

## A DECORATED BRONZE PLATTER FROM KAFR MIŞR

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### INTRODUCTION

During October 2002 a trial excavation was conducted at Kafr Mişr prior to the construction of a residential dwelling (map ref. NIG 2399/7279; OIG 1899/2279). One square was excavated, revealing a few ancient remains (Syon 2006).<sup>1</sup> The finds were meager, including only a few potsherds—the rim of a bowl from the end of the Byzantine period (seventh century CE), a jug handle of buff clay, the neck of a bottle dating to the Early Islamic period (eighth–ninth centuries CE)—and a bronze platter, which is central to this article. The platter was found in a layer of stone collapse and soil accumulation (L11), “close to the bedrock surface and next to a meager wall, which apparently belonged to an installation... whose nature was not ascertained” (Syon 2006).

Kafr Mişr is situated in the eastern lower Galilee, off Route 7276, approximately 5 km east of its junction with Route 65. Apart from Kafr Mişr, there are only three other settlements along this relatively isolated road: Kefar Kish and ‘En-Dor north of Kafr Mişr, and Gazit southeast of it. This is an agricultural region that has been settled in various periods by sedentary populations of assorted religions. The area was under the protection of the Christian order based on Mount Tabor before it was settled by Bedouins at the end of the tenth century CE. Zev Vilnay (1945:181) reported that “...the village holds 240 Muslims. It is thought that it was named after Egyptians who settled here in the early nineteenth century. Kafr Mişr is first mentioned by a Christian traveler who passed through in 1821.”

Some 100 m to the west of the excavation lie the remains of an ancient synagogue, dated to the time of the Mishnah and Talmud (Onn 1994).<sup>2</sup> The synagogue remains, with mosaic pavements depicting menorahs and inscriptions in Hebrew, were also touched upon briefly by Ilan (1987) in his survey of synagogues in the Galilee and the Golan. The site was not mentioned by Kohl and Watzinger (1916) in their monumental work on Galilean synagogues and does not seem to appear in the rabbinical sources.

### DESCRIPTION

The find circumstances of the platter cannot enlighten us regarding the meaning, date and artistic origins of the images portrayed on it, nor can they tell us about the vessel’s provenance or its route to Kafr Mişr. In an attempt to reach plausible assumptions we must therefore derive our answers from the platter itself. An iconographic and stylistic analysis of its images and their comparison to other artistic data may help to decipher its enigma.

The bronze platter, now misshapen and with segments missing, was originally approximately 60 cm in diameter (Fig. 1). The following elements are clearly observed: elevated margins, an internal frame displaying a plaited pattern, a row of medallions interspersed with floral motifs and an ornamental center surrounded by a flat S-pattern. There seem to have been originally eight medallions, of which six have survived (although one is incomplete). The medallions are framed by a pearl-like pattern of protruding knobs set into miniature



Fig. 1. The bronze platter from Kafr Miṣr.

rosettes. Two medallions featuring human busts alternate with three containing eagles. The sixth medallion is too damaged to ascertain the nature of its image.

One figurative medallion (Fig. 2) represents a masculine figure in profile. He is haloed with a ring of pearls. His helmet-like hairstyle, with its wavy locks, features a round diadem over the brow that ends in a massive knot behind his left ear. Posed in profile, his left eye appears enlarged and wide open with a distinctive central pupil. His features are almost classical: a long straight nose, a small mouth and a protruding chin. He is dressed in a military habit that emphasizes his broad shoulders. His right arm parallels the outer circle of the medallion and ends in a rounded palm with one



Fig. 2. Detail: figure in profile.



Fig. 3. Detail: figurative medallion.



Fig. 4. Detail: first eagle.

clear, outstretched finger that almost touches his nose.

Another figurative medallion (Fig. 3) depicts another masculine bust, this time frontally. Unlike the first figure, this image bears childish features: a round face, open vivid eyes and curly hair styled like a round hat on his head. Similar to the first figure, he also wears a military habit, whose elongated lines create the impression of broad shoulders. The horizontal lines of the habit create a bulging chest. The halo that encircles him is surrounded by a ring of pearls.

Three similarly molded medallions, described counter-clockwise, are inhabited by an eagle. All three eagles are presented at a three-quarters view. The first eagle (Fig. 4) faces the missing figure to its right, while perched in profile on a branch with three small leaves. The eagle's tail is broad and heavy, and a scaled pattern ornaments its body. An intense eye and strong beak are very clear. The eagle's wings bear a round, elevated upper part, decorated with pearls.

A very determined-looking eagle inhabits the third medallion of the platter, facing the rigid figure on its left (Fig. 5). The eagle possesses



Fig. 5. Detail: second eagle.

a round, rather menacing eye, and a sharp and prominent beak. The eagle's legs rest on a branch with three small leaves, and its body bears a scaled pattern. The bird has ornamented wings, which appear huge in comparison to its body, and a tail that seems stiff and not organically linked to its body.



Fig. 6. Detail: third eagle.

The third eagle is smaller than the other two (Fig. 6). This depiction is more schematic with legs composed of geometrical lines, and a fan-shaped tail awkwardly attached to its body. The eagle's beak is short, and its wings are similar to those of its mates. It faces the curly-haired figure, its back to the missing medallion.

The ornamental elements display various types of floral motifs and separate the medallions from each other. One floral motif is depicted with exposed roots and a rather long stem, which splits in its upper part into two vine-like inflorescences (Fig. 7). Another one, ending in three split branches, is also depicted from its roots to its fruit (Fig. 8). It shows the process of development, from closed buds to gradually ripening grapes. The third floral motif depicts a stem branching into two five-petalled flowers. This motif appears more than once, although not intact (see Figs. 3, 4).

The center of the platter displays a pure ornamental pattern. Its boundaries are defined by a continuous flat S-pattern, which encloses a round space divided into small squares composed of repetitive motifs: trefoil, heart, lozenge and rosette (Fig. 9). This design creates an effect of a rich ornamented carpet.



Fig. 7. Detail: floral motif with two inflorescences.



Fig. 8. Detail: floral motif with three inflorescences.



Fig. 9. Detail: central ornamental motif.

#### INTERPRETATION

When the images described above are examined in the larger context of art history, they seem to indicate a possible interpretation based on Christian iconography, as manifested in Byzantine art of the tenth and eleventh centuries CE. The figurative human heads, the floral motifs, the emulation of luxurious textiles and jewelry and the ornamentation were highly prominent in both monumental and minor Byzantine art of the period. Furthermore, we can trace what may be stylistic and iconographic sources of these images back to ancient Mediterranean art in the Roman Empire, and later on, in Early Christian times. The images were used in cameos, coinage, consular diptychs, book covers, or integrated into rich monumental art (Bandinelli 1971; Houston 1977; Honnstad 1986; Elsner 1988). The early models of these periods might have served as sources of inspiration to later artists. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, similar images of human figures, and floral and ornamental patterns, were deeply anchored in imperial artistic expression of Byzantine art.

#### *Human Figures*

Most likely, the figures on the platter represented Byzantine warrior saints, whose depictions after the Iconoclasts established a code of unique visual forms by which they could be identified, either as individuals, or as prototypes (Maguire 1993; Walter 2003).

Saints Theodore Tiron, Theodore Stratelates, Demetrius, Procopios, Marcurios and George were presented, time and again, with a similar hairstyle and similar physiological features and attributes. This is most evident in non-narrative representations, where the saint cannot be identified by his heroic actions, by an inscription above his head, or in the moment of his well-recognized martyrdom, but rather by his iconic depiction. Thus, beyond the general definition of a “typical warrior saint”, there are saints who can be identified by their individual characteristics. In a twelfth-century fresco in Macedonia, St. George, for example, may be recognized by his curly hair and smooth chin. St. Theodore Tiron, although bearing a resemblance to St. Theodore Stratelates, has longer facial features and a heavy beard (Fig. 10).

The cult of warrior saints and its visual expression was greatly encouraged in the Middle Byzantine period. Hussey (1970:31–34) elaborates on the warrior saints that, “their battle cry was ‘the Cross has conquered’, and they were moved by a crusading spirit, conscious of the presence of the heavenly host, particularly the vigilant militant saints, such as St. George or St. Theodore, under whose special protection they fought.” Emperor Leo VI, the Wise (ruled from 886 to 912 CE) referred to them as “Soldiers of God and Champions of the Church” (Mango 1986; Jenkins 1987; Walter 2003). Their “portraits” were perpetuated on coins and seals. Churches and public monuments were dedicated to them. Even though their artistic depiction did not always match their literary description, they were always visually represented as strong and good-looking young men. The cult of St. George, who was named by Walter “the ‘star’



Fig. 10. Icon with warrior saints (from left to right): St. George, St. Theodore and St. Demetrius (late eleventh–early twelfth centuries). Courtesy of The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum, by Vladimir Tarebenin, Leonard Kheifets, Yuri Molodkovets.

warrior saint,” was especially popular (Walter 2003). In early works of art, as well as more recent ones, he is always depicted as a very young man with childish features and a mass of curly hair.

The two undamaged “portraits” of the warrior-saints on the Kafr Mişr platter greatly differ from one another, although both bear attributes of sainthood and combat. The image in profile looks very fierce: he seems to hold a weapon in his right hand, and his appearance and gestures are similar to depictions of Byzantine rulers. The other warrior is more innocent looking, with a softer appearance and curly hair, and might even be St. George.

### *Eagles*

The images of the eagles differ slightly from one another, but together embody an impressive visual representation. Unlike the saints, they do not bear head haloes, although the rich contour of the medallion makes their entire body appear haloed. It is clear that the artist of the platter

tried to glorify them through his accurate physical representation.

In the Roman Empire, the eagle symbolized the authority and glory of the ruler. This can be seen in the *Gemma Augustea* cameo, which depicts Emperor Augustus and shows the eagle perched at his feet (Strong 1988: Ill.31).

In Christian iconography, the eagle plays an important role: it is believed to symbolize resurrection and the Christian spirit (according to legend, unlike other birds, it can renew its youth and plumage by flying into the circle of the sun, and then diving into the water). The eagle sometimes symbolizes Christ in its ability to gaze into the blazing mid-day sun. It also represents the new life conferred on Christian believers through the sacrament of baptism, and the virtues of generosity, grace and courage (Ferguson 1961; Sill 1975; Muthesius 2004). As the symbol of John the Evangelist and as a component of the apocalyptic scene, the eagle was abundantly featured in Early Christian art, e.g., in fourth–fifth century Rome (Santa



Fig. 11. Marble slab with allegorical representations of eagles. Byzantine, tenth–eleventh centuries.  
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Pudentiana and Santa Maria Maggiore) and in fifth–sixth century Ravenna (Galla Placidia, St. Apollinare in Classe). The eagle, symbolizing the triumphant Christ, is represented four times in the mosaics of the apse of St. Apollinare in Classe. It perches on the four columns that serve as architectural background to the sacrificial scene of Abel and Malchizedek and to the representation of Constantine IV and his entourage (Vantaggi 1985:114–127).

Despite his probable exposure to early artistic models from Late Antiquity and Early Christianity, it appears as though the artist of the platter chose to follow the later example of the tenth–eleventh century Byzantine eagle, distinguished by its huge raised round wings. An example of this eagle can be seen on a marble panel from that period, now in the British Museum (Fig. 11). In most such depictions, the eagle is rendered in combat with snakes or hares as part of an allegorical scene (Beckwith 1968:217, Fig. 186; Bord and Skubiszewski 2000). However, the eagle demonstrates its non-violent, rather majestic metaphysical nature on the woven textiles of the same period as on silk garments worn by individuals in the service of the Byzantine rulers and their imperial courts. Surviving examples that are known from the time of Basil II do, indeed, attest to imperial manufacture: the chasuble of St. Albuin (957–1006 CE),

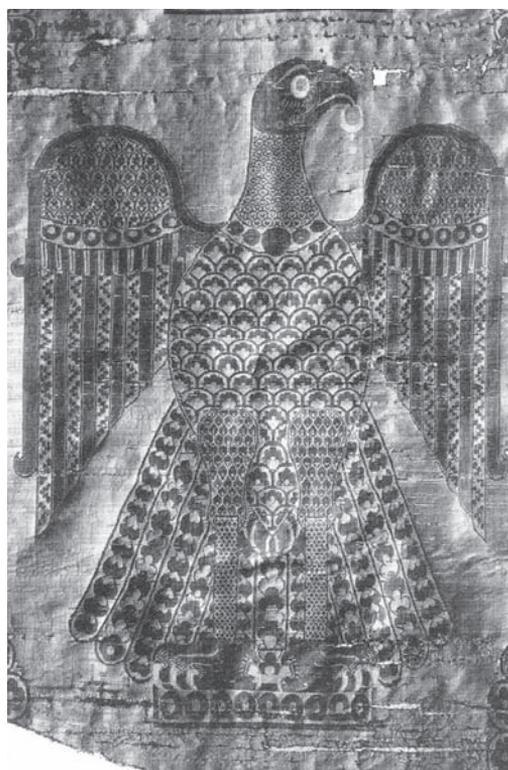


Fig. 12. Brixen Cathedral, treasury. Constantinople tenth–eleventh centuries (with the permission of Brixen Diözesanmuseum).

now in the Cathedral Treasury at Brixen (Fig. 12) and the shroud of St. Germain in the Church of St. Eusèbe at Auxerre (Runciman 1975:86).



Fig. 13. Ravenna. St. Apollinare in Classe. Floral motif mosaic. Seventh century (detail).

### *Floral Motifs*

The floral images between the medallions echo John's words (15:1–6):

*I am the true vine, and my father is the husbandman... every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit... As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, accept it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing...*

The concept of the barren branch, in contrast to the ripe heavy grapes, is enhanced by the depiction on the platter, which metaphorically refers to those who have abandoned the path to salvation, as opposed to those who chose to take the path of the Savior (see Figs. 7, 8). Early Christian art is richly populated with the same floral motif, starting with the mosaic on the ceiling of the Mausoleum of Constantina in

Rome in the fourth century CE (which still bear traces of Dionysiac rites), and continuing to the art of Ravenna, for instance, Maximian's throne and the visions of Paradise in St. Vitale and St. Apollinare in Classe (Fig. 13). In common with the above mentioned examples, the vine branches on the platter end in three accurately molded inflorescences that bear an obvious allusion to the Trinity.

### *Ornamental Motifs*

The repetitive ornamental motifs in the center of the platter often appear on official garments of Byzantine rulers of the tenth and eleventh centuries, where they represent the official imperial style of the era (Piltz 1994; Maguire 1998; Parani 2003). Examples can be seen on an ivory relief from Constantinople representing the spiritual coronation of Romanus II and the Empress Eudocia, and on the robes and crowns of Constantine Monomachus and Zoë (1028–1034 CE) in a mosaic in the southern gallery of Hagia Sofia (1042–1050 CE; Figs. 14, 15).

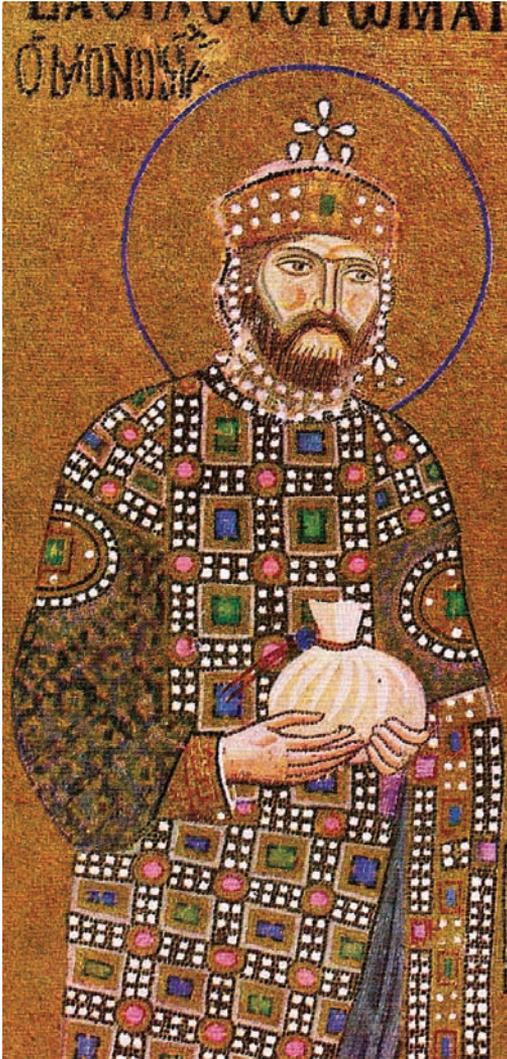


Fig. 14. Constantinople, Hagia Sofia, Emperor Constantine Monomachos. Mosaic. Eleventh century.

#### DATING AND ORIGINS

The various images and motifs on the platter from Kafr Mişr bear a close similarity to Byzantine imagery of the tenth–eleventh centuries, thus suggesting that it may date to the same period. Clearly, the images on the platter are composed of imperial as well as theological iconography, which draw on Late Antique and Early Christian works of art. Both iconographic and stylistic aspects are deeply rooted in the

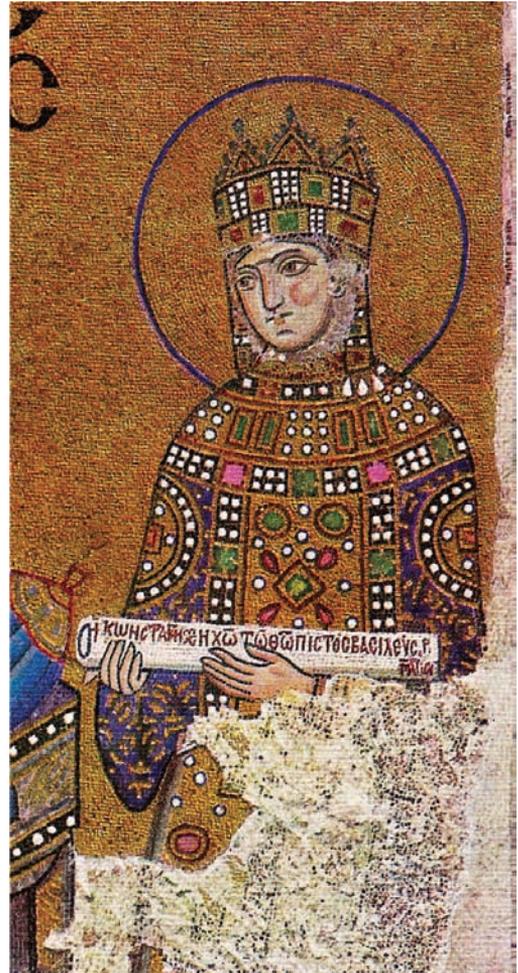


Fig. 15. Constantinople, Hagia Sofia, Empress Zoë. Mosaic. Eleventh century.

ideology of Christian salvation, which when combined with their imperial implications; form a visual eulogy of its assumed patron.

Who was the patron of this object? What was its possible use? How did it find its way to the vicinity of Mount Tabor? Definite answers to these questions cannot be established; however, I believe that historic and artistic data can illuminate some of the circumstances concerning the production of the platter and its provenance.

#### *The Art of the Middle Byzantine Period*

After the Iconoclastic controversy, the Middle Byzantine period enjoyed an artistic revival,

under which classical models in religious art and architecture flourished. Great achievements of the “Macedonian Renaissance” (also rightly called “the second Golden Age of Byzantine art”), which reached its peak at the time of the death of Basil II in 1025 CE, are evident in monumental art, such as the construction of new churches and their rich mosaic decorations. Evidence can also be found in the minor arts: book illumination, enamel work and ivory carving, and other imperial and liturgical luxury objects (Kalavrezou 1997). The Classical revival of the period suited Byzantine artistic tendencies, which had, from the outset, combined a rather “conservative” attitude with what Louis Bréhier calls a *goût pour le luxe* (Bréhier 1973:21). Kitzinger refers to Byzantium as “the guardian of classical art,” and emphasizes the fact that even during the Iconoclastic period and the ninth–tenth centuries, Byzantine patrons and craftsmen cherished the classical traditions (Kitzinger 1969:55). Alongside narrative representations of such leading Christological subjects as the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Crucifixion or Ascension, we find hieratic imagery of saints and imperial officials that bear static, formal and emotionless features, “lined up like columns in complete isolation” (Kitzinger 1969:57). This solemnity matched the approach of the Macedonian court and that of its successor Comnenan dynasty. Even if a work of art was not always commissioned by the ruler himself, its production was supervised by a civil committee, “trained to regard art as a proper expression of religious truth and imperial prestige” (Runciman 1975:108). In any case, the whole range of artistic creation was produced in the palace workshops, which suggested that they enjoyed imperial and aristocratic patronage (Cormack 1989:158).

At the same time, Byzantine monasteries continued to play an important role in the production of works of art—especially manuscript illuminations. From three monastic inventories dated to 1059, 1077 and 1083 CE, we learn that such collections consisted of

liturgical objects and fittings, vestments and altar cloths, icons, books and manuscripts. It is important to note that many of these objects, including altar vessels and other religious items were not made of luxury materials (Cormack 1989:165–167).

This last observation takes us back to the Kafr Mişr archeological find, to different aspects of patronage in the minor and portable arts, and to what Anthony Cutler calls a “hierarchy of metals” (Cutler 1992:760). It is obvious that in spite of its considerable size, accurate design, and high votive imagery, our platter does not belong to the “luxury club” and cannot dwell among its most distinguished artifacts of gold, silver, or ivory. Being made of bronze, it must be assigned to a lower rung of the hierarchical ladder of materials. On the other hand, it can be assumed that a vessel of its size and quality would not have been commissioned and produced by the poorer classes of Byzantine society (Wessel 1969).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the platter’s distinctive nature does not correspond to any known style of decorated pottery, which reflected the rather popular taste of that time (E.D. Maguire 1997). The depictions on the Kafr Mişr platter are far from “secular” or humorous. Rather, they reflect great devotion and a wish to unite the two poles of Christian experience by depicting interwoven images of spirituality and faith, imperial strength and ceremony.

It is beyond the scope of this study to survey the splendid nature of luxurious Byzantine objects and materials of courtly and monastic households, or compare their reflected images in the minor arts that imitate them. On the other hand, we can gain some insight by trying to trace the artist’s visual sources of inspiration and the models he chose to imitate in defining his own artistic vision.

#### *Possible Models*

It seems as though three major models served the artist of the Kafr Mişr platter: high-quality platters and dishes; coins and seals; and fragments of silk tapestry.

The silver and silver-gilt dishes produced in Byzantium in the middle of the fourth century, as well as the luxurious bowls and patens of later periods, are well known. Most famous is the Missorium of Theodosius (Constantinople, fourth century CE), which depicted the emperor and his attendants, and nine other silver dishes with scenes from the life of King David or representations of the saints (Constantinople, mid-seventh century CE). These objects can certainly be categorized as court art by their subject matter, high-quality production, and luxurious materials. Besides being a source of imitation, they also stimulated autonomous works that bring together various aspects of courtly and religious imagery. Thus, less imposing objects, such as the bronze platter under discussion, seem to have drawn their inspiration, as well as their pattern of visual display, from such elite models.

In this sense, such visual expressions are not alien to the popular Byzantine images of the spiritual coronations of Byzantine rulers of the age. In the same way that Christ bestows his divinity on the emperor and empress, so too do the images of the warrior saints that embody the divine spirit on the platter bestow their holiness on the courtly symbols represented in the inner, central circle. The divine and the earthly, the spiritual and the corporeal, comprise iconographic as well as visual harmony and perfection.

The minor arts, including coinage, seals and cameos, should not be excluded from the list of visual and iconographic sources that might have been of service to the artist of the platter. From ancient times, Roman emperors and high-ranking figures had been commemorated on coinage and seals as tokens of imperial authority. Their portraits, frontal or in profile, illustrated their noble nature and imposing character. At times, they were featured on royal jewelry, as seen in the gold coin-set pendant, probably from fourth-century Constantinople, with a profiled, crowned bust of Constantine the Great, surrounded by six figurative medallions (Fig. 16). Also well known are the metal seals,



Fig. 16. Gold coin pendant of Constantine. Fourth century. © Trustees of the British Museum.

coins and copper-alloy coin-weights from the Middle Byzantine period. Cheynet notes that most of the surviving seals are made of lead and were used by every institution and official, including the imperial court (Cheynet 1997:110).

The most contemporaneous source of inspiration for the images found on the platter appears to be Byzantine silk weaving from the eleventh century. Robert Sabatino Lopez specifies the various uses of silk in the imperial courts of Byzantium, as “an indispensable symbol of political authority, and a prime requirement for ecclesiastical ceremonies” (Lopez 1945:1). Here again, hierarchy is revealed in the observation that the officers of the court wore attire less brilliant than those of the emperor (Lopez 1945:2). Anna Muthesius elaborates on the artistic, economic, and technical aspects of Byzantine silk weaving, which was dictated by the skill of the weaver and the financial backing of the patron (Muthesius 1997:47–50).

Two motifs on the platter have stylistic parallels in silk weaving of the tenth and eleventh centuries: the eagle and the central decorative patterns. The *Book of Ceremonies* (Jenkins 1987:256–268; Maguire 1994:39–80) by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959

CE) gives a good idea regarding a number of luxury items that were used in ceremonies in the palace and on feast days, and supplies evidence of richly colored textiles embellished with eagle motifs (Muthesius 1997:47–50). Two examples, probably created by imperial weavers in Constantinople, are the above-mentioned chasuble of St. Albin (975–1006; see Fig. 12) and the shroud of St. Germain at Auxerre (Runciman 1975:86). Another eagle-decorated silk, although of lower technical quality, was found in Odense. All three textiles are dated to the tenth or eleventh century (Beckwith 1979:100–101; Muthesius 1997:49).

The decorative pattern in the center of the platter relates strongly to another work of art: a silk tapestry that may have been woven to celebrate the triumph of Basil II over the Bulgars in 1017 CE. The tapestry was found in the tomb of Bishop Gunther (d. 1065 CE) in the Cathedral of Bamberg (Fig. 17; Beckwith 1979:98–100; Muthesius 1997:98, 118–120). It depicts an imperial triumphal ceremony: two

personifications of cities offering a crown and a *toufa* (an imperial diadem with a peacock-feather crest; Beckwith 1979:375) to the richly attired emperor, who is mounted on a decorated horse, and holds a *labarum*.<sup>4</sup> The top of the *toufa*, as well as the background of the scene, is set with an ornamental pattern similar to that of the platter (Fig. 18). It is assumed that the tapestry was probably acquired by Bishop Gunther during his visit to Constantinople in 1064–1065, or presented as a gift from Basil II himself.

#### ROUTE OF THE PLATTER

The mobility of such works of art leads us back to the platter from Kafr Miṣr and to the question of “pathways of portability” (Hoffman 2001)—from one geographical location to another, from one culture to another, from one patron

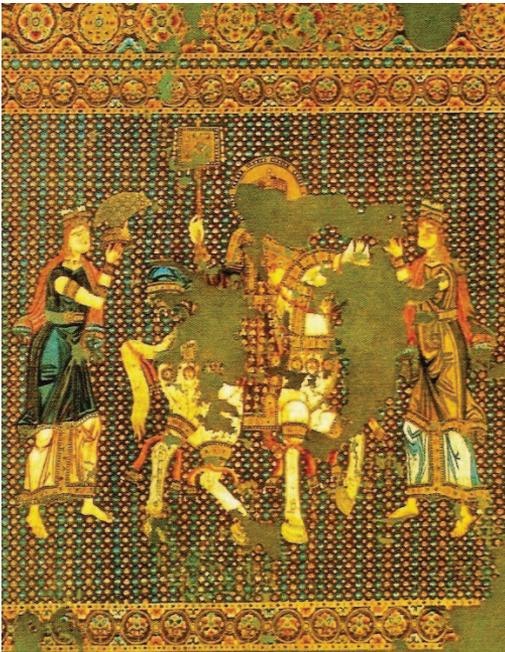


Fig. 17. Silk carpet found in the tomb of Bishop Gunther in the Cathedral of Bamberg (with the permission of Bamberg Diözesanmuseum).



Fig. 18. Detail of silk carpet found in the tomb of Bishop Gunther in the Cathedral of Bamberg (with the permission of Bamberg Diözesanmuseum).

to another. This transfer of images through objects, which constantly moved along the trade routes, often served as an artistic intercessor of inspiration, adaptation and change (Gauthier 1967; Seidel 1987:33; Chen 1997). Eva Hoffman contends that “through movement these objects participated in and defined the contours of visual culture and experience.” With reference to the lack of documentation needed in order to identify the provenance of an object, she suggests that “instead of asking where objects came from, the question might be reformulated to ask what were the implications of portability and how were objects used and perceived inter-culturally” (Hoffman 2001:17).

Between the tenth and twelfth centuries CE, close connections were maintained between the various Mediterranean centers. Cross-cultural and artistic exchanges, as well as flourishing commercial and familial ties, were conducive to artistic circulation and cross-border import and export of objects, materials and ideas (Chen 1997). Regarding findings in the Holy Land, we must add another highly important factor: pilgrimages to the holy places, among them Mount Tabor (Limor 1998).

The Transfiguration, one of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament, is believed to have taken place on Mount Tabor. This sacred site, with its churches and monasteries, has attracted Christian pilgrims from the Early Christian period, through the Byzantine and Crusader periods. To the south of Mount Tabor, there is another sacred location, the village of Nain, where, according to the New Testament, Jesus performed one of his miracles:

*And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain, and many of his disciples went with him... And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak (Luke 7:11–15).*

The diocese of Tabor was one of the most ancient in the Valley of Esdraelon (the Jezreel Valley). The anonymous pilgrim of Piacenza (570 CE) attests to three sacred buildings on the mountain. A century later, the Frankish

bishop, Arculf, spoke of a great monastery with three churches and many cells inhabited by monks (Ovadia 1970:71; Friedman 1982a; Schiller 1992). The mountain does not seem to have suffered from the invasion of the Persians (614 CE), and its devout inhabitants went on with their lives and rites even after the Arab conquest of 637 CE. During the Crusader period, Mount Tabor remained populated. From the chronicles of William of Tyre, it is known that when Tancred was anointed “Prince of the Galilee,” he restored the churches of Nazareth, Tiberias and Tabor. In 1102 CE, there was still evidence of three ancient monasteries surviving on the mountain: one in honor of Our Lord Jesus Christ; another in honor of Moses; and a third, a little further away, in honor of Elijah (Schiller 1992:130–133). It is believed that during the twelfth century, the religious inhabitants of the mountain possessed extensive land holdings: thirty-four villages in the lower Galilee, especially in the area surrounding the mountain, and 22 villages in the Jordan Valley or beyond the Jordan River (Friedman 1982b; Safrai 1982:21–25). The Benedictines abandoned the mountain when the Crusaders were defeated by Saladin at the Horns of Ḥattin (1187 CE). Only in 1204, when the Crusaders signed a truce with Sultan el-‘Adil, did the sultan start the construction of a strong fortress on Mount Tabor. The Church of the Transfiguration and the Benedictine abbey disappeared almost completely under the new constructions. During subsequent crusades, the top of the mountain witnessed time and again battles and destruction. In the spring of 1263, Sultan Baybars conquered the mountain and destroyed its monasteries. After the Crusaders left the area, only two bishops for Tabor were listed: Bishop Walter in the second half of the fourteenth century and Andrea Didaci in 1414 (Friedman 1982b).

We will probably never know for certain how the platter found its way to the vicinity of Mount Tabor and under what circumstances it arrived at KaḤr Miṣr. We can only assume that in the course of the turbulent historical events

that took place in the area, it may have been among the spoils of war, looted from nearby religious establishments by invaders, soldiers, pilgrims, Crusaders or any of the inhabitants who took part in the dramatic happenings around the mountain. In addition, we have to take into consideration that Kafr Mišr is located on the periphery of a principal traffic artery, part of the ancient *Via Maris* that connected Egypt in the south with Syria and Lebanon in the north and continued on to Mesopotamia. Furthermore, Naḥal Tavor, which flows into the Jordan Valley, served as a hiding place for outlaws, who took advantage of the isolated settlements in the region (Vilnay 1945:299).

In spite of the obscurity shadowing the circumstances of its finding, we can be certain

of the platter's religious imagery and style, which are embodied in Christian thought. We may therefore assume that the platter's origin may be found in a Byzantine workshop of the tenth or eleventh century, whence it was imported into the territory of the Holy Land.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The excavation, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Permit No. A-3763), was directed by Danny Syon, with the assistance of Yossi Yaakobi (administration), Yael Gorin-Rosen (glass) and Ayala Lester (preliminary identification of the bronze platter).

<sup>2</sup> Some of the finds are on display at the 'En Dor Regional Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Cutler points out that "The wish to possess what one's superiors enjoyed seems to have pervaded the entire social spectrum." The so-called "industrial arts" he contends, indicate an "aspiration expressed via imitation from near the top to almost the bottom of Byzantine society" (Cutler 1992:770).

<sup>4</sup> A Roman military standard decorated with the monogram of Christ (Beckwith 1979:374).

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