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16

MÉLANGES
CÉCILE MORRISON

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NUMISMATIC AND METROLOGICAL PARALLELS FOR THE ICONOGRAPHY OF EARLY BYZANTINE MARRIAGE JEWELRY THE QUESTION OF THE CROWNED BRIDE

by Alicia Walker

Within the material culture of early Byzantium, a corpus of jewelry—including rings, pendants, and belts—depicts marriage iconography, which usually consists of a man and woman flanking a cross or figure of Christ. Much recent study has focused on the amuletic capacities of these objects and their possibly magical nature. Little attention has been paid, however, to the imperial nature of a number of marriage rings and belts, which depict one or both members of the bridal couple crowned. The present essay considers the close relationship of these objects to imperial numismatic and metrological imagery and the implications of these parallels. It is often proposed that Byzantine marriage rings functioned much as wedding rings do today, as ceremonial objects that bind the man and woman who exchange the ring(s). But early Christian and Byzantine texts do not

* This essay is offered with great affection for and in honor of Cécile Morrisson, whose commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry and support of a holistic approach to Byzantium are an inspiration.


2. Vikan acknowledges imperial elements in the iconography of some rings, but sees these parallels merely as evidence for the numismatic origins of the imagery. Vikan, Art and marriage (cit. n. 1), p. 149, 157 n. 100, and 158.

3. From the fourth century onward, coins were commonly adapted to serve as jewelry. Numismatic iconography was also copied in imitation medallions that were incorporated into belts and necklaces. See J.-A. Bruhn, Coins and costume in late antiquity, Washington DC 1993; M. M. Fulghum, Coins used as amulets in late antiquity, in Between magic and religion (cit. n. 1), p. 139-148; and H. Maguire, Magic and money in the early Middle Ages, *Speculum* 72, 1997, p. 1037-1054, esp. p. 1040-1042.


cited rings as a necessary part of wedding commemorations, perhaps because these rituals were not yet codified and were typically conducted in relatively private and informal circumstances. Although beginning in the fourth century, Christian church authorities encouraged the blessing of betrothal and marriage agreements by a priest, it was not until the tenth century that an ecclesiastical representative was required by law to preside over a marriage. Even in instances when rings are mentioned in connection with the celebration of betrothal or marriage, no specific iconography is noted for these objects.

In what follows, I explore the numismatic and metrological parallels for early Byzantine marriage ring iconography and suggest new ways to interpret the function of these ornaments. Specifically, I revisit the question of whether all rings that display marriage imagery necessarily operated within betrothal or wedding rituals. Instead, it can be speculated that some jewelry depicting marriage iconography was intended to commemorate imperial nuptials and to serve as largitio (gifts distributed by the emperor to his preferred subjects) on those occasions. From the fourth century it became the practice for emperors to grant largitio to elite members of the court and army on the occasion of important events, such as the accession to office and anniversaries of rule.

5. For example, the sixth-century vita of St. Alexius reports that he gave his new bride a ring and belt in the intimate setting of the marriage chamber. La légende syrienne de Saint Alexis l’homme de Dieu, par A. Armiaud, Paris 1889, p. 12-13. Crowns, rather than rings, are more commonly cited as part of early Byzantine marriage ceremonies. See Walker, Myth and magic (cit. n. 1), p. 77 n. 49. The tenth-century compendium of Byzantine court rituals, the Book of ceremonies, specifically distinguishes between the imperial crown, orstemma, and the wedding crown, which is called a stephanos. Constantine Poppyrogenitus, Le livre des cérémonies, texte établi et traduit par A. Voigt, Paris 1940, vol. II, ch. 48, 6-9, esp. II. 3 and 29.


7. The custom for married and/or betrothed women to wear rings existed by the first century CE, as attested by authors including Pliny the Elder (23-79) and Tertullian (ca. 160-220), but in no instance is any specific iconography for these devices cited. See A. M. STOUT, Jewelry as a symbol of status in the Roman Empire, in The world of Roman costume, ed. by J. L. SEBESTA and L. BONANTE, Madison 1994, p. 77-100, esp. p. 78.

8. The present article further substantiates Marvin Ross’s passing suggestion that some early Byzantine marriage rings may have been distributed to commemorate imperial nuptials. M. Ross, Catalogue of the Byzantine and early mediaeval antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks collection. 2, Jewelry, enamels, and art of the migration period, Washington DC 1965, p. 56. Vikan dismisses Ross’s suggestion for lack of evidence. VIKAN, Art and marriage (cit. n. 1), p. 147 n. 16.

9. Fourth-century examples of rings andfibulae that were likely gifted by the emperor to his subjects are often inscribed with the emperor’s name. During the fifth century, however, imperial inscriptions are increasingly replaced with imperial portraits. I. M. JOHANSEN, Rings, fibulae and buckles with imperial portraits and inscriptions, JRA 7, 1994, p. 223-242, esp. p. 228-229, fig. 3, and 234-235. A ring inscribed with the name of the fourth-century empress Eudoxia may have served as largitio in this fashion. It shows a cross on the bezel and is inscribed AEL – EVDÔ + CIA – AVG (Aelia Eudoxia Augusta) around the band. J. C. BIEERS, A gold finger ring and the empress Eudoxia, Muse 22/23, 1989-1990, p. 82-99. On Roman traditions surrounding the privilege to wear a ring, especially rings that portrayed the emperor, see STOUT, Jewelry as a symbol (cit. n. 7), p. 78.


11. JOHANSEN, Rings (cit. n. 9).

12. Ernst Kitzinger notes that the rings of the empresses, see KITZINGER, Reputation, Power and Identity, p. 21, 1994, at p. 72 n. 72. If they were presented to military officials, they would be considered within the larger category of largitio and functioned as personal tokens that introduced a new dimension to the interpretation of marriage in Byzantium.

Two subspecies of Byzantine marriage rings are documented in numerous published examples (see Ross, Catalogue of the Byzantine and early mediaeval antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks collection. 2, Jewelry, enamels, and art of the migration period, Washington DC 1965, p. 56. Vikan dismisses Ross’s suggestion for lack of evidence. VIKAN, Art and marriage (cit. n. 1), p. 147 n. 16. A ring inscribed with the name of the fourth-century empress Eudoxia may have served as largitio in this fashion. It shows a cross on the bezel and is inscribed AEL – EVDÔ + CIA – AVG (Aelia Eudoxia Augusta). The similarities in iconography to the interpretation of marriage as among those objects discussed by Ross dates to the seventh century.

13. The History ofTheodora, trans. Michael and Mary Whitby, Cambridge 1997, p. 144. The similarities in iconography to the interpretation of marriage as among those objects discussed by Ross dates to the seventh century. This ring was kept by (Eudocia) Augusta around the band. J. C. BIEERS, A gold finger ring and the empress Eudoxia, Muse 22/23, 1989-1990, p. 82-99. On Roman traditions surrounding the privilege to wear a ring, especially rings that portrayed the emperor, see STOUT, Jewelry as a symbol (cit. n. 7), p. 78.

14. Of course the possibility remains that the rings of the empresses, see KITZINGER, Reputation, Power and Identity, p. 21, 1994, at p. 72 n. 72. If they were presented to military officials, they would be considered within the larger category of largitio and functioned as personal tokens that introduced a new dimension to the interpretation of marriage in Byzantium.
These objects included rings as well as other items of personal adornment such as *fibulae* (large pins used to clasp a cloak at the shoulder). They were fabricated in precious metals, like gold and silver, as well as more humble materials, like bronze. The type of metal presumably indicated the social status of the recipient. These objects were produced under the authority of the imperial office, but were not intended for imperial use, which explains why their craftsmanship is often somewhat unrefined and their weight relatively light.

Evidence for the distribution of gifts to commemorate imperial marriages is found in the textual record. At the wedding of the emperor Maurice (r. 582-602)—who consolidated his claim to the throne by marrying Constantina, the daughter of his imperial predecessor, in 582—the attendants called upon the groom to distribute gifts to them when he appeared before the court following the marriage ceremony.

Focusing on examples of marriage rings in which one or both members of the bridal couple wears a crown, I propose that the desire to publicize an imperial marriage would have been particularly strong on two occasions when the throne was left to a royal woman, and the stability of Byzantine imperial authority was secured through her marriage to a non-imperial consort: the marriage of Pulcheria (d. 453) to Marcian (r. 450-57) in 450; and Ariadne (d. 515) to Anastasios I (r. 491-518) in 491. Both marriages were commemorated with special issues of solidi (see figs. 2 and 3). Rings depicting the imperial newlyweds could have been gifted to members of the court and possibly the army in celebration and promulgation of the weddings. While these rings should still be considered within the larger rubric of marriage jewelry, they would not have initially functioned as personal tokens exchanged between husband and wife. They therefore introduce a new dimension to the broader study of the material culture and iconography of marriage in Byzantium.

Two subsets of Byzantine marriage rings, which together number at least twenty-eight published examples (see Table 1), offer particularly striking iconographic analogies to models found in coins and weights. In one group, the bride and groom appear full-length...
and stand to either side of Christ (figs. 4 and 7). In another group, the husband and wife are rendered in bust form (figs. 8, 9, and 10). The couple typically flanks a cross; additional iconographic features—including a centrally placed bust of Christ (figs. 8 and 9) or a dove—also appear. These rings are commonly dated to the sixth or seventh centuries, but, as explained below, equally persuasive evidence supports an earlier date in the fifth century for some of the rings, raising the possibility that they were produced at the same time as the imperial marriage solidi and for the same purpose: to commemorate and promote the marriages of non-imperial grooms to imperial brides.

The earliest of the fifth-century solidi issued to celebrate royal nuptials was minted under Theodosius II (r. 408-50) to mark the union of his daughter, Licinia Eudoxia (d. 462), to the emperor of the West, Valentinian III (r. 425-55), in 437 (fig. 1).16 The reigning senior emperor and father of the bride, Theodosius, stands between couple. He performs the role of *promus* (witness to the marriage), joining the hands of the bride and groom in a gesture known as *dextrarum iunctio*, the traditional symbol of matrimony inherited from Roman imperial iconography.17 All three figures wear imperial *regalia*, although Licinia Eudoxia’s crown is more elaborate and includes *prependoula* (jeweled pendants that hang to each side) while her male companions wear only the *stemma* (a simple diadem) with an ornament at the center that extends slightly above the forehead and no *prependoula*.

In two later issues commemorating imperial marriages—those of Pulcheria and Marcian of 450 (fig. 2) and Ariadne and Anastasios of 491 (fig. 3)—Christ, rather than a senior emperor, stands between and blesses the newlyweds.18 In the coin of Pulcheria and Marcian, the bride again wears a more elaborate crown with *prependoula*, while the groom’s crown is summarily indicated with three small dots at the center of his head and no *prependoula*.19 In the coin of Ariadne and Anastasios, both figures wear crowns with prominent three-prong extensions at the apexes. *Prependoula* hang to either side of Ariadne’s face, but not in a loop, which allowed it to be brought up and over the crown.

The innovation of representing two later coins reflects the changing roles of the newlyweds. In the presence of Christ may have been without fathers or brothers, he portrayed their union and engineered to convey his approval that had been previously dedicated.20 In another coin, the iconography conveys the message that Ariadne, who served as the emperor’s wife, was also an emperor of the West.

Early Byzantine marriage coins in which the emperor and empress join hands, sometimes under the supervision of the *promus* Concordia, the personification of concord. See E. KANTOROWICZ, On the golden marriage belt and the marriage rings of the Dumbarton Oaks collection, DOP 14, 1960, p. 1-16, esp. p. 4-9; and P. DENIS, Scenes of marriage in Byzantium, Rotunda 28/3, 1993, p. 18-23, at p. 21.

17. For discussion of this gesture, see L. REEKMANS, Le *dextrarum iunctio* dans l’iconographie romaine et paleochrétiennne, Bulletin de I’Institut historique belge de Rome 31, 1958, p. 23-29; and KANTOROWICZ, On the golden marriage belt (cit. n. 16), p. 4-9.


24. Ibid., p. 48 n. 4.

25. GRIFFERSON and MAYS, Catalogue (cit. n. 16), no. 870.
of Ariadne’s face, but not Anastasios’s. This coin was later mounted in a bracket with a loop, which allowed it to be worn as a pendant.

The innovation of replacing the senior emperor with the figure of Christ in the two later coins reflects the increasing Christianization of Roman-Byzantine society—including the institution of marriage—over the course of the fifth century. In addition, the presence of Christ may have been dictated by necessity: because Pulcheria and Ariadne were without fathers or brothers at the time of marriage, no reigning emperor could be portrayed endorsing their unions. Pulcheria took a vow of chastity in her youth, which she retained throughout her marriage. Christ’s presence on her solidus may have been engineered to convey his approval of her nuptials, a necessary detail in light of her having been previously dedicated as “a bride of Christ.” In all three early Byzantine marriage solidi, the iconography conveys the idea that imperial status is shared between the figures depicted. This message was especially appropriate for the marriages of Pulcheria and Ariadne, which were engineered to convey his approval of their nuptials, a necessary detail in light of her having been previously dedicated as “a bride of Christ.” In all three early Byzantine marriage solidi, the iconography conveys the idea that imperial status is shared between the figures depicted. This message was especially appropriate for the marriages of Pulcheria and Ariadne, who served as the conduits of imperial authority to their husbands. Yet Licinia Eudoxia also played an important role in solidifying political power by creating a familial bond between her father, who was emperor of the East, and her new husband, who was emperor of the West.

Early Byzantine marriage rings in which the figures are depicted full-length and the couple flanks Christ closely follow the iconography of the imperial solidi. Furthermore, a consistent feature is apparent in several examples: only the bride wears imperial regalia. A ring in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts shows Christ flanked by the bride and groom, whose hands he joins. The bride wears a crown, distinguished by a three-prong extension at the center and pendendoulia which frame her face (fig. 4). The groom is uncrowned. In the exergue of the bezel is inscribed MONVIAI (concord), which presumably wishes a harmonious union for the couple. The ring is attributed to the sixth or seventh century based on the purported similarity of the female figure’s crown to those worn by seventh-century empresses, such as Martina, the second wife of Heraclius (r. 610-41). Yet crowns with comparable features are also found in the coins of the mid-fifth-century empress Licinia Eudoxia (fig. 5), raising the possibility that the ring could date to this earlier period. Additional support for an early date is found in imperial depictions on fifth- and early sixth-century consular diptychs that portray the empress Ariadne wearing...
a crown with three prongs and *prependoulia* (fig. 6), and in imperial flat weights dating to the fourth or fifth century that depict figures wearing similar *regalia* (see fig. 11). 26

The band of the ring is octagonal and undecorated (fig. 4); it measures 1.8cm in diameter. Although the average ring sizes of early Byzantine men and women are unknown, the average modern ring sizes for an adult woman is between 1.7cm and 1.8cm in diameter, while the average modern ring size for an adult man is between 1.9cm and 2.1cm in diameter. 27 There is no reason to believe that women's ring sizes in Byzantium would have been larger than today. Indeed, given the relative youth of most brides, who would have been produced suggesting it—and other early Byzantine "marriage" rings—would have been produced for the fourth or fifth century that depict figures wearing similar *regalia*. Inscriptions in the exquisite OMONOIA (concord) (fig. 8), ring inscribed OMONOIA and OMONOIA, but these most likely represent not the imperial *stemma*. 28 The pair face forward, are depicted full length, and flank a figure of Christ, who joins their hands to mark their union. This ring is dated to the late fifth century and possibly to the year of their marriage, 491. It was almost certainly intended to be worn by a man.

A ring in the Dumbarton Oaks Collections shows a similar composition, but no inscription (fig. 7). 29 Again an imperial crown, distinguished by *prependoulia*, adorns the bride. A round line above the head of the groom may be intended to represent a *stemma*, but unlike portrayals of the imperial grooms in the solidi, there is no ornament decorating the apex of the crown. 29 The pair face forward, are depicted full length, and flank a figure of Christ, who joins their hands to mark their union. This ring is dated to the late sixth century, however it was discovered with a marriage medallion of Ariadne and Anastasios (see fig. 3) in a treasure purportedly unearthed in Trebizond. 30 These circumstances raise the possibility that the ring is contemporary with the solidus and therefore dates to the late fifth century and possibly to the year of their marriage, 491. It has been hypothesized that the ensemble was part of the jewelry chest of a bride. 31 Yet the diameter of the ring, which measures ca. 2.1cm, is quite large, indicating that it was intended instead to be worn by a man.

The other major category of marriage ring iconography—half-length figures flanking a cross and/or a bust of Christ—also frequently shows only the female figure wearing a prominent imperial crown. This group has been dated to the later sixth to seventh centuries based on comparison with imagery on glass coin weights as well as coins and weights issued during the reign of Justin I (r. 565-78) and Sophia. 32 Yet iconography on fourth to fifth century weights also shows compelling parallels, raising the possibility that at least some of these rings could date to an earlier era. Two examples, both at Dumbarton Oaks, depict a cross-over scarf, and *prependoulia* to either side of the heads of the grooms, but unlike portrayals of the imperial figures were so widely attested in weights. For example, a cross-over scarf), a *regale* that adorns the heads of the grooms, but unlike portrayals of the imperial grooms in the solidi, there is no ornament decorating the apex of the crown. 29 The pair face forward, are depicted full length, and flank a figure of Christ, who joins their hands to mark their union. This ring is dated to the late fifth century and possibly to the year of their marriage, 491. It was almost certainly intended to be worn by a man.

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29. Vikan notes the bride's imperial crown, but does not interpret her as an empress, stating that she "quite inappropriately, has retained from Ariadne's portrait both diadem and *pendilia* (*prependoulia*)." He perceives the groom to be bareheaded. Vikan, *Art and marriage* (cit. n. 1), p. 158.


31. Ibid.

Dumbarton Oaks, depict a bride with a three-pronged ornament at the top of her head and *prependoulia* to either side of her face (figs. 8 and 9). There are elaborations around the heads of the grooms, but neither *prependoulia* nor the *stemma* are discernable. The bride and groom flank a cross, and a bust of Christ is positioned at the top of the central axis. Inscriptions in the exergue again record good wishes for the newlyweds, in one case ΟΜΟΝΟΙΑ (concord) (fig. 8) and in the other ΘΕΟΥ ΧΑΡΙΣ (grace of God) (fig. 9).32 The ring inscribed ΟΜΟΝΟΙΑ also depicts crowns suspended over the heads of each figure, but these most likely represent the ceremonial crown, or *stephanos*, of the marriage ritual, not the imperial *stemma*.33 Both rings are dated to the seventh century, yet the evidence marshaled for these attributions is inconclusive, and an earlier date remains possible.34 One ring (fig. 8) has an extremely large band, which measures 2.4cm in diameter and was almost certainly intended for a male wearer. The other ring (fig. 9), which has a band measuring 2cm in diameter, is also beyond the average size for a modern—and no doubt a Byzantine—woman.

An additional example, also at Dumbarton Oaks, shows the bridal couple flanking a cross, but there is no bust of Christ (fig. 10).35 In his place, the inscription ΘΕΟΥ ΧΑΡΙΣ (grace of God) curves across the upper edge of the bezel. In the exergue is inscribed ΟΜΟΝΟΙΑ (concord). The groom is clearly bareheaded. The bride has vertical extensions to either side of her face which may represent *prependoulia*.36 The diameter of the band is very large, measuring 2.5cm, which leaves little doubt that this ring was made for a man. The treasure in which the ring was discovered is dated to the seventh century based on comparison with jewelry from another treasure, which was buried with seventh-century coins. Yet, it is possible that the ring dates to an earlier period. The image of a half-length frontal bust is widely attested in coins, but the closest parallels for these rings are found in weights. For example, a late fourth- to fifth-century copper alloy flat weight shows two imperial busts flanking a cross (fig. 11).37 Although the image is schematic, three-prong ornaments clearly extend from the apexes of the crowns and short *prependoulia* hang to either side of the figures' faces. Weights like these are rarely inscribed with the names of the individuals depicted.38 The absence of identifying inscriptions could imply that the imperial figures were so well-known as not to require specification. Alternatively, it could have been desirable for them to embody authority in the abstract, thereby avoiding the necessity of identifying specific individuals.39

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32. Ross, *Catalogue* (cit. n. 8), p. 57-58, nos. 67 and 68.
33. Ross, *Catalogue* (cit. n. 8), p. 57-58, nos. 67 and 68.
34. On this distinction, see n. 5, above.
35. For one ring (fig. 9), it is claimed that the bride may be depicted wearing the *loros* (a jeweled, cross-over scarf), a *regale* that appeared in imperial coinage for the first time during the reign of Justinian II (r. 685-95 and 705-11). Ross, *Catalogue* (cit. n. 8), p. 58. But the clothing of the figure is schematically rendered and impossible to interpret conclusively.
36. Ross, *Catalogue* (cit. n. 8), p. 7, no. 4E.
37. Although to the modern eye the vertical extensions may appear to resemble hair, this is not likely the case because in Byzantium women commonly wore snoods, nets or cloths which covered the hair and secured it close to the head.
39. When names are provided, they are typically those of a local official, not the imperial figures, who serve instead to endorse the local official's authority.
need to replace the weights with the accession of a new ruler. In either case, the royal images serve the purpose of authenticating the object and guaranteeing the integrity of its measurement.

The production of coins, weights, and metal rings required the same technique of engraving, and it is possible that metal devices bearing the images of the emperor and empress would have been fabricated in the imperial mints or similar state run workshops, from which other forms of largito are known to have derived. This common location of production would further explain the similarity of decorations on these diverse objects. Indeed, images of imperial authority—whether on coins, weights, or largito in the form of rings—shared a similar purpose: they were all intended to assert and promote confidence in the stability and authority of imperial rule. It is often assumed that early Byzantine marriage rings belonged to women. Yet, as noted above, the majority of known examples share a similar purpose: they were all intended to fit the fingers of men. The possibility that marriage rings served as a form of largito distributed to high-ranking members of the court and army would have demanded that the rings be fabricated for male recipients.

The emphasis on the imperial character of the female figure in the iconography of some early Byzantine marriage rings would have been a key factor in the communication of political power. In cases where the male figure is uncrowned, the discrepancy in the rendering of the bride and groom would seem to have been intentional because in any ring that depicts one figure crowned, it would have been equally possible to portray the second individual in similar fashion. When noted, the lack of a crown for the groom in early Byzantine marriage jewelry has led scholars to argue that these objects do not represent imperial marriages. Rather, the non-imperial bride is said to be depicted "like a princess" to celebrate her special status on her wedding day. Yet in the third and fifth-century imperial marriage solidi, the bride wears a pronounced crown with extended prongs at the apex and prependoulias to either side, while the male figure wears a simple stemma with short ornaments projecting from the center. The tendency of the marriage rings to emphasize the regalia of the female figures over that of the male figures is in keeping with the iconography of the solidi. The solidi celebrated the royal marriage in order to promote the authority of the new emperor, who—in the cases of Marcian and Anastasios—was raised to the throne through this union. It is possible that in the rings, the understatement or even absence of a royal regalia to each couple's marriage marks a significant stylistic feature, these bel tota iean the marriage solidi with their own Byzantine jewelry that resembles the imperial authority of the new emperor, who—in the cases of Marcian and Anastasios—was raised to the throne through this union. It is possible that in the rings, the understatement of imperial authority. In this way, the production of images serves the purpose of authenticating the object and guaranteeing the integrity of its measurement.
In either case, the royal marriage in keeping with the same technique of representations of the emperor and empress of the emperor and empress in early Byzantine imperial numismatic imagery and coinage. This common location of the emperors and empresses of early Byzantine was intentional because in any instance a crown for the female figure emphasizes her role as the conduit of imperial authority. In the case of Pulcheria and Marcian, it is known that their wedding took place prior to his coronation. This sequence of events might explain why he would be depicted without the imperial crown in rings intended to commemorate their marriage. In the case of Ariadne and Anastasios, great effort was exerted in visual and textual sources of the era to emphasize their union. Indeed Ariadne appeared on consular dipyches with Anastasios (see fig. 6), but not with her previous husband, Zeno (r. 474-91), whom she married while her father, Leo I (r. 457-74), was still alive. Rings celebrating the nuptials of each couple would have been part of the effort to impress upon the populace the legitimacy and stability of the imperial office achieved through their marital bond. Like the imperial solidi, the rings privilege the royal status of the bride.

The iconography of imperial marriage solidi was also imitated in several sixth-century belts and pendants. An example in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection incorporates two large repoussé gold sheet medallions featuring a couple blessed by Christ (figs. 12 and 13). The groom is clearly bareheaded; the bride wears a crown with a pronged ornament at the apex and prependoula, which run along each side of her face. The inscriptions on the medallions replace the name of the reigning emperor and the mint mark found on the imperial solidi with wishes for concord, grace, and health from God. In addition, the medallions are significantly larger—about twice the size—of their numismatic models. Similar marital iconography appears in another belt in the collection of the Musée du Louvre, and in a double sided pendant in the Christian Schmidt Collection, Munich, which shows on one side a comparable image of a couple blessed by Christ, presumably a bride and groom, and on the other side a scene of the Nativity of Christ. Based on stylistic features, these belts and pendant are dated to the sixth century, but they clearly imitate the marriage solidi of the previous century. Indeed, it was quite common for Byzantine jewelry that reproduced numismatic iconography to be modeled after coins from earlier periods.

In all three of the imitative medallions the bride wears the imperial crown with a three-prong fixture at the center and prependoula, while the groom is bareheaded (see fig. 13). Her regalia indicate imperial status, although no inscriptions specify her name or that of the groom. There are several possible explanations for these features. The subtle rendering of the groom’s crown on the imperial solidi may have been overlooked by or even absence of a royal crown for the groom stresses his non-imperial origin, while the distinct rendering of a crown for the female figure emphasizes her role as the conduit of imperial authority. In the case of Pulcheria and Marcian, it is known that their wedding took place prior to his coronation. This sequence of events might explain why he would be depicted without the imperial crown in rings intended to commemorate their marriage. In the case of Ariadne and Anastasios, great effort was exerted in visual and textual sources of the era to emphasize their union. Indeed Ariadne appeared on consular dipyches with Anastasios (see fig. 6), but not with her previous husband, Zeno (r. 474-91), whom she married while her father, Leo I (r. 457-74), was still alive. Rings celebrating the nuptials of each couple would have been part of the effort to impress upon the populace the legitimacy and stability of the imperial office achieved through their marital bond. Like the imperial solidi, the rings privilege the royal status of the bride.

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the artisan charged with copying the numismatic models. Alternatively it may be that, like the imperial marriage rings, these medallions intentionally emphasize the imperial status of the bride and could have served as largitio to commemorate an imperial union. Finally they may intentionally replicate imperial coins in objects that were destined for use by non-imperial patrons, who copied the imagery of the coins, but changed the inscriptions, thereby assuming the imperial couple as a model for their own marriage while appropriately distancing the composition from the authority of the royal prototype. Imitating imperial iconography is consistent with trends in fashion of the fourth and fifth centuries, which show a marked increase in the replication of imperial imagery by non-imperial individuals. It also allowed those who reproduced imperial iconography to advertise their own subscription to the norms of Christian marriage in an era when such statements were encouraged, but not yet required.

A number of rings displaying marriage iconography on their bezels show the same grouping of Christ or a cross flanked by the bride and groom in full- or half-length, but seem to depict neither the bride nor the groom with crowns (fig. 14). It is possible that these rings are simply schematic renderings in which the detail of the crown was inadvertently omitted. Alternatively they might depict non-imperial figures, who emulated the iconography of imperial nuptials, but respectfully avoided the appropriation of imperial insignia. The latter possibility is supported by a particularly elaborate ring with an eight-lobed bezel that depicts the bride and groom at either side, but two figures at the center, presumably Christ and the Virgin Mary; each faces outward and reaches to bless one of the newlyweds, neither of whom wears a crown (fig. 15). This ring is inscribed in the exergue of the bezel OMONVA (concord) and along the edges of the bezel and band with a prayer and the names of the bride and groom, Peter and Theodote. The outer surfaces of the band are ornamented with narrative vignettes from the life of Christ. Although related to the iconography of imperial marriage, the decoration of the bezel clearly celebrates a non-imperial pair. The diameter of the band, 2.3cm, indicates that the intended wearer was probably Peter, rather than Theodote. The presence of a personal inscription on this object also draws attention to the lack of such references on the majority of early Byzantine marriage rings, again suggesting that the latter served as something other than tokens to be exchanged between husband and wife on the occasion of their betrothal or wedding.

Early Byzantine "marriage" rings follow a larger pattern of early Byzantine elite artistic production, which is characterized by the emulation of imperial exemplars. Yet the most intricate examples show the use of loca sancta scenes, discovery of one ring in a set of iconography of marriage that makes a clear statement of imperial status for the couple. In the case of the Soli solidi. I suggest that the solidi on Byzantine marriage rings may have been given as signs of favor to the marriage jewelry of the elite, who carefully deleted the emblems of imperial regalia, 

This survey of the two ring types, full-length figures and busts, and the development of the iconography of marriage shows that it is possible to advertise imperial status for the couple, yet it should be understood as imperial marriage of an augusta to an eastern general, and to a situation occurred in the early 4 of the early 5th century, and Ariadne and Ares is associated with the Soli solidi. I suggest that the solidi of Byzantine marriage rings may have been given as signs of favor to the marriage jewelry of the elite, who carefully deleted the emblems of imperial regalia, 

50. Johansen, Rings (cit. n. 9), p. 224-225, with additional references. This phenomenon is found, for example, in imagery produced by fourth- and fifth-century consuls in objects that commemorate their ascensions to office. See R. E. Leader-Newbury, Silver and society in late antiquity: functions and meanings of silver plate in the fourth to seventh centuries, Aldershot 2004, p. 41-47.

51. Swift discusses wedding rings as part of a broader late antique concern for promoting the Christianization of marriage and family. She views idealized marital and familial images in various media as propagating new social concepts to which elite members of society subscribed. Swift, Style and function in Roman decoration (cit. n. 20), p. 157-158. Regarding the reconciliation of pagan and Christian iconography in early Byzantine marriage jewelry, see Walker, Myth and magic (cit. n. 1).

52. Ross, Catalogue (cit. n. 8), p. 55, no. 64.
53. Ibid., p. 58-59, no. 59.
most intricate examples show a number of elaborations on the earlier models, including the use of *loca sancta* scenes to decorate the band. Their later date is supported by the discovery of one ring in a seventh-century archaeological context. While inspired by an iconography of marriage that has imperial origins, these rings are likely items of personal adornment that commemorate the union between husband and wife. The fact that they imitate imperial coins (and possibly *largitio* rings), but avoid the representation of imperial *regalia* suggests that they represent a subsequent development in early Byzantine marriage jewelry, when the imperial prototypes had been adapted for use by non-imperial users, who carefully deleted the emblems of royal power from this iconography.

This survey of the two major types of early Byzantine marriage ring iconography—full-length figures and bust-length figures—has discerned two further sub-categories of imagery. One group shows at least one member of the couple wearing imperial headgear; the other shows neither the bride nor the groom crowned. While both of these types developed from the iconography of imperial coins and weights, only the former group makes a clear statement of imperial identity for the individuals depicted, and this status is consistently emphasized for, if not limited to the bride. I propose that in rings that assert imperial status for the female figure, this distinction was intentional. These rings should be understood as imperial gifts that would have been issued to commemorate the marriage of an augusta to a non-imperial consort. The two specific instances when this situation occurred in the early Byzantine era—the marriages of Pulcheria and Marcian in 450, and Ariadne and Anastasios in 491—were commemorated through imperial solidi. I suggest that the solidi and *largitio* rings eventually influenced the iconography of Byzantine marriage rings more broadly, however, in these later, non-imperial examples the couple is uncrowned. The appearance of royal marriage iconography on objects that were given as signs of favor would have encouraged the imitation of these motifs in the marriage jewelry of the elite. Still these emulations of imperial examples avoid laying claim to the identity and authority inherent in imperial *regalia*. The material surveyed here suggests that during the fifth century, Byzantine marriage ring iconography was initially generated in the form of imperial *largitio*, which drew from numismatic and metrological imagery to promote political authority and stability. Yet over time this iconography shed its imperial associations, with only its marital significance persisting into the sixth and seventh centuries.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position of couple</th>
<th>Bride crowned</th>
<th>Groom crowned</th>
<th>Diam. of band</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Collection &amp; Acc. Inv. no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (fig. 4)</td>
<td>full length frontal w/hands joined; flanking Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1.8cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (fig. 7)</td>
<td>full length frontal w/hands joined; flanking Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.1cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1.6cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (fig. 10)</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.5cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (fig. 9)</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross &amp; bust of Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross &amp; bust of Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross &amp; dove</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.3cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a star</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1.8cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking cross</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1.8-1.9cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.1cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (fig. 8)</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross &amp; bust of Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.4cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 (fig. 15)</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ &amp; the Virgin</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.3cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (fig. 14)</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ &amp; the Virgin</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.2cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 (fig. 12)</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1.9-2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 (fig. 13)</td>
<td>full length profile; flanking Christ</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.1cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 (fig. 17)</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.0cm</td>
<td>bronze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 (fig. 11)</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.1cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.1cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>full length frontal; flanking Christ</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>band not preserved</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1.6-1.8cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1.8-2.0cm</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>half length frontal; flanking a cross</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2.5cm</td>
<td>bronze</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Sample of published early Byzantine marriage rings in European and North American collections.
THE QUESTION OF THE CROWNED BRIDE

Fig. 1 – Marriage solidus of Valentinian III and Licinia Eudoxia, Byzantine, 437, gold, diam. 2.1cm, 4.37g, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC.

Fig. 2 – Marriage solidus of Marcian and Pulcheria, Byzantine, 450, gold, diam. 2.2cm, Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, coll. no. 32543.

Fig. 3 – Marriage solidus of Anastasios and Ariadne mounted as a pendant, Byzantine, 491, said to be part of a treasure from Trebizond, gold, diam. 2.5cm, Dumbarton Oaks Museum, Washington DC, acc. no. 59.47.

Fig. 4 – Marriage ring, Byzantine, fifth century (?), gold, inner diam. of band 1.8cm, diam of bezel 1.6cm. Inscribed: OMONV (concord). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, acc. no. 66.37.7.

Fig. 5 – Solidus of Licinia Eudoxia, Byzantine, 439, gold, diam. 2.1cm, Dumbarton Oaks Museum, Washington DC.
Fig. 6 - Consular diptych of Anasrasios with portrait of Ariadne at upper right corner, 517, ivory, h. 36.2cm, w. 12.7cm, depth 1cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, acc. no. 369-1871.

Fig. 7 - Marriage ring, Byzantine, fifth century (?), gold and niello, diam. of band 2.1cm, diam. of bezel 1.2cm, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 53.12.4.

Fig. 8 - Marriage ring, Byzantine, fifth century (?), gold and niello, diam. of band 2.4cm. Inscribed: OMONOIA (concord). Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 59.60.

Fig. 9 - Marriage ring, Byzantine, fifth century (?), gold and niello, diam. of band 2.0cm, diam. of bezel 1cm. Inscribed: ΘΕΟΥ ΧΑΙΡΕ (grace of God). Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 69.77.

Fig. 10 - Marriage ring, Byzantine, late fifth or sixth century (?), gold and niello, diam. of band 2.5cm, diam. of bezel 1.5cm. Inscribed: ΘΕΟΥ ΧΑΙΡΕ ΟΜΟΝΟΙΑ (grace of God, concord). Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 59.60.

Fig. 11 - Coin weight, Byzantine, fourth to fifth century, copper, 1.4cm by 1.4cm, inscribed ΛΙΜΕΟΝ reverse ΛΙΜΕΟΝ (just), British Museum, London, OA.824. ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 12 - Belt, Byzantine, late fifth gold, length 75.5cm, diam. of large plaques 2.5cm, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC,
Fig. 11 – Coin weight, Byzantine, late fourth to fifth century, copper alloy, 1.4cm by 1.4cm, inscribed on the reverse ΔΙΚΕ (just), British Museum, London, OA.824. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 12 – Belt, Byzantine, late fifth or sixth century (?), gold, length 75.5cm, diam. of large medallions 4.8cm, diam. of small plaques 2.5cm, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 37.33.

Fig. 13 – Detail of fig. 12, large medallion. Inscribed: EX ΘΕΟΥ ΟΜΟΝΩΝ ΧΑΡΙΤΩΝ (from God, concord, grace, health).

Fig. 14 – Marriage ring, Byzantine, sixth century (?), gold, diam. of band 2.2cm, diam. of bezel 1.4cm, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 53.12.3.

Fig. 15 – Marriage ring, Byzantine, sixth or seventh century (?), gold and niello, diam. 2.3cm, Inscribed: ΟΜΟΝΩΝ (concord), Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 47.15.

Marriage ring, Byzantine, fifth century, diam. of band 2.1cm, diam. of bezel 2.2cm. Inscribed: ΟΜΟΝΟΙΑ Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 61.3.

Marriage ring, Byzantine, sixth or seventh century (?), gold and niello, diam. 2.3cm. Inscribed: ΟΜΟΝΩΝ Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, acc. no. 53.12.4.