

## Preface

During the last hundred years there have come to light numerous silver vessels belonging for the most part to ancient church treasures or barbarian hoards and stamped with Byzantine "hallmarks." Some were chance discoveries along the shores of the Mediterranean, in Russia, in the Balkans, and in Western Europe; others were found in archaeological excavations, while a few had been preserved above ground. Many of these vessels are decorated with reliefs which are closely dependent, iconographically and stylistically, upon classical traditions—so closely dependent, in fact, that the vessels were at first thought to be Hellenistic, while the stamps, which are purely Byzantine in character, were assumed to have been applied at a later period. Subsequent investigations, however, have proved this view to be untenable.

At the turn of the century the first serious study of the stamps, and their interpretation, was undertaken by O. M. Dalton in England and Iacov I. Smirnov in Russia.<sup>1</sup> In 1928 M. Rosenberg of Germany published a revised edition of his catalogue of goldsmiths' marks of medieval and later periods in which he included the stamps on about sixty Byzantine silver objects,<sup>2</sup> and in 1929 the Russian scholar Leonid Matsulevich elaborated upon the work of Smirnov and produced a study (in German) which not only contributed to the interpretation of the stamps but also provided the first stylistic grouping of the relevant objects in the Hermitage Museum.<sup>3</sup> Both Smirnov and, later, Matsulevich cited a number of instances where the stamps had been damaged when the relief was worked, or where they bore other indications of having been applied before, rather than after, the vessel was finished. It thus became clear that the stamps provide a *terminus post quem* for the relief, and may indicate, moreover, a provenance or workshop for the object. They furnish, therefore, documentary evidence upon which may be based the stylistic and iconographic study of silver, with or without control marks.

The work of Smirnov and Dalton was confined to the interpretation of a limited group of stamps; that of Matsulevich, though larger in scope, dealt almost exclusively with objects in the Hermitage. Since Rosenberg published his catalogue, more than forty additional silver vessels with Byzantine control marks have been discovered.<sup>4</sup> These additional examples throw new light on

<sup>1</sup> For these authors, see *infra*, References Cited in Abbreviation.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Matsulevich, *Byz. Ant.*

<sup>4</sup> Nos. 4, 5, 6, 10, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 53, 72, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82, 84, 85, 86, 87, 90, 95, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103. The list is not exact, as Rosenberg published some objects without publishing their stamps, and photographs of these have now been procured. Other objects are included in the present catalogue on the strength of the fact that they are known to bear stamps though no photographs or descriptions are available. No. 103 is not stamped but engraved (p. 22).

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the interpretation of the stamps, and before progress can be made in solving stylistic and iconographic problems pertaining to Byzantine silver, all the available information regarding the stamps must be marshalled systematically. It is to this task that the present study is devoted. Concerned solely with the stamps, it is intended to provide a basis for future research in broader fields.

The book is divided into three parts: Part I presents a classification and analysis of the stamps and explains the method of dating. Part II explores the type of organization that applied them, and takes up the question of provenance. Part III is a catalogue in which all the stamped objects now known are included; wherever possible the stamps themselves are illustrated and described, and in the descriptions emphasis has been placed on those points that throw light on the date of the stamps and help to place them in a chronological sequence. For each object the principal bibliographical references are given. In the text the vessels are referred to by the number under which they appear in the catalogue.

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