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*À l'occasion du XII^e Congrès d'études du Sud-Est européen,
Bucarest 2019*

*En hommage à la mémoire de Vassilka Tăpkova-Zaimova,
Professeure d'histoire byzantine et balkanique*

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Sommaire

Dan ZAMFIRESCU, Un témoignage personnel.....	197
Raïa ZAÏMOVA, Les agents diplomatiques de France et les études sud-est européennes.....	199
Biser BANCHEV, Serbia and the European Community before 1989. History Forgotten.....	212
Alexandre KOSTOV, The Trade Relations between Bulgaria and Greece in the 1886 – 1911 Period	226
Dobrinka PARUSHEVA, In the Mirror of the Satire	249
Andrei PIPPIDI – Le prince valaque « Ecorche-chiens » entre la légende et la réalité.....	278
Bernard DOUMERC, Les Vénitiens dans le Péloponnèse : là où les peuples se mêlent (fin du XV ^e siècle)	294
Marie NISTAZOPOULOU-PÉLÉKIDOU, Un texte spécial de Michel Psellos à l'occasion de la fête des tisseuses (milieu du XI ^e siècle)	323
Thomas THOMOV, Mark The Monk From Thebes and His Graffito of the Cross at the Church of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople	334
Кирилл П. ПАВЛИКЯНОВ, История Афонского Зографского скита „Мавровир“ (Черный вир) – неизвестные болгарские свидетельства из архива Зографского Святогорского монастыря.....	351
Tudor TEOTEOI, Sur la disparition du latinisme <i>benefikion</i> du vocabulaire (juridique) byzantin.....	390

MARK THE MONK FROM THEBES AND HIS GRAFFITO OF THE CROSS AT THE CHURCH OF HAGIA SOPHIA, CONSTANTINOPLE¹

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Abstract: This paper deals with a rare example of a graffito, representing a cross of unequal arms having a rectangular base and a tetragram: IC XC NI KA filling the spaces between the cross arms. The cross has decoration consisting of a medallion-like circular frames within the arms and the centre, enclosing small irregular crosses. A semicircular end closed the gaps between the arms at the center thus forming a quatrefoil. Due to the close proximity of an inscription, which reads "Mark the Monk from Thebes" to the cross, one may conclude that the writer and the artist are one and the same person. The decoration of the cross, consisting of circles with small crosses inside can be regarded as most closely associated with pectoral crosses generally datable to the 10th – 11th centuries. It may be permitted to hypothesize that this schematic arrangement of crosses could symbolically represent Christ and the saints or the four evangelists. The fact that the cross is depicted resting on a base indicates that the graffito belongs to the type of liturgical cross that include a platform, presumably to be carried in processions and then returned to a stationary place where it would be visible. The graffito can be approximately dated to the Middle Byzantine period.

Keywords: graffito cross, monk, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, liturgical objects

The Great Church or the church of the Holy Wisdom is a famous sixth-century domed church, which was built by emperor Justinian the Great. It contains an interesting collection of graffiti inscriptions and drawings, some crude and schematic, others remarkably detailed². Thematically, they may be divided into memoranda, inscribed mainly on the occasion of attendance at the church, various inscriptions of an invocative nature, the beginning of an

¹ I would like to express my warmest thanks to Professor L. Dončeva-Petkova and Dr Brad Hostetler for their help and valuable suggestions. Needless to say, any errors are my own.

² Т. Томов, *Непознатият храм „Св. София“*. Част. I. *Надписи-графити на кирилица и глаголица*. София, ЕМАйВи Консулт ЕООД, 2016.

alphabet, human³, magical and animal figures, ships, coats-of-arms⁴, weapons, crosses, game's board⁵, monograms and mason's marks. The autographic, supplicatory inscriptions containing the formula 'Lord, help Your servant X' and those with the formula 'X wrote' occur frequently. The graffiti are written in Greek, Cyrillic, Armenian and Latin script letters. Eighty-five Cyrillic and one Glagolitic inscriptions which have been scratched in almost all parts of the galleries of Hagia Sophia were recently published. A total of 90 graffiti drawings were recorded as a result of my fieldwork in Istanbul between 2005 and 2014. They include many different shapes – from sailing ships, animals, birds, weapons, coats-of-arms and abstract geometrical patterns, to portraits or full scale figures of saints, angels, clerics and laymen⁶. Among them, the most numerous are the ship graffiti (35)⁷. Many of the drawings are highly detailed and accurate, indicating that they have been sketched by skilled visitors.

This paper is the result of a fieldwork during my stay in Istanbul in 2013 r. In the Church of Hagia Sophia, I had the opportunity to observe a graffito, representing a cross of unequal arms having a rectangular base and three arms with pairs of teardrop terminals at their corners. The cross has an inscription

³ К. Савова, Модата според един графит на жена от храма „Св. София в Константинопол“, *онлайн Списание за текстил, облекло, кожи и технологии*, 2018, N 5, p. 134 – 136; Chr. Savova, Th. Thomov, A Woman's Graffito Drawing from Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 2019, N 56 (in press); Chr. Savova, Th. Thomov, Two Graffiti Drawings in the Church of Hagia Sophia, *Bulgaria Mediaevalis*, 2018, N 9, (in press).

⁴ Т. Томов, Гербове-графити от храма „Св. София“ в Константинопол, В: А. Николов (ред.), *REGNUM BULGARIAE. Studia in honorem annorum LX Georgii N. Nikolov*. София, УИ „Св. Кл. Охридски“, 2018, с. 679 – 693.

⁵ Т. Томов, Игра на „дама“ в храма „Св. София“, Константинопол, В: Г. Николов, А. Николов (съст.), *Българско средновековие: общество, власт, история. Сборник в чест на проф. д-р Миляна Каймакамова*, София, УИ „Св. Кл. Охридски“, 2013, с. 437 – 452.

⁶ I discovered 16 coat-of-arms and decided to share them with my Italian colleague Maurizio Carlo Alberto Gorra. He published them in Academia.edu under the title of 'Observations and reflections on some coats of arms graffiti in Santa Sofia in Constantinople' https://www.academia.edu/35771277/Observations_and_reflections_on_some_coats_of_arms_graffiti_in_Santa_Sofia_in_Constantinople – 19.01.2019.

⁷ Recently I have published four ship graffiti which are connected to Viking sailing vessels: Four Scandinavian ship graffiti from Hagia Sophia, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 2014, N 38/2, p. 168 – 184, as well as an ex-voto scene with three vessels and full scale figure of St. Nicholas: Maritime ex-voto graffito from the Church of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, *Byzantinoslavica*, 2015, N 73/1 – 2, p. 57 – 74.

at its upper end, written horizontally with unevenly incised letters, which reads: ΜΑΡΚΟΣ ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ ΘΗΒΕΟΣ. The whole length of the inscription is 41 cm and the height of the letters varied from 1 (ΟΣ, 8) cm to 3.5 cm (Κ). It should be noted that due to natural colors of the marble, some letters at the end of the inscription are legible only under strong light beamed from various angles. Another inscription with the motto ΧΗ ΧC ΗΝ ΚΑ filling the spaces between the cross arms. It is written with a horizontal line over each group of letters, signifying the fact it is an abbreviation. Letters vary in size, from 1 cm (C) to 4.3 cm (K) and their contours are imprecise. There is also an addition of four X placed within the four quadrants of the cross. The cross has decoration consisting of a medallion-like circular frames within the arms and the centre, enclosing small irregular crosses. A semicircular end closed the gaps between the arms at the center thus forming a quatrefoil. The area of the drawing is 19 cm in width and 18 cm in height. The graffito is engraved lightly into the marble plate on the north side of the northwest pylon in the north aisle at about 140 cm above floor level (Fig. 1).

The sure lines and fine details in the graffito indicate that it was carried out by a skilled person using tools. However, irregular shape of individual letters, crossing of individual lines and uneven circles is a result from the fact that the author did not have a proper writing tool. Due to the close proximity of the inscription “Mark the Monk from Thebes” to the cross, one may conclude that the writer and the artist are one and the same person⁸. All of the pairs of Greek letters which occupy the four quadrants of the cross bears the shortening sign on top. Thus, it will be easy to discern that behind them is hidden the most common formula IC – XC NI – KA or in our case “Ι[ησοῦ] σ Χ[ριστὸ]ς Νικᾷ” (Jesus Christ conquers). It does not become common until the eight century⁹. The first two letters are supported on superior arms IC XC

⁸ For Thebes, see T. Gregory, Thebes in Beotia, In: A. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, Vol. III, New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 2023.

⁹ The inscription IC XC NHKA is first documented during Iconoclasm: it appeared in an inscription commemorating the restoration of the walls of Constantinople in 740 – 741 or latter. However, the abbreviated legend may, however, have been used as early as the reign of Heraklios. See A. Frolov, IC XC NI KA, *Byzantinoslavica*, 1968, N 17, p. 104, 106, n. 48, 66; A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin*. Paris, Dossier archéologique, 1957, p. 31, 126; Chr. Walter, IC XC NI KA. The apotropaic Function of the victorious Cross, *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 1997, N 55, p. 194 – 195; L. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth Century Byzantium. Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, Cambridge, Cam-

(Jesus Christ), the second two by lower arms NI KA (conquers). The crosses using the formula are the most common among reliquaries and encolpions. It should also be noted that the author constantly replaces I with H, which suggested that he aimed the vernacular orthography. The violation of standard orthography seems to be a characteristic feature of the provincial monuments of the late 9th century onwards¹⁰. It was often shown at the encolpions as a sign of illiteracy. The letter H is always given as a capital letter. Its midline that links the two vertical bars of the letter in some cases goes beyond them or turn in one or other direction. In the same formula a peculiar form of the ligature HN for NH (or NI) may be observed in the left lower quadrant of the cross¹¹. A mirror image of the abbreviation HC is found at the left upper quadrant. Its closest parallel is an encolpion, described by L. Dončeva-Petkova, and dating to the second half of the 12th century and the first quarter of the 13th century¹².

Next we must note that there are incised four capital X on each horizontal bar across the top of all letters of the abbreviation IC XC NI KA. They can be interpreted as a shortened version of Christ's name with clearly symbolical meaning¹³. In this connection, an important example to be taken into account

bridge University Press, 1999, p. 153. The inscription also appeared with the stepped cross on iconoclast coins, thereby linking the relevant emperors with Christ, Constantine, and victory. See P. Grierson, *A Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, Vol. III, Part 1. Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 1973, p. 411, pl. XXII № Ia.2-Ic.2; Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin*, p. 145, 153 – 155 and for the previous use 27 – 30, 70.

¹⁰ В. Пуцко. Византийский медальон с изображением Георгия-война, *Советская археология*, 1969, N 2, 220 and note 30 with cited literature.

¹¹ For similar ligature, see А. Банк. Византийские серебряные изделия XI-XII вв. в собрании Эрмитажа, XI – нач. XII в., *Византийский временник*, 1958, N 14, p. 235. Cf. also the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Ms. Gr. 510, Bv and Cr (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84522082/f12.item> and <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84522082/f13.item> – 14.03.2019) and two folias from the the so-called 'Bible of Leo' in the Biblioteca Vaticana, Reg. gr. 1B, 1v and 3v (https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.gr.1.pt.B-14.03.2019).

¹² Г. Цанкова-Петкова, *Средновековни кръстове-енколпиони от България (IX – XIV в.)*. София, АИ „Проф. Марин Дринов“, 2011, с. 492, № 1343, Pl. CCVII mirror-image letters X and C in the abbreviation XC.

¹³ For this, see the statement of J. Cotsonis (*Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*. Washington, DC, 1994, p. 54) that the Byzantines used images, inscriptions, and relics to enhance the sacred qualities of the cross.

is an encolpion № 104, which is dated to the end of the 10th – 11th century¹⁴. The four quadrants of the encolpion bears two crossing diagonal lines in the form of Greek letter X.

Another possible alternative explanation is that these X in combination with the horizontal titles over the letters can also be seen as a stars with six rays. It has been suggested that the star with six rays is the sign of The Creator and the first six days of Creation but it is popularly known as the „Star of David”¹⁵. According to the liturgical texts, however, the Emperor Constantine the Great saw a “cross of light with stars” in the heavens¹⁶. As an illustration of this, one can recall a foliated cross with two six-pointed stars in the spaces between the upper cross arms of the Limburg reliquary, a reproductive ‘portrait’ of the True Cross relic (ca. 960 C.E.)¹⁷. However, I do not know an example in which the tetragram appears with six-pointed stars. For this reason, I believe that a most likely explanation is that these four X accompanying the cross would have been intended to indicate its importance.

The most conspicuous characteristic of the graffito is the richness and character of its decoration. It is difficult, however, to determine its exact function, because it is somewhat of a puzzle. The cross is ornamented at the intersection and the arms with small crosses enclosed within a circle or circular border. The first step is to determine exactly what these circles represent. For this reason it is necessary to find the closest analogies to this scheme of decoration. The first three examples comes from the domain of pectoral crosses, ranging in date from the tenth to the twelfth century, and the fourth examples is the Hermitage staurotheke dated to the 11th – the beginning of the 12th century.

¹⁴ Цанкова-Петкова, *Средновековни кръстове-енколпиони*, с. 358, № 104 and с. 546, Tabl. XX, 306 – 307 (decoration).

¹⁵ G. Scholem (*Das Davidschild. Geschichte eines Symbols*. Frankfurt, Iudaica, 1963, p. 86) states that the hexagram had purely decorative purposes, and the origin of the cultic significance of this symbol must be sought in the realm of Jewish magic against demons. E. Goodenough (*Jewish Symbols in the Graeco – Roman Period*. Vol. I, New York, Pantheon Books, 1958, p. 68) has pointed out that the six-pointed star or the “Shield of David” means more generally protection or guard than shield, and simply indicated that the sign brings with it the protection of David.

¹⁶ The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, stikheres-book. Cf. К. Щедрина, «Крест императора Константина Великого» (К вопросу иконографии), В: С. Гнутова (ред.), *Ставрографический сборник. Кн. 2: Крест в Православия*. Москва, изд. Московской Патриархии, изд. «Древлехранилище», 2003, с. 59.

¹⁷ А. Банк, *Прикладное искусство Византии IX – XII вв.* Москва, Наука, 1978, с. 29.

The first example, a lead pectoral cross, was found at Malko Belovo and now is located in the private collection. Dated in the 10th or 11th century, it was made of lead with decoration of five small crosses in the middle of rhombuses¹⁸ (Fig. 2). This scheme of decoration can be seen as a closest analogy to our drawing with one difference – circular medallions are replaced with rhombus.

We may now turn our attention to the next example, an 11th-century pectoral cross from private collection¹⁹ (Fig. 3). Incised four circles outline the cross and a small cross appear at the intersection. These circles with crosses inside look much like of the our example, but the central cross is without circular frame.

The third example is a pectoral cross found in the medieval village of Karasura²⁰ (Fig. 4). Dated to the 10th – 12th century, it was made of stone with carefully engraved small crosses within each of the arms. The intersection of the cross has two crossing diagonal bars but their identification has raised some difficulty to scholars. In his study, for example, G. Tsankova-Petkova has tried to identify these diagonal bars with the Greek letter X or as an abbreviation for the Christ's name²¹. Nevertheless we do not know what arguments that scientist used to support his assumption. It should be consider this example as a more distant parallel to our graffito drawing. In this scheme of things, we can find that the back of staurotheke from the Hermitage Museum shows a patriarch cross, embellished with circular medallions within the arms and the intersections²². Each medallion of the cross encloses an X-shaped ornament. The cross is furnished with a stepped base.

¹⁸ Цанкова-Петкова, *Средновековни кръстове-енколпиони*, с. 452, № 941; 692, Pl. CLXVI.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 471, № 1142, 710, Pl. CLXXXIV.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 201, № 1329; 732, Pl. CCVI.

²¹ All other examples with X-shaped motif at the intersection dates to the 10th- and 11th-century. For this, see Цанкова-Петкова, *Средновековни кръстове-енколпиони*, с. 437, №№ 776 – 778A, 678, Pl. CLII and 351, № 54, 534, Pl. VIII. Such crosses are a characteristic feature of many reliquary crosses originating in the Greek East. According to J. Durand (*La relique impériale de la Vraie Croix d'après le typikon de Sainte-Sophie et la relique de la Vraie Croix du Trésor de Notre-Dame de Paris*, In: J. Durand, B. Flusin (eds.), *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*. Paris, Association des amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2004, p. 98) they are technical means or threads for attachment.

²² Банк, *Византийские серебряные изделия*, с. 234 – 242, Pls. 1 – 5.

All this goes to show that the decoration consisting of circles with small crosses inside can be regarded as most closely associated with pectoral crosses generally datable to the 10th – 11th centuries²³. The small crosses are a regular component of these schemes of decoration, but not always enclosed in circles. In other words, these simplest decorations found in the above cited examples means that they are aniconic. As such, it was direct allusion to the cross as a relic itself, and perhaps also to the cross as a sign of Christ's Second Coming.

It may be permitted to hypothesize that in our scheme of decoration the five small crosses represented Christ in the central rhombus as described in the Apocalypse surrounded by the four evangelists, authors of the four Gospels, in the other rhombuses²⁴. The four gospels dominated Christian iconography: the four living creatures, symbolic of the evangelists, were frequently represented around the divine throne amid cosmic potents underscoring the four square nature of the earth²⁵. Thus numerology is also undoubtedly important to the design. According to N. Pokrovskij the circles with equilateral cross inside were a symbol of the Creation of the World and possibly introduced from the 10th – 11th century²⁶.

Another possible solution leads us to the representation of the Deesis: Christ is placed at the intersection of the cross arms and is flanked by the Virgin and John the Forerunner (or Baptist) in the ends of the horizontal arm, while the images of the Archangels (Michael and Gabriel)²⁷ or various saints²⁸

²³ An early example that would nicely illustrate this composition comes from Byzantine gold cross pendant in the The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which is dated 500 – 700 A.D.: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/473126> 14.03.2019.

²⁴ The four Evangelists is one of the most common subjects of Christian monuments, but the method of representation changed. In the Catacombs at Rome, in the early centuries, Christ is symbolized by the cross and the four Evangelists by four books or scrolls. W. Smith, S. Cheetham, *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities: Comprising the History*. Vol. I. London, John Muray, 1875, p. 70. According to J. Cotsonis (*Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, p. 42): “the specific combination of Saints must have reflected the devotional needs the donor and the setting for which the cross was intended”.

²⁵ H. Holländer, *Early Medieval Art*. New York, Universe, 1974, p. 76, fig. 59, 89.

²⁶ According to Н. Покровский. *Древняя Софийская ризница в Новгороде*. т. I. Москва, 1914, с. 67 – 68; А. Банк, Послесловие к статье А. Смирнова, В: Г. Попов (ред.), *Древнерусское искусство: Зарубежные связи*, Москва, Наука, 1975, с. 41.

²⁷ H. Evans, W. Wixom (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843 – 1261*. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997, p. 60 – 66, №№ 24, 26, 27.

²⁸ Evans, W. *The Glory of Byzantium*, p. 497, № 335.

appear above and below this group. They acquired an intercessory character, the worshippers appealing to the three personages of the Deesis to intercede for them with the Almighty²⁹. It is a common Byzantine iconographical motif used via monograms or images on reliquary, processional crosses and other liturgical vessels. However, these images can be determined in most cases owing to the accompanying inscriptions more successfully. So, if the author of the drawing intended to present a Deesis, then he would have written the abbreviated names of the personages of the scene inside the medallions.

We must also pay attention to other key visual element of our graffito: it sits on a square platform or base. Such variant may have been inspired by one of the monumental crosses that had been set up on the mount of Golgotha in Jerusalem to commemorate Christ's death and Resurrection³⁰. This type appeared on coins³¹, processional and liturgical objects³², as well as in reli-

²⁹ For a discussion of the theme usually designated as the Deesis, see Ch. Walter, Two Notes on the Deesis, *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 1968, N 26, p. 311–336; *Idem*, Further Notes on the Deesis, *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 1970, N 28, p. 161–187; Th. Von Bogay, Deesis und Eschatologie, *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 1967, N 2, p. 59–72; T. Velmans, L'image de la Déisis dans les églises de Georgie et dans celles d'autres régions du monde byzantin, *Cahier Archéologique*, 1980–1981, N 29, pt. I, p. 49–58, 100 and *Cahier Archéologique*, 1983, N 31, pt. II, p. 135–168; A. Cutler, Under the Sign of the Deesis: On the Question of Representativeness in Medieval Art and Literature, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1987, N 41, p. 145–154; L. Bouras, *The Cross of Adrianople. A Silver Processional Cross of the Middle Byzantine Period*. Athens, Benaki Museum, 1979; Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, p. 46, 62, 68–72.

³⁰ A Latin cross on steps is thought to have represented the monumental cross on Golgotha. For this, see E. Dinkler, *Signum crucis. Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament und zur christlichen Archäologie*. Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1967, p. 68; E. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 314–460*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 228–229, n. 49; A. Bellinger (ed.), *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. 1: *Anastasius I to Maurice, 491–602*. Washington, DC. 1966, p. 266–269 and Ph. Grierson (ed.), *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. 2: *Phocas to Theodosius III*. Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 1968, p. 94–99.

³¹ See, the cross-on-steps iconography that is found on coins in the Early Byzantine period: <https://www.doaks.org/resources/online-exhibits/byzantine-emperors-on-coins/sixth-seventh-centuries-emperors-491-717/solidus-of-tiberios-i-578-582-14.03.2019>.

³² Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, p. 106, 110; I. Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 300–900*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 292; Y. Piatnitskii, V. Boelle, and M. Kleitert (eds.), *Byzantium-Jerusalem: Pilgrim Treasures from the Hermitage*. Exh. cat. The Hermitage Amsterdam,

gious art³³. The stepped cross familiar from iconoclast lead seals, for example, remained in the word of N. Oikonomides: “particularly common between the middle of the ninth and the eleventh century”³⁴. Another interpretation of this element is that it may also represent a base or stand for the cross³⁵. A rectangular base at the bottom would have facilitated the use of the cross as liturgical one. The fact that it is depicted resting on a base indicates an original that could have been lifted in and out, presumably to be carried in liturgical ceremonies and then returned to a stationary place where it would be visible.

Additional support for this inference comes from the decorative elements at the corners of each arm of the cross and the angles between the cross-pieces. Without any doubt, they depict pearls and their symbolic meaning is to display the Tree of Life³⁶. As to the decoration at the angles between the cross-

Amsterdam, 2005, p. 36, 40 – 41. H. Evans, B. Ratliff (eds.), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th – 9th Century*. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012, p. 89.

³³ See, for example, the opus sectile panel above the Imperial door in the naos of Hagia Sophia.

³⁴ N. Oikonomides, *Byzantine Lead Seals*. Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 1985, p. 12, № 29.

³⁵ We could find similar examples of a cross on stepped base in two illuminations of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Ms. Gr. 510, Bv and Cr (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84522082/f12.item> and <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84522082/f13.item> 14.03.2019). This painting shows a cross with a tang or handle at the base that is inserted on a stand so that it can be held upright. See, also the cross shown on the lid of the Hermitage’s staurotheke: Банк, Византийские серебряные изделия, Pl. 5, between pages 236 and 237.

³⁶ H. Stern, Les représentations des conciles dans l’église de la nativité à Bethléem, *Byzantion*, 1936, N 11, p. 48 – 151. Cf. А. Банк, Византийские серебряные изделия XI–XII вв. в собрании Эрмитажа, *Византийский временник*, 1958, N 13, с. 214; C. Shepard, Byzantine Carved Marble Slabs, *Art Bulletin*, 1969, N 51, p. 66; P. Mihindukulasuriya, Persian Christians of the Anuradhapura Period, In: P. Mihindukulasuriya, I. Poobalan, R. Caldera (eds.), *A Cultured Faith: Essays in Honour of Prof. G. P. V. Somaratna on His Seventieth Birthday*, Colombo, CTS Publishing, 2011. As W. Hildburgh (On a Copper Processional Cross in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, 1930 – 1931, N 3, p. 248, 250) has pointed out that this was due to wide use of the Coptic crosses with “... disks or knobs at their corners” but, apart from that, he qualifies them as a form of embellishment. Cf. also F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*. Tome III. Deuxième partie, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1907, s.v. Copte, p. 2827. According to the Book of Revelation (Rev. 21:21) the twelve gates of Heavenly Jerusalem are made by pearls. Interpretations of the pearls were powerfully influenced by early Christian writers,

pieces, it is an element common in Byzantine luxury metalwork, where pearls were often used to fill in gaps in metal designs for a 'softened' or more finished effect around the edges³⁷. In our case the depicted circles resemble a pearl ligature, a decorative device used to embellish the point at which the arms and spine of a cross were connected, that is found on some gemmed reliquaries³⁸

For Origen, the pearl symbolized the Word of God in the Kingdom of Heaven; Clement of Alexandria used it as a metaphor for Christ; while Ephraim the Syrian elaborated his idea by interpreting the pearl as a symbol of Christ's dual nature, by virtue of its being at once of mineral and organic origin. For this, see Ch. Meier, *Gemma Spiritualis. Methoden und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese vom frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*. part 1. München, Fink, 1977, p. 95 – 96, 323; T. Jülich, *Gemmenkreuze: Die Farbigkeit ihres Edelsteinbesatzes bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*, *Aachener Kunstblätter*, 1986 – 1987, N 54 – 55, p. 125, 130.

³⁷ J. Anderson, Tiles, Books, and the Church Like a Bride Adorned with Pearls and Gold, In: S. Gerstel, J. Lauffenburger (eds.), *A Lost Art Rediscovered: The Architectural Ceramics of Byzantium*. University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001, p. 125 – 129; P. Hetherington, *Enamels, Crowns, Relics and Icons: Studies on Luxury Arts in Byzantium*. London, Ashgate 2008, p. 259; B. Hostetler, *The Function of Text: Byzantine Reliquaries with Epigrams, 843 – 1204*. Florida State University, 2015, p. 93 file:///C:/Users/1\$/Downloads/PDF%20datastream.pdf – 14.03.2019 (dissertation).

³⁸ For closest examples, see the Limburg Staurotheke (920 – 959), a reliquary type common in Byzantium at least since the ninth century. See most recently H. Klein, *Die Limburger Staurotheke und der kreuzkult in Jerusalem und Konstantinopel*, In: A. Heuser, M. Kloft (eds.), *Im Zeichen des Kreuzes: Die Limburger Staurotheke und ihre Geschichte*, Regensburg, Schnell & Steiner, 2009, p. 13 – 30. See also B. Pentcheva, Containers of power: eunuchs and reliquaries in byzantium, *Res. Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 2007, N 51, p. 108 – 120; J. Rauch, *Die Limburger Staurotheke*, *Das Münster*, 1955, N 8, p. 205 – 212. Other similar examples may also be cited: H. Willard, The Staurotheca of Romanus at Monte Casino, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1976, N 30, fig. 4, Montecassino Cross Reliquary (10th – 12th century), Abbey of Montecassino; St. Papadopoulos, Ch. Kapioldasi-Sotiropoulou (eds.), *Treasury of the Protaton*, vol. 1. Mount Athos: The Holy Community of Mount Athos, 2001, p. 51, fig. 8, a cross from Protaton Reliquary (11th – 12th century), Treasury of the Protaton Monastery, Mount Athos; G. Schlumberger, *L'Épopée byzantine à la fin du X^e siècle*. Seconde partie. *Basile II le tueur de Bulgares*. Paris: Hachette, 1900, p. 68, Modena Cross Reliquary (11th – 12th century), Tesoro del Duomo, Modena; L. Bellosi (ed.), *L'oro di Siena: il Tesoro di Santa Maria della Scala*. Milano, Skira, 1996, p. 109, Siena Holy Blood Reliquary (12th century), Tesoro di Santa Maria della Scala, Siena.

and pectoral crosses³⁹. This pattern was often imitated in sculpture relief⁴⁰ and painting⁴¹.

In sum, the main consequence from the above findings is that the graffito belongs to the type of liturgical cross that include a stepped base, presumably to be carried in processions and then returned to a stationary place where it would be visible. Its attribution is made on the basis of style and details. When the cross is elevated, it is visible from a longer distance, and it captures the awareness and attention of viewers, serving as a rallying point. That function is also essential to the liturgical crosses when they serve as a rallying point.

All of the above cited parallel examples ranging in date from the 10th through the 12th century. As the inscriptions around the cross bears no date, their age must be derived from the words used and the forms of its letters. However, the letters are unsuitable for dating purposes. For this reason the graffito can be approximately dated to the Middle Byzantine period. Nevertheless, one thing is abundantly clear from the inscription a top of the cross, namely that Mark the Monk is the author of the graffito. The details shown on the cross suggests that the author was guided by a real model. But it is difficult to determine precisely whether it was a real object, an image from a Gospel books cover or a manuscript's illustration. As always with graffiti the problem seems to reside in how far one might trust them. Bearing this in mind, we might hypothesize, I believe, that the graffito probably meant to depict a cross which is owned by Mark the Monk.

³⁹ For example, see the pectoral gold cross of the Georgian Queen Tamar (1189 – 1213), dated to the end of 12th and the beginning of the 13th century. Cf. N. Chichinadze, *The True Cross Reliquaries of Medieval Georgia, Studies in Iconography*, 1999, N 20, p. 34 and fig. 4. See, also La Stauroteca Maggiore Vaticana in D. Rezza (ed.), *Museo Storico Artistico del Tesoro di San Pietro. Bollettino d'archivio 18/19*. Vatican City, Edizioni Capitolo Vaticano, 2012, p. 20, Vatican Reliquary Enkolpion (12th century), Museo del Tesoro di San Pietro, Vatican; a pectoral cross of the Cleveland Museum of Art, dated 900s <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1948.20> 14.03.2019.

⁴⁰ Μ. Σκλάβου-Μαυροειδή, *Γλυπτά του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Αθηνών. Κατάλογος*. Αθήνα 1999, σ. 137 (a marble plate, collection of Theseus, Athens, 11th century), Θ. Παζαράς, *Ανάγλυφες σαρκοφάγοι και επιτάφιας πλάκες της μέσης και ύστερης βυζαντινής περιόδου στην Ελλάδα*. Αθήνα 1988, σ. 46, pl. 48 (pseudo sarcophagus from the monastery of St. Panten the Confessor, Athens, 11th century).

⁴¹ N. Thierry, *Haut moyen-âge en Cappadoce. Les églises de la région de Çavusin*. Vol. I. Paris, Paul Geuthner, 1983, p. 20, image 11b, N. Thierry, *La Cappadoce de l'Antiquité au Moyen-âge, Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen-Age*, 1998, N 110/2, p. 882 (St. Basil, Çavusin, Cappadocia, 9th century).

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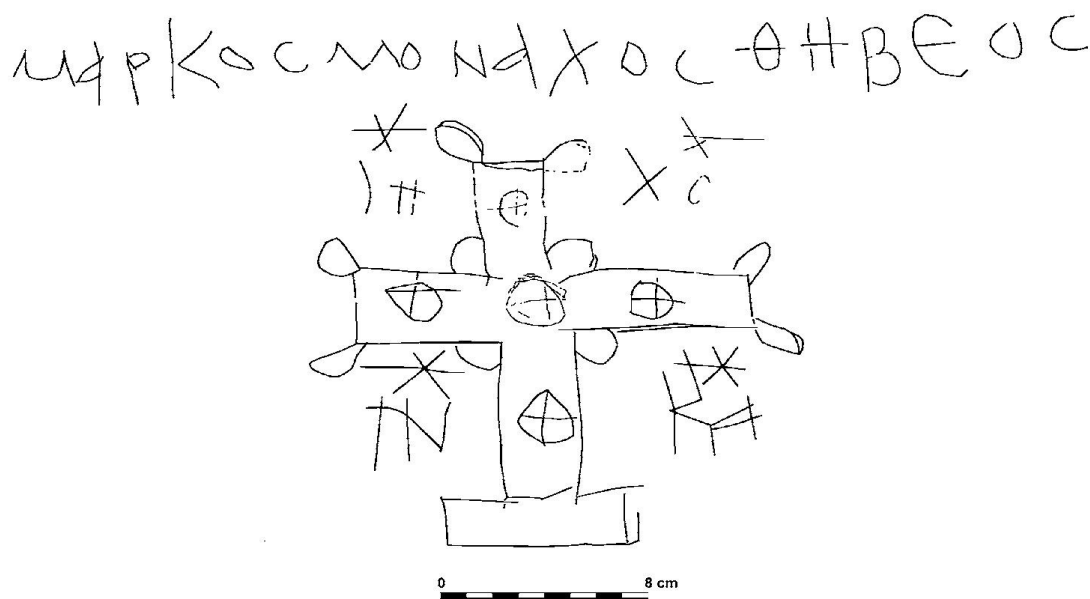
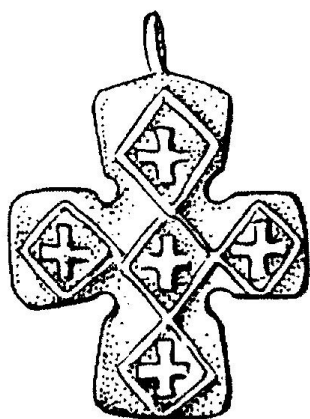
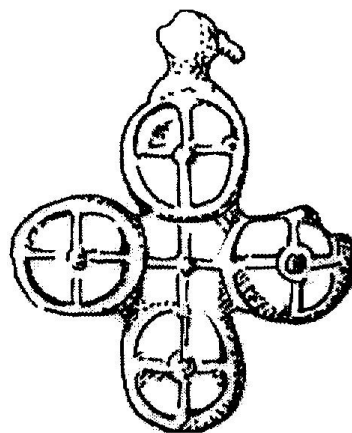


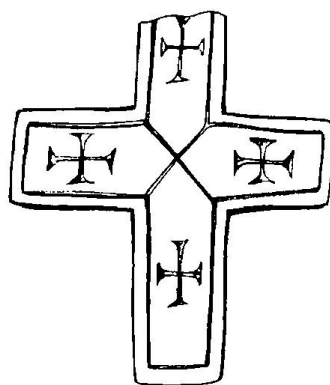
Figure 1. Graffito drawing from Hagia Sophia



*Figure 2, after L. Dončeva-Petkova
№ 941, c. 692, Pl. CLXVI*



*Figure 3, after L. Dončeva-Petkova,
№ 1142, c. 710, Pl. CLXXXIV*



*Figure 4, after L. Dončeva-Petkova,
№ 1329; c. 732, Pl. CCVI, 77*

