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Actual Problems of Theory and History of Art

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Сборник научных статей содержит материалы Международной конференции молодых специалистов, проходившей на историческом факультете МГУ имени М.В. Ломоносова 24–27 ноября 2011 г. и посвященной актуальным вопросам истории искусства и культуры от древности до современности. В статьях отечественных и иностранных авторов (на русском и английском языках) представлены результаты исследований в области изучения искусства Древнего мира, Византии, Древней Руси, Западной Европы от Средневековья до Нового и Новейшего времени, России XVIII–XX вв., а также теории искусства.

Издание предназначено в первую очередь для специалистов. Может быть использовано в учебной, научно-практической деятельности, а также интересно широкому кругу любителей искусства.

The collection of articles presents the materials of the International Conference of Young Specialists held at the Faculty of History of Lomonosov Moscow State University on November 24–27, 2011. It deals with the actual problems of art history and theory from Antiquity to the present day. The articles by Russian and foreign authors (in Russian and in English) present the results of research in the art of the Ancient World, Byzantium, Medieval Russia, Western Europe from the Middle Ages to the 20th c., Russian art from the 18th to the 20th c., theory of art.

The edition is addressed to art historians, historians, art students and art lovers.

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На обложке использована картина Егора Кошелева «Акмэ», 2005.
Собрание галереи «Реджина», Москва
On the cover: Egor Koshelev, "Acme", 2005. Gallery "Regina", Moscow

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(Sapienza University, Rome)

Early Christian and Byzantine fakes at the turn of the twentieth century: a note on Giancarlo Rossi's Tesoro Sacro

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars interested in history of Byzantine art did not necessarily have to travel to the East to experience its culture and artistic heritage. Throughout Europe there existed not only examples of the influence of Byzantine civilization on Western monumental art, but also many smaller fragments of the lost Empire of Constantinople, including illuminated books, jewels, ivory carvings, icons, textiles and enamels. These so called 'minor arts' were largely present in treasuries, libraries, private collections and museums, and an increasing number of recent researches, as well as the 2011 exhibition *Before the Blisses* at Dumbarton Oaks Library[1], have all highlighted the importance of these objects in shaping scholarly opinions about early Christian and Byzantine art. Pioneering contributions like the *Histoire de l'Art* by Jean-Baptiste Seroux D'Agincourt, together with other seminal studies by scholars such as Jules Labarte, Emile Molinier, Nikodim Kondakov and Ormond Maddock Dalton[2], clearly show how Byzantine objects started to be considered essential when trying to understand the development of European artistic culture.

One of the most difficult challenges faced by scholars at that time was the increasing circulation of fake 'early Christian' and 'Byzantine' artefacts. This phenomenon became widespread in particular during the late nineteenth century: forgers took advantage of the growing commercial interest in those particular kind of products, and many different imitations were gradually put on the international art market. While the practice of detection forgeries was well established within the scholarly field of classical art, these methods had not previously been systematically applied within other historical areas. Consequently, archaeologists and art historians were required to develop new skills and instruments for detecting fakes, not only to ensure accuracy within academic scholarship, but also to protect collectors and museums from unintentionally acquiring unauthentic objects. The case of the fake enamels owned by artist and collector Mikhail Petrovich Botkin is a well-known example of this kind of misinterpretations[3]. The enamels – which were originally published in 1911 by Botkin himself[4] and were afterwards shown in temporary exhibitions – are actually imitations of famous authentic Byzantine works, such as some figures in the Limbourg Staurotheca and others from the Pala d'Oro in the treasury of San Marco in Venice. In 2008, the Italian scholar Fabrizio Crivello was presented with a golden enamelled plaque that contained the bust of *Pantokrator*[5] , which was probably produced by the same artisans who created the Botkin's enamels: these forgers, who worked in St. Petersburg from the last decade of the nineteenth century, were apparently connected with the Fabergé workshop. It seems probable that their activity drew inspiration from the coeval Antonio Pasini's dissertation on the Venice Pala d'Oro in 1885 and Nikodim Kondakov's essay on Byzantine enamels in 1892[6]. The detailed colour plates included in these publications could easily provide excellent models for the fakes.

The situation with ivory carvings is sometimes more complicated. This is due to the great number of pieces that were still circulating in public and private collections at the turn of the twentieth century, and the permanent difficulties that exist in detecting ivory and bone imi-

tations, even after the most advanced scientific analyses[7]. Detection of new forgeries remains, therefore, a frequent phenomenon. The Làzaro Galdiano collection in Madrid, for example, has recently revealed a remarkable group of fakes that imitate early Christian and Byzantine works such as the Barberini ivory in the Paris Louvre Museum and the Veroli casket in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London[8]. During the last few decades, scholars like Anthony Cutler have invested considerable effort into developing new methodological approaches for recognizing the main features of authentic Byzantine ivory pieces: a careful examination of the quality of the material and the carving techniques has become essential to distinguish a fake[9]. Discerning the extent to which these unauthentic pieces are deliberate is, however, a difficult task. At least some of the carvings that are now considered counterfeit were probably created with the intent of being simple copies, without necessarily being deceptive. The case of two bone reliefs (a diptych and a *Pantokrator*) now in the Musei Civici in Bologna provides a clear-cut example. The former owner, painter and collector Pelagio Palagi (1775–1860), who apparently bought the pieces before 1832, was probably well aware that both of them were modern works[10]. An artisan in Milan seems to have been the main architect for a certain number of these copies, some of which are still easily detectable, like the two fragments imitating the Barberini Ivory that are now preserved in the Victoria & Albert Museum[11].

One of the most interesting examples of falsification of early Christian and Byzantine works of art is the case of the so-called 'Tesoro Sacro Rossi', or 'the Rossi Treasury'. This episode is almost forgotten by the modern literature[12], since the fakes seem no longer traceable. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, the story became a very high profile case, one which involved a high-pitched scholarly debate and which provides a relevant example of the evolution of the critical approach towards early Christian and Byzantine minor arts. The affair officially began in 1888–1890, when a sumptuous catalogue of 25 luxurious engraved plates was published by Danesi Press in Rome[13]. These plates, drawn by Pietro De Simone, illustrated the collection of precious gold and silver pieces that comprised the Rossi Treasury, all of which were claimed to have been produced during the "primissimi secoli della Chiesa": the very beginning of Christianity. The catalogue was supported by a long essay written by three different authors: theologian Luigi Di Carlo, archaeologist Giacinto De Vecchi Pieralice and the treasury owner Giancarlo Rossi[14], who was previously known in Rome as a coin collector[15]. In total, the Rossi Treasury consisted of 58 objects: chiselled foils, disks and bookplates, cups, belts, head ornaments, brooches, little crosses or *encolpia*, a mitre, a chalice, and – as the most important piece of the collection – a lamb-shaped Eucharist vase that had been welded onto a tray and was surrounded by twelve small glasses (Pl. 16, 17).

The catalogue, which accurately described each piece, also reported how the treasury had been discovered. According to this official version[16], an anonymous peasant working in an unspecified field in the Marche region in 1880 discovered a large grave with a sarcophagus under the ruins of a country building. When he opened the sarcophagus, the corpse of an ancient bishop appeared, together with a wealth of gold and silver objects, and some parchment books. At that exact moment, a gust of wind passed over the grave, which caused the corpse to disintegrate. The peasant then mysteriously decided not to reveal the place where the treasury had been discovered. Soon afterwards, he gave the surviving pieces to a Franciscan monk, whose identity remained unknown as well. Following several such handovers, the collection eventually reached Pietro Guarantini, an antiquarian and goldsmith working in Rome who specialised in early Christian and Medieval art. Four pieces were bought by Count Grigorij Stroganoff, the famous Russian nobleman who was known as one of the most passionate collectors of antiquities

in Rome[17]. A few more months later, Giancarlo Rossi acquired the remaining 54 pieces in early 1882. The finding was preliminarily announced in February of the same year by Luigi Bruzza, president of the *Società dei Cultori della Cristiana Archeologia in Roma*[18].

The unexpected arrival of this new collection caused a major sensation. According to Rossi's report[19], several of the most important Italian specialists – such as Luigi Bruzza and Raffaele Garrucci – showed great enthusiasm for the uncommon subjects presented on the pieces, which they claimed opened up new perspectives about Christian archaeology and art history. The reception given by international scholars was also largely positive: Jules Helbig and Xavier Barbier de Montault from the *Revue de l'Art Chrétien*, and Anton de Waal from the *Römische Quartalschrift*, for example, dedicated contributions to the Rossi collection and praised the significance of its discovery[20]. The flashy originality and the unusual stylistic features of the pieces were hardly comparable to the traits usually associated with early Christian antiquities, and the descriptions provided in most important publications at the time. It is not surprising, therefore, that specialists advanced very different hypotheses about the treasury's origin and dating. The owner of the collection, Giancarlo Rossi, was convinced that the pieces dated back directly to Constantine's empire, mainly because of the abundance of early Christian symbols such as fishes, doves, peacocks, and even crosses, all of which could be related to Helena's finding of the True Cross in Jerusalem[21]. A radically dissimilar interpretation was put forward by other scholars like Anton de Waal or Barbier de Montault[22]. They noticed an anomaly between the aforementioned symbols and the style of the decorations, which seemed to be too modern to be fit within fourth century norms. Considering that the treasury was supposed to have been buried in an area that was once part of the Byzantine *Pentapolis*, they inferred that it could have formed part of burial of a local bishop from the Exarchate, dating back to the seventh or the eighth century. They further hypothesized that the coexistence of Lombard-style decorations and Greek-inspired costumes could be explained by the cultural and artistic exchanges that would have been commonplace in a territory still politically dominated by the Byzantine Empire.

In 1895 a paper published in the German *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* journal (and later printed in French and Italian[23]), marked a turning point in this debate. The author was the theologian and historian Hartmann Grisar, professor at Innsbruck University. In his essay, Grisar stated boldly that the entire Rossi treasury was a forgery. He recalled that a new critical examination had been strongly encouraged by Count Stroganoff who, just a few years after purchasing four items from the collection, had become suspicious about their authenticity. Grisar had had the opportunity to work directly on Stroganoff's collection and to publish a clear and faithful photographic reproduction. A preliminary examination of the condition of the pieces proved that they had been produced using a very flexible metal – too supple to be dated back to the early Medieval centuries – and that their surfaces had been exposed to an artificial aging process. As for the overall iconography and style, Grisar had noticed many contrasts between the overpopulation of very archaic Christian symbols and the decorative patterns, which seemed to have been roughly copied from Lombard and Carolingian ornamental sculptures. Most of the details on the pieces could not have plausibly been conceived by artists, even as late as in the eighth or the ninth century: the liturgical garments and the mitre worn by several bishop figures provided good examples of these anachronisms. Grisar argued that the absence of any kind of nimbus or monogram – both of which would have provided important clues for dating the pieces – represented an intentional choice by the forger, who probably wanted to offer a generic kind of product, which could easily adapt itself to many possible interpretations.

Grisar's conclusions were largely well-accepted: even the scholars who had previously admired

the Rossi treasury, such as Helbig, de Waal, De Rossi or Marucchi, admitted their mistakes, and praised Grisar for his intuition. Many announcements appeared in the most relevant specialized journals, including the *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* and the *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*[24]. A particularly condemning appraisal was made in the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, in which Karl Krumbacher stated that "the issue of the treasury can be considered dismissed once and for all"[25].

The owner of the treasury, Giancarlo Rossi, was however understandably dissatisfied by this conclusion and the tirade of his irritated denials were collected in a new book that was published in 1896[26]. Grisar answered these with a new short essay[27], in which he referenced the positive reviews he had received from his colleagues and advised Rossi to dampen down the tones of his polemics to avoid further damaging his reputation. Two years later, Rossi suddenly died, and his controversial treasury was rapidly forgotten[28].

The identity of the forger who created these fakes has never been revealed. As Grisar suggested in his first paper, it is quite plausible that Rossi was innocent and that someone had taken advantage of his good faith by selling him the treasury. Consequently, suspicions could fall directly onto the sellers, and feasibly even to Guarantini, who originally owned the pieces in his workshop in Rome. While it is not possible to produce concrete evidence, the fact that Guarantini was a goldsmith by trade, combined with the way in which he tried to exonerate himself after the scandal by accusing an obscure associate who was immediately declared dead[29], do suggest that he may have in some way been culpable for the forgery. Regardless of who was responsible for creating the fakes, it seems reasonable to suppose that the items were produced in Rome. During the second half of the nineteenth century the Italian capital provided the largest quantity of possible prototypes for imitation. In addition to a rich diversity of sculptures and reliefs from the eighth and the ninth centuries, there also existed an increasing number of illustrated journals and monographs which were dedicated to early Christian and Medieval art and were either printed or widely available in Rome. The forger of the treasury could have taken inspiration from the engravings published on the *Storia dell'Arte Cristiana* by Raffaele Garrucci, or the *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* by Giovanni Battista De Rossi. The distinctive style of the figures and decorations, so linear and essential, could be partially attributed to the use of printed reproductions rather than original works.

The precious materials from which the fakes were made meant that they could not reasonably have survived long after Rossi's death in 1898, even if some pieces seem to have been still circulating after the Second World War[30]. Engravings and photographs remain, therefore, probably the only witnesses of this peculiar case of falsification, which in just a few years was almost able to shake the very foundations of archaeology and art history to its core. Although still relatively unknown in modern scholarship, Grisar's essay provides an outstanding example of the modern kind of methodological approach that characterized a new generation of scholars. Their competence and ability in recognizing the true identity of the objects, and consequently their authenticity, came to transform the history of early Christian, Byzantine and Medieval scholarship at the turn of the twentieth century.

Endnotes

[1] *Before the Blisses: 19th century Connoisseurship of the Byzantine Minor Arts* (Dumbarton Oaks Library, April 15, 2011 – July 31, 2011): http://library.doaks.org/exhibitions/before_the_blisses/ (accessed April 21, 2012).

[2] J.-B.L.G. Seroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire de l'art par les monuments, depuis sa décadence au IVe siècle jusqu'à son renouvellement au XVI^e^*, I–VI, Paris 1823 (Italian edition: *Storia dell'arte col mezzo dei monumenti dalla sua decadenza*

nel IV secolo fino al suo risorgimento nel XVI, I–VI, Prato 1826–1829); J. Labarte, *Histoire des arts industriels au Moyen Age et à l'époque de la Renaissance*, I–IV, Paris 1864–1866; E. Molinier, *Histoire générale des arts appliqués à l'industrie, du Ve à la fin du XVIII^e siècle,* I–IV, Paris 1896; N. Kondakov, *Histoire et monuments des émaux byzantins: collection Zwenigorodskoi*, Frankfurt 1892; O.M. Dalton, *Catalogue of early Christian antiquities and objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and mediaeval antiquities and ethnography of the British museum,* London 1901; Id., *A guide to the Early Christian and Byzantine antiquities in the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities,* London 1921.

[3] D. Buckton, in *Fake? The Art of Deception,* ed. by M. Jones, London 1990, pp. 178–179; Id., *Byzantine enamels in the twentieth century,* in *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization. In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman,* ed. by E. Jeffreys, Cambridge 2006, pp. 25–90.

[4] M.P. Botkin, *Collection M.P. Botkine,* St. Petersburg 1911.

[5] F. Crivello, *Ancora uno smalto del falsario di Botkin? A proposito di un medaglione con Cristo benedicente e degli smalti "bizantini" nel XIX e XX secolo,* in *Medioevo: arte e storia,* Proceedings of the International Congress (Parma, Sept. 18–22, 2007), ed. by A.C. Quintavalle, Milano 2008 (I convegni di Parma: 10), pp. 505–512.

[6] A. Pasini, *Il tesoro di San Marco in Venezia,* I–II, Venezia 1885–1887; Kondakov, *Histoire et monuments des émaux byzantins* cit.

[7] A recent comprehensive overview on the technical and scientific determination of the authenticity in art is P. Craddock, *Scientific Investigation of Copies, Fakes and Forgeries,* London 2009. Radiocarbon tests have been recently applied to some ivories preserved in the Victoria & Albert Museum: see P. Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings. Early Christian to Romanesque,* London 2010, pp. 454–455. There is still an ongoing debate regarding the application of modern scientific analyses to medieval ivories: see i.e. the recent Dumbarton Oaks Museum Workshop (June 24th–26th 2011), *Ivory Analysis Combined: Art History and Natural Science*.

[8] G. Bernardi, *Gli avori 'bizantini' del Museo Làzaro Galdiano di Madrid,* in *Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies,* III, Abstracts of Free Communications, Sofia 2011, p. 366; see also A. Cutler, *Nineteenth-century versions of the Veroli Casket,* in *Through a glass brightly: studies in Byzantine and Medieval art and archaeology presented to D. Buckton,* ed. by C. Entwistle, Oxford 2003, pp. 199–209.

[9] See A. Cutler, *The Hand of the Master,* Princeton 1994; Id., *Carving, Recarving, and Forgery: Working Ivory in the Tenth and Twentieth Centuries,* in *West 86th* 18/2 (2011), http://www.west86th.bgc.bard.edu/articles/cutler-carving-ivory.html (accessed April 21, 2012).

[10] I. Nikolajević, *Gli avori e le steatiti medievali nei Musei Civici di Bologna,* Grafis, Casalecchio di Reno 1991, pp. 33–46; G. Gasbarri, *Gli avori bizantini del Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna: arte, collezionismo e imitazioni in stile, in Vie per Bisanzio,* Atti del VII Congresso Nazionale dell'Associazione Italiana di Studi Bizantini (Venezia, 25–28 novembre 2009), in print.

[11] Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings* cit., pp. 432–436.

[12] A. Lipinsky, *Ritorna il "Tesoro Sacro Rossi"?,* in *L'Urbe. Rivista Romana di storia, arte, lettere, costumanze* 27 (1964), pp. 31–37; M. Ibsen, *Tavole XXV riproducenti il Sacro Tesoro Rossi,* in *I Longobardi. Dalla caduta dell'Impero all'alba dell'Italia,* exhibition (Torino-Novalesa 2006–2007), ed. by G.P. Brogiolo, A. Chavarría Arnau, Cinisello Balsamo 2007, p. 297, nr. 5.17.

[13] *Tavole XXV riproducenti il Sacro Tesoro Rossi corredate da III Tavole di Storici Cimelii che ne confortano l'epoca opinata,* Roma 1888 (2nd ed. Roma 1890).

[14] G. Rossi, L. Di Carlo, G. De Vecchi Pieralice, *Commenti sopra suppellettili sacre di argento ed oro appartenute ai primissimi secoli della Chiesa. Pubblicati già il 1° Gennaio 1888 pel faustissimo giorno del sacerdotale Giubileo di Papa Leone XIII e dedicati ai cultori di Archeologia Cristiana da Giancarlo Rossi,* Roma 1888 (2nd ed. Roma 1890).

[15] The bulk of the coins were displayed and sold in December 1880, apparently in order to subsequently buy the "Tesoro": see *Catalogo delle monete italiane medioevali e moderne componenti la collezione del Cav. Giancarlo Rossi di Roma,* Roma 1880; Rossi, Di Carlo, De Vecchi Pieralice, *Commenti sopra suppellettili sacre* cit., pl. XXI.

[16] Ibid. pl. XIX–XXIII, pp. 113–114.

[17] V. Kalpakcian, *La passione privata e il bene pubblico. Il conte Gregorio Stroganoff: collezionista, studioso, filantropo e mecenate a Roma fra Otto e Novecento,* in *Il collezionismo in Russia da Pietro I all'Unione Sovietica*, proceedings (Napoli, 2–4 febbraio 2006), ed. by L. Tonini, Formia 2009, pp. 89–113: 95; see also: S. Moretti, *Sulle tracce delle opere d'arte bizantina e medievale della collezione di Grigorij Sergeevic Stroganoff,* in *La Russie et l'Occident. Relations intellectuelles et artistiques au temps des révolutions russes,* Actes du colloque, Lausanne 20–21 mars 2009, a cura di I. Foletti, Viella, Roma 2010, pp. 97–121.

[18] O. Marucchi, *Conferenze della Società di Cultori della Cristiana Archeologia in Roma (Continuazione e fine dell'anno VII),* in *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana*, IV.II (1883), pp. 73–74.

[19] Rossi, Di Carlo, De Vecchi Pieralice, *Commenti sopra suppellettili sacre* cit., pl. XXII.

[20] J. Helbig, *Le Trésor des ornaments et des instruments liturgiques de la collection du chevalier Giancarlo Rossi à Rome,* in *Revue de l'Art Chrétien* IV.4 (1893), pp. 89–97; X. Barbier de Montault, review on Rossi, Di Carlo, De Vecchi Pieralice, *Commenti sopra suppellettili sacre... cit., Ibid.,* pp. 156–157; A. De Waal, *Longobardische Gold-und Silberarbeiten,* in *Römische Quartalschrift* I (1887), p. 272; Id., *Der Silber-und Goldschatz des H. Cav. Rossi,* in *Römische Quartalschrift* II (1888), p. 86; Id., *Der Silber-und Goldschatz des H. Cav. Rossi, Ibid.,* pp. 148–164; Id., *Eucharistisches Gefäss in Lammes-*

Form, Ibid., pp. 277–280; Id., *Die goldene Krone aus dem Schatze des Cav. Rossi,* in *Römische Quartalschrift III* (1889), pp. 66–70.

[21] Rossi, Di Carlo, De Vecchi Pieralice, *Commenti sopra suppellettili sacre* cit., pp. 85–93.

[22] See especially De Waal, *Die goldene Krone* cit.

[23] H. Grisar, *Ein angeblich altchristlicher Schatz von liturgischen Geräten,* in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* XIX (1895), pp. 306–331. French translation: *Un prétendu trésor sacré des premiers siècles : (le "Tesoro sacro" du Chev. Giancarlo Rossi à Rome) ; étude archéologique,* Rome 1895. Italian translation: *Di un preteso tesoro cristiano de' primi secoli : il "tesoro sacro" del cav. Giancarlo Rossi in Roma: studio archeologico,* Roma 1895.

[24] See i.e. E. Stevenson, review on *Di un preteso tesoro cristiano dei primi secoli…,* in *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* I.1 (1895), pp. 125–126; O. Marucchi, *Conferenze di Archeologia Cristiana (Anno XX – 1894–1895 – continuazione e fine), Ibid.,* pp. 170–171; C. Hofstede de Groot, *Der Tesoro Sacro Rossi,* in *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* XVIII (1895), p. 77.

[25] K. Krumbacher, in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 4 (1895), pp. 643–644.

[26] G. Rossi, *Risposta a certo Padre Grisar della C. Di G., scrittore nella Civiltà Cattolica…*, Roma 1896; see also G. De Vecchi Pieralice, *L' autenticità del s. tesoro del cav. Giancarlo Rossi dimostrata…*, Roma 1896.

[27] H. Grisar, *Ancora di un preteso tesoro cristiano,* Roma 1896.

[28] See the obituary in *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini,* XI (1898), p. 305, with no reference to the fakes. The case of the Rossi Treasury was later recalled in general essays such as K.M. Kaufmann, *Handbuch der christlichen Archäologie,* Paderborn 1905, pp. 72–73.

[29] Rossi, *Risposta* cit., p. 158; Grisar, *Ancora di un preteso tesoro cristiano* cit., p. 13.

[30] Lipinsky, *Ritorna il "Tesoro Sacro Rossi"?* cit., passim.