

Constantinopolitan processional bronze crosses from Bulgaria. Part II

(Abstract)

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To the group of bronze crosses, made in the Byzantine capital, belongs a specimen from Bulgaria, found in a small church near Sliven, dated to 12th-14th c. It is a complete double plating of the lower arm, the only one that is preserved (21.5 x 8 cm). It allows for reconstruction of a cross with approximate dimensions 75 x 44 cm, dating probably from the 10th c. (Fig. 1 1; Fig. 5). The style and the iconography of the floral and geometric decoration that includes rosettes and palmettes, hammered in relief and engraved on the body of the cross, create a complete ornamental composition that is directly related to the above discussed examples of monumental and applied arts from the time of the Macedonian Renaissance.

The shape and decoration of the processional crosses of this group seem to be related to a fashion trend that was established in Constantinople in the 10th c. In this respect, a direct proof is the cross from Veliko Tarnovo with dedicatory inscription „+ Ο αγιος Κωνσταντινος (και η αγια Ελενη ο εν Κωνσταντις)” – “+ St. Constantine (and St. Hellen) from Constantinople” – made in the same period (Fig. 1 2; Fig. 6). It seems that the cross belonged to a church in the Byzantine capital, dedicated to the two saints. Significantly later, the same inscription was engraved on the cross in Bulgarian, with added text “... to help sebastos Berislav.” Apparently, the cross was reused in 13th-14th c. in Tarnovgrad, the capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (Fig. 6).

The processional cross from Plovdiv offers another case. It has similar decoration, but is of considerably larger size (Fig. 1 3). Little is known of his origin. Two arms, the upper and the left horizontal, are entirely preserved and of

impressive dimensions: 77 x 51 cm. It is made of flat bronze band with ends bent at right angles. The extensions of the two arms are attached to the central cross-like panel. At the broadened ends of every arm, there are two medallions with broad openings pierced through them. Probably, spherical or elongated spheroid caps with conical sleeve were riveted to the medallions. This specimen was richly decorated with five processional crosses, floral and geometric ornaments that were engraved (Fig. 1 3). There is an obvious close similarity of the engraved ornamental motifs of this cross to elements of the decoration of various Byzantine monuments, mostly Constantinopolitan stone reliefs of 10th-11th c. (The Glory of Byzantium..., 1997, no.3, 290). These are the main reasons the bronze cross from Plovdiv to be dated to that period, and its manufacture to be related to the Byzantine capital.

One should pay attention to several better preserved specimens of another variety of processional crosses. Their manufacture, fitting together, and decoration turn out to be a very complex process, about which there are still no specific studies and exact data. These are three intact crosses from a hoard discovered in Veliki Preslav, and fragments of a cross from the fortress Ayazmoto at Ruyno, near Silistra (Fig. 2 1-3). Their core is of hammered iron sheet, covered with thin copper layer. Subsequently, bronze plating was added on both sides, to which relief medallions with engraved images were soldered. They were additionally decorated through gilding.

The well mastered technology of combining two metals, bronze and iron, is attested in several relatively well preserved Byzantine crosses of Constantinopolitan

manufacture, kept in the following museums: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Museum of Ancient Corinth; Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, DC; Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; and Metropolitan Museum, New York. They are generally dated to 10th – 12th c.

There are grounds to relate five more crosses from Bulgaria to a general group of processional crosses, manufactured in Constantinople between late 10th and late 11th c. These are: a cross with an image of Archangel Michael from Veliko Tarnovo, the crosses from the region of Vidin, Perperikon, and Silistra, and a cross with the image of St. Gregory from the fortress of Sveta Petka near Peshtera (Fig. 3 1-4). They are of medium size, with engraved and soldered relief decoration and inscriptions. The technique of manufacture, the iconographic and stylistic specifics of the engraved and relief images,

as well as the inscriptions provide grounds to list these crosses among the specimens that were made in Constantinople.

At this stage of study of crosses from Bulgaria, the manufacture of the above-discussed specimens could be related with greater certainty to Constantinople. Despite the fragmentary state of some of them, their overall presentation broadens the possibilities for formulating criteria for classification of the processional crosses that were manufactured just after the iconoclasm, in the times of the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties. In the same time, the above-discussed imported materials from Bulgaria allow for drawing important conclusions about the safe-keeping, duration of use, restoration and additional decoration of these valued works of Christian cult – in the times of both the First and the Second Bulgarian Kingdoms.