

RELIQUIARE

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RELIQUIARE

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Einleitung

»Reliquienbehälter waren zu allen Zeiten ein notwendiges Gerät des privaten wie des öffentlichen Reliquienkultes. Sie sind deshalb auch so alt wie dieser, reichen wie er in die altchristliche Zeit zurück, begegnen uns im Osten wie im Westen. Aus dem gleichen Grunde ist aber auch die fernere Geschichte des Reliquienkultes zugleich die der Reliquiare, entspricht der Aufstieg des ersten im gleichen Ausmaße dem der letzteren.«¹

Mit diesen Sätzen postulierte Joseph Braun schon im Anfangskapitel seines 1940 erschienenen Handbuches über Reliquiare deren enge Abhängigkeit von der Geschichte des Reliquienkults. Dieses Postulat durch eine eingehende Analyse und Darstellung der Interdependenzen von Kult und Gerät einzulösen, vermochte Braun allerdings noch nicht; sein Kompendium hatte zunächst einmal der imponierenden Materialfülle und der Vielfalt unterschiedlichster Formen von Reliquiaren eine Ordnung und Systematik abzurufen. Braun fand sie in einer feinteiligen Typisierung, die sich an den unterschiedlichsten Typen von Behältern, wie Kasten, Flasche, Scheibe, Ziborium usw., orientierte. Diese Typisierung kreuzte er mit dem Paradigma der Entwicklungsgeschichte, die in der oben zitierten Passage mit dem Begriff »Aufstieg« schon signalisiert ist. Die stilanalytisch gewonnene Zuordnung von Typen und Einzelformen zu den Epochen der Kunstgeschichte ergab so eine weitgehend widerspruchsfreie und homogene Entwicklungsgeschichte des Reliquiars, die der Wissenschaft einen lange dominierenden Orientierungsrahmen bot.

Seit einiger Zeit ist jedoch ein Interesse an Reliquiaren zu verzeichnen, das über Stilgeschichte und Ikonographie hinausgeht.² Nicht allein die Skepsis gegenüber dem Konstrukt einer zielgerichteten und autonomen Formgeschichte, einer eindimensionalen ›Entwicklung‹ von Typen und Formen ist dafür verantwortlich; vielmehr erlangt die schon von Braun konstatierte Bindung der Reliquiare an Heiligen- und Reliquienkult in dem Maße neue Aktualität, wie die näheren und ferneren kulturgeschichtlichen Kontexte als bedeutsam für die Formfindung erkennbar werden. Das betrifft nicht nur im engen Sinne die Funktion, die Reliquiare im Kultgeschehen zu erfüllen hatten, die Praktiken des Aufbewahrens, des Verschließens und Zeigens von Reliquien, sondern

genereller das gesamte durch Heiligen- und Reliquienkult berührte Themenfeld.

So hat das Interesse der neueren, anthropologisch orientierten Kulturwissenschaften an den sozialen, religiösen oder politischen Bedingungen, welche die Vorstellung vom menschlichen Körper in vergangenen Zeiten geprägt und seine Wahrnehmung und Deutung bestimmt haben, auch einen neuen Blick auf Grundbedingungen des Reliquienkultes möglich gemacht.³ Durch die Praxis der Zerlegung von Heiligenleibern werden Fragen aufgeworfen, wie die nach dem Verhältnis von Körperfragmenten zum ganzen und unversehrten Heiligenleib, nach der postmortalen Bedeutung materieller Körper, nach der Kultfähigkeit von Körperteilen oder nach deren Beziehung zu himmlischen Existenzen. Dies sind Themen einer Wahrnehmungs- und Deutungsgeschichte des menschlichen Körpers; ebenso aber bedarf ihre Relevanz für die Formeigenschaften von Reliquiaren der Überprüfung, denn nicht die Reliquien selbst, sondern die Reliquiare sind es, die diesen Vorstellungen anschauliche Gestalt geben können.

Wenn es dabei immer wieder auch um das Verhältnis von physischer und ikonischer Präsenz geht und um die Repräsentanz des Unsichtbaren, Heiligen und Göttlichen, so sind damit nicht nur fundamentale Eigenheiten der Reliquie berührt, sondern gerade auch deren ästhetische Folgen, die Zusammenhänge zwischen dem Reliquienkult, Reliquiaren und der Entstehung des Kultbildes. Daher gehören Reliquiare in das Zentrum eines großen Themenfeldes, das die kunstgeschichtliche Forschung in den beiden letzten Jahrzehnten vielfach bearbeitet hat: Das Problem von Funktion und Status des Bildes, speziell die Frage nach dem religiösen Bildgebrauch im Mittelalter.⁴ Die mit dem religiösen Bildgebrauch eng verknüpften Kulthandlungen um und mit Reliquien führen zudem eine Semiotik von Handlungen, von Zeremonien und Ritualen, generell von nonverbaler und symbolischer Kommunikation vor. Indem Reliquiare zu Akteuren in diesem Zusammenhang werden können, erfährt ihr medialer Status eine zusätzliche Ausweitung.⁵

Die Bindung der Reliquiare an den Heiligen- und Reliquienkult ist demnach ausgesprochen vielschichtig angelegt. So unterschiedliche Aspekte wie die theologische Reflektion und Legitimation des Reliquienkultes, wie seine historiographische, hagiographische und bildliche Artikulation, seine politische Indienstnahme oder seine mentalitäts- und frömmigkeitsgeschichtliche Ausgestaltung kommen daher in diesem Band zur Sprache – Aspekte, die mal sehr konkret, mal allgemeiner zu den Gestalteigenschaften von Reliquiaren in Beziehung gesetzt werden können. Dieses weitere Interpretationsspektrum zu eröffnen und zu erproben, jenseits einer von den Kontexten absehenden autonomen Formgeschichte oder einer direkten Funktionalisierung im Kultgeschehen selbst, ist das gemeinsame Anliegen der hier versammelten Beiträge.

Sie gehen zurück auf eine Tagung des Kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars der Universität Hamburg, die unter dem Titel ›Reliquiare im Mittelalter. Kunst – Kult – Kontext‹ vom 29. April bis 1. Mai 2004 im Warburg-Haus in Hamburg

stattgefunden hat und die vom Forschungsprojekt ›Reliquiare als Wahrnehmung und Konstruktion von Heiligkeit‹ initiiert und getragen wurde. Die Tagung wurde gefördert von der DFG und vom Verein zur Förderung des Kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars. Ihnen ist ebenso zu danken wie der Michael-und-Susanne-Liebelt-Stiftung, durch deren Unterstützung diese Publikation möglich wurde. Für die sorgfältige Korrektur- und Redaktionsarbeit gilt ein Dank den Hilfskräften des Forschungsprojektes, Daria Dittmeyer und Magdalena Schulz, sowie meiner Mit-Herausgeberin Gia Toussaint.

Bruno Reudenbach

¹ Joseph Braun, *Die Reliquiare des christlichen Kultes und ihre Entwicklung*, Freiburg i. Br. 1940, S. 3f.

² Wichtige Impulse gingen u.a. aus von einem Themenheft der Zeitschrift *Gesta*; darin vor allem Caroline Walker Bynum – Paula Gerson, *Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages*, in: *Gesta* 36, 1997, S. 3–7; Cynthia Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries*, in: ebd., S. 20–31; Arnold Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart*, München 1994; Edina Bozóky – Anne-Marie Helvétius (Hgg.), *Les Reliques. Objets, cultes, symboles* (Hagiologia 1), Turnhout 1999.

³ Es ist hier nicht der Ort, diese Forschungsrichtung umfassend zu dokumentieren. Als für den Reliquienkult bedeutsam seien nur genannt Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (Lectures on the History of Religions 15), New York 1995;

Arnold Angenendt, *Corpus incorruptum*. Eine Leitidee der mittelalterlichen Reliquienverehrung, in: *Saeculum* 42, 1991, S. 320–348; Ders., *Der ‚ganze‘ und ‚unverweste‘ Leib – eine Leitidee der Reliquienverehrung bei Gregor von Tours und Beda Venerabilis*, in: *Aus Archiven und Bibliotheken*. FS Raymund Kottje, hg. von Hubert Mordek (Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 3), Frankfurt/M. 1992, S. 33–50.

⁴ Hans Belting, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter*, Berlin 1981; Ders., *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, München 1990, bes. S. 331–347: *Statuen, Gefäße und Zeichen. Bild und Reliquie im westlichen Mittelalter*.

⁵ Zum Reliquienkult als Kommunikationssystem Hedwig Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen im 9. Jahrhundert. Über Kommunikation, Mobilität und Öffentlichkeit im Frühmittelalter* (Beihefte der *Francia* 48), Stuttgart 2002.

The Meaning of Early Medieval Treasuries

From the assembly of gems on crosses to the bundles of relics in every sort of reliquary from heads to portable altars, relics and reliquaries are typically found in the context of collections.¹ As parts of a greater whole, their meaning derives from their metonymic nature, a nature that is too easily ignored in studies that focus on a single relic, or a body in a tomb. It is only in groups, especially in treasury collections of small portable reliquaries, that the potential expressive power of relics flourishes.

This essay should begin by defining what is meant by a ›treasury‹ or reliquary collection, but an initial effort immediately meets with frustration. One has a sense of what a treasury must be but, as we will see, meaning fluctuates and takes on different shapes for different observers. One modern historian has boldly stated:

»A church treasury in the middle ages, any sacred dimension set apart, is nothing but an immobilization of capital under the form of art objects. When they judge it necessary, the keepers of these depositories do not hesitate for a single instant to draw upon these resources for the amount of gold or silver corresponding to their needs.«²

Indeed, many episodes in chronicles and lives of saints report instances when gold or silver objects were melted down and sold to feed the poor or fund the crusades.

But, if treasuries were nothing but temporarily stored disposable wealth, they would have been ›disposed of‹ long ago. Given their makeup, an inventory of objects of primarily »consumptive value,«³ the more remarkable aspect of church treasure is that so much survives. A first reason for preservation is that, despite constant ›renewal‹ and remaking of objects, there were many inhibitions against reusing or selling the precious materials.⁴ A second reason is that treasuries had to maintain reputations as strongholds – as miraculously-protected vaults of sanctity – in order to encourage further gift-giving. A final and most important reason for preservation was the maintenance of the treasury's ability to testify. The objects, singly and together, both in their materials and in

the memorialized intentions of their donors, spoke to the glory of the sanctuary and the saint. Without such testimony, the shrine was a poor thing. With it, the treasury became a source of riches – spiritual riches that because of their safe-keeping could be freely drawn upon in disputes, wars, and for spiritual renewal.⁵

Thus, if treasuries are not liquid assets congealed in aesthetic form, what are they? I have already begun to argue that they are a testimony to the prestige of the patron saint and the institution. But treasuries are yet more as well. Each object can be the nexus of a legend or complex of legends telling of the history of the saint, the cult, and the foundation, as Amy Remensnyder has argued.⁶ They functioned, as James Clifford would have it, »as aides-mémoires, occasions for the telling of stories and the singing of songs.«⁷ Moreover, they participated in a particular relationship to their spectators. In order to understand them, we must try to comprehend a different sort of vision in which they participated – a totalizing vision, largely devoid of the input of other senses, and, as Susan Stewart emphasizes, a vision that invested objects with the capability to »project (...) an eternalized future-past upon the subject.«⁸ The objects seem, in some sense, to objectify history.

To understand how this sense of history is created, we may turn to studies of a Renaissance collection type, the Cabinet of Curiosities. One essential function of these cabinets is a quality that is also important to the medieval treasury – the creation of a ›conversable space‹ – a space that balanced the verbal with the visual in discussion that sought to discover meaning.⁹ Two aspects of the collections contribute to creating this effect, and both aspects can be expressed as deficits. Each is characterized by an intrinsic lack of completeness and a lack of a permanent order of display.

Just as a cabinet, with a delightful variety of doors and drawers, may be explored in any way that the viewer pleases, the early medieval treasury also presented no fixed or permanent spatial arrangement.¹⁰ Although many writers presume reliquaries were exhibited in chapels on altars, until the ninth century the church maintained strict prohibitions against anything but Christ's body, i. e., the elements of the Mass, being placed on the altar.¹¹ Furthermore, even after such prohibitions were relaxed, reliquaries were typically displayed only briefly on altars. As opposed to any permanent display, we must imagine the objects in early medieval treasuries hidden away, stored in sacristies, cupboards, among books in an *armarium*, in large coffer, etc., and brought out only when they were needed in liturgies, or for the devotions of special visitors.¹² The second characteristic of these early collections, incompleteness, is also essential to their operation, as Jean Baudrillard explains.¹³ In his understanding, the full meaning of the signifying nature of the objects of a collection can be fully comprehended only by the collector who substitutes his self-created system of meaning and relations for the disappointments of language and social discourse which resist control and ›gaze back‹. Only insofar as the collection is incomplete, does it continue to operate for the collector.

Baudrillard's theory, of course, requires adjustment in the case of treasury collections. Although one could discuss certain medieval collectors of distinction (or legend), the church treasury is primarily institutional. Furthermore, Baudrillard's »final term«, the element that gives meaning to the collection through absence, can almost assuredly be identified in medieval collections – the final term of a collection of relics can be almost viscerally apprehended as the forever absent and unattainable body of Christ. Each of the relics in the series represents this body, but it does so only imperfectly and incompletely. The desire for Christ's body is precisely the element that structures and even impels the collection (perhaps explaining the prominence in the Late Middle Ages of the transformation of the Corpus Christi, the host into a relic). The assemblage of relics or *bricolage*, made up of imperfect and fragmentary parts, must both strive for and metaphorically indicate a more meaningful yet ultimately unattainable whole.¹⁴

Thus if, as Mieke Bal argues, a collection is a narrative, it is a narrative without a conclusion.¹⁵ A treasury, by its very nature, is never complete, always open to pious donation, indeed dependent on such donation for a continuing ›life‹ or effectiveness. In addition, however, to the open-endedness of the collection, the fragmentation of the relics in themselves begs the eye to contemplate them while at the very same time forcing the mind to bigger issues, to other stories, to the connections between them, to original bodies, and finally, to heaven itself.

Thus, while representing the ›court of heaven‹ and the unity of the saints, relic collections never represented perfection or completion. Treasuries exhibited a certain restlessness, so that at the same time that they were strongholds, they were also distinctively open and permeable. They were purportedly safe and secure, but ›leaked‹ continually. Ever smaller bits of relics were divided and distributed from such sources of power, and yet this distribution made them only all the more powerful. Each new relic fragment was a voice singing the saint's praise but also glorifying the renowned location of his or her major relics. Even in a less exalted sense, relics and treasures were redistributed or circulated among medieval treasuries, in effect, endlessly.¹⁶ (It was a bishop's duty and the prince's privilege to accouter the churches under his control.)

In sum, the power and combination of narratives and ›conversations‹ are the real content of a treasury. To explore this content, one is in need of a guide. In the place of the collector, who explicates his system through conversation or display, ideally we should have an ecclesiastical substitute. Indeed, treasuries commonly had the *custos sacrarii*, appointed to care for the treasury – the keeper of the keys, but also the keeper of stories.¹⁷ In the absence of this pleasant conversationalist to help us, we must turn to individual treasuries and consider the surviving history of the acquisition of the objects, their individual visual statements, their interrelationships – aesthetic, material, and historical – and their history of display. Much of this evidence is, of course, no longer available to the modern researcher, but by carefully considering a few case histories from

the early middle ages, we will begin to create a picture about what these collections meant to their owners and viewers, both inside and outside communities.

As their inventories show, in addition to reliquaries, treasuries in the middle ages were considered to contain liturgical service items, ornaments of the church, precious book bindings and books, many sorts of vestments and textiles, and assorted other, even profane, objects and votive gifts.¹⁸ Among all these riches, however, the only truly essential part of the treasury was the gold and silver service items, such as chalices, patens, and candlesticks. Our consideration will occasionally include these sorts of objects, but in the main, our concern will be with the more variable content of the collection – the portable reliquaries that were collected and used to give sanctity to the institution and shrine.

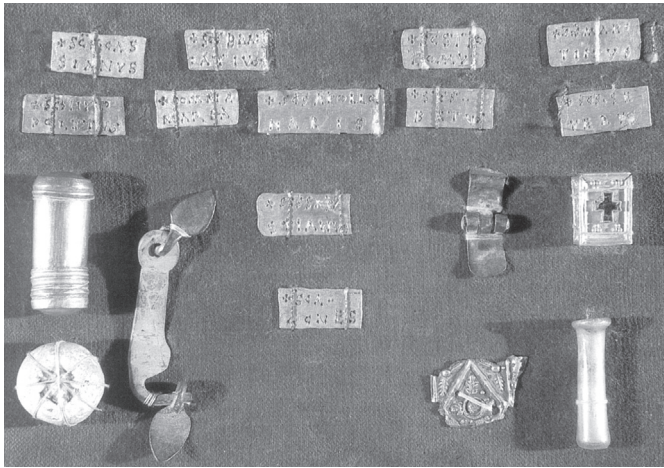
The little treasury at Grado Cathedral on an island in the Adriatic, northeast of Venice, may serve as a first example. Stories narrate its origin. Fleeing Lombard raids on his church in Aquileia in 568, Bishop Paulinus I was said to have carried the entire treasury from his mainland church to Grado, in effect transferring the ›seat‹ of his bishopric. This is a satisfying story for us because it literally links the identity of a town to its treasury. Of course, countering story with archeological fact, Grado was already a prosperous town previous to this incident.¹⁹ Moreover, after a competing Aquileian bishop was elected in 610, this transfer was not only disputed but also used as central evidence in a long-standing quarrel over the location of what was eventually called a ›patriarchate.‹ The ongoing quarrel added significantly to the potential of Grado's treasury to testify.

Of particular note concerning the collection at Grado is the antiquity of its core elements. It had three (gold and) silver reliquaries from the fifth or sixth century, an alabaster carved throne-reliquary (now a reproduction), a relic of the True Cross of possibly the sixth century, as well as the remnants of an ivory throne of the sixth or seventh century (figs. 1–4). A marker of the importance of these objects is the fact that one central piece, the alabaster throne, was eventually ›donated‹ to Venice by Grado sometime after 1451, when the smaller city lost its claim to the patriarchate. The various permutations of these ecclesiastical and political wranglings over patriarchal power are told elsewhere,²⁰ but the key aspect for our concerns is that Aquileia and Grado began vigorously competing for the honor of the patriarchate by the ninth century. Aquileia was supported by the Franks and the Germans. Grado, still in the Byzantine exarchate in the sixth century and later a dependency of Venice, was supported by Byzantines and Venetians and sometimes Rome. It seems that the treasury was used as visible (and invisible) support of Grado's claims.

Let us begin with the beginning. The two small silver *scrinia* in today's treasury are among the very earliest surviving relic boxes.²¹ They were discovered *in situ* in the archaeological excavation of an altar in the cathedral in 1871, a fact that attests to their authenticity, but also argues that they did not become part of a visible ›treasure‹ until the modern period. Nonetheless, they are interesting, not in terms of treasure display, but in terms of the elements of a



1. Round silver reliquary box (Duomo di Grado, Treasury), fifth or sixth century



2. Contents of round silver reliquary box (Duomo di Grado, Treasury)

founding treasure. They probably came from Aquileia, perhaps with Bishop Paulinus transferred in the sixth century, and buried when the Patriarch Elias built St Euphemia in 579 and claimed the leading place among the churches of Istria and Venetia.²² The labeled relics in an oval silver box are Aquileian, although portrait medallions also represent Peter and Paul.

In contrast to local saints, the relics in the second *scrinium*, a round box, represent what is clearly already a collection of saints and relics (fig. 1). They include well-known martyrs such as Agnes and Sebastian, as well as Hippolytus of Rome, Trophime of Arles, Martin of Tours, and Apollonaris and Severus of Ravenna, in addition to what was probably a relic of the cross (fig. 2). The intent of this seemingly very carefully chosen collection of saints seems to be to represent a selection of important contemporary ecclesiastical centers. Additionally, the last two may remind us of Grado's political link to Ravenna through the Exarchate. Remarkably, despite the fine workmanship, meaningful gathe-



3. True Cross reliquary (Duomo di Grado, Treasury), seventh century (?)

ring of relics, and lavish use of silver and gold (the authentics are gold and one section of the round box contained a third, tiny, gold reliquary), the two *scrinia* were hidden from sight within the fabric of the church. Additional relics from Grado's foundation treasury must have been similarly buried in the fourth-century Basilica della Corte that has the same sort of chamber below the altar.²³

In contrast to this invisible wealth, later additions to Grado's treasury were put to more strenuous visual service. A third silver reliquary very close in date, that is, sixth or seventh century, also came from a very different source. It is clearly Greek and likely to be Constantinopolitan (fig. 3). Its inscription in Greek monograms reads ›Lord, help your servant, Magistros Stylianos,‹ Stylianos apparently was a Byzantine official either of the exarchate or in Constantinople. The church at Grado prides itself on this gift, still using it in a procession on Good Friday.²⁴



4. Alabaster throne, plaster reproduction (Duomo di Grado, Treasury), sixth century

The cross reliquary gives the impression of being an early example in which the relic was visible, but that may be the result of adjustments in the seventeenth and eighteenth century when the crystal may have been added.²⁵ In fact, the relic today is a double-traverse or Byzantine type of cross. This sort of cross is first witnessed, textually, in the seventh-century testimony of the pilgrim Arculf concerning a cross in Hagia Sophia.²⁶ Thus, it is possible even if the reliquary is indeed as early as the seventh century that it was originally made in this new shape, but its physical disposition argues otherwise.²⁷ The top surface of the reliquary is defined by four symmetrically disposed circles that contain Greek monograms. These monograms have been distorted by the insertion of the cross in its present form, and as originally designed, they would have better allowed for an equal-armed cross of ›imperial‹ type. Today, the opening prayer of the donation inscription concerning *Magistros Stylianos* is disrupted by the

upper traverse of the cross.²⁸ Moreover, two small silver ›patches‹ adorned with squat crosses cover the extra space that the original lateral would have occupied. If the cross has been changed from a ›Greek‹ imperial type to a ›Patriarchal‹ or Byzantine type, it is also possible that the entire reliquary has been changed from a more conventional panel or box reliquary with sliding lid to this ostensorium type (and indeed it was enclosed in a monstrance in 1891, now lost). The tiny gold reliquary that was once in the round silver *scrinium* preserves the Greek cross form, the box or panel shape, and the sliding lid that I am suggesting for the original of the larger reliquary (fig. 2, upper right).²⁹ The silver True Cross reliquary would then be a good example of an adjustment to keep up with contemporary styles of reliquary presentation, while, interestingly enough, emphatically preserving an association with the holy and antique East through revising the cross shape to a more recognizably Eastern cross.

But we have yet to discuss the primary reason that the cross is central to the prestige of the treasury. Legends claim that it represents an early imperial gift from Heraclius. Heraclius, of course, was the emperor who rescued the True Cross from Chosroes II, the Persian emperor, and carried it first to Jerusalem in 630, and then, apparently in part, to Constantinople. Therefore it seems to have become his privilege to distribute pieces of the cross, and a gift from such an imperial source is especially significant. The pieces preserved in the Grado reliquary of the True Cross are exceptionally large (the reliquary measures 16.2 × 17.5 cm).

The legendary gift is recorded only in late medieval histories. By the time of the eleventh-century chronicle of John the Deacon, the legend proclaimed that Heraclius gave the Grado Patriarch the chair of St. Mark, which Helena had brought back from Alexandria, as well as the chair of Hermagoras, the first bishop of Aquileia,³⁰ thus, explaining the *two* chairs. Andrea Dandolo, the fourteenth-century Venetian chronicler, records in similar but somewhat revised fashion that Heraclius brought Mark's chair from Alexandria and gave it to the ›Venetian region.‹³¹ In the sixteenth century the ivory throne, still then in Grado, was known as the Throne of Mark, today the alabaster throne is so designated (fig. 4).³² The mix of Saracen-defeating emperor and relic-finding empress in these reports suggests the importance of this group of objects. Nevertheless, the True Cross relic *per se* was not mentioned until 1523 when it was seen with the ivory throne at Grado.³³

The ivory throne was a special object of display and luxury and may have the primary claim to be that of Mark; it is not unlikely that it was an imperial gift, as is argued concerning the comparable ivory throne in Ravenna. Surviving ivories depict at least six scenes from the life of Mark as well as others from the Life of Christ, Mary, and other saints.³⁴ As has also been suggested for ivory thrones in Ravenna and the Vatican, the throne surely was used primarily for display rather than for seating because of its fragile material.

The second throne, the alabaster so-called ›Throne of St Mark,‹ now in Venice, seems to be primarily an unusual device for reliquary display (fig. 4). It

conforms to a Syro-Palestinian type which was used for the exhibition of relics or books in Syrian churches like that at St. Jeremy in Saqqara.³⁵ This may explain its small size (147 × 55 × 33 cm). However in this example, a *loculus* or *fenestella* that opens to two sides of the throne presumably may have allowed the True Cross relic to be stored inside underneath the seat, perhaps also allowing the display of a gospel book above. (Such a *loculus*, of course, is not unique but is comparable to the relic niche in the marble throne at Aachen.) The throne is decorated at its apex on both front and back with images of apostles on either side of the single-armed cross, a number of fruiting trees, burning candles and the evangelists with the angelic wings of Ezekiel's vision, as well as two angels blowing trumpets, announcing the Last Judgement. The fact that the throne is decorated on its back side speaks against it being an episcopal throne as thrones are almost always positioned against the wall of the apse.³⁶ The imagery combines elements suggestive of a cult of the True Cross relic with iconography concerning the gospels and the Last Judgment. The throne may have originally been made for a different church but clearly suits episcopal or patriarchal use, promising the benefits of the life-giving cross that are nourished and disseminated by the institution of the church. In its use as a means of relic display or accommodation, and as a lithic object that asserts itself as a permanent part of the church (although clearly, it was moved from its original location), it is a central element of the visible treasury. It is also likely to have been paired with the True Cross relic which may have been at least selectively visible.³⁷

The combination of both buried and displayed treasure at Grado was probably characteristic of the wealth of many early-Christian churches, in part because much of the wealth of such churches included service objects. This disposition gives an indication of the range of use to which a treasury was put in the service of the church. Of particular interest, however, is the way in which the reliquaries are seen to make claims to prestige for their church through their iconography, and, more importantly, through their Eastern origins. These Eastern origins were clearly apparent to viewers and, in the case of the conversion of the cross from an imperial to patriarchal type, made even more apparent. Public claims of foundation and legitimation through the well-known story of the transfer of relics from Aquileia were reinforced by prestigious evidence of imperial support and donations.³⁸ Nevertheless, in the end, these reliquaries were not able to preserve Grado's position as patriarchate. The ›alabaster throne‹ now displayed in a small room to the south of the apse is a plaster cast, and Grado is better known as a seaside resort than as a center of power for the early church.

In the second collection to which we turn our attention, the valence of donation is reversed – an ecclesiastical figure donates relics to a royal founder. The renowned early-medieval treasury at Monza seems to have displayed its treasure more publicly and to greater effect than did Grado, but it similarly elicited cupidity in the late Middle Ages (figs. 5–9).



5. *Cross of Berengar (Duomo di Monza, Treasury), ninth century*

In 603 Gregory the Great sent gifts to the Catholic Lombard Queen Theodelinda, wife of the Lombard Arian king Agilulf, to thank her for helping to reestablish the peace and for baptizing her son as a Catholic. These gifts were in turn apparently donated to her foundation, St. John the Baptist at Monza, as reported two centuries later by Paul the Deacon. Although still in dispute as to the precise identification of elements, the original royal donation that founded the treasure at St. John's in Monza consisted of numerous pewter ampullae from the Holy Land along with 23 glass vials and one terra-cotta ampulla, and perhaps the magnificent surviving golden Gospel book.³⁹ It seems reasonable to propose that Gregory filled the ampullae and glass vessels with *pignora* of the saints of Rome, perhaps oil from the tombs of the saints, each labeled with a tiny authentic and documented in a list, the so-called *notula*, recorded about fifty years later. As Gregory hoped, Theodelinda was able to found a long-lasting Christian tradition at Monza, despite the relatively short life of the Lombard dynasty in the North. She herself donated a number of items, perhaps including a crown, the cross of Agilulf, and it was once believed, the famous hen and chicks, a fan, and a comb.⁴⁰ It is notable that her portion of the donation represents a ›barbarian‹ aesthetic of heavily jeweled objects, very different in appearance from the Greek objects in the Grado treasury. Throughout the Middle Ages and



6. Iron crown (*Duomo di Monza, Treasury*), remade in the ninth century

the changing fortunes of the church, the Monza treasury grew in size and prestige.

Three diplomas testify to the importance with which Berengar I, king of Italy (840–924) and grandson of Charlemagne, considered the church and its treasury. In order to secure the contents, two inventories were made on the leaves of the king's sacramentary, inventories that had become customary for the Franks under Louis the Pious and especially Charles the Bald.⁴¹ A number of new objects appear in these inventories, and others are clearly to be credited to the donation of the king, including the sacramentary itself, a cross said to be Berengar's pectoral cross and sometimes called the cross of the kings (fig. 5),⁴² and ivory diptychs (particularly indicative of the ›Roman imperial‹ tradition being built or laid over the Lombard kingship at Monza). Subsequently, Otto III chartered Monza as an imperial foundation in 1000, but it soon passed into the power of the archbishopric of Milan, and two more inventories were made of St. John's treasures. In 1042 one inventory records the movement of the treasury into a marble sarcophagus. Heribert, the archbishop of Milan, who had moved his residence to Monza and made donations of his own, was responsible for the second inventory of 1044. At some point the famous and much disputed ›iron crown‹ perhaps an earlier object remade in the ninth

century, entered the treasury (although it is not inventoried until 1275, fig. 6). Kings such as Conrad in 1093,⁴³ Conrad of Swabia in 1128, Frederick Barbarossa in 1158,⁴⁴ and others were crowned in Monza, as it came to be considered the seat of the legendary Lombard kingdom, and with Pavia, the place of coronation for the so called Italian ›nation.‹ In the twelfth century, Henry IV specifically asked the pope if he could be crowned King of Italy by the bishop of Milan and Pavia at Monza ›as was the custom of earlier kings.‹⁴⁵ The treasury was used as collateral when the fortifications of Milan were strengthened against imperial threats in 1242, and in the process lost a chalice. More problems ensued and the treasury had to be ›redeemed‹ and restored to the church by Matteo Visconti, an episode commemorated along with the original donation by the circa 1320 sculpture of the tympanum of the cathedral (fig. 10), that is, just after Theodelinda's body was translated into a sarcophagus in the church (1308). The treasury even suffered an ›exile‹ in Avignon along with the papacy but was finally recovered.⁴⁶

Interestingly, the crown continued to be used often for coronations, including the self-coronation of Napoleon. A further consideration of additional contents of the treasury will indicate some of the variety and utility of this treasury. Already in the 1042 inventory, the ›purses‹ of the apostles, *de sportis apostolorum*, are mentioned: five small sacks woven of palm leaves of possible early Palestinian provenance which may, at one time, have been used to transport relics or as pilgrim sacks.⁴⁷ In supplement to these objects and reinforcing a link to the apostolic early church, the sixth-century cloths of Byzantine manufacture, the so called ›corporals‹ of the apostles, may have been part of Gregory's original gift.⁴⁸ This ›apostolic‹ material, especially the purses, is complementary to a golden gemmed purse of the eighth or ninth century containing relics of the dedicatee of the cathedral, John the Baptist (fig. 7). Combining the various purses with the many Holy Land relics and *pignora* from Rome, as well as a ›veil of the Virgin‹ mentioned in the 1042 inventory (probably a tenth-century eastern textile),⁴⁹ suggests an awareness of a very rich trove of important relics. The gemmed purse, originally to be hung around the neck and carried in procession (its feet are a seventeenth-century addition), may have been the public declaration of the episcopal, as opposed to royal, ability to ›dispense‹ the benefits of this spiritual treasure.⁵⁰ It is notable that many of the early important treasuries have such a purse, and it may be that its meaning was well established in the Carolingian period. The purse could have entered the treasury when it was under Carolingian domination in the eighth century or, more likely, have been donated by Berengar and quickly converted to such an episcopal meaning.

A famous part of the treasury at this time was the sculpture of the hen and chicks which may also serve as an episcopal message of church unity, although it is not a reliquary (fig. 8). The unusual sculpture was mentioned in the inventory of 1275 when it was noted that one of the chicks was broken, so presumably the object was not new.⁵¹



7. *Reliquary purse of John the Baptist (Duomo di Monza, Treasury), eighth and ninth century*

An assortment of other items is included in the treasury. Three ivory diptychs (two noted above) date to late Roman antiquity, although one is re-carved to show Pope Gregory standing and King David seated (fig. 9). This re-carving may be associated with Carolingian ideas about David's kingship, but as a gift to the treasury, the diptych perfectly reflects the association of royalty with the church that Monza represents. A late-antique cobalt blue glass cup called the ›sapphire‹ cup was reused as a chalice, set in first, perhaps, a Byzantine setting, now reset in an elegant fifteenth-century gold setting. The cup had legendary importance as it was said to have been used by Theodelinda for Agilulf's ritual of election, although Berengar's father had a similarly designated ›sapphire‹ chalice.⁵² Finally, a jeweled comb that has been dated to the sixth century but also to the tenth, eleventh, or twelfth, and which is first mentioned in the 1275 inventory, returns the spectator's thoughts to the person of the queen herself, as it is called ›Theodelinda's comb.‹ Such a comb is more likely to have entered the treasury to serve in the rituals of coronation or for episcopal liturgical use than as an item from a personal toilet kit, but it has been associated since the thirteenth century with the queen herself. It even has an added ring so that it could be suspended in display (perhaps over her sarcophagus?).



8. *Hen and chicks (Duomo di Monza, Treasury)*

The Monza hoard is an excellent example of the legendary ›conversation‹ that a treasury can represent. It turns back to its founder as well as forward toward the ›future‹ of Italy as a coronation site for its kings. It is flexible enough to represent the church's alliance with royalty as well as the church's strength and unity in its own traditions, apostolic associations, and episcopal prestige. Remarkably, all of this is reflected in the tympanum over the portal of the Duomo, mentioned above, and almost unique in its status as a sculpted inventory of the treasure (fig. 10).⁵³ In that tympanum there is an iconographic joining of each of the disparate worlds represented by the treasury and its legends.

The imagery of the tympanum is grounded in Scripture. In the center of the lower register, John the Baptist, to whom the church is dedicated, baptizes Christ while an angel looks on. At either side are Elizabeth and Zachary, his parents. On either side of this scene, separated by tree ›dividers‹ that are so common in early Christian sarcophagi, are two of the apostles, Peter and Paul, with sword and keys, representing the apostolic foundations of the treasury in relics of the early church. Above this apostolic and biblical grounding are pictured the treasury and its legendary history. At the viewer's far right are six choice objects from the treasury: the hen and chicks, four chalices (including the sapphire chalice in its original, Byzantine setting), and Berengar's cross, displayed so that all can see and testify to the riches of the usually hidden treasures. The place of the treasury is indicated as securely interior by the tiny column separating the objects from Theodelinda and John. Beginning a sequence that moves from right to left in the remainder of the register, is an image of the crowned Theodelinda making the original donation to John the