

Foreword by the editor

*In memory of Silke Tammen (1964-2018),
who also believed that small objects
can reveal much information*

The current volume comprises the papers of the international conference »Neue Forschungen zur spätbyzantinischen Goldschmiedekunst – New Research on Late Byzantine Goldsmiths' Works (13th-15th Centuries)«. The conference was hosted by the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Leibniz-Forschungsinstitut für Archäologie, in the old Electoral Palace in Mainz from 29 to 30 October 2015. This event was part of the research project »Analyse und Datenbank spätbyzantinischer Goldschmiedearbeiten (13.-15. Jahrhundert)« (Analysis and Database of Late Byzantine Goldsmiths' Works (13th-15th Centuries), managed by the editor of this volume and generously funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation).

The aim of the conference was to bring together the international research community dealing with precious metal works of the Late Middle Ages and to fathom the current standing of research in this field. The specialists presented their latest research on goldsmiths' works of the post-Crusade period from Byzantium and beyond, a field that has been neglected for a long time. Goldsmiths' works – and especially small objects belonging to the genre of arts and crafts – are often seen as less important than the »major genres« of art history – architecture, painting and sculpture – and have thus received less attention. Furthermore, Late Byzantine art has not been studied as intensively as the arts of earlier Byzantine periods. Thus, this volume fills a gap in research that has been in need of attention.

Goldsmiths' works were most often portable and thus present the researcher with different questions than, for example, monumental painting or architecture. Apart from some excavated archaeological material, most objects are today in collections all over the world, and their provenance and date are often unclear. If there are no revealing inscriptions, for example, naming the – not always identifiable – owners or a date, the researcher falls back to »classical« methods of art history and archaeology, such as stylistic, iconographical and typological analyses. There is, unfortunately, no scientific method that allows determining the provenance or age of Medieval goldsmiths' works by testing their composition, since most of the objects were made of re-used, melted-down precious metals.

Jewellery and other personal adornments reflected the owners' personal tastes and the fashions of the times, and religious donations, such as precious-metal icons and their

frames, gem-encrusted crosses or reliquaries, served as an expression of their religiousness, as well as testifying to their wealth and taste. Precious objects changed hands, not only as war booty or trade goods, but also through »international« diplomatic exchange, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, and also beyond, Russia, the Golden Horde, Mamluk Egypt, Sicily and Central Europe.

It is through such luxury metal objects that we gain knowledge of the tastes and fashions of the ruling and non-ruling elites of the Late Middle Ages. Important examples are found in the Chalcis Hoard from Euboea, comprising Venetian and Byzantine jewellery of the finest workmanship and representing the exchange between the ruling Venetians in former Byzantine territory. Often small details reveal a cultural exchange – may it be the decoration of an archer's ring from Serbia, or peculiarities in inscriptions of Russian enamels testifying to inspiration from the West, or Gothic features in Late Byzantine goldsmiths' works, such as chalice forms or enamel techniques.

Not only the current debates on »elite cultures« and »luxury« will benefit from the studies presented here, but also research on cultural transfer through trade and diplomatic exchange. Much more research will be necessary to study these processes, which yield important insights into cultural exchange and the complex distribution patterns of objects and their designs. Studies on Islamic goldsmiths' and metal works are a *desideratum*, especially, and it is hoped that this book will serve as an incentive to study these important witnesses of »international relations« in the Middle Ages.

I would like to express my gratitude to all speakers who have contributed with their expertise to this volume, and also to the Leibniz-WissenschaftsCampus Mainz: Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident (Leibniz-ScienceCampus Mainz: Byzantium between Orient and Occident) for including the conference proceedings in the book series Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident (BOO), and particularly its former spokesman Prof. Dr Falko Daim. I am very grateful that the publication was financially supported by the ScienceCampus, by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation), as well as the Freunde der Universität Mainz e. V. Many thanks also to Anke Dingler MA, Rachel Odenthal, Dr Claudia Nickel, PD Dr Stefan Albrecht and Dr Leo Ruickbie for their meticulous editorial work on the manuscripts.