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Meaningful Mingling: Classicizing Imagery and Islamicizing Script in a Byzantine Bowl

Alicia Walker

Among the sacred relics, precious liturgical implements, and luxurious curios assembled in the treasury of the church of S. Marco, Venice, sits a well-known middle Byzantine vessel of purple-red glass embellished with bright polychrome enamel and gold paint (Fig. 1). Measuring only 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches (17 centimeters) in height and the same in diameter, this delicate object fits in the palm of one's hand. When light passes through the vessel's walls, the motifs are dramatically illuminated. Ivory-colored figures highlighted in gold fill seven large medallions. Brilliant frames of blue, green, yellow, and red florettes encircle these almost monochrome vignettes. Fourteen smaller medallions enclose profile busts, and a web of gilded tendrils weaves through the interstices. The vessel's translucent material, vibrantly painted details, and diminutive size endow it with a jewellike quality. The exact date and location of the object's production are unknown, but scholarly consensus places it in the mid-tenth to early eleventh century and associates it with the luxury art industry of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople.¹

Because the vessel resides in a church treasury, alongside liturgical objects, a modern viewer might at first glance mistake it for a chalice.² But the two handles, which make it possible for the vessel to function as a cup, were not part of the initial design. Since the outer surface is decorated with an odd number of vignettes, one grip always overlaps a roundel, a design that seems unlikely to have been intentional. It is more logical to assume that the object originally functioned without handles, as a bowl. Furthermore, close examination reveals a decorative program clearly unsuitable for a liturgical implement. The large roundels feature classicizing male figures, and the profile busts in the smaller medallions recall Greco-Roman and late antique numismatic and glyptic models (Figs. 1, 2).³ These themes were certainly inappropriate for an object used in Christian rites. Additionally, whereas middle Byzantine chalices were commonly inscribed with prayers and dedications in Greek, the interior rim and bottom of the S. Marco bowl are embellished with bands of pseudo-Arabic, that is, forms that closely resemble Arabic script but are illegible (Figs. 3, 4).⁴ Both the classicizing and Islamicizing features were part of the original design; a distinctive leaf motif appears in the inscriptions and in two of the figural vignettes, evidence of their common conception and execution (Figs. 3, 4, 9, 12). At the same time, their arrangement on the vessel distinguishes the two categories of decoration, with the classicizing elements depicted prominently on the outer wall of the vessel and the pseudo-Arabic bands positioned in less visible areas of the inner rim and base.

The presence of a non-Christian object in the decidedly religious context of a church treasury is not surprising. Following the Fourth Crusade in 1204, a multitude of Byzantine luxury objects, both secular and sacred, were removed from

Constantinople and eventually found their way into ecclesiastical and private collections in the West.⁵ The bowl may well have traveled as Crusader booty, its material and symbolic value making it a fitting trophy for a Latin Christian and, later, his church. Still puzzling, however, is the object's combination of two seemingly unrelated categories of motifs: classicizing imagery and Islamicizing script. In isolation, each theme is commonly found in middle Byzantine art. Although Christian, medieval Byzantines perceived themselves as inheritors and renovators of Greco-Roman culture. Antique mythological narratives and vignettes feature prominently in middle Byzantine secular objects, especially those of the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁶ Although the medieval Islamic world was a perennial political and military adversary of Byzantium, animosity did not preclude artistic exchange. Pseudo-Arabic ornament found in numerous tenth- to thirteenth-century Byzantine buildings and portable objects attests to Islamic artistic impact in Byzantium during this era.⁷ Yet the bulk of these Byzantine works of art and architecture are religious, and their Christian character inflects the meaning that their Islamicizing decoration conveyed. In contrast, the pagan imagery of the S. Marco bowl creates a different context and significance for pseudo-Arabic.

The classicizing motifs on the vessel vary in their relations to antique models. Some figures possess clear parallels to Greco-Roman and late antique depictions of specific deities, while the identities and sources of other figures are ambiguous. In response to this iconographic uncertainty, some historians of Byzantine art argue that the maker of the vessel misunderstood or disregarded the identities of his ancient models.⁸ Other scholars discern a generic relationship among the figures, interpreting the classicizing decoration as a formulaic allusion to the prestigious aura of antique art and culture.⁹ Still others suggest that the figures' iconographic ambiguity and lack of identifying inscriptions are intentional omissions, serving to disempower pagan images.¹⁰

The pseudo-Arabic motifs are typically explained as a decorative and generic appropriation of an Islamic artistic form.¹¹ The combination of Islamicizing ornament and classicizing vignettes is said to evince aesthetic eclecticism—perhaps intended to bring the Greco-Roman decorative motifs “up to date”—but no deeper association is perceived between the two.¹² In all these discussions, the original function of the bowl has received little consideration. A clearly secular object, the vessel is presumed to have been used in a private context and has been related to an “Arab” drinking cup cited in a letter written by a mid-tenth-century Byzantine emperor.¹³

No doubt, some medieval viewers saw only an aesthetically pleasing array of antique figures—or a dangerous gathering of pagan idols—when they gazed on the S. Marco bowl. But others may have perceived a meaningful mingling of classi-

1 S. Marco bowl, 11th–12th century, enameled and gilded glass, h. 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (17 cm), diam. 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (17 cm) (with handles 13 in., or 33 cm). Treasury of S. Marco, Venice (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

cizing and exoticizing elements. By perpetuating an assumption that the program of the bowl lacks particular significance, earlier interpretations instigate a rupture between the pagan and foreign elements on the object and in Byzantine culture more broadly. Although the hybrid nature of the vessel's program defies easy explanation, eclecticism and idiosyncrasy need not be equated with confusion or lack of meaning. Rather, the active selection and combination of classicizing and Islamicizing features may reflect the artistic innovation of the medieval maker, who adapted art forms from the Greco-Roman past and Islamic present to express the particular associations that these non-Christian cultures held for the Byzantine user. It may be fruitful, therefore, to focus not on the deficit of meaning between the Byzantine object and its iconographic and inscriptional models but rather on the creation of meaning within the vessel itself, on the significant relation this object establishes between Islamic and classical cultures, on the one hand, and between these groups and Byzantine culture, on the other.

It is possible that the hybrid program of the S. Marco bowl reflects a perception prevalent among the middle Byzantine educated elite that both the ancient Greek and contemporary Islamic worlds were sources for occult learning, specifically, divination. The vessel may reflect knowledge of antique divinatory culture and may even have been used in lecanomantic hydromancy, that is, divination through containers filled with water. Lecanomancy and hydromancy were ancient mantic, or divinatory, techniques with relatively consistent textual traditions until at least the fifteenth century.¹⁴ The practitioner gazed into a vessel and witnessed revelations communicated in the surface of the liquid. Information was sought from demons, spirits, or deities, depending on whom the medium conjured. The small size of the S. Marco bowl limited the area in which the message appeared, serving to concentrate the diviner's attention and enhance the efficacy of the device.¹⁵

Divination occupied a prominent place in ancient learning and remained popular from antiquity through the late Mid-

2 S. Marco bowl, detail showing small medallion with profile bust (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

dle Ages and beyond. In Byzantium, attitudes toward the occult were ambivalent. The church, unsurprisingly, held the mantic arts in suspicion because of their association with pagan idols and the demonic. Accusation of involvement in magic was a recurring form of political invective.¹⁶ Nevertheless, members of the Constantinopolitan elite studied and even engaged in divination, providing a vibrant context of production and use for the S. Marco bowl. The vessel can be situated in this privileged social space, where classical and Islamic intellectual and artistic traditions intersected with middle Byzantine thought and practice.

Scholarship on Byzantine secular art traditionally privileges the authority of Greco-Roman models, judging the success of medieval works of art according to the effective revival or survival of antique forms and meanings.¹⁷ As a result, Byzantine artists and audiences too often appear as passive conduits

3 S. Marco bowl, detail showing pseudo-Arabic inscription on interior rim (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

4 S. Marco bowl, detail showing pseudo-Arabic inscription on base (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

or ill-informed imitators of classical sources. In contrast, recent studies increasingly insist on the agency of medieval makers and users in the deployment of antique models and interpret the potential significance of classicizing elements according to Byzantine systems of meaning.¹⁸ Furthermore, earlier analyses pay little attention to the Islamicizing elements of the S. Marco bowl, despite the evidence these features contribute regarding the date and meaning of the object. Although aesthetically hybrid, the vessel is semantically unified, reflecting

a broader system of Byzantine thought that grouped Greco-Roman and Islamic traditions in a common cultural category.

Studies of medieval art tend to divide along boundaries of media, religion, geography, and chronology, but the S. Marco bowl demands a cross-cultural, cross-temporal, multimedia, and multidisciplinary approach. At the same time, interpretation of this object necessarily draws on areas of scholarly inquiry—such as Byzantine divination and Byzantine-Islamic artistic interaction—that are just beginning to receive thorough investigation.¹⁹ For this reason, the conclusions of this study must remain hypothetical, to await fuller understanding of the social contexts within which this object functioned and through which it can be interpreted. It is hoped that the approach presented here helps to open the way toward new interpretations of medieval material culture that might in turn have repercussions for the broader study of art history. These realms of inquiry include the meaning of antique iconography in medieval contexts, intercultural communication (and miscommunication) in the visual realm, and the role of non-Christian beliefs and practices in shaping medieval Christian cultures.

The Date of the S. Marco Bowl

In order to place the S. Marco bowl within a specific context of production and reception, it is necessary to reconsider its probable date. A major challenge to this effort is the extreme dearth of glass surviving from medieval Byzantium. Early and middle Byzantine comparanda exist for the compositional

5 *Tiraz* fabric, detail showing inscription, Egyptian, Fatimid, 996–1020, linen plain weave with silk and linen slit tapestry weave insert, 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (45 × 50.5 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Marie Antoinette Evans Fund, 32.31 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

devices of the S. Marco bowl, most notably, a corpus of enameled glass vessels dated on the basis of archaeological evidence from the eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries.²⁰ But precise iconographic and stylistic parallels are unattested among surviving Byzantine glass objects.

Looking beyond comparanda in glass, the seven figural vignettes and the framing motifs of florettes and profile portraits recall elements of the so-called rosette caskets, a corpus of well-known tenth- to eleventh-century Byzantine ivory boxes decorated with a repertoire of classicizing motifs rendered in a dynamic, naturalistic style.²¹ On the basis of these general iconographic and stylistic parallels, earlier studies frequently cite the rosette caskets as key comparanda for dating the S. Marco bowl.²² Some scholars further narrow the vessel's date to the mid-tenth century through direct or indirect association with the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (r. 913–59), who was long credited with spearheading a classical revival, the so-called Macedonian renaissance.²³ Neither the renaissance concept nor Constantine VII's role in it are widely accepted today.²⁴ Nonetheless, classicizing evidence of the tenth century continues to be privileged in discussions of the S. Marco bowl.

Efforts to date the object pay relatively little attention, surprisingly, to the pseudo-Arabic motifs. Yet an analysis of inscriptional style yields a close connection with Islamic epigraphic models of the late tenth to the eleventh century, arguing for reconsideration of the mid-tenth-century date commonly ascribed to the bowl. In addition, pseudo-Arabic motifs in other media of Byzantine art—including architecture and manuscripts—appear as early as the late tenth century but are concentrated in the eleventh to thirteenth century, further supporting a later attribution.

The pseudo-Arabic inscriptions on the S. Marco vessel possess a relatively square format and closely adhere to an emphatically horizontal baseline from which spring regular vertical extensions. Rendered in a relatively thin line, the forms are precise and evenly distributed. While nonsensical, the pseudoinscription is remarkably varied in its form, simulating the appearance of actual Arabic.²⁵ Some of the individual shapes loosely resemble Arabic letters—for example, *kaf*, *lam*, *mim*, and *ta marbuta*—suggesting that they were modeled on an actual inscription.²⁶ Features evoking true Arabic indicate that even though the pseudoscript on the S. Marco bowl is illegible, perception of it as language was important.

The most distinctive characteristic of the inscription is the prominent vegetal embellishment at the terminating points

of certain “letters.” This feature associates the S. Marco motif with a type of medieval Arabic script known as floriated Kufic, which was produced by a variety of medieval Islamic groups and in diverse media beginning in the mid- to late ninth century.²⁷ Because of geographic proximity to Byzantium, portable objects from the Mediterranean region constitute the most likely sources for possible inscriptional models.²⁸ In particular, Byzantine alliances and conflicts with the Umayyad dynasty of Spain and the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt resulted in the traffic of goods through trade, diplomacy, and war.²⁹

Among medieval Islamic objects embellished with floriated Kufic, textiles offer especially useful comparanda because they are preserved in relatively large numbers and are often inscribed with the name of a ruler, thereby providing reliable dating evidence from a fairly extensive corpus. For example, the sharply angled letter forms and floriated terminals in a textile produced during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim (r. 996–1020) presents intriguing parallels to the S. Marco bowl inscription (Fig. 5).³⁰ Medieval Islamic ivories, especially those from Spain, also carry inscriptions, which sometimes include precise dates of production. A Spanish Umayyad box displays inscriptions that resemble the shape of floriated elements (above all, the trilobed leaf finial) and the horizontal emphasis of the baseline in the S. Marco vessel (Fig. 6). The inscription on the Umayyad box simply repeats the word *baraka* (“blessings”), but it parallels more complex floriated Kufic motifs on a group of ivories produced in Spain and dated by inscription from the late tenth to the mid-eleventh century.³¹

While it is possible that the S. Marco bowl could have imitated an early example of floriated Kufic, it is more likely that the motif reached Byzantium somewhat later, after the style had become widespread. Two middle Byzantine manuscripts embellished with a similar type of pseudo-Arabic support this argument. One manuscript, which contains the *Homilies* of Saint John Chrysostom (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France gr. 660, fol. 350), dates to the eleventh century (Fig. 7).³² The other manuscript, a Byzantine lectionary (Sinai, Monastery of St. Catherine gr. 207, fol. 210r), dates to the twelfth century.³³ In addition, a group of late-tenth- to thirteenth-century churches located in Greece and decorated with pseudo-Arabic motifs in mosaic, wall painting, and brickwork demonstrates the broader phenomenon of pseudo-Arabic embellishment during this period.³⁴ An eleventh- or even twelfth-century date for the S. Marco bowl also

6 Lid from a scale box, Umayyad, Spain, 10th–11th century, ivory, approx. $9\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{8}$ in. (25 × 13 cm). Stiftsmuseum, Klosterneuburg, Austria (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Inge Kitlitschka, Klosterneuburg)

7 Folio 350 from the *Homilies* of Saint John Chrysostom, detail showing a pseudo-Arabic headpiece, 11th century. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France gr. 660 (artwork in the public domain)

8 Bowl, Egyptian, Fatimid, 11th–12th century? stained glass, h. $3\frac{1}{4}$ in. (8.5 cm). The British Museum, London, OA 1902.5-17.2 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © copyright the Trustees of The British Museum)

brings the object into closer chronological alignment with the corpus of middle Byzantine enameled glass mentioned above.

In this regard, it is worth noting that surviving examples of medieval Islamic glass reveal some general parallels to the S. Marco bowl in terms of form and color. For example, a possibly eleventh- to twelfth-century Fatimid vessel said to be from Atfa, al-Wasta, in Middle Egypt, has a similar shape (Fig. 8), and preserved fragments of Fatimid stained glass share a comparable palette. In instances where Byzantine and Fatimid vessels resemble one another in appearance, however, techniques of production diverge, suggesting that if some direct relation between these traditions existed, it was limited to aspects of form and design.³⁵ Furthermore, Fatimid glass vessels differ in the placement of inscriptions, which typically appear on the outer walls. The location of pseudo-Arabic on the S. Marco bowl reflects more closely the placement of inscriptions on medieval Islamic metalwork: around the rim—although rarely on the base—of a vessel.

In sum, the application and form of pseudo-Arabic on the S. Marco bowl lack a direct parallel, demonstrating innovation and adaptation, rather than direct imitation, of an Islamic model. Nonetheless, comparanda indicate a medieval Mediterranean source—perhaps Spanish Umayyad or Fa-

timid—dating no earlier than the late tenth and more likely the eleventh or even twelfth century. This later date is supported by similar examples of pseudo-Arabic in late-tenth- to thirteenth-century Byzantine buildings and manuscripts, and it places the vessel in closer alignment with the corpus of related middle Byzantine enameled glass vessels, which, as noted above, dates from the eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries.

The Iconography of Divination

A variety of textual and visual corroborations must be considered in order to establish a fuller picture of Byzantine awareness of ancient mantic traditions in the eleventh to twelfth century. Greek, Roman, and late antique texts still known in Byzantium afford one body of reference. In particular, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—which discuss the oracular and necromantic abilities of various gods and heroes—were central texts in Byzantine schooling and known to any educated person. As such, they offer potential points of common

reference for Byzantine familiarity with pagan divination.³⁶ Roman literature also furnishes possible sources on the subject. For instance, the second-century CE geographer Pausanias, who was still known to some medieval Byzantine readers, cited the locations of ancient cults of oracular deities.³⁷ A rich mine of occult knowledge is found in late antique “magical papyri” that record a vast range of pagan and Early Christian mantic spells. Although these documents are typically dated no later than the fifth century CE, the spells and procedures they describe often parallel instructions preserved in later Byzantine texts, implying the persistence and integrity of occult practices from late antiquity to the medieval era.³⁸ Most important, middle Byzantine written sources reference ancient oracular deities and divinatory practices, hinting at continued acquaintance with the occult.

In the visual realm, extant antique and late antique works of art that parallel figural types in the S. Marco bowl illustrate in general terms the iconographic stock that Byzantine makers and viewers may have had at their disposal. But the range of classicizing models available in the middle Byzantine period was certainly more extensive than what survives today. For instance, a partially preserved fifth- or sixth-century CE illustrated manuscript of Homer’s *Iliad* (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana cod. F. 205 inf.) is inscribed with eleventh- or twelfth-century marginal commentaries, demonstrating its continued use in the medieval era.³⁹ Although the surviving illuminations present few parallels for the iconography of the S. Marco bowl, the manuscript proves that illustrations of Homer’s narratives circulated during the middle Byzantine era and could have informed the iconography on an object like the S. Marco bowl. In addition, antique statuary decorated public and private spaces of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. The vast majority of these sculptures is no longer extant, but textual references attest to the broader iconographic repertoire once available to Byzantine viewers and their active engagement with these works of art.⁴⁰

All the vignettes on the S. Marco bowl exhibit generically classicizing features, including heroic nudity, archaic garments, and antique furnishings (benchlike thrones, footstools, columns). Some of the scenes depict figures with conventional attributes of specific Greco-Roman gods and heroes. Other representations show less direct connections with ancient precedents, and their attributions must remain hypothetical. Scenes that can be identified with confidence serve as a foundation to support possible interpretations of the more ambiguous vignettes. These less precise reflections of ancient models remain important, though, because they show that the Byzantine artistic relation with the antique was not one of slavish imitation. Rather, classical sources provided the raw material from which uniquely Byzantine images and meanings were created.

The most direct statement of the S. Marco bowl’s association with divination is found in the medallion currently obscured by one of the two handles (Fig. 9).⁴¹ As Antonio Pasini demonstrated in 1886, the vignette depicts an augur, that is, a diviner who reads omens from natural phenomena, primarily the flight of birds. The figure is depicted in profile, stepping toward the right. He is fully wrapped in robes, and a divining rod, or *lituus*—identified by its characteristic curved end—rests on his right shoulder.⁴² The augur raises

9 S. Marco bowl, detail showing an augur (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

his left hand in a gesture of speech, emphasizing his role as interpreter. The tendrils framing the figure evoke the outside setting in which the augur employed the *lituus* to establish physical boundaries for reading omens.⁴³ These vegetal forms also parallel the floriated elements in the pseudo-Arabic motifs, creating a visual link between the figural and inscriptional sections of the vessel’s program.

Augury was known to Byzantines from antique sources like Homer’s *Odyssey* (2.145–88) and *Iliad* (1.78–84). The late-twelfth-century legal commentator Theodore Balsamon called for the abolishment of augury, implying its continued practice, but the late-twelfth- to early-thirteenth-century historian Niketas Choniates cited it as a form of ancient divination that was no longer in use.⁴⁴ In any case, the S. Marco bowl depiction is a unique survival in Byzantine art. Its unequivocal connection with divination limits the range of meaning for the program of the vessel as a whole and acts as a point of reference for the interpretation of the more indeterminate scenes in some of the other large roundels. The augur, viewed in profile, marks a starting point for the program. As Ioli Kalavrezou notes, both his gaze and raised, pointing finger direct our attention to the right, beginning a series of visual connections that link figures one to the next.⁴⁵ The augur was later obscured through the addition of the handle, suggesting that subsequent users recognized his connection to pagan divination and, by partially concealing this vignette, obstructed the intended reading of the bowl’s occult program.⁴⁶

Following the augur’s gesture, the viewer next encounters a medallion depicting Ares, god of war, who crosses one leg in front of the other as he strides briskly to the right, continuing the direction of movement initiated by the augur (Fig. 10). Ares wears an open cape and a helmet with a gilded rim that frames his face. Golden rings encircle his neck, upper arms, and ankles. In each hand he grasps a golden staff with a floriated finial. The type is familiar from late antique

10 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Ares (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

12 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Apollo (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

11 Solidus of Constantine I, reverse showing Ares flanked by captives, Byzantine, 310 or 313, gold, diam. $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (2 cm). Kemper Art Museum, The John Max Wulff Collection, Washington University in St. Louis, WC 5556 (artwork in the public domain)

depictions of the god, like the device on the reverse of an early-fourth-century gold coin of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine I (Fig. 11).

Although Ares was not a prominent Greco-Roman oracular deity, divinatory cults were dedicated to him in at least two locations, and it is possible that some memory of his mantic role persisted in the middle Byzantine era.⁴⁷ Unlike augurs, who interpreted natural phenomena through acquired skill, oracles received inspiration directly from a god and were associated with specific locales sacred to the deity. In addi-

tion, Ares sometimes compelled human or supernatural beings to cooperate in occult rituals. In a late antique spell for securing amorous affection, a wax statuette of Ares ensures the intended outcome by threatening a figurine of the desired woman with a sword.⁴⁸ Likewise, on the S. Marco bowl Ares could secure the cooperation of an otherworldly informant—a demon or spirit of the dead—to answer the diviner's questions. It is also possible that this figure served a more general function, evoking the powerful force of the pagan pantheon, while other vignettes established a more direct connection with divination.

Ares' rightward movement directs the viewer's gaze to the subsequent roundel, which depicts Apollo, the most famous of ancient oracular deities (Fig. 12).⁴⁹ Viewed from behind, he is nude except for golden bands that decorate his arms, ankles, and hair. He leans languorously against a column. A cloak hangs from each of his arms, and he holds a golden plant tendril in his right hand. The latter most likely represents a bough from the laurel tree, which was sacred to him.⁵⁰ Apollo was similarly portrayed in cult statues and personal objects. For example, a third- to second-century BCE gem depicts the god leaning against a column and holding a bough, but facing forward (Fig. 13). In the S. Marco bowl, the form of the laurel branch is highly stylized, resembling the floriated motifs in the pseudo-Arabic inscriptions.

For a middle Byzantine viewer, the branch signaled Apollo's divinatory powers. Laurel played a special role in rituals at Apollo's most famous oracle, Delphi, on the slope of Mount Parnassus in Greece, where the plant was hung around the shrine and burned to stimulate the Pythia, the priestess of Apollo, who sat on a tripod and delivered divinely inspired messages.⁵¹ Apollo and his mantic laurel also feature in late antique spells, especially those for inducing prophetic dreams, which refer to laurel as "Apollo's holy plant of presage."⁵² Long after the oracle at Delphi had been aban-

13 Ring stone with nude youth (Apollo), eastern Mediterranean, 3rd–2nd century BCE, jasper, $\frac{3}{4} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. Indiana University Art Museum, Burton Y. Berry Collection, 64.70.26 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Michael Cavanagh and Kevin Montague)

done, middle Byzantine texts still noted the so-called final oracle of Apollo: “No longer does Phoebus have his chamber, nor mantic laurel, nor prophetic spring; and the speaking water has been silenced.”⁵³ These references show continued awareness of the central role that the laurel branch played in Delphic prophecy.

Although Apollo leans back toward the left, he turns his head and extends his arm to the right, drawing the viewer’s gaze to the next roundel, which represents the god Zeus as a bearded man seated on a throne, resting his feet on a stool (Fig. 14). His muscular chest and arms are adorned with gold bands, and a mantle is draped around his hips. He raises one hand in a gesture of speech. The pose is similar to that of the god in a silver plate of about 400 CE in which Zeus holds a sphere (Fig. 15).⁵⁴ In the S. Marco bowl, Zeus grasps in his left hand a small round object decorated with a human face; the object may be his aegis, a shield emblazoned with the head of the Gorgon.⁵⁵

Like Apollo, Zeus was closely associated with divination, particularly through his oracle at Dodona in Epirus, Greece, which was cited in Homer’s *Odyssey* (14.327–31).⁵⁶ The ninth-century chronicler George Synkellos mentions that the ancient Greeks consulted the oracle at Dodona, offering evi-

14 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Zeus? (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

15 Achilles Plate from the Sevso Treasure, detail showing Herakles, Zeus, and Apollo, Byzantine, Athens or Constantinople, ca. 400, silver. Private collection (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Trustee of the Marquess of Northampton 1987 Settlement)

dence for the continued association of Zeus with prophecy in middle Byzantine literature.⁵⁷ Zeus was also invoked in late antique divinatory rituals, for example, necromantic (conjuring the dead), oracular dream, and lecanomantic spells.⁵⁸

By the middle Byzantine period, the oracles of Apollo and Zeus had long since fallen into disuse, but memory of them persisted. In his *Chronographia*, the eleventh-century scholar and courtier Michael Psellos responds to a physician whose diagnosis contradicted Psellos’s own by invoking the gods’ mantic devices: “Let us hope your Dodonian cauldron is right and my [Delphic] tripod wrong . . . my own studies have not been advanced enough for me to play the oracle.”⁵⁹ The divinatory sites of Zeus and Apollo are also discussed and illustrated in two eleventh-century Byzantine manuscripts that negotiate the relation between pagan divination and Christian revelation. One of these manuscripts (Mount

16 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Hermes (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

17 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Odysseus? (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

Athos, Esphigmenou 14) is a *Panegyrikon*, a liturgical text privileging three homilies dedicated to the Nativity of Christ and citing select saints' lives to be read during the liturgy. It includes numerous textual passages and illuminations that discourse on themes such as oracles, pagan statues, and magic arts. The other manuscript (Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate Library cod. Taphou 14) consists of several tracts, including an illustrated commentary on the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzos and a homily on the Birth of Christ, which discuss and illustrate oracles of Zeus, Apollo, and Athena (Fig. 23).⁶⁰ These texts, which argue for the insufficiency of pagan divination in comparison to the prophecy of Christ, visualize middle Byzantine conceptions of ancient Greek oracles in a manner that departs significantly from antique representations. Attitudes toward divination in these two manuscripts differ from that evinced by the S. Marco bowl, and the illuminations are narrative rather than emblematic, depicting the priests and priestesses of the cults rather than the gods themselves. Nonetheless, all three works of art attest to knowledge of and interest in antique oracular cults in eleventh-century Byzantium.

Zeus points left, toward Apollo, neutralizing the rightward motion initiated by the augur. Zeus's gaze, however, is cast toward the figure at the right, Hermes (Fig. 16). Viewed from behind, Hermes strides briskly toward the left and raises his right hand in a gesture of speech. His left hand holds a golden staff, his *kerykeion* (or *caduceus*), which resembles the staves carried by Ares.⁶¹ A cloak hangs from his left arm across the front of his body and billows behind his right shoulder. Otherwise nude, Hermes wears the same golden bangles that decorate the bodies of Ares, Apollo, and Zeus.

Hermes bore a long-standing and complex association with ancient magic.⁶² Because he directed the dead to Hades—thus his epithet *Psychopomp* (soul guide)—the god played a

key role in late antique necromantic spells, helping to secure spirits for consultation by leading them to the earthly realm. His *kerykeion* functioned as a tool for directing souls. Spirits of the dead were sometimes conjured to serve as informants in divinatory rituals, and Hermes may have been included in the program of the S. Marco vessel to aid in this endeavor. Furthermore, as a messenger of the gods, Hermes was responsible for the effective transmission of words between humankind and its deities, another association that made him a desirable assistant in mantic consultations.⁶³ On the S. Marco bowl, the figure's gesture and motion serve as visual references to Hermes' capacity for efficient and effective communication.

Hermes moves, gazes, and gestures toward the left, thereby reversing the rightward motion introduced by the augur. Together with Ares (Fig. 10), he frames a subgroup within the series. Both gods hold similarly shaped staves and step inward toward Apollo and Zeus, who are positioned in more neutral poses that allow movement to flow both left and right. Although the augur initiates entrance into this sequence, Ares complements the figure of Hermes more effectively. The augur is thereby set apart from the four deities. A possible motivation for this distinction lies in the fact that these four figures are not only pagan gods but also planetary personifications: Ares/Mars, Apollo/Sun, Zeus/Jupiter, and Hermes/Mercury. Their celestial associations may have been relevant to the function of the vessel because the days and times associated with different heavenly bodies were thought to be advantageous for specific divinatory acts. Wednesday, the day of Hermes, was believed effective for controlling spirits, and the hour of Hermes on a certain day ensured success in conversing with otherworldly forces.⁶⁴ Although augurs traditionally divined the movement of birds, the S. Marco bowl may extend the interpretation of sky-born omens

18 Lykaon Painter, jar (*pelike*) showing Odysseus consulting the spirit of Elpenor, Greek, Classical period, ca. 440 BCE, Attica, Athens, red-figure ceramic, h. 18 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (47.4 cm), diam. 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (34.3 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Amory Gardner Fund, 34.79 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

to include the planets.⁶⁵ Indeed, the augur engages with the series of deities through a gesture of speech, and two of the planetary gods, Zeus and Hermes, gesticulate in response.

The final two vignettes show more ambiguous iconography, but these scenes might still depict antique characters associated with divination. Rather than deities, they represent a different category of ancient mantic figures: heroes. The roundel to the right of Hermes portrays a winged, fully robed figure standing on a pedestal and gesturing emphatically toward a warrior, who is seated on a bench and rests his feet on a stool (Fig. 17).⁶⁶ Both turn inward; their poses disassociate them from the scenes in the adjacent roundels. The warrior's lower body is draped, and a red scabbard hangs from his waist. His upper body is encircled by golden straps and bangles. He wears a helmet with a pointed top. His right elbow rests on a shield, and he holds a golden spear in his left hand. In keeping with the theme of divination, the vignette may depict the Homeric warrior Odysseus consulting a ghost. Odysseus's necromantic skills were legendary and familiar to educated Byzantines from book 11 of the *Odyssey*, the *Nykeia*, in which the hero raises the spirit of the deceased seer

Teiresias, to advise him on his journey home. Odysseus's successful *catabasis*, or descent, into Hades may have qualified him for securing the dead to answer divinatory inquiries.⁶⁷

The seated figure rests his chin in his hand, a position that recalls Odysseus's depiction in a scene of the conjuring of his deceased crewman Elpenor (*Odyssey* 11.51–83) on a well-known fifth-century BCE Greek vase in which Odysseus appears in the company of Hermes and wears a scabbard on his left shoulder (Fig. 18).⁶⁸ Similar images of classicizing figures in late antique art—especially those of Odysseus and Oedipus—offer chronologically closer visual models for the S. Marco bowl and attest to the iconographic lineage that bridged ancient and medieval artistic traditions (Fig. 19).⁶⁹ Elpenor does not, however, resemble the figure atop the column, who is winged and clothed in a full-length robe. In Byzantine iconography, spirits—whether the souls of the deceased or demons—were sometimes depicted with wings. This convention might have led a Byzantine viewer to interpret an antique winged and robed figure—perhaps Nike (Fig. 20) or Psyche—as a disembodied soul and combine this motif with a depiction of Odysseus conjuring the dead.⁷⁰

19 Sardonyx intaglio impression showing Oedipus and the Sphinx, Roman, Imperial, 1st century BCE–3rd century CE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of W. Gedney Beatty, 1941 (41.160.707) (artwork in the public domain; photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Although echoing classical and late antique precedents, the Odysseus vignette innovates on earlier models. Byzantine viewers would have drawn from their knowledge of Odysseus's adventures and familiarity with ancient and medieval iconography to reconcile this unusual scene with the program of the bowl.

Like the preceding roundel, the final vignette is self-contained. Here a male figure distinguished by a highly developed physique stands between two columns, which frame and isolate him (Fig. 21). His body is nude except for a cloak hanging from his left shoulder and gold rings encircling his ankles, wrists, upper arms, and head. He rests his right hand on top of a pillar. From the other column hangs a red scabbard. The figure may represent the Greco-Roman hero Herakles. Relaxed, frontal depictions of Herakles abound in ancient and late antique art, although typically the hero leans against his club, positioned vertically with the end resting on the ground. In the S. Marco vessel, the hero's pose recalls these earlier models, such as the late antique silver plate depicting Zeus (Fig. 15).⁷¹

Like Odysseus, Herakles traveled to the underworld and returned unscathed, most notably to capture Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog of Hades, and to retrieve Alkestis, the queen of Thessaly, who had agreed to die in place of her husband.⁷² The capture of Cerberus was mentioned by Pseudo-Apollodoros, the first- to second-century author of the *Bibliothēke*, a compendium of information on Greco-Roman gods and heroes still known in the middle Byzantine era.⁷³ Homer reports that Hermes accompanied Herakles on his underworld journey (*Odyssey* 11.625–26), linking the two figures in the iconographic program of the S. Marco bowl.⁷⁴ Herakles' return from the underworld was thought to have created portals through which souls of the dead could easily pass. These sites were eventually associated with oracular cults

20 Gem seal showing Nike holding a wreath and a male figure holding ears of corn, Roman, carnelian, diam. ½ in. (1.5 cm). American Numismatic Society, New York, 0000.999.33705 (artwork in the public domain)

and necromantic activities.⁷⁵ Herakles' journeys to the underworld made him a model for those who sought access to chthonic realms and forces.⁷⁶ This diversity of associations with supernatural communications qualifies Herakles to appear among other divinatory figures.

The readings posited here build on a variety of ancient, late antique, and medieval textual and visual sources that together argue for the persistence of an iconography of pagan divination in the middle Byzantine era. Not all the classicizing scenes on the S. Marco bowl directly imitate extant Greco-Roman or late antique types, but these departures should not be interpreted a priori as evidence of Byzantine confusion or ignorance, as has often been maintained. The bowl's high level of production and detail of execution indicate the care invested in this work of art and suggest that divergence from classical sources was intentional, an adaptation of antique imagery and themes to accommodate specifically Byzantine meanings.

It is certainly true that even if the iconographic identifications cited above are correct, not every Byzantine viewer would have recognized them. Nonetheless, certain of the figures depicted possess clear mantic associations—especially the augur, Apollo, Hermes, and Zeus—and could direct the reading of less obviously divinatory characters. In this way, the overarching themes of antiquity and divination are communicated to any viewer with at least some knowledge of the literary and visual traditions of these subjects. In fact, the obscure identities of some figures might contribute to the occult character of the device, these rarefied visual references implying that full comprehension of the program is reserved for those few viewers privy to exclusive divinatory knowledge.

The Mechanics of Lecanomancy and Hydromancy

Together, the seven vignettes on the S. Marco bowl reflect an array of mantic associations, including oracular, necromantic, and augural. They depict gods, possibly heroes, and, in

one instance, a pagan priest as agents of occult practice. The richness and consistency of the theme signal that the figures may well serve more than a merely decorative function. According to the mechanics of divination, pagan gods, demons, and the souls of the dead are attracted to powerful and evocative images, particularly representations of themselves or the actions they are called to perform.⁷⁷ Such images function sympathetically, usually in tandem with magic incantations that are inscribed or spoken. Image and word together compel otherworldly entities to answer questions about future events. According to these operations, the vignettes on the S. Marco bowl serve as visual invocations that accompany verbal ones; they attract supernatural entities as aids for otherworldly inquiry. Several of the figures—Hermes, Zeus, Odysseus, and the augur—gesture in speech, conveying this communicative aim.⁷⁸

The smaller medallions in the borders may additionally buttress the magic efficacy of the bowl (Figs. 1, 2). The conjuring of demonic forces was a tricky business and required careful regulation. During these supernatural interactions, the practitioner had to maintain power over the otherworldly informers. Control was typically achieved by means of ritual purity, the strategic use of amulets, and the drawing of circles within which magic acts were confined.⁷⁹ A mid-fifteenth-century Italo-Byzantine manuscript includes a rare depiction of a lecanomantic ceremony (Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna MS 3632, fol. 350v) in which the medium sits within a sphere drawn on the ground and gazes into a vessel that is also circumscribed (Fig. 22).⁸⁰ In the S. Marco bowl, the circular frames around the vignettes may similarly restrain the supernatural entities attracted to these scenes. Furthermore, the coinlike images of profile busts in the interstices could help to control otherworldly beings summoned to inhabit the vessel, as coins, especially ancient ones, were believed to possess apotropaic properties.⁸¹

Finally, the number of large and small medallions, seven and fourteen, respectively, may have been significant. Seven is a key numeral in late antique magic spells, representing, for example, the number of times a phrase should be repeated, the number of days required for a procedure, the amount of a substance to be used, the number of objects to be employed, the number of protective devices to be marshaled, or, of particular significance to the S. Marco vessel, the number of gods to be invoked.⁸² The presence of seven deities and fourteen (two times seven) “coins” may have enhanced the bowl’s efficacy.⁸³

A fourth-century CE spell recorded among the Greek magical papyri prescribes the following lecanomantic-hydromantic ritual and gives some sense of the instructions possibly available in the middle Byzantine period:

Whenever you want to make a divination about things, take a bronze vessel, a pan or a dish, of whatever sort you like, and put water in it. If you are invoking the heavenly gods, use Zeus’ rainwater; if you are invoking the underworld gods, use sea-water; if you are invoking Osiris or Sarapis, river-water; if you are invoking the dead, spring-water. Hold the vessel on your lap. Pour into it the oil of unripe olives, and bending over the vessel yourself proclaim the spell written out hereafter and call on the god

21 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Herakles? (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

you want. Ask him about the subject you want, and he will answer you and tell you about everything. When he has spoken to you, dismiss him with the dismissal spell. When you use this spell, you will be amazed. . . . Later, when you have made your summons, the one summoned will manifest himself, a god or a dead man, and he will answer all the questions you put to him.⁸⁴

The text further instructs the practitioner to wear an amulet inscribed with protective letters in order to guard against the powerful forces conjured through this ritual. Like the S. Marco vessel, the spell does not limit the practitioner to a single source of divination; multiple informants (those of the heavens, the underworld, the dead) can be rallied through the same process. The spell mentions Zeus—who appears on the S. Marco bowl—as the key mediator for communications with “heavenly gods.”

Lecanomancy and hydromancy possessed ancient roots but were alive and well in middle Byzantine Constantinople.⁸⁵ At the beginning of the period, John the Grammarian (d. ca. 867), the last iconoclast patriarch, was said to have practiced lecanomancy, an activity that led to his condemnation as a sorcerer.⁸⁶ Toward the end of the era, a description of a hydromantic ceremony performed at the twelfth-century imperial court recalls the ritual described in the late antique magical papyri and demonstrates the persistence of divinatory knowledge over time. The historian Niketas Choniates recounts with disapproval how Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (r. 1183–85) turned to lecanomancy to prophesize the name of his imperial successor. Andronikos “yielded himself wholly to those who read the signs of the unknown in the waters, wherein certain images of the future are reflected like the shining rays of the sun.”⁸⁷ The supernatural communicator in this instance, a demon, conveyed answers to the diviner’s questions through letters revealed in the liquid. The

22 Scene of a lecanomantic ritual, from Dioscorides, *Materia medica*, Italo-Byzantine, 1440. Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna MS 3632, fol. 350v (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna)

late-twelfth-century legal commentator Theodore Balsamon condemned lecanomancy, a prohibition that may in fact indicate its vogue.⁸⁸

Interest in the occult—although not necessarily lecanomancy—is also attested among a circle of eleventh-century Constantinopolitan elites, including the scholar and courtier Michael Psellos. Psellos was fascinated by the mechanics and devices of divination.⁸⁹ In the *Chronographia* he claimed to know how “stones and herbs and mystic rites induce apparitions of divinities.”⁹⁰ Psellos was familiar with the *Hermetica*, a collection of first- to third-century magical papyri purportedly originating in ancient Egypt, that address alchemy, astronomy, and magic.⁹¹ He also wrote a commentary on the Chaldean Oracles, a collection from the second century of allegedly divine revelations said to derive from the ancient East.⁹² Psellos was an influential figure at the Byzantine court, serving as an imperial adviser and as chief of the imperial school of philosophy. In this capacity, he encouraged his students to study “Hellenic” wisdom, including subjects that bordered on the occult.⁹³ While taking pride in his esoteric knowledge, he insisted that it was purely theoretical and claimed not to practice magic. Indeed, a speech Psellos delivered to support the prosecution of the patriarch Michael Kerularios condemns the latter in part by subtly implicating him as a practitioner of unorthodox activities, including lecanomancy.⁹⁴

As already demonstrated by Emperor Andronikos’s practice of lecanomancy, interest in the occult sciences also existed among members of the twelfth-century Constantinopolitan elite. The imperial princess and scholar Anna Komnene, for example, claimed knowledge of astrology, although she maintained that she did not practice it herself.⁹⁵ Her contemporary the scholar and courtier Michael Italikos was likewise versed in the occult, specifically the Chaldean Oracles, although he rejected these teachings as barbarian.⁹⁶ Despite their disavowals, eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine schol-

ars clearly studied pagan wisdom and confirm the continued prevalence of such learning at the imperial court.⁹⁷ While it is impossible to know the specific patron of the S. Marco bowl, the privileged stratum of medieval Byzantium’s court elite provided the aesthetic and intellectual climate, as well as the financial resources, to commission this deluxe and rarefied object.

Eastern Origins of Lecanomancy and Hydromancy

Like the classicizing iconography, the pseudo-Arabic inscriptions on the S. Marco bowl reflect a complex network of divinatory beliefs and practices current in the middle Byzantine era. Following the Greeks and Romans before them, the Byzantines associated divination with the learning of the so-called Persians or Chaldeans, that is, ancient cultures of the East.⁹⁸ For instance, a tenth-century Byzantine “encyclopedia,” the *Souda*, states that sorcery and magic were invented by the ancient Persians and Medes.⁹⁹ Lecanomancy and hydromancy in particular were ascribed “Persian” origins by classical and Early Christian authors.¹⁰⁰

During the middle Byzantine era, contemporary Islamic groups were identified as the cultural inheritors of the ancient Persians, Medes, and Chaldeans and were therefore credited with possessing occult knowledge. Michael Psellos stated that individuals of “Persian” derivation were commonly assumed to be astrologers and fortune-tellers regardless of whether or not they actually possessed knowledge of these matters.¹⁰¹ In light of this affiliation, it is a distinct possibility that the maker of the S. Marco bowl sought to enhance the object’s divinatory power by employing a pseudo-inscription derived from the Arabic alphabet. The prevailing connection of magic with the ancient and medieval East allied Arabic letters with the occult and therefore with the classicizing imagery of divination on the S. Marco bowl.

An association of pseudo-Arabic and classicizing imagery with divination is also found in the aforementioned eleventh-century commentary on the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzos

23 The Achaeans consult the priestess of Athena, from *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzos, Byzantine, 11th century. Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate Library cod. Taphou 14, fol. 100r (artwork in the public domain)

(Taphou 14). In one illumination (fol. 100r) the priestess of Athena, Xanthippe, consults with the Greek Achaeans. In the background, antique statuary indicates a pagan setting, and a loom, the attribute of the priestesses, stands at the left (Fig. 23). Remarkably, the fabric suspended from the loom, the work of the priestess, is ornamented with a band of pseudo-Arabic, as is the upper sleeve of Xanthippe's robe.¹⁰² The Byzantine maker invented the milieu of an ancient Greek oracle by combining the classicizing device of antique sculpture with the exoticizing device of pseudo-Arabic. The eclecticism of Taphou 14 and the S. Marco bowl are not random or purely aesthetic, as scholars often suppose. In each work of art, classicizing and exoticizing motifs illustrate a specifically

Byzantine conception of divination as associated with both ancient pagan and contemporary Islamic cultures.

Lest we discredit Byzantine affiliation of the occult with the Arabic-speaking world as mere superstition or bias, it must be noted that Islamic groups not only were perceived as the cultural descendants of the ancient Persians and Chaldeans, from whom lecanomancy and hydromancy were thought to originate, but also were believed to have preserved and transmitted ancient Greek learning on occult subjects. During the Abbasid translation movement of the eighth to tenth centuries, among the books converted from Greek to Arabic were works on astrology and other categories of potentially unorthodox knowledge.¹⁰³

A tenth-century magic text from Islamic Spain attributed to Abu I-Qasim Maslama ibn Qasim al-Qurtubi, the *Ghayat al-hakim* (later known in the medieval West by the Latin title, *Picatrix*), presents an idea of relevant occult sciences circulating at this time in the Islamic world. The *Ghaya* draws from a multicultural tradition, including ancient Greek, Byzantine, and medieval Islamic magic texts. The treatise justifies the conjuring of celestial forces in the form of demons and deities by arguing that their power derives ultimately from God. These entities are summoned through, among other means, persuasive imagery and magic incantations, strategies that resonate with the program and possible use of the S. Marco bowl.¹⁰⁴

Lecanomanancy was practiced in the medieval Islamic world, although the tradition is not well attested in the written record, making it difficult to ascertain if Islamic devices directly influenced the design of the S. Marco vessel.¹⁰⁵ Still, medieval Islamic "magic bowls" may have informed the Byzantine association of Arabic with occult tools. These vessels do not resemble the S. Marco bowl in format, medium, or design, but they were commonly inscribed with Arabic and pseudo-Arabic and employ magic script and images in tandem.¹⁰⁶ They were intended for medical use, including the exorcism of demons; the patient was healed by drinking from the cup. The earliest examples date to the twelfth century, but they relate to an interest in magic healing that is evinced no later than the eleventh century.¹⁰⁷ They are densely inscribed, most notably on the rims and bases, the latter disposition offering an intriguing parallel for the placement of inscriptions on the S. Marco vessel. Although apparently not intended for lecanomanancy, the bowls nonetheless employ Arabic and pseudo-Arabic to serve magic aims and may have encouraged association of the script with occult practices.

Arabic could also have gained currency as a magic language through the Byzantine translation of Islamic divinatory texts. Maria Mavroudi demonstrates that in the tenth and eleventh centuries, certain Byzantine manuals for dream interpretation, another field of mantic knowledge, were translated from medieval Arabic sources that in turn had been copied from classical and late antique versions.¹⁰⁸ Paul Magdalino notes that an influx of scientific learning—especially astrology—from Islamic lands reached an unprecedented level in the eleventh century.¹⁰⁹ In other words, for categories of knowledge associated with prophecy, medieval Byzantium seems to have relied in part on Arabic sources. Arabic therefore possessed an affiliation with divination and magic that was based on both antique typology and contemporary social practice. Indeed, Michael Psellos reported that his student John Italos lamented the fact that "Hellenic learning" had been lost in Byzantium while it flourished in the eastern lands of the "Assyrians and Medes and Egyptians."¹¹⁰ Perhaps divinatory knowledge figured in the antique wisdom that John, and others like him, found underappreciated in Byzantium.

Pseudo-Arabic as an Occult Language

Bands of pseudo-Arabic script in the S. Marco vessel and the Taphou 14 illumination probably possessed additional magic significance by virtue of their indecipherability. Late antique spells commonly transformed the Greek alphabet into an occult language by combining familiar letters into nonsensi-

cal arrangements. These *Ephesia grammata* were thought to channel divine or magic speech.¹¹¹ In the previously cited instructions for a fourth-century lecanomantic ritual, for example, the practitioner provided the following additional spell:

AMOUN AUANTOU LIMOUTAU RIPTOU MANTAU IMANTOU LANTOU
PALTOUMI ANCOUMACH ARAPTOUMI. Come here to me, god
(insert his name), manifest yourself before me this very
hour and do not alarm my eyes. Come here to me, god
(insert his name), pay heed to me, because this is the wish
and the command of ACHCHOR ACHCHOR ACHACHACH PTOUMI
CHACHCHO CHARACHOCH CHAPTOUME CHORACHARACHOCH AP-
TOUMI MECHACHAPTOUTOU CHARCHPTOU CHACHCHO CHARACHO-
PTENACHOCHEU.¹¹²

In the papyrus document, the nonsensical words are written in Greek script and include syllables and letter combinations familiar from actual Greek, suggesting their communicative potential. The Arabic alphabet was similarly employed as a magic language in medieval Islamic occult and mystical practices, as seen in a section of the *Ghaya*, which documents a purportedly ancient magic script based on the Arabic alphabet.¹¹³ In other medieval Islamic objects, letters and symbols are combined in seemingly nonsensical arrangements that served as secret, magic languages for communicating with supernatural entities.¹¹⁴ Together these examples indicate that pseudo-Arabic, although illegible, is still potentially significant, its cryptic character contributing to its esoteric and magic value. "Arabic" inscriptions that defy decipherment can function as occult language much as the *Ephesia grammata* of the Greek magic tradition.

In late antique and medieval magic, text and image worked in tandem to empower spells and the objects that facilitated them.¹¹⁵ But if this was the case, why not simply employ Greek script to accompany classicizing images? The Byzantines certainly knew that the ancient Hellenes spoke Greek, and Greek was commonly used in the early Byzantine period on a plethora of magic devices.¹¹⁶ One possibility is that the original form of a script was believed to preserve its magic effect. In his interpretation of the Chaldean Oracles, Michael Psellos specified that when the name of a god has been cited in one language, the name should not be translated because the original form exercised supernatural force. He notes several Hebrew words that, if changed into Greek, lose their ritual efficacy.¹¹⁷ If the source for the inscription on the S. Marco vessel had itself been a text written or an object inscribed in Arabic (or even pseudo-Arabic), then linguistic (or at least alphabetic) consistency may have been thought necessary to preserve the efficacy of the device.

In other words, if the pseudoinscriptions in the S. Marco bowl and Taphou 14 illumination employ Arabic as *Ephesia grammata*—imitating the forms of actual letters, but not composing coherent words or phrases—formal proximity to the Arabic alphabet would have been essential to convey the communicative potential of the magic inscription, while illegibility would have been equally necessary to preserve its magic power. I do not propose that these inscriptions deployed systematic cryptic languages that were intended to be deciphered. Rather, they used pseudo-Arabic as an occult

language that was by necessity unintelligible. From a modern perspective, the S. Marco script is perhaps best characterized as “meaningless but plausible.”¹¹⁸ For a Byzantine viewer it might have been understood, instead, as significant but obscure. The meaning was elusive, hidden even to those fluent in the language on which the inscriptions were based, but presumably intelligible to the supernatural entities whose assistance was required.¹¹⁹ The script’s cryptic character was further enhanced by the placement of the pseudo-Arabic bands in less visible areas, around the inner rim and base.

As scholars of Arabic epigraphy have long recognized, the meaning of any inscription rests in more than its literal message. Richard Ettinghausen proposes, for instance, that inscriptions communicate in part by way of “symbolic affirmation,” the potential to convey meaning through form and context, regardless of legibility or content.¹²⁰ Ettinghausen is concerned predominantly with Islamic *religious* art and architecture, in which Arabic inscriptions are frequently difficult to read but retain significance as the sacred language of God. Their meaning derives not, or not only, from their particular content but also from the sacred spaces in which they appear and the sacred texts—foremost, the Qurʾān—to which they allude. Irene Bierman has expanded understanding of the mechanics of medieval inscriptions by demonstrating how they communicate through “territorial” references, that is, the evocation of specific social contexts and practices that include, but are not limited to, sacred functions.¹²¹ The S. Marco bowl and the Taphou 14 illumination position pseudo-Arabic in a similarly synecdochic role. Their “evocational field” is fixed by the classicizing scenes of divination so that the inscriptions call to mind not the Qurʾān and the doctrine of Islam but real or imagined texts and objects that dealt in the occult. These Byzantine works of art employ “Arabic” not as the sacred word of God but as the textual and material tradition of divinatory wisdom. The makers and users of the S. Marco bowl, aware of the Eastern origin of lecanomancy and the magic potency of obscure language, strove for greater authenticity and efficacy through the use of pseudo-Arabic.

At the same time, another motivation can be discerned for employing this non-Greek and non-Christian script on a divinatory device. Bierman argues that writing also functioned in medieval cultures to establish the “boundedness” of group identity.¹²² Had the S. Marco bowl been inscribed with Greek, it would have implicated the Greek-speaking Byzantine viewer in the unorthodox heritage of pagan divination. Instead, pseudo-Arabic imbued the object with the authority that words held in magic practice while conscientiously avoiding an improper or even blasphemous application of the Christian-Greek language to pagan figures and magic devices. By binding together classicizing iconography and exoticizing inscriptions on this mantic device, the maker positioned the object outside Byzantine identity, at a comfortable remove from the presumably Christian user.¹²³

The merging of ancient Greek and medieval Islamic cultures to distance people or practices from Byzantine identity also occurs in middle Byzantine literature. Describing contemporary Muslims, Anna Komnene conflates Islamic worship with ancient Greek religion, claiming that Muslims are devoted to Dionysos, Eros, and Aphrodite.¹²⁴ In the twelfth-

century satire *Timarion*, the protagonist descends to Hades, where the ancient Greek kings Minos and Aeacus, who serve as judges in the underworld, wear “turbans on their heads like Arab chieftains,” and the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates “looked like some Arab with his tall and pointed turban for headgear.”¹²⁵ In both texts, the authors elide medieval Islamic and ancient Greek identities in order to ridicule both traditions. In this respect, the S. Marco bowl is noteworthy in that it combines classicizing and Islamicizing elements without displaying a notably derisive attitude toward these non-Christian cultures.

Although the S. Marco bowl is unique, aspects of its program parallel features of other middle Byzantine vessels, raising the possibility that these objects also functioned as lecanomantic, hydromantic tools. A fragmentary twelfth-century ceramic dish from Corinth, for example, combines classicizing and exoticizing elements that may have empowered the object to serve magic rituals. The plate depicts a centaur treading on a snake, the pair encircled by a band in pseudo-Arabic (Fig. 24).¹²⁶ Observing that certain middle Byzantine vessels represent serpents, animals commonly associated with demons, Henry Maguire proposes that the motif of the snake may invoke chthonic powers.¹²⁷ The styles of the figures and the inscription are simpler than those elements of the S. Marco bowl, but the program presumably functions in a comparable manner. The form of the snake attracts demonic forces to the ceramic bowl, much as Greco-Roman gods and heroes associated with divination are drawn to their own images on the S. Marco vessel. The centaur controls the demonic serpent, just as the coins and circles constrain pagan forces. Finally, pseudo-Arabic script enhances the magic efficacy of each vessel.

The delicate material and meticulously rendered decoration of the glass bowl designate it as a luxury object of the elite, while the humble medium and less refined execution of the ceramic dish indicate a less privileged owner. Even the pseudo-Arabic on the pottery vessel appears generic and summary in comparison with the more complex and elegant design of the S. Marco inscription. These differences suggest that belief in the magic power of pseudo-Arabic—and a fascination with lecanomancy—extended throughout Byzantine society. People who engaged in this illicit practice used whatever device was appropriate to their budget or taste.

The Hybrid Image of Byzantine Divination

A modern visitor to the S. Marco treasury who mistakes the glass bowl for a chalice is only partly wrong, for in a sense the vessel may indeed be understood as a liturgical object, but it is one serving occult, rather than Christian, ritual. Based on middle Byzantine familiarity with the mechanics and aims of divinatory devices, combined with the iconographic and inscriptional evidence on the vessel itself, I propose that the bowl facilitated lecanomantic hydromantic practices. For earlier scholars, the object epitomizes a waning of classical culture in medieval Byzantium and a confusion of classicizing and exoticizing sources. Its makers and users are said to have possessed only faint understanding of the iconographic and inscriptional motifs they employed. In contrast, I posit that the object articulates an intentional and meaningful mingling of Greco-Roman and medieval Islamic traditions, one

24 Fragment of a plate showing a centaur trampling a snake, Byzantine, Corinth, 12th century, ceramic, diam. ca. 9 1/8 in. (23 cm) (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the American School of Classical Studies, Corinth Excavations, I. Ioannidou and L. Bartzioti)

that positions Byzantine users and makers not as imitators or passive conduits of the antique and the foreign but rather as active interpreters.

The elite owner of the S. Marco bowl satisfied unorthodox intellectual and supernatural interests by marshaling the imagery and language of non-Christian cultures to empower this divinatory tool. In magic traditions inherited from antiquity, words and images share an essential role, endowing objects with supernatural force. The classicizing imagery and exoticizing script on the S. Marco bowl facilitate divination, while allowing the maker of the object to employ exclusively non-Christian, non-Byzantine sources for occult purposes. The bowl reflects an engagement with antique and Islamic sources that is well informed, if not erudite, and anything but generic.

This conclusion refutes an interpretation of the Byzantine appropriation of Islamicizing, and even classicizing, motifs as derivative, confused, and meaningless. The S. Marco bowl demands that the modern viewer rethink familiar categories of the antique, the exotic, and the secular in the medieval world. The vessel illuminates the hybrid nature of divination as both ancient and Islamic and provides insight into the means by which occult knowledge was pursued and preserved in Byzantium. Ultimately, this delicate, unassuming glass bowl makes a profound statement about medieval Christian negotiation of visual and textual traditions from the Greco-Roman and Islamic worlds. As such, it offers valuable and rare perspective on how Byzantine material and intellectual culture maintained a dynamic, meaningful, and complex connection with non-Christian traditions, both past and present.

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cross-cultural exchange in the medieval world, and she is currently completing a book on the role of foreign elements in middle Byzantine imperial imagery and ideology [Department of Art History and Archaeology, Washington University in St. Louis, 1 Brookings Drive, St. Louis, Mo. 63130-4899, awwalker@wustl.edu].

Notes

This article is part of a larger study on the role of pseudo-Arabic in middle Byzantine art and architecture, which grew from a footnote in my doctoral dissertation. Aspects of my research were presented at the annual meetings of the Medieval Academy, Seattle, 2004, and the College Art Association, Atlanta, 2005. I thank the audiences and participants of those sessions for their valuable suggestions. The bulk of this project was undertaken with the support of a Mellon Post Doctoral Fellowship in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. Generous assistance from the Department of Art History and Archaeology, Washington University in St. Louis, supplemented the cost of illustrations. I am greatly indebted to numerous individuals for their helpful advice and perceptive criticism, especially Ioli Kalavrezou, David Roxburgh, Maria Mavroudi, Kirsten Ataoguz, Dilianna Angelova, Emine Fetvacı, Ludovico Geymonat, Sheila Blair, and the two anonymous readers for *The Art Bulletin*. Any mistakes or shortcomings remain, of course, my own.

1. André Grabar, "La verrerie d'art byzantine au Moyen Âge," *Monuments et Mémoires* 57 (1971): 90–94; Anthony Cutler, "The Mythological Bowl in the Treasury of San Marco at Venice," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy, and History, Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), 235–54; Ioli Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco and the 'Classical' in Byzantium," in *Studien zur mittelalterlichen Kunst 800–1250: Festschrift für Florentine Mutherich*, ed. Katharina Bierbrauer, Peter K. Klein, and Willibald Sauerländer (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1985), 167–74; and David Buckton, ed., *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan: Olivetti, 1984), 181–83, cat. no. 21. Regarding glass production in Byzantium, see J. Henderson and M. Mundell Mango, "Glass at Medieval Constantinople: Preliminary Scientific Evidence," in *Constantinople and Its Hinterland*, ed. Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (Aldershot, U.K.: Variorum, 1995), 333–56.
2. For early and middle Byzantine chalices equipped with double handles and/or lacking stems, see Marlia M. Mango and Laskarina Bouras, "Chalice," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (hereafter ODB), ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), vol. 1, 405; and Buckton, *The Treasury of San Marco*, cat. nos. 15, 23.

3. Cutler, "The Mythological Bowl," 240–41; and Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco," 172.
4. The inscription on the lip encircles the entire opening. Around the base, the inscription runs only partway, although it originally extended further, as the shadow of additional decoration indicates.
5. The vessel probably entered the S. Marco treasury after 1231, when a fire destroyed portions of the early medieval building. The earliest inventory (1283) does not mention the bowl, which is first recorded in 1325 and again in 1820–24. Rodolfo Gallo, *Il tesoro di S. Marco e la sua storia* (Venice: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1967), 13–15, 19–31, 278, V, no. 3, 376, no. 33; and Guido Perocco, "History of the Treasury of San Marco," in Buckton, *The Treasury of San Marco*, 65–68.
6. Byzantium's relation with the antique past was complex and shifting. See Margaret Mullett and Roger Scott, eds., *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham, U.K.: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981); Paul Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism: The First Phase; Notes and Remarks on Education and Culture in Byzantium from Its Origins to the 10th Century*, trans. Helen Lindsay and Ann Moffatt (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986); Ruth Macrides and Paul Magdalino, "The Fourth Kingdom and the Rhetoric of Hellenism," in *The Perception of the Past in 12th-Century Europe*, ed. Magdalino (London: Hambledon Press, 1992), 117–56; Helen Saradi, *Aspects of the Classical Tradition in Byzantium* (Toronto, 1995); and nn. 17, 18 below.
7. George C. Miles, "Classification of Islamic Elements in Byzantine Architectural Ornament in Greece," *Actes du XIIe Congrès Internationale des Études Byzantines* 3 (1964): 281–87; idem, "Byzantium and the Arabs: Relations in Crete and the Aegean Area," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 20–32, with earlier bibliography; Anthony Cutler, "A Christian Ewer with Islamic Imagery and the Question of Arab *Gastarbeiter* in Byzantium," in *Iconographica: Mélanges offerts à Piotr Skubiszewski*, ed. Robert Favreau and Marie-Hélène Debiès (Poitiers: Université de Poitiers, Centre d'Études Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale, 1999), 63–69; and Robert Nelson, "Palaeologan Illuminated Ornament and the Arabesque," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 41 (1986): 7–22. Pseudo-Arabic was also used in medieval Islamic, Western medieval, and Renaissance art, although the significance of the motif shifts depending on the context. Don Aanavi, "Islamic Pseudo Inscriptions" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1969); S. D. T. Spittle, "Cufic Lettering in Christian Art," *Archaeological Journal* 111 (1954): 138–54; Richard Ettinghausen, "Kufesque in Byzantine Greece, the Latin West and the Muslim World," in *A Colloquium in Memory of George Carpenter Miles (1905–1975)* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1976), 28–47; Michele Bernardini, "Un'iscrizione araba in una vetrata nella chiesa della SS. Annunziata a Firenze," in *Arte d'Occidente temi e metodi: Studi in onore di Angiola Maria Romanini*, vol. 3, ed. Angiola Maria Romanini and Antonio Cadei (Rome: Edizioni Sintesi Informazione, 1999), 1023–30; and Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 51–71.
8. Cutler, "The Mythological Bowl," 239.
9. Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco," 168–73. See also Hans Belting, "Kunst oder Object-Stil?" in *Byzanz und der Westen: Studien zur Kunst des europäischen Mittelalters*, ed. Irmgard Hutter (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), 65–83.
10. Unlike Byzantine icons of saints, which accurately identify holy people to ensure the efficacy of the devotee's veneration, representations of pagan characters, it is argued, avoid idolatry by maintaining a degree of uncertainty regarding the identity of the figure depicted, thereby neutralizing any supernatural force they might possess. Eunice Dauterman Maguire and Henry Maguire, *Other Icons: Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 165–67.
11. William Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 139–40. To my knowledge the sole exception to this trend is Anthony Cutler's suggestion that the pseudo-Arabic might have been deployed as an archaizing device, functioning in tandem with the classicizing imagery. Cutler, "Parallel Universes of Arab and Byzantine Art [with Special Reference to the Fatimid Era]," in *L'Égypte fatimide: Son art et son histoire*, ed. Marianne Barrucand (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999), 639.
12. Cutler, "The Mythological Bowl," 254; and Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco," 173. Regarding aesthetic eclecticism in middle Byzantine secular art, see André Grabar, "Le succès des arts orientaux à la cour byzantine sous les Macédoniens," *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 2 (1951): 32–60. Taking their cue from Byzantinists, Islamicists understand the pseudo-Arabic to be without specific meaning and interpret the vessel's pairing of classical and Islamic motifs to reflect Byzantium's attitude toward these two cultures as exotic "others."
- Richard Ettinghausen et al., *Islamic Art and Architecture, 650–1250* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 296–97.
13. J. Darrouès, *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*, Archives de l'Orient chrétien, 6 (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1960), 329, cited in Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco," 173.
14. On lecanomancy and hydromancy in the Byzantine world and antique precedents for this tradition, see Armand Delatte, *La catoptronomie grecque et ses dérivés* (Liège: H. Vaillant-Carmanne; Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1932), esp. 7–11, 147–49; idem, *Anecdota Atheniensia*, vol. 1, *Textes grecs inédits relatifs à l'histoire des religions* (Liège: H. Vaillant-Carmanne; Paris: Édouard Champion, 1927), passim; R. P. H. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1988), 95–96; idem, "Contributions to the Study of Palaeologan Magic," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 146–47; and Henry Maguire, "Feathers Signify Power: The Iconography of Byzantine Ceramics from Serres," in *Diethnes Synedrio Hoi Serres kai he perioche tous apo ten archaia ste metabyzantine koinonia*, 2 vols. (Thessaloniki: Demos Serron, 1998), vol. 2, 383–98.
15. A similar concentration of a prophetic image was achieved in an early Renaissance German necromantic text, which instructed that a vision be conjured on the surface of the medium's polished fingernail. Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the 15th Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 97–98, 108–12.
16. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, passim; idem, "Sorcery and Politics at the Byzantine Court in the 12th Century: Interpretations of History," in *The Making of Byzantine History*, ed. Roderick Beaton and Charlotte Roueché (Aldershot, U.K.: Variorum, 1993), 73–85; and Dimitris Chahelias, "The Mount Athos Esphigmenou 14 Codex: Pagan and Christian Myth in Middle Byzantine Manuscript Illumination" (PhD diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1995), 163–79.
17. Kurt Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951); idem, *Classical Heritage in Byzantine and Near Eastern Art* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981); Ernst Kitzinger, "The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 95–115; and H. Belting, "Problemi vecchi e nuovi sull'arte della cosiddetta 'rinascenza macedone' a Bisanzio," *Corso di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 29 (1982): 31–57.
18. Henry Maguire, "Epigrams, Art, and the 'Macedonian Renaissance,'" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994): 105–15; idem, "The Profane Aesthetic in Byzantine Art and Literature," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 189–205; Liz James, "Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and Be on Your Guard: Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople," *Gesta* 35, no. 1 (1996): 12–20; and Amy Papalexandrou, "Memory Tattered and Torn: Spolia in the Heartland of Byzantine Hellenism," in *Archaeologies of Memory*, ed. Ruth M. Van Dyke and Susan E. Alcock (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 56–80. The creative refashioning of antiquity is certainly not unique to Byzantium; for example, see Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice & Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Alina Payne et al., eds., *Antiquity and Its Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Ellen Perry, *The Aesthetics of Emulation in the Visual Arts of Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
19. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*; Maria Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and Its Arabic Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Alicia Walker, "Exotic Elements in Middle Byzantine Secular Art and Aesthetics: 843–1204 C.E." (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004); Paul Magdalino, *L'orthodoxie des astrologues: La science entre le dogme et la divination à Byzance, VIIe–XIVe* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2006); Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi, *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium* (Geneva: La Pomme d'Or, 2007); and Anthony Cutler, *The Empire of Things: Gifts and Gift Exchange between Byzantium, the Islamic World, and Beyond*, forthcoming.
20. Grabar, "La verrerie d'art byzantine," 94–107, 112–27, who leans toward an eleventh-century date for the S. Marco vessel based on comparison with surviving middle Byzantine glass objects; and Henderson and Mango, "Glass at Medieval Constantinople," 339–48, with earlier bibliography.
21. Adolf Goldschmidt and Kurt Weitzmann, *Die byzantinische Elfenbeinskulpturen des X–XIII Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1, *Kasten* (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1930); and Anthony Cutler, "On Byzantine Boxes," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 42–43 (1984–85): 32–47.
22. Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco," 171. Cutler ("The Mythological Bowl," 237–38) has cautioned against making too close a connection between the vessel and rosette caskets, noting that the rosettes on the ivory boxes are more naturalistic than the summary, abstract floral motifs on the S. Marco bowl. He does not, however, dispute a tenth-century date for the bowl. In addition, it should be noted that the bulk of the rosette caskets were mass-produced, while the high level

- of production and carefully executed program of the S. Marco bowl indicate that it was a commissioned piece, designed to convey a particular meaning and serve a specific purpose.
23. Active proponents of a tenth-century date posit that the bowl's heterogeneous assemblage of classicizing motifs reveals a collecting spirit in keeping with the supposed encyclopedic character of Constantine VII's literary patronage. (Regarding encyclopedism in Byzantium and Constantine VII's purported role in these efforts, see Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, 309–46.) Accordingly, the classicizing motifs on the S. Marco bowl are said to be modeled on antique gems, which Constantine is hypothesized to have collected (Cutler, "The Mythological Bowl," 254; and Cyril Mango and Marlia Mundell Mango, "Cameos in Byzantium," in *Cameos in Context: The Benjamin Zucker Lectures, 1990*, ed. M. Henig and M. Vickers [Houlton, Me.: Derek J. Content, 1993], 58, 73 n. 9). There exists, however, no evidence for an imperial gem collection during Constantine VII's reign or that of any other Byzantine emperor. Furthermore, this argument relies on—and perpetuates—the assumption that the motifs on the S. Marco vessel are meaningless; like a modern stamp collection, the assemblage is proposed to hold significance only in the amassing of types.
 - Additional evidence for an association of the bowl with Constantine VII has been found in a letter the emperor wrote in thanks for an "Arab cup" received as a gift (see n. 13 above). The document attests to Byzantine recognition and admiration of Islamic art in the tenth century, but Constantine does not describe the cup in question, and the basis of its identification as "Arab" is unclear. Presumably, had Constantine beheld a vessel similar to the S. Marco bowl, he would have recognized the predominantly classicizing character of the iconography. While it evinces admiration of Islamic art in the mid-tenth century, the letter sheds little light on the Byzantine reception of a hybrid object like the S. Marco bowl.
 24. Ihor Ševčenko, "Rereading Constantine Porphyrogenitus," in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. J. Shephard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, U.K.: Variorum, 1992), 167–89.
 25. In contrast to the complex and varied pattern on the S. Marco bowl, pseudo-Arabic in other works of medieval art is often dominated by a highly reduced, repeated motif that Ettinghausen ("Kufesque in Byzantine Greece," 30–45) terms "the tall-short-tall syndrome" and identifies as a debased form of the word "Allah" (God), which, he argues, was deployed as a powerful but generic apotropaic device.
 26. Although significantly postdating the creation of the S. Marco bowl, a thirteenth-century account by the Byzantine court historian George Pachymeres provides a sense of the reception Islamic objects may have received at the Byzantine court and the potential availability of Arabic inscriptions to be copied. A copper plate decorated with Arabic script is, because of its beauty, prepared for presentation to the emperor during a Christian festival. The "Egyptian" inscription arouses suspicion, however, when the name of the "accursed" Muhammad is recognized. A courtier literate in Arabic confirms its meaning, and the plate, considered impure because of its inscriptional content, is not used in the celebration. Georges Pachymères, *Relations historiques*, trans. Vitalien Laurent, ed. Albert Failler (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1984), vol. 2, 574–75 (6.12).
 27. Adolf Grohmann, "The Origin and Early Development of Floriated Kufic," *Ars Orientalis* 2 (1957): 183–213; and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 56–59.
 28. Floriated Kufic was used, however, in other regions of the medieval Islamic world. For example, see the tenth- to eleventh-century epigraphy on buildings in Iran. Sheila Blair, *Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), nos. 9, 23, figs. 14, 15, 38.
 29. On artistic exchange between Byzantium and the Fatimids, see Cutler, "Parallel Universes," 635–48; and George F. Bass et al., *Serge Limani: An 11th-Century Shipwreck*, vol. 1, *The Ship and Its Anchorage, Crew, and Passengers* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).
 30. Although floriated Kufic is found in Abbasid and Fatimid textiles beginning in the second half of the tenth century, the most compelling comparanda appear in Fatimid textiles of the eleventh century. Claus-Peter Haase, "Some Aspects of Fatimid Calligraphy on Textiles," in Barrucand, *L'Égypte fatimide*, 339–47, esp. 341; Nancy Pence Britton, *A Study of Some Early Islamic Textiles in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1938), figs. 41, 42, 46; and Ernst Kühnel and Louisa Bellinger, *Catalogue of Dated Tiraz Fabrics: Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid* (Washington, D.C.: National Publishing Company, 1952), pls. xxviii–xxx, nos. 73.672, 73.42, 73.39, 73.573, 73.43.
 31. Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen: 8.–13. Jh.* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1971), esp. cat. nos. 20, 21, 24, 28, 35, 40, 42, 43, 134; Sophie Makariou, "A New Group of Spanish Ivory Pen Boxes?" *Journal of the David Collection* 2 (2005): 185–95, esp. figs. 90, 93; and Sheila Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us: Text and Message on the Ivories from al-Andalus," *Journal of the David Collection* 2 (2005): 75–100.
 32. Jean Ebersolt, *La miniature byzantine* (Paris: G. Vanoest, 1926), 48, pl. LIII, fig. 2; and Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs," 32, fig. 94.
 33. Kurt Weitzmann and George Galavaris, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Illuminated Greek Manuscripts*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 118, fig. 395; and Cutler, "Parallel Universes," 642, fig. 2.
 34. See n. 7 above.
 35. Enameled and gilded glass, for example, is attested in Islamic regions only in the twelfth century and may have developed from Byzantine glass production, which used these techniques already in the eleventh century. Prior to the twelfth century, Islamic glass was stained, a technique often referred to as luster painting, and gold was "sandwiched" between layers of glass rather than painted onto the surface, as in Byzantine examples. Stefano Carboni, *Glass from Islamic Lands* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 50–53, 62–67, 323–25; and Carboni and David Whitehouse, *Glass of the Sultans* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 199–207, cat. nos. 108–9.
 36. For discussion of Homer's importance in Byzantine education and literature, see N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1996), passim; and Alexander Kazhdan et al., "Homer," in *ODB*, vol. 2, 943–44.
 37. Although Pausanias was not widely read in the Byzantine era, his *Periegesis (Description of Greece)* was known to the early-tenth-century scholar Arethas and was cited in the late-tenth-century *Souda*. A. Diller, "Pausanias in the Middle Ages," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 87 (1956): 84–97; and Alexander Kazhdan, "Pausanias," in *ODB*, vol. 3, 1609.
 38. Regarding the continuity of occult traditions across Byzantine history, see Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, 129–31; and Dorothy de F. Abrahamse, "Magic and Sorcery in the Hagiography of the Middle Byzantine Period," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982): 3–17.
 39. R. Bianchi Bandinelli, *Hellenistic-Byzantine Miniatures of the Iliad (Ilias Ambrosiana)* (Olten: U. Graf, 1955); and Kurt Weitzmann, "The Survival of Mythological Representations in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and Their Impact on Christian Iconography," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 14 (1960): 46–47.
 40. Byzantine reception of antique statuary ranged from aesthetic wonder and scholarly appreciation to Christianized reinterpretation and fear of demonic powers thought to reside within pagan sculptures, but these varied reactions all attest to continued engagement with the art of antiquity. Sarah Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and James, "Pray Not to Fall into Temptation," with earlier bibliography.
 41. The blacked-out area in the illustration showing an augur (Fig. 9) is the result of compositing two side views of the bowl to produce a full view of the figure. Under normal conditions, the handle obscures this medallion. My iconographic analysis of the vessel is indebted to earlier studies, especially Cutler, "The Mythological Bowl," and Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco." Where my interpretations differ, I note other scholars' alternative readings.
 42. A. Pasini, *Il tesoro di San Marco in Venezia* (Venice: Ferdinando Ongania, 1886), 100–101. Cutler ("The Mythological Bowl," 252–54, fig. 15) endorses this identification and provides as a parallel a Roman gem with an augur similarly posed in profile, but with his divining rod extended forward. For a Roman representation of augural tools, including the *lituus*, see Susanne W. Rasmussen, *Public Portents in Republican Rome* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2003), 153, fig. 23.
 43. Scholars prefer Roman or late antique comparanda for the motifs on the S. Marco bowl, but the tendrils flanking the augur recall the so-called framing palmettes in mid-fourth-century BCE red-figure Greek vessels from Paestum, suggesting an additional category of ancient models for the glass vessel (A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Paestum* [London: British School at Rome, 1987], 16, type III.D, 65–66, figs. 2.18–21). This comparison complements Kalavrezou's observation that the pale-bodied figures against the dark glass on the S. Marco vessel evoke the aesthetic of ancient Greek red-figure vases (Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco," 167–69).
 44. Nicetas Choniates, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. Jan Louis van Dieten (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 339; *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulas (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 187; and Paul Magdalino, "Occult Sciences and Imperial Power in Byzantine History and Historiography," in Magdalino and Mavroudi, *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, 159–60.
 45. Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco," 169–70.
 46. I thank Christopher Faraone for this suggestion.
 47. Paul Marius Martin, "L'oracle aborigène de Mars à Tiora-Matiene:

- Essai de localisation et d'interprétation," in *Actes du colloque Ethnohistoire et Archéologie* (Tours: Imprimerie Spéciale de l'Université, 1984), 203–16; and Matthew Gonzales, "The Oracle and Cult of Ares in Asia Minor," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 45, no. 3 (2005): 261–83.
48. Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM) IV.296–334.
 49. Apollo was strongly associated with prophecy in the Greco-Roman world. No fewer than twenty-two separate oracular sites were dedicated to him. Leonard Schmitz, "Oraculum," in *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, ed. William Smith, 2 vols. (1870; reprint, Boston: Longwood Press, 1977), vol. 2, 836–40.
 50. Images of Apollo holding a branch and leaning against a pedestal typically depict the god frontally (John Boardman et al., eds., *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae* [hereafter *LIMC*], 8 vols. [Zurich: Artemis, 1981–99], vol. 2, pt. 2, 205, nos. 249, 251–54, 260, 312–13, nos. 189, 191, 192, 202–4, 209, 252, 253, 260). The figure has also been identified as Dionysos based on his pose and the wreath that encircles his head (Cutler, "The Mythological Bowl," 244–45; and Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco," 170). Apollo and Dionysos possess similar characteristics (languid poses and wreathed hair tied in knots at the nape of the neck), but the prominence of the branch within the S. Marco composition links the figure more strongly with Apollo.
 51. Schmitz, "Oraculum," 836–38; and H. Parke, *Greek Oracles* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 72–89.
 52. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, PGM I.262–347, II.1–184, III.290–320, VI.1–47, VII.727–39. See also S. Eitrem, "Dreams and Divination in Magical Ritual," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 177–78.
 53. These references are made by John of Rhodes in the tenth century and Kedrenos in the twelfth century. See J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae graeca*, vol. 96 (1860; reprint, Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), col. 1284D; George Cedrenus, *Compendium Historiarum*, *Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae*, ed. I. Bekker, vol. 1 (Bonn: E. Weberi, 1838), 532, trans. Timothy Gregory, "Julian and the Last Oracle of Delphi," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 24 (1983): 356. See also A. Markopoulos, "Kedrenos, Pseudo-Symeon, and the Last Oracle at Delphi," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985): 207–10, who questions the attribution of the tenth-century reference to John of Rhodes, because the author is otherwise unattested in the literary record.
 54. Marlia Mango, *The Seso Treasure*, pt. 1 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1994), 167, 180, figs. 3-1, 3-15. See also the depiction of Zeus in the Milan *Iliad*, Weitzmann, "The Survival of Mythological Representations," fig. 1.
 55. Although the aegis is more commonly associated with Athena, it was in fact the trophy of Zeus, who received the Gorgon's head from his son the hero Perseus. Zeus later presented the aegis to Athena, who is often depicted with the device on her breastplate or shield. Cutler ("The Mythological Bowl," 245–48) tentatively identifies this figure as Perseus bearing a shield with the Gorgon's reflection. The vignette does not, however, convincingly parallel any known representations of Perseus. Kalavrezou ("The Cup of San Marco," 170) also interprets the face as that of the Gorgon but does not venture to identify the figure who holds it.
 56. H. W. Park, *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957).
 57. George Synkellos, *The Chronography of George Synkellos*, trans. William Adler and Paul Tuffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 311.
 58. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, PGM III.230–62, in which Zeus is invoked together with Apollo; PGM V.1–53, a lecanomantic spell invoking Zeus, among other gods; and PGM V.459–89.
 59. Michel Psellos, *Chronographie*, vol. 2 (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1926), 129–30 (7.74).
 60. Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology*, 61–65, pls. xxii–xxiii; idem, "Representations of Hellenic Oracles in Byzantine Manuscripts," in *Mansel's Armağan / Mélanges Mansel*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1974), 397–410, 402; George Galavaris, *The Illustrations of the Liturgical Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzenus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 222–27; S. M. Pelekanidis et al., *The Treasures of Mount Athos*, vol. 2 (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1975), 206–54, esp. 231–35; and Cacharelis, "The Mount Athos Esphigmenou 14 Codex." T. Avner, "A Comparison of the Illustration of the Homily on the Nativity in the Manuscripts Mount Athos, Esphigmenou Monastery, cod. 14 and Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate Library, cod. Taphou 14" (PhD diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1978), was, unfortunately, not available to me.
 61. Hermes' staff in the S. Marco bowl does not resemble any common types of the *kerykeion* (Boardman et al., *LIMC*, vol. 8, pt. 1, 728–30, pt. 2, 494–95). Elements of his staff reflect features of annotations for metals and minerals associated with Hermes/Mercury in Byzantine alchemical manuscripts (Charles DuFresne Du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae graecitatis*, vols. 1–2 [Graz: Akademische Druck, 1958], esp. 18), but these symbols do not provide any direct parallels.
 62. This was due in part to his conflation and confusion with Hermes Trismegistus, the purported author of a late antique magic treatise. G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
 63. Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26–27, 175–76, 182–84, 251–53. For discussion of late antique lecanomantic spells employing Hermes, see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, PGM III.45–50, IV.1442–70, V.370–446, and esp. VII.664–85, a spell for inducing dream oracles.
 64. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, 258.
 65. Augurs sometimes divined from celestial phenomena. Jyri Vaahtera, *Roman Augural Lore in Greek Historiography* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001), 136–37.
 66. Cutler ("The Mythological Bowl," 250–51) identified this as a scene of mourning, possibly that of Ajax lamenting the death of Achilles. This interpretation is not, however, compelling with respect to the closest antique parallels.
 67. Raymond J. Clark, *Catabasis: Vergil and the Wisdom Tradition* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1979), 74–78; and Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 43–54, 63.
 68. Odysseus used his sword to slaughter animals whose blood attracted and appeased the spirits of the dead (*Odyssey*, 11.23–50).
 69. See also Boardman et al., *LIMC*, vol. 6, pt. 2, 624, nos. 10a–b, 11, 22, in which the hero wears a distinctly pointed cap similar to that worn by the figure on the S. Marco bowl.
 70. For Nike, see *ibid.*, vol. 6, pt. 2, 571, no. 124; for Psyche, vol. 7, pt. 2, 451, no. 98. Alternatively, the S. Marco vignette could draw from an antique model depicting winged Eros addressing the god of war, Ares (*ibid.*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 406, no. 328); however, Eros usually appears nude and does not alight on a column. Weitzmann ("The Survival of Mythological Representations," 50–51) suggests that a Sphinx might have provided the basis for the form of the winged figure, the feline beast slowly evolving to appear more like a victory figure.
 71. Boardman et al., *LIMC*, vol. 4, pt. 2, 463–91, esp. 475, no. 452, 477, no. 478, 535, no. 1396. Cutler ("The Mythological Bowl," 251–53) notes that abrasions in the area of the figure's torso may indicate that he was originally depicted wearing the pelt of the Nemean lion, another attribute of Herakles. Kalavrezou ("The Cup of San Marco," 170) identifies the figure as "Herakles-like."
 72. Clark, *Catabasis*, 79–92.
 73. Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. Sir James George Frazer, vol. 2 (1921; reprint, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1939), 2.5.12. Apollodorus was cited in the description of books known to the ninth-century Byzantine bibliophile Photios. Photius, *Bibliothèque*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. R. Henry (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1960), 123 (161.22–24), 155 (167.24).
 74. Their association is also noted by Pseudo-Apollodorus (Apollodorus, *The Library*, 2.5.12).
 75. Like Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, and Ares, Herakles possessed an oracle, located at Bura in Achaia, Greece (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, vol. 3, trans. W. H. S. Jones [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1977], 7.25.10). A cave identified as the venue of this ancient oracular cult preserves Byzantine and post-Byzantine wall paintings that indicate the continued use of the site during the medieval era (Dora Katsonopoulou and Steven Soter, "The Oracular Cave of Herakles of Bura" [in Greek], *Archaiologia* 47 [1993]: 60–64). Herakles' popularity as a healing deity might also be relevant to his divinatory efficacy because medical shrines often provided oracles that diagnosed the sick. Christina A. Salowey, "Herakles and Healing Cult in the Peloponnesos," in *Peloponnesian Sanctuaries and Cults*, ed. Robin Hägg (Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Athen, 2002), 171–77.
 76. In Lucian's second-century dialogue *Menippus*, a text still read in medieval Byzantium, the Chaldean magus enlisted to guide Menippus to Hades instructs him to wear the attributes of Herakles, Odysseus, and Orpheus—the lion skin, cap, and lyre—and, if asked his name, to identify himself as one of these characters (*Menippus*, secs. 6–8). This strategem was aimed at tricking the guard, Aeacus, at the gate of Hades, who was responsible for allowing only the dead to pass (Lucian, *Menippus*, trans. and ed. A. M. Harmon [New York: Macmillan, 1967], 130–33). The work of Lucian was well known and widely imitated in

- the middle Byzantine era. The ninth-century bibliophile Photios praises him generously, and a tenth- or eleventh-century dialogue was written in his style. Photius, *Bibliothèque*, vol. 2, 102–3 [128]; and Kenneth Snipes, "Lucian," in *ODB*, vol. 2, 1255.
77. For evidence of these mechanics in late antique magical papyri, see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, PGM XXXVI.1–XXXVI.133 and XXIX.1–XXIX.21. Pagan statuary was believed to be a particularly potent site for the attraction of pagan deities and demons. James, "Pray Not to Fall into Temptation."
 78. In his study of oracles in middle Byzantine illuminated manuscripts, Weitzmann ("Representations of Hellenic Oracles," 409–10) noted that Byzantine representations tend to emphasize the "delivery" of the oracle. Although the S. Marco vignettes are more emblematic than narrative, their emphasis on the moment of communication might allude to a similar concern.
 79. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, 286–91; and Delatte, *La catoptronomie grecque*, 24.
 80. Delatte, *Anecdota Atheniensia*, 595; and Maguire, "Feathers Signify Power," 384, fig. 5.
 81. Henry Maguire, "Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages," *Speculum* 72 (1997): 1037–54.
 82. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, passim.
 83. It is tempting to search for a link among the figures depicted, the heavenly bodies, and astrological magic, but figures in only four of the seven vignettes share a celestial connection (Mars/Ares, Mercury/Hermes, Jupiter/Jesus, and Sun/Apollo). Nonetheless, the scholar Michael Scot (ca. 1175–ca. 1234), who was active at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II and translated philosophical and scientific texts from Arabic to Latin, cited the hours of Jupiter, Apollo, and Mercury as efficacious times for the performance of a lecanomantic ritual that employed Christian invocations (Delatte, *La catoptronomie grecque*, 25–26). The presence of these deities on the S. Marco bowl could have further enhanced its effectiveness.
 84. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, PGM IV.222–34 and 249–51; for a late antique lecanomantic spell conjuring Aphrodite, see PGM IV.3209–54. To my knowledge, no extant vessels from the late antique period have been identified as lecanomantic devices.
 85. Regarding the practice of divination at the middle Byzantine court and the prevalence of lecanomancy among other mantic techniques, see Magdalino, "Occult Sciences and Imperial Power," 119–62, esp. 129.
 86. His divinations were undertaken for the benefit of Emperor Theophilos (ibid., 123–24, 133–34). John the Grammarian is depicted performing a lecanomantic ritual to reveal the name of Theophilos's imperial successor in the twelfth-century illustrated manuscript of the *History* of John Skylitzes (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España vitr. 26-2, fol. 58r). Vasiliki Tsamakda, *The Illustrated Chronicle of Ioannes Skylitzes in Madrid* (Leiden: Alexandros Press, 2002), 101, fig. 139.
 87. Nicetas Choniates, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, 339.10–19; and Magdalino, "Occult Sciences and Imperial Power," 150–51, 155. Choniates describes lecanomancers as "those who falsely divined through tubs and basins" and cites them along with astrologers as the only diviners still active in twelfth-century Constantinople. Seth Skleros, the medium for this ritual, was blinded in about 1166 as punishment for his occult activities (Alexander Kazhdan, "Skleros," in *ODB*, vol. 3, 1912). According to Choniates, Skleros had performed divination since childhood, which would be in keeping with the practice of using children as mediums.
 88. Migne, *Patrologiae graeca*, vol. 137 (1978), cols. 720C, 741B, cited in Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, 296.
 89. Regarding Psellos's familiarity with occult knowledge and attitude toward pagan learning, see John Duffy, "Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals to the Theory and Practice of Magic: Michael Psellos and Michael Italikos," in Maguire, *Byzantine Magic*, 83–95; idem, "Hellenic Philosophy in Byzantium and the Lonely Mission of Michael Psellos," 147–55; and Polymnia Athanassiadi, "Byzantine Commentators on the Chaldean Oracles: Psellos and Plethon," 241, both in *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, ed. K. Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); and Magdalino, *L'orthodoxie des astrologues*, 91–96.
 90. Psellos, *Chronographie*, vol. 1, 149–50 (6.LXVII); trans. Duffy, "Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals," 89.
 91. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 158; and John Duffy, "Hermes Trismegistos," in *ODB*, vol. 2, 920.
 92. Psellos's attraction to the occult and, specifically, the Chaldean Oracles, probably stemmed from his study of late antique Neoplatonist philosophers, particularly Proclus, who promoted theurgy (the effort to communicate and ultimately achieve union with the divine) as the apex of religious and philosophical practice. Georg Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 189–225; and Athanassiadi, "Byzantine Commentators," 241.
 93. W. Wolska-Conus, "Les écoles de Psellos et de Xiphilin sous Constantine IX Monomaque," *Travaux et Mémoires* 6 (1976): 231–43; and Duffy, "Hellenic Philosophy," 150–52.
 94. George T. Dennis, ed., *Michaelis Pselli orationes forenses et acta* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1994), 1–103, esp. 96–97; Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, 44; and Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship," 203–4, 212–13. These accusations were probably motivated at least in part by political interests, as were similar charges brought against Psellos's student John Italos. Lowell Clucas, *The Trial of John Italos and the Crisis of Intellectual Values in Byzantium in the 11th Century* (Munich: Institut für Byzantinistik, Neugriechische Philologie und Byzantinische Kunstgeschichte der Universität, 1981).
 95. Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 193–95 (6.7); Sarolta A. Takács, "Oracles and Science—Anna Comnena's Comments on Astrology," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1996): 35–44; Magdalino, *L'orthodoxie des astrologues*, 96–100; and idem, "Occult Sciences and Imperial Power," 140–46.
 96. Duffy, "Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals," 91–94.
 97. In addition, the twelfth-century emperor Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–80) wrote a highly controversial defense of astrology, claiming its value as a means to access divine knowledge through the natural phenomena created by God. For discussion of this treatise, its reception, and the larger culture of occult learning at the Komnenian court, see Magdalino, *L'orthodoxie des astrologues*, 109–32; and idem, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 377–82.
 98. Cacharelías, "The Mount Athos Esphigmenou 14 Codex," 174; Athanassiadi, "Byzantine Commentators," 237–52; Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology*, 66–67; and Magdalino and Mavroudi, *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, passim.
 99. A. Adler, ed., *Suidae Lexicon*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1931), 534. In his description of an apotropaic coin purportedly depicting the Byzantine Emperor Constantine I, Michael Italikos takes pains to distinguish this Christian device from the magic instruments of Chaldean and Assyrian "theurgists." Maguire, "Magic and Money," 1044.
 100. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 40–41; and idem, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, 193.
 101. Dennis, *Michaelis Pselli orationes*, 96–97, lines 2657–61.
 102. Weitzmann (*Greek Mythology*, 65; and idem, "Representations of Hellenic Oracles," 402) acknowledged the pseudo-Arabic motif in the textile but did not comment on it.
 103. Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998); and Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 105–9, 195–98. Regarding Byzantine association of "Arab" learning with astrology in the eighth to early tenth centuries, see Magdalino, *L'orthodoxie des astrologues*, 55–89; and idem, "The Road to Baghdad in the Thought-World of 9th-Century Byzantium," in *Byzantium in the 9th Century: Dead or Alive?* ed. Leslie Brubaker (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate Variorum, 1998), 195–214.
 104. David Pingree, "Some of the Sources of the *Chayal al-Hakim*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 4, 13–14; and Maribel Fierro, "Batinism in al-Andalus: Maslama b. Qasim al-Qurtubi (d. 353/964), author of the *Rubbat al-Hakim* and the *Chayal al-Hakim* (Pica-trix)," *Studia Islamica* 84, no. 2 (1996): 87–112.
 105. Emilie Savage-Smith, ed., *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004), esp. xxxi; and Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe: Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l'Islam* (1966; reprint, Paris: Sindbad, 1987), 405. Regarding lecanomantic rituals in the modern Arab world that resemble features of late antique practice, see Alexander Fodor, "Arabic Bowl Divination and the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Proceedings of the Colloquium on Popular Customs and the Monotheistic Religions in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Fodor and A. Shvitiel (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University Chair for Arabic Studies, 1994), 73–101.
 106. Emilie Savage-Smith, "Magic-Medicinal Bowls," in *Science, Tools, and Magic*, pt. 2 (London: Nour Foundation, 1997), 72–87, esp. 76.
 107. Savage-Smith, "Magic and Islam," in *Science, Tools, and Magic*, 60. On the basis of comparison with medieval Islamic magic vessels, it could be argued that the S. Marco bowl was intended as a medical device, but this function is not consistent with the full range of the iconographic program. Only some of the pagan figures depicted possess a connection to ritual healing.

108. Mavroudi (*A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation*, 409–11) notes a thirteenth-century Byzantine prisoner in Arab lands who translated a treatise on celestial omens from Arabic to Greek. In the text, it was claimed that the work had been translated from the Hebrew to Greek, then to Arabic, and back to Greek. Although the provenance may be an elaboration, the idea of a divinatory text being recycled via Arabic was apparently not far-fetched.
109. As Magdalino (*L'orthodoxie des astrologues*, 104–7) notes, a word of caution must be voiced against eliding astrology and lecanomancy. It could be argued that astrology occupied an intellectual space within the bounds of Christian knowledge, a status that lecanomancy was never accorded.
110. A. R. Littlewood, ed., *Michaelis Pselli oratoria minora* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1985), 70–71, trans. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 155–56.
111. David Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions," *Helios* 21, no. 2 (1994): 195–96, 199–211. The use of exotic alphabets in magic devices was not a late antique invention; Greek and Roman occult texts and implements also employed foreign and secret letters. The obscurity of these "languages" added to the perceived power of the magic device. See also S. J. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," *Man*, n.s., 3, no. 2 (1968): 175–208.
112. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, PGM IV.235–42.
113. The alphabet is ascribed an Egyptian origin during the reign of Cleopatra (Pingree, "Some of the Sources of the *Ghayat al-Hakim*," 5). This attribution lends support to Cutler's suggestion that the pseudo-Arabic on the S. Marco bowl might have been deployed as an archaizing device (see n. 11 above). Perhaps the magic language was to be recognized as both exotic and ancient.
114. Savage-Smith, "Magic-Medicinal Bowls," nos. 25–28; and idem, "Magic and Islam," 59–63.
115. Frankfurter, "Magic of Writing," 208–9. For further discussion of the essential role that inscriptions played in ancient and late antique magic, see Roy Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets," in Faraone and Obbink, *Magika Hiera*, 108–10; and Naomi Janowitz, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practice in Late Antiquity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 45–61.
116. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, passim.
117. Michel Psellos, "Commentaire des 'Oracles chaldaïques,'" in Édouard Des Places, trans. and ed., *Oracles chaldaïques* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1979), 162–86, fragment 150, at 169–70; and Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship," 202. Hebrew was employed in at least one late antique magical papyrus (Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, PGM III.120).
118. Ettinghausen et al., *Islamic Art and Architecture*, 296–97.
119. At the middle Byzantine court, both diplomats and scholars were versed in Arabic and would have been able to decipher coherent inscriptions. For example, Symeon Seth, a bilingual student of Psellos, translated the Arabic folktale *Kalila wa Dimna* into Greek and may have served as an imperial delegate to Cairo in about 1058 (Magdalino, *L'orthodoxie des astrologues*, 100–103). Foreigners may also have attended schools in Constantinople; Michael Psellos claimed Arabs, Persians, Egyptians, and Ethiopians among his students (Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 164–65).
120. Richard Ettinghausen, "Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation?" in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy, and History*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), 307–11.
121. Irene Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 15–22.
122. Ibid., 17.
123. Scholars argue that in some Byzantine objects imprecise iconography and visual humor served to disarm pagan imagery, rendering it appropriate for Christian viewers (Cutler, "On Byzantine Boxes," 32–47; and Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, 165–67). The S. Marco bowl depicts pagan figures with relative specificity and seriousness, however, suggesting that these images maintained the power of their pagan referents. The program was instead distanced from Byzantine-Christian identity through the use of pseudo-Arabic.
124. Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 309–10 (10.5). This is not to say that all Byzantines elided ancient and medieval pagan cultures. Michael Italikos, for example, considered Chaldean, or Eastern, learning to be barbaric, and Hellenic learning its superior (Duffy, "Reactions of Two Byzantine Intellectuals," 91–94).
125. *Timarion*, secs. 33, 37, in *Timarione*, ed. Roberto Romano (Naples: Università di Napoli, Cattedra di Filologia Bizantina, 1974), 78, lines 805–6, 82, lines 919–21, trans. Barry Baldwin, *Timarion* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 64, 67; and R. Beaton, "Cappadocians at Court: Digenes and Timarion," in *Alexios I Komnenos*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Dion Smythe (Belfast: Queen's University of Belfast, 1996), 333–35.
126. Charles H. Morgan, *The Byzantine Pottery*, Corinth, vol. 11 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), 118, 264, fig. 92.
127. Maguire, "Feathers Signify Power," 385–87, figs. 6–13.

1 S. Marco bowl, 11th–12th century, enameled and gilded glass, h. 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (17 cm), diam. 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (17 cm) (with handles 13 in., or 33 cm). Treasury of S. Marco, Venice (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

cizing and exoticizing elements. By perpetuating an assumption that the program of the bowl lacks particular significance, earlier interpretations instigate a rupture between the pagan and foreign elements on the object and in Byzantine culture more broadly. Although the hybrid nature of the vessel's program defies easy explanation, eclecticism and idiosyncrasy need not be equated with confusion or lack of meaning. Rather, the active selection and combination of classicizing and Islamicizing features may reflect the artistic innovation of the medieval maker, who adapted art forms from the Greco-Roman past and Islamic present to express the particular associations that these non-Christian cultures held for the Byzantine user. It may be fruitful, therefore, to focus not on the deficit of meaning between the Byzantine object and its iconographic and inscriptional models but rather on the creation of meaning within the vessel itself, on the significant relation this object establishes between Islamic and classical cultures, on the one hand, and between these groups and Byzantine culture, on the other.

It is possible that the hybrid program of the S. Marco bowl reflects a perception prevalent among the middle Byzantine educated elite that both the ancient Greek and contemporary Islamic worlds were sources for occult learning, specifically, divination. The vessel may reflect knowledge of antique divinatory culture and may even have been used in lecanomantic hydromancy, that is, divination through containers filled with water. Lecanomancy and hydromancy were ancient mantic, or divinatory, techniques with relatively consistent textual traditions until at least the fifteenth century.¹⁴ The practitioner gazed into a vessel and witnessed revelations communicated in the surface of the liquid. Information was sought from demons, spirits, or deities, depending on whom the medium conjured. The small size of the S. Marco bowl limited the area in which the message appeared, serving to concentrate the diviner's attention and enhance the efficacy of the device.¹⁵

Divination occupied a prominent place in ancient learning and remained popular from antiquity through the late Mid-

2 S. Marco bowl, detail showing small medallion with profile bust (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

dle Ages and beyond. In Byzantium, attitudes toward the occult were ambivalent. The church, unsurprisingly, held the mantic arts in suspicion because of their association with pagan idols and the demonic. Accusation of involvement in magic was a recurring form of political invective.¹⁶ Nevertheless, members of the Constantinopolitan elite studied and even engaged in divination, providing a vibrant context of production and use for the S. Marco bowl. The vessel can be situated in this privileged social space, where classical and Islamic intellectual and artistic traditions intersected with middle Byzantine thought and practice.

Scholarship on Byzantine secular art traditionally privileges the authority of Greco-Roman models, judging the success of medieval works of art according to the effective revival or survival of antique forms and meanings.¹⁷ As a result, Byzantine artists and audiences too often appear as passive conduits

3 S. Marco bowl, detail showing pseudo-Arabic inscription on interior rim (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

4 S. Marco bowl, detail showing pseudo-Arabic inscription on base (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

or ill-informed imitators of classical sources. In contrast, recent studies increasingly insist on the agency of medieval makers and users in the deployment of antique models and interpret the potential significance of classicizing elements according to Byzantine systems of meaning.¹⁸ Furthermore, earlier analyses pay little attention to the Islamicizing elements of the S. Marco bowl, despite the evidence these features contribute regarding the date and meaning of the object. Although aesthetically hybrid, the vessel is semantically unified, reflecting

a broader system of Byzantine thought that grouped Greco-Roman and Islamic traditions in a common cultural category.

Studies of medieval art tend to divide along boundaries of media, religion, geography, and chronology, but the S. Marco bowl demands a cross-cultural, cross-temporal, multimedia, and multidisciplinary approach. At the same time, interpretation of this object necessarily draws on areas of scholarly inquiry—such as Byzantine divination and Byzantine-Islamic artistic interaction—that are just beginning to receive thorough investigation.¹⁹ For this reason, the conclusions of this study must remain hypothetical, to await fuller understanding of the social contexts within which this object functioned and through which it can be interpreted. It is hoped that the approach presented here helps to open the way toward new interpretations of medieval material culture that might in turn have repercussions for the broader study of art history. These realms of inquiry include the meaning of antique iconography in medieval contexts, intercultural communication (and miscommunication) in the visual realm, and the role of non-Christian beliefs and practices in shaping medieval Christian cultures.

The Date of the S. Marco Bowl

In order to place the S. Marco bowl within a specific context of production and reception, it is necessary to reconsider its probable date. A major challenge to this effort is the extreme dearth of glass surviving from medieval Byzantium. Early and middle Byzantine comparanda exist for the compositional

5 *Tiraz* fabric, detail showing inscription, Egyptian, Fatimid, 996–1020, linen plain weave with silk and linen slit tapestry weave insert, 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (45 × 50.5 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Marie Antoinette Evans Fund, 32.31 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

devices of the S. Marco bowl, most notably, a corpus of enameled glass vessels dated on the basis of archaeological evidence from the eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries.²⁰ But precise iconographic and stylistic parallels are unattested among surviving Byzantine glass objects.

Looking beyond comparanda in glass, the seven figural vignettes and the framing motifs of florettes and profile portraits recall elements of the so-called rosette caskets, a corpus of well-known tenth- to eleventh-century Byzantine ivory boxes decorated with a repertoire of classicizing motifs rendered in a dynamic, naturalistic style.²¹ On the basis of these general iconographic and stylistic parallels, earlier studies frequently cite the rosette caskets as key comparanda for dating the S. Marco bowl.²² Some scholars further narrow the vessel's date to the mid-tenth century through direct or indirect association with the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (r. 913–59), who was long credited with spearheading a classical revival, the so-called Macedonian renaissance.²³ Neither the renaissance concept nor Constantine VII's role in it are widely accepted today.²⁴ Nonetheless, classicizing evidence of the tenth century continues to be privileged in discussions of the S. Marco bowl.

Efforts to date the object pay relatively little attention, surprisingly, to the pseudo-Arabic motifs. Yet an analysis of inscriptional style yields a close connection with Islamic epigraphic models of the late tenth to the eleventh century, arguing for reconsideration of the mid-tenth-century date commonly ascribed to the bowl. In addition, pseudo-Arabic motifs in other media of Byzantine art—including architecture and manuscripts—appear as early as the late tenth century but are concentrated in the eleventh to thirteenth century, further supporting a later attribution.

The pseudo-Arabic inscriptions on the S. Marco vessel possess a relatively square format and closely adhere to an emphatically horizontal baseline from which spring regular vertical extensions. Rendered in a relatively thin line, the forms are precise and evenly distributed. While nonsensical, the pseudoinscription is remarkably varied in its form, simulating the appearance of actual Arabic.²⁵ Some of the individual shapes loosely resemble Arabic letters—for example, *kaf*, *lam*, *mim*, and *ta marbuta*—suggesting that they were modeled on an actual inscription.²⁶ Features evoking true Arabic indicate that even though the pseudoscript on the S. Marco bowl is illegible, perception of it as language was important.

The most distinctive characteristic of the inscription is the prominent vegetal embellishment at the terminating points

of certain “letters.” This feature associates the S. Marco motif with a type of medieval Arabic script known as floriated Kufic, which was produced by a variety of medieval Islamic groups and in diverse media beginning in the mid- to late ninth century.²⁷ Because of geographic proximity to Byzantium, portable objects from the Mediterranean region constitute the most likely sources for possible inscriptional models.²⁸ In particular, Byzantine alliances and conflicts with the Umayyad dynasty of Spain and the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt resulted in the traffic of goods through trade, diplomacy, and war.²⁹

Among medieval Islamic objects embellished with floriated Kufic, textiles offer especially useful comparanda because they are preserved in relatively large numbers and are often inscribed with the name of a ruler, thereby providing reliable dating evidence from a fairly extensive corpus. For example, the sharply angled letter forms and floriated terminals in a textile produced during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim (r. 996–1020) presents intriguing parallels to the S. Marco bowl inscription (Fig. 5).³⁰ Medieval Islamic ivories, especially those from Spain, also carry inscriptions, which sometimes include precise dates of production. A Spanish Umayyad box displays inscriptions that resemble the shape of floriated elements (above all, the trilobed leaf finial) and the horizontal emphasis of the baseline in the S. Marco vessel (Fig. 6). The inscription on the Umayyad box simply repeats the word *baraka* (“blessings”), but it parallels more complex floriated Kufic motifs on a group of ivories produced in Spain and dated by inscription from the late tenth to the mid-eleventh century.³¹

While it is possible that the S. Marco bowl could have imitated an early example of floriated Kufic, it is more likely that the motif reached Byzantium somewhat later, after the style had become widespread. Two middle Byzantine manuscripts embellished with a similar type of pseudo-Arabic support this argument. One manuscript, which contains the *Homilies* of Saint John Chrysostom (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France gr. 660, fol. 350), dates to the eleventh century (Fig. 7).³² The other manuscript, a Byzantine lectionary (Sinai, Monastery of St. Catherine gr. 207, fol. 210r), dates to the twelfth century.³³ In addition, a group of late-tenth- to thirteenth-century churches located in Greece and decorated with pseudo-Arabic motifs in mosaic, wall painting, and brickwork demonstrates the broader phenomenon of pseudo-Arabic embellishment during this period.³⁴ An eleventh- or even twelfth-century date for the S. Marco bowl also

6 Lid from a scale box, Umayyad, Spain, 10th–11th century, ivory, approx. $9\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{8}$ in. (25 × 13 cm). Stiftsmuseum, Klosterneuburg, Austria (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Inge Kitlitschka, Klosterneuburg)

7 Folio 350 from the *Homilies* of Saint John Chrysostom, detail showing a pseudo-Arabic headpiece, 11th century. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France gr. 660 (artwork in the public domain)

brings the object into closer chronological alignment with the corpus of middle Byzantine enameled glass mentioned above.

In this regard, it is worth noting that surviving examples of medieval Islamic glass reveal some general parallels to the S. Marco bowl in terms of form and color. For example, a possibly eleventh- to twelfth-century Fatimid vessel said to be from Atfa, al-Wasta, in Middle Egypt, has a similar shape (Fig. 8), and preserved fragments of Fatimid stained glass share a comparable palette. In instances where Byzantine and Fatimid vessels resemble one another in appearance, however, techniques of production diverge, suggesting that if some direct relation between these traditions existed, it was limited to aspects of form and design.³⁵ Furthermore, Fatimid glass vessels differ in the placement of inscriptions, which typically appear on the outer walls. The location of pseudo-Arabic on the S. Marco bowl reflects more closely the placement of inscriptions on medieval Islamic metalwork: around the rim—although rarely on the base—of a vessel.

In sum, the application and form of pseudo-Arabic on the S. Marco bowl lack a direct parallel, demonstrating innovation and adaptation, rather than direct imitation, of an Islamic model. Nonetheless, comparanda indicate a medieval Mediterranean source—perhaps Spanish Umayyad or Fa-

8 Bowl, Egyptian, Fatimid, 11th–12th century? stained glass, h. $3\frac{1}{4}$ in. (8.5 cm). The British Museum, London, OA 1902.5-17.2 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © copyright the Trustees of The British Museum)

timid—dating no earlier than the late tenth and more likely the eleventh or even twelfth century. This later date is supported by similar examples of pseudo-Arabic in late-tenth- to thirteenth-century Byzantine buildings and manuscripts, and it places the vessel in closer alignment with the corpus of related middle Byzantine enameled glass vessels, which, as noted above, dates from the eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries.

The Iconography of Divination

A variety of textual and visual corroborations must be considered in order to establish a fuller picture of Byzantine awareness of ancient mantic traditions in the eleventh to twelfth century. Greek, Roman, and late antique texts still known in Byzantium afford one body of reference. In particular, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—which discuss the oracular and necromantic abilities of various gods and heroes—were central texts in Byzantine schooling and known to any educated person. As such, they offer potential points of common

reference for Byzantine familiarity with pagan divination.³⁶ Roman literature also furnishes possible sources on the subject. For instance, the second-century CE geographer Pausanias, who was still known to some medieval Byzantine readers, cited the locations of ancient cults of oracular deities.³⁷ A rich mine of occult knowledge is found in late antique “magical papyri” that record a vast range of pagan and Early Christian mantic spells. Although these documents are typically dated no later than the fifth century CE, the spells and procedures they describe often parallel instructions preserved in later Byzantine texts, implying the persistence and integrity of occult practices from late antiquity to the medieval era.³⁸ Most important, middle Byzantine written sources reference ancient oracular deities and divinatory practices, hinting at continued acquaintance with the occult.

In the visual realm, extant antique and late antique works of art that parallel figural types in the S. Marco bowl illustrate in general terms the iconographic stock that Byzantine makers and viewers may have had at their disposal. But the range of classicizing models available in the middle Byzantine period was certainly more extensive than what survives today. For instance, a partially preserved fifth- or sixth-century CE illustrated manuscript of Homer’s *Iliad* (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana cod. F. 205 inf.) is inscribed with eleventh- or twelfth-century marginal commentaries, demonstrating its continued use in the medieval era.³⁹ Although the surviving illuminations present few parallels for the iconography of the S. Marco bowl, the manuscript proves that illustrations of Homer’s narratives circulated during the middle Byzantine era and could have informed the iconography on an object like the S. Marco bowl. In addition, antique statuary decorated public and private spaces of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. The vast majority of these sculptures is no longer extant, but textual references attest to the broader iconographic repertoire once available to Byzantine viewers and their active engagement with these works of art.⁴⁰

All the vignettes on the S. Marco bowl exhibit generically classicizing features, including heroic nudity, archaic garments, and antique furnishings (benchlike thrones, footstools, columns). Some of the scenes depict figures with conventional attributes of specific Greco-Roman gods and heroes. Other representations show less direct connections with ancient precedents, and their attributions must remain hypothetical. Scenes that can be identified with confidence serve as a foundation to support possible interpretations of the more ambiguous vignettes. These less precise reflections of ancient models remain important, though, because they show that the Byzantine artistic relation with the antique was not one of slavish imitation. Rather, classical sources provided the raw material from which uniquely Byzantine images and meanings were created.

The most direct statement of the S. Marco bowl’s association with divination is found in the medallion currently obscured by one of the two handles (Fig. 9).⁴¹ As Antonio Pasini demonstrated in 1886, the vignette depicts an augur, that is, a diviner who reads omens from natural phenomena, primarily the flight of birds. The figure is depicted in profile, stepping toward the right. He is fully wrapped in robes, and a divining rod, or *lituus*—identified by its characteristic curved end—rests on his right shoulder.⁴² The augur raises

9 S. Marco bowl, detail showing an augur (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

his left hand in a gesture of speech, emphasizing his role as interpreter. The tendrils framing the figure evoke the outside setting in which the augur employed the *lituus* to establish physical boundaries for reading omens.⁴³ These vegetal forms also parallel the floriated elements in the pseudo-Arabic motifs, creating a visual link between the figural and inscriptional sections of the vessel’s program.

Augury was known to Byzantines from antique sources like Homer’s *Odyssey* (2.145–88) and *Iliad* (1.78–84). The late-twelfth-century legal commentator Theodore Balsamon called for the abolishment of augury, implying its continued practice, but the late-twelfth- to early-thirteenth-century historian Niketas Choniates cited it as a form of ancient divination that was no longer in use.⁴⁴ In any case, the S. Marco bowl depiction is a unique survival in Byzantine art. Its unequivocal connection with divination limits the range of meaning for the program of the vessel as a whole and acts as a point of reference for the interpretation of the more indeterminate scenes in some of the other large roundels. The augur, viewed in profile, marks a starting point for the program. As Ioli Kalavrezou notes, both his gaze and raised, pointing finger direct our attention to the right, beginning a series of visual connections that link figures one to the next.⁴⁵ The augur was later obscured through the addition of the handle, suggesting that subsequent users recognized his connection to pagan divination and, by partially concealing this vignette, obstructed the intended reading of the bowl’s occult program.⁴⁶

Following the augur’s gesture, the viewer next encounters a medallion depicting Ares, god of war, who crosses one leg in front of the other as he strides briskly to the right, continuing the direction of movement initiated by the augur (Fig. 10). Ares wears an open cape and a helmet with a gilded rim that frames his face. Golden rings encircle his neck, upper arms, and ankles. In each hand he grasps a golden staff with a floriated finial. The type is familiar from late antique

10 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Ares (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

12 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Apollo (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

11 Solidus of Constantine I, reverse showing Ares flanked by captives, Byzantine, 310 or 313, gold, diam. $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (2 cm). Kemper Art Museum, The John Max Wulff Collection, Washington University in St. Louis, WC 5556 (artwork in the public domain)

depictions of the god, like the device on the reverse of an early-fourth-century gold coin of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine I (Fig. 11).

Although Ares was not a prominent Greco-Roman oracular deity, divinatory cults were dedicated to him in at least two locations, and it is possible that some memory of his mantic role persisted in the middle Byzantine era.⁴⁷ Unlike augurs, who interpreted natural phenomena through acquired skill, oracles received inspiration directly from a god and were associated with specific locales sacred to the deity. In addi-

tion, Ares sometimes compelled human or supernatural beings to cooperate in occult rituals. In a late antique spell for securing amorous affection, a wax statuette of Ares ensures the intended outcome by threatening a figurine of the desired woman with a sword.⁴⁸ Likewise, on the S. Marco bowl Ares could secure the cooperation of an otherworldly informant—a demon or spirit of the dead—to answer the diviner's questions. It is also possible that this figure served a more general function, evoking the powerful force of the pagan pantheon, while other vignettes established a more direct connection with divination.

Ares' rightward movement directs the viewer's gaze to the subsequent roundel, which depicts Apollo, the most famous of ancient oracular deities (Fig. 12).⁴⁹ Viewed from behind, he is nude except for golden bands that decorate his arms, ankles, and hair. He leans languorously against a column. A cloak hangs from each of his arms, and he holds a golden plant tendril in his right hand. The latter most likely represents a bough from the laurel tree, which was sacred to him.⁵⁰ Apollo was similarly portrayed in cult statues and personal objects. For example, a third- to second-century BCE gem depicts the god leaning against a column and holding a bough, but facing forward (Fig. 13). In the S. Marco bowl, the form of the laurel branch is highly stylized, resembling the floriated motifs in the pseudo-Arabic inscriptions.

For a middle Byzantine viewer, the branch signaled Apollo's divinatory powers. Laurel played a special role in rituals at Apollo's most famous oracle, Delphi, on the slope of Mount Parnassus in Greece, where the plant was hung around the shrine and burned to stimulate the Pythia, the priestess of Apollo, who sat on a tripod and delivered divinely inspired messages.⁵¹ Apollo and his mantic laurel also feature in late antique spells, especially those for inducing prophetic dreams, which refer to laurel as "Apollo's holy plant of presage."⁵² Long after the oracle at Delphi had been aban-

13 Ring stone with nude youth (Apollo), eastern Mediterranean, 3rd–2nd century BCE, jasper, $\frac{3}{4} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. Indiana University Art Museum, Burton Y. Berry Collection, 64.70.26 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Michael Cavanagh and Kevin Montague)

doned, middle Byzantine texts still noted the so-called final oracle of Apollo: “No longer does Phoebus have his chamber, nor mantic laurel, nor prophetic spring; and the speaking water has been silenced.”⁵³ These references show continued awareness of the central role that the laurel branch played in Delphic prophecy.

Although Apollo leans back toward the left, he turns his head and extends his arm to the right, drawing the viewer’s gaze to the next roundel, which represents the god Zeus as a bearded man seated on a throne, resting his feet on a stool (Fig. 14). His muscular chest and arms are adorned with gold bands, and a mantle is draped around his hips. He raises one hand in a gesture of speech. The pose is similar to that of the god in a silver plate of about 400 CE in which Zeus holds a sphere (Fig. 15).⁵⁴ In the S. Marco bowl, Zeus grasps in his left hand a small round object decorated with a human face; the object may be his aegis, a shield emblazoned with the head of the Gorgon.⁵⁵

Like Apollo, Zeus was closely associated with divination, particularly through his oracle at Dodona in Epirus, Greece, which was cited in Homer’s *Odyssey* (14.327–31).⁵⁶ The ninth-century chronicler George Synkellos mentions that the ancient Greeks consulted the oracle at Dodona, offering evi-

14 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Zeus? (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

15 Achilles Plate from the Sevso Treasure, detail showing Herakles, Zeus, and Apollo, Byzantine, Athens or Constantinople, ca. 400, silver. Private collection (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Trustee of the Marquess of Northampton 1987 Settlement)

dence for the continued association of Zeus with prophecy in middle Byzantine literature.⁵⁷ Zeus was also invoked in late antique divinatory rituals, for example, necromantic (conjuring the dead), oracular dream, and lecanomantic spells.⁵⁸

By the middle Byzantine period, the oracles of Apollo and Zeus had long since fallen into disuse, but memory of them persisted. In his *Chronographia*, the eleventh-century scholar and courtier Michael Psellos responds to a physician whose diagnosis contradicted Psellos’s own by invoking the gods’ mantic devices: “Let us hope your Dodonian cauldron is right and my [Delphic] tripod wrong . . . my own studies have not been advanced enough for me to play the oracle.”⁵⁹ The divinatory sites of Zeus and Apollo are also discussed and illustrated in two eleventh-century Byzantine manuscripts that negotiate the relation between pagan divination and Christian revelation. One of these manuscripts (Mount

16 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Hermes (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

Athos, Esphigmenou 14) is a *Panegyrikon*, a liturgical text privileging three homilies dedicated to the Nativity of Christ and citing select saints' lives to be read during the liturgy. It includes numerous textual passages and illuminations that discourse on themes such as oracles, pagan statues, and magic arts. The other manuscript (Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate Library cod. Taphou 14) consists of several tracts, including an illustrated commentary on the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzos and a homily on the Birth of Christ, which discuss and illustrate oracles of Zeus, Apollo, and Athena (Fig. 23).⁶⁰ These texts, which argue for the insufficiency of pagan divination in comparison to the prophecy of Christ, visualize middle Byzantine conceptions of ancient Greek oracles in a manner that departs significantly from antique representations. Attitudes toward divination in these two manuscripts differ from that evinced by the S. Marco bowl, and the illuminations are narrative rather than emblematic, depicting the priests and priestesses of the cults rather than the gods themselves. Nonetheless, all three works of art attest to knowledge of and interest in antique oracular cults in eleventh-century Byzantium.

Zeus points left, toward Apollo, neutralizing the rightward motion initiated by the augur. Zeus's gaze, however, is cast toward the figure at the right, Hermes (Fig. 16). Viewed from behind, Hermes strides briskly toward the left and raises his right hand in a gesture of speech. His left hand holds a golden staff, his *kerykeion* (or *caduceus*), which resembles the staves carried by Ares.⁶¹ A cloak hangs from his left arm across the front of his body and billows behind his right shoulder. Otherwise nude, Hermes wears the same golden bangles that decorate the bodies of Ares, Apollo, and Zeus.

Hermes bore a long-standing and complex association with ancient magic.⁶² Because he directed the dead to Hades—thus his epithet *Psychopomp* (soul guide)—the god played a

17 S. Marco bowl, detail showing Odysseus? (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

key role in late antique necromantic spells, helping to secure spirits for consultation by leading them to the earthly realm. His *kerykeion* functioned as a tool for directing souls. Spirits of the dead were sometimes conjured to serve as informants in divinatory rituals, and Hermes may have been included in the program of the S. Marco vessel to aid in this endeavor. Furthermore, as a messenger of the gods, Hermes was responsible for the effective transmission of words between humankind and its deities, another association that made him a desirable assistant in mantic consultations.⁶³ On the S. Marco bowl, the figure's gesture and motion serve as visual references to Hermes' capacity for efficient and effective communication.

Hermes moves, gazes, and gestures toward the left, thereby reversing the rightward motion introduced by the augur. Together with Ares (Fig. 10), he frames a subgroup within the series. Both gods hold similarly shaped staves and step inward toward Apollo and Zeus, who are positioned in more neutral poses that allow movement to flow both left and right. Although the augur initiates entrance into this sequence, Ares complements the figure of Hermes more effectively. The augur is thereby set apart from the four deities. A possible motivation for this distinction lies in the fact that these four figures are not only pagan gods but also planetary personifications: Ares/Mars, Apollo/Sun, Zeus/Jupiter, and Hermes/Mercury. Their celestial associations may have been relevant to the function of the vessel because the days and times associated with different heavenly bodies were thought to be advantageous for specific divinatory acts. Wednesday, the day of Hermes, was believed effective for controlling spirits, and the hour of Hermes on a certain day ensured success in conversing with otherworldly forces.⁶⁴ Although augurs traditionally divined the movement of birds, the S. Marco bowl may extend the interpretation of sky-born omens

18 Lykaon Painter, jar (*pelike*) showing Odysseus consulting the spirit of Elpenor, Greek, Classical period, ca. 440 BCE, Attica, Athens, red-figure ceramic, h. 18 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (47.4 cm), diam. 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (34.3 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Amory Gardner Fund, 34.79 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

to include the planets.⁶⁵ Indeed, the augur engages with the series of deities through a gesture of speech, and two of the planetary gods, Zeus and Hermes, gesticulate in response.

The final two vignettes show more ambiguous iconography, but these scenes might still depict antique characters associated with divination. Rather than deities, they represent a different category of ancient mantic figures: heroes. The roundel to the right of Hermes portrays a winged, fully robed figure standing on a pedestal and gesturing emphatically toward a warrior, who is seated on a bench and rests his feet on a stool (Fig. 17).⁶⁶ Both turn inward; their poses disassociate them from the scenes in the adjacent roundels. The warrior's lower body is draped, and a red scabbard hangs from his waist. His upper body is encircled by golden straps and bangles. He wears a helmet with a pointed top. His right elbow rests on a shield, and he holds a golden spear in his left hand. In keeping with the theme of divination, the vignette may depict the Homeric warrior Odysseus consulting a ghost. Odysseus's necromantic skills were legendary and familiar to educated Byzantines from book 11 of the *Odyssey*, the *Nykeia*, in which the hero raises the spirit of the deceased seer

Teiresias, to advise him on his journey home. Odysseus's successful *catabasis*, or descent, into Hades may have qualified him for securing the dead to answer divinatory inquiries.⁶⁷

The seated figure rests his chin in his hand, a position that recalls Odysseus's depiction in a scene of the conjuring of his deceased crewman Elpenor (*Odyssey* 11.51–83) on a well-known fifth-century BCE Greek vase in which Odysseus appears in the company of Hermes and wears a scabbard on his left shoulder (Fig. 18).⁶⁸ Similar images of classicizing figures in late antique art—especially those of Odysseus and Oedipus—offer chronologically closer visual models for the S. Marco bowl and attest to the iconographic lineage that bridged ancient and medieval artistic traditions (Fig. 19).⁶⁹ Elpenor does not, however, resemble the figure atop the column, who is winged and clothed in a full-length robe. In Byzantine iconography, spirits—whether the souls of the deceased or demons—were sometimes depicted with wings. This convention might have led a Byzantine viewer to interpret an antique winged and robed figure—perhaps Nike (Fig. 20) or Psyche—as a disembodied soul and combine this motif with a depiction of Odysseus conjuring the dead.⁷⁰

19 Sardonyx intaglio impression showing Oedipus and the Sphinx, Roman, Imperial, 1st century BCE–3rd century CE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of W. Gedney Beatty, 1941 (41.160.707) (artwork in the public domain; photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Although echoing classical and late antique precedents, the Odysseus vignette innovates on earlier models. Byzantine viewers would have drawn from their knowledge of Odysseus's adventures and familiarity with ancient and medieval iconography to reconcile this unusual scene with the program of the bowl.

Like the preceding roundel, the final vignette is self-contained. Here a male figure distinguished by a highly developed physique stands between two columns, which frame and isolate him (Fig. 21). His body is nude except for a cloak hanging from his left shoulder and gold rings encircling his ankles, wrists, upper arms, and head. He rests his right hand on top of a pillar. From the other column hangs a red scabbard. The figure may represent the Greco-Roman hero Herakles. Relaxed, frontal depictions of Herakles abound in ancient and late antique art, although typically the hero leans against his club, positioned vertically with the end resting on the ground. In the S. Marco vessel, the hero's pose recalls these earlier models, such as the late antique silver plate depicting Zeus (Fig. 15).⁷¹

Like Odysseus, Herakles traveled to the underworld and returned unscathed, most notably to capture Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog of Hades, and to retrieve Alkestis, the queen of Thessaly, who had agreed to die in place of her husband.⁷² The capture of Cerberus was mentioned by Pseudo-Apollodoros, the first- to second-century author of the *Bibliothēke*, a compendium of information on Greco-Roman gods and heroes still known in the middle Byzantine era.⁷³ Homer reports that Hermes accompanied Herakles on his underworld journey (*Odyssey* 11.625–26), linking the two figures in the iconographic program of the S. Marco bowl.⁷⁴ Herakles' return from the underworld was thought to have created portals through which souls of the dead could easily pass. These sites were eventually associated with oracular cults

20 Gem seal showing Nike holding a wreath and a male figure holding ears of corn, Roman, carnelian, diam. ½ in. (1.5 cm). American Numismatic Society, New York, 0000.999.33705 (artwork in the public domain)

and necromantic activities.⁷⁵ Herakles' journeys to the underworld made him a model for those who sought access to chthonic realms and forces.⁷⁶ This diversity of associations with supernatural communications qualifies Herakles to appear among other divinatory figures.

The readings posited here build on a variety of ancient, late antique, and medieval textual and visual sources that together argue for the persistence of an iconography of pagan divination in the middle Byzantine era. Not all the classicizing scenes on the S. Marco bowl directly imitate extant Greco-Roman or late antique types, but these departures should not be interpreted a priori as evidence of Byzantine confusion or ignorance, as has often been maintained. The bowl's high level of production and detail of execution indicate the care invested in this work of art and suggest that divergence from classical sources was intentional, an adaptation of antique imagery and themes to accommodate specifically Byzantine meanings.

It is certainly true that even if the iconographic identifications cited above are correct, not every Byzantine viewer would have recognized them. Nonetheless, certain of the figures depicted possess clear mantic associations—especially the augur, Apollo, Hermes, and Zeus—and could direct the reading of less obviously divinatory characters. In this way, the overarching themes of antiquity and divination are communicated to any viewer with at least some knowledge of the literary and visual traditions of these subjects. In fact, the obscure identities of some figures might contribute to the occult character of the device, these rarefied visual references implying that full comprehension of the program is reserved for those few viewers privy to exclusive divinatory knowledge.

The Mechanics of Lecanomancy and Hydromancy

Together, the seven vignettes on the S. Marco bowl reflect an array of mantic associations, including oracular, necromantic, and augural. They depict gods, possibly heroes, and, in

one instance, a pagan priest as agents of occult practice. The richness and consistency of the theme signal that the figures may well serve more than a merely decorative function. According to the mechanics of divination, pagan gods, demons, and the souls of the dead are attracted to powerful and evocative images, particularly representations of themselves or the actions they are called to perform.⁷⁷ Such images function sympathetically, usually in tandem with magic incantations that are inscribed or spoken. Image and word together compel otherworldly entities to answer questions about future events. According to these operations, the vignettes on the S. Marco bowl serve as visual invocations that accompany verbal ones; they attract supernatural entities as aids for otherworldly inquiry. Several of the figures—Hermes, Zeus, Odysseus, and the augur—gesture in speech, conveying this communicative aim.⁷⁸

The smaller medallions in the borders may additionally buttress the magic efficacy of the bowl (Figs. 1, 2). The conjuring of demonic forces was a tricky business and required careful regulation. During these supernatural interactions, the practitioner had to maintain power over the otherworldly informers. Control was typically achieved by means of ritual purity, the strategic use of amulets, and the drawing of circles within which magic acts were confined.⁷⁹ A mid-fifteenth-century Italo-Byzantine manuscript includes a rare depiction of a lecanomantic ceremony (Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna MS 3632, fol. 350v) in which the medium sits within a sphere drawn on the ground and gazes into a vessel that is also circumscribed (Fig. 22).⁸⁰ In the S. Marco bowl, the circular frames around the vignettes may similarly restrain the supernatural entities attracted to these scenes. Furthermore, the coinlike images of profile busts in the interstices could help to control otherworldly beings summoned to inhabit the vessel, as coins, especially ancient ones, were believed to possess apotropaic properties.⁸¹

Finally, the number of large and small medallions, seven and fourteen, respectively, may have been significant. Seven is a key numeral in late antique magic spells, representing, for example, the number of times a phrase should be repeated, the number of days required for a procedure, the amount of a substance to be used, the number of objects to be employed, the number of protective devices to be marshaled, or, of particular significance to the S. Marco vessel, the number of gods to be invoked.⁸² The presence of seven deities and fourteen (two times seven) “coins” may have enhanced the bowl’s efficacy.⁸³

A fourth-century CE spell recorded among the Greek magical papyri prescribes the following lecanomantic-hydromantic ritual and gives some sense of the instructions possibly available in the middle Byzantine period:

Whenever you want to make a divination about things, take a bronze vessel, a pan or a dish, of whatever sort you like, and put water in it. If you are invoking the heavenly gods, use Zeus’ rainwater; if you are invoking the underworld gods, use sea-water; if you are invoking Osiris or Sarapis, river-water; if you are invoking the dead, spring-water. Hold the vessel on your lap. Pour into it the oil of unripe olives, and bending over the vessel yourself proclaim the spell written out hereafter and call on the god

21. S. Marco bowl, detail showing Herakles? (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice)

you want. Ask him about the subject you want, and he will answer you and tell you about everything. When he has spoken to you, dismiss him with the dismissal spell. When you use this spell, you will be amazed. . . . Later, when you have made your summons, the one summoned will manifest himself, a god or a dead man, and he will answer all the questions you put to him.⁸⁴

The text further instructs the practitioner to wear an amulet inscribed with protective letters in order to guard against the powerful forces conjured through this ritual. Like the S. Marco vessel, the spell does not limit the practitioner to a single source of divination; multiple informants (those of the heavens, the underworld, the dead) can be rallied through the same process. The spell mentions Zeus—who appears on the S. Marco bowl—as the key mediator for communications with “heavenly gods.”

Lecanomancy and hydromancy possessed ancient roots but were alive and well in middle Byzantine Constantinople.⁸⁵ At the beginning of the period, John the Grammarian (d. ca. 867), the last iconoclast patriarch, was said to have practiced lecanomancy, an activity that led to his condemnation as a sorcerer.⁸⁶ Toward the end of the era, a description of a hydromantic ceremony performed at the twelfth-century imperial court recalls the ritual described in the late antique magical papyri and demonstrates the persistence of divinatory knowledge over time. The historian Niketas Choniates recounts with disapproval how Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (r. 1183–85) turned to lecanomancy to prophesize the name of his imperial successor. Andronikos “yielded himself wholly to those who read the signs of the unknown in the waters, wherein certain images of the future are reflected like the shining rays of the sun.”⁸⁷ The supernatural communicator in this instance, a demon, conveyed answers to the diviner’s questions through letters revealed in the liquid. The

22 Scene of a lecanomantic ritual, from Dioscorides, *Materia medica*, Italo-Byzantine, 1440. Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna MS 3632, fol. 350v (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna)

late-twelfth-century legal commentator Theodore Balsamon condemned lecanomancy, a prohibition that may in fact indicate its vogue.⁸⁸

Interest in the occult—although not necessarily lecanomancy—is also attested among a circle of eleventh-century Constantinopolitan elites, including the scholar and courtier Michael Psellos. Psellos was fascinated by the mechanics and devices of divination.⁸⁹ In the *Chronographia* he claimed to know how “stones and herbs and mystic rites induce apparitions of divinities.”⁹⁰ Psellos was familiar with the *Hermetica*, a collection of first- to third-century magical papyri purportedly originating in ancient Egypt, that address alchemy, astronomy, and magic.⁹¹ He also wrote a commentary on the Chaldean Oracles, a collection from the second century of allegedly divine revelations said to derive from the ancient East.⁹² Psellos was an influential figure at the Byzantine court, serving as an imperial adviser and as chief of the imperial school of philosophy. In this capacity, he encouraged his students to study “Hellenic” wisdom, including subjects that bordered on the occult.⁹³ While taking pride in his esoteric knowledge, he insisted that it was purely theoretical and claimed not to practice magic. Indeed, a speech Psellos delivered to support the prosecution of the patriarch Michael Kerularios condemns the latter in part by subtly implicating him as a practitioner of unorthodox activities, including lecanomancy.⁹⁴

As already demonstrated by Emperor Andronikos’s practice of lecanomancy, interest in the occult sciences also existed among members of the twelfth-century Constantinopolitan elite. The imperial princess and scholar Anna Komnene, for example, claimed knowledge of astrology, although she maintained that she did not practice it herself.⁹⁵ Her contemporary the scholar and courtier Michael Italikos was likewise versed in the occult, specifically the Chaldean Oracles, although he rejected these teachings as barbarian.⁹⁶ Despite their disavowals, eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine schol-

ars clearly studied pagan wisdom and confirm the continued prevalence of such learning at the imperial court.⁹⁷ While it is impossible to know the specific patron of the S. Marco bowl, the privileged stratum of medieval Byzantium’s court elite provided the aesthetic and intellectual climate, as well as the financial resources, to commission this deluxe and rarefied object.

Eastern Origins of Lecanomancy and Hydromancy

Like the classicizing iconography, the pseudo-Arabic inscriptions on the S. Marco bowl reflect a complex network of divinatory beliefs and practices current in the middle Byzantine era. Following the Greeks and Romans before them, the Byzantines associated divination with the learning of the so-called Persians or Chaldeans, that is, ancient cultures of the East.⁹⁸ For instance, a tenth-century Byzantine “encyclopedia,” the *Souda*, states that sorcery and magic were invented by the ancient Persians and Medes.⁹⁹ Lecanomancy and hydromancy in particular were ascribed “Persian” origins by classical and Early Christian authors.¹⁰⁰

During the middle Byzantine era, contemporary Islamic groups were identified as the cultural inheritors of the ancient Persians, Medes, and Chaldeans and were therefore credited with possessing occult knowledge. Michael Psellos stated that individuals of “Persian” derivation were commonly assumed to be astrologers and fortune-tellers regardless of whether or not they actually possessed knowledge of these matters.¹⁰¹ In light of this affiliation, it is a distinct possibility that the maker of the S. Marco bowl sought to enhance the object’s divinatory power by employing a pseudo-inscription derived from the Arabic alphabet. The prevailing connection of magic with the ancient and medieval East allied Arabic letters with the occult and therefore with the classicizing imagery of divination on the S. Marco bowl.

An association of pseudo-Arabic and classicizing imagery with divination is also found in the aforementioned eleventh-century commentary on the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzos

23 The Achaeans consult the priestess of Athena, from *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzos, Byzantine, 11th century. Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate Library cod. Taphou 14, fol. 100r (artwork in the public domain)

(Taphou 14). In one illumination (fol. 100r) the priestess of Athena, Xanthippe, consults with the Greek Achaeans. In the background, antique statuary indicates a pagan setting, and a loom, the attribute of the priestesses, stands at the left (Fig. 23). Remarkably, the fabric suspended from the loom, the work of the priestess, is ornamented with a band of pseudo-Arabic, as is the upper sleeve of Xanthippe's robe.¹⁰² The Byzantine maker invented the milieu of an ancient Greek oracle by combining the classicizing device of antique sculpture with the exoticizing device of pseudo-Arabic. The eclecticism of Taphou 14 and the S. Marco bowl are not random or purely aesthetic, as scholars often suppose. In each work of art, classicizing and exoticizing motifs illustrate a specifically

Byzantine conception of divination as associated with both ancient pagan and contemporary Islamic cultures.

Lest we discredit Byzantine affiliation of the occult with the Arabic-speaking world as mere superstition or bias, it must be noted that Islamic groups not only were perceived as the cultural descendants of the ancient Persians and Chaldeans, from whom lecanomancy and hydromancy were thought to originate, but also were believed to have preserved and transmitted ancient Greek learning on occult subjects. During the Abbasid translation movement of the eighth to tenth centuries, among the books converted from Greek to Arabic were works on astrology and other categories of potentially unorthodox knowledge.¹⁰³

24 Fragment of a plate showing a centaur trampling a snake, Byzantine, Corinth, 12th century, ceramic, diam. ca. 9 1/8 in. (23 cm) (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the American School of Classical Studies, Corinth Excavations, I. Ioannidou and L. Bartzioti)

that positions Byzantine users and makers not as imitators or passive conduits of the antique and the foreign but rather as active interpreters.

The elite owner of the S. Marco bowl satisfied unorthodox intellectual and supernatural interests by marshaling the imagery and language of non-Christian cultures to empower this divinatory tool. In magic traditions inherited from antiquity, words and images share an essential role, endowing objects with supernatural force. The classicizing imagery and exoticizing script on the S. Marco bowl facilitate divination, while allowing the maker of the object to employ exclusively non-Christian, non-Byzantine sources for occult purposes. The bowl reflects an engagement with antique and Islamic sources that is well informed, if not erudite, and anything but generic.

This conclusion refutes an interpretation of the Byzantine appropriation of Islamicizing, and even classicizing, motifs as derivative, confused, and meaningless. The S. Marco bowl demands that the modern viewer rethink familiar categories of the antique, the exotic, and the secular in the medieval world. The vessel illuminates the hybrid nature of divination as both ancient and Islamic and provides insight into the means by which occult knowledge was pursued and preserved in Byzantium. Ultimately, this delicate, unassuming glass bowl makes a profound statement about medieval Christian negotiation of visual and textual traditions from the Greco-Roman and Islamic worlds. As such, it offers valuable and rare perspective on how Byzantine material and intellectual culture maintained a dynamic, meaningful, and complex connection with non-Christian traditions, both past and present.

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Notes

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1. André Grabar, "La verrerie d'art byzantine au Moyen Âge," *Monuments et Mémoires* 57 (1971): 90–94; Anthony Cutler, "The Mythological Bowl in the Treasury of San Marco at Venice," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy, and History, Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), 235–54; Ioli Kalavrezou, "The Cup of San Marco and the 'Classical' in Byzantium," in *Studien zur mittelalterlichen Kunst 800–1250: Festschrift für Florentine Mütterich*, ed. Katharina Bierbrauer, Peter K. Klein, and Willibald Sauerländer (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1985), 167–74; and David Buckton, ed., *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan: Olivetti, 1984), 181–83, cat. no. 21. Regarding glass production in Byzantium, see J. Henderson and M. Mundell Mango, "Glass at Medieval Constantinople: Preliminary Scientific Evidence," in *Constantinople and Its Hinterland*, ed. Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (Aldershot, U.K.: Variorum, 1995), 333–56.
2. For early and middle Byzantine chalices equipped with double handles and/or lacking stems, see Marlia M. Mango and Laskarina Bouras, "Chalice," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (hereafter ODB), ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), vol. 1, 405; and Buckton, *The Treasury of San Marco*, cat. nos. 15, 23.