

Two silver encolpions from Bulgaria (Abstract)

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The article discusses two rare Byzantine works of art that are privately owned and whose provenance is unclear. They are made of silver and what makes them interesting is the choice of saints and the models used for their depiction.

The first encolpion is with rectangular shape. It is constructed as a box, with two rectangular sides that are made of silver plate, linked by a silver-plated metal band that lines them. Images of saints are presented on both sides of the encolpion, on the rectangular silver plates. They are made in high relief by hammering on a matrix. Most probably the hollow of the box was filled with a piece of wood that has served as a constructional support in order to keep the overall shape of the encolpion. On the encolpion, the upper body of a saint is depicted, supporting the lower side of a book with his left hand, while his right hand is raised to the upper end of the book. The relief of the image is flattened and damaged to a great extent. There are no inscriptions and the upper right end of the plate is missing. The iconography suggests that the saint depicted is either St. Paul the Apostle or St. John the Apostle. We identify the figure as St. Paul, as on most representations that we used for the comparative analyse the figure of St. John the Apostle is more bent at the shoulders.

The warrior-saints Theodor and George are depicted on the other side of the encolpion in full height. They are placed in a rectangular field that ends at the upper and the lower edges with a double frame. Both saints are dressed in short tunics and long cloaks, armed with a spear and a

sword. Greek inscriptions ο αγιος Θεοδωρος and ο αγιος Γεωργιος run vertically on both sides of the figures. The stylistic specifics of the figures and the palaeography of the letters of the inscriptions point to a date of the encolpion in late 13th or 14th c. AD. In terms of iconographic style, the closest parallels are the images of St. George and St. Theodor on a double-sided encolpion from the 13th-14th c. AD from the private collection of Konstantin Notaros in Athens.

The second encolpion has a similar construction, but is oval in shape. On one of the sides, St. Theodor is depicted as a horseman and dragon-slayer. The format, the composition and the Greek inscription are completely identical to those of the well-known group of Venetian glass medallions made in a Byzantine style and dated to the 13th c. AD. It seems that the relief image of St. Theodor on the silver plate was made with a similar bronze mould, used for casting of such glass medallions. The other side of the encolpion depicts the torso of St. John the Baptist in profile. The relief and the inscriptions are badly damaged. The pose of the saint is with hands raised in a praying gesture, as he is usually depicted in the composition Deisis.

The breast icons share close stylistic similarities and are close to the famous Vatopedi group of encolpia, manufactured in the 13th -14th c. AD. The exact place of manufacture remains unknown, but most probably this was either Thessaloniki, or one of the adjacent monasteries, including those on Athos.