



## *Roman Culture in the Ottonian World*

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**Abstract:** Roman culture outlived its empire in the West. Any study aiming to assess its relevance in the medieval period must consider that related conceptions and cultural features may change over time. A significantly different definition may have applied to medieval periods compared to what we know from the time of the Roman Principate. This paper studies Roman culture in the Ottonian world by considering the significance and role attributed to the culture of the Roman past and the Byzantine present. The first section focuses on cultural elements related to politics and the exertion of power, the second deals with Roman culture in the material heritage, and the third discusses related non-material aspects. The study argues that although the Ottonians called themselves emperors of a Roman empire, elements that may have been conceived as Roman or were related to the Byzantine world were far from abundant and largely limited to the court. The Roman empire was part of their western heritage, while Roman and Byzantine models represented the sole known sets of adequate examples or sources of inspiration to represent western emperorship. These models had already been adopted and adapted by the Carolingians, who remained an important reference among their imperial successors. Still, while influences from Byzantine court culture were present at the Ottonian court, monastic and popular Byzantine culture was largely absent from the Ottonian world.

**Keywords:** Ottonian; Byzantine; Carolingian; Roman; culture; manuscripts; art; architecture; tradition.

### Assessing Roman Culture

**A**lthough the Latin West and the Greek East were both the homes of Christian societies emerging from the same Roman culture and heritage, they did not represent a cultural unity. Both societies combined further, but different, influences: from the Celtic and Germanic, and the Hellenic and Oriental, worlds respectively. The Italian diplomat Liutprand of Cremona († 972), in his *Legatio*, drew two distinct pictures of the Byzantines' Roman culture, showing that even features of this shared heritage could solicit criticism emphasising perceived differences. Referring to his

first stay of 949 in Constantinople, he described a show of “astonishing quality, ... not unpleasant to insert here,” which he had been able to watch:

There enters some fellow sustaining on his forehead without the help of his hands a wooden pole that is twenty-four and more feet long, which had, a cubit below its tip, a crosspiece two cubits long. Then two naked boys were led in, but girt with short knickers, that is, wearing brief costumes, who climbed up the wooden pole and played around there, and then, clambering back down it with their heads turned upside-down, they maintained the pole so motionless that it appeared rooted to the earth. Finally, after the descent of one, the other, who remained there alone, cavorted up there and left me stunned with even greater admiration.<sup>1</sup>

In his report of his second visit in 968 to the same imperial capital, Liutprand lamented that he had not been allowed to export purple robes for his western emperor in the following manner:

But how unsuitable and how insulting it is that soft, effeminate, long-sleeved, tiara-wearing, hooded, lying, unsexed, idle people strut about in purple, while heroes, that is, strong men, who know war, full of faith and charity, in submission to God, full of virtues, do not! What an insult, if that is not!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liutprand, *Antapodosis* 6.8–9, ed. Paolo Chiesa, *Livdprandi Cremonensis. Opera Omnia* (Turnhold: Brepols, 1998), 148: “Ludos denique quos ibi perspexerim, quia nimis longum est scribere, praetermitto; unum solummodo ob admirationem hic inserere non pigebit. Venit quidam XXIII et eo amplius pedum longitudinis lignum sine manuum amminiculis in fronte gerens, quod cubito a summitate inferius, bicubitum transversim habuerat. Adducti sunt autem duo pueri nudi, sed campestrati, hoc est succinctoria habentes, qui per lignum ascendentes eodemque ludentes versisque deorsum capitibus per id descendentes ita servaverunt immobile, ac si radicitus terrae esset adfixum. Denique, post unius descensum, alter qui remanserat eodemque solus luserat, ampliori me admiratione attonitum reddidit.” Trans. Paolo Squatriti, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 200.

All images are my own redrawing from the originals.

<sup>2</sup> Liutprand, *Legatio* 54, ed. Chiesa, *Livdprandi*, 211: “Quod cum fieret, quinque mihi pretiosissimas purpuras abstulerunt, indignos vos omnesque Italos, Saxones, Francos, Bagoarios, Suevos, immo cunctas nationes huiusmodi veste ornatos incedere iudicantes. Quod quam indecorum quamque contumeliosum sit molles, effoeminatos, manicatos, tiaratos, teristratos, mendaces, neutros, desides purpuratos incedere, heroas vero, viros scilicet fortes, scientes bellum, fidei caritatisque plenos, Deo subditos, virtutibus plenos, non! – Quid est, si non haec contumelia est?” alter qui remanserat eodemque solus luserat, ampliori me admiratione attonitum reddidit.” Trans. Squatriti, *The Complete Works*, 272.

Although neither of these descriptions is objective, both do contain genuine information about Roman culture in the tenth-century Byzantine world. They also attest to two opposing variants of possible western related opinions (about its inhabitants). The West competed with the Byzantines in claims for authentic Roman identity, a feature that had regained significance since the rise of a new empire under Saxon authority. In a diploma dated 23 January 1001, the emperor Otto III († 1002) called himself “emperor and augustus of the Roman world” (*Romani orbis imperator augustus*).<sup>3</sup> This designation not only referred to an ancient past, but also to its persisting contemporary empire in the East. The Ottonian empire had emerged four decades after the Frankish empire had sunken into irrelevance. Its first Saxon *imperator*, Otto I († 973), was crowned during his second visit to Rome in 962. The Roman characterisation of his empire was emphasised more prominently from the time of his son Otto II († 983), who in 972 married the Byzantine princess Theophanu († 991). They were not the first medieval emperors in the West to use the characterisation “Roman:” it was already employed almost two centuries earlier by the Carolingian Charlemagne. Although Roman culture was no predominant feature of Ottonian society, Roman heritage and identity remained significant features of western rulership. A comprehensive treatment of the availability, development, and significance of Roman cultural elements in the Ottonian West is still lacking. The present study uses a selection from the wide range of available evidence to investigate the significance attributed in the Ottonian world to Roman heritage and identity by looking at related culture in and outside of the imperial court.

Roman culture outlived its empire in the West. Walter Pohl suggested that Roman identity could be expressed through infrastructures such as streets, aqueducts or bridges, representative architecture, including statues, funerary monuments and inscriptions, but also Latin literature and law, cult sites, particular household objects, including glass and silver wares, and by what he calls the corporate identity of the Roman army.<sup>4</sup> This is a relatively static definition, however, which best applied to the time of the Principate. The medieval understanding of Romanness and the culture that belonged to it changed over time, which is why we need to consider that a significantly different definition may have

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<sup>3</sup> *Dipl. Germ.* Otto III, nr. 390, ed. Theodor von Sickel, *Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae*, Vol. 2.2: *Ottonis III.*, *Diplomata MGH DD O II* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1888), 821.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Pohl, “Romanness: A multiple Identity and its Changes,” *Early Medieval Europe* 22, no. 4 (2014): 406–407. See also the discussion in Jonathan Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean*, 439–700 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

applied in other periods.<sup>5</sup> Any such alternative vision of Roman identity, and related culture, was no less Roman, real or relevant from the perspective of its contemporaries. Therefore, any study on related notions referring to other periods needs to assess how contemporaries perceived and conceived Romanness. At the time of the Ottonian rulers, Roman identities were once again closely linked to their role as emperors, but they also remained associated with the eastern *imperium*. Studies of Roman culture in the Ottonian world thus need to not only consider elements related to ancient Rome or western notions of Romanness, but have to also include the Roman East.

Culture, as a term, refers to a wide set of elements that define a society and its people. It may relate to ideas, stories, rituals, and traditions but also techniques and styles. Culture, thus, incorporates material and immaterial knowledge and heritage shared among the members of such a community. Referring to Byzantine culture, Peter Schreiner distinguished three different levels: a predominant court culture, which was most distinct and regularly exported to other regions, and the less discernible monastic or clerical culture, and popular culture (“Volkskultur”).<sup>6</sup> In order to study Roman culture in the Ottonian world, the present study considers three different groups. The first is the imperial heritage of Antiquity. It remained relevant throughout the medieval period and is attested, for example, by architectural features like marble columns, Latin literature, or the use of purple as a reference to imperial authority. The second group includes influences from the contemporary or near-contemporary Byzantine world, which, although western authors referred to these as “Greek” since the eighth century, was conceived in the East and the West as having emerged from a shared Roman imperial cultural heritage.<sup>7</sup> It includes elements like lavish or gold interwoven clothing, icons, or orthogonal representational architecture. Some of these features may have reached the Ottonian world indirectly, as

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<sup>5</sup> The study of medieval notions of Romanness has received much attention more recently, not least in the volume edited by Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, Cinzia Grifoni, and Marianne Pollheimer-Mohaupt, *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), with a paper by Veronica West-Harling on the perception of the Roman past in the tenth century.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Schreiner, “Byzanz zwischen Kulturkonkurrenz und Leitkultur,” in *Der Doppeladler: Byzanz und die Seldschuken in Anatolien vom späten 11. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, ed. Neslihan Asutay-Effenberger and Falko Daim (Mainz: Schnell and Steiner, 2015), 12. On early medieval court culture more in general, see Yitzhak Hen, *Roman Barbarians: The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Medieval West* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), with a treatment of the late Merovingian and early Carolingian courts at pp. 94–123 and 153–76.

<sup>7</sup> See Laury Sarti, “From Romanus to Graecus. The identity and perceptions of the Byzantines in the Frankish West,” *Journal of Medieval History* 44.2 (2018): 131–50.

the Carolingians had already adopted these. The third group is the most heterogeneous, and its components may be more difficult to identify: it comprises anything Roman that belonged to the medieval West and emerged from persisting Roman culture. It can be divided into subgroups, among which Carolingian and Italian versions of a Roman culture are the most relevant for this investigation.<sup>8</sup> They comprise, for example, Christian hagiography, Roman-style architecture, and the use of a basilica, or post-imperial titles and functions.

In opposition to the impression that may emerge from the above, these three groups do not represent three distinct entities. Christian church architecture, notably the orthogonal plan, or the use of purple in an imperial context, to mention two examples, were concurrently related to ancient Roman, Byzantine, and Carolingian models. In many other cases, it is difficult, if not impossible, to make such distinctions. Michael McCormick therefore rightly noted that “though these early medieval societies evolved away from their late antique roots, those common roots are everywhere discernible, and it is easy to mistake residual for recent borrowing,” adding that “the shared matrix could give rise to structural parallels, that is, similar developments that arose independently in each culture.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, distinguishing between the three groups is impeded because they share the same Roman heritage, which is why it is helpful not to attempt to exclude any of these from such a study. Important guidelines for any assessment are explicit references in the written evidence defining an element as “Greek” or “Roman,” which at least attest to how contemporaries identified a specific feature, even though medieval presumptions must not be identical to modern assessments.

For this study, I discuss a wide range of examples belonging to the three mentioned categories. By including both the most significant examples, on the one hand, and, on the other, a range of less unusual samples, the following aims to reflect the material as a whole. Whenever possible, I add suggestions how they may relate to the mentioned groups or try to differentiate between a genuinely western heritage and eastern influences or adoptions. As the range of definite terminology is limited, I refer to these as ancient or late, Carolingian, or Italian, and maintain the largely anachronistic designation “Byzantine” as

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<sup>8</sup> A major western subgroup relates to Roman features emerging from the city of Rome and the pope. It is difficult to differentiate from the other categories, to which it is closely interlinked, and will not be considered here as such.

<sup>9</sup> Michael McCormick, “Western Approaches (700–900),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 395.

a reference to the medieval eastern Roman world. The first section focuses on cultural elements related to politics and the exertion of power, the second deals with aspects of Roman culture in the material heritage, and the final section discusses non-material elements of Roman culture.

### Political Culture

Political culture may be expressed by different means: through architecture, rituals and traditions, or through the representation of the ruler himself. Ottonian monuments, however, only included few references to either Roman or Byzantine models. The centre of Magdeburg would be an excellent place to look for Roman or Byzantine references. In 967, it was elevated to the status of archbishopric and, according to modern scholarship, it was conceived to become another “new Rome”<sup>10</sup> or at least a “new Aachen.”<sup>11</sup> The construction of the central church started in 955, although many details of the Ottonian plan remain debated. What we know is that the church had a rectangular nave, and that it did not ostensibly imitate any known Roman or biblical model.<sup>12</sup> However, when Otto I chose this place for his sepulchre, Roman elements were included to its interior. The emperor’s body was buried in a marble sarcophagus of ancient Roman style that was imported from south of the Alps in Ravenna.<sup>13</sup> The emperor also followed Charlemagne’s example by having further material carried from Italy to Magdeburg to decorate his church, including marble, gold and gems.<sup>14</sup> Although this construction thus did not prominently display Roman features as part of its building structure, references to the Roman past were added using material relating to the ancient empire.

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<sup>10</sup> Evangelos K. Chrysos, “Otto der Große aus byzantinischer Sicht,” in *Otto der Große: Magdeburg und Europa*, ed. Matthias Puhle (Mainz: Zabern, 2001), 488.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Schubert, “Imperiale Spolien im Magdeburger Dom,” in *Herrschaftsrepräsentation im Ottonischen Sachsen*, ed. Gerd Althoff and Ernst Schubert (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1998), 16 and 30.

<sup>12</sup> Matthias Untermann, “Frühmittelalterliche Pfalzen im Ostfränkischen Reich,” in *The Emperor’s House: Palaces from Augustus to the Age of Absolutism*, ed. Michael Featherstone (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 118–22; Klaus G. Beuckers, “‘Imperiales Bauen’ im frühen Mittelalter. Bemerkungen zu Herrscherlicher Bautätigkeit bis ins 10. Jahrhundert,” in *Kaisertum im ersten Jahrtausend: Wissenschaftlicher Begleitband zur Landesausstellung Otto der Große und das Römische Reich: Kaisertum von der Antike zum Mittelalter*, Hartmut Leppin, Bernd Schneidmüller and Stefan Weinfurter, (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2012), 312–16. The plan of Quedlinburg is even less known through archaeological evidence.

<sup>13</sup> Schubert, “Imperiale Spolien im Magdeburger Dom,” 22.

<sup>14</sup> Schubert, “Imperiale Spolien im Magdeburger Dom,” 10–11, 16, and 30.

Other Roman features reached the Ottonian world through its Carolingian forerunner. One example is the institution of co-emperorship, a procedure with a long imperial tradition which, according to Herwig Wolfram, was firmly rooted in the Ottonian rivalry with Byzantium.<sup>15</sup> In 967, Otto I had his son Otto II elevated to be his imperial co-ruler. A similar procedure was already used when Louis the Pious was crowned co-emperor before his father's death in 814, and the same was true for his son Lothar I in 817 and grandson Louis II in 850. Otto's II new role was made explicit in contemporary documents with the term *coimperator*, which corresponds to the Greek *συμβασιλεύς*.<sup>16</sup> Otto I already used a similar course of action to secure the family's rulership before he travelled to Rome in 962, when he had his six-year-old son Otto II crowned king.<sup>17</sup> The same intention applied to the crowning of the three-year-old Otto III († 1002), who was elevated to the status of a king in Aachen in December 983. The purpose of this ceremony again was to make him his father's co-ruler. However, the arrival of the news about Otto's II death, only shortly after the ceremony, retroactively transformed this ceremonial act into the coronation of a new king.<sup>18</sup>

The Ottonians adapted Byzantine and Carolingian co-emperorship to meet their own needs. Otto's I wife Adelheid († 999) was the first woman to be elevated to the status of *coimperatrix*. This ceremony occurred shortly before their legate Liutprand of Cremona had returned from Constantinople, although he had been unsuccessful in winning the expected bride "born in the purple" for their son Otto II. Further attempts were needed until Otto II was united in marriage with Theophanu, a family relative of the Byzantine emperor John I Tzimiskes. In her lavish marital contract, the bride bears the unusual title *consors imperii*, which means that, like her mother-in-law, she was not only the ruler's wife,

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<sup>15</sup> Herwig Wolfram, "Lateinische Herrschertitel im neunten und zehnten Jahrhundert," in *Intitulatio II. Lateinische Herrscher- und Fürstentitel im neunten und zehnten Jahrhundert*, ed. Karl Brunner, Anton Scharer and Wolfgang Eric, (Vienna/Cologne/Graz: Bohlau Verlag, 1973), 87–90.

<sup>16</sup> Constantin Zuckerman, "On the Title and Office of the Byzantine Basileus," *Travaux et mémoires* 16 (2010): 888. For a short survey of the adoptions of Byzantine procedure in the Ottonian west, see also Norbert M. Borengässer, "Byzantinisches Erbfolgerecht und Ottonische Thronerhebungen," in *Im Gedächtnis der Kirche neu Erwachen: Studien zur Geschichte des Christentums in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Festgabe für Gabriel Adriányi zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Reimund Haas, Karl J. Rivinus and Hermann-Josef Scheidgen (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Ernst-Dieter Hehl, "Zwei christliche Kaiser im mittelalterlichen Europa: Eine problematische Geschichte," in Leppin et al., *Kaisertum*, 288.

<sup>18</sup> Thietmar, *Chron.* 3.26, ed. Robert Holtzmann, *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi chronicon*, MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S. 9 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1935).



but also had a share in his imperial authority.<sup>19</sup> Although Irene, in the late eighth century, had ruled the East as a female emperor,<sup>20</sup> wives with imperial power were unknown in the Byzantine world, which is why Rosamond McKitterick is right that the elevation of the Ottonian co-empresses was a western phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> Still, the Ottonian co-empresses would hardly have been conceivable without their male Roman precursors, and the temporal and situational evidence both support not only that they were related to the western Roman empire, but also that contemporaries drew a connection between these procedures and related Byzantine traditions. The Ottonian establishment of co-rulers, whether female or male, appears to have had the same purpose as those executed in the Byzantine world, as Johannes Irmscher already argued, and the same also seemingly applied to the Carolingian co-emperors.<sup>22</sup> They ensured that in case of an unexpected death, a family member would be able to succeed as a ruler or regent. It proved very useful when, in 983, Otto II died, and Theophanu was able to rule instead of her toddler son.

Roman and Byzantine references are also well-attested in the representation of the Ottonian rulers. Among the most widespread types of regal representation were the emperor's portraits on coinage. When in 966, four years after his rise to emperorship, Otto I chose his representation to be shown on seals, he ignored the Carolingian models. Instead of the usual regal iconography with the ruler in profile and with a shield, lance and diadem, he introduced a new style: he had himself depicted with a hieratic frontal figure carrying the liturgical regalia, the crown, sceptre and globe. This combination conformed to

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<sup>19</sup> See Wolfenbüttel, Staatsarchiv, 6 Urk 11; *Dipl. Germ.* Otto II, nr. 76, ed. Theodor von Sickel, *Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae*, vol. 2, MGH Diplomata Otto II. (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1888), 92: "dilectissimae coniugi nostrae Theophanu coimperatorici augustae nec non imperii regnorumque consorti." On the political circumstances, see Adelbert Davids, "Marriage Negotiations between Byzantium and the West and the Name of Theophano in Byzantium (Eighth to Tenth Centuries)," in *The Empress Theophano: Byzantium and the West at the Turn of the First Millennium*, ed. Adelbert Davids (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 99–120; Krijnie N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Constantinople: The West and Byzantium, 962–1204. Cultural and Political Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 211–12. See also Simon MacLean, *Ottonian Queenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 160–161.

<sup>20</sup> *Annales regni Francorum* a. 802, eds. Georg Heinrich Pertz and Friedrich Kurze, *Annales regni Francorum inde a. 741 usque ad 829*, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6 (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1895), 117: "Herena imperatrix de Constantinopoli misit legatum nomine Leonem spatarium de pace confirmanda inter Francos et Grecos". See also Werner Ohnsorge, "Das Kaisertum der Eirene und die Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen," *Saeculum* 14 (1963): 228.

<sup>21</sup> Rosamond McKitterick, "Ottonian Intellectual Culture in the Tenth Century and the Role of Theophanu," *Early Medieval Europe* 2, no. 1 (1993): 69–71.

<sup>22</sup> Johannes Irmscher, "Otto III. und Byzanz," in Konstantinou, *Byzanz*, 219.

Byzantine habit, where a frontal depiction was most common for the representation of Christ. In the West, the same style was used for ecclesiastical dignitaries.<sup>23</sup> Otto I, thus, must have intended to emphasise not only his imperial status but also his role as a Christian ruler. Otto I also adopted the Byzantine habit of appearing bearded on his seals.<sup>24</sup> In addition, this frontal representation, i.e. without arms and with a beard, may be interpreted as an attempt to demilitarise the regal portrait, as Ernst-Dieter Hehl argued. It is noteworthy that it occurred while the Byzantine emperorship was particularly militarised:<sup>25</sup> the current emperor, Nikephoros II, stemmed from a family of high military officials and army leaders, and his military success in 963 allowed him to rise to the status of emperor. It is possible that the Ottonians not only used Byzantine models but also did so to emphasise the legitimacy of their emperorship by pointing to the violent context of the rise of their current eastern counterpart.

The Ottonian frontal style was further developed under Otto III. In a lavish Reichenau manuscript, he was depicted in full on his throne, adopting another iconography typical for Byzantine representations of Christ.<sup>26</sup> It appears likely that it was adopted to portray Otto III as Christ's earthly representative.<sup>27</sup> The iconography did not follow Byzantine models alone, but also Carolingian precedents that had been inspired by eastern forerunners.<sup>28</sup> Famous is the imperial portrait contained in the Reichenau *Liuthar Gospel*, which may have been destined for ceremonial use.<sup>29</sup> The manuscript was presented

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<sup>23</sup> John W. Bernhardt, "Concepts and Practice of Empire in Ottonian Germany (950–1024)," in *Representations of Power in Medieval Germany, 800–1500*, ed. Björn Weiler and Simon MacLean (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 148–9; Hagen Keller, "Das Erbe Ottos des Großen: Das Ottonische Reich nach der Erweiterung zum Imperium," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 41 (2007): 72–73, mentioning that a comparable depiction is first attested in the West for the kings Hugh and Lothar; Hehl, "Zwei christliche Kaiser," 288–289, with figs. 5 and 6. Cf. the styles of the examples provided by Philip Grierson, "Byzantine Gold Bullae, with a Catalogue of those at Dumbarton Oaks," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 239–255.

<sup>24</sup> Bernhardt, "Concepts," 147–8, with fig 1.

<sup>25</sup> Hehl, "Zwei christliche Kaiser," 289–290.

<sup>26</sup> Hagen Keller, "Zu den Siegeln der Karolinger und der Ottonen: Urkunden als 'Hoheitszeichen' in der Kommunikation des Königs mit seinen Getreuen," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 32, no. 1 (1998): 421–422; Hehl, "Zwei christliche Kaiser," 293. On this and other Reichenau manuscripts, and their relation to Byzantium, see Henry Mayr-Harting, *Ottonian Book Illumination: An Historical Study* (London: Harvey Miller, 1999), 203–213.

<sup>27</sup> See Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4453, 24, [daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0009/bsb00096593/images](https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0009/bsb00096593/images). See also Florentine Mütherich and Karl Dachs, eds., *Das Evangeliar Ottos III. Clm 4453 der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München* (Munich: Prestel, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Bernhardt, "Concepts," 150.

<sup>29</sup> Aachener Domschatzkammer, inv.-nr. 25, fol. 16<sup>r</sup>, [bildindex.de/document/obj20460194](https://bildindex.de/document/obj20460194).

to Otto III during his coronation in 983.<sup>30</sup> It contains a dedication scene showing the emperor enthroned and surrounded by a mandorla, with the imperial colours red and gold prominently displayed. A figure carrying a banner stands on either side, above each figure is a winged beast, and above these is an angel, on the left, and what appears to be a white eagle, on the right side. In the middle of the upper image section, a hand belonging to God reaches towards the emperor and bestows a crown on his head. Two clerical and two military figures are standing in the lower image section. This latter composition recalls the sixth-century San Vitale in Ravenna, in which a similar group of men is depicted surrounding Justinian on his famous mosaic.

The most prominent representation of the Ottonian emperor is an ivory from Paris. It shows a young imperial couple blessed by Christ standing in their midst. A Greek inscription identifies the two figures as the emperor Otto II and his wife, Theophanu. Both are represented at the same height and designated as *imperator augustus*, with the addition *Romanorum* for the emperor.<sup>31</sup> Theophanu's imperial title is noteworthy, as it confirms the special status of this western empress, which must have emerged from her imperial and Byzantine background, and thus also seems to attest to the particular prestige associated with her Byzantine provenance from a western perspective. Later in her life, after her husband's death and in her role as regent empress, she even used the title of *imperator augusta*.<sup>32</sup> The ivory itself largely appears to be a one-to-one reproduction of another ivory that has long been considered to show the Byzantine emperor Romanos II and his wife Eudocia, who died at the age of eight years. The only more significant difference is that the western couple lacks a nimbus.<sup>33</sup> More recently, Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner argued, with good reasoning, that this ivory must depict Romanos IV and his wife Eudocia, and thus date to the third quarter of the eleventh century. If this is correct, it post-dates the Ottonian example, which raises the question about the latter's origin or model. The ostensibly Byzantine iconography and inscription on the Ottonian ivory suggest that it was not a

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<sup>30</sup> Eliza Garrison, *Ottonian Imperial Art and Portraiture: The Artistic Patronage of Otto III and Henry II* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 46–9; Höfert, *Kaisertum*, 445. For an excellent study on this and other illuminations, see Mayr-Harting, *Ottonian Book Illumination*.

<sup>31</sup> Paris, Musée de Cluny Cl. 392.

<sup>32</sup> Irmscher, "Otto III.," 219. See also Bernhardt, "Concepts," 150; Penelope Nash, "Demonstrations of Imperium: Byzantine Influences in the Late Eighth and Tenth Centuries in the West," in *Basileia: Essays on Imperium and Culture in Honour of E. M. And M. J. Jeffreys*, ed. Geoffrey S. Nathan and Lynda Garland (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 159 and 164–165.

<sup>33</sup> Paris, BnF, Cabinet des Médailles, inv.-nr. 55.300.

genuinely western creation. If so, there must have been either an earlier Byzantine example, now lost, which was used as a model to create the Ottonian ivory or the Ottonian ivory is indeed a Byzantine work. Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner argued that Otto's Italian advisor, John Philagathos, may have commissioned it during the Ottonian advances in southern Italy in the early 980s.<sup>34</sup>

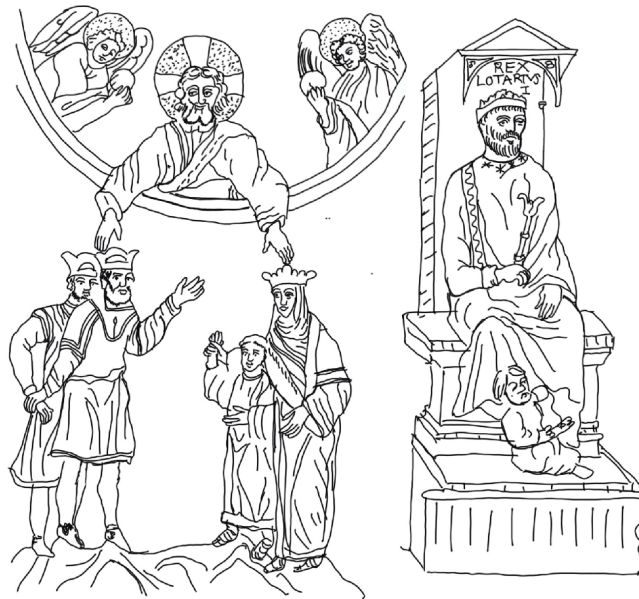
Walter Cahn pointed to a potential western adaptation and early testimony of the Ottonian ivory in a Psalter (figure 1). It was lost in 1774 in a fire in the library of St. Remi. The work was dedicated to Emma, the wife of king Lothar († 986) and mother of the last western Carolingian king Louis († 987). An impression of the lost depiction is preserved thanks to an early modern interpretation, which refers to their coronation in 979: it shows Christ crowning the king and his queen.<sup>35</sup> The composition, however, is not entirely identical to the Byzantine versions, as Christ does not stand in the middle of the couple but reaches out from above in the manner known from the iconography of the divine hand already encountered in the *Liuthar Gospel*. Besides, the king is crowned with his son and co-ruler, and his queen is accompanied by their second son Otto. The iconography of the divine hand has been known since late Antiquity, for example, in the framework of the sacrifice of Abel and Melchisedec in one of the apsidal mosaics of San Vitale.<sup>36</sup> Thus, although this western composition was apparently inspired by Byzantine and probably also late Roman models, these images were not one-to-one copies but original creations combining a new set of iconographies from prior works.

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<sup>34</sup> Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, "Eudokia Makrembolitissa and the Romanos Ivory," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977): 307–309, 315–316, and 321–324, discussing further differences, with figs. 1 and 13. Percy E. Schramm had already suggested John Philagathos as the sponsor: see his "Kaiser, Basileus und Papst in der Zeit der Ottonen," *Historische Zeitschrift* 129 (1924): 443. Doris Gerstl strongly challenged the authenticity of the ivory and is able to address some noteworthy incongruities: see her "Die Tafel mit Otto und Theophano im Musée de l'hôtel de Cluny in Paris: Ein Elfenbein der Nikephoros-Gruppe?" *Zeitschrift des deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 2005/6 (vol. 59/60): 9–33. However, her reasoning is not cogent as it postulates that our knowledge of related pieces of art and styles is largely comprehensive and that the said ivory thus needs to fit into what we know about comparable pieces of art of that period, which is not the case.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Cahn, "The Psalter of Queen Emma," *Cahiers archéologiques. Fin de l'antiquité et Moyen Âge* 33 (1985): 72–85.

<sup>36</sup> See also Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751–877)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 250–254, with n. 177. Further examples in Irmgard Siede, "Abkopiert—ummontiert—uminterpretiert: Buchmalerei und Elfenbein im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert—byzantinische Kunst Missverstanden?" in *Byzanz und seine europäischen Nachbarn: Politische Interdependenzen und kulturelle Missverständnisse*, ed. Ludger Körntgen et al. (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2020), 113–115.



**Figure 1. Redrawing of the figure in Cahn.<sup>37</sup>**

Late Roman references in the representation of the emperor became particularly pronounced at the time of Otto III. A prominent example is a portrayal of what seems to be the young emperor with his followers in an illumination found at the beginning of the lavish Reichenau manuscript briefly discussed above.<sup>38</sup> The central composition, with military officials on the one and clerical on the other side, again invokes the mosaic in San Vitale showing Justinian among his followers, although in reversed order. The illumination is accompanied by another picture on page 23, showing provincial personifications identified by their respective crown and an inscription as *Sclauinia*, *Germania*, *Gallia* and *Roma*.<sup>39</sup> They offer presents to the emperor depicted on the opposing page. This iconography is well-known from ancient Roman art. In the tenth century, it related to the Saxon empire, according to Henry Mayr-Harting. He argued that this was one among several Ottonian images inspired by a copy of the late Roman *Notitia Dignitatum*, on the one hand, and, on the other, earlier images of the Epiphany, when Christ was approached by the three Magi. Referring to the depiction of Otto III, Mayr-Harting points to Carolingian

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<sup>37</sup> Redrawn from Cahn, "The Psalter," 72.

<sup>38</sup> Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4453, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> This manuscript is not numbered according to its *folia*, but every page bears a different number.

models like the famous but more complex image of Charles the Bald in the *Codex Aureus*.<sup>40</sup> The new element in the Ottonian version would be the inclusion of representatives of the Church,<sup>41</sup> an element that is already part of the mentioned depiction of Justinian in Ravenna. The same is true for the depiction of the bowl carried by the figure Roma, which is quite similar to the one seen in the hands of the late Roman emperor in San Vitale (figure 2). Further comparable images are known from the church San Apollinare Nuovo in the same city of Ravenna. The cover of the manuscript is decorated with a Byzantine *spolium*, a mid-tenth-century ivory that belongs to a genre that will be further discussed below. The image measures 14.3 cm x 11 cm and shows the death of Mary among the Apostles and the reception of her soul by Christ. The initial gold overlay is lost.<sup>42</sup> Although all these images represent original compositions, they compose a wide set of models related to the same Roman heritage and comparable subsequent developments in the framework of Christian iconography.



**Figure 2. Redrawing of Roma (left) and Justinian.<sup>43</sup>**

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<sup>40</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Ottonian Book Illumination*, 159–60. See Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14000, fol. 5<sup>v</sup>, [daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0009/bsb00096095/images](https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0009/bsb00096095/images).

<sup>41</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Ottonian Book Illumination*, 160.

<sup>42</sup> See “Elfenbeintafel (Spolie) – BSB Clm 4453#Einband, Vorderdeckel”, [einbaende.digital-sammlungen.de/Prachteinbaende/Clm\\_4453\\_Einband\\_Spolie\\_Elfenbeintafel\\_VD](https://einbaende.digital-sammlungen.de/Prachteinbaende/Clm_4453_Einband_Spolie_Elfenbeintafel_VD). The picture bears the inscription “Η Τ[ΗΣ] Θ[ΕΟΤΟ]ΚΟΥ ΚΟΙ[ΜΗ]ΣΙΣ”.

<sup>43</sup> Respectively redrawn from Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4453 (left); and San Vitale, Ravenna (right).

Although Ottonian art was rare until Otto I,<sup>44</sup> his successors thus became the patrons of significant works, many of which being displayed in the context of political communication. A substantial accumulation of ancient Roman, Byzantine, and also some Islamic *spolia*, was included in a pulpit or *ambo* offered by Henry II to the chapel in Aachen around 1002/14. The *spolia* were carefully worked into the structure of the pulpit, which was intended to attract as much attention as possible: it had an ostentatious layout and included gold, crystals, gems, and other precious stones from different parts of the known world. Karen R. Mathews argued that the intention behind this combination of material was to portray the western emperor as the successor of the Roman heritage with a status coequal to that of the eastern emperor.<sup>45</sup> Although the evidence does not prove this thesis, it should be safe to say that this combination of material from far-away regions was meant to be a demonstration of—maybe Roman—power.

The evidence discussed until here shows a wide range of material and immaterial elements related to Roman political culture in the Ottonian world. It encompasses all three groups of inspiration and influence defined in the first section, i.e. late Roman, Byzantine and contemporary western models. It attests that the Ottonians did not merely adopt from their predecessors, but adapted and recombined these models whenever necessary to meet their current needs and ideas. The evidence thus attests to a vital Roman political culture able to bear new rituals and forms of representation. In the following section, I would now like to take a look at related material culture more in general.

## Material Culture

Further evidence for material and immaterial Roman political culture in the Ottonian world is much less abundant and more heterogeneous. The majority of material culture that has come to us from the Ottonian era either belonged to the court or to the Church.

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<sup>44</sup> Werner Maleczek, "Otto I. und Johannes XII. Überlegungen zur Kaiserkrönung von 962," in *Mediaevalia Augiensia: Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, ed. Jürgen Petersohn (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2001), 155.

<sup>45</sup> Karen R. Mathews, "Expressing Political Legitimacy and Cultural Identity through the Use of Spolia on the Ambo of Henry II," *Medieval Encounters* 5, no. 2 (1999): 156–183. See also Ulrike Koenen, "Zur Rezeption Byzantinischer Kunstwerke im mittelalterlichen Westen," in *Byzanz in Europa: Europas östlichstes Erbe. Akten des Kolloquiums "Byzanz in Europa" vom 11.–15. Dezember 2007 in Greifswald*, Vol. 2 ed. Michael Altrip (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 320–321; Ulrike Koenen, "Kulturelle Missverständnisse? Zur Aufnahme Byzantinischer Kunstwerke im Westen," in *Byzanz und seine europäischen Nachbarn: Politische Interdependenzen und kulturelle Missverständnisse*, edited by Ludger Körntgen et al. (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2020), 130.

Not infrequently, these two overlap, as is the case for the miniatures discussed above. While evidence for popular medieval culture is scarce, Roman culture appears to have been largely inexistent beyond the regal and ecclesiastical sphere. The three types of objects again will be of interest: ancient Roman artefacts reused and adapted; more or less contemporary Byzantine imports; and objects and pieces of art produced in the medieval West. Again, these categories are only guidelines because such differentiations are not always possible, and sometimes several categories may apply. These distinctions are helpful, nevertheless, as each group relates to a different kind of context and set of intentions.

Material culture is a broad field that will be discussed here by looking at a selection of architecture and art, and their uses in the Ottonian world. Evidence related to architecture and ancient Roman techniques is scarce. For example archaeological findings have confirmed that the bishop Bernward of Hildesheim used bricks into which his name was added with stamps for roof construction. This may be a medieval revival of a well-known ancient practice maybe inspired by comparable bricks Bernward had seen during his stays in Italy as Heiko Steuer suggested.<sup>46</sup> Comparable finds are exceptional and the same is true for evidence attesting to the involvement of eastern artisans.<sup>47</sup> A rare example is contained in the *Life* of bishop Gauzlin († 1030). It recounts that the saint called for Byzantine artists and materials to have his church in Fleury decorated with mosaics.<sup>48</sup> Another church which probably bears the work of Byzantine artists is the early eleventh-century chapel of St. Bartholomew in Paderborn.<sup>49</sup> Both edifices are well-attested, as they may still be visited today. Evidence for Byzantine material in possession of individuals outside the Ottonian court is also rare. One example is contained in Brun of Cologne's testament cited in his *Life* by Ruotger. It mentions a "Greek" platter as part of his lavish possessions but without offering a detailed description.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Heiko Steuer, "Die Gegenwart der Antike im Mittelalter: Fragestellung und Ziel des Kolloquiums," in *Antike im Mittelalter. Fortleben—Nachwirken—Wahrnehmung*, ed. Sebastian Brather et al. (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014), 16–18.

<sup>47</sup> Nash, "Demonstrations," 163, and at 165 speaking of a "composite style ... recognizable, but with distinct differences."

<sup>48</sup> See Ciggaar, *Western Travellers*, 169.

<sup>49</sup> Ciggaar, *Western Travellers*, 208–9.

<sup>50</sup> Ruotger, *Vita Brunonis* 49, ed. Irene Ott, *Ruotgeri Vita Brunonis Archiepiscopi Coloniensis. Ruotgers Lebensbeschreibung des Erzbischofs Bruno von Köln*. MGH SRG NS 10. Weimar: Böhlau, 1951, 52: "Cuppam auream, sigillum et scutulam Grecam."



In the Ottonian era, contemporary Byzantine parallels prevailed over ancient Roman models, while the latter was primarily maintained as part of the Carolingian heritage.<sup>51</sup> Illuminated manuscripts associated with the Ottonian family, which often included Roman features, are attested from the late tenth century. Many of these were produced in the monastery of Reichenau.<sup>52</sup> A Byzantine motif which became comparably popular in the Ottonian West is the *Dormition of the Virgin*, the *koimesis*. It is found, for example, on a Byzantine ivory attached to an early eleventh-century Reichenau Gospel, and a comparable miniature was added to the manuscript at fol. 79<sup>v</sup>.<sup>53</sup> The two images show Mary surrounded by grieving figures. On the ivory, they are depicted with a nimbus, following Byzantine iconography. The Virgin's soul is incorporated by a baby carried by Christ and handed over to the angels. The imitation of Byzantine models was at its height around 1000, a circumstance usually explained by referring to an increase of contacts and exchanges with the Byzantine East and the influence supposedly exerted by the presence of the empress Theophanu<sup>54</sup>—a topic I will come back to later. Anton von Euw pointed to a Bamberg manuscript dating before 995 that contains a picture of Henry of Bavaria († 955) that largely conforms to the iconography used a decade later to depict the emperor Basileios II († 1025) in a Byzantine manuscript now stored in Venice. As with the famous ivory from Paris, it seems likely that an earlier Byzantine example now lost served as a model for the Ottonian piece of art. The inclusion of a nimbus, an element that was uncommon in the West in the context of secular images, supports the assumption that the composition goes back to an earlier eastern model.<sup>55</sup>

Not every similarity was necessarily inspired by a prior eastern model. Penelope Nash pointed to some likeness between the dedication illumination in the Byzantine mid-tenth-century *Bible of Leon the Patrician* and the Ottonian *Hilda Codex* dating around 1020

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<sup>51</sup> Anton von Euw, "Der Einfluß des Ostens auf die abendländische Buchkunst im 9., 10. und 11. Jahrhundert," in Euw and Schreiner, *Kunst*, 181–182.

<sup>52</sup> McKitterick, "Ottonian Intellectual Culture," 59–60.

<sup>53</sup> Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 84.5 Aug. 2, fol. 79<sup>v</sup>, partly accessible via [diglib.hab.de/?db=mss&list=ms&id=84-5-aug-2f](http://diglib.hab.de/?db=mss&list=ms&id=84-5-aug-2f); Ciggaar, *Western Travellers*, 217; Gia Toussaint, "Elfenbein an der Schwelle: Einband und Codex im Dialog," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 40 (2013): 56, with figs 9 and 10.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Euw, "Der Einfluß des Ostens," 195.

<sup>55</sup> Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc. Lit. 142, fol. 4<sup>v</sup>, [nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:22-dtl-0000024890](http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:22-dtl-0000024890); Venice, Bibliotheca Nazionale Marciana Cod. Gr. 17, fol. 1<sup>r</sup> (= 421), [www.internetculturale.it/jmms/iccuviewe/r/iccu.jsp?id=oai%3A193.206.197.121%3A18%3AVE0049%3ACSTOR.240.9608](http://www.internetculturale.it/jmms/iccuviewe/r/iccu.jsp?id=oai%3A193.206.197.121%3A18%3AVE0049%3ACSTOR.240.9608); Euw, "Der Einfluß des Ostens," 182.

(figure 3).<sup>56</sup> The first shows Leon the Patrician offering the manuscript to the Virgin Mother, and the second shows the abbess Hitda handing a book to the saint Walburga. Nash uses these images as examples of Byzantine influence in the West, which implies either that a western artist had seen his Byzantine model in the Byzantine East or that a copy of that same image was available in the West. Nash acknowledges, however, that there is no conformity beyond the composition itself. Although, in each case, the receiver stands in the middle and on a pedestal, and the offeror stands on the left, these similarities do not suffice to prove any direct influence from the East, especially as specific borrowings that would prove that the second image was drawn with knowledge of the first are lacking. Still, this and other similar examples attest that common ways of expression and styles were used in the East and the West, even though it often remains difficult to assess whether they emerged from mutual influence or in the framework of independent parallel developments.



**Figure 3. The central figures from the dedication illuminations in the *Bible of Leon the Patrician* (left) and the *Hitda Codex* (right).<sup>57</sup>**

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<sup>56</sup> The Byzantine manuscript Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, reg. gr. 1 B, fol. 2v, [digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Reg.gr.1.pt.B](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.gr.1.pt.B); the Ottonian manuscript Hessische Landesbibliothek, Ms 1640, fol. 6<sup>r</sup>, not yet accessible online; Nash, “Demonstrations,” 163.

<sup>57</sup> Respectively redrawn from the Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, reg. gr. 1 B, fol. 2v(left) and Nash, “Demonstrations,” 163 (right).

Several ivory diptychs or triptychs were detached to use their parts to decorate the covers of books. This was usually done regardless of or ignoring the original iconographic program. In late Antiquity, decorated ivory plates were used to write, which was done on the back covered with wax, and they were also popular as lavish gifts.<sup>58</sup> In order to reuse an ivory diptych, Ottonian artists occasionally cropped the original image. One example attesting to this procedure is the ivory triptych used around 1000 to decorate an evangelistary now stored in Jena.<sup>59</sup> The treatment of these ivories suggests that they were most appreciated for their material value and artistic sophistication, and maybe also for their exotic appearance. There is no evidence supporting that they were valued more particularly for their Roman or Byzantine provenance. The discrepancy between the initial purpose of these objects and their use in the Ottonian world points to cultural differences. Diverging habits seemingly entailed that these objects were not used according to their original purpose and were re-appropriated to make them useful in a new context.

Lavish cloth, coloured or dyed in imperial purple, and silk items were popular gifts.<sup>60</sup> These types of cloth were not produced in the West until at least the tenth century, which means that they had to be imported from the Byzantine or the Islamic world.<sup>61</sup> In Byzantium, the production and vending of purple silks, in particular, was strictly monitored and carried out in court manufactories according to secret recipes.<sup>62</sup> This is certainly one reason why these silks were particularly valued in the West, where a comparably high number of these items has been preserved. The majority was donated at some point to a church where they were used to wrap holy scripts, the body of the saints,

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<sup>58</sup> Kim Bowes, "Ivory Lists: Consular Diptychs, Christian Appropriation and Polemics of Time in Late Antiquity," *Art History* 24, no.3 (2001): 339 and 353; Susanne Wittenkind, "Die mittelalterliche Verwendung spätantiker Elfenbeine," in *Persistenz und Rezeption: Weiterverwendung, Wiederverwendung und Neuinterpretation antiker Werke im Mittelalter*, ed. Dietrich Boschung and Susanne Wittekind (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2008), 289–290.

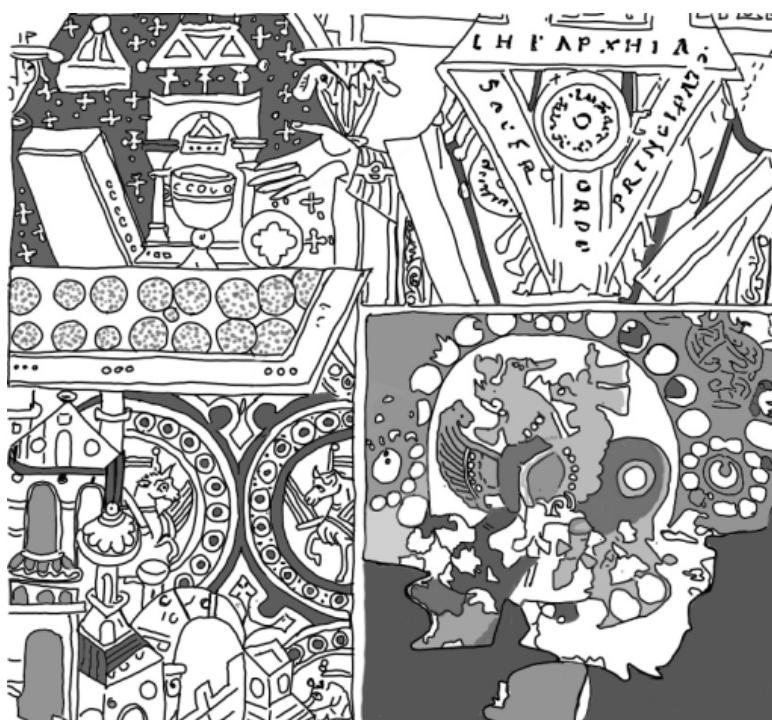
<sup>59</sup> Koenen, "Kulturelle Missverständnisse?" 121–24.

<sup>60</sup> Leslie Brubaker, "The Elephant and the Ark: Cultural and Material Interchange across the Mediterranean in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 191–192; Peter Schreiner, "Diplomatische Geschenke zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen, ca. 800–1200: Eine Analyse der Texte mit Quellenanhang," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 268; Schreiner, "Byzanz," 19; Nicolas Drocourt, "Ambassadors as Informants and Cultural Brokers Between Byzantium and the West (8th to 12th Centuries)," in *Menschen, Bilder, Sprache, Dinge: Wege der Kommunikation zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen*, ed. Falko Daim et al. (Mayence: Schnell & Steiner, 2018), 88. On Byzantine silk, see Leonie von Wilckens, "Byzantinische Seidenweberei in der Zeit vom späten 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert," in Euv and Schreiner, *Kunst*.

<sup>61</sup> Brubaker, "The Elephant," 190.

<sup>62</sup> Siede, "Abkopiert," 109.

or relics.<sup>63</sup> Irmgard Siede pointed to a miniature in the richly decorated *Uta-Code* produced around 1020/5 in the convent of St. Emmeran (figure 4). It shows an altar with gifts, some of which are preserved until this day. The illustration shows what seems to be a gold interwoven silk cloth. It is decorated with several circles coloured in blue and white with a muster of white and red dots. Below the table, there are three winged horses with a banner depicted inside a circle, images that seem to represent an enlarged version of the same silk design. This pattern is provided in some detail and largely corresponds to the decoration known from Sassanian cloth, a popular product in the eighth- and ninth-century Byzantine world.<sup>64</sup> The detail with which it was depicted seems to attest to the high esteem that was attributed to this foreign material. Byzantine silk is also known to have been used to decorate the cover of manuscripts, as in the case of the *Bamberg Gospel* dedicated to Henry II around 1007/14.<sup>65</sup>



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<sup>63</sup> A surprisingly high number of these silks was preserved in the Ottonian world thanks to such donations. See Anna Muthesius, "The Role of Byzantine Silks in the Ottonian Empire," in Konstantinou, *Byzanz*, 301–317. See also the discussion in Brubaker, "The Elephant," 191–194.

<sup>64</sup> Uta-Codex, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 13601, fol. 4<sup>r</sup>, [daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/007/bsb00075075/images](https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/007/bsb00075075/images). Siede, "Abkopiert," 103–4. Siede also relates this to the intriguingly detailed depictions of what appears to be the musters of Byzantine silk cloth in a slightly later manuscript from Echternach: 104–108.

<sup>65</sup> Siede, "Abkopiert," 108.

**Figure 4. Miniature detail from the Uta-Code, fol. 4<sup>r</sup> (left), and an example from a Sassanian cloth (lower right).<sup>66</sup>**

Theophanu is regularly referred to as the promoter of Byzantine culture in the West. This thesis is based on a noticeable increase in Byzantine elements at that time, and the importance her son Otto III seemingly attributed to his mother's Byzantine heritage.<sup>67</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg († 1018) mentioned that when Theophanu travelled to the West, she was “accompanied by a splendid entourage and magnificent gifts.”<sup>68</sup> Modern scholars concluded that she arrived in the company of Byzantine clerical and lay servants, probably alongside some people from southern Italy, and with goods like lavish clothing, jewellery, and Greek manuscripts.<sup>69</sup> An eleventh-century report by Otloh of Sankt Emmeram († after 1070) of a vision by a nun, who dreamed that the then deceased empress confessed to having seduced her subjects by introducing superfluous “Greek” luxury like jewellery hitherto unknown in the West, has been referred to as another confirmation that Theophanu had an active part in the spreading of Byzantine lifestyle and luxury.<sup>70</sup>

Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen challenged the thesis that Theophanu had a significant and active role in the introduction of Byzantine artists and arts. Westermann-Angerhausen convincingly argued in her detailed discussion of the evidence that although Theophanu probably did contribute by creating a framework allowing contemporaries to

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<sup>66</sup> Redrawn from Siede, “Abkopiert,” 104, figs 1 and 2.

<sup>67</sup> For short surveys of Byzantine influence at the time of Theophanu and her son, see Karl Leyser, “The Tenth Century in Byzantine-Western Relationships: Paperback of Publication from 1973,” in *Relations Between East and West in the Middle Ages*, ed. Derek Baker (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 212–20; Schramm, “Kaiser,” 441. See also Werner Ohnsorge, “Das Abendländische Kaisertum,” in *Ost-Rom und der Westen: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte der byzantinisch-abendländischen Beziehungen und des Kaisertums*, ed. Werner Ohnsorge (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 17, stressing the “Byzantinophile” nature of the Ottonian court.

<sup>68</sup> Thietmar, *Chron.* 2.15, 57: “Qui mox muneribus magnificis comitatuque egregio non virginem desideratam, sed neptem suam, Theophanu vocatam, imperatori nostro trans mare mittens, suos absolvit amicitiamque optatam cesaris augusti promeruit.” Trans. David A. Warner, *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 103.

<sup>69</sup> See Ihor Ševčenko, “Byzanz und der Westen Im 10. Jahrhundert,” in Euv and Schreiner, *Kunst*, 21; Ciggaar, *Western Travellers*, 210 and 217. Günter Prinzing stressed that the volume of Theophanu's bride treasury is difficult to estimate due to lack of information: “Das mittelalterliche Mainz und Byzanz: Historisch-politische, kirchen- und kulturgeschichtliche Aspekte,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 91 (2009): 64.

<sup>70</sup> Otlo, *Liber visionum* 17, ed. Paul Gerhard Schmidt, *Otlo von St. Emmeram: Liber visionum*, MGH QQ zur Geistesgesch. 13 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger 1989), 91–2; Schramm, “Kaiser,” 441–2; Ciggaar, *Western Travellers*, 210.

get acquainted with and experience Byzantine culture, her role was much more passive.<sup>71</sup> Further notable work has been offered by Rosamond McKitterick. She showed that although there is evidence proving that Ottonian scholars were interested in the Greek language, their concern for Greek and related knowledge did not surpass that of the Carolingian era. She also argued, with good reasoning, that the teaching and learning of Greek took place without any significant contribution by the imperial family. Limited involvement in promoting Byzantine culture would only be confirmed by the contents of the library of Otto III, which may be partly reconstructed thanks to relevant records. This library appears to have mostly contained manuscripts from southern Italy, including several classical texts from Antiquity, like works of Livy, Orosios, Augustine, Cassiodorus or Isidore. However, Byzantine manuscripts or such containing Greek text were largely lacking.<sup>72</sup> Although the Ottonians clearly understood their empire as Roman and to share in the ancient and contemporary imperial tradition, it appears that there was no interest in pretending to be Byzantine or competing with the eastern imperial culture. Comparable to what I have argued elsewhere concerning the Carolingian era, when Greek was mainly used for reasons located in the West,<sup>73</sup> the Ottonian revival of anything Greek or Byzantine appears to have been an intellectual and clerical, and a genuinely western, phenomenon. This means that we should not refer to the Ottonian period as a “Byzantine era,” as Percy Ernst Schramm suggested.<sup>74</sup> This period was much more characterised by rulers and scholars particularly interested in their Roman heritage as a whole.

### Non-material Culture

The above already touches on the third topic to be addressed here, which is non-material Roman culture. The distinction I have made between the material that follows and the one I discussed above is debatable, as the relevant source often implies a material component. It confirms that Ottonian and Byzantine cultures were largely incompatible. A lively impression of the misunderstandings that could arise when both met is attested by the not unproblematic testimony of the Italian legate Liutprand of Cremona already quoted in the

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<sup>71</sup> Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen, “Spuren der Theophanu in der Ottonischen Schatzkunst?” in Wolf, *Kaiserin Theophanu*, 263–278.

<sup>72</sup> McKitterick, “Ottonian Intellectual Culture,” 59–62 and 72–74.

<sup>73</sup> Laury Sarti, *Orbis Romanus: Byzantium and the Legacy of Rome in the Carolingian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

<sup>74</sup> Schramm, “Kaiser,” 441.

beginning of this study. He was particularly well-acquainted with the Byzantine world and is our primary source for the study of contemporary perceptions of eastern and western Roman culture. Peter Schreiner emphasised that the genuine “eastern” character of Byzantine court culture and protocol were prone to produce incomprehension and dissension among western visitors.<sup>75</sup> For example, the Byzantine and the Ottonian world had developed different means of displaying hierarchy and status. Liutprand of Cremona referred on several occasions, in his reports of his two visits to Constantinople, to seating arrangements at court, which were carefully designed to reflect the rank and esteem of every guest at the imperial dining table. Constantine VII’s *De cerimoniis* confirms that the seating order was pre-defined.<sup>76</sup> Any departure from this was meant and understood to express either promotion or affront. However, the Byzantine definition of an attendee’s rank did not necessarily correspond to the guest’s assessment, as emerges from Liutprand’s report of his second embassy.<sup>77</sup> He deplored that fourteen guests were ranked before him and that he had not received the appropriate seat due to his function as the envoy of the western emperor Otto I. Although the evidence does not allow verifying his case, Tobias Hoffmann offered some good reasoning to argue that the Cremonan bishop may in fact have been properly seated, according to Byzantine standards.<sup>78</sup>

Even though the Frankish courts and society were hierarchically organised, as emerges from Hinkmar’s *De ordine palatii*,<sup>79</sup> there is no evidence of an elaborate ritual display comparable to the one referred to by Liutprand. Either the seating arrangements were less sophisticated, or the sources lack proof of the opposite.<sup>80</sup> A potential exception is

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<sup>75</sup> Schreiner, “Byzanz,” 12–13.

<sup>76</sup> Constantine, *De cerimoniis* 1.87, eds. Ann Moffatt, and Maxeme Tall, *Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos. The Book of Ceremonies* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 393, according to which the duty of the *magistrer*, when ambassadors visited the imperial court, included that “ὁ δὲ δεχόμενος πυρασκευάζει ἕκαστον αὐτῶν καθίσαι πρὸς τὰ ἀξιώματα αὐτῶν.”

<sup>77</sup> Liutprand, *Legatio* 11 and 19.

<sup>78</sup> Tobias Hoffmann, “Diplomatie in der Krise: Liutprand von Cremona am Hofe Nikephoros II. Phokas,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 43 (2009): 157–168, preceded by a discussion of regal feats more in general at 147–157.

<sup>79</sup> See, in particular, Hinkmar, *De Ordine* 4–6, ed. Thomas Gross and Rudolf Schieffer, *Hincmarus De ordine Palatii* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1980). See also, e.g., Notker, *Gesta Karoli* 1.11, ed. Hans F. Haefele, *Notkeri Balbuli: Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatoris* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1959); Achim T. Hack, “Ritual und Zeremoniell um 800,” in *Karl der Große, Charlemagne: Orte der Macht. Essays*, ed. Frank Pohle (Dresden: Sandstein, 2014), 271.

<sup>80</sup> See e.g. Einhard, *Vita Karoli* 24, eds. Georg H. Pertz, G. Waitz, and Oswald Holder-Egger, *Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni* (Hanover/Leipzig: Hahn, 1911).

contained in the work of Widukind of Corvey, describing a feast held around a lavishly decorated marble table in the framework of Otto's I royal coronation in 936. Widukind explained that the king honoured his high-ranking officials with gifts considered appropriate to their respective status, but without referring to how the bishops and secular authorities were seated.<sup>81</sup> Thus, although Liutprand may have misunderstood some elements related to the Byzantine seating arrangements, the idea of expressing status and rank through ritual procedures was also known in the West. This again explains why his treatment according to his status as imperial envoy was crucial to Liutprand.

Liutprand also provided a notable testimony on clothing. Attire, as an aspect related to culture, was a visible means to express identity and distinction. Antony Kaldellis stressed that from a western perspective, the Byzantines had distinctive wear that, together with their language and customs, "formed a package of ethnic indicia which proved that they were not Romans as they claimed."<sup>82</sup> Similarly to the silks already discussed, Byzantine garments were most attractive for westerners, particularly lavish clothes as those worn at the imperial court. Liutprand prominently laments, in a section already quoted in the introduction to this study, how the purple garments he had been offered and bought in Constantinople were confiscated by the authorities. They explained that the Italians, Saxons, Franks and other western peoples were considered unworthy of these. At the same time, Liutprand mocked the Byzantines for being "weak" and "effeminate," for wearing garments with "wide sleeves, Phrygian caps and headscarfs," adding that only "lazy people walk in purple, not heroes, brave, war-experienced men, filled with faith and love, god-fearing, and full of virtue."<sup>83</sup> Again, there is an interesting tension between the Byzantine and Western perspectives: both potentially used similar methods to display status but were able to resort to opposing stereotypes to deny the legitimacy of the opponent's claim. Thus, although Byzantine attire was the most

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<sup>81</sup> Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* 2.2, eds. Paul Hirsch, and H.-E. Lohmann, *Widukindi Monachi Corbeiensis Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum libri tres. Die Sachsen Geschichte des Widukind von Korvei* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1935), 67: "cum pontificibus et omni populo ... Rex autem post haec unumquemque principum iuxta munificentiam regalem congruenti sibi munere honorans cum omni hilaritate dimisit multitudinem."

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, "Ethnicity and Clothing in Byzantium," in *Identity and the Other in Byzantium: Papers from the Fourth International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium*, ed. K. Durak and I. Jevtiæ (Istanbul: Koç University Stavros Niarchos Foundation, 2019), 50. See also his examples attesting distinct "Roman" dress from a Byzantine perspective at 43–44.

<sup>83</sup> Liutprand, *Legatio* 54. See also Liutprand, *Antapodosis* 3.23, 76: "Grecorum more teristro opertum habituque insolito viderunt indutum".



attractive, Liutprand had no trouble finding suitable preconceptions about Roman and imperial identities to disclaim that this was the case.

Some differences and similarities in looks were notably subtle, and they involved not only the style of clothes themselves but also the habits of their wearing. Liutprand mentioned that in Constantinople, he was forbidden to wear his cape (*pilleatus*) in the presence of the emperor, who only allowed a scarf (*teristratum*/θερίστρα). He responded: “When riding, our women [wear] bonnets (*tiaratae*) and headscarves (*teristratae*), men [wear] hats.” It would be wrong to compel him to change the customs of his fathers given that the Byzantines’ habits would be respected in the West, and this even though they would “wear long sleeves, bandages, bracelets, long hair, and long tunics, whether they are riding, walking, or sitting at table,” and kiss the emperor with their heads covered. This would be against western customs.<sup>84</sup> The occasional use of hats in the West is confirmed by Notker, who related the story of a poor man ashamed of his red hair. As he had no cape (*pilleum*) to cover them, he would have done so with his “red footwear” (*rufo gallicula*).<sup>85</sup> Liutprand’s critique of long hair in reference to the Byzantines is confirmed by Aeneas of Paris in his *Book against the Greeks*, who makes similar mentions.<sup>86</sup> Comparable critique is expressed by referring to the wear of the inhabitants of Constantinople. Liutprand described how, during a festive day, a largely barefooted crowd of traders and common people gathered on the road leading from the palace to the Hagia Sophia to receive the emperor Nikephoros II. The emperor and his courtiers would have worn excessively opulent and visibly worn robes and presented themselves in a notably inferior style to any official western attire. With the exception of the emperor’s clothes, none of these garments would have been adorned with gold or precious stones. The Italian legate adds that it would

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<sup>84</sup> Liutprand, *Legatio* 37, 203: “Mulieres ... nostrae tiaratae et teristratae, viri equitant pileati. Nec decet vos compellere patrium me hic mutare morem, cum vestros nos adeuntes patrium morem tenere sinamus. Manicati enim, fasciati, fibulatie, criniti, talari tunica induti penes nos equitant, incedunt, mensae assident et, quod nostris omnibus nimis turpe videtur, ipsi soli capite operto imperatores nostros deoseulantur”.

<sup>85</sup> Notker, *Gesta Karoli* 1.18, 22-3: “uno pauperculo valde rufo, gallicula sua, quia pilleum non habuit et de colore suo nimium erubuit, caput induto”, with note 1 at 23 of the said edition.

<sup>86</sup> Aeneas, *Adversus Graecos* 186, ed. Jacques P. Migne, *Aeneae Parisiensis. Liber adversus Graecos*. (Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1880), col. 747: “convenienter et Latini vicem quaestioni rependunt, quare Graecorum laici more feminarum contra interdictum tonantis Pauli comas nutrient.” Also referred to in Hans-Werner Goetz, *Die Wahrnehmung anderer Religionen und christlich-abendländisches Selbstverständnis im frühen und hohen Mittelalter (5.-12. Jahrhundert)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 743.

have been more decent if these officials had appeared in their everyday clothes.<sup>87</sup> Again, Liutprand compared the Byzantines to his fellow countryman by referring to contemporary ideas about the representation of Roman authority, and once more he used his critique of Byzantine proceeds to offer a positive assessment of Western habits. Liutprand's criticism did not end here: he also claimed to dislike Byzantine wine and food for including much garlic, onions, oil, and the famous Roman fish sauce known as *garum*.<sup>88</sup>

Evidence for borrowings from the Byzantine world in the Ottonian West is also scarce. Modern scholars have pointed to the introduction of some Byzantine saints in the West since the later tenth century. A prominent example is the cult of St. Nicholas of Myra, which, according to Percy Ernst Schramm, travelled with Theophanu.<sup>89</sup> Although St. Nicholas was already known in the West in the ninth century,<sup>90</sup> his cult was only introduced when his relic was treasured in the monastery's church in Burtscheid near Aachen. The church was founded by Otto III in 997, and the saint's cult was further promoted by his *Life* written by Otloh of St. Emmeram.<sup>91</sup> A Byzantine icon of the saint may still be visited in the said church: it is a mosaic of 22 by 11.5 cm showing the saint's front portrait, which is usually dated to the tenth century. Maybe the icon was first in the private possession of Theophanu. If this was the case, it must have left Constantinople with her.<sup>92</sup> In this initial

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<sup>87</sup> Liutprand, *Legatio* 9, 191: "Negotiatorum multitudo copiosa ignobiliumque personarum ea sollempnitate collecta ad susceptionem et laudem Nicephori a palatio usque ad Sanctam Sophiam ... nudis processerat pedibus. [...] Sed et optimates sui [...] magnis et nimia vetustate rimatis tunicis erant induti. Satis decentius cotidiana veste induti procederent. [...] Nemo ibi auro, nemo gemmis ornatus erat [...]. Per salutem vestram [...] una vestrorum pretiosa vestis procerum, centum extat, horum et eo amplius pretiosior est!" See also Drocourt, "Ambassadors as Informants," 88. Andrew M. Small stresses that in Constantinople the age of ceremonial attire defined its worth, while at the Ottonian court lavish clothing was meant to be new. Liutprand used his knowledge about the differences in both cultures to create a negative impression of the Byzantines among his western readers: see Small's "Constantinopolitan Connections: Liudprand of Cremona and Byzantium," in *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*, ed. Nicholas S. M. Matheou, Theofili Kampianaki and Lorenzo M. Bondioli (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 92.

<sup>88</sup> Drocourt, "Ambassadors," 87–88.

<sup>89</sup> Schramm, "Kaiser," 442.

<sup>90</sup> Gunther Wolf, "Kaiserin Theophanu, die Ottonen und der Beginn der St. Nikolaus-Verehrung in Mitteleuropa," in Wolf, *Kaiserin Theophanu*, 27–28.

<sup>91</sup> Ciggaar, *Western Travellers*, 215–216; Grzegorz Pac, "Communities of Devotion across the Boundaries: Women and Religious Bonds on the Baltic Rim and in Central Europe, Eleventh–Twelfth Centuries," in *Imagined Communities on the Baltic Rim: From the eleventh to fifteenth Centuries*, ed. W. Jezierski, L. Hermanson and M. Peikola (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 135–137.

<sup>92</sup> Anke-Angelika Krickelberg-Pütz, "Die Mosaikikone des hl. Nikolaus in Aachen-Burtscheid," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 50 (1982): 9–141; Helmut Buschhausen, "Studien zur Mosaikikone mit dem Bild des Hl. Nikolaus

phase, the cult of Nicholas probably was celebrated as an Ottonian family cult, which may have implied some political relevance. The significance the rulers attributed to such cults is confirmed by the fact that in 1024 Theophanu's daughter Mathilda followed the initiative of her brother Otto III by dedicating an abbey in Brauweiler to the saints Nicholas and Medardus.<sup>93</sup>

The little evidence referring to non-material Roman culture in the Ottonian world and related perceptions is very heterogeneous and far from significant. It confirms that Roman features were only of marginal importance and, when present at all, limited to the court and the Church. Still, elements related to a Roman culture known from the Byzantine East were willingly adapted to become part of a western cultural repertoire.

## Conclusion

The Ottonians called themselves emperors of a Roman empire. However, elements that may have been conceived as belonging to the Roman heritage or that were related to the Byzantine West were far from abundant, and, as far as the evidence can tell, they were limited mainly to the court and some productions by clerics. Ottonian Romanness thus only remotely conformed to Walter Pohl's definition mentioned at the beginning of this study. It mainly implied elements related to Roman emperorship, most of which were in the colouring known from the Byzantine East, while genuinely Roman elements of a western provenance were relatively scarce. Here, San Vitale in Ravenna may have been one source of inspiration, although a comparable iconography was certainly also available elsewhere. Other Roman features, like co-emperorship, reached the Ottonian world by the Carolingian detour. They confirm that the Ottonians conceived themselves as the heirs and successors of their Frankish predecessors.<sup>94</sup>

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in Aachen-Burtscheid," in Konstantinou, *Byzanz*, 57–109. Buschhausen discussed more recent suggestions that the icon may date to the thirteenth century, which he argued to be less improbable, although not impossible given the major difficulties involved with any attempt to date this or comparable icons. In 1029, under Henry II, the church of Aachen-Burtscheid was rededicated to John the Baptist: Andrea Stieldorf, "Der Heilige Nikolaus im Rheinland: Ein politischer oder Volksheiliger," *Annalen des Historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein* 221, no. 1 (2018): 97.

<sup>93</sup> Wolf, "Kaiserin Theophanu" (1991), 29–34; Pac, "Communities," 135–136; Stieldorf, "Der Heilige Nikolaus," 98–100. The cult only became more popular after 1087 when his body was translated to Bari.

<sup>94</sup> See the discussion on this aspect in Hagen Keller, "Die Ottonen und Karl der Große," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 34, no. 1 (2000): 112–131.

Roman culture, as represented by its Byzantine, Italian, or Frankish examples, had evolved separately until the tenth century to become distinctly different. Still, they belonged to the same Roman identity and heritage and defined the medieval understanding of Romanness. In consequence, Roman culture, as seen from the perspective of the Ottonian sources in the West and the Byzantine East, had become significantly different to classical Romanness as known from the time of the Principate. Still, Romanness was not alien to the court of the Ottonians. Their empire emerged from the Roman heritage, and related models represented the only known sets of adequate examples or sources of inspiration to represent western emperorship. Consequently, when the Ottonian monarchs became emperors, they naturally resorted to their Roman heritage and known Byzantine models to represent or propagate their role as imperial rulers, a procedure that also attests to the significance of the eastern empire as a paradigm of imperial authority. However, although Roman culture remained an imported feature, related styles and features were not prominently displayed, neither in nor outside the Ottonian court.

While genuinely Byzantine culture was never restricted to the imperial court, related features belonging to the monastic or popular sphere were largely absent from the Ottonian world. The western use of Byzantine material culture and the reports of Liutprand of Cremona attest to the advanced alienation both worlds had undergone. Byzantine objects were mainly appreciated for their quality and finishing, not for their origin. The reworking of the ivories to serve as manuscript cover confirms their perceived foreignness. Still, the Ottonians did not copy their models one-to-one, as a dead quote of an ancient past or the imitation of a contemporary but foreign archetype.<sup>95</sup> Although relevant evidence is scarce, it attests that the Ottonian contemporaries adopted and adapted Roman and Byzantine cultural features to become their own, as in the case of Roman co-emperorship applied to the imperial wives.

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<sup>95</sup> This tendency was even more pronounced in the later eleventh century. See the excellent survey of Michael Rentschier, "Griechische Kultur und Byzanz im Urteil westlicher Autoren des 11. Jahrhunderts," *Saeculum* 31 (1980): 112–156.

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