



INTERNATIONAL ONLINE CONFERENCE

CHRISTIAN RELICS AND RELIQUARIES FROM
LATE ANTIQUITY TO POST-BYZANTINE TIME:
PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION

PROGRAM



ABSTRACTS

OCTOBER 18-19, 2025

The Center of Medieval Studies
School of Arts and Sciences
Ilia State University



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18

14:00 (CEST 12:00) – Opening

I SESSION

Chair: **Serban Marin**

14:30 – **Athanasios Koutoupas**, *Relics and Pilgrimage: The Cult of Saint Mena in Alexandria.*

14:50 – **Boris Stojkovski**, *Loot Spreading Eastern Christianity - Bulgarian and Byzantine relics in Medieval Hungary.*

15:10 – **Lorenzo Maria Ciolfi**, *From the Death of the Living to the Life of the Dead: The Relics of John III Vatatzes and the Making of a Homeland.*

15:30 – Discussion

16:00–16:20 – Break

II SESSION

Chair: **Brad Hostetler**

16:20 – **Branislav Cvetković**, *The Reliquary of Stefan and Lazar from Vatopaidi.*

16:40 – **Rafaele Menna**, *The Mosaic icon of the Museo Civico di Sassoferato and the fascination of the Icon Reliquary.*

17:00 – **Dorota Zaprzalska**, *Composite Icons as Relics and Reliquaries: Concealment and Revelation.*

17:20 – Discussion

17:50–18:10 – Break

III SESSION

Chair: **Branislav Cvetković**

18:10 – **Nina Chichinadze**, *Revisiting Medieval Georgian Cruciform Encolpia.*

18:30 – **Brad Hostetler**, *A Taxonomy of Relics.*

18:50 – Discussion



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19

IV SESSION

Chair: Boris Stojkovski

14:00 – **Serban Marin**, *The Quest for Holy Relics as a Crusading Element, according to the Venetian Chronicles.*

14:20 – **Anastasios Kantaras**, *A Kind of Magic or Faith? The Case of Byzantine Enkolpia.*

14:40 – **Eliso Elizbarashvili**, *The Sacred in Narrative: Textual Ritualization of Relics in – Byzantine Historiographical Discourse from Procopius to Skylitzes.*

15:00 – **Anna Adashinskaya**, *The Empty Tomb and Echo of Holiness: Relic Absence as Ritual Presence.*

15:20 – *Discussion*

15:50–16:10 – *Break*

V SESSION

Chair: Anna Adashinskaya

16:10 – **Çise İpek Çınar**, *The Influence of the Virgin Mary's Relics on the Marian Representations: Analyzing the Development of the Madonna della Misericordia Iconography through the Case Study of the Galata Icon.*

16:30 – **Tamar Khosroshvili**, *On the Dating of the St. Nino Cross Reliquary.*

16:50 – **Elisabeta Negrău**, *The Reliquary of St. Niphon II of Constantinople at Dionysiou and its Wallachian Iconographic Context.*

17:10 – *Discussion*

17:50–18:10 – *Break*

VI SESSION

Chair: Nina Chichinadze

18:10 – **Marieta Chikhladze**, *Furta Sacra in Word and Image – The Importance of the Relics of Saint Ketevan for the Portuguese Augustinian Mission in the East.*

18:30 – **Chari Chotzakoglou**, *Relics of Travelers and Native Saints in Cyprus.*

18:50 – **Dragoş Gh. Năstăsoiu**, *"Embodied Presence: The Multifunctional Role of St. Ladislav's Bust Reliquary in Late-medieval Hungary".*

19:10 – **Lindsay Corbett**, *Embedding Relics in Icons: Reconsidering the Relationship between Sacred Image and Matter in Later Byzantium.*

19:30 – *Discussion and closing remarks*

NB The program shows the local time, which is 2 hours ahead of CEST



ABSTRACTS

1. **Anna Adashinskaya**, *Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale (CESC)*

The Empty Tomb and Echo of Holiness: Relic Absence as Ritual Presence

This paper explores the continued veneration of sacred sites following the removal or destruction of relics, focusing on two key examples from medieval Serbia: the empty tomb of Simeon Nemanja (St. Simeon the Myrrh-flowing) at the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, and the site of Mileševa Monastery, once home to the relics of his son, St. Sava, the first archbishop of Serbia. In both instances, the absence of the saint's physical remains did not diminish the sanctity of the site; instead, it inaugurated new modes of performative devotion and ritual memory associated with empty tombs of the saints. Simeon's relics were translated from Hilandar to Studenica shortly after his death in 1207, yet his empty tomb at Hilandar remained a place of veneration, sustained by monastic ritual, narrative tradition, and the ongoing perception of his spiritual presence. Similarly, after the Ottomans exhumed and publicly burned the relics of St. Sava in 1594, the Mileševa Monastery continued to function as a devotional center, its empty tomb and memory sites re-signified through liturgy, pilgrimage, and, later, nation-building myth. So, their "empty tombs" remained active loci of spiritual presence and ritual activity.

Central to this process is the concept of contact relics: the idea that sanctity could permeate and remain within the spatial and material environment touched or inhabited by the saint. In both Hilandar and Mileševa, absence did not negate holiness; rather, it catalyzed new forms of veneration grounded in the belief that the space itself had been permanently sanctified. Liturgical commemoration, monastic ritual, and pilgrimage reanimated these tombs as contact sites between the earthly and the divine. These Serbian examples are not isolated. The continued reverence of Myra—despite the translation of St. Nicholas's relics to Bari—and the veneration of the Tomb of the Magi in Milan, after their relics were removed to Cologne, show a broader medieval logic of sacred presence that transcended physical remains. Drawing on theories of performativity and ritual materiality, this paper argues that sacred absence functioned not as a void but as an activated space of memory and ritual practice, where absence itself became a form of presence.

2. **Nina Chichinadze**, *Ilia State University*

Revisiting Medieval Georgian Cruciform Encolpia

The relics of the True Cross and their reliquaries have been examined from multiple perspectives by scholars over the decades; however, Georgian material has received comparatively limited attention within Western scholarship. This paper focuses on a group of cruciform encolpia from the medieval period, preserved in the Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts. These encolpia—crafted from precious metals such as gilt silver and gold, and adorned with refined cloisonné enamel and niello decoration—reflect the complex religious, cultural, and social environment and their historical context.

Throughout the centuries, various religious practices, rituals, and objects were developed to facilitate communication with the Divine. Encolpia containing relics of the True Cross were regarded as powerful mediators, granting access not only to the divine realm but also to the Biblical past associated with the sacred fragments they enclosed. Cruciform phylacteries served both as instruments of personal protection and as tangible expressions of the owner's piety and identity. Preserved encolpia made for the medieval elite demonstrate various artistic and conceptual approaches to the housing of relics and their visual manifestation. The inscriptions of the owners reveal the intention of the believers and their aspirations. It has been suggested that wearing the icon-encolpia imitates the icon processions; therefore, it could be assumed that the wearing of cruciform encolpia with the True Cross relics echoed processions with crosses.

3. Marietta Chikhladze, *Ilia State University*

Furta Sacra in Word and Image – The Importance of the Relics of Saint Ketevan for the Portuguese Augustinian Mission in the East

The eighteenth-century azulejos panel in Graça monastery in Lisbon, that represents the martyrdom of the Georgian Queen Ketevan in Shirāz (1624), shows the delivery of her relics to her son, King Teimuraz I (1628) by the Augustinian Missionary – Ambrósio dos Anjos, handing over the queen's remains to King Teimuraz in a box inscribed with the words: Ossos de R. [rainha] Martir [bones of the martyred queen]. The tall figure of Teimuraz is shown in profile, wearing a turban adorned with a crown in order to highlight his royal origins and distinguish him from the surrounding figures. Teimuraz leans forward from his throne, extending his hands towards the box held by the missionary, while the eyes of his entourage are also fixed on the queen's remains.

Canonized as a saint by the Orthodox Church and venerated by the Catholic community, holy relics of the martyred queen, stolen and secretly transported by Portuguese missionaries from Shiraz to Old Goa and later disseminated throughout the Christian world, quickly became a means of consolidating political power and establishing diplomatic relations among Christian States. As part of these exchanges, Teimuraz granted Portuguese Augustinians permission to establish a mission in Georgia in exchange for the repatriation of Queen Ketevan's relics. Similarly, he later sent part of the relics to Tsar Alexis I of Russia, seeking a new political ally to counteract the Islamic powers, leveraging their shared Christian faith as a unifying bond.

Comparing the different textual and visual sources, this paper will explore the role that the relics of Queen Ketevan had for the Portuguese Augustinian Mission in the East during the 17th and 18th centuries, while analyzing the political significance of gifting relics of the martyred queen.



4. Charalampos Chotzakoglou, *Hellenic Open University*

Relics of Travelers and Native Saints in Cyprus

Cyprus' geographical location, situated in the middle of the trade routes of three continents and on the route to Jerusalem, made it an important stepping stone for travelers. However, it also formed the boundary between Christendom and Islam. On the one hand, the progressive spread of Muslim Arabs caused migratory flows of Christians to the island, who brought with them the relics of their saints from the areas they were abandoning (e.g. relics of St. Kyprianos and Ioulitta from Syria); on the other hand, the Arab raids against Cyprus led to the translation of holy relics (e.g. Lazarus, Spyridon, Theraon) to safer areas of the Byzantine Empire. Also interesting are cases of nonnative saints, who died during their stay in Cyprus (e.g. Hilarion, Lazarus, John of Montfort), cases of relics that were cut into pieces (e.g. Triphyllios) or stolen from Cyprus (e.g. Hilarion, Palamon), or cases of relics that were bought and brought to the island (e.g. Philippos). The presentation will focus on such cases, focusing on how relics, their reliquaries, or their sarcophagi contributed to the development of veneration and their role in shaping cultural and religious identities, especially during the period of the Latin occupation of Cyprus. Furthermore, we will offer insights related to the relationship between relics and pilgrimage traditions and their devotional practices.

5. Çiše İpek Çınar, *Sabancı University*

The Influence of the Virgin Mary's Relics on the Marian Representations: Analyzing the Development of the Madonna della Misericordia Iconography through the Case Study of the Galata IconPortuguese Augustinian Mission in the East

The relics of the Virgin Mary have been one of the fundamental aspects of the Christian belief system and practices, particularly effective in emphasizing her immaculate, miraculous nature to the faithful. As priceless artifacts attaining the divinity and humanity of Mary, Marian relics were embraced as objects of veneration for centuries, thus shaping the religious textures of cultural milieus they were housed in, along with the devotional and cultic practices taking place in those cities. Among those cultural milieus, Constantinople, the imperial city of Byzantium, comes to the forefront with the variety of relics and Marian cult centers it contained, including the Virgin's maphorion preserved in the Soros of the Blachernai Church and her girdle in the Chalkoprateia Church. The existence and veneration of the Marian relics, along with the miracle narratives that surfaced around them, were influential in developing particular Marian iconographical types in the East and the West. A significant Marian iconography that was popular in the Latin West extensively in the 13th-16th centuries, Madonna della Misericordia, emphasizing the merciful nature of the Virgin Mary and her protective role over humankind by representing her gathering a group of people underneath her maphorion, highlights the influential role of the Marian relics on the development of her iconographical types. This paper aims to analyze the Misericordia iconography and its development by investigating the possible roles of the Marian relics, particularly her maphorion, by utilizing the Marian icon in the church of Saints Peter and Paul in Galata, Istanbul, as a case study. Given that this particular icon employs a composite nature, i.e., composed of a 13th-14th century wooden panel and a silver revetment covering the wooden icon of the Virgin Mary and the Child with the Misericordia iconography applied at the end of the 17th century (c.1699), it emphasizes on the Marian legacy of Constantinople from Byzantine to Post-Byzantine era through surfacing the significance of the maphorion and other Marian relics for centuries.



6. Lorenzo Maria Ciolfi, *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*

From the Death of the Living to the Life of the Dead: The Relics of John III Vatatzes and the Making of a Homeland

Emperor John III Vatatzes, who ruled the Empire of Nicaea with great success in the mid-13th century, was swiftly recognized and venerated as a merciful saint following his death. This veneration stemmed not only from his astute and vigorous political leadership but also from his profound benevolence toward his people. A particular hagiography dedicated to him by George of Pelagonia (14th century, third quarter) offers invaluable insight into the process through which his relics emerged – an exceptional case within the broader context of Byzantine culture.

Through an analysis of hagiographical texts and liturgical fragments, it becomes evident that from this moment onward, the relics of the sovereign was the driving force of a long and highly distinctive trajectory, ultimately elevating John III Vatatzes to a figure of both historical significance and saintly veneration. From the 15th century, following the fall of Asia Minor to Muslim rule, the remaining Greek communities – particularly those in Lydia – faced the urgent challenge of defining their identity in relation to both other Greek groups and foreign powers. In response, they cultivated a collective memory centred on a glorious and unifying episode from their past: Vatatzes' reign. Initially, this memory functioned as a means of survival; over time, however, it became the foundation upon which they envisioned their future, particularly as revolutionary and nationalist ideas began to spread from Western Europe – ultimately contributing to the emergence of the Modern Greek nation. By tracing the long and intricate trajectory of veneration surrounding this emperor's relics, we gain deeper insight into the defining characteristics of the phenomenon "Vatatzes". At the same time, this analysis sheds light on the broader mechanisms by which the Greeks reinterpreted their past, transforming it into a cornerstone of their collective memory within the Aegean world and into a heroic presence within contemporary society.

Embedding Relics in Icons: Reconsidering the Relationship between Sacred Image and Matter in Later Byzantium

Relics were rarely embedded into sacred icons in Byzantium and fewer than a dozen examples survive. Remarkably, two were commissioned by a single patron: Maria Palaiologina, basilissa of Ioannina (r. 1366/67–d. 1394). The first of these, the Cuenca Diptych, features an opulent interior laden with icons of twenty-eight saints, who all bear relics in small cavities incised into their portraits. With its two faces joining at a hinge, the Cuenca Diptych participated in a dynamic of revelation characteristic of Byzantine reliquaries.

However, a second relic-icon commissioned by Maria Palaiologina, now at the Monastery of the Transfiguration in Meteora, complicates this reading. Closely modeled on the Cuenca Diptych's left panel, this icon features the Virgin and Child surrounded by fourteen saints with relic niches. Though a faithful visual copy, as a single-paneled icon, it abandons the dynamic of revelation in favor of presentation. Given that relics were typically concealed in Byzantine practice, their overt display here marks a significant deviation, challenging the classification of the object as a reliquary and signaling an ideological shift in the presentation of sacred matter.

A third icon, also made for Maria, provides a revealing foil. Depicting the Doubting Thomas, it contains no relics but similarly centers on tactile faith, depicting the moment Thomas is invited to touch Christ's wound. But, in a striking departure from scripture, Maria inserts herself into the scene, interrupting the exchange as an active participant. This unprecedented intervention transforms the biblical narrative into a personal statement on the power of haptic devotion. In considering these three icons in light of each other, this paper proposes that they form a continuum of material and representational possibilities for the late Byzantine icon, challenging traditional assumptions surrounding the rigid divide between sacred image and matter in Byzantine devotion.

8. Branislav J. Cvetković, *Regional Museum Jagodina*

The Reliquary of Stefan and Lazar from Vatopaidi

Among luxurious items kept in the Vatopedi monastery on Athos, there is a richly decorated cross reliquary from the 14th Century, which once belonged to the monastery Nova Pavlica in Serbia as a votive gift from the noblemen Stefan and Lazar of the Moussich clan. The cross is placed in a rectangular cypress box, containing fourteen small compartments housing relics closed with silver covers displaying busts of saints equipped with Slavonic inscriptions. A number of questions are open, from the epigraphic dossier, complex structure, to historical context, and ideological issues. The fact that this reliquary is kept in the altar of the Vatopaidi katholikon has often caused its unavailability for research. Also, the time or circumstances when it reached Vatopaidi are still unknown.

The stem of the cross bears incised inscriptions: the shorter on the front side displays concise devotional prayer for the souls of Stefan and Lazar, while the longer on the back has basic data of the gift to the monastery of the Presentation, naming again Stefan and Lazar, and their mother nun Theodosia (formerly Dragana, the sister of Prince Lazar), as well as John, the metropolitan of Toplica.

Although the reliquary has been known to scholars since the early 19th Century, it received more attention only much later. Grujić was the first to provide a description of its structure and the relics with legends transcribed in modern script. More recently, Todić published captions given with an ancient font. However, results of new analyses reveal that some inscriptions have not been deciphered at all, while others were read imprecisely. Crucial problems are the dating of the constituent parts of the whole made up of chronologically distinct parts, and the establishment of the proper historical context of the reliquary due to baseless conviction in earlier scholarship that the metropolitan was the third brother of the donors.

9. **Eliso Elizbarashvili**, *G. Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Studies, Ilia State University*

The Sacred in Narrative: Textual Ritualization of Relics in Byzantine Historiographical Discourse from Procopius to Skylitzes

Modern scholarship views Byzantine historiography not merely as factual record-keeping but as a cultural and ideological expression. Composed by educated elites often linked to the court or Church, these texts reflect the authors' values and intentions, addressing an audience that shared their religious, political, and intellectual worldviews. Within this context, the paper deals with the perception of relics in Byzantine historical discourse, considering that these sacred objects functioned as essential narrative devices explaining military victories, miraculous healings, or divine judgments.

The selected cases of textual ritualization will be discussed from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages (Procopius of Caesarea, Leo the Grammarian, Theophanes Continuatus, Symeon Magister, Joseph Genesius, John Skylitzes, Michael the Syrian, Constantine Porphyrogennetos, and others) including the defense of the city of Apamea through the power of the Holy Cross, the translation of the Mandylion and the right arm of John the Baptist to Constantinople, liturgical procession with the True Cross and the holy Robe of the Theotokos along the city walls to invoke divine aid. These narratives incorporate themes such as the sanctification of cities, the apotropaic function of relics, intervention in battles, the Adventus ceremony, and the act of consensus omnium as a symbol of imperial legitimacy.

The paper argues that historiographical texts did not merely record the presence of relics and icons; they performed them. Through vivid descriptions, miracle accounts, and liturgical allusions, authors transformed sacred objects into active agents within their narratives. This textual ritualization paralleled the performative nature of Byzantine religious life, in which relics were carried in processions, venerated in churches, and believed to mediate divine presence. By embedding these elements into their narratives, historians sought to recreate the sacred experience for their readers.

10. **Brad Hostetler**, *Kenyon College*

A Taxonomy of Relics

What types of matter were considered sacred relics (*leipsana*) in Byzantium, and how were they categorized and valued? In contemporary discourse, we typically distinguish between primary relics (those that came from the body) and secondary relics (those that came in contact with the body). As demonstrated by Julia Smith for relics of the medieval Latin West, this system and prioritization of bodily relics over other types of sacred remains is not grounded in the sources. In this paper, I build upon Smith's conclusions and explore other ways in which the Byzantines conceptualized their sacred matter.

Through an examination of reliquaries, epigrams, and literary sources, I show that the Byzantine relics encompassed a wide range of materials including wood of the True Cross, the garments of the Mother of God, the bodily remains of saints, as well as the oil that gushed from their tombs. I examine three different ways in which relics were ordered and valued in Byzantium. First, I discuss the evidence that shows a value system based on heavenly hierarchy, where relics of Christ are in the primary position, followed by those of Mary and John the Baptist, then relics of the Apostles, and then by the remains of post-biblical saints and martyrs. Next, I examine a distinguishing of relics based on their supply, which I term non-renewable and renewable relics — that is, relics that have a finite supply and those that can be generated and "grown". Finally, I look at the Byzantine discourse surrounding relic collections, where no one relic stands out; rather, the presence of the group or holy collective is what was most valued. These three perspectives will help us better understand the various relic taxonomies that existed in Byzantine practice.

11. **Anastasios Kantaras**, *Aristotle University of Thessaloniki* **A Kind of Magic or Faith? The Case of Byzantine Enkolpia**

In the course of human history, amulets as objects belong to a special category, as they are associated with the meaning of the Sanctum. Specifically, man, through amulets, tried to approach the divine and provide the necessary protection in order to be able to cope with the difficulties of his life. Somehow, amulets are transformed into objects of an apotropaic nature, which are able to prevent evil to their possessor by invoking the good supernatural powers. With the advent of the new religion of Christianity, amulets as objects acquire a deeper background, as they are closely linked to the faith. In Byzantium, the construction of enkolpia is part of this concept, on the one hand, about protection from evil forces and, on the other hand, about enlightening the soul of the holder by strengthening his faith. Some of these enkolpia had inside them small parts of the sacred wood of the cross of Christ, which were accompanied by verses, thus clarifying the properties of the object and the expectations of its holder. In these last cases of enkolpia, this speech will try to shed light, drawing some basic thoughts.

12. **Tamar Khosroshvili**, *G. Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Tbilisi State Academy of Arts*

On the Dating of the St. Nino Cross Reliquary

One of the most revered relics of the Georgian Orthodox Church is the Cross of St. Nino of Cappadocia, the Enlightener of Georgia, which has been preserved to this day and is currently enshrined in the Sioni Cathedral of Tbilisi. The cross rests in a specially crafted repoussé reliquary. While the Cross itself has been the focus of numerous publications and scholarly attention — and will undoubtedly remain so — its metal reliquary has never been the subject of a dedicated study. An inscription on the back of the reliquary mentions its patron, “King Vakhtang,” but due to damage to the text, it remains unclear which King Vakhtang is referenced. In the scholarly literature, the prevailing view has been that the reliquary was produced in the Seventeenth century, and thus its patronage is usually attributed to King Vakhtang V Shahnava (1656–1675). This assumption is further reinforced by the presence of an inscription bearing the name of Vakhtang V’s son, King Archil (1661–1713), on the icon that once served as the reliquary’s cover. However, this inscription appears not on the icon itself, but rather on the reliquary for other relics attached to the icon. A stylistic analysis of the repoussé work casts doubts on this widely accepted Seventeenth-century dating. Certain features of the reliquary indicate an eighteenth-century origin, including artistic details that are paralleled in numerous pieces of Georgian and foreign metalwork and other media of that period. In this case, the likely patron emerges as King Vakhtang VI (1716–1740s)— a hypothesis that aligns not only with stylistic evidence, but also with a number of historical facts and the king’s well-documented cultural and artistic initiatives. Determining the precise date of the reliquary is not merely a matter of establishing its artistic provenance; it also has broader implications for understanding the cultural and political context of the period. Identifying the correct royal patron—whether King Vakhtang V or King Vakhtang VI—not only clarifies the historical setting in which the reliquary was created but also sheds light on issues of royal patronage, ecclesiastical art production, and the shaping of Georgian identity during a complex era of the country’s history.

13. **Athanasios Koutoupas**, *The Cyprus Institute's Science and Technology in Archaeology Research Center (STARC)*.

Relics and Pilgrimage: The Cult of Saint Mena in Alexandria

The site of Saint Mena in Alexandria stands as one of the most significant pilgrimage centers of Late Antiquity, attracting devout travelers from across the Mediterranean. The veneration of Saint Mena's relics played a central role in the development of pilgrimage traditions at the site, shaping both religious practices and the spatial organization of the sanctuary. The presence of healing springs, ex-voto offerings, and an extensive architectural complex underscores the multifaceted nature of the pilgrimage experience, where the relics of the saint functioned as a focal point for communal devotion and personal supplication. This paper reassesses the interconnection between relic veneration and pilgrimage by critically examining the material culture associated with the site, including ampullae depicting the saint, inscriptions, and architectural remnants. It explores how the dissemination of Mena's relics and pilgrimage souvenirs contributed to the spread of his cult beyond Egypt, reinforcing transregional devotional networks. Furthermore, it engages with theoretical perspectives on relics as performative objects that mediate sacred presence and pilgrimage as a socially constructed experience that shapes religious identities. By applying concepts from semiotics, memory studies, and pilgrimage theory, this study offers a new interpretation of how material culture facilitated the expansion of Saint Mena's veneration. Additionally, this paper situates the pilgrimage site of Saint Mena within a broader comparative framework, drawing connections with similar Late Antique and Byzantine pilgrimage centers. By highlighting the unique role of relics and ampullae in structuring transregional devotion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ways in which sacred landscapes, religious memory, and pilgrimage practices intersected in the Christian Mediterranean.

14. **Șerban V. Marin**, *National Archives of Romania*

The Quest for Holy Relics as a Crusading Element, according to the Venetian Chronicles

The paper relies upon a number of almost 300 Venetian chronicles that cover the period between the 11th and the 13th centuries. It is about the interval that includes the classical crusades directed against the Muslims in the Holy Land. Almost all these chronicles make references to the events that could be regarded as representing the Venetian involvement in three major crusades, as follows:

- the Venetian supposed participation in the conventional First Crusade;
- the crusade promoted by Doge Domenico Michieli;
- the Fourth Crusade.

As these major crusading events are represented in the Venetian chronicles, it results that, beside the main elements that define a crusade – that is, the taking up of the Cross, the Papal involvement, the action beyond the sea (*Crux transmarina*), the military feature, the presence of the Muslims as opponents, the multiethnic feature – it is another element that defines a crusade, that is the quest for holy relics. According to the Venetian chronicles, the holy relics are present to a significant extent as being connected to the Venetian fleets that crossed the sea towards the Holy Land. Concretely, it is about the relics of St Nicholas and St Theodore in the First Crusade, of St Donatus and St Isidore during Domenico Michiel's campaign; of St Lucy, St Agatha, and St Simon the Prophet in the context of the Fourth Crusade. To them, one could add the many relics brought to Venice from Constantinople during the existence of the Latin Empire of Constantinople (1204-1261). The high percentages in which these holy bodies are referred to in their chronicles testify that the Venetians were not interested to such a high degree in reaching commercial privileges and benefits as they had in intention to acquire relics.

15. **Maria Raffaella Menna**, *University of Tuscia*

The Mosaic Icon of the Museo Civico di Sassoferatto and the Fascination of the Icon Reliquary

The mosaic icon with the figure of St. Demetrius kept at the Civic Museum of Sassoferatto, dated to the beginning of the 14th century, constitutes a very special example of a reliquary icon. The figure of the saint, dressed in military garb with a spear and shield with a rampant lion, is paired with a terracotta ampulla also with the figure of St. Demetrius, containing the “sacred balsam” inserted in the silver frame. On the right side of the frame the balsam in the ampulla is indicated to have come from the well where St. Demetrius was buried and from which the saint caused the fragrant ointment to gush out, while ‘inscription on the left side of the frame now lost, but known through Vasilev’s transcription (1950), reported the prayer for the saint to support him Emperor Justinian in the fight against his enemies. If the mosaic by its stylistic features and fineness of execution, is to be referred to the Constantinopolitan sphere, the arrangement of the frame is assigned to a later time on the basis of some antiquarian and intentionally antiquating elements of the inscriptions, probably at the time when the artifact entered the collection of Niccolò Perotti, a humanist from Sassoferatto and secretary of Cardinal Bessarione. It was probably at this time that the silver frame with the ampulla was inserted from an Italian workshop, transforming the mosaic icon into a reliquary, as the ampulla’s oversized dimensions compared to the mosaic seem to indicate. The contribution, starting from the Sassoferatto icon, aims to investigate the role of Byzantine icon-reliquaries within the collections of Italian humanists in the 15th century and their transformations.



16. **Dragoş Gh. Năstăsoiu**, *Art Conservation Support (ACS)*

Embodied Presence: The Multifunctional Role of St. Ladislav’s Bust Reliquary in Late-medieval Hungary

The 14th-century Chronicle of the Anonymous Minorite recounts a miraculous episode happening in 1345, in which the relic of the Hungarian Holy King Ladislav I (r. 1077–1095) vanished from the Cathedral of Oradea during a battle with the Tartars, only to reappear later, sweat-soaked, as if it had just returned from combat. Under the guise of a crowned horseman wielding a battle axe and aided by the Virgin Mary, the saint reportedly defeated the enemy before returning to his reliquary and resting place in the cathedral. Kept today in the Cathedral of Győr, this bust reliquary – still housing the saint’s skull – originated from Oradea, the site of St. Ladislav’s original tomb and cult. A masterwork of late-medieval silversmithing, it is a composite piece that was assembled over time (14th to 17th century) and was modeled in life-like proportions to represent the saint’s actual head. Its human-like shape and size enabled the faithful to perceive the saint not only as symbolically present, but bodily active in their world.

This paper explores the multiple roles played by such life-sized bust reliquaries in the Late Middle Ages, focusing on St. Ladislav as a case study. Drawing on both textual accounts and visual representations, it examines how these objects functioned in a wide range of contexts: military (divine intervention in battles), thaumaturgic (healing of physical ailments), devotional (pilgrimages), legal (ordeals by hot iron performed at the saint’s tomb), and political (oath-swearing of anti-royal conspirators or legitimizing post-coronation rituals of Hungarian kings). By embodying the saint in tangible form, these types of reliquaries served as more than mere containers for holy remains; they operated as participants in social, religious, and political life. Subsequently, this paper aims to illuminate how the anthropomorphic nature of such reliquaries shaped medieval perceptions of presence, agency, and sacred power.

17. **Elisabeta Negrău**, *“George Oprescu” Art History Institute, Romanian Academy*

The Reliquary of St. Niphon II of Constantinople at Dionysiou and its Wallachian Iconographic Context

The Dionysiou reliquary dedicated to St. Niphon II of Constantinople (†1508), crafted in the form of a cross-in-square church, represents a puzzling piece for art historians. This reliquary is unusual within the Orthodox world because of its church-like form, which is rare for Byzantine reliquaries but common in Western traditions. It has five domes and decorative elements which blend Byzantine and Gothic features. Former Ecumenical Patriarch Niphon II (in office 1486–1488, 1497–1498, and 1502) had a few of his later years before his death linked to the Principality of Wallachia. He was residing in Târgoviște (the capital and residence of the Wallachian ruler) from 1503 to 1505, following his deposition by the Ottoman Sultan. Niphon led the Wallachian Church under Voivode Radu the Great (r. 1495–1508). He then left for the Dionysiou Monastery from 1505, where he stayed until his death in 1508. Voivode Neagoe Basarab (r. 1512–1521) met Niphon during his time in Wallachia. The former patriarch became a mentor to the young nobleman. Neagoe, in 1515, exhumed Niphon’s relics at Dionysiou, and finding them uncorrupted, commissioned the reliquary still at Dionysiou.

The provenance of the models and the workshop responsible for their creation has not been fully clarified, despite the recent growing interest in this piece. This study argues that the reliquary was worked after a Wallachian model supervised by Neagoe Basarab, most likely by craftsmen from Transylvania. It shows similarities to Neagoe’s monastic foundation at Curtea de Argeș (built 1512–1517), another unique architectural masterpiece that combines Byzantine, Gothic, and Islamic elements. In this grand Wallachian monastery, Neagoe organized in August 1517 the canonization of St. Niphon through a procession that included the Ecumenical Patriarch and all the hegumens of Mount Athos. The study will also examine issues related to the hybridity of these creations and the cultural significance of these intertwined references to Byzantine, Gothic, and Islamic models.



18. **Boris Stojkovski**, *University of Novi Sad*

Loot spreading Eastern Christianity-Bulgarian and Byzantine relics in medieval Hungary

The paper examines three particular cases where Eastern Christian (Bulgarian and Byzantine) relics have been taken to Hungary as a spoil of war. The first case is from the beginning of the 11th century, when Hungarian King Stephen I helped Byzantine Emperor Basil II in his conflict with Samuel’s Empire. When conquering and plundering Skopje, most probably sometime after 1003, Hungarians also took the relics of Saint George, as well as Saint Nicholas of Smyrna and other relics. The question of the identity of one Saint Geroje will also be discussed, as well as the further destiny of these relics.

In the large-scale Byzantine-Hungarian war that broke out in 1071, the Hungarian troops conquered the important city of Niš. From the church dedicated to Saint Procopius, Hungarians took the relics of the said saint and transferred them to Sirmium, i. e. present-day Sremska Mitrovica, an ancient ecclesiastical center. It remained there until 1165, when these relics were returned to Niš.

Finally, the third example dates from 1183. During the largest part of the 12th century, Serbia and Hungary were allies in their struggle against the Byzantine Empire. One of many war episodes occurred in 1183 when Hungarian King Béla III, helped by Serbian Grand Prince Stephen Nemanja, continued to attack the Byzantine Balkans. Hungarians have reached Niš and Serdica, and after that, they have plundered the Rila monastery. The relics, presumably the whole body, of Saint John of Rila were transferred to Esztergom. This episode is of particular interest due to the fact that it is a unique example of Byzantine, but also Bulgarian Orthodox tradition and influence on Hungary and its ruler.

Composite Icons as Relics and Reliquaries: Concealment and Revelation

Composite icons – icons formed by inserting one panel into another, each individually created at a different time – are a rare and intriguing category of Byzantine and post-Byzantine art. First described by Panayotis L. Vocotopoulos, they have typically been interpreted as the result of a method employed to maintain icons in good condition. However, the diversity of insertion techniques and the variety of motivations of those who created them suggest more complex functions.

Building on Anastasia Tourta's proposal to view composite icons as both relics and reliquaries, this paper investigates the crucial role of authentication and viewer perception in conferring a heightened status to inset panels. Focusing on Cypriot and Georgian examples from the 13th to the 16th centuries, I argue that these icons exhibit distinctive features absent from other regional traditions – most notably, movable wings. These wings signal a logic of concealment and revelation, and emphasize the sanctity of the central icon while also allowing its occasional withdrawal from view.

By employing the material logic of interiority and unveiling, wings stress the importance of the central panel and also enable its dispensation. Through analysis of both the material form and the inscriptions found on these icons, this paper suggests that the larger panels were not seen as mere frames but rather as containers for the more sacred object contained, akin to the relationship between relics and reliquaries. Seeing them in these terms clarifies the dynamism of the form of composite icons and is the key to answering the questions of the purpose of their creation and subsequent use.

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The background of the entire page is a faded, light green image of a Byzantine-style cross. The cross is ornate, with a central figure and four smaller figures in the quadrants. The cross is surrounded by a decorative border with a repeating pattern of small circles. The overall style is reminiscent of ancient religious art.

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