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Heraclius, the Boar Hunter: Notes on the Hermitage Meleager and Atalanta Silver Plate

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Heraclius, the Boar Hunter: Notes on the Hermitage Meleager and Atalanta Silver Plate¹

A N C A D A N

CNRS-PARIS SCIENCES LETTRES

οὔτοι δ' ἂν εἶεν καὶ τοκεῦσιν ἀγαθοὶ καὶ πάσῃ τῇ ἑαυτῶν πόλει καὶ ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ τῶν φίλων καὶ πολιτῶν.
οὐ μόνον δὲ ὅσοι ἄνδρες κυνηγεσίῳν ἠράσθησαν ἐγένοντο ἀγαθοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες αἷς ἔδωκεν ἡ
θεὸς ταῦτα [Ἄρτεμις], Ἀταλάντη καὶ Πρόκρις καὶ ἦτις ἄλλη. /

For all men who have loved hunting have been good: and not men only, but those women also to whom the
goddess [Artemis] has given this blessing, Atalanta and Procris and others like them . . .
(Xenophon, *On Hunting* 13.18)

An Extraordinary Silver Plate: Hermitage Inv. No. ω 1 (fig. 1)

Among the exceptional objects in the collections of the Hermitage Museum, there is a circular silver plate dated to the 7th century A.D., usually considered one of the latest illustrations of pagan myths in the Christianized Mediterranean. This early Byzantine plate entered the imperial collection in 1840. Its precise place of discovery, somewhere in the Tsarist Governorate of Perm, remains unknown. It has a diameter of 27,8 cm, and weighs 1523 gr.; it is supported by a ring foot 1,2 cm thick, with a diameter of 12,5 cm. Its state of conservation seems quite good, despite the presence of an upper hole, under the rim (suggesting that the dish was, at some point, hung down), and of some scratches and notches on the back. Unfortunately, we could not examine it directly.² The photos kindly provided by the Hermitage show that the manufacture required a wide gamut of skills, for details like the different viewing plans the artist tried to suggest by incisions; plants, walls, pelts and textile decorations were imprinted by points; facial expressions and body muscles were impressed by punches which look strange on the modern photos but which could have been originally polished. Five stamps, on the back, guarantee the fabrication of the plate

between A.D. 613–629/630 in an imperial workshop which had a monopoly on silver. Besides the names of the imperial officials in charge of controlling the metal (Andreas, Philippos, Basilios, Symeon), three stamps contain monograms of the emperor Flavius Heraclius Augustus, ruler of Byzantium from A.D. 610 to 641 (fig. 2).³

The decoration covers the whole surface of the plate. The disc is divided into three symmetrical zones: the upper zone is occupied by a tree, its roots at the left extremity of the show-plate, and by the representation of a fortified settlement whose architectural shape confirms the late date of the plate. Both the tree and the fortification are schematic: the tree has a twisted trunk with four main branches, three of which bifurcate into two twigs. The contorted twigs and foliage recall the Mediterranean forests (of oaks?) but the aim of the artist was perhaps not to indicate a precise species. He rather seems to have filled the space to suggest that the action takes place in the wasteland, on the ἐσχατιά, between a Mediterranean meadow and “a thicket intricate, where neither steed nor lance could penetrate” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.376–77: *nisi saetiger inter opacas / nec iaculis isset nec equo loca pervia silvas*; cf. 8.369–71).

Analogously, the fortified settlement in the middle of the upper part of the plate, built in

large regular blocks represented by double lines of dense dots, contains a round tower on a high foundation, with two (crossbow?) windows and covered by a shingle roof, and a lower (circular?) structure in the back, also built with large stones with two analogous windows. The sheltering tree and the fortification have good parallels on other early Byzantine show-plates: the tree can be compared with the shrubs on the herdsman's plate in the Hermitage (Inv. ω 277), dating back to ca. A.D. 530 (fig. 3) or with the tree on the plate representing the biblical king David slaying a lion (fig. 4, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 17.190.394). The stronghold recalls the shapes of the fortified cities of Sochoh and Azekah on the largest plate of the series illustrating the story of David, and bearing stamps of the same emperor, Heraclius, now dated to A.D. 629–630 (fig. 5, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 17.190.396). Therefore, the decor in the upper part of our dish fulfils a double function: spatially, it locates the scene in a middle ground, on the frontier between the civilized and the savage worlds. Chronologically, by its details of execution, it confirms the early Byzantine date of the plate.

The lower band is occupied by two excited dogs, ready for action, and a deployed net (Greek ἄρκυς). The dogs have complementary attitudes, one looking down to sniff the prey's trace, the other barking while twisting his head up in order to call his master. They could belong to the two main Greek species used for hunting: the first, to the viewer's left, is a fine scent hound, with long nose and ears, used for chasing the prey. He must be Laconian (Xenophon, *On Hunting* 4; Aristotle, *History of Animals* 8. 28, 9.1–4 608a–b). The second looks like a stronger hound, able to find the prey and look after the master: his short ears, strong mouth with big teeth and longer hair around the neck make us think of a Molossian, attached to its master (Lucretius, *On Nature* 51063–72).⁴ Ancient sculptors and painters usually paid attention to these differences: yet, their presence on our plate suggests that the public for which the model was created was not only familiar with the iconographic codes and perhaps ideas related to these races but that it was also able to appreciate the dogs' action in a hunt in general and in the hunt represented on the plate in particular.⁵

This kind of "exergue" and the triple frame of our plate's decoration are stereotypes of the

Western tradition of show-plates, at least from the 1st century B.C. The "Aulis" plate, which is, for us, the first of the Roman series (inspired by Hellenistic models), already follows this plan: while the upper band is occupied by the decor, the lower part contains indicators of the plate's theme, which are not directly used in the main scene.⁶ Analogously, on this Hermitage plate, the dogs and the nets, key attributes of boar hunting (Xenophon, *On Hunting* 10.1, Virgil, *Aeneid* 10.707–16, Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.331), are not the principal tools for the specific hunt suggested by the artist. The heroes on the major stage of the plate have horses and spears (rather than javelins), according to the principles of heroic hunting, based on virtue not on cunning, according to Plato (*Laws* 7 822d–824a, cf. *infra*) and Xenophon.

The same tripartite frame is preserved on the marble Hadrianic tondos included in the triumphal Arch of Constantine in Rome: the medallion representing the hunting of a lion has the animal lying under the feet of Hadrian and his companions. The medallion showing Hadrian and finally Constantine hunting the boar has the animal lying under the feet of the riders (fig. 6; cf. fig. 4 for David hunting the lion).⁷ This parallel offered by Hadrian's (and Constantine's) hunt is important for two reasons: first, it recalls the importance of hunting under Hadrian's reign—and more generally from Flavian times onwards, when decorations analogous with the model of our plate (if not the model itself of our plate) could have circulated.⁸ Second, Constantine the Great, who used Hadrian's tondos in his Arch, was a political milestone for Heraclius: therefore, if Constantine referred to Hadrian, Heraclius and his court were certainly trying to imitate Constantine, his esthetic and political choices.⁹

Following Hadrian, the tripartite frame of the circular show-plates, including a significant "exergue", continued to have a great success in the Greco-Roman as well as in the Iranian world. Even if Sassanian silver plates illustrating a royal hunt remain indebted to the very old Eastern tradition of circular representations, they sometimes situate a killed animal in a kind of exergue, below the king in action.¹⁰ In the Greco-Roman tradition, the tripartite frame remains well attested on plates from the 4th/5th–7th century A.D., as on the famous silver plate representing a dance of Silenus wearing a wineskin on his shoulders, with

a Maenad (Hermitage Inv. no. ω 282), contemporary to our plate.¹¹ The continuity of the tripartite design of the show-plates is a sign of continuity for the way they were exposed (vertically, as shown also by the later whole); unlike in the East, the Roman plates were not made in order to be turned around on a ground. The long life of the triple frame does not allow us to precisely date the model of our plate but expands the span of time when this decoration could have been elaborated. It also points to Late Antique intermediary models which supported the continuation of the tradition until early Byzantine times.

The middle zone, which occupies more than half of the plate's surface, includes four standing figures, organized in two groups: one group is composed of three characters disposed in a semi-circle facing the viewer; the other is represented by a humble character coming from the left. In the group of three, to the right, the main figures are a hunting hero, completely naked, and a young woman dressed in a wild fashion and turned towards him. We recognize the most famous couple of hunters in the Greek and Roman mythology, Meleager and Atalanta. Meleager—in the center-right—and Atalanta—in the center-left—are accompanied by their horses and disposed between two servants: Meleager's servant to the right and the foreign, humble servant heading towards their group, from the left. Meleager, in the middle between Atalanta and his servant, resting with his left hand on his spear, the right hand on his ankle, takes the heroic pose well known from sculptures and gems going back to the 4th century B.C. and perhaps to an archetype by Skopas—as it has been supposed on the basis of Pausanias' reference to the Athena Alea's temple in Tegea, whose front gable was decorated with a representation of the Calydonian hunt (*Periegesis of Greece* 8.45.6). On the Hermitage plate, Meleager exposes his naked body frontally, the mantle wrapped around his arms and behind his torso: there can be no doubt that he represents the most important character on the plate, an ideal of young masculine beauty and virtue. Meleager's servant, dressed in a short tunic above tight pants, adapted to his function of manservant or soldier, bears a spear and keeps his horse's bridle in a pose suggesting his restraint and respect towards his master. Atalanta, on the other side of Meleager, wears a short, coarse tunic, which leaves naked her right breast, in a pose re-

calling an Amazon. Like Meleager and the fourth character to the extreme left, she wears Roman boots (*caligae*). She holds the spear (*hasta pura* or a scepter?) in her right hand, with the horse to the left: lacking a personal servant, she looks independent, yet paying respect to Meleager, towards whom she is slightly turned. This representation of the virgin hunter can also go back to a Classical archetype although here Atalanta is not an archer.¹² The symmetrical disposition of the two characters has parallels in the Roman imperial representations of the athlete Atalanta, next to a male competitor.¹³

The facial features of the three characters seen frontally by the viewer and their hair dresses are not carefully executed, making us think that the artist who made the drawing was more ambitious and skillful than the artisan who executed the chasing of the plate—in case the two were different. It is however clear that the artist created different hair dresses and perhaps two types of diadems for the two heroes (*cf. infra*). Atalanta's horse raises the right hoof, in a spectacular trotting pose, symmetrical with Meleager's horse, which raises its left hoof while looking to the right. Their heads and arched coils turned one toward each other underline the symmetry and unity of the scene, despite the variation of forms and gestures.

Behind Atalanta is an almost savage servant covered by wild skins with four limbs, two hanging down, two trailing back; we cannot identify the species of the animal that he hunted in order to get this skin, but the gravure of the fur suggested that it was an indelicate beast, perhaps a boar. He walks in full contrast with Meleager's more civilized, urbane servant. He advances bent towards the semicircle of the main characters to the right, and brings a dead animal, paws up in the air. Its species remains difficult to identify. Its ears make us think of a hare, but its fur and tail suggest rather a yearling, a young goat or, most probably, a lamb. In any case, it must be a mild animal, whose presence breaks the usual code of Meleager's and Atalanta's representations after the successful hunt, in the company of the Calydonian boar—or of its skull, as on the 6th–7th century A.D. München silver plate (fig. 7, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum L 56/113).¹⁴ Previous researchers identified this animal with a lamb, which would have served either as a sacrifice

victim or as a bait for the hunting net.¹⁵ However, on the plate, there is no fire altar or wine vase suggesting a sacrifice (unlike on the “Aulis” plate, mentioned above). The fresh, bloody carcass is a rather strange trap for feral pigs. Furthermore, the use of a bait and therefore the treachery (*ἀπάτη*) could diminish the heroism of the hunters, which is the main topic of the plate.¹⁶

The dead lamb looks like the animal at the bottom of the already mentioned 7th century A.D. plate that represents David’s slaying of the lion (fig. 4). There, the dead victim corresponds to the sheep from the flock, carried away by the cruel lion, as indicated by the biblical text which served as source of inspiration for the drawing (1 Samuel 17:34–37). Accordingly, the drawer of the David plate compiled in a snapshot two successive narrative moments: the lion killing the lamb and David killing the lion. Following a similar pattern, the artist who made the final drawing for the Meleager and Atalanta plate could have represented here one of the victims of the Calydonian boar, which persuaded the heroes to begin the hunt in order to eliminate the evil and restore the peace and prosperity of the country. Indeed, if for Homer the wild boar ripped up the trees and flowers of Oineus’ orchard (*Iliad* 9.541–42), for Ps.-Apollodoros (*Library* 1.66) the beast became more dangerous and it destroyed also animals and people (*τὰ βοσκήματα καὶ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας διέφθειρεν*).

If so, the Hermitage plate represents the justification of the hunt, emphasizing both the reason for a right pursuit and the youth and beauty of the heroes facing their heroic duties. At the same time, the triumphal positions of the heroes, near their horses, already suggest the successful outcome of their action (cf. *infra*). The image could therefore be read as an all-in-one, the beginning and the (prefiguration of the) end of a hunt, through which a good Roman citizen reestablishes the order and cleanses the edges of his domain, according to his due.¹⁷ By doing so, he is acting bravely and rightly, in the Greek, Macedonian and Iranian aristocratic tradition, according to Platonic principles of virtuous behavior. In Xenophon’s words, hunting “. . . makes the body healthy, improves the sight and hearing, and keeps men from growing old; and it affords the best training for war / ὑγίειάν τε γὰρ τοῖς σώμασι παρασκευάζει καὶ ὄραν καὶ ἀκούειν μᾶλλον, γηράσκειν δὲ ἦττον, τὰ δὲ πρὸς

τὸν πόλεμον μάλιστα παιδεύει. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ τὰ ὄπλα ὅταν ἔχοντες” (*On Hunting* 12.1).

More than any other, the Calydonian hunt, as a collective action, was adapted to symbolize the success of a group of heroes, sound in body and mind, as any successful army should be. Furthermore, since the hunt is also a metaphor of the erotic seduction, we also assist at the beginning of the love affair, of the adult life, and therefore of the initiation myth of Meleager and Atalanta.

Models and Possible Significances

In the Greek and Roman figurative arts, Meleager’s representation remained constant, from the 4th century B.C. original up to Roman imperial copies (like fig. 8, a 2nd century A.D. marble statue in Rome, Galleria Borghese) and the last Byzantine attestations.¹⁸ Besides our plate, this last phase of Meleager’s iconography is illustrated by the silver plate in München (fig. 7): it shows the victorious hero alone, naked, a mantle on his right shoulder, resting on his spear, near the boar’s skull. This plate has no stamps and, therefore, its precise date is unknown: yet, the technical details of execution show that it can only date from the 6th–7th century A.D. probably between the epochs of Justinian and Heraclius himself.

The combination of a standing Meleager and a standing Atalanta, ready for the hunt or immediately after the feat, seems unusual before the later Roman Empire. It is, in any case, different from the common image of a standing Meleager and of a seated Atalanta (on Attic painted vases) and of a seated Meleager accompanied by a standing Atalanta, triumphant after the hunt and in love, as they are represented on the Pompeian frescoes of the 4th style—like the painting in the house of the Centaur, dating back to the years A.D. 40–50, where both figures face the viewer, while turning their heads towards each other (fig. 9, Museo Nazionale di Napoli Inv. 8980). Meleager, totally naked, is seated to the left, Atalanta is standing, fully dressed, to the right. This scheme was common at least until the 4th century A.D., when it appears on the central medaillon of one of the Sevso dishes (fig. 10, National Museum Budapest).¹⁹

How can we date and explain the position of the heroes on the Hermitage plate? If we leave

aside the Etruscan bronze mirrors where the couple stands partially naked accompanied by other mythical characters,²⁰ examples of standing Meleager and Atalanta appear from the 2nd–3rd century A.D. onwards, on mosaics (fig. 11, from Antioch, House of the red pavement, ca. A.D. 140), marble reliefs and sarcophagi (fig. 12, Rome, from Saint Peter's basilica, ca. A.D. 180–190), and polychromic textiles (fig. 13, ca. A.D. 400, in Riggsberg, Abegg-Stiftung).²¹ The best parallel for our plate preserved to our day is the central illustration of a 4th century fragmentary mosaic from a Roman villa in Cardenajimeno (fig. 14, now in the Burgos Museum, Spain): Meleager and Atalanta, slightly turned one towards each other, face the viewer; Meleager wears a diadem and a spear, and has his horse at his left, while Atalanta, crowned, is accompanied by a servant.²² Of course, this combination of the two standing figures could be earlier than the Roman imperial times and go back to a late Classical or Hellenistic archetype, but we have no proof outside the Etruscan world.

The presence of horses in hunting scenes is another sign of the late date of the composition. One of the first representations of a couple hunting with spears, between two horses accompanied by riders (Dioscuri? slaves?), appears in the 4th–5th century A.D. on the border of the so-called Meleager plate in the Sevso treasure (fig. 10). The hunting couple remains unidentified but can be compared with other hunter couples chasing a lion, like the one on a plate in the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection (fig. 15, BZ.1947.12).²³ Moreover, while our plate is a unicum for the representation of the two heroes near their horses, riding Meleager and Atalanta appear on several mosaics dating back to the 4th–5th centuries A.D. (fig. 16, British Museum 1857, 1220.439, from Halicarnassos).²⁴

It is difficult to say to what extent the iconography reflects a progress in the real hunting practices of Late Antiquity. It is however probable that these innovations reflect a Late Antique evolution in the taste of the elites for representations of noble, idealized, heroic hunting. Indeed, the horses are a well-known aristocratic attribute in the Greco-Roman and Iranian worlds.²⁵ The hunt with horses, which shows the bravery of the hunter, is the one recommended by Plato (*Laws* 7 823d–824a), in opposition to the nocturnal hunt

with nets, which remain in the lower register of the plate (trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb, 1926):

ὦ φίλοι, εἴθ' ὑμᾶς μήτε τις ἐπιθυμία μήτ' ἔρωσ τῆς περὶ θάλατταν θήρας ποτὲ λάβοι μηδὲ ἀγκιστρείας μηδ' ὄλωσ τῆς τῶν ἐνύδρων ζώων, μήτε ἐργηγορόσιν μήτε εὐδουσιν κύρτοις ἀργὸν θήραν διαπονουμένοις. μηδ' αὖ ἄγρας ἀνθρώπων κατὰ θάλατταν ληστείας τε ἡμερος ἐπελθὼν ὑμῖν θηρευτὰς ὤμοις καὶ ἀνόμοις ἀποτελοῖ· κλωπείας δ' ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ πόλει μηδὲ εἰς τὸν ἔσχατον ἐπέλθοι νοῦν ἄψασθαι. μηδ' αὖ πτηνῶν θήρας αἰμύλος ἔρωσ οὐ σφόδρα ἐλευθέριος ἐπέλθοι τινὶ νέων. πεζῶν δὲ μόνον θήρευσίς τε καὶ ἄγρα λοιπῆ τοῖς παρ' ἡμῖν ἀθληταῖς, ὧν ἡ μὲν τῶν εὐδόντων αὖ κατὰ μέρη, νυκτερεία κληθεῖσα, ἀργῶν ἀνδρῶν, οὐκ ἀξία ἐπαίνου, οὐδ' ἦττον διαπαύματα πόνων ἔχουσα, ἄρκυσίν τε καὶ ἀγῆαις ἀλλ' οὐ φιλοπόνου ψυχῆς νίκη χειρουμένων τὴν ἄγριον τῶν θηρίων βῶμην· μόνη δὲ πᾶσιν λοιπῆ καὶ ἀρίστη ἢ τῶν τετραπόδων ἵπποις καὶ κυσίν καὶ τοῖς ἑαυτῶν θήρα σώμασιν, ὧν ἀπάντων κρατοῦσιν δρόμοις καὶ πληγαῖς καὶ βολαῖς αὐτόχειρες θηρεύοντες, ὅσοις ἀνδρείας τῆς θείας ἐπιμελές.

O friends, would that you might never be seized with any desire or craving for hunting by sea, or for angling, or for ever pursuing water-animals with creels that do your lazy hunting for you, whether you sleep or wake. And may no longing for man-hunting by sea and piracy overtake you, and render you cruel and lawless hunters; and may the thought of committing robbery in country or city not so much as cross your minds. Neither may there seize upon any of the young the crafty craving for snaring birds—no very gentlemanly pursuit! Thus there is left for our athletes only the hunting and capture of land-animals. Of this branch of hunting, the kind called night-stalking, which is the job of lazy men who sleep in turn, is one that deserves no praise; nor does that kind deserve praise in which there are intervals of rest from toil, when men master the wild force of beasts by nets and traps instead of doing so by the victorious might of a toil-loving soul. Accordingly, the only kind left for all, and the best kind, is the hunting of quadrupeds with horses and dogs and the hunter's own limbs, when men hunt in person, and subdue all the creatures by means of their own running, striking and shooting—all the men, that is to say, who cultivate the courage that is divine.

We may summarize the question of the chronology and aim of the Hermitage plate's models as follows: if we take into consideration the details of representation of the tree, fortification and animal with their Late Antique and early Byzantine parallels, we may suppose that the final image drawn on our plate was composed only

at the end of Antiquity and the beginning of Byzantine times (6th–7th centuries A.D.), most probably in Heraclius' time. This image was based on previous models, going back to the 1st century B.C.–2nd century A.D. and following late Classical archetypal representations of Meleager and a woman-warrior/hunter (Amazon/Atalanta). While the "Aulis" plate fixes the *terminus post quem* for the tripartite frame of a Roman show-plate with a mythical decoration and a political message by the middle of the 1st century B.C., Hadrian's and, more generally, the Antonine period was mostly favorable for the creation of hunting decors. At that time, the Romans rediscover the hunt as an activity able to reveal the virtues serving the social *concordia* (Dio Chrysostomos, *Oratio* 70.2 [*On philosophy*], referring precisely to Meleager). Besides Meleager—who never went completely out of fashion, as we can see from Late Antique silver plates, textiles and mosaics—the lion-hunter (Heracles and then David) and, more generally, the killer of monsters (Heracles but also Perseus and Bellerophon) are favorite models, comparisons or analogies for Roman and then Byzantine rulers, in pagan as well as in Christian contexts.²⁶

The ancient silver plates were *prestige* objects, used as royal and aristocratic gifts, in specific military, political and social contexts. They could be exposed in reception halls (the public parts of the domestic spaces), as symbols of the social recognition of their owners, or deposited in religious spaces (sanctuaries and churches), as reminders of those who offered them.²⁷ These elites, still educated in the spirit of the Hellenistic and Roman *paideia* deeply rooted in Platonic principles, were able to tell Meleager's stories and probably to quote the famous literary texts, from Homer's *Iliad* onwards, and even to acknowledge the most famous artistic models. They could also recognize the ethical values attached to these characters in different contexts, and perhaps could point to prominent historical figures who compared themselves with such mythical characters, well known for their heroic and yet tragic destiny.

Byzantine *pasticcio*: Meleager, Achilles, Bellerophon

The silver show-plates of the 6th–7th century A.D. that are preserved open an exceptional window

onto the aristocratic culture of early Byzantine times and on a mix of pagan and Christian motives which still need explanation, beyond Kurt Weitzmann's and Ernst Kitzinger's contributions to the study of the Greek mythological motives and, more generally, of the "perennial Hellenism" in Byzantine art.²⁸ For the 4th–5th centuries A.D., we have numerous literary texts, in Greek and Latin, illustrating the essential place of the pagan mythology in the contemporary education.²⁹ After the 5th century, despite the progress of Christianity which clearly dominates the literary creations, the rhetorical culture is still full of pagan *exempla*. Even if they are not objects of religious belief, they are occasionally brought to life in literature (as in Dracontius' *Romulea*) and figurative arts in order to recall ancestral virtues. The pagan mythological characters serve as both models for new Christian inspirational characters, issued from the Bible, and as comparisons for the Christians who imitate these new Christian symbols.

The literary curriculum of the Hellenistic and Roman schools established a canon of inspirational heroes that we see often represented in private and public spaces frequented by educated men. Besides Meleager (with the two plates mentioned before, figs. 1 and 7), there is Achilles, whose anger has been one of the most long-lasting topics of rhetorical debate and ethic reflection throughout Antiquity.³⁰ The so-called Scipio's shield in Paris' National Library (fig. 17, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Cabinet des Médailles inv. 56.344), dated to the end of the 4th–beginning of the 5th century A.D., represents a synthesis between the two terms of Achilles' wrath, the abduction of Briseis (*Iliad* book 1) and the Achaean embassy (*Iliad* book 9). It is interesting to note that one of the scenes integrated in this synthesis was still illustrated apart, as the beginning and the end of Achilles' withdrawal from war, determined by Briseis' abduction and return, on a Hermitage silver plate (Inv. no. ω 350), stamped towards the end of the time of Justinian, ca. A.D. 550.³¹ At that time, Procopius (*On buildings* 1.2.7) confirms the importance of Achilles in the imperial expression of power: Justinian himself was represented through one of Achilles' statues. The continuity of the iconographic tradition from which the "Scipio's shield" was compiled is confirmed by another 6th century A.D. silver plate in the Hermitage (Inv. no. ω 279), il-

lustrating the quarrel between Ajax and Odysseus and the judgment of the weapons after Achilles' death. Odysseus, at the right of the viewer and left of Athena's throne, is represented in a similar manner as during the embassy to Achilles, on the "Scipio's shield" (fig. 17) and, more generally, in the long iconographic tradition of the *Doloneia*.³²

The same technique of *pasticcio*—that we have also noticed on the Meleager and Atalanta plate, illustrating both the beginning and the end of the Calydonian hunt (cf. *supra*)—is visible on a plate devoted to another inspirational hero: Bellerophon, on the silver plate in Geneva (d 35,8 cm, 817,5 g; Musée d'art et d'histoire, Inv. AD 2382, fig. 18).³³ Judging by the 43 pieces brought together in order to reconstruct a part of the plate, the hero was shown near his flying horse, Pegasus. This pose probably evokes, at the same time, two episodes of Bellerophon's myth: the capture of Pegasus near the source Pirene in Corinth with the help of Athena and Bellerophon's fight with the Chimera, with the help of the flying horse. This silver plate is all the more important for our study, since it has been considered as being close for its manufacture to the München Meleager plate (cf. *supra*, fig. 7). More than Meleager, Bellerophon is one of the pagan successful heroes whose positive actions are emphasized in early Christian times: his battle with the Chimera was an excellent representation of the victory of good versus evil, analogous to the biblical victories of King David. Moreover, unlike Heracles, Bellerophon was not one of the heroes with a cult.³⁴ Illustrating him—like Meleager—alone on a plate which served as a prestigious object proves that independently of the viewer's adhesion to paganism or Christianity, the hero remained an inspirational model in the young men's education and behavior.

The King's Political *Exempla*: David and Meleager

During Heraclius' reign, we know of one Christian hero who benefited from borrowing the features of the pagan heroes and finally fulfilled their propagandistic functions in the imperial iconography: the biblical king David, full of talents analogous to those of Achilles, Perseus, Orpheus, Bellerophon, Heracles and even Meleager, who delivered the Holy Land of the evil, monstrous

beasts and enemies. According to currently accepted opinion, the series of nine plates discovered in Lapethos/Lambousa (Cyprus), where they were buried before the Arab invasion of A.D. 653–654, is a direct attestation of this phenomenon. Now divided between The Metropolitan Museum of Arts and the Nicosia Museum, the series was an illustrated feuilleton of the life of King David. It seems plausible that not only the imperial elites but the Byzantine emperor himself used the image of the biblical king by analogy, in order to claim his authority and legitimacy as Christian king (πιστὸς ἐν Χριστῷ βασιλεύς), victorious upon the Barbarians (in A.D. 629).³⁵ The similarity in the disposition of the characters on the *missorium* of Theodosius, on the so-called Scipio shield (cf. *supra*, fig. 17) and on some plates of the David series could suggest a similar function of the illustrations: express power in myth, history and contemporary politics.

Just like our Hermitage plate, the nine David plates discovered in Cyprus were made in the imperial workshops (perhaps of Constantinople³⁶) and bear Heraclius' imperial stamps prior to 630. Heraclius, the founder of the Byzantine dynasty of the Heraclids, born ca. 575, was crowned in 610, after a period of instability following Phocas' usurpation of Maurice's throne (602). Descendant of a Cappadocian (or Armenian?) family said to have Arsacid roots,³⁷ Heraclius managed to defeat the Avars and especially the Sassanians and to have some success against the Arabs. It is after his victories, in A.D. 629–630, that the imperial workshops could have chosen the David saga in order to glorify the king and to motivate his soldiers and collaborators. By recovering the Holy Cross from the Persians, by his efforts of uniting the Christians under the doctrine of monotheism as well as by his battles against the Muslims (mentioned in the Surah 30), Heraclius appears until today as a champion of Christianity. The nine silver plates seem to perfectly fit Heraclius' claim of final victory against the pagan Barbarians (Zoroastrian Sassanians). They are supported by texts which explicitly compare or assimilate Heraclius to David, a new Heracles.³⁸

Yet, Heraclius' reign was not without contest, especially because of his second marriage to Martina, the daughter of his sister, who accompanied him in the military campaigns at least from A.D. 624 onwards.³⁹ The political, religious and even public opposition towards Martina culminated

after Heraclius' death, in 641, when Martina tried, without success, to establish her authority over Heraclius' two sons Heraclius Novus Constantine III and Herakleonas. The turmoil of this long and particularly dramatic, sometime tragic, reign inspired analogies not only with David but with other biblical figures such as Daniel, Noe, Job, as well as comparisons with Heracles, Perseus, Achilles and Odysseus.⁴⁰ In particular, the comparison between the Heraclids (Heraclius the Elder, the emperor Heraclius and his two sons) and Heracles is supported by their names, all derived from the name of the hero.

Even if we do not have clear literary attestations for an explicit comparison between Heraclius and Meleager, we might think that the presence of Meleager (with Atalanta) in the iconographic repertoire of the silver plates stamped by the imperial officials indicates that the hunting-hero remained part of this series of pagan heroes said to have been surpassed by the emperor, according to contemporary propaganda.⁴¹ If our hypothesis is right, the use of Meleager's image on show-plates (fig. 1 and 7, if the last one was done also under Heraclius) could have preceded and prepared the use of the images of David, after the final victory.

There are several reasons for which Heraclius himself or his contemporaries would have chosen Meleager as a political *exemplum*:

a. From Homer (*Iliad* 9.527–605) onwards, Meleager is the hunter of Calydon (in Aetolia), the one who killed or, at least, played an essential part in killing the boar sent by Artemis as a punishment for the *hybris* of his father, Oineus.⁴² Therefore, Meleager is a good example of an aristocratic hero who could pay for his father's (or predecessor's) errors.

In most ancient cultures, hunting (including men-hunting, war) was the main proof of virile virtue. As George of Pisidia states at the beginning of his first *elogium* of Heraclius returning from Africa (I [III] 5), many contemporary authors celebrated the armed riders and the successful hunters (ἰππεῖς ἐνόπλους, θηρολέτας <κατ>ευστόχους). We do not know to what works George of Pisidia was referring, but it is possible to suppose that Meleager, the best of hunters, could have been a mythological paragon for the emperor and the elites in those works, already at the beginning of the reign.

Heraclius' Armenian/Cappadocian-Iranian and Greco-Roman backgrounds justify the choice of a

hunting hero: from Archaic times, in both Greece and Iran, hunting was an aristocratic, even royal, activity. The Macedonians, Alexander and his heirs, maintained the tradition of the representation of the king as a hunter (as illustrated, for example, in the pictorial decoration of Philip II's tomb in Vergina or on the so-called Alexander's sarcophagus in Istanbul).⁴³ A change appeared in the West only at the end of Hellenistic times: if the Iranian kings who conquered the Seleucid territories continued this tradition—up to the Sassanians, whose favored pose on silver plates is that of the hunting king—Augustus and the Julio-Claudians banned it from the repertoire of their signs of prestige for almost a century, until the Flavians and the Antonines. Hunting, however, related with triumph, the imperial cult or with the coming into function of the emperors and high officials, always remained an important part of the Roman spectacles.⁴⁴ The *uenationes* were important public events from the 2nd century B.C. and up to the 6th or 7th century A.D. To this late period, the Byzantine art historians date the pavement of the Great Palace in Byzantium, covered by a mosaic with arable-pastoral and hunting scenes. Together with the plates of Bellerophon and Meleager, this pavement confirms the intimate relationship between the triumphal chief and the figure of the successful hunter, a feature shared by Greco-Roman and Iranian kings, throughout centuries.⁴⁵

What better symbol for an emperor said to have been able to kill the lions in the arena and many wild boars in unfrequented places (Fredegar, *Chronicle* 4.65 630: *pugnatur aegregius, nam et sepe leones in arenas et in aerimis plures singulos interficit*), than the figure of the boar hunter *par excellence*, Meleager? The importance of hunting as action revelatory of the royal virtues and of the hunting hero as an ideal king is even greater if we take into consideration Heraclius' Armenian/Cappadocian (not to say Arsacid) roots.⁴⁶ Meleager, son of Oineus and Althaia, the brother of Deianira, wife of Heracles, the hero who inspired the name of Heraclius, of his father and of his sons. This genealogical link could have been taken in consideration when choosing these *exempla*. For instance, from Homer onwards (*Iliad* 2.677; Diodorus of Sicily 5.54; Strabo 9.5.23), Heracles was the father of Thessalos (from his union with Chalciopé or Astyoiché). Thessalos, the mythical ancestor of the Thessalians, was ac-

According to Hellenistic sources the father of Arme-nos, the mythical ancestor of the Armenians⁴⁷. Therefore, besides being the best hunter, Meleager could have appeared as a reminder of the Greek heroic origin of Heraclius the Armenian.

b. Heraclius' relationship with Martina recalls the debated relationship between Meleager and Atalanta. Being Heraclius' young niece and a very ambitious lady, Martina was never accepted by the people of Byzantium. The marriage, which produced several handicapped children, was criticized by Heraclius' brother himself.⁴⁸ The reason why Heraclius insisted so much on this union was perhaps not only sentimental but also political: the endogamous marriage—of Heraclius himself with his niece, but also of Heraclius' first-born son, Heraclius Constantine III, with his paternal second cousin, Gregoria⁴⁹—was a sign of continuity with the dynastic habits of the Iranian kings, or, at least, with the Armenian, Cappadocian or more generally Anatolian family practices.⁵⁰ Analogously, a woman-hunter (and, according to some mythical variants, fighter and Argonaut) was necessarily a monster, rejected by Meleager's companions. Whatever the conclusion of their relationship—either marriage, or Atalanta's preserved virginity—Meleager and Atalanta remained an excellent example of couple who put their love and warrior virtue in the service of their community.

c. Heraclius saved the empire, in a critical moment of the war with the Sassanians of Chosroes II. One of the generals of Chosroes II, who was most active in the confrontations with Heraclius and who even became *shah* of the whole empire for less than two months in A.D. 630, by his real name Farrukhān, of the Mihrān family, was called the "Boar of the Empire", Šahrbarāz/Šahrwarāz (Gr. Σαρβάρως), because of his military talents.⁵¹ For the Iranians, the boar was one of the animal incarnations of Warahrām/Wahrām, the warrior god of victory, companion of Miθra (cf. *Yašt* 14; also *Yašt* 10.70).⁵² After important conquests in Syria, Palestine (where he captured Jerusalem) and Egypt (611–616), Šahrbarāz/Šahrwarāz failed to take Constantinople. But just like the terrible boar of Meleager's myth who caused much damage before being hunted by Meleager and Atalanta, Šahrwarāz caused nearly fatal injuries to the Byzantines before being neutralized by Heraclius in

625–626.⁵³ In the end, he was helped by Heraclius to take the Sassanian throne from Ardašīr III.

In a key moment of the military conflict—like the year 622, when Heraclius defeated and rejected Šahrwarāz from Anatolia and especially at the beginning of 624, when Heraclius, encouraged by his first success, started his major campaign over Persia and the Caucasus—Heraclius or his court could have answered to the Sassanian propaganda of the "Boar of the Empire", with the image of the greatest boar hunter in the Greek culture, Meleager, accompanied by his beloved Atalanta. The chronology of Heraclius' military campaigns and of his marriage with Martina is, unfortunately, not sure: for our plate, or at least for its model, the best solution seems to be the beginning of 624, after the Anatolian military success but before leaving Constantinople on the 25th of March, together with his young wife, Martina. This moment seems to fit the scene, since the beginning of the hunt and of Meleager's relationship with Atalanta could recall the start of the war and the recent marriage; at the same time, the triumphal posture of Meleager and maybe the *hastae purae*, the spears "without iron", signs of military success could have been justified by Heraclius' previous victories and confidence in the future triumph. Furthermore, Theophanes Confessor (p. 303 de Boor) attests to the confiscation of metal goods from rich particulars and big churches at the beginning of the campaign of 624. Our plate could have been made and offered as a military, political or votive gift, at that moment (right after Heraclius' and Martina's wedding and before the departure to Persia), or later, as a souvenir or compensation for that action.

This image would have clearly surpassed the possible equivalence between the two enemies, who compared themselves with Heracles: Heraclius was named after the hero-god; since the god Wahrām was often represented as Heracles, Šahrwarāz was indirectly claiming Heracles'/Wahrām's strength. Given the symbolism of the boar in the Armenian and Iranian religion, political communication and iconographies, the comparison of the Byzantine *basileus* with the boar hunter would have been an extremely powerful message of resistance and counter-offensive against the Sassanian pretensions regarding the West.⁵⁴

Finally, if Heraclius was really compared to Meleager because of his victory over an exceptional "boar", he was not the first Roman who would

have confronted, in an allegorical hunting, an adversary called “boar”: he belongs to a series which set apart, at least from the end of the 3rd century A.D. onwards, the image of the Roman emperor as a boar hunter. Already before the end of the 1st century A.D., Tacitus and Pliny the Younger seem to have used the metaphor of the hunting against the Gallic rhetor Marcus Aper.⁵⁵ For Heraclius, however, the main reference must have been Diocletian, who became the legitimate emperor only after killing a boar—Arius Aper, Numerian’s father-in-law and Praetorian Prefect, in 284, at Nicomedia.⁵⁶ After this crime, Diocletian, who had already killed a lot of real boars in his life before becoming an emperor, is said to have made a reference to the hunt of Aeneas, the founder of the Roman *gens* (who pursued Mezentius like a boar, *Aeneid* 10.707–716), but also to a prophecy he received in his young years from a Druid woman: “you will become emperor when you have slain a Boar / *Imperator eris, cum Aprum occideris*”. The boar was, indeed, an animal associated by the Celts with the classes of kings and priests. It was also recognized by the Greeks and Romans as an attribute of Apollo: this is why its hunt appears, on Constantine’s arch, near a sacrifice to Apollo. After Diocletian, the tradition of the emperor boar-hunters is continued by Constantine’s heirs: a famous sapphire gem once in the collection of Marquis Folci Rinuccini in Florence (now lost), represented Constance II hunting the boar in Caesarea of Cappadocia (fig. 19).⁵⁷ Although this kind of scene is common in the 4th century A.D.—a good parallel being the Risley Park lanx (fig. 20)—precisely at the time when Meleager and Atalanta started to be represented with royal diadems (cf. fig. 14), Constance II’s gem could show that at the beginning of the 360s, in Cappadocia, a boar hunting could be the sign of legitimizing the Roman imperial power, in dangerous conflicts with the Sassanians but also with Western usurpers. Of Cappadocian origins, humiliated at the beginning of his reign when the Persians took Caesarea, Heraclius could have referred to this legitimizing boar hunting in Cappadocia, in 624, when he was starting his campaign to Armenia and Persia.

d. The choice of Greco-Roman heroic *exempla* is not contradictory to Heraclius’ fervent Christian faith: at least one subtle sign allows a Christian reading of the scene. When compared with the rest of the tradition—and in particular

with the mosaic in fig. 14—the most surprising feature of the Hermitage plate is the lack of the boar. The victim took the place of the slayer. The slain lamb, similar to the one represented on one David plate, could embody the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36; 1 Corinthians 5:7), the Christ (before the Council in Trullo, 691–692) and, through Him, the Christians, their Holy City and the Cross which had to suffer from the Persian conquest and devastation.

In the footsteps of Constantine, Heraclius might have wanted to be seen as the providential hero called the revenger of the innocents and restorer of Christianity.⁵⁸ Before him, at the beginning of the 4th century A.D., another Armenian of Arsacid descent, established in the Cappadocian Caesarea, won against a royal “boar”, enemy of the Christians: this was Gregory the Illuminator, who converted the Armenians to Christianity in the time of Diocletian and Constantine. According to the legendary life of the saint, transmitted through several versions among which one in Armenian, by Agathangelos, the king Tiridates became mad, being possessed by demons, and began to behave like a boar, after killing some innocent maidens. Even if he might be persecuted by the king, Gregory agreed to cure him. In the end, the saint recovered the remains of the innocent martyrs who would inspire the Christian people of lambs.⁵⁹

Obviously, this hypothesis must be taken with caution. First, even if we are sure that Meleager remained one of the heroes of the Classical *paideia* in Late Antiquity, the identification of Heraclius with Meleager is not attested by any literary text. It is true that Heraclius remained a tragic figure in the public opinion—this is also why, centuries after, Pierre Corneille wrote the tragedy *Héraclius, empereur d’Orient*. In fact, when looking at the whole ancient literary tradition, Meleager is a tragic hero, who seemed to have all, even immortality, at his birth but who committed misdeeds and lost everything before his death. In the Greco-Roman political mentality, an *exemplum* is not only a hero that a young person can never equal. An inspirational model must also have weaknesses and faults that he learns to surpass and, by doing so, he teaches the others to do so (like the biblical king David, Heraclius’ explicit model). Furthermore, in the Greco-Roman tradition, the tragic heroes were not only models

but also intermediaries in purging passions. Through the cathartic tragedy of Achilles, Hercules, Bellerophon, Meleager, the young men could free themselves from the passions which would have brought them to error. Therefore, in order to understand the hypothetical choice of Meleager as a possible comparison for Heraclius (and, more exactly, as a pagan model for the Christian emperor), we need to look deeper into the literary evidence of Meleager's saga and observe the rhetorical reasons for which Meleager's personality could have recommended him not only as an ideal of any young aristocrat but also as a tool for Heraclius' propaganda.

A Tragic Destiny in Intentional History

In our modern languages, the name of Meleager remains related to that of the Meleagrides, the guinea fowl into which Meleager's sisters or at least some women mourners were transformed.⁶⁰ Meleager's death is indeed one of the most tragic in the whole Greek and Roman tradition: according to Bacchylides, in the Underworld, even Hercules is moved by the story of Meleager, who tells him about his unmarried sister, Deianira (the one who will be the cause of Hercules' own death).⁶¹ This is how Bacchylides the lyric poet enchains two of the most tragic destinies of the Greek literature (*Epinikion* 5.155–75, ed. and trans. R. C. Jebb, 1994):

Φασὶν ἀδεισιβόαν Ἄμ-
φιτρώωνος παῖδα μῶνον δὴ τότε
τέγξαι βλέφαρον, ταλαπενθέος
πότμον οἰκτίροντα φωτός·
καὶ νιν ἄμειβόμενος
τᾶδ' ἔφα· «Θνατοῖσι μὴ φῦναι φέριστον
μηδ' ἀελίου προσιδεῖν
φέγγος . . .» Τὸν δὲ μενεπτολέμου
ψυχὰ προσέφα Μελεά-
γρου· «Λίπον χλωραύχενα
ἐν δώμασι Δαϊάνει-
ραν . . .»

. . . He said that then, and then alone, tears came to the eyes of Amphitryon's intrepid son, in pity for the ill-fated hero's doom; and he answered him with such words as these: "It were best for mortals that they had never been born, and never looked upon the sunlight. . . ." And to him spoke the spirit of Meleager, steadfast in war: "I left Delaneira at home, in the fresh bloom of youth. . . ."

In the 2nd century A.D., Pausanias (10.31.3–4) lists three different traditions about the causes of Meleager's death:

a. Homer (*Iliad* 1.566) says that the Erinys heard the curses of Althaia, Meleager's mother, after her son killed her own brothers, the Thes-tiadai, in battle.

b. The Hesiodic poem *Eoiai* (fr. 25.9–13 Merkelbach-West) and the *Minyad* (*EFG* p. 144 fr. 3 Davies) agree in saying that Apollo helped the Curetes against the Aetolians, and that Meleager was killed by this god (in Pleuron).

c. There was a folk story about a brand burning in the family's foyer at the birth of Meleager. The Fates (*Moirai*) predicted to his mother, Althaia, that the child would live as long as the brand would not be consumed by fire. Althaia preserved the brand until she burnt it up in the passion following the death of her brother. This story was the subject of a drama in the 6th century B.C. by Phrynichos, in his *Pleuronian Women* (*TrGF* I² 3 fr. 5–6 Snell): "For chill doom / He escaped not, but a swift flame consumed him, / As the brand was destroyed by his terrible mother, contriver of evil // κρυερὸν γὰρ οὐκ / ἤλυξεν μόρον, ὠκεῖα δὲ νιν φλόξ κατεδαίσατο, / δαλοῦ περθομένου ματρὸς ὑπ' αἰνᾶς κακομηγάνου". However, it appears that Phrynichos did not invent the story, but only touched on it as one already in the mouths of everyone in Greece.

Folk tales of many peoples include characters possessing or looking for immortality, who are associated with eternal youth and virtue. Since we have lost Phrynichos and Euripides' tragedy (which were, however, still read in Roman times and, for Euripides at least, even during Late Antiquity), our main source for this variant of Meleager's myth is Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 8.267–546; cf. Hyginus, *Fabulae* 171–74; Ps.-Apollodorus, *Library* 1.8.2). After the killing of the Calydonian boar, Meleager courts Atalanta with the hide, but when this is seized by his uncles, Plexippus and Toxeus, he slaughters them in his rage. Althaia, distraught with grief for her brothers, determined his fate by casting the brand into the fire, at which point Meleager succumbs to fever and dies.

This death of the young and victorious hero, who finally put the common interest higher than

his own life, became one of the most famous topics of funerary decoration between the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. More precisely, the ca. two hundred sarcophagi known until today, produced mainly in the West and decorated with episodes from Meleager's life, represent the most numerous group of mythological sarcophagi related to one hero.⁶² This is no surprise, since in his *Meleager* (performed in 416 B.C.), Euripides, who seems to be the real inventor of the tragedy of the couple of Meleager and Atalanta, already formulated the essential message of Meleager's tragedy: "Do good while people are alive; when each man dies / He is earth and shadow. What is nothing changes nothing // τὸς ζῶντας εἶ δρᾶν· καθανὼν δὲ πᾶς ἀνήρ / γῆ καὶ σκιά· τὸ μηδὲν εἰς οὐδὲν ῥέπει" (fr. 532 Nauck). Moreover, the three main episodes emphasized on these sarcophagi fit three common topics in the Roman funerary art: the hunt as heroic act, the funerary banquet (after the Calydon hunt), and the death moment—either by sickness, or in the Pleuron battle against the Curetes, where Meleager would still have Atalanta, mourning companion and hypostasis of Artemis, by his side.

If Meleager and Atalanta appeared from Antoinine times onwards side by side as the exemplary couple united beyond *Thanatos*, they were already, at the beginning of the Empire, the couple united by *Eros*. Besides the poems of Ovid, Gracchus, Manilius or Seneca, an interesting testimony about the success of this erotic couple is offered by Suetonius, who mentioned the shameful representation of Atalanta performing fellatio on Meleager in Tiberius' bedroom (*Life of Tiberius* 44).⁶³ We do not have any figurative trace of this representation, but we may suppose that it could have been somehow related to the Etruscan drawings of the two naked heroes on bronze mirrors. In any case, Suetonius' mention is all the more interesting since from Hellenistic times (when Meleager is mentioned as an Argonaut by Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 1.190–91; cf. Diodorus 4.48.4–5; Ps.-Apollodorus 1.9.16) to the 2nd century A.D.

Since the couple decorated the domestic walls of the Romans (in private, even erotic contexts), it is not impossible to suppose (with all the caution necessary in this kind of hypothesis, which is not directly supported by a text) that silver plates representing the couple were already produced in the early Roman Empire. They could have been an

appreciated gift for marriages—like the Augustan silver cup from Xanten-Lüttingen, Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn 58, 4, representing the marriage of Jason and Creusa, which is supposed to have been offered as a gift to the army on the occasion of Tiberius' marriage with Agrippina (fig. 21). The tradition of offering objects decorated with tragic weddings for marriage gifts goes back to Classical Greek times and continues up to the end of Antiquity. The practice can be explained by the purifying force of the Greek tragedy and by the exemplarity of the hero, who shows the way the educated elites have to follow.

There is another hint regarding the hypothetical matrimonial event which could have been echoed by our plate: the unique representation of the two standing characters, with harmless spears (scepters?) and horses, contrasting their asymmetrical pose in Roman painting and mosaics. It is true that divine and heroic couples are represented rather side by side on early Byzantine objects—like the bucket with the images of six gods (Hercules and Minerva, Apollo and Diana, Mars and Venus) also wearing five stamps from the reign of Heraclius (in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien, ANSA VIIa 95, fig. 22)⁶⁴ and, more generally, like the latest representations of Meleager and Atalanta (figs. 12–14, mentioned *supra*). There is at least a couple represented in a similar pose in Pompeian painting: they are usually identified with Alexander the Great and Roxane, represented as Ares and Aphrodite, during their wedding in Susa, in 324 B.C. (fig. 23, from the House of the golden bracelet, Pompei Antiquarium). The frame of a royal wedding fits both the narrative and the possible political context of our plate: the hunt of Calydon is their initiation into life; if Heraclius and Martina or their entourage ever choose Meleager and Atalanta as their mythical paragons, they would have represented them as a royal couple, side by side, ready for action, before the tragic denouement of their story. The exceptional presence of diadems on the heads of the two heroes—as a bandelette, in the Hellenistic fashion, for Meleager and as a small crown for Atalanta—could confirm an emphasis on their royal status. Their clothes—Meleager, naked with his mantle, and Atalanta in her Amazon dress, which fits her young bride status⁶⁵—in contrast to the hunting costumes of Roman imperial times, are further hints to the artist's desire to go back to the Classical figures, better adapted for

anchoring a legitimizing claim deep into ancient Hellenism.

The presence of the imperial stamps on the back of the dish is not definite proof in favour of a political reading of the plate, even if they show that the product was checked by imperial authorities. But if our propagandistic interpretation is valid, Heraclius could have chosen the comparison with Meleager around A.D. 622–624, date of his first military success against the “Boar of the Empire” and of his marriage with Martina, in order to answer both external and internal contestations of his authority. In this case, our plate would be a tool of “intentional history”, that is an attempt of the king or his court to impose a positive public image, despite the difficult political and military context.⁶⁶ For composing the decoration of this plate, the artists of his court would have used a century-old mythological scene, in an elusive Christian perspective. Only those who directly identified the slain lamb with the Lamb of God, bearer of the Cross, were able to understand the full propagandistic message of Heraclius, *basileus* at the crossroads of civilisations.

For all those familiar with Homer and the Greco-Roman texts and images, Meleager was a good heroic *exemplum*: he was the champion of hunting, a favorite topic of the Greco-Roman and Iranian elites. Yet, unlike any other “black hunter”—the ephebe who runs away from marriage and the political life of the city in order to make war, save his people and acquire glory—the blond Meleager saves his fatherland and also shares his glory with the woman he loves, despite the disapproval of his relatives. His epic-tragic destiny and, in our opinion, the game of Greco-Roman and Iranian propaganda around the warrior virtues of the boars, made Meleager and

Atalanta one of the last survivors of the Greek pagan culture in Christian Byzantium before the 8th century iconoclasm.

Conclusion

Inspired by a myth of great success since its invention in Classical times, drawn with Late Classical figures in a frame which can go back to the 1st century B.C.–2nd century A.D., the Meleager and Atalanta plate fulfilled the expectation of the Roman elites, increasingly interested in hunting since the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. This aristocratic public recalled the hunting and erotic deeds of the hero in 4th/5th century A.D. banquets and still considered Meleager—together with other victors in hunting and in war, from Homer or from the Bible—as an inspirational model or at least as a pagan paragon in early Byzantine times.

The plate of Meleager and Atalanta was probably first manufactured between 622 and the spring of A.D. 624, on the occasion of Heraclius’ and Martina’s marriage and departure for war against Šahrwarāz. The composition, based on a long iconographic tradition, answered the taste of the elites for mythological representations under the influence of the traditional *paideia* and probably also fulfilled a role of propaganda for a hated imperial couple, who finally defeated the Persian “Boar of the Empire” and recovered the Holy Cross. This is only a hypothesis based on the historical elements which could have inspired the comparison. Nonetheless, the Hermitage plate is a clear proof of the vitality of the Classical models and, more generally, of the Classical *paideia* based on mythical *exempla* in post-antique, Christian Hellenism.



Fig. 1. Frontal view of the Meleager and Atalanta silver plate in the Hermitage, A.D. 613-629/630, Inv. no. Ø 1. Photo by Svetlana Suetova. Courtesy of The State Hermitage Museum.



- Monogram of Heraclius, type b, barely visible; small, nimbed bust above the monogram; inscribed [AN]Δ||PEAC.
- Nearest the hexagon: monogram of Heraclius, type a; inscribed ΦΙΑ[]||ΠOC (see the corresponding stamps on nos. 54 B-56).
- Above the cross stamps: as above; inscribed [ΦΙΑ]||ΠOC.
- ⊕ Between the square stamps: flared arms; monogram BACIΛIOV; inscribed in a circular direction CV||ME||ΩN||IC. This stamp is identical with the corresponding stamps on nos. 54 B-56.
- ⊕ Same as above; inscribed CV||ME||ΩN||IC.



Fig. 2. Heraclius' stamps on the back of the Meleager and Atalanta silver plate in the Hermitage, Inv. no. 01. After Althaus and Sutcliffe 2006, p. 58 and Dodd 1961, p. 177, no. 57.



Fig. 3. The herdsman's silver plate in the Hermitage, ca. A.D. 530, Inv. № 277.



Fig. 4. David slaying a lion on a silver plate in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, ca. A.D. 629/630, Inv. 17.190.394. Public Domain <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464375>.



Fig. 5. David fighting Goliath on the main silver plate of the David series in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, ca. A.D. 629/630, Inv. 17.190.396. Public Domain <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464377>.



Fig. 6. Tondos of Constantine's Arch in Rome: Hadrian has killed the lion; Hadrian (recarved as Constantine) hunts the boar.



Fig. 7. Meleager silver plate, 6th-7th century A.D., Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, München. Foto-No. D5369 Haberland, Walter. Inv.-No. L56/113. Photo courtesy of the Museum.



Fig. 8. Statue of Meleager, Roman 2nd century A.D. copy of a 4th century B.C. Greek original. The head is a modern restoration. Rome, Galleria Borghese, Arachne Foto Oehler 53/1953/5-6 EA 2714 Anderson 4558, <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/marbilder/8307925>.

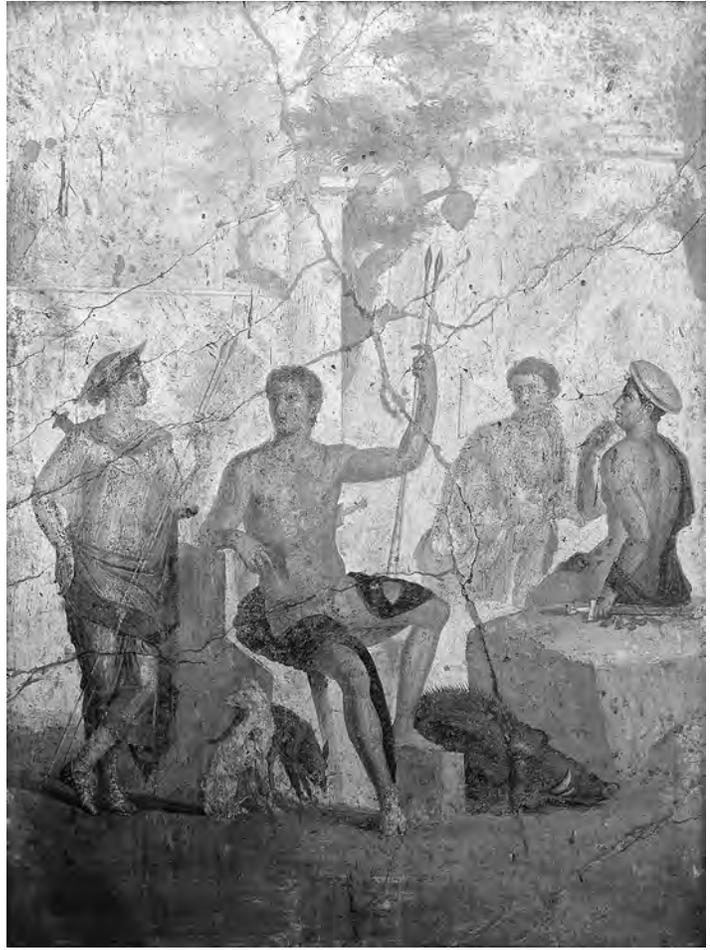


Fig. 9. Meleager and Atalanta on a fresco from the house of the Centaur in Pompeii, now in the MAN Napoli, Inv. 8980. Courtesy of the Museum.



Fig. 10. The Meleager plate in the Sevso treasure of the National Museum, Budapest. Online https://mnm.hu/en/exhibitions/temporary/seuso_treasure.

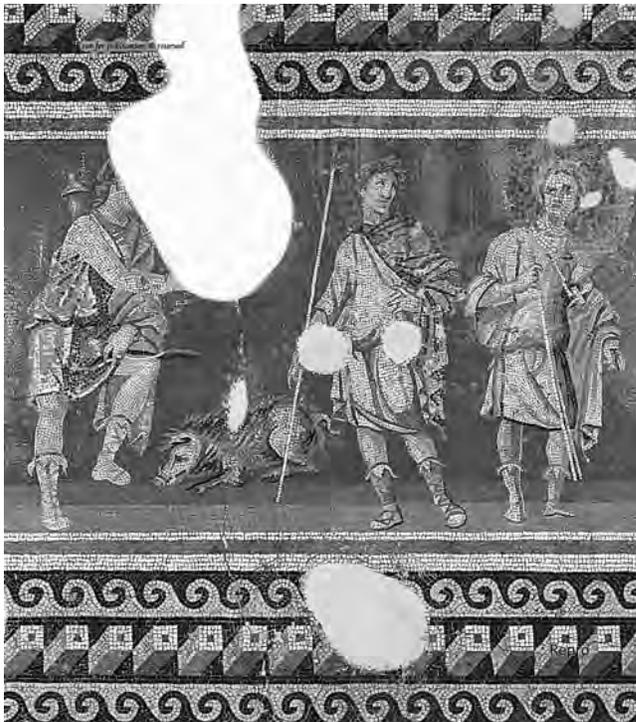


Fig. 11. Mosaic, Antioch, House of the red pavement, ca. A.D. 140. Photo: Arachne <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/marbilder/3366475>.

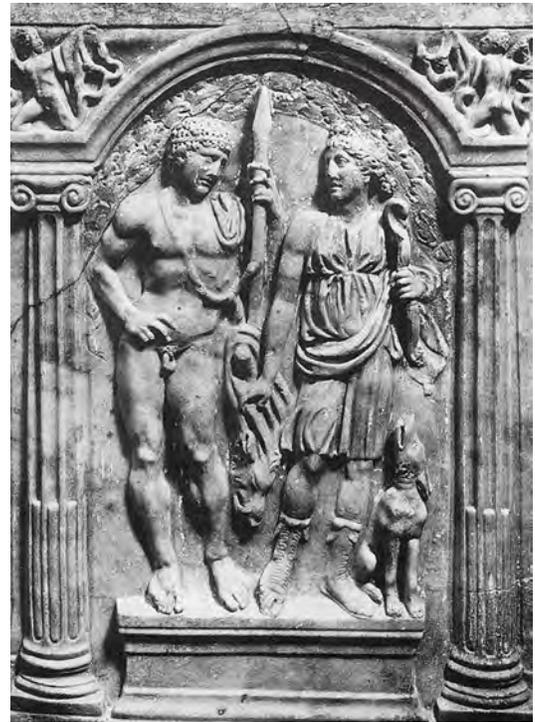


Fig. 12. Marble relief on a Roman sarcophagus, Rome, Saint Peter's basilica, ca. A.D.180–190. Vatican Museum. After K. A. Rasf, ed., *Roman Art at the Art Institute of Chicago*, cat. 4, fig. 4.14.



Fig. 13. Meleager and Atalanta on a woollen wall hanging of the 4th-5th c., at the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, 2003. Photo: Christoph von Viräg. Courtesy of the Foundation.

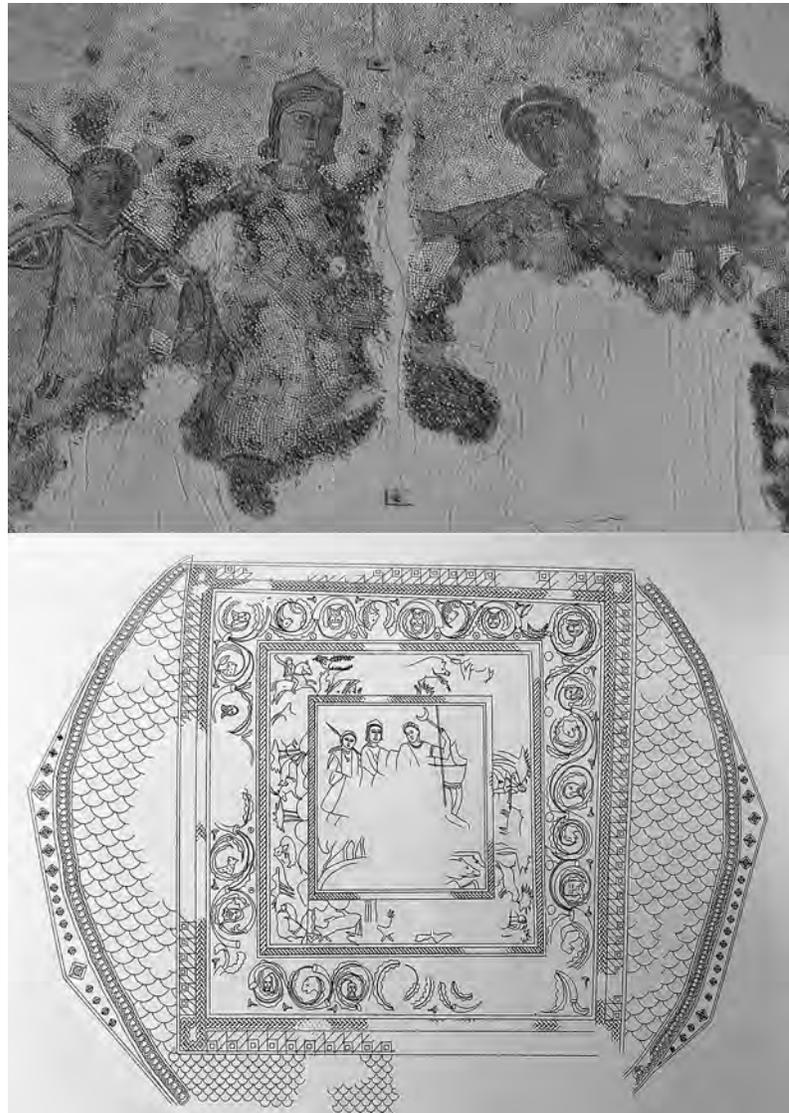


Fig. 14. Meleager and Atalanta in the central emblem of a 4th c. Roman mosaic, from Cardenajimeno. Burgos museo, Spain. Online images: <http://mosaico.easd-merida.es/mosaicos-romanos-en-el-museo-de-burgos/>.



Fig. 15. Hunting scene on a silver plate, 5th c., Byzantium. Dumbar-ton Oaks Research Library and Collection BZ.1947.12. Online <https://images.app.goo.gl/4VMMxsvaVFXSBA758>.

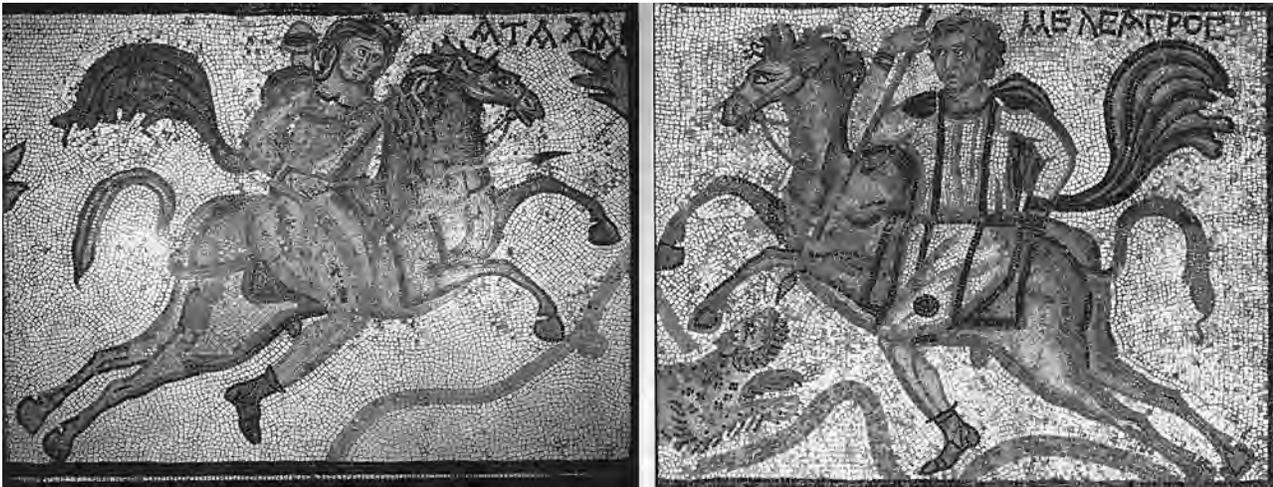


Fig. 16. Riding Meleager and Atalanta on a mosaic from Halicarnassos, preserved in the British Museum 1857, 1220.439. Images AN254436001 and AN254497001. Courtesy of the British Museum.



Fig. 17. The so-called Scipio shield in the French National Library, Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. 56.344. Courtesy of the BNF.



Fig. 18. Bellerophon on a 6th-7th c. silver plate in Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire, Inv. AD 2382. Photo Bettina Jacot-Descombes. Courtesy of the Museum.



Fig. 19. Constance II, accompanied by a servant, hunts the boar in Cappadocian Caesarea, on a sapphire from the old Rinuccini collection in Florence, then in the Trivulzio collection in Milano, now lost. 4th century A.D. Beazley archive, online <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/gems/styles/EarlyChristian/Image/12.jpg>.



Fig. 20. Replica of the Risle Park silver lanx, 4th century A.D., now lost, from the British Museum, on-line <https://www.bmimages.com/preview.asp?image=00259059001>.



Fig. 21. Jason's wedding with Creusa on the Augustan silver cup from Xanten-Lüttingen, Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn 58, 4. Courtesy of the Museum.



Fig. 22. Mars and Venus on the six gods *situla* (bucket) in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien, ANSA VIIa 95, on-line <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/silver-bucket/AAFwM3D5LpvYNA>. Courtesy of the Museum.



Fig. 23. The wedding of Alexander the Great and Stateira in Susa, in 324, on a Pompeian fresco from the House of the golden bracelet, Pompeii Antiquarium. Courtesy Pareo Archeologico di Pompeii.

Notes

1. A preliminary version of this paper (Калидонская охота между римской, ранневизантийской и сасанидской империями: заметки относительной серебряного блюда «Мелеаг и Аталанта» из коллекции Эрмитажа) was presented at the Gasparov Readings 2019 in Moscow. I am very grateful to Samra Azarnouche and Frantz Grenet for their critical feedback. All the remaining errors are mine.

2. L. Stephani, "Erklärung einiger Kunstwerke der Kaiserlichen Ermitage", *Compte rendu de la Commission Impériale Archéologique: pour l'année 1867* (1868), pp. 52–152, Taf. II 4–5; F. Drexel, "Über einen spätantiken Silberteller mit mythologischer Darstellung", *JDAI* 30 (1915), pp. 192–211 (p. 203, 205); M. Rosenberg, *Der Goldschmiede Merkmale IV. Aus-land und Byzanz* (Frankfurt, 1928), pp. 662–63; L. Matzulewitsch, *Byzantinische Antike: Studien auf Grund der Silbengefäße der Ermitage* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 9–17, 23; J. P. C. Kent and K. S. Painter, eds., *Wealth of the Roman World: Gold and Silver AD 300-700* (London, 1977), pp. 96–97, no. 160; W. F. Volbach, "Silber - und Elfenbeinarbeiten vom Ende des 4. bis zum Anfang des 7. Jahrhunderts", in *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und Archäologie des Frühmittelalters: Akten zum VII. Internationalen Kongress für Frühmittelalterforschung, 21.-28. September 1958*, ed. H. Fillitz (Graz, 1962), pp. 21–36 (pp. 31–32); A. Effenberger, B. Maršak, V. Zalesskaja and I. Zaseckaja, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silbergefäße aus der Staatlichen Ermitage Leningrad: Ausstellung der Staatlichen Ermitage Leningrad in der Frühchristlich-byzantinischen Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Dezember 1978 bis März 1979* (Berlin, 1978), Dok.-No. 12, pp. 155–57; K. Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York, 1977), pp. 163–64, no. 141; A. V. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (Leningrad, 1985; 1st ed. 1977), p. 284, pl. 83 (*non uidi*); J. M. C. Toynbee and K. S. Painter, "Silver Picture Plates of Late Antiquity: AD 300 to 700", *Archaeologia* 108 (1986), pp. 15–65 (p. 18); V. Zalesskaya, "La toreutique byzantine du VI^e siècle (les centres locaux)", in *Argentierie romaine et byzantine: Actes de la table ronde, Paris, 11-13 octobre 1983*, ed. N. Duval and F. Baratte (Paris, 1988), pp. 227–33; "Byzantine Metalwork, Ivory and Bone Carving", in *The State Hermitage: Masterpieces from the Museum's Collections* (London, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 378–93; "Dish Showing Meleager and Atalanta", in *Treasures from the Hermitage, St. Petersburg: The European Fine Art Fair, MECC, Maastricht, the Netherlands, 12-20 March 1994*, p. 32, no. 7 (*non uidi*); "Masterpieces of Byzantine Art: Applied Art", in *The Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg: the Greek Treasures* (Athens, 2004), pp. 285–307 (pp. 290–93); E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*

(Cambridge Mass., 1995, 1st ed. 1977), p. 107, pl. 191; R. Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity: Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 139–40, fig. 3.9; F. Althaus and M. Sutcliffe, *The Road to Byzantium: Luxury Arts of Antiquity. An Exhibition Held in the Hermitage Rooms of Somerset House, London, 30 March 6–September 2006* (London, 2006), pp. 58, 72–73, 159. The main references are J. Boardman, "Atalante", *LIMC* 2 (1984), pp. 940–50, no. 34, and S. Woodford and I. Krauskopf, "Meleagros", *LIMC* 6 (1992), pp. 414–35, no. 100 (from now on abbreviated as *LIMC*, s.v. "Atalante" and s.v. "Meleagros").

3. E. C. Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (Washington, D. C., 1961), pp. 176–77, no. 57.

4. O. Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt I. Säugetiere* (Leipzig, 1909), pp. 91–151; D. B. Hull, *Hounds and Hunting in Ancient Greece* (Chicago, 1964); D. J. Brewer, T. Clark and A. Phillips, *Dogs in Antiquity: Anubis to Cerberus: The Origins of the Domestic Dog* (Warminster, 2001). I am particularly grateful to Samra Azarnouche for her suggestions on this question.

5. For the dogs in the iconography of the Calydonian hunt, see J. Cabrero Piquero, "A New Hispano-Roman Mosaic with the Story of Meleager", in *11th International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics. October 16th–20th, 2009, Bursa, Turkey*, ed. M. Şahin (Istanbul, 2011), pp. 193–203.

6. A. Dan, F. Grenet and N. Sims-Williams, "Homeric Scenes in Bactria and India: Two Silver Plates with Bactrian and Middle Persian Inscriptions", *BAI* 28 (2018 [2014]), pp. 195–296 (with bibliography).

7. For Constantine's portrait carved on Hadrian's figure, see D. H. Wright, "The True Face of Constantine the Great", *DOP* 41 (1987), pp. 493–507.

8. See especially the studies edited by W. Martini, *Die Jagd der Eliten in den Erinnerungskulturen von der Antike bis in die Frühe Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2000); for the Flavian times, S. L. Tuck, "The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery: Domitian and the Re-definition of *Virtus* under the Principate", *G&R* 52.2 (2005), pp. 221–45.

9. Cf. M. M. Mango, "Imperial Art in the Seventh Century", in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries: Papers from the Twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992*, ed. P. Magdalino (Aldershot, 1994), pp. 109–38.

10. P. O. Harper and P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period 1: Royal Imagery* (New York, 1981), pp. x, xii, xiii, 210–11, 214–16, 218, 221–22.

11. Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, pp. 202–3, no. 70; F. Althaus and M. Sutcliffe, *The Road to Byzantium*, p. 158, no. 85.

12. Although this is not the dominant iconographic tradition, Atalanta wears spears already on some Greek and Etruscan representations; in the Roman tradition,

she has a spear analogous to the one of Meleager on Pompeian frescoes (*LIMC*, s.v. "Atalante", nos. 34–36, 44; s.v. "Meleagros", nos. 91–94).

13. Cf. *LIMC*, s.v. "Atalante", nos. 82–84.

14. R. Kahsnitz, "Meleager-Schale", in *Rom und Byzanz. Schatzkammerstücke aus bayerischen Sammlungen*, ed. R. Baumstark (München, 1998), pp. 108–13; V. Zaleskaja, "Die byzantinische Toreutik des 6. Jahrhunderts: Einige Aspekte ihrer Erforschung", in *Metallkunst von der Spätantike bis zum ausgehenden Mittelalter: Wissenschaftliche Konferenz anlässlich der Ausstellung "Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silbergefäße aus der Staatlichen Ermitage Leningrad"*, Schloss Köpenick, 20. und 21. März 1979, ed. A. Effenberger (Berlin, 1982), pp. 97–111 (pp. 108–9); more generally, K. Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art* (Princeton, 1984, 1st ed. 1955), pp. 24–26, 177–79; R. Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World: Three Modes of Artistic Influence* (Leyden, 1972), p. 11sq.; N. Yalouris, *Pegasus: Ein Mythos in der Kunst* (Mainz, 1992).

15. *LIMC*, s.v. "Atalante" no. 54.

16. The origin of this idea goes back at least to Macedonian kings: according to the historian Hegesander of Delphi (*FHG* IV 419, quoted by Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 1.31 18a), a Macedonian could not recline at dinner until he had killed a wild boar without nets.

17. For the Roman ideas about hunt, J. Aymard, *Les chasses romaines des origines à la fin du siècle des Antonins* (Paris, 1951); J. K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World* (Berkeley, 1985); C. M. C. Green, "Did the Romans Hunt?", *ClAnt* 15.2 (1996), pp. 222–60; S. L. Tuck, "The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery"; J. Trinquier and Chr. Vendries, eds., *Chasses antiques: Pratiques et représentations dans le monde gréco-romain (IIIe s. av.-IV apr. J.-C.)*. Actes du colloque international de Rennes (Université de Rennes II, 20–21 septembre 2007) (Rennes, 2009). For the Etruscan background: G. Camporeale, *La caccia in Etruria* (Roma, 1984). For the previous Greek attitudes, more favorable to hunting practices, see O. Manns, *Über die Jagd bei den Griechen* (Cassel, 1889–1890); P. Chant-raine, "Quelques termes du vocabulaire pastoral et du vocabulaire de la chasse", in *Études sur le vocabulaire grec* (Paris, 1956), pp. 31–96; D. B. Hull, *Hounds and Hunting*; K. Schauenburg, *Jagddarstellungen in den griechischen Vasenmalerei* (Hamburg, 1969); A. Schnapp, "Images et programme: Les figurations archaïques de la chasse au sanglier" *RA* (1979), pp. 195–218; "Pratiche e immagini di caccia nella Grecia antica", *Dialoghi di archeologia* 1 (1979), pp. 36–59; P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir* (Paris, 1981); J. K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient Greek World* (Berkeley, 1985); G. López Monteagudo, "La caza en el mosaico romano. Iconografía y simbolismo," *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 8 (1991), pp. 497–512; C. Mauduit, "Loisir et plaisir cynégétiques dans la littérature grecque archaïque et classique", *BAGB* 1 (1994), pp. 41–55; F. Poplin,

"La chasse au sanglier et la vertu virile", in *Homme et animal dans l'Antiquité romaine: Actes du colloque de Nantes [29 mai–1er juin] 1991*, Caesarodunum HS (1995), pp. 445–67; R. Lane Fox, "Ancient Hunting: From Homer to Polybius", in *Human Landscapes in Classical Antiquity: Environment and Culture*, ed. G. Shipley and J. Salmon (London, 1996), pp. 119–53; A. Schnapp, *Le chasseur et la cité: Chasse et érotique dans la Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1997). For the Near Eastern and Mycenaean background, see W. Helck, *Jagd und Wild im alten Vorderasien* (Hamburg, 1968); C. E. Morris, "In Pursuit of the White Tusked Boar: Aspects of Hunting in Mycenaean Society", in *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid*, ed. R. Hägg and G. C. Nordquist (Stockholm, 1990), pp. 149–56. For the relationship with the Iranian world, see Canepa 2009, pp. 154–66.

18. See G. Daltrop, *Die kalydonische Jagd in der Antike* (Hamburg, 1966); E. Simon, *Meleager und Atalante: Eine spätantike Wandbehang* (Bern, 1970); *LIMC*, s.v. "Meleagros".

19. M. Mundell-Mango, "Un nouveau trésor (dit de 'Sevso') d'argenterie de la basse antiquité", *CRAI* 134.1 (1990), pp. 238–54 (pp. 249–50); M. M. Mango, *The Sevso Treasure: A Collection from Late Antiquity* (Zurich, 1990); T. Geszelyi, "Das Bildprogramm der Meleager-Platte aus dem Seuso-Schatz", *Acta Classica Univ. Scient. Debrecen* 52 (2016), pp. 135–47.

20. J. D. Beazley, "The World of the Etruscan Mirror", *JHS* 69 (1949), pp. 1–17 (pp. 12–13); *LIMC*, s.v. "Atalante", nos. 29–33; *LIMC*, s.v. "Meleagros", nos. 62–70.

21. *LIMC*, s.v. "Atalante" nos. 37–39, 51, 55; *LIMC*, s.v. "Meleagros", nos. 98, 102. For the mosaics in general, I. Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and Their Sources", *DOP* 17 (1963), pp. 179–286; J. M. Blázquez and J. Cabrero, "Antioch Mosaics and Their Mythological and Artistic Relations with Spanish Mosaics", *JMR* 5 (2012), pp. 43–47; for the textiles in general, F. Baratte, "Héros et chasseurs: La tenture d'Artémis de la Fondation Abegg à Riggisberg", *Mon-Piot* 67 (1985), pp. 31–76; for the earlier Greek tradition, A. Schnapp, *Le chasseur et la cité*. The main synthesis is still the thesis of Simon, *Meleager und Atalante*.

22. 11.45 x 7.8 m : J. M. Blázquez, J. C. Elorza and A. Bartolomé Arraiza, "Atalanta y Meleagro en un mosaico romano de Cardenajimeno (Burgos, España)", *Latomus* 45.3 (1986), pp. 555–67; G. López Monteagudo et al., *Corpus de Mosaicos de España. Fascículo XII, Mosaicos Romanos de Burgos* (Madrid 1998), pp. 21–8 (no. 9), pl. 7–12, 35–42; Cabrero Piquero, "A New Hispano-Roman Mosaic", p. 198, fig. 14.

23. Toynbee and Painter, "Silver Picture Plates of Late Antiquity", pp. 15–65 (p. 20).

24. *LIMC*, s.v. "Atalante", no. 49; "Meleagros", no. 109.

25. See in general P. Vigneron, *Le cheval dans l'Antiquité gréco-romaine (des guerres médiques aux*

grandes invasions): *Contribution à l'histoire des techniques* (Nancy, 1968).

26. Cf. e.g. Th. Kluge, *Die Darstellungen der Löwenjagd im Altertum*, Dissertation (Giessen, Berlin, 1906); B. Andreae, *Die Symbolik der Löwenjagd* (Opladen, 1985); B. A. Strawn, *What is Stronger Than a Lion? Leone Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Göttingen, 2005).

27. Like the Risley Park silver lanx (discovered in 1729 in Great Britain and now lost, reproduced fig. 20), representing a boar hunt and offered by *Exsuperius episcopus* to a church in the 4th century: C. Johns, "The Risley Park Silver Lanx: A Lost Antiquity from Roman Britain", *The Antiquaries Journal* 61.1 (1981), pp. 53–72; M.-M. Gauthier, "La lanx de Risley Park et son inscription chrétienne de dédicace", *BSNAF* 1991 (1993), pp. 79–82.

28. Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art*; Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, pp. 107–12; cf. A. Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium", *PeP* 84 (1979), pp. 3–35; M. W. Merrony, "The Reconciliation of Paganism and Christianity in the Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements of Arabia and Palestine", *LA* 48 (1998), pp. 441–82.

29. Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 5.18.16; Servius, *Ad Aeneidem* 4.205, 7.306; Malalas, *Chronographia*, p. 165; Dindorf, Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 35.81–87; Procopius, *On the Wars* 5.15.8; in general, see P. Chuvp, *Chronique des derniers païens: La disparition du paganisme dans l'Empire romain, du règne de Constantin à celui de Justinien* (Paris, 2009³, 1st ed. 1990). For the difference between the 4th–5th and the 6th–7th century mythological revivals, see e.g. E. Rosenbaum, "The Andrews Diptych and Some Related Ivories", *The Art Bulletin* 36.4 (1954), pp. 253–61.

30. Cf. A. Cameron, "Young Achilles in the Roman World", *JRS* 99 (2009), pp. 1–22.

31. L. Matzulewitsch, *Byzantinische Antike: Studien auf Grund der Silbengefäße der Ermitage* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 3–4, 25–31; Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, pp. 84–85, no. 16; B. Г. Луконин, "Среднеперсидские и согдийские надписи на серебряных сосудах", *ВДИ* 3 (1964), с. 165–67. For a parallel in Rome, see A. Carandini, "La secchia Doria. Una 'storia di Achille' tardoantica", *Studi Miscellanei: Seminario di archeologia e storia dell'arte greca e romana dell'Università di Roma* 9 (1965), p. 17.

32. F. Althaus and M. Sutcliffe, *The Road to Byzantium*, pp. 66, 159 (no. 86).

33. M. Lazovic, N. Dürr, H. Durand, C. Houriet and F. Schweizer, "Objets byzantins de la collection du Musée d'art et d'histoire", *Genava* 25 (NS 1977), pp. 5–46 (p. 8, no. 5).

34. H. Brandenburg, "Bellerophon Christianus? Zur Deutung des Mosaiks von Hinton St. Mary und zum Problem der Mythendarstellungen in der kaiserzeitlichen dekorativen Kunst", *Römische Quartalschrift für*

christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte 53 (1968), pp. 49–84; J. Huskinson, "Some Pagan Mythological Figures and Their Significance in Early Christian Art", *BS* 42 (1974), pp. 68–97.

35. See S. S. Alexander, "Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology, and the David Plates", *Speculum* 52.2 (1977), pp. 217–37; *contra*, for a simple use of the plates in a domestic, Christianized environment, R. E. Leader, "The David Plates Revisited: Transforming the Secular in Early Byzantium", *The Art Bulletin* 82.3 (2000), pp. 407–27. More generally on these plates, see Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, pp. 178–94; K. Weitzmann, "Prolegomena to a Study of the Cyprus Plates", *MetMusJ* 3 (1970), pp. 97–111; S. H. Wander, "The Cyprus Plates: The Story of David and Goliath", *MetMusJ* 8 (1973), pp. 89–104; M. van Grunsven-Eygenraam, "Heraclius and the David Plates", *BABesch* 48 (1973), pp. 158–74; S. B. Downey, "Possible Ancient Prototypes for the Cyprus Plates", *GRBS* 8 (1968), pp. 309–13; H. L. Kessler, "David Plates from Cyprus", in *Age of Spirituality*, pp. 475–83; J. Trilling, "Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court: A Literary Approach to the David Plates", *Byzantion* 48 (1978), pp. 249–63; S. H. Wander, "The Cyprus Plates and the Chronicle of Fredegar", *DOP* 29 (1978), pp. 345–46; Leader, "The David Plates Revisited", *ArtB* 82.3 (2000), pp. 407–27; G. Noga-Baai, "Byzantine Elite Style, the David Plates and Related Works, *Boreas. Münstersche Beiträge zur Archäologie* 25, (2002), pp. 225–37; S. A. Boyd and M. M. Mango, eds., *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate in Sixth Century Byzantium: Papers of the Symposium Held May 16-18, 1986 at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore and Dumbarton Oaks* (Washington D.C., 1993), nos. 58–66. For Heraclius' title of king, I. Shahid, "On the Titulature of the Emperor Heraclius", *Byzantion* 51.1 (1981), pp. 288–96; I. Shahid, "Heraclius ΠΙΣΤΟΣ ΕΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ", *DOP* 34–35 (1980–1981), pp. 225–37. For the general context of this *exemplum*, see C. Rapp, "Comparison, Paradigm and the Case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography", in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. M. Whitby (Leiden, 1998), pp. 277–98.

36. Cf. D. Feissel, "Le Préfet de Constantinople, les poids-étalons et l'estampillage de l'argenterie au VI^e et au VII^e siècle", *RN* 6e série, 28 (1986), pp. 119–42. For the possibility of a workshop outside the capital, see M. M. Mango, "The Purpose and Places of Byzantine Silver Stamping", in *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate in Sixth Century Byzantium*, ed. S. A. Boyd and M. M. Mango, pp. 204–16; Mango, "Imperial Art in the Seventh Century", pp. 109–38.

37. On Heraclius' Cappadocian and Armenian origins (attested by Theophylactos Simocatta, *Histories* 3.1.1, John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 106.2, 109.27), see D. Kouymjian, "Ethnic Origins and the 'Armenian' Policy of Emperor Heraclius", *REArm* 17 (1983), pp. 635–42. Heraclius' Arsacid claims were supposed by C. Toumanoff,

"The Heraclids and the Arsacids", *REArm NS* 19 (1985), pp. 431–34; I. Shahîd, "The Iranian Factor in Byzantium during the Reign of Heraclius", *DOP* 26 (1972), pp. 293–320.

38. Theodore Synkellos, *Homily on the Avar Siege of Constantinople* (in A.D. 626), *passim*; Fredegar, *Chronicle* IV.65; cf. George of Pisidia, *Persian Expedition* 2.113–15. More generally, for the sources showing Heraclius claiming to make a holy war, of Christianity vs. Zoroastrianism, see Y. Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross: Anti-Persian Warfare. The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and the Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare* (Vienna, 2011); J. Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns and the Revival of the East Roman Empire, 622–630", *War in History* 6.1 (1999), pp. 1–44.

39. The date of the marriage (in any case before 624, cf. *Chronicon Paschale* 713–14 Dindorf) is not clear, because of the contradictory testimonies of Theophanes Confessor (*Chronographia*, AM 6105 p. 300 de Boor, i.e. between 614–616) and Nikephoros (*Chronographia* p. 105 de Boor, and *Breviarium historicum* p. 14 de Boor, in 623/624), and because of the ambiguity of the coins representing an *Augusta*: cf. C. Zuckermann, "La petite Augusta et le Turc. Epiphania-Eudocie sur les monnaies d'Héraclius", *RN* 150 (1995), pp. 113–26; P. Speck, "Epiphania et Martine sur les monnaies d'Héraclius", *RN* 152 (1997), pp. 457–65; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses* (London, 1999), pp. 61–72; A. McClanahan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (New York, 2002), pp. 144–46. If our interpretation of the plate is right, it confirms a marriage ca. 623–624, before the Persian expedition, which fits also the birth dates of the first children.

40. For Heracles: George of Pisidia, *Persian Expedition* III.353–54; *On Bonus the Patrician* IV.1; *War with the Avars* 56–57; *Heraklias* I.65–79. For other assimilations and comparisons: *Heraklias* I.15–16 (Daniel); 84–92 (Noe); *Heraklias* II.13–18 (Perseus); *Heraklias* III fr. 1 (Achilles); *Persian Expedition* III.452–54 (Odysseus): cf. M. Whitby, "A New Image for a New Age: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius", in E. Dąbrowa, ed., *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East: Proceedings of a Colloquium Held at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków in September 1992* (Krakow, 1994), pp. 197–225, and "George of Pisidia's Presentation of the Emperor Heraclius and His Campaigns: Variety and Development", in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–614): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (Leuven, 2002), pp. 157–73. For the supposed assimilation to Job, see Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, pp. 35–36.

41. A similar suggestion could be made for another biblical hero with whom Heraclius could have been compared: the king Joshua, on the basis of the famous Joshua roll—a remarkably illustrated manuscript dating back to the 10th century, whose archetype could

have been created on the occasion of Heraclius' victory over the Persians: see S. H. Wander, *The Joshua Roll* (Wiesbaden, 2012).

42. S. C. R. Swain, "A Note on *Iliad* 9.524–599: The Story of Meleager", *CQ* 38 (1988), pp. 271–76; J. Burgess, "The Tale of Meleager in the *Iliad*", *Oral Tradition* 31.1 (2017), pp. 5–76. More generally, see M. C. van der Kolf, "Meleagros", *RE* 15.1 (1931), pp. 446–78; *LIMC*, s.v. "Meleagros"; now P. Grossardt, *Die Erzählung von Meleagros zur literarischen Entwicklung der kalydonischen Kultlegende* (Leiden, 2001).

43. For Philip's tomb, M. Andronikos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and the Ancient City* (Athens, 1984); B. Tripodi, "Il fregio della caccia della tomba reale di Vergina e le cacce funerarie d'oriente", *DHA* 17 (1991), pp. 143–209; L. C. Reilly, "The Hunting Frieze from Vergina", *JHS* 113 (1993), pp. 160–62; cf. also W. S. Greenwalt, "The Iconographical Significance of Amyntas III's Mounted Hunter Stater", *Ancient Macedonia* 5 (1989), pp. 509–19; P. Briant, "Chasses royales macédoniennes et chasses royales perses", *DHA* 17 (1991), pp. 211–56. For the so-called Alexander's sarcophagus, see e.g. I. Kleemann, *Der Satrapensarkophag aus Sidon* (Berlin, 1958); K. Schefold, *Der Alexander-Sarkophag* (Frankfurt, 1968); V. von Graeve, *Der Alexandersarkophag und ihre Werkstatt* (Berlin, 1970). More generally, M. Seyer, *Der Herrscher als Jäger: Untersuchungen zur königlichen Jagd im persischen und makedonischen Reich vom 6.-4. Jahrhundert v. Chr. sowie unter den Diadochen Alexanders des Großen* (Wien, 2007). For the reality of the hunt, B. Tripodi, *Cacce reali macedoni tra Alessandro I e Filippo V* (Messina, 1998).

44. B. Schrodt, "Sports of the Byzantine Empire", *Journal of Sport History* 8.3 (1981), pp. 40–59.

45. G. Brett, "The Mosaic of the Great Palace in Constantinople", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), pp. 34–43; E. Yücel, *The Great Palace: Mosaic Museum* (Istanbul, 1987); W. Jobst, "Der Kaiserpalast von Konstantinopel und seine Mosaiken", *AntW* 18.3 (1995), pp. 2–22; Mango, "Imperial Art in the Seventh Century". J. Trilling, "The Soul of the Empire: Style and Meaning in the Mosaic Pavement of the Byzantine Imperial Palace in Constantinople", *DOP* 43 (1989), pp. 27–72, dates it to the time of Heraclius I. For a more general discussion of hunting scenes in the private sphere, I. Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and Their Sources", pp. 179–286; S. P. Ellis, "Power, Architecture, and Decor: How the Late Roman Aristocrat Appeared to His Guests", in *Roman Art in the Private Sphere: New Perspectives on the Architecture and Decor of the Domus, Villa, and Insula*, ed. E. K. Gazda and A. E. Haeckl (Ann Arbor, 1994), pp. 117–34; M. Nassar, "The Art of Decorative Mosaics (Hunting Scenes) from Madaba Area during Byzantine Period (5th–6th c. AD)", *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 13.1 (2013), pp. 67–76. In general, for the Byzantine emperor as hunter, see A. Grabar,

L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin: Recherches sur l'art officiel de l'Empire d'Orient (Paris, 1936), pp. 57–62. For the evidence on silk even during iconoclasm, L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680-850): The Sources. An Annotated Survey* (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 88, 91–102.

46. For the Sassanian royal hunt, see Harper and Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period 1. Royal Imagery, passim*. During Heraclius' time, Chosroes II represented himself in a hunting scene on the monumental relief of Tāq-e Bostān: cf. J. Howard-Johnston, "Kosrow II", *EIr* (2000) online <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khosrow-ii>.

47. P. Bernard, "Les origines thessaliennes de l'Arménie vues par deux historiens thessaliens de la génération d'Alexandre", *Topoi Suppl.* 1 (1997), pp. 131–216.

48. Nikephoros, *Breviarium historicum* 23 de Boor.

49. Nikephoros, *Breviarium historicum* 9 de Boor.

50. Cf. B. Spooner, "Iranian Kinship and Marriage", *Iran* 4 (1966), pp. 51–59; J. M. Bigwood, "Incestuous Marriage in Achaemenid Iran: Myths and Realities", *Klio* 91.2 (2009), pp. 311–41; P. J. Frandsen, *Incestuous and Close-kin Marriage in Ancient Egypt and Persia: An Examination of the Evidence* (Copenhagen, 2009); P. Thonemann, "Close-kin marriage in Roman Anatolia", *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 63 (2017), pp. 143–66.

51. Movses Dasxurants'i, *History of the Aghuans* 2.10, p. 59 [English trans. R. Bedrosian]: "Although [that general's] real name was Xor'ean, [Xosrov, because of his success] began to call him by various fancy names, now R'ozmi-Ozan and now Shah(r)-Varaz, on account of the advances, attacks, and victories won by Persian cunning". His origins and carrier remain debated: see C. Mango, "Deux études sur Byzance et la Perse sassanide, II. Héraclius, Šahrvaraz et la Vraie Croix", *TM* 9 (1985), pp. 105–18; W. E. Kaegi and P. M. Cobb, "Heraclius, Šahrbarāz, and al-Ṭabarī", in *Al-Ṭabarī: A Medieval Muslim Historian and His Work*, ed. H. Kennedy (Princeton, 2002), pp. 27–42; P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederation and the Arab Conquest of Iran* (London, 2008), pp. 142–46; *contra*, J. Banaji, "On the Identity of Šahrālānyōzān in the Greek and Middle Persian Papyri from Egypt", in *Documents and the History of the Early Islamic World*, ed. A. T. Schubert and P. M. Sijpesteijn (Leiden, 2015), pp. 27–42, proposed his identification with Šahrālānyōzān, but his position remains isolated. For a Sassanian silver dish probably made by Šahrwarāz's propaganda after the conquest of Egypt, see S. Azarnouche, H. Fragaki and F. Grenet, "De l'Égypte à la Perse: un plat sassanide du VII^e siècle", *Études Alexandrines* (forthcoming).

52. G. Gnoli and P. Jamzadeh, "Bahrām (Vərəθraγna)", *EIr* III/5 (1988), pp. 510–14, online <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bahram-1>.

53. W. E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003).

54. For the boar in the Sassanian iconography, see now the Ph.D. thesis of D. Poinso, *Le répertoire des animaux dans les sceaux et les bulles sassanides, structure et interprétation*, Paris EPHE, 2019, *passim* ("sanglier" and "*sus scrofa*"). For the Armenian boar, N. G. Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk)* (Harvard, 1989). I am grateful to F. Grenet for this suggestion and references and to D. Poinso for the ms. of her Ph.D.

55. R. Edwards, "Hunting for Boars with Pliny and Tacitus", *CIAnt* 27.1 (2008), pp. 35–58; E. Manolaraki, "Imperial and Rhetorical Hunting in Pliny's *Panegyricus*", *ICS* 37 (2012), pp. 175–98.

56. Flavius Vopiscus Syracusanus, *Historia Augusta: The Lives of Carus, Carinus and Numerian* 12–16.

57. A. Papagiannaki, "Imperial Portraiture and the Minor Arts in the Era of Constantine the Great", in *Saint Emperor Constantine and Christianity II. International Conference Commemorating the 1700th Anniversary of the Edict of Milan, 31 May - 2 June 2013*, ed. Dragiša Bojović (Niš, 2013), pp. 479–91 (p. 482).

58. I am grateful to Frantz Grenet, who suggested to me this interpretation of the slain lamb as *Agnus Dei*.

59. J.-P. Mahé, "Philologie et historiographie du Caucase chrétien", *Livret-Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études. Section des sciences historiques et philologiques* 20.2004–2005 (2006), pp. 54–63.

60. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.526–546; Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 14.70–71 655C; Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses* 2 (μελεαγρίδες).

61. Cf. J. Stern, "The Imagery of Bacchylides' *Ode* 5", *GRBS* 8 (1967), pp. 35–43.

62. See e.g. G. Koch, "Verschollene Meleagersarkophage", *AA* (1973), pp. 287–93; G. Koch, *Die mythologischen Sarkophage 6. Meleager* (Berlin, 1975); G. Koch, "Nachlese zu den Meleagersarkophagen", *AA* (1975), pp. 530–52; E. D'Ambra, "A Myth for a Smith: A Meleager Sarcophagus from a Tomb in Ostia", *AJA* 92.1 (1988), pp. 85–99; K. G. Lorenz, "Image in Distress? The Death of Meleager on Roman Sarcophagi", in *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, ed. J. Huskinson and J. Elsner (Berlin, 2011), pp. 305–32; F. Baratte, "La chasse dans l'iconographie des sarcophages: Signe social ou valeur funéraire?", in Trinquier and Vendries, eds., *Chasses antiques*, pp. 53–64.

63. For a different interpretation of Suetonius' scene, see J. P. Hallett, "Morigerari: Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 44", *AC* 47.1 (1978), pp. 196–200.

64. Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, pp. 174–75.

65. Cf. N. Serwint, "The Female Athletic Costume at the Heraia and Prenuptial Initiation Rites", *AJA* 97.3 (1993), pp. 403–22.

66. For the term, see the volume edited by L. Foxhall, H.-J. Gehrke, N. Luraghi, *Intentional History. Spinning Time in Ancient Greece* (Stuttgart, 2010).

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