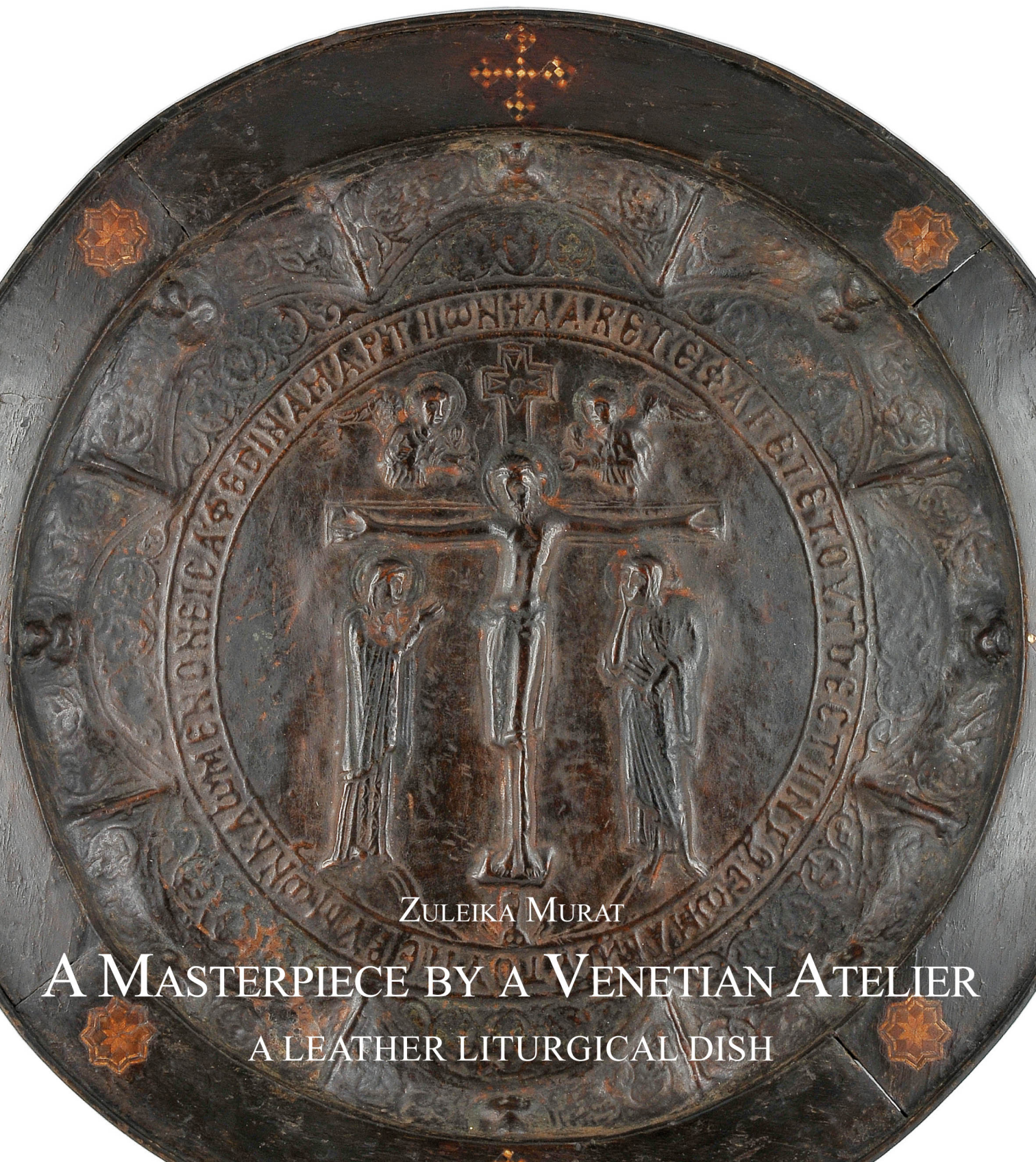




LONGARI arte MILANO

Early Italian and European Works of Art



ZULEIKA MURAT

A MASTERPIECE BY A VENETIAN ATELIER

A LEATHER LITURGICAL DISH

Fig. 1  
Commonwealth of Venice

**VENETIAN ATELIER**

*Paten*

(plate on which the Holy Bread is placed in  
the celebration of the Eucharist)

Early 16th century

Leather on wooden support

Ø cm 38, H. cm 4.4



## CIRCULATING IDEAS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, FROM MEDIEVAL BYZANTIUM TO RENAISSANCE VENICE

The Paten presented here is a unique object (Fig. 1). The material it is made with (i.e. leather on a wooden support) is indeed extremely fragile, therefore this is one of the very few artworks of that kind to have survived over the centuries. In this respect, its good state of preservation is also remarkable, and makes the Paten even more precious. Furthermore, the model reproduced in the Paten through the impression of a mould is highly outstanding, being it an Eastern liturgical plate created by a workshop of the Byzantine court.

A *Crucifixion* in relief is represented on the base of the Paten. Christ, a strong and noble figure, stands majestically on the Cross. Jesus' anatomy is lightly, yet confidently articulated, and great prominence is given to his bust from which ejects a spurt of blood. His noble figure seems to be triumphant over his death and martyrdom, in order to visualize the promise of salvation that was contained in the Eucharistic Bread kept in the Paten. At the sides of the Cross, the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist are standing, completely wrapped in loose-fitting, classicised robes. They gaze impotently at Christ, and express with vivid gestures the *pathos* of the moment. In the upper part of the composition, two floating angels present Christ to the viewer holding out a hand towards him. On the inner border there is a frame in relief with floral decorations, spaced out by eight half-length saints. On the external profile of the Paten is written a Greek inscription, which corresponds to the form of the Eucharistic celebration. It reads †ΔΑΒΕΤΕ ΦΑΓΕΤΕ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΤΟ ΣΩΜΑ ΜΟΥ ΤΟ ΥΠΕΡ ΥΜΩΝ ΚΑΩΜΕΝΟΝ ΕΙΣ ΑΦΕΣΙΝ ΑΜΑΡΤΙΩΝ [take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me]. The external border is a wooden one, and it is embellished with geometrical decorations, similar to a cross and to a flower, made of bone and beechwood, plus maybe ebony and oak.

Traces of pigments and gold suggest that the paten might have been polychromed, at least in respect to some details, such as haloes and part of the clothing. The back is also painted, though this decoration dates probably to a later period, perhaps the nineteenth century, when the Paten underwent some restorations.

The mould used to impress the leather has a traceable origin. It was surely created in Byzantium, likely by a workshop of the Byzantine court between 1050 and 1190. Indeed, an identical Paten, made in gilded silver, is held in the Museum of the Treasure of the Cathedral of Halberstadt (Fig. 2). The origin of that artwork is documented: on 16 August 1205, Konrad von Krosig, bishop of Halberstadt, went back to his Episcopal See after having taken part in the Fourth Crusade. He took several objects with him from Byzantium, including the silver Paten (Hecht 2008).

These two artworks are almost identical (Figs. 1-2). Their dimensions correspond precisely, and so do many other details. A comparison between the two confirms this connection, with particular reference to the anatomy of Christ's body, equal in the two Patens (Figs. 3-4), with prominent bust and identical loincloth, in addition to the slight and elegant bending of his left knee. We can also see the identical position of the two angels, the wing furthest from view flexed between the halo and the arm stretched out towards Christ. The poses of the Virgin Mary and John and their zigzag drapery clearly correspond too (Figs. 5-6).

We might hypothesize that someone made a mould of the Halberstadt paten, or of a similar object obtained through the impression of the same matrix used for the Paten itself. The use of matrices for the manufacturing of leather was widespread and is testified to on

several occasions. Indeed, the procedure was known during Antiquity and several workshops were located throughout the Mediterranean Area. The mould of the Byzantine Paten (or of a similar object) had a wide geographic and chronological circulation, as the artworks discussed below clearly demonstrate.

In fact, at least six other similar leather objects were created through the impression of the same matrix. They had different function and typology, being them a retable, two icons, the part of a frame, a book cover, the part of a casket. Yet, their dimensions and shape, as well as many technical details, can confirm that they derive from the same model (Figs. 7-9).

Apparently, they were all created during the sixteenth century in the Veneto, probably in Venice. That city had a well established tradition of byzantine artworks, which last over the centuries and which often took the form of a nostalgic revival. Furthermore, during that same period, several Venetian workshops were involved in the production and decoration of leather objects. The first statute of the painters' guild, dated 7 December 1271 already regulated the activity of leather workers, called *cuoridoro* in that city. The association lasted for centuries, and leather was used to create altar decorations, as well as private house fittings. By the time the *cuoridoro* obtained independent guild status in the sixteenth century, there were already more than seventy workshops active in leather production in Venice.

It is possible that one of these active workshops created the Longari Paten, as well as the other artworks previously mentioned. Venice was the ideal place to trade in Byzantine look-like products, as they were widely appreciated in many different artistic fields.

It is worth notice that all the leather objects discussed here, though derived from the same model, were then diversified by the inclusion of new details or by the use of single portions of the matrix, eventually combined with other figures and decorative patterns. This is the case of the Longari Paten too. The bone decorations which embellished its external border can be compared to patterns used to decorate several caskets created by the Embriachi workshop and other concurrent ateliers during the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries (Figs. 10-11). Such circumstance has a notable importance, for it demonstrates, on the one hand, the chronology of the Paten, to be fixed in the sixteenth century and, on the other, it contributes to specify the place of its creation: in fact, many of the workshops involved in that field of production worked in the Veneto.

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#### Credits:

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Fig. 2

Eastern Mediterranean

**BYZANTINE ATELIER**

*Paten*

1050-1190

Silver

Ø cm 41.4

Halberstadt, Treasure of the Cathedral





Fig. 3 - Venetian Atelier,  
*Paten* (detail), leather, early 16th century.  
Longari arte Milano

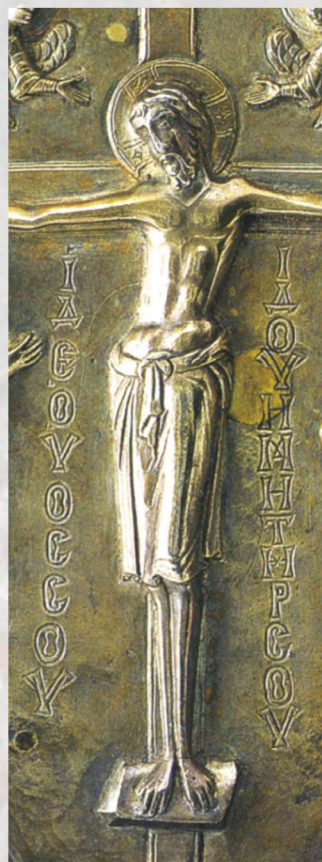


Fig. 4 - Byzantine Atelier,  
*Paten* (detail), silver, 1050-1190.  
Halberstadt, Treasure of the Cathedral



Fig. 5 - Venetian Atelier,  
*Paten* (detail), leather, early 16th century.  
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Fig. 6 - Byzantine Atelier,  
*Paten* (detail), silver, 1050-1190.  
Halberstadt, Treasure of the Cathedral



Fig. 7 - Venetian Atelier,  
*Retable*, leather, early 16th century.  
Private collection



Fig. 8 - Venetian Atelier,  
*Icon*, leather, early 16th century.  
Private collection



Fig. 9 - Venetian Atelier,  
*Icon*, leather, early 16th century.  
Location unknown



Fig. 10 - Venetian Atelier,  
*Paten* (detail of the wood edge), early 16th century.  
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Fig. 11 - Embriachi Atelier,  
*Casket* (detail), 15th century.  
Private collection

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