

## Protection and salvation: an eleventh-century silver vessel, its imagery, and its function

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*A small silver bowl, discovered in Russia and usually attributed to eleventh-century Byzantium, displays a range of unusual imagery that has complicated its interpretation. The role of the saint and prayer on the vessel and the emphasis placed on intercession as well as on protection, this paper will suggest, was to protect the vessel's owner both on earth and in his afterlife. The vessel, which makes visible contemporary ideas about punishment, Last Things, and salvation, presents a fragmentary image of the Last Judgement designed to stress the importance of heavenly justice and to remind its viewer to remain virtuous.*

**Keywords:** Byzantine art; Last Judgement; metalwork; apotropaic imagery

In 1949, a small silver bowl was found in Solikamsk, in the Perm region of Russia.<sup>1</sup> The dish names its owner in an inscription engraved around its rim: +K[YPI]E BOHΘH TON ΔΟΥΛΟΝ ΣΟΥ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΝ ΤΟΥΡΚΕΛΗΝ – ‘Oh Lord, help Thy servant Theodore Tourkeles’. The bowl is small and would comfortably fit into the palm of one’s hand. It is usually dated to the eleventh century, and alongside the invocation for divine assistance depicts, inside the vessel, a raised portrait of Saint Theodore, identified by the inscription Ο Α[ΓΙΟΥ] ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΥ. The portrait of the saint is framed on the outside of the vessel by seven teardrop-like shapes, each of which contains a fish. Each fish holds in its mouth a body part, including human hands and feet. In-between the fields containing fish are placed birds and one human-lion hybrid. It has been suggested that the small bowl had a stand, now lost, so that the imagery at its bottom would have been visible when the dish was lifted, revealing its decoration in full by being used. On the body of the vessel, medallions containing raised figures alternate with images placed in-between

1 The dish is now in the collections of the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, together with a group of vessels attributed to Byzantium, which are catalogued in V. P. Darkevich, *Svetskoe iskusstvo Vizantii: proizvedeniia vizantiiskogo khudozhestvennogo remesla v Vostochnoi Evrope X-XIII veka* (Moscow 1975). A. Bank, ‘Monuments des arts mineurs de Byzance (Xe-XIIe siècles) au Musée de l’Ermitage (Argenterie, stéatites, camées)’, *Corsi di cultura sull’arte ravennate e bizantina IX* (1962) 125–138. 128.



Fig. 1. (Colour online) Bowl of Theodore Tourkeles. Byzantium, eleventh century. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Svetlana Suetova.

the roundels and include depictions of sphinxes, griffins, bears gnawing human figures, birds with prey, and a snake devouring a human (Figs.1-2).

The shape and decorative layout of the Tourkeles bowl parallel other works in precious metal and enamel from Byzantium and its provinces dated to a similar period, including the Innsbruck dish, a bowl now in the Hermitage Museum, and a repoussé gold vessel from late tenth- or eleventh-century Georgia.<sup>2</sup> Yet, its decoration is completely unique and, consequently, baffling. The puzzling nature of the object's imagery and its enigmatic depiction of human-animal violence have met with scholarly reticence in attempting an interpretation of the object, apart from some passing mentions.<sup>3</sup> This article will examine the vessel's function not in terms of its utilitarian purpose but through its symbolism and the way that the object made visual, enacted, and constructed ideas, particularly in relationship to the viewer's earthly life and afterlife. It will also address the question of how the images on the vessel, which seem disparate and incongruent both in their specific meaning and in their relation to one another, work together. To do so, this article will re-contextualize the dish within the broader framework of Middle Byzantine visual and intellectual culture, particularly considering the role of saints and heavenly justice, images of human-animal violence, and depictions and descriptions of the Last Judgement.

At the bottom of the bowl, a portrait of Saint Theodore is modelled from the silver (Fig.3). The figure is contained within an engraved circle, resembling the window-like

2 S. Redford, 'How Islamic is it? The Innsbruck Plate and its setting', *Muqarnas* 7 (1990) 119–135. 125–6.

3 N. P. Ševčenko, 'Eaten alive: animal attacks in the Venice *Cynegetica*', in I. Anagnostakis, T. G. Koliai and E. Papadopoulou (eds.), *Ζωα και περιβάλλον στο Βυζάντιο (7ος-12ος αι.)* (Athens 2011) 115–135. 132; H. Maguire and E. Dauterman Maguire, *Other Icons: Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture* (Princeton 2007) 96; H. Maguire, 'The profane aesthetic in Byzantine art and literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999) 189–205. 193.



Fig. 2. Bowl of Theodore Tourkeles. External view of the vessel's bottom. First published in A. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (Leningrad 1985) 172, fig. 211.

shapes that enclose holy figures in church decorations. The saint is dressed in a military uniform, as indicated by the scale-like shapes on his upper body and the epaulettes on his shoulders. On his right shoulder is fastened a cloak. In his left hand, the saint is holding a sword; in his right, a spear. Military saints held a strong appeal to worshippers both in Byzantium and beyond and their cult was particularly prominent from the tenth century onwards.<sup>4</sup> But the identification of the figure on the Tourkeles dish as St Theodore is not as straightforward as it seems. There are two distinct Saint

4 J. Haldon, *A Tale of Two Saints. The Martyrdoms and Miracles of Saints Theodore 'the Recruit' and 'the General'* (Liverpool 2016) 1–17; M. White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900–1200* (Cambridge 2013) 5, 50. For a detailed treatment of the development and background of warrior saints, see C. Walter, Part I 'History and Antecedents', in *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot 2003); E. Kurtz, 'Zwei griechische Texte über die Hl. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI.', *Mémoires de l'Académie impériale des sciences de St.-Pétersbourg*, Classe historico-philologique 3.2 (1898) 1–80. 10; P. Magdalino, 'Saint Demetrios and Leo VI', *Byzantinoslavica* 51 (1990) 198–201. 198–9; H. Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton 1996) 5–47; R. Nelson, "And So, With the Help of God": the Byzantine art of war in the tenth century', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 65–66 (2011–2012) 169–192. 189.



Fig. 3. (Colour online) Bowl of Theodore Tourkeles. Detail: interior, St Theodore. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Svetlana Suetova.

Theodores: Saint Theodore Tiron (the Recruit) and St Theodore Stratelates (the General).<sup>5</sup> So which St Theodore is depicted on the bowl of Theodore Tourkeles?<sup>6</sup> Both Saint Theodore Tiron and Saint Theodore Stratelates were known and popular during the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, as textual sources, church foundations and liturgy attest. It was not unusual for St Theodore to be depicted without any qualifier in the tenth and eleventh centuries. We see him named simply ‘St Theodore’ on the Chalice of the Patriarchs, the Limburg Staurotheke, the Pala d’Oro, and on the twelfth-century enamel icon of Gabriel in the Treasury of San Marco, to name a few. In the case of the Tourkeles vessel, the non-specified name of the saint could be read, as has been suggested, either as a reference to the older Saint Theodore Tiron – or, as I propose, as a conscious and intentionally vague reference.<sup>7</sup> Rather than depicting or being addressed to one of the two Saint Theodores, the image inside the Tourkeles vessel is designed to establish a link with both saints of that name. This would allow the viewer of the bowl to address his prayer to not one, but two saints who could act as intercessors. While the

5 See, for example, W. Woodfin, ‘An officer and a gentleman: transformations in the iconography of a warrior saint’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 60 (2006) 111–143.

6 While iconographic features of the saint’s portrait, such as his short hair and pointed beard, could help to identify the saint as either St Theodore Tiron or St Theodore Stratelates, the small size of the depiction on the vessel, which can measure no more than 5cm across and the resulting lack of detail make it difficult to establish with certainty the saint’s identity based on these features. For the iconographic features and histories of the two St Theodores, see: Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, 44–64.

7 Maguire, ‘The profane aesthetic’, 193; White, *Military Saints*, 59.

ambiguity in naming the saint on the vessel was not a prerequisite for intercession, it promoted the effectiveness of the prayer.<sup>8</sup>

Turning to a saint for help was one of the best solutions for medieval Byzantines in countering a range of problems. The slow pace of heavenly justice gave a role to the saints, who could intercede with God during a person's lifetime and put things right on earth and would intercede for a person's soul at the judgement after death.<sup>9</sup> The importance of the role of saints as intercessors is expressed in texts such as the medieval apocalypses, and in the private jewellery, seals, and icons of Middle Byzantine believers; intercession was also a common feature of church decoration.

The inscriptions on the vessel of Theodore Tourkeles express its owner's desire to secure divine help and protection. His petition is reinforced by the portrait of the saint inside the vessel. The address to two saints rather than one promotes the petition's reception. Together, the prayer and the portrait of the saint emphasise the desire and need for divine intercession and protection. But to what end did Theodore Tourkeles require the assistance of holy figures? Why does the vessel put such emphasis on protection and intercession? And how does this striving for help relate to the remaining imagery on the bowl?

The outside of the bowl of Theodore Tourkeles shows images of violence and fragmentation, some of them involving human beings: bears and serpents have human parts in their jaws, and one bear towers over a prone, nude human being. Animals were an important feature of Middle Byzantine art; yet, the animals on the bowl are quite different from images of game animals, the animals of the arena, or Old Testament animals acting in accordance with God's plan. Images of animals were employed to intimidate viewers, as in the case of the automata documented at the court of the emperor, and in figural and literary imagery could express an individual's power and domination.<sup>10</sup> But despite numerous images representing man's triumph over the beast, such as the illustrations of the eleventh-century *Cynegetica* now in Venice, or showing creatures with their prey, we rarely see the animals committing such acts of violence, directed towards a human being, as represented on the Tourkeles bowl.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the depiction of violence on the vessel is ambiguous; it appears that animals are engaged in violent acts but neither the context of, nor the reason for, the violence is evident. To address the meaning of the animals on the vessel, as well as

8 H. Maguire, 'Magic and the Christian image', in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, D. C. 1995) 51–2.

9 H. Maguire, 'From the evil eye to the eye of justice: the saints, art, and justice in Byzantium', in A. Laiou and D. Simon (eds.), *Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth to Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, D. C. 1994) 217–239. 235.

10 Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, ed. and trans. P. Squatriti (Washington, D. C. 2007) Retribution VI.5; C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (London 1986) 209–10.

11 Ševčenko, 'Eaten alive', 118; exceptions include the image of a traitor accused of having attempted to poison Basil II in 1022, shown being thrown to the lions in a Madrid manuscript of John Skylitzes, Madrid BN Vitr.26-2, fol.196r, or the comical depiction of a gladiator felled by a lion on an ivory box in the State Hermitage Museum, see: A. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (Leningrad/St Petersburg 1985) figs.134–135.



of the acts of violence that appear to be perpetrated, the potential protective function of animal images will be examined and the link between the vessel's imagery and that of Last Judgement scenes in Middle Byzantine art will be discussed.

At the bottom of the vessel are depicted fish interspersed with images of birds. Eagles and other raptors held an important place in the medieval Byzantine imagination and had significant symbolic associations.<sup>12</sup> Eagles abounded in Byzantine material culture; particularly frequent are images of eagles with prey. The sharp claws, stretched-out legs, long feather tails, and spread wings of the birds depicted on the vessel suggest that at least three out of the six are birds of prey. These are in the process of vanquishing animals of different kinds, with their victims coming from the three realms of water, earth, and sky. By the Middle Byzantine period, it was the apotropaic, or amuletic significance of the motif of the eagle with prey that became most prominent, as surviving images and texts suggest.<sup>13</sup> The chronicle known as Theophanes Continuatus notes that the tenth-century emperor Constantine VII constructed a guardhouse (φυλακή) of porphyry outside his chamber in the imperial palace in Constantinople that contained a silver sculpture of an eagle set above a water basin.<sup>14</sup> The location of the sculpture in the emperor's guardhouse is a strong indication that its purpose was intended to be protective.<sup>15</sup>

The exterior façade of the Little Metropolis church in Athens, now dated to the fifteenth century, displays an array of stone carvings that pre-date the building's construction and were reused to articulate its exterior.<sup>16</sup> These images were not arranged in a haphazard manner, but instead had a defensive role, so Henry Maguire argued: they guaranteed the neutralization of the power of demons to harm people through the dangers of the world and controlled the destructive beasts and the dangers inherent in them through circles and crosses.<sup>17</sup> The reliefs, in particular those showing eagles killing

12 Achmet, *Achmetis Oneirocriticon*, ed. F. Drexel (Leipzig 1925) 285; translated in S. Oberhelman, *The Oneirocriticon of Achmet: a Medieval Greek and Arabic Treatise on the Interpretation of Dreams* (Lubbock 1991) 239–40; Maguire, *Other Icons*, 88–9; for Western and Eastern sources, see: St Jerome, In Isaiam, 66,13. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia latina*, 24, 662; St Ambrose, Sermo XLVI, 2. *Patrologia latina*, 17, 695C–D; Anastasius Sinaites, Hexameron, 6 in *Patrologia graeca*, 89, 926A; Maximus of Turin, Homilia LX. *Patrologia latina*, 57, 369–370.

13 Maguire, *Other Icons*, 65; H. Maguire, 'Profane icons: the significance of animal violence in Byzantine art', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38 (2000) 18–33. 24; Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies*, 124–26.

14 Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn 1838) 6.24. 451; *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Libri I–IV*, eds. and trans. M. Featherstone and J. Signes Codoñer, Series Berolinensis, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 53 (Berlin 2015).

15 Maguire, 'Profane icons', 27.

16 The church, previously dated to the late twelfth or thirteenth century, has now been dated to the fifteenth by B. Küllerich, 'Making sense of the spolia in the Little Metropolis in Athens', *Arte Medievale* 4 (2005) 95–114.

17 H. Maguire, 'The cage of crosses: ancient and medieval sculptures on the 'Little Metropolis' in Athens', *Θυμιάμα. Στη μνήμη της Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα* (Athens 1994) I, 169–172. 170; A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines du moyen âge II (XIe–XIVe siècle)* (Paris 1976) 59; H. Maguire et al. (eds.), *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House* (Ann Arbor 1989); Küllerich, 'Making sense of the spolia in the Little Metropolis in Athens', 95–114; O. Palagia, 'The date and iconography of the Calendar Frieze on the Little Metropolis, Athens', *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 123 (2008) 215–37.

snakes, project the power of Christ and his agents to harness potentially destructive forces and to use them to destroy evil and thus assume an offensive function.<sup>18</sup> The façade of the Little Metropolis arguably visualizes ideas that were present in Late Antique and Byzantine art throughout the centuries and therefore allows for the interpretation of the images on the silver vessel. These images, which seem to be illustrating neither a coherent set or array of stories nor to bear much similarity to Middle Byzantine objects as a whole, function as quasi-emblematic signs and symbols that had a long tradition in the visual arts of the empire, and that were intended to fulfil apotropaic functions.

The representations of the birds at the bottom of the vessel are not the only depictions on the vessel to carry apotropaic connotations. The outside of the vessel bears a number of images of hybrid creatures: the bottom of the vessel shows a sphinx grasping a snake, while the body of the vessel depicts two more sphinxes and at least four griffins, so that almost half of the images in the upper tier of decoration show hybrids and fantastical creatures. In light of the remaining imagery of the Tourkeles vessel and the interpretation proposed for it here, it seems likely that the vessel's images of griffins and sphinxes, known as ferocious animals that defended people and objects, ought to be read as emblematic depictions with an apotropaic function.<sup>19</sup> Such an interpretation would be consonant with the emphasis of the vessel on protection and could explain the visual emphasis placed on the hybrid creatures. A third apotropaic device used both in the ancient and the Byzantine worlds, in addition to images of eagles and fierce hybrid creatures, is that of the circle. For example, pagan sculptures, which were seen as sites of power in Byzantium, could be neutralized, through their setting, by crosses and by circles.<sup>20</sup> It seems plausible that the circles on the vessel of Theodore Tourkeles fulfil a similar function. Designed to contain the destructive forces of the beasts represented on the object, the circles worked in conjunction with the other visual elements and reinforced the protective power of the dish. Together, the hybrid creatures, known for their defensive power and ferocious nature; the eagles, with an established meaning as a protective device; the prayer and portrait of St Theodore, which pleaded for divine assistance; and the circles that framed and contained the dangerous as well as the protective beasts formed a powerful ensemble designed to protect the vessel's owner from harm. This need for protection appears to have been one of the main factors motivating the design and use of the bowl of Theodore Tourkeles; while it may seem that the iconographic elements on the vessel are disparate and present little in way of a common theme

18 *Le roman de Callimaque et de Chrysorrhoe*, ed. M. Pichard (Paris 1956) II, 188-194; trans. G. Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances* (New York 1995) 40; Maguire, 'The cage of crosses', 172.

19 On the protective function of beasts such as dragons, sphinxes, and serpents in combination with epigraphy on a monumental scale, see: A. Eastmond, 'Other encounters: popular belief and cultural convergence in Anatolia and the Caucasus', in A. Peacock, B. De Nicola and S. Nur Yildiz (eds.), *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia* (Farnham 2015) 183-213.

20 Maguire et al. (eds.), *Art and Holy Powers*; Maguire, 'The cage of crosses', 172.

or narrative, many of them do in fact express the same desire – that for intercession and intervention.

But from whom did the vessel's owner need protection and for what did he need assistance? The bowl, I propose, makes visible Tourkeles' ambition to secure protection from the saint depicted at the heart of the vessel, St Theodore, through his intercession on Tourkeles' behalf. Saints were important as intercessors on two main levels: to help the faithful in their earthly life, and to assist them and intercede for them in the afterlife. While the wild beasts and apotropaic images found on the bowl might be intended to defend Tourkeles from threats and dangers during his lifetime, the portrait of the saint and the prayer inscribed around the rim address concerns that extend beyond Tourkeles' earthly life. To address the significance of the Tourkeles bowl as a visual reminder not only of the dangers of earthly life, but also of the so-called Last Things and the judgement of the individual's soul, this section will explore contemporary descriptions and depictions of the Last Judgement together with otherworldly tales.

The decorative tiers of the Tourkeles vessel, while thematically coherent, are divided in their spatial layout. Circling the body of the vessel are beasts and other creatures; the bottom of the dish displays fish alternating with birds. The fish are contained in teardrop-like shapes, swimming outwards from the centre of the dish. Alice Bank and Nancy Ševčenko proposed that the registers on the bowl correspond to those found in images of the Last Judgement, with the fish at the bottom representing the realm of the sea, the animals symbolizing the earthly realm, and the saint inside perhaps representing the inviolable domain of Paradise.<sup>21</sup> However, the animal ferocity is not something that characterizes Byzantine Last Judgements of the period; it is closer to the terrifying visions of fierce beasts devouring sinners at random, so characteristic of Romanesque art.<sup>22</sup>

The prospect of the Second Coming of Christ and of its central event, the Day of Judgement, was considered very real in the medieval period. The event itself was based on the biblical passage in which it is related that forty days after the crucifixion, Christ ascended into heaven:

while he was going, and they [the apostles] were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'.<sup>23</sup>

21 Ševčenko, 'Eaten alive', 132; A. Bank, *Iskusstvo vizantii v sobranijach SSSR* (Moscow 1977) II, no.551.

22 Ševčenko, 'Eaten alive', 132.

23 Acts 1:10-11.



Images of the Last Judgement were being painted as early as the ninth century, both on church walls and on icons.<sup>24</sup> Christ is represented presiding over the Second Coming in the narthex of the Church of the Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessalonike, dated to 1028; in the Church of the Panagia Mavriotissa in Kastoria, also dated to the eleventh century; and in the Yılanlı Kilise in Ihlara, Cappadocia, painted in the tenth century, to name a few.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, only three painted icons of the Last Judgement survive from the Byzantine period; one of them, probably dating to the twelfth century, depicts the scene in detail (Fig. 4).<sup>26</sup> Across the top, Christ is represented seated in his mandorla. He is flanked by the twelve apostles and surrounded by a host of angels. Next to Christ are the Virgin and John the Baptist, interceding on behalf of those about to be judged. From under Christ's feet flows the river of fire. Below is the prepared throne, the Hetoimasia, which is being adored by Adam and Eve, the first sinners of all. Below this are the figures of two angels and a pair of devils preparing to weigh on the scale between them the deeds of someone about to be judged. The angels trumpet to wake the dead across land and sea, with the latter personified by a female figure seated on a marine monster. Animals, including an elephant, birds, and fish, disgorging parts of human bodies represent earth and sea giving up the dead. The rest of the composition contrasts the damned and the saved. The condemned on Christ's left wait for their judgment or are pushed into the lake of fire. Below the fire are the eternally damned, forming groups that represent the gnashing of the teeth, the worm that never sleeps, the unquenchable fire, and the outer darkness, features of the punishments awaiting sinners.<sup>27</sup> On Christ's right are the saved, arranged in groups of apostles, prophets, martyrs, bishops, monk, nuns, and female saints. Below them is the gate of Paradise. Paradise itself is a grove of vines within which sits Abraham, with the soul of an innocent in his lap and flanked by the souls of baptized children who died too young to think about sinning. Above him sits the Virgin on a throne flanked by two angels; also in Paradise is the good thief with his cross.<sup>28</sup>

The elements found in representations of the Last Judgements derive from a variety of biblical sources, from both Old and New Testaments and the Book of Revelation. Most of the imagery comes from the Gospels: the angels trumpeting to round up the saved, Christ on his throne of glory, the gathering of the court and the opened books,

24 N. Ševčenko, 'Some images of the Second Coming and the fate of the soul in Middle Byzantine Art', in S. J. Robert Daly (ed.), *Apocalyptic Themes in Early Christianity* (Brookline, Mass. 2009) 250–72. 250–51.

25 For more on the Last Judgement, including images, see: S. Jónsdóttir, *An 11th Century Byzantine Last Judgment in Iceland* (Reykjavik 1959); B. Brenk, *Die Anfänge der byzantinischen Weltgerichtsdarstellung* (Munich 1964); Y. Christe, *Jugements derniers* (Saint-Léger-Vauban 1999); H. Klein, R. Ousterhout and B. Pitarakis (eds.), *Kariye Camii, yeniden* (Istanbul 2011); N. Bhalla, *Social Histories of the Last Judgement in Byzantine Art*, PhD Dissertation, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2014.

26 Ševčenko, 'Images of the Second Coming', 252.

27 Ševčenko, 'Images of the Second Coming', 253.

28 Ševčenko, 'Images of the Second Coming', 254.

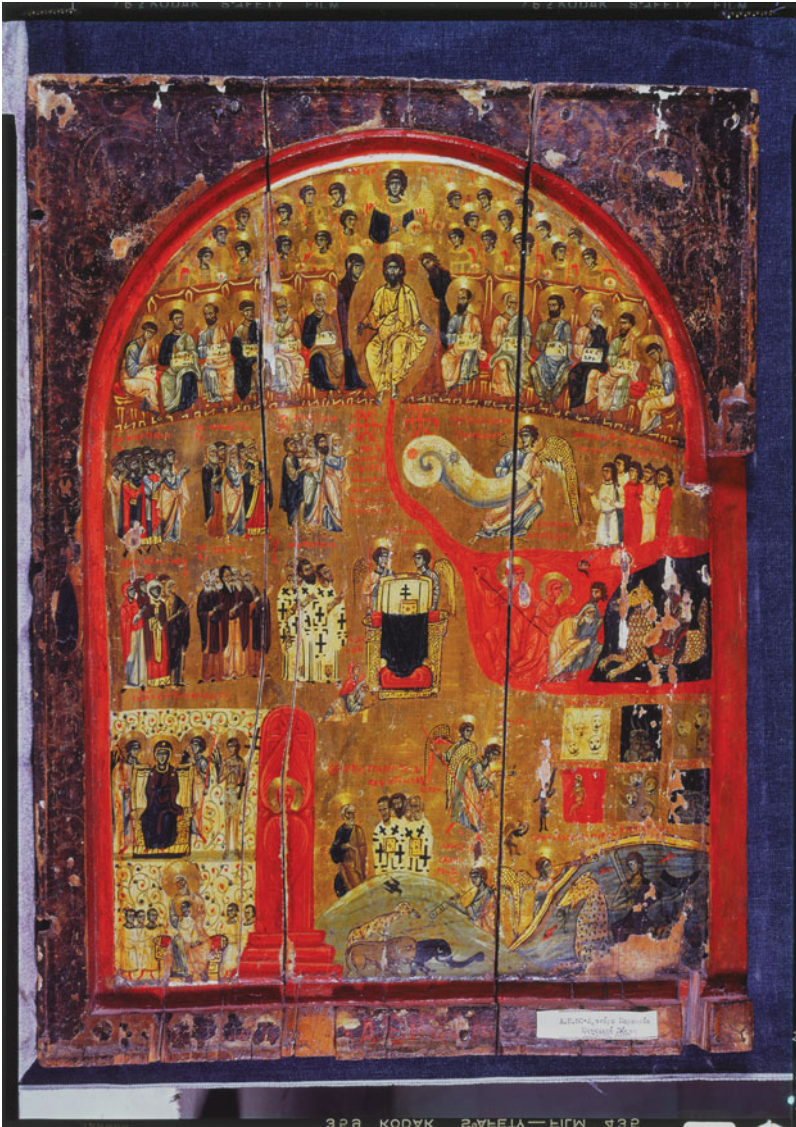


Fig. 4. (Colour online) Icon of the Last Judgement, St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai. Byzantium, twelfth century. By permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt. Photograph courtesy of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai.

the river of fire, the everlasting fire, the gnashing of the teeth, the worm that never sleeps.<sup>29</sup> The rolling up of the scroll of heaven, and the earth and sea giving up their dead come from Revelation.<sup>30</sup> A few components, such as the weighing of the soul,

29 Matthew 25:31-46; Daniel 7:9-10.

30 Revelation 20:11-15.

have no clear biblical sources but do have a visual tradition that dates back to the pre-Christian world.<sup>31</sup>

A Gospel book in Paris thought to have been painted in the monastery of St John Stoudios in Constantinople in the third quarter of the eleventh century contains two Last Judgement compositions; the first of these is painted at the end of the Gospel of Matthew (Fig. 5).<sup>32</sup> At the top of the image, Christ is flanked by the Mother of God and John the Baptist. Around and behind Christ's throne are rows of apostles; the river of fire stretches out below. Below Christ on his right-hand side is shown an angel rolling up the scroll of heaven and two rows of saints, public figures, and other individuals who represent the saved. Below this is an image of Paradise, to which the blessed are being admitted. This arrangement is visually divided from the scenes beneath Christ's left by the depiction of an angel weighing souls, with two small winged demons watching the process. Behind them, and below the lake of fire, are the prison cell-like compartments of hell, waiting to receive the soul of the damned. In the fiery lakes, two angels are handing the sinners over to a fearsome figure seated on a creature that is half leopard, half fish.

Above the lake of fire is a smaller, burning red field. On its left is an angel blowing a trumpet; to his right are three figures emerging from a tomb. Framing the scene are three animals: a beaked and winged animal, probably a griffin; a lion; and an elephant. All three animals have human body parts protruding from their mouths: the griffin is spitting out an arm or leg, while the lion is shown regurgitating a human head first, and the elephant is also rendering forth a human figure. This image is matched on the other side of the illumination by a blue tear-shaped field, framed in gold, that represents the sea. Here, four fish are depicted neatly aligned. One is spitting out a human foot or arm, the one below is regurgitating a half-length figure, and the fish below that has a leg protruding from its jaws.

There are some notable similarities between the imagery on the Tourkeles bowl and that of Middle Byzantine images of the Last Judgement. Firstly, the spatial organization of images of the Last Judgement, divided into spheres and zones, resembles that found on the silver vessel, where the images of the animals are divided into two different rows of decoration. Secondly, the depictions of creatures from the earth and the sea rendering forth the dead provide some of the only known visual parallels to the imagery on this dish. This would suggest that, rather than committing acts of violence towards humans, the beasts on the bowl are agents in the resurrection of mankind during the Second Coming. Moreover, images of the Last Judgement emphasize the importance of intercession on behalf of the individual by giving a central place to the Virgin and St John the Baptist on either side of Christ; a similar prominence is awarded to the intercessory role of St Theodore on the vessel and to the prayer asking for divine assistance. Yet, the

31 L. Kretzenbacher, *Die Seelenwaage: Zur religiösen Idee vom Jenseitsgericht auf der Schicksalswaage in Hochreligion, Bildkunst und Volksglaube* (Klagenfurt 1958).

32 Paris Bib. Nat. gr.74, fol.51v.





Fig. 5. (Colour online) The Last Judgement, Gospel Book, Paris, BNF gr.74, fol.51v. Byzantium, 1075–1100. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Tourkeles bowl constitutes at best a fragment of a Last Judgement composition, as the majority of components seen in images depicting this event, such as the presence of Christ and the apostles, the river and lake of fire, and the saved and the sinners, are absent from the vessel.

While the Tourkeles vessel is unique in its imagery, bringing together seemingly disparate images of animals attacking humans or regurgitating human body parts, birds of prey, and the portrait of a saint in what I argue to be a conscious highlighting of elements of the Last Judgement, it has been suggested by scholars that later objects from regions both inside and beyond Byzantium, and made of other materials may also depict allusions to the Last Judgement. A twelfth-century glazed sgraffito ceramic plate from

Corinth depicts a beast's head devouring an arm, a scene that would have been disclosed once the bowl was emptied. It has been suggested that hands and fingers, as well as the feline beast's head, were familiar as fixtures of hardware, used for holding or suspending things.<sup>33</sup> Simultaneously, the motif would have recalled the depiction of animals at the Last Judgement spitting up their victims, familiar to the viewer from contemporary images. A pair of doors from the church of St Nicholas in Ohrid, which have been dated to between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, bear carved decoration that features a selection of images comparable to those found on the Tourkeles bowl.<sup>34</sup> The door depicts haloed riders on horseback, a kneeling woman, a centaur, an eagle with a snake, a griffin, two lions with human heads, two birds devouring smaller animals, amongst other motifs. It has been argued that the imagery of mounted saints, animals, and threatening monsters on the door has an apotropaic function.<sup>35</sup> This interpretation highlights the desire for protection also proposed for the decoration of the Tourkeles vessel, but only allows for a partial comparison with the vessel.

I would suggest that it was never the aim of the Tourkeles vessel to construct a coherent image of the Last Judgement. Arguably, instead of showing a complete Last Judgement scene, the Tourkeles vessel emphasizes and highlights certain aspects of this event, with a visual stress on rebirth, fragmentation, and punishment.<sup>36</sup> At first sight, the vessel of Theodore Tourkeles with its depiction of animals with entire human bodies and body parts shows the moment of the Second Coming, with sea and earth rendering forth their dead for judgement. But, I will suggest, the vessel also holds another meaning. It alludes to contemporary practices, thoughts, and ideas relating to sin and punishment that would have been familiar to the viewer from contemporary stories and images. The following section also explores the deliberately complex and layered meaning of the vessel's imagery.

Central to the expression of medieval Byzantine ideas about and attitude towards death, the Last Judgement, and the afterlife are the two Greek apocalypses, the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* and the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*.<sup>37</sup> These texts, which are some

33 E. D. Maguire, 'Ceramics of everyday life' in H. Evans and W. D. Wixom (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261* (New York 1997) 255–257; C. Morgan, *Byzantine Pottery Vol.11. Corinth: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* (Cambridge, Mass. 1942) no. 1271, 134, pl. XLIII.

34 V. Angelov, *Bulgarian Church Woodcarving 14th-19th Century* (Sofia) 6; B. Filov, *Die Altbulgarische Kunst* (Bern 1919) 35, fig. XXXIV.

35 Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines*, 118-121, pl. LXXXVII.

36 The beasts on the bowl might represent the punishments meted out to the sinners, therefore possibly serving as 'shorthand' images of hell.

37 The Middle Byzantine date is implied on one hand by the occurrence of emperor John I Tzimiskes (969-976) and his predecessor Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969) in the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*, and on the other the cult of the Virgin as an intercessor, which begins around the ninth to tenth centuries in Byzantium, in the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*. Baun suggested that the most likely period for *Anastasia's* composition lies between 976 and the end of the eleventh century; see: J. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge 2007) 16–17.

of the best-known texts of their time, narrate their protagonists' visionary journeys through the otherworldly places of blessed reward and terrible punishment.<sup>38</sup> The main characters of the two tales are led through the Other World by the Archangel Michael, their heavenly tour guide, and are shown its main features, including the throne of judgement, the angelic hosts, sinners undergoing gruesome punishments, and other wonders.<sup>39</sup> Texts such as these apocalypses were not written for the rich and powerful, but for the individuals belonging to local communities, as evidenced by the type of sinners and vices that they depict.<sup>40</sup> Widely consumed and widely known, these texts reflect non-elite images and attitudes, and were important cautionary tales and moral guidelines to their readers.

In the two apocalyptic tales, the respective central characters go on a journey that invites hearers and readers to accompany the visionary, who is led through and past scenes of pain and punishment that showcase the grim consequences of sin. In the punishments of the sinners, the moral norms of Middle Byzantine society become immediate, personal, and unforgettable with made-to-measure punishments. In the Theotokos apocalypse, the angels are guardians or guides but do not torment the sinners (as they do in the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*); here they are replaced by beasts, generated from within the sinners themselves, which tear at the flesh of the sinners in ways specific to their sins; sleepless worms; and even a dragon.<sup>41</sup> Descriptions of the punishments of sinners such as this and depictions of the same scene echo the penal code of medieval Byzantium, whereby prisoners were often punished with mutilations of the body parts involved in the sin, resulting in a symbolic transformation of the body according to the crime.<sup>42</sup> The *Ecloga*, a selection of laws issued by Leo III and Constantine V in 741, accorded mutilation special prominence in the Byzantine penal code. In addition to flogging and fines, its seventeenth title provided for the amputation of the hand for theft; of the tongue for perjury; or private parts for sodomy; for blinding as a punishment for sacrilege, and nose-slitting for sexual sins.<sup>43</sup> I propose that, in addition to constituting depictions of the bringing forth of the dead by earth and sea, the images on the Tourkeles vessel of animals attacking humans and holding human body parts invite the viewer to read them as visualisations of made-to-measure punishments of sins. Like the mutilations suffered by Byzantine criminals, the made-to-

38 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 3.

39 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 1.

40 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 3; vices included are ploughing out of one's furrow, and virtues such as respect for the local priest, i.e. virtues and vices which weigh heavily on local networks of kin, village, and parish.

41 *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*, trans. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, §17.

42 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 242.

43 A. Kazhdan, et al. (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford, 1991) 672; L. Burgmann, *Ecloga* (Frankfurt am Main 1983) II, 52-61; Leo III and Constantine V, *A Manual of Roman Law: the Ecloga*, ed. and trans. E. Freshfield (Cambridge 1926) 104-105; Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 242.





Fig. 6. (Colour online) Punishments in Hell, Yilanli Kilise, Cappadocia. Tenth century. © The Courtauld Institute of Art.

measure punishments of the sinners whom the Virgin encounters on her otherworldly tour reflect their sins:

And she saw a woman hanging from her two ears, and all the beasts were coming out from her mouth and gnawing her in pieces. And the Kecharitomene asked the Archistrategos, 'Who is this one, and what is her sin?' And the Archistrategos said, 'This is she who eavesdrops in the homes of strangers and of her neighbours, also concocting evil words to make strife, and because of this, here she is thus punished'.<sup>44</sup>

A fresco in the narthex of the rock-cut church of Yilanli Kilise in Cappadocia, dated to the tenth century, depicts four naked women in Hell punished by snakes gnawing the body parts involved in their respective sins: she 'who does not nourish her children' is bitten on her breasts; she 'who slanders' is bitten on the mouth; and she 'who does not obey' is bitten on the ears (Fig.6).<sup>45</sup> Together, the popular texts of the apocalypses and images such as the fresco in the Yilanli Kilise highlight the Byzantine concern with the life, morals, and sins of the 'average' Byzantine citizen. But they also reveal the practice of teaching by fear of Hell, rather than the hope of Heaven, and the existence of a

44 *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*, trans. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, §10

45 The fourth woman, who is bitten all over by eight serpents, now lacks the inscription to identify her sins. See: J.-M. Thierry and N. Thierry, *Nouvelles églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Région de Hasan Dagi* (Paris 1963) 100–101.

literary and artistic practice of depicting the brutal and individualized punishments of Hell. Images of the punishment and pain awaiting sinners were intended to detract their viewers from committing acts that would lead to such damnation.<sup>46</sup>

I would argue that it is this practice, established in text and image by the eleventh century, that is referenced by the imagery of creatures attacking individual body parts as well as human figures on the Tourkeles bowl. The vessel is decorated with images of animals violating human bodies and depictions of animals with human body parts, which on a primary level alludes to the rendering forth of the bodies of the dead at the end of time. But, when considered in conjunction with texts consumed widely during the eleventh century and with images that decorated the churches frequented by Byzantine citizens, a second possible reading of the scenes on the Tourkeles vessel emerges: the fierce creatures on the bowl, such as the animals attacking human figures, are the instruments that punish the dead prior to the Last Judgement. This possible layered interpretation of the vessel's imagery highlights the deliberately complex and complicated nature of the bowl and its decoration that does not always lend itself to straightforward analysis. Like the worm that never sleeps from the apocalyptic texts or the snakes in the fresco from Yılanlı Kilise, the creatures on the Tourkeles bowl mete out individualized, made-to-measure punishments. This interpretation might also account for the variety of human fragments depicted on the vessel, which include feet, hands, heads, and whole bodies. The pain inflicted on these body parts by the fangs and claws of the creatures represented on the bowl arguably corresponds to the punishment for the sins committed with the individual body parts. Thus, much like the frescoes adorning Byzantine churches and the texts describing the Other World, the images on the vessel of Theodore Tourkeles function as a warning sign and teach through fear rather than positive encouragement.

Although the imagery of the Tourkeles vessel may seem morbid when interpreted as a visual caution against sin and digression by showcasing the painful consequences in the afterlife, this kind of imagery is in keeping with wider cultural practices during the Middle Byzantine period, particularly of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Involuntary dreams of death appear to have been pervasive among medieval Byzantines, and dreaming of death or resurrection was considered commonplace in medieval Byzantium. Even more pervasive than involuntary dreams of death was voluntary, purposeful meditation on death and the Last Things, as an aid to repentance and a preparation for a good death. Edifying or 'spiritually beneficial' tales, a popular genre of short simple stories meant to teach basic moral lessons, circulated continuously throughout the Byzantine centuries and presented the exercise in simple, vivid terms, accessible to Christians at all cultural levels.<sup>47</sup> Meditation on death was so fundamental to spiritual development that

46 G. Dagron, 'Ainsi rien n'échappera à la réglementation.' État, église, corporations, confréries: à propos des inhumations à Constantinople (IVe-Xe siècle), in V. Kravari et al. (eds.), *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin* (Paris 1991) 155–82, 163; Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 382.

47 See: J. Wortley, 'Death, judgment, heaven, and hell in Byzantine "Beneficial Tales"', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001) 53–69; *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul, Bishop of Monembasia and of other Authors*, ed. and trans. J. Wortley (Kalamazoo 1996).

when Paul of Evergetis, the eleventh-century abbot of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis in Constantinople, decided to compile a comprehensive guide to monastic life, he chose repentance and death as its first two themes.<sup>48</sup> Similar meditations were pursued by the images of judgement and punishment found on church walls and panel icons, and the vivid thought-world of the Holy Scripture.<sup>49</sup>

The spiritual exercise of meditating on the Last Things is described in an excerpt taken by Paul from the tales of the desert elders:

Call to mind the bitter punishments in Hades; consider how the souls are there now: in what most bitter silence or in what terrible groaning, in such fear and trembling, always expecting the unceasing pain and intolerable punishments which await them... Still more, imagine to yourself that fearsome and awesome tribunal, in which shame will cover the sinners eternally before God and his chosen angels... Then after the shame, the intolerable and countless penalties that will be received: the unquenchable fire of Gehenna, the worm that does not die, the gnashing of teeth, the outer darkness, Tartaros, and all the other innumerable torments which are laid up for such as these. But the righteous will shine more brightly than the sun, and they will be ruling together with Christ for eternity...<sup>50</sup>

By making visual the grim consequences of sin and the inevitability of the Last Judgement, the vessel of Theodore Tourkeles participates in the important cultural practice, prominent during the time of the vessel's making, of contemplating death and the Last Things. The viewer of the object is encouraged to contemplate both this life and the next upon each use of the vessel, and is reminded by the scenes depicted on the vessel to stay on the path of virtuousness, or be subjected to the terrible punishments of Hell. Thus, the vessel, despite its strongly idiosyncratic nature, engages with ideas current in wider Byzantine culture at the time of its making and the fears and hopes of its owner. Here, the body of the sinner is fragmented and attacked, with this act of violence functioning to recall the viewer to correct his behaviour now, or suffer forever.

Yet, while forcing the viewer to contemplate death, punishment, and resurrection, the stark message of the Tourkeles bowl is tempered by the presence of St Theodore at the heart of the vessel and the prayer inscribed around its rim, which highlight the possibility of intercession and, eventually, salvation. The morality of repentance, judgement, and punishment also exists in Middle Byzantine images of and texts concerning the Last

48 *Εὐεργετηνός ἦτοι συναγωγή τῶν θεοφθόγων ρημάτων καὶ διδασκαλίον τῶν θεόφρων*, ed. V. Matthaios (Athens 1957); translated in Wortley, *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales*. For a text and translation of the monastic foundation document, see R. H. Jordan and R. Morris, ed. and trans., *The Hypotyposis of the Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis, Constantinople (11th-12th Centuries): Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Farnham 2012).

49 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 153.

50 *Evergetinos* I.5, 58-60; *The Evergetinos: a Complete Text. The First Book*, ed. and trans. Archbishop Chrysostomos et al., (Etna, CA 1988) I, 76-79.

Judgement. The more typical edifying tale regarding otherworld fates is unequivocal, showing the person in question as either saved or damned. But the sinner, counsels Paul of Evergetis, should never despair: it is never too late to repent.<sup>51</sup> Baun argued that the apocalyptic texts of the eleventh century strongly imply that the majority of sinners still had time for mercy before the Second Coming and Last Judgement put an end to time, and that the tales showed temporary punishments and catharsis rather than eternal punishment.<sup>52</sup> The express purpose of the otherworldly tale of Anastasia, she proposed, is to warn humanity about ‘the fearsome mysteries that we will face on the day of Judgement, should we not repent’.<sup>53</sup> The primary message of the two apocalyptic tales is for the living, an incentive to change their behaviour while there is still time. Prayer and almsgiving can ease the agony of otherworldly punishment for others, and all the hosts of Heaven intercede constantly for the sinners.<sup>54</sup>

Intercession is a pivotal theme in the two otherworldly tales, highlighting that the Byzantine individual’s main hope was to have a powerful advocate in heaven to plead one’s case before the throne of Christ.<sup>55</sup> And in both apocalypses, repentance and intercession are presented as the most powerful actions or interventions that can secure a positive outcome for the individual’s soul.<sup>56</sup> Believers were anxious to establish who might lend a sympathetic ear, who else stood close to the throne and was a friend of souls. Brigitte Pitarakis’ analysis of 229 Middle Byzantine bronze pectoral crosses revealed that after the Mother of God, the three most popular saints are George with 61 examples, John with 46, and Peter with 33.<sup>57</sup> Such crosses have been found dispersed all over the empire, from Rome to Armenia, and from the Balkans to Palestine and in military, domestic, funerary, and monastic archaeological contexts, which demonstrates that they ‘were worn by individuals of both sexes and all ages, in life and in burial’.<sup>58</sup> The high number of surviving pectoral crosses and their dispersal in a range of archaeological contexts, from Byzantium and beyond, reveal the centrality of the desire for intercession. In the case of the vessel of Theodore Tourkeles, the saint chosen to plead for Tourkeles’ case is his namesake, St Theodore. The inscription on the outside of the vessel and the image on its inside articulate a strong desire for holy protection and intervention, with intercession at the heart of the bowl literally and figuratively.

51 *Evergetinos* I.1,19-40; *The Evergetinos*, 17-56.

52 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 306.

53 *Apocalypse of Anastasia*, translated in Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, §50.

54 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 311.

55 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 97.

56 *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*, trans. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, §26; Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 12.

57 B. Pitarakis, *Les croix-reliquaires pectorales byzantins en bronze* (Paris 2006) 84–108.

58 M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Athens 2000) 308; B. Pitarakis, ‘Female piety in context: understanding developments in private devotional practices’, in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot 2005) 153–166. 155; Pitarakis, *Les croix-reliquaires*, 123-144.

To conclude, the small vessel's intricate and complex imagery, which brings together ambiguous images of human-animal violence, the portrait of a saint, and animals belonging to the realms of earth, sea, and air, can be read as a coherent ensemble when interpreted with the help of contemporary texts and images. In particular, depictions of the Last Judgement provide some of the only known parallels to the imagery on the dish. The scenes of animals and fish holding human bodies and body parts, when interpreted with the help of Last Judgement imagery and textual sources on contemporary law and on the attitudes to death and the individual's preparation for death, function as allusions to the Day of Judgement, thought by medieval Byzantines to be imminent, and to the punishment received by those who have sinned. The images of regurgitation and punishment are accompanied by the portrait of a saint, whose role it was to act as an intercessor, and by a prayer reinforcing the petition for divine protection and intervention. Thus, the vessel presents the viewer with a display of sin, fragmentation, and protection, to prepare the audience for their earthly life as well as their afterlife. In addition, the images and visual devices on the vessel such as the birds, hybrid creatures, and circles could be read as apotropaic devices, working with the remaining imagery of the vessel to protect its owner from harm. The ambiguous status and imagery of the dish highlights the inextricable link between the religious and secular spheres in Byzantium, and the close interweaving of the practices sanctioned by the church and those marginalized. The dangers against which Theodore Tourkeles sought protection could be threats to his physical and earthly self, or to his soul and body after death. The images of violent animals and fragmentation depicted on the vessel function as an abbreviated image of the Second Coming, and allude to the punishments awaiting sinners. As such, they function as reminders of the Last Things, a virtuous life, and a good death. The images on the Tourkeles vessel participate in wider trends and cultural practices current during the Middle Byzantine period and bespeak the vessel's nature as a Byzantine object. Moreover, the grim images of purgation and punishment on the bowl are mediated by the potential and promise of intercession, resulting in an emphasis on repentance, prayer, and possibly salvation. The overall message of the Tourkeles vessel can be compared to the primary message to the living embedded in the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*: change your behaviour now, while there is still time.