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Myth and Magic in Early Byzantine Marriage Jewelry: The Persistence of Pre-Christian Traditions

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Edited by ANNE L. McCLANAN & KAREN ROSSOFF ENCARNACIÓN

THE
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SEX,
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IN
PREMODERN
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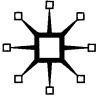


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THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF SEX, PROCREATION, AND MARRIAGE IN
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Myth and Magic in Early Byzantine Marriage Jewelry

The Persistence of Pre-Christian Traditions*

Alicia Walker

The material culture of early Byzantine marriage, as represented by a small corpus of marriage rings and belts, indicates a clear appropriation and adaptation of pre-Christian traditions. In this paper, I investigate the melding of pagan and Christian cultures in early Byzantine marriage art, taking as my departure point the issue of the amuletic properties of early Byzantine marriage rings. In a series of articles that appeared during the 1980s and early 1990s, Gary Vikan interpreted the rings to be medical magical devices, foregrounding their role as amulets for healthy parturition.¹ As I have argued elsewhere, a connection with birth facilitation is not strongly supported by the iconography or inscriptions of the rings;² rather, these features indicate—as Ernst Kitzinger had proposed³—a more general concern for the protection of marital union.⁴

In this study, I expand on Kitzinger's comment by tracing the amuletic properties of these rings to late antique magical practices that were intended to secure the affections of a spouse and foster marital harmony. In addition, I demonstrate that the rings could have protected against aggressive pagan magical spells and devices that are known to have circulated during the early Byzantine period.⁵ Finally, I address the rings' appropriation and adaptation of magical mechanisms with regard to the prominence of pagan mythological imagery in the art and literature of early Byzantine marriage. I concur with earlier studies in which scholars have recognized a deeply rooted connection between early Byzantine and pre-Christian marriage art⁶ and I offer some new understanding for how the material culture of early Byzantine marriage reconciled pagan and Christian traditions.



figure 4.1. Marriage ring, late fourth to early fifth century, gold, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, acc. no. 47.18.

Typically made of gold and in some cases encrusted with precious gems, early Byzantine marriage rings were used by members of the most affluent class.⁷ They display a range of iconographic motifs and inscriptions that connect them to marriage, largely continuing the iconography of marriage in Roman art, an important indication of Byzantine cultural continuity with Roman marriage imagery and ideology.⁸ Scholars have defined and dated several distinct groups of the rings, although these dates are not absolute. In all likelihood the various categories of marriage rings overlapped chronologically to some degree. In what follows, I discuss a representative sample of extant early Byzantine marriage rings.⁹

The earliest Byzantine marriage rings, dated to the mid-fourth to early fifth century, show a pair of hands, representing those of the bride and groom, clasped together in a gesture known as the *dextrarum iunctio*, which symbolized the concord of the marriage union.¹⁰ These rings display a close iconographic resemblance to Roman marriage rings, but the use of Greek inscriptions has prompted their association with the Byzantine world.¹¹

Rings of another distinct group show busts of the couple in profile, facing one another (figure 4.1).¹² Rings of this group also draw from Roman prototypes, but are differentiated by their use of Greek inscriptions and additionally by the presence of the Christian sign of a cross. On the basis of archaeological evidence and numismatic comparison, this group dates to the late fourth to early fifth century.¹³

Rings in a third group exhibit schematic images of the couple in either frontal bust form (figure 4.2)¹⁴ or full length (figure 4.3).¹⁵ The bride and groom flank a cross and/or a figure of Christ, identifiable by his cruciform nimbus. Christ blesses the couple by joining their hands or by resting his



figure 4.2. Marriage ring, seventh century, gold, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, acc. no. 59.60.

own hands on their shoulders. Although rings of this type show iconographic similarities to images of couples found in Roman art, their close proximity to Byzantine coins and medallions localizes them in the fifth to sixth century.¹⁶ Three of these rings form a sub-group based on their common feature of *loca sancta* vignettes on the facets of their octagonal bands (figure 4.4).¹⁷ This group dates to the early seventh century on the basis of iconographic similarity to ampullae from the Holy Land, which also exhibit abbreviated *loca sancta* scenes.¹⁸ Support for this dating comes from one of the rings in the sub-group, which was discovered in a seventh-century archaeological context.¹⁹ Two of the three rings exhibit the iconographic variation of a second figure, possibly the Virgin Mary, who assists Christ in blessing the husband and wife.²⁰

Due to a general dearth of archaeological evidence for early Byzantine marriage rings, their chronology remains uncertain. Nonetheless, the bulk of the evidence implies a pre-Iconoclastic date for the rings. In terms of their cultural context, therefore, the corpus is considered a phenomenon of the mid-fourth to early eighth century.

Although some early Byzantine marriage rings are uninscribed,²¹ many include good wishes on the bezel, typically *ὁμόνοια* (harmony) (figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4).²² In some cases, the names of bride and groom are inscribed around the figures (figure 4.1) or at the edge of the bezel (figure 4.4). More extensive inscriptions found on some rings indicate the object's amuletic function. Several rings represent characteristically protective phrases, such as an excerpt from the Psalms: *ὡς ὄπλον εὐδοκίας ἐστεφάνωσας ἡμᾶς* [With favor wilt thou compass us as with a shield (Psalm 5:12)].²³ In other cases the standard invocation for divine aid appears, *κύριε βοήθει* (Lord



figure 4.3. Marriage ring, sixth to seventh century, gold, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, acc. no. 66.37.7.

help) (figure 4.4) or θεοτόκε βοηθεί [Theotokos (literally “God bearer,” an epithet of the Virgin Mary) help].²⁴

The inscriptions on early Byzantine marriage rings offer the key for associating the rings with late antique magical texts and devices. The term *ὁμόνοια* (harmony), which features on a large number of early Byzantine marriage rings, translates the Latin term *concordia*, which figures prominently in Roman marriage art and ideology.²⁵ But *ὁμόνοια* also appears in late antique magical texts, which prescribe spells to insure the devotion of a beloved. For instance, in the *Kyranides*, a magical treatise attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, which was popular in the Byzantine world from the fourth to sixth century,²⁶ a passage speaks of the properties of an amulet that not only helped to ease difficulties in breathing and liver and kidney disorders but also brought goodwill and harmony (*ὁμόνοϊαν*) to the husband and wife:

τὸν δὲ φοροῦντα ποιήσει ἐπιχαριν, ἐπιτευκτικὸν εἰς ὃ ἂν ἐπιβάληται.
ποιεῖ δὲ καὶ εὐνοϊαν εἰς τοὺς γαμοῦντας καὶ ὁμόνοϊαν εἰς τὰ
ἀνδρόγυνα ὡς λίαν κάλλιστον.²⁷

It [the amulet] makes the wearer charming and brings him success in all his endeavors. In addition it brings both goodwill to married couples and harmony to husband and wife as a thing most excellent.²⁸

Another love charm prescribed the consumption of a bird’s heart to mend a troubled marriage:

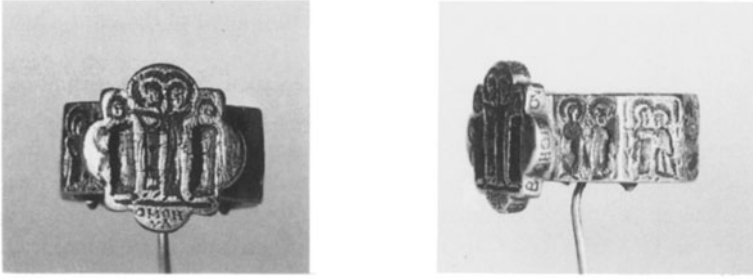


figure 4.4. Marriage ring, seventh century, gold and niello, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, acc. no. 47.15.

Βορὸς ὄρνεόν ἐστι πᾶσι γνωστόν. . . ἡ δὲ καρδία ὀπηθεῖσα, ἐὰν γυναικὶ λάθρα δοθῆ ἔν βρώσει ἢ ἐν ποτῶ, φίλτρον ἐργάσεται αὐτῇ πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα. καὶ γυνὴ δὲ καὶ ἀνὴρ ἑτεροφρονούντες ἀλλήλοις ἢ ὁ ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον, ἐὰν λάβωσιν αὐτὴν ἐν βρώσει ἢ πόσει ὡς εἴρηται, εἰς ὁμόνοιαν τρέψουσι τὸ μῖσος.²⁹

A Βορὸς is a well known bird. . . . When its heart is cooked, if it should be given secretly to a woman in food or drink, it works as a love charm on her towards the man. And, when both wife and husband are discordant with one another or one with the other, if they should consume the heart in food or drink as described, then they will turn their hate to harmony.

As noted above, the passage ends with the consoling guarantee that, if the wife and husband are at odds, they can turn their “hate to harmony” (ὁμόνοιαν) by means of the prescribed charm. In a final comment, the author states explicitly that the heart of the bird, when used in love amulets, brings harmony (ὁμόνοιαν) to married couples.³⁰ In both love spells and marriage rings, ὁμόνοια is repeatedly employed to bring about the desired outcome of marital concord.³¹

The term χάρις also appears on Byzantine marriage jewelry, although less frequently than ὁμόνοια (harmony).³² Unlike ὁμόνοια, χάρις does not have an immediate precedent in any term associated with Roman marriage art. The inscription on a seventh-century gold ring from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (figure 4.2) specifies χάρις as deriving from God (θεοῦ χάρις), and in this context χάρις is usually translated as “grace.”³³ Certainly this connotation of divine grace or blessing is the most immediate definition of the inscription. But χάρις, with the meaning of “attraction” or “charm,” was also frequently employed in ancient and late antique amuletic devices that were used to entrap lovers. I propose that this earlier

meaning was a subordinate, but still vital, connotation of the term when it appeared on Byzantine marriage rings.³⁴

For example, in one of the aforementioned spells from the *Kyranides*, a device that brings harmony to a marriage does so because it “makes the wearer charming” (ἐπιχαριν).³⁵ An antique amulet from the University of Michigan collection also makes use of the word χάρις. It displays an image of a half nude Aphrodite accompanied by her lover Ares; above the figures is inscribed H XARI.³⁶ As Campbell Bonner has explained, the imagery and inscription on this amulet presumably served to liken the wearer to Aphrodite, according the goddess’s powers of charm and attractiveness in order to bring favor with the opposite sex.³⁷ When used on Byzantine marriage rings, χάρις might have resonated, however faintly, with this earlier meaning of the term as attractive force.³⁸ On Byzantine marriage rings, the frequent qualification of χάρις with the word θεοῦ (from God) might indicate an effort to appropriate χάρις from its pagan magical source, validating it for use in a Christian context.

On Byzantine marriage jewelry, χάρις and ὁμόνοια appear with images of Christ or the cross, making a clear statement that, in the Christian wearer’s world, harmony and grace/charm come from God alone. But by citing χάρις and ὁμόνοια Byzantine marriage rings echo the specific language of non-Christian love spells, suggesting that these pagan magical texts and devices may have informed the development of amuletic mechanisms in Byzantine marriage rings. Furthermore, the pairing of ὁμόνοια and a derivative of χάρις in at least one magical text and the appearance of these two words together on early Byzantine marriage rings (figure 4.2) argues in favor of the notion that they were intended to act together.³⁹

Ancient love magic not only preserved marital harmony but was also employed to disrupt marital bonds. The circulation of aggressive magical spells during the late antique period suggests that contemporary marriage rings served not only to engender good relations between couples but also to defend the marriage union from supernatural attack. That aggressive love magic targeted married people is demonstrated, for example, by a spell found on a second-century C.E. ostrakon (an inscribed potsherd) that includes the statement “Remove Allous from Apollonos her husband.”⁴⁰ In another case, a spell directed at a married woman states, “Cause her to swoon. . . . Become fire beneath her until she comes to me, so . . . that she may love me for all time . . . so that she may forget her . . . husband.”⁴¹ Another spell aiming to attract a woman “wronged by her husband” prescribes that a lizard be placed in an iron vessel and burnt in the coals of a fire while the spell maker recites the following, “Lizard, lizard, as Helios and all the gods have hated you, so let her . . . hate her husband for all time and her husband hate her . . . let her love me.”⁴² Although the spell does not men-

tion the harmony of the marriage as the aim of the destructive force, one of the spells from the *Kyranides* recounted above does identify harmony as the opposite of hate when it states that a love potion will “turn hate to harmony.”⁴³ We may read, therefore, that in promoting hate, a spell implicitly attacks harmony.

Although most extant magical papyri date to the late antique era, it is known that these texts were copied and circulated well into the Byzantine period. For example, in Michael Psellus’s eleventh-century summary of the late-second- to early-third-century magical treatise the *Kestoi* (*Amulets*) by Julius Africanus, Psellus states that the *Kestoi* includes descriptions of amulets that “both kindle and quench love.”⁴⁴ And a tenth-century Coptic parchment in the collection of the Louvre is inscribed on both sides with a magical spell that claims, “I am that which separates a woman from her husband.”⁴⁵ It calls on several chthonic forces to put “hatred and separation . . . and discord”⁴⁶ between the couple. The continued adoption and adaptation of pagan magic that these documents demonstrate supports the proposal that fourth- to seventh-century Byzantine marriage rings could have been produced and used within a cultural milieu that was familiar with and even responded to pagan love spells and magical devices.

Late antique antimagic prohibitions provide additional evidence for the prevalence of magic during the early Byzantine era. For example, legislation enacted in the fourth century under Emperor Constantius II (337–361) forbade a wide range of magical practices and listed punishments for those who sought the aid of non-Christian supernatural forces.⁴⁷ And Canon 61 from the late-seventh-century Council in Trullo (691–692) explicitly prohibited the activities of those who purveyed magical services.⁴⁸ While the promulgation of laws such as these aimed to discourage illicit activities, this legislation also attests to the continued popularity of magic in early Byzantium. In a world where some individuals did resort to the assistance of unsanctioned supernatural forces, people would have required equally powerful Christian protection. By donning a marriage ring that made use of an inscriptional and visual language that responded to aggressive love magic but which protected the wearer through Christianized iconography and phrases, the wearer could comply with prohibitions against magical charms and practices while combating aggressive supernatural forces of the type that early Byzantine legislation both witnesses and condemns.

The identification of Byzantine marriage rings as love amulets has implications for our understanding of the social contexts in which the rings were employed. Previous scholarship has focused on the role that the rings might have played within betrothal and marriage ceremonies.⁴⁹ There is, however, no extant textual documentation of the pre-Iconoclastic Byzantine marriage liturgy. In fact, marriages were not required to be consecrated in a church or

even in the presence of a priest until the beginning of the tenth century.⁵⁰ Prior to that, the marriage was conducted in a private ceremony, frequently in a home, to which a priest might or might not be invited to bless the union.⁵¹ In one of the only extant descriptions of a pre-Iconoclastic marriage ceremony, that of the Emperor Maurice (r. 582–602), there is no reference to rings, rather only marriage crowns are mentioned as part of the ceremony.⁵²

A primarily amuletic role for early Byzantine marriage rings obviates the need for the rings to have been produced for use in a specific ceremony. Instead, the rings adopt a more workaday function as perpetual guardians of marital concord. This non-ceremonial role accords with the informal nature of marriage ring exchange that is recorded in select early Byzantine texts. For instance, in the sixth-century version of the life of St. Alexius, the Saint mentions his presentation of a marriage belt and ring to his new wife in the privacy of the bridal chamber.⁵³ The exchange is listed in an inventory of important and highly personal events from the Saint's life that he recorded before renouncing this world for an ascetic life. The intimate nature of the circumstances surrounding the presentation of the marriage ring in this instance argues against the view that early Byzantine marriage rings were produced primarily for use in religious ceremonies. Rather, they assume a more mundane role as constant promoters and protectors of marital harmony.

The evidence surrounding Byzantine marriage rings discussed thus far indicates that the rings functioned as amulets intended to protect the marriage union in perpetuity. The rings gained protective power from the Christian imagery and inscriptions that adorned them, but also from inscriptions of *ὁμόνοια* (harmony) and *χάρτις* (grace or charm), two words that also appear in pagan love spells and amulets.

A Byzantine marriage belt from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection further indicates how, even though Christian imagery dominated early Byzantine marriage jewelry, pagan aspects were still at play (figure 4.5).⁵⁴ In the central medallions of the belt appears the familiar iconography of Christ blessing the husband and wife. An inscription, EX (*sic*) ΘΕΟΥ ΟΜΟΝΙΑ (*sic*) ΧΑΡΤΙΑ (*sic*) [from God harmony grace health], encircles the couple. In the small medallions around the chain of the belt appear busts of pagan gods and tyches as well as some figures that exhibit attributes of Dionysian revelers: the *thyrsos*, ivy leaf crowns, and bunches of grapes dangling from their heads. Within the composition of the belt, these non-Christian figures take a decidedly subordinate position: Christ stands between the bride and groom blessing their union, while the Dionysian entourage gathers around the periphery. But the role of this pagan retinue as co-revelers at the marriage is clear.

The association of pagan figures like Dionysos with early Byzantine marriage is not limited to jewelry, but also appears in literature. In the sixth-



figure 4.5. Detail of a marriage belt, sixth to seventh century, gold, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, acc. no. 37.33.

century epithalamic poems of Dioscorus of Aphrodito, Dionysos features as a member of a wedding party in a manner that resonates with the imagery on the marriage belt, “Dionysos attends the summer of your wedding, bearing wine, love’s adornment, with plenty for all.”⁵⁵ In this poem, the author also compares the bride to Ariadne, the wife of Dionysos.⁵⁶

In an earlier work of late antique marriage art, a fourth-century belt buckle from the Metropolitan Museum, we see a bride and groom on the obverse flanking the *chi-rho* and on the reverse Bellerophon, riding his winged horse Pegasus and attacking the fierce beast Chimera (figure 4.6).⁵⁷ Bellerophon likewise makes an appearance in Dioscorus’ poems as an icon of youthful beauty and grace. In one poem Dioscorus addresses the groom, “Your young body has surpassed prize-winning Bellerophon.”⁵⁸ In yet another poem Dioscorus congratulates the bride on the virtues of her spouse: “Your dear husband, godlike in his grace, like Bellerophon, a desired bridegroom.”⁵⁹

The appearance of pagan figures such as Bellerophon in the context of otherwise distinctly Christian art objects has previously been explained by attributing a Christian symbolism to the pagan hero: Bellerophon is viewed as an image of Christ, who conquers death, symbolized by the Chimera.⁶⁰ While such a reading is no doubt appropriate for some early Byzantine representations of the hero, the poems of Dioscorus of Aphrodito indicate that the pagan Bellerophon could also play a role in the rhetoric of Byzantine marriage without being translated into a Christian symbol.⁶¹ As a wise, brave, and handsome young man, Bellerophon offered a prime figure through which to compliment and celebrate the groom.⁶²

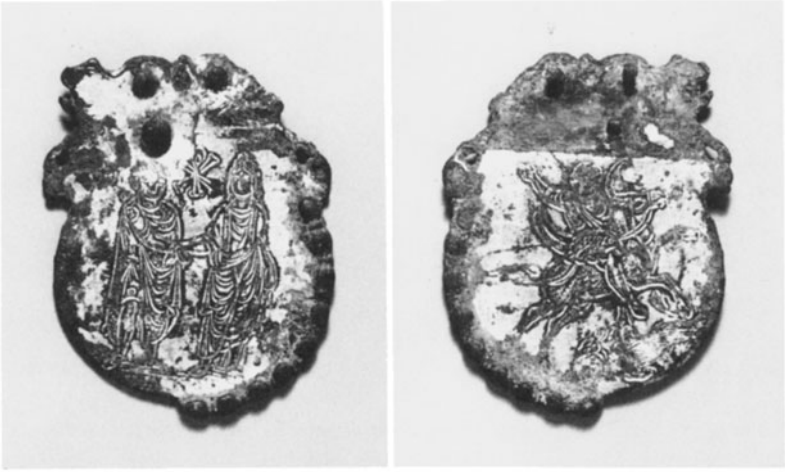


figure 4.6. Belt buckle, fourth century, gilded copper, Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 1993.166.

Both marriage jewelry and Dioscorus's poems indicate that marriage still deeply intermingled with pagan culture in the early Byzantine world. But, the poems and belts represent a different relationship with the pagan past than do the marriage rings. While the belts and poems promote an intermingling of Christian and non-Christian traditions, the rings obscure an association with pagan sources by recasting the magical terms in a Christian light. This difference points to an important distinction in the perpetuation of paganism: Dionysian imagery and the equation of the bridal couple with mythological figures spoke of the user's erudition and high social status, much in the way that the precious material of marriage jewelry marks the wearer as a member of the social elite. But within this social class, power was also associated with Christian Orthodoxy. Reference to pagan traditions could not transgress from the rhetorical to the devotional.

In the marriage rings—and even the central medallions of the marriage belt—a representation of a pagan deity protecting the union of bride and groom would have directly conflicted with imperial and ecclesiastical legislation against the worship of pagan deities and the employment of magic. The terms *ὁμόνοια* (harmony) and *χάρις* (grace and charm) may indicate an appropriation of pagan love magic, but the connection of Byzantine marriage rings with the mechanisms and language of pagan love charms was obscured by the Christianization of inscriptions and iconography; the presence of the inscription *θεου*, for example, made clear that a ring invoked power “from God.”

Even in the case of the marriage belts and poems, pagan references, although present, take a subordinate role. The buckle and belt relegate pagan figures to the periphery and reverse, giving way to Christian figures and symbols at the center. Likewise, in Dioscorus's writings, pagan figures are ranked second to the Christian God, as indicated by a passage in one poem which reads, "Easily protecting garlanded Dionysos and the Nile with his many children, may God grant a noble marriage free from the destructive envy of others. . . . Go away, evil eye; this marriage is graced by God."⁶³ It is the Christian God, not the pagan deity Dionysos, who is the ultimate source of protection and blessings.

To summarize, while inscriptions on Byzantine marriage rings specify the origin of χάρις and ὁμόνοια as from God, making a clear statement of the wearer's Christian dedication, these terms might nonetheless have resonated, however faintly, with the connotation of the words as they were employed in non-Christian love-enhancing spells and devices. In contrast to the marriage belt from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and the belt buckle from the Metropolitan Museum, Byzantine marriage rings do not express an overt association with pagan traditions. But, the resonance of their inscriptions with pagan magical texts may still indicate a perpetuation, on some level, of non-Christian practices and beliefs within the social context of Byzantine marriage. The appropriation and adaptation of pagan magic may be understood as a highly intentional act that aimed to conform the rings to late antique ecclesiastical and imperial legislation against pagan magical practices while still imbuing the objects with powerful amuletic properties.

Notes

- * A version of this essay was presented at the Byzantine Studies Conference, Harvard University, October 23–27, 2000.
1. Ernst Kitzinger first proposed that *loca sancta* vignettes found on the bands of a sub-group of early Byzantine marriage rings were intended to protect the wearer. See Ernst Kitzinger, "Christian Imagery: Growth and Impact," in *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 151. Gary Vikan later specified the amuletic intent of the *loca sancta* rings—and Byzantine marriage rings in general—to be the promotion of healthy parturition. See Gary Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 65–86, esp. 83–84 and *Ibid.*, "Art and Marriage in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 145–63, esp. 154–57.
 2. Alicia Walker, "A Reconsideration of Early Byzantine Marriage Rings," in *Between Magic and Religion*, ed. Corinne Pache et al. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).
 3. Kitzinger questioned Vikan's proposal of medical magical properties for the rings and argued instead that the rings protected marital concord in general.

- See Ernst Kitzinger, "Reflections on the Feast Cycle in Byzantine Art," *Cahiers archéologiques* 36 (1988): 68, n. 71. Responding to Kitzinger's criticism, Vikan stated: "E. Kitzinger, apparently unaware of Byzantine marriage legislation and *hygia* [sic] rings, failed to recognize the inherently complementary nature of concord and health in his analysis of Byzantine marriage ring iconography" (Vikan, "Art and Marriage," 155, n. 79).
4. Although Kitzinger's critique of Vikan's argument has gone largely unnoticed, other scholars have cited protection of marital union, along with healthy parturition, as the amuletic intent of early Byzantine marriage rings. See Anna Gonosova and Christine Kondoleon, *The Art of Late Rome and Byzantium in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts* (Richmond: The Museum, 1994), 49; and Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 150. Maguire extended the magical properties of the rings from health preservation to protection of the marriage union from malevolent spirits, citing the demons Modabel and Kataikotael, who are mentioned in the *Testament of Solomon* as disrupters of marriage and bringers of bad luck (*Ibid.*, 149–50).
 5. In this paper, I follow the basic approach of Vikan's studies: Magical spells and devices are compared with Byzantine marriage rings, and the amuletic properties of the marriage rings are hypothesized based on commonalities with the magical texts and objects ("Art Medicine and Magic," 83–84, and "Art and Marriage," 154–57 and 160–62). An important difference in our methodologies, however, is that Vikan allows for the transferal of amuletic properties from one object to another, even when the second object lacks the iconography or inscriptions that accord the first object the protective or luck-bringing properties in question. It is this transferal of amuletic properties that led Vikan to associate Byzantine marriage rings with a birth facilitating function ("Art and Marriage," 155 and 157). My approach, in contrast, operates from the premise that the amuletic intent expressed through inscriptions or iconography on one object can not be transferred to a second object that lacks these key inscriptions or iconography. My method results in a reading of the rings as love amulets, an interpretation that is consistent with the inscriptions and imagery apparent on the majority of rings. See also Walker, "A Reconsideration."
 6. See especially L. Reekmans, "La 'dextrarum iunctio' dans l'iconographie romaine et paleochrétienne," *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 31 (1958): 23–95; and Ernst Kantorowicz, "On the Golden Marriage Belt and the Marriage Rings of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 14 (1960): 3–24.
 7. For example, a seventh-century gold ring in the Hermitage Museum (acc. no. ω 121) is encrusted with an emerald on the body of the bride and a garnet on the body of the bridegroom. See Alice Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1977), 288–89.

8. Reekmans, "La 'dextrarum iunctio,'" 23–95; Kantorowicz, "On the Golden Marriage Belt," 4–10 and 14–16; and Vikan, "Art and Marriage," 146–48 and 163.
9. Although the full corpus of early Byzantine marriage rings has yet to be catalogued, at least 30 of these rings, dating from the fourth to the seventh century C.E., are known. For the most complete published listing of the rings, see Vikan "Art and Marriage," 148, n. 22; 150, n. 45; and 157, n. 97.
10. For example, a circa-fifth-century sardonyx and gold ring in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (acc. no. 63.1555) is identified as Byzantine and features a pair of clasped hands with a fillet above and the inscription OMONOIA (harmony) in the exergue. See *Romans and Barbarians* (Boston: Department of Classical Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1976), 179, no. 202. An onyx gem from the Indiana University Art Museum (acc. no. 66.36.33) shows a markedly similar composition of a pair of clasped hands below and a fillet above and the inscription OMONOIA (harmony) in the exergue. Although this gem is the appropriate size for a ring, it is unmounted. See Burton Barry, *Ancient Gems from the Collection of Burton Y. Barry* (Bloomington: Indiana State University, 1968), no. 140. For discussion of the *dextrarum iunctio* and its Roman precedents, see Reekmans, "La 'dextrarum iunctio,'" 23–95; and Kantorowicz, "On the Golden Marriage Belt," 3–5.
11. For example, a third- to fourth-century gold Roman marriage ring in the collection of the British Museum (acc. no. M&LA 1971.8–2.4) shows the motif of the *dextrarum iunctio*. See David Buckton, *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 47, no. 26. Additional examples of Roman marriage rings of this general type may be found in Friedrich Henkel, *Die römischen Fingerringe der Rheinlande und der Benachbarten Gebiete* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1913), especially nos. 75, 86, 87, 1033, and 1869. The inclusion of a Greek inscription does not, however, necessarily qualify an object as Byzantine, and it is possible that rings of this type were produced and used in Greek speaking regions of the non-Christian Roman world. Their lack of explicitly Christian iconography, such as the Cross or a bust of Christ, questions their association with a Christian context of use.
12. The ring (figure 4.1) shows the couple in profile busts with a small cross between them. It is inscribed in Greek with the names of the husband and wife: APICTOΦANHC OYIΓIANTIA (Aristophanes Vigil[a]ntia). See Marvin Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, II (Washington, D.C.: The Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1965), 48–50, no. 50. A gold fourth- to fifth-century marriage ring in the British Museum (acc. no. M&LA AF 304) shows almost identical profile busts and a cross, but no inscription (Buckton, *Byzantium*, 47, no. 27). For bibliography on additional rings of this composition, see Ross, *Catalogue*, 48–50.

In terms of style and technique, the Dumbarton Oaks and British Museum rings are the superior examples of the group. In both the Dumbarton

Oaks and British Museum rings, the figures are rendered in portrait-like detail. Ross suggested that the rings may indeed depict a specific couple and that they might have been produced as a matching pair for use by the bride and groom (*Catalogue*, 50). Vikan argued that the similarity in features between the couples represented on the two rings indicates instead “shared workshop technique and . . . common dependency on familiar coin types” (“Art and Marriage,” 149).

13. Vikan, “Art and Marriage,” 148–49.
14. The ring (figure 4.2) shows the bride and groom in frontal bust form and flanking a large cross. It is inscribed in Greek: ΘΕΟΥ [with the “O” and the “Y” conflated] XAPIC (from God grace) above and OMONOIA (harmony) in the exergue (Ross, *Catalogue*, 7–8).
15. The ring (figure 4.3) shows full-length figures of Christ between the bride and groom. It is inscribed in Greek: OMONY (sic) (harmony) in the exergue (Gonosova and Kondoleon, *The Art of Late Rome and Byzantium*, 48).
16. Vikan, “Art and Marriage,” 150–52. For Roman comparanda, see the funerary altars, sarcophagi, and medallions gathered in Reeksmann, “La ‘dextrarum iunctio,’” especially figures 3, 5–7, 31–32, and 35. A Byzantine prototype for the composition of the standing bride and groom flanking the figure of Christ is found in the fifth-century imperial medallions of Marcian and Pulcheria (450 C.E.) and Anastasius and Ariadne (491 C.E.). No doubt the medallions follow earlier Roman types, but the availability of this iconography in a Byzantine object, even one of such limited circulation as an imperial marriage medallion, nonetheless suggests a clustering of rings bearing this iconography to the mid- to late fifth century. See Kantorowicz, “On the Golden Marriage Belt,” 8. See also G. Zacos and A. Vegliery, “Marriage Solidi of the Fifth Century,” *Numismatic Circular* 68/4 (1960), 73–74 (I thank Anne McClanan for the latter reference). The proximity of the medallions’ iconography to the compositions apparent on certain Byzantine marriage rings (for example, figure 4.4) has led scholars to associate the rings with the imperial circle. Ross proposed that the rings might have served as gifts to preferred subjects at the occasion of an imperial marriage (*Catalogue*, 56), a suggestion which Vikan disputes (“Art and Marriage,” 147).

Beyond proving an elite circle of users, the imitation of imperial numismatic imagery found in this group of Byzantine marriage rings may further indicate the amuletic nature of early Byzantine marriage rings. Maguire has noted that Byzantine coins were considered valuable not only for their material worth, but also because the image of the emperor—which these coins almost always display—was thought to possess intrinsic protective properties (Henry Maguire, “Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 72 [1997]: 1039–40). For this reason, coins displaying imperial images were frequently adapted to serve as amulets, as illustrated by coins mounted as rings, bracelets, and medallions as well as by coins that display piercings or the additions of loops to hold a chain. See Maguire, “Magic and Money,” 1041; Jutta-Annette Bruhn, *Coins and Costume in Late Antiquity*, *Dumbar-*

ton Oaks Byzantine Collection Publications 9 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1993); and Mary Margaret Fulghum, "Coins Used as Amulets in Late Antiquity," in *Between Magic and Religion*, ed. Corinne Pache et al. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001). In fact, one of the extant imperial marriage medallions of Anastasius and Ariadne (Dumbarton Oaks Collection, acc. no. 59.47; Ross, *Catalogue*, 56–57), shows the addition of a loop that equipped the coin to be worn as a pendant.

Numismatic imagery was also adapted to jewelry that copied the key iconographic features of coins, but which replaced the inscriptions of the emperor's name and mint location with words and phrases that specify the protective nature of the object (Maguire, "Magic and Money," 1040–41). This process is illustrated by a well-known circa-sixth-century Byzantine marriage belt from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (acc. no. 37.33; Kantorowicz, "On the Golden Marriage Belt," 3–24 and Ross, *Catalogue*, 37–39) (detail, fig. 4.5). At the clasp, two large medallions display a married couple flanking the figure of Christ, a composition that directly reflects the iconography of fifth-century imperial wedding medallions as well as sixth- and seventh-century Byzantine marriage rings. An inscription on each of the Dumbarton Oaks belt medallions replaces the inscriptions of emperor's name and mint location with EX (*sic*) ΘΕΟΥ ΟΜΟΝΥΑ (*sic*) ΧΑΡΙΣ ΥΓΙΑ (*sic*) [from God harmony grace health], a phrase that clearly indicates that the belt was intended to function as an amulet for the wearer. By copying imperial medallions, Byzantine marriage jewelry may well have emulated the imperial couple as the ideal of marital harmony, employing the imperial form as a talisman to protect the wearer's marriage.

17. The ring (figure 4.4) is inscribed around the edge of the bezel: ΚΥΡΙΑ ΒΟΗΘΙ ΤΟΥΣ ΔΟΥΛΟΥΣ ΟΥ ΠΕΤΡΟΥΣ ΘΕΟΔΟΤΙΣ (Lord, help your servants, Peter and Theodote); around the edges of the band: + ΕΙΠΙΝΗΝ ΤΗΝ ΕΜΗΝ ΑΦΙΗΜΗ ΥΜΗΝ + / + ΕΙΠΙΝΗΝ ΤΗΝ ΕΜΗΝ ΔΗΔΩΜΕ ΥΜΗΝ + (My peace I leave with you / my peace I give unto you [John 14:27]); and in the exergue ΟΜΟΝΥΑ (harmony) (Ross, *Catalogue*, 58–60).
18. Vikan, "Art and Marriage," 158–59. The three extant rings showing *loca sancta* vignettes are found in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (acc. no. 47.15; Ross, *Catalogue*, 58) (figure 4.4), the British Museum (acc. no. AF 231; Buckton, *Byzantium*, no. 106), and the Museum of Palermo (acc. no. 31; C. Cecchelli, "L'anello bizantino del Museo di Palermo," *Miscellanea Guillaume de Jerphanion, Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 13 [1947]: 40–57). All three rings show inscriptions of ὁμόνοια (harmony) in the exergue. For the pilgrims' ampullae, see André Grabar, *Les ampoules de Terre Saint (Monza, Bobbio)* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1968).
19. Cecchelli casts some doubt on this archeological evidence and, on the basis of paleographic analysis, argues for a ninth-century date for the ring ("L'anello bizantino," 44–46). The *loca sancta* imagery on the rings, however, argues soundly for a date in the seventh century.

20. The two rings which depict a second figure accompanying Christ are in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (acc. no. 47.15; Ross, *Catalogue*, 58) (figure 4.5) and the British Museum (acc. no. AF 231; Buckton, *Byzantium*, no. 106). Kantorowicz suggested that this second figure, who was referred to as the bride of Christ in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians 5:25, might also represent the church: "As the church is subject to Christ so let the wives be subject to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it." (Kantorowicz, "On the Golden Marriage Belt," 11–12). John Meyendorff's study of canonical and liturgical traditions relating to Byzantine marriage supports Kantorowicz's suggestion. Meyendorff identifies Christ's relationship to the church as a mystical union that served as a model of monogamy for the married couple. See John Meyendorff, "Christian Marriage in Byzantium: The Canonical and Liturgical Tradition," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 101.

The identification of the figure as the Virgin Mary is, however, supported by another iconographic prototype for marriage that was available in sixth-century Constantinople. According to Paul the Silentarius, the altar at Hagia Sophia was decorated with cloths that displayed an image of the emperor Justinian and empress Theodora joining hands with Christ and Mary. See Ruth Macrides and Paul Magdalino, "The Architecture of Ekphrasis: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentary's Poem on Hagia Sophia," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988): 71. This composition, needless to say, recalls the sixth- to seventh-century Byzantine marriage rings at Dumbarton Oaks and the British Museum that display Christ and the Virgin at center blessing the bride and groom.

21. For example, two sixth-century gold rings in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (acc. nos. 53.12.3 and 53.12.8) show full-length figures of the bride and groom without inscriptions (Ross, *Catalogue*, 55–56).
22. The term ὁμόνοια translates literally as "likeness" or "sameness," referring, for example, to the oneness of mind and body that was believed to transpire through the consecration of marriage. The term is generally translated as "harmony" or "concord," the latter connecting it with the Latin term *concordia*, which appeared in Roman marriage art and ultimately had its origins in Roman state and military ideologies (Kantorowicz, "On the Gold Marriage Belt," 4–7).
23. The aforementioned ring in the collection of the Hermitage Museum (n. 7) is inscribed around the band with this excerpt from Psalm 5:12 (Bank, *Byzantine Art*, 288) as is the ring from Palermo (n. 18–19; Cecchelli, "L'anello byzantino," 42).
24. For the inscription on figure 4.4, see n. 17.
25. Kantorowicz, "On the Gold Marriage Belt," 4–7.
26. The *Kyranides* provides magical spells and charms that are based on a system of correspondences between different natural materials—animals, plants, and minerals—which were believed to influence one another. It was thought that the sympathies between these various substances could be ma-

nipulated to achieve certain effects. This type of magic has much earlier roots, being first systematized by Bolus of Mendes (“the Democritean”) in circa 200 B.C.E. See E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 246. In the *Kyranides*, a single material can serve a variety of purposes. For example, the beryl stone cures shortness of breath and liver and kidney illness, but also brings “goodwill to married couples” (Hermes Trismegistus, *Kyranides* (*Die Kyraniden*), ed. Dimitris Kaimakis [Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1976], 34). This multiplicity of applications for the beryl stone, however, does not equate kidney or liver disorders with marital strife. These two disorders are distinct from one another; their only commonality is that the beryl stone influences each symptom positively.

27. Hermes Trismegistus, *Kyranides*, 34.
28. I thank Florent Heintz and Emmanuel Bourbouhakis for assistance in translating passages from Hermes Trismegistus.
29. Hermes Trismegistus, *Kyranides*, 197.
30. κορώνη καὶ δεδώνη καλουμένη, ὄρνεόν ἐστι πᾶσι γνωστόν, ἧς ἡ καρδία φορουμένη ὁμόνοιαν εἰς τὸ ἀνδρόγυνον παρέχει (Hermes Trismegistus, *Kyranides*, 211)[The κορώνη is also called δεδώνη, a well known bird, whose heart, if worn, brings harmony to married couples].
31. It should be noted that there is no mention of birth facilitation in the aforementioned spells of Hermes Trismegistus. Conception and healthy parturition were addressed through other types of magical amulets that employ different terminology and iconography. See, for example, the *Kestoi* of Julius Africanus as preserved in the writings of Michael Psellus (Francis C. R. Thee, *Julius Africanus and the Early Christian View of Magic* [Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1984], 186 and 188; Jeffrey Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 [1993]: 25–62; and Barry Baldwin, “Michael Psellus on the Properties of Stones,” *Byzantinoslavica* 56 [1995]: 398–99 and 401).
32. In addition to figure 4.2, at least two other early Byzantine marriage rings with inscriptions of χάρις are known. A seventh-century gold ring also in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (acc. no. 69.77) shows the bride and groom in frontal bust form and flanking a cross and a bust of Christ. It is inscribed in Greek ΘΕΟΥ (from God) above and ΧΑΡΙC (grace) below. The ring is dated to the seventh century based on stylistic comparison with similar bust of Christ figures found on pilgrims’ ampullae in the treasury of the Monza Cathedral, Italy (Ross, *Catalogue*, 57–58). A second ring also in gold and dating to the seventh century shows the bride and groom in frontal bust form flanking a cross. A dove with a sprig in its mouth appears above. The inscription in the exergue reads OMONOIA (harmony) ΘΕΟΥ (with the “O” and the “Υ” conflated) ΧΑΡΙC (from God grace) (Paul Spieser, “Collection Paul Canellopoulos,” *Bulletin de Correspondence hellénique* 96 [1972]: 125–27).
33. Ross, *Catalogue*, 7 and 57.

34. The term χάρις also appears frequently on antique gems, expressing a desire for “favor” or “success,” particularly in business and social situations. See Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 47. For a general discussion of Greek amulets and spells that focus on χάρις to bring the wearer success and charm, see John J. Winkler, “The Constraints of Eros,” in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 218–20.
35. Hermes Trismegistus, *Kyranides*, 34.
36. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, fig.159, pl. VIII.
37. *Ibid.*, 120. A second- to third-century silver amulet from Egypt reiterates this definition of χάρις as attractive force in its inscription, “Grant charm [χάρις], friendship, success, and sexiness to the man wearing this amulet” (Christopher Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1999], 107).
38. Use of χάρις with the connotation of physical attraction and charm appears in the fifth-century *vita* of Saint Thekla. In the first instance, a man describes an eye catching woman as “admirably pretty, so superiorly beautiful, so full of charm [χαρίτων μετόν]” (Gilbert Dagron, *Vie et Miracles de Sainte Thecle: Texte grec, traduction et commentaire* [Brussels: Société des bollandistes, 1978], 378–79). In the second instance, a woman loses the affections of her husband because she has disfigured her “charming” [χαρίεν] face through the application of a poisoned beauty product (*Ibid.*, 400–401).
39. For the pairing of ὁμόνοια and a derivative of χάρις in a magical text, see Hermes Trismegistus, *Kyranides*, 34. The aforementioned ring in the Canellopoulos Collection, Athens, also exhibits the inscriptions OMONIOIA and XAPIC together (see n. 32; Spieser, “Collection Paul Canellopoulos,” 127, fig. 18).
40. John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 111–12.
41. Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 291–92.
42. *Ibid.*, 291–92.
43. Hermes Trismegistus, *Kyranides*, 197.
44. Thee, *Julius Africanus*, 188.
45. Marvin Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 218–22.
46. *Ibid.*, 218–22.
47. Marie Theres Fögen, “Balsamon on Magic: From Roman Secular Law to Byzantine Canon Law,” in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 103; and Th. Mommsen and P. M. Meyer, eds. *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellae ad heodosianum pertinentes*, I and II (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1905), 9.16.4–6, a. 356/7.

48. Fögen, "Balsamon on Magic," 100; and Frank Trombley, "The Council in Trullo (691–692): A Study of the Canons Relating to Paganism, Heresy, and the Invasions," *Comitatus* 9 (1978): 6.
49. The rings probably played some role in marking the agreement of a betrothal, but it was a third type of object, the marriage crown, that played a more prominent role in ceremonies and later liturgies (Meyendorff, "Christian Marriage in Byzantium," 104–05). On the topic Byzantine marriage crowns, see Christopher Walter, "Marriage Crowns in Byzantine Iconography," *Zograf* 10 (1979): 33–91. No marriage crowns from the early Byzantine era are extant. For discussion of two later Byzantine crowns in the collection of the Benaki Museum, Athens, see P. A. Drossoyianni, "A Pair of Byzantine Crowns," *XVI. Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress, Akten 11/3, Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/3 (1982): 529–38. Drossoyianni identifies the objects as votive offerings, but Vikan persuasively argues for interpreting them as marriage crowns (Vikan, "Art and Marriage," 145, n. 3).
50. Meyendorff, "Christian Marriage in Byzantium," 101. The Emperor Leo VI (r. 886–912) published a law (Novella 89), which required marriages to be officiated by a church authority: "We order that marital cohabitation be sanctioned by the witness of the sacred blessings" (Ibid., 105; P. Noailles and A. Dain, *Les Nouvelles de Léon VI le Sage* [Paris: Société d'édition les belles lettres, 1944], 297). On Byzantine marriage of the pre-Iconoclastic era in general, see K. Ritzer, *Le mariage dans les églises chrétiennes du Ier au XIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970).
51. Meyendorff, "Christian Marriage in Byzantium," 105.
52. Michael and Mary Whitby, trans., *The History of Theophylact Simocatta: An English Translation with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 33; Theophylactus Simocatta, *Historiae*, ed. C. de Boor, rev. Peter Wirth (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1972).
53. Arthur Armiaud, trans., *La légende syriaque de Saint Alexis l'homme de Dieu* (Paris: F. Vieweg, Libraire-Éditeur Émile Bouillon, 1889), 12–13. See also Vikan, "Art and Marriage," 162.
54. See Ross, *Catalogue*, 37–39. The exact purpose of Byzantine marriage belts is unclear, but reference to them in texts such as the life of Saint Alexis speak of their being given as gifts to the bride from the groom (Armiaud, *La légende*, 13). Even more so than marriage rings, marriage belts were nonliturgical objects associated with the more secular dimension of the celebration and commemoration of the marriage and/or engagement.
55. L. S. B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphroditto: His Works and His World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 89. See also Vikan, "Art and Marriage," 162.
56. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphroditto*, 89.
57. See William Wixom, ed. *Mirror of the Medieval World* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and H. N. Abrams, 1999), 25, no. 28.
58. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphroditto*, 89.

59. *Ibid.*, 82.
60. M. Simon, "Bellerophon chrétienne," *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'épigraphie, et d'histoire offerts à Jérôme Carcopino* (Paris: Hachette, 1966): 889–903.
61. For discussion of the questionable identity of Bellerophon as a Christian figure, see George A. Hanfmann, "The Continuity of Classical Art: Culture, Myth, and Faith," in *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 85–86.
62. A comparable juxtaposition of a bride to a pagan figure is found in the fourth-century Roman silver container known as the Projecta Casket in the collection of the British Museum, London (acc. no. 66.12–29.1). The box depicts the goddess Aphrodite as a visual analogue to the bride Projecta. For the Projecta casket, see Kathleen Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasury* (London: British Museum Publications, 1981), especially 72–75.
63. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito*, 112.