

Introduction. Rings and Jewelry in the Palaiologan Period: problems of attribution

In 1261, the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, returning from exile in Nicaea, reclaimed the city of Constantinople from the Latin occupiers who had seized the capital in 1204. Although constantly under threat from hostile neighboring states, the restored Byzantine Empire survived for nearly two centuries longer under the rule of the Palaiologan dynasty before finally succumbing to the Ottomans in 1453. Despite the deteriorating political and economic situation, the imperial court reestablished a degree of traditional grandeur. Aristocratic patronage produced works of art of considerable quality, most notably in the form of mosaics, painted frescoes and icons, illuminated manuscripts, embroidery, and carved steatite and ivory.¹ A revival of the manufacture of jewelry of fine quality also took place, although the amount of surviving material is small and likely only a poor reflection of what once existed.

The jewelry that does survive is of interest not only for its quality but also for the historical evidence it provides. Rings are especially notable for the personal names and monograms they bear. Some display official titles and no doubt served as marks of authority or aristocratic status (for which see Chapter Two). One particular group of rings, produced in a workshop in Constantinople with ties to the imperial court, displays short epigrams finely carved in relief around the gold bezels (discussed in Chapter Three). Other rings of good quality were still being produced in the final years of Byzantium (for which see Chapter Four).

In contrast, other types of jewelry are rare and do not allow a clear picture of the variety that once existed. It is certainly possible that the production of jewelry may have been far more limited than in previous centuries, but it is perplexing that even inexpensive items made of bronze or other base metals can hardly be identified at all in contrast to the large amount of surviving material datable to the ninth to early thirteenth centuries.² Although such popular items of jewelry as necklaces, bracelets, and belt ornaments had long been in use in Byzantium, examples of Palaiologan date cannot be identified with confidence. Some jewelry of Byzantine manufacture may be present among the relatively plentiful archaeological finds from Bulgaria, Serbia, and Macedonia,³ but distinguishing imported Byzantine work from locally made items is difficult. Most notable are Bulgarian finds, which are particularly rich and include several imported Byzantine gold rings and earrings.⁴ A remarkable treasure of mostly Venetian jewelry discovered in the fortress of Chalcis on the island of Euboea (Negroponte) provides evidence for the existence of fine quality Byzantine jewelry around the time of the fall of Constan-

1 For a discussion of aristocratic patronage in the Palaiologan period, see Kalopissi-Verti 2006.

2 Bosselmann-Ruickbie 2011 discusses many finds from excavations, primarily in Greece.

3 For Macedonia, see Maneva 1992 and Maneva 2007; for Serbia, Bikić 2010.

4 See the rings *cat.* 7, 11, 26–30, 32, 47; and pp. 10–11 and 25–26, *figs.* 19, 20, and 22, for earrings.

tinople, but only a few pieces are of Byzantine origin.⁵ The absence of most varieties of Byzantine jewelry from the archaeological record is a serious obstacle for study, especially since their existence is in fact attested in historical documents.

It is to these records one must turn to get a fuller sense of what items of jewelry were in use in the Palaiologan period. For the most part these are legal documents, including private and ecclesiastical inventories, wills, marriage contracts, and court records.⁶ Rings and earrings appear with some frequency in these records, as do *enkolpia* (most often in the form of reliquary crosses worn around the neck, although sometimes triptychs).⁷ Also listed, however, are many types of jewelry otherwise unattested in surviving examples, including necklaces (τραχηλαία or τραχήλιον); brooches (κατακλείδον, κομποθηλεία, πούκλαι); hanging ornaments, perhaps from a diadem (κατασειστά); hair bands decorated with gems and pearls (ἀναδέτα); bracelets (βραχιόνια or βραχιόλλια); and ornamented belts and buckles, including some described as φραγγικόν, “Frankish.” It is likely that this last term refers to belts with elaborate buckles and other elements, usually of gilt-silver, which have been found widely in Europe.⁸ A few such belts, probably of Venetian manufacture, were present in the Chalcis Treasure,⁹ but no example has been discovered in a purely Byzantine context and only a few at Bulgarian or other Balkan sites.¹⁰ According to legal records, however, a “Frankish belt,” valued very highly at 50 *hyperpyra*, was the subject of a lawsuit in Constantinople around the year 1400, indicating that fine imported objects of this type were indeed reaching the capital.¹¹ It is clear from these various records that many different types of ornament were worn, but at present it is impossible to know what they looked like.

Although *enkolpia* in the form of pendant crosses (some serving as reliquaries) worn on chains around the neck had long been popular in Byzantium and are listed in legal documents of the Palaiologan period, only a few are known. Most remarkable is a unique cross of gold and inlaid lapis lazuli in the Benaki Museum in Athens, which is notable both for its quality and its metrical inscription citing the name and dignity of its owner (fig. 1a–b):¹²

ΟΠΛΟΝ ΓΕΝΟΙΟ ΚΑΙ ΦΥΛΑΞ Ω ΣΤΡΕ ΜΟΥ ΒΑΡ{ΑΡ}ΑΓΓΟΠΟΥΛ(Ω) ΣΕΒΑΣΤΩ
ΓΕΩΡΓΙΩ

Ὅπλον γένοιο καὶ φύλαξ, ὦ στ(αυ)ρέ μου, Βαραγγοπούλ(ω) σεβαστῶ Γεωργίω.

Be the arms and protection, O my Cross, for the *sebastos*, Georgios Barangopoulos.

5 See pp. 11, 45, and 51; cat. 13 and 19; and fig. 32a–b.

6 See the fundamental work, Parani 2010.

7 Parani 2010, p. 187.

8 Fingerlin 1971; Lightbown 1992, pp. 306–41.

9 Fingerlin 1971, pp. 370–9, nos. 150–77.

10 Fingerlin 1971, pp. 312–4, no. 21, from Tuzla, Bosnia; and recently discovered examples from Bulgaria, Atanasov 2009, pp. 266 and 491, pl. 11, 1–3, from Dolishte; and Atanasov 2011, from Drustar.

11 Parani 2008, pp. 364–5.

12 Segall 1938, p. 174, no. 277; Georgoula 1999, pp. 354–5, no. 132 (Anna Ballian); and *PLP*, no. 93159; and for the inscription, Rhoby 2010, pp. 197–8, no. Me31. For the family name and dignity, see p. 42.

Some silver pendant crosses may also date to the Palaiologan period, but they are surprisingly rare.¹³ Embossed silver pendants that served as miniature reliquaries, *panagiaria*, and icons similar to those widely used in the eleventh and twelfth centuries may still have been made in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but they are difficult to date.¹⁴ A gold band and a group of gilt-silver discs embossed with imperial symbols and monograms that probably decorated a garment (now in the Benaki Museum) are other rare examples of precious metal jewelry dating from the Palaiologan period (fig. 2).¹⁵

Only finger rings and earrings have been discovered in some quantity and occasionally in useful archaeological contexts. Gilt-silver earrings bearing imperial monograms were discovered in excavations at Mystras (fig. 18a–b), along with simple jewelry in bronze, including rings, and these items must date to the end of the thirteenth century or later, since there was no earlier occupation at the site.¹⁶ Some earrings discovered outside the borders of Byzantine Empire, primarily in Bulgaria and Macedonia, clearly derive from imperial workshops in Constantinople in view of their monograms or engraved images (figs. 19, 20, and 22).¹⁷ Several fine earrings of unique type but perhaps of Byzantine origin were discovered with gold coins of Andronikos II Palaiologos and silver coins of the Bulgarian Tsar Theodor Svetoslav (1300–1322) in a hoard discovered at Dabene in Bulgaria.¹⁸ A few gold earrings from the Chalcis Treasure appear also to be of Byzantine manufacture, and these too are very fine, set with pearls and decorated with niello inlay (fig. 32a–b).¹⁹

Larger works in precious metal, such as reliquaries, vessels, and large crosses, are very rare, and in view of the deteriorating financial condition of the empire it is unlikely that the aristocratic commissions of such items were common. The empress Anna of Savoy notoriously pawned the crown jewels to the Venetians in 1343, and they were never recovered.²⁰ Soon after, in 1356, more treasures left the imperial palace when the empress Helena Kantakouzene, the wife of John V Palaiologos, sold a group of fine reliquaries to a Florentine merchant. The works soon reached Venice and were acquired for the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, where they remain today.²¹ It is notable that the finer reliquaries set with gems and inlaid with enamel were antique at

13 *Byzance* 1992, pp. 446–7, no. 342 (Jannic Durand), for an example in Paris, although the date is not certain; and see the unusual inscribed reliquary cross in Palma de Mallorca, Schlumberger 1905, pp. 137–9.

14 See Totev and Pletnyov 2011, pp. 56–78. Silver *enkolpia* are often listed as personal property in legal documents of this period; see Parani 2010, p. 187. For *panagiaria*, see Drpić 2011.

15 Segall 1938, pp. 146–7, no. 229, pl. 45; Acheimastou-Potamianou and Liva-Xanthaki 1985, p. 197, no. 217 (Laskarina Bouras); Durand 2004, pp. 343–4, fig. 11; Evans 2004, p. 47, no. 19 (Pari Kalamara).

16 See Kalamara and Mexia 2001, pp. 157, no. 9 (buttons); 161, no. 16 (buckle); 164–5, nos. 18–20 (rings); 168, no. 24 (silver earring); many objects remain unpublished.

17 See pp. 25–26.

18 *Bulgarie médiévale* 1980, pp. 158–9, nos. 320–324bis (but without mention of the accompanying coins); and Antje Bosselmann-Rückbie in Daim 2012, pp. 318–9, nos. XI.33–38 (no illustrations).

19 See p. 51.

20 Nicol 1988, pp. 259–60; and Bertelè 1962, for the documentary sources.

21 Hetherington 1983, who suggests a Palaiologan date for all the reliquaries; Derenzini 1996; Rhoby 2010, pp. 244–8, nos. Me75–77, who argues for an eleventh–twelfth century date for those reliquaries with enamel and metrical inscriptions; and Daim 2012, p. 378, no. XVII.29 (Ewald Kislinger and Andreas Rhoby), for the gilt-silver reliquary pendant certainly of Palaiologan date. See also Klein 2004, pp. 308–12, for the sale of relics during Palaiologan times.

the time of sale and not works of the Palaiologan period, while the only item certainly of fourteenth-century date, a gilt-silver reliquary pendant, is a more modest work. Another reliquary dating from the Palaiologan period, a gilt-silver arm reliquary containing relics of John the Baptist now in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum in Istanbul, bears a Greek inscription naming the donor as Daniel the monk, but its workmanship, entirely Western in style, suggests a Venetian origin.²²

Nevertheless, at least some very fine works in precious metal were still being produced for the Byzantine court. Perhaps the most important surviving imperial commission is the gilt-silver and jasper chalice presented by the despot of Mystras, Manuel Kantakouzenos Palaiologos (1349–1380), to the Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos (fig. 27a–b).²³ Several large silver crosses were dedications from aristocratic patrons to the monasteries on Mount Athos as well, including one from the empress Helena Palaiologina (c. 1372–1450), wife of Manuel II Palaiologos, to the Dionysiou Monastery.²⁴ The luxury dedication of choice in the Palaiologan period, however, was the silver icon frame decorated with repoussé and filigree, of which a surprisingly large number of examples survive.²⁵ The technique of silver repoussé, however, has little in common with that of the jeweler.

Workshops outside Constantinople

It is difficult to recognize jewelry and metalwork produced outside of Constantinople during the Palaiologan period. Thessalonica, where a remarkable variety of rings and other objects appear to have been made at the end of the twelfth century,²⁶ must have continued to support jewelers and silversmiths despite considerable political turmoil. Under Latin rule for only two decades (1204–1224), the city passed briefly to the despotate of Epiros (1224–1230) and then became a vassal of Bulgaria (1230–1246) before returning to the Byzantine Empire of Nicaea in 1246. No doubt the city supported important workshops, at least for silver work, such as frames for icons, some of which was destined for the monasteries on Mount Athos.²⁷ Rings and jewelry from this period, however, cannot be identified.²⁸

22 Rice 1959, p. 338, pl. 196.

23 See pp. 43 and 52.

24 Millet, Pargoire and Petit 1904, p. 159, no. 461; *Treasures of Mount Athos* 1987, pp. 314–5, no. 9.23. For Helena Palaiologina, see *PLP*, no. 21366.

25 Grabar 1975; Durand 2004b; and see also Vassilaki 2000, pp. 320–1, no. 30 (Lazaros Deriziotis), for a reliquary diptych in Cuenca bearing the dedication of Maria Angelina Doukaina Palaiologina and Thomas Preljubović, the despot of Ioannina, c. 1367–1384. Gilt-silver book covers were also produced in these workshops, such as those preserved in the Protaton and Iviron Monasteries on Mount Athos, pp. 309–12, nos. 9.19–20 (Katia Loverdou-Tsigarida).

26 See pp. 17–18.

27 Loverdou-Tsigarida 2003.

28 Legal documents of the ecclesiastical tribunal in Thessalonica dated 1384 record the property claimed as a marital gift by the widow Maria Deblitzene; six gold rings valued at 10 *hyperpyra* were gone, but she reclaimed one ring set with glass valued at one and half *hyperpyra*, *kataseista* with gems and pearls valued at 36 *hyperpyra*, and a pair of large earrings with pearls and gems valued at 48 *hyperpyra*; nothing is described in more detail, however; see Parani 2010, pp. 186–7 and 191; Oikonomides 1984, pp. 258–65, no. 49; and p. 62.

Mystras, a fortified city in the Morea built by William II Villehardouin, the Frankish prince of Achaëa (1246–1259), was relinquished to the Greeks in 1261 and became a flourishing cultural center with close ties to the Byzantine court. Aside from its fine buildings, however, little of its material wealth survives. The most remarkable object with links to Mystras is the exceptionally fine chalice commissioned by the despot of Mystras, but it was more likely produced in an imperial workshop in Constantinople than in Mystras itself.²⁹ Excavations have yielded some important silver-gilt earrings with imperial monograms (fig. 18a–b) but for the most part only simple jewelry in silver and bronze.³⁰

Neither Epiros nor Thessaly had the cultural traditions of Constantinople or Thessalonica, nor did they have great wealth. One gold ring of late thirteenth-century date, however, bears the name of Michael Zorianos, a prominent military commander in Epiros, and was likely made there (cat. 33). Trebizond, a wealthier province, probably did have workshops supported by aristocratic patronage, and one outstanding fourteenth- or fifteenth-century reliquary dedicated to the four martyrs of the city is known, preserved in the Treasury of San Marco in Venice.³¹ Wood from the True Cross decorated with gold overlay and inscribed with a dedication naming Manuel Komnenos, most likely Manuel I Komnenos of Trebizond (1238–1263), is in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris, but the workmanship is modest.³² Nothing else of fine quality has come to light, or indeed any jewelry at all.³³

There can be little doubt that Constantinople itself was the source for nearly all the jewelry of fine quality. Many of the surviving rings and earrings display imperial symbols, monograms, or other features that suggest an origin in workshops with close ties to the imperial court. Other goldsmiths in the capital no doubt produced fine work as well, but their numbers appear to have been small.

29 See p. 52; Durand 2004a, pp. 338–9, suggests the chalice was made in Mystras.

30 See p. 11, note 16.

31 Hahnloser 1971, pp. 39–40, no. 33, pl. 31 (A. Frolow).

32 *Byzance*, pp. 444–5, no. 340 (Jannic Durand).

33 The testament of Georgios Kapetzes, recorded at the Vazelon Monastery in Trebizond in 1272, lists a ring with the modest value of three aspers, but it is not described in any detail; Ouspensky and Benechevitch 1927, pp. 50–51, no. 86; *PLP*, no. 11025.