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## Introduction

### Studies on Material Culture – Some General Considerations\*

The question of the definition of the term ‘(Byzantine) Material Culture’ is central to the development of material culture studies in the Byzantine field. Up to the present time, there is no all-round and comprehensive agreement about precisely what this general term covers, or about which research methods might best serve this new discipline. Outside the field of Byzantine studies, there has been earlier extensive discussion about approaches to the ‘everyday or to daily life’ as manifested in studies such as ‘Realienkunde’, or ‘Sachkultur’ and other specialised areas of investigation occupied with object based analysis. This paper presents below, a summary overview of some of the key discussions, for consideration in relation to the development of Byzantine Material Culture studies.

#### WHAT DO SOME EARLIER DISCUSSIONS POINT TO?

In medieval material culture studies most of the discussion has been amongst scholars of western civilisation. The key issue has been to determine what is meant by ‘material culture’ as a generic term across disciplines, and to define ‘daily life’ in regard to the term. A number of centres of study (including Warsaw, Krems, Vienna, Cambridge), have engendered useful debate around major issues important to the development of material culture studies in general.

By 1969 the Krems Institut für Mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs, had been founded and Kühnel became its first director. This institute was engaged with folk-narrative research and with object centred studies as allied to a variety of disciplines including archaeology, social and economic history and historical anthropology<sup>1</sup>. Kühnel, writing in 1976, traced the history of ‘Realienkunde’ in Austria back to the eighteenth century. He outlined the contribution of archaeologists, cultural historians, art historians, philologists and museum directors to the field<sup>2</sup>. He also noted the importance from the nineteenth century onwards, of exhibitions which displayed objects in their spiritual as well as their cultural contexts. Kühnel advocated the writing of inventories of surviving objects and the collation of visual and of written source materials.

In the late 1970s Krems scholars joined with scholars from the universities of Munich, Göttingen and Münster amongst other places, to debate and publish papers on the theme of ‘Geschichte der Alltagskultur’<sup>3</sup>. This collection of studies highlighted some important issues around the definitions of ‘Sachkultur’, ‘Volkskunde als Alltagswissenschaft’, and ‘materielle Kultur’. The symposium also indicated the complex inter-disciplinary methods that were emerging around this area of study. The different disciplines accorded on the fact that object based, visual and written source evidence analyses were necessary. Wiegelmann pointed out that the parallel study of word and image had been in operation as early as the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>4</sup>. In 1909 the inter-disciplinary periodical for ‘historische Sachforschung’, entitled “Wörter und

\* The author is indebted to E. Kislinger / Vienna for reading the manuscript and for suggestions regarding bibliography and for providing additional details about the exchange of ideas between institutions in Krems, Vienna and Berlin.

<sup>1</sup> H. APPELT, Mittelalterliche Realienkunde als Forschungsaufgabe, in: Europäische Sachkultur des Mittelalters (*Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte* 374 = *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs* 4). Wien 1980, 7–12. On the activities of the institute now see <http://www.imareal.oeaw.ac.at>.

<sup>2</sup> H. KÜHNEL, Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit. Versuch einer Darstellung. Erfordernis der Gegenwart, in: *Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von K. Lechner (= Jahrbuch für Landeskunde von Niederösterreich N.F. XXXVII 1965–1967)*. Wien 1967, 215–47.

<sup>3</sup> *Geschichte der Alltagskultur*, ed. G. W. WIEGELMANN (*Beiträge zur Volkskultur in Nordwestdeutschland herausgegeben von der Volkskundlichen Kommission für Westfalen, Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe. Heft 21*). Münster 1980.

<sup>4</sup> WIEGELMANN, Einführung, in: *Geschichte der Alltagskultur* 11–20.

Sachen", already had appeared. Folklore narrative, object based studies, were promoting an 'archaeology of the Middle Ages'.

Another factor that was to play a part in the material culture discussions involved the French Annales school, whereby the history of civilisations was viewed as an exploration of social and economic themes in relation to processes of cultural development. This school was occupied with the problem of how representative were the sources used as evidence. It was not sufficient merely to enquire were there sufficient sources. It was necessary to gain an impression of 'medieval mentalities' to avoid misinterpretation of the sources. This 'new historical' approach lent itself to inter-disciplinary study of daily life, with recourse also both to related philosophical and sociological discourses<sup>5</sup>. Wiegmann noted the contributions of social science and of historical anthropology to the early debates on material culture. He further stressed that archival research and a thorough study of inventories would provide rich ground for the assembly of object inventories, and that inter-disciplinary exploration of the assembled objects would follow.

Jaritz from the Krems Institute looked at problems surrounding the quality of sources used as evidence in material culture studies. He broached the thorny issue of the interpretation of sources<sup>6</sup>. Written sources presented problems of the use of literary conventions and problems of determination of the relationship between person-/object. With pictorial sources, questions of authenticity: that is of 'reality as against imagined reality', were highlighted. In object centred analysis, lack of source material occurred and there was an imbalance for instance, in the source availability for analysis of the poorer as against the richer sections of society. Even in the case of objects listed in inventories, there remained the problem of relating the named objects to their everyday uses. It was not easy to determine what was an everyday use, nor to recognise which practices might reflect social norms.

Everyday history demanded its own methods of research; it moved beyond the usual histories as related to states of being, and it aimed towards a 'total' picture. This demanded a new historical approach, which amalgamated socio-economics, technology, and the history of mentalities. Earlier structural and narrative historical approaches were inadequate to encompass the 'everyday', which needed to be seen rather as a 'representative sample' history. There would never be sufficient sources to cover all aspects of daily life and it would be important to look out for the 'unusual' rather than for the 'exceptional and the individual' within the available evidence. The historian of 'daily life' had to seek out 'types representative of their time' but usually this was possible only where sources abounded. There was also the problem of establishing what topics were relevant under the heading of 'daily life' and here Jaritz suggested: status; occupation; background; education; mentality; age; gender; and religious leanings, as possible examples.

The study demanded a consideration of what stood as a social norm and of whether different levels of social reality were possible. For example, how did the individual reality compare to what was considered the norm, and how far did either one or both of these states compare with the perceived reality of the society as a whole?

Documented norms were not necessarily realities: both written and visual sources could engage with fiction and with idealisation. Even if fiction and idealisation were evident, it would be possible to seek a method for their analysis, towards the appreciation of social reality. Material culture was clearly a type of history but where did it belong in regard to specific economic or social histories, or in relation to political history, each of which had their own particular emphasis. A fresh approach to the written sources was needed; an approach that took into consideration what was the intention of the writer of the source. It was also necessary to seek out unusual sources such as receipts, ledgers and so on, which might act as a counter-balance to the evidence of the usually cited sources.

Writing in 1980, Brockmann explored the relationship between 'cultural history', 'daily life history' and the 'history of material culture'<sup>7</sup>. He distinguished between the approaches of the historical anthropologist

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *La nouvelle histoire*, ed. J. LE GOFF – R. CHARTIER – J. REVEL. Paris 1978, with contributions of J. LE GOFF, *L'histoire nouvelle* (210–41) and J.-M. PESEZ, *L'histoire de la culture matérielle* (98–130).

<sup>6</sup> G. JARITZ, *Die spätmittelalterliche Stadt in der Sachkulturforschung. Problematik–Möglichkeiten–Grenzen*, in: *Geschichte der Alltagskultur* (as note 3) 53–68.

<sup>7</sup> H. BROCKMANN, *Dreimal Kulturgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Geschichte der Materiellen Kultur. Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 13 (1986) 201–215.

and the historian of mentalities and he contemplated what contribution the folklorist might make. He also briefly outlined the distinct approaches of the Warsaw School and of the Krems School of material culture studies<sup>8</sup>. He outlined how the Warsaw school initially emphasised production and consumption issues (1950s–1960s), only later exploring material culture as the ‘handmaiden of living’. Essentially this approach looked at problems of the integration of material objects into life patterns, from economic and business points of view. The Krems school from the 1970s, applied research approaches from the discipline of Folk narrative studies, and it explored relationships with historical anthropology, history, sociology, art and literary scholarship.

The author also noted how Baxandall of the Warburg Institute in London, from the 1970s on, pioneered the amalgamation of historical and of art historical approaches, including a consideration of techniques and technologies, within his own branch of material culture studies<sup>9</sup>. Baxandall explored cultural artefacts in relation to technological processes and social settings, whilst also defining the political boundaries which existed within cultural landscapes. Brockmann concluded that material culture studies of whatever kind belonged to the discipline of ‘History’ and that it was perhaps secondary whether they style themselves as ‘Realienkunde’ or as ‘Kulturgeschichte’.

In 1982 an International Round table was held at Krems entitled „Die Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur des Mittelalters (Methode–Ziel–Verwirklichung)“. The proceedings (published in 1984)<sup>10</sup> are very useful for consideration of the relative contributions of a wide variety of disciplines to the field of material culture. Archaeology as well as Social and Economic History<sup>11</sup> were considered to be of central importance.

Meyer thought of archaeology as a research method and of ‘Realienkunde’ as an academic discipline, which is an interesting comment upon research of his time<sup>12</sup>. Archaeology needed to set itself the right questions to answer if it was to be of service to material culture studies. Olsen’s paper asked about what terminology the archaeologists should adopt to record finds<sup>13</sup>. Von Stromer emphasised the immense significance of technical recording from the surviving objects themselves<sup>14</sup>.

With reference to the French Annalists, Pionnier saw strength in the alliance between archaeology and history in its broadest sense. An alliance between these disciplines and ethnography was also desirable, primarily in the sense in which Levi-Strauss approached the field of ‘understanding mentalities’<sup>15</sup>. Ethnographers were not generally sufficiently engaged with the source evidence housed in museums she felt. Dirlmeier noted the attempts of scholars to synthesise historical and archaeological approaches<sup>16</sup>. The study of manufacture, products and processes belonged to historical archaeology, as did the areas of nutrition and housing. Specific types of historians might contribute to specialised areas: for instance, economic historians to the question of taxation in relation to urban and rural social structures, or in relation to housing and comfort, weights and measures etc. In the case of metrology the written evidence analysed by the economic historian might be cross-referenced to the archaeological evidence of surviving weights and measures. Dirlmeier considered economic history a sister discipline of material culture studies.

<sup>8</sup> BROCKMANN, Dreimal Kulturgeschichte 202.

<sup>9</sup> BROCKMANN, Dreimal Kulturgeschichte 210–12. M. BAXANDALL, *Painting and experience in fifteenth century Italy*. Oxford 1972; IDEM, *The Limewood sculptors of Renaissance Germany*. New Haven 1980.

<sup>10</sup> *Die Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur des Mittelalters. Methode–Ziel–Verwirklichung. Internationales Round-Table Gespräch*. Krems an der Donau, 20. September 1982. (*Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte* 433 = *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs* 6). Wien 1984.

<sup>11</sup> W. RÖSENER, *Sozialgeschichte und mittelalterliche Realienkunde*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 88–98.

<sup>12</sup> W. MEYER, *Der Beitrag der Archäologie zur mittelalterlichen Realienkunde*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 53–9.

<sup>13</sup> R.A. OLSEN, *Terminologie und Registrierung mittelalterlicher Sachgüter in Skandinavien*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 68–74.

<sup>14</sup> W. VON STROMER, *Technikgeschichte und Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 129–39.

<sup>15</sup> F. PIPONNIER, *Les sources de l’histoire de la culture matérielle à la lumière des recherches récentes*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 23–32.

<sup>16</sup> U. DIRLMEIER, *Realienkunde und mittelalterliche Wirtschaftsgeschichte Deutschlands*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 122–8.

Bentzien presented a picture of the relationship between 'Realienkunde' and Folklore studies<sup>17</sup>. Both were concerned with the relationship between objects and people. However, Folklore studies were primarily concerned with contemporary themes: they did not employ 'period' techniques (divisions into early, middle and later phases of historical development) in the way that historians tended to do. Folklore was not firmly categorised into historical periods.

Albeit that literary style including rhetorical devices, stylisation, caricature, parody and use of topos, might obscure fact, written sources did yield evidence of social reality. Schüppert<sup>18</sup> considered that written sources not only listed objects, and linked objects to owners, but that they also described the functions of the objects, and outlined behaviours used in their presence. Written evidence allows for the association of medieval mentalities to material culture.

A variety of historians also raised their voices to indicate the place of legal history and of economic and of social history to the development of material culture studies<sup>19</sup>. The legal historian for example, might look for reflection of sumptuary laws or of building regulations in visual records of dress or of housing, whilst from the 1970s onwards Schwarz and others had looked at the relationship between material goods and life styles<sup>20</sup>.

Kubinyi drew attention to the immense field covered by material culture studies<sup>21</sup>. He saw a problem in that scholars exploring the field could not at once be trained as historians, archaeologists, art historians, ethnographers, literary analysts and philologists. The sources belonging to the study of material culture were the sources of many disciplines, each with specialised methods of analysis. Cross-disciplinary Symposia involving close collaboration between individual specialists would be the only answer. He advocated the setting of single themes upon which these different specialists might work in common. Inter-disciplinary study by single scholars was more problematic; these scholars he felt, could function across only a limited number of disciplines<sup>22</sup>.

Such methodological discussions centred in the Krems Institute in the course of time set the standard across medieval studies and beyond that also influenced the Byzantine field. In this context it should be noted that after the completion of the monumental work of Ph. Kukules, *Byzantinon bios kai politismos (Vie et civilisations byzantines)*, I–VI. Athens 1948–1955, no other all-encompassing study in Byzantine material culture appeared.<sup>23</sup> For the first time at the 16. Internationaler Kongreß für Byzantinistik 1981 in Vienna, an independent section „Realienkunde – Materielle Kultur“ (6.1–2.) was included. Most of the papers drew out few questions<sup>24</sup>, but a significant main paper by H. Köpstein (Zentralinstitut für Alte Geschichte und Archäologie der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR) as well as a smaller communication by E. Kislinger (Institut für Byzantinistik der Universität Wien) set out the position of, the future direction of, and the inherent problems involved in this type of study<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> U. BENTZIEN, *Volkscundliche Geräteforschung und mittelalterliche Realienkunde*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 140–6.

<sup>18</sup> H. SCHÜPPERT, *Der Beitrag der Literaturwissenschaft für die mittelalterliche Realienkunde*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 158–67.

<sup>19</sup> G. KOCHER, *Rechtsgeschichte und mittelalterliche Realienkunde*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 99–121.

<sup>20</sup> See D. W. H. SCHWARZ, *Sachgüter und Lebensformen. Einführung in die materielle Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*. Berlin 1970.

<sup>21</sup> A. KUBINYI, *Die Rolle interdisziplinärer Forschung für die mittelalterliche Realienkunde*, in: *Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur* 45–52.

<sup>22</sup> KUBINYI, *op. cit.* 45.

<sup>23</sup> For a general publication based on older concepts see G. WALTER, *La vie quotidienne à Byzance au siècle des Comnènes (1081–1180)*. Paris 1966 and T. TALBOT RICE, *Everyday Life in Byzantium*. London – New York 1967; H. HUNGER, *Reich der Neuen Mitte*. Graz – Wien – Köln 1965.

<sup>24</sup> For example the main paper of C. MANGO, *Daily life in Byzantium*. *JÖB* 31/1 (1981) 337–53 mainly about baths and circus games or the communications of L. BOURAS, *Byzantine Lighting Devices*. *JÖB* 32/3 (1982) 479–91, G. VIKAN, *Security in Byzantium: Keys*. *JÖB* 32/3 (1982) 503–8 and J.-M. SPIESER, *Ceramique byzantine de Pergame*. *JÖB* 32/3 (1982) 561–76.

<sup>25</sup> H. KÖPSTEIN, *Gebrauchsgegenstände des Alltags in archäologischen und literarischen Quellen*. *JÖB* 31/1 (1981) 355–75; E. KISLINGER, *Aspekte der realienkundlichen Quellenauswertung*. *JÖB* 32/3 (1982) 469–78.

In 1986, these two Byzantinists followed up their discussions at a day session held between Krems and Vienna, under the organisation of H. Hundsbichler. Köpstein<sup>26</sup> looked at daily life in relation to cultural history and she considered this to be a part of historical studies in general. Object based material remains analysis was emphasised. The object, she argued, went far beyond physical reality; it was a philosophical mirror of intellectual and moral stances. Material Culture included appreciation of mentalities alongside study of the relationship of the Byzantines to their natural environment, and exploration of their social organisation, and occupational settings. Objects were both physical and symbolic aspects of material culture, and they related to people who existed on both a material and a spiritual level. She envisaged a discipline, which explored both material and spiritual endeavour as part of the creative activity of human beings. This would be a multi-disciplinary field of study, which would engage with history, philosophy, political theory, literary studies, philology, artistic production and aesthetics, and archaeology.

Kislinger<sup>27</sup> in agreement with this approach, produced a graphic tree-ring model diagram to encompass Köpstein's ideas. The innermost circle represented research on the surviving object. The next circular ring set the object into human context (primarily the production, consumption, life support triangle). The outermost circular ring included spiritual aspects in order to encompass the theme of being as tied up in human involvement with material goods. This tree-ring arrangement demands unity not division<sup>28</sup>.

Hundsbichler in the same publication<sup>29</sup>, demonstrated the development of the understanding of the word "Realien" across the years at Krems. Originally (with reference to D.H.W. Schwarz) they were likened to "Sachgüter", which "Encompasses all material objects, across the multitude of human needs and the endeavors of human occupation". The material components in this way spoke in opposition to spiritual requirements, but through them both, a total-culture was forged. Realienkunde has to be more broadly understood as „the examination of human ways of life, based upon material uses and forms“<sup>30</sup>. Living involves repetition, which leads to overall Well-Being and provides structure, conventions of communal life such as laws and family living. These are not self sufficient but they are shaped through factors of communication (passing on of knowledge, adoption and imitation, and normalisation).

Essentially, both Hundsbichler and Kislinger suggested that the elements of importance are the object and its qualities in relation to people and their human context<sup>31</sup>. Objects stand at the centre of material culture study, but they cannot function alone. The object is at once bound up with individual human inter-action and the need to sustain daily life, and with the creation of a 'living world' upon which institutional structures act and within which human 'mentalities' are formed. How and why were the objects used, and what were the qualities and values attached to those objects, were important questions to be asked. These were separate questions to those asking about the physical qualities of those objects (form, materials, colours etc.). The object-centred material culture of daily life belongs to the wider 'Lebenswelt' and it impacts upon the material and the non-material experiences involved in the business of living. Inter-disciplinary methods should be applied to the analysis of inter-disciplinary source materials, and archaeological records should be revisited for possible re-readings, in Hundsbichler's view. He also advocated the study of topics such as daily life and its life forms, the material basis of social and economic phenomena, and the significance of daily life for the creation of generic historical phenomena<sup>32</sup>. Hundsbichler recommended for the archaeologist, a firm grounding in historical method, and critical competence in handling sources, materials and research methods in general. He saw the need for creation of typologies and for an analysis of terminology found in written sources as daily life patterns often were communicated in a 'hidden form'. It was important to recognise the

<sup>26</sup> H. KÖPSTEIN, Realienkunde – materielle Kultur – Alltagsleben in Byzanz. Zu Termini und Forschungsgegenstand. *Medium Aevum Quotidianum. Newsletter* 9 (1987) 6–25.

<sup>27</sup> E. KISLINGER, Notizen zur Realienkunde aus byzantinistischer Sicht. *Medium Aevum Quotidianum, op. cit.* 26–33.

<sup>28</sup> Developed by H. HUNDSBICHLER, Perspektiven für die Archäologie des Mittelalters im Rahmen eine Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters in: *Methoden und Perspektiven der Archäologie des Mittelalters*, hrsg. von J. TAUBER. Liestal 1991, 85–99, esp. 91–3. Cf. G. JARITZ, *Zwischen Augenblick und Ewigkeit. Einführung in die Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters*. Wien – Köln 1989, 13–26.

<sup>29</sup> H. HUNDSBICHLER, Realienkunde zwischen 'Kulturgeschichte' und 'Geschichte des Alltags'. *Medium Aevum Quotidianum, op. cit.* 34–42.

<sup>30</sup> See previously H. HUNDSBICHLER, Wege zum Alltag des Mittelalters. Arbeitsweise und Forschungsziele des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs. *Medium Aevum Quotidianum. Newsletter* 1 (1982) 11–8.

<sup>31</sup> HUNDSBICHLER, Perspektiven 87 and 90; KISLINGER, Notizen 28–9.

<sup>32</sup> HUNDSBICHLER, Perspektiven 91–3.

unusual before any grasp of the ‘norm’ could occur. How ‘realistic’ a picture could be painted of daily life depended upon all these factors. The archaeologist and the art historian also needed to co-operate. In addition, it should be recognised that: spectacular finds did little to increase understanding of daily life; some objects would always remain a mystery and that conversely, other objects could be recognised as earlier forms of items still in daily use. The sense of continuity yielded in the latter case, lent a timeless dimension to the study of material culture, he concluded.

At the same period of time as these Austrian-German theories were being developed<sup>33</sup> amongst British Byzantinists Magdalino was suggesting that there was a “literary perception” of everyday existence in Byzantium<sup>34</sup>. He wrote about Apokaukos, the almost singular observer of and writer on daily life. This individual, Magdalino felt, in an exceptional manner managed to integrate popular and classical literary trends. A study of the work of this writer led Magdalino to propose that it would be useful to categorise Byzantine literary perception according to author and period. In this system it would be possible for example, to class seventh century hagiographers and twelfth century literati as excellent communicators of their own medieval world. Broader trends could also be categorised across periods. For instance, the twelfth century it could be said, was characterised by a closer treatment of human nature (physical and psychological). Magdalino suggested that the court entertainments and public celebrations set the tone for the greater communication of human experience, and that this perhaps opened the way for the inclusion of popular language within formal literary output.

In the discussions surrounding the study of western and of Byzantine material culture mainly qualitative methods of research were outlined, but it is important also to consider the value of quantitative analysis. In a paper of 1988 Jaritz, for example, illustrated how statistics could provide evidence towards the creation of an ‘over-all picture’ of certain every day situations. He used a structural history approach in combination with qualitative analysis to detect tendencies and patterns of consumption of food during periods of fasting and of non-fasting at Klosterneuburg, based on the evidence from registers of expenses of the monastery<sup>35</sup>.

In 1992, a Festschrift for Kühnel was published under the title of ‘Symbols of daily life and daily life as Symbol’<sup>36</sup>, but surprisingly, no further developments of Byzantine material culture theory were published.

Quite unrelated to and uninfluenced by the German/Austrian developments, in 1996, the McDonald Institute for archaeological research at Cambridge University, held a conference entitled, ‘Cognition and Material Culture: the Archaeology of Symbolic Storage’. (Proceedings edited by C. Renfrew, C. Scarre. Oxford 1998). The inspiration for the conference came from a publication of 1991 by Merlin Donald, entitled, ‘Origins of the Modern Mind’. The conference was concerned with ‘the archaeology of external symbolic storage: the dialectic between artefact and cognition.’ The aim was to explore what it meant to ‘be human’ as revealed by the records of material culture. The conference emphasised analysis of material objects within pre-literate and non-literate societies and the use of non-literate symbols within literate societies. This moved the emphasis from the more usual concentration upon the uses of writing within literate societies. The symbols explored, (objects of material culture), either were functional in nature, (e.g. weights and measures) and allied to the assignment of status (e.g. price, quality), or they were symbolic adjuncts of domestic and non-domestic life.

The concept of symbolic storage operated across time and space and it was applicable to historical and to contemporary living. The impact of the symbolically charged object as catalyst for changes in human behaviour was a core theme of the conference. Social context and human communication, and the meaning and value embedded into the object as carrier of information were explored. The relationship between man and

<sup>33</sup> For a recent overview see H.-W. GOETZ, *Moderne Mediävistik. Stand und Perspektiven der Mittelalterforschung*. Darmstadt 1999, 299–318.

<sup>34</sup> P. MAGDALINO, *The Literary Perception of Everyday Life in Byzantium*. *BSI* 48 (1987) 28–38.

<sup>35</sup> G. JARITZ, *Quantitative Methoden in der Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters*, in: ‘Qualität und Quantität’. *Zur Praxis der Methoden der Historischen Sozialwissenschaft (Studien zur Historischen Sozialwissenschaft 10)*. Frankfurt – New York 1988, 85–108.

<sup>36</sup> *Symbole des Alltags. Alltag der Symbole*. Festschrift für Harry Kühnel zum 65. Geburtstag. Graz 1992.

object, (more broadly, between humans and material culture), was recognised as reflexive<sup>37</sup>. Symbolic meaning was acknowledged as socially situated, so that the emphasis of necessity fell upon the processes of interaction between humans and objects and upon the changing meanings that might be attached to these artefacts over time. Objects (artefacts) were seen as belonging to different categories of daily life so that their symbolism was ‘stored’ in different ways, some visual, others through ritual enactment. The conference concluded that material culture within social existence presents new cognitive opportunities, and these can affect how humans, (either individually or as a group) think of and represent ‘reality’<sup>38</sup>.

Lord Renfrew emphasised the active role of material culture: historically it was pro-active in forming social relations, but at the same time, it was reflective of those social relations and their cognitive categories<sup>39</sup>. Artefacts, linguistic terms and concepts were integrally related. Both artefacts and linguistic terms played a part in the creation of ‘institutional reality’, to which humans, alongside their physical reality, were subject. It was suggested that in human evolution cognitive development passed from a linguistic (mythic) culture, through a phase of symbolic storage culture, prior to the rise of theoretic culture, which relied upon systems such as writing<sup>40</sup>.

As a sociologist speaking at the Cambridge conference, Halle illustrated how very similar questions regarding the relation between material artefact, symbol and cognition, could be asked in both historical and in modern contexts<sup>41</sup>. He advocated ‘uncovering the symbolism of particular types of artefacts in particular types of social setting’. Halle defined ‘symbolism’ as ‘something which stands for or represents something else’<sup>42</sup>. Thus, a symbol needs to be assigned a meaning. Artefacts as symbols function beyond their physical attributes and both ‘locals’ and ‘non-locals’ attach meanings to them. This allows for different meanings to be attached to the same artefact<sup>43</sup>.

At the same conference Lake considered the relationship between ideas and material objects<sup>44</sup>. Evolutionary biology, anthropology, archaeology and philosophy were the important disciplines for exploring questions about how the content of culture changes and how culturally acquired ideas are transmitted from individual to individual. He was also concerned with the intervention of memory in the process of storage of culturally acquired ideas, and with the possibility of ‘transformation’ through processes of ‘cultural imitation’<sup>45</sup>. The system of symbolic structures inherent in material culture operated on a level more complex than that of simple replication. The stored ideas had to be decoded using a retrieval system. Before meaning could be acquired the stored ideas (symbolic structures) had to generate non-symbolic structures. Speaking in the context of material objects and the role they played in the promotion of cultural change, Lake made three points: objects carry cultural ideas, they stand for coded cultural ideas, they function both to store and to express those ideas<sup>46</sup>.

For replication to occur within this system, both the physical characteristics of the object and the symbolic coding system have to be transmitted across time. Lowe added to the debate in his paper, through the observation that ‘only a concept-user can regard an object as symbolic of another object’<sup>47</sup>. The storage systems under discussion entailed the existence of humans with the capacity for conceptual thought. Human artefacts with either a representative or a symbolic function or with both, involved the use of visual symbolism and external memory, he concluded.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. already HUNDSBICHLER, *Perspektiven* and JARITZ, *Augenblick und Ewigkeit* (as note 28), both unknown to the Cambridge conference contributors.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Reality’ as used here refers collectively to social, institutional, mental and physical reality.

<sup>39</sup> C. RENFREW, *Mind and Matter: Cognitive Archaeology and External Symbolic Storage*, in: *Cognition and Material Culture* 1–6.

<sup>40</sup> RENFREW, *Mind and Matter* 3.

<sup>41</sup> D. HALLE, *Material Artefacts, Symbolism, Sociologists and Archaeologists*, in: *Cognition and Material Culture* 51–60.

<sup>42</sup> HALLE, *Material Artefacts* 52.

<sup>43</sup> HALLE, *op. cit.* 51.

<sup>44</sup> M. LAKE, *Digging for Memes: the Role of Material Objects in Cultural Evolution*, in: *Cognition and Material Culture* 77–88.

<sup>45</sup> LAKE, *Digging for Memes* 80–2.

<sup>46</sup> LAKE, *op. cit.* 83–5.

<sup>47</sup> E. LOWE, *Personal experience and belief: the significance of external symbolic storage for the emergence of modern human cognition*, in: *Cognition and Material Culture* 89–96.

Another speaker at the Cambridge conference explored the role of material symbols in the transmission of religious ideas<sup>48</sup>. Mithen suggested that both material symbols and ritual enactment anchored the immaterial (the unworldly) in the mind. The early human mind needed to develop the capacity for cognitive fluidity, so that ideas could be transmitted, which were not reflected in the physical reality of the world. Religious ideas were inherently difficult to comprehend and they were re-enforced through ritual enactment, which also served to prevent dissipation and corruption of the ideas. Visual images too, helped to anchor abstract ideas in the mind. Strathern finally emphasised how far cultural artefacts could at once embody ‘virtues and powers of a particular office’, and in turn, ‘bestow virtue and power on the person of the office holder’<sup>49</sup>. The transformed status of the office holder was then put on display to the world. Thus, it was suggested, that the artefact embodied extra-personal power. – These discussions outside the field of Byzantine studies provide interesting food for thought.

#### WIDENING THE HORIZON – EXAMPLES OF INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Byzantine Material Culture is only just beginning to be recognised as a self-standing area of Byzantine studies. Inter-disciplinary material culture studies outside the Byzantine field have long been recognised. For this reason Byzantinists need to refer to the publications across material culture studies outside their own specialisation. There are numerous publications of relevance only a sample of which might be mentioned here. Technology, science, economy and trade are important aspects of material culture and these aspects are covered in various ways by authors such as Langdon (mills); Constable (trade, lodging and travel); Jones (city state and popular power); Kaye (money in relation to scientific thought)<sup>50</sup>. These books combine a knowledge of technology with research approaches from political and social science and they use written, visual and material remains evidence. The subject of the city is linked to the themes of public display and spectacle. The city is also viewed in relation to occupational and consumer issues<sup>51</sup>. Gilchrist examines the place of religion within material culture<sup>52</sup>. Binski explores social, cultural and theological issues surrounding the rite of death in the Latin west<sup>53</sup>. All the cited books offer inter-disciplinary avenues into the greater understanding of material culture issues which are equally applicable to Byzantium and the west.

If Byzantine studies are to offer an equally vibrant series of publications on material culture issues, the time has come for a re-evaluation of training of future Byzantinists in this branch of study. A greater degree of inter-disciplinary research will be called for and training in technical as well as in written and visual source analysis will be essential. A combination of research approaches primarily drawn from the disciplines of history, art and design history, archaeology and anthropology, religious, philosophical and literary studies, has somehow to be encompassed<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> S. MITHEN, The supernatural beings of Prehistory and the external storage of religious ideas, in: *Cognition and Material Culture* 97–106.

<sup>49</sup> M. STRATHERN, Social relations and the idea of externality, in: *Cognition and Material Culture* 135–47.

<sup>50</sup> J. LANGDON, *Mills in the Medieval Economy. England 1300–1540*. Oxford 2004; O. CONSTABLE, *Housing the stranger in the Mediterranean world*. Cambridge 2003; P. JONES, *The Italian City State*. Oxford 1997; J. KAYES, *Economy and Nature in the fourteenth century*. Cambridge 1998.

<sup>51</sup> *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, ed. B. HANAWALT – K. RAYERSON. Minneapolis 1994; A. HUNT, *Governance of the consuming passions. A history of sumptuary law*. Basingstoke 1996; C. M. WOOLGAR, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England*. Manchester 1999; C. DYER, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*. Guildford 2002.

<sup>52</sup> R. GILCHRIST, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of religious women*. London and New York 1997.

<sup>53</sup> P. BINSKI, *Medieval Death*. London 1996.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. recently *Les villages dans l’empire Byzantine (IV<sup>e</sup>–X<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, édité par J. LEFORT, C. MORRISSON – J.-P. SODINI (*Réalités Byzantines* 11). Paris 2005; L. LAVAN – W. BOWDEN (eds.), *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology (Late Antique Archaeology 1)*. Leiden – Boston 2003.

## OBJECTS (CULTURAL ARTEFACTS) – PHYSICAL AND SYMBOLIC IDENTITY

Some scholars see material culture as purely the study of materials, skills and functions; an approach that may be termed ‘material essentialism’. This approach is favoured in a situation where it is necessary first of all to draw together an inventory of the available evidence, whether object based, visual or written<sup>55</sup>. This approach, however, does not concern itself with the relationship of ‘materiality’ to ‘material expression’ an aspect that cannot be ignored by Byzantine scholars. Materiality is central to cultural production but cultural production involves creation of meaning and value, and these cannot be explored through material essentialism’ alone. It is clear that there are different levels at which the field of Byzantine material culture studies will need to operate.

Contemporary disciplines including social science, philosophy, psychology, archaeology, ‘Sachkultur’, and anthropology have been involved in an examination of ‘materiality’ not only in a physical capacity but also as it encompasses non-material domains. These disciplines have considered how, in the relationship between object and man, symbolic values become attached to objects. They have suggested that it is the non-material values attached to objects that create meaning and value in daily life, (taken here to mean as it is lived at all social levels). Thus, the object (cultural artefact) can serve to attract ‘cultural capital’, through the application of status functions to itself, which subsequently will enhance the identity of the user. In this system special cultural languages (object-based/visual and/written) are used to encode information and to store it in the cultural artefact. This stored information (either institutionally or informally generated), is transmitted through communication between people, and a sense of the ‘reality of daily life’ as it is lived in its broadest sense, is built up. This way of understanding the role of objects (cultural artefacts) in relation to the creation of social reality, I would suggest, is relevant to the development of Byzantine material culture studies. It is an approach, which crosses time and space and in hindsight it can be seen to work with Byzantine cultural artefacts such as textiles.

The ‘materiality’ of cultural artefacts’ provides a medium for the expression of political and of socio-economic power, both within and beyond institutions. It also acts as the medium of storage and for the embedding of memory as the basis of discourse and the formation of narratives around the artefact. Whilst the physical side of ‘materiality’ concerns itself with the study of a hierarchy of materials and of uses on a practical level, the symbolic side of the subject looks at the ideology behind the uses of the materials, and with the resultant status implications. The non-material aspect of study looks at the sign language (semiotics) of materials<sup>56</sup>. Here, the physical forms of cultural artefacts may be looked upon as ‘idea types’ with meaning anchored in their ‘materiality’. For the purposes of Byzantine Material Culture, one may discern two fields of related study along these lines:

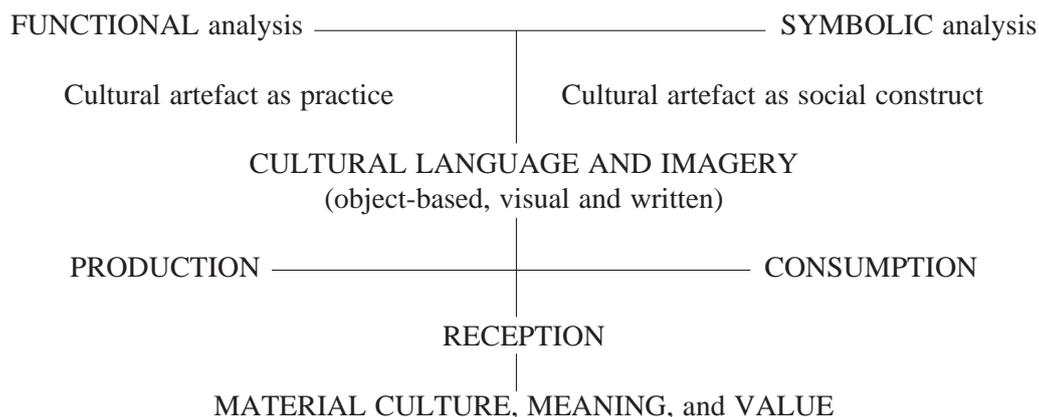
### MATERIALS, PRACTICE AND PRACTICAL FUNCTIONS CULTURAL IMAGERY AND LANGUAGE AND SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS

The artefacts of material culture are viewed as capable of a physical and of a symbolic identity. Further, it is possible, to explore how the physical impinges upon the symbolic identity of objects, and vice-versa, how their symbolic identity impinges upon their materials based identity.

The cultural artefact in this system can be read as a monitor of inter-action and change and as a mirror of socially relevant topics and of socio-economic issues. It can also be viewed as a means to explore the formation and the display of identity, the creation of meaning, and the assignment of value in society. This can be expressed in a simplified diagram as shown below.

<sup>55</sup> See M. GRÜNBART – D. STATHAKOPOULOS, Sticks and Stones: Byzantine Material Culture. *BMGS* 26 (2002) 298–327, especially the definition on page 299 with footnote 5.

<sup>56</sup> Semiotics was developed as part of contemporary literary theory from where it passed into design theory. It is entailed with communication systems reliant on visual signs. For the many branches of semiotics consult P. BOUÏSSAC, *Encyclopaedia of Semiotics*. Oxford 1998.



### THE ROLE OF OBJECT ANALYSIS IN RELATION TO IMAGE AND TEXT CRITICISM

The earlier discussions touched upon the need to balance material, visual and written evidence within the study of material culture. All three types of systems acted to carry information, from which meaning could be sought. Value was given to meaning, in the contexts of products, and practices and categorisations of people, involved in the creation of that meaning. Material evidence in the tri-partite system outlined above, operates upon a physical and a symbolic level. Materials, processes and practices are important on a physical plane. On a symbolic level, the material object assumes non-physical characteristics and takes on symbolic meaning created in the light of institutional and informal influences. This process has been termed 'taking on a status function'<sup>57</sup>.

The objects of material culture might be seen as both physical and as symbolic entities. A study of the objects of material culture might be viewed as the analysis of modes of existence of the entities, and an exploration of their role in creation of social reality. The processes of assigning conceptual as well as social status to the objects of material culture, is involved. It is also important in this system of analysis to examine the use of the objects to initiate, to maintain and/or to revive social institutions.

The assignment of 'social function' to the object might be formal (institutionally driven) or informal (consensus based). A formally assigned status function is allocated meaning using rules to which the object is subject<sup>58</sup>. An informally assigned status function has no written rules, but there may be involved, unwritten rules and here it will be necessary for people to embrace each others intention.

These two situations produce two types of reality: institutional reality and informal reality. In order for these 'realities' to exist, the object is subject to both social and to psychological conditioning. It is subject to mentalities grouped around the physical evidence of the object and to the evidence based on mental processes (consciousness, perception, intention, and communication).

This allows for transmission, understanding and acceptance of the information, which the object stores, to take place. Throughout these processes, the object is subject to the power structures and to the circumstances of its existence and operation, as its role both as material and social entity demands<sup>59</sup>. These ideas based on a reading of artefacts in their social context, can be expressed as a diagram as below.

<sup>57</sup> Materialism and the Mind Body Problem, ed. D. M. ROSENTHAL. Indianapolis 2000, looks at philosophical aspects of materialism. The book, John Searle's ideas about social reality. Extensions, criticisms and reconstructions, ed. D. KOEPEL, L. S. MOSS. Oxford 2003, examines the work of Searle. He is concerned with the social framework underpinning the development of material culture in society and with the analysis of 'status function', 'collective intentionality' and 'institutional and informal reality'.

<sup>58</sup> For example, see B. SMITH, J. SEARLE, The Construction of Social Reality. An exchange, in: John Searle's ideas about social reality 258–309.

<sup>59</sup> These ideas are explored as follows: D. FITZPATRICK, Searle and collective intentionality, R. TUOMELA, Collective acceptance, social institutions and social reality, F. A. HINDRIKS, The new role of the constitutive rule, L. A. ZAIBERT, Collective intentions and collective intentionality, N. MISCEVIC, Explaining collective intentionality, all in: John Searle's ideas about social reality, see 45–66, 123–65, 185–208, 209–32 and 257–67 respectively for these articles.

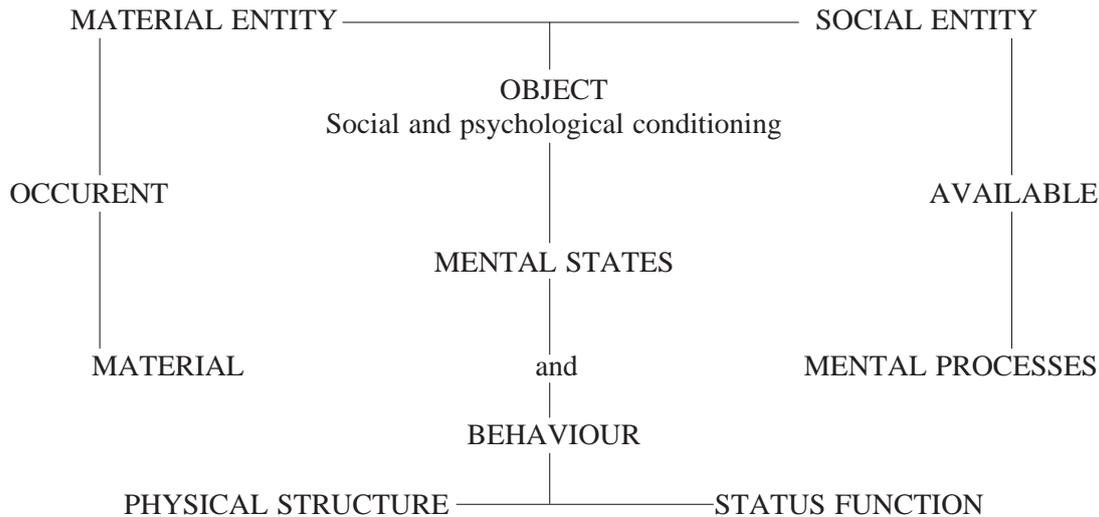


Diagram to show objects of material culture in social context  
(Power structures, circumstances of existence and operation)

The role of object analysis in relation to image and text criticism is crucial. The object analysis allows for the physical circumstances of the object to be fully appreciated. The object in its physical reality might act as a corrective to the visual or the written evidence of the object. Both visual and written evidence is subject to internal conventions of presentation and to idealisation, and to other potential pitfalls of qualitative analysis. Balanced research on Byzantine material culture involves first-hand recourse to surviving objects combined with the evidence of the visual and the written evidence external to the material remains.

#### THE IMPACT OF MUSEUMS: STORAGE; CONSERVATION; DISPLAY; EXHIBITION, AND INTERPRETATION ISSUES

The value of archaeological excavations is undoubted, but finances for full excavation of all possible sites of Byzantine material culture, will never become a reality. It is necessary, therefore, to explore museum collections and to carefully note major exhibitions, which bring together objects from many different locations. The era of grand Byzantine exhibitions has dawned.

Large exhibitions of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, have brought together vast numbers of Byzantine works of art<sup>60</sup>. Also, in Munich within a few years two Byzantine exhibitions took place<sup>61</sup>. The Greek ‘Daily Life in Byzantium’ exhibition of 2001–2002, also presented daily life objects<sup>62</sup>. Only scarcely, however, does an exhibition deal with both the physical and the symbolic identity of objects. In 2003, an exhibition of ceramics was held at the Byzantine Museum, Athens. This presented a chronology of techniques and of processes as linked to a study of social criteria, including changes in dietary habits and life-style<sup>63</sup>.

The exhibition catalogues are expensive to produce and they provide a perfect opportunity for the transmission of information important to material culture studies. It is to be hoped that these catalogues in future

<sup>60</sup> The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843–1261, ed. H. C. EVANS – W. D. WIXOM. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 11 March – 6 July 1997. New York 1997; Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261–1557), ed. M. C. EVANS. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 23 March – 4 July 2004. New York 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Rom und Byzanz. Archäologische Kostbarkeiten aus Bayern, ed. L. WAMSER – G. ZAHLHAAS. Munich 1998 and Die Welt von Byzanz – Europas östliches Erbe, ed. L. WAMSER. Munich 2004 (both including liturgical artefacts, pilgrim’s tokens, ceramics, bread stamps, weights, jewellery, belt buckles).

<sup>62</sup> Byzantine Hours. Works and Days in Byzantium. Daily Life in Byzantium, ed. D. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI. Thessaloniki, October 2001–January 2002. Thessalonica 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Byzantine Glazed Ceramics. The Art of Sgraffito, ed. D. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI. Byzantine and Early Christian Museum Athens, July–August 1999. Athens 1999. Compare the archaeological publication, J. VROOM, After Antiquity. Ceramics and society in the Aegean from the seventh to the twentieth century. A case study from Boeotia, Central Greece (*Archaeological Studies* 10). Leiden 2003.

will contain more data on materials, processes, uses, symbolic content and social impact, so that the role of the objects in creation of social realities, might be better appreciated. Cross-referencing in an inter-disciplinary manner between the contributors to the different sections of such catalogues, would also prove useful. The individual contributors to the catalogues, who have not been trained in the physical analysis and recording of artefacts of material culture, might usefully team up with conservation and other specialists, to bring the required information to publication. Increasingly, it will also be necessary to train future generations of Byzantine scholars in archaeological and in museum based object and technique analysis, if material culture studies are to progress.

A systematic bibliography within the Byzantine cultural material field is required. Categories of bibliographical references in the "Byzantinische Zeitschrift" over the last fifty years have changed and developed and the size of the bibliographical sections has vastly increased. However, there are the same entries under different headings and new headings such as 'material culture' in reality represent many separated headings as they occurred earlier. To search these valuable bibliographies is an immensely difficult and time-consuming task<sup>64</sup>.

The range of literature published across disciplines on aspects of Byzantine material culture is enormous. This point can be appreciated by considering the bibliographical range of the Byzantine daily life exhibition, mentioned above<sup>65</sup>. The cited bibliography is taken mainly from exhibition catalogues, archaeological excavation reports, social and economic history monographs, congress proceedings, and specialised periodical publications. The disciplines encompassed within the bibliography include: history in its broadest sense (materials and technology based, economic, social, political, legal, ecclesiastical, architectural and military); art history; archaeology; museum studies; numismatics; theology; literary studies and philology. Close co-operation between academic and museum sectors involved in the study of and in the conservation and the presentation of Byzantine material culture will be necessary.

#### THE STAGES OF PREPARATION TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE MATERIAL CULTURE METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The discussion so far suggests that 'Byzantine material culture' as a discipline demands the application of a well worked out inter-disciplinary method. In essence, this method embraces both physical and non-physical domains of research. To reveal the physical identity of the objects of material culture, materials and processes based object analysis is required. In the symbolic identity domain, a complex level of inter-disciplinary academic theoretical research is called for. This paper has presented a brief impression of key material culture themes, which have earlier attracted the attention of scholars from a wide body of disciplines. How far all these disciplines might be regarded in their broadest sense as part of historical studies, is open to debate.

The discussion certainly has highlighted the need for the integration of material essentialism with theoretical analysis. The question is, how and where should this training be provided? The study of physical characteristics of objects has been usual in archaeology and in museum studies, but techniques and processes outside painting, (for example, in textile production) have not formed part of academic art historical or historical training of the past. Increasingly archaeology has involved itself with approaches from other disciplines. For the purposes of Byzantine material culture studies, an amalgamation of approaches as outlined above, would prove useful. This would demand fresh methods of training for Byzantine scholars, and for integration of research method training across disciplines.

Already visual and written evidence has played an important part in Byzantine studies, but so far few Byzantine scholars have been trained in materials, techniques and technologies analysis. This area of study

<sup>64</sup> The Byzantinische Zeitschrift bibliographies offer an astounding range of titles, but these are difficult to scan in a time efficient manner in their printed form. A re-ordered electronic version of these bibliographies would provide a most useful tool for research. – In 2004 Michael Grünbart / Vienna started an online bibliography on this subject, which is accessible at <http://www.univie.ac.at/byzantine>. This "Bibliography on Byzantine Material Culture and Daily Life" comprises publications concerning various aspects of "Alltagsleben" covering the period from about 300 until 1500. Each entry includes a classification and a short description of the contents.

<sup>65</sup> See note 62 above.

needs to be encompassed so that analysis from objects of material culture can be integrated into the system. The scholar of Byzantine material culture needs to be competent in the handling of material remains, visual and written source evidence and to be familiar with approaches across a wide range of disciplines. The training in object analysis is distinct from that of training in visual or in written source evidence.

*i. Materials based object analysis*

Handling of objects has become more rare today for students, than it was in the past, (with the advent of greater numbers of students, with stricter conservation regulations in operation and with availability of facsimiles and simulation technology packages). Some museums have bridged the gap by having small groups of students of material culture observe the analysis of objects by specialist teachers<sup>66</sup>. This training is essential for those students who later wish to make first hand analysis of unpublished objects part of doctoral research. First hand access to and handling of the objects of material culture, either through museum sessions or as part of archaeological fieldwork is essential in the training of Byzantine material culture specialists.

Special archive and catalogue record techniques must be taught to the students, to store relevant data in a standard format<sup>67</sup>. The detail of record making of physical characteristics of the objects of material culture is not yet standard across different areas of study. Some fields, such as pigment analysis, although sophisticated, suffer from an absence of sufficient samples offered for analysis. The impact of selective analysis should be borne in mind. The empirical analysis should provide the basis for understanding of literary terms as they reflect for example, textile technique, fabric tailoring, and dye technology.

The technical languages reflected in written sources cannot be analysed as part of literary culture, and the methods of written source based scholars are insufficient and inappropriate for analysis of these physical languages of Byzantine material culture. First hand analysis of material remains is essential as is the application of scientific methods of analysis to these remains. Manufacture of objects of material culture depended upon many factors: raw materials; established processes and skilled labour; financial backing, and a viable marketing and distribution network. The exact composition of materials yields valuable information about date, provenance, workshop practices etc. An analysis of techniques and of processes involved in making objects of material culture can reveal much. This includes information about the degree of skill required, the costs of production, and the capital outlay entailed<sup>68</sup>. Single literary references to a certain type of item of material culture, can neither count as evidence that manufacture of that item was local, nor that it was widespread or usual. Analysis of the material remains of the same item in its archaeological or museum context can yield far more information. Written records cannot take precedence over the evidence of the material remains and broad conclusions from written sources without reference to the evidence of surviving materials, should no longer be made<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> Amongst the centres in London where student seminars are held in museums, are: the British Museum, the Museum of London, The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Museum of Mankind. Special facilities also exist to accommodate student visits to exhibitions.

<sup>67</sup> E.g. the Centre International d'Études des Textiles Anciens Vocabularies of Technical terms, published by the Museum of Historic Textiles, Lyons from 1964 onwards, are used by more than five hundred keepers of textiles in museums across the world. Communication of technical information across different languages is possible using these vocabularies.

<sup>68</sup> An understanding of weaving and dyeing processes and of loom technology is essential in the study of Byzantine silks as material culture. The work of conservators is also relevant. See A. TIMAR-BALAZSY – D. EASTOP, *Chemical principles of Textile Conservation*. Oxford 1998. This provides a detailed discussion of precise techniques used in conservation, which reflect upon workshop practices.

<sup>69</sup> Only technically trained specialists able to refer to the material remains as well as to the written evidence, are equipped to assign provenance to textiles. For the correct approach see for example, D. KING, *Silk weaves of Lucca in 1376*, in: *Collected Textile Studies of Donald King*, ed. A. MUTHESIUS – M. KING. London 2004, 93–110. Economic historians working only with scant documentary evidence, for example with the term damask, and suggesting that all damask comes from Damascus, are ill advised. For the technical correction of such generalised approaches, for instance see M. SONDAY, *Damask: Definition and Technique*. *Riggisberger Berichte* 7 (1999) 113–30.

*ii. Integration of technical with other academic methods of analysis*

First hand experience of techniques, technologies and processes of making, together with scientific analysis of materials (e.g. metals, dyes, pigments, fibres, glazes, ceramic and stone types etc.) provides a sound basis for the further analysis of objects of material culture, through theoretical research. The types of interdisciplinary theoretical research approaches that are relevant, have been briefly discussed above. Further interesting avenues of research are also possible, with reference to contemporary design theory, material culture studies<sup>70</sup>.

The Journal of Design History special issue 17 (Nr. 3 / 2004) entitled, ‘Dangerous Liaisons: relationships between design, craft and art’, places emphasis on the study of ‘materiality’ within contemporary society. The issue is concerned with the role of the object in structuring social experience. The approaches are close to those of the McDonald Institute of archaeology and there are areas that have formed part of the earlier theoretical discussions as outlined above. The design theorists, archaeologists, social scientists, anthropologists and medieval material culture specialists, are all concerned with the cultural language and the imagery surrounding objects, and with the material, functional and emotional responses evoked by objects within the context of human existence.

The contemporary design theorist separates the object itself, from the discourse on the elements, which impinge on the creation of the object, and this is parallel to the medieval material culture approach described above. Both historical and contemporary material culture studies also ask, ‘How far is the object conceived, made and used within the boundaries of consistent rules and principles?’ In historical as well as recent times, there can be little doubt that institutional forces have played a part in shaping objects of material culture. It could be argued that criticism and discourse today is broader, more accessible through the actions of the modern media, and more influential in shaping and forming objects of material culture.

The force of popular feeling in medieval times, was most certainly felt; not least through public demonstration such as riots. It was felt also through the powers invested in bodies such as the trade guilds. These ‘informal institutions’ could also have played a part in shaping material culture<sup>71</sup>. Elements such as repetition of design as bound to the familiar and the acceptable, which historically might be termed ‘tradition’ and today ‘nostalgia’ provide a sense of continuity across material culture mentalities. Across human existence, it could be stressed, that repetition as an appeal to memory, provokes emotional response, a sense of stability and a feeling of Well-Being.

Parallels between historical and contemporary material culture studies might be listed under a series of initial points:

- The objects of material culture are at once both practical and symbolic agents.
- Under practical belong questions of physical ‘materiality’; materials, processes, practices and practical uses. Under symbolic is understood the object as assigned a category in the light of institutional discourse.
- Objects of material culture have a symbolic identity. This relies upon the status value they have been assigned through institutional or informal discourse (i.e. through application of rules and regulations or by way of informal consensus amongst people).

<sup>70</sup> There is a sense of timelessness in the study of material culture, where the same issues occur across time and space. The approaches of folklore narrative research thus may remain useful for those engaged in historical material culture studies. A first approach in the field of Byzantine studies offers P. SCHREINER, *Stadt und Gesetz – Dorf und Brauch. Versuch einer historischen Volkskunde von Byzanz: Methoden, Quellen, Gegenstände, Beispiele* (*Nachrichten Akad. Wiss. zu Göttingen, philolog.-hist. Kl.* 9 / 2001). Göttingen 2001.

<sup>71</sup> On the social, economic and political power of the Byzantine trade guilds, for example, see S. VRYONIS, *Byzantine ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ and the Guilds in the eleventh century*. *DOP* 17 (1961) 289–314 (Reprint in IDEM, *Byzantium: its internal history and relations with the Muslim World*. London 1971, III); P. SCHREINER, *Die Organisation byzantinischer Kaufleute und Handwerker*, in: *Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*, VI: *Organisationsformen der Kaufmannsvereinigungen in der Spätantike und im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. H. JANKUHN – E. EBEL (*Abhandlungen Akad. Wiss. in Göttingen, philolog.-hist. Kl.* III 183). Göttingen 1989, 44–61. In general on aspects of trade cf. *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, I–III (*DOS XXXIX*), ed. A. E. LAIOU. Washington, D.C. 2002.

- To take on the role of symbol as against a purely physical entity, the symbolic information has first to be stored in the object and then it has to be communicated. This involves the operation of a cultural language (written or visual) through use of which the symbolic information can be retrieved.
- Repetition of information held in storage, memory and retrieval systems involve other agents, (e.g. the creation of narratives for the transmission of the information).
- Repetition involves not only retrieval but also ongoing discourse, whether institutionally or informally driven.
- Objects within material culture, serve to provide meaning and value to daily life activities at all levels of society. They engage mentalities and they help to shape social reality.

The concept of assigning ‘value’ to daily life covers the operation of ideology, laws, religious beliefs and so on, which provide both legal and spiritual cover. It also refers to the ability of people outside institutional constraint to embrace each other’s intentions, or of groups of people to act under a collective intention.

Objects within material culture have a physical and a social existence. They not only provide physical support for human existence, but they also enable meaning and value to be expressed. These meanings and values are expressed over periods of time and they reflect cultural change and cultural inter-action. This system can be illustrated in the form of a simplified diagram as set out below.

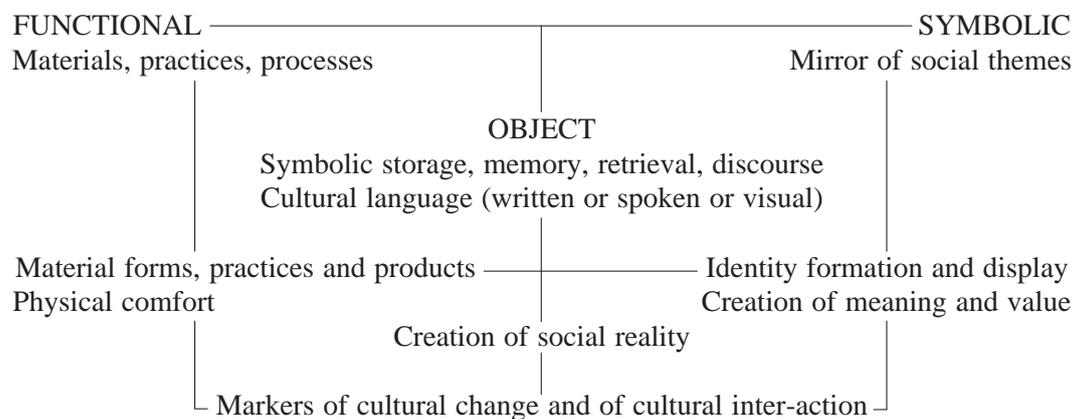


Diagram to demonstrate the role of objects in material culture

Contemporary theoretical debate in the philosophy of the social sciences has also been occupied with the concept of the dual role of objects in society. Rosenthal in 2000 and Searle in 2003, stressed the importance of objects in relation to mental states<sup>72</sup>. They debated questions about the behaviour related by humans to objects, and the sensory stimulation generated in the presence of objects as manifestations of mental states. They were concerned also, with the imagination and memory invested into physical objects by humans. Searle suggested that objects should be considered under distinct headings in the context of their role as agents of the construction of social reality. His analysis suggested a bi-partite division as follows:

*Physical*

- Objects as physical entities
- Objects as functional agents
- Objects as they operate under cognitive states or acts
- The circumstance under which these states or acts are able to operate

<sup>72</sup> Consult ROSENTHAL, Materialism (as note 56) 1–17, especially 15–7, and J. SEARLE, From speech acts to social reality, in: John Searle, ed. B. SMITH. Cambridge 2003, 1–33.

*Social*

Objects in the realm of social acts

The effect of 'collective intentionality'<sup>73</sup> in respect of social objects as constituted by social act

Objects as institutional realities (in the context of the expression of rights, duties and obligations)

The relationship of object as social entity to power structures surrounding the object

In this analysis a context is required in which the object is assigned a status function, but once this is created, the object can exist in a way that is context free.

Tuomela in relation to Searle's theories, explored the philosophy of social practices and the question of the establishment of social norms in relation to social functions as assigned to objects<sup>74</sup>. He defined a social norm as that which implied the object should be treated in a certain way. The social norm could be institutionally or non-institutionally led. Where the agreement of people rather than the imposition of written rules and regulations operates, there is a 'for groupness', involving joint decision or collective agreement to allow roles, actions and states to exist. The 'for groupness' represents intentional, voluntary, common consensus, according to Tuomela<sup>75</sup>. This involves agreement, consensus, acceptance of belief, and some reflection of social expectations. This type of normative practice can be considered a social institution when it becomes 'we believed'. Objective, collective commitment in the sense Tuomela presented, in public space, can act as a social norm.

In the context of medieval material culture studies these ideas provide food for thought. One might argue for example, that in Byzantium silk (precious cloth) was assigned status functions and initially that these were institutionally led and governed by rules and regulations. Silk served initially as an institutional reality. Through 'collective acceptance', silk later came to operate outside institutions, as non-institutional reality<sup>76</sup>, and came to have meaning and value outside institutions. One may argue that it moved from 'institutional reality' to 'social norm', once it came to express 'power', status etc.' as a context free entity.

This type of theoretical discourse would further call for exploration of how far 'collective acceptance' as against 'imposed institutional regulation' might have acted to initiate, to maintain or to revive social norms. This would involve an analysis of the operation of public social space and the workings of the objects of material culture within that space.

*iii. The stages beyond the recording of objects*

With the emergence of complex inter-disciplinary research on material culture, there is a growing need for bibliographies to align themselves with theoretical discourse, so that categories of study and their attendant theoretical discourse together might be more easily accessed. Where different disciplines rather than inter-disciplinary research are involved, it would be good to set out bibliographies around common themes across disciplines. To gather together titles of widely varying approach, theme, and depth of study, is not the most useful way forward. For instance, it would be very useful to have a separate bibliography of material culture in which all the physical characteristics and scientific analysis of surviving materials have appeared.

Databases of Byzantine material culture might be usefully organised as records of the physical as well as the symbolic identity of the objects in question. It would be useful to combine the evidence of the material remains, the visual and the written source evidence on a single site. The real difficulties encountered in the recognition of names and terms assigned to items of material culture, might be alleviated by cross-reference between the evidence of the different sources. In particular technique and technology recorded under material remains source evidence might prove useful for introducing the notion of the existence of technical and of brand names in Byzantium.

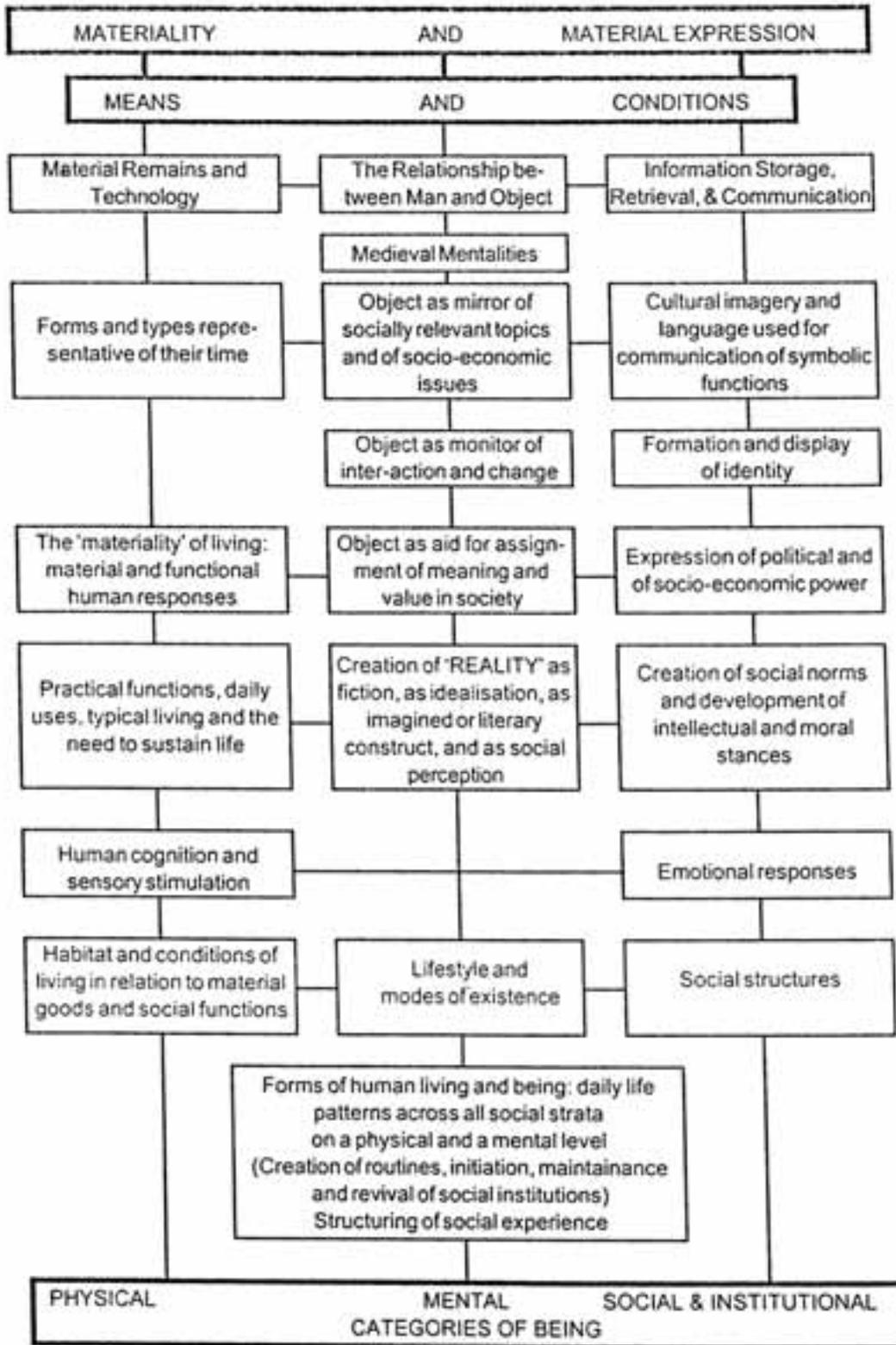
The listing of objects from whatever type of source evidence is only a first stage. It is then necessary to pass from the physical 'materiality' to the symbolic identity field. For this purpose the theoretical debate

<sup>73</sup> TUOMELA, Collective acceptance (as note 59) 123–65.

<sup>74</sup> TUOMELA, *op. cit.* 123ff., 137ff.

<sup>75</sup> *Op. cit.* 131, 141–48.

<sup>76</sup> As demonstrated in relation to the operation of the private silk guilds across broader markets from the tenth to the eleventh centuries onwards.



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centred on how objects function in society, might prove most helpful. Concepts such as institutional action, collective intention, symbolic storage, memory and retrieval systems and so on, outlined above, provide an angle from which sources might be newly approached. New readings or re-readings of the written evidence in particular, might be made. The closer analysis of visual images in relation to the newly analysed written sources might also follow. Of central concern, however, must be the full understanding of the properties and processes behind the creation of the objects of material culture, themselves, whether newly excavated or freshly discovered in museums, monastic treasuries or private collections.

In the course of this paper I have tried to discuss important themes of study. A key-issues chart set out on p. 37 provides my concluding visual map of the possible future direction of Byzantine Material Culture studies. This visual map sets out to record the main themes for study under three headings: physical; mental; social and institutional. The map sets out the areas for study relevant to the exploration of the relationship of materiality to material expression. The map proposes a route for the analysis of the relationship between object and human as an element of 'Byzantine being' as set within specific Byzantine social and institutional parameters.

The map is to be read both vertically and horizontally. It highlights *physical* (left vertical column), *mental* (central vertical column), and *social and institutional* (right vertical column) themes. These are not mutually exclusive. The *physical* concerns are centred upon an analysis of material remains, physical properties and the application of technologies in the uses of raw materials. The physical concerns encompass creation of types useful for sustaining life and the human reactions to the practicalities of living. The *mental* concerns relate directly to issues of the creation of lifestyles, and the evolution of 'realities' across different Byzantine social strata. The *social and institutional* issues relate to the methods used towards the creation of meaning and value. These include issues of identity and social hierarchy, power and communication of intellectual, moral and emotional response. When read horizontally at various levels across all three columns (*physical, mental, social and institutional*) the map acts to emphasise the relationship between material essentialism and human cognition and response in social and in institutional context.

The research approach necessary for exploration of Byzantine Material Culture is inter-disciplinary. Both scientific methods (e.g. material science based and technological analysis of physical properties and structures of objects, social, anthropological and psychological science centred analysis) and non-scientific methods (e.g. historical, art historical, archaeological, literary, philosophical analysis etc.) are required. Material remains, visual and documentary evidence available within the field of Byzantine Material Culture must be finely balanced before conclusions are reached. It is not sufficient to rely only on literary evidence, as many Byzantine scholars have tended to do in the past.

It will also be dangerous for those untrained in one or more methods of analysis to publish results based upon only one type of evidence, without proper recourse to their fellow specialists working with the other types of evidence. This complex research field will demand close co-operation between individual specialists where it is impossible for single scholars to cross all the boundaries involved in their subject. Equally important will be the training of individual scholars as specialists within narrow fields so that they might have time to increasingly work across disciplines based upon a single medium. This has happened in certain branches of Byzantine object studies (e.g. textile studies, which in a sense has pioneered the approach of linking material essentialism and material expression studies, and it is increasingly becoming evident in other branches such as, pottery studies, architecture and town planning and so on)<sup>77</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to outline the history of these developments across the fields mentioned. The present author presents an analysis of the workings of the research method outlined above as applied to her own Byzantine textile studies over the last thirty years. See, *Byzantine Material Culture; theory and method*, with a section on *Studies in Material Culture; the case of Byzantine Silks*, in: A.MUTHESIUS, *Studies in Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk Weaving*. London 2007, chapter XV.