# THE OLIPHANT

# ISLAMIC HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

## STUDIES AND TEXTS

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# THE OLIPHANT

*Islamic Objects in Historical Context*

BY

AVINOAM SHALEM




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## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The system for transliteration from Arabic used here is essentially that of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, with the following modifications: foreign words, proper nouns, names of places and of historic personages that have entered the language or have a generally recognised English form are anglicised, *j* replaces *dj*, *q* replaces *k* and subscript dots are omitted.

Wer sich selbst und andre kennt
Wird auch hier erkennen:
Orient und Okzident
Sind nicht mehr zu trennen.

Goethe, *West-Östlicher Divan* (literary remains)

CHAPTER ONE

# PROLOGUE

Works of art—be they buildings, paintings or objects—are silent. And yet, like opened books, they give us access to a huge amount of information. The moment we are ready, or able, to 'read' them, a story is told. Moreover, sometimes it seems as if works of art silently wait to be discovered, as if they challenge our eyes to unveil the power of the materials, the mystery of colours or even to decipher the lines and contours of their shapes and decoration. For works of art speak in a language, in which material, form, colour and motifs are not only essentially defined and therefore understood or explained, but also read as having meaning, as relating to the vast invisible world of our thoughts, imagination and memories.

Like literary sources, art objects of the past are concrete evidence that enrich our understanding of the complexity of religious, social and cultural life. And yet it is quite astonishing how these objects—the so-called 'minor' arts—are traditionally considered to belong to one of the lesser artistic genres. These objects of the past are in fact the archaeological evidence, so to speak, of a specific era. They demand that we observe them carefully in order to find out the history marked on their surface and to divulge the raison d'etre of their existence. Studying any artefact, we are therefore required to retrieve through it the lost world of the past.

One of the main purposes of this book is to set a group of medieval carved ivory horns in the specific historical context in which they were manufactured and used, and thus present them as a mine of information for the study of medieval history.

Oliphants, that is, horns carved from the ivory tusks of elephants, are among the most intriguing and impressive examples of secular arts of the pre-Gothic era in Western Europe. Their huge size, elegant form and attractive decoration, which mainly consists of hunting scenes and fantastic animals, suggest that these were exceptionally prestigious objects.

About seventy-five oliphants are known, scattered all over the world in museums, church treasuries and private collections. But according

to medieval church inventories, it seems that there were many other ivory horns, which were probably lost or have perished through the course of time. The usual term used for describing these artefacts in medieval church inventories is *cornua eburnea*, which literally means ivory horns. It is due to their inclusion in medieval church treasuries and later in princely cabinets and treasuries of wonders of nature, that the oliphants have escaped destruction and have survived in a relatively good state.

The majority of oliphants measure about 50–70 cm. in length, while the large openings measure between 5–13 cm. in diameter. The decoration on their bodies consists mainly of hunting scenes, wild animals and fantastic creatures. According to the style of their carving, it is likely that most of them were produced during the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They are usually roughly divided into three groups. The first group of about thirty oliphants—the so-called 'Saracenic' oliphants, as termed by Kühnel—were, according to Kühnel, most probably made by Arab craftsmen, or at least by western workshops strongly influenced by Fatimid motifs. The second group consists of almost thirty oliphants and is usually called the Byzantine group. But it seems that only a few of these were made in Constantinople. The majority of them were probably made in South Italy, in Salerno, Amalfi or Sicily. The third group comprises of about ten oliphants, the so-called European oliphants. Most of them were made over the Alps, probably in England and Scandinavia. The fourth group consists of the remaining oliphants. Each of the oliphants of this group differs from one to the other and, therefore, until other comparable oliphants come to light, should be regarded as unique. This book considers the largest group of surviving oliphants, some thirty specimens, the style of which strongly evokes the eleventh-century art of Fatimid Egypt.

In the medieval Latin West, most of them were immediately identified with the famous oliphant of the hero Roland, calling to mind the dramatic moment of the decisive battle of Roncevaux in 778, described in the *Chanson de Roland*. This famous medieval epos, which, although orally known during the Middle Ages, was written down around the end of the eleventh century (1098–1100), became extremely popular in the Latin West during the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. The epos tells us of moving moments in the early medieval history of Europe. It focuses on the battle of Roncevaux, where the rear

guard of Charlemagne's army led by Roland was ambushed in a mountain pass. Roland, who according to tradition was Charlemagne's nephew, fought to the last against the Saracens in this battle. Fatally wounded, so the story goes, in the last moments of his life, just before dying, he mustered all his strength and vigorously blew his oliphant. He was probably calling for help, or perhaps sounding his oliphant so forcefully in order to inform the other legions of his near end. The blast was so strong that the oliphant cracked. Roland died. But the myth of the tragic end of a valiant warrior in these dramatic and crucial moments of European history was kept green for centuries to come. His oliphant, which was later found next to him by Charlemagne, was said, according to tradition, to have been taken like a holy relic and donated to the church of St. Seurin in Bordeaux. Roland became a hero who fought against Saracens, and his oliphant became, perhaps, the symbol of any Christian combatant fighting against infidels. This tradition might be also one of the primary reasons for the manufacturing of numerous oliphants in the Crusade era, in the same centuries that this epos was well known.

The frequent association of oliphants with the epos of Roland suggests that, unlike any other objects which are both essential, namely having specific function for which they were made, and imaginary, for which their shape and decoration bear witness, these objects function also as aide mémoires. It is likely that the following verses of this epos were again and again remembered when oliphants were seen or blown:

> The County Roland with pain and anguish winds
> His Oliphant, and blows with all his might.
> Blood from his mouth comes spurting scarlet-bright
> He's burst the veins of his temples outright.
> From hand and horn the call goes shrilling high:
> King Carlon hears it who through the passes rides . . .[1]

Like relics, which recall the specific tragedy or miracle of martyrs or saints, the oliphant—a physical object—also has a particular effect on the viewer's mind. It evokes memories. To make my point clearer, whereas in the prevalent manner of considering the relationship between image and word the image usually takes the illustrative role of a specific account, in this particular case the object, namely the

[1] *The Song of Roland*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Baltimore, 1957), verses 1761–66.

oliphant, acts as the trigger for the narrative. Moreover, since the battle of Roncevaux was regarded in the popular medieval mind as the battle marking the end of the rapid Arab incursion into Europe around the last quarter of the eighth century, these specific objects symbolise the everlasting confrontation between Islam and Christianity in the Middle Ages.

Both mystery and myth seem to surround the initial use of the oliphants. The specific style of their carving, the intricate pattern of their decoration and the fantastic and sometimes even archaic motifs depicted on them, were a source of attraction and puzzlement. To some extent, these artefacts are early visual evidence of medieval exotica in the Latin West—the early traces of orientalism in medieval Europe. But discussing these artefacts and their decoration in the context of the medieval man's awareness of 'Otherness' would be too simple; it seems to cover only a narrow spectrum of their entire significance. It is rather the ambiguity of their ornament which is so typical to this group of artefacts. Their decoration appears as relating to more than one specific geographical area or one homogeneous religious-cultural domain. Generally speaking, it is rather the diffusion of motifs and styles which characterise these objects; as if the motifs are no more bound to solid criteria of comparable study of style. In several other cases it is the hybridised element which is clearly apparent in these objects. Art historians must therefore rise to the challenge of seeking other points of view while interpreting these artefacts. It is no wonder that terms and phrases like mobility, pathways of portability, interchange and interaction, shared visual culture, cultural encounter and cross-cultural idiom are used while discussing these and other related artefacts.

The oliphants seem then to mirror a specific sense of time and place in the mind of the medieval Mediterranean man, whose identity was most probably formed by the above-mentioned terminology rather than by religious or geographical boundaries.

The body of this book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is a prologue. It introduces the oliphants to the reader and briefly sketches the fluid cultural space and intricate pattern of the historical context in which these artefacts were used. The second one discusses the current state of research. The third chapter focuses on the substance. It is divided into three parts: a short discussion on the terminology of ivory; an outline of the morphology of the sub-

stance; and a historical introduction on the sources, availability and trade in ivory, mainly focusing on the medieval Mediterranean basin. Chapter four examines the process of making oliphants. This is mainly done with the help of several—or rather few—literary sources and by studying the artefacts. In the fifth chapter the oliphants are classified into different stylistic groups. In the first section, the limitations of Kühnel's grouping of the oliphants are explained. In the second one, a stylistic classification is made, and the third section discusses the complex question of centres of production. The sixth chapter deals with the oliphants' function and meaning. It does it in three stages, which follow a short introduction. These are the iconography of the material, the meaning of the shape and the message of the carved decoration. In the seventh chapter, the second life, so to speak, of the oliphants is considered. The adventurous biographies of oliphants in a sacred context are revealed. The chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part, the question concerning the quantity of oliphants in medieval church treasuries is examined. In the second one, questions such as why and how oliphants were accepted in the church treasuries are answered. The third section presents to the reader how oliphants were displayed in the medieval church. And the last section discusses the medieval lore concerning the magical aspects associated with ivory horns.

CHAPTER TWO

# STATE OF RESEARCH

The oliphants were first mentioned as a group in 1860 by Bock, who mainly focused on their medieval religious and profane functions.[1] In fact, Bock's discussion is centred on the meaning and function of horns, either metal, ivory or animal's horn ones, and chronologically arranged, from Ancient times to the High Middle Ages. His study makes use of literary sources as well as traditions and folk tales concerning horns, but his stylistic observations of the decorated horns are dull, albeit, as far as the oliphants are concerned, the oriental—'Saracenic-moorish'—character is emphasised.[2]

A short comment on medieval oliphants was published by Molinier in 1896. He drew attention to their 'oriental' decoration and principally attributed them to Byzantine workshops of the tenth and eleventh centuries.[3]

Dalton, in 1913, and Longhurst, in 1927, made some attempts to organise them into specific groups according to their different functions. Dalton arranged them into four groups: hunting horns, tenure horns (that is, horns which were presented as a symbol for the transfer of land), horns decorated with different scenes of the hippodrome, and horns decorated with religious themes. Longhurst clearly differentiated between function and decoration. She mentioned two main functions: hunting and tenure horns, and argued that both groups were used later as relic containers. As far as decoration is concerned, she classified them into two iconographic groups: the hippodrome and the hunting horns. But it should be stressed that Dalton's and Longhurst's classifications are too rigid, and the dis-

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[1] Fr. Bock, "Über den Gebrauch der Hörner im Alterthum und das Vorkommen geschnitzter Elfenbeinhörner im Mittelalter," *Mittelalterliche Kunstdenkmale des österreichischen Kaiserstaates*, ed. G. Heider and R. v. Eitelberger (Stuttgart, 1860), vol. 2, pp. 127–43.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[3] Émile Molinier, *Histoire générale des arts appliqués à l'industrie du V^e^ a la fin du XVIII^e^ siècle* (Paris, 1896), vol. 1: Ivoires, especially pp. 93–95.

tinction between function and decoration that they proposed is rather superficial.[4]

It must be mentioned that already in 1908, with the establishment of the Deutsche Verein für Kunstwissenschaft in Berlin, Goldschmidt had the intention of publishing the medieval oliphants in a separate volume in the monumental corpus of *Elfenbeinskulpturen*. This volume was to include ivory horns, combs and croziers, but the project was not realised.[5] It was not until 1929 that the first comprehensive study was made by von Falke,[6] who organised them into four stylistic groups: a Fatimid group which he assigned to Egypt; a group assigned to Italy which imitates Fatimid motifs; a European group (excluding Italy) which is also influenced by Islamic motifs and designs; and a Byzantine group which was not necessarily made in Constantinople. Von Falke's study is the first attempt to define oliphants according to methods of carving rather than function or theme. It is also the first attempt to divide the oliphants, which were usually treated, as far as style is concerned, as one solid group decorated with 'oriental' motifs.

Approximately thirty years later, in 1959, Kühnel suggested that von Falke's first three groups were manufactured by 'Saracenic' craftsmen working in South Italy, probably in Amalfi.[7] Kühnel specifically used the term 'Saracenic' in order to stress that these oliphants are the unique product of Arab ivory workshops active in the West.[8] He convincingly argued that, despite the similarity in the method of carving and motifs between the Saracenic group of oliphants and carved wood and ivory artefacts from the Fatimid period, the lack

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[4] Ormond M. Dalton, "A Paper on Medieval Objects in the Borradaile Collection," *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London* 26(1913), pp. 8–12. Margaret H. Longhurst, *Catalogue of Carving in Ivory* (London, 1927), vol. 1, especially p. 50.

[5] Kurt Weitzmann, *Adolph Goldschmidt und die Berliner Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin, 1985), p. 22 (with a preface by Rainer Haussherr); I wish to thank Professor Rainer Haussherr, who called my attention to this essay. The corpus of the medieval oliphants is at present in preparation by the author. This research project is commissioned by the Deutsche Verein für Kunstwissenschaft in Berlin and funded by the Deutsche Forschungs Gemeinschaft.

[6] Otto von Falke, "Elfenbeinhörner: I. Ägypten und Italien," *Pantheon* 4(1929), pp. 511–17; *idem*, "Elfenbeinhörner: II. Byzanz," *Pantheon* 5(1930), pp. 39–44.

[7] Ernst Kühnel, "Die sarazenischen Olifanthörner," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 1(1959), pp. 33–50. In fact Kühnel already suggested this idea in 1958, in a lecture the summary of which was published, see Ernst Kühnel, "Die sarazenischen Olifante," *Kunstchronik* 11(1958), pp. 298–99.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

of any literary sources on oliphants in the medieval Islamic world and the appearance of several Byzantine and Christian motifs on this specific group of oliphants suggest that they were manufactured in the western part of the mediterranean basin, most probably in a specific melting-pot region like South Italy. However, the diversity of types and methods of carving among the Saracenic oliphants might hint at several workshops in different regions in the West which specialised in carving ivory tusks. For example, it is plausible that several oliphants could have been manufactured in other ivory-carving centres of the Mediterranean basin, for example in Spain or even in a cosmopolitan city like Venice.

This group of Saracenic oliphants was further discussed by Kühnel, in 1971, in his posthumous publication of the Islamic ivories—*Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII.–XIII. Jahrhundert*; the book was published by the Deutsche Verein für Kunstwissenschaft in the monumental series of Goldschmidt on ivories.[9] In this book, thirty oliphants—the so-called Saracenic—are excellently illustrated and broadly discussed in a descriptive catalogue. Kühnel proposed a useful grouping for the oliphants based on the different patterns on their bodies. These are oliphants with smooth bodies (occasionally facetted); oliphants decorated with vine roundels or medallions enclosing animals; and oliphants decorated with narrow vertical bands inhabited by animals. Unfortunately, his useful classification of the composition of the decoration of the Saracenic oliphants has been mistakenly accepted by some scholars as a stylistical grouping.[10] Kühnel's chapter in this book on Saracenic oliphants and caskets is an important contribution to the study of medieval oliphants.[11] Drawing upon literary and visual evidence, he broadly discusses the general uses and functions of horns in the Middle Ages.[12] However, von Falke's fourth group, namely the Byzantine group, is almost ignored, though it has been generally accepted that many of the Byzantine oliphants were also manufactured, like the Saracenic ones, in South Italy, most probably in Amalfi.

It should be said that only a few oliphants of the Byzantine group were occasionally discussed, especially six oliphants of a certain styl-

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[9] Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII.–XIII. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1971), pp. 6–19, and cat. nos. 52–81.

[10] This problematic issue is discussed in chapter five.

[11] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. 6–23.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 6–14 (Die mittelalterlichen Olifante allgemein).

istic group. This small group was first identified in 1937 by Kendrick, who discussed the famous oliphant of York Minster.[13] Later, in 1962, Hanns Swarzenski examined them while studying one of the two oliphants in the Museum of Fine Art in Boston.[14] However, some oliphants of this small group have now and then been mentioned, for example by Fillitz in 1967 and Bergman in 1980, and are usually associated with the eleventh-century ivories from Salerno.[15]

More recently, Ebitz has discussed the meaning and function of oliphants in Romanesque secular art and has suggested that many of the so-called Saracenic oliphants were made in Venice—a no less active medieval trade centre than Amalfi.[16] Ebitz's argument is, though, mainly based on a reconstruction of a Fatimid-influenced ivory book cover which he assigns to Venice.[17] Furthermore, this reconstructed book cover consists of several ivory plaques of different styles and therefore cannot be attributed to the same ivory workshop which he assigns to Venice; indeed, in the Middle Ages, it was common practice to re-use materials for adorning a new artefact. Furthermore, Ebitz discusses in several articles published in the 1980s the general function of the medieval oliphant and also the lore and traditions associated with them.[18]

In my book *Islam Christianized*, published in 1996, a new stylistic classification for the so-called Saracenic oliphants is suggested. This classification is based on observation of different methods of carving and the repertoire of motifs. In addition, some speculations about

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[13] Thomas D. Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph," *Antiquity* 11(1937), pp. 278–82.

[14] Hanns Swarzenski, "Two Oliphants in the Museum," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 60(1962), pp. 27–45; *idem*, "Les Olifants," *Les Monuments historiques de la France* 12(1966), pp. 6–11.

[15] Hermann Fillitz, *Zwei Elfenbeinplatten aus Süditalien* (Bern, 1967), pp. 16–20; Robert P. Bergman, *The Salerno Ivories* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1980).

[16] David M. Ebitz, "Two Schools of Ivory Carving in Italy and Their Mediterranean Context in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," Ph.D Diss. (Harvard, 1979); *idem*, "Fatimid Style and Byzantine Model in a Venetian Ivory Carving Workshop," *The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange between East and West during the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir P. Goss (Michigan, 1986), pp. 309–29; *idem*, "Secular to Sacred: The Transformation of an Oliphant in the Musée de Cluny," *Gesta* 25/1(1986), pp. 31–8.

[17] Ebitz, "Fatimid Style and Byzantine Model," pp. 314–5, figs. 52, 53.

[18] David M. Ebitz, "The Medieval Oliphant, Its Function and Meaning in Romanesque Secular Art," *Explorations, A Journal of Research at the University of Maine at Orono* 1(1984), pp. 11–20; *idem*, "The Oliphant: Its Function and Meaning in Courtly Society," *The Medieval Court in Europe*, ed. Edward R. Haymes (Munich, 1986), pp. 123–141.

the possible provenance, function and meaning of the oliphants were made.[19]

However, it should be stressed that none of the medieval oliphants bears an inscription which might shed some light on its provenance, nor does any medieval document mention a specific ivory workshop specialising in carving ivory horns; the only ivory piece which is strongly related to a large group of the so-called Saracenic oliphants and which bears a dedicatory inscription—"TAVR.FI.MANS" (Taurus filius Mansonis)—is a small case in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (17.190.236, see Plate IV, Figs. 34a–c).[20] Tauro was probably a member of the famous Mansone family from Amalfi, to whom there are frequent references between the tenth and the twelfth centuries. But it is uncertain whether this inscription should be taken to refer to the place of origin of the piece, that is Amalfi or its neighbouring regions as Kühnel has suggested,[21] or merely as an indication of ownership.[22]

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[19] Avinoam Shalem, *Islam Christianized* (Frankfurt a.M., 1996), pp. 99–110.

[20] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 67, cat. no. 86, pl. XCI.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

[22] For further general discussions on oliphants, see mainly: Jördis Lademann, "Olifant—das legendäre Horn von Helden und Heiligen," *Kunst und Antiquitäten* 10(1993), pp. 16–20; Maria A. Lala Comneno, "Corno: (area mediterranea e Islam)", in *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, vol. 5, (Rome, 1994), pp. 337–341; Ralph Pinder-Wilson, s.v. "ʿĀdj", in *EI*$^2$, vol. 1, pp. 200–203; *idem*, s.v. "Ivory" in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 16, p. 526; H. Erdmann, s.v. "Olifant" in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 6, pp. 1397–98; David M. Ebitz, s.v. "Oliphant" in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Turner, vol. 23 (London, 1994); Michelle R. Warren, "The Noise of Roland," to be published in *Exemplaria* 16,2(2004); Valentino Pace, "Fra l'Islam e l'Occidente: Il mistro degli olifanti," to be published in the Festschrift for Umberto Scerrato (I would like to thank Valentino Pace for sending me the unpublished version of this article). The oliphants were also recently discussed in several exhibition catalogues, among which the following two should be cited here: *Europa und der Orient 800–1900*, exhibition catalogue (Berlin, 1989) and *I Normanni: popolo d'Europa 1030–1200*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, 1994).

CHAPTER THREE

# IVORY—THE SUBSTANCE

## I. *Etymology, Terminology*

The term 'ivory' usually refers to the material obtained from a kind of dentine in certain types of teeth of tusked species. These teeth, usually one pair, extend outside the mouth and are used for obtaining food, attack or defence. In the case of the elephant, these are the highly developed upper incisors, which are also specified as tusks.

The English word 'ivory' derived from the Old French *yvoire*, and the latter derived from the Latin *eboreus*, which literally means from *ebor* (from ivory). According to some etymologists, it is likely that the Latin term for ivory has its roots in Sanskrit, for elephant in old Sanskrit is *ibhas*; hence the Latin term *ebor*.[1] But the Latin term *ebor* or *ebur* might also hint at the provenance of this material in Ancient times because *ebur* also means from Egypt (*āb, ābu*; in old Coptic εβου).[2] Hence the Italian word *avorio*. It must be added that some scholars have suggested that the Latin term *ebur* refers to the pale and white colour of the material. They point out that the ancient Syrian term for ivory is *hivar*, namely *album* (white), and that *ebur* probably derived from the idiom *albugo in oculo*; the latter refers to the white and opaque thin layer, the cataract, which covers the eye—*havarvar* in old Syriac and also in Hebrew.[3] The German term for ivory, namely *Elfenbein*, consists of two words *elfen* or *helfant* and *bein*, which means elephant's bone. It is very likely that the word *helfant* derives from the Latin and Greek words for elephant; the Latin names are *elephantus, elephas* and *elephans*. The Greek name is ἐλέφας. The latter suggests that it also has its roots in the old Sanskrit word for elephant: *ibhas*. It is interesting to note that the old Hebrew term

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[1] S.v. "ivory" in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, repr. 1959).

[2] See Erich Herzog and Anton Reß, s.v. "Elfenbein, Elfenbeinplastik" in Ernst Gall and Ludwig H. Heydenreich (eds.), *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1958), vol. 4, pp. 1307–1308.

[3] Anselm Salzer, *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters* (Darmstadt, 1967), p. 294.

for ivory is *shen* or *shenhab*.[4] The latter is probably the combination of the two words, namely the Hebrew word *shen* (tooth) and the ancient Egyptian term for ivory or elephant *ābw*.[5] A similar combination for designating ivory appears in Akkadian, namely *šin pīri* which is composed of *šinnu* "tooth" and *piru* "elephant" (in old Akkadian *pīlu*).[6] The medieval Arabic name for ivory, however, is *ʿĀj*, which probably hints at the bent form of the tusk; *ʿĀj* derived from the root *ʿawj* meaning to bend, twist, or curve. However, ivory in medieval Arabic was also called *nāb al-fîl* (tooth of elephant), which probably derived from Hebrew *niv ha-pil* (tooth of elephant) and which, in turn, derived from old Akkadian *pīlu*. Hence the Spanish word for ivory, namely *marfil*, which most likely derived from the Arabic expression *nāb al-fîl*.[7]

## II. *Morphology: The Physical Characteristic/Constants of the Material*

Ivory mainly consists of dentine, that is sixty per cent calcium phosphate in association with carbonate and fluoride and forty per cent cartilage (ossein). The density of elephant ivory is normally reported to be between 1.83 and 1.93, which is less dense than bone. The dentine is formed by specialised cells: odontoblasts. These cells develop in a columnar pattern, but at the same time they are also organised in a 'ribbon-like' or 'cone-within-cone' formation developed from the tusk's centre towards the dentine edge.[8] This contrast between the inner 'cone-within-cone' enlargement and the columnar development of the odontoblasts gives a tusk its strength and elasticity. The columnar appearance of these cells can be clearly seen in a longitudinal section of the tusk.[9] Sometimes—usually because of aging

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[4] See for example, *Kings I*, 10:18, 22 and *Chronicles* 2, 9:21.

[5] Maximilian Ellenbogen, *Foreign Words in the Old Testament: Their Origin and Etymology* (London, 1962), p. 162. See also Paul Kretschmer, "Der Name des Elefanten," *Anzeiger der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse* 88(1951), pp. 307–25, especially p. 318.

[6] Ellenbogen, *Foreign Words*, p. 162. See also Kretschmer, "Der Name des Elefanten," p. 325.

[7] See also Herzog and Reß, s.v. "Elfenbein, Elfenbeinplastik", pp. 1307–8.

[8] Arthur MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn: The Technology of Skeletal Materials since the Roman Period* (London, 1985), pp. 14–16.

[9] MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn*, p. 19, fig. 18.

or excessive drying—a cross section might reveal a mass of minuscule, diamond-shaped figures densely attached to each other, which creates a fine criss-cross or chequered pattern.[10] During the growth of the cells in thin layers, mineral salts are also deposited, and a mineralised tissue called cement develops around the tusk's roots. According to Burack, ivory also has an oily element, which is the reason for its polished appearance when rubbed. He adds: "After a long period of time, the ivory may dry out; some collectors use a transparent polish for adding a surface gloss. Most ivory darkens with age, becoming yellow or brown and sometimes, after many centuries, resembling some various kinds of wood."[11]

The tusk is formed in the soft tissues of the elephant's jaw. Unlike most animals' teeth, the elephant's tusk lacks the enamel coating which usually covers the outer surface of teeth. This is due to the fact that the elephant uses his tusks for widely different purposes. Thus the thin enamel layer is constantly damaged. However, the entire outer surface of a tusk, which is also called husk, is covered with a rough, brownish bark. As soon as the dentine body of the tusk erupts through the gums, roots are developed and deeply embedded in the animal's jawbone. The growing tusk is built up in thin layers over a central cavity filled with dental pulp (Fig. 1). The pulp cavity of elephant tusk is wide open at the root, almost as wide as the tusk itself. The walls of the tusk's body, more specifically the outer layers, gradually expand in conical accretions; in the case of ancient and disintegrating ivories these layers might come apart in conical forms.[12] Elephant and walrus tusks are continuously built up for most, or sometimes all of their lives, though in later years the growth is restricted to the production of further layers while dentine at the tip is worn away. The hollow section of the tusk, the pulp cavity, extends deep into the tusk and diminishes to a point, which is almost halfway down the tusk. It contains a nutritive pulp tissue and nerve. The nerve runs from the narrow end of the pulp cavity to the tip of the tusk in a diminutive nerve canal. It should be mentioned that the material immediately adjacent to the pulp cavity is of a poor quality. It is too soft and therefore unsuitable for carving.

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[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Benjamin Burack, *Ivory and Its Uses* (Vermont and Tokyo, 1984), p. 29.

[12] Burack, *Ivory and Its Uses*, p. 29, note 1. For an illustration see Anthony Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory* (Washington, 1985), p. 3, figs. 3, 4.

Since the tusk grows from the inside outwards, the material built up close to the pulp cavity is newest and relatively soft, and the material that is farthest from the pulp cavity is oldest and friable. Ivory is an organic material and therefore, as in wood carving, it is preferable to let it first dry. It is of course also possible to carve a 'green', or fresh, ivory piece, but this might result in cracks and rifts later on, as the piece slowly dries out. However, in the medieval period, as transportation took several weeks or even months, at the moment in time when ivory tusks reached a workshop, the material was already suitable for working; the oliphant in the Louvre (Fig. 27)[13] has a fairly damaged surface which might have been the result of unsuitable conditions when the tusk was left to dry, or simply the wear and tear of time.

The main source for ivory in the Middle Ages was elephant ivory. African elephants (Loxodonta africana), both male and female, carry tusks. In the Asiatic elephant (Elephas maximus, commonly called Indian) tusks grow only in males. The tusks of the African elephant are usually larger than those of Asiatic ones.[14] The average African tusk weighs around 22 kg and measures up to 2 m (Fig. 2); in males, tusks might grow to over 3 m long and weigh over 85 kg.[15] The largest pair known so far are the Kilimanjaro tusks which have been recorded as measuring almost 8 m and weighing 207 kg.[16] African ivory is regarded as being better than Asiatic, since it has a finer-grained structure and its white colour is richer. Among the various African ivories, that of East Africa is considered ideal, compared, for example, to West African ivory, which is harder and its colour less intense; among the Saracenic oliphants the largest pieces are the oliphants from the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh (Fig. 40) and the Blackburn one from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, both of which measure 68–69 cm in length; it should be noted also that the oliphant in the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh has an extremely dull, pale-white colour (Plate XI) and is remarkably heavy (c. 4 kg).

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[13] Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII.–XIII. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1971), cat. no. 69.

[14] For a discussion on the two species of elephants, see Anthony Cutler, "The Elephants of the Great Palace Mosaic," *Bulletin de l'Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaique Antique* 10(1985), pp. 125–31, especially pp. 125–6.

[15] On the tusk of the African elephant, see Silvia K. Sikes, *The Natural History of the African Elephant* (London, 1971), pp. 80–86.

[16] *Ivory: A History and Collector's Guide*, ed. Fiona St. Aubyn (London, 1987), p. 12.

Nonetheless, small tusks too were in demand in the Middle Ages. They were chiefly used as ink containers. The best example is the depiction of the writer on the carved ivory book cover in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.[17] The ink container that he holds in his left hand is short and straight, like a typical African female elephant's tusk. A similar carved ivory ink horn is kept in the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne (B 95).[18] Other small tusks were used as powder horns. Examples of ivory powder horns are scattered in different museums and private collections; see for example the one in the David Collection in Copenhagen (1/1974).[19] In England's ivory markets, the small tusks are called 'scrivelles' or 'ball scrivelloes', and are mainly used for making billiard balls.

Occasionally, ivory was obtained from other animals like the mammoth, hippopotamus, walrus and narwhal, but the 'true' ivory is elephant ivory, and the oliphants discussed in this study are likely to be made out of the elephant's pair of teeth. However, a distinction between, for example, elephant ivory and mammoth ivory is not clear and easy. And although some scholars have suggested that at least freshly preserved mammoth ivory can be distinguished from that of elephant ivory—it is a specific fine matrix of an intersecting arc structure in an acute angle which can be noticed in cross-section—it seems that this becomes difficult, especially when the ivory is kept in less than ideal conditions.[20] A differentiation between elephant and walrus ivory is relatively easier: the outer coating of the walrus tusk is coarser; it has a rather yellow tinge; and, more importantly, the intersecting arc structure of typical elephant ivory is missing.[21] The structure of narwhal ivory is coarser, and spirals grooves run along its exterior surface, up to the tip.[22]

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[17] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 11, fig. 18.

[18] *Ornamenta Ecclesiae: Kunst und Künstler der Romanik*, exhibition catalogue, Schnütgen Museum in Cologne (Cologne, 1985), vol. 1, p. 284, cat. no. B 71.

[19] Kjeld von Folsach, *Art from the World of Islam in the David Collection* (Copenhagen, 2001), p. 258, cat. no. 414; Wolfgang Born, "Ivory Powder Flasks from the Mughal Period," *Ars Islamica* 9(1942), pp. 93–111.

[20] MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn*, p. 17.

[21] MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn*, p. 18.

[22] MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn*, p. 19.

## III. *Trade and Availability: The Picture the Sources Illustrate*

In his famous encyclopedic *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder, Gaius Plinius Secundus (23–79 AD), claims that "the most expensive produce found on land is ivory".[23] Ivory was, indeed, and still is, considered a valuable material. It is, perhaps, the fact that in the West, in Pliny's time as well as today, elephants are rarely seen, and for this reason ivory is considered a somewhat mysterious and exotic substance.

And yet there is a great ambivalence concerning ivory. Its excellent working properties and especially its hard-wearing character have recommended it as a favourable raw material for carving into lucrative ornaments as well as articles of daily use. When one compares it with other organic substances, one is astonished by the relative abundance and diversity of the surviving articles made of ivory. It is probably its durability which left us with a relatively large amount of surviving evidence. But, expensive as it was, it also enjoyed remarkable favour. This suggests that trade in ivory must have been quite active.

Unfortunately, as opposed to the considerable archaeological evidence, the literary sources on ivory trade are few and sporadic. The aim of this chapter is to focus mainly on the few available medieval sources and to try to glean information from them. This will enable us to draw a picture, even if not a complete one, of trade in and the availability of ivory in the Mediterranean, especially between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages.

Evidence of trade in elephant tusks seems to appear as early as c. 2258–2251 BC. A hieroglyph found in the tomb of Herchuef, the head of an expedition to Nubia, a region located today in Sudan, north of Khartoum, tells us of "300 donkies loaded with incense, ebony, oil, leopards' skin and elephants' tusks".[24] The expedition was commissioned by the King Pharaoh Merenre (sixth dynasty).

Hence, the name Elephantine given to a specific island on the Nile, located near the city of Aswan, hints at the importance of this specific district for the import of ivory from Sudan. It is likely that

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[23] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History: A Selection*, trans. and annotated by John F. Healy (repr. London, 1991), p. 377.

[24] Rosemarie Drenkhahn, *Elfenbein im Alten Ägypten* (London, 1986), p. 18.

ivory tusks were shipped along the Nile, from Sudan via Upper Egypt to Lower Egypt. The group of the Cataract islands near Aswan, and especially the Elephantine island, probably functioned as a customs station because the relatively low water around these islands and the narrow channels between them prevented the boats from getting past easily.[25]

According to other hieroglyphs found in the Palace of Queen Hatshepset (1490–1468 BC), the city of Punt, located on the shore of the Red Sea (in Somaliland), was one of the important trade centres for goods among which ivory is also recorded.[26] Moreover, ivory trade in the Red Sea is also attested in the Bible. For example, during the reign of King Solomon (c. 10th century BC), a fleet of his ships arrived back from Tarshish laden with gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons (or rather parrots, as mentioned in the Hebrew text):

> And the king also had a fleet of Tarshish at sea with Hiram's fleet, and once every three years the fleet of Tarshish would come back laden with gold and silver, ivory, apes and baboons.[27]

Although the location of Tarshish is uncertain—some scholars suggest that Tarshish is the city of Tarsus in Asia Minor—, it is plausible that Solomon's fleet travelled in the Red Sea. But it seems that goods were not solely imported from lands situated on both sides of the Red Sea coast and in East Africa. Moreover, the reference in the Bible to the gold of Ophir, from where goods were also imported during the reign of Solomon, might hint at a longer sea route which extended between the Red Sea harbour city of Eilat and other ports on the west Indian Coast, for Ophir is probably to be associated with the ancient city of Suppara near Bombay.[28] It should be added that this literary source also relates that the naval trade in ivory was also in the hands of Hiram, the Phoenician king from the Lebanon. This piece of information is further attested in Ezekiel (27:15), who tells us that the kingdom of Tyre used to exchange her goods against ivory and ebony: ". . . many shores were your clients; you [the Kingdom of Tyre] were paid in ivory tusks and ebony". He adds:

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[25] See for example the description of Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD) of this region: Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, p. 59.

[26] Drenkhahn, *Elfenbein im Alten Ägypten*, p. 19.

[27] *Kings I*, 10:22.

[28] Richard D. Barnett, "Phoenicia and the Ivory Trade," *Archaeology* 9(1956), pp. 91–92.

"From the tallest oaks of Bashan they made your [the Kingdom of Tyre] oars. They built you a deck of cedar inlaid with ivory from the Kittim isles." The reference to the specific district of the Kittim isles is interesting. It has been suggested that it might refer to Cyprus, but it is more likely to be a general term for distant isles and foreign settlements.[29] However, it is not clear whether the isles of Kittim are mentioned as the source for ivory or cedar wood.

It is therefore likely that already in ancient times, ivory was, mainly but not exclusively, imported from East Africa and the Sudan as well as from the western lands of India. Some ivory might have reached the Mediterranean from Mesopotamia, for at this time a breed of Indian elephant was to be found in the marshes of the Euphrates and even in the north-eastern parts of Syria. This breed of elephant seems to have disappeared in the eighth century BC.[30]

The earliest Greek author to mention Africa as a source for ivory is Herodotus (484?–425? BC), who travelled to Egypt and visited the Elephantine islands. He mentions that twenty ivory tusks were sent as annual tribute from the Ethiopians to the Persian king.[31] According to the Greek sources we have at hand, it seems that Africa played a major role in exporting this material. For example, Hermippus, an Athenian comic poet (ca. 430–420 BC), says: "Libya supplies ivory in plenty for trade". And Pseudo-Scylax, the author of the *Periplus* (ca. 350 BC), also mentions the island of Cerne in Africa as a trade centre for the Phoenician-Ethiopian trade in ivory.[32]

The impressive communication network within the entire Roman Empire rendered possible the easy diffusion of raw materials and goods from one region to another. Moreover, with the annexation of Egypt by Rome in 30 BC, commodities, be they from India or East Africa, could have easily reached the Mediterranean basin via the Red Sea trade route. Ivory was one of the materials among this merchandise. It has been suggested that ivory mainly reached the Roman empire through the trading posts on the Red Sea, several

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[29] The term *kuti* usually appears in the Talmud as referring to any foreigner.

[30] Barnett, "Phoenicia and the Ivory Trade", p. 87.

[31] This source is mentioned by Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 260.

[32] For a general discussion on the ivory trade in the Greek and Roman period and for the reference to these two literary sources, see the appendix on ivory in Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 260–261.

of which were founded as early as the third century BC especially for the export of live elephants from Ethiopia and eastern Sudan. The elephants were acquired for military purposes,[33] but, with the decline of the elephant's military significance, these ports started to trade in ivory.[34] However, Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD), in his *Natural History*, describes two different hunting methods for elephants: the African and the Indian methods.[35] This suggests that elephants were imported from both regions. Moreover, he adds that they are hunted nowadays, namely in the first century BC, in order to obtain their tusks.[36] In a further paragraph, he describes the abundance of ivory tusks in East Africa, especially those regions neighbouring Ethiopia. He says:

> Polybius, on the authority of Prince Gulusa, also records that in remote parts of Africa having a common border with Ethiopia, tusks are substitutes for doorposts in houses, and that in these and in cattle stalls, partitions are made with elephants' tusks in place of stakes.[37]

The third-century Roman author Aelian, too, mentions in his book *De Natura Animalium* that African elephants were hunted for their tusks. He even mentions elephant hunts in Libya and Mauritania, which suggests North as well as West African sources for ivory.[38]

It is likely that ivory continued to diffuse to the Mediterranean through the Red Sea trade route without interruption in the early Byzantine era, between the third and the sixth centuries. The relatively large amount of ivory artefacts from the Roman and the early Byzantine periods which have survived, either for sacred or for secular

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[33] Raman Sukumar, *The Asian Elephant: Ecology and Management* (Cambridge, 1989), especially, pp. 4–8.

[34] MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn*, p. 38.

[35] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, p. 112.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, p. 113. See also Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World*, especially pp. 208–235.

[38] Cited by Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World*, p. 228. The depiction of a personification, most probably Africa, holding an ivory tusk in her left arm, in the south apse of the 'Great Hunt' mosaic of Piazza Armerina in Sicily, might also suggest an African source for ivory in the late Roman period; in the Roman period, this island was a stepping stone for the trade between Africa and Italy. See Anthony Cutler, "The Elephants of the Great Palace Mosaic," *Bulletin de l'Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaique Antique* 10(1985), pp. 125–138. Hans P. L'Orange, "Nuovo contributo allo studio del Palazzo Erculio di Piazza Armerina," *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia* 2(1965), pp. 65–104; Roger J.A. Wilson, *Piazza Armerina* (London, 1983).

purposes, suggests that the ivory trade was exceptionally active.[39] Moreover, as Cutler has suggested,[40] the abundance of carved bone objects excavated in Egyptian sites and datable to the early Byzantine period might hint at a "taste for ivory" in these centuries.[41] As far as literary sources are concerned, the frequently cited mid-fifth-century document which tells us of eight stools and fourteen chairs of ivory sent by Cyril (c. 375–444 AD), Patriarch of Alexandria, to the emperor Theodosius II (401–450 AD), suggests that this material, whether raw or finished, reached the Mediterranean world through Egypt.[42] The majority of ivory tusks at this period came from East Africa. But it should be stressed that early medieval authors occasionally confuse India and East Africa, especially India and Ethiopia. Thus, although East Africa was probably the source from which ivory reached the Mediterranean, it is plausible that ivory tusks were also transferred from East Africa eastward, mainly to Arabia and India, and that, at the same time, some ivory might have been shipped westward, from the Indian subcontinent to different ports on the coasts of the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. The scholarly debate concerning the Asiatic or African origin of ivory in the Middle Ages cannot be easily solved, and probably awaits a new method of biochemical analysis to differentiate between the two.[43]

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[39] See mainly Richard Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin, Leipzig, 1929); Wolfgang F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz, 1976); Klaus Wessel, "Studien zur oströmischen Elfenbeinskulptur," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Greifswald, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftsreihe* 2(1952–53), pp. 63–94 and 3(1953–54), pp. 1–36; Anthony Cutler, "Five Lessons in Late Roman Ivory," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 6(1993), pp. 167–92; Kim Bowes, "Ivory Lists. Consular Diptychs, Christian Appropriation and Polemics of Time in Late Antiquity," *Art History* 24(2001), pp. 338–357.

[40] Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory*, p. 20.

[41] See also Johannes Kollwitz, "Alexandrinische Elfenbeine," in *Christentum am Nil* (Recklinghausen, 1964); Archer St. Clair, "Evidence for Late Antique Bone and Ivory Carving on the Northeast Slope of the Palatine: The Palatine East Excavation," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 50(1996), pp. 369–374.

[42] Cited also by Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory*, p. 20.

[43] Anthony Cutler's method of differentiation between the African and the Indian, which is based on the size of ivory artefacts—the African tusk is considerably bigger than the Asiatic one—, might, in some cases, solve this problem. For this discussion, see Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory*, pp. 27–28; *idem*, "Observations on the Production of Carved Ivory in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Artistes, artisans, et production artistique au Moyen-Age*, Colloque international, Université de Rennes, *Rapports provisoires* 2(1983), pp. 936–986. See also the discussion of Friederike von Bargen, "Zur Materialkunde und Form spätantiker Elfenbeinpyxiden," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 37(1994), pp. 55–57.

However, the importance of West Africa as a source for ivory, at least in the early Byzantine era, should not be undervalued; for example, in 573, a delegation from Mauritania presented Emperor Justin II with elephant tusks as a token of friendship.[44]

With the Islamic expansion of the seventh and eighth centuries, trade routes and manners of commerce were probably modified rather than suffering a severe blow; the hypothesis concerning the destructive effect that the Arab conquest had on the Mediterranean trade, first suggested by Pirenne, has been challenged more than once.[45] Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, medieval literary sources fail to provide us with information concerning the probable sources of this material in the Umayyad period (c. 650–750). Moreover, the surviving ivory pieces attributed to the early Islamic period are very few and lack any inscriptions which might provide food for thought about the regions from which the raw material was obtained.[46]

But, nevertheless, the distinctive carving method and the motifs which decorate the so-called Umayyad ivories and bone plaques, suggest that pre-Islamic practices of ivory carving, be that Byzantine-Coptic, Syrian-Byzantine or Sasanian, continued in the early Islamic period. We may even suspect that non-Muslim craftsmen were involved in the production of these ivories. The bone and ivory pieces are usually small fragments of rectangular panels which are slightly curved and decorated with vine scrolls. They frequently bear some holes for attachment, which suggest that the carved panels were used for decorative purposes, most probably for adorning various pieces of furniture.

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[44] Cited by Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory*, p. 24.

[45] Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed und Karl der Große* (rep. Frankfurt am Main, 1985); Robert S. Lopez, "Mohammed and Charlemagne: A Revision," *Speculum* 17(1943), pp. 14–38; Sture B. Lund, "Mohammed, Charlemagne and Ruric," *The Scandinavian Economic History Review* 1(1935), pp. 5–39; Howard L. Adelson, "Early Medieval Trade Routes," *American Historical Review* 65(1960), pp. 271–287; C. Cahen, "Commercial Relations between the Near East and Western Europe from the VIIth to the XIth Century," *Islam and the Medieval West*, ed. Khalil I. Semaan (Albany, 1988), pp. 1–25; Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the origins of Europe, Archaeology and the Pirenne thesis* (London, 1983).

[46] For the 'Umayyad' pieces, see mainly Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 1–11. See also Henri Stern, "The Ivories on the Ambo of the Cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle," *The Connoisseur* 153(1963), pp. 166–171; *idem*, "Quelques œuvres sculptées en bois, os et ivoire de style Omeyyade", *Ars Orientalis* 1(1954), pp. 119–131; Marilyn Ershefsky, "Bone and Ivory Carving in Early Islamic Egypt," M.A. Thesis, The American University in Cairo, 1979 (unpublished).

The chronology of Mediterranean ivory trade during the Abbasid period is far from certain, and the sporadic information at hand at present does not provide us with a complete picture; as far as excavated material is concerned, there are very few carved ivory pieces which have been excavated recently in Humeima in Jordan.[47] It is therefore crucial to look carefully into the following few documents in order to learn more from the little available.

One of the most celebrated authors of the Abbasid period, al-Masʿudi (896–956), informs us in his original and monumental book, *Meadows of Gold* (*Muruj al-Dhahab*) of the massive export of ivory in the land of Zenj in East Africa:

> From their land [the land of Zendjes, namely Ethiopia] elephant tusks are exported. Each of the tusks weighs at least 150 kg. The majority are transferred from the land of the Zendjes to Oman, and from there they are later sent to China and India.[48]

Masʿudi's account is extremely important, for he sketches a specific trade route which goes from Ethiopia to Oman, either by land, through Arabia, or, more probably, by sea, along the south coast of Arabia. His account confirms that ivory was also transported eastward, to China and even to India. Moreover, his account, which emphasises the importance of Oman and the Persian Gulf as an active Abbasid trade district for Chinese and Indian commerce, goes hand in hand with several medieval literary sources and archaeological evidence concerning the importance of the Persian Gulf in exchanging goods between China and the Islamic world.[49] According

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[47] These important finds are attributed to the early Abbasid and were lately published by Rebecca M. Foote, "Frescoes and carved ivory from the Abbasid family homestead at Humeima," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 12(1999), pp. 423–428.

[48] Al-Masʿudi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, ed. Charles Barbier de Meynard (1917), pp. 7–9. See also Al-Masʿudi, *Bis zu den Grenzen der Erde*, trans. Gernot Rotter (Tübingen and Basel, 1978), p. 186.

[49] David Whitehouse, "Abbasid Maritime Trade: Archaeology and the Age of Expansion," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 59(1985), pp. 339–47; *idem*, "Excavations at Siraf", *Iran* 6(1968), pp. 1–22, 7(1969), pp. 39–62, 8(1970), pp. 1–18, 9(1971), pp. 1–17, 10(1972), pp. 63–87, 12(1974), pp. 1–30; among the imported goods from China which reached the ports of the Persian Gulf, especially the port of Siraf, were also porcelain vessels. For sources on the large import of Chinese ware by the ʿAbbasids, see Paul Kahle, "Chinese porcelain in the lands of Islam", *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 1(1953), pp. 219–26; *idem*, "Islamische Quellen zum chinesischen Porzellan", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 88(1934), pp. 1–45; Basil Gray, "The Export of Chinese Porcelain to the Islamic World: Some Reflections on its Significance for Islamic Art, Before 1400," *Transaction of the*

to several medieval Arab sources, the main trade centres in which ivory was collected were the cities of Aden and Siraf.[50] Moreover, the *Akhbār al-Sin wa'l-Hind* (the Relations between China and India), which was probably written in the ninth or tenth century, informs us of the import of African elephant tusks (*anyāb al-fālah*) to the lands of India and China and even mentions that Basra was the port for exporting goods to China.[51] The existence of ivory in the Persian Gulf might also explain the wealth in ivory of the city of Basra, which is also mentioned by Masʿudi in a rather amusing anecdote. In this account, Ahnaf ibn Qais enumerates the merits of Basra versus those of Kufa:

> Basra has reed below, woods in the middle and meadows above. We have more teak than you, more ivory and silk brocade, and likewise more sugar and more coin. Truly, it is a city I always enter with joy and leave with regret.[52]

It must be admitted that it is not clear if Ahnaf refers to the abundance of ivory in the bazaars of Basra as raw material or as finished carved ivory artefacts. But the fact that he mentions ivory among other materials such as teak, silk brocade and, in the next breath, even sugar, indicates that it is likely that he might have been referring to ivory as a raw material.

Al-Biruni, in his book on precious stones (*kitāb al-jamāhir fi maʿrifat al-jawāhir*), written in the first quarter of the eleventh century, attests that ivory was to be found in Arabia and was traded by Yemenite merchants. In his discourse on pearls, he argues that the term *ʿāj* used for jewellery refers solely to ivory and not to pearls as some Bedouins might say:

> It is said that Arabs designate the pearl as ʿāj also since ʿāj was used by them in jewellery. A Bedouin says:
>
> . . . just as concealing the pearl and anointing with fragrances make (one) pale.
>
> Aʿarabi says:

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*Oriental Ceramic Society* 41(1975–77), 231–261; see also: *Islam and the Trade of Asia: A Colloquium*, ed. Donald S. Richards (Oxford, 1970).

[50] Subhi Y. Labib, s.v. "Elfenbein", *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 3, p. 1812.

[51] *Akhbar as-Sin wa l-Hind. Relation de la Chine et de l'Inde*, rédigée en 851, ed., trans. and annotated by Jean Sauvaget (Paris, 1948), pp. 14–16 (paragraphs 52–53); cited also by Richard Ettinghausen, *The Unicorn* (Washington, 1950), p. 56.

[52] Al-Masʿudi, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*, trans. and ed. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London, New York, 1989), p. 61.

> The ornaments worn by ʿUmayra on [her] hands are like ʿāj (pearls) with its yellowishness fine and fragrant.
>
> I believe [says Biruni] he has not equated ʿāj with the pearl, since the pearl remains in good state if concealed. He has implied the ivory of the tusk which becomes pale, as the pearl also becomes pale. It is said that the people of Arabia and India made bracelets for their women from elephant tusks. They were narrow or broad according to the wrists of the women. The people of Arabia call them wasqf.
>
> Nabighah Jaʿdi says:
>
> Like the elephant tusk bracelet anointed with the fragrance of musk which Yemenite traders bring.[53]

Excellent visual evidence which hints at the availability of ivory on the above-mentioned trade route between Ethiopia and Oman, is the cylindrical ivory box with a conical lid in the treasury of the church of St. Gereon in Cologne. An Arabic inscription in Kufic script incised with small dots runs around the base of its lid. The inscription informs us that this piece was made in Aden in the eighth century. It reads: "In the name of Allah, blessing to the servant of Allah, Abdallah, Commander of the faithful [Amir al-Muʾminin], this was commissioned by the Amir Abdallah bin al-Rabiʿ in Aden."[54] The reference to the specific governor in Yemen called Abdallah bin al-Rabiʿ suggests that the box was probably ordered by ʿAbdallah ibn Sulayman al-Rabiʿ, who was the Abbasid governor in Yemen between 778–784 (although with some interruptions).

Another object which should be mentioned in this context concerning evidence for Abbasid ivory, is the tantalizing chess piece in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (inv. no. 311). Although the scholarly debate about its date and provenance has not yet been satisfactorily solved, the ductus of the genuine Kufic inscription incised on its base suggests that this inscription was made in the ninth century. Thus, it can serve as *terminus ante quem*. But more important is the reference to the name of one of the members of the Bahili tribe in this inscription. It reads: *min ʿamala Yūsuf al-Bāhilī* (from the work

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[53] The English translation is taken from al-Biruni, *The Book of Most Comprehensive In Knowledge On Precious Stones*, trans. Hakim Mohammad Said (Islamabad, 1989), p. 111.

[54] For this box see mainly, Johann Gildemeister, "Arabische Inschriften auf Elfenbeinbüchsen," *Jahrbücher des Vereins von Alterthumsfreunden im Rheinlande* 46(1869), pp. 115–127; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 18; *Ornamenta Ecclesiae, Kunst und Künstler der Romanik in Köln*, exhibition catalogue, Schnütgen-Museum, Cologne (Cologne, 1985), cat. no. E33; see also Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 187.

or labour of Yusuf al-Bahili). Members of the Bahila family are mentioned as early as 650 AD. Several of them held prominent positions in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods in Iraq as well as in Muslim India, but it should be stressed that the descendants of this family belong to the Bahila clan—a Bedouin tribe from the vicinity of the city of Basra. Although it is unclear whether the name Yusuf al-Bahili refers to the craftsman or the owner of this piece—the use of the word *min* (from) in this inscription is unusual—, this chessman might be further physical evidence of the availability of ivory in central Asia or, perhaps, more specifically in Basra, most probably in the Abbasid period. Another interesting ivory piece, which is datable to the ninth to tenth centuries and may be assigned to Egypt, is a pen case in the Centre for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh. This relatively large ivory pen case is made out of one cylindrical piece of ivory and measures 21.5 cm in length and 4.5 cm in diameter. Its sparsely inscribed decoration, which could be associated with the above-mentioned box from Aden, suggests an Abbasid provenance, perhaps between the eighth and the ninth centuries.[55]

The following account, which appears in the Chronology of Bar Hebraeus, also known as Abu'l Faraj (1226–1286), tells us of an annual tribute of varied goods sent from the Nubians to the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad. Among the tributes, elephant tusks are mentioned:

> And in the year eleven hundred and forty-seven (AD 836) Mu'tasim sent a message to the king of the Nebadis, that is to say the Nubians, [ordering him] to send tribute according to ancient use and wont, and [telling him] that if he did not send [it] he would dispatch an army against him. And when the envoy arrived he found that the king of the Nubians was dead, and that a young man whose name was Giwargi [George], who on his mother's side was descended from royal stock, had risen up, and that his father Zechariah was administering [the kingdom]. Then when Zechariah saw that the Arabs were powerful, he said to the envoy, 'It is true that it is our duty to give tribute annually, viz. three hundred and sixty Moorish slaves, and baboons who can walk about and have been taught to imitate the ways and actions

[55] For the chess piece, see mainly, Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. 50–51, cat. no. 17, plates VI and VII; Blaise de Montesquiou-Fezensac and Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Le trésor de Saint-Denis* (Paris, 1977), cat. no. 197; *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*, Musée du Louvre, exhibition catalogue (Paris, 1991), cat. no. 18. For the pen case in Riyadh, see *The Unity of Islamic Art*, exhibition catalogue, Islamic Art Gallery, the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh (Kent, 1985), p. 59, cat. no. 42.

> of men, and ostriches, that is to say, giraffes (?), and bone (that is, tusks) of elephants, and thongs of panther skins. But it was the duty of the kings of the Arabs to send us tribute, such as a kur of wheat and rich apparel, and that there should be to us a man who collecteth contributions from the Nubians who dwell in the country of the Arabs. Now inasmuch as they (that is, the Arabs) have cut off [their tribute], we also have cut off [ours]. But because we have heard of the goodness of your king, and the greatness of his family, we will not make conversation with an ambassador, but our new king shall go in person to do homage to him! Then the envoy quickly sent a message and informed Mu'tasim.' And he replied, 'Let him come!' And he commanded the prefects of Egypt to go to meet him as far as the city of Siwani (Aswan, Syene), which was on the frontier, and that when he came to Fostat he would give him as many camels as sufficed for his baggages, and thirty dinars each day for his expenses . . . [the delegation and the envoy made their way to Baghdad—later].[56]

It should be added that in the geographical work on Persia *Hudud al-'Alam* (The Regions of the World) which was compiled by an anonymous writer in 982–983, it is related that "the presents (*silāt*) given by the kings of Qimar [Khmer, Cambodia] consist of elephant tusks (*dandan-i pil*) and the Qimari aloes".[57]

Apart from the medieval source cited above, the various accounts repeatedly attest that the main source of ivory in the Abbasid period was East Africa. However, it also suggests that trade was not the only means by which ivory reach the Islamic world. Elephants tusks could also be presented as tribute.[58] This manner of transport is quite interesting because in these cases the raw material directly reached the caliphal court of Baghdad rather than the markets. Thus, the existence of Islamic ivory workshops attached to royal courts, such as those located in Cordova and Madinat al-Zahra between c. 950–1050, and the fact that numerous Islamic ivories bear inscriptions mentioning names of royal members or notable courtiers, is quite understandable. On top of that, the probability that ivory workshops in the lands of Islam might have obtained supplies of raw material sent as tribute from India to the royal courts rather than acquired it in the markets, is also attested by another of Bar Hebraeus'

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[56] *The Chronology of Gregory Abu'l Faraj, the son of Aaron, the Hebrew physician commonly known as Bar Hebraeus*, trans. from the Syriac by Ernest A. Wallis Budge (Oxford, 1932), vol. 1, pp. 134–135.

[57] *Hudud al-'Alam, The Regions of the World. A Persian Geography 372 AH–982 AD*, trans. Vladimir Minorsky (Oxford, 1937), p. 87.

[58] See the discussion in chapter six.

accounts. He mentions that a tribute, among which three hundred elephants were included, was offered to the Arabs in 1023, after the military defeat of the citadel of Kawakir in India. Cutler has suggested that such a tribute may have furnished an opulent supply of ivory.[59]

The numerous carved ivories of the Cordoban caliphate which have come down to us, and the large number of ivories attributed to the Fatimid period, suggest that the trade in ivory during the tenth, eleventh and the twelfth centuries in the Muslim world of the Mediterranean was quite extensive. According to the informative inscriptions which decorate many of the ivories made in Muslim Spain, it might be surmised that between 950 and 1050 large amounts of elephant tusks reached the ivory workshops at the royal courts of Cordova and Madinat al-Zahra. Moreover, a group of several ivories which were carved in the provincial centre of Cuenca during the Taifa period, suggest that this precious material was also available in Muslim Spain in the second half of the eleventh century. Thus, ivory in Muslim Spain was a royal monopoly reserved for the master craftsmen of the court.

Of tremendous importance for the history of ivory in Muslim Spain is a document which appears in the monumental book on Muslim Spain, *Nafh al-tīb min ghusn al-Andalus al-ratīb* by al-Maqqari (1577–1632). He tells us that in 991 a huge amount of "eight thousand pounds of the most pure ivory" was sent as a present to the caliph Hisham II by a Berber prince:

> In the year 381 (beginning March 19, AD 991) says the diligent historian Ibnu Hayyan—who, as is well known, had dwelt longer on the events of that time than on any other comprised in his voluminous work—there arrived in Cordova an embassy from Zeyri Ibn 'Atiyah al-Maghrawi, Lord of the Zenatah, with valuable presents consisting of various rarities and productions of Africa; among which were two hundred generous steeds; fifty camels of a species called *mehriyyah*, which are renowned for their fleetness; one thousand shields covered with the skin of the *lamt* or hippopotamus; several loads of bows and arrows made in the country of Zab, many civet-cats, giraffes, and other quadrupeds of the desert, as rhinoceroses, elephants, lions, tigers, leopards,

[59] For this account and Cutler's remark see Anthony Cutler, *The Hand of the Master: Craftsmanship, Ivory, and Society in Byzantium (9th–11th centuries)* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1994), p. 264, note 39.

> and so forth; one thousand loads of the best dates; one hundred and fifty ostrich-feathers; eight thousand pounds of weight of the purest ivory [*nab al-fīl*], and other curiosities of that country. There were besides several loads of bornuses (that is, trousers) and other articles of woolen cloth manufactured in Africa. The object of the ambassadors was to announce to al-Mansur the extensive conquests which their master, Zeyri, had just made in western Africa, the greater portion of which he had reduced, causing the khalif Hisham to be proclaimed in all the mosques thereof. The news of the ambassadors came with suitable presents and a letter for the Lord of the Zenatah, wherein he granted him in Hisham's name the investiture of all those dominions which he had wrested from the enemies of the house of Umeyyah.[60]

If one takes this literary source at its face value, it explains the availability of ivory in Muslim Spain in the tenth and the eleventh centuries. Unfortunately, the source of the material is not mentioned, but it is likely that the Berbers sent African ivory to the Umayyads of Spain. Moreover, the fact that the goods, among which ivory is mentioned, were sent to the Cordovan court after the conquests of Ibn ʿAtiyah in the western parts of Africa, suggests that the ivory might be of West African origin.

It is worth mentioning that ivory, either of good or inferior quality, was relatively abundant in Constantinople, too, from the mid ninth century until the end of the eleventh century.[61]

The surviving carved ivories attributed to the Fatimid period seem to be made of elephant ivory.[62] However, the trade with walrus (or narwhal) ivory should not be undervalued; it is likely that this type of ivory was mainly used in the medieval Islamic world for making the handles of swords, daggers and knives.[63] The report of the

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[60] Pascual de Gayangos, *The History of Muhammadan Dynasties in Spain*, a version adapted from the *Nafh al-ṭīb* of al-Maqqarī (London, 1840), vol. II, pp. 190–191.

[61] Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory*, especially p. 34; *idem*, *The Hand of the Master*, pp. 41–51 (Cutler argues that the use of ivory of inferior quality in the tenth and eleventh centuries hints at the desire for and shortage of the material in Byzantium at this specific period. However, it might be added that the immense desire for ivory at that period dictated the use of the entire dentine, by which parts of a lesser quality, like those around the pulp cavity, were used).

[62] Anna Contadini, *Fatimid Art in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London, 1998), pp. 110–111 (see also p. 114, note 5).

[63] Ettinghausen, *The Unicorn*, pp. 126–128. Guido Schönberger, "Narwhal-Einhorn. Studien über einen seltenen Werkstoff," *Städel-Jahrbuch* 9(1935–36), pp. 167–247. See also, Julius Ruska, "Arabic and Chinese Trade in Walrus and Narwahal Ivory," *Der Islam* 5(1914), p. 239; *idem*, "Noch einmal al-Chutww," *Der Islam* 4(1913), pp.

eleventh-century author of the *Book of Gifts and Rarities* (*kitāb al-dhakhā'ir wa al-tuhaf*) on the many boxes, square and round, small and large, and the chess and backgammon pieces in the Fatimid treasury made of precious materials, among which ivory (*'āj*) is also mentioned, hints at the large supply of ivory at the disposal of those who worked with it in Fatimid Egypt.[64] It has been suggested that already in the pre-Fatimid period, during the reign of the Aghlabids in Tunisia (circa 800–909), ivory became more readily available. This was made possible due to the sub-Saharan trade with North Africa.[65] The earliest evidence, however, for the appearance of a supply of ivory in North Africa is a rectangular ivory casket in the Archaeological Museum in Madrid. A Kufic inscription which runs around the casket's lid tells us that it was made for the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz (reign 953–975) at al-Mansuriyya, the capital city of the Fatimid dynasty before they moved to their new capital al-Qahira, namely Cairo, in 972–3. It should be stressed that the casket is made out of large, thick ivory panels.[66] This might hint at the availability of ivory during this period.

Though we lack any information telling us of the specific cross-Sahara trade route with North Africa, we may assume that ivory was imported from East Africa and then carried through the mainland to Egypt. The sole medieval document which confirms that, around this period, the source for ivory was East Africa and especially Zanzibar, is to be found in the travel book of Nasir-i Khusraw,

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163–164. For an interesting discussion on the trade with mammoth tusks, see Georg Jacob, *Welche Handelsartikel bezogen die Araber des Mittelalters aus den nordisch-baltischen Ländern?* (Berlin, 1891), pp. 18–19. See also Lyuba Smirnova, "Utilization of rare bone materials in Medieval Novgorod," in Alice M. Choyke and László Bartosiewicz (eds.), *Crafting Bone: Skeletal Technologies through Time and Space*, BAR International Series 937 (Oxford, 2001), pp. 9–17.

[64] Al-Qadi al-Rashid b. al-Zubayr, *Kitāb al-dhakhā'ir wa'l-tuhaf*, ed. M. Hamidullah (Kuwait, 1959), p. 254 (paragraph 381), and p. 257 (paragraph 390). See also Ghada al-Hijjawi al-Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts and Rarities, Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf* (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1996), pp. 234–235 (paragraphs 381, 390).

[65] Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, p. 188.

[66] On this casket see *The Arts of Islam*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery (London, 1976), cat. no. 145; Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, p. 188, fig. 13.81; Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "Signatures on Works of Islamic Art and Architecture," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 11(1999), pp. 52–53, pl. 10d. Another ivory casket, similar in shape and decorative programme, is kept in the Diocesan Museum of Mantua. The casket was formerly kept in the cathedral of San Pietro in Mantua. See Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, *Wiligelmo e Matilde: L'officina romanica* (Milan, 1991), pp. 393–394, cat. no. 24.

the *Safar-nama*, which was written around 1050. He mentions that some elephant tusks were put on sale in the bazaars of Cairo and adds that they were brought from Zanzibar.[67] Since Nasir-i Khusraw does not mention any decoration on the tusks, it is likely that they were sold as raw material for making ivory artefacts.

It should be mentioned, however, that, according to Ibn 'Idhari, who probably lived between the end of the thirteenth century and the first decades of the fourteenth century, the Zirids of North Africa, who, under Fatimid patronage, ruled in central Algeria (971–1152), received in (384 H.) huge elephants from Egypt.[68] The import of elephants to North Africa via Egypt suggests, to some extent, that ivory trade took a similar route during that period, from East Africa and the Sudan via Egypt to the northern parts of Africa.

It is quite evident that during the Crusading period, that is, between 1095 and 1291, changes were brought about in the medieval trade of the Mediterranean.[69] However, despite the occasional shortage of ivory caused by several papacy embargoes prohibiting mainly the Venetians but also other important trade centres of the Latin West from trading with the Levant, oriental merchandise did reach the West. For instance, this is attested by the following account which tells us that, during a sea trade embargo in 1226, seven huge elephant tusks imported from Egypt were among the confiscated goods found on a Lombard cargo ship.[70]

As far as trade in ivory is concerned, the vast amount of information gathered by Labib in his book on Egyptian trade in the High Middle Ages provides us with a fairly comprehensive picture.[71]

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[67] Charles Schefer, *Sefer Nameh: Relation du voyage de Nassiri Khosrau*, The Persian manuscript with a French translation (repr. Amsterdam, 1970), p. 149.

[68] Ibn Idhari, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord et de l'Espagne musulmane*, ed. George S. Colin and Evariste Lévi-Provençal (Leiden, 1948), vol. 1, p. 256 (the import of elephants took place in 384 H.).

[69] See mainly Subhi Y. Labib, *Handelgeschichte Ägypten im Spätmittelalter, 1171–1517* (Wiesbaden, 1965); Andrew M. Watson, "Back To Gold—and Silver," *The Economic History Review*, 20(1967), pp. 1–34; Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1938); Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages 950–1350* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); Hilmar C. Krueger, "The Wares of Exchange in the Genoese-African Traffic of the Twelfth Century," Speculum 12(1937), pp. 57–71.

[70] Louise Buenger Robbert, "Venice and the Crusades," in: *A History of the Crusades*, ed. Kenneth M. Setton, vol. 5, *The Impact of the Crusades on the Near East*, ed. Norman P. Zacour and Harry W. Hazard (Madison, Wisconsin, 1985), p. 442.

[71] Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens, passim.*

According to him, the source for ivory was East Africa, especially Nubia and Ethiopia. He mentions the city of Zailaʿ on the Red Sea, on the Gulf of Aden, as an important trade centre for the export of ivory to Ayyubid Egypt, and adds that both Aden and Alexandria played a major role in this trade.[72]

The detailed accounts by Marco Polo (1254–1324) of Madagascar and Zanzibar also demonstrate that ivory was obtained from East Africa. However, it should be stressed that, although it is certain that Marco Polo travelled in Asia and India between the years 1271 and 1295—accompanying his father in the service of the Kubilai Khan—, it is unlikely that he was also in East Africa. His description of the island of Madagascar might refer to Mogadishu in Somaliland, and that of Zanzibar might be rather associated with a large area in East Africa called Zenj. Nonetheless, his meticulous description of both regions suggests that he drew upon a trustworthy source, and, despite the ambiguity concerning the exact identification of these regions, this document clearly indicates that ivory was imported from East Africa.

He says:

> Madagascar is an island lying about 1,000 miles south of Socotra. The people are Saracens who worship Mahomet. They have four *sheikhs*—that is to say, four elders—who exercise authority over the whole island. You must know that this island is one of the biggest and best in the whole world. It is said to measure about 4,000 miles in circumference. The people live by trade and industry. More elephants are bred here than in any other province; and I assure you that not so many elephant tusks are sold in all the rest of the world put together as in this island and that of Zanzibar.[73]

As far as the island of Zanzibar is concerned, Marco Polo tells us too that "they [the people of Zanzibar] have elephants in plenty and drive a brisk trade in their tusks".[74] He also adds some important information concerning the significance of the island for the sea trade:

> A brisk trade is plied here; for many merchant ships call at the island with a great variety of goods, all of which they dispose of before taking in a return cargo—chiefly of elephant tusks, which are very abundant here. There is also no lack of ambergris, since the whales are caught in great number.[75]

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[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 98, 335.
[73] Marco Polo, *The Travels*, trans. Ronald E. Latham (London, 1958), p. 299.
[74] Marco Polo, *The Travels*, p. 301.
[75] Marco Polo, *The Travels*, p. 302.

But it should be noticed that Marco Polo also tells us of the import of Indian ivory to the harbour city of Hormuz, which he describes as "a great centre of commerce" and which is located in the Strait of Hormuz. He says:

> Merchants come here by ship from India, bringing all sorts of spices and precious stones and pearls and cloths of silk and of gold and elephants' tusks and many other wares.[76]

Indeed, it is likely that with the decline of the cities of Basra and Siraf in the High Middle Ages, Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman played a major role in the Arabian Sea trade. Two other towns—Zaila' and 'Aidhab, both located on the East-African coast of the Red Sea—are mentioned as trade centres for ivory in the High Middle Ages, especially in the Mamluk period. This suggests that the source for ivory was indeed East Africa.[77]

Another interesting literary source mentioned by Labib, informs us that East-African ivory occasionally reached the Mamluk court of Egypt as tribute. For example, the Amirs of the islands of Sawakin and Dahlak—both located on the Red Sea, near the present city of Asmara in Eritrea—used to send an annual tribute to the Mamluk court which included ivory raw material.[78]

It should be added that several medieval Chinese sources on the lands of Islam also mention the province of Zenj in East Africa as being famous for its export of elephant tusks.[79]

While the above-mentioned accounts illuminate the picture of ivory trade in the Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, the following literary source sheds some light on the Mediterranean trade in ivory during the Mamluk period. According to the merchant Pegolotti (1310–40),[80] "denti di liofante" were also to be found in the fourteenth-century markets of Venice. Moreover, during his travels to the holy places in Egypt, Sinai Palestine and Syria, which took place in 1384, Giorgio Gucci mentions that the elephant tusks that he saw

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[76] Marco Polo, *The Travels*, p. 66.

[77] Cited by Labib, s.v. "Elfenbein", *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, p. 1812.

[78] Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens*, pp. 88, 374.

[79] Friedrich Hirth, *Die Länder des Islam nach chinesischen Quellen* (Leiden, 1894), p. 54; Chau Ju-Kua, *His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, trans. and annotated by Friedrich Hirth and William W. Rockhill (St. Petersburg, 1911), pp. 126–7, note 5.

[80] Francesco B. Pegolotti, *La pratica della mercatura*, ed. Allen Evans (Cambridge, Mass., 1936).

in Cairo were ". . . not a great thing, because in Venice I saw many, and elsewhere, which were three or four braccia" (c. 180 or 240 cm).[81] This might hint at the long trade route of ivory from East Africa to Venice.[82] Moreover, he adds that the main fourteenth-century Mediterranean trade centres via which ivory reached Europe were Alexandria, Acre and Famagusta.[83]

To sum up, on the basis of the scant and sporadic evidence on medieval trade in ivory discussed in this chapter, we may assume that, with the rise of Islam in the seventh century, most ivory was imported from East Africa. In the early Muslim period, that is, from the Umayyad until the end of the Fatimid period, the source for ivory was mainly Ethiopia. From this area it was usually transferred either to Egypt or Arabia. The trade route from Ethiopia to Arabia went via several other trade centres like Oman and Basra and reached different Muslim regions of central Asia. The other trade route went to Egypt. And from there, more specifically from Alexandria, ivory was shipped to different naval trade centres of the Mediterranean basin. However, ivory was also carried with caravans from Egypt through the mid and northern parts of the Sahara. As medieval sources concerning ivory in Byzantium suggest, it is likely that Alexandria was the main port for the export of this material to the different regions of the Mediterranean basin, both regions under Muslim and Christian rule.[84] During the High Middle Ages, in the Ayyubid and the Mamluk periods, ivory continued to be exported from East Africa. It is likely that in addition to ʿAidab and Zailaʿ on the East-African coast of the Red Sea, several other East-African sources for ivory, especially those of Zanzibar and Madagascar, were also involved in the ivory trade.

Several medieval sources suggest that ivory, as raw material, might have reached the lands of Islam not only as part of other imported commodities but also as tribute, in which case the elephant tusks were presented directly to the royal courts. The literary sources

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[81] *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria in 1384 by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli*, trans. Theophilus Bellorini and Eugene Haode (Jerusalem, 1948), p. 103.

[82] Cited by Cutler, *The Hand of the Master*, pp. 29, 58.

[83] Cited by Labib in s.v. "Elfenbein" in: *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 3, p. 1813.

[84] For the role of Alexandria in the Byzantine medieval trade with ivory, see Cutler, *The Hand of the Master*, pp. 58–59.

mentioned here hint at the direct delivery of ivory tusks to the royal courts of Abbasid Baghdad, Umayyad Cordova and Mamluk Egypt. However, the visual evidence of the carved ivories of the Abbasid period, which have come to our hands so far, is very little, in comparison to the rich and dated visual evidence of the Cordovan royal workshops and the relatively securely datable ivories of Mamluk Egypt.

Since the majority of the Saracenic oliphants were produced mainly in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, namely in the Fatimid period, the assumption concerning the East-African origin of ivory in the Fatimid period applies also to the oliphants discussed in this book. Moreover—as will be shown in chapter five—, the large surviving body of the so-called Saracenic carved horns, consists of at least one clearly homogenous group, with which, as pointed out by Kühnel, a small ivory case in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (inv. no. 17.190.236) is associated (Plate IV, Fig. 34a).[85] The case bears a Latin inscription "TAVR. FI. MAN." which appears on both narrow sides of the casket (Figs. 34b–c) and was read by Kühnel as Taurus filius Mansonis. He suggested that it is a dedicatory inscription referring to Tauro, a member of the prominent Mansone family from Amalfi.[86] As noted in chapter two, this inscription does not necessarily indicate that the case was made in Amalfi and that an ivory workshop for decorating oliphants in this specific Fatimid style existed there. But it might hint at the taste for ivory in South Italy in these specific centuries. Indeed, before the establishment of the Latin Kingdoms in the Levant at the beginning of the twelfth century, Mediterranean trade in the tenth and eleventh centuries between the lands of Islam and western Europe mainly went via small cities in South Italy like Salerno, Naples and Amalfi.[87] Among these cities, Amalfi, for example, had direct trade ties with North Africa, Sicily and also with Alexandria, Cairo and Antioch.[88]

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[85] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 67 cat. no. 86.

[86] *Ibid.* This speculation was first suggested by Kühnel in 1959, see Ernst Kühnel, "Die sarazenischen Olifanthörner," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 1(1959), pp. 33–50.

[87] Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages 950–1350*, especially pp. 63–70; Robert S. Lopez and Irving W. Raymond, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World* (New York, 2001).

[88] Armand O. Citarella, "The relations of Amalfi with the Arab World before the Crusades," *Speculum* 42(1967), pp. 299–312; *idem*, "Patterns in Medieval Trade: The Commerce of Amalfi before the Crusades," *The Journal of Economic History* 28(1968), pp. 531–55. See also Ulrich Schwarz, *Amalfi im frühen Mittelalter (9.–11. Jahrhundert), Untersuchungen zur Amalfitaner Überlieferung* (Tübingen, 1978).

It is likely, then, that ivory was shipped with some other goods from Fatimid trade centres in the eastern parts of the Mediterranean basin and North Africa to Amalfi. It must be emphasised, however, that the large body of carved ivory tusks and the manufacturing of relatively big caskets suggest prosperity in the trade and availability of the material in the above-mentioned centuries. But it must be also kept in mind that—according to the stylistic observations made in chapter five—it is likely that several oliphants might have been produced prior to this eleventh-century boom in the ivory trade of the Mediterranean.

CHAPTER FOUR

# CUTTING AND CARVING—THE MAKING OF OLIPHANTS

Our knowledge of medieval techniques of ivory carving is very limited. In his discussion on ivory carving techniques in Byzantium, Cutler emphasises that "we are faced with the absence of any surviving tools that can be positively identified as having been used for this purpose".[1] The lacunae in the medieval Islam world involving the surviving tools and records on methods of ivory carving are also wide. Although our knowledge concerning ivory carving in medieval Christendom is limited, the information we have on Islamic ivory workshops is relatively detailed, especially on those located in medieval Islamic Spain. Medieval Islamic sources provide us with information concerning the historical context of ivory carving. These are mainly the numerous references to specific names of political figures, artisans, places of manufacturing and dates, which usually appear on the carved inscriptions decorating these artefacts.[2] The bleak picture concerning ivory carving techniques leaves us with no other choice but to deduce evidence for medieval carving methods from the artefacts themselves.[3]

But before I embark on the discussion concerning the particular methods and the process of making oliphants, which are based on observation of the artefacts, some points should be made clear.

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[1] Anthony Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory* (Washington, 1985), p. 37, see also E.C. Sandford, *"The identification and working of ivory"* thesis, Institute of Archaeology, University of London (1973).

[2] For this historical approach see mainly, John Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordova* (London, 1960); Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh, 1998), especially pp. 187–190.

[3] For methods of ivory carving in Byzantium, see Anthony Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory*, pp. 37–50; *idem, The Hand of the Master* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 79–152. See also Josef Engemann, "Elfenbeinfunde aus Abu Mena/Ägypten," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 30(1987), pp. 172–186, especially pp. 178–182; Friederike von Bargen, "Zur Materialkunde und Form spätantiker Elfenbeinpyxiden," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 37(1994), especially pp. 48–54; Alan Cameron, "A Note on Ivory Carving in Fourth Century Constantinople," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86(1982), pp. 126–129.

It is likely that the medieval methods of ivory carving were not significantly different from those practised in our modern era, and that the tools involved are largely the same as those used in Antiquity. Moreover, much information on ivory carving techniques can be gleaned from methods of woodcarving. Like wood, ivory can be sawn, drilled, glued to itself or to other supports, mainly wood, and also fixed and secured by nails or ivory pegs. Details can be worked with a scraper, drill, chisel, scorper, gouge and file,[4] and, in addition, ivory can be over-painted with coloured pigments and gold emulsion.

Despite the existence of several medieval sources concerning methods of working with ivory, these sources should be considered cautiously, or even critically. The best example is the well-known tradition concerning the ancient practice of softening ivory in liquids, particularly beer. This tradition, which is probably drawn from Dioscorides' *Materia Medica*, in his chapter on the medicinal value of beer (probably written in the first century AD), seems to be taken as valid truth by other scholars in ancient, medieval and modern eras alike.[5] According to Dioscorides, this practice rendered possible an easy carving of the material. Some other versions of classical authors certify that the size of ivory plaques might be enlarged to at least three times their actual length and width after immersing them in beer or by warming the material. For example, Pausanias (ca. 175 AD), in his *Description of Greece*, tells us that "the horn both of oxen and elephants can be by the action of fire made straight from round, and can in fact be turned into any shape".[6] Recently, Engemann has thoroughly discussed the history of the myth of softening ivory.[7] It seems, at least according to Seneca's report, that the myth was invented by Democritus (460–370 BC) and appeared later in other tractates of classical authors like Plutarch (ca. 46–120 AD), Pausanias (c. 175 AD), and Dioscorides, as mentioned above.[8] Engemann also mentions that in another chapter of the *Materia Medica*, Dioscorides describes an additional method for softening ivory, namely cooking

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[4] For a cautious discourse on medieval tools for carving in ivory, see Cutler, *The Hand of the Master*, pp. 91–94.

[5] Cutler, *The Hand of the Master*, p. 20.

[6] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, V, 12; cited by Anthony Cutler, "The Making of the Justinian Diptychs," *Byzantion* 54(1984), p. 81, note 29.

[7] Engemann, "Elfenbeinfunde aus Abu Mena/Ägypten," pp. 183–186.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

it with the root of the Mandragora plant.[9] However, this long-lived myth, which survives even in recent studies on ivories,[10] clearly demonstrates how misleading literary sources might be.[11]

The first thing to be done in the process of preparing an oliphant is the scraping of the rough bark from the tusk surface. In some cases, as the tusk is forcefully pulled out of the hunted elephant, the lips of the large opening of the tusk's mouth are damaged. The uneven edges are therefore sawn off to create a smooth opening with an even rim. One of the rare visual examples illustrating this first stage of scraping off the husk is to be found in an eleventh-century Byzantine manuscript known as the *Cynegetica* of Pseudo-Oppian—a sort of hunting manual book—which is now in the Bibliotheca Marciana in Venice (cod. gr. Z.479). The book includes several miniatures of elephants, among which one of the pages (fol. 36r) includes two horizontal pictures (Fig. 3). The miniature at the upper part of the page depicts an African elephant with relatively long tusks, and the one below illustrates a craftsman sitting at a large bench-like working table. The craftsman holds a tool similar to an adze in his right hand, with which he removes the damaged husk and most probably also the dentine layer around the pulp cavity. The tusk, the mouth of which has already been cut straight, is firmly held in his left hand and pressed to the surface of the working table in order to keep the tusk steady while stripping the husk. Most probably an iron saw is fixed to the table, at its other end. A large antler depicted to the right of the table suggests that workshops specialising in ivory carving were also involved in carving antlers and other sorts of horns. According to Cutler, the "finished bow" lying under the table suggests that this miniature illustrates the whole process of working in ivory, from the first stage of removing the husk to the finished bow ivory pieces, and that all steps were undertaken in a single workshop.[12]

The second step involved the preparation of the tusk as a hol-

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 184. Engemann detects this myth for example in Wolfgang F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz, 1976).

[11] For further discussion concerning this myth and some experiments made after these legendary methods, see Benjamin Burack, *Ivory and Its Uses* (Vermont and Tokyo, 1984), pp. 43–45; Cutler, "The Making of the Justinian Diptychs," p. 81, note 29.

[12] Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory*, p. 38.

lowed instrument. Unfortunately, we do not possess any written evidence on this specific method of hollowing out tusks. The suggestions put forward are no more than speculations based on the logistics of working with ivory and observing oliphants.

One method involves the clearing of the inside of the tusk. Since the pulp cavity is already void, the tusk is further hollowed out by different tools, such as a gouge and scroper. This is done along the nerve canal up to the tusk's tip. It is likely that ivory tusks with a relatively large pulp cavity, which deeply extends into the tusk, were prefered for making oliphants. This type of tusk with an extended pulp cavity reduces, to some extent, the hard job of carving out the inside of the tusk up to its tip.

Although the following medieval account refers to the fashioning of ivory handles, it might shed some light on the method of hollowing tusks. It appears in the famous book *Diversarum Artium Schedula* of Theophilus, most probably the twelfth-century monk and metalworker Roger of Helmarshausen. The passage is part of his instructions on ivory carving. He says:

> Now fashion ivory handles, round or ribbed, and make a hole down the axis. Enlarge the hole with various appropriate files so that the inside is the same shape as the outside and the ivory is even throughout and moderately thin and flat.[13]

The fact that the inside of the tusk is made out of a concentric 'cone within cone' structure might, in some cases, make the removal of the ivory inside the tusk easier, especially because of the tendency of the material to split along these concentric lines. But it is likely that the curved shape of the tusk might have rendered this work almost impossible. Moreover, using this method, it seems likely that the best section of tusk—the 'ivory fillet' so to speak—cannot be used any more because it is completely damaged. To the best of my knowledge, medieval sources are silent concerning the question of whether the ivory hollowed out of the tusk could have been used further or whether it was wasted.

As far as material is concerned, the second suggested method is more profitable and is easier to work. In this method, tusks with a relatively extended pulp cavity are also chosen for making oliphants.

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[13] Theophilus, *On Divers Arts*, trans. from the Latin by John G. Hawthorne and Cyrill S. Smith (New York, 1979), pp. 187–188.

But in comparison to the former method, the carver shapes the tusk into an oliphant while carving its outer walls, namely its surface, rather than its inner section. The carver makes full use of the pulp cavity. He shapes the oliphant along the natural slightly curved and hollowed pulp cavity of the tusk. The tip of the oliphant is therefore located immediately at, or just a few centimetres behind, the end of the pulp cavity. Working an oliphant from outside rather than from inside enormously facilitates the carving process. Moreover, the best solid section of the tusk is hardly damaged.[14] Of course, with this method a quite large piece of ivory should be cut off around the lower zone of the oliphant and especially around its narrow end, but if this is done carefully, one is able to make use of the removed pieces. The best evidence for using this method is perhaps the oliphant from Lugano, which is kept in the private collection of the Baroness E. von Buch (Fig. 69).[15] The oliphant retains a quite large piece of ivory on its lower zone, which encircles the oliphant's surface between the lower decorative bands and tip. The piece projects quite substantially from the surface of the oliphant. This suggests that a relatively large piece of ivory was cut off for the shaping of the oliphant's lower part.

At this specific stage the tip was also cut, most probably with the help of a saw. It was important that while sawing off the tip one should try to avoid the material becoming warm, because this could cause it to split. For example, a narrow, relatively short crack appears on the oliphant from the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, running from its tip to the recessed band at its lower zone (Fig. 40). A relatively long crack, which runs from the tip to the upper part of the body, also appears on the oliphant from the Musée Crozatier in Le Puy-en-Velay (Fig. 29). However, it must be stressed that it is quite difficult to give the exact reasons for these cracks.

It seems likely that before decorating the oliphants with vegetal and figural motifs, recessed bands on the lower and upper zones were fashioned. It is also likely that the tip of the tusk was carved at this stage, thus creating a proper mouthpiece, or at least preparing the tip for a metal mouthpiece to be affixed at a later stage.

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[14] I would like to thank Hiltrud Jehle, restorer in Bode Museum in Berlin, who first suggested this method of carving oliphants. I also thank her for discussing it further with me.

[15] See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 58.

Some marks of mainly deep-cut horizontal lines usually appear on the borders of the recessed bands and also on the slightly raised narrow bands flanking these recesses. They suggest that a sharp tool, probably a sort of knife or scalpel, was used for marking the recessed areas on the upper and lower zones. Thus, four main sections were first marked on the surface of the tusk: a lower recessed zone with two narrow raised bands, an upper recessed zone with two narrow raised bands, a quite large area in between the recessed zones forming the body of the oliphant and a fairly wide band at the top of the oliphant, just around its large opening. In some cases, these deep-cut lines were carved freehand; the best example is to be found on the oliphant from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Fig. 4). But in several other cases, the deep-cut lines are remarkably accurate and exact, suggesting they were done with the aid of other tools or perhaps even turned on a lathe; exact lines as such appear on the upper and lower decorative bands of the oliphants from the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh and from the Musée du Louvre in Paris (Figs. 5, 6). The recessed areas were probably carved with a metal tool, perhaps a scorper, with a curved blade that would hollow a flat or slightly rounded surface. The numerous horizontal scratches on the recessed areas of the oliphants from Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Fig. 37) and the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (Fig. 39) might indicate that the shaping of the recesses was done by carving out the ivory with horizontal sweeps. However, the marks left on the recesses of the oliphant from the Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm suggest that the recessed areas were carved out by vertical strokes (Fig. 7). It should be emphasised that in the remainder of the oliphants, the direction in which the recessed bands were hollowed cannot be determined, either because the areas are now covered by later mountings or because they were smoothed over and polished, erasing any carving marks.

Oliphants' tips were also shaped. After being cut, the opening was further enlarged to create an appropriate wind instrument that can be blown. The mouthpiece's edges were usually smoothed, but in some cases, it was carved to allow the mounting of a metal mouthpiece. This type of carved mouthpiece prepared for affixing a metal mounting appears on the oliphants from the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (Fig. 39), the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait (Fig. 25), the Musée du Louvre in Paris (inv. no. 1075, Fig. 27), the Museo Nazionale in Florence (Fig. 30), and the one recently sold in Stockholm

(now in the collection of Sheikh Saud al-Thani in Qatar, Plate III, Fig. 32). A unique carved mouthpiece with a bulbous form appears on the oliphant from Arles (Fig. 78); this oliphant also lacks the usual recessed bands. In the case of the oliphants with smooth and facetted bodies, the flat surfaces of their bodies were first cut and afterwards flattened with the aid of specific tools, such as a file.

The work which required the greatest skill, however, was the relief carved decoration on the oliphants' bodies. It is likely that the specific design was first drawn or engraved on the surface before scraping away the surplus ivory from around the areas of the motifs which were to be left in relief. This speculation is attested by Theophilus' description concerning the carving of ivory. He says:

> When you are going to carve ivory [*os*],[16] first shape a tablet of the size you want, put chalk on it and draw figures with a piece of lead according to your fancy. Then mark out the lines with a slender tool so that they are clearly visible. Next cut the grounds with various tools as deeply as you wish and carve figures or anything else you like according to your skill and knowledge.[17]

And in another paragraph concerning the carving of a decorative ivory handle, he adds:

> Around the outside [of the handle] delicately draw little flowers or animals, or birds, or dragons linked by their necks and tails, pierce the grounds with fine tools and carve with the best and finest workmanship that you can.[18]

It is not clear whether the design was first drawn with a piece of lead or else perhaps engraved by scoring shallow outlines onto the surface with a delicate sharp tool such as a graver. Nonetheless, the main decorative zones were usually marked by shallow-cut lines. Although these outlines were generally effaced by polishing, this method of preparing the ground by scoring can be distinctly seen on the oliphant from Auch, on which the different horizontal zones as well as the vertical bands along the body are engraved (Plate X, Fig. 28).

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[16] Although Theophilus refers to bone (*os*) in this sentence, it is likely that he is speaking about ivory, for he uses *os* interchangeably with *ebur* in this section. See the remark of the translators, who prefer to translate *os* as ivory here: Theophilus, *On Divers Arts*, p. 187, note 1.

[17] Theophilus, *On Divers Arts*, p. 187 (Book 3, chapter 95).

[18] Theophilus, *On Divers Arts*, p. 188 (Book 3, chapter 95).

As far as tools and technique are concerned, some oliphants might explicitly reveal the artistry that has gone into the creation of their carved ornament. For example, it is clear that a type of drill for boring was in use. The drill was usually employed for hollowing small areas enclosed within the design to be left in high relief. It is likely then that the drill could have been used for making small holes and enlarging them slowly and cautiously by rotation to the exact size required. For example, while carving specific decorative bands, such as the basket weave bands on the oliphants from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Fig. 8) and from the Cluny Museum in Paris (Fig. 41), holes were drilled in the tiny areas between the densely woven bands. A similar method of drilling holes appears on the pierced bead bands on the oliphants from the Musée du Louvre in Paris (Fig. 9), the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh (Fig. 40) and on the oliphant from the Museum für Deutsche Geschichte in Berlin, which was formerly kept in the Zeughaus (Fig. 10). A drill was also used while carving the arabesque bands around the recessed area in the upper zone of this oliphant from Berlin. On the inner curve section of the oliphant from Baltimore, on which two intertwined serpents are depicted, holes were drilled between their twisted bodies (Fig. 11). Sometimes traces of drilled holes, which were later enlarged and smoothed, appear on the oliphants decorated with interwoven medallions. The holes are especially to be found on the circular knots between the medallions (see for example, Fig. 12). The pattern of animals within medallions which decorates the body of the oliphant from the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait reveals that drills were also used for hollowing small enclosed areas around the animals' bodies (Fig. 25). For example, in the medallion with an elephant, a hole was drilled exactly in the tiny enclosed area formed by the bend at the very end of the elephant's trunk. In another medallion of this oliphant, a hole appears in the tiny area enclosed within the eagle's chest, neck, head and beak. And a hole was probably drilled between the horns of the stag depicted in one of the medallions decorating the body of this oliphant from Kuwait. A similar method of boring holes appears on the oliphant from the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich Museum in Brunswick (Fig. 13). This can be clearly seen on the elephant carved on the upper decorative band of the oliphant, around the large opening. The mouth of the elephant is emphasised by a relatively deep drilled hole. Some remnants of drilled holes are to be found in other scenes depicted on the so-called

Blackburn oliphant from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The holes mainly appear on the rear side of the necks, just between head and back, of the wild animals.

Some other ornaments reveal the use of a chisel or more likely a scorper with a curved blade, which would hollow out a slightly rounded surface. The zigzag ornament which appears on the upper zone of the oliphant from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, just below the frieze of the running animals, consists of triangles, the centres of which are slightly hollowed out (Fig 8). These hollowed out areas were most probably cut with a scorper with a V-shaped blade. The same observation could be made when looking at the zigzag decorative band at the upper zone of the oliphant from Boston (Fig. 4). The tiny areas which fill the gaps between the pointed ends of the triangles and the contours of the palmette leaves, were probably also carved with the same type of scorper. A scorper with a curved (U-shaped) blade might have been used for carving the borders of the upper band of the oliphants from Le Puy-en-Velay and from Aachen (Fig. 14, 15).

Similarly, the deep straight cuts which usually appear on the decoration of the Fatimid-style oliphants with the interwoven medallions, suggest that a chisel fitted with a flat blade was used for carving the so-called lace-like decoration of these artefacts (see for example, Fig. 26).

It should be stressed that, according to techniques employed by modern ivory carvers, chisels, scorpers and gouges are seldom struck with a mallet or hammer. If a deep cut is needed, hand pressure is used, and occasionally small areas are first drilled to allow access for the blades of chisels, gouges or scorpers.

For finishing and adding details, sharp knives and other sharp tools were used. Long, vertical cuts appear on the animals' chests, and short, horizontal, quite shallow scratches organised in small groups along the vertical axis are carved on the animals' limbs and chests. These specific cuts represent the plumage or the hairy pelts of the animals. It should be stressed that these details only appear on the Fatimid-style oliphants, which are classified as group I in this book (see, for example, Fig. 36).

In some cases tiny dots appear on the bodies of several animals. These dots were probably done with a slender, pointed piece of metal like a needle. For example, such dots appear on the bird depicted in the frieze of running animals around the mouth of the

oliphant from the Museum für Deutsche Geschichte in Berlin (Fig. 16). However, it is difficult to say why this puncture technique was employed only on the bird depicted in this frieze. Several tiny dots also appear on the cheeks of the lion depicted in the upper medallions' row on the body of the oliphant from New York and on the lion depicted on the casket from the Islamic Museum in Berlin. These dots probably depict the prickly whiskers on the lion's cheeks.

It is likely that the cuts and holes in the centre of the animals' eyeballs were done with a drill, a sharp knife or even a scalpel with an extremely thin blade. The best example for this method is to be found on the oliphant from the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich Museum in Brunswick. The elephant's pupil was probably carved with a scalpel with a thin blade (Fig. 13).

Another decorative feature, which usually appears along the length of the animals' bodies, is the elegant rinceau. This motif decorates the bodies of almost all the animals depicted on the oliphant from Edinburgh (Plate XI, Fig. 5), but it is also to be found on a few other animals within medallions, especially birds. For example, animals with this rinceau appear on the oliphants from the Islamic Museum in Berlin and the Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm.[19] This motif also appears on the bodies of the animals carved on the upper zone of the oliphants from the Museum für Deutsche Geschichte in Berlin (Fig. 10) and the treasury of the Palatine Chapel in Aachen (Fig. 17). The rinceau was probably done with a slender scalpel.

At the final stage, the oliphants' surface was smoothed and then even polished; most of the oliphants discussed in this study have a smooth, flat surface. The polished surface enhances the natural glowing appearance of the material. Modern studies on ivories suggest that the surface is usually smoothed with sandpaper, and that since ivory contains an oily element, it yields a polished appearance when rubbed with a soft cloth.[20] In addition, modern techniques make use of abrasive powders for finer smoothing and polish powder for enhancing the natural gloss.[21]

To the best of my knowledge, medieval sources of the Islamic world are silent concerning methods of polishing ivory.[22] However,

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[19] See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 60 and 70.

[20] Burack, *Ivory and Its Uses*, pp. 29, 48.

[21] Burack, *Ivory and Its Uses*, p. 48.

[22] See also the discussion of Cutler concerning the polishing of ivory in the Middle Ages in Byzantium. Cutler, *The Hand of the Master*, p. 141.

although the following medieval account is slightly imprecise, Theophilus provides us with a detailed description of the different methods of polishing bone and horn handles, at least the way it was done in twelfth-century Europe. To some extent, his account might shed some light on the methods of polishing ivory in the Middle Ages, especially beyond the Alps, but it might also be associated with polishing methods in the Mediterranean. Theophilus says:

> When you have turned these [bones and horns knops] with sharp tools, smooth them with shave grass. Collect the shaving on a linen cloth and, still turning the lathe, rub them vigorously on the knops which will then become completely shiny. You can also polish horn-handles, huntsmen's horns, and [horn] windows in lanterns with sifted ashes on a woolen cloth. But do not forget to smear them finally with walnut oil.[23]

Although kept in a relatively good condition, the majority of the oliphants have lost their original polish. But they undoubtedly still have the strong impact of meticulously and accurately carved artefacts. This impact is enormously enhanced by making use of the sharp contrast between light and shade, which is achieved by employing the deep, straight cut, especially as it appears in the oliphants with the 'lace' decoration (Plates IX, X). In some cases ivory can also be bleached, stained with oil, or varnished.[24] For example, the narrow oliphant from the private collection in London has an extremely shiny surface, which suggests that it was varnished.[25]

The practice of colouring ivory with usually bright colours like red, blue, green and gold was known in ancient and medieval periods.[26] Indeed, a few oliphants retain some traces of paint. But it is difficult to answer whether they were originally painted. For example, some remains of red pigment appear on the upper decorative band of the so-called Blackburn oliphant from the Victoria and Albert

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[23] Theophilus, *On Divers Arts*, p. 189 (Book 3, chapter 94).

[24] L.J. Matienzo, and Carol E. Snow, "The chemical effects of hydrochloric acid and organic solvents on the surface of ivory," *Studies in conservation* 31(1986), pp. 133–139; Carol E. Snow and Terry D. Weisser, "The examination and treatment of ivory and related materials," *Adhesives and Consolidants* 98(1984), pp. 141–145.

[25] Ralph Pinder Wilson and Avinoam Shalem, "A Newly Discovered Oliphant in a Private Collection in London," *Mitteilungen zur Spätantiken Archäologie und Byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 2(2000), pp. 79–92.

[26] See mainly, Carolyn L. Connor, *The Color of Ivory* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1988).

Museum in London.[27] Stains of blue paint appear on the upper zone of the oliphant from Arles.[28] The ivory casket in the museum for Islamic Art in Berlin (K 3101), which is strongly related to the Fatimid-style oliphants with inhabited medallions, retained, at least until 1838, some traces of red pigment on the background of its carved decoration.[29]

Whether the oliphants received mountings or hanging belts in this last stage cannot be easily answered. The recessed bands seem to have been designed for metal bands, to which a belt or even a rope could be later attached. But, unfortunately, the several mountings which are to be found on some oliphants, are most probably later additions. This might suggest that if specific mountings were indeed affixed to the oliphants in the last stage of their production, these were probably made of perishable materials like leather or fabric.

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[27] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 81. I would like to thank Paul Williamson from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for letting me examine this oliphant.

[28] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 57. For a colour illustration see *Les Andalousies*, exhibition catalogue, Institut du monde arabe, Paris (Paris, 2000), cat. no. 210.

[29] See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 63 (cat. no. 82).

CHAPTER FIVE

# STYLISTIC CLASSIFICATION

## I. *Why Kühnel again? Reconsidering Kühnel's Classification*

Perhaps the first question to be asked is why one should reconsider the classification made by Kühnel first in 1959 and later on in 1971, in his monumental study of medieval Islamic ivories. As far as stylistic observation is concerned, it appears, at least at first glance, that already in 1929 von Falke subtly analysed the Saracenic oliphants. As mentioned in chapter two, von Falke was the first scholar to base his arrangement of the varied oliphants according to methods of carving rather than function or theme; until 1929, the latter method had been used as the main criterion for the grouping of the medieval oliphants and therefore caused a great deal of confusion.[1] It would then be worth studying first of all von Falke's stylistic observation. This will help to clarify the difference between von Falke's stylistic arrangement of the oliphants and Kühnel's classification, and also to explain my new suggestion for a stylistic arrangement of the Saracenic oliphants; the latter is the core of the discussion in this chapter.

Von Falke clearly distinguished between two large groups: the 'oriental' and Byzantine groups, both of which were also treated in two different articles.[2] For our discussion, his observations of the 'oriental' group are relevant. Among the so-called 'oriental' oliphants, he recognised two different levels of 'orientalisation' and therefore suggested that an Islamic group must have existed, on which the other 'oriental' copies or rather variations were based.[3] His first group, namely the Islamic, displays what he defines as a clear Fatimid style,

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[1] See the discussion in chapter two.

[2] Otto von Falke, "Elfenbeinhörner. I Ägypten und Italien," *Pantheon* 4(1929), pp. 511–517, and "Elfenbeinhörner. II. Byzanz," *Pantheon* 5(1930), pp. 39–44.

[3] Von Falke, "Elfenbeinhörner. I.," p. 511: "Da in sehr vielen Olifanten des hohen Mittelalters orientalische Elemente bald stärker, bald schwächer sichtbar sind, sollen die rein orientalischen Hörner hier als die mutmaßlichen Prototypen vieler abendländischer Stücke in einer islamischen Gruppe vorangestellt werden."

and therefore is assigned to Fatimid Egypt. The second group, the 'nearly Fatimid', copied, albeit with some modifications, oliphants of the Fatimid group. However, a close and minute observation of the carving style and shaping of motifs of this group suggests, according to von Falke, that these artefacts were made in the West, probably in Italy.[4] The third group of the 'oriental' oliphants, although keeping to the same programme of inhabited medallions, demonstrates a basically different style of carving, which is clearly flat, and also several crucial differences in the shaping of the animals' bodies. The treatment of the scrolls is essentially unconventional, when compared to the Fatimid group. Therefore, according to von Falke, this group might be assigned to France or Germany.[5]

Von Falke's concept of a stylistic classification based on degrees of similarity to a prototype is valuable. This method not only recognises the varied styles and methods of carving but also arranges these observations in a certain scheme recalling the three levels of the comparative form of an adjective, as if the oliphants were arranged in three groups: near-Fatimid, nearer-Fatimid and nearest-Fatimid. However, this method of classification is not perfect. As in almost all comparisons between a copy and its model, it is usually taken for granted that the model is genuine without its having been proven. Moreover, there is always the danger of interpreting the different levels of similarity as hinting at the factual distance, in time or space, between a prototype and its copies. Von Falke accepted the 'pure oriental' ("rein orientalische") group among the 'oriental' oliphants as a genuine Fatimid one and even located the second and third groups at an appropriate analogous distance from the suggested place of manufacturing of the genuine Fatimid ones, namely Cairo. He then suggested that the second group was made in Italy and the third in France or Germany.[6]

Von Falke's refined observations appeared to be less useful in 1959, as soon as Kühnel discussed the 'oriental' oliphants. Kühnel, in fact, ignores von Falke's delicate stylistic observations and gathers von Falke's three groups into one large group which he terms

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 514.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 516–517.

[6] This method of arrangement probably derived from the idea of centre and province, as if style has its own power and thus radiates from the capital to the surrounding areas. The influence radiating from the centre is thus diluted and reduced according to the distance of the province to it.

'Saracenic' and locates in South Italy.[7] It is true that the more intricate picture drawn by von Falke seems to be clarified by Kühnel's suggestion. The different levels of style, as related to Fatimid art, were then regarded as the products of different South Italian workshops, the craftsmen of which might be Arabs or even non-Arabs, both influenced by Fatimid style. But only two places in a specific region in South Italy, namely the cities of Amalfi and Salerno in Campania, were specifically suggested as the possible places of manufacturing for the Saracenic oliphants, despite the numerous stylistic discrepancies among these oliphants already pointed out by Kühnel in his article of 1959. Here the problem started. Kühnel's suggestion became so attractive that almost every oliphant decorated with what scholars of medieval Europe term as 'oriental' motifs, was immediately attributed to South Italy or Sicily. Moreover, his sub-division of the oliphants into three groups—oliphants with a smooth body, inhabited scrolls or medallions and horizontal zones filled with running animals—has been mistakenly regarded as a stylistic analysis rather than simply relating to the decorative pattern which appear on their bodies.[8]

A confusion arose in 1971, with the publication of Kühnel's *Die Islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*. The book appeared seven years after his death and included some additional oliphants, which are clearly defined in the book itself as western copies of the large group of oliphants with inhabited medallions. The fact that these additional oliphants appear in the corpus of the medieval Islamic ivories is rather curious. Moreover, the majority of them were excluded from Kühnel's discussion of the Saracenic oliphants in 1959. The result of this inclusion was that the border between Islamic, or rather Fatimid, oliphants and their western copies became indistinct. For example, the group of four small and narrow oliphants—the oliphants in the Islamic museum in Berlin (K3107), the Louvre in Paris (O.A. 152), in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (17.190.215) and in the Historisches Museum in Dresden (X63)—which are mentioned by Kühnel in a footnote in 1959 and are defined as later copies,[9] appears in 1971 in the chapter on the oliphants decorated

[7] Ernst Kühnel, "Die sarazenischen Olifanthörner," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 1(1959) p. 46 and note 26.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 34; see also the discussion in chapter two.
[9] Kühnel, "Sarazenische Olifanthörner," p. 46, note 26.

with inhabited medallions.[10] Or, for example, the oliphants from the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (71.234), the British Museum in London (1923.12–5–3) and the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (AP641), which, according to Kühnel 1959, show a strong "Byzantine" influence,[11] appear in 1971 within the large group of oliphants with inhabited medallions, namely next to the Fatimid-style group.[12] This inconsistency is likely to be explained by the fact that Kühnel's manuscript on the Islamic ivories, and especially on the Saracenic oliphants, was left uncompleted in 1964, when he suddenly died. The material was then gathered and prepared for publication by his wife Irene Kühnel-Kunze and her assistants, Dr. Brigitte Dürre-Scheunemann, Dr. Günther Krüger and Dr. Dorothea Duda.[13] On top of that, it seems that, when the actual artefacts were prepared for publication, the term 'Saracenic' as used by Kühnel in 1959 for defining different oliphants, either Islamic or under Islamic influence, indeed caused a confusion. The borders, then, among Islamic ivories, their copies and the Islamic-inspired ones were blurred. In addition, Kühnel's classification based on the three patterns which appear on oliphants' bodies, dictated the structure of the chapter on oliphants, and perhaps for that reason several oliphants which are decorated with animals within medallions but are far from being called Islamic or even under Islamic influence, were also included in the corpus of the medieval Islamic ivories of 1971. In this case, similarity in design, that is, animals within scrolls or medallions, was mistakenly taken as a criterion for classification, and thus a typology method of division was confused with a stylistic classification.

It should be stressed that Kühnel's manuscripts on three other topics were left partially, or rather barely, researched when he died. First, the question of the different workshops and their locations was not further investigated, and therefore Kühnel's suggestion of 1959 of Amalfi and Salerno was simply repeated. Second, the chapter on the peculiar iconography of the Saracenic oliphants, which Kühnel intended to write, did not come about. Third, the medieval treasuries' documents concerning oliphants were compiled without any

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[10] Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII.–XIII. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1971), cat. nos. 72–75.

[11] Kühnel, "Sarazenische Olifanthörner," p. 37.

[12] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 59, 64, 65.

[13] See Irene Kühnel-Kunze's introduction to this corpus, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. VII–IX.

critical or analytical notes. These important documents were published simply in a list form in the appendix of the corpus.[14]

Since the publication of the corpus in 1971, several more pieces of evidence have came to light, which demand the re-thinking of Kühnel's suggestion concerning the western origin of the Saracenic oliphants. Kühnel based this suggestion of western origin on the following facts: first, he argued that medieval Arabic sources fail to mention ivory horns; second, he stressed that not even one medieval oliphant has been found in the East; and third, he drew attention to the fact that there are very few representations of curved horns, let alone oliphants, in Islamic art. These arguments should be re-examined.

But let me first tackle the first issue, namely whether or not there was a specific medieval Arabic term for oliphant. It should be stressed, however, that, as successful as this attempt might be, it does not guarantee that oliphants were therefore made within the Islamic world.

Arabs do indeed have special names for a horn-type blowing instrument. For example, both *sūr* and *nāqūr* are mentioned in the Qur'an and traditionally regarded as conical instruments, probably horns, which are blown on the Day of Resurrection by the two angels *Munkar* and *Nakīr*.[15] Unfortunately, their material is not described. Another term often used is the *qarn* which refers to any crescent-shaped horn. This term probably derived from the Hebrew term *qeren* which refers solely to horns of animals. It therefore seems probable that the latter was not used to specify an elephant tusk.

It is likely, then, that the general Arabic term *būq* for a conical wind instrument, whether crescent-shaped or straight, and irrespective of its material, was also used for an ivory blowing horn. This term, which probably derived from the Greek βωχάνη or the Latin *buccina*, might hint that this type of instrument was introduced to the Mediterranean Arabs by their western neighbours.

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[14] See the introduction by Irene Kühnel-Kunze, in *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. VIII. See also Oleg Grabar, "Ernst Kühnel, Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen. VIII.–XIII.," book review, *The Art Bulletin* 56(1974), pp. 282–283; Richard Ettinghausen, "Ernst Kühnel, Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen. VIII.–XIII. Jahrhundert," book review, *Artibus Asiae* 39(1977), pp. 98–100; Volkmar Enderlein, "Ernst Kühnel, Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen. VIII.–XIII.," book review, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 75(1980), pp. 556–560.

[15] Sura LXXIV:8; LXXVIII:18. For the traditional accounts see *EI*[2], s.v. "Munkar wa-Nakir".

For example, *Būqāt* (the plural of *būq*) are mentioned by al-Maqrizi (1364–1442) as being among the riches of the Fatimid treasury during the reign of al-Mustansir (1036–1094).[16] Since the Arabic term *nafīr* was frequently used from the eleventh century onwards as referring to straight conical trumpets,[17] the *būqāt* may have been horn-shaped instruments made, perhaps, out of elephant tusks.

Two other unique wind instruments were mentioned by Ibn al-Tuwayr, a late Fatimid and early Ayyubid historian.[18] The first were called 'trumpets of peace' (*abwāq al-salām*) which were used by the Fatimids during the Nile ceremonies.[19] The use of the Arabic term *abwāq* (another plural form of *būq*) suggests that these trumpets were horn-shaped. The second instrument, *al-gharbiyya* or *al-gharība*, was sounded on new year ceremonies, as soon as the caliph neared the palace gate and his face became visible.[20] This term is interesting because it can be translated as "the marvel" or "the occidental". Thus, this suggests that the instrument was rare at least in the eastern part of the Islamic world and that its possible origin was in the West. In fact this term is similar to the term "oriental" used in the West as referring to any exotic item from the East. It might, therefore, be suggested that the *al-gharbiyya* was a specific horn-shaped instrument which in the eleventh century was popular in the West and hardly known in the East.

It is worth mentioning that in the Mamluk period, when interactions with the West in general and with crusaders in particular were intensive, horns appeared on Mamluk blazons and became an attribute of the nobility.[21] Furthermore, according to Qalqashandi (1355–1418),

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[16] Ahmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā'iz wa'l-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khitat wa'l-āthār* (the Bulāq edition, repr. in Beirut, circa 1970), vol. 1, p. 415.

[17] *EI*[2], s.v. "Būk".

[18] This source was not available to me, and I rely on the translation by Paula Sanders, *The court ceremonial of the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt* (Ph.D., Princeton University, New Jersey, 1984).

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 188.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[21] For a discussion about these Mamluk horns, which were formerly described as 'trousers', see Leo A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry: A Survey* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 19–22; Michael Meinecke, "Zur mamlukischen Heraldik," *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 28/2(1972), pp. 213–87; William Leaf, "Not trousers but trumpets: A further look at Saracenic Heraldry," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 114(1982), pp. 47–51; William Leaf, "Developments in the system of armorial insignia during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 115(1983), pp. 61–74. For the appearance of these horns also on coins, see Carole Hillenbrand,

in the Mamluk investiture ceremony of an amir, a blowing horn and a flag were presented to him (*ummir bi'l-būq wa'l-ʿalam*).[22] The presentation of a blowing horn called *būq* in Mamluk investiture ceremonies is probably reminiscent of the medieval western idea of horns of tenure, which were given as a symbol of the transfer of land.[23] But it is unknown whether the Mamluk horns were made of elephant tusks.

The second of Kühnel's arguments concerns the fact that no oliphant has been found so far in the Islamic world. This is quite curious because it is generally accepted that many of the Saracenic oliphants are decorated with oriental motifs and strongly recall the Fatimid style of ivory carving. However, in 1976, the first Islamic ivory horn was published. It is a side-blown horn from the Lamu Museum in Kenya.[24] This horn, the so-called 'Pate siwa', is 215 cm long and is made of two elephant tusks attached to each other (Fig. 18a). Its facetted body is smooth, and a band of *naskhi* inscriptions decorates the upper zone, around its large opening (Figs. 18b,c). The horn was usually sounded on special royal occasions. Though it is datable to the late seventeenth century, it is traditionally said to be a copy of an earlier lost ivory horn.[25] And as the carved *naskhi* inscriptions around its large opening recall typical Mamluk *naskhi* inscriptions, it is possible that the ivory horn from Pate copied a Mamluk one.[26] Moreover, de Vere Allen, who published this ivory horn, pro-

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*The Crusaders: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999), figure 4.21. For Mamluk heraldry, see also Estelle Whelan, "Representations of the Khassakiyah and the Origins of Mamluk Emblems," *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World, Papers from a Colloquium in Memory of Richard Ettinghausen*, ed. Priscilla P. Soucek (Pennsylvania, 1988), pp. 219–243.

[22] Al-Qalqashandi, *Subh al-aʿshā* (Cairo, 1914–28), vol. 4, p. 70; cited by Leaf, "Not trousers but trumpets," p. 51; Leaf has associated the pair of horns motif which appear on Mamluk blazons with Saracenic oliphants of the first stylistic group. But it must be pointed out that these oliphants are Fatimid and clearly not Mamluk ones, and that though "influenced by the work of Egyptian craftsmen", they were most probably made in the West.

[23] A good example of this type of horn is the horn of Ulph which, according to tradition, was given to York Minster by Ulph with all his lands. See Thomas D. Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph," *Antiquity* 11(1937), pp. 278–82; on this ritual see mainly, John Cherry, "Symbolism and survival: medieval horns of tenure," *Antiquaries Journal* 69(1989), pp. 111–18. See also the discussion in chapter six.

[24] James de Vere Allen, "The *Siwas* of Pate and Lamu: Two Antique Side-Blown Horns from the Swahili Coast," *Art and Archaeology Research Papers* 9–10(1976), pp. 38–47.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 40–1.

[26] There are another two oliphants which were not published by Kühnel and

vides us with an important fifteenth-century literary source, in which specific musical instruments of ivory are mentioned. The document is taken from the travel book of Vasco da Gama, describing his arrival in Malindi in 1498. He was received by the king and attendants playing "on anafils, and two trumpets of ivory, richly carved and the size of a man, which were blown through a hole in the side and made sweet music with the anafils".[27] The document, though dated to the end of the fifteenth century, clearly describes side-blown ivory instruments similar to the *siwas* ones of East Africa. The reference to other musical instruments called *anafils* is quite interesting because it might suggest another term for musical instruments made of ivory used in the Islamic world in East Africa. The term *anafil* probably derived from the Arabic, namely *al-nab al fil* (the tooth of an elephant), and perhaps was used in the High Middle Ages as referring to end-blown ivory horns. Whether the *anafils* were also side-blown instruments or, perhaps, made as end-blown horns like the medieval oliphants is difficult to answer;[28] fifteenth and sixteenth-century side-blown ivory horns, the so-called in Swahili *mbiu*, are known on the Arab coast of East Africa and might well also be associated with the *anafils*. The *mbiu* are shorter than the *siwas* and therefore portable and known to have been used in minor official functions.[29]

Kühnel's third argument, for a western origin for the Saracenic oliphants, is grounded on the very few visual representations of oliphants in Islamic art, especially when compared to the numerous depictions of men, and occasionally angels, blowing huge horns in European art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, both in secular and religious iconography. Kühnel's sole example is to be found on

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which might throw some light on the question concerning the existence of Islamic oliphants. Unfortunately, I was not able to study them. One of them has disappeared and the other, which has an Arabic Kufic inscription carved on its lower decorative band, is in the Collection of Sheikh Sa'ud. Nonetheless, they are discussed and illustrated below.

[27] De Vere Allen, "Siwas of Pate and Lamu," p. 38.

[28] A woodcut entitled *The King of Cochin* by Hans Burgkmair from Nuremberg (dated post 1500), is probably unique visual evidence for the use of *anafils* in royal processions, in particular those similar to the ones described by Vasco da Gama. The figure at the head of the parade blows a horn, which is most likely made out of elephant tusk. See Ezio Bassani and William B. Fagg, *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory* (New York, 1988), p. 41, fig. 7.

[29] Brian M. Fagan and James Kirkman, "An Ivory Trumpet from Sofala, Mozambique," *Ethnomusicology* 11(1967), pp. 368–374; for the existence of elephant tusks, though not necessarily hollowed, see the discussion on ivory availability in Egypt in chapter three.

a thirteenth-century bronze candlestick in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul. It is a depiction of a rider who sounds a horn-shaped instrument.[30]

However, an earlier depiction of seven figures blowing huge horns is to be found on a gilded silver plate in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (S46). The relatively big plate (diameter: 23.9 cm) was probably made in central Asia and is dated between the ninth and the tenth centuries (Fig. 19). It has been suggested that the Biblical story of the fall of the walls of Jericho is depicted on this plate, but in my opinion, the iconography has not yet been satisfactorily solved. Nonetheless, seven figures wearing long garments hold in their right hands huge horns, which are slightly curved and have relatively wide openings. The horns' length and shape suggests that these might be oliphants. Moreover, each of them is decorated with a band which runs along the upper zone. The latter recalls the typical decoration of several oliphants.[31]

Another example can be found on the carved ivory casket from Maastricht (inv. no. 27), on which a bearded figure with a turban and a long kaftan sounds a horn-shaped instrument which is most probably an oliphant (Fig. 20). The oliphant appears to have a smooth body and a single decorative band on its upper zone. Although this casket belongs to the group of carved ivories with the lace-like decoration, which—as will be shown in this chapter—were probably manufactured in the West, the distinctly oriental appearance of the figure blowing the oliphant suggests that Arabs, perhaps those living in the Islamic regions of the western Mediterranean, also used oliphants.

Interesting visual evidence, in which oliphants are shown in a religious context, is to be found in the medieval Coptic iconography of the scene of the Harrowing of Hell. The first example is a rectangular cedar wood panel in the British Museum in London (MLA 1878 12–3, 9) on which this scene is carved (Fig. 21). It belongs to

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[30] See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, fig. 31.

[31] A rider blowing a huge horn is depicted on a fragment of a woven textile from Antinoe (Musée Historique de Tissus in Lyon no. 908. I. 117). The piece is decorated with different scenes in a 'Sasanian' style. However, it is quite difficult to recognise it as a horn made of ivory. See Dominique Bénazeth, "Une paire de jambières historiées d'époque copte, retrouvée en Égypte," *Revue du Louvre* 3 (1991), pp. 16–29; see also Agnes Geijer, "A Silk from Antinoe and the Sasanian Textile Art," *Orientalia Suecana* 12(1963), pp. 3–36.

a group of ten cedar wood panels carved with crosses and other feast scenes, which are recorded as having come from the Coptic church of the Virgin (the al-Muʿallaqa) in Old Cairo (Fustat). Hunt has recently discussed them and suggested that they decorated the door of the sanctuary screen of the baptismal chapel in this church.[32] Basing her argument on stylistic and iconographic observation, she also suggested a date for them, namely the early Mamluk period (circa 1300).[33] Describing the carved scene of the Harrowing of Hell, Hunt correctly recognises that the two figures depicted behind Christ, one of whom is probably the prophet Samuel, carry oliphants. These are large and long tusks decorated with two narrow bands running around the upper zone of their bodies.

A 'Crusader' icon at Mount Sinai, which Weitzmann dated between 1250 and 1275 (Fig. 22),[34] demonstrates too that, in the specific "Loca Sancta" iconography of the Harrowing of Hell, the horn of anointment is depicted as an ivory horn. According to Weitzmann, the man holding the ivory horn is Aaron.[35] It might be suggested then that the two figures holding oliphants depicted on the carved wooden panel from the Muʿallqa church are Aaron and Samuel.

The horn carried by Aaron or Samuel probably refers to the Biblical story on the horn of anointment used by the early high priests.[36] However, the iconography of this scene of the Harrowing of Hell in the Coptic sphere is based on apocryphal sources, especially the Gospel of Nicodemus, and also on homiletic literature, particularly

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[32] Lucy-Anne Hunt, "The al-Muʿallaqa Doors Reconstructed: An Early Fourteenth-Century Sanctuary Screen from Old Cairo," *Gesta* 28(1989), pp. 61–77. See also *Ägypten Schätze aus dem Wüstenland: Kunst und Kultur der Christen am Nil*, exhibition catalogue, SPK-Berlin and Gustav-Lübcke-Museum in Hamm (Wiesbaden, 1996), p. 140, fig. 102c; *L'Art Copte en Égypte: 2000 ans d'Christianisme*, exhibition catalogue, Institut du Monde Arabe (Paris, 2000), pp. 176–177, cat. no. 184 (no. 4).

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[34] Kurt Weitzmann, "Thirteenth Century Crusader Icons on Mount Sinai," *The Art Bulletin* 45(1963), pp. 184–85.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

[36] Samuel also appears carrying an oliphant in the mosaics of the northern dome of the Kariye Djami in Istanbul (dated 1315–21). See Paul A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami* (New York, 1966), vol. 1, p. 56 (no. 76), and vol. 2, pl. 83b. For the Unction of David by Samuel, see mainly Anthony Cutler, "A Psalter from Mar Saba and the Evolution of the Byzantine David Cycle," *Journal of Jewish Art* 6(1979), pp. 39–63 (see especially fig. 5, in which a huge horn is used for the anointment of David); see also C. Walter, "The Significance of Unction in Byzantine Iconography," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2(1975), pp. 53–73.

Armenian.[37] Thus it should be stressed that, in the Armenian version of the Harrowing of Hell, Adam, dressed as a king, is said to be anointed with the oil of the Tree of Mercy.[38] This belief might also explain the appearance of an anointing horn in the scene. However, it seems likely that the traditional iconography of the prophet Samuel, whose attribute is the horn of anointment, is the main cause for his appearance in the scene of the Harrowing of Hell holding a big horn-shaped object.[39]

The fact that in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, in the eastern Mediterranean domains and especially in Egypt, the horn of anointment started to be depicted as an oliphant, suggests that the Christian community in the Levant were familiar with this specific object. On top of that, and as already mentioned, the likely depiction of horns incorporated in the Mamluk blazon of the warrior class (*mamalik al-sultaniyya*, see Fig. 23) and the existence of an oliphant in East Africa which is most probably a copy of a Mamluk one, strengthen the hypothesis that the Muslim and Christian populace in the Levant, especially in Mamluk Egypt, were quite familiar with oliphants.

Bearing in mind the discussed reconsideration of Kühnel's classification and the new visual and literary evidence gathered here, I would like to proceed now to the main aim of this chapter, namely the stylistic classification of the Saracenic oliphants. This is done in two stages. In the first section, the oliphants are gathered and listed in specific groups and the characteristic style of each group is defined. In the second part, the question concerning the probable provenance of each group is addressed.

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[37] Hunt, "Al-Muʿallaqa Doors," p. 69, and note 44. See also Per J. Nordhagen, "The Harrowing of Hell as Imperial Iconography. A Note on Its Earliest Use," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 75(1982), pp. 345–348.

[38] Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "An Armenian Version of the Homilies on the Harrowing of Hell," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8(1954), p. 214. On the legendary blessed oil of the Tree of Mercy see mainly: Wilhelm Gessel, "Das Öl der Märtyrer. Zur Funktion und Interpretation der Ölsarkophage von Apamea in Syrien", *Oriens Christianus* 72(1988), p. 197; Bernhard Kötting, "Wohlgeruch der Heiligkeit", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 9(1982), pp. 168–75.

[39] A challenging question which must at least be asked is: what was the reason for the association of the Biblical horn of anointment with an oliphant in the twelfth century in the Levant?

## II. *The Stylistic Groups*

As we have noticed, the term Saracenic coined by Kühnel has caused problems, mainly by blurring the borders between Islamic, Fatimid-influenced and even orientalised oliphants. Definition and clarity is required. I suggest, therefore, including into the Saracenic group only those oliphants which have a distinctive Islamic decoration or those which slightly diverge from the typical Islamic ones. The "distinctive" Islamic group and the "slightly-diverged" one are defined by both the vocabulary of motifs and patterns and, more importantly, methods of carving which are characteristics of the Islamic carving style.

The first group of oliphants which was published in Kühnel's *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen* but which should be dismissed from our discussion, is the group of the small and narrow oliphants. These are the oliphants in the Islamic museum in Berlin (K3107), the Louvre in Paris (O.A. 152), the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (17.190.215) and the Historisches Museum in Dresden (X63). An unpublished oliphant which certainly belongs to this group is the one from a private collection in Freiburg; this oliphant was once exhibited in the Berner Kunstmuseum in 1944 and has only lately been recovered.[40]

Although the decoration of these oliphants clearly copied the typical pattern of animals within medallions of the so-called Fatimid-style oliphants, the carving technique and the shaping of motifs are completely different. The carving, the so-called *intaglio* carving, is remarkably shallow. The medallions have lost their clear-cut circular form. They are rather egg-shaped and occasionally appear squashed against each other. The motifs filling the spaces between the medallions are amorphous. For example, fruits are marked by groups of small orbs, and leaves are irregularly shaped and coarsely bisected. The animals are deformed and, when compared with the animals of the Fatimid-style group, occupy the medallions in a less elegant manner. It should be noted that von Falke suggested already in 1929

[40] For the four small oliphants published by Kühnel, see Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 72–75. For the newly recovered one, see *Gemälde und Zeichnungen alter Meister, Kunsthandwerk aus Privatbesitz*, exhibition catalogue, October 1944 until March 1945, Berner Kunstmuseum (Bern, 1945), cat. no. 222. The oliphant appeared in the art market in June 2000. I was kindly permitted to study this oliphant (outer length 47.3 cm, inner length 43.8 cm, upper diameter 4.5 cm, and lower diameter 1.9 cm).

that these small and narrow oliphants were probably carved in Europe.[41] Kühnel defined them in 1959 as later western copies of the Fatimid-style group.[42]

The oliphant from Hanover (inv. no. 418) included in Kühnel's *Islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen* should also be omitted from our discussion. This oliphant is associated with another oliphant in a private collection in London and with a bone casket in the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin (inv. no. 17.110).[43] A careful study of the carving technique of these artefacts reveals a quite different method from the one employed in the Fatimid-style group. Their cut is soft rather than straight. The pattern is not strictly organised in two panels. The cutting projects slightly in relief. The animals are differently shaped: their bodies are less compact; their chests and the upper parts of their hind legs are relatively rounded. Their limbs are elongated and thin, and almost all of them have protruding jaws which look like pointed beaks.

Two other oliphants are excluded from this discussion. These are the oliphants in the British Museum in London (1923, 12–5–3), and in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (AP-641).[44] The oliphant from the Hermitage is most probably a European copy of the Fatimid-style oliphants.[45] The oliphant from the British Museum in London displays a specific carving style which is far beyond what one may call Islamic or even Saracenic; its carving is in very low relief, and several motifs are clearly unusual, when compared with Fatimid images.[46]

In order to classify the remainder of the Saracenic oliphants stylistically, two main points should be considered: the method of carving and the variety of motifs. In a few cases, and to some extent,

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[41] Von Falke, "Elfenbeinhörner. I.", pp. 516–517.

[42] See Kühnel, "Die sarazenischen Olifanthörner," p. 46.

[43] For the oliphant from Hanover, see Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 63. For this specific group, see Ralph Pinder-Wilson and Avinoam Shalem, "A Newly Discovered Oliphant in a Private Collection in London," *Mitteilungen zur Spätantiken Archäologie und Byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 2(2000), pp. 79–92.

[44] See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 64, 65.

[45] This has been suggested by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 64. I tend to agree with him. Moreover, there are some further 'disturbing' motifs on this oliphant, especially the depiction of the mask with the elongated ears which appears in the upper row of the medallions of the oliphant's body, just below the raising bands.

[46] This oliphant from the British Museum in London is discussed in the corpus of the medieval oliphants (Shalem, forthcoming).

the shape of the oliphants might also serve to distinguish one group from the other.

*Group I*

Bearing the above in mind, we can say that the oliphants fall into at least three groups. Among these, one large group is immediately discerned. This group consists of thirteen oliphants decorated with inhabited scrolls or inhabited vertical bands, namely the second and third of Kühnel's groups. These are the oliphants from the Islamic Museum in Berlin (K3106), the al-Sabah collection in Kuwait (formerly John Hunt in Dublin), the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (7953–1862 and the so-called 'Blackburn oliphant'), the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (04.3.177 and 17.190.219), the Louvre in Paris (1075), the Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm (289), the Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie in Auch (O.11), the Musée Crotzatier in Le Puy-en-Velay (M 359), the Museo Nazionale in Florence (Avori, no. 7), the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich-Museum in Brunswick (MA 107) and in a private collection of Sheikh Saʿud in Qatar (formerly Baron Claus Jürgen von der Recke in Riga, see Plates, I, II, Figs. 24–32).[47] In addition, the oliphants of this group are associated with several relatively big rectangular ivory caskets with truncated pyramidal covers and with a small ivory rectangular case. The rectangular caskets are in the Islamic Museum of Berlin-Dahlem (K 3101, Fig. 33), the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (17.190.241), the treasury of St. Servatius Cathedral in Maastricht (no. 27) and the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (CB 9621), and a small ivory case in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (17.190.236, see Plate IV, Figs. 34a–c).[48]

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[47] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 60, 61, 66–70, 76–81.

[48] For these ivories, see *ibid.*, cat. nos. 82–6. There is another peculiar ivory casket in the depot Metropolitan Museum in New York, which is probably an unfinished carved piece of this group of caskets. It is also a rectangular casket with a truncated pyramidal cover. The typical decorative bands of scrolls of half palmettes decoration appear on the borders of the panels of this casket. See "The Property of A Gentleman," in *Sotheby's London, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Works of Art*, 13 November, 1975, pp. 8–9 (I would like to thank Charles Little from the Metropolitan Museum in New York for calling my attention to this peculiar casket). The oliphant in the Louvre (inv. no. 1075) was once displayed in the Musée de Cluny in Paris, as mentioned by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 69.

Another oliphant which is kept in the Musée des Armée in Paris might be associated with this group (Fig. 35). The oliphant bears similar carving decoration on its narrow raising belts and lower and upper zones. However, its body is carved differently, in a style which recalls that of the so-called Italo-Byzantine group (Plates XIII, XIV).[49]

The decoration of this group of oliphants is dense and carved in two planes. The cut is straight and deep, the background left undecorated, and the surface smooth. This method of carving conveys the impression of a thick perforated cloth or heavy lace embroidery (Plate IX). The craftsman exploits the intense contrast between light and shadow in using this method of a deep and straight cut. This group is characterised by the specific tiny scratches which usually appear on the animals' bodies; the scratches are delicate details of fur and plumage (see for example Fig. 36). Another characteristic feature of this group is the shape of the animals' eyes, which are round, the pupils marked by a tiny puncture at the centre (see for example Fig. 7). As far as the vocabulary of motifs is concerned, it should be stressed that this group is the only one on which human figures—mostly warriors or hunters—and fabulous creatures such as griffins and harpies appear. The raised belts on the upper and lower parts of the oliphants' bodies, as well as the borders of the caskets associated with this group, are exclusively decorated with scrolls of half palmettes.

*Group II*

The second group is smaller and consists of eight oliphants. These are the oliphants from the Museum of Fine Art in Boston (Acc.50.3425), the Louvre in Paris (OA.4069), the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin (formerly Zeughaus, W 1007), the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (71.234), the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh (1956.562), the Musée de Cluny in Paris (Cl.13065 and the fragment of an oliphant Cl.13061), and in the Early Christian and Byzantine collection in Berlin (586, see Figs. 37–42). Although slightly modified, two other oliphants might be, to some extent, associated with this group. These are the oliphants from the treasury of Aachen

[49] This oliphant is discussed in the corpus of the medieval oliphants (Shalem, forthcoming).

and its 'twin' in the British Museum in London (OA+1302, see Plates V, VI, Figs. 43, 44).[50]

Although the bodies of four oliphants of the second group—the oliphants from Baltimore (Fig. 39), Edinburgh (Fig. 40), Paris (Fig. 41), and Berlin (Fig. 42)—are decorated, it is likely that all the oliphants of this stylistic group were originally decorated with narrow carved bands encircling their lower and upper zones, while their bodies were left smooth. The decoration which appears on the bodies of the above-mentioned four oliphants was most probably carved later, perhaps by western craftsmen.[51] Both Kühnel and Ebitz have noticed that the style and method of carving on the bodies of these four oliphants clearly differ from those on their upper and lower decorative bands.[52]

It should be stressed that the style of decoration on upper and lower bands of these oliphants is Islamic par excellence. It is the method of carving combined with the repertoire of animals running after one another which usually appears in late Abbasid and Early Fatimid wood carving from Egypt. The cut is the typical oblique cutting back to the ground, or, as Cutler calls it, "cut with a slanting stroke".[53] The running animals appear on arabesque ground.[54] But unlike the first group, the decoration is cut in one plane only, so that the animals and the arabesque ground appear on the same level. In the case of the oliphants from Boston, Baltimore and Berlin, in which animals do not appear on the upper bands, the half-palmette scrolls are densely organised within geometrical frames, that is, in triangles, all of which appear on one level. A twisted cord ornament and pierced bead design occasionally appear in this stylistic group (Fig. 9). The bodies of all the animals of this group are

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[50] Almost all of these oliphants are published in Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 52, 53, 54, 55, 59, 62.

[51] See David M. Ebitz, "Secular to Sacred: The Transformation of an Oliphant in the Musée de Cluny," *Gesta* 25(1986), pp. 31–38.

[52] *Ibid.* See also the remarks of Kühnel concerning the oliphants from Paris and Baltimore. Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. 18–19 and p. 55, cat. no. 59.

[53] Anthony Cutler, *The Hand of the Master: Craftsmanship, Ivory, and Society in Byzantium (ninth-eleventh centuries)*, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1994), p. 111.

[54] An exception is the oliphant from the Musée de Cluny in Paris. The running animals appear on a smooth background. But after observing this oliphant carefully, I suspect that the arabesque ground was recarved later and that the background was flattened in order to match the narrow decorative band with the fabulous animals, which also appear on a smooth background, on the lower zone of this oliphant.

decorated with an elegant rinceau, which runs along the length of the body, and deep scratches on their chests mark the chest bones (Fig. 10). The animals' eyes are almond shaped and the pupils appear at the pointed end rather than in the centre (Fig. 45). It is worth noting that no human figures or fabulous animals appear on these oliphants.

*Group III*

The third group is perhaps the most interesting because one of the oliphants bears a carved Kufic inscription encircling its lower decorative band. Thus, this group might hint at the possibility of the production of several oliphants in a Muslim ambience or at least in an area strongly influenced by Muslim culture. It consists of three oliphants which are similar to each other in shape, method of carving and, to some extent, in the repertoire of motifs. These are the oliphants in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (once in the treasury of St. Denis, Fig. 46),[55] Sheikh Saʿud's Collection in Qatar inv. no. IV.11.1998.KU (Plate VII) and the oliphant whose location is at present unknown but which was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the collection of Eduard Gans (Fig. 48). It is likely that the oliphants of Sheikh Saʿud and that of Eduard Gans were not known to Kühnel.

The peculiar feature of this group is that its oliphants lack the typical recessed bands on their upper and lower bodies. It is therefore likely that these oliphants were held in the hand rather than carried with the help of a chain or strap. However, some holes around the lower section of the upper and the lower decorative bands on the oliphant from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, suggest that metal collars were probably attached to the oliphant's body, to which a carrying chain would have been attached. The cut is straight and relatively deep. The background is left undecorated. The decoration is organised in two panels. The lower decorative band is usually adorned with a thick vegetal motif; and the upper one is decorated with figures and animals. While the lower band leaves the impression of a densely decorative programme, the upper zone is decorated with scenes of a somewhat narrative character. For exam-

[55] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 56; see also *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*, exhibition catalogue, Musée du Louvre (Paris, 1991), pp. 142–43, cat. no. 20.

ple, riders, warriors (probably hunters), and two lions attacking a bull appear on the oliphant from Qatar; a banquet scene with wild animals and peacocks is depicted on the oliphant of Eduard Gans; the upper zone of the oliphant from Paris is unfortunately damaged, but the rest of its lower section suggests that it is decorated with wild animals and peacocks, similar to the ones on the oliphant of Eduard Gans. The Kufic inscription which appears on the oliphant from Qatar, runs on both ends of the lower decorative band. It is a repetition of the Arabic word *al-mulk* (Fig. 47).[56]

## III. *Centres of Production: Worksites or Workshops?*

It would be too simplistic to draw a direct line between the different stylistic groups and their possible worksites or workshops, in other words to identify simply a specific style with a certain place of manufacture. Although this art-historians' method is quite conventional, it faces several, rather crucial dilemmas, particularly when ivory production in the Middle Ages is discussed. For example, on the one hand, this conventional method takes for granted that only one distinctive style could emerge in a specific place within a definite span of time. Different styles are therefore less likely to be associated with one specific region. It seems as if there exists a hidden necessity to find a specific provenance for each style, but this ignores the possibility of the existence of an 'international style' which concomitantly might emerge, with some modifications, in different locales. And, as Cutler demonstrates,[57] the notion of art historians to associate a specific ivory carving style with a specific workshop cannot be so easily accepted, especially in the Byzantine sphere in the Middle Ages. This for the following reasons.

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[56] It is tempting to suggest that the oliphant in the treasury of St. Trophime in Arles (Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 57) is somehow associated with this group. This oliphant has the same peculiar shape which lacks the typical recessed bands, and the decoration is organised in two distinctive levels and appears only on its upper and lower zones. The cut is straight and relatively deep, and the background is smooth. However, the style in which the animals are shaped is slightly different, and the animals' shapes themselves are rather coarse. The contours of their bodies are sharp rather than rounded or soft (Fig. 78). For a recent publication of this oliphant, see *Les Andalousies: de Damas à Cordoue*, exhibition catalogue, Institut du Monde Arabe (Paris, 2000), pp. 178–179, cat. no. 210.

[57] See mainly Cutler, *The Hand of the Master*, pp. 66–78.

Cutler has challenged the use of the term workshop altogether and suggested that an ivory piece was usually carved by an individual craftsman occasionally aided by a pupil or a member of his family.[58] He also regards the possibility of ivory workshops attached to the ruler's court, namely the Great Palace in Constantinople, as mere speculation.[59] In this case, at least in Byzantium, a change in the 'individual' carving method—as Cutler puts it in his book *the Hand of the Master*—does not necessarily have anything to do with a change in the site of production.

When discussing the oliphants, these controversies should be borne in mind. For while the majority of the oliphants were probably produced at the time when the Fatimid style became almost the international style of the Mediterranean,[60] similarity in style and even in carving technique do not indubitably verify that the artefacts were produced in the same centre. Moreover, it seems that the criteria for the localization of the oliphants were rather defined by the extended portability of these objects in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries and the demand for Fatimid fashion in several Mediterranean sites. Their style mirrors the intercultural atmosphere of the Mediterranean basin and extends the rigid geographical and cultural borders between Islam and Christianity. The style therefore might be associated sometimes with more than one site. As Eva Hoffman stresses: "Instead of a single dominant culture radiating out from the capital to the provinces, what is suggested here is a 'pluritopic' model which allows for the existence of multiple sites and greater fluidity between various centres and peripheries".[61] For this reason, modifications within the 'international' Fatimid style oliphants, be it in shape, decoration or even minute carving techniques, should be spotted. These modifications might suggest not only a change in hand in a specific centre of production—as the traditional art historian would

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[58] Cutler, *The Hand of the Master*, pp. 66–7.

[59] Cutler, *The Hand of the Master*, p. 68.

[60] Oleg Grabar, "Imperial and Urban Art in Islam: The Subject Matter of Fatimid Art," *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire (27 Mars–5 Avril, 1969)*, Ministry of Culture of the Arab Republic of Egypt (General Egyptian Antiquities Organization) (Cairo, 1972), pp. 173–190; *idem*, "Qu'est-ce que l'art fadimide?", *L'Égypte Fatimide; son art et son histoire*, ed. Marianne Barrucand (Paris, 1999), pp. 11–18. See also the discussion of Eva R. Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian interchange from the tenth to the twelfth century," *Art History* 24(2001), pp. 17–50, especially pp. 21–25; see also James Trilling, "Medieval Interlace Ornament: The Making of a Cross-Cultural Idiom", *Arte Medievale* 9(1995), pp. 59–86.

[61] Eva Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability," p. 21.

like to read—but, perhaps, a change of taste or a change of cultural legacy within the medieval pluralistic model of the Mediterranean.

At the same time, and complicated as it might sound, since we are dealing with a precious and extremely expensive material, a change in style does not always suggest a change in the hand of a master, let alone a workshop. As with other precious materials, for example, carved rock crystals and precious stones, we are normally dealing with *unica*. In these cases, the taste of the patron might have played an important role in decisions concerning style and iconography; the fact that each oliphant is made out of a whole piece of ivory tusk makes it quite clear that the carved horn was an exceptionally expensive item.

In addition, some oliphants—like the four oliphants of group II with the two different carving techniques on their bodies and their upper and lower zones (Figs. 39–42) or the oliphant from the Musée des Armée in Paris (Fig. 35, Plates XIII, XIV)—might suggest that some ivory carving centres applying different carving techniques were probably located next to, and were constantly influenced by, each other.[62]

While in medieval Byzantium the likelihood of ivory craftsmen being attached to the royal court cannot always be substantiated, the surviving body of ivories of Muslim Spain, for example, bear witness to the association of this material to the court. These ivories are usually decorated with Arabic inscriptions which provide us with extremely important information concerning the names of the patron and the craftsman, the place of production, the date, and, sometimes, the reason the artefact was made. It is true that we usually hear of a specific craftsman or a family of craftsmen rather than the name of a workshop, but it is obvious that the objects were made in, or for, the royal courts, be that in Cordova, Madinat al-Zahra or Toledo. Among the ivories of Muslim Spain, the rectangular casket in the Museo de Navarra in Pamplona is perhaps the best example to suggest the existence of an ivory 'workshop' in the form of a master and his few assistants.[63] An inscription written in Kufic appears

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[62] This could also fit the oliphants of group I which seem to be influenced by some of the carving techniques of oliphants of the so-called Byzantine group, especially those which reveal some similarity to the Salerno ivories of the eleventh century; this aspect is discussed below.

[63] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. 41–43, cat. no. 35; see also Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "Signatures on Works of Islamic Art and Architecture," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 11(1999), p. 53.

on the inside of the casket's lid and reads: *'amal faraj wa talamidhahi* ("the work of Faraj and his pupils"). It should be noted that the names of seven of these pupils are incised in different places in the figural scenes decorating the casket. Each of these names is preceded by the word *'amal* (the work of).[64]

On top of that, as already mentioned in chapter three, several medieval literary sources tell us that in some cases a mass quantity of ivory reached the royal courts, either as tribute or booty. It is therefore likely that in these specific cases the initiative to make luxury objects out of this material was undertaken by the royal court. This evidence suggests that, unlike the Byzantine production of ivory, ateliers for carving ivories might have existed in the medieval Islamic world.

Bearing these factors in mind, I suggest that the numerous surviving objects of group I are probably further tangible evidence for the existence of a busy ivory atelier. The relatively large number of oliphants and the several caskets attributed to this specific group, their standardised size and similar decoration, suggest that in some cases specific ivory manufacturing of the eleventh and twelfth centuries might have been done in a manner approaching mass production.[65] It is therefore likely that a large-scale 'factory' for ivory was involved in the manufacture of the ivories of group I, and that it specialised chiefly in making oliphants with inhabited scrolls or with inhabited vertical bands. But where might this active 'factory' have been located?

It is true that decorative patterns of animals enclosed within medallions or running after each other in rows were extremely popular and are to be found in different regions of the Mediterranean and the Near East. As Dalton stressed already in 1913, these specific pat-

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[64] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 42 (for the discussion concerning the specific names of the pupils).

[65] It is beyond the province of this book to discuss the Islamic painted ivories, but this group might serve as a further argument for mass-production of ivory objects. See mainly, Ernst Diez, "Bemalte Elfenbeinkästchen und Pyxiden der islamischen Kunst," *Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 31(1910), pp. 231–244 and 32(1911), pp. 117–142; Percy B. Cott, "Siculo-Arabic Ivories in the Museo Cristiano," *The Art Bulletin* 12(1930), pp. 131–46, see especially pp. 139–40, where earlier references are mentioned; *idem*, *Siculo-Arabic Ivories* (Princeton, 1939); José Ferrandis, *Marfiles Arabes de Occidente* (Madrid, 1940), vol. 2; Ralph H. Pinder-Wilson and Christopher N.L. Brooke, "The Reliquary of St. Petroc and the Ivories of Norman Sicily," *Archaeologia* 104(1973), pp. 261–305.

terns have a "cosmopolitan character", and for this reason are difficult to attribute or date.[66] Inhabited medallions with wild and occasionally fantastic animals were indeed very popular in early Byzantine, Sasanian and early Coptic arts.[67] But a scrutinised analysis of the carving techniques and variety of motifs of group I might lead to fruitful conclusions.

When focusing on methods of carving and repertoire of motifs, the ivories of group I strongly recall the carving style of both Fatimid woodworks and eleventh-century ivories of South Italy, mainly those attributed to Salerno. For example, several carved wooden panels from Fatimid Egypt are almost identical to the oliphants of group I. The wooden panel from the Faculty of Philosophy in the Fouad I University in Cairo (Fig. 49), discussed by Kühnel in 1959, is perhaps the best example.[68] This is a rectangular panel (length: 30 cm; width: 6.5 cm) decorated with animals within scrolls. The scrolls are symmetrically designed, creating six medallions in which each animal is narrowly enclosed. The shape, the specific activity and even the relationship between the animals' contours and the border of each medallion clearly recall the pattern of animals in scrolls of the oliphants of this group. Several details are surprisingly similar. These are, starting from left to right: the silhouette of the rabbit in a full profile; the bird turning its head backwards and pushing its bill under its raised wing; the stag with its long curved horn, which almost touches the upper part of its tail; the peacock with a large tail; the quadruped which lowers its head and looks backwards; and even the fruit-like motif which is depicted in the medallion with the bird on the right-hand side of the panel.[69]

Several other wooden panels from the church of St. Barbara in Old Cairo, which are kept at present in the Coptic Museum in

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[66] Ormond M. Dalton, "A Paper on Medieval Objects in the Borradaile Collection," *Proceeding of the Society of Antiquaries of London* 26(1913), pp. 8–12, especially p. 11.

[67] See mainly, chapter six, footnote 60; for Sasanian metalwork with inhabited scrolls, see Ann C. Gunter and Paul Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery* (Washington, D.C., 1992); for Coptic textiles with inhabited medallions, see mainly, Pierre du Bourquet, *Catalogue des étoffes coptes du musée national du Louvre* (Paris, 1964); Patrice Cauderlier, *Les tissues coptes*, Catalogue raisonné du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon (Dijon, 1985).

[68] Unfortunately its origin is unknown. The illustration is taken from Zaki M. Hassan, *Moslem Art in the Fouad I University Museum* (Cairo, 1950), vol. 2, p. 31.

[69] There is an almost similar piece of carved wood in the Islamic Museum in Cairo. The piece is on display (unfortunately no inv. no. is available).

Cairo, also demonstrate the similar repertoire of animals within medallions, among which the rooster, peacock, rabbit, gazelle and griffin are very similar to those depicted on the oliphants.[70] Moreover, the few human figures which occasionally appear within the inhabited medallions are also to be compared with Coptic woodworks of the tenth century. For example, the carved wooden panel from the church of Abu Sarga in Old Cairo (datable to the tenth century), which is part of the ornate door of the iconostasis, displays a similar carving method to group I, namely a straight and deep cut (Fig. 50). It represents the Christian scene of the Nativity on the upper zone of the panel and the scenes of the Adoration of the Magi and the Arrival of the Shepherds on its lower part. The figures are characterised by round faces, big, wide eyes, short, cube-like noses and small mouths which seem to be almost attached to the nose. This specific type of face recalls those of several figures, as well as that of the harpy, on the oliphants and caskets of group I (see Fig. 51).

In addition, the magi and the shepherds are clothed in short garments with belts around their waists, which also recall the short dresses of the warriors on the oliphants from the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Fig. 52) and the Musée Crozatier in Le Puy-en-Velay (Fig. 53), and the short dresses of the figures affixed to the four corners of the caskets from the treasury of St. Servatius in Masstricht and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (see for example, Fig. 54). The garments' folds, or perhaps pattern, are marked by vertical lines, and sometimes, tiny, horizontal cuts appear on the garments' edges, strongly recalling the pattern of the dresses of the warriors and guards on the above-mentioned oliphants and caskets of this group. It should be noticed, however, that, unlike the warriors and guards, the figures depicted on the panel from the church of Abu Sarga have no turbans on their heads. However, this might be explained as a less-conventional feature of this specific Christian scene, at least in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

A similar method of carving, and even similar tiny scratches, which are the typical decoration of this group of oliphants, appear on several other ivories attributed to South Italy. The first is an ivory panel from the Rabenou Collection in New York (Fig. 55), which has been

[70] See Edmond Pauty, *Bois sculptés d'églises Coptes (Époque Fatimide)*, (Cairo, 1930), pl. XI.

associated by Bergman with the series known as the Salerno ivories (dated to the eleventh century).[71] The second piece decorates one of the facets of the so-called 'Farfa Casket' (1071–1075) from Monte Cassino (Fig. 56);[72] the Latin inscription that runs around the borders of the casket identifies the donor of this object as Maurus, merchant of Amalfi.[73] The third example is the ivory plaque from the Biblioteca Apostolica in the Vatican (no. 1163) on which the Christian scene—Christ Enthroned—is depicted (Fig. 57). This plaque forms part of Ebitz's reconstruction of the Fatimid-influenced book cover.[74] The plaque was recorded in 1756 as being in the Camaldolese monastery of San Michele,[75] but it is not known from where or how it had reached the monastery. Nevertheless, the method of carving is similar to that of the oliphants. This similarity is particularly strong when one compares the wings of the angels of this plaque with those of the birds of the oliphants. The wings consist of long straight feathers and solid limbs which are attached to the bodies and decorated with tiny scratches.

The fact that the ivory from the Rabenou Collection, the one mounted on the Farfa Casket and, particularly, the small ivory case from the Metropolitan Museum (17.190.236, Figs. 34a–c) bearing the name of a member of the Mansone family, are all linked to South Italy, especially to Salerno and Amalfi, supports Kühnel's suggestion concerning the South Italian origin of this group of oliphants. But it must be emphasised that the similarity of this group to Coptic and Fatimid woodworks from Old Cairo dated between the tenth and the eleventh centuries, is also apparent. Thus, the probable production of oliphants of group I in Fatimid Cairo should not be ruled out.

This ambiguous picture concerning the style of group I is in fact an ideal example of the complicated 'international' Fatimid style of

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[71] Robert P. Bergman, *The Salerno Ivories* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1980), fig. 159.

[72] For an illustration of this facet, see Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London, 1971), vol. 1, fig. 216.

[73] Robert P. Bergman, "A School of Romanesque Ivory Carving in Amalfi," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 9(1974), pp. 164–166.

[74] David M. Ebitz, "Fatimid Style and Byzantine Model in a Venetian Ivory Carving Workshop," *The Meeting of two Worlds, Cultural Exchanges between East and West during the period of the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir P. Goss (Michigan, 1986), pp. 309–329. See also the discussion in chapter two.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 311, note 12.

the eleventh century in the Mediterranean basin. In fact, the Fatimid space in the eleventh century spread over many parts of the Mediterranean world. It occupied the northern coasts of Africa, Egypt, Syria, Sicily and some regions in South Italy. The dominant force of the Fatimid style seems to radiate its influence over other regions of the Mediterranean basin also, such as the eastern parts of Byzantium, Constantinople and even, to some extent, Muslim Spain.[76] The Fatimid taste seems to ignore the religious borders of the Mediterranean. Moreover, the extensive and active trade between Cairo and other Christian commercial centres, be that Amalfi, Salerno, Naples, Venice, Constantinople or Corinth, and the relative mobility of Arabs and Christian within this Fatimid space, contributed to the puzzling style emerging in the eleventh century.[77]

It is therefore difficult to locate the active ivory atelier of group I in a specific site of the Fatimid Mediterranean. It is likely that, unless physical evidence comes to light—primary literary sources explicitly

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[76] It is beyond the scope of this study to illustrate the Fatimid influence on the Christian and Byzantine art of the Mediterranean basin. For this 'influence', see mainly, Giorgio Di Gangi, "Alcuni frammenti in stucco die età normanna provenienti dagli scavi medievali di Gerace," *Arte Medievale* 9(1995), 85–103; Eva Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability," passim; André Grabar, "Le succèss des arts orientaux à la cour Byzantine sous les macèdoniens," *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 2(1951), pp. 32–60; idem, "Thrônes épiscopaux du XI$^{ème}$ et XII$^{ème}$ siècle en Italie méridionale," *Walraff Richartz Jahrbuch* 16(1954), pp. 7–52; idem, "Reflets de l'art islamique sur les peintures et les reliefs medievaux en Italie méridionale (XIII$^{ème}$ siècles)," *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 161–169; Wolfgang F. Volbach, "Oriental Influences in the animal sculpture of Campania," *Art Bulletin* 24(1942), 172–180; Ernst Kühnel, "Das Rauten Motiv an romanischen Fassaden in Italien," *Edwin Redslob zum 70 Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1955), pp. 83–89; Tessa Garton, "Islamic Elements in Early Romanesque Sculpture in Apulia," *Art and Archaeology Research Papers* 4(1973), pp. 100–116; Bianca M. Alfieri, "Influenze islamiche di tradizione sasanide sull'arte medievale Campania," in: *Presenza araba e islamica in Campania* (Atti de Convegno, Napoli-Caserta, 1989, Napoli, 1992), pp. 21–33; Maria Vittoria Fontana, "L'influsso dell'arte islamica in Italia," in *Eredità dell'Islam. Arte islamica in Italia* (Milan, 1993), pp. 455–498. See also S. David Goitein, "The Unity of the Mediterranean World in the 'Middle' Middle Ages," *Studia Islamica* 11(1959), pp. 29–42.

[77] It is tempting to suggest that a mozarabic style similar to the one associated with Spain also developed in Sicily at the end of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. But unfortunately we lack any historical documents on the existence of Muslim craftsmen who converted to Christianity. On the 'Mozarabs' of Sicily, see Henri Bresc and Anneliese Nef, "Les Mozarabes de Sicilie (1100–1300)," *Cavalieri alla conquista del sud. Studi sull'Italia normanna in memoria di Léon-Robert Ménager*, ed. E. Cuozzo and Jean-Marie Martin (Roma, Bari, 1998), pp. 134–156. See also my discussion of this topic in *Islam Christianized*, pp. 93–99, especially pp. 95–96.

telling of the location of a workshop for making oliphants—, no clear-cut answer can solve this puzzle.

But some points which might serve as guide lines for this query should be emphasised. The first point refers to the social context of these artefacts. Given the relative large surviving body of ivories of group I, it is likely that the boom in the production of these extravagant oliphants and relatively big caskets must have been financed or commissioned by well-to-do clientele or extremely wealthy sponsors.[78]

The other points are stylistic. Although the typical pattern of group I, of animals within scrolls or in vertical lines, strongly recalls wood carving of Fatimid Cairo, it seems that the whole design was somewhat modified, as if it went through a phase of being slightly rigid and regular. The elegant Fatimid scrolls are 'geometrised' and appear as perfect circular medallions. The outlines of the animals' shapes are sharper, and the cut is absolutely straight, deep and perfect. One may argue that this might be the result of the 'mass-product' manner of this group. But it is interesting to note that ivory carving in Muslim Spain also went through a similar phase around the end of the eleventh century, namely during the Taifa period. It might then be suggested that, for some reasons, the Islamic carving methods in the Mediterranean at the end of the eleventh century were slightly modified and reached a somewhat rigid phase.[79]

Another characteristic of this group is the sense of humour detected in the depicted motifs. This mainly appears on the caskets of this group. In some cases, figures are no longer bound to the rigid borders of the medallions, and medallions are widened in order to create space for a slightly narrative or anecdotal scene. The two lions depicted on the lid of the ivory casket from Berlin seem to be frightened, or even terrified, looking at each other (Fig. 58). This terrified look might also be detected in the depiction of the two interwoven snakes on the oliphant from Brunswick (Fig. 75). Several other animals are even depicted biting themselves (Fig. 58a). Or, for example, the scene of the hunter and the lion on the front side of the casket from Berlin, which is quite amusing: the spear with which the hunter intends to kill the lion is held in the lion's jaws as if the

[78] This speculation is further discussed in chapter six.

[79] For this notion of rigidity, see, for example, the four ivory panels from the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (ET-801–804) and the one in the Museo Nazionale in Ravenna; for illustrations see Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 80 (cat. nos. 132a–c, 133), pls. CVI (132a–c) and CVII (132d, 133).

lion is playing with it. The hunter and his dog are amazed and worried by the unusual situation (Fig. 59); the same amusing scene appears on the lid of the ivory casket from the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Fig. 60). The two widened medallions on the front side of the truncated lid of the casket from Berlin display a lion in a rather funny way. The lion with the rabbit head on the end of its tail maliciously smiles while biting the embarrassed rabbit and the stag on the fleshy part of their hind legs (Fig. 61).

It should also be stressed that no Arabic inscriptions appear on the oliphants or on the caskets of this group, and that the shape of the rectangular caskets with truncated pyramidal covers is unusual, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean parts of the medieval Islamic world.

Unlike group I, group II is clearly associated with Cairene woodwork datable to the tenth and the eleventh centuries. As already mentioned, the method of carving in an oblique cut combined with the repertoire of animals running after one another is Islamic par excellence, and no parallels for it are known in the medieval West. Examples of the distinctive ornament of palmette scrolls organised within triangles, which appears on the oliphants from Boston, Baltimore, the Louvre and Edinburgh, and of animals running after one another, seems to appear in Egypt already in the late Abbasid period (Figs. 37–40).[80] Kühnel pointed out that the fragment of a carved wooden panel with the depiction of two gazelles within scrolls (Islamic Museum, Cairo, Fig. 62) strongly recalls the decoration on the upper zone of the oliphant from Aachen (Fig. 15).[81] Moreover, several carved wooden panels attributed to the Fatimid period display similarities in the carving technique, the vocabulary of motifs and also in the treatment of details. For example, a small wooden piece found in Fustat and datable to the Fatimid period (Islamic Museum, Cairo, no. 4797), is decorated with a quadruped (Fig. 63). The animal recalls those

[80] See, for example, the two carved wooden panels in the Louvre (AA 165 and HI 4). A dog running after a hare and a bird are depicted on the first panel, which is datable between the eighth and the ninth centuries; the second one, datable to the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth, is decorated with a narrow band of palmette leaves organised within triangles. See Elise Anglade, *Catalogue des boiseries de la section islamique*, Musée du Louvre (Paris, 1988), p. 13 (no. 4) and p. 34 (no. 18).

[81] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 53, fig. 52.

depicted on the oliphants of Aachen and the British Museum in London (Figs. 43, 44). It has a relatively long head, its eyes are almond-shaped and there is the hint of a smile on its face.[82] Another example is a small wooden piece in the form of a six-pointed star in the Islamic Museum in Berlin (I. 1649, Fig. 64). The piece, which is datable to the eleventh century, displays a gazelle within a star. The cut is the typical oblique cut of group II, and the characteristic features of this group, namely the sharp cuts marking the animals' chests and the decorative rinceau running along their bodies, also appear on this piece.

The cumulative evidence on the source of material, style of pre-Fatimid and Fatimid carved artefacts, and textual and pictorial references concerning the existence of oliphants in medieval Egypt, suggest an Egyptian provenance for the oliphants of group II. Given the slight diversity of quality and motifs, it is likely that different hands were involved in the production of this stylistic group. According to the few literary sources which concern the possible medieval Arabic terms for oliphants discussed in this chapter, it might be suggested that these oliphants were used either in Coptic or in royal Fatimid contexts.

It is quite certain that the three oliphants of group III are Islamic or, at least, were manufactured in an area strongly influenced by Fatimid art. The method of carving, the compact composition of figures and animals surrounded by dense vegetal motifs or arabesques, and the Kufic inscription which appears on the oliphant from Qatar (Fig. 47), might even suggest that these oliphants were carved by Muslim craftsmen. A few motifs are undoubtedly Islamic. These are: the doubled sphinx with the lotus crown which is depicted on the lower decorative band of the oliphant from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Fig. 65); the peacocks and the probably female figure holding a beaker in her left hand and a globular bottle with a long neck in her right hand, which are depicted on the upper decorative band of the oliphant of Eduard Ganz (Fig. 66); the vegetal motif of an 'over-sized' branch (probably trees) depicted on the oliphants from Qatar and on that of Eduard Ganz (Plate VII and Fig. 48); and

[82] Edmond Pauty, *Les bois sculptés jusqu'à l'époque ayyoubide*, catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire (Cairo, 1931), pl. XXXII, no. 4797, text in p. 38 (for another example, see also pl. XXIX, no. 5828, text in p. 34).

even the scene of the two lions devouring a stag or an ox on the upper band of the oliphant from Qatar.[83] The lively banquet and hunting scenes, and the dense, busy composition of figures and animals in a vegetal background, strongly recall the lavishly painted ceiling of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo (mid-twelfth century)[84] and some carved ivory panels which are assigned to Fatimid Egypt and are datable between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries.[85] Some peculiarities which appear on the oliphant from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and on that of Eduard Ganz, and which concern the treatment of details, clearly recall the carved wooden ceiling from the Palazzo Reale in Palermo (Galleria Regionale, Fig. 67). These are the scale-like breasts of the peacocks and the half-palmette motif which decorate the upper thigh of the quadrupeds.[86]

It seems likely that this unique group is mainly associated with the distinctive 'Fatimid' art prevailing in Norman Sicily in the twelfth century. Thus, one may speculate that the provenance for such luxurious artefacts must have been the opulent Norman city of Palermo.

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[83] This scene recalls to some extent the scene of the lion and the ox in the Kalila wa Dimna. See, for example, Esin Atil, *Kalila wa Dimna: Fables from a Fourteenth-Century Arabic Manuscript* (Washington, D.C., 1981), p. 28 or Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, *Kalila und Dimna* (Wiesbaden, 1981), p. 117 (62v).

[84] See mainly, Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Le pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella Palatina in Palermo* (Rome, 1950). The turbaned figure holding a beaker and a bottle recalls several seated figures holding wine beakers which are depicted on the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. The riders and the horses also recall some of the painting of this ceiling (see Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic art and Architecture* (London, 1999), p. 70, fig. 48).

[85] See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, especially pp. 68–71, cat. nos. 88–90; see also Eva R. Hoffman, "A Fatimid Book Cover: Framing and Re-framing. Cultural Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean World," *L'Égypte Fatimide: son art et son histoire*, ed. Marianne Barrucand, (Paris, 1999), pp. 403–419. For the specific Islamic motif of the crowned sphinx, see the Fatimid carved ivory piece from the Islamic Museum in Cairo (13497) illustrated in Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 73, cat. no. 101, pl. C (101).

[86] As far as I can judge from the photograph of the oliphant from Qatar, the Kufic inscription on the lower decorative band could be compared, perhaps, with carved Kufic inscriptions on the ivory rectangular boxes from the cathedral of San Martiño in Orense and the Museum of the Chorherrenstift in Klosterneuburg. For the box from Orense, see *Memorias do Imperio Arabe*, exhibition catalogue, Auditorio de Galicia Santiago de Compostela (Santiago, Spain, 2000), cat. no. 151; for the box from Klosterneuburg, see Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, no. 134; *Schätze der Kalifen: Islamische Kunst zur Fatimidenzeit*, exhibition catalogue, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (Vienna, 1998), pp. 232–234, cat. no. 234.

[87] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 71. See also *Schätze der Kalifen, Islamische Kunst zur Fatimidenzeit*, exhibition catalogue, cat. no. 231.

It should be added that the oliphants from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (inv. no. 4072)[87] and the private collection in Lugano [88] which cannot be assigned to any of the stylistical groups discussed here, might also be associated with the Fatimid style of Norman Sicily (Figs. 68, 69). The exceptionally low-relief carved decoration of the oliphant from Lugano can be associated, as Kühnel has already pointed out,[89] with several cylindrical ivory boxes attributed to Sicily and datable to the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries.[90] The oliphant from Vienna is left unassigned and, until another similar oliphant comes to light, remains a *unicum*.

In sum, it seems that the largest group of surviving oliphants, namely group I, were probably made in one of the ivory-carving centres of the Mediterranean basin, most probably in a region ruled by the Fatimids or at least strongly influenced by the Fatimid carving style. These are oliphants decorated with animals within medallions or within vertical rows organised along the horns' bodies. It has been noticed that it is also likely that several oliphants were carved in the East, most probably in Fatimid Cairo. The latter belong to the second stylistic group, namely oliphants which were originally decorated with narrow bands on their upper and lower zones while their bodies were left smooth or were slightly facetted. The third group, is clearly Islamic and, on account of its specific motifs, could well be attributed to the Fatimid art of Norman Sicily. However, the fact that none of these carved horns, apart from the oliphant of Sheikh Sa'ud, bears any Arabic dedicatory inscriptions, which usually ornament costly Islamic ivory artefacts, remains enigmatic.

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[88] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 58.

[89] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 55, cat. no. 58.

[90] For the three cylindrical boxes from the Islamic Museum in Cairo, Musée de Beaux-Arts in Lyon and Musée du Louvre in Paris, see Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 137, 136, 135.

CHAPTER SIX

# FUNCTION AND MEANING

## I. *Introduction*

It is quite clear that the majority of the Saracenic oliphants were used as wind instruments. All of them are hollowed out and their tips are bored, carved and occasionally even fitted with metal mouthpieces to enable them to be blown in order to produce sounds. This suggests that they were initially made as horns for blowing. The only oliphant whose tip is enclosed within a metal mounting that does not allow for blowing is the oliphant from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London,[1] but it is unclear whether this oliphant was originally mounted this way. In addition, the carved recessed areas on their upper and lower zones suggest that they were meant to be carried on, or perhaps to be hung from, a belt attached to these recesses.

Oliphants are blown like trumpets but the sound obtained is limited to one, or one and a half tone only; a chance to investigate this matter was given to the author while studying the oliphant from Auch. However, though initially made to be blown—they are usually believed to have been used on specific occasions during hunting activities, as their decoration might suggest, or, perhaps, more specifically, in emergencies, as in the story of Roland—, Ebitz believes that they were rarely used for this. He has explained that their huge size made them inconvenient to use on the hunt and adds that the fact that most of them are well preserved suggests that they were used solely for ceremonial occasions.[2] This last argument is unconvincing because their excellent state might be explained by the fact that most of them reached medieval treasuries soon after they had

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[1] Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII–XIII. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1971), cat. no. 81.

[2] David M. Ebitz, "The Medieval Oliphant, Its Function and Meaning in Romanesque Secular Art," *Explorations, A Journal of Research at the University of Maine at Orono* 1(1984), p. 13.

been made. Numerous eleventh- and twelfth-century church inventories mention oliphants, and it seems, therefore, that the secular phase of the usage of oliphants was short; this issue is broadly discussed in chapter seven.[3] Ebitz's further speculation concerning their use solely for ceremonial occasions will be addressed in more detail in this chapter.

But the possibility that, on specific occasions, some of them were also used as drinking horns should not be ruled out. Although their tips are cut and bored—a fact that makes it quite difficult to drink out of them without spillage—they are hollowed out and thus could have been used as drinking containers held in one hand while blocking the opening of their tips with the thumb of the other hand. An example of using what look like oliphants as drinking horns appears in the famous Bayeux Tapestry, datable c. 1100. It is the specific scene of Harold's feast in Bosham, in which some of Harold's men are depicted taking part in a banquet held around a long refectory table on the upper floor of an arched building (Fig. 70). Two of them hold horns, which, to judge from their huge size and the mountings around their mouths and tips, are most probably oliphants. The figure depicted on the extreme left side of the scene holds a huge horn in his left hand and raises it up while drinking out of the large opening. However, according to medieval literary sources, these occasions of using oliphants as drinking horns usually relate to late medieval legends associating oliphants with magic power rather than depicting normal drinking habits; these traditions are discussed in chapter seven.

Since all Saracenic oliphants lack their original mountings, the attempt to uncover their specific function and significance has to be focused mainly on the meaning associated with the material and the unique curved shape of an elephant tusk and the iconography of the varied motifs which decorate their surface.

Perhaps before discussing the probable meaning and function of medieval oliphants, it might be worth examining some general aspects concerning the 'iconography' of ivory.

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[3] See also the list of medieval inventories mentioning horns in Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. 85–8.

## II. *'Iconography' of the Material*

### IIa. *Colour*

The natural creamy-white colour of ivory with the slightly yellowish tint it occasionally has and its smooth, shiny surface, strongly recalls human skin. It is, therefore, quite understandable that in poetry, ivory is usually compared to unblemished and pure skin. For example, in Homer's Odyssey (c. eighth century BC), it is related that Athene put Penelope into a deep sleep and made her as beautiful as carved ivory.[4] The same allegory appears in the Song of Songs, where the allusions to the resemblance of human skin to ivory also carry erotic connotations. For example, in a poem which praises the beauty of Shulamit, the maid of Shulam (Song of Songs, 7:5), her neck is described as if made of ivory: "Your neck is an ivory tower (*migdal ha-shen*)". In another verse (Song of Songs 5:14) in which the bride describes the beauty of her beloved, the beloved's belly is also compared to ivory: "His belly a block of ivory (*'esheth shen*) covered with sapphires".

A similar allegory is to be found in Christian contexts. In the Litany and other liturgical prayers, ivory appears as a metaphor for the chastity of the Virgin: *Ebur candens castitatis, turris eburnea* ("ivory shining with chastity, tower of ivory").[5] The exceptional characteristics of ivory were regarded as symbolic of many virtues associated with the Virgin, like *patientia, continentia, temperantia, innocentia* and *amicitia*.[6] For example, in a sermon formerly ascribed to Peter Damien (1007–72)[7] we hear the following description of ivory:

> *Sola eboris substantia capax est tantae compositionis et fabricatur in ea quod omnibus operibus praeferatur. Ebur enim et mirabili candore relucet, et multa praeeminet fortitudine, frigidiorisque naturae sortitur auspicium. Et quid candidius*

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[4] Homer, *Odyssey* 18, 196.

[5] See mainly, Anselm Salzer, *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters* (Darmstadt, 1967), pp. 293–297. See also s.v. "Elfenbeinerner Turm" in Remigius Bäumer and Leo Scheffczyk, *Marienlexikon* (St. Ottilien, 1989), pp. 324–325. It has been suggested that the medieval association of the Virgin with an ivory tower might have derived from the Akathistos hymns of the Orthodox Church. See s.v. "Litanei" in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg, 1997), vol. 6, pp. 954–956.

[6] Salzer, *Sinnbilder und Beiworte*, p. 293.

[7] Petrus Damianus, *Sermones*, ed. Joannes Lucchesi, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, vol. 57 (Turnhout, 1983), p. VIII.

> *illa virginitate, quae singularis aspectus sui gratia supercoelestem curiam allicit ad videndum?* . . . (The substance of ivory alone is capable of so great a composition and out of ivory is made what is preferable to all works. For ivory shines with a miraculous shimmer, and it is pre-eminent by its force and gains significance of its fairly cool nature. And what is more shining than that virginity which thanks to its unique sight attracts the super-celestial court to look at? . . .)[8]

This might explain, to some extent, the massive output of small ivory statues of the Virgin and Christ in the Gothic period.

The idea that ivory symbolises chastity appears also in the remarks of Petrus Berchorius (Pierre Bersuire), a fourteenth-century interpreter of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. In his book *Ovidius moralizatus*, he explains the meaning of the various precious materials which decorate the palace of Apollo. According to him, gold symbolises wisdom and the ability to distinguish; silver eloquence and erudition, and ivory, chastity and purity.[9]

It is quite natural that similar allegories were also associated with ivory in the Islamic world. The erotic associations of the unblemished skin-like colour of ivory appear in *jahiliyya* poetry. In some *qasida*s the colour of the female breast is said to be as perfect and tender as ivory (*launu-ʿāj*).[10] Moreover, the breast is also compared to ivory boxes (*huqq al-ʿāj*), most probably of cylindrical shape.[11] The same association between ivory and the female breast appears in a verse carved on an ivory pyxis, which is now in the Hispanic Society of America, New York (D 752).[12] The pyxis was probably carved in Madinat al-Zahra around 970. The verse running around the lid's rim reads:

> The sight I offer is of the fairest.
> The firm breast of a delicate maiden (*nahd khawd lam yukassir*).
> Beauty has invested me with splendid raiment that makes a display of jewels.
> I am a receptacle for musk, camphor, and ambergris.[13]

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[8] See Petrus Damianus, *Opera omnia*, ed. Constantinus Cajetanus, vol. 1, coll. 737 (in: Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia latina*, vol. 144, Paris 1853). Cited also by Salzer, *Sinnbilder und Beiworte*, p. 295.

[9] Cited by Thomas Raff, *Die Sprache der Materialien* (Munich, 1994), p. 20, note 40.

[10] Ilse Lichtenstädter, "Das Nasib der altarabischen Qaside," *Islamica* 5(1931), p. 46.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. 36–37, cat. no. 28.

[13] Werner Caskel, *Arabic Inscriptions in the Collection of the Hispanic Society of America* (New York, 1936), pp. 35–6. See also, Oleg Grabar and Richard Ettinghausen,

Apart from the interesting point that the ivory casket from Madinat al-Zahra seems to speak to its beholder,[14] this poetic verse clearly reveals that the cream-white colour of ivory was associated with the beauty of feminine skin in the medieval Islamic world.

### IIb. *Brilliance and Gloss*

The creamy and slightly yellowish colour of ivory and its high gloss might well have been associated in the medieval period with light symbolism. Like other shiny materials, such as gold, silver and precious stones, ivory has a natural radiance. A tenth-century literary source praising the qualities of a reliquary suggests that ivory was praised for its radiance at least as much as gold:

> Operoso satis artificio, gemmarum multitudo [read probably multitudinis] diversarum splendore, laminis aureis et eboris sculptura radiantibus mirifice decoratus, profecto talis ut materiam superaret opus. (Marvellously decorated by the very laborious artistry, by the gleam (or sparkle) of the multitude of different jewels and by the radiant gold leafs and ivory sculpture, [is it] truly of that kind that the workmanship surpassed the material.)[15]

The best examples to illustrate the medieval Islamic desire to make full use of the natural radiance of ivory, are the Ayyubid and Mamluk wooden panels inlaid with small carved pieces of ivory. These wooden panels are usually decorated with intricate geometric patterns, and the small ivory pieces, which are cut in different geometric shapes, are inserted into the wood. The clear contrast between the usually dark ebony wood and the creamy white colour of the ivory makes it seem as if the wood is perforated and that light diffuses through it.

### IIc. *Preciousness*

The primal notion associated with ivory, over the centuries and in one culture after another, is that of a costly and precious material. Thus, its distinct iconography as an attribute of gods, kings and

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*Islamic Art and Architecture* (Harmondsworth, 1987), p. 151; recently also discussed by Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Schönheit in der Arabischen Kultur* (Munich, 1998), p. 141.

[14] Avinoam Shalem, *If Objects Could Speak* (forthcoming).

[15] Raff, *Sprache der Materialien*, p. 20. For Abbot Suger's expression *materiam superaret opus*, see also the discussion of Panofsky: Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger, on the abby church of St.-Denis and its art treasures* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1979), pp. 62–63.

nobility is understandable. However, before discussing these connotations of ivory, a rather fundamental question should be addressed—namely, what is it that causes a specific material to be regarded as precious?

This question seems at first glance to be an easy one to answer. It might be argued that a precious material is one which is scarce, hard to obtain or to produce. Indeed this is logical. All the factors mentioned above stress the rarity of the material or the painstaking labour involved in its production as the main reasons for its high price. But marble, for example, which is also usually regarded as a costly material, might be relatively hard to work but is evidently common enough in particular regions, to judge from its frequent use mainly in architecture. Other materials or minerals like mercury or pepper, which were scarce, at least in antiquity and the Middle Ages, cannot be defined as precious, let alone associated with royalty or nobility.

It seems therefore that in addition to the above-mentioned factors concerning precious materials, there are several others, and these should be discussed because they directly relate to the precious nature of ivory.

The first factor is probably the material's long-lasting character. The fact that it is a solid substance, which resists ageing and decay, stresses its power to suppress the effects of time and thus demonstrates its eternal quality, as if it were superior to the very laws of nature.

Next comes its natural radiance or sheen. It seems that man has always been fascinated by the ability of materials, especially precious stones, to shine like a source of light, be they the heavenly bodies or a lamp or candle. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to search for the cardinal attraction of man to light and indeed to any substance that glitters, but, generally speaking, the sparkle of light radiating from such sources was associated with the eternal light of the sun, the source of life, and thus with the spirit or even wisdom itself.

A further key element concerns the material's natural colour and its attractive pattern. The intensity of its colour was probably associated with vitality. Its naturally attractive pattern—like the wide range of colours and variegations of marble or agate—was probably regarded as an *acheiropoietos*, a supra-natural work of art which does not involve human intervention.

Then one must consider the material's uniqueness. Its unusual shape, colour or the particular pattern which appears on its surface, emphasise its singularity or the 'onceness' involving its formation.

Nor should one forget the non-functional character of the material, indeed its seeming uselessness for the purposes of daily life. This aspect has recently been discussed by Godelier in his essay on the varied qualities of precious gifts.[16] Indeed, precious materials are usually not suitable for daily use for the simple reason that their high price imposes infrequent use. But, in addition, precious materials are usually too soft or fragile—this is, for example, the case with rock crystal, glass or porcelain—in comparison to solid and hard materials, like wood and iron, to sustain frequent use.

The last factor involves the very process of working. Precious material is usually difficult to shape or to decorate. Its substance is either too hard to work with or it might break. Any error made during the working process cannot be easily repaired, if at all. Therefore only a skilled craftsman can be permitted to be involved in the manufacturing of precious materials.

Ivory seems to meet most of the factors outlined above concerning precious materials. Moreover, the following example clearly illustrates that ivory was classified as one of the more eminent precious materials. Lucian—the Greek satirical author of the second century AD—discusses in one of his dialogues the conflict between material and value, and art and value. In the dialogue Hermes is asked by Zeus to evaluate all the cult artefacts made by human beings. Hermes accepts this task and organises the works according to their materials and artistic values. He puts golden ones first, and thereafter those in silver, ivory, bronze and marble.[17]

In addition, the fact that ivory is the tooth of a powerful animal, the elephant, fosters its royal associations. And in areas which have no elephants, the aura of myth surrounding this powerful animal contributed to its imperial and regal associations.[18] This explains the frequency with which it was used for decorating temples and shrines

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[16] Maurice Godelier, *Das Rätsel der Gabe, Geld, Geschenke, heilige Objekte* (Munich, 1999), p. 227 (the book was originally published in French: *L'énigme du don*, Paris, 1996).

[17] Cited by Raff, *Sprache der Materialien*, p. 19; see also Tanja S. Scheer-Bauer, "Götter aus Menschenknochen? Antike Kultbilder im Spiegel christlicher Polemik," *Mitteilungen zur Spätantiken Archäologie und Byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 3(2002), p. 14.

[18] See the discussion of Richard Ettinghausen, *The Unicorn* (Washington, 1950).

in ancient times. For example, the specific Biblical expression *beth ha-shen* (ivory house) which is mentioned in I Kings 22:39, refers to specific pagan shrines built by King Ahab. The use of this term in relation to shrines recurs in Psalms 54:9 and Amos 15:3. And even the above-mentioned term *migdal ha-shen* which appears in the Song of Songs 7:5 as an allegory for the beauty of a bride's neck, might well refer to a shrine, as the word migdal suggests.[19] It is likely that these pagan shrines were decorated with ivory, most probably with pieces of ivory inlaid in the shrine's wooden walls, ceiling, beams and pillars. In some cases, it might refer to the statues of the gods which were made of ivory and enshrined within these temples. For example, Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD), in the chapter on the elephant in his *Natural History*, says: "Their tusks command a high price and the ivory is excellent for images of the gods," and adds: "Large tusks are seen in temples."[20] In another chapter concerning the world's most expensive products, Pliny says: "The most expensive produce found on land is ivory."[21]

Hence the use of ivory for making royal furniture, as witness the archaeological evidence for the inlaid ivory luxury objects of the Pharaohs and other ancient kings or the literary sources describing the extravagant thrones of Solomon or Penelope.[22]

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[19] The term *migdal* (tower) usually appears in the bible as a high tower erected for the veneration of a specific god. See, for example, the discussion concerning *migdal Babel* (the tower of Babel). See Silvia Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder* (Freiburg, Göttingen, 1987), p. 387.

[20] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History: A Selection*, trans. and annotated by John F. Healy (London, 1991), p. 113.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 377.

[22] I Kings, 10:18; II Chronicles, 9:17). Homer, *Odyssey* 19, 55f. See also Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder*, pp. 380–386; Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Archäologie im Heiligen Land* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976), p. 254; Anton Jirku, *Die Ausgrabungen in Palästina und Syrien* (Graz, 1970), p. 62; Gordon Loud, *The Meggido Ivories*, The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 52 (Chicago, 1939); J.M. Crowfoot and G.M. Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria (Samaria-Sebaste II)* (London, 1938); Georgina Hermann (ed.), *The Furniture of Western Asia: Ancient and Traditional* (Mainz,1996). For the ivory throne of King Solomon, see mainly, Georg Salzberger, *Salomos Tempelbau und Thron in der semitischen Sagenliteratur* (Berlin, 1912), August Wünsche, *Salomos Thron und Hippodrom, Abbilder des babylonischen Himmelsbildes* (Leipzig, 1906); Martin Metzger, *Königsthron und Gottesthron: Thronformen und Throndarstellungen in Ägypten und im Vorderen Orient im dritten und zweiten Jahrtausend von Christus und deren Bedeutung für das Verständnis von Aussagen über den Thron im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1985), 2 vols.; Henri Stierlin, *Astrologie und Herrschaft: von Platon bis Newton* (Frankfurt a.Main, 1988), especially pp. 228–235; Isa Ragusa, "Terror demonum and terror inimicorum: The two lions of the throne of Solomon and the open door of paradise," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 40(1977), pp. 93–114.

Other examples of the association of ivory with royalty, senior clergy and the nobility are the famous ivory cathedra of Bishop Maximianus in Ravenna;[23] the large group of carved ivory caskets which were made in Cordova for the royal members of the ruling Umayyad dynasty of Spain;[24] the numerous medieval ivory sceptres and croziers and ivory caskets for enshrining the relics of saints.[25]

## III. *Iconography of Form: Imperial Associations*

Oliphants are indeed difficult to carry. They are rather big, especially when compared with typical medieval hunting horns, which are usually made out of the horns of much smaller animals. They are essentially ostentatious, prestigious objects. It is, first and foremost, the material of which they are made that immediately gives the impression of a supremely extravagant object. It is probably the combination of the tusk's appealing clean beauty, the contrast between its soft creamy colour and its solid and powerful material, its spotless white and shiny surface, and its elegant curved form, that makes it so desirable.

Being the powerful part of the elephant—the strongest animal—the tusk naturally became an attribute of power and thus was regarded as the proper present to give to gods and, later on, to kings—the representatives of gods on earth.[26] The earliest literary sources at our

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[23] Carlo Cecchelli, *La cattedra di Massimiano* (Rome, 1936); Gunther W. Morath, *Die Maximianskathedra in Ravenna* (Freiburger theologische Studien, Heft 54) (Freiburg i.Br., 1940); Meyer Schapiro, "The Joseph Scenes on the Maximianus Throne in Ravenna," in *idem, Late Antique, Early Christian and Mediaeval Art, Selected Papers* (London, 1980), pp. 35–47.

[24] See mainly, Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 19–39; John Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordoba* (London, 1960); José Ferrandis, *Marfiles Arabes de Occidente* (Madrid, 1935–40), 2 vols.

[25] These are mainly painted ivory objects, which are sometimes also decorated with Christian subjects. See Percy B. Cott, *Siculo-Arabic Ivories* (Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology, Folio Series III, Princeton, 1939); Ernst Diez, "Bemalte Elfenbeinkästchen und Pyxiden der islamischen Kunst," in: *Jahrbuch d. Kgl. Preuss. Kunstsammlungen* 31(1910), 231–244; Ralph H. Pinder-Wilson and Christopher N.L. Brooke, "The Reliquary of St. Petroc and the Ivories of Norman Sicily," *Archaeologia* 104(1973), 261–305; Avinoam Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, especially pp. 110–113.

[26] On the iconography of the elephant in art, see mainly, s.v. "Elefant" in: *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte* (Ernst Gall and Ludwig H. Heydenreich (eds.), vol. 4, (Stuttgart, 1958); s.v. "Elphas, Elefant" in: *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Munich and Zurich, 1986), vol. 3, pp. 1809–1811; s.v. "Elefant", in: *Reallexikon für Antike und*

disposal concerning the donation of elephant tusks to kings as tribute appears on an obelisk in the Temple of Amun in Karnak. The hieroglyphic inscription informs us that, during the reign of Queen Hatshepset (1495–1475 BC), seven hundred tusks were brought from Libya as tribute.[27] The habit of sending elephant tusks as tribute from different regions like Nubia (Sudan), Punt (the southeastern region on the shore of the Red Sea), Syria and even Cyprus, seems to have continued during the reign of Queen Hatshepset's successor, Thutmose III (c. 1475). Some sources even mention that Syrian elephant tusks were brought to Egypt by Thutmose III himself after his campaign in this region; the reference to tusks brought from Cyprus suggests that this island played an important role in the trading of ivories imported from Syria.[28] In an inventory including tribute which was brought to Egypt during the reign of King Amenhotep II (1439–1413 BC), tusks are recorded as tribute. They were carried by three hundred and forty Nubian men.[29] Some Pharaonic paintings which were discovered in tombs and which are dated to the period of the eighteenth dynasty (c. 1550–1300), illustrate these tribute scenes. An interesting example is to be found in a wall painting decorating the tomb of Rekhmire, an important vizier of King Thutmose III. The wall painting consists of four registers of tribute scenes. A man from Crete and another one from Punt are shown carrying huge elephant tusks on their shoulders.[30] In one of these scenes, Syrians loaded with various kinds of tribute are depicted. They are also bringing some animals: an elephant, a bear and two horses. One of the men in this procession carries a huge elephant tusk on his left shoulder (Fig. 71).[31]

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*Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauser, vol. 4 (Stuttgart, 1959), pp. 1001–1026. See also the general discussion on ivory and royal associations in Grahame Clark, *Symbols of Excellence: Precious Materials as Expressions of Status* (Cambridge, 1986), especially pp. 13–16.

[27] Rosmarie Drenkhahn, *Elfenbein im Alten Ägypten* (London, 1986), p. 19.

[28] Drenkhahn, *Elfenbein im Alten Ägypten*, pp. 19–20; for the Syrian trade in ancient times see mainly, Richard D. Barnett, "Phoenicia and the Ivory Trade," *Archaeology* 9,2(1956), pp. 87–97.

[29] Drenkhahn, *Elfenbein im Alten Ägypten*, p. 20.

[30] For this tomb see Norman Davies, *The Tomb of Rekh-Mi-Re in Thebes*, Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition Publication (New York, 1972). See also Drenkhahn, *Elfenbein im Alten Ägypten*, p. 21, figs. 1–2.

[31] This depiction is taken from Barnett, "Phoenicia and the Ivory Trade," *Archaeology* 9,2(1956), p. 89, fig. 1 (see also Norman Davies, *The Tomb of Rekh-Mi-Re at Thebes*, pl. XXIII).

Some literary evidence of the Pharaonic period mentions the offering of tusks to gods. For example, it is related that King Thutmose I (1508–1493) brought back from Syria tusks of an elephant that he had killed, and donated them to the god Amun in a consecration ceremony—most probably the consecration of a temple erected for this god.[32]

The account of a trading fleet which arrived every three years in the kingdom of King Solomon (1 Kings, 10:22 and 2 Chronicles, 9:17), informs us of the imported goods, among which ivories (*shen-habim*) are mentioned. The reference to ivory imported with exotic animals suggests that the fleets carried not only trading goods but also some goods typically offered for royal tribute.

Herodotus (484?–425? BC) also mentions the tribute of twenty elephant tusks sent to the Persian king by the Ethiopians and the inhabitants of the region in Ethiopia called Nysa or Nysas.[33]

The above-mentioned sources clearly illustrate how, in ancient times, an elephant tusk was a sought-after object which was explicitly associated with royalty and was either offered by kings to gods or given as tribute to kings.

Recently, in his anthropological study on the cultural history of the act of offering presents, Godelier has suggested that a costly object offered to gods should be associated with, or even act as, the materialisation of the invisible ideas of wealth and power. The act of giving these powerful presents symbolises on the one hand the loss of power of the human being before the gods and on the other the handing back of that strength and might which gods lend or confer on man.[34] It is beyond the scope of this study to search for the roots of the custom of offering presents,[35] but it should be stressed that the choosing of an elephant tusk as a proper present for gods and kings in ancient times embodies the general idea of presenting gods with power lent by them to us. In the case of presenting ele-

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[32] Drenkhahn, *Elfenbein im Alten Ägypten*, p. 20.

[33] Cited by I. Opelt s.v. "Elefant", *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 4, p. 1005.

[34] Godelier, *Das Rätsel der Gabe*, especially pp. 227–237.

[35] Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don* (Paris, 1950); for the English translation see *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 1990). See also Robin Cormack, "But is it Art?" in *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the 24th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 219–236.

phants' tusks, the whole process of hunting the mighty animal, cutting off its powerful tooth, and presenting it later to gods or kings, is more likely to be connected with the idea of the donor's loss of power before the potentate. Of course, the highest act of deprivation of power before the gods culminates too in the act of offering the gods human life, namely human sacrifice. But it could also be done in a symbolic way by presenting the gods with important, essential or powerful organs of the human or animal body. In ancient times, it was first the offering of animals' genitals to gods as a sacrifice.[36] In this religious ritual, which was probably regarded as symbolic of human castration, the reproductive organ of the animal which gives or maintains life is deprived of its power and given to the gods. Another and more frequent symbolic ritual was the offering of the blood of animals—the fluid of life—on the altar.[37] The act of giving an elephant's tusk as a present to gods or kings might also be regarded as symbolic of the donor's loss of power and concomitantly the re-assertion of the recipient's power.

The best example illustrating the symbolic act of offering the animal's strongest part to a god is, perhaps, to be found in the epic of Gilgamesh written around the third millennium BC. It is related that after Gilgamesh and Enkidu killed the Bull of Heaven, the bull's horns were adorned and donated to Gilgamesh's guardian god Lugulbanda:

> But Gilgamesh called the smiths and the armourers, all of them together. They admired the immensity of the horns. They were plated with lapis lazuli two fingers thick. They were thirty pounds each in weight, and their capacity in oil was six measures, which he gave to his guardian god, Lugulbanda. But he carried the horns into the palace and hung them on the wall.[38]

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[36] See for example the story of Gilgamesh killing the Bull of Heaven and offering the bull's genitals to the goddess Ishtar. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, an English version with an introduction by Nancy K. Sandars (London, revised ed. 1972), p. 88. For a discussion on the Jewish religious circumcision ceremony as related to sacrifice, see Franz Maciejewski, *Psychoanalytisches Archiv und jüdisches Gedächtnis. Freud, Beschneidung und Monotheismus* (Vienna, 2002).

[37] See the discussion in Joan R. Branham, "Sacred Space in Ancient Jewish and Early Medieval Christian Architecture," Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1993 (UMI Dissertation Services, 1994), especially pp. 33–57. See also Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Greek Religion* (New York, 1983).

[38] *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, pp. 88–89.

The custom of decorating temples with horns of wild and mighty animals in the Near East and also Islamic mausolea has a long tradition.[39] It should be mentioned that the altar of the Children of Israel is also described as being decorated with four horns, which were attached to its four corners (*karnoth ha-mizbe'akh*).[40]

The ample Roman and Late Antique evidence for the grand imperial parades in Rome celebrating victorious campaigns, in which elephant tusks were exhibited to the public as spoils of war, perhaps relates to the above-mentioned idea. The tusks brought to Rome and carried in these parades by Roman soldiers might have been either looted from the conquered province and thus regarded as costly trophies or exacted as tribute. In the latter case they could be considered as a token of the new relationship, be that an alliance or any other kind of pact established between the conquered people and the ruler. The offered or looted tusks were thus regarded as symbols of the deprivation of power of the vanquished land and the acceptance of this by the triumphant force.

For example, according to the Roman historian Livy (59 BC–17 AD), more than 1,200 elephant tusks were carried through the streets of Rome after the successful campaign of Lucius Scipio in Asia Minor in 190 BC.[41] Some other sources mention the display of eight hundred elephant tusks as trophies of war in a triumphal procession of Antiochus IV (d. 164 BC), and six hundred in another parade of Ptolemy IV (221–204 BC).[42]

The practice of presenting ivory tusks as tribute seems to have continued in the early medieval period in the Byzantine court in Constantinople. For example, according to the *Chronica Johannis abbatis monasterii Biclarensis*, ivory tusks were presented as tribute to the Byzantine court of Justinian II (685–95 and 705–11) by a delegation of the Macurrae (the people of Mauritania):

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[39] Daniel T. Potts, "Notes on Some Horned Buildings in Iran, Mesopotamia and Arabia," *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale* 84(1990), pp. 33–40; Robert B. Serjeant, *South Arabian Hunt* (London, 1976).

[40] See the discussion by Beatrice L. Goff, *Symbols of Prehistoric Mesopotamia* (New Haven and London, 1963), pp. 34–35.

[41] Cited by Benjamin Burack, *Ivory and Its Uses* (Vermont and Tokyo, 1984), p. 20.

[42] See *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, s.v. "Elfenbein, Elfenbeinplastik", vol. 4, p. 1320.

> "Legati gentis Maccurritarum Constantinopolim veniunt dentes elephantinos et camelopardam Iustino principi munera offerentes sibi cum Romanis amicitias collocant." (The delegates of the people of Mauritania go to Constantinople and offer ivory tusks and a she-giraffe as gifts to the prince Justinianus to establish the amicitia with the Romans.)[43]

Excellent visual evidence for these parades is to be found on the lower register of a sixth-century imperial diptych now in the Louvre—the so-called 'Barberini Diptych' (Fig. 72).[44] A procession featuring figures dressed in 'oriental' clothes—especially the two at the left-hand side who wear relatively long tunics, wide trousers and Phrygian hats on their heads—pay homage to their sovereign by bringing exotic animals and presents. A figure holding a huge elephant's tusk in his left hand appears on the left-hand side of this panel, next to the elephant. The figure bends his body forward in a gesture which shows respect and submission; he raises his right hand in greeting.[45]

'Archaeological' evidence, so to speak, for this practice is the huge elephant tusk (2.45 cm in length and 15 cm in diameter), which is kept in the Vatican and which is recorded as being presented to the cathedral of St. Peter in the sixth century AD.[46]

The idea of presenting elephant tusks to the ruler as a symbol of oath of allegiance or homage seems to have continued in the Middle Ages, at least in Europe. One of the best visual examples is the illustrated double page from the codex of Flavius Josephus, *De Bello Judaico*, in the Staatsbibiothek in Bamberg (Class. 79, fol. 1v–1ar), which was probably made around the end of the tenth century in Reichenau.[47] Two framed scenes appear on these two pages. The

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[43] Cited by Josef Engemann, "Elfenbeinfunde aus Abu Mena/Ägypten," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 30(1987), p. 182, note 64. See also, Anthony Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory* (Washington, 1985), p. 24.

[44] An extensive bibliography on the presentation of elephant tusks as tributes is mentioned by Engemann, "Elfenbeinfunde aus Abu Mena," p. 182, note 64; another visual depiction of bringing elephant tusks as tributes is to be found on the column of Arcadius in Constantinople (also cited by Engemann, *ibid.*). See also Friederike von Bargen, "Zur Materialkunde und Form," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 37(1994), p. 55, note 53.

[45] Wolfgang F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz, 1976), 47, no. 48, pl. 26. A Dionysiac parade in which a huge elephant tusk on the back of an elephant is depicted, is to be found on the rear side of a late Roman sarcophagus in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. See Erwin Panofsky, *Grabplastik* (Cologne, 1993), fig. 106.

[46] Margherita Guarducci, "Antichi elefanti in Vaticano," *Rendiconti* 51/52(1978–79, 1979–80), pp. 47–68. See also the discussion in chapter seven.

[47] See Horst Fuhrmann and Florentine Mütherich, *Das Evangeliar Heinrichs des*

one on the right-hand side shows a baldachin in which an enthroned ruler is depicted; it is generally accepted that the ruler is Otto III (r. 996–1002). He holds a sceptre in his right hand and a globe in his left hand. Military men, probably his personal guards, appear to his left and clergy to his right. The other framed scene shows the personifications of the four provinces of the Imperium (Fig. 73). The one closest to the Emperor is Italia. She stretches her hands out to offer tribute, which is a facetted horn-shaped container (cornucopia?) studded with precious stones and filled with huge acanthus leaves. Behind her appear the personifications of Gallia, Germania and Sclavinia clasping their tribute next to their chests. The last one, Sclavinia, holds a horn-shaped container. The container is slightly curved, its tip is somewhat rounded, and it has an ivory-cream colour, all of which suggest that the personification of the province of Sclavinia holds an elephant's tusk. It has been suggested that the appearance of Sclavinia in this scene should be associated with the victory of Otto III over the Slovenians in 997.[48] If we accept this assumption, the depiction of the personification of this province with an elephant's tusk is more than a mere coincidence.[49]

This might also partially explain the tradition associated with the Saracenic oliphant, the so-called 'Oliphant of Charlemagne', which is kept in the treasury of Aachen (Fig. 43).[50] Tradition claims that this oliphant was given as a present to Charlemagne by Harun al-Rashid. In fact, at least according to medieval Latin sources, it is attested that delegations were exchanged between the Abbasid court in Baghdad and the Carolingian one in Aachen around the end of the eighth century. Although the puzzling question concerning the silence of Arabic sources on this matter has not yet been entirely solved, it seems plausible that a common interest on both sides existed, especially at the end of the eighth century and the very beginning of the ninth century, when the political situation in the newly established Muslim hegemony in Spain was still unstable. It

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*Löwen und das mittelalterliche Herrscherbild* (Munich, 1986), p. 41, cat. no. 5, plates 11–12.

[48] Fuhrmann and Mütherich, *Evangeliar Heinrichs des Löwen*, p. 41.

[49] For a new interpretation of this specific scene, see Ursula Nilgen, "Blonde Roma? Zum Sinn des Blondhaars in der Buchmalerei der Reichenau," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 66(2003), pp. 19–32.

[50] See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 55; Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, cat. no. 109, pp. 39–40.

is likely that the Carolingians tried to seek an alliance with the Abbasids in order to weaken the power of their enemies at the time: the Byzantine empire and the Umayyads of Spain. This probably suited Abbasid political ambitions.[51] However, although the exchange of royal presents by the envoys in these formalities was part of an unwritten diplomatic code, an oliphant is not mentioned as being brought from Baghdad to Aachen.[52] Moreover, to judge from the style of its carving and the specific motifs, the oliphant is datable to the end of the tenth century or the eleventh century, that is, at least two hundred years or so after the Abbasid-Carolingian embassies. It is likely that the tradition is a later one, which tends to associate the oliphant as well as several other exotic objects with Harun al-Rashid and Charlemagne.[53] It should be emphasised that the traditions concerning the oliphant in Aachen might well be derived from the medieval accounts of Einhard (770–840) and Notker the Stammerer (840–912) who both mention that an elephant was sent by Harun al-Rashid to Charlemagne.[54] However, the selection of the oliphant

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[51] Francis W. Buckler, *Harunu'l-Rashid and Charles the Great* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1931); Walther Björkman, "Karl und der Islam," in: *Karl der Große, Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, ed. Wolfgang Braunfels I (Düsseldorf, 1965), p. 673 and specially pp. 680–2.

[52] For a discussion of diplomatic gifts, see mainly *EI*$^2$, s.v. "Hiba" (especially the article by Clifford E. Bosworth); see also Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, pp. 37–55; for a splendid medieval Arabic source concerning royal gifts, see Al-Qadi al-Rashid ibn al-Zubayr, *Kītāb al-Dhakhā'ir wa'l-Tuhaf*, ed. Muhammad Hamidullah (Kuwait, 1959); Ghada al-Hijjawi al-Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts and Rarities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996). It should be mentioned that most of the presents sent from the West to the East were regarded by Muslim rulers as tribute. The reaction of al-Muʿizz, who was asked by a Byzantine envoy, admitted to the Fatimid court in 957–8, to send an ambassador to the Byzantine court in return, illustrates this latter aspect. He said, "People send ambassadors to other people for one of the following two reasons: either because they are in need of something or because they have an obligation toward the person [to whom they send the ambassador]." See Samuel M. Stern, "An Embassy of the Byzantine Emperor to the Fatimid Caliph al-Muʿizz," *Byzantion* 20(1950), pp. 247–8.

[53] Apart from the oliphant in Aachen and the chessmen in Hanover, both of which are associated with Charlemagne—for these see Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, pp. 39–43, cat. nos. 18, 109—there are some others, see the list of presents associated with Harun al-Rashid and Charlemagne in Buckler, *Harunu'l-Rashid and Charles the Great*, p. 42, note 1. The Syrian enamelled beaker from Chartres, the so-called 'Coupe de Charles le Grand', is also allegedly regarded as Harun al-Rashid's present, see Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, cat. no. 99; see also Anna Contadini, "Poetry on enamelled glass: the Palmer Cup in the British Museum," in Rachel Ward (ed.), *Gilded and Enamelled Glass from the Middle East* (London, 1998), pp. 56–60.

[54] Lewis Thorpe, *Einhard and Notker the Stammerer: Two Lives of Charlemagne* (London, 1969), pp. 70, 145–6.

from Aachen as an aide-mémoire of the back-and-forth journeys of the envoys interested in signing a truce between the Carolingians and the 'Abbasids, suggests again that the idea of presenting an elephant's tusk as tribute, or more specifically as a token of alliance, was current at the time.

Further visual evidence which shows, among other precious objects, horns being offered, are the various illustrations of the Christian theme of the Adoration of the Magi. The iconography of this specific scene might be partially influenced by the classical and early medieval representations of people paying homage to their sovereign.[55] An interesting depiction of this famous Christian scene, in which an ivory horn is depicted, is to be found in Giotto's 'Adoration of the Magi' in the Arena Chapel in Padua (Fig. 74). The fresco appears on the upper zone of the south wall and was executed between 1303 and 1305. The three kings, Caspar, Balthazar and Melchior, appear on the left of this episode. While the first king kneels in front of the infant Christ and the Virgin, the two others stand attentively behind him holding gifts in their hands. One of the two holds a huge horn-shaped object which is in fact an elephant tusk, of a whitish ivory colour. Its large opening is marked by a narrow gold line, and a relatively wide decorative band, also painted with gold pigment, appears on its body. The band consists of an Arabic inscription—most probably in stylised Kufic—and two narrow lines, each of which marks the border of the band.[56]

Of course, the appearance of an ivory horn as one of the presents brought by the three kings of the East is associated, in the first place, with the textual traditions of presenting Christ with objects made out of rare and precious materials. But it also tinges the whole scene with an exotic atmosphere. An elephant tusk was, and still is, a distinct symbol of remote lands, especially of Africa and India. Moreover, the allusion of Giotto's ivory horn, with its pseudo Arabic

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[55] Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London, 1971), vol. I, pp. 100–114; Hugo Kehrer, *Die heiligen Drei Königen in der Legende und Kunst* (Strasbourg, 1904).

[56] For Mongolian and Arabic scripts in Giotto's paintings, see Hindemichi Tanaka, "The Mongolian Script in Giotto Paintings at the Scrovegni Chapel at Padova," in *Europäische Kunst um 1300, Akten des XXV. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*, Vienna, 4–10 September 1983, ed. Hermann Fillitz and Martina Pippal (Vienna, 1986), pp. 167–174; *idem*, "Oriental Script in the Paintings of Giotto's Period," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 113(1989), pp. 214–226. See also Maria Vittoria Fontana, "I caratteri pseudo epigrafici dall'alfabeto arabo," *Giotto. La Croce di Santa Maria Novella*, ed. Marco Ciatti and Max Seidel (Florence, 2001), pp. 217–225.

script, to oliphants, with which the beholder was quite familiar at the time that these frescoes were made, bestows upon the scene a great sense of authenticity.[57] However, on a different level, the presentation of a huge ivory horn to the Infant Christ might also be rooted in the long tradition discussed here of kings or any other subjects accepting the sovereignty of a potentate by presenting him with their tribute.

## IV. *Decoration: Iconography of Motifs*

In his concluding paragraph of the article "Two Oliphants in the Museum", Swarzenski wrote:

> It is generally believed that the designs of eastern textiles imported in quantity to the west were primarily responsible for the fantastic beasts on the capitals of the cathedrals, on bronzes, in the initials and the columns of the canon-tables of the Romanesque period north of the Alps.[58]

Although this general belief is in part tackled by Swarzenski—in particular by bringing the artistic influence of the carved oliphants into discussion—his remark clearly stresses that the motifs of wild and fantastic animals were part of the secular artistic *lingua franca* of Romanesque art in almost all media. Indeed, one cannot avoid the sense of the conventional character evoked by the oliphants' decoration or even the sense of familiarity which, to some extent, breeds carelessness.[59] The decoration of the majority of the oliphants consists of wild and fabulous animals organised either within medallions

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[57] On this specific aspect, see Avinoam Shalem, "The Portraiture of Objects: A Note on Representations of Islamic Objects in European Painting of the 14th–16th Centuries", *Europa e Islam tra secoli XIV e XVI*, ed. Michele Bernardini, Clara Borrelli, Anna Cerbo and Encarnación Sánchez García, (Napoli, 2002), vol. 1, pp. 497–512.

[58] Hanns Swarzenski, "Two Oliphants in the Museum," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 60(1962), p. 44.

[59] For general discussion of the popular motifs of wild and fantastic animals in Romanesque art, see mainly, Henri Focillon, *The Art of the West: I Romanesque* (repr. Ithaca, New York, 1980), pp. 114–116; Meyer Schapiro, *Romanesque art* (New York, 1977), especially pp. 16–17; Emile Male, *Religious Art in France, The Twelfth Century. A Study of the Origins of Medieval Iconography* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 341–363; Francis Klingender, *Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages* (London, 1971), pp. 267–268; Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Das phantastische Mittelalter* (repr. Berlin, 1977), especially pp. 101–191.

or simply running after each other in horizontal or vertical bands. This pattern, which is usually called the inhabited or the peopled scrolls, has a long tradition, especially in the art of the eastern parts of the Mediterranean basin.[60] It must be admitted that the motif of running animals within vegetal ornament is probably almost as old as recorded art. The Fatimid-style pattern of the inhabited scrolls which is to be found on the majority of Islamic oliphants, mainly those of groups I and II, probably has its roots in the art of Late Antiquity. It constitutes, therefore, visual evidence for the continuity of classical motifs in medieval Islamic art. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this specific motif became extremely fashionable. It mainly appears in secular art of the Mediterranean but also in that of the Latin West, in regions located beyond the Alps.

Generally speaking, the fabulous and wild animals carved on these majestic elephant tusks are probably intended to convey the impression of courage and power. This genre of imagery corresponds well with the nexus of ideas already discussed as to the meanings associated with elephant tusks. Their role as a metaphor of strength, and their perennial association with royal life, are perhaps even intensified by the motifs of wild, fabulous and strong animals carved on their surface.

Lions, griffins and eagles, predatory beasts *par excellence*, are constantly encountered in the visual repertoire of oliphants. They probably transmit the message of strength and aggression, implying that

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[60] The literature on this topic is too vast to include in this note. See mainly, Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee and John B. Ward-Perkins, "Peopled Scrolls: A Hellenistic Motif in Imperial Art," *Papers of the British School of Archaeology at Rome* 18(1950), pp. 1–43; Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Princeton, 1947); Irving Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and their Sources: A Study of Compositional Principles in the Development of Early Mediaeval Style," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17(1963), pp. 179–286; Claudine M. Dauphin, *Inhabited Scrolls from the IVth to the VIIth Century AD in Asia Minor and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh, 1974); idem, "The Development of the Inhabited Scroll in Architectural Sculpture and Mosaic Art from Later Imperial Times to Seventh Century AD," *Levant* 19(1987), pp. 183–213; and *idem*, "Byzantine Pattern Books: A Re-examination of the Problem in the Light of the 'Inhabited Scroll'," *Art History* 1(1978), pp. 400–423; Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1992), pp. 195–224; for several articles on the peopled scrolls, see Nurith Kenaan-Kedar and Asher Ovadiah (eds), *The Metamorphosis of Marginal Images: From Antiquity to Present Time* (Tel Aviv, 2001); for an apotropaic interpretation, see James Trilling, "Medieval Interlace Ornament: The Making of a Cross-Cultural Idiom", *Arte Medievale* 9(1995), pp. 59–86; James Trilling, *The Medallion Style: A Study in the Origins of Byzantine Taste* (New York, London, 1985).

these very qualities are to be associated with the person holding the object. The appearance of an armed figure, most probably a hunter, on several oliphants of group I strengthens this indirect impression. For example, a turbaned figure with a short tunic appears in one of the medallions of the oliphant from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 52). He holds a circular shield in his left hand and a sword in his right. Similar figures appear on the oliphant from Le Puy-en-Velay (Fig. 53) and on the so-called Blackburn oliphant in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The figure on the oliphant from the Victoria and Albert Museum is fighting with a lion. Other male figures which appear on some of the rectangular caskets of group I are either hunters or guards. The hunters are depicted in specific hunting scenes, fighting with lions or, in one case, blowing a horn. The guards which appear on the four corners of the caskets from Maastricht and New York (see, for example, Fig. 54), usually stand on the backs of crouching lions and hold swords with both hands.

Figures of guards appear solely on the caskets of group I. They might be explained as being explicitly related to these specific objects, protecting, as it were, the contents of the luxury caskets. Hence, it should not be ruled out that the fearsome animals depicted on some oliphants might also bear some protective or, perhaps, apotropaic meaning. Legendary animals like sphinxes and griffins were associated with such ideas in the Islamic medieval world.[61] But lions, eagles and even peacocks might convey similar apotropaic ideas, which probably explains their frequent depiction in the art of heraldry in the East as well as in the West.

Moreover, the motif of interlaced serpents which undulates along the bodies of the oliphants from Baltimore (Fig. 11) and Brunswick (Fig. 75) might hint at the magical aspect, and the power to work good, occasionally associated with some oliphants. It should be added that a serpent appears on each of the two upper recessed bands of the so-called Blackburn oliphant from the Victoria and Albert Museum, and that the motif of the snake-eating stag is depicted three times on this oliphant.[62] This suggests that in a few cases ivory horns

[61] Eva Baer, *Sphinxes and Harpies in Medieval Islamic Art* (Jerusalem, 1965).

[62] For the iconography of this motif, see Charles Clermont-Ganneau, "Les cerfs mangeurs de serpents," *Recueil d'archéologie orientale* 4(1901), pp. 319–322; Richard Ettinghausen, "The 'Snake-Eating Stag' in the East," *Late Classical and Medieval Studies*

were also associated with the power to protect or even to heal.[63]

It must be noted that the carved fabulous and wild animals on the oliphants might also hint at the exotic provenance of the material itself, either through the imagery of the marvellous fauna of far-off lands or by evoking memories of a medieval royal menagerie.

And yet, before discussing the more specific meaning of the oliphants' decoration and their use, it should be made clear that the existence of different groups, as defined in chapter five on the basis of modifications in style and motifs, might also hint at different functions and meanings associated with oliphants. For this reason it would be worthwhile, at this stage of the discussion, to keep in mind that the meaning and function of the Islamic medieval oliphants is subtly differentiated and variable, rather than homogeneous and uniform.

As mentioned above, the visual language of group I transmits, via metaphorical associations and analogies, the idea of courage. It is clearly illustrated by the several armed figures holding swords and shields, and above all by the depiction of mighty animals. Despite the fact that each animal remains within its roundel, there is a strong sense of dynamism and even of conflict. This is probably achieved by the activities in which these are animals engaged. Most of them are shown running or, rather, escaping from hunters. Quadrupeds are usually depicted as running in one direction while turning their heads backwards as if being followed by a hunter. Birds are also normally shown raising their wings out of fear, or perhaps while preparing for an attack. This sense of forceful energy is also emphasised by numerous depictions in which the animals' hind legs jut out of the roundels (see, for example, Fig. 25).

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*in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend Jr.*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann (Princeton, New Jersey, 1955), pp. 272–286. See also Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge, 1995), especially pp. 40–51, figs. 33–39.

[63] Damiri, *Hayat al-Hayawan*, trans. Atmaram S.G. Jayakar (Bombay, 1908), vol. 2, part 1, p. 585 (If its [the elephant's] bone be tied on the bodies of children, it will protect them from epilepsy. If ivory, which is its bone, be tied on a tree, it will not give fruit that year. If vine-creepers, plants, and trees are fumigated with its bone, no worms will approach that place. If a house containing bugs be fumigated with it, the bugs will die. If the shaving of ivory, about the weight of two dirhams, be given mixed with water and honey daily to drink to any one, this retentive faculty will become excellent; and if a sterile woman drinks them for seven days, she will conceive by the order of God). Some Pharaonic ivory carved pieces, most probably magical objects, retain engraved symbols, which protect the owner from poisonous creatures; see Richard D. Barnett, "Fine Ivory-Work," *A History of Technology*, ed. C. Singer E.J. Holmayard and A.R. Hall, (Oxford, 1954), p. 666. See also the discussion on the magical aspects concerning horns in chapter seven.

The large surviving body of ivories of this group—be that oliphants or caskets—suggests that ivory was available in quantity in the specific eleventh- and twelfth-century Mediterranean carving centre responsible for this output. That in turn raises questions as to the identity of the well-to-do patrons who commissioned these ivories and the reason behind the great demand for them. In order to place this group, defined on stylistic grounds, in its appropriate historical framework, some contextual evidence should be brought into this discussion. The fact that these oliphants are hollowed out and that their tips are designed for blowing, suggests that they were used as musical instruments. But since their sound is limited to one or one and a half tone, it is likely that they were used on specific occasions. Moreover, the royal connotations of their material and form suggest their use in a noble setting, perhaps ostentatiously displayed in certain ceremonies. Their non-religious imagery might be related to the feudal fantasy of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, concerning courage and valiant knights. Knicely has recently demonstrated how the imagery of the eleventh-century noble warrior and ruler was usually described with similes of savage animals.[64] The literary sources she gathered concerning the heroic imagery of the Normans are highly important for our discussion, for the Normans might well be the patrons of the oliphants of group I.[65] Similes as such frequently appear in the *Chanson de Roland*, which enjoyed tremendous popularity in the Latin West during the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, during the Normans' 'Golden Age'. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, the origin of the name oliphant as referring to a hollowed ivory tusk which was used as a blowing horn, appeared for the first time in the *Chanson de Roland*. It is mentioned there in its medieval form *olifan*.[66] For example, in one verse Roland is compared to a wild lion or leopard:

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[64] Carol Knicely, "Food for Thought in the Souillac Pillar: Devouring Beasts, Pain and the Subversion of Heroic Codes of Violence," *Canadian Art Review* 24(1997), especially pp. 26–28.

[65] The Normans might also have commissioned several other oliphants—the so-called Byzantine (see chapter two, notes 13, 14). These oliphants and others are discussed by the author in the corpus of the medieval oliphants (forthcoming).

[66] This term is generally regarded as deriving from the vulgar Latin *elephantu* meaning ivory or elephant. But it is also possible that the name *olifan* derived from Arabic. For the discussion of this term, see James A. Bellamy, "Arabic Names in the *Chanson de Roland*: Saracen Gods, Frankish Swords, Roland's Horse, and the Oliphant," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107(1987), pp. 275–76.

When Roland sees that battle will begin,
He becomes fiercer than a lion or a leopard.[67]

In another verse the pagans, namely the Arabs, are describes as a frightened stag:

Just as a stag flees before the hounds,
So the pagans take flight before Roland.[68]

Or, in the passage concerning Charlemagne's dream, ferocious wild animals are symbols for the pagans (namely Muslims) fighting against the Franks:

He [Charlemagne] sees his knights in great pain;
Then bears and leopards attempt to devour them,
Serpents, vipers, dragons and devils.
There are griffins there, more than thirty thousand;
They all swoop down on the Franks
Who cry out; 'Charlemagne, help.'[69]

Ebitz has emphasised the degree to which the Normans were attracted by this Chanson.[70] Indeed, the song had been written down in Anglo-Norman by the mid-twelfth century.[71] In any case, the ivory horn of the hero Roland played a vital part in this tale. It is mentioned in several different episodes, but the most dramatic one is that which tells us how, during the famous battle of Roncevaux in the Pyrenees in 778, just before dying, Roland "with pain and anguish winds his oliphant, and blows with all his might".[72] This story clearly demonstrates that Roland's ivory horn was used as a signal horn.[73] Later on, so the story goes, the ivory horn of Roland was treated as a holy relic. Soon after his death, it was brought to the church of St.

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[67] *The Song of Roland*, trans. Glyn Burgess (London, 1990), p. 64 (1110–1111).
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 89 (1874–75).
[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 109–110 (2541–46).
[70] Ebitz, "The Medieval Oliphant," pp. 15–17. For the popularity of this epos in Europe in the twelfth century, see also the *Pseudo-Turpin* manuscript: *Die Chronik von Karl dem Grossen und Roland*, trans., ed. and annotated by Hans-Wilhelm Klein (Munich, 1986). For poetry in the Norman court of Palermo, see Karla Mallette, "Poetries of the Norman Courts," in Maria R. Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells (eds.), *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 377–387.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[72] *The Song of Roland*, verses 1761–62, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Baltimore, 1957).
[73] The term *Tuba eburnea* also appears in the twelfth-century manuscript *Gesta Karoli Magni in Hispania* in Aachen (Stadtarchiv Aachen D 107, Nr. 173). See *Die Chronik von Karl dem Grossen und Roland*, ed. Hans-Wilhelm Klein (Munich, 1986), pp. 98, 102, 114.

Seurin in Bordeaux and placed over the altar.[74] The ivory horn of Roland thus became the symbol of the hero Roland who fought against the Saracens. Moreover, as Rütten has suggested, the story of the battles between Charlemagne and the Saracens in the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the eighth century was not only compared to the actual crusaders' fights between the Christians and the Saracens in Spain but also to the Biblical story of the fall of Jericho to the hands of the Israelites. This is interesting because this analogy claims, for example, that the seven days it took to capture Jericho is compared to the seven years of the battles between Charlemagne and the Saracens of al-Andalus; the besieging and fall of Jericho is analogous to the besieging of the city of Saragossa by Charlemagne in 778 (the former Latin name of this city was Caesarea-Augusta); and the sounding of the horns during the capture of Jericho to the sounding of the oliphant of Roland.[75] It is therefore quite possible that during the crusades the oliphant was regarded as a key attribute of the valiant knight. This might explain the massive manufacture of oliphants during this era, the very same period in which this particular epic enjoyed such popularity.

It should be stressed that another twelfth-century epic, *Aspremont*, relates that the oliphant, the famous sword Durendal and the horse Veillantif were spoils taken by Roland after he had defeated a Saracen king called Aymes.[76] Thus, the Arabic names of Roland's sword, horse and, perhaps, also oliphant[77] suggest that these famous possessions of his were regarded as Saracenic spoils. An interesting visual example which illustrates the medieval western belief that ivory horns were used by the "pagan" Muslims, at least during the Arab conquest of Spain, is to be found in the twelfth-century German version

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[74] For a depiction of this scene, see the illustration in the illustrated manuscript of the story of Roland in the Stadtbibliothek of St. Gallen (ms. 302, f. 3v), which is dated 1300. This illustration is depicted in Rita Lejeune and Jacques Stiennon, *La legende de Roland dans l'art du moyen âge* (Brussels, 1968), p. 23, pl. 24. For the German edition, see Rita Lejeune, *Die Rolandssaga in der mittelalterlichen Kunst* (Brussels, 1996).

[75] Raimund Rütten, *Symbol und Mythus im altfranzösischen Rolandslied* (Brunswick, 1970), p. 62; see also Marianne Otto-Meinberg, *Kreuzzugsepos oder Staatsroman* (Munich, 1980), especially pp. 63–78.

[76] James A. Bellamy, "Arabic Names in the *Chanson de Roland*: Saracen Gods, Frankish Swords, Roland's Horse, and the Oliphant," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107(1987), pp. 273–74.

[77] *Ibid.*, 272–76.

of the Song of Roland: *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*. This illustrated manuscript is kept in the Library of Heidelberg University (Codex Pal. Ger. 112).[78] One of the drawings in this manuscript (fol. 80 v) is a depiction of a group of armed Muslim warriors, six of whom are blowing huge horns (Fig. 76).[79] In another illustration in this manuscript (fol. 93 v), one of the most dramatic moments of the song is illustrated (Fig. 77). It is related that one of the treacherous Saracens approached Roland while he lay wounded, in order to steal his sword. But the hero Roland gave him such a forceful hit on the head that the oliphant broke. Roland is depicted in this drawing holding his sword in one hand and hitting the Saracen on his helmet and hooked nose with the oliphant in his other hand.

The relatively immense production of oliphants in group I might have been sponsored and commissioned by the Normans, who liked to see in the hero Roland an ideal reflection of themselves. In the Latin West, then, the oliphant became a sought-after item, which any valiant knight would be proud to have. It was an attribute of a hero. Visual evidence of the Norman period, moreover, clearly suggests that the Normans were familiar with ivory horns; the best example is the representation of the huge horns, most probably ivory ones, in the famous tapestry of Bayeux, commissioned in the 1070s by Bishop Odo of Bayeux.

Literary sources also tell us of ivory horns in the possession of Norman noblemen.[80] William the Conqueror (d. 1087) donated his *cornu eburneum* to Rochester cathedral.[81] Bishop Osmund (1078–1099) presented Salisbury Cathedral with two oliphants.[82] Tradition also relates that the oliphant from Angers was given to the Abbey of St. Florent-le-Vieil by a Norman nobleman.[83] Finally, certain oliphants in Carlisle Cathedral are recorded as having been given by Henry I (d. 1135).[84]

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[78] *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*, facsimile edition (Wiesbaden, 1970), 2 vols (with a commentary vol. by Wilfried Werner and Heinz Zirnbauer). See also Otto-Meinberg, *Kreuzzugsepos oder Staatsroman*, especially pp. 217–232.

[79] *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*, vol. 1, p. 104, illustration no. 26.

[80] See also the discussion in chapter seven.

[81] Otto Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen zur Kunst in England, Wales und Schottland vom Jahre 901 bis zum Jahre 1307* (Munich, 1956), vol. 2, p. 390, no. 3709. Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 20.

[82] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, pp. 479–480, no. 4053; cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 22.

[83] Cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 6, note 5.

[84] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 85, no. 6.

As already mentioned, the decoration on oliphants, which consists of a display of wild, exotic and fantastic animals as well as of armed warriors, goes hand in hand with the Norman ideal of the warrior. The use of ferocious animals devouring each other in Norman iconography is too vast to be discussed here. But at least three monumental examples for this Norman aesthetic and quasi-ideological notion should be mentioned. These are the famous coronation mantle of Roger II,[85] the painted ceiling of the Palatine Chapel[86] and the mosaics of the Stanza di Ruggiero, both in Palermo.[87]

When one compares group I with groups II and III, the factor of large-scale production is missing. Moreover, whereas the decoration of group I is dense, crowded and, as mentioned above, generates the sense of both dynamism and conflict, the decoration of the oliphants of groups II and III is rather sparse. The oliphants' bodies are smooth, and only narrow decorative bands appear on the upper and lower zones. The faunal repertoire of group II excludes fantastic creatures. Wild animals usually appear running after each

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[85] See mainly Hermann Fillitz, *Die Schatzkammer in Wien, Symbole abendländischen Kaisertums* (Salzburg and Vienna, 1986), p. 171, cat. no. 8; Tarif al-Samman, "Arabische Inschriften auf den Krönungsgewändern des heiligen römischen Reiches," *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 78(1982), pp. 31–4; *Eredità dell'Islam*, ed. G. Curatola (Milan, 1993), cat. no. 95 (with extensive bibliography). For the recent study of Roger's Mantle, see Rotraud Bauer, "Il manto di Ruggero II,", *I Normanni: popolo d'Europa 1030–1200*, exhibition catalogue, ed. M. d'Onofrio, (Venice, 1994), pp. 279–287 (with extensive bibliography); William Tronzo, "The Mantle of Roger II of Sicily," *Robes and Honor. The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. S. Gordon, (New York, 2001), pp. 241–253; Eva R. Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability," in *Art History* 24(2001), especially pp. 27–33.

[86] See mainly Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Le pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella Palatina in Palermo* (Rome, 1950); Annabelle Simon-Cahn, *Some Cosmological Imagery on the Ceiling of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo* (Ph.D., Columbia University, 1978); Dalu Jones, "The Cappella Palatina in Palermo: Problems of Attribution," *Art and Archaeology Research Papers* 2(1972), pp. 41–57; Nora Nercessian, *The Cappella Palatina of Roger II: The Relationship of its Imagery to its Political Function* (Ph.D. Thesis, UCLA, 1981); William Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom* (Princeton, 1977), especially pp. 54–62; idem, "Byzantine Court Culture from the Point of View of Norman Sicily: The Case of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo," *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. S. Gordon (Washington D.C., 1977), pp. 101–114. See also David Nicolle, "The Cappella Palatina Ceiling and the Muslim Military Inheritance of Norman Sicily," *Gladius* 16(1983), pp. 45–145; Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen, *Medieval Islamic Symbolism and the Paintings in the Cefalù Cathedral* (Leiden, 1986).

[87] Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily* (London, 1949), pp. 180–83, figs. 113–19; Hans-Rudolf Meier, *Die normannischen Königspaläste in Palermo: Studien zur hochmittelalterlichen Residenzbaukunst* (Worms, 1994). It must be noticed that these mosaics were probably commissioned at the order of William I or William II and are datable between 1160 and 1170.

other within vegetal scrolls. This common pattern, which frequently appears in almost all media of Fatimid art, seems to be fairly decorative. The same assessment can stand for the decoration on the oliphants of group III. It must be conceded, however, that the figural decoration of the oliphants of Sheikh Sa'ud and Eduard Gans, which includes hunting and banquet scenes, clearly belongs to the usual Islamic royal iconography.

Perhaps the oliphants of group II were indeed designed for specific ceremonial uses, either in a royal Fatimid or Coptic context. As already mentioned in chapter five, curved musical instruments called the trumpets of peace (*abwāq al-salām*) were used by the Fatimids during the annual Nile ceremonies. Another instrument, called *al-gharbiyya* or *al-gharība*, was used in a Fatimid royal context. This type of trumpet was sounded on new-year ceremonies, to announce that the caliph was approaching the palace gates.[88]

The decoration of the oliphants of group III, which strongly recalls the Fatimid-related art of Norman Sicily, might have been individually commissioned, then, by members of the royal family or by noblemen, or perhaps even designed to be royal presents. In any case, the fact that the majority of the medieval oliphants were usually decorated with 'oriental' or 'orientalised' motifs suggests that in the collective memory of medieval man the origin of the oliphant was probably associated with the East.[89]

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[88] For these two types of trumpets, see the discussion in chapter five on the Arabic terms *būq* and *gharbiyya*.

[89] The question concerning the possibility of an ancient Near Eastern revival in decorating medieval oliphants will be addressed in the author's corpus of the medieval oliphants (forthcoming), especially in the section on the so-called Byzantine group. However, for ancient ivory drinking horns decorated with hunting scenes, see mainly, Georgina Herrmann, *The Iranian Revival* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 41–46; Jean-Claude Margueron, "Une corne sculptée à Emar," *Insight through Images: Studies in Honor of Edith Porada, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*, ed. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, vol. 21 (1986), pp. 153–158. For a general discussion see André Grabar, "Le rayonnement de l'art sassanide dans le monde chrêtien," in *La Persia nel medioevo, Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Roma 1970* (Rome, 1971), pp. 679–707.

CHAPTER SEVEN

# OLIPHANTS IN CHURCH TREASURIES

## I. *How many Oliphants were kept in Church Treasuries?*

The Capilla del Legarto at the cathedral of Seville is famous for some objects traditionally associated with the hero of the Spanish Reconquest, El Cid. Next to the alleged rein of El Cid's horse, there is a smooth elephant tusk, hanging above the heads of the visitor to this chapel. This piece is known as the oliphant of El Cid.[1] Many other European church treasuries proudly display the oliphants in their possession. Two large and smooth oliphants are kept in the treasury of the Vatican, and it is likely that one of them used to be hung above the main altar of St. Peter's.[2] The oliphant of Angers, which is at present kept in the Musée Saint-Jean in Angers, belonged to the treasury of the cathedral. But it appears for the first time in the inventory of 1255 of the church of Saint-Maurice and was famous, at least until 1595, as the horn in which the relics of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were enshrined.[3] No less famous are the horns of the Danish nobleman Ulph in York Minster and the so-called 'Olifant de Roland' in the cathedral of Saint-Sernin in Toulouse.[4]

As far as literary sources are concerned, it seems that many of the medieval oliphants were donated to various church treasuries already in the late Middle Ages, most probably quite soon after they

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[1] Mentioned and depicted in Julius von Schlosser, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaissance* (Leipzig, 1908), p. 16.

[2] These two oliphants are dealt with below.

[3] Charles Urseau, *Le Musée Saint-Jean d'Angers* (Angers, 1924), pp. 70–71; see also *Ornanamenta Ecclesiae, Kunst und Künstler der Romanik*, exhibition catalogue, Schnütgen-Museum in Köln (Cologne, 1985), vol. 3, p. 93, cat. no. H 13 A.

[4] For the oliphants from York, see Cyril G.E. Bunt, *The Horn of Ulf, Report of the Friends of York Minster* (York, 1935); Thomas D. Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph," *Antiquity* 11(1937), pp. 278–82. For the oliphant from Toulouse, see mainly, *De Toulouse a Tripoli: La puissance toulousaine au XII^e siècle (1080–1208)*, exhibition catalogue, Musée des Augustins (Toulouse, 1989), p. 245, cat. no. 346. See also Hanns Swarzenski, "Two Oliphants in the Museum," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 60(1962), pp. 27–45; *idem*, "Les Olifants," *Les monuments historiques de la France* 12(1966), pp. 6–11.

were made. Among the so-called Saracenic ones, the 'Oliphant of Charlemagne' is one of the famous pieces kept in the treasury of Aachen. It is displayed, at present, with an additional late Gothic (most probably fourteenth-century) hanging belt made of dark-red velvet, on which the inscription *Deyn Eyn* (appropriated for you, or perhaps Dein [des Kaisers] Eyn [ein Horn], that is, your horn) is embroidered (Plate V).[5] Another oliphant, though somewhat crudely carved, is kept in the treasury of the church of St. Trophime in Arles (Fig. 78).[6]

Several others, which are kept nowadays in different museums, are known, or at least are considered, as having been kept in church treasuries. The oliphant with the facetted body and the relatively deep, carved decorative bands on its lower and upper zones, which is kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, probably belonged to the treasury of St.-Denis in Paris (Fig. 46).[7] The oliphant from the Islamic Museum in Berlin (K 3106, Plate I), is said to have been formerly kept in the treasury of the cathedral of Speyer.[8] The oliphant from the Metropolitan Museum in New York (04.3.117) is traditionally said to belong to a Benedictine cloister in Dijon (Plate II).[9] The oliphant from Auch, also known as the 'oliphant of St. Orens', which is kept at present in the Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie of the city of Auch, was formerly kept in the treasury of the church of St. Orens in Auch (Fig. 28).[10] The one from Musée Crozatier in Le Puy-en-Velay in France, once belonged to the treasury of the cathe-

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[5] Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII–XIII. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1971), cat. no. 55; Ernst G. Grimme, "Der Aachener Domschatz," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 42(1972), cat. no. 11, pp. 17–18; see also Fr. Bock, "Über den Gebrauch der Hörner im Alterthum und das Vorkommen geschnitzter Elfenbeinhörner im Mittelalter," *Mittelalterliche Kunstdenkmale des Osterreichischer Kaiserstaates*, ed. G. Heider and R. von Eitelberger, vol. II (Stuttgart, 1860), p. 133.

[6] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 57. See also *Les Andalousies: de Damas à Cordoue*, exhibition catalogue, Institut du monde arabe, Paris (Paris, 2000), p. 178, cat. no. 210.

[7] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 56. See also *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*, exhibition catalogue, Musée du Louvre (Paris, 1991), pp. 142–43, cat. no. 20.

[8] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 60. See also *Museum für Islamische Kunst Berlin*, second revised edition (Berlin, 1979), p. 21, cat. no. 22 (fig. 49). See also Ralph Pinder-Wilson and Avinoam Shalem, "A newly discovered oliphant in a private collection in London," *Mitteilungen zur Spätantiken Archäologie und Byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 2(2000), pp. 79–92.

[9] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 67.

[10] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 76. See also *Les Andalousies*, cat. no. 209.

dral of Le Puy and was kept in the chapel of St. Pol of this cathedral (Fig. 29).[11] Some traditions claim that the oliphant from the Museum of Herzog Anton Ulrich in Brunswick used to have been kept in the cathedral of this city (Fig. 31).[12]

A scrutinised observation of the oliphants reveals some marks like drills, cuts, cracks and indentations which suggest that some were used as containers, most probably for enshrining relics, and were therefore secured by additional covers or lids attached to their upper rims. Perhaps the best example for the re-use of oliphants in church treasuries is the oliphant in the Musée de Cluny in Paris (Cl. 13065, Fig. 41), which was recently discussed by Ebitz. He has provided us with some "physical evidence" suggesting that the oliphant originally belonged to the specific group of oliphants with decorative bands on their upper and lower zones, occasionally with the typical frieze of running animals on the upper zone, and smooth facetted bodies.[13] Ebitz has argued that the carving of the Christian images on the main body is a later addition executed by a workshop in Italy copying Byzantine iconography. He has detected at least eighteen identical drilled holes around the wide end of the oliphant's body, organised in a tight pattern around and below the raised belt of rosettes and diamonds. He suggests that a punctuated basket-weave band, similar to the one decorating the lowest zone of the oliphant, was originally carved at the upper zone of the oliphant's body, just below the raised decorative belts.[14]

Since the level of the oliphant's body in comparison to its upper raised belt is rather high, it is less likely that the decoration on the oliphant's body was re-carved. In order to prepare an already carved surface for a new carving, the surface should be first made almost totally smooth, so the new carving area appears at a relatively deep level. However, regardless of what Ebitz suggests, the additional decoration, which consists of an Ascension on the inner curved part of the oliphant's body and of three vertical panels with depictions of busts of the four Evangelist symbols, the twelve apostles, a hand

[11] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 77.
[12] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 79.
[13] David M. Ebitz, "Secular to Sacred: The Transformation of an Oliphant in the Musée de Cluny," *Gesta* 25(1986), pp. 31–38.
[14] See Ebitz's reconstruction of the oliphant, fig. 5.

of God and a quadruped, is the best example for a Christianisation process of an object. Ebitz says:

> Why was the horn carved? The answer is, I believe, in order to decorate the horn with Christian themes more appropriate to the new use to which it was put when presumably it passed as a pious gift from the hands of its secular owner into the treasury of a church.[15]

The brutal cut of the upper decorative band of the oliphant from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris—once kept in the treasury of St.-Denis—and the elongated notch at the upper section of the oliphant's inner curved part, suggest that an additional lid, which was most probably secured by a thin, elongated bracing band, was once mounted to the oliphant's large opening (Fig. 46).

The concentration of at least seven drilled holes as well as several others on the uppermost smooth zone of the oliphant from Edinburgh, suggests that a lid was mounted to the oliphant's upper rim. The concentration of the seven drilled holes on the outer curved part hints at the possible use of a hinge joining the lid to the oliphant's body so that the attached cover could swing freely.

The badly damaged upper rim of the oliphant from St. Trophime in Arles (Fig. 78),[16] suggests that an additional cover was once fixed to this oliphant.

The cracks, the rectangular notch on the narrow upper raised band with the arabesque decoration and the numerous drilled holes at the uppermost smooth band of the oliphant from the Metropolitan Museum in New York,[17] suggest that a lid was once mounted to its large opening; as mentioned above, the oliphant is reputed to have been formerly kept in the Benedictine cloister in Dijon.

The same assumption can be made about the fragment of the oliphant also kept at present in the Metropolitan Museum of New York (Fig. 26).[18] The wide drilled hole in its bracing band and the straight cuts on its raised narrow bands, which might have rendered possible the attachment of a hinge or lock plate, are probably the prima facie evidence to support such speculation.

The crack running along the outer and inner curved parts, from the upper rim almost to the narrow end, of the oliphant from Le

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[15] Ebitz, "Secular to Sacred," p. 37.
[16] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 57; *Les Andalousies*, cat. no. 210.
[17] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 67.
[18] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. 68.

Puy, might also be the result of an additional lid mounted at its top (Fig. 29).[19]

However, it should be noted that several small holes, which usually appear on the topmost zone of several oliphants—for example, such holes appear on the oliphants from Baltimore (71.234), Florence (Avori no. 7), Brunswick (MA 107),[20] and the one which was lately sold in an auction in Stockholm (once in the possession of the Baron Claus Jürgen von der Recke)[21]—might have been drilled in order to render possible the attachment of a metal ring to the oliphants' upper lips. Such metal rings appear on the oliphants from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (7953–1862, and the so-called 'Blackburn oliphant'),[22] and the ones from the treasury of the cathedral of Aachen,[23] and the Musée de Louvre in Paris (1075).[24]

Perhaps the best evidence for the large number of ivory horns kept in medieval treasuries is the abundance of treasuries' records and church inventories in the Latin West, in which these items are mentioned. It is therefore crucial to study carefully these records in order to glean more from these literary sources.

The Latin term usually used for describing a single ivory horn in these medieval sources is *cornu eburneum*; the plural form is *cornua eburnea*. The following sources focus only on the richest treasuries with oliphants, but one should bear in mind that many other cathedrals, churches and cloisters mention one or sometimes two oliphants in their inventories.[25]

Three oliphants are mentioned in the inventory of the cathedral of Bamberg, which was written in 1127, at the time of Bishop Otto I and the custodian Udalrich.[26] Another oliphant is recorded in the treasury of the cathedral of Speyer in 1051.[27] However, fourteen

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[19] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 77.
[20] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. nos. 59, 78, 79.
[21] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 80.
[22] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 66 and 81 (Blackburn Oliphant).
[23] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 55.
[24] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 73 and 69.
[25] For a list of medieval church inventories mentioning oliphants, see Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. 85–88. See also Paul Williamson, "Ivory Carving in English Treasuries before the Reformation," *Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture presented to Peter Lasko*, ed. David Buckton and T.A. Heslop, (London, 1994), pp. 187–202.
[26] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 85, no. 1.
[27] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 24.

years later, in the inventory of 1065, the cathedral of Speyer had six oliphants: "Item sechs Hörner von Helffantzehnen gemacht" (and six horns made out of elephants' teeth). It is likely that these additional oliphants were transferred from the treasury of the Benedictine cloister in Limburg to the treasury of the cathedral of Speyer by Bishop Einhard II.[28] Among the different important relics of the cathedral of Prague, three ivory horns are recorded in the inventory dated 1378:

> "Gladius sti. Stephani, regis Hungariae cum manubrio eburneo. Vexillum magnum quod fecit B. Ludmilla. Lorica sancti Wenzeslai, vexillum sancti Georgii albi et rubri coloris, donatum Ecclesiae per D. Imperatorem. Cornua tria sive tubae sufflatiles eburneae. Clyppeus cum aquila nigra, circumtatus argento deaurato, quem donavit Imperator Ecclesiae Pragensi." (The sword of St. Stephen, King of Hungary, with a hilt of ivory. The large flag, which St. Ludmilla made. The breastplate (*lorica*) of St. Wenceslas, the flag of St. George in white and red, which was presented to the church by the emperor. Three ivory horns, or trumpets (*tubae*). The *clipeus* with a black eagle, framed with gilded silver, which was donated by the emperor to the church of Prague).[29]

Three oliphants are mentioned in a list of the royal treasures seized by King Edward in the castle of Edinburgh in 1296–97. The oliphants are recorded as being decorated with silver and silk. This might refer to their specific decorative bracing bands and hanging belts.[30] Around the year 1060, Exeter Cathedral was presented with four ivory horns brought by Bishop Leofric.[31] Two oliphants are also mentioned as being kept in the treasury of St. Paul's in London in the year 1295. One of them is described as:

> "Item cornu eburneum gravatum bestiis et avibus, magnum. Item aliud cornu eburneum planum et parvum" (and a big ivory horn engraved (carved) with wild animals and birds and a small and smooth [namely undecorated] ivory horn).[32]

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[28] Cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 25.

[29] Bock, "Über den Gebrauch der Hörner im Alterthum," pp. 136–37.

[30] Alfred Maskell, *Ivories* (London, 1905), p. 240; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 86, no. 10.

[31] Maskell, *Ivories*, p. 189; cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 86, no. 13.

[32] Otto Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen zur Kunst in England, Wales und Schottland vom Jahre 901 bis zum Jahre 1307* (Munich, 1956), vol. 2, no. 2903; cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 86, no. 16. See also Williamson, "Ivory Carvings in English Treasuries", p. 193; Williamson refers to an early inventory of St. Paul's Cathedral, which is dated to 1245.

The description of the big oliphant from St. Paul's as being decorated with wild animals and birds is interesting because it might have referred, though not exclusively, to the large group of Saracenic oliphants, the 'lace' group, decorated with animals in medallions or running animals within vertical bands.[33] Three oliphants were also kept in 1303 in the royal treasury of Westminster in London. The three are described as consisting of one big and two small ones: "Tria cornua eburnea unum magnum et duo minora" (Three ivory horns, one big and two small).[34] At least up to 1099, Salisbury Cathedral had two oliphants, which were given by Bishop Osmund (1078–1099),[35] but in the first half of the thirteenth century, four *cornua eburnea* are recorded.[36] Nine oliphants were given to Winchester Cathedral by Bishop Henry of Blois, Abbot of Glastonbury (d. 1171).[37] In the inventory of the church of St. Martial in Limoges dated between 1126–1245, four oliphants, some with most probably silver mountings, are recorded ("IV cornua de ebore; quaedam sunt cum argento").[38] Another six horns, the material of which is unfortunately not mentioned, were kept in the treasury of the cathedral of Lüttich during the time of Bishop Reginard (1025–1057).[39]

What can we learn from the various medieval sources concerning donations of oliphants to church treasuries? The considerable collection of excerpts from medieval sources and church inventories gathered by Kühnel in the appendix of his monumental corpus of Islamic ivories, is a convenient starting point to begin this discussion.[40] Perhaps the first comment to be made on this bulk of medieval sources concerns the Latin term *cornu eburneum*, because this term is a general term for any ivory horn regardless of its origin or its

[33] For this speculation, see Williamson, "Ivory Carvings in English Treasuries", p. 193.
[34] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, no. 2970; cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 86, no. 17.
[35] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, no. 4053; cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 22.
[36] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, no. 4085; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 23.
[37] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, no. 4767; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 88, no. 29.
[38] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 86, no. 15.
[39] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 18.
[40] Unfortunately, this appendix was published in Kühnel's posthumous book without any critical remarks.

decoration. Thus no distinction is made in these sources between the so-called Saracenic, Byzantine or European ivory horns. Moreover, the oliphants are seldom described. The information provided mainly focuses on how many items there were and the material they were made of, namely ivory—with the exception of the above-mentioned inventory of 1295 from St. Paul's Cathedral, telling us of a huge oliphant with wild animals and birds. However, this description might be associated with the typical large groups of the Saracenic or Byzantine oliphants.

The earliest literary source mentioning the existence of an ivory horn in a church treasury, which might be associated with one of the so-called Saracenic oliphants, is the inventory of the cathedral of Speyer dated 1051. Kühnel suggested that if we accept that the oliphant from Berlin (K 3106, Plate I) indeed belonged to the cathedral of Speyer, it could have already been mentioned in the inventory of 1051 of this treasury or at least later, in the inventory of 1065, in which six ivory horns are mentioned. He also added that, in this case, the inventories of 1051 or 1065 might serve as *terminus ante quem* for the production of this type of oliphant, namely for the oliphants of group I. Nonetheless, several medieval sources, like those from the cloister of Croyland in England and the church of Eller a.d. Mosel in Germany, which are dated to the ninth and the first half of the tenth centuries respectively, also mention oliphants or at least horns in their church treasuries.[41] Another important notice on Kühnel's list of medieval sources concerns the oliphant of York, the so-called 'Horn of Ulph'.[42] The first reference of this oliphant as being given to York Minster by the Danish nobleman Ulph, appears in a metrical chronicle written during the time of Archbishop Thomas Arundel (1388–97):

> Consul et insignis Eboracensis, come Ulfus,
> Praedia praebendis praebuit ille sua.
> Tradens ex ebore cornu Petrique sigillum,
> Investituram constituit solidam.
> Cornea buccina, candida, lucida testificatur
> Munus et eximium largiflui comitis.

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[41] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 85, no. 7, and p. 86, no. 11.

[42] See mainly, Samuel Gale, "An Historical Dissertation upon the antient Danish Horn kept in the Cathedral Church of York," *Archaeologia* 1(1770), pp. 168–182; Bunt, *The Horn of Ulf*; Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph," pp. 278–82.

(The excellent consul of York, Ulfus,
Donated to the cathedral's chapter his estate.
By handing over an ivory horn and the seal of Peter,
He constituted a firm investiture.
The signal horn, spotless, white and shining, testifies
The outstanding donation of this generous giving [of this] Count.

According to a later record of the inventory of York Minster, the oliphant kept at present in York was associated already in 1393 with this tradition; a silver gilt chain bearing the inscription "great horn of ivory with silver-gilt ornament, the gift of Ulph, son of Thorold" was attached to it by the treasurer John Neweton.[43] If indeed the oliphant of York Minster is the one given by Ulph around 1036, this suggests a *terminus ante quem* for this type of oliphant.

At any case, according to these medieval documents, it seems that the majority of the ivory horns were recorded in the inventories of church treasuries of Europe between the second half of the eleventh century and the end of the thirteenth century. This might hint at a European fashion of having oliphants in church treasuries and, to some extent, at the possible date of manufacture for the majority of the oliphants.

Another aspect which should be stressed is the remarkable number of oliphants which were in the possession of or donated by kings. King Richard I presented the treasury of Canterbury Cathedral in 1189 with an ivory horn which was exceptionally big (*cornu eburneum mirae magnitudinis*).[44] King Henry I (d. 1135) donated an oliphant to Carlisle Cathedral:

> ". . . ecclesiam praedictam [beatae Mariae Karliol.] inde feoffavit per quoddam cornu eburneum, quod dedit ecclesiae suae praedictae, et quod adhuc habet, . . ." (. . . therefore he enfeoffed the above-mentioned church [St. Mary in Carlisle] with an ivory horn, which he has given to this mentioned church and which is still in the possession [of the church] . . .).[45]

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[43] The Latin Inscription dated 1675 reads: "Cornu hoc ulphus in occidentali parte deirae princeps unacumomnibus terris et redditibus suis olim donavit: vel abreptum. Henricus Ds fairfax demum restituit, dec.et cap. De novo ornavit an. Dom. 1675". See Gale, "An Historical Dissertation," p. 173.

[44] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, vol. 1, no. 843, Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 85, no. 4.

[45] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 85, no. 6.

In the royal records of King Edward dated 1296–97, three ivory horns are mentioned. The records list the numerous treasures of Edinburgh Castle, which were seized by King Edward after John Balliol, King of Scotland, was brought into submission.[46] Three oliphants are recorded in 1303 in the royal treasuries of Westminster in London.[47] Rochester Cathedral received different precious presents from King William I, i.e. William the Conqueror (d. 1087), among which an ivory horn is mentioned:

> "dedit [Wilhelmus I rex], et tunicam propriam regalem, et cornu eburneum, et alia plura ornamenta" (He [King Wilhelmus I rex], presented his own royal garment, an ivory horn and many other [royal] adornments).[48]

Between the years 1014 and 1024, the church of St. Vincent in Verdun was presented by Emperor Henry II (1002–24) with two ivory horns, in which relics were enshrined ("Dedit et Heinricus [II. imp.] imperator . . . cornua 2 eburnea idemtidem reliquiis conferta").[49] One ivory horn mounted with gold and having a lavish embroidered silk hanging belt is also mentioned in the royal inventory of 1379–80 of King Charles of France ("Item, ung cornet d'yvire, bordé d'or, pendant à une courroye d'une tissu de soye ferré de fleurs de lys et daulphins d'or").[50] The so-called Nigel's horn is associated with King Edward the Confessor (1042–66). The above-mentioned oliphant in York Minster is traditionally associated with, or perhaps even given by, Ulph, son of Thorald, who reigned in North Umbria before King Edward the Confessor, and the oliphant which in 1383 was still in the treasury of Durham Cathedral, is associated with King Oswald of North Umbria (d. 642 or 672).[51]

Several oliphants were donated to church treasuries by bishops. Around 1060, four oliphants were given to Exeter Cathedral by Bishop Leofric, and, in 1277, two others were presented to the cathedral by Bishop William Brewer.[52] Bishop Osmund (1078–99) donated

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[46] Maskell, *Ivories*, p. 240; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 86, no. 10.
[47] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, no. 2970.
[48] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, no. 3709. Kühnel, p. 87, no. 20.
[49] Otto Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Schriftquellen zur Kunstgeschichte des 11. und 12. Jhs. für Deutschland, Lothringen und Italien* (Berlin, 1938), no. 2815. Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 28.
[50] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 88, no. 34; Maskell, *Ivories* (London, 1905), p. 240.
[51] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 86, no. 9, p. 88, nos. 30, 32.
[52] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 86, nos. 13, 14.

two oliphants to Salisbury Cathedral.[53] Einhard II, Bishop of Speyer (1060–1067), brought six horns of elephants' tusks ("sechs Hörner von Helffantzehnen").[54] from the Benedictine cloister of Limburg to the treasury of the cathedral of Speyer. And Bishop Henry of Blois (d. 1171) presented Winchester Cathedral with nine oliphants.[55]

The direct association of numerous oliphants with kings and clerics of high rank suggests that oliphants were usually regarded as royal and highly prestigious objects.

## II. *Why and how were they Accepted?*

The famous *Chanson de Roland* tells us that after the tragic death of Roland in Roncevaux in 778, Charlemagne took Roland's oliphant and it was presented later on to the church of St. Seurin in Bordeaux:

> They storm Narbonne and leave it by the way,
> And reach Bordeaux, a city of great fame.
> There, on the altar of Sev'rin the good saint,
> Filled with gold mangons, the Olifant they lay,
> (Pilgrims may see it when visiting the place). [56]

According to this epic, the oliphant of Roland was immediately accepted for the church treasury of St. Seurin in Bordeaux and hung there over the main altar. The object was probably regarded as a relic of the courageous hero Roland and perhaps also as a symbol of the heroic and fateful battle of Christendom against the invading forces of Islam in Roncevaux. It was hung in the church, then, as a sort of trophy of war. But unlike other trophies of war, which usually manifest specific victory, it embodies the myth of a rather tragic and unsuccessful battle—in fact, that of a fall. In this light, it is almost as if Roland might be compared to a martyr who dies for the sake of Christianity rather than overcomes or vanquishes pagans

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[53] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, vol. 2, no. 4053; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 22.

[54] Bernhard Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse. Erster Teil: von der Zeit Karls des Großen bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1967), p. 49, no. 42; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 25.

[55] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, vol. 2, no. 4767; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 88, no. 29.

[56] *The Song of Roland*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Baltimore, 1957), captions 3683–87.

and infidels. His oliphant is therefore a relic of a worldly saint; it is a memorial piece, which functions as a memorial monument, keeping alive the memory of the incidents of the battle in Roncevaux. For example, it is likely that pilgrims visiting the church of St. Seurin were able to identify the crack in the oliphant's mouth and to detect the location of the missing precious stones on its lavish mounting, all of which are mentioned in the famous Chanson. It is related that, just before departing, Roland used the oliphant as a weapon, smiting it on the helmet of one of the Saracens, who wanted to steal his sword (Fig. 77). At that instant, the mouth of his oliphant broke and its decoration, consisting of gold and crystals, fell to pieces. The crack and the damaged mounting were clear evidence of what took place in the last moments before the hero died. These marks on the oliphant were therefore the *stimuli* of the medieval collective memory of this epic.

The presence of the carved horn of Roland in the church of St. Seurin in Bordeaux is also mentioned in the famous Pilgrim's guide to Santiago de Campostella. The guide was written around 1139. It says: "Tuba vero eburnea scilicet scissa aput Burdegalem urbem, in basilica Beati Severini habetur . . ."[57] Although Roland's epos was extremely popular, it would, of course, be absurd to suggest that this was the main reason for oliphants' being donated to church treasuries. Moreover, since the majority of the oliphants belonged to eminent and noble persons or were already associated with them before they reached church treasuries, it is likely that, in numerous cases, they were accepted in treasuries as 'relics' commemorating specific events or persons—namely acting as 'aide-memoires'.[58]

However, before entering the core of the discussion concerning the various reasons contributing to their acceptance into church treasuries, a certain issue should be emphasised. It is likely that several of them were accepted simply as luxurious objects. Oliphants are extremely impressive artefacts. The imposing size, elegant shape, the precious and expensive material they are made of and their attrac-

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[57] *Le Guide du pélerin de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle*, ed. and trans. Jeanne Vielliard (Macon, 1938), p. 78; cited by David M. Ebitz, "The Medieval Oliphant, Its Function and Meaning in Romanesque Secular Art," *Explorations, A Journal of Research at the University of Maine at Orono* 1(1984), p. 20, note 34.

[58] John Cherry, "Symbolism and Survival: Medieval Horns of Tenure," *Antiquaries Journal* 69(1989), pp. 111–118.

tive, in some cases also exotic, decoration contributed to their immediate acceptance in church treasuries.[59]

In other cases, several oliphants were accepted as expensive containers in which relics were kept. As a matter of fact, many Islamic objects made out of different precious materials were simply donated to church treasuries because they were already brought from the East as mementoes, in which relics or sacred substances from holy sites were carried. These Islamic containers were sometimes even regarded as relics of a lesser degree, for they were sanctified by sheer proximity to the relics carried within them.[60] Their acceptance, therefore, was not even questioned. For example, the oliphant from Angers is traditionally said to have been brought from the East by Guillaume de Beaumont, Bishop of Angers (died 1240), with different relics, including those of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah. The inventory of the cathedral of Angers dated 1255 provides us with the following information:

> "Cor[n]um eburneum in quo continentur reliquiae quatuor patriacharum Abrahae, Isaac et Jacob et Sarae et de fragmentis cenae domini et plures aliae reliquiae, prout in cedula interius inclusa continentur" (An ivory horn [which] contains relics of the four patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah and relics of the Last Supper of our Lord and many other relics [and] which are kept locked within a small receptacle).[61]

Another literary source tells us that the two ivory horns donated by Emperor Henry II to the church of St. Vincent in Verdun between 1114 and 1124 were also accepted as relic containers: "Dedit et Heinricus [II imp.] imperator . . . cornua 2 eburnea idemtidem reliquiis conferta".[62]

According to the *Chanson de Roland*, oliphants were also presented filled with gold:

> There, on the altar of Sev'rin the good saint,
> Filled with gold mangons,
> The Oliphant they lay.[63]

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[59] The meaning of oliphants is widely discussed in chapter six (see mainly the discussion "Iconography of Form: Imperial associations").

[60] On this matter see Avinoam Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, especially pp. 129–141.

[61] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 88, no. 36.

[62] Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Schriftquellen zur Kunstgeschichte des 11. und 12. Jhs.*, no. 2815; Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 87, no. 28.

[63] *The Song of Roland*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers, captions (3683–87).

The idea of presenting an oliphant filled with costly goods recalls the common classical motif of the full horn (cornucopia), which is usually depicted as a large goat's horn containing food, drink and so on, symbolising abundant and overflowing supply.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect which should be examined, is the acceptance of horns to church treasuries as a symbol of the conveyance and tenure of land. This practice of associating an object with particular deeds or events seems to be ancient. The essential idea is probably rooted in the human being's desire to free the memory of a specific event from its verbal narrative phase and keep it green in the collective memory for centuries to come with the help of a specific object, namely a symbol.

Du Cange in his *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae latinitatis* classified the symbolic objects used in the Middle Ages in rituals of vassalage into three groups. These are objects which have direct relation to the things transferred; objects which manifest power; and objects which symbolise a right to do violence to property or perhaps also to protect it.[64] Le Goff has recently suggested another classification of medieval symbolic objects; he too organised them into three groups: socio-economic symbols, socio-cultural symbols and socio-professional symbols.[65] Although the classifications of Du Cange and le Goff help us to define clearly the primary character or qualities of symbolic objects, it seems that their classifications are too rigid. Several objects might serve more than one function and thus seem to fit two and sometimes even three of the categories suggested by Du Cange and le Goff. For example, as far as the transfer of land is concerned, a hunting horn might be directly associated with land or forest, indicating power, and might also be used as a signal horn, that is, for calling for help in case of violation of territory. Almost similar arguments could be put forward concerning the three socio-categories of le Goff, especially his two last groups—the socio-cultural and socio-professional, for the border between these two categories might be in numerous cases quite vague.

However, as far as literary sources are concerned, this peculiar method of using a horn during transfer of land seems to have been common practice, especially in England, in the eleventh century,

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[64] Cited by Cherry, "Symbolism and Survival," p. 111.

[65] Jacques le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 245–46.

during the Norman Conquest. Ingulphus, Abbot of Croyland, mentions a horn among the different symbols of land transfer at the beginning of the reign of William the Conqueror (d. 1087). He says:

> "Conferebantur eitem primo multa praedia nudo verbo, absque scripto vel charta, tantum cum domini gladio, vel galea, vel cornu, vel cratera; et plurima tenementa cum calcari, cum strigili, cum arcu; et nonnulla cum sagitta" (At first many estates were transferred by bare word of mouth, without any writing or charter, only by the lord's sword, or helmet, or horn, or cup; and many tenements by a spur, a scraper, a bow; and some by an arrow).[66]

A medieval visual example illustrating the ritual of presenting an oliphant as well as other objects like a sword and a shield to a specific bishopric, appears in one of the seven large miniatures of the so-called 'Libro de los Testamentos' (executed between 1126 and 1129), which is kept in Oviedo Cathedral.[67] In the miniature (Fig. 79), King Bermudo II hands over his testament to an archbishop standing next to him. On the far right-hand side of the illustration, another figure, most probably the king's armiger, is depicted holding a shield, a sword and an oliphant, which is also hung over his neck.[68]

According to tradition, the habit of presenting a horn as a symbol for transfer of land was well known in the northern lands before it was adopted in England. This tradition might be related to the common use of drinking horns in the Nordic countries. An echo of this tradition might be detected in the legend—or folk account—concerning the history of the famous ivory oliphant from York Minster—the so-called the Oliphant of Ulph. This oliphant is said to have been given to the Minster as a tenure horn symbolising the transfer of lands of the Danish nobleman Ulph to the Minster. This might also explain why this Danish nobleman has been identified as Ulph Thorgilsson, the brother-in-law of Cnut, rather than Ulph Thoroldsson.[69]

The tradition concerning the famous York oliphant also sheds light on the medieval ritual of presenting tenure horns to churches. William

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[66] Cited by Samuel Pegge, "Of the horn as a charter or instrument of conveyance," *Archaeologia* 3(1775), pp. 1–2.

[67] See Jesús Domínguez Bordona, *Spanish Illumination* (Paris, circa 1930), vol. I, pl. 73.

[68] This miniature is also illustrated in Ebitz, "The Medieval Oliphant," p. 17, fig. 6.

[69] Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph," pp. 278–82.

Camden, who in the late sixteenth century studied the history of objects preserved by tenurial obligations in England, provides us with the following description taken, according to Samuel Gale from an "antient book":[70]

> "Dominabatur [i] Ulphus ille in occidentali parte Deirae, et propter altercationem (s)filiorum (s)fuorum, senioris et junioris, super dominiis post mortem mox omnes fecit aeque pares. Nam indilato Eboracum divertit, et cornu, quo bibere conf(s)uevit, vino replevit, et coram altari, Deo et beato Petro, Apostolorum principi, omnes terras et redditus relexis genibus propinavit." (This Ulphus reigned in the western part of Deira [the former Anglo-Saxon kingdom, whose capital was York], and because of exchange of words between the older and younger sons about the [division of?] lands after his death, he [Ulphus] made them immediately fair dependants. And right after he went to York, filled his horn, from which he used to drink, with wine, knelt in front of the altar, and offered his land and revenues to God and to St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles.)[71]

William Dugdall, who visited York Minster in 1666, also tells us of the tradition of drinking wine in front of an altar out of a tenure horn.

He says:

> Upon coming to York, [Ulph] with that horn wherewith he was used to drink, filled it with wine, and before the altar of God, and Saint Peter, Prince of the Apostles, kneeling devoutly, drank the wine, and by that ceremony offered his church with all his land and revenues.[72]

It was probably quite difficult to drink wine out of an oliphant without spilling the contents. The huge size of the oliphant, and the fact that one had to keep one's thumb pressed to the relatively large opening of the oliphant's tip while drinking, made this ploy inconvenient. However, the use of horns in these rituals involving the transfer of land is understandable. The horns—especially hunting horns—were associated with land and they were regarded as distinctive attributes of nobility and aristocracy, as hunting was restricted in the Middle Ages to this social class. And, in numerous cases, they bore the clear evidence of having been once in the private possession of the specific person who handed over a piece of land.

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[70] Gale, "An Historical Dissertation," p. 169.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 169–70.

As mentioned above, among the medieval oliphants the one in York Minster is the famous oliphant associated with the transfer of land, but there are several others traditionally regarded as tenure horns. For example, the so-called 'Bruce Horn' which is also known as the 'Savernake Horn', is an ivory undecorated horn with a facetted body. This horn is reported as having been presented to Thomas Lord Bruce by the Seymours. According to tradition:

> Roger, the son of William Seymour, who accompanied the Black Prince into Gascony, having, in the reign of Henry IV, married Maud, one of the co-heiresses of William Esturmy, of Chadham, Lord of Wolfhall, in the country of Wilts, knight; which family—Mr. Camden observes—had been ever since the reign of Henry the Second hereditary bailiffs and keepers of the neighbouring forest of Savernake.[73]

This horn is therefore considered to be the tenure horn of Savernake forest.[74] A certain ivory horn, which was presented to Carlisle Cathedral by King Henry I (d. 1135), as a symbol for a grant of land in Inglewood Forest, is mentioned in the cathedral's inventory dated between 1272 and 1277:

> ". . . ecclesiam praedictam [beatae Mariae Karliol.] inde feoffavit per quoddam cornu eburneum, quod dedit ecclesiae suae praedictae, et quod adhuc habet . . ." (. . . therefore he enfeoffed the above-mentioned church [St. Mary in Carlisle] with an ivory horn, which he has given to this mentioned church and which is still in the possession [of the church] . . .).[75]

Another ivory horn, the present location of which is unknown and which is dated to the thirteenth century, is said to be also a tenure horn. It is described as being carved in low relief with two griffins and two huntsmen—one of them carrying a spear and blowing a horn, the other a sword—a hound, a deer and a heron.[76] The two oliphants in the Victoria and Albert Museum (no. 7953–1862 and the so-called 'Blackburn Horn'), were given, at least according to family tradition, as a symbol of transfer of land.[77] Two others which are traditionally regarded as tenure horns are the oliphants in the

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[73] Dr. Milles, Dean of Exeter, "On Lord Bruce's Horn," *Archaeologia* 3(1775), pp. 24–29, especially p. 24.

[74] Cherry, "Symbolism and Survival," p. 112.

[75] Cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 85, no. 6.

[76] Cherry, "Symbolism and Survival," p. 114.

[77] See Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 13, and cat. nos. 66 and 81.

Fine Arts museum in Boston (Maria Antoinette Evans Fund 57.581) and the one which once belonged to the Basilewsky collection.[78]

The last aspect to be stressed in this chapter is that concerning the acceptance of oliphants in church treasuries as marvels of nature. Like ostrich eggs, bezoars, antelope horns (the so-called griffin claws), narwhal tusks (better known as tusks of the unicorn), coconuts, tortoiseshells, and even exotic plants and perfumes, oliphants were also collected and accepted into medieval church treasuries. As Hanns Swarzenski says:

> The princely cabinets and magazines of curious and wonders are documents of a state of the human mind that did not yet draw a rigid line between Art and Nature, Arts and Sciences.[79]

It is also likely that in medieval times the border between these spheres and, above all, between magic and sacred was not yet clearly defined. Oliphants in European church treasuries might then have been accepted also as souvenirs or memorabilia of the most powerful part of that exotic animal, the elephant. The fact that they were also decorated with wild and fabulous animals enhanced their exotic look.

A rare visual example of the transportation of a huge ivory tusk to the cloister church of San Millan de la Cogolla in Spain is to be found on an ivory plaque once mounted on the lid of the Arca of Saint Aemilianus, namely the reliquary casket of San Millan (Fig. 80). The carved ivory piece is dated between 1060 and 1080. It was once kept in the Museum of Berlin (inv. 3008), but its present location is unknown; the piece was probably lost during the Second World War.[80] The central figure—a rider—probably a monk of the Benedictine cloister of San Millan, carries a huge elephant tusk on his shoulder, while three other monks stretch their hands upwards, supporting the huge piece.

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[78] For the oliphant from Boston see Swarzenski, "Two Oliphants in the Museum," p. 34, figs. 2–5; for the Basilewsky one, see Alfred Darcel, *Collection Basilewsky* (Paris, 1874), no. 111.

[79] Swarzenski, "Two Oliphants in the Museum," p. 27.

[80] For this piece, see Adolph Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der romanischen Zeit* (Berlin, 1926), vol. 4, p. 28, cat. no. 87 (see also cat. no. 84a-o), pl. XXVIII, no. 87.

## III. *How were they Used and Displayed?*

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, most of the oliphants were used as relic containers. It is likely that they were kept in the same way as other reliquaries, behind the locked doors of the sacristy, most probably in special cupboards, which, according to some late medieval woodcuts, were also secured by metal latticework. However, for example, in Cologne, around 1300, relics and reliquaries were displayed to the public in relic cupboards (*Reliquienarmaria*) in the main halls or side chapels of churches (Fig. 81); these cupboards were usually located high above the heads of the visitors, out of reach.[81] These wooden cupboards are divided into compartments, creating a separate niche for each object, and were placed mainly in the chancel. This practice permitted an equal presentation for variegated artefacts, among which oliphants might have been displayed.

To the best of my knowledge, the earliest depiction of a treasury's contents is the fourteenth-century marble relief at the entrance to the treasury of San Marco on which, it seems, some important reliquaries of the treasury are depicted (Fig. 82).[82] On the upper part, above the kneeling angel, on the right side of the relief, perhaps a little clumsily drawn, an oliphant is depicted. The oliphant is hung on its upper and lower recessed bands by a chain. A pattern, which consists of intersecting lines forming a series of lozenges, decorates its body. This peculiar pattern might be a stylised simplification of the "inhabited scrolls"—a design which is so characteristic of the large group of the 'Saracenic' oliphants.

Unfortunately, most of the illustrations of relic cupboards are dated to the sixteenth century and later. For example, the engraving of Abraham Hogenberg, which was made in 1632, illustrates the different reliquaries kept in the treasury of Aachen (Fig. 83). The reliquaries

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[81] Anton Legner, "Vom Glanz und von der Präsenz des Heiltums—Bilder und Texte," *Reliquien, Verehrung und Verklärung*, exhibition catalogue from the collection of Louis Peters in the Schnütgen-Museum in Cologne, ed. Anton Legner, (Cologne, 1989), 102 and fig. 58 (the wooden Gothic relic cupboard from the cathedral of Cologne). See also Anton Legner, *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult: zwischen Antike und Aufklärung* (Darmstadt, 1995), especially pp. 87–119; Stephan Beissel, *Die Verehrung der Heiligen und ihrer Reliquien in Deutschland im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, repr. 1991), especially part II, pp. 19–39.

[82] *Der Schatz von San Marco in Venedig*, exhibition catalogue, the Römisch-Germanische Museum in Cologne (Milan, 1984), 33b.

are organised in rows, and each of the reliquaries is displayed in a separate niche, as if they are depicted in a typical late medieval relic cupboard. Among the various reliquaries, on the right side of the second row, the famous Oliphant of Charlemagne is depicted. It is displayed within a separate niche suspended from a belt, which is in turn attached to a ring located at the apex of the arched niche.[83]

Literary sources usually fail to tell us how oliphants were displayed. The sole written pieces of evidence are those of Canterbury Cathedral (dated 1315) and that of the cathedral of Lund in Sweden (north of Malmö). In a list in which ivory horns with relics are specified, we are informed that an oliphant—it is not clear whether this oliphant was Byzantine, European or Saracenic—was suspended over the main altar of Canterbury Cathedral:

> "In majori cornu eburneo pendente sub trabe ultra magnum altare . . ." (In the bigger ivory horn, which was suspended from the beam, [just] over the main altar . . .).[84]

The medieval source referring to the cathedral of Lund tells us of an elephant tusk (*dente eburneo*) hanging below the huge cross in the centre of the church, in which relics are kept:

> In dente eburneo pendente sub maiore cruce in medio ecclesie lundensis & quo(?) sibi supraposito [relikerna uppräknas].[85]

It is likely that the bracing metal bands and the hanging belts with which oliphants were probably donated, dictated at least the immediate or primary manner of their display. Oliphants could have been easily hung aloft with the help of a further chain attached to their hanging belts, if necessary, or simply on the wall or beneath arcades.

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[83] *Rhein und Maas: Kunst und Kultur 800–1400*, exhibition catalogue, Schnütgen-Museum, Cologne, (Cologne, 1972), p. 140, fig. VIIIh.

[84] Cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 85, no. 5. Cited also by Williamson, "Ivory carvings in English Treasuries," p. 194.

[85] The reference to an oliphant hanging below the cross appears in a catalogue of the reliquaries of Lund published in 1820. However, the inventory of the reliquaries refers to the medieval treasury of this cathedral; an oliphant (*dens olifant*) appears in the inventory of the year 1200. For the early reference to the oliphant of Lund, see Göran Axel-Nilsson, *Thesaurus Cathedralis Lundensis: Lunds domkyrkas medeltida skattsamling* (Göteborg, 1989), p. 78. The later description of 1820 appears in Sven Hylander, *Catalogus reliquiarum sanctorum in ecclesia Lundensi*, Lund, 1820, No. R46/R47. It was re-published in Axel-Nilsson, *Thesaurus Cathedralis Lundensis*, p. 103 (I would like to thank Dr. Ebbe Nyborg from the National Museum of Denmark for calling my attention to this reference).

Visual example for this type of extension band or chain appears on a fifteenth-century Italian textile (lampas) which is kept in the Bayerische National Museum in Munich (inv. no. T27, see Fig. 84). The horns depicted on this textile are hung on stylised trees' branches with the help of relatively wide extension belts.[86]

It might be suggested that the depiction of suspended horns from a pillared arcade in the Carolingian miniature of the Gospels from Prüm (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Lat. Theol. Fol. 733, f. 19v, see Fig. 85), might also illustrate this practice of hanging horns in the lands over the Alps as early as the Carolingian period.[87]

One of the earliest depictions of an oliphant hanging above an altar of a church is to be found in the *Sala di Costantino* in the Vatican in Rome. The depiction, which is one of the series of frescoes of the Stanzas of Raphael, is based on a Raphael cartoon and was completed after his death in 1520 by Giulio Romano and Gianfranco Penni, most probably between 1520 and 1524.[88] The fresco—La Donazione di Costantino al papa Silvestro (the Donation of Constantin to Pope Silvester, Fig. 86)—presents a specific episode, in which Constantin I handed over to Pope Silvester a statuette symbolising the city of Rome. The scene takes place in the nave of the cathedral of St. Peter's. In the background, the main altar is depicted. The area of the altar and the niche are separated from the main nave by four spiral columns supporting an architrave. A long wire stretched at the top of the columns, just below the base of the capitals, serves for hanging oil lamps. On the left-hand side of the main altar, almost attached to the farthest spiral column, an elephant tusk is suspended from the stretched wire with the help of two metal chains attached to the tusk's lower and upper zones. Indeed, Giacomo Grimaldi, who describes the basilica of St. Peter in the seventeenth century, mentions that an elephant's tusk hangs over the oratory of Sixtus IV (1471–48). He describes it as huge and adds that it is kept at present in the sacristy (sacrario) of the basilica: "Pendebat ibi magnus elephantis dens longitudine et crassitudine insignis, pendet hodie

[86] Saskia Durian-Ress, *Meisterwerke mittelalterlicher Textilkunst aus dem Bayerischen Nationalmuseum* (Munich, Zurich, 1986), pp. 128–129, cat. no. 46.

[87] This illustration was also mentioned and illustrated by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 8, fig. 17.

[88] Michael Rohlmann, "Leoninische Siegverheißung und clementinische Heilserfüllung in der Sala di Costantino," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 57(1994), pp. 153–169, especially p. 163, fig. 13.

in sacrario basilicae" (There was hanging a huge tooth of an elephant, of an outstanding length and thickness, which hangs nowadays in the sacristy of the basilica.)[89]

More visual evidence for the exhibiting of this ivory horn in the Vatican is to be found in a print dated 1586 (Fig. 87).[90] It is a depiction of the transportation of the famous obelisk from the right wing of the basilica of St. Peter's to the main court, the Piazza di San Pietro. The building—the walls of which are wide open in order to let the beholder see the excessive activity, indoors and outdoors, involving this transfer—is the old rotunda of San Andrea. This building was later transformed, first into the Chapel of Santa Maria delle Febbri and then into the sacristy. In the central arched niche of this illustration, just below the tripartite window and most probably suspended from the vault's apex, a huge ivory horn appears. The description of Grimaldi as well as the fresco of Raphael's Stanza and the print of the Rotunda of San Andrea are indeed associated with a particular ivory tusk which is kept at present in the treasury of the Vatican.[91]

Of course, later on, lavish mountings might have been made specifically for the oliphants, rendering it possible to display them also on elongated feet similar to chalices or directly on flat bases as drinking horns. An example of an oliphant mounted as a drinking horn appears in Gerharrd Alzenbach's engraving, which was probably made at the very beginning of the sixteenth century (Fig. 88). This is a depiction of the important reliquaries of the treasury of Trier—the illustration shown here is taken from the pilgrimage votive tablet (Wallfahrtsbild) dated 1655. In the upper row, in the extreme right-hand niche, an oliphant is depicted. Its body is ornate, probably carved, with decoration organised in horizontal zones, which is the typical decoration of a specific group of the so-called Byzantine oliphants. Metal feet in the shape of birds' talons are affixed to its body, and an elongated reliquary is attached to the centre of its

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[89] Margherita Guarducci, "Antichi elefanti in Vaticano," *Rendiconti, Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, 51–52(1978–1980), pp. 47–68 (for Grimaldi's description see pp. 48–49, note 3).

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 50, fig. 3; see also Cesare D'Onofrio, *Gli obelischi di Roma* (second ed., Rome, 1967), pl. I, fig. 7.

[91] *Ibid.*, figs. 4, 6.

body.[92] A similar mounting appears on the 'Saracenic' oliphant in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The mounting is datable to the early seventeenth century.

Perhaps the most impressive example of an ivory piece hanging in a European church is the huge mammoth tusk which is displayed in the cathedral of St. Michael in Schwäbish Hall in Germany (Fig. 89). An enormous metal mount is attached to the tusk's body, by which the tusk is hung on the ceiling of the arcade, at the ambulatory, just behind the altar of this church. It should be mentioned that the lavish metal mounting, in which two unicorns within scrolls are depicted, probably intensifies the exotic, marvellous or even magical aspects usually associated with ivory horns in the church treasuries of Europe.

It is likely that some oliphants might have been kept in specially made leather cases, similar to the medieval leather cases made for holding enamelled glass beakers.[93] The oliphant of the Metropolitan Museum in New York (04.3.177) used to be kept in such a leather case (Plate XV). It is quite large—it measures 49.5 cm in length—and the opening measures 14 cm in diameter. The case has a dark, warm-brown colour and is decorated with a stamped pattern of scrolls consisting of large acanthus leaves. The decoration recalls French stamped leatherwork of the fifteenth century; a similar stamped leather case is also kept in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Fletcher Fund, 1924, 24.135.3). The latter is datable to the fifteenth century and bears the arms of the bishopric of Langres. Two small leather loops at the upper zone of the case were probably used for securing an additional leather cover with the help of a relatively thin, elongated lash.

It must also be mentioned that some oliphants served several functions on specific occasions. For example, on the mourning days of the Passion, mainly on the last three days before Good Friday, monks refrained from using bells and instead blew oliphants.[94] A similar function is associated with the 'Saracen' oliphant, the so-called horn

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[92] *Rhein und Maas: Kunst und Kultur 800–1400*, exhibition catalogue, p. 141, fig. VIIIj.

[93] Avioam Shalem, "Some speculations on the original cases made to contain Islamic enamelled beakers for export," *Gilded and Enamelled Glass from the Middle East*, ed. Rachel Ward (London, 1998), pp. 64–68.

[94] Bock, "Über den Gebrauch der Hörner im Alterthum", p. 142.

of St. Orens from Auch (Fig. 28),[95] and with the horns of the Guelph Treasure in Brunswick, the so-called 'St. Blasius' Horns'.[96] Monks' use of oliphants for calling believers to prayer or services on specific occasions, might be illustrated in a stone relief of the twelfth-century cloister of the church of Santo Domingo in Silos in Burgos (Fig. 90).[97] In this relief, which decorates a corner pillar in the cloister, a monk with relatively long hair and a beard sounds a horn held in his right hand. The size of the horn and its raising bands at its lower and upper zones suggest that this horn is an oliphant.

According to some inventories, sacred oil was carried in horns on Maundy Thursday and then used for specific purposes. The different names with which this oil is labelled, "oleum infirmorum", "oleum catechumenorum" and "sanctum chrisma", suggest that the oil poured from horns was used for the final unction, baptism and confirmation.[98]

## IV. *The Magical Horn: Folk Tales Associated with Oliphants*

Many curious and eccentric objects were collected in medieval church treasuries.[99] Several oliphants were probably accepted as 'marvels of nature'. Their exotic provenance and astonishing decoration, which consists of fantastic and wild animals, probably intensified their eccentric appearance and thus captured the imagination of medieval beholders. It is therefore hardly surprising that very soon, almost immediately after their acceptance, legends became associated with them.

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[95] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 76; Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, cat. no. 115, fig. 30.

[96] William M. Milliken, "The acquisition of six objects from the Guelph Treasure for the Cleveland Museum of Art," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 17(1930), p. 169.

[97] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 7, fig. 11. See also Meyer Schapiro, "From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos," *The Art Bulletin* 21(1939), pp. 312–374 (fig. 17). Another depiction of a monk blowing an oliphant appears on the wall of the south porch of the church of Moissac, see Meyer Schapiro, "The Romanesque Sculpture of Moissac. Part I (2)," *The Art Bulletin* 13(1931), pp. 464–531, fig. 140.

[98] Bock, "Über den Gebrauch der Hörner im Alterthum," pp. 142–3. Unfortunately Bock does not provide us with the specific medieval inventories which mention these rituals on Maundy Thursday.

[99] Schlosser, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaissance; The origins of museums, the cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe* ed. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, (Oxford, 1985). See also Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in motion: An introduction to the history and functions of museums* (Nashville, 1979).

Their most outstanding feature was the peculiar or even magic sound they produced. This was already stressed in the *Chanson de Roland*—the origin of the western idea of the oliphant—wherein Roland's oliphant is said to have had an individually recognisable sound.[100] Indeed, generally speaking, the peculiar sound of horns was normally associated with a unique power which causes something to appear or to happen. The Jewish horn *shofar*, which is usually made of a curved ram's horn, and which in ancient times was used to mark wars and special religious feasts, is blown up to the present day on the Day of Atonement. Its blast is traditionally believed to cause the Gates of Heaven to be opened and thus to enable prayers of repentance to approach God. The magic power of the sound of the *shofar* was also known from the story of the conquest of Jericho (Joshua,6), in which it is related that the sound of seven ram's horns caused the town walls to collapse. In northern mythology the Gods are supposed to be awakened by the sound of a horn.[101] Hence, in the medieval popular song *Le Pélerinage de Charlemagne*, the palace of the Emperor Hugon of Constantinople was adorned with two figures of smiling youths, each holding an ivory horn. As soon as a strong wind started to blow, the horns sounded, and the palace began to rotate.[102] Another popular late medieval legend was that of Gog and Magog. In some versions of this story, it was related that Alexander the Great installed two horns on the metal gate behind which Gog and Magog were enclosed. The horns, resounding in the wind, caused Gog and Magog to believe that Alexander and his army were there, guarding the exit.[103] This legend, associating the sound of horns with Gog and Magog, who, according to Christian and Jewish apocalyptic literature, will manifest themselves immediately before the end

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[100] *The Song of Roland*, 85 (cap. 1768).

[101] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 6.

[102] Margaret Schlauch, "The Palace of Hugon de Constantinople," *Speculum* 7(1932), p. 500.

[103] Andrew R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), pp. 83–5; Charles E. Wilson, "The Wall of Alexander against Gog and Magog and the expedition sent out to find it by Khalif Wathiq in 842 AD," *Friedrich Hirth Anniversary Volume, Asia Major*, (London, 1922), pp. 575–612. An illustration, though probably of a later date, appears in the *Daqā'iq al-Haqā'iq*, which was completed in April 1272 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS pers. 174, Folio 100v), see Marianne Barrucand, "The miniatures of the *Daqā'iq al-haqā'iq* (Bibliothèque Nationale Pers. 174): a testimony to the cultural diversity of Medieval Anatolia," *Islamic Art* 4(1990–91), fig. 31. See also Afif Alvarez Bulos, *Handbook of Arabic Music* (Beirut, 1971), p. 50.

of the world (Rev. 20), recalls the widespread idea of the two trumpets of the Last Judgement.[104]

It is worth mentioning in this context that, in both of the medieval French versions of Roland's epos, there are direct references for the similarity between the biblical story of the fall of Jericho and the historical events concerning the Arab conquest of Spain. In these versions, as already mentioned in chapter six, Roland is compared to Joshua, the city of Jericho to the city of Saragossa and the seven horns of Joshua to the oliphant of Roland and to the seven trumpets of the angels mentioned in the apocalyptic vision of St. John.[105]

Indeed, in many medieval Christian representations of this scene, especially those of the Romanesque period, two angels blow huge horn-shaped trumpets, which are most probably oliphants.[106] This could indicate that some oliphants might have been associated with the trumpets of the Last Judgement. For example, an angel blowing a huge horn, which is undoubtedly an oliphant, appears on the tympanum of the cathedral of Autun (c. 1125, Fig. 91). The horn has the typical shape of an ivory horn. Its body is smooth, and narrow decorative bands appear on its lower and upper zones. The horn from Autun strongly recalls the oliphant from the Fine Arts Museum in Boston (Fig. 37).[107] Another example is to be seen on a fragment of a stone relief which once decorated the central part of

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[104] The trumpets blown by angels on the Last Judgement Day are frequently depicted as huge elephant horns. See, for example, the illustrations of the Bamberger Apocalypse (Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, Msc. Bibl. 140). The illustrated manuscript was probably made in Reichenau around 1010; see *Die Bamberger Apokalypse*, ed. Gude Suckale-Redlefsen and Bernhard Schemmel, vol. I: Faksimile and vol. II: Kommentar (Luzern, 2001). See also Reinhold Hammerstein, *Die Musik der Engel* (Munich, 1962).

[105] Raimund Rütten, *Symbol und Mythus im altfranzösischen Rolandslied* (Brunswick, 1970), p. 62; see also Hammerstein, *Musik der Engel*, especially pp. 205–214. For a unique thirteenth-century depiction of the distribution of the apocalyptic trumpets, in which each trumpet is individually decorated and strongly recalls a carved tusk, see the MS Ludwig III. I, fol. 10 in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California, which is also illustrated in Suzanne Lewis, *Reading Images: Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 94, fig. 57.

[106] See for example, the trumpet-blowing angels on the tympanum of the church of Neuilly-en-Donjon (c. 1130), on the arched vault of the tympanum of the church of St. Trophime in Arles (c. 1170), on the tympanum of the cathedral of Autun (c. 1125), on that of the church of Sainte-Foy in Conques (c. 1140), or on that of the abbey at Beaulieu (c. 1130–5). Most of these examples are illustrated in Millard F. Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture* (Oxford, 1981), figs. 134, 136–37.

[107] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 52. See also Swarzenski, "Two Oliphants in the Museum," passim.

the western facade of the cathedral of Paris (Notre Dame de Paris). The relief, which was probably made between 1210 and 1240, is kept at present in the Musée National des Thermes et de l'Hôtel de Cluny in Paris (Fig. 92). One of the angels holds in his hand a relatively big horn, which is indeed an oliphant. The horn has a smooth facetted body, and it is likely that a narrow decorative band runs around its large opening. The horn strongly recalls the oliphant which was most probably once kept in the treasury of St.-Denis in Paris and which is at present in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Fig. 46).[108] It might be suggested then that the artisan who decorated the western facade of Notre Dame de Paris, drew upon a specific oliphant he knew for the depiction of the trumpet of the Last Judgement. Moreover, it illustrates again that oliphants were associated with this specific apocalyptic scene.

It should be pointed out that some oliphants were actually used as blowing horns in medieval monasteries. Tradition tells that the Byzantine oliphant from Angers was given to the Abbey of St. Florent-le-Vieil by a Norman nobleman, who promised that a raid for plunder or any other Norman attack could be avoided if the sound of his oliphant was heard.[109] He explained that the attacking Norman forces would recognise the unique sound of his oliphant and withdraw in fear.[110] As mentioned above, some oliphants were even blown on the mourning days of the Passion, particularly on the last three days before Good Friday, when the ringing of bells was forbidden. But, unfortunately, the meaning of sounding oliphants on these special days is not known.

There is a vague possibility that in a few cases oliphants were associated with the claws of the griffin. The griffin was a famous legendary animal in the medieval West; in Hellenistic antiquity, these animals were the sacred creatures which drew the chariot of Apollo. But in the late Middle Ages, they were also known as the fabulous animals guarding the gold of India, or as the mighty birds, which can carry an elephant through the air.[111] Numerous antelope horns

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[108] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, cat. no. 56. See also *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*, exhibition catalogue, cat. no. 20.

[109] For this oliphant, see mainly *Ornamenta Ecclesiae, Kunst und Künstler der Romanik*, exhibition catalogue, vol. 3, cat. no. H 13A (with extensive bibliography).

[110] Cited by Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 6, note 5.

[111] For the association of the griffin with the mighty bird which carries an elephant through the air, see Marco Polo, *The Travels*, trans. R. Latham (London,

collected in medieval church treasuries were exhibited to the public as griffin claws.[112] The horns are usually shaped as drinking horns. They are lavishly mounted and are usually supported by eagles' feet. The seventeenth-century silver mounting of the so-called 'Blackburn oliphant' in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, suggests that this might also have been associated with the claw of the griffin.[113] The oliphant is displayed on a silver leg with a clawed foot, probably an eagle's foot. The latter is attached to the upper part of the oliphant's body by a silver band fixed around the recessed area.

Although the oliphants were first and foremost associated with the famous epic of Roland, the medieval legend of the Magic Horn, which tells us of a specific event evolving an ivory horn (*cor d'yvoir*), is no less important and should be mentioned in this study. The story appears in numerous Arthurian legends, and, despite its popularity from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, it has so far received little scholarly attention. The tale appeared for the first time in an Old French document—the poem *Lai du Cor*, which was written by a Norman author in England probably in the third quarter of the twelfth century. Heller, who discusses the development of this medieval tale,[114] tells us its essence:

> The action takes place on Absolution Day at Carlion where 30,000 knights with their ladies are assembled at King Arthur's court for a feast. While they are waiting for dinner a young squire arrives on horseback; as a gift from his master, King Mangons de Moraine, he presents the king with a wonderful ivory horn, made by a fairy. Before receiving his reward, the messenger departs hurriedly. The king orders his chaplain to read aloud the inscription which the horn bears. Reluctantly the latter makes known that no man whose wife ever has been faithless or even has harbored a faithless desire may drink from the horn without spilling its contents. The king immediately decides on taking the test, and spills the wine with which it is filled. In his sudden anger he threatens the queen with a knife, but his knights pre-

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1958), pp. 300–301; see also, Rudolf Wittkower, "'Roc': an Eastern Prodigy in a Dutch Engraving," in *idem*, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London, 1977), pp. 94–96.

[112] The famous 'claw of a griffin' is in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (inv. no. 28). See *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*, exhibition catalogue, cat. no. 41; see also Heinrich Kohlhaussen, *Nürnberger Goldschmiedekunst des Mittelalters und der Dürerzeit 1240 bis 1540* (Berlin, 1968), pp. 138–141.

[113] Kühnel, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, p. 63, cat. no. 81.

[114] Edmund K. Heller, "The Story of the Magic Horn: A Study in the Development of a Medieval Folk Tale," *Speculum* 9(1934), pp. 38–50.

> vent him from injuring her. Thereupon he makes all of his knights take the test, and all of them fail like their royal master, with the exception of Caradoc, who drinks without spilling a drop after his beautiful wife has encouraged him. He is awarded the horn, and all guests take leave and return to their homes.[115]

The relatively big size of oliphants render it almost impossible to drink out of them without spilling the drink. But the fame of this tale in the High Middle Ages, and particularly its popularity in Norman England, suggests that some ivory horns might have been regarded as having magical power. It has been argued that this tale was written in the third quarter of the twelfth century in an English Norman context.[116] Thus, the wild and fabulous animals carved on the bodies of the majority of the oliphants might have enhanced this popular thought.[117]

[115] Heller, "Magic Horn," p. 38.
[116] Ibid.
[117] For further discussion on medieval popular thought concerning oliphants see Ásdís R. Magnúsdóttir, *La voix du cor* (Amsterdam, Atlanta, 1998).

# EPILOGUE

This book has highlighted the specific group of carved ivory tusks known in the literature as the 'Saracenic' oliphants: that is, oliphants whose style strongly evokes the eleventh-century art of Fatimid Egypt. It has attempted to show that the research done so far on the medieval oliphants usually excluded a detailed stylistic study of these artefacts. Thus, the oliphants were generally classified into groups according to the composition and iconography of the decoration carved on their bodies. This brought about a confusion. A typology method of arrangement was confused with a stylistic classification. Moreover, no attempt was made to tackle as a whole the complex historical context involved in the making, use and re-use of the medieval oliphants.

Taking into consideration their specific style of carving, the vocabulary of motifs and even their distinctive shapes, the oliphants fall into at least three main groups. The first group—the largest—should be assigned to one of the medieval ivory carving centres of the Mediterranean basin, most likely to a region ruled by the Fatimids or at least strongly influenced by Fatimid carving style. The second group was probably manufactured in Egypt, most probably in Cairo, and several oliphants of this group might be dated to as early as the tenth century. The third group, also influenced by Fatimid style, is possibly attributed to Norman Sicily.

In the late eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, oliphants were sought-after items in the Latin West, which any valiant knight was proud to have. Several of them were associated with the oliphant of Roland; the oliphant became one of the attributes of a hero. This might explain the production of the majority of them during the Crusade era.

Their secular phase was relatively short. Most of them soon reached church treasuries and were mainly used as relic containers. They were regarded as exotic items and many legends were told about their magic sound. These legends and traditions associating them with famous figures fostered their popularity in the West.

The oliphants discussed in this book—and this should be clearly stressed—form only the third part of the whole group of medieval

oliphants, all of which were manufactured during the tenth, eleventh, twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. That means that this book has deliberately presented a specific view of the medieval oliphants: it is concerned with those oliphants strongly related to Fatimid carved ivories and wood work. Clearly, such an approach is as biased and incomplete as the one dealing only with the European or the Byzantine oliphants, excluding those discussed here. Moreover, and surprising as it may seem, the other stylistic groups of medieval oliphants, be they European or the so-called Byzantine, are also related to the oliphants discussed here. In that sense, it seems crucial to discuss the whole group of oliphants together. However, this task is beyond the remit of this book and is the subject of several other books; this broader approach will be taken in the author's forthcoming corpus of the medieval oliphants. What is offered here are thoughts on the process of manufacturing, use and re-use of oliphants in the Middle Ages. In sum, it is an attempt to interpret them in a historical and social context.

And yet, it must be admitted that the oliphants' hybrid character renders it sometimes impossible to distinguish between the different cultural contexts in which they were made. It seems therefore that it is not only East and West, namely Levant and Latin West, but also South and North, namely North Africa and South Italy, which are intermingled in this hybrid group of artefacts.

# COLOUR PLATES



Plate I. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art, inv. no. K. 3106 (courtesy: Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin).



Plate II. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no.04.3.177 (photo: Charles T. Little).



Plate III. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Qatar, Sheikh Sa'ud Collection (photo: Bukowiskis, auction house, Stockholm).



Plate IV. Casket, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 17.190.236 (photo: Charles T. Little).

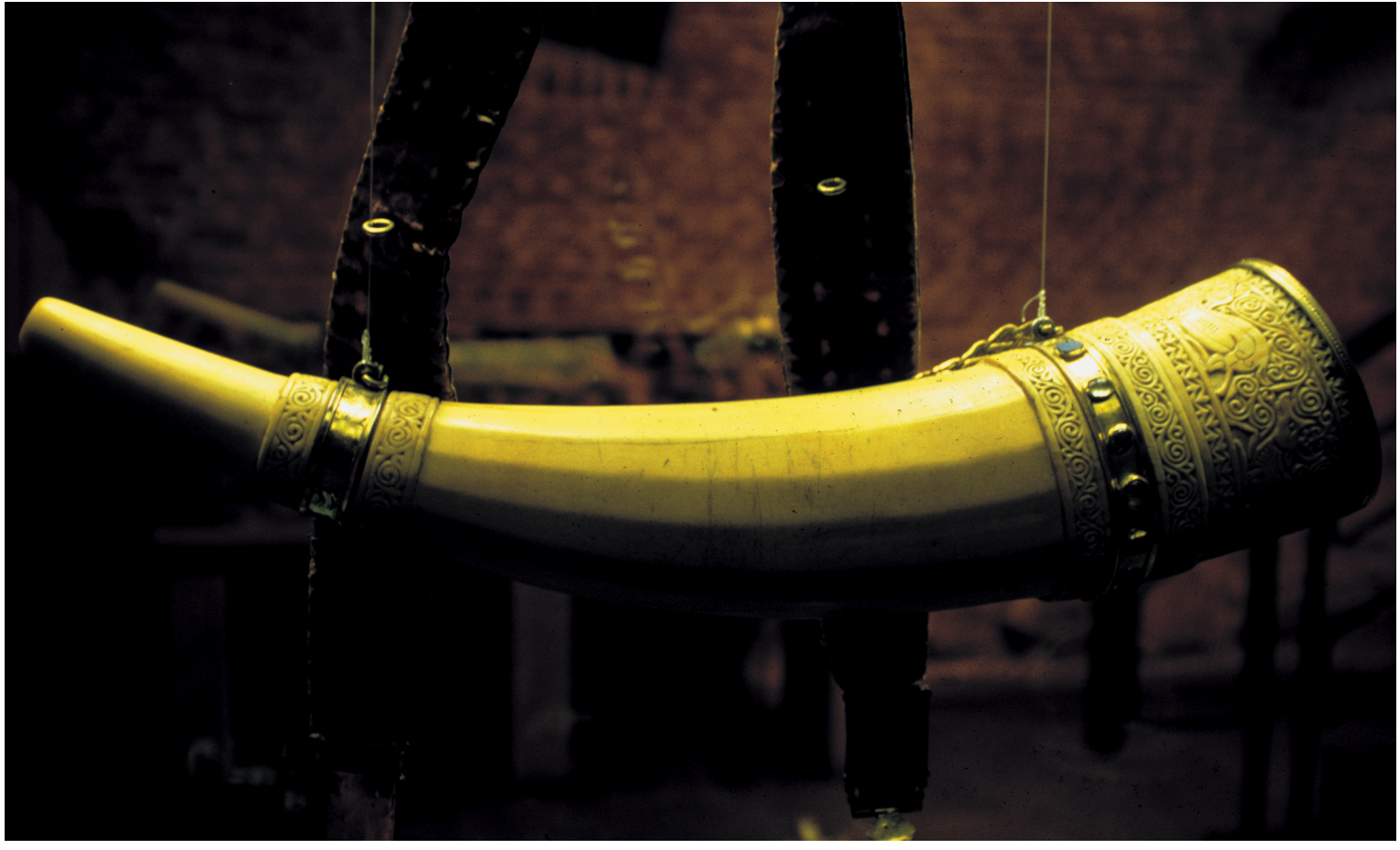

Plate V. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000, Aachen, Palatine Chapel Treasury (photo: Shalem).



Plate VI. Oliphant (detail), Egypt, c. 1000, London, British Museum, inv. no. OA+1302 (courtesy: British Museum).



Plate VII. Oliphant, Fatimid style, Norman Sicily, 12th century, Qatar, Sheikh Saʿud Collection inv. no. IV.11.1998.KU (courtesy: Sheikh Saʿud Collection).



Plate VIII. Casket (detail), Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art, inv. no. K 3101 (courtesy: Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin).



Plate IX. Oliphant (detail), Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art (photo: Shalem).



Plate X. Oliphant (detail), Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Auch, Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie de la Ville d'Auch, inv. no. O.11 (photo: Shalem).



Plate XI. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000 (detail of later carving on the body), Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Museum, inv. no. 1956.562 (photo: Shalem).



Plate XII. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000 (detail of later carving on the body), Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. no. 586 (photo: Shalem).



Plate XIII. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century (detail of later carving on the body), Paris, Musée de l'armée (photo: Shalem).



Plate XIV. Oliphant (detail of the upper zone), Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Paris, Musée de l'armée (photo: Shalem).



Plate XV. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no.04.3.177; its leather case, French, probably 15th century (photo: Charles T. Little).

# BLACK & WHITE ILLUSTRATIONS

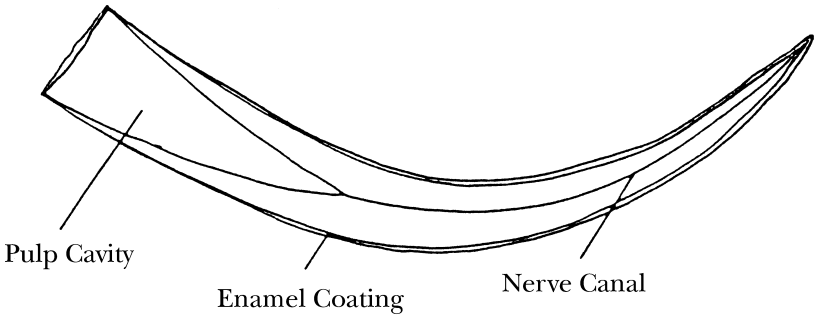


Fig. 1. Drawing of an elephant tusk.



Fig. 2. A huge elephant tusk carried by human porters, c. 1895 (National Archives of Zanzibar).



Fig. 3. An elephant and an ivory worker. 11th-century MS, so-called *Cynegetica* (Cod. Z 479), fol. 36r, Venice, Bibliotheca Marciana.



Fig. 4. Oliphant, upper zone (detail of fig. 37), Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

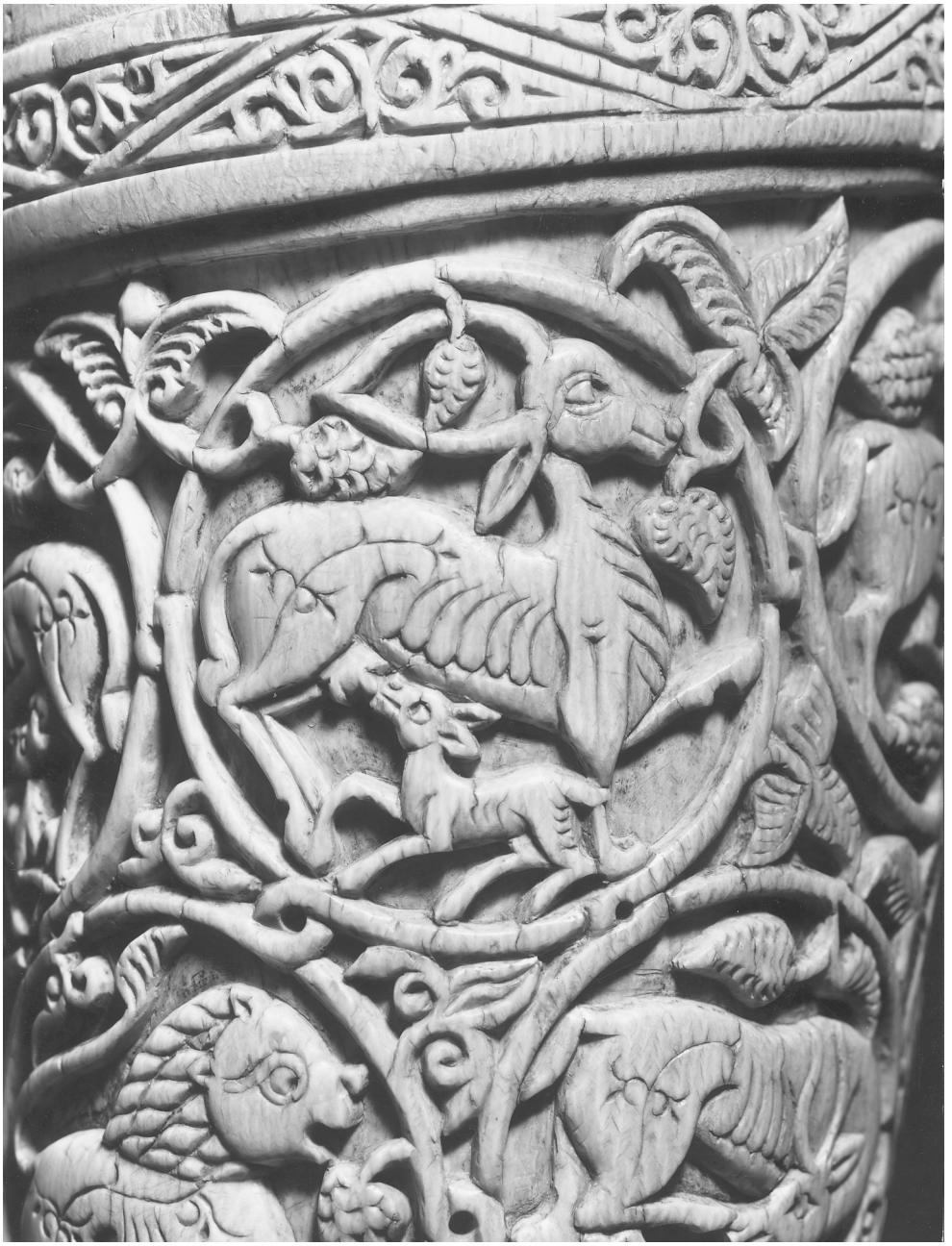

Fig. 5. Oliphant, upper part of the body (detail of fig. 40), Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 6. Oliphant, upper zone (detail of fig. 38), Paris, Louvre (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).




Fig. 7. Oliphant, upper zone (detail), Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Stockholm, Statens Historiska Museum, inv. no. 289 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 8. Oliphant, upper zone (detail of fig. 68), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

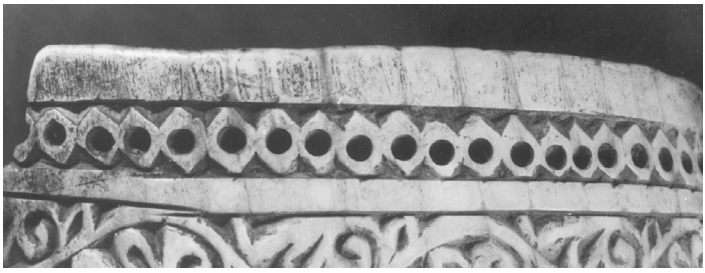

Fig. 9. Oliphant, upper zone (detail of fig. 38), Paris, Louvre (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 10. Oliphant, upper zone (detail), Egypt, c. 1000, Berlin, Deutsches Historisches Museum, inv. no. W 1007 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 11. Oliphant, inner curve section (see also fig. 39), Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 12. Oliphant, upper part of the body (detail of fig. 25), Kuwait, Kuwait National Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 13. Oliphant, upper zone (detail of fig. 31), Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 14. Oliphant, upper zone (detail of fig. 29), Le Puy-en-Velay, Musée Crozatier (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 15. Oliphant, upper zone (detail of fig. 43), Aachen, Palatine Chapel Treasury (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 16. Oliphant, upper zone (detail, see also fig. 10), Berlin, Deutsches Historisches Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 17. Oliphant, upper zone (detail of fig. 43), Aachen, Palatine Chapel Treasury (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

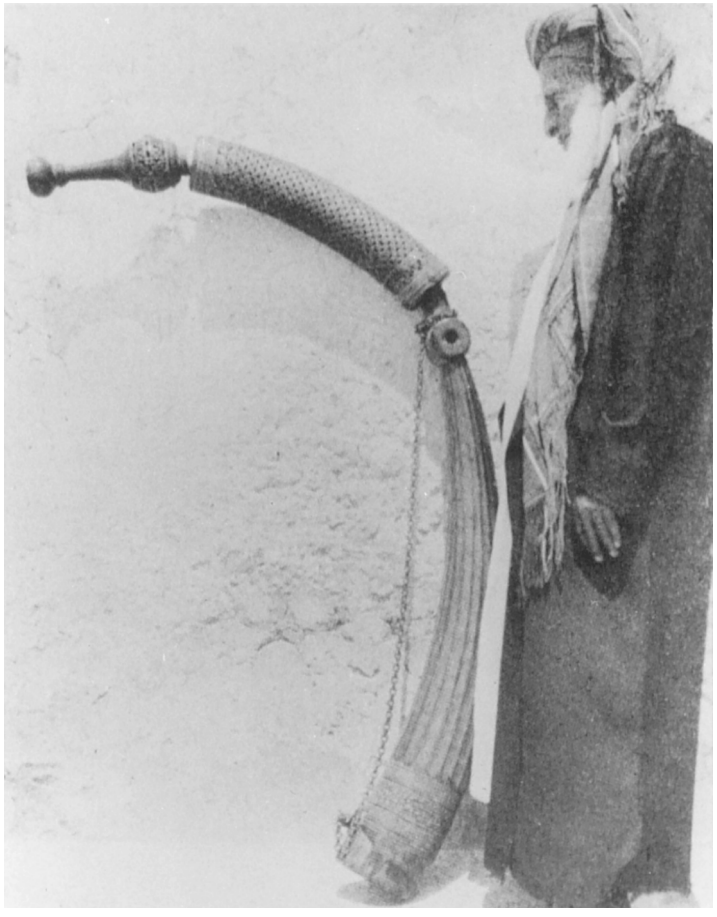

Fig. 18a. Ivory *siwa* of Pate.

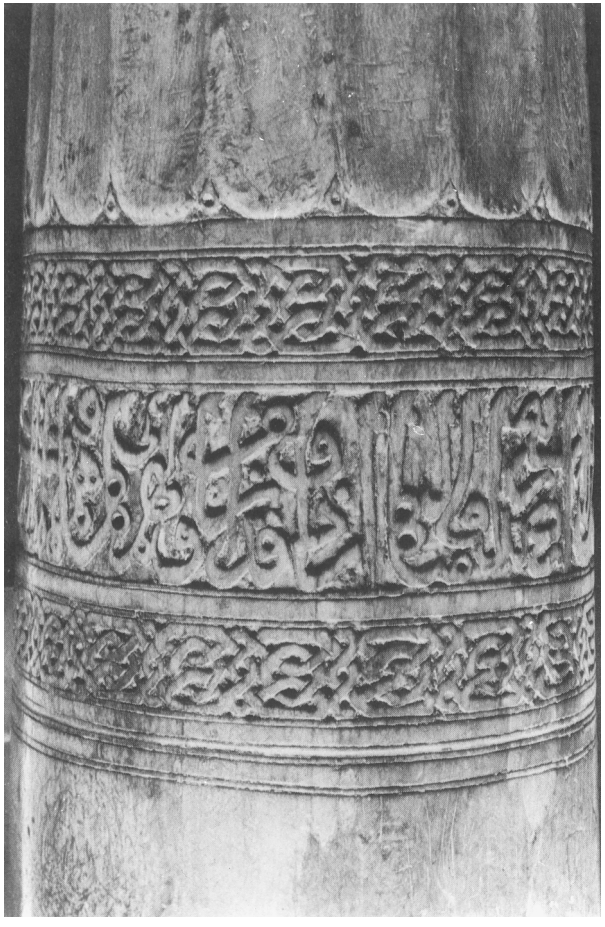

Fig. 18b. Ivory *siwa* of Pate, detail, 17th century (after de Vere Allen).

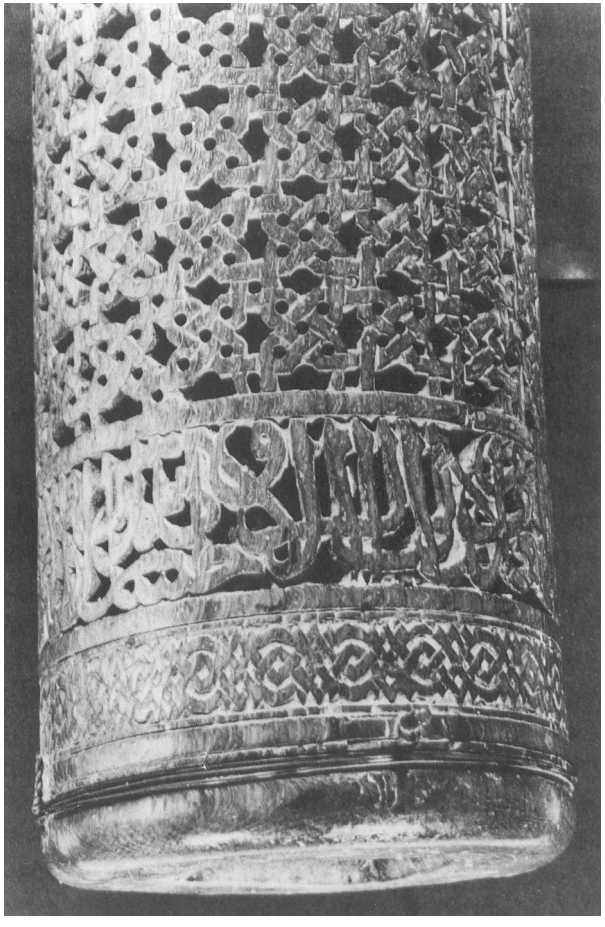



Fig. 19. Plate, gilded silver, central Asia, 9th-10th century, St. Petersburg, Hermitage, inv. no. S 46 (after Suslow).

← Fig. 18c. Ivory *siwa* of Pate, detail, 17th century (after de Vere Allen).



Fig. 20. A turbaned man blowing an oliphant. Casket, lid (detail), Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Maastricht, St. Servatius, Cathedral Treasury, in. no. 27 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

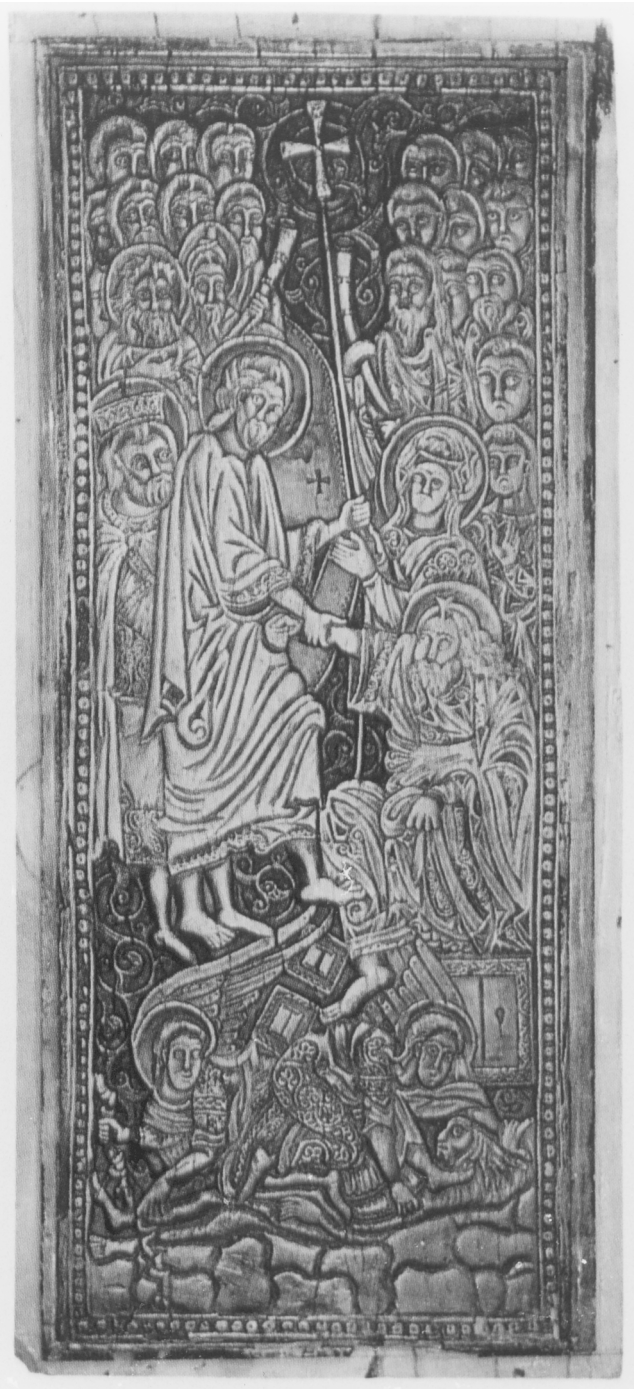

Fig. 21. The Harrowing of Hell. Carved wooden panel, Egypt, c. 1300, London, British Museum, inv. no. MLA 1878 12-3, 9 (after *L'art copte en Egypte*, 2000).



Fig. 22. The Harrowing of Hell. Icon, 1250-1275, Mount Sinai (after Weitzmann 1963).



Fig. 23. Mamluk Blason, fragment, woven wool, late 15th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 1972.120.3 (after Atil).



Fig. 24. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art, inv. no. K. 3106 (courtesy: Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin), see also plate I.



Fig. 25. Oliphant, Kuwait, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Kuwait, Kuwait National Museum, inv. no. LNS 12 I (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

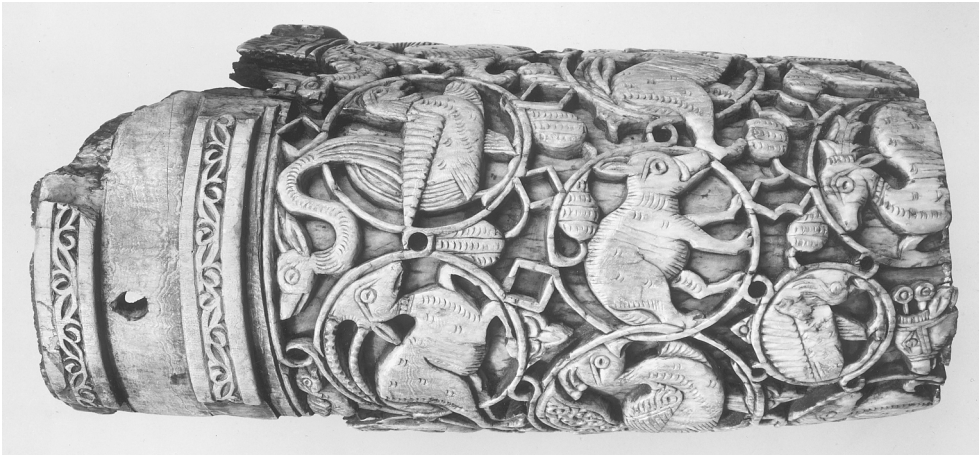

Fig. 26. Oliphant, fragment, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 17.190.219 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

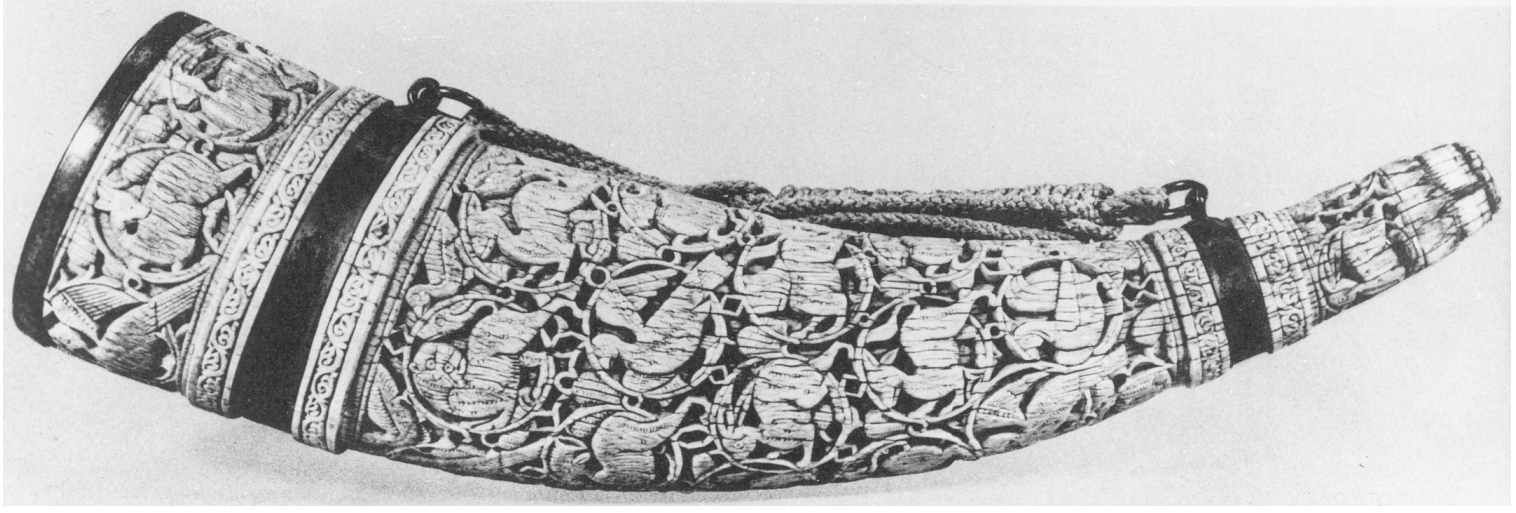

Fig. 27. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Paris, Louvre, inv. no. 1075 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 28. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Auch, Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie de la Ville d'Auch, inv. no. O.11 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin), see also plate X.

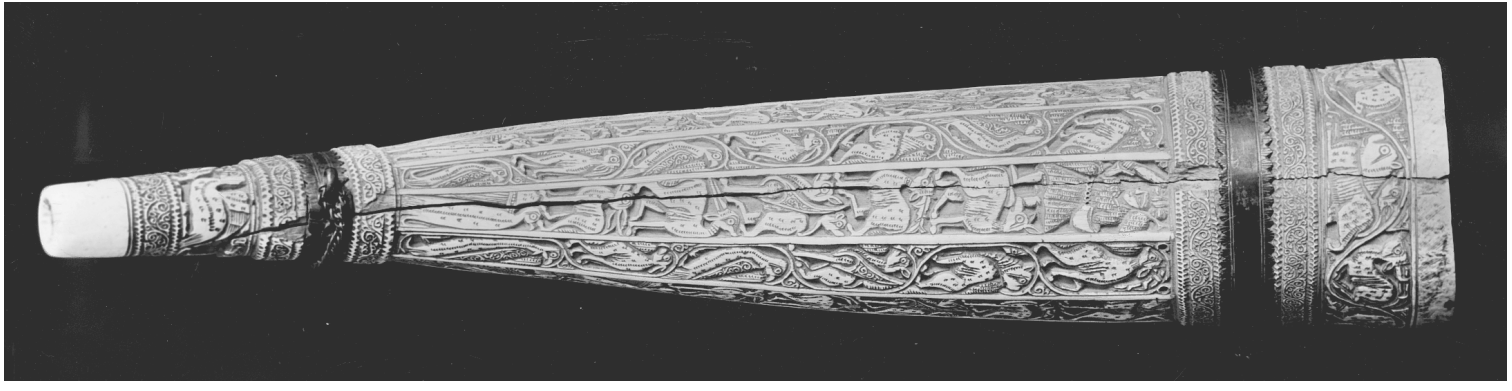

Fig. 29. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Le Puy-en-Velay, Musée Crozatier, inv. no. M 359 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 30. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, inv. no. Avori no. 7 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 31. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, inv. no. MA 107 (courtesy: Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum).



Fig. 32. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Qatar, Sheikh Sa'ud Collection (photo: Bukowiskis, auction house, Stockholm), see also plate III.



Fig. 33. Casket, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art, inv. no. K 3101 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin), see also plate VIII.

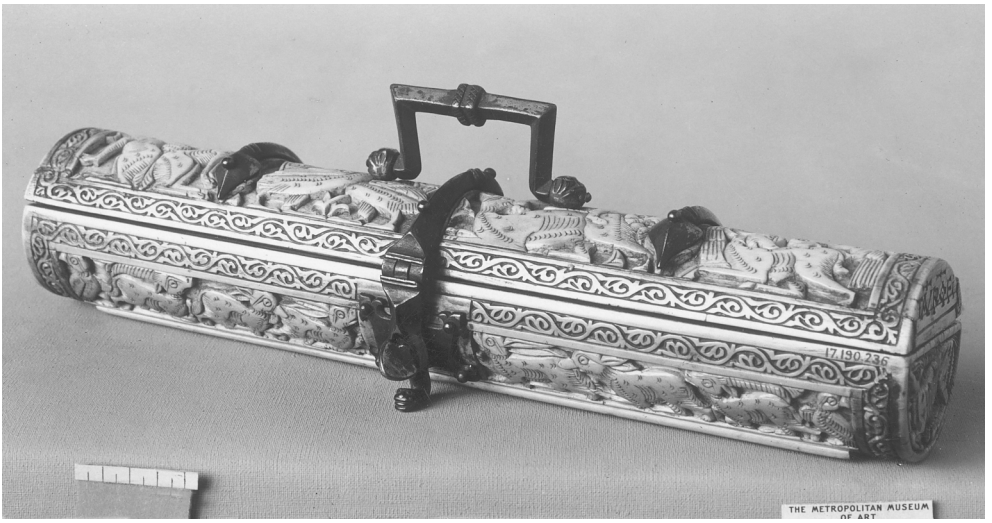


Fig. 34a. Case, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 17.190.236 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin), see also plate IV.






34b–c. Details.



Fig. 35. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, Paris, Musée de l'armée (photo: Goldschmidt Archive, Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin), see also plates XIII, XIV.

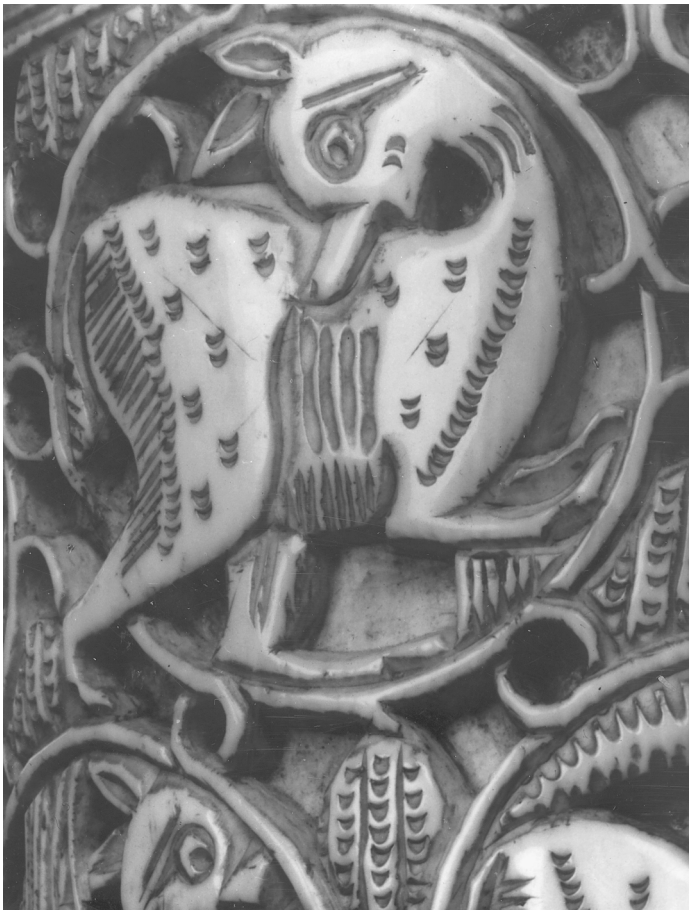

Fig. 36. A medallion with a quadruped, oliphant, (see also fig. 7), Stockholm, Statens Historiska Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 37. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. Acc. 50.3425 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).




Fig. 38. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000, Paris, Louvre, inv. no. O.A. 4069 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 39. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000 (carving on the body probably later), Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, inv. no. 71.234 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

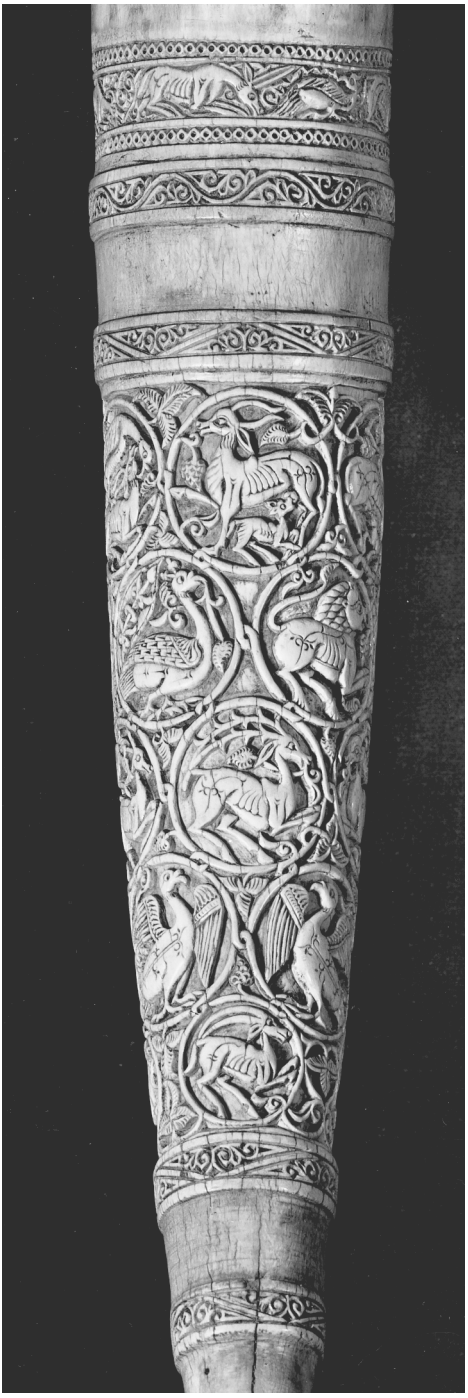

Fig. 40. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000 (carving on the body probably later), Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Museum, inv. no. 1956.562 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin), see also plate XI.

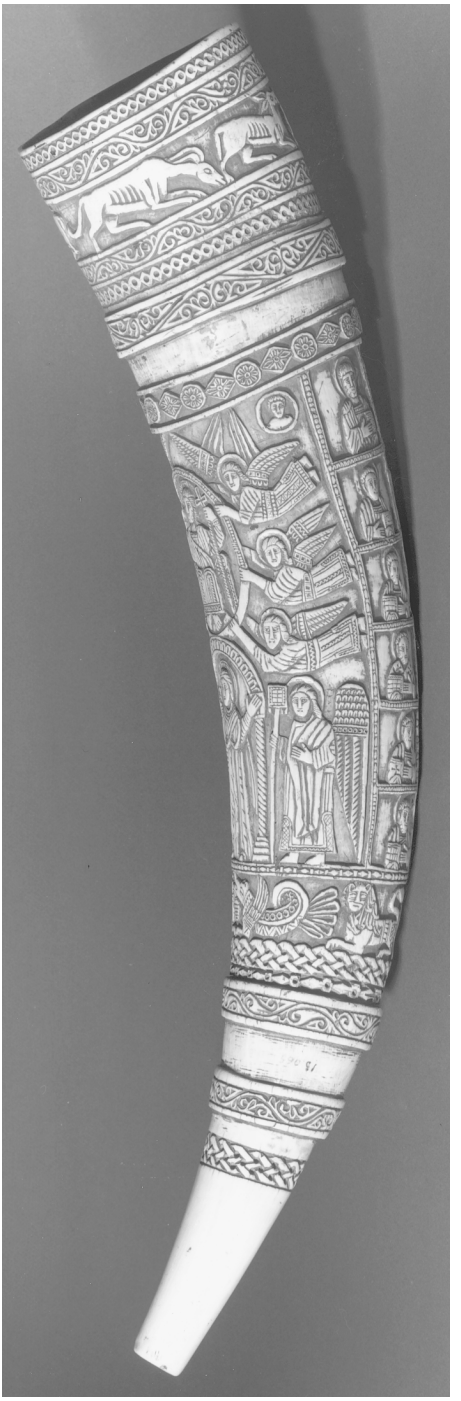

Fig. 41. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000 (carving on the body probably later), Paris, Musée National des Thermes et de l'Hôtel de Cluny, inv. no. CL 13.065 (photo: R.M.N.).



Fig. 42. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000 (carving on the body probably later), Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. no. 586 (courtesy: Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin), see also plate XII.



Fig. 43. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000, Aachen, Palatine Chapel Treasury (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin), see also plate V.

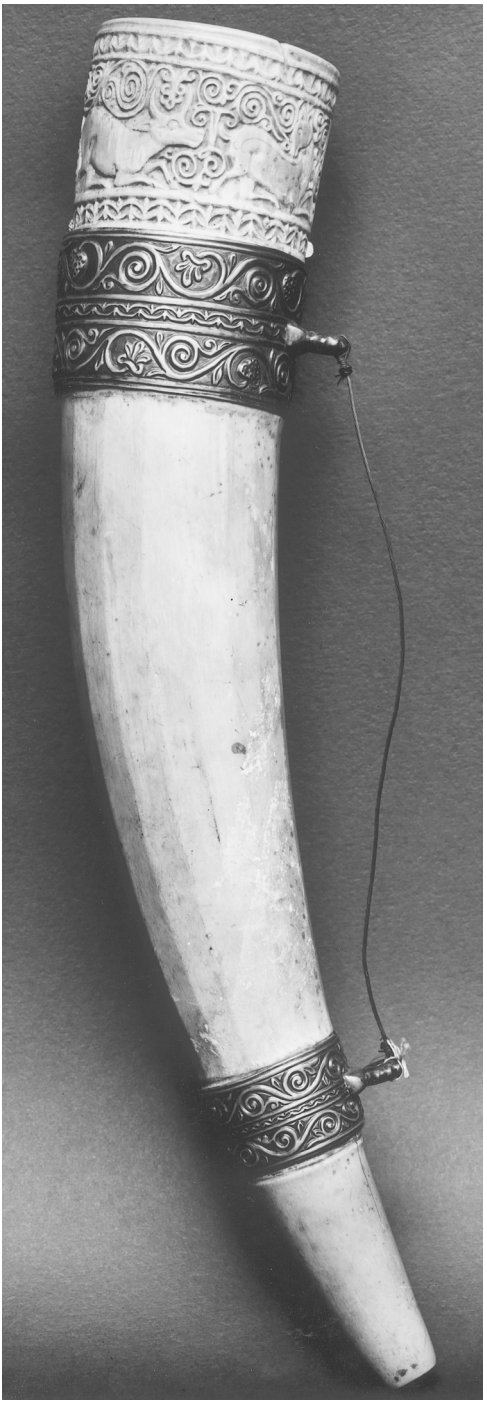

Fig. 44. Oliphant, Egypt, c. 1000, London, British Museum, inv. no. OA+1302 (courtesy: British Museum), see also plate VI.



Fig. 45. Running animal. Oliphant, (detail, see also fig. 10), Berlin, Deutsches Historisches Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



←
Fig. 46. Oliphant, Fatimid style, Norman Sicily, 12th century, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, inv. no. (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

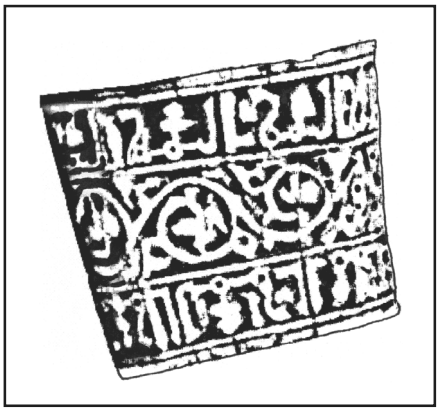

Fig. 47. Arabic inscription on lower zone. Oliphant (drawing, see also plate VII), Fatimid style, Norman Sicily, 12th century, Qatar, Sheikh Sa'ud Collection.



Fig. 48. Oliphant, Fatimid style, Norman Sicily, 12th century, present location unknown, formerly Eduard Gans Collection, Berlin (photo: Goldschmidt Archive, Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin).

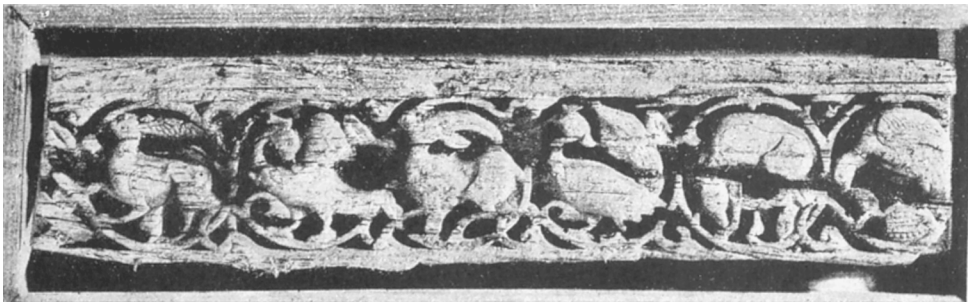

Fig. 49. Running animals in medallions. Carved wooden panel, Egypt, 11th century, Cairo, Fouad I University (photo after Hassan).



Fig. 50. Nativity and Epiphany. Carved wooden panel, Egypt, 10th century, Cairo, Church of Abu Sarga (photo after Volbach and Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte, Byzanz*).



Fig. 51. Harpy. Oliphant (detail of plate II), New York, Metropolitan Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 52. Hunter. Oliphant (detail of plate II), New York, Metropolitan Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

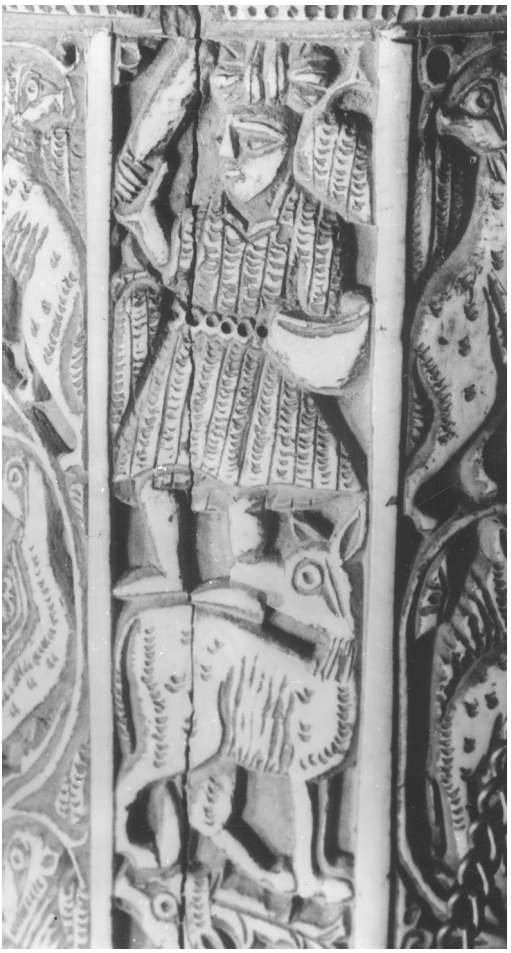

Fig. 53. Hunter. Oliphant (detail of fig. 29), Le Puy-en-Velay, Musée Crozatier (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 54. Guard. Casket (detail, see also fig. 20), Maastricht, St. Servatius, Cathedral Treasury (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).




Fig. 55. Saints Philip and James. Ivory plaque, South Italy, 11th century, New York, Rabenou Collection (photo after Bergman).



Fig. 56. Annunciation to the shepherds. Detail of the right side panel of the "Farfa Casket", Ivory, South Italy, 1071-75, Farfa, Abbey Treasury (photo after Bergman).




Fig. 57. Christ enthroned. Ivory plaque, South Italy, 11th century, Rome, Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica, inv. no. 1163 (photo after Fillitz).

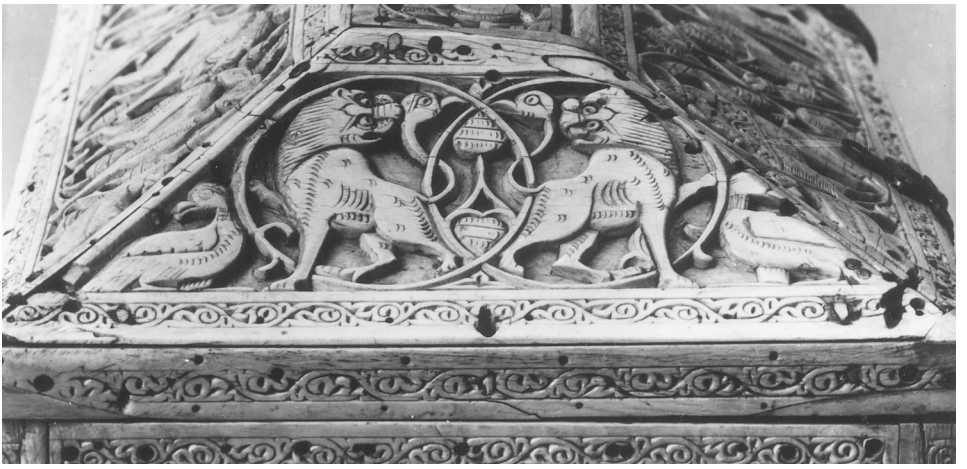

Fig. 58. Two lions in medallions, (see also fig. 33), Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

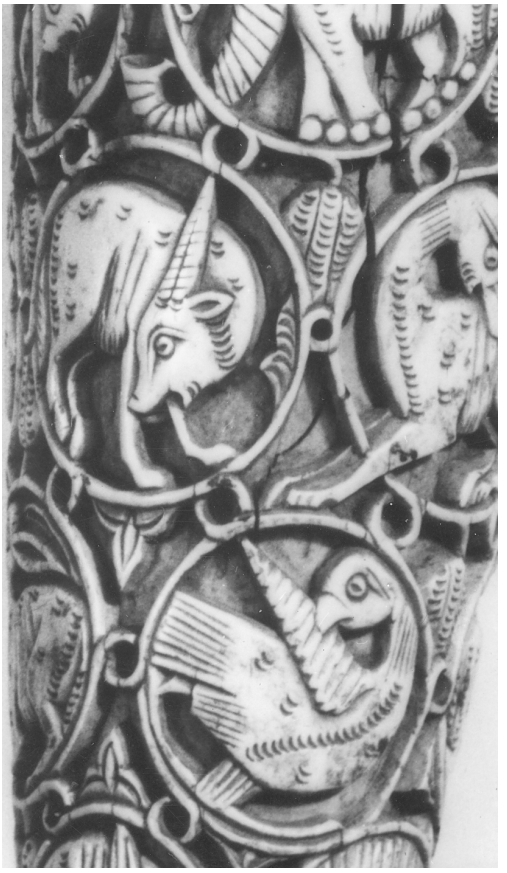

Fig. 58a. Animals in medallions, (see also plate II), New York, Metropolitan Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 59. Hunting scene in medallions, (see also fig. 33), Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 60. Hunting scene in medallions. Detail of the lid of an ivory casket, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century, New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 17.190.241 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 61. The lid of an ivory casket (see fig. 33), Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin), see also plate VIII.



Fig. 62. Gazelles within scrolls. Carved wooden panel, late Abbasid or early Fatimid, c. 1000, Cairo, Islamic Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

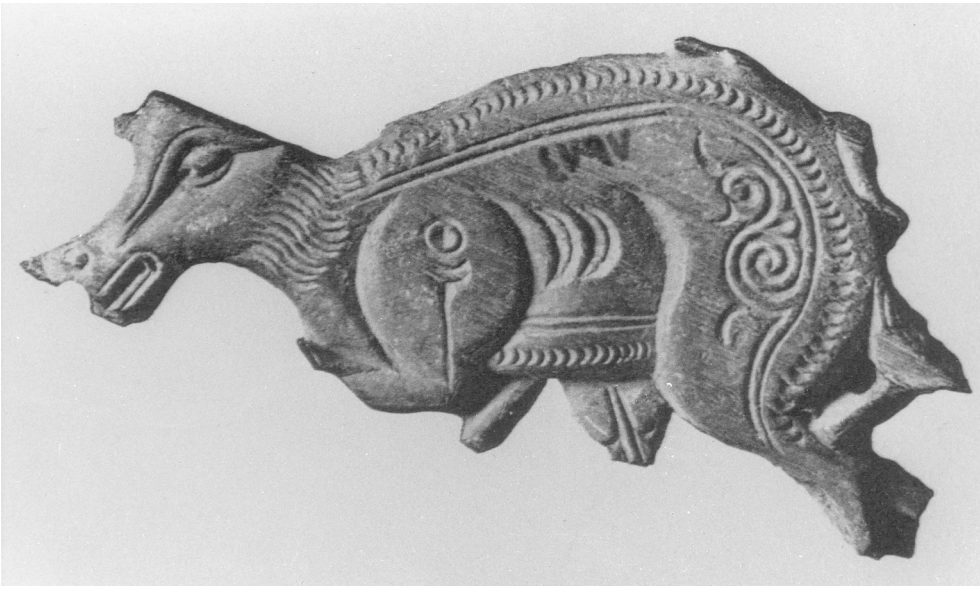

Fig. 63. Quadruped. Carved wooden panel, Fatimid, 11th century, Cairo, Islamic Museum, inv. no. 4797 (photo after Pauty).



Fig. 64. Gazelle within a star. Carved wood, Fatimid, 11th century, Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art, inv. no. I. 1649 (courtesy: Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin).



Fig. 65. Sphinx. Oliphant (detail of fig. 46), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 66. Oliphant, upper decorative bands, (details of fig. 48), formerly Gans Collection, (photo: Goldschmidt Archive, Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin).



Fig. 67. Carved wooden panels of the ceiling of the Palazzo Reale in Palermo, Fatimid Style, Norman Sicily 12th century, Palermo, Galleria Regionale (after Giuseppe Bellafiore, *Architettura in Sicilia nelle Età Islamica e Normanna*, Palermo 1990).



Fig. 68. Olifant, Fatimid style, perhaps Norman Sicily, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. 4072 (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 69. Olifant, Fatimid style, perhaps Norman Sicily, Lugano, Baroness E. von Buch Collection, (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

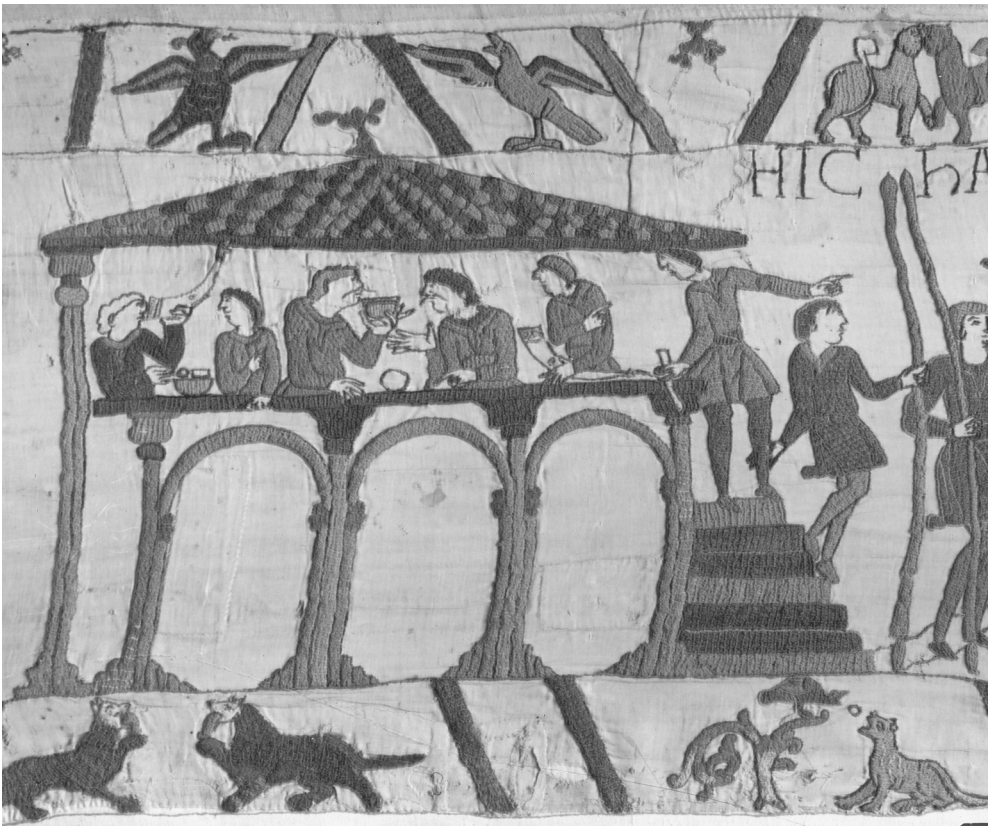


Fig. 70. Harold's Feast at Bosham, (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1100, Bayeux, Centre Guillaume le Conquérant (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

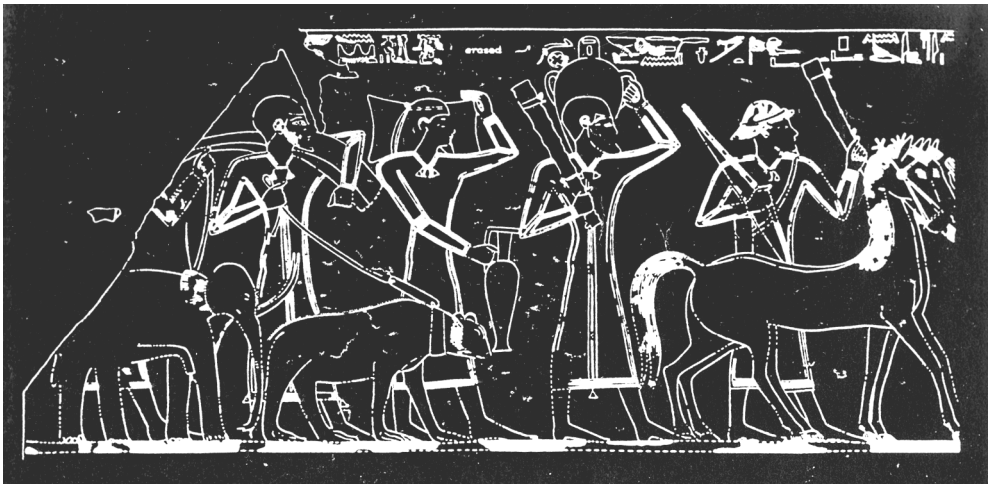


Fig. 71. Syrian men bringing tributes. Wall painting, 15th century BC, Tomb of Rekhmire, near Luxor, Egypt (after Barnett).



Fig. 72. So called Barberini Diptych, Ivory, Constantinople 527 AD, Paris, Louvre, inv. no. OA. 9063 (courtesy: Hirmer Fotoarchiv).



Fig. 73. Personifications of the Four Provinces of the Imperium, miniature, Flavius Josephus, *De Bello Judaico*, Reichenau, end of 10th century, Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek Msc. Class. 79, fol. 1v (courtesy: Staatsbibliothek Bamberg).

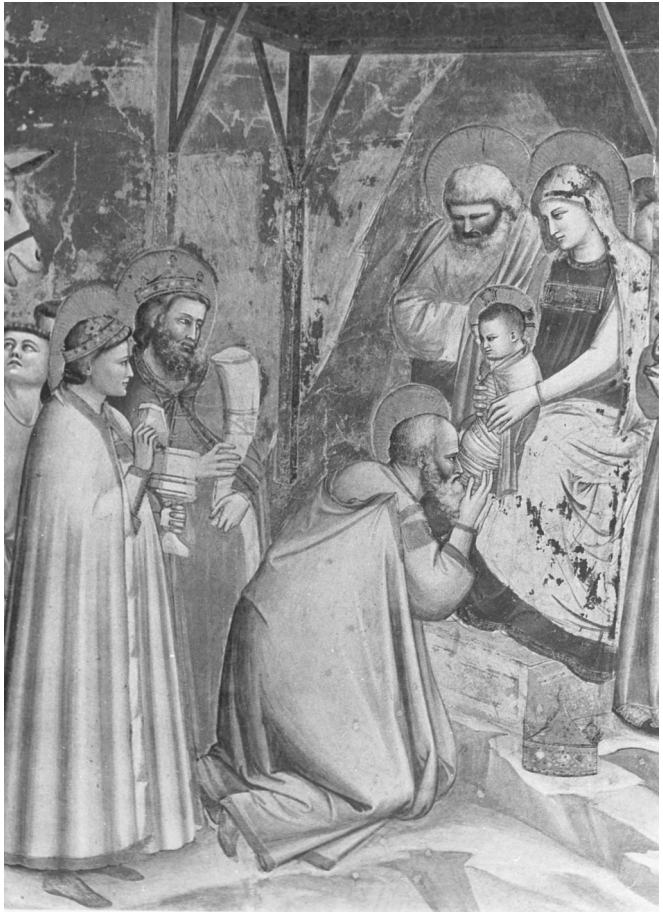

Fig. 74. Giotto, Adoration of the Magi (detail). Wall painting, c. 1303-05, Padua, Arena Chapel (after C. Semenzato, *Giotto: la Cappella degli Scrovegni*, Florence 1965).



Fig. 75. Intertwined snakes, (see also fig. 31), Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 76. Muslim warriors blowing horns, *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*, drawing, 12th century, Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek cod. pal. Germ. 112, fol. 80v (courtesy: Universitätsbibliothek, Heidelberg).

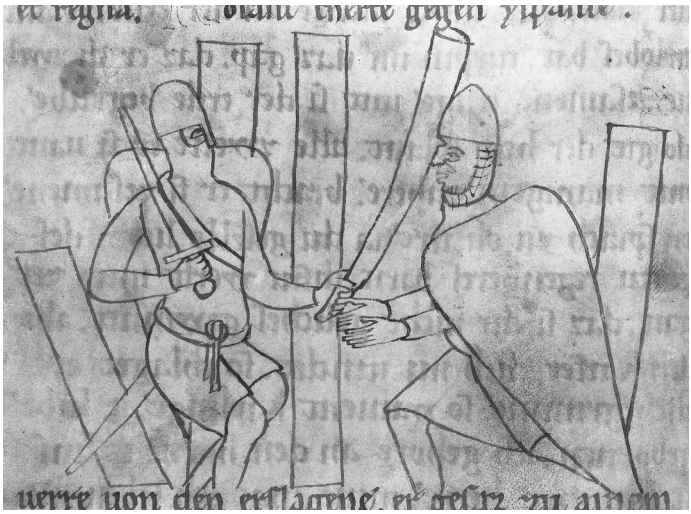

Fig. 77. Roland fighting against a Saracen, *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*, drawing, 12th century, Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek cod. pal. Germ. 112, fol. 93v (courtesy: Universitätsbibliothek, Heidelberg).



Fig. 78. Oliphant, Fatimid style, perhaps Norman Sicily, 12th century, Arles, St. Trophime, Treasury (after *Les Andalousies: de Damas à Cordoue)*.





Fig. 80. Transport of an elephant tusk. Ivory panel (once mounted on the lid of the reliquary casket of San Millan), Spain, c. 1070. Formerly Berlin, Kaiser Friedrich Museum, inv. no. 3088 (courtesy: Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin).

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Fig. 79. King Bermudo hands over his testament, *Libro de los Testamentos*, miniature, 1126/29, Oviedo, Cathedral Treasury (after Bordona).

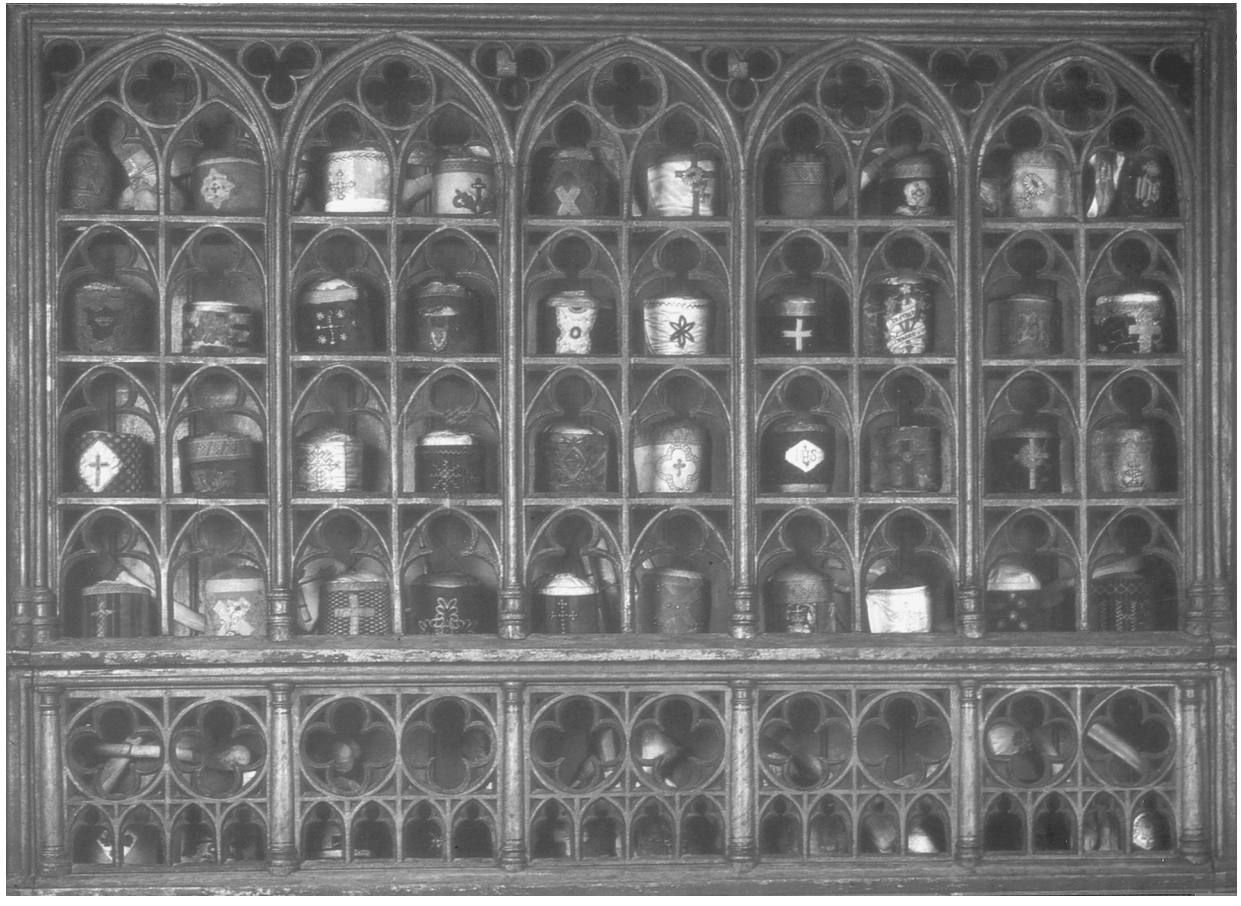

Fig. 81. Relic cupboard, wood, Cologne, c. 1300, Cologne, Cathedral (after Legner).



Fig. 82. Marble relief, 14th century, Venice, S. Marco, Treasury (after *Der Schatz von San Marco in Venedig*).

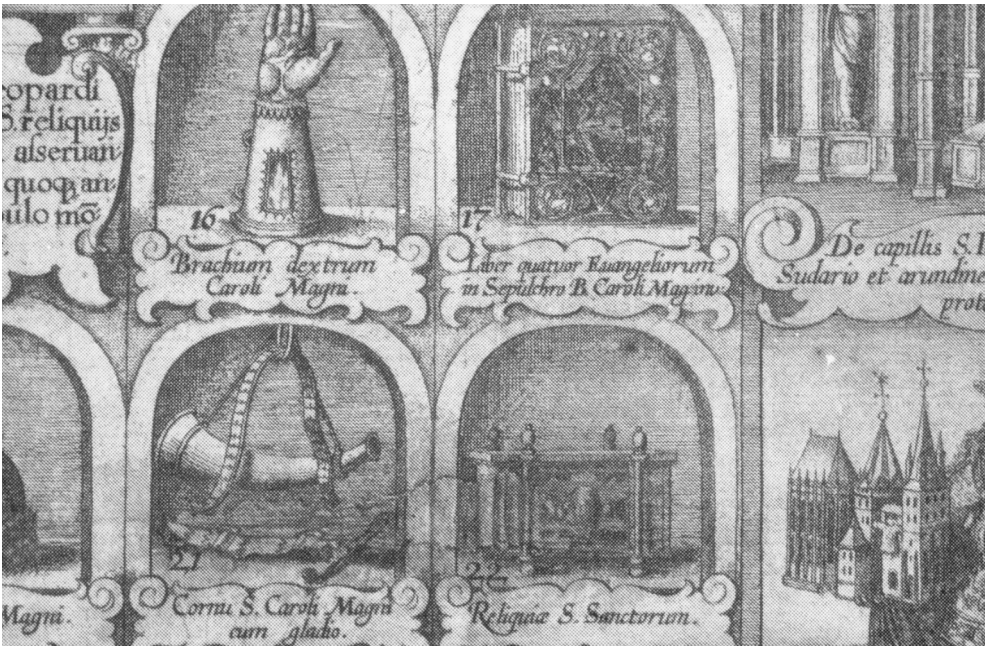


Fig. 83. The treasury of Aachen with its reliquaries (detail). Engraving, Abraham Hogenberg, 1632 (after *Rhein und Maas: Kunst und Kultur 800-1400*).

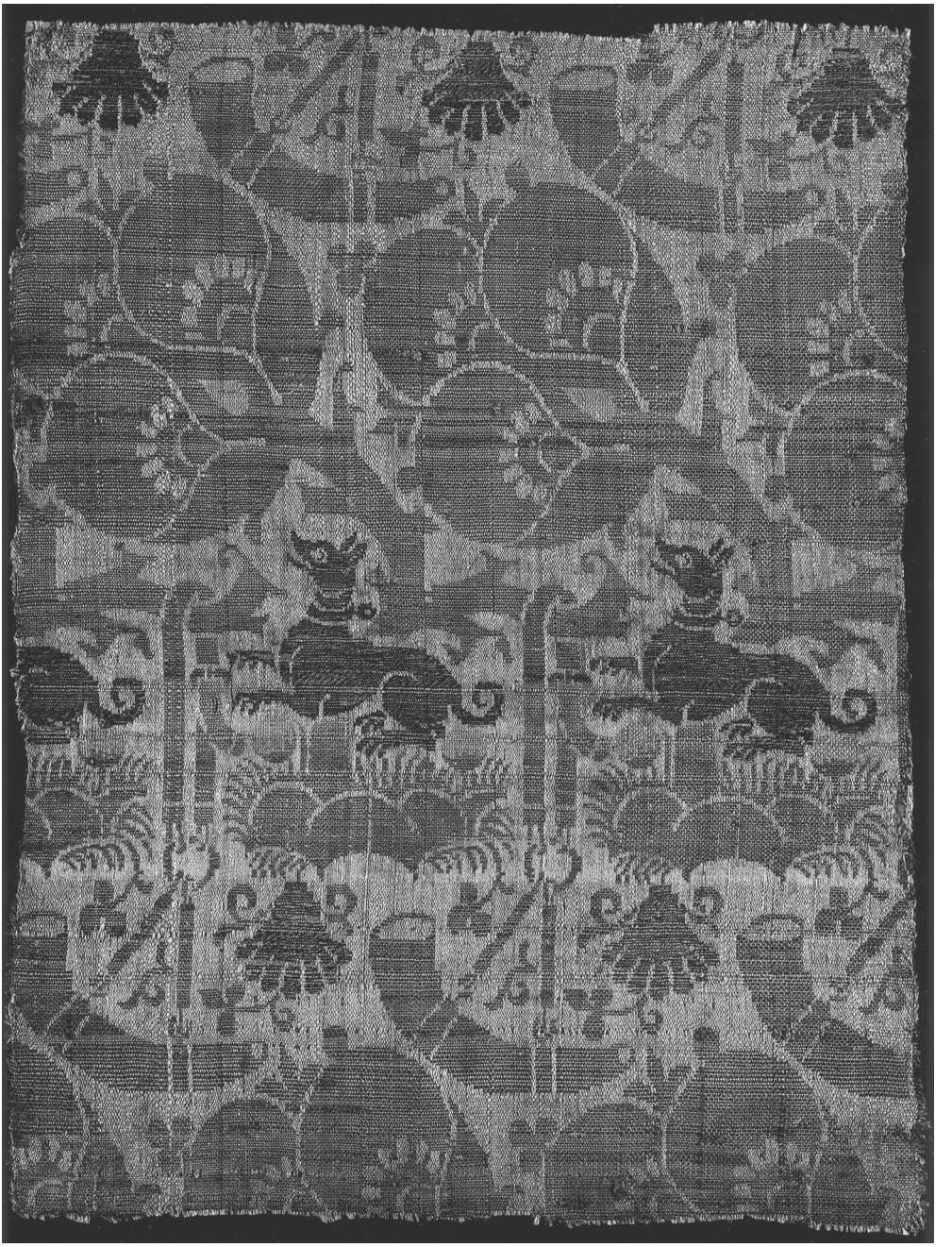

Fig. 84. Lampas, Italy, 15th century Munich, Bayerisches National Museum, inv. no. T27 (courtesy: Bayerisches National Museum, Munich).

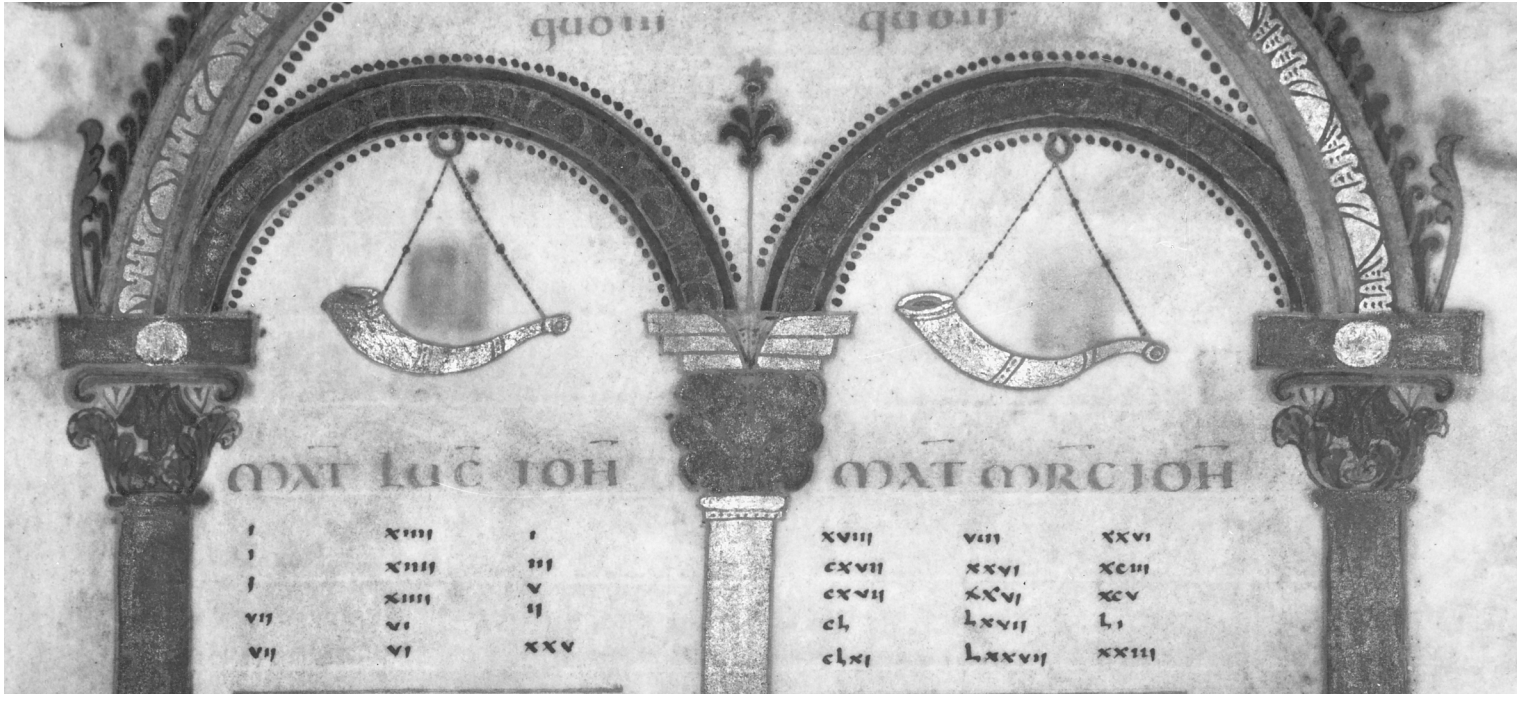

Fig. 85. Canon table (detail), Gospel book from Prüm, Carolingian, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Lat. Theol. Fol. 733, folio 19v (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 86. School of Raphael, *The Donation of Constantin to Pope Silvester* (detail). Fresco, completed 1520, Rome, Vatican, Sala di Costantino (after Guarducci).

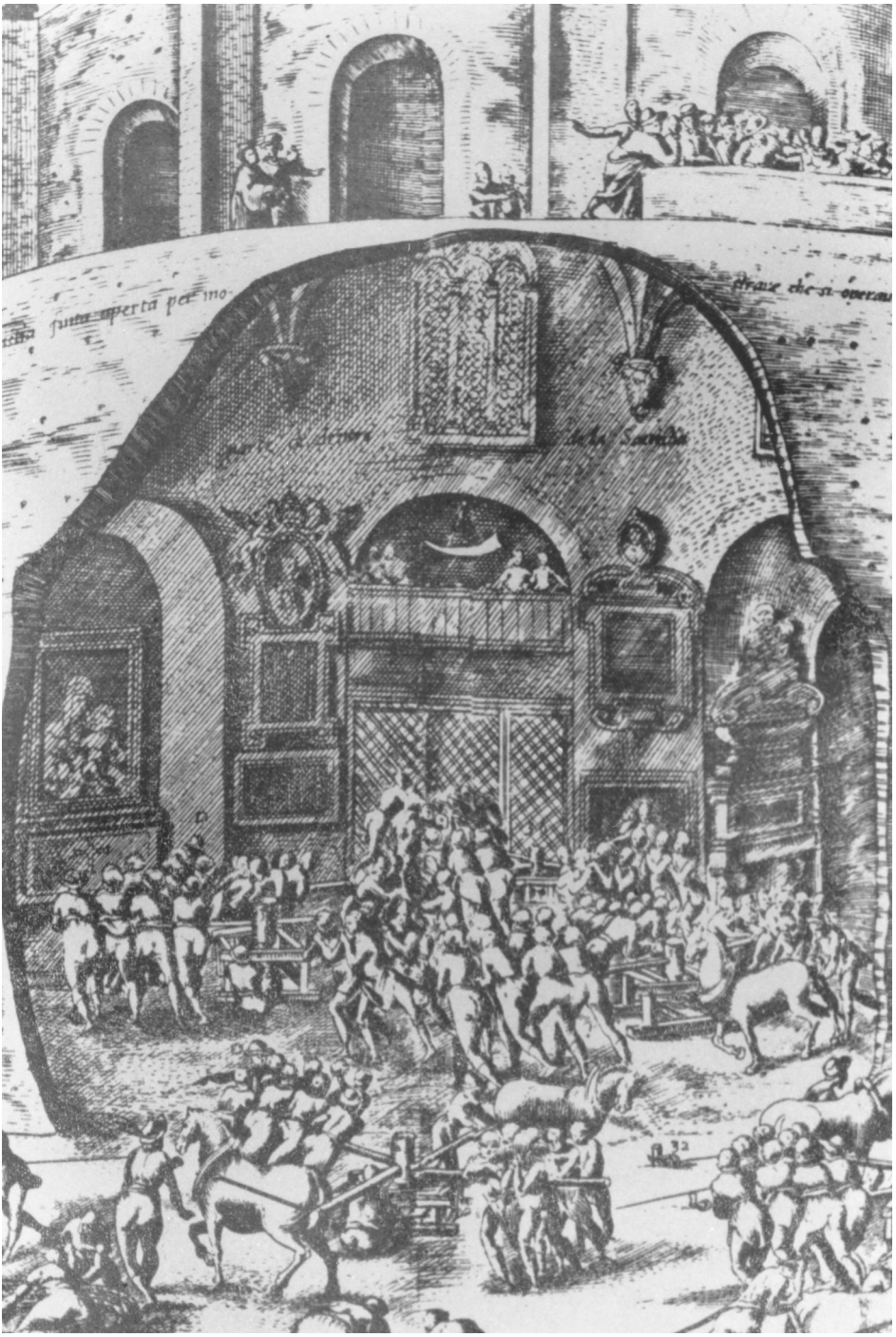

Fig. 87. Transportation of the Obelisk. Print, 1586 (after Guarducci).

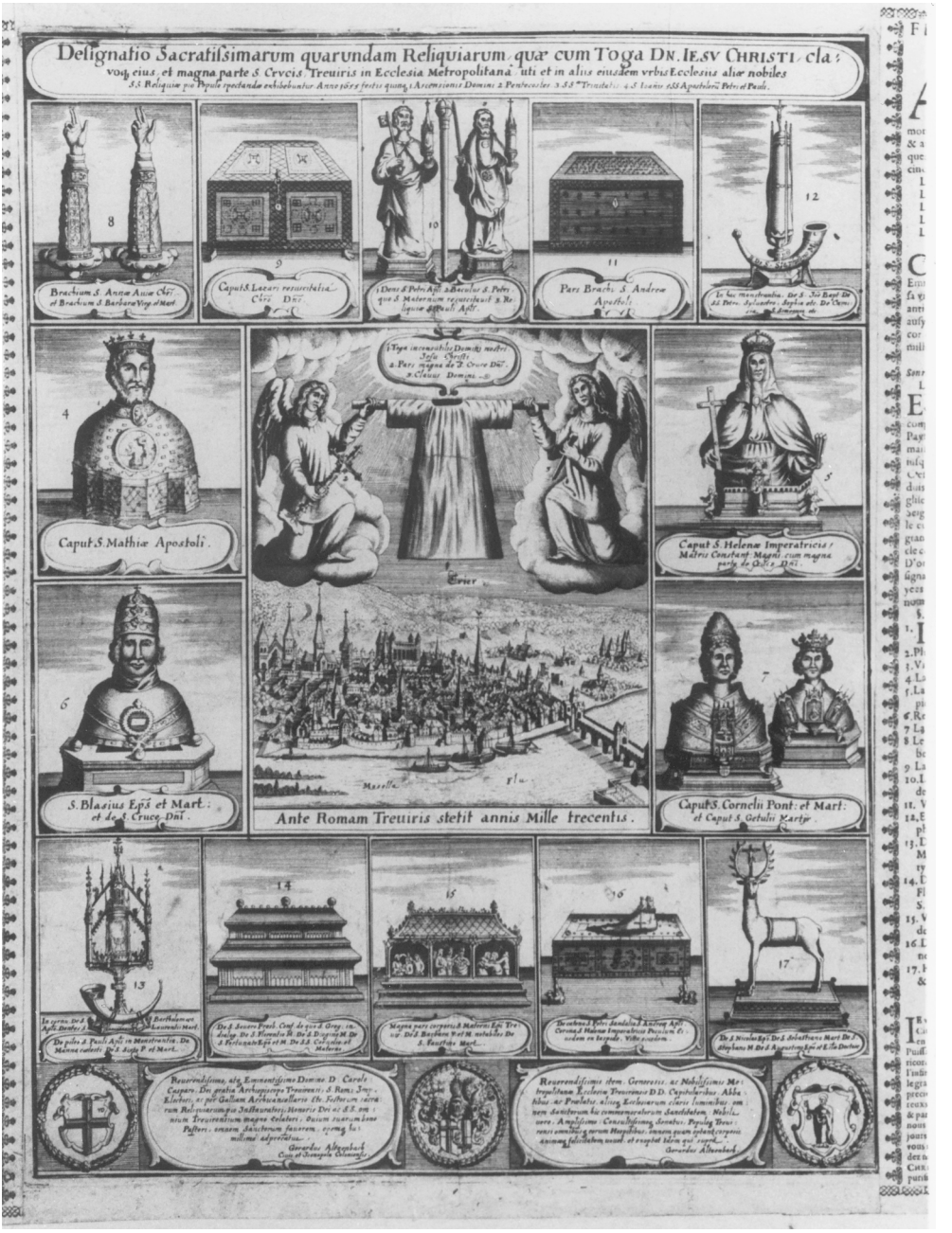


Fig. 88. The treasury of Trier with its reliquaries (detail). Engraving, Gerhard Alzenbach, Cologne, 1655 (courtesy: Bischöfliches Generalvikariat, Trier).



Fig. 89. Mammoth tusk, Schwäbisch Hall, Germany, church of St. Michael (photo: Shalem).



Fig. 90. Monk blowing a horn, stone relief, 12th century, Burgos, Santo Domingo in Silos (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 91. Angel blowing a horn, Last Judgement (detail), stone relief, tympanum, c. 1125, Autun, Cathedral (Courtesy of the Kühnel Archive, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).



Fig. 92. Angels holding a horn, stone relief, 1210-40, once on the western façade of Notre Dame in Paris, Paris, Musée National des Thermes et de l'Hôtel de Cluny, Paris (photo: Shalem).

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