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EARLY CHRISTIAN SILVER

Sacred and domestic

Ruth Leader-Newby

The craft of silver

Finely worked silver vessels were used in sacred and domestic contexts in the ancient world for hundreds of years before the advent of Christianity. The use of silver as an artistic medium by early Christians is both a continuation of and a departure from these long-established traditions. Individual Christians, especially those of elevated social rank, remained avid consumers of silver in their secular domestic life, despite the hostile attitude towards personal wealth displayed by many early Christian writers, while Christian communities put silver to new uses in the service of the Church, borrowing the material symbols of social rank to emphasise the Church’s newly-acquired status as the dominant religion in the Roman world. However, before looking at how early Christians used silver in both sacred and secular settings, a short introduction to some of the key techniques and terminology of silverworking is necessary.

The techniques of Roman silverworking must be deduced from close examination of individual pieces, and comparison with more recent practice, since no ancient technical treatises for this art form exist. Although silver was mined in several locations in the Roman Empire, much of the silverware made in the late Roman period would have been recycled from old pieces, either provided by a client or acquired by the craftsman. Silver was collected in taxes during Late Antiquity but was not required for coinage, and so would often be released from the imperial treasuries in return for gold. This practice is thought to be behind the system of imperial control stamps, which are found on a significant proportion of silver vessels from the sixth and seventh centuries AD (including some liturgical silver), and allow these pieces to be dated closely. Stamped silver would have originated in Constantinople, and possibly other eastern imperial centres such as Antioch and Alexandria. Vessels may have been roughly worked into basic shapes, stamped, and then sold on to private craftsmen, or they may have been fully finished in imperial workshops. In either case, the basic shape of a vessel could be created either by raising it from a sheet of silver by means of hammering, or by casting a blank in a mould. The former technique was used especially for closed forms, such as jugs, or the bowls of chalices, while the latter was frequently employed for plates, bowls and spoon handles. More complex vessels would be made in several pieces (for example the bowl and foot of a chalice, or a jug and its handle) and soldered together. Relief decoration was added subsequently, using the technique of chasing, whereby the metal is worked from the front with hammers and punches; or repoussé...
Early Christian silver

where the design is worked from the reverse. Two-dimensional surface decoration could be created with engraving and niello inlay. Niello is a soft mixture of silver sulphide that turns hard and black on heating, providing a contrast with the shiny surface of the silver. Relief decoration could also be further embellished with punched patterns, and details might be picked out with gilding. Both sacred and secular silver was made using various combinations of these different techniques; generally speaking, the more elaborate the object, the more different techniques are employed in its making.

Silver in churches

We do not know when silver vessels were first employed for administering Christian communion. The existing evidence suggests that by the time of the emperor Constantine’s conversion in the fourth century AD, communion vessels made of precious metal were not a new phenomenon. An inventory of vessels confiscated in the persecution of 303 AD from a church in Cirta (later Constantine) in North Africa lists gold and silver chalices, and silver dishes and lamps. However, the official sanctioning of Christianity with the Edict of Milan in 313 AD had the effect of substantially increasing the amount of wealth lavished upon church furnishings. Some of the key evidence can be found in the Liber Pontificalis (“Book of Pontiffs”), a series of biographies of the popes originally compiled in the sixth century in Rome. It incorporates detailed inventories of donations made by Constantine and his son to the churches he founded in Rome after his conversion, recording the gift of large numbers of both gold and silver patens, chalices, and other liturgical vessels, as well as light fittings, silver revetments and sculpture to the imperial foundations. The following extract, which describes the donation to the basilica of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, is typical:

an altar of finest silver weighing 200 lb [a Roman pound = 327.45 g]; 2 patens of finest gold each weighing 15 lb; 2 silver patens each weighing 15 lb; a larger gold scyphus [chalice], with the imperial name represented on it, weighing 20 lb; a smaller gold scyphus weighing 10 lb, 5 silver scyphi each weighing 12 lb, 20 silver service chalices each weighing 3 lb, 4 silver amae [wine jars] each weighing 15 lb.

Although these imperial donations were undoubtedly grander than anything used in churches up to that point—Constantine’s ostentatious patronage signaling Christianity’s new status as an imperially sanctioned religion—we can presume that they were inspired by more modest silver items already in use.

As well as being used to make portable liturgical objects to adorn churches, silver could also be fastened to the walls and furniture in the form of revetments: thin silver sheeting that was attached to a core of stone or wood. It has been calculated that the silver furniture donated to St Peter’s and the Lateran, as listed in the Liber Pontificalis, outweighs silver objects by a ratio of about two and a half or two to one. This is not surprising when one considers the scale of some of the structures that were covered in silver, such as the Lateran fastigium (a type of colonnaded screen or canopy) clad in silver and decorated with near life-size silver statues of Christ and the apostles. Two centuries later when Procopius describes Justinian’s church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, he tells his readers that they can gauge the amount of precious metal the emperor has lavished on his foundation from the fact that the sanctuary alone displayed forty thousand pounds of silver, most of which would have been in the form of revetments. A silver ciborium (a type of domed canopy that enclosed an altar) was considered an essential part of a saint’s
shrine: that of St Demetrios in Thessalonike is perhaps the most famous from the early Byzantine period, and it features in several of the accounts of the saint's miracles that were compiled in the seventh century. One miracle revolves around the means by which extra silver was acquired to repair St Demetrios' ciborium (which unusually contained his tomb rather than an altar) after it had been damaged in a fire. In the story, the saint warns the archbishop against melting down his silver episcopal throne—yet another type of silver furnishing—and ensures that two donors appear with the necessary quantity of silver. Similarly, Severus of Antioch preached a homily in 516 exhorting his congregation to donate sufficient silver to cover the ciborium of local martyr St Drosis.

The Constantinian liturgical vessels perished in the Gothic sack of Rome in 410 AD, nor does any trace remain of their replacements from the fifth and sixth centuries (although these are listed in the Liber Pontificalis). However, seven hoards of early Christian liturgical silver have been discovered in modern times, together with a handful of individual pieces, and it is from these that our knowledge of the forms of this medium, and its decoration, derives. Such a small sample means that our understanding of liturgical silver is necessarily limited. With the exception of the fourth-century hoard from Water Newton, all these hoards have been dated to the sixth century. Moreover, the geographical distribution of the hoards' find spots is uneven: two hoards were found in the west of the Roman empire (Water Newton in Britain and the Gallunianu Treasure from central Italy), and the remainder were discovered in the east, in Syria and Turkey. Indeed the Syrian hoards (the Kaper Koraon, Beth Misona, Phela, and Ma’aret en-Noman Treasures) are associated with a relatively small geographical area near the modern Syrian town of Idlib, and belonged to small village churches there, accounting for the very similar nature of much of their contents.

The Sion or Kumluca Treasure (found in Lycia, south western Turkey) is the only one of the hoards that gives us some insight into the quality of vessels that might have adorned urban churches of this period. Despite the limitations of the surviving body of material, a relatively large range of liturgical and paraliturgical objects are represented in the hoards. Almost all hoards contain the basic liturgical equipment of paten (Latin patena; Greek diskos) and chalice (Latin calix, scyphos; Greek poterion). Other objects relating to the preparation of the eucharist that are present in several hoards include ewers and jugs, spoons, strainers and ladles, while the broader adornment of the church is represented by a variety of different types of freestanding and hanging lamps, votive crosses, and embossed book covers for the gospels. There are even some unusual objects like the asterisk from the Sion Treasure (a star-shaped object used to support a cloth over the host), or the two silver fans (rhipidia) from the Kaper Koraon hoard, ceremonial versions of the peacock feather fans originally used to keep flies from the bread and wine during mass.

As with the liturgical and paraliturgical vessels, the surviving hoards offer evidence that silver revetments featured in church decoration outside the major metropolitan centres, which are the focus of our literary sources. The Kaper Koraon Treasure contains a wooden cross, sheathed in silver, which is held in place with 100 silver nails. The Sion Treasure has revetments from several objects: an altar table, one or more lampstands, and several pieces whose function is unknown, as well as 29 silver nails and 3 spirally fluted small columns. What is significant is that all these items seem to have been carefully removed from the cores to which they were fastened, in contrast to the cross from the Kaper Koraon hoard. Clearly silver revetments could, if the need arose, be removed for concealment together with the rest of a church’s moveable wealth, lest they fall victim to looting and pillage. One theory suggests the Sion Treasure may have been hidden in the seventh century to escape Arab raids along the Lycian coast. But it is also possible
that the silver had been removed to fund a worthy cause: the sanctity of a church’s holdings of silver did not prevent it from serving as a financial reserve if the need was deemed great enough. The foremost example of this is the “loan” made in 621 to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius of the silver from Hagia Sophia, in order to finance his campaign against the Persians.\(^{12}\)

So far we have seen the range of ways in which silver vessels and sheeting could be used to adorn churches. What about the appearance of the pieces themselves and their decoration? The earliest of the seven surviving liturgical hoards is the Water Newton (or Durobrivae) Treasure, discovered in eastern England in 1975 and dated to the early fourth century AD (Figure 15.1).\(^{13}\) This offers the earliest evidence of the shapes and decorative choices for liturgical vessels. It comprises nine silver vessels, as well as about 18 small votive plaques, and its total weight is about 12 Roman pounds—a tiny fraction of the huge weights listed in the \textit{Liber Pontificalis} inventories.\(^{14}\) Two things stand out about the Water Newton hoard. First, though modest, the objects it contains correspond closely to the types of vessel in the contemporary inventories: there is a paten and a chalice (an undecorated kantharos-type cup with handles), as well as jugs and strainers, and a bowl with suspension rings that could have served as a lamp. Second, their decoration is for the most part very simple, and inscriptions and symbols rather than images indicate their Christian liturgical character. One of the jugs and the bowl with suspension rings are decorated with mainly floral ornament; the chalice, another jug, and a bowl are undecorated. The paten—the largest piece in the hoard—has minimal decoration: a series of concentric rings, within the smallest of which is a lightly inscribed chi-rho, flanked by an alpha and omega (unfortunately hard to make out in photographs). Two small bowls each carry a votive inscription beneath the rim, and feature the chi-rho monogram flanked by an alpha and an omega as a device to mark the beginning/end of the inscription. Similarly, most of the votive plaques also feature the chi-rho/alpha-omega monogram, as does the handle of the silver strainer.

Simple decoration based upon Christian symbols and dedicatory inscriptions is a feature of the sixth-century liturgical hoards too, which are comparable in their relatively modest level of craftsmanship, fitting with the theory that the Syrian hoards belonged to small village churches, not...
large urban establishments. Moreover, some vessel types changed little over the two centuries: the Water Newton paten is a large deep dish with a flat base, high sloping sides, and a flat horizontal rim, as are the patens in the Kaper Koraon, Phela and Beth Misona hoards (as well as that from the Italian Galunianu hoard). If we compare the paten from Water Newton with the paten in the Beth Misona hoard (Figure 15.2), not only are they of a similar size (approximately 33 cm in diameter, though the Beth Misona paten weighs less), but the Beth Misona paten is also decorated with a series of concentric rings. Instead of the chi–rho, a cross with flaring arms is engraved in its centre, and enclosed by an inscription recording the donation of this paten by “Domnos son of Zachecos” to “(the church of) St Sergius of the village of Beth Misona.”

The Kaper Koraon and Phela Treasures also contain multiple patens with the same simple decoration of cross and encircling dedicatory inscription. Although the Water Newton paten has no inscription, dedicatory inscriptions feature on the two small beaker-like bowls in the hoard, which conceivably could have served as chalices. Their shape (and that of the other chalice in the Water Newton hoard) is unlike that of surviving sixth-century chalices, which all have broad hemispherical bowls mounted on a flaring circular foot, often with a knop. However, the mode of decoration, an engraved inscription around the rim naming the donor, remains the same.

Despite these important similarities, we can see a wider range of decorative options in use in the sixth century, even within the Syrian village treasures. In some cases, inscriptions are inlaid in niello, as in the chalice from the Kaper Koraon Treasure dedicated by Symeonius the magistrate, now in the Walters Art Museum (Figure 15.3). A further elaboration can be seen in the three

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**Figure 15.2**  Three chalices and a paten, Beth Misona Treasure, c. 500–700. © The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J.H. Wade Fund.
chalices that form the rest of the Beth Misona hoard, in the form of tondo busts of Christ and the evangelists worked in relief on the body of the chalice, and stylised leaves embossed on the knop (the round knob on the stem, Figure 15.2).

In two of these chalices, the inscription around the rim has been replaced by a pattern of concave discs alternating with palmettes: clearly the images of Christ and the evangelists, rather than word or symbols, are now being used to mark these chalices as liturgical vessels. Such tondo or clipeate busts are found on other types of liturgical vessel too, most notably the large silver ewer in the Louvre known as the “Homs Vase” (another Syrian find of the early 20th century) and a censer in the Sion Treasure. Figural imagery is used on patens too: possibly the most elaborate vessels in the Kaper Koraon hoard are the two “Communion of the Apostles” patens (now in Washington DC and Istanbul). These depict two similar (though not identical) versions of the same scene: Christ (shown twice) administering communion to the apostles at the altar of an early Byzantine church (Figure 15.4). Details of the scene are gilded (at least in the Washington paten) and both feature a dedicatory inscription in niello around the rim, but the two plates are clearly by different hands. This subject is highly appropriate for the patens’ function since, rather than representing the Last Supper (the prototype of the eucharist), it represents the ritual itself, with Christ and the apostles taking the place of the sixth-century priest and his congregation. It is surprising, then, that these two patens are the only surviving representation of this subject on liturgical silver from the late antique period. Of course, we should remember that what survives is only a tiny fraction of the church silver that existed in that period, and we have no way of knowing how representative a sample has been preserved.
The Communion of the Apostles patens are not the largest or heaviest that survive, or even the most skillfully crafted (despite their ambitious subject matter). The six patens in the Sion or Kumluca Treasure range in diameter from just under 60 cm to 77 cm, and weigh almost four and a half kilograms each, twice as large and more than four times as heavy as the Communion of the Apostles patens. The Sion patens display superlative craftsmanship, but the basic concept of their design is relatively simple. Three have a cusped border worked in relief with alternating palmettes and acanthus leaves (picked out in gilding), enclosing a dedicatory inscription inlaid with niello, and a gilded christogram in the centre (Figure 15.5), while two others have a convex fluted rim, with the flutes alternately gilded to produce a striped effect, again enclosing a niello inscription and a large gilded cross in the centre. Despite differences in size, weight and workmanship, the basic formula is not so different from the simple patens in the Syrian hoards, or even the Water Newton paten.

In this context it is worth noting that we have little idea what the liturgical vessels mentioned in the Liber Pontificalis actually looked like. Descriptive details, such as “gold chalices . . . with . . . jewels”, “a larger gold scyphus with the imperial name represented on it”, or “a silver chalice decorated in relief” are rare. An inventory is by its nature brief, and concerned primarily with the monetary value of the objects itemised (description simply serving to identify particular pieces), but the superlative quality yet simple design of the Sion patens suggests that not all “metropolitan” liturgical silver would have had elaborate figural decoration.

**Christian silver in the domestic sphere**

When Severus, the patriarch of Antioch, preached a sermon in the early sixth century, exhorting his congregation to donate silver to cover the ciborium of their local saint, Drosis, he argued...
that they could easily afford the expense. There were many in his congregation, he claimed, who ate their meals off silver dishes, while their wives visited the baths in silver-decorated chairs, pulled by mules with silver harnesses, taking with them silver vessels “weighing many pounds”. Despite the potential for rhetorical exaggeration, he nevertheless presents us with the image of a wealthy urban Christian community for whom silver was an essential sign of their status. While they might have enjoyed hearing about the ascetic renunciation practiced by St Drosis (described in the earlier part of the sermon), this was not a mode of life that many of them chose to emulate. This attitude to personal wealth was not restricted to the citizens of sixth-century Antioch; rather it is typical of Christianised elite Romans from the fourth century onwards. Severus’ evocation of the types of silver objects used by the wealthy citizens of Antioch is believable, not least because it is closely mirrored by the contents of the Esquiline Treasure, a late fourth-century hoard from Rome that includes chair fittings, horse ornaments and women’s toilet vessels, as well as items of tableware. The Esquiline Treasure’s most famous piece, the so-called “Projecta Casket” (Figure 15.6), is particularly relevant in this context, as it bears an inscription that identifies its owners as Christians, but at the same time is decorated with scenes from classical mythology and elite life. Overall it is a prime example of how the new Christian identity of the Roman elite was articulated in the medium of silver.

The Projecta Casket is a large silver box (approximately 55 cm × 43 cm × 28 cm), made in the form of two truncated rectangular pyramids, connected by hinges at their bases, and with flattened, rectangular tops that form the apex and the base of the casket respectively. The whole casket, with the exception of the base, is elaborately worked with figures in relief, and decorated further with engraved and punched details, as well as gilding. The apex of the lid shows the portrait of a bearded man and a richly dressed woman within a wreath supported by two cupids, a common way of portraying a husband and wife in fourth-century art, especially
on sarcophagi and gold glass medallions. Beneath them, on the front panel of the lid, is the figure of the nude Venus, holding a mirror and a pin, supported on a shell by two tritons, each of whom has a cupid standing on his back bearing a box and a basket respectively. The two end panels of the lid continue the theme of the marine Venus, depicting nereids riding sea monsters, attended by more cupids. The back of the lid abandons this mythological iconography to show a woman accompanied by attendants, approaching a multi-domed bath building. This theme of “elite daily life” is continued on the front of the lower part of the casket, which depicts a rich woman seated in her dressing room, flanked by two female attendants holding a mirror and a casket. The remaining three sides of the casket body show a series of further male and female attendants (nine in total), framed by curtained arcading and holding a series of boxes, lights and cosmetic utensils.

Through close iconographic and thematic parallels the casket’s decoration makes a clear equation between the goddess Venus and the Roman woman adorning herself: each is shown seated, placing a pin in her hair with an identical gesture, while her attendant (human or divine) holds the same round mirror so she can admire her reflection. Venus’ attendants of tritons, nereids, cupids and sea-monsters are echoed in the Roman matron’s retinue of male and female servants. The flattering comparison of the Roman wife of the casket’s lid and sides with the goddess of love, Venus, might seem straightforward, but it is not. Engraved along the sill at the front of the casket—directly below the image of Venus—are the words: Secunde et Proiecta vivatis in Christo (“Secundus and Projecta, live in Christ”), preceded by a monogram cross with an alpha and omega. Thus the Projecta Casket combines the iconography of the toilet of Venus and scenes of elite life with an emphatically Christian inscription. An elaborate silver object whose purpose is purely secular (to transport its owner’s possessions to the baths in ostentatious style, as in the scene on the back of the casket) at the same time exhorts its owners—by implication the husband and wife represented on the top of the casket—to pursue a Christian life. How are we supposed to interpret this juxtaposition?
As others have warned, it would be a mistake to claim that Venus was simply a meaningless decorative device, since the formal iconographic programme of the box is too carefully planned for this to be the case. Nor can the inscription be reduced to a conventional expression of goodwill, given its emphatic evocation of the name of Christ, reinforced by the cross monogram that precedes it. Rather, through the inscription, the casket asserts that Christianity is an integral part of Projecta’s identity as a wealthy Roman woman, standing alongside her familiarity with the classical culture that held up Venus as an archetype of feminine beauty and wifely love, and her use of jewellery, fine clothes, bathing and cosmetics to adorn herself for her husband. Conflating these three facets of fourth-century Roman elite identity was not without its inherent contradictions, but it was a popular strategy and the Projecta Casket is not unique among fourth-century silver in doing this.

In fact, many of the major hoards of domestic silver surviving from the fourth century contain a variety of items that in one way or another advertise their owners’ Christian allegiance, while at the same time other pieces in these hoards proclaim their affiliation to the mythological traditions of classical culture. The Mildenhall Treasure, found in eastern England like the Water Newton hoard, is best known for the “Great Dish”, a huge circular plate decorated with an outer frieze of Dionysos and his followers, and an inner frieze of nereids riding sea monsters (very similar to the two short panels on the lid of the Projecta Casket). Two small companion plates depict maenads dancing with a satyr and Pan respectively. Yet this same hoard also contains a set of three spoons with the chi-rho monogram, flanked by an alpha and an omega engraved in the bowl (Figure 15.7).

Likewise the Kaiseraugst Treasure (discovered in Switzerland in the 1960s) is famed for its octagonal plate showing scenes from the childhood of Achilles, and also features a silver statuette of Venus and a rectangular plate depicting Ariadne and Dionysos. However, one of the smaller pieces in the hoard is a pointed utensil with a small spoon at one end, and at the other a pointed

Figure 15.7 Spoons with chi-rho monogram, Mildenhall Treasure. © The British Museum.
comma-shaped finial, decorated with an openwork chi-rho monogram. It is conventionally described as a toothpick, but the function of such implements in a Roman dining service is not known for certain.

The Hoxne Treasure (from Suffolk, England) features a considerable number of Christian symbols on small dining utensils: there are two spoons with the chi-rho, one inscribed Vivas in Deo (“Live in God”), and a set of ten ladles decorated with the monogram cross on the handles. Unlike the Mildenhall and Kaiseraugst hoards, this hoard comprised only small bowls and other table implements (in addition to coins and gold jewellery) and we have no way of knowing whether the larger items, which its owners must have undoubtedly possessed, were decorated with the same type of mythological scenes as the pieces in the Mildenhall and Kaiseraugst hoards. The use of Christian symbols in the Hoxne Treasure even extended to the jewellery: one of the gold necklace clasps is decorated with a tiny filigree monogram cross.

The symbols of Christianity adorning spoons and ladles may seem insignificant in the wider context of their respective hoards. Unlike the Projecta Casket, Christian symbols and mythological imagery do not appear on the same objects, and one could argue that it would have been possible for an uninterested dinner guest to overlook the Christian references entirely. Nevertheless, the juxtapositions are significant, showing that for the owners of these hoards, adopting the imperially sanctioned religion did not entail a straightforward rejection of a long-established tradition of advertising one’s classical culture at the dining table. Among those fourth-century Romans wealthy enough to afford a silver dinner service, a discreet advertisement of their religion was preferred. There is also the possibility that, for some individuals in the fourth-century, the use of the chi-rho or cross monogram may have been seen less as a profession of faith than a belief in the apotropaic, luck-bringing powers of this symbol (as proved by Constantine’s successful deployment of it at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge).

Because we know next to nothing about the owners of these hoards, it is impossible to say exactly what meaning they would have ascribed to the Christian symbols on their possessions. Despite this caution, it is clear that the fourth-century domestic hoards provide important insights into the way in which Christianity came to be integrated into the self-image of the Roman elite. The most explicit manifestation of this (after the Projecta Casket) is the central medallion of the Great Hunting Plate from the Sevso Treasure (Figure 15.8). Using niello inlay upon an engraved silver surface, it combines scenes of hunting with an open-air banquet: both are idealised images of the male elite lifestyle, in the same way that the scenes of the procession to the baths and female adornment on the Projecta Casket represent an ideal of elite feminine activity. Like the casket, it features an inscription: a verse couplet expressing the hope that the ironically described “small vessels” should last a certain Sevso and his descendants for many years. The juncture between the beginning and end of the inscription, located conspicuously at the apex of the medallion, is marked by a tiny yet elegantly formed chi-rho in a wreath. The chi-rho symbol is an integral part of the design of the plate, but is simultaneously discreet. It only advertises Sevso’s religious allegiance to those who look closely enough to read the inscription and study the miniature scene. But the very fact of its presence shows that Christianity was an integral part of Sevso’s self-fashioning.

Our understanding of silver as a form of early Christian art is shaped by accidents of survival: while there are numerous hoards of domestic silver dating to the fourth century, there are far fewer comparable hoards from the fifth and sixth centuries. Similarly, liturgical hoards cluster around the sixth century, and there is very little later material surviving from either East or West with which we can compare it. Nevertheless, silver surviving from the sixth and seventh centuries casts an important light on the way that Christianity is evoked in a domestic context as it shifts from being one religion among many (as it was in the fourth century), to being the only recognised religion of the Roman empire.
One of these survivals is a type of silver dish from the eastern Empire known as a “cross monogram plate”, of which there are many extant examples. A significant proportion of these can be dated through the imperial control stamps on them, revealing that while the earliest surviving example was made in the reign of Anastasius (491–518 AD), most were produced between 578 and 641.\textsuperscript{22} They get their name from their decoration: a small niello cross, or a monogram of the owner’s name arranged around a cross, enclosed in a wreath or scroll (Figure 15.9). Despite the presence of the cross (reminiscent of the decoration of some contemporary patens) these are not liturgical vessels and have been found as part of domestic dinner services, even as a set in a range of sizes.\textsuperscript{23}

Unlike the discreet chi-rho symbols in the fourth century hoards, the crosses on these plates reflect a society where the image of the cross was ubiquitous, and the owner’s Christian allegiance was expected. Their rate of survival suggests that they were produced in large numbers, and widely used. While domestic silver decorated with classical mythology (in the tradition of the Projecta Casket or the Mildenhall Great Dish) continued to be made into the seventh century, at the same time Christianised alternatives to these themes were developed, as shown by the set of nine plates depicting the early life of the biblical King David, dating from the early seventh century, which were discovered in Cyprus in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{24} These represent David in classicising style as an equivalent to the heroes of Graeco-Roman mythology, and in doing so herald a new type of secular decoration for the Christianised domestic sphere. In the history of early Christian silver, both the David Plates and the cross monogram plates anticipate developments of later Christian art as much as they connect to their antecedents in this medium from the fourth century.
Notes


5 Davis, Book of Pontiffs, 16.

6 Procopius, Buildings 1.1.65.


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16 Davis, Book of Pontiffs, 23.
17 Guidi, Severus of Antioch, 247.
22 Dodd, Byzantine Silver Stamps; Ruth E. Leader-Newby, Silver and Society in Late Antiquity: Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 177.

**Further reading**

Most research on silver is published in the form of catalogues, either of individual hoards or exhibitions. For liturgical silver, Mango Silver From Early Byzantium and Boyd and Mango Ecclesiastical Silver Plate are essential reading. The fourth-century hoards discussed in this chapter have been catalogued in detail (Cahn, Kaufmann-Heinimann et al. Der spätromische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst; Guggisberg and Kaufmann-Heinimann Der spätromische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst, die neuen Funde; Johns The Hoxne Late Roman Treasure; Mango and Bennett The Sevio Treasure; Painter The Mildenhall Treasure), while Painter The Wealth of the Roman World is still a useful reference source for a wide variety of objects. Leader-Newby Silver and Society offers a broader study of the key functions of silver in Late Antiquity, while Noga-Banai The Trophies of the Martyrs is an iconographical study of one type of object. On uses of silver (and other wealth) in sacred contexts, both pagan and Christian, Janes God and Gold and Lapatin The Berthouville Silver Treasure provide valuable insights.