cross. The robe in this image is not the traditional colobium but a perizonium, showing Christ's human body.

29. K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery*, vol. I: B.50, pl. 32, pp. 79ff. In his position, and most significantly in his closed eyes, the B.50 Christ recalls the Palestinian icon of the Crucifixion catalogued by Weitzmann as B.36 and dated to the mid eighth century, which is the earliest known Crucifixion showing the dead Christ. Differences in style between the B. 50 Sinai icon, and the B.36 Palestinian Sinai icon, point to influence from Constantinople on the artist of the B.50. See also Belting, pp. 120-121.

30. Weitzmann, *The Monastery*, p. 80.

As is characteristic of works of a transitional period, in this case the early eighth to tenth century, the ampulla of Casserres and the objects presented above display both commonly used and new motifs, as well as some elements which appear to be unique.

THE INSCRIPTIONS

The inscriptions in the sixth to early seventh century ampullae are similar in paleography, abbreviations and spelling errors, all of them characteristic of the time.³¹ Some of the inscriptions in these ampullae help identify the figures or the scenes. They occasionally appear as an integral part of the image, and, more frequently, in a circular band on the border. There are two main types of inscriptions, in relation to their correspondence with the visual images.³² The first type quotes from the scriptures or the liturgy at the site, for instance, *Anastasis* in scenes of the Holy Women at the Tomb,³³ according to the words of the Angel «For he is risen» (Matthew 28:6), quoted in prayers at the Tomb. The other type refers to the *locus sanctus* related to the ampulla, or the contents of the flask. For instance, the inscription «Oil from the Tree of Life» frequently appears on ampullae depicting the Crucifixion.³⁴

The diagonal reading of the inscription on the Casserres ampulla, as proposed by Carbonell and Vigué, would place the flask in this context. The inscription IC XC, Christ's monogram, with A (alpha) and W (omega) for Christ as the beginning and the end, would refer to Revelation 21:6 and 22:13.³⁵ This inscription is known in Early Byzantine *loca sancta* objects and in the Holy Land and Eastern Mediterranean as a whole. It appears in the spaces between the arms of the Cross and also in connection with other symbols, usually in a horizontal arrangement. One well known example in the context of pilgrimage objects is the reliquary box now in the Sancta Sanctorum in the Museo Sacro at the Vatican that originated in the Holy Land, probably Jerusalem around the year 600.³⁶ The monogram and the alpha and omega appear in the common horizontal arrangement on the lid, at the sides of the mandorla enclosing a *chi-ro*: IC XC above, and A (alpha) and W (omega) below. A

31. Grabar, *Ampoules*, p. 14.

32. N. Feuchtwanger, The Metal Ampullae from Jerusalem from the Late Sixth Century, in: D. Jacobi and Y. Tsafir, eds., *Jews, Samaritans and Christians in Byzantine Eretz-Israel*, Jerusalem 1988, p. 47 (Hebrew).

33. Monza 2 rev. and Monza 6-8 rev., and in a more complete formula in Monza 9-11 obv., Bobbio 15, and Württembergisches Landesmuseum, rev. See Feuchtwanger, p. 47.

34. Monza 1 obv., Monza 9 obv., Bobbio 1, Dumbarton Oaks obv., in idem.

35. As noted above this concept follows Is. 41:4 and 44:6.

36. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, 18ff.; M. Brandt, and A. Effenberger, eds., *Byzanz. Die Macht der Bilder*, Hildesheim 1998 (catalogue of exhibition at the Hildesheim Dome Museum), fig. 29. The interior of the lid presents a cycle of the life of Christ, focusing on the Crucifixion and emphasizing his perfect nature as God and man.

Holy Land example of this inscription between the arms of a cross was painted on plaster in the sixth century in a building discovered beneath the governor's palace in Caesarea, and I X for Christos and A (alpha) and W (omega) between the arms of a cross inscribed in a circle appears on the mosaic floor in the church of Hazor-Ashdod also in the sixth century.³⁷ Less frequent is a vertical arrangement as seen in a wool embroidery from Akhmin in Upper Egypt, dated to the fifth to sixth century.³⁸ The arrangement of the monogram in diagonal axes, as in the reading of Carbonell and Vigué for the ampulla of Casserres, is most unusual.³⁹

The inscription on the ampulla of Casserres should be read horizontally, with the horizontal strokes above the pairs of letters indicating that the words are abbreviated and appearing in a liturgical context. The inscriptions in the spaces above the arms of the cross are clear: IC XC, with the XC retrograde. The inscription in the left space below the arms clearly reads NI(ka), hence, the second inscription, in the right space, could be BA(sileuei). However the letter on the right has disappeared, or perhaps was not properly impressed at the time this piece was created, and so it is difficult to say whether the first letter is a beta (the 8-shaped beta sometimes found in inscriptions), in which case the second should have been an alpha, or whether the second word was also retrograde, in which case the visible mark would be the remnant of an alpha, and the second letter - the beta.⁴⁰ Another possibility is that the second letter is a poorly inscribed kappa and the retrograde inscription reads AK, completing the word NIKA, in which case the horizontal strokes above the NI and AK - indicating an abbreviation - would prove unnecessary. This use of horizontal strokes in the word NI KA is common in popular crafts as well as in high quality objects from Constantinople. One such example of the inscription IC CX and NI KA with abbreviation strokes appears on the back of a silver staurotheke made in Constantinople between 975-1025.⁴¹ The formula in the ampulla of Casserres would be

37. Y. Israeli and D. Mevorah, eds., *Cradle of Christianity*, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem 2000 (Catalogue of exhibition), figs. pp. 34 and 164 respectively. An inscription with I X below the arms of the cross and the alpha and omega above the arms appears in a mosaic floor in the church of Ozem in the southern coastal region, dated also to the sixth century. See *idem.*, fig. p. 129.
38. The State Hermitage Museum, *Christians in the Holy Land. The Art of the Melchites and Other Denominations of Orthodox Church*, St. Petersburg 1998, fig. 172 (catalogue). Also, in *loca sancta* objects the monogram and the alpha and omega appear not in Crucifixion scenes but with a Cross.
39. The unusual diagonal arrangement for the alpha and omega on one axis, with another alpha, palm branches and a hardly identifiable sign on the other, appears in a simple clay stamp for *prosporas* with a representation of a Cross from the Eastern Mediterranean, dated to the sixth century. The monogram of Christ does not appear in the stamp. See: The State Hermitage Museum, fig. 25.
40. I am most grateful to Dr. Leah Di Segni for her generous and learned help in reading the inscriptions.
41. H.C. Evans and W.D. Wixom, eds., *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843-1261*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1997 (catalogue), no. 37, pp. 78-79.

Christos nika, *Christos basileuei*, «Christ conquers, Christ reigns,» or *Christos nika*, «Christ conquers,» with unnecessary horizontal strokes above the word NIKΑ.

The basic formula *Christos nika* derives from the Gospel of John (16:33), who reports Jesus' words: «I have overcome the world.» It is linked with the story told by Eusebius about Constantine's vision before the battle at Pons Milvius, following which he adopted a banner showing the cross and the legend *Touto nika*, «Conquer by this.»⁴² Many variants of this phrase are found in inscriptions,⁴³ including the one likely on the ampulla of Casserres, *Iesus Christos nika. Basileuei*. The formula *Christos basileuei*, «Christ reigns,» appears in the liturgy of Palm Sunday. It may derive from Psalm 28 (29):10, «The Lord sits enthroned as king forever.»⁴⁴

The second possible reading of the inscription, *IC XC NI KA* (in the ampulla with a retrograde KA), appears mostly in images of the Crucifixion and of the Cross. In this context it may convey the theological concept that Jesus Christ is victorious over death, as stated in Romans 6:4, and that through Him all believers can conquer death, as written in Colossians 2:12. In this sense the inscription, in an image of the Crucifixion, may play some of the theological and liturgical functions of the scene of the Holy Women at the Tomb, which usually complemented representations of the Crucifixion in sixth and early seventh century ampullae from the Holy Land. Moreover, these images together with this inscription, would present more complex and rich layers of meaning. The inscription conveys the concept of the dual nature of God and man in Christ, as well as his triumph over death and the promise of redemption. The same theological concept would explain its appearance in a funerary context.

Some examples of the dual formula *XC NI[ka]*, *XC BA[sileuei]* in the Holy Land are the inscriptions from the Early Byzantine period in a burial cave at Luzit and in the Monastery of St. George at Sama, the territory of Bostra, which is dated 624/625.⁴⁵ The inscription *XC NIKΑ*, in any of its variations, does not appear in the sixth and early seventh century ampullae from the Holy Land. It appears with representations of the Cross on bread stamps from the seventh century,⁴⁶ on the back of icons

42. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* I, 28. See: L. Di Segni, Christian Burial Caves at Luzit: The Inscriptions, in: G.C. Bottini, L. Di Segni, E. Alliata, eds., *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land, New Discoveries: Essays in Honour of Virgilio C. Corbo*, OFM, Jerusalem 1990, p. 317.

43. Di Segni, p. 317 and note 7, with examples in Syria-Palestine and bibliography.

44. idem, p. 318, referring, for the use of this formula in Christian liturgy, to E. Peterson, *Heis Theo*, Gottingen 1927, 226, no.1.

45. idem, p. 318, inscription no. 7.

46. Late pre-iconoclastic and iconoclastic period Eucharistic bread stamps in the empire's territories. See J.D. Breckenridge, *The Iconoclasts Image of Christ*, *Gesta* 11:2, 1972, pp. 3-8.

beginning in the late seventh or eighth century,⁴⁷ bronze pectoral Crosses of the tenth and eleventh century⁴⁸ and other Byzantine cultic objects like portative and processional Crosses, manuscripts, and reliquaries depicting the Crucifixion or the Cross from the ninth to the eleventh century and later.⁴⁹ The inscription brings evidence to the soteriological character and devotional function of these objects.

It may also be significant that inscriptions with the invocation *NIKA* appear sometime in the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610-641) and afterwards in folles depicting the emperor holding a globus cruciger or a cross. For instance, on folles of Heraclius depicted with a globus cruciger on the obverse and the reverse inscription *XCNIKA*, and acclamation of Christ's ultimate victory, replacing the usual *IEPOCOS* (Jerusalem), found in Jerusalem and dated to «the fourth year», that is 617/8 or 630/31, the fourth indictional year: the latter date would coincide with the Return of the True Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius, a great Christian victory.⁵⁰ In this context also the early folles of Constans II (641-668) would be indicative: they employ a number of novel, not to say revolutionary features, such as replacing the name and titles of the emperor on the obverse by the invocation *en touto nika*, «conquer by this.» Such innovations were part of the cult of Constantine the Great which Heraclius and his family used for propaganda. The Byzantines had an obvious propagandist motive in ensuring copper coins reached Syria, Palestine and other lands lost to the Arabs.⁵¹ Interestingly, the Crucifixion as the Triumph of Christ over Death is visually conveyed on Byzantine solidi from the fifth century in the image of Nike at the side of the Cross.⁵²

A most important *loca sancta* example of a visual image with a variant of the inscription *IC XC NIKA*, is the mosaic that decorated the apse

47. Weitzmann, *The Monastery*, no. B.35, cf. B.52.

48. Karl A. Sandin, *Middle Byzantine Bronze Crosses of Intermediate Size: Form, Use and Meaning*, Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey 1992, p. 222 f. for a Cross in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, and 227 f. for one in the Royal Ontario Museum.

49. idem, pp. 123, 132; Weitzmann, *The Monastery*, p. 85; D. Buckton, ed., *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Milan 1984 (catalogue), pp. 148-151.

50. W.R.O. Hahn, *Moneta imperii Byzantini: von Heraclius bis Leo III. Alleinregierung (610-720)*, Wien 1981 (MIB) vol.3, plate 15, X28. I thank Dr. Tony Goodwin for his remarks on this Heraclius follis.

51. M. Phillips and T. Goodwin, A Seventh-Century Syrian Hoard of Byzantine and Imitative Copper Coins, *Numismatic Chronicle* 157, 1997, pp. 81-82 with examples and references in the catalogue. The authors note that the motives of the Arab authorities in allowing coins which announced the triumph of the cross over Islam to be imported and circulate are less obvious, yet perhaps they did not care or thought it impractical to interfere.

52. A. Frolov, *Numismatique byzantine et archéologie des Lieux Saints, Mémorial Louis Petit, Mélanges d'Histoire et d'Archéologie Byzantines (Archives de l'Orient Chrétien, 1)*, Bucharest 1948, 78-94; J.P.C. Kent, «Auream Monetam... cum Signo Crucis,» *The Numismatic Chronicle* 20, 1960, p. 132.

of the chapel of Adam in the Church of the Anastasis (fig. 8). The mosaic decoration was probably made during the restoration works initiated by Modestus, abbot of the Monastery of St. Theodosius and later Patriarch of Jerusalem, after the severe damage inflicted to the church by the Persian conquerors of Jerusalem in 614. In the mosaic, as reconstructed by Christa Ihm,⁵³ a *crux gemmata*, with a medallion enclosing a bust of Christ in the crossing of the arms, rises on a stepped podium. The *crux gemmata* is flanked by angels and characterized as the instrument of victory over death by the inscription NICKA that appears below its arms. Quaresmius, who visited the Holy Land in the early seventeenth century, provided a clear description of the decoration of the apse in his *Elucidatio* (II., S. 481a): *sub fornice est depicta crux Domini et in medio eius et circulo est effigies Salvatoris culm litteris graecis NIC KA (sic) et ex utraque parte angelus: omnia opere musaico elaborata.*⁵⁴ The angels and the accompanying inscription link this image of the Cross to the visions of Rufin, Socrates and Sozomenos.⁵⁵ The influence of the decoration of this *locus sanctus* and its prototypes on objects and monuments is common, and pilgrimage eulogiae have certainly reflected it. In the ampulla of Casserres, the iconic image of Christ on the Cross, together with the inscriptions *Christos nika*, [*Christos*] *basileuei*, or *Christos nika*, is visually proposed as the primary agent of protection and salvation. It proclaims the faith in Christ's victory over the world, a victory over death and therefore a promise of eternal life. We should recall that the tradition that Adam was buried in the chapel below the Golgotha dates to Origen in the third century,⁵⁶ and in the first quarter of the sixth century an anonymous pilgrim wrote in his *itinerarium*, known as the *Breviarius de Hierosolyma*,⁵⁷ that he had seen the birth place of Adam.⁵⁸ Thus in his sacrificial death Christ, the second Adam, redeemed the first and his offspring. The sacrificial death and the sin that required it are theologically, geographically and liturgically unified. The image of the Crucifixion and the inscriptions on the ampulla of Casserres convey these same concepts, as well as the significance of the living Christ on the Cross, during a period of consolidation of new theological concepts and modes of visual representation. The opposition between death and life in the image of the crucified Christ represents the dual reality of God and man

53. C. Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei, 4.-8. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 90-91, 194-195, fig. 24.

54. «In the vault is depicted the Cross of the Lord and in the center, in a medallion, is the image of the Savior, with the Greek letters NIC KA (sic) and at his sides angels. All this work is done in mosaic» (my translation). See C. Ihm, pp. 194-195.

55. After Ihm, p. 90 note 44: Rufin, *Hist. Eccl.*; Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* I.2, MPG 67, col. 37; Sozomenos, *Hist. Eccl.* I.3, MPG 67 col. 864 f.

56. N. De Lange, *Origen and the Jews*, Cambridge 1976, p. 126 no. 33.

57. The *Breviarius de Hierosolyma* may have been written as a brief guide to pilgrims, and is known in two versions. See O. Limor, *Holy Land Travels. Christian Pilgrims in Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 195-207 (Hebrew).

58. This tradition appears in the two versions of the *Breviarius*, 2. *Idem*, p. 201.

in Christ. He dies as a man on the Cross and in dying, as God, overcomes death as *Christus Triumphans* and *Basileus*, a concept clarified by the inscriptions. Yet the partly bare body of Christ conveys the theological concept of the Crucifixion as prevalent in the East since the eighth century: the suffering on the Cross in his sacrificial death. Significantly, the theological concept of the Crucifixion as triumph over death, general at the time the earlier Holy Land ampullae were produced, namely the sixth to early seventh century, was conveyed by the inscription accompanying some images of the Crucifixion: *Emmanuel*, The Lord is With Us.⁵⁹

THE CROSS ON THE REVERSE OF THE AMPULLA

The image of the Cross adorns ampullae and other objects from the Holy Land and the East Mediterranean as a whole, from the Early Byzantine period onwards. The shape of the cross on the reverse of the ampulla of Casserres - a Greek cross with flared arms inscribed in a circle that echoed the shape of the round object - was highly popular. To name only few examples from the Holy Land in different media, dated to the fifth to seventh century: a clay ampulla found in a bath-house at Hammat Tiberias,⁶⁰ a bronze inlay or scepter head found in the church at Shavei Zion, a bronze inlay found at Ramat Rachel,⁶¹ a bronze brooch inlaid with glass from the northern church at Nizanna,⁶² and a fragment of a marble chancel screen (?) from Jericho.⁶³ This widespread and lasting motif cannot point to a specific date for the ampulla of Casserres.

AFTERWORD

The decoration of the Holy Land ampulla found in the main altar of the church at the Monastery of Sant Pere de Casserres refers to the *locus sanctus* that has always been the center of Christian belief, the Golgotha and the Chapel of Adam at his foot. The image reflects a turning point in the development of the image of the Crucifixion, thus presenting traditional elements together with new contemporary ones. This could have happened in the Holy Land from the early eighth up to the tenth century. At that time the triumph of Christ over death in the dogmatic sense

59. Monza 6-8 obv. The inscription «Emmanuel» appears also on the Palestinian gemma depicting the Crucifixion, dated to the early sixth century, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. See K. Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, New York 1969, no. 525, pp. 586-587.

60. *Cradle of Christianity*, fig.p. 202, p.225.

61. idem, fig.p. 137, p. 221.

62. idem, fig.p. 141, p. 222.

63. idem, fig.p. 129.

was being conflated with the concept of God's human death, a theological concept concerning the dual and perfect nature of Jesus Christ, which was discussed in the iconoclastic controversy and was supported by new visual imagery. In the ampulla of Casserres the theological concepts are also strengthened by the inscriptions: *Christos nika* / [*Christos*] *Basileus*, «Christ conquers. [Christ] reigns,» or *Christos nika*, «Christ conquers.»

The question of how and when the ampulla arrived to the monastery of Sant Pere de Casserres, and whether it was introduced into the main altar of the church at its consecration concerns historians. Nevertheless, it is tempting to assume this possibility and go even further: the ampulla could have been brought by one of the donors to the monastery when coming in pilgrimage to the Holy Land between 1005 and 1153. The latter date could be that of the consecration of the monastery church: although neither the Act of Consecration nor the Act of the Dotation is known, a document written towards 1053 certifies the consecration of a lateral altar in the church, that of the northern aisle,⁶⁴ and on that occasion also the church and the main altar could have been consecrated. The earlier date refers to a document from 8 March, authorizing Arnulf, Bishop of Ausona (Vic), to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre.⁶⁵ Bishop Arnulf was the son of Viscountess Ermetruit of Ausona, who in 1006 obtained from Ramon Borrell and Ermessendis, Counts of Ausona, a dotation for the church of Sant Pere of the Castle of Casserres - a juridical basis to the foundation of the monastery by Ermetruit some years later.⁶⁶ In light of his mother's involvement in the foundation of the monastery, Bishop Arnulf could have endowed it with a precious eulogia, an ampulla from the Holy Land. Another possible donor could have been the afore mentioned Countess Ermessendis, widow of count Ramon Borrell of Ausona, who came in pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre in 1046, as testified by a document from 25 January of that year.⁶⁷ Needless to say, in the age before art eulogiae would have been sought for the holiness and blessings they enclosed, which the pious pilgrim was eager to obtain for his own benefit as well as for that of his family or patrons. We cannot assume that the sellers and the common purchasers were aware of the place and function of ampullae decoration in the development of theological concepts and their expression in visual imagery. Yet, it would be most rewarding to find what was the depth of understanding that pilgrims like Bishop Arnulf might have had of the various layers of

64. R. Ordeig i Mata, *Les dotalties de les esglésies de Catalunya (segles IX-XII)*, vol. 2, part 1, Vic 1996, document no. 195, pp. 169-170.

65. R. Ordeig i Mata, *Diplomatari de la Catedral de Vic, segle XI*, Vic 2000, no. 690, p. 35.

66. F. Monsalvatje y Fossas, *El Monasterio de San Pedro de Casserres*, vol. 20, Gerona 1910, no. 1, pp. 97-99.

67. J. Alturo i Perucho, *L'arxiu antic de Santa Anna de Barcelona del 942 al 1200 (Aproximació historicolingüística)*, Barcelona 1985, no. 52, pp. 55-57. I am most grateful to Mn. Josep M. Masnou who has kindly given me this important information.

meaning of the religious representations. Moreover, if such people were aware of the complex significance of imagery, would eulogiae reflecting a shift in the development of the image of the Crucifixion have a special significance in the eyes of an eleventh century donor? Lastly, in a more general context we can assume that neither sellers nor the devout pilgrims who purchased eulogiae took an interest in these objects as works of art or documents whose age has monetary value as a collection object. Moreover, for the common provider and consumer a date in the early seventh or the eighth to tenth century would have made a difference in a much different sense: believers presumed eulogiae to be authentic relics from the time of Christ, the apostles and other saintly figures, and consequently, out of faith, they would have probably dated the ampulla to a much earlier period than the art historians.

RESUM

L'ampul·la trobada a l'altar major del temple monàstic de Sant Pere de Casserres i avui en una col·lecció particular és un recipient de metall típic de Terra Santa quant a forma, dimensions, material i decoració. La gran simplicitat decorativa ens parla clarament d'un *locus sanctus*. A l'anvers hi ha un Crist crucificat cobert amb el perizoneum; inscripcions gregues omplen els espais situats damunt i davall dels braços de la creu; darrere, hi ha una creu grega, amb els braços més amples als extrems que no a l'encreuament. L'estil i l'execució són més aviat rústics, com s'esdevé en moltes eulògies de metall i argila elaborades a Jerusalem i altres centres de peregrinació, en part pel caràcter popular del medi i el material, la fabricació massificada, la distribució i la mateixa realitat d'uns objectes devots destinats sobretot a satisfer uns pelegrins afanyosos de reviure-hi la santedat del lloc visitat i les pregàries allí recitades. L'ampul·la de Sant Pere de Casserres s'ha datat, com les ben conegudes i també palestines de Monza i Bobbio, entre el segle VI i els primers anys del VII o del VIII, en ambdós casos sense arguments. Aquest article proposa revisar la datació de l'ampul·la atenint-se als paral·lelismes iconogràfics i estilístics dels motius figuratius i a una nova lectura de les inscripcions.

ABSTRACT

The ampulla found in the main altar of the monastery church of Sant Pere of Casserres, now part of a private collection, is a small metal flask typical of the Holy Land in its form, measures, material and decoration. Its concise decoration is a clear reference to a *locus sanctus*. On its obverse it presents the crucified Christ clad in a perizonium, with Greek inscriptions in the spaces above and below the arms of the Cross, and on its reverse it shows a Greek cross with flared arms. The style and workmanship are rather rough, as in many metal and clay eulogiae produced in Jerusalem and other centers of pilgrimage, both because of the plebeian medium and material, the mass production and distribution, and because these devotional objects mainly addressed the wish of pilgrims to encapsulate the holiness of the place and their prayers there, whereas aesthetical aspects were not important. The ampulla of Sant Pere de Casserres has been dated to the sixth or early seventh century like the well known Holy Land ampullae at Monza and Bobbio, and to the early eighth century, in both cases with no argumentation. This paper offers a re-evaluation of the dating of the ampulla, on the basis of iconographic and stylistic parallels of the figurative motifs, and on a new reading of the inscriptions.

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Fig. 1a Monastery of Sant Pere de Casserres,
Holy Land ampulla, obverse



Fig. 1b Monastery of Sant Pere de Casserres,
Holy Land ampulla, reverse



Fig. 2 Monza, Holy Land ampulla no. 11



Fig. 3 Monza, Holy Land ampulla no. 13



Fig. 4 Berlin, Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst, Holy Land bronze censer



Fig. 5 Athens, Benaki Museum, Syrian bronze cross

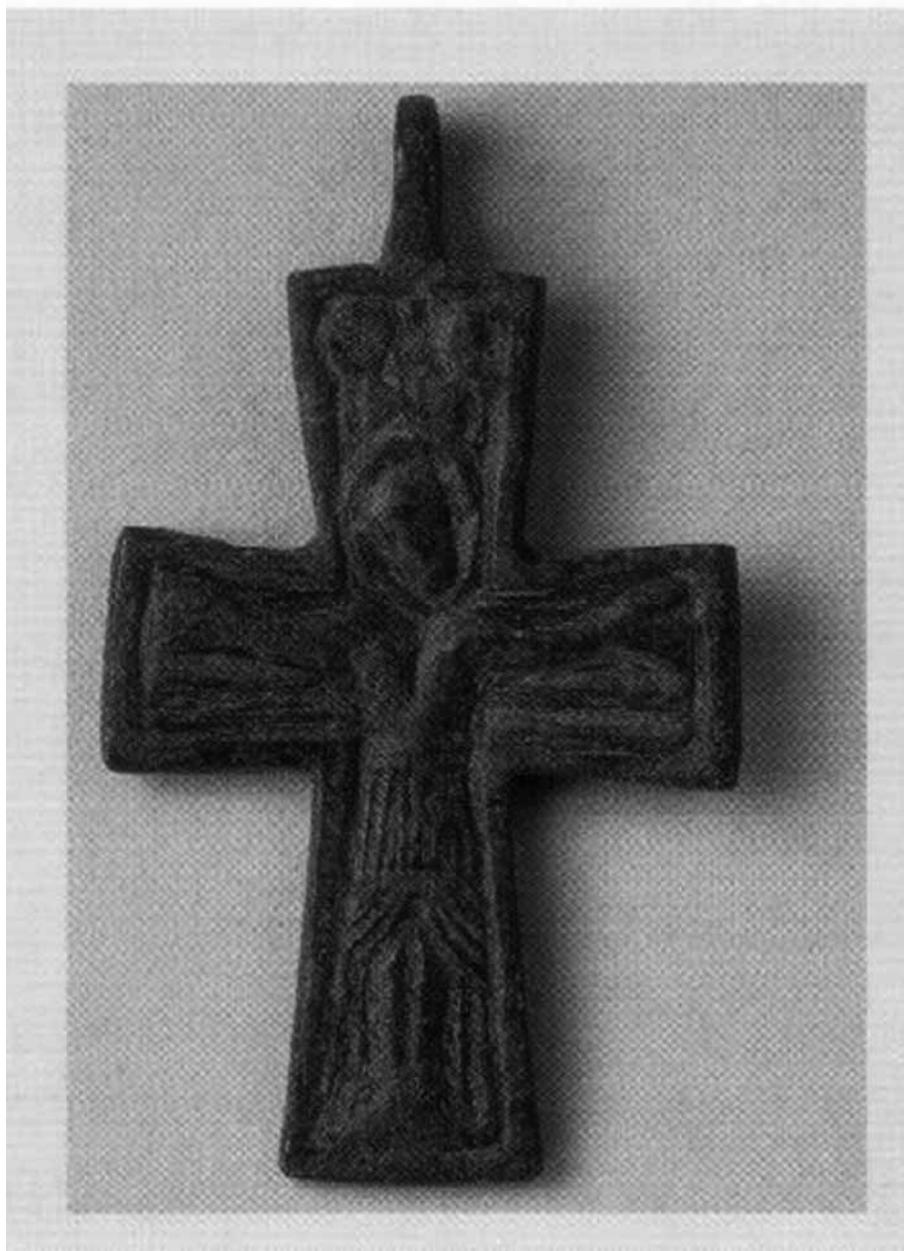


Fig. 6 Freising, Diozesan Museum, Byzantine pectoral cross

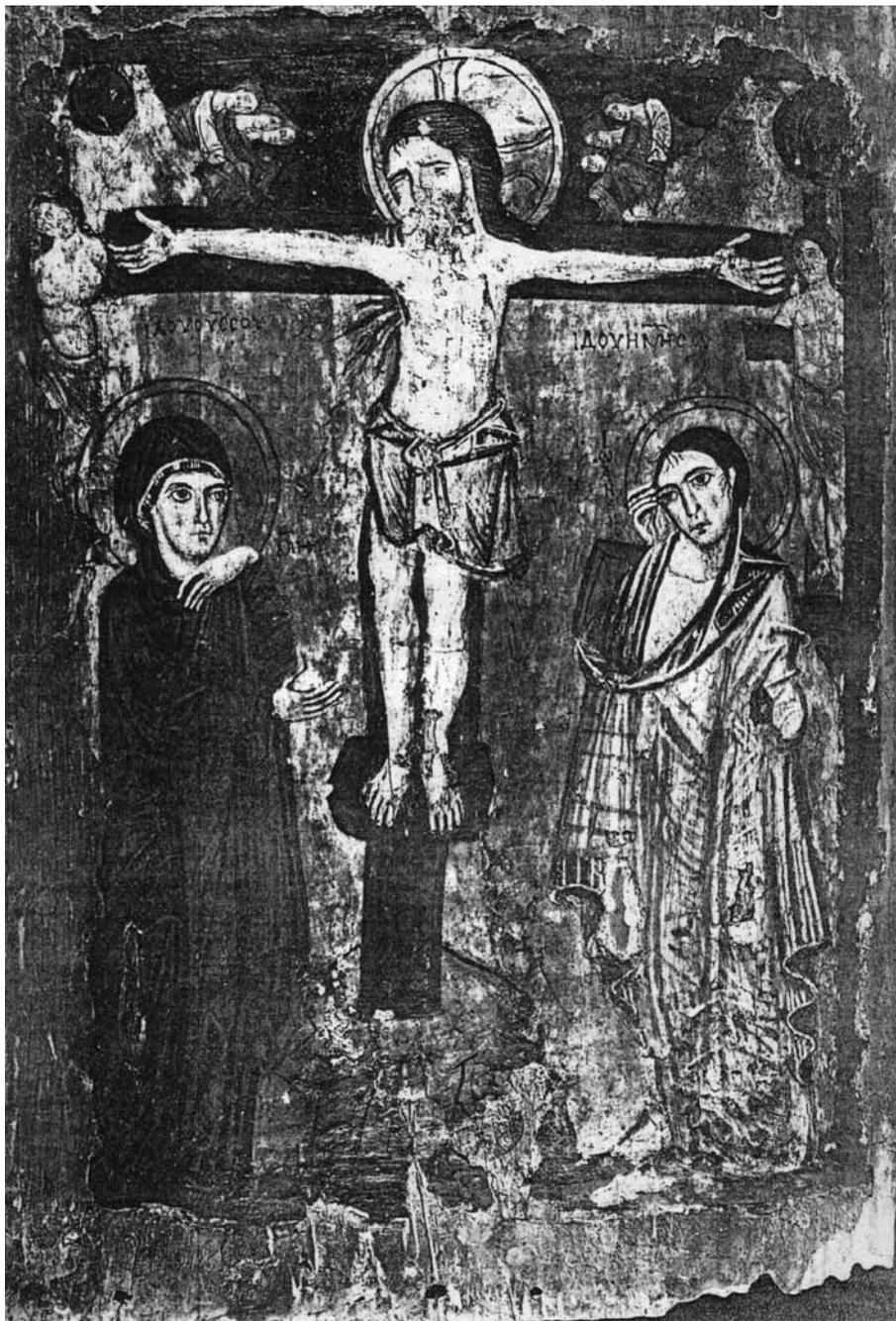


Fig. 7 Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine, Icon B.50

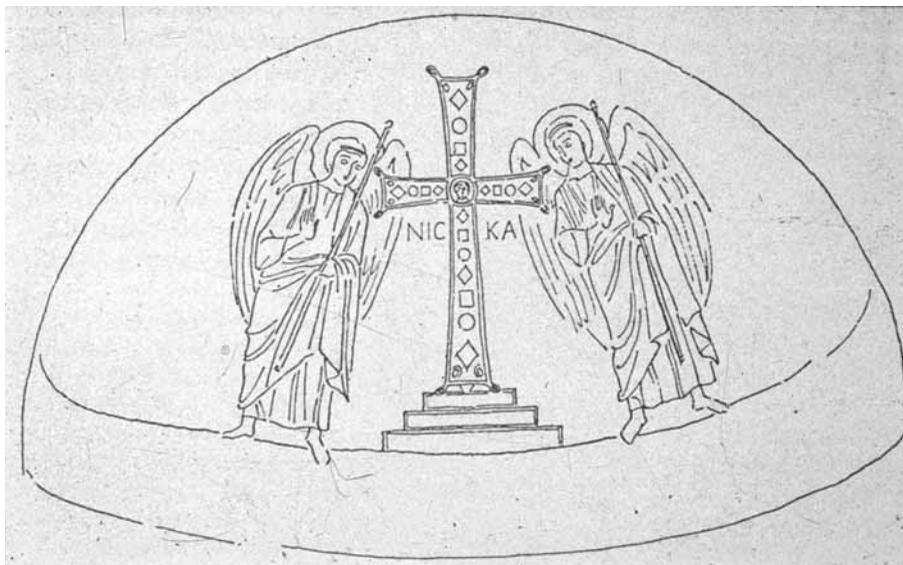


Fig. 8 Jerusalem, Church of the Anastasis, Chapel of Adam
(reconstruction of lost decoration)