

Three copper alloy spoons from the Peloponnese (14th – 16th centuries)

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ABSTRACT

The need for consumption of liquid foods, especially by vulnerable groups (infants, the sick, the elderly), has contributed to the long-term use of spoons. In the Middle Ages, eating with the use of one's fingers was the most common way. However, spoons, in addition to their practical use, when made of metal, were treated as investment goods and symbols of social rank. A copper alloy spoon from the Frankish castle of Chlemoutsi with a double-headed eagle at the tip of its handle, and two more samples from the church of Hagios Petros of Kastania in Western Mani correspond to types known in the late Antiquity, which vary in typology and are found in a wide geographical range in the late Middle Ages.

Since prehistoric times, spoons made of clay, metal, glass, bone, horn or wood have been used as household items, for the consumption of liquid foods and desserts.¹ Throughout the entire medieval period, viscous and solid foods were most commonly ingested using one's fingers, eventually with the help of bread. Therefore, the use of spoons, apart from gradually answering a necessity, implied sophistication and, to a certain extent, reflected one's social position.²

Luxurious spoons, made of silver or copper alloys and sometimes decorated, often formed sets of identical objects, indicating the economic and social status of their owners, and were even used as a means of boasting.³ References to the utilitarian and capital value of spoons are quite frequent in written sources of the middle and late Byzantine period, as well as in the Latin states of the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴ In Western Europe, silver spoons were treated as a social symbol and investment goods, and were often exchanged as wedding gifts or offered at baptisms.⁵ Moreover, in monasteries, just like in hospitals and other public benefit foundations, the

1 Koukoules 1933, 110; Boas 2010, 146–47; Parani 2010, 151; Pappa 2012, 25–33. See also: <https://www.cmog.org/search/site/Roman%20spoon?f%5B0%5D=bundle%3Aartwork>.

2 Prawer 1972, 86; Weiss Adamson 2004, 4, 105, 158; Vroom 2007, 193, 198, 200, 204; Parani 2010, 142, 150.

3 Ward-Perkins 1940, 130 fig. 41; Egan 1998, 6, 244–7; Parani 2010, 143–4, 151–2. For the symbolic and sophisticated use of silverware in late Antiquity see Baratte 1992, 5–20; Leader-Newby 2004, especially 75–82.

4 Miklosich and Müller 1862, 406; Gedeon 1896, 115; Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1899, 79–81; Thomas and Constantinides-Hero 2000, 109, 357, 369, 552, 716–717, 745, 968, 1190, 1365, 1479, 1931; Bompaire et al. 2001, 355 v. 55; Talbot 2007, 113–14, 122. For Venetian Crete typically see Panopoulou 2011–2012, 434–35.

5 Gilchrist 2012, 125, 144. Stone moulds for metal spoons have been excavated in Germany and England, Nickel 1964, 43–4, pl. 65; Homer 1991, 66, fig. 21.

personalisation of serving utensils addressed other practical needs – mainly sanitation.⁶

The typology of metal spoons from the Roman and early Byzantine period has been well-documented, mainly because research carried out over the past decades has focused on the study of significant treasures of luxury objects, of which spoons are a part.⁷

Recent research has shed light on the typological evolution of spoons in Medieval Byzantium (8th–middle of the 15th century).⁸ The number of silver spoons, found in collections or excavations, progressively declines from the middle Byzantine period onwards, and the discovery of sets of identical spoons, which probably belonged to wealthy households or institutions, became limited. An obvious explanation could be that subsequently-manufactured spoons were made less frequently from metal, compared to earlier periods.⁹ In all probability, they were mainly made from organic materials, wood or bone, and thus are difficult to find during excavations, complicating the research as a result.¹⁰ Recent finds of wooden spoons from the excavations at the port of Theodosius in Constantinople (Yenikapi) have led to the assumption that such spoons, particularly widespread among the middle and lower social strata, could emulate those manufactured from metal.¹¹

Two known silver spoons from the royal treasure of Preslav, which feature oval-shaped bowls and intricately decorated handles, stand out.¹² The finds of Preslav show a change in the typology of spoons, which seems to have taken place sometime between the 7th and the 10th century. The elongated, shallow, almost pear-shaped bowls, predominant during the 6th and 7th century, were gradually replaced by deeper and narrower, leaf-like forms, already known in the Roman period.¹³ Meanwhile, the disc connecting the bowl with the handle of the spoon was progressively minimised, and eventually became obsolete from the 11th century onwards.¹⁴

In Byzantium, spoons with leaf-shaped oblong bowls never ceased to exist. They were used uninterruptedly, due to their practical shape. There are two leaf-shaped spoons, one made of lead from Rhodes and a copper alloy one from the Yassi Ada shipwreck, which date back to the early Byzantine period.¹⁵ A silver spoon, nowadays exhibited in Munich, probably dates to the 11th or 12th century.¹⁶ A bronze spoon from the St. Nikolaos Orphanos church of Thessaloniki, dating back to the 14th century, has a perforated handle ending in a bird. Given its rather small length (11.5 cm), it could have been intended to feed young children.¹⁷ Leaf-shaped spoons were equally widespread throughout Europe.¹⁸

An interesting case is a copper alloy spoon, collected at the castle of Chlemoutsi.¹⁹ Its bowl is leaf-shaped

6 Egan 1998, 8, 246, 251 no. 769, fig. 197, 252 no. 773, fig. 198; Talbot 2007, 113–14.

7 Hauser 1992; Taft 1996, 210, 212–13; Drandaki 2008, 150–64; Cormack and Vassilaki 2008, 155 no. 99–102, 158 no. 107–109; Parani 2010, 139 and note 3, 141–4, with extended bibliography; Drandaki et al. 2013, 234–35 no. 104 (A. Drandaki). See also Hobbs 2005, 197–208.

8 Parani 2010, 150–3.

9 Which can be attributed to the gradual loss of the metal-mining regions of the Byzantine empire (Matschke 2006, 208).

10 Wooden spoons were excavated from sites enjoying stable temperature and humidity conditions. Typically see Ottaway and Rogers 2000, 2805; Colardelle and Colardelle 1980, 193, fig. 43–4; Dean 1927, 39, fig. 54.D.

11 Karamani Pekin 2007, 227, fig. 22; Kızıltan et al. 2013, 185 no. 196, no. 198, 187 no. 202, no. 204 (M.A. Polat).

12 Totev 1993, 83, fig. 53; Pace 2001, no. 58.35.

13 Shatil and Behar 2013, 321–23, no. 4, 5; Parani 2010, 143.

14 Wamser 2004, 247 no. 362–63 (early Byzantine period) and 247 no. 364 (middle Byzantine period) (C. Schmidt), where the disc-shaped joint between the bowl and the handle has gradually diminished.

15 Papanikola-Bakirtzi 2002, 340 no. 382 (A. Nika). The spoon from Yassi Ada had a leaden sheet over its copper alloy core, possibly due to repair (Bass and van Doorninck 1982, 280 no. MF 23).

16 Wamser 2004, 247 no. 364 (C. Schmidt).

17 Thessaloniki, History and Art 1986, no. 24.3.

18 Typically see Tonnochy 1932, 106–7, pl. XLVI; Mainman and Rogers 2000, 2547, 2644 no. 10366, fig. 1245; Ottaway and Rogers 2000, 2803–5, 3113 no. 14190, fig. 1387.

19 Ephorate of Antiquities of Ilia, Medieval Collection, Inv. number: HM 1248. The castle of Chlemoutsi was erected during early 13th century as an important stronghold of the Principality of Achaia (1205–1428) (Bon 1969, 325–28, 608–29; Athanasoulis 2013, 127–41, with extended bibliography).

and corresponds to types occasionally found across Europe during the late Middle Ages (Fig. 1).²⁰ It has a total length of 14.9 cm and the dimensions of its bowl are 3.2 by 2.9 cm. It is typically similar, in terms of the shape of its bowl, with a pewter spoon, possibly of the 12th century, which was discovered during the excavation of a church in the deserted medieval village of Quattro Macine, in south Puglia, and which was adorned with Eucharistic symbols (fish and wild creatures on either side of the tree of life).²¹ The handle of the spoon from Chlemoutsi castle has a flattened stem and an undecorated back. The front is divided, based on the decoration, into three sections. The first section, closest to the bowl of the spoon, is undecorated. The second –middle– section has a vegetal design inside a ribbon frame. A similar decoration is found on the handle of a spoon from London, dating back to the 14th century.²² The third section, at the tip of the utensil, is adorned with a two-headed eagle with open wings (Fig. 2). The tips of its feathers are portrayed with parallel engravings and its body is covered with a rhomboid grid. A small pellet appears between the two heads.



Fig. 1. Chlemoutsi castle, copper alloy spoon (© Ephorate of Antiquities of Ilia).

In the Middle Ages, the double-headed eagle, a well-known ancient symbol in the Near East, started to spread across Western Europe as a coat of arms, often under the influence of the Byzantine imperial court.²³ In a manuscript from around 1330–1340, associated with the Anjou kings of Naples, suzerain rulers of the Principality of Achaia from 1278 to c. 1386, the two-headed eagle is occasionally used as a coat of arms.²⁴ From the late 13th–14th century, the double-headed eagle was used as a family emblem by the imperial family of Palaiologos and was also adopted by several powerful families, who were affiliated with the Palaiologos dynasty in various ways.²⁵ Although it cannot be ruled out that it belonged to some nobleman of Western European origin, the spoon should probably be linked to Constantine XI Palaiologos, the last Byzantine emperor (1448–1453), and his court, considering Constantine's historically documented stay at the castles of Chlemoutsi and Glarentza from 1428 to 1432.²⁶ In any case, the object most probably had a secular use.

The similarity, in terms of decorative choices, between the spoon from Chlemoutsi castle and a bronze spoon with an almost heart-shaped bowl that was found in the Syrian city of Hama and dates back to the 14th century, is worth noting.²⁷ The spoon from Hama bears in its bowl a coat of arms with an open-winged eagle

20 Egan 1998, 246, 248 no. 750, fig. 192. See also <http://www.ipac.regione.fvg.it/aspx/ViewPercTemRicAppr.aspx?idAmb=120&idSttem=2&idTem=115&TSK=RA&numTsk=5&pg=1>.

21 Arthur 1996, 211, fig. 26; Arthur 2012, 22–3, figs 7–8.

22 Egan 1998, 248 fig. 194.

23 Androudis 2001, 249–52; Babuin 2010, 132–34, 139, 140.

24 The luxurious manuscript was sponsored by Robert of Anjou (1309–1343) between c. 1330–1340, Morrison and Hedeman 2010, no. 50, with previous bibliography. The double-headed eagle as a coat of arms is occasionally to be traced in depictions of knights, London, British Library, MS Royal 20 DI, fols. 107r, 117v, 126v, 144v, 150r, 154r, 156r–v, 175v, 219v, 221v, 338v; http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_20_d_i_fs001r.

25 The double-headed eagle was a symbol of Byzantine authority and had been widely used on garments, vestments, riding equipment and flags since the 12th century (Fourlas 1984, 179–90; Barmparitsa 2019, 404–5, with previous bibliography).

26 Maisano 1990, 36.XVI.14–24, 38.XVI.16–21, 42.XVII.9–10, 72.XXI.11. The spoon, which is an artefact of some sophistication, could also be dated to the Ottoman period of Chlemoutsi castle (1460–1685, 1715–1830), however that is less possible. During the first period of the Ottoman occupation (1460–1685) the castle declined, turning into a local defensive stronghold and habitation area, and was gradually deserted by the Second period of Venetian Rule (1685–1715) (Andrews 1953, 146–49).

27 Ploug et al. 1969, 67, fig. 26.4 and fig. 27.1. The heart-shaped bowl of the spoon of Hama is a variation of the semicircular bowl



Fig. 2. Chlemoutsi castle, copper alloy spoon, detail of the double-headed eagle.

over a chalice. The handle's recurring decorative pattern corresponds to the type of decoration found on the spoon handle from Chlemoutsi.

Leaf-shaped spoons with deep bowls and thin elongated handles are depicted in Byzantine art.²⁸ In addition, flat metal handles, square in section, which become wider towards the end of their stem, similar to the one from Chlemoutsi castle, were not unusual in the middle/late Byzantine period.²⁹

In 2013–2014, two spoons were discovered during the restoration and rehabilitation works at St. Peter's church in the village of Kastania, on the Mani peninsula.³⁰ The spoons were made of copper alloys and have characteristic wide bowls of a different typology (Figs. 3, 5).

The first spoon (Fig. 3) is 15.3 cm long, with a handle width of 0.4 cm and bowl dimensions of 4.5 by 5.2

and became widespread over the next century, especially in Renaissance silverware (Ploug et al. 1969, 67, fig. 26.6 and fig. 27.2; Praškov 1988, no. 96). So far, the heart-shaped bowl has not been traced on spoons from late Byzantine settlements. A spoon with heart-shaped bowl is depicted in the Communion of St. Mary of Egypt, at the church of the Virgin Odigitria, Peć, 14th century (Pitarakis 2015, 182 fig. 1).

28 Parani 2010, 152–53; Drandaki et al. 2013, no. 170 (A. Tanoulas).

29 Xanthopoulou 2008, 312 no. 54; Arthur 2012, fig. 7.

30 The church was built by the end of the 12th century with later additions. Its main iconographic layer can be dated to the second half of the 14th century (Drandakis 1976, 213–20, pl. 152–55; Drandakis 1995, 226 note 6, 227 note 7, 230 note 14; Kalopissi-Verti 1999, 200–3; Bouras and Boura 2002, 178–80; Bouza 2010, 247–66; Kappas 2016, 149, 165–79).

cm.³¹ It features a large, shallow bowl, a thin and long handle of almost circular profile and a knob in the shape of an acorn. Metal or bone finds from the early Byzantine period illustrate the prevalent use of shapes with wide, circular bowls and thin necks, suitable both as grooming paraphernalia and as tableware.³² The use of wooden spoons of a similar typology, possibly by the lower social strata, is confirmed by an 11th century find from Yenikapı in Constantinople, as well as two spoons from Montfort castle in northern Israel, which possibly date to the 13th century.³³ The same type of bowl is found on a pair of Communion spoons from the middle or late Byzantine period.³⁴ A comparable spoon made of bronze is featured in the collection of the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens.³⁵

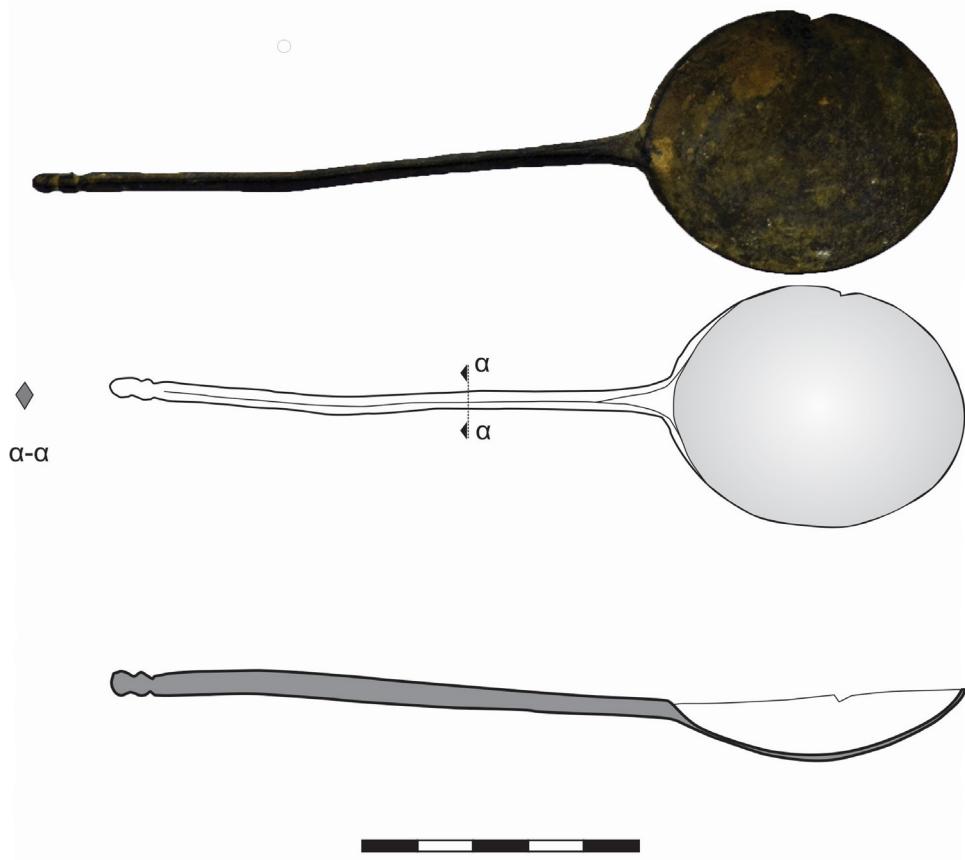


Fig. 3. St. Peter of Kastania, Mani, copper alloy spoon (© Ephorate of Antiquities of Messinia).

The example from St. Peter also presents a characteristic resemblance, in terms of typology, material and dimensions, with two spoons found in Rhodes, dating from the period of the Order of the Knights Hospitaller of St. John (1309–1522), one of which bears a fleur-de-lis on its back (Fig. 4).³⁶ In the finds from Rhodes, the handles have knobs which are shaped like acorns, in two variations: the first handle is more realistically depicted, while the second one is more rugged, similar to that of the St. Peter's spoon. The acorn-shaped knob is part of a

31 Ephorate of Antiquities of Messinia, Medieval Collection, Inv. number: 1036.

32 Papanikola-Bakirtzi 2002, 95 no. 72β (P. Kampanis), 468 no. 639–40 (A. Antonaras, D. Makropoulou respectively). The type was widespread during the Roman period (Virgili and Biagiotti 1990, 104 no. 177–84, 113 no. 22.17; Sherlock 2000, 365–70).

33 Karamani Pekin 2007, 227 fig. 22; Boas 2016, 217, fig. 18.36.d–e.

34 Fourlas and Tsamakda 2011, 330 no. III.5.7 (A. Bosselmann–Ruickbie).

35 Gratiou and Lazaridou 2006, 203 no. 206 (M. Bormpoudaki). The spoon, with its well-shaped acorn knob, is attributed to the 18th century and it comes from the monastery of Zoodochos Pigi (Hagias) on the island of Andros. Almost identical spoons from Picardy, in Northern France, are dated to the 16th century (Legros 2015, nos 317, 323–24).

36 Zafeiropoulou 2004, 53, fig. 47.



Fig. 4. Rhodes, copper alloy spoons (1309–1522) (© Ephorate of Antiquities of Dodecanese).

trend, observed in Western Europe since the late 13th century, towards more decorated spoons.³⁷

The characteristic correspondence of these finds and their chronological attribution to the late Middle Ages is confirmed by a large number of spoons of similar typology found across Europe.³⁸ Moreover, in Western Europe, the use of leaf-shaped spoons, known from the Roman times and used continuously to this day, appears to be declining from the 14th century onwards in favour of more rounded and shallow types.³⁹ Depictions of spoons with wide bowls are also occasionally encountered in artistic contexts from Greece, especially Venetian Crete.⁴⁰

The second spoon from St. Peter of Kastania is 15.2 cm long, has a handle width of 0.5 cm and bowl dimensions of 3.5 by 2.8 cm (Fig. 5).⁴¹ It consists of a fig-shaped bowl and a thin long handle with a quadrilateral profile, which is slightly flattened from the mid-length up to its cross-shaped knob. This bowl type is timeless.⁴² Spoons with similar bowls and elongated, thin necks are excavated in layers from the 12th–14th century in the

37 For the chronological evolution of the acorn-shaped knobs, Gilchrist 2012, 125; Legros 2015, 140–1.

38 Lightbown 1978, 17 no. 10; Legros 2015, 140–42, fig. 95, 226–30. See also <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/four-latten-and-pewter-medieval-spoons-5815144-details.aspx>; <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/an-english-pewter-acorn-style-knop-spoon-14th-4894506-details.aspx?pos=2&intObjectID=4894506&sid=&page=4&lid=1>.

39 Ward-Perkins 1940, 127–33, fig. 41; Egan 1998, 246, fig. 191.

40 Crete, Hagios Konstantinos (Artos), church of St. George, altar painting, 1401 (Spatharakis 1999, fig. 25). Also, in a Cretan icon of the Dormition of St. Efraim of Syria, dated to c. 1457 (Evans 2004, 158 no. 80, K.-Ph. Kalafati). In the depiction of the Last Supper from the katholikon of the Great Meteoron monastery (1483), the spoon is painted in a different color from the metal blades of the knives, suggesting that it was made of different material, possibly wood (Papanikola-Bakirtzi 2002, 226–27).

41 Ephorate of Antiquities of Messinia, Medieval Collection, Inv. number: 1037.

42 Papanikola-Bakirtzi 2002, 95 no. 72a (P. Kampanis); Wamser 2004, 247 no. 365 (C. Schmidt). See also a copper alloy spatula of the 12th–13th century from Tille (French et al. 1982, 167, fig. 10.1).

Syrian city of Hama.⁴³ A similar copper alloy spoon comes from the Red Tower in Palestine and dates back to the late Middle Ages.⁴⁴

The two finds from St. Peter of Kastania indicate the use of spoons with wide bowls and thin handles with decorated knobs across the Greek territory. This is a type that becomes widespread in Europe during the late Middle Ages. According to their typology, these finds could be dated from the second half of the 14th to approximately the 16th century. The use of the two spoons from Kastania is uncertain, especially since it has been demonstrated that in Byzantine lands, spoons with religious symbols were commonly used as household items.⁴⁵ However, the spoon with the cross-shaped knob (Fig. 5) recalls modern Communion spoons and, in conjunction with the religious environment in which it was found, could be considered as a liturgical implement.⁴⁶

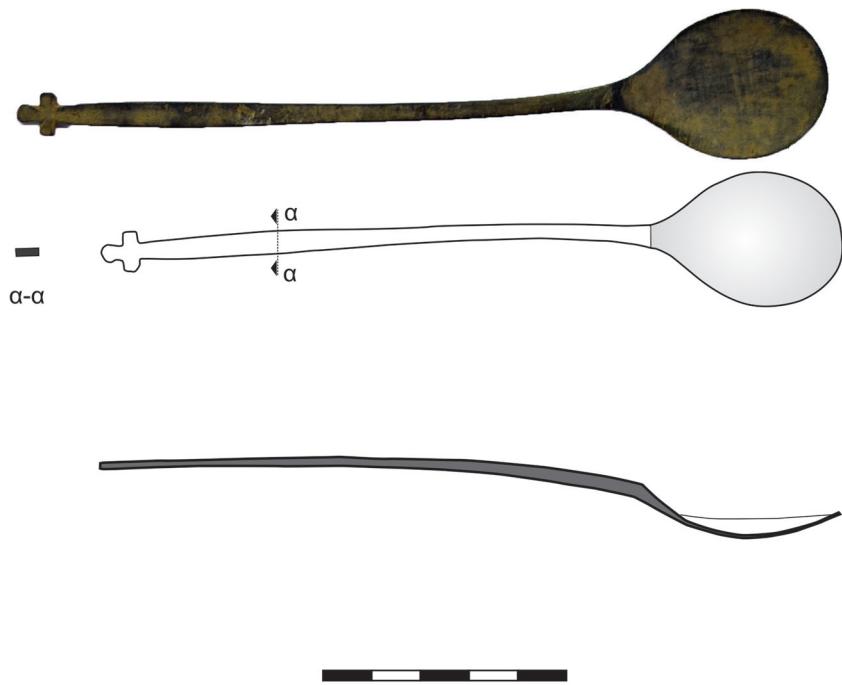


Fig. 5. St. Peter of Kastania, Mani, copper alloy spoon (© Ephorate of Antiquities of Messinia).

In conclusion, in the Peloponnese, during the late Medieval period, in addition to the constant use of leaf-shaped spoon bowls, other broader, rounder and oval forms seem to be spreading by the late 14th century onwards. The new types of spoon probably derived from the European urban centers of the late Middle Ages and were diffused, possibly through the agency of the Latin States, to the Eastern Mediterranean. The appearance of these spoons in relatively remote sites in the Greek territory, such as Kastania in Western Mani, may indicate the extent of the cultural interactions in the Peloponnese of the late Medieval period. After 1204, both the settlement of a Latin population in the urban centers of the peninsula and the commercial activities of Italian merchants, who were active in the Principality of Achaia as well as the Despotate of Mistra, were the main ways

43 Ploug et al. 1969, 70, fig. 26.8–9, fig. 27.3–4.

44 Pringle 1986, 163 no. 7, fig. 54.

45 Papaconstantinou 2001, 239–41; Parani 2010, 144; Caseau 2012, 59.

46 Spoons discovered inside churches, apart from mere donations of monetary value, could possibly have served in other liturgical circumstances besides Communion (Taft 1996, 213–19, especially 216; Gilchrist 2012, 227–36, especially 235–36).

of western cultural products to diffuse in the Peloponnese. In the 14th and 15th century, Kastania was part of the Despotate of Mistra, which maintained throughout its history close contact with the West.⁴⁷ Moreover, the main iconographic layer of St. Peter is attributed to a workshop, who painted secondary monuments in Mistra during the late 14th century.⁴⁸ It is not unlikely that, during this major restoration program, the church of St. Peter might have also acquired new liturgical implements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express my gratitude to the Directors of the Ephorates of Antiquities of Achaia and Messinia, Dr. Anita Koumousi and Dr. Evangelia Militsi-Kehagia respectively, for granting me permission to study the presented material. Drawings were produced by Mrs. Marina Georgoutzou (Figs. 3, 5) and Dr. Alexandra Konstantinidou (Fig. 2). I deeply thank my colleagues of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Dodecanese for the permission to reproduce a photograph from the Ephorate's archive (Fig. 4).

⁴⁷ Kalopissi-Verti 2013, 224–39, with extended bibliography; Louvi-Kizi 2019.

⁴⁸ Kappas 2016, 165–79, especially 176–79.

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