

The Late Antique *Kosmos* of Power: International Ornament and Royal Identity in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries.

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Art historians have long commented on the formal parallels between sixth and seventh century Byzantine and Sasanian ornamental material with select recent studies refining our knowledge of these parallels.¹ However, the unique role that they played in the two realms' interaction has requires special attention, and shall be the focus of this paper. In this study I consider the role that the ornamental motifs which embellished Roman and Sasanian palaces, sacred architecture, royal monuments luxury objects and court-costumes played in defining royal identity. Here I investigate what motivated the two realms to appropriate each other's ornamental material and examine the extent to which there emerged an 'international' visual language of kingship between the two empires in which they both participated yet can be located entirely in neither. As I hope will become evident, in order to understand foreign ornamental material between late Roman and Sasanian visual cultures in the politically and ideologically charged imperial sphere, it is most productive to approach ornament as a social, political and economic artifact.²

¹ M. Canepa, "The Two Eyes of the Earth" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2004); E. Russo, "La scultura di S. Polieucto e la presenza della Persia nella cultura artistica di Costantinopoli nel VI secolo," in *Convengo internazionale La Persia e Bisanzio (Roma: 14-18 ottobre 2002)* Atti dei Convengi Lincei 201 (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2004), 737-826.

² For an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of Roman-Sasanian interaction and the theoretical and cultural context of these exchanges, see my forthcoming project: M. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Competition and Exchange in the Art and Ritual of*

Given the Sasanian and Roman Empire's four hundred years of interaction the fact that their visual cultures' would bear marks of this contact should, perhaps, not be unexpected. However, where these parallels emerge is particularly telling: almost exclusively in material sponsored by and intended for those at the apex of the social hierarchy. Aristocratically- and, especially, royally-sponsored art and architecture in particular provides the bulk of the prominent examples in both realms including such prominent sites as Galerius' Palace in Thessaloniki, the Churches of H. Polyeuktos, Saints Sergius and Bacchus and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Šāpūr I's palace and rock reliefs at Bīšāpūr, the Ayvān-e Kesrā in Ctesiphon and Kōsrow II's foundations at Tāq-e Bostān and Bīsotūn. All these sites firmly integrated this, originally, foreign material into the larger fabric of Roman and Sasanian visual, architectonic and ritual culture suggesting that the patrons put a great deal of thought into the process and overall message of the appropriation. It also suggests that this phenomenon of 'international ornament' was an important tool in the Roman and Sasanian sovereign's ideological and rhetorical arsenal.

The phenomenon of ornamental appropriation did not unfold according to a linear progression. Rather, the evidence occurs in several bursts, largely connected with the activities and aspirations of individual aristocrats and sovereigns. The first grouping of evidence comes largely from third century Sasanian architectural material with limited examples from the sumptuary arts. Šāpūr I's palace and rock reliefs at Bīšāpūr present the majority of the evidence, with some limited ornamental motifs in Galerius'

Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran Transformation of the Classical Heritage (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

mausoleum, however as a phenomenon, this early cross-cultural movement of visual material was limited in scope and appears to be only as long-lived as the events and the sovereign that directly encouraged their manifestation. The sixth and seventh centuries present a much different picture where ornament takes on a new, more important- and complicated- role. As a result of the normalized, even ritualized, relations that grew between Constantinople and Ctesiphon, we can begin to speak of something approaching a common visual aristocratic culture that involved the aristocracies of both cultures. The amount, prominence and persistence of shared motifs in the sixth and seventh centuries dwarfs what came before and suggests a greater depth in the cultural conversation.

The emperors' motives and worldviews that drove the process were strictly interested in prestige, distinction, and most importantly, the projection of power.³ In this study I argue that one of the most important vocations of ornament in late antique Roman and Sasanian art, alongside fulfilling other more formal functions, like frame, fill and link or just pleasurably embellish a space, was its power to communicate political messages and articulate identities. While Oleg Grabar defined ornament as a “necessary manner of compelling a relationship between objects or works of art and viewers and users”, I concentrate on how ornament defined the patron's, as well as the viewer's, relationship with the structure or object with respect to their royal identity or social place.⁴ The practice of appropriating the other culture's ornamental material, like the two courts' appropriations of their ritual and ideological material, was a tool define the sovereigns' relational identities and situate him in a larger cosmos of power. While attributes of royal

³ Ibid.

⁴ Grabar 1992, p. 230.

representation such as the nimbus or red footwear consisted mostly of recognizable figural components and could communicate a relatively direct and clear message to the viewer, ornament played a special role due to its relative abstraction and open-ended semiotic and symbolic possibilities and provided a level of allusion and flexibility that highly defined and even legislated imperial iconographies did not.⁵

As the uneven distribution of the material suggests, the processes and practices by which these motifs moved between cultures were not uniform. In some cases they were directly connected with craftsmen, who traveled between the courts voluntarily or were captured in one of the many wars. The Bīšāpūr mosaics are the best example of this, where Roman craftsmen working in a Roman medium produced largely traditional ornamental material in a Sasanian palace. In some cases the two realms' diplomatic exchange had a direct impact on this phenomenon of international ornament. The best documented example is the occurrence of late-Roman marble and mosaic work in Kosrow I's Ayyān-e Kesrā which resulted from one of Justinian's diplomatic gifts. Theophylact Simocatta records that, "Justinian provided Chosroes son of Kabadēs with Greek marble, building experts, and craftsmen skilled in ceilings, and that a palace situated close to Ctesiphon was constructed for Chosroes with Roman expertise."⁶ However, many cases did not follow this model of simple transfers of motifs with craftsmen. In many cases, especially in the Roman material, craftsmen took foreign

⁵ See M. Canepa, "The Diadem, Nimbus, Red Footwear and the Veil: Insignia and Court Practice as Cross-Cultural Mediators between Rome and Sasanian Iran," *Sixth Biennial Conference on Iranian Studies*, London Aug. 3-5, 2006.

⁶ Theoph. Simok. 5.6.10, trans. Whitby, 240; there is no reason to doubt the basic veracity of this passage, though perhaps its scope.

motifs normally present in one medium and incorporated them into an entirely different medium and context. The Roman craftsmen who incorporated Sasanian textile and stucco ornament into the marble architectural ornament of H. Polyeuktos or the mosaics of Justinian I's Hagia Sophia provide a ready example for this phenomenon.

While images of Romans or Sasanians performing obeisance or motifs such as the royal hunter consisted of recognizable figural components and could communicate a relatively direct and clear message to the viewer, ornament played a special role due to its relative abstraction and open-ended semiotic and symbolic possibilities. Ornamental material, like the two courts' ritual and ideological material, could be a tool define the sovereigns' relational identities and situate him in a larger cosmos of power. Because of this, the two sovereigns did not hesitate to appropriate and incorporate each other's ornamental motifs into their own structures and images. This provided a level of allusion and flexibility that these other traditions of competitive triumphal imagery did not. In a forthcoming study I examine this phenomenon as it initially emerged in Šāpūr I's foundations and remark on its limited occurrence.⁷ In the sixth century the phenomenon reemerged, though with several noticeable differences. While Roman ornamental material occurred alongside more traditional Sasanian ornamental material at Bīšāpūr, and in the case of the stuccowork, even translated into traditional media, in the sixth century this process of integration intensified. Foreign motifs occurred in some of the most important structures and monuments closely integrated with traditional motifs and media.

⁷ Canepa, *Two Eyes of the Earth*.

Evidence of ornamental appropriation occurs on several different objects and structures that were important for expressing the sovereigns' power. There were many similarities in the colors and patterns of the textiles that the emperors wore and these features of Sasanian and Roman royal clothing played a uniquely powerful role part in defining power and kingship cross-culturally. The majority of the evidence of ornamental appropriation in architecture comes from the Roman empire during this period with the churches of Hagios Polyuktos and Hagia Sophia providing the bulk of the evidence, although limited available evidence from Ctesiphon, Bīsotūn and Ṭāq-e Bostān suggest that it occurred in Iran as well. This may just be an accident of survival or excavation, considering how much of Sasanian sacral and palatial material has been lost or improperly excavated, however with respect to the history of late-Roman/Byzantine art, this flowering of 'Sasanizing' ornament was certainly a dominant and largely unprecedented feature of the age of Justinian, with many effects on later developments. This subject could support a full-length study of its own to deal in depth with the practical modes of exchange and the impact of these motifs on later Byzantine ornament, and here I will consider the phenomenon's significance in the broader sense of Roman-Sasanian competitive interaction and royal identity formation.

Several conversations were at play in this process of ornamental appropriation. First of all, the conversation between the empires, namely between the Roman and Sasanian sovereigns themselves, shaped both the nature of the appropriation and several possible meanings the material took on in its new home. In this way, structures such as Hagios Polyuktos, Hagia Sophia and the Ayvān-e Kēsrā were rhetorical statements meant to make an impact and situate the patron within the cosmos of power. The two

sovereigns also interacted with foreign ornamental material in order to situate themselves with respect to larger aristocratic common-cultures that were developing across Eurasia. The popularity of Central Asian silk and its ornamental motifs clearly illustrates this. One must also take into account the role that ornament played in the conversations which took place within the two empires, that is between the sovereign and the upper echelon of the aristocracy. For example, early and mid sixth century Constantinople witnessed a heavily contested political environment where several new and old dynastic lines strove to assert or establish their legitimacy. The use of certain ornamental motifs were a subtle way to make imperial claims.

The first case that I deal with, the church of Hagios Polyeuktos, lay at the intersection of such a multiple conversation and it is my contention that its ornamental program was an important aspect in the overall polemical statement of the church's patroness, Anicia Juliana. Despite the fragmentary state of H. Polyeuktos' architectural remains, three important aspects of its ornament have impressed many who have studied any of its scattered members: the abundant wealth and skill lavished on the architectural sculpture, its ornamental program's utter novelty within the late-Roman and Constantinopolitan architectural tradition of large portions its compelling similarities to ornamental traditions on structures built in Sasanian Iran. The problem of H. Polyeuktos' unique ornament and its similarities to Sasanian visual material have intrigued scholars for a century now yet the topic has never received the attention of a study that went beyond marking formal parallels to analyze the meaning of their employment and socio-political implications.⁸ The field of late Roman/Byzantine art history is only beginning to

fully integrate this structure and its ornament into its narrative.⁹ At times, its very existence seems to be a silent embarrassment to, or even negation of, several of the field's basic assumptions about cultural influence and the development and function of ornament, problems which it has not reexamined for some time.

The remains of H. Polyeuktos, though fragmentary, still evoke the richness of the actual structure. The church's architectural ornament contains motifs that unquestionably derive from traditional Roman visual culture such as grapevines, urns peacocks and stylized acanthus leaves.¹⁰ However, a profusion of symmetrical and semi-vegetal geometric material appears alongside these more traditional motifs which parallel Sasanian material. It would take an extended study to catalogue the forms that make up these motifs, however from an overview there are vegetal motifs that resemble late-Byzantine acanthus but appear in symmetrical and geometric arrangements. Along the

⁸ Erdman 1950, 508-534. C. Mango, "Storia del arte," in *La Civiltà Bizantina dal IV al IX secolo* Università degli studi di Bari Centro di Studi Bizantini, Corso di Studi, I, 1976 (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1977), pp. 319-21. idem, Review: "Harrison, Temple for Byzantium," in *JRS* 81 (1991): 237-238. C. Strübe, *Polyeuktoskirche und Hagia Sophia: Umbildung un Auflösung antiker Formen, Entstehen des Kampferkapitells*, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Abhandlungen, n.s., no. 92 (Munich: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984). E. Russo, "La scultura di S. Polieucto e la presenza della Persia nella cultura artistica di Costantinopoli nel VI secolo," paper presented at the conference 'La Persia e Bisanzio', Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, Rome, 14 - 18 Oct. 2002. [conference volume not available at time of deposit]

⁹ What I believe will be the landmark study: Russo 2004.

¹⁰ For the peacocks in particular: J.-P. Sodini, "Les paons d Saint-Polyeucte et leurs modèles," in eds. I. Ševčenko and I. Hutter, *AETOS. Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango Presented to him on April 14, 1998* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1998), 306-313.

cornice of many of the fragments appear motifs that parallel the Sasanian material more closely such as running ‘pomegranate’ and palmette motifs.

A small portion of this ornamental material finds parallels in Sasanian silks, however, for most of it preceding and contemporary Sasanian stuccowork provides the closest precursors for this material, as well as the architectural ornament at Ṭāq-e Bostān. These motifs’ practical mode of entry into St. Polyeuktos’ stone mason workshops and late-Roman visual culture is not clear, although most previous studies have suggested textiles and the minor arts. It is possible that textiles would provide enough visual information for these elaborate reliefs and minor arts could have provided useful three-dimensional precursors. Some motifs, such as the running palmette and pomegranate friezes articulate space on the St. Polyeuktos fragments in much the same way as they do on Sasanian structures. Other motifs, such as the symmetrical vegetal and geometric motifs do not find any close parallels in application like they do in form, other than matching the general tendency of Sasanian ornament to cover the surface of an architectural member. Considering the strong parallels between the church’s and Sasanian architectural ornament, the possibility that stonemasons or stucco-workers trained in Iran worked on this structure should not be discounted either.

The problem of H. Polyeuktos’ unique ornament and its similarities to Sasanian visual material has intrigued scholars for a century now yet the motivations of the structure’s patron to include the ornament in the structure and its socio-political implications remain largely unstudied. In order to explain these foreign impositions into the Byzantine visual realm, many earlier responses to H. Polyeuktos followed Strzygowski’s theories even though they were rooted in his ideas of the degeneration of

late Roman art due to ‘oriental’ influence.¹¹ Following Strzygowski, previous scholarship relegated the forms that did not fit into their idea of cultural evolution to the status of anomalies passively filtered into late Roman art through Antioch. While these previous conjectures that silk or the minor arts might have provided the mode of transfer for the Sasanian material are sound enough, the understanding that this transfer and integration occurred passively is not.¹² Since older scholarship understood ornamental traditions as capable of developing within their own ‘genetic pool’ they took the fact that H. Polyektos’ ornament came from outside the genealogy of late Roman ornamental logic as aberrant. Because of this, previous studies looked to modes of transmission which assume that the patron neither understood the nature of the ornament nor had a motive which would account for the patron’s active appropriation. Cyril Mango’s 1977 essay is noteworthy in that it was, for a long time, the only attempt to provide an interpretation of the Sasanian material’s function. In it he made the important observation that the appearance of these motifs is confined only to the highest aristocracy and upper circles of the imperial hierarchy.¹³

H. Polyektos’ architectural ornament is unique when compared to the larger development of Roman architecture- including in eastern regions such as Syria. The fact

¹¹ J. Elsner characterizes this combination of Riegl’s and Strzygowski’s approaches as, “style art history without conviction,” with respect to Kitzinger. J. Elsner, “The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901,” in *Art History* 25, no. 3 (2002): 375.

¹² Whereas Grabar, Deichman and Harrison adhered to Strzygowski’s and Diehl’s original assumption that H. Polyektos’ craftsmen absorbed the motifs piecemeal from a sundry collection of moveable sumptuary objects, Strube looked to actual Sasanian architectural ornament; Diehl, 49; Grabar 1963, 64; Deichmann, 88; Harrison 1989; 122; Strube 1984, 63-74.

¹³ Mango 1977, p. 321.

that this Sasanian ornament would appear seemingly out of the blue in the capital rather than in one of the provinces in closer contact with the Sasanian empire suggests that it stemmed from the will and tastes of its patron rather than any ‘organic development’ or passive absorption. In order to understand her motives and overall statement, we must examine her background and the domestic and international political milieu when she built the church. Previous studies have mentioned the impressive imperial lineage and pretensions of H. Polyeuktos’ patroness but certain aspects bear discussing here.¹⁴ Anicia Juliana was born in Constantinople ca. 462/3, the daughter of Flavius Anicius Olybrius, emperor of the west for eight months in 472, and of Placidia, the daughter of Valentinian III.¹⁵ She was the great-granddaughter of Eudocia and Theodosius II and thus descended from Theodosius I.¹⁶ She remained in Constantinople when her father took up his office in Italy and appeared to have lived the majority of her life in the metropolis.¹⁷ The emperor Zeno offered Juliana to Theodoric (479), a marriage that did not take place,

¹⁴ C. Capizzi, “Anicia Giuliana (462 ca - 530 ca): ricerche sulla sua famiglia e la sua vita,” *Rivista di Studi bizantini e neoellenici* 15, no. 5 (1968), pp. 191-226. Mango 1977, 319. M. Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: the Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana’s Palace-Church in Istanbul* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 36-41. G. Fowden, “Constantine, Silvester and the Church of S. Polyeuktos in Constantinople,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 7 (1994), pp. 274-284; C. Milner, “Image of the Rightful Ruler,” in P. Magdalino, ed., *New Constantines* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), 73-92. C.L. Connor, “The Epigram in the Church of Hagios Polyeuktos in Constantinople and its Byzantine Response,” in *Byzantion* 69, no. 2 (1999): 479-527. L. Brubaker, “The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana,” in A. Littlewood, H. Maguire, and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn, eds., *Byzantine Garden Culture* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 189-214. B. Kiilerich, “The Image of Anicia Juliana in the Vienna Dioscurides: Flattery or Appropriation of Imperial Imagery?” in *Symbolae Osloenses* 76 (2001): 169-190.

¹⁵ *PLRE*, 2:635-636.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

however later she married Flavius Areobindus Dagalaiphus, a Romanized Goth who held several offices including *Magister Militum per Orientem* (503-504/5) and consul (506).¹⁸ Several studies have pointed out the offense the events of 512 might have caused to her sense of entitlement and even sanity.¹⁹ In 512 the orthodox population of the Constantinople, in revolt against the Monophysite Anastasius, tried to acclaim Areobindus as emperor, a challenge from which he fled. After Anastasius' death the palace guard acclaimed Justin, passing over Juliana's son Olybrius.

While most scholars would grant that an ostentatious display of wealth and lineage was at least an end in and of itself for Anicia Juliana, agreement on the precise polemical message intended by this enormous project and how she expected the visual and textual elements to communicate it remains elusive. Several scholars have offered interpretations of the entire project but, in my view, have often unnecessarily championed one aspect of H. Polyeuktos' rich content as the structure's primary message and have attempted to subordinate all other elements to one aspect.²⁰ The theories that revolve

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

¹⁹ Harrison 1989, pp. 36-41. Mango 1977, p. 472. Küllerich 2001, *passim*.

²⁰ In the few works that have taken up the problem of the structure's polemics, the interpretation of H. Polyeuktos as an Old Testament temple has been the most popular though it is not widely accepted. H. Polyeuktos' excavator, Martin Harrison, at first dismissed the possibility that the church might have any clear religious or political statement. M. Harrison, *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul*, p. 417; Fowden 1994, 274. However, in his later publications Harrison argued that Anicia Juliana intended St. Polyeuktos to evoke the temple of Solomon and that, "Her motive would have been to demonstrate her royal pretensions: for Solomon was the most kingly of kings and he had been crowned by Zadok the priest." Harrison 1989, 139; *idem*, "The Church of St. Polyeuktos in Istanbul and the Temple of Solomon", in *Okeanos: Studies presented to Ihor Sevcenko* Harvard Ukrainian Studies 7 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 76-79. In 1993 Christine Milner expanded and modified this biblical view and proposed that Anicia Juliana sought to create Ezekiel's heavenly temple with H. Polyeuktos, and argued that Anicia Juliana attempted to, "not only materialize, but also

around the temple of Jerusalem are just one extreme of this line of interpretation. In contrast, I understand that the patrons of sixth century structures like H. Polyeuktos, and H. Sophia utilized a number of allusive options and expected these structures visual, architectural and textual motifs could suggest multiple messages. It is precisely for its allusive qualities that visual material could convey ideas that a patron could not express openly in order to provide a commentary on those elements that inscribed or recited texts stated more explicitly. This is important to keep in mind in order to correctly interpret the intention both of H. Polyeuktos' patroness and the role of the individual elements in

appropriate, the great abstract ideal temple of early Christian theology.” She attempted to prove a thematic connection between the temple of Ezekiel’s baptismal connotations and H. Polyeuktos’ mosaic of the baptism of Constantine, as described in an ekphrastic turn of the church’s inscription, a connection which is possible but not exclusive or fundamental to the structure. Milner 1993, p. 81-82. This strain of discourse, which some have tried to apply to the church of Hagia Sophia too, as well as Byzantine kingship in general, assumes that biblical prototypes provided the most attractive structural and ideological models for late antique aristocrats in the same way they did for Medieval Byzantine grandees. However those who take this line of interpretation too far 1) risk serious anachronism by retrojecting Medieval exegetical thought and popular traditions onto late antiquity and 2) ignore the plurality of allusions, that were available and useful to the late antique patron without necessarily requiring exclusive adherence to any prototypes biblical or otherwise. Furthermore, this approach overly privileges textual evidence over the other modes of expression that conveyed meaning, namely that of the visual realm. G. Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre: Étude sur le ‘Césaropapisme’ byzantine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 20. Garth Fowden, in his 1994 article concentrated on how the Constantinian baptismal mosaic commented on historical events that Anicia Juliana had some hand in bringing to pass, namely a doctrinal rapprochement between the emperor Justin and the papacy in 519. In this article, Fowden exhibits a more even approach to H. Polyeuktos’ multiple messages. He characterizes H. Polyeuktos as a monument to Roman prestige in the east, both culturally, in terms of the traditions of the Old Rome of the *gens* Anicia’s illustrious past, and religiously as a monument to the Chalcedonian orthodoxy that Juliana and the Roman papacy succeeded in reestablishing in Constantinople. In terms of the Solomonic allusions (which he accepted as more likely than that of Ezekiel), Fowden stated that though, “a few *cognoscenti* may have recognized that it was a Solomonic temple too, its connections with Rome were probably more widely perceived and appreciated than its echoes of Jerusalem.” He remarked that, “comparisons with Solomon’s temple were apt anyway to boomerang in the Christian context.” Fowden, pp. 281-282, and n. 50.

the church. Thus, rather than reconstructing the temple of Jerusalem, either Solomon's or Ezekiel's version, H. Polyuktos' main purpose was to situate Anicia Juliana as partaking in and controlling several traditions of kingship including Biblical, Roman and Sasanian traditions of royalty.

Fundamentally H. Polyuktos was Anicia Juliana's statement about her connection to the imperial office. Along with the many biblical and imperial allusions, which spoke to her spiritual and ancestral fitness to rule, the Sasanian ornamental material asserted that her family history and personal taste gave her claim to sovereignty in a contemporary and truly international sense. Taken as a whole the church celebrated her life experiences and accomplishments (such as championing Chalcedonian orthodoxy or her husband's military service) and especially her royal lineage and thwarted imperial prerogatives. Along with its massive size and richness, its content challenged the nascent Justinianic regime. The church itself functioned as a potent polemical statement, in so far as it was answered by Justinian with Hagia Sophia. Like the Constantinian and biblical allusions, Anicia Juliana's innovative use of ornamental themes appropriated from the Sasanian royal architectural repertoire was an important component of her program.

The Sasanian motifs performed several vocations in the context of an international visual culture of royalty. Within the Roman empire, the motifs alluded to wealth, refinement and cross-cultural political savvy of the sort only one of imperial background would have. If we look at the situations and objects by which individuals of Anicia Juliana's social class came into contact with Sasanian material the symbolic potential of the motifs become clearer. These would be with diplomatic gifts, silk, war booty and possibly reports from the envoys about the Sasanian palaces. As a princess

Anicia Juliana would have been at least aware of the type of material that originated from the diplomatic exchanges and would certainly have been an avid consumer of silk of the sort that the the San Vitale presbytery mosaic illustrates. With their connection to wealth and as a symbol of power of the rival empire, these motifs served as a tool to situate herself as participating and dominating contemporary visual and symbolic markers of royalty. In addition, they functioned as a symbolic display of the spoils of war akin to Šāpūr I's productions at Bīšāpūr. The fact that her husband was hailed as conquering hero suggests that Anicia Juliana came into contact with these ornamental motifs in the context of victory, from the booty that Joshua the Stylite reports that Areobindus took in Persarmenia. A leaf of one of his consular diptychs also carries this type of 'Sasanizing' ornament suggesting that it functioned as sort of 'family visual culture' for Areobindus and Anicia Juliana.

Justinian's churches of Sergius and Bacchus and Hagia Sophia need less introduction and historiographical commentary as they have lain at the center of late-Roman and Byzantine scholarship for some time now. Like H. Polyeuktos, Justinian's foundations participated in multiple conversations. With regards to inter-aristocratic rivalry Saints Sergius and Bacchus was a statement of Justinian's early aristocratic confidence. In one sense Hagia Sophia responded to Anicia Juliana's challenges by reclaiming the status of city's largest and richest structure for the emperor. However, since Hagia Sophia was an imperial foundation and the dominant structure of the city, like many aspects of Constantinople's cityscape it certainly contributed to Roman and Sasanian competitive interaction, and spoke to Justinian's understanding of himself as a sovereign in global context. Sasanian ornamental motifs inflect several aspects of the

structures. As Strube concluded, Hagia Sophia's column capitals integrate H. Polyeuktos' rather raw appropriation of Sasanian motifs in a more uniform way. Their surface-oriented, spiky acanthus occurs in symmetrical patterns reminiscent of the Sasanian palmette, however it was possible that this resulted from an engagement with the architectural ornament of H. Polyeuktos rather than another direct appropriation of Sasanian material.

In contrast to its ornamental carving, Hagia Sophia's original non-figural mosaics contain a great volume of Sasanian ornament and suggest a direct and sustained engagement and appropriation of Sasanian material. Modern scholarship has largely ignored Justinian's non-figural mosaics and, with the exception of Cyril Mango's 1977 lecture, no study has analyzed their content and significance, despite the fact that H. Sophia presents Byzantium's largest mosaiced surface- nearly 2,300 square meters.²¹ Mosaics originally covered Hagia Sophia's dome and vaults. Multicolored ornamental material on a gold ground articulated the groin vaults of the structure's inner narthex and upper and lower side aisles and edges of the nave's arches and dome. A good portion of the mosaic has been destroyed in the intervening centuries. The narthexes and side aisles have the largest preserved sections though the nave also maintains several sections as well. It is outside the scope of this project to thoroughly describe the mosaics and here I will only analyze select representative examples. Taken as a whole, the Hagia Sophia's mosaic ornament frames Sasanian ornamental motifs with more traditional Roman geometric ornament. In the narthex and the side aisles, Sasanian ornamental motifs appear in four triangular sections of the groin vault framed by more traditional geometric

²¹ Mango 1977, 320-21.

ornament. These Sasanian motifs also occur in the side aisle's small intermediate arches. Sasanian palmettes and lozenges originally embellished the edges of nave's great tympana, pendentives and dome, again bordered with more traditional geometric material.

Geometrical forms consisting of a sixteen sided star with a rosette at its center adorn the center of each section of the groin vault in the narthex mosaics. Stylized wings or a striped oval extend off of each point. The side aisles carry a somewhat different ornamental motif. These consist of four ovals with stylized wings extending off of the four sides of a composite square geometric pattern. At each of the square's four corners smaller palmettes fill the space created by the wings. Both of these ornamental motifs contain elements that are extremely common in Sasanian visual culture and some of the elements, such as the stylized oval and wing composite, have specifically royal connotations. The great tympanum carried simpler ornamental material consisting of alternating palmette and pomegranate or lozenge motifs. Sasanian ornament occurs on several non-mosaic surfaces of Hagia Sophia as well. The wooden support beams in the gallery, which have been radiocarbon dated to the sixth century, offer ornamental carving with many ready parallels both to the mosaics and Sasanian stuccowork.²² On some surfaces, these wooden buttresses carry palmettes and four-sided geometrical motifs in medallions similar to those in the narthex mosaics. Lozenge or 'spade' motifs similar to the tympanum mosaics fill the interstitial spaces. On others, alternating variations of simple, symmetrical, 'rampant' palmette motifs cover the surface, again reflecting

²² C.D. Sheppard, "A Radiocarbon Date for the Wooden Tie Beams in the West Gallery of St. Sophia, Istanbul," *DOP* (1965): 237-240.

Sasanian stucco-work. The intarsia frieze which runs beneath the plaster cornice in the narthex, incorporate this Sasanian ornamental material into yet another Roman technique, and consists of similar alternating palmettes and stylized floral patterns.

Sasanian stuccowork and textiles contain the closest comparable material to this ornamental material. Several contemporary and preceding stucco plaques both from the vicinity of Ctesiphon and the provinces closely parallel the geometrical motifs in the narthex and nave mosaics. These geometric motifs are also common in extant Sasanian textiles and several examples are sufficient to demonstrate this. The lozenge or 'spade' shapes and palmette motifs on the great tympanum parallel motifs on Central Asian silk as well as silk clothing worn by Justinian's bodyguard and Kōsrow II. Geometric motifs on the Lyon 'Kōsrow' textile, provides an interesting example as it juxtaposes this type of geometrical motif with a stylized image of a Sasanian king of kings, demonstrating the context of competitive regal imagery with which such motifs reached the Roman court. Further reflecting this, the mounted figure of Kōsrow II at Tāq-e Bostān wears this type of ornamental material on his caftan under his chain mail. As well as the connection with precious textiles, aspects of this Sasanian ornamental material carry a specifically regal charge in their original cultural milieu. The geometrical motifs of the oval with the wings evoke the late-Sasanian crown with the *korymbos* and wings of Warahrān.²³ Given his familiarity with Sasanian the royal image through diplomatic gifts, it is possible that

²³ Kröger 1982, 241-42. (Mid. Pers.) Warahrān, (Av.) Vərəθraϥna, the hypostasis of victory and controlled violence used to smash through any obstacle and destroy all evil; G. Gnoli, "Bahrām, i. in Old and Middle Iranian Texts," *EIr*; P. Jamzadeh, "Bahrām, ii. Representations in Iranian Art," *EIr*.

Justinian would be aware of this connotation of this type of geometric motif in Sasanian visual culture.

Such widespread evidence of appropriation begs the question, what motivated Justinian to cover the majority of the surface of his Great Church with motifs that originated in the cultural sphere of his rival? In a very basic sense, such imagery could give the viewer the impression that silk swathed all surfaces of the structure. In late antique Constantinople numerous textiles controlled visual and physical access to a variety of restricted imperial and ecclesiastical spaces, such as into the throne room of the Great Palace as we encountered in the protocol for the reception of the Sasanian envoy, or into the interior of a church before the Great Entrance. These ornamental patterns perhaps refer to this type of highly privileged textile, some mosaic portrayals of which carry roughly similar ornamental representations. However this still leaves the larger question of why these motifs in particular? Like H. Polyuktos, the ornament of Hagia Sophia defined its patron's identity. Sasanian courtly art and architecture had become hugely popular in the Near East and Central Asia by the sixth century.²⁴ It replaced Hellenistic art as the new Eurasian aristocratic visual common-culture and, with H. Polyuktos and representations of textiles as evidence, its popularity was rising in the Roman empire as well.²⁵ By incorporating such motifs, Justinian took ownership of this new visual font of aristocratic marks of distinction in the eyes of his own aristocratic hierarchy. With the potential audience of Sasanian diplomats, appropriating such motifs demonstrated that the Roman sovereign could control and counter in the Sasanian king of

²⁴ Azarpay 2000, 67-75

²⁵ Ibid.

kings' hegemony over this abstract, yet potent, imagery of power and wealth. I am skeptical if Justinian would have viewed the winged ovals as an appropriation of the Sasanian crown, but the motifs' connection with regal imagery would have been unmistakable. In this sense, Justinian's appropriation of these motifs not only commented on his identity as a cosmopolitan sovereign, but strategically predicated the identity of Sasanian kingship on something which adorns and serves the Roman emperor and the Christian religion.

Justinian was not alone in his appreciation and appropriation of his opponent's visual culture. Theophylact Simocatta briefly mentions K̲osrow I's Roman-style palace in Ctesiphon which he reports originated from Justinian's gift of marble and architects, though the king of kings' sustained looting of Roman Syria would have provided him enough raw material and skilled labor to cultivate his taste for late-Roman architectural ornament without such gifts.²⁶ Excavations of a square terrace associated with main palatial complex of the Ayvān-e Kēs̲rā, known as Tell Ḍahab, bears out both Theophylact's text and records of K̲osrow I's war booty.²⁷ This precinct revealed a structure whose walls and floors were decorated with marble, opus sectile and mosaics as well as traditional Sasanian stucco sculpture.²⁸ Such Roman material certainly functioned as a trophy, parallel to king of kings' 'recreation' of Antioch (*Weh Antīōk K̲osrow*) which

²⁶ "Justinian provided Chosroes son of Kabades with Greek marble, building experts, and craftsmen skilled in ceilings, and that a palace situated close to Ctesiphon was constructed for Chosroes with Roman expertise." Theoph. Simok. 5.6.10, trans. Whitby, 240.

²⁷ Kröger "Ctesiphon", *EnIr* printed version 447.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Ḳosrow built nearby Ctesiphon complete with baths and a hippodrome. The fact that the king of kings also included such material in one of his palaces suggests that Ḳosrow I engaged with the Roman architectural material as a manifestation of an international culture of kingship much like Justinian.

While almost nothing remains of Roman imperial building in late sixth and seventh century Constantinople, Ḳosrow II's sculptural and architectural material from Bīsotūn and Ṭāq-e Bostān suggest that this phenomenon of an international royal visual culture continued, no doubt quickened by Ḳosrow II's initial alliance with the Roman court of Maurice. Three column capitals reflect this. These architectural members stem from a structure that Ḳosrow II began but left unfinished at Bīsotūn now in the precincts of Ṭāq-e Bostān reflect this.²⁹ They are products of the last flowering of Sasanian art and provide an important testament to the melding of Roman and Sasanian architectural ornament right before the fall of the Sasanian empire. These capitals appropriate the architectural form of the late-Roman impost capital, hitherto unknown in Sasanian architecture, but apply Sasanian ornamental material or relief sculptures of divinities or Ḳosrow II. The king of kings' rock cut *ayvān* at Ṭāq-e Bostān appropriates several motifs from Roman visual culture and integrates them thoughtfully with the more indigenous ornamental motifs, which predominate. The structure's winged victories are

²⁹ These were possibly associated with the massive unfinished rock relief and terrace, the Tarāš-e Farhād near Bīsotūn. E. Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien* (1920), 110; K. Erdmann, "Die Kapitelle am Taq i Bostan," *MDOG* 80 (1943): 1-24; H. Lushey, "Zur Datierung der sasanidischen Kapitelle aus Bisutun und des Monuments von Taq-i-Bostan" *AMI* n.s. 1 (1968): 129-42; idem, "Bīsotūn ii. Archaeology" *EIr*.

its most obvious Roman elements.³⁰ While I have covered the symbolism of the figures elsewhere, here I want call attention to the fact that the border at the neck and wrists of their garments carry a vegetal rinceau which is closer to Greco-Roman grapevine scrolls, such as occur in the mosaics of the Great Palace, than any Sasanian pattern. This ornamental material marks these figures as stemming from another cultural milieu. On the whole the victories are visually subordinate to the Sasanian king of kings and as ornament themselves, they comment on his identity as cosmopolitan sovereign controlling several cultural and visual markers of kingship.³¹

In this study I have argued that ornamental motifs played an important role in defining Roman and Sasanian royal identity cross-culturally. This phenomenon, which I have termed ‘international ornament’ refers to the fact that the practice of appropriating foreign ornamental material, like the two courts’ appropriations of their opponent’s ritual and ideological material, was a tool with which the sovereigns defined their relational identities and situated themselves in a larger *kosmos* of power. While attributes of royal representation such as the nimbus or red footwear consisted mostly of recognizable

³⁰ Mackintosh argued that Sasanian frontality and the arrangement of the figures in the *ayvān* derived from the church decoration of Byzantine apses an assertion which is anachronistic. In contrast to the winged victories which were not a terribly common Iranian motif, Sasanian art inherited a richly developed tradition of royal frontality and *ayvān* decoration from the Parthians, which they continued to develop over the course of their history. M. Mackintosh, “Taq-i Bustan and Byzantine Art. A Case for Early Byzantine Influence on the Reliefs of Taq-i Bustan,” *Iran* 13 (1978):149-77.

³¹ Its placement next to the smaller *ayvān* of Šāpūr III and the fact that it was left unfinished suggests that its designers intended it to evoke either a triple bayed Roman triumphal arch, a triple *ayvān* Sasanian palace, or most likely both. B. Musche, “Römische Einflüsse auf den Taq-e Bostan,” in eds. P. Calmeyer et al. *Beiträge zur Altorientalischen Archäologie und Altertumskunde. Festschrift für Barthel Hrouda zum 65. Geburtstag* (Weisbaden: Harrasowitz, 1994), 193-199.

figural components and could communicate a relatively direct and clear message to the viewer, ornament played a special role because of its relative abstraction and open-ended semiotic and symbolic possibilities. In the sixth century, the process of ornamental appropriation unfolded subtly and grew out of the two courts' diplomatic interactions and subsequent increased familiarity with their opponent's ritual and visual culture. In this quest to control dominate the marks of distinction of the Mediterranean, Near East and Central Asia, the two realms incorporated many of each other's ornamental motifs into some of the most important structures and objects of their cultures such as Justinian I's Hagia Sophia and K̄osrow I's palatial structures at Ctesiphon. While the empires remained distrustful of each other throughout their mutual history, the meeting and melding of their practices of kingship transformed both visual cultures as well as shaped the expression of power in late antique and medieval Near East and Europe.