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*Reading the Seuso Hunting Plate:*  
**Text, Image and Identity in the Later Roman Empire**

MA Thesis in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies

Central European University

Budapest

May 2018

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by

Zoltán Pallag

(Hungary)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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External Reader

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I, the undersigned, **Zoltán Pallag**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 17 May 2018

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Signature

# Abstract

My thesis explores the complex relationship of texts and images on the fourth century silver plate, the so called Seuso Hunting Plate with the close reading of both its inscriptions and visual images. The texts on the plate consist of a verse inscription in Latin and two name labels (*Innocentius*, *Pelso*) while the images represent various scenes of the daily life of a villa estate.

The plate was probably found in Hungary in the 1970s as a part of a larger hoard. The introduction presents the topic in its modern context (the modern-day history of the object), since without the understanding the issues of its provenance it cannot be understood why it is much safer (in terms of archaeological research) to deal with plate alone and not with the treasure in general.

From the data currently available, we can distinguish at least four key phases or social contexts in which the Seuso Hunting Plate participated. These are the contexts of the patron, the maker, the owner, and the viewer. Although it is impossible to identify the exact patron of the object examined, the textual and visual sources are sufficient to provide at least a profile of the probable patron of the Seuso Hunting Plate, the person who commissioned the object, using two traditional methods: epigraphy and iconological analysis.

This Late Roman silver plate conveys the patron's messages, which are incorporated into the object through conscious and unconscious choices. My thesis aims to unpack these messages by using different strategies of examination.

After the analysis the texts (chapter 1) I contextualize the imagery (chapter 2) of the plate: the outdoor banquet, the hunting scenes, and the rural landscape. My starting point is that the composition of the plate is abstract and referential rather than illustrative, so the focus falls on the images and the meanings represented by them, which convey certain symbolic values.

The analysis of the visual language of the plate shows that the iconography is not an ad-hoc depiction of a real picnic, hunt and villa estate but a carefully constructed iconography referring to good life and a *locus amoenus*, and they fit very closely into the domestic décor of the age.

I aimed to demonstrate the importance of looking closely at objects and the potential of an integrated and contextual approach in the study of Late Roman silver and art in general, since the relationship between visual representations and written sources are highly complex and one should not choose to analyse only one of them since both are fundamental in research, especially if we do not have the archaeological context in which the object was found.

# Acknowledgements

I take the opportunity to thank my supervisors Volker Menze and Cristian-Nicolae Gaşpar for all of their help and critiques and for keeping me grounded. I would also like to express my gratitude to Kriszti, Eszter and Friedrich for their time. My special thanks go to my parents for their constant support and the delicious Saturday dinners.

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# Introduction

*For the historian, the isolated work of art is always somewhat disconcerting.*

*He will attempt to provide it with context and atmosphere.*

Heinrich Wölfflin<sup>1</sup>

*Context is everything.*

John R. Clarke<sup>2</sup>

The Late Roman collection named the Seuso Treasure (Fig. 1), known to the public only in the last three decades, has a central role in the history of late antique art. A clear evidence of this statement is the fact that large size colour pictures featuring the Treasure can be found in three different volumes of the Oxford History of Art series: volumes discussing the art of Late Roman,<sup>3</sup> Byzantine,<sup>4</sup> and early Middle Ages<sup>5</sup> all devote double pages to the Treasure. In my thesis, however, I am not dealing with the entire collection, only with the so-called Hunting Plate, its most exciting piece. I am looking for an answer to the question what we can find out from the thorough analysis of the inscriptions and imagery of the plate and a better

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<sup>1</sup> “Das isolierte Kunstwerk hat für den Historiker immer etwas Beunruhigendes. Er wird versuchen, ihm Zusammenhang und Atmosphäre zu geben.” Heinrich Wölfflin, *Das Erklären von Kunstwerken* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1921), 167.

<sup>2</sup> John R. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans. Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 315* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Jas Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100-450*. (Oxford University Press, 1998), 104-105, fig. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), fig. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Nees, *Early Medieval Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 68-69, fig. 40.

understanding of the relationship between text and image. Before that analysis, we have to understand the modern-day context of the hoard, since without the modern context it cannot be understood why it is much safer to deal with plate alone and not with treasure in general.

The fourth century AD silver hoard known as the Seuso Treasure, as we know it today, consists of a copper cauldron and fourteen vessels used for eating and personal hygiene (washing).<sup>6</sup> The pieces are seen as the most outstanding masterpieces of late antique silversmiths. The Seuso Treasure is made up of the following pieces: two big plates used to serve food (the Seuso and the Geometric Plates), two other platters used for serving and also probably for display (the so-called Achilles and Meleager plates), a bowl and two corresponding ewers with geometric pattern probably used for washing the face and hands, and three further ewers (one patterned with Dionysian scenes, one with animals and one with scenes from Greek mythology – the so-called Hippolytus Ewer). The Hippolytus Ewer is accompanied by two buckets with patterns similar to it, a small box for storing scented cosmetics and an amphora. These vessels were all hidden in the big-sized copper cauldron (Fig. 2). A common feature of the silver vessels is the high purity of silver, and their notable size and weight.<sup>7</sup> These put the vessels among the biggest ones in known Roman silver vessels.<sup>8</sup> Their ostentatious sizes and decorations often covering the whole surface of the pieces give us indications about the high social position and education of their owner.

Hungarian researchers suggest that the Seuso Treasure also contained a four-legged silver stand (quadripus) that had been found earlier in Kőszárhegy, near Polgárdi, in 1878 (Fig. 3,

<sup>6</sup> Marlia Mundell Mango – Anna Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure, Part I*. Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series N. 12 part 1. (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Zsolt Mráv– Marianna Dági, “Az ezüst bűvöletében – A Seuso-kincs/ Under the Spell of Silver – The Seuso Treasure,” *Magyar Régészet / Hungarian Archaeology* (Summer/2014): 1-9.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Hobbs, *Late Roman Precious Metal Deposits c. AD 200-700. Changes over Time and Space* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006), 17-24; Richard Hobbs, “Mine’s Bigger than Yours: Values of Late Roman Hoards,” in *Roman Finds: Context and Theory*. Proceedings of a conference held at the University of Durham, eds. Richard Hingley – Steven Willis (Oxbow: Oxbow Books, 2007), 83-84.

4), while cutting a tree.<sup>9</sup> There are several arguments that suggest the silver hoard and the quadripus belong together. The quadripus has the same level of purity of silver and artistic quality as the pieces of the Seuso Treasure. Both finds were created in the second half of the fourth century AD, and they functionally complement each other. The Polgárdi stand, in all probability, belonged to a set of silver pieces used for serving food and hygiene very similar to the Seuso Treasure. On the basis of its weight of 20 kg, it might well have been the most valuable piece of its hoard.

The weight of the silver pieces known today is more than 67 kilograms. This weight ranks it in the second place among late Roman silver collections known in our days.<sup>10</sup> As the pieces of the Trier (Germany) hoard were melted soon after their finding in 1628,<sup>11</sup> we can state that the Seuso Treasure – even incomplete as it is now – is the most valuable surviving silver hoard from Late Roman times.

### **A modern biography**

The origin of the Seuso Treasure is still to be researched and many episodes of its modern-day history are still unclear. The Treasure only became known to the public when its English owner offered it for sale in the 1990s. In February 1990 a press conference held at Sotheby's New York office presented the 14 pieces and the copper cauldron as the Seuso Treasure to the public. After the world press gave the first news items about the matchless Late Roman

<sup>9</sup> Katalin T. Bruder – Zsolt Mráv – Kálmán Veres, “Az elrejtett quadripus. A polgárdi ezüstlelet újraértelmezése (The hidden quadripus. The re-evaluation of the silver find from Polgárdi),” *Műtárgyvédelem* 28 (2002): 49-65; Zsolt Mráv, “A polgárdi összecsukható ezüstállvány és a Seuso-kincs - The silver folding stand from Polgárdi and the Seuso treasure,” in *The Seuso Treasure and Pannonia. Scientific contributions to the Seuso treasure from Hungary*, eds. Zsolt Visy – Zsolt Mráv (Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Régészeti Tanszék, Genianet, 2012), 80-106.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Hobbs, “Mine's Bigger than Yours: Values of Late Roman Hoards”.

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Binsfeld, “Der 1628 in Trier gefundene römische Silberschatz,” *Trierer Zeitschrift* 42 (1979): 113-27.

treasure, Hungarian researchers and laymen also developed an interest in the Seuso case. In 1991, the Republic of Hungary declared its claim for the hoard, and took legal action against the Northampton trust, similarly to the Lebanon and Yugoslavia (later Croatia).<sup>12</sup> In the verdict reached in 1993 judge Beatrice Shainswit declared that the origin of the hoard is not any clearer now than when the lawsuit began, so she declared none of the claims were rightful. The treasure remained in the ownership of the lord according to the verdict of the New York Court of Appeals on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1994.

The Hungarian standpoint was that a then 20-year-old young man from Polgárdi, József Sümegh, presumably found the hoard in a stone quarry in 1976, while working there. According to Sümegh's acquaintances, the hoard consisted of 40 pieces, but today we can only claim with certainty about 15 pieces that they belonged to the hoard. We can suppose that the young man had sold a few pieces before being called up for military service, but we know for sure that he was found dead four days before the end of his service in the so-called Borbély cellar in Kőszárhegy, near Polgárdi, where most of the hoard could have been stored.<sup>13</sup> He was hanging on two joined military belts. The military prosecutor ruled that the case was suicide and the issue was closed. The National Police Headquarters started a new investigation in 2000 to look into the possible links between the Seuso Treasure and József Sümegh's death, and found that the 24-year-old Sümegh was killed, and his death is directly linked to the disappearing of the hoard known as the Seuso Treasure.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Éva Hajdú, "A Seuso-kincs és Magyarország – The Seuso Treasure and Hungary," in *The Sevso Treasure and Pannonia. Scientific contributions to the Sevso treasure from Hungary*, eds. Zsolt Visy – Zsolt Mráv (Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Régészeti Tanszék, Genianet, 2012), 25-28; Mihály Nagy – Endre Tóth, "The Seuso Treasure. The Pannonia Connection?" *Minerva* 1:7 (1990): 4-11; Mihály Nagy – Endre Tóth, "The Seuso Cauldron. Is the Seuso treasure from Hungary?" *Minerva* 1:10 (1990): 22-23. Peter Landesman, "The curse of the Sevso silver", *The Atlantic*, (November 2001); Harvey Kurzweil, Leo V. Gagon, and Ludovic De Walden, "The trial of the Sevso Treasure", in *Who Owns the Past? Cultural Policy, Cultural Property and the Law*, ed. Kate Fitz Gibbon (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 83-96; Neil Brodie, "Thinking Some More about the Sevso Treasure," *Journal of Art Crime* 12 (2014): 6.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Brodie, "Thinking Some More about the Sevso Treasure," 7.

<sup>14</sup> Éva Hajdú, "A Seuso-kincs és Magyarország – The Seuso Treasure and Hungary," 30-31.

In 1984, when the owners tried to sell the hoard to an American Museum, the false proofs of origin written in Arabic became suspicious to one of the curators of the Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, Arthur Houghton, who had lived for years in the Middle East – a reporter of *Atlantic Monthly* wrote in 2001.<sup>15</sup> A Hungarian professor of archaeology, János György Szilágyi (1918-2016), who was in the museum at the time, had a look at the hoard and spotted the inscription *Pelso*, the Roman name for Lake Balaton,<sup>16</sup> on one of the plates, so the Getty Museum refrained from buying the hoard:

In the beginning of 1984, when I was doing research in Malibu for Getty Museum – then the centre of the collection – and I studied the antique collection, one day an old colleague and friend, Jiří Frel, the leader of the collection – who previously worked in Prague University and emigrated in 1968, after the Soviet occupation and finally got to Metropolitan Museum and Getty Museum, whose antique collection he developed to be the third largest in America – came up to me and said: “If you want to see something beautiful, come with me quickly! We have decided to buy a silver treasure, you have half an hour to have a look at it before it is packed...” So I was all 14 pieces – I do not remember the kettle –, and as soon as I had a look at one of the plates, I saw the inscription *Pelso* on it. “This used to be the Roman name of Lake Balaton” – I told Jiří, who ran away to look up the word in the encyclopaedia. And then all the pieces were given back to the owner.

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Landesman, “The Curse of the Sevso Silver,”

<sup>16</sup> András Mócsy, “Pelso lacus,” *Paulys Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Suppl. XI. Stuttgart, sv. 1049-1051.

<sup>17</sup> János György Szilágyi, “Semmit sem tudunk Seusóról,” interview by Eszter Rádai, *Élet és Irodalom* 58/17 (25 April 2014): 7.

As it later turned out, the Antikensammlung in Berlin, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC and also George Ortiz refused to buy the pieces.<sup>18</sup> It is a notable episode of the story that a photograph of Marion True, a curator of Getty shows two little limestone or marble heads as part of the hoard just to prove the Middle East origin of the pieces. Mihály Nagy, the publisher of the photograph (Fig. 5),<sup>19</sup> remembers the story as follows:

The series of pictures, which also includes the photo published, was taken by Marion True. As we were researching the historical and archaeological aspects of the hoard, we wrote to Getty if they know anything about it. True sent us a series of diapositives made at the time when the hoard was with them. The objects seen in the picture were offered for Getty to buy.<sup>20</sup>

According to László Török, we cannot know whether the Seuso Treasure is an ancient composition, or whether one or more art dealers added or removed pieces from the hoard. All the same, “it is premonitory that things could be added to the hoard in the years when it was unknown to the public.”<sup>21</sup> Even in this case we can uphold the statement of Melanie Holcomb, who spoke about the so-called Albanian or Avar hoard, displayed in the Metropolitan Museum:

<sup>18</sup> Geraldine Norman and Thomas Hoving, “Inside the silver syndicate”, *Independent on Sunday*, 29 December, 4-5; David D’Arcy, “Shadow of the Sevso Treasure”, *Vanity Fair* (October, 1993): 158.

<sup>19</sup> Mihály Nagy, „Lifting the curse on the Sevso Treasure, Part 1,” *Hungarian Review* 5:6 (2014): 110.

<sup>20</sup> Mihály Nagy, “Azt szerettem volna, ha a múzeumból egy világszínvonalú intézmény lesz,” interview by Zoltán Pallag, *MúzeumCafé* 52 (2016): 235.

<sup>21</sup> László Török, “‘A kincsen lévő ábrázolások a műveltség tárgyai voltak.’ Interjú Török László akadémikussal a Seuso-kutatások eddigi eredményeiről,” interview by Emőke Grécsi, *MúzeumCafé* 62 (2017): 181. Cf. Neil Brodie, “Thinking Some More about the Sevso Treasure,” 5: „The findspot and the early trading history of the Treasure after its discovery are obscure, though its constituent pieces are generally believed to comprise a single find, or hoard, and not an artificially assembled collection of archaeologically unrelated pieces brought together in order to increase their aggregate monetary value.”

in the mutually reinforcing enterprise of producing a discovery story, the scholar might look to the seller, often the sole source, for a treasure's provenance, while the seller relied on the scholar to give his tale an academic imprimatur.<sup>22</sup>

The first pieces were bought by Sir Peter Wilson, the then president of Sotheby's as a private person, then he involved Lord Northampton (Spencer Douglas David Compton, the 7<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Northampton) in the business because of a shortage of funds. The lord commissioned the Allen & Overy law firm to buy the Seuso Treasure.

After 1990, the first time when the treasure was disclosed to the press and some chosen academics and collectors was in 2006, in an exclusive exhibition of Bonhams, London.<sup>23</sup> The then owner, Lord Northampton had high hopes of finally getting rid of the hoard. This did not happen, though; even Colin Renfrew, an authoritative professor of archaeology condemned the exhibition saying that selling objects of unknown origin is a crime, and an unethical act at the same time as it suggests museums could be involved in illegal trade of art pieces. As he put it:

Presumably the British Government would find it difficult to grant an export licence for the Sevso Silver if there were any move to export it, yet for any museum in Britain to put it on view would offend the Museum Association's code of ethics. It is an affront to public decency that a commercial dealer should do so – even if many archaeologists, such as myself, will take the opportunity of going to inspect it.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Melanie Holcomb, "Ugly but... important": the Albanian Hoard and the making of the archaeological treasure in the early twentieth century," *Early Medieval Europe* 16 (2008): 12.

<sup>23</sup> Marlia Mundell Mango, *The Sevso Treasure : a private exhibition, October, 2006*. Exhibition Catalogue (London: Bonhams, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Open letter by Sir Colin Renfrew to the *Times* of London in 2006. See: [http://www.atrium-media.com/rogueclassicism/Archives/2006\\_10.html](http://www.atrium-media.com/rogueclassicism/Archives/2006_10.html)

From the 15-piece Treasure, which had ended up in England, the Hungarian government bought the co-called Seuso or Hunting Plate in March 2014,<sup>25</sup> the Geometric Plate, and the full washing set with the fluted washing bowl and the two geometric ewers. Besides, the small boxes, the Dionysiac Ewer, and the copper cauldron also returned to Hungary. In 2017, all the other known pieces returned to Hungary, where, after being exhibited in many county museums, the hoard will find its final place in the Hungarian National Museum from 2018. The objects are being inspected by a group of scientists, led by László Török, the results are likely to be published in a few years' time.<sup>26</sup>

Although the repatriation was completed, but we must not forget the responsibility of the dealers, museums, archaeologists, lawyers and other experts who “worked together intentionally and unintentionally to transform the archaeological assemblage into a valuable and marketable commodity.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Seeing the Hungarian government's efforts to get ownership of the hoard for about 20 years, it was the author of the present paper who first articulated in the Hungarian press that if Hungary wants the treasure, it will have to pay for it. See Zoltán Pallag, “Használati útmutató a Seuso-kincs visszaszerzéséhez” (A manual for getting the Seuso Treasure back), *Magyar Narancs* (35/2012): <http://magyarnarancs.hu/publicisztika/hasznalati-utmutato-a-seuso-kincs-visszaszerzeséhez-81470>

<sup>26</sup> László Török, “A kincsen lévő ábrázolások a műveltség tárgyai voltak”

<sup>27</sup> Neil Brodie, “Thinking Some More about the Sevso Treasure,” 10.



# Approaches

## Approaching the texts and the images

From the data currently available, we can distinguish at least four key phases or social contexts in which the Seuso Hunting Plate participated. These are the contexts of the patron, the maker, the owner, and the viewer. Although it is impossible to identify the exact patron of the object examined, the textual and visual sources are at least sufficient to provide a profile of the probable patron of the Seuso Hunting Plate, the person who commissioned the object, using two traditional methods: epigraphic analysis and iconological analysis. Being a relatively small object, designed for handling and close attention by its users, this Late Roman silver plate conveys the patron's messages, which are incorporated into the object through conscious and unconscious choices. My aim is to unpack these messages by using different strategies of examination.

In a second stage of my analysis I will attempt to contextualize the imagery of the plate: the outdoor banquet, the hunting scenes, and the rural landscape. My starting point is that the composition of the plate is abstract and referential rather than illustrative. The fine execution of the object suggests a workshop producing high quality pieces. However, the condensed composition and the abbreviated images show that the patron placed communicative function above the artistic value, so the focus falls on the images and the meanings represented by them, which convey certain symbolic values. To unpack these layers of meaning, I still consider Erwin Panofsky's three-level iconological model to be the best method.<sup>28</sup> Many

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<sup>28</sup> For the method of iconology as it is applied for classical art, see: Katharina Lorenz, *Ancient Mythological Images and Their Interpretation. An Introduction to Iconology, Semiotics, and Image Studies in Classical Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 19-36. For the development of the method, see: Jaś Elsner and Katharina Lorenz, "The Genesis of Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 3 (2012): 483-512.

scholars have emphasized the relevance of iconology in the study of late antique silver plates, considering that it can be particularly useful in reconstructing the social status of the owner(s) of such objects.<sup>29</sup>

I shall try to decipher what is inscribed into the object by and about the patron, as I am convinced that examining the iconographic and epigraphic choices made by the patron is the best way to approach him and his social milieu.

### **Approaching the object**

The Seuso Hunting Plate, probably dating from the mid- to late fourth century AD, is a piece of silver (Fig. 6), 70.5 cm in diameter, with a central medallion 17.3 cm in diameter (Fig. 7), surrounded by an inscription, and a frieze around the rim. The outer frieze has hunting scenes, with hunters on horseback and on foot chasing various animals large and small in a woodland setting, and bringing game back to a villa (Fig. 8). Within the medallion we see again a number of hunting scenes. The whole centre of the plate is occupied by the scene of a picnic, held under an awning spread between two trees, to which two horses are also tied. Beneath this, five figures recline against a curving bolster: four men in short tunics and a woman. The little table in the curve of the bolster holds a plate with a fish, servants below bring more food and drink, and other vessels and containers stand in front. We also see two men cutting up the carcasses of game, a boar and a deer; a cauldron being heated; and the hunter's hounds waiting for morsels from their masters.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Kenneth Painter, "Late-Roman silver plate: A reply to Alan Cameron," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 6 (1993), 114.

<sup>30</sup> This description based on Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 142.

This sort of description can usually be found at the beginning of any work on the Seuso Hunting Plate. In most cases research is based on iconographic issues.<sup>31</sup> In my thesis, I will argue that this approach is quite unsatisfactory, since if our conclusions are based only on iconology, we lose sight of the artefact itself, and results will be unilateral and will not allow us a deeper understanding of the subject. Although iconology is a useful method to establish absolute chronology and draw wider context for the artwork,<sup>32</sup> especially where, such as in the case of the object under scrutiny, there is no archaeological context available, using this analytical tool exclusively, we renounce the possibility of a more complex understanding.

My thesis will offer a fresh perspective on the plate by drawing on the agenda of three academic disciplines: epigraphy, classical art history, and social history. Focusing on the Late Roman world I aim to identify what made the Roman picnic such a good image to use and why it reflected social practices so well. I analyse the kind of connotations these images had and what these images tell us about a ‘globalised’ visual and social culture in Late Antiquity.

Besides iconological analysis, which focuses on the picture and its elements, I will employ a modified version of Kopytoff’s object biographical approach,<sup>33</sup> in order to answer the questions above by shifting the focus to the objects that carry these pictures. By examining the circumstances along an object’s ‘lifecycle’, or itinerary, this methodology can illuminate

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<sup>31</sup> Francesca Ghedini, “Raffigurazioni conviviali nei monumenti funerari romani,” *Rivista di Archeologia* 14 (1991): 35-62; *Eadem*, “Caccia e banchetto: un rapporto difficile,” *Rivista di Archeologia* 16, (1992): 72-88; *Eadem*, “Iconografie urbane e maestranze africane nel mosaico della Piccola Caccia di Piazza Armerina,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 98 (1991): 323-35; Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 141-44.

<sup>32</sup> Lorenz, *Ancient Mythological Images and Their Interpretation*, 92-99.

<sup>33</sup> Igor Kopytoff, “The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64-91.

intersections among networks of craftsmen and clients, owners and viewers, since things can be said to have agency<sup>34</sup> and ‘social lives’<sup>35</sup> as they move through various social contexts.

The application of this method on Late Antique material culture makes it possible to see how the different contexts of the plate varied across time and space, and offers a pathway through all the shifts and fluctuations that characterise the objects’ use right from the time of manufacture to their deposition or afterlives. This is particularly useful for identifying how meanings get attached to the object through different social actions.<sup>36</sup> Looking at the relationship between indoors and outdoors, function and decoration, patrons and viewers, portability and circulation, allows understanding the links between specific contexts.

### Approaching the Patron

Through the contextual analysis of images and inscriptions, and of the object that carries them, I intend to explore why this particular composition could have been attractive to the patron. In order to do this, I rely mainly on the toolbox of the epigraphist and the art historian, as, due to the lack of archaeological context for the Seuso treasure, there is no external

<sup>34</sup> On art and agency, see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Robin Osborne – Jeremy Tanner, *Art's Agency and Art History* (Malden, MA; Oxford; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> For the application of the method to archaeology, see e.g. Jody Joy, “Reinvigorating object biography: reproducing the drama of the object lives,” *World Archaeology* 41, no. 4 (2009): 540-56; Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things. Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects*. Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 21-38; Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*. Malden, MA; Oxford; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1-14; Nanouschka M. Burström “Things in the Eye of the Beholder: A Humanistic Perspective on Archaeological Object Biographies,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 47:1 (2014): 45-62. For Late Roman visual and material culture, see e.g. Janet Huskinson, “*Habent sua fata*: Writing life histories of Roman sarcophagi,” in *Life, Death and Representation. Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, ed. Jas Elsner and Janet Huskinson (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 55-82.

<sup>36</sup> As Galit Noga-Banai (“Workshops with Style: Minor Art in the Making,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 97 [2004]: 542) notes, “[I]n order to form as full picture as attainable of a late antique workshop and its artistic attitudes it is necessary to compare objects made for different purposes.” Similarly, Barbara Borg emphasizes that “differences in tone between sarcophagus decoration and wall painting, for instance, result from their aims and purposes.” Barbara E. Borg, *Crisis and Ambition: Tombs and Burial Customs in Third-Century AD Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5.

evidence that would provide a firm context and thus would help in the process of interpretation. Treasures of this kind have been found all over the empire.

However, in the present chapter I am going to use this analytical tool in order to portray the patron, since my assumption is that the iconography and the inscriptions of the Seuso Hunting Plate, an object intended to be a gift,<sup>37</sup> was determined not by the prospective owner but by the patron. Thus, in my opinion, this complex decorative object speaks more about the patron, the wider social context of production and distribution, and the interactions generated by the plate. The highly personalized visual rhetoric of the object suggests that the patron knew the prospective owner, a certain Seuso, in person. He reasonably thought that the receiver will be content with the gift, due to the fact that the plate was not melted shows that it has satisfactory fulfilled its role as a gift, as a personalised portable luxury object passing through the hands of human actors between two phases of its life. By applying a life-historical method we can re-create the drama of the life of the object by following its biography.<sup>38</sup>

In order to (re-)construct such theoretical actors in the life history of the object a helpful starting point is to consider the term ‘inscribed object’. Yvonne Marshall drew a distinction between what she terms ‘inscribed’ and ‘lived’ objects.<sup>39</sup> Inscribed objects are marked out as socially powerful at the time of their production. Meaning and significance is built into the object when it is manufactured. Lived objects on the other hand may be so-called ‘everyday’ objects that acquire meaning through social action. Undoubtedly, Seuso's hunting plate belongs to the former category as shown by its complex iconography, style, and materiality.

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<sup>37</sup> Alan Cameron, “Observations on the Distribution and Ownership of Late Roman Silver Plate,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 5 (1992): 185: “The inscription of the Sevso plate does not allude to any specific occasion but the reference to the use that his posterity will make of it is certainly consistent with a wedding. So too the toilet box, depicting in repussé a woman sitting at her toilet while attendants bring her various toilet items, just as we see on the Projecta casket in the Esquiline treasure.”

<sup>38</sup> Jody Joy, “Reinvigorating object biography: reproducing the drama of the object lives,”

<sup>39</sup> Yvonne Marshall, “The social lives of lived and inscribed objects: a Lapita perspective,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 117, no. 1 (2008): 59-101.

What kind of story does our plate tell about the patron? To answer this question and attempt setting up a social history of the plate, I will examine the three inscriptions visible in the central medallion and the Chi-Rho symbol which is used very much in the same way as the ivy leaf symbol (*hedera*), a decorative punctuation-mark, being used in other Latin inscriptions as a separator between the beginning and the end of the metrical verse inscription which encircles a medallion (Fig. 9).

# Chapter 1.

## The Inscriptions

Although earlier research has touched upon some aspects of the inscriptions, the question of their very presence on the plate, has never arisen, in spite of its obvious importance. In my opinion, this question is highly relevant, since the Cesena silver plate,<sup>40</sup> the closest parallel of our plate in iconographical terms, which also depicts a picnic scene, with an abbreviated villa, horse and rural estate, contains no inscription. This very fact suggests that the patron put a special emphasis on lettering and the plate would lose much of its meaning without inscriptions. It has generally been assumed that the metric verse inscription (*carmina epigraphica*)<sup>41</sup> suggests that the plate and the other vessels of the treasure served as a wedding gift.<sup>42</sup>

So far, as we have seen in the introduction, there have been several attempts to interpret the name *Seuso* and the *Pelso* inscription in order to substantiate claims about Hungarian ownership or to deny it, but in some ways, both approaches are problematic.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, it has been argued that the inscription ‘In(n)ocentius’, the name of the horse, only serves as

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<sup>40</sup> Paolo Enrico Arias, “Il piatto argenteo di Cesena,” *Annuario della Scuola Archeologica di Atene*, XXIV - XXVI, 1946-1948, (1950): 309-44.

<sup>41</sup> Manfred G. Schmidt, “Carmina Latina Epigraphica,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*, eds. Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 764-82.

<sup>42</sup> Cameron, “Observations on the distribution and ownership of late Roman silver plate,” 185; Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 237, and n.4; Endre Tóth, “A Seuso-kincs: egy Észak-Pannoniai ezüstkincs/The Sevso treasure: a silver hoard from northern Pannonia”, in *A Seuso-kincs és Pannonia/The Sevso Treasure and Pannonia*, ed. by Zsolt Mráv and Zsolt Visy (Pécs: PTE Régészeti Tanszék/GeniaNet, 2012), 66-67; Mihály Nagy, “Lifting the Course on the Sevso Treasure, Part II,” *Hungarian Review* (January, 2015): 109-23.

<sup>43</sup> Marlia Mundell Mango, “The Seuso Treasure Hunting Plate.” *Apollo* 132 (1990): 5-6; Endre Tóth, “A Seuso-kincs: egy észak-pannoniai ezüstkincs/ The Sevso Treasure: A Silver Hoard from Northern Pannonia,” 68-69.

illustrative of Seuso's wealth,<sup>44</sup> even if a detailed analysis of the inscription offers more possibilities for interpretation just as the presence of the Chi-Rho monogram can be interpreted not only in the context of the question: 'was Seuso a Christian?' as it has been done in previous scholarship.<sup>45</sup>

The presence of Chi-Rho does not automatically refer to the Christian faith of the owner,<sup>46</sup> since in the middle of the 4th century it could be understood in multiple ways. Following the Edict of Milan, it could have expressed loyalty to the emperor and membership in the ruling stratum of society if it was interpreted as the political logo of the house of Constantine. By all means, if it is true that the plate had been used by two generations,<sup>47</sup> it might have had a different meaning for the viewers around 400 AD than 50 years before. The Chi-Rho decorated a whole range of portable objects and villa mosaics in the later empire.<sup>48</sup> For example, in Britain in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century it seems to have been a "sign of not only Christian affiliation but also of a trendy *Romanitas*."<sup>49</sup>

## Inscription A

<sup>44</sup> Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle. Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 204; Zsolt Mráv and Marianna Dági, "A Seuso-kincs régész szemmel," *Artmagazin* 67, no. 3 (2014): 17.

<sup>45</sup> Mundell Mango, "The Sevso Treasure Hunting Plate," 6; Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 706.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Mundell Mango, "The Sevso Treasure Hunting Plate," 6; Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer. The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 257-60; Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 144; Ruth Leader Newby, *Silver and society in late antiquity: functions and meanings of silver plate in the fourth to seventh centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 7; Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 204-5, Martin A. Guggisberg, "Das Jagdpicknick. Ein neuer Lebensstil der Spätantike oder Flucht in Eine Heile Welt?" in *Picknick-Zeit. Ausstellungskat. Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt am Main*, eds. Ch. Trümpler and K. M. Wagner (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2017), 78. Hereby I would like to thank professor Guggisberg for sending me his paper.

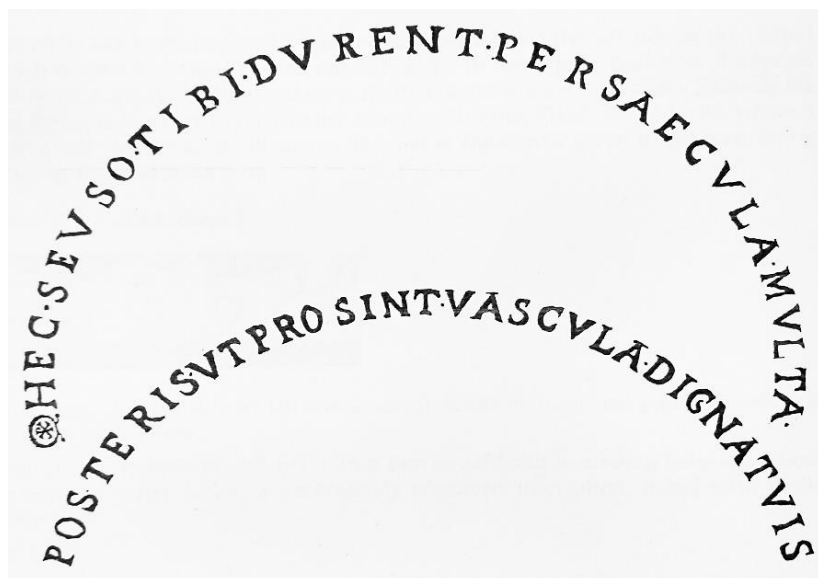
<sup>47</sup> Herbert Adolph Cahn – Annemarie Kaufmann-Heinimann – Kenneth Painter, "A Table Ronde on a treasure of late Roman silver," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 4 (1991): 191.

<sup>48</sup> The material has been revised recently: Ildar Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 300-900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 50-80.

<sup>49</sup> Kim Bowes, "Christian Images in the Home," *Antiquité Tardive* 19 (2011): 176-77.



In the following section I am going to analyse the plate's inscriptions. A Latin inscription composed of black letters (9-10 mm in height) carved in capitals inlaid with niello (silver sulphur) set against a silver background in the band around the medallion at the centre (**Fig. 2.**), reads as follows:



((chi-rho)) hec Seuso tibi durent per saecula multa posteris ut prosint uascula digna tuis<sup>50</sup>

The inscription consists, in fact, of an elegiac distich, which can be reconstructed as follows:

((chi-rho)). Hec, Seuso, tibi durent per saecula multa,

posteris ut prosint uascula digna tuis.

“((chi-rho)) Seuso, may these dishes endure through many ages, so that they may be worthy of and of use to your descendants.”

While focusing mostly on the name ‘Seuso’, researchers came to very different conclusions, suggesting Celtic, German, Alan, Thracian origins for its bearer.<sup>51</sup> Among these, the

<sup>50</sup> Mundell Mango - Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure. Part One*, 77, figs. 1, 1.27 (=AE 1994, 1919).

Germanic interpretation seems the most plausible, as it is supported by other similar names in contemporary tomb inscriptions (Seiso, Seso, Siso).<sup>52</sup> Instead of the name itself, I would like to shift the focus to the execution of the inscription and some of the features of the text, as I believe these can bring us closer to a more accurate portrait of the patron.

The inscription is written in epigraphic capitals, sometimes also referred to as *capitalis quadrata* or *capitalis elegans*, a type of script that imitates the monumental style of Roman public inscriptions from the time of Augustus.<sup>53</sup> The use of display capitals in a non-monumental context signaled specific intent, as is the case with the two fifth-century codices of Virgil<sup>54</sup> written in the traditional lapidary block capitals aimed to confer monumentality on the text.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth Painter, "The Seuso Treasure," *Minerva* 1, no. 4 (1990): 6; Marlia Mundell Mango, "The Seuso Treasure Hunting Plate," 6; Ivana Popovic, "Observations sur le plat d'argent à scènes de chasse du trésor de Seuso", *Latomus* 51, no. 3 (1992): 615; Günther Neumann, "Zum Personennamen Seuso," in *Sprachen und Schriften des antiken Mittelmeerraumes. Festschrift für Jürgen Untermann*, eds. Frank Heidermanns - Helmut Rix - Elmar Seebold (Innsbruck: Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, 1993), 275-79; Endre Tóth, "A Seuso-kincs...", 66-67, 70, n.27 and n.52.; András Mócsy, "Pannonia törzsi arisztokráciája a római korban / The Celtic Tribal Aristocracy of Pannonia in the Late Roman Era," in *A Seuso-kincs és Pannonia. Magyarországi tanulmányok a Seuso-kincsről / The Seuso Treasure and Pannonia. Scientific Contributions to the Seuso Treasure from Hungary*, eds., Zsolt Visy and Zsolt Mráv (Pécs: PTE Régészeti Tanszék – GeniaNet, 2012), 107-11; Nagy, "Lifting the Curse, II," 117-18.

<sup>52</sup> Hans Lieb and Michael Alexander Speidel, "Die Inschriften (Decennalienplatte des Constans)," in *Der Spätromische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst. Die Neuen Funde. Silber im Spannungsfeld von Geschichte, Politik und Gesellschaft der Spätantike*, ed. Martin A. Guggisberg (Augst: Römerstadt Augusta Raurica, 2003), 179, and n. 515.

<sup>53</sup> Géza Alföldy, "Augustus und die Inschriften: Tradition und Innovation. Die Geburt der imperialen Epigraphik," *Gymnasium* 98 (1991): 289-324; Greg Woolf, "Monumental Writing and the Expansion of Roman Society in the Early Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996): 22-39; Jaś Elsner, "Inventing Imperium: Texts and the Propaganda of Monuments in Augustan Rome," in *Art and Text in Roman Culture*, ed. Jaś Elsner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32-53.

<sup>54</sup> For the Vergilius Romanus (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica, Cod. Vat. lat. 3867), see: David H. Wright, *The Roman Vergil and the Origins of Medieval Book Design* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). For the Vergilius Vaticanus (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica, Cod. Vat. lat. 3225), see: David H. Wright, *The Vatican Vergil, a Masterpiece of Late Antique Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 706-12. It is worth mentioning that the Vergilius Vaticanus also contains an illustration of a picnic scene on fol. 19r ("Sack of Troy"). For the picnic scene, see: Johannes de Wit, *Die Miniaturen des Vergilius Vaticanus* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1959), 53-56.

<sup>55</sup> Bernhard Bischoff, *Latin Paleography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 59.

Whether we find this lettering on monumental stone inscriptions, illuminated manuscripts, or silver<sup>56</sup> and bronze vessels, it is difficult to deny that these inscribed objects were made to impress. In such a context, it is very tempting to interpret the Seuso Hunting Plate primarily as a display item, as it has been done in the past,<sup>57</sup> but we need to be very cautious in associating works with simplistic concepts like “display context”. Although, the decorative function is evident in many of the so-called ‘picture plates’ of Late Antiquity<sup>58</sup> and where there is no figural representation exists the inscriptions’ decorative function is nevertheless clear, such as in the case of the *decennalia* plate of Constans (337-350 A.D.) in the Kaiseraugst treasure (Fig. 10),<sup>59</sup> (which provides the closest formal parallel for the inscription of Seuso's hunting plate,)<sup>60</sup> categories such as “display items” or “conversation pieces”<sup>61</sup> are rather vague, and there is no evidence that these items would function primarily or exclusively as room decorations. Moreover, the concept of display context, in addition to overemphasizing the aesthetic role of silver plate,<sup>62</sup> does not take into account the scratches on their surfaces, likely to have been associated with use of a knife, as in the case of the hunting plate.<sup>63</sup> These vessels are certainly not made merely to stand on shelves.

<sup>56</sup> Silver bowls with inscriptions around their central medallion are known from the 2nd century BC. See the hunting plate of the Berthouville Treasure, which was given to Mercurius Kanetonensis by C. Propertius Secundus around 200 AD. François Baratte and Kenneth Painter, eds., *Trésors d'orfèvrerie gallo-romains*. Catalogue de l'exposition 8 fevr. - 23 avril 1989 (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1989), Nr. 24.

<sup>57</sup> Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee and Kenneth S. Painter, “Silver Picture Plates of Late Antiquity: A.D. 300 to 700,” *Archaeologia* 108 (1986): 15; Ruth Leader-Newby, “The David Plates Revisited: Transforming the Secular in Early Byzantium,” *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (2000): 418-24; Ellen Swift, “Decorated Vessels: The Function of Decoration in Late Antiquity,” in *Objects in Context, Objects in Use. Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity*, eds. Luke Lavan, Ellen Swift and Toon Putzeys (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 403; Simon Esmonde Cleary, *The Roman West, AD 200-500: An Archaeological Study*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 233-34.

<sup>58</sup> Toynbee - Painter, “Silver Picture Plates of Late Antiquity.”

<sup>59</sup> Dated to 342/343 AD. See: Annemarie Kaufmann-Heinimann, “Decennalienplatte des Constans,” in *Der Spätromische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst. Die Neuen Funde. Silber im Spannungsfeld von Geschichte, Politik und Gesellschaft der Spätantike*, ed. Martin A. Guggisberg (Augst: Römerstadt Augusta Raurica, 2003), 164.

<sup>60</sup> Kaufmann-Heinimann, “Decennalienplatte,” 141-42.

<sup>61</sup> Mundell Mango, “The Seuso Treasure Hunting Plate,” 8.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Hobbs, *The Mildenhall. Treasure: Late Roman Silver Plate from East Anglia*. With contributions by Janet Lang, Michael J. Hughes, Roger Tomlin and Jude Plouviez (London: British Museum, 2016), 286, and n. 1.

<sup>63</sup> “The whole surface of the plate is scratched. The fact that some of the deep scratches are beneath the corrosion indicates that these were present on the plate before it was placed in the cauldron.” Mundell Mango – Bennett, *The Seuso Treasure*, 72-73.

According to Annemarie Kaufmann-Heinimann not only is the *capitalis* similar on the Kaiseraugst *decennalia* plate and the Seuso Hunting Plate, but also the content structure of the texts: both verses refer to gift-giving, one specifies the recipient, while the other names the giver.<sup>64</sup> I would question this statement; the two inscriptions have very little in common in terms of contents; one refers to political event and echoes, in its wording, official imperial rhetoric associated with celebrations such as those of the *decennalia*,<sup>65</sup> the other is private in tone and contents, its language suggesting a gift between individuals in a private, not an official context.<sup>66</sup> This difference is visible in the generic tone of the Kaiseraugst inscription, which refers to the general welfare of the state and makes no mention of the actual object it is inscribed on as a gift – *dat* refers there to the welfare granted by the successful emperor to his subjects, not to the object itself – while the Seuso inscription clearly identifies the gift objects it refers to, i.e., *hec uascula*.

Much better comparison piece is the roughly contemporary silver bowl from Malaga known as the *poculum Malacitanum*, found in the 1960s. Around its central medallion a similar

<sup>64</sup> The Kaiseraugst inscription reads as follow: ((*Palm leaf*)) *Augustus Constans dat laeta decennia victor spondens omi<i>nibus ter tricennalia faustis*. Hans Lieb and Michael Alexander Speidel, “Die Inschriften (Decennalienplatte des Constans)”, in *Der Spätromische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst. Die Neuen Funde. Silber im Spannungsfeld von Geschichte, Politik und Gesellschaft der Spätantike*, ed., Martin A. Guggisberg (Augst: Römerstadt Augusta Raurica, 2003), 178 (=AE 1999, 1123). The Latin text can be translated as: “Constans victorious Augustus gives (this) for a joyous ten years, (and), having been blessed, promising (it) to all three times over for the thirty-year anniversary,” after Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, 25. For the Latin inscription see also: Heinz Heinen, “Zum Verständnis des Textes auf der neuen Decennalien-Platte des Constans aus Kaiseraugst,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 132 (2000): 291-94; Rudolf Wachter, “Ter tricennalia? Zur Inschrift auf der Decennalien-Platte des Constans,” *Tyche* 16 (2001): 211-15.

<sup>65</sup> For imperial gift-giving, see: Martin A. Guggisberg, “Kaiseraugst und die Silberschätze der Spätantike,” in *Der Spätromische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst. Die Neuen Funde. Silber im Spannungsfeld von Geschichte, Politik und Gesellschaft der Spätantike*, ed., Martin A. Guggisberg (Augst: Römerstadt Augusta Raurica, 2003), 247-84; for *largitio*, see: *ibidem*, 255-62; Leader Newby, *Silver and Society*, 11-64; Franz Alto Bauer, *Gabe und Person. Geschenke als Träger personaler Aura in der Spätantike* (Eichstätt: Eichstätter Universitätsreden, 2009), 9-36; Markus Beyeler, *Geschenke des Kaisers. Studien zur Chronologie, zu den Empfängern und zu den Gegenständen der kaiserlichen Vergabungen im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011); Martin A. Guggisberg, “Silver and donatives: non-coin exchange within and outside the Roman empire,” in *Late Roman Silver Within and Beyond the Frontier: the Traprain Treasure in Context*, eds., Fraser Hunter and Kenneth Painter (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2013), 193-212.

<sup>66</sup> For private gift exchange between the members of aristocracy in Late Antiquity: Ian Wood, “The Exchange of Gifts among the Late Antique Aristocracy,” in *El disco de Teodosio*, eds., Martín Almagro-Gorbea, José M. Álvarez Martínez, José M. Blázquez Martínez and Salvador Rovira (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2000), 301-14.

inscription can be read, both in style and content: *Accipe me sitiens, forte placebo tibi* (Fig. 4.),<sup>67</sup> as it has already been observed by Kaufmann-Heinimann.<sup>68</sup> It is clear that the inscribed text, inlaid with niello, is closely related to the bowl's function.

All these cases have something in common with what Armando Petrucci calls public lettering, since any type of writing made for display purposes. The term “public lettering” (*scrittura esposta*) has been defined by Petrucci as inscriptions executed with a refined calligraphy or on a monumental scale designed to be legible to a broad but targeted public. This type of writing was designed to be used in open or confined spaces in order to allow multiple readings (group or mass, in contrast of private) and at a certain distance and, at the same time, is to be written on an exposed surface and the writing to be sufficiently large to present the verbal or visual message in a clear way.<sup>69</sup> From the eleventh century, “public lettering” was increasingly common on monuments, churches, liturgical furniture and open spaces,<sup>70</sup> but the usage of such *scritture esposte* can be observed in Late Antiquity as well.

It is obvious that the inscriptions on the Seuso plate would have lost their meaning if nobody could see them, and the object was likely to be designed for use in a confined space, where it could be read and/or seen from a relatively small distance, since inscriptions rely on

<sup>67</sup> AE 1965, 54. “Take me, thirsty, you may find me pleasant!” The Malaga silver bowl has been dated to the second half of the fourth century: Antonio García y Bellido, “Novedades arqueológicas en la provincia de Málaga,” *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 36 (1963): 187-8, fig. 15; Concepción Fernández Martínez and Rocío Carande Herrero, “Pentámetro en un poculum malacitano,” *Analecta Malacitana Electrónica*, 15, jun. 2004, [www.anmal.uma.es/numero15/Fernandez.htm.]; François Baratte, *La Vaisselle d'argent en Gaule dans l'antiquité tardive* (Paris: De Boccard, 1993), 112, pl. XVIII, fig. 37; François Baratte, *Silbergeschirr, Kultur und Luxus in der römischen Gesellschaft* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998), 8-9.

<sup>68</sup> Cahn - Kaufmann-Heinimann - Painter, “A Table Ronde on a treasure of late Roman silver,” 188.

<sup>69</sup> “*Scrittura esposta*: con questo termine intendo indicare qualsiasi tipo di scrittura concepito per essere usato, ed effettivamente usato, in spazi aperti, o anche in spazi chiusi, al fine di permettere una lettura plurima (di gruppo o di massa) ed a distanza di un testo scritto su di una superficie esposta. L'esponibilità, e perciò l'esposizione, fungono infatti da mezzo per un contatto potenzialmente di massa, o comunque più rilevante numericamente di quanto non possa avvenire con un testo contenuto in un libro o in un foglio, destinato alla lettura singolare. Condizione necessaria perché questo avvenga è che la scrittura esposta sia sufficientemente grande e presenti in modo sufficientemente evidente e chiaro il messaggio (verbale e / o visuale) di cui è portatrice.” Armando Petrucci, “Potere, spazi urbani, scritture esposte : proposte ed esempi.” Armando Petrucci, “Potere, spazi urbani, scritture esposte : proposte ed esempi,” in *Culture et idéologie dans la genèse de l'état moderne* (Rome: École Française, 1985), 88.

<sup>70</sup> Armando Petrucci, *Public Lettering: Script, Power, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1993.

nonverbal elements, such as scale, location, choices of script, letter style, spatial organization, clarity and legibility, and as Antony Eastmond notes “in addition to their contents, the ways in which words were presented to onlookers is a key source of information and a generator of meaning that should not be ignored,”<sup>71</sup> but we have to be circumspect in using the notion of “display context”.

Taking Petrucci’s thesis as a point of departure, we can draw some conclusions for the patron’s original intent, namely, claiming power. It is very likely that the plate was made to be seen and used, although this does not rule out the possibility of occasional uses as showcase piece, but this type of use is much more typical for *largitio* plates. It is supported by the fact that both the *poculum Malacitanum* (Fig. 11), three *largitio* bowls from Kerch, dated to the reign of Constantius II (337-361 A.D.) (Fig. 12, 13, 14), and a fourth-century bowl from Chalon-sur-Saône, France (Fig. 15),<sup>72</sup> have small metal loops on the back intended to facilitate the hanging of the bowls on a wall or in a cupboard. These plates, like the illuminated luxury manuscripts of Late Antiquity, were luxury objects intended for display in a domestic (aristocratic or courtly) context,<sup>73</sup> and such plates were not, or just on exceptional occasions, used for eating, but functioned mainly as display items.<sup>74</sup> However, we cannot classify all the late antique silver plates with figural imagery into a “picture plate” category as

<sup>71</sup> Antony Eastmond, “Viewing Inscriptions,” in *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*. ed. Antony Eastmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Franz Alto Bauer, *Gabe und Person*, 48. Fig. 42-43; Arne Effenberger - Boris. Maršak - Vera Zaleskaja - Irinia Zaseckaja, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silbergefäße aus der Staatlichen Eremitage Leningrad. Ausstellung der Staatlichen Eremitage Leningrad in der Frühchristlich-byzantinischen Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Dezember 1978 bis März 1979*. (Berlin: Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 1978), 78-84, Nr. 1-2 (A. Effenberger); Toynbee - Painter, “Silver Picture Plates of Late Antiquity: A.D. 300 to 700,” 26-27, Nr. 12-14.

<sup>73</sup> Ruth Leader-Newby, “The David Plates Revisited: Transforming the Secular in Early Byzantium,” 418-24.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Reece, *The Later Roman Empire: an Archaeology AD 150–600* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2009), 115; Ellen Swift, *Style and Function in Roman Decoration. Living with Objects and Interiors* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 120-21.

Toynbee and Painter did,<sup>75</sup> as there is a clear difference in function between eating silver with beaded rims and *largitio* bowls, as Richard Hobbs has pointed out.<sup>76</sup>

The Seuso Hunting Plate belongs to the first category and it seems likely that it would have been used for service purposes. This type of flat niello platter may have been known as a *discus*, suitable for drier foods such as sausages and roasted meats.<sup>77</sup>

In the following paragraphs I shall discuss some of the features of the text, since the mistakes and misspellings of the text provides some information about the patron. However, the personality of the patron has usually been appeared in the literature in the context of a single word: *uascula*. I suggest that the “false humility” (i.e. “these small vessels”) repeatedly recurring in literature,<sup>78</sup> which the patron accused of, does not seem probable after the carefully examination the noun *uascula*, as (1.) in many cases the diminutive suffix *-culum* (“small” or “little”) in late Latin lost its semantic value,<sup>79</sup> and *uasculum* did not mean „small vessel” but merely vessel, since “diminutives must have been not only widely used but thought of as a colloquial feature.”<sup>80</sup>

To sum up: in “Vulgar” Latin diminutives replaced the words that had served as bases for their derivation. So, very probably, *uasculum* = *uas* in Late Latin. Moreover, in the first half of the sixth century the *Digesta Iustiniani* (34.2.1 pr.1) mentions *uascularius aut faber*

<sup>75</sup> According to them, decorated plates „were essentially pictures for display in their owner’s houses, or in temples or churches (...) where they could be admired for their beauty as works of art and/or their political, cultic or mythological implications”, Toynbee - Painter, “Silver Picture Plates of Late Antiquity,” 15.

<sup>76</sup> “[I]t does make one wonder if the beads were specifically designed to denote eating silver, for there are no instances of *largitio* vessels that have beaded rims”, Hobbs, *The Mildenhall Treasure...*, 275.

<sup>77</sup> As described in Apicius: 4.2.16; 7.13.8; 8.6.9-10; 8.12. See: Marlia Mundell Mango, “From ‘glittering sideboard’ to table: silver in the well-appointed triclinium,” in *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry (Luke 12:19)--Food and Wine in Byzantium. Papers of the 37th Annual Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, In Honour of Professor A.A.M. Bryer*, eds. Leslie Brubaker, Kallirroe Lindardou, (Williston: Ashgate, 2007), 129.

<sup>78</sup> Most recently: Sean Leatherbury, “Writing (and Reading) Silver with Sidonius: The Material Contexts of Late Antique Texts,” *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Inquiry* 33, no. 1 (March 2017): 40.

<sup>79</sup> Michèle Fruyt, “Word-Formation in Classical Latin,” in *Companion to the Latin Language*, ed. James Clackson (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 163.

<sup>80</sup> József Herman, *Vulgar Latin*, translated by Roger Wright (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000), 100.

*argentarius*. It is very unlikely that the master would have made only small vessels. Thus, I suggest that *uascula* can no longer be used to characterize the patron/donor. But instead of this what else do we have to portray the patron?

Lieb and Speidel assess the verse as “kein Meisterwerk.” They have analyzed the text in a short footnote in 2003 publication of the “new” objects of the Kaiseraugst treasure stating that in Latin literature there is not known literary antecedent of the metrically inaccurate couplet. Virtually no further scholarly attention was paid which goes beyond the obvious observation of a metrically faulty couplet. Lieb and Speidel suggest reading the last syllable of *posteris* as a short one instead of long may be arguable, but reading *tibi* as two long syllables sounds so awfully, that this may not even be attributed to an untalented poet. They claim that a word is left out after *tibi*, i.e. it was the engraver’s mistake, rather than the poet’s fault. The authors even offer some possible solutions to the missing word, but, according to them, only a few fit: *da*, *dat*, *sunt*, *sint*, *iam* (for *iam sint*), *erunt* (Verg. Aen. 6,852 *tibi erunt*), also *perurent* (*per saecula multa*) and *Dat* makes most sense. This would, in turn, change the commonly accepted interpretation to the opposite: Seuso, then, would be the giver, not the recipient – “which we should have expected anyway,”<sup>81</sup> argues Lieb and Speidel.

The authors have drawn attention to key issues that include the correct spelling *posteris* and *tibi*, but I have to agree with Alan Cameron who described their contribution as an “unfortunate footnote”. Cameron rightly argues that “the engraver must have calculated the space necessary for writing two lines of verse in a circle with great care, and the omission of an entire word (and which word?) is unlikely.”<sup>82</sup> Moreover there is no need to scan both syllables of *tibi* as long. If we allow the 4th century poet to scan only the last syllable for long,

<sup>81</sup> ‘wie ohnehin zu erwarten war’, Lieb and Speidel, “Die Inschriften,” 179, n. 515.

<sup>82</sup> Alan Cameron, “More pieces from the Kaiseraugst treasure and the issue of imperial and senatorial *largitio* plate,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 19 (2006): 696.



then the problem disappears. Similarly in line 1 where the demonstrative pronoun *haec* stands as *hec*.<sup>83</sup>

According to Luca Mondin it is difficult to say whether the hexameter is regular or not, due to the unknown pronunciation of the non-Latin name *Seuso*.<sup>84</sup> We simply do not know how it was read, but the poet made Seuso's name a trisyllable [Sē·ū·sō]; while the "vulgar" scan of *posteris*, treated as a dactyl, where the antepenultimate syllable is stressed, although non-classical, but would have been acceptable. My conclusion is that there are only minor faults, or rather arbitrary poetic solutions in the distich and therefor no need to make Seuso the patron of the plate.

What we can see here is a clear attempt of using the very high register of the language by an educated, but maybe not perfectly educated person.<sup>85</sup> The presence of an inscription is, of course, no proof of literacy, either on the part of the carver or on that of the patron, since texts could have been copied mechanically from models. Indeed, the spelling of the inscription argues for a less than perfect command of the Latin language. The most likely assumption here is that the verse is not really spoiled, but there are some unconventional solutions, at least compared to classical Latin literature. But would it really be so unusual in Late Antiquity?

Based on the poetic and grammatical features of the text, Lieb and Speidel still assume that the mistakes were made by the engraver rather than a less talented poet. For a better understanding of the text, it is worth exploring how inscriptions could get on the surfaces that carry them. However, we know almost nothing about the organization of Late Roman silver

<sup>83</sup> Paolo Cugusi - Maria Teresa Sblendorio Cugusi, *Studi sui carmi epigrafici. Carmina Latina Epigraphica Pannonica* (Bologna: Pàtron, 2007), 120.

<sup>84</sup> Luca Mondin, "Sui carmi latini epigrafici della Pannonia," *Eikasmos* 20 (2009), 459.

<sup>85</sup> Mihály Nagy's suggestion, with regard to authorship, that the couplet was written by Valentinian I himself sometime between 365 and 368 AD seems particularly unlikely. See: Mihály Nagy, "Lifting the Course on the Seuso Treasure. Part II," 116.

workshops<sup>86</sup> or the process of ordering the inscriptions. To answer this question, we must look at the little we know about how Romans manufactured their inscriptions. Although most of the information available derives from epigraphic data, it is assumed that parts of the process may also have been valid for the ordering and execution of smaller inscriptions on mobile objects belonging to the household.<sup>87</sup>

Based on epigraphic and literary data we can distinguish at least two key phases<sup>88</sup> of the production of inscriptions on different surfaces: 1, the *ordinatio* or the arranging of the text onto the surface, 2, the *sculptio*, the actual carving. It is quite probable that some customers knew exactly what they wanted and came to the workshop with a copy of the text to be inscribed. This could have been the case with the couplet of the hunting plate, as it is unlikely that the workshop workers would have been on such a relatively high level of literacy that they could write even a bad couplet at the customer's request. In such cases, as we know it from a letter that Sidonius Apollinaris wrote to his grandnephew Secundus in 467 AD, in which he mentions that he will be sending him the text of a *carmen epigraphicum* to be carved into Secundus' grandfather's tomb, the customer often supervised the process to ensure the craftsman makes no mistakes in executing the task.<sup>89</sup> Scholars have often explained

<sup>86</sup> The serial production of late Roman silverware required many hands through which a vessel passes through before it is finished, as noted by Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 7.4), when he compares the „lower gods” of the universe to workers in the silversmiths' quarter: „opifices in vico argentario ubi unum uasculum ut perfectum exeat per multos artifices transit, cum ab uno perfecto perfici posset. Sed aliter non putatum est operantium multitudini consulendum, nisi ut singulas artis partes cito ac facile discerent singuli, ne omnes in arte una tarde ac difficile cogerentur esse perfecti.” On this question, see Anthony Cutler, “The Right Hand's Cunning: Craftmanship and Demand for Art in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 72 (1997): 971, 988.

<sup>87</sup> For the inscriptions of the Late Roman houses, see: Veronika-Scheibelreiter-Gail, “Inscriptions in the Late Antique Private House. Some Thoughts about their Function and Distribution”, in *Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity*, eds. Stine Birk and Birte Poulsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press), 135-65.

<sup>88</sup> Jean Mallon presented a model consisted of three parts, his first phase before the *ordinatio* is drafting the text to be inscribed: Jean Mallon, *Paléographe romaine* (Madrid: Consejo de Investigaciones Científicas. Instituto Antonio de Nebrija de Filología, 1952), 58. For the similar process of drafting and executing North African building inscriptions, see: Ari Sastamoinen, “Some Observations on the Authorship of Building Inscriptions,” in *L'Africa romana. Le ricchezze dell'Africa. Risorse, produzioni, scambi. Atti del XVII convegno di studio. Sevilla, 14-17 dicembre 2006*, eds., Julián González, Paola Ruggeri, Cinzia Vismara and Raimondo Zucca. (Rome: Carocci, 2008), 237-52; *Idem*, “Physical and Visual Characteristics of Latin Building Inscriptions: The Case of North Africa,” *Arctos* 47 (2013): 219-42.

<sup>89</sup> *Epistulae* 3.12.5., translation in W. B. Anderson, *Sidonius: Poems and Letters*. vol. 2 of 2. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1965).

oddities of inscriptions on the grounds that the stonecutter had misunderstood the draft text from which he was working.<sup>90</sup> But is it a satisfactory explanation for the slightly unusual features of the Seuso couplet?

I am convinced that the elaborately executed round inscription speaks for an experienced engraver (*caelator*),<sup>91</sup> who has undoubtedly worked on the basis of a model provided by the patron; he carved into the plate what he saw and what the patron had approved. One of the peculiarities of decorating Late Roman silver plates is to produce a rather precise sketch on the surface to be engraved; therefore it seems quite unlikely that the *caelator* would simply have used his eye to inscribe the letters and when he realized that there is not enough space available on the plate he would have arbitrarily abbreviated the text.

Instead of this scenario, we have to assume that mistakes were made during the *ordinatio*, or, in other words, were committed by the patron in the original text. The first option can only be possible if we assume that the patron did not directly supervise the production process, while in the second case we should construct a patron who was probably not on the highest level of literacy, clearly not a Symmachus or an Ausonius, but maybe a non-native speaker of the Latin language, a relatively educated member of the Late Roman elite, who could not write a flawless hexameter.

Although, due to the indirect nature of the evidence, these considerations are mostly based on logical reasoning, it is clear that we must go further, and ask questions about authorship and literacy even if we cannot be sure about the identity of the poet of the Seuso distich. We do

<sup>90</sup> Jonathan Edmondson, "Inscribing Roman Texts. Officinae, Layout, and Carving Techniques," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*, eds. Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 118.

<sup>91</sup> In the first half of the sixth century the *Digesta Iustiniani* (34.2.1 pr.1) mentions *uascularius aut faber argentarius*. Beyond these generic terms for silversmiths, Roman funerary inscriptions identify craftsmen as *caelatores* (engravers), *crustarii* (embossers), *brattiarum* (workers in gold leaf), and *auri nextrices* (joiners of gold). Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure* (London: British Museum Press, 1981), 47-48. For epigraphic evidences of *caelatores*, see: Edmondson, "Inscribing Roman Texts," 113.

not know whether the patron and the poet were the same person or not. Many people composed texts to be carved themselves, others ordered them from poets.<sup>92</sup>

Bearing in mind the principle of unequal social distribution of literacy skills, as formulated by Armando Petrucci,<sup>93</sup> and as it appears on inscriptions, we must assume a patron who was proud of his literary taste, as cultural pursuits were important parts of the common vocabulary of the late-Roman elites across the Mediterranean and were intended to reflect on luxurious life, to display class, and a shared culture – not only in public but in private context as well.<sup>94</sup> As Renée Salzman has argued:

literary accomplishment was so deeply associated with high status that (...) even emperors, like Constantinus II, felt the need to demonstrate cultural abilities by composing poetry, if not rhetoric. This symbiosis of power and knowledge was assumed to lead to high office. The pagan aristocrats of Rome in the 380s and 390s, it has been argued, used their literary accomplishments to claim a certain superiority over their Christian peers. (...) A good deal of peer pressure must have been exerted on aristocrats to claim at least an appreciation for cultural pursuits.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> In Latin literature there are several passages that refer to the fact that a person wrote or ordered his or her epitaph. See, for instance, Cic., *Tusc.*, I, 34; Cic., *Cato*, 73; Petron., 71, 7-12; Plin., *Epist.*, 9, 19, I; Val. Max., 5, 3, 2b. As quoted by Saastamoinen, “Some Observations,” 239, and n. 13.

<sup>93</sup> See n. 69.

<sup>94</sup> As Ruth Leader-Newby explains: “visual as well literary culture could serve as a means of unification and communication, not in the public sphere of city politics but in its counterpart, the private politics of the dining rooms of the elite (where key political issues and alliances were as likely to be enacted).” Ruth Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, 124.

<sup>95</sup> Michele Renée Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 48-49.

Whether he wrote the poem or somebody else, our patron could have been a “new man” eager to show off his belonging to the elite and emphasize his wealth.<sup>96</sup> This has also been supported by the inscriptions in the name labels of the Seuso Hunting Plate.

## Inscription B

The inscription which can be read in a name label above a horse (Fig. 16), although is only one word in length, is quite telling in terms of literacy and skills. The name of the horse, *In(no)centius* (“Innocent”), which is inscribed in the left side of the plate, gives a great opportunity for analysis because of its errors. As Marlia Mundell Mango rightly notes, it seems that there was never a second ‘N’, so either the model given by the patron was wrong or the mistake was made by the carver. For such a high quality, expensive object, it is highly unlikely that the maker would have made the mistake, but it is also unlikely that he would have been at a high level of literacy, since after a more thorough autopsy, it becomes clear that the ‘S’, the last letter of the inscription, written in a modified capital, and which differs noticeably from the other letters of the word, is a later addition. So the original form was INOCENTIU and not INOCENTIUS. It is clearly visible how the carver tried to squeeze the letter ‘S’ into the place between the ‘V’ and the horse's mane.

One can easily imagine the following hypothetical system: the patron gave a wrong model to the maker (missing ‘N’, missing ‘S’), the maker followed the model slavishly and being less familiar with Latin writing did not notice the mistake, but someone later did, and after that

<sup>96</sup> On this large subject see e.g: Peter Heather, “New men for new Constantines: creating an imperial elite in the eastern Mediterranean,” in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, ed., Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994), 11-33; Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, 19-68; Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 185-207; Benet Salway, “Redefining the Roman imperial élite in the fourth century AD,” in *Elites in the Ancient World*, ed., D. Okoń (Szczecin: Minerwa, 2015), 189-220.

this second person or a third one had repaired it. If the original carver would have been the one who replaced the missing ‘S’, then he would probably have chosen a font similar to the rest of the inscription. Accordingly, I believe that this short inscription may be considered as a work of two hands.

Mango's idea that the name *Innocentius* (i.e. innocent) might be an ironic one, which actually refers to the wild nature of the horse, cannot be ruled out. The name label and the horse tied to a tree are relatively unproblematically understandable in the context of Late Roman African mosaics, where the representation of horses named - and sometimes tied<sup>97</sup> - is not at all uncommon.

My conclusion is that the failure was in the model and the inscription was made by two different hands in two different times and the scribes used two different types of script.

### Inscription C

A decoratively engraved inscription inlaid with niello, can be read as *Pelso* (Fig. 17), the ancient name of the Lake Balaton in Hungary,<sup>98</sup> in the left field of the central medallion on a horizontal band. One of the most apparent features of the inscription is the lettering, namely, that the letter ‘L’, completely differ from the ‘L’-s of the circular inscription (Fig. 18), and the ‘P’ also. These differences have not yet been discussed in the literature so far, although it is obvious that these choices were not accidental and their analysis may contribute to the

<sup>97</sup> Two race horses on a mosaic from Sidi Abdallah (Bardo National Museum, Tunis): Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 129.

<sup>98</sup> In the literature, Marlia Mundell Mango, the publisher of the bowl, is the only one who does not accept this identification, but his arguments are not convincing. However, this fact does not necessarily mean that the bowl was used or made nearby the Lake Balaton. On the other hand, it seems likely that both of the inscriptions have had some nostalgic commemorative function. For the attempts to relate the *Pelso* inscription with a dog and a boar, see: Mundell Mango, “The Sevso Treasure Hunting Plate,” 5-6, Mundell Mango – Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, 78.

understanding of the plate. This sort of decorative lettering can be found all over the Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, although it is not typical of the high prestige inscriptions of Rome, e.g. the Damasan inscriptions; it appears to be more common in provincial, or at least non-capital – contexts. This type of ‘L’ also can be found in some 4<sup>th</sup> century Pannonia inscriptions,<sup>99</sup> but, of course, this cannot be taken as proof of the plate’s Pannonian origin.<sup>100</sup>

It seems quite probable that in the case of (1.) INOCENTIU and the round inscription and (2.) the ‘S’ of the INOCENTIUS and the PELSO inscription we are dealing with two different hands or scribes who have been producing the inscriptions at different times, since both the S and the *Pelso* seem to be a later addition. The intentions behind these choices are not clear, however some conclusions can be drawn, or, to be more precise, some hypotheses can be constructed.

It has not been suggested so far that the two shorter inscriptions of the plate, or at least some parts of them, were most probably made later in another type of letters than the verse inscription. It is obvious why the horse name was corrected from *INOCENTIU* to *Innocentius*, but there is no easy answer why the *Pelso* inscription was carved only later into its designated name label. It seems most logical that the carver did not know the name of the water when he was carving the rest of the inscriptions, since the patron was unable to remember the name of the lake, so the word *Pelso* as well as the correct form of *Innocentius* was produced only later, maybe on the venue of gift-exchange. This explanation, while impossible to prove, seems reasonable.

<sup>99</sup> See, e.g.: CIL 03, 3980; CIL 03, 03653; CIL 03, 4222.

<sup>100</sup> For Late Roman epigraphy in Pannonia, see: Péter Kovács, “The Late Roman Epigraphy of Pannonia (260-582),” in *Epigraphica II*. (Ed. by György Németh - Ioan Piso), *Hungarian Polis Studies* 11 (Debrecen, 2004), 185-95; Gaetano S. Bevelacqua, “Observations on Christian Epigraphy in Pannonia,” *Studia Patristica* 73 (2014): 75-111.

## Viewing texts

As we have seen, the detailed analysis of the inscriptions of the Seuso Hunting Plate offers unlocking more layers of meaning, than previously thought. The significance of the verse inscription does not only lie in that it refers to a certain Seuso, but in following: 1. the very existence of the inscription, 2. well executed epigraphic capital, 3. and the text is a metric verse inscription. The visual appearance, the content, as well as the form of the text have special significance. It is clear, that with all these the commissioner was trying to claim power. What we see is a clear attempt at using a very high register of language, both in visual and textual term. At the same time the patron in some cases switches between a formal high and an everyday low registers. This failure in using in mastering the high language in a formal context might refer to a not perfectly educated person.

Bourdieu's idea about cultural capital,<sup>101</sup> that the position of the person in the society is determined by access to cultural goods and good education can be associated with the ancient concept of *paideia* (Gr. παιδεία), which refers to the education of the elite.<sup>102</sup> The traditional Roman elite regarded *paideia* as a necessary requirement to become a member of the elite.<sup>103</sup> A Peter Brown sums up: "The meticulous internalization of the literary classics went hand-in-hand with a process of moral formation: correct forms of verbal interchange manifested the upper-class citizen's ability to enter into the correct form of interpersonal relations among his peers."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Outline of a Social Theory of Art Perception," in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 215-37.

<sup>102</sup> Lieve van Hoof, "Performing Paideia: Greek Culture as an Instrument for Social Promotion in the Fourth Century A.D.," *Classical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2013): 387-406.

<sup>103</sup> Peter Heather, "Literacy and power in the migration period," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, eds. Alan Bowman and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 177-97; Sarah Scott, "Elites, Exhibitionism and the Society of the Late Roman Villa," in *Landscapes of Change. Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Neil Christie (Aldershot, Ashgate), 39-65.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Brown, "Late Antiquity," in *A History of Private Life, Volume 1: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. Paul Veyne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 240.



*Paideia* provided a link between the members of the senatorial and military elite, and contributed to some sort of cultural homogeneity: anyone lacking proper education was not regarded as a member of the elite. As power, status also consisted of many elements, such as wealth, legal condition, lifestyle, birth, education, etc. When a person scores highly in one field, but less in another, the resulting inconsistency is called status.<sup>105</sup> In case of the text on the Seuso Hunting Plate a kind of status dissonance can be observed, due to the minor errors and mistakes in the text, which are, as we have seen above, which were probably not committed by the carver. The phenomenon is very similar to what sociolinguists call *diglossia*.<sup>106</sup>

With all the meanings that the patron incorporated into the plate, consciously or unconsciously, reveals a lot about himself, and the very fact that inscriptions were used at all refers to a climate in which literacy was expected or was socially important. The different texts of the plate thus increased social cohesion by establishing visual borders to outsiders, since the existence of a shared textual culture “gradually influenced the manner in which Late Roman aristocrats could express their social status and group identity in portable luxury objects.”<sup>107</sup>

It remains an interesting question to what extent the previous points about patron’s education, social status, and status dissonance reflected in the imagery of the plate, and whether iconographic and stylistic analysis will bring us closer to the place of production the plate. In order to answer the questions above, in the following section I shall turn to the images.

<sup>105</sup> Inge Mennen, *Power and Status in the Roman Empire, AD 193-284* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), 9; John Bodel, “Status dissonance and status dissidents in the equestrian order,” in *Social Status and Prestige in the Roman World*, ed. Annika B. Kuhn (Munich: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), 29.

<sup>106</sup> J. N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 537-41.

<sup>107</sup> Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity*, 133.

## Chapter 2

### Images

The images of the Seuso Hunting Plate fit well into the visual language widespread in the Late Roman period that can be found on sarcophagi, mosaics, murals, and portable luxury goods in the whole territory of the Mediterranean. This imagery was part of the thematic reorientation that appeared in the third and early fourth century. New topics gained popularity, while old ones, so dominant in previous centuries in decorating domestic spaces, lost their significance.<sup>108</sup>

Eating, depiction of food, presenting wealth and luxury played an increasingly important role in decorating funerary realm and domestic space. Pictures showing a good life, pleasure, and prosperity were supplemented by ones showing the aristocrat as a *dominus* of a vast, rich estate, often together with his wife, the *domina*, who had lavish jewellery. The most important elements of this iconography were hunting, abundant domains and banquets, which set the status of the aristocrat. These images were originally taken from the “real world” but soon they became uniform and in the fourth century the same schematic representation, for example, of a wild boar hunt appeared on belt buckles, glasses, sarcophagi, or mosaics even in the remotest parts of the empire. By the fourth century the iconography’s thematic spectrum

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<sup>108</sup> Lambert Schneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild: Wirkungsstrukturen der spätantiken Bildsprache* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983); Sarah Scott, „The Power of Images in the Late Roman House,” in *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, eds. Ray Lawrence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 22), 53-68; Jaś Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 91-113; Susanne Muth, *Erleben von Raum – Leben im Raum. Zur Funktion mythologischer Mosaikbilder in der römisch-kaiserzeitlichen Wohnarchitektur* (Heidelberg: Verlag Archäologie und Geschichte, 1998); *Eadem*, “Überflutet von Bildern. Die Ikonophilie im spätantiken Haus,” in *Lebenswelten. Bilder und Räume in der römischen Stadt der Kaiserzeit*, eds. Paul Zanker – Richard Neudecker (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005), 223-42; *Eadem*, “The Decoration of Private Space in the Later Roman Empire,” in *A Companion to Roman Art*, ed. Barbara Borg (Malden, MA; Oxford; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 406-28.

changed and highly uniform pictures occupied the material culture of the Roman Empire. In the words of Susanne Muth, the “interest in these new pictorial themes can be easily explained by the reconceptualization of *the* house as the central space of upper-class life in the late imperial period.”<sup>109</sup> This change in domestic iconography, as we have seen, happened in the third century with the more and more frequent appearance of hunting expeditions and rural life on mosaics. These pictures appearing on the floors, walls, textile ware and various smaller objects were much more than mere decoration. Henry Maguire argues that “these images were both an expression and an assurance of abundance,”<sup>110</sup> while Guy Métraux suggests that the audience did not just want to understand this iconography, but wanted to become a part of it.<sup>111</sup> Peter Brown uses poetic words so characteristic of him: “the theme of cosmic abundance (summed up in the dance of the seasons) was the new, more faceless but no less potent god of the new rich.”<sup>112</sup>

A more quantitative approach used by Francesca Ghedini and Silvia Bullo in analysing this iconography, albeit far less poetic, may take us closer to understanding the pictures of the Late Roman *domus*. In a study published in 2007, the authors organize the mosaics of Africa Proconsularis into thematic areas, sub-areas and subjects in order to perceive general tendencies in taste, the personal choices of the patron, and the craftsman’s contribution to the realisation of the work by examining all the fixed and movable decorative elements that made

<sup>109</sup> Muth, “The Decoration of Private Space in the Later Roman Empire,” 421. For the increased role of the *domus* in the aristocratic self-representation, see: Simon Ellis, “Power, Architecture, and Décor: How the Late Roman Aristocrat Appeared to His Guests,” in *Roman Art in the Private Sphere: New Perspectives on the Architecture and Décor of the Domus, Villa, and Insula*, eds. by Elaine K. Gazda and Anne E. Haeckl, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 117-34; Scott, “The Power of Images in the Late Roman House,” 53-54; Muth, *Erleben von Raum – Leben im Raum*, 270-82; Barbara Borg and Christian Witschel, “Veränderungen im Repräsentationsverhalten der Römischen Eliten während des 3. Jhs. n. Chr.,” in *Inchriftliche Denkmäler als Medien der Selbstdarstellung in der römischen Welt*, ed. Géza Alföldy and Silvio Panciera (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001), 113-14.

<sup>110</sup> Henry Maguire, “The Good Life,” in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, eds. Glenn W. Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 243.

<sup>111</sup> Guy P. R. Métraux, “Consumers’ Choices: Aspects of the Arts in the Age of Late Roman ‘Mechanical’ Reproduction,” in *The Art of Citizens, Soldiers and Freedmen in the Roman World*, Eve D’Ambra and Guy P. R. Métraux (Oxford: British Archaeological Report, International Series, 1526, 2006), 151.

<sup>112</sup> Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 199.

up the surroundings of where Late Roman aristocrats lived and moved. Their observations are in accordance with Muth's observations that "among the 'new' themes, aristocratic hunting and villas have been singled out."<sup>113</sup>

The subjects seen in the middle and the border frieze of the Seuso Hunting Plate such as hunting, villa landscapes and outdoor banquets developed in North-African mosaics first, and subsequently spread to Sicily, Hispania, and other areas of the Empire. But this imagery is a relative of Late Roman floor mosaics not just in terms of iconography, but also in terms of style.

What might the choice of these subjects say about the patron of the Seuso Hunting Plate? And what can the relationship of image and text reveal about the social context of the plate? To obtain answers to these questions, I will discuss some important stylistic features of the plate, after that I will investigate aspects of its iconography.

## Style

The style of the plate is characteristically North African: the image is organized in four superimposed registers. Various vignettes are arranged in the horizontal registers separated by ground-lines; the centre of the second register from the top is occupied by a picnic scene. The design along the border frieze is composed of closely interrelated vignettes, mostly hunting scenes, with trees and shrubs used to separate the episodes – closely parallels the development in North Africa at this period.<sup>114</sup> The earliest surviving example of the use of registers

<sup>113</sup> Francesca Ghedini – Silvia Bullo, "Late antique domus of *Africa Proconsularis*: Structural and decorative aspects," in *Housing in Late Antiquity: From Palaces to Shops*, eds. Luke Lavan, Lale Özgenel and Alexander Sarantis (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 360.

<sup>114</sup> Irving Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and Their Sources. A Study of Compositional Principles in the Development of Early Medieval Style," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 226-44.

employed in a hunting context appears on a mosaic from Carthage dated circa 210-230 (Fig. 19).<sup>115</sup> The origin of the register technique is quite uncertain, but Katherine Dunbabin sees its possible origin in the Nilotic landscape tradition.<sup>116</sup>

Here it is worth noting that Marlia Mundell Mango does not associate the inscription *Pelso* in the upper third register of the plate with the undulating body of water (Fig. 20) underneath (i.e. Lake Balaton), because she thinks it depicts a river rather than a lake.<sup>117</sup> This argument can be easily disproved using style criticism. It is clearly visible that the artist wanted to individualise the landscape, and the plate, with a body of water, and this symbolic body of water also serves as an undulating ground line between two registers. This artistic technique does not make the water a river, a lake, nor a sea, and its use undoubtedly originates in North-African traditions; it is just a stylistic phenomenon, which at the same time, symbolises a body of water, in this case Lake Balaton (*lacus Pelso*).

### Aspects of Iconography

Before proceeding to the analysis of the depictions in the plate, I briefly answer the question “What is iconology or iconography?” This method of analysing artworks was developed by German art historian Erwin Panofsky in the 1930s, on the basis of the ideas of Austrian philosopher Karl Mannheim, and German art historian Aby Warburg. The model, developed further until the 1950s, is a three-layered system of interpretation, which attempts to decipher

<sup>115</sup> Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 48-49, and n. 9.

<sup>116</sup> Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 48. Most recently for the Nilotic tradition, see: Andy Merrills, *Roman Geographies of the Nile: From the Late Republic to the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 50-67.

<sup>117</sup> Mundell Mango, “The Sevso treasure Hunting Plate,” 5-6, Mundell Mango – Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*. 78.

the meaning proper of the piece of art (*eigentlicher Sinn*), using all the available pictorial or verbal sources which can help us understand an object or a picture.<sup>118</sup>

Iconology, as Panofsky conceived it, claims that by analysing a piece of art, the iconologist can follow the mechanisms of the mind in a certain historical environment. There are three – deeper and deeper – layers of analysis:

1. Primary or natural subject matter, description before iconology (*vor-ikonographische Beschreibung*), i.e. a phenomenal meaning (*Phänomensinn*).
2. Secondary, or conventional subject matter, or meaning dependent on content, the level of iconographic analysis (*ikonographische Analyse*), where the object of interpretation is intentional meaning (*Bedeutungssinn*).
3. The third layer is the level of intrinsic meaning or content, or documentary meaning (*Wesenssinn*). This is what we might call iconological interpretation proper (*ikonologische Interpretation*), which is explored by the researcher in the hope of unveiling or exposing the religious or philosophical beliefs of a nation, period, class, or group, that is, the attitude to the world (*Weltanschauung*) represented by the piece of art. Iconology, which is clearly distinct from iconography and description before iconology, is the exploration and interpretation of symbolic values.

During the iconographic analysis of the plate, I will distinguish between three thematic units:

1. the rural estate, 2. hunting, and 3. outdoor dining; their analysis will be done in the same order, taking into account the pictures of the central medallion, as well as the outer frieze.

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<sup>118</sup> Short summary of the method: Katharina Lorenz, *Ancient Mythological Images and Their Interpretation*, 19-36. How it developed: Elsner - Lorenz, “The Genesis of Iconology.”

## The Rural Estate

From the second half of the third century, aristocratic visual culture became increasingly uniform.<sup>119</sup> Shared visual culture was used by a newly emerged upper class to represent its social status.<sup>120</sup> In the fourth century, the wealthiest elites left the urban scene and displayed their riches in rural settings, villas and country houses.<sup>121</sup> As Chris Wickham put it in 2005, “the interest shown by aristocrats in rural living, comfort and display – unmatched in the east, outside suburban areas at least – was firmly part of western aristocratic identity.”<sup>122</sup>

This aristocratic identity can be read from the imagery of the plate, with the banquet scene in focus, surrounded by vignettes from the life of a rural villa. In this sense, the visual programme of the central medallion and the outer frieze are strongly connected. The villa seen on the frieze (Fig. 8) does not only symbolise Seuso’s wealth, but it is the starting point of a visual narrative as well, as hunters start out from the building and return there after the hunt. Properties outside the cities were a popular theme in domestic display in third and fourth century pictorial representations. Rural or suburban villas, residential buildings, stables and plantations set in lush landscapes often appear on floor mosaics as attributes of abundance.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 91-115; Nees, *Early Medieval Art*, 63-79; Métraux, “Consumers’ Choices: Aspects of the Arts in the Age of Late Roman ‘Mechanical’ Reproduction,”

<sup>120</sup> Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer. The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, 251-70; Gian Luca Grassigli, “Il regno della villa. Alle origini della rappresentazione della villa tardoantica,” *Ostraka* 9, no. 1 (2000): 119-226; Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, 43-49; Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 185-207; Esmonde Cleary, *The Roman West, AD 200-500*, 198-263; Lea M. Stirling, “Prolegomena to the Study of Portable Luxury Goods and Shared Aristocratic Culture in the Theodosian Age,” in *Production and Prosperity in the Theodosian Age.*, ed. Ine Jacobs (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 191-213.

<sup>121</sup> Javier Arce, “Otium et negotium: The Great Estates 4th–7th Century,” in *The Transformation of the Roman World AD 400–900*, eds. Leslie Webster and Michelle P. Brown (London: British Museum, 1997), 19-32; Carla Sfameni, “Residential Villas in Late Antiquity: Continuity and Change,” in *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside*, (Late Antique Archaeology 2.) William Bowden, Luke Lavan and Carlos Machado (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 335-75; Scott, “Elites, Exhibitionism and the Society of the Late Roman Villa”; Carla Sfameni, *Ville residenziali nell'Italia tardoantica* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2006), 166-89.

<sup>122</sup> Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 468.

<sup>123</sup> Tadeusz Sarnowski, *Les représentations de villas sur les mosaïques africaines tardives*, (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nuak, 1978); Noel Duval, “La représentation des monuments dans l'Antiquité tardive, à propos de deux livres récents,” *Bulletin Monumental* 138:1 (1980): 77-95.

Activities of daily life have an explicit self-representational character in Late Roman aristocratic visual culture,<sup>124</sup> especially if they occur together with hunting scenes.<sup>125</sup> Some of the best known examples are the Julius Dominus mosaic (Fig. 21) from the end of the fourth century from the house on the Hill of Juno in the Carthage area, which shows a large villa complex in the centre surrounded by seasonal activities of the estate<sup>126</sup>, and the three Tabarka apse mosaics from a triconch (c. 400 AD) in modern Tunisia (Fig. 22, 23, 24), where three different buildings can be seen, which, according to Francesca Ghedini, are “clearly intended by the patron to show-off different views of his property to the guests he receives in this large room.”<sup>127</sup> While the Tabarka apse mosaic landscapes are almost entirely uninhabited (aside from the solitary shepherdess), the Julius Dominus mosaic and the Seuso border rim is full of vignettes of daily life (e.g. hunting, bucolic scenes, harvesting, etc.) with all the images emphasizing the role of the villa probably as the symbol of the power of the lord, the Late Roman *dominus*, over his household, over his world.

Jeremy Rossiter warns us we should be careful not to take these images as “photographs” of late antique buildings, since these are “artistic ‘composites’ of Late Roman villa architecture, images which incorporate all the ‘display’ components of high status houses (baths, porticoes, turrets) but present them in a non-literal way.”<sup>128</sup> Moreover, as Ellen Swift adds, “these elite

<sup>124</sup> Yvonne Thébert, “Private Life and Domestic Architecture in Roman North Africa,” in *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. Paul Veyne (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 312-409.

<sup>125</sup> Ghedini, “Caccia e banchetto: un rapporto difficile”.

<sup>126</sup> Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 119-21; Schneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild*, 68-87; Wulf Raack, “*Publica non despiciens*: Ergänzungen zur Interpretation des Dominus-Julius-Mosaiks aus Karthago,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archeologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*, 94 (1987): 295-308; Lisa Nevett, “Housing as Symbol: Elite Self-Representation in North Africa under Roman Rule,” in *Eadem, Domestic Space in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120-41.

<sup>127</sup> Ghedini – Bullo, “Late antique domus of Africa *Proconsularis*,” 356.

<sup>128</sup> Jeremy Rossiter, “Domus And Villa: Late Antique Housing In Carthage And Its Territory,” in *Housing in Late Antiquity: From Palaces to Shops*, eds. Luke Lavan, Lale Özgenel and Alexander Sarantis (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 380.



self-representations are constructed accounts of daily life (for example, they emphasize some activities, and omit others), yet to the viewer, they apparently show ‘reality’.”<sup>129</sup>

Presenting the villa like this symbolised luxury and richness, since (1), it is not an easy task to amass wealth from all areas of the empire,<sup>130</sup> and (2) the conscious use of scenes harvesting the nature on silver plates and mosaics can be best interpreted as an extension of the self of the *dominus*. Outdoor dining offered a great opportunity to show how a villa works. On the basis of Lambert Schneider’s iconographic analyses, researchers agree<sup>131</sup> that on these pieces Late Roman artists represent nature as a source of life, which is also a part of the villa economy. The landscape appears not only as background, but also as a significant actor in the picture.<sup>132</sup> The villa, a place of *otium* as opposed to *negotium*, has everything deemed necessary for a good life of aristocrats.<sup>133</sup>

The iconography discussed above can be considered as a commentary on Roman power, the power of the *paterfamilias*, as “for centuries, the ownership of farms, urban housing, and other forms of real estate constituted the basis of wealth and social standing.”<sup>134</sup>

The century-long tradition of bucolic scenes can be seen on a fourth century silver plate from Cesena (Fig. 25), which is the closest thematic parallel to the Seuso Hunting Plate with villa and picnic scene in the central medallion. The so-called Vinkovci hoard, found in 2012 in

<sup>129</sup> Ellen Swift, *Style and Function in Roman Decoration*. 132.

<sup>130</sup> Schneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild*, 110.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Richard Reece, “The myths and messages of silver plate,” *Antiquité Tardive* 5 (1997): 145-52; Swift, *Style and Function in Roman Decoration*, 129; Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 194, and n. 31.

<sup>132</sup> Schneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild*, 116-17.

<sup>133</sup> Arce, “Otium et negotium: The Great Estates 4th–7th Century”.

<sup>134</sup> Kristina Sessa, *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy. Roman Bishops and the Domestic Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37. For the Late Roman household in Italy, see: *Ibid.* 35-62, and in general: Kate Cooper, “Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure and Private Power in the Late Roman *Domus*,” *Past and Present* 197 (2007): 3-33; Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Croatia, has a plate which also has an “abbreviated” villa in a bucolic setting in the central medallion of the plate (Fig. 26), similar to the one seen on the Cesena plate.<sup>135</sup>

The pastoral imagery of the Seuso Hunting Plate does not only take its sources from everyday life, but the gutting and fishing scenes as well as the food served appearing next to a bucolic meal scene serve as symbolic signifiers of the fertility of nature, deeply rooted in Hellenistic art.<sup>136</sup> On the border rim, all decoration is organized around the building,<sup>137</sup> similarly to North-African mosaics, while on the Cesena plate, the architectural representation plays only a relatively minor role, since it is only part of the setting, the main theme being the banquet and country life, “the idealized image of the owner and his lifestyle”.<sup>138</sup> These depictions had a strong symbolic value, both for the owners of the villas and the silverware, and for the viewers who might have perceived these pictures as the “real life” of the wealthy owners.<sup>139</sup> As Maria Cristina Carile put it:

The depiction of villas on metal objects points towards the acceptance in wealthy circles of the villa theme as a conceptual place, a symbol immortalizing the image of the owner’s power and culture to guests as well as to posterity.<sup>140</sup>

On the Seuso Plate this formula is more complex, as here the commissioner was not the owner, but a peer who apparently had some idea of the *zeitgeist* and knew perfectly well what imagery and text would best convey the message he wanted to communicate about Seuso and about himself to Seuso and to other spectators of the plate.

<sup>135</sup> Hrvoje Vulić, Damir Doračić, Richard Hobbs, Janet Lang, “The Vinkovci treasure of Late Roman silver plate: preliminary report,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 30 (2017): 127-50. I would like to thank Hrvoje Vulić and Richard Hobbs for sending me their articles.

<sup>136</sup> Guggisberg, “Das Jagdpicknick. Ein neuer Lebensstil der Spätantike oder Flucht in Eine Heile Welt?” 76-78.

<sup>137</sup> Mundell Mango, “The Sevso Treasure Hunting Plate,” 5.

<sup>138</sup> Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, 7.

<sup>139</sup> Maria Cristina Carile, “Memories of Buildings? Messages in Late Antique Architectural Representations,” in *Images of the Byzantine World: Visions, Messages, and Meanings: Studies Presented to Leslie Brubaker*, ed. Angeliki Lymberopoulou (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2015), 32.

<sup>140</sup> Carile, “Memories of Buildings? Messages in Late Antique Architectural Representations,” 33.

## The Hunt

Hunting was a central element of this message as the basis of Late Roman aristocratic leisure culture, since the scenes depicted on the plate refer not only to the maker, but also to the patron and his broader social and cultural context. The exquisite craftsmanship in itself suggests that the plate was made for a wealthy customer. Analysing the role of hunting in the Late Roman period<sup>141</sup> and hunting as a subject matter for art can bring us closer to a better understanding of the role of this phenomenon in the self-representation of Late Roman elites.

From the end of the second, and the beginning of the third centuries, as part of a new thematic spectrum, hunting became a popular topic on mosaics and paintings of villas and palaces – later also in churches –, as well as in minor arts.<sup>142</sup> Large-scale hunt, which developed in North Africa at the beginning of the third century, was a novelty as a preferred subject matter as it had no tradition before, although hunting as a topic had gained increasing popularity in Roman art from the first century AD.<sup>143</sup> From the third century on, hunting became a regular activity in military bases as a practice ground for fighting and war, and from the fourth century, hunting scenes appeared in early Christian religious symbolism as well.<sup>144</sup>

Hunting scenes and the mosaics and other objects featuring them represented the elevated status of their owners, and emphasised the ideal masculine role of the Late Roman

<sup>141</sup> J. K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 122-53.

<sup>142</sup> Swift, *Style and Function in Roman Decoration*, 130-131; Examples for minor are e.g.: Kurt Weitzmann, ed., *Age of spirituality: late antique and early Christian art, third to seventh century*. Catalogue of the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 19, 1977, through February 12, 1978 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), 83-92.

<sup>143</sup> Wulf Raack, *Modernisierte Mythen. Zum Umgang der Spätantike mit klassischen Bildthemen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 24-70.

<sup>144</sup> Rainer Warland, "Vom Heros zum Jagdherren. Transformation des Leitbilds 'Jagd' in der Kunst der Spätantike," in *Die Jagd der Eliten in den Erinnerungskulturen von der Antike bis in die Frühzeit*. ed. Wolfram Martini (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 176-77.

*dominus*.<sup>145</sup> The *dominus* appears as the master of the world surrounding him, as an overlord of nature and the household. Thus, everything we can see on the Seuso Hunting Plate exemplifies the power and richness of the master, similarly to the Cesena Plate mentioned above.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, in a domestic context we can interpret late antique hunting scenes “as a claim to membership in a wider cultural *koine*.”<sup>147</sup>

This quintessentially aristocratic activity was especially popular near Carthage with the members of the new “barbarian” aristocracy of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>148</sup> According to the thematic division of Ghedini and Bullo, two thematic sub-areas can be distinguished within the subject matter of hunting in North African mosaics: hunting for capture and hunting for sport. The Seuso Hunting Plate has both. The latter are characterised by complex compositions that follow an entire hunting expedition from its departure to its return.<sup>149</sup> We can undoubtedly read the images of the Seuso Plate as such: the scenes of the border frieze are organised around a villa, to the right of which a hunting expedition departs and returns, going around the whole plate. We must also note, however, that out of the 12 segments of the border frieze, some depict a non-real or fantastic hunt, where wild animals chase wild animals (Fig. 27).<sup>150</sup> The heroic rider in the upper segment of the central medallion (Fig. 28) undoubtedly depicts the master of the estate, the *dominus*, while hunting. The vignette represents *virtus*, manly courage, but a triumphant rider over wild beasts was also understood to represent the emperor conquering his enemies.<sup>151</sup> The thematic sub-area of hunting for sport, according to Ghedini and Bullo, “served as an inherent declaration of one’s aristocratic status.”<sup>152</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Ellen Swift, “Decorated Vessels: the Function of Decoration in Late Antiquity,” 395.

<sup>146</sup> Schneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild*, 113-51, especially 123.

<sup>147</sup> Nevett, “Housing as Symbol: Elite Self-Representation in North Africa under Roman Rule,” 131.

<sup>148</sup> Rossiter, “Domus And Villa: Late Antique Housing In Carthage And Its Territory,” 380.

<sup>149</sup> Ghedini – Bullo, “Late antique domus of *Africa Proconsularis*,” 353.

<sup>150</sup> Mundell Mango, “The Sevso Treasure Hunting Plate,” 5; Mundell Mango – Bennett, *The Sevso Treasure*, 96-97, fig. 1.50.

<sup>151</sup> Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements, Volume I*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 243.

<sup>152</sup> Ghedini – Bullo, “Late antique domus of *Africa Proconsularis*,” 354.

## Hunting for Capture

As Mundell Mango pointed out in 1990, a scene on a segment of the outer frieze (segment XII) can be interpreted as hunting for capture, given that<sup>153</sup> the ox cart in the picture (Fig. 29) resembles several other ox carts pictured in other – roughly contemporary – mosaics. The ox cart returning from the hunt seems to be carrying the type of cage shown in the two fourth century Sicilian pavements: the Tellaro mosaic (Fig. 30) and the Great Hunt corridor mosaic in Piazza Armerina (Fig. 31), where we can see the capture of exotic animals<sup>154</sup> to be used later in the lavish spectacles of metropolitan amphitheatres.<sup>155</sup> It is generally accepted that all three mosaics were made by craftsmen from Carthage.<sup>156</sup> This fact supports the African origin of the Seuso Plate, even if we cannot come to definitive conclusions from the few known examples.

Capture of wild animals is an action mentioned several times in the letters of the fourth century aristocrat, Symmachus. He asked for African animals for his son's questorship ceremony in 393, then for his praetorship games in 401.<sup>157</sup> The permission to do so in the Colosseum was given by Stilicho. For the games to celebrate his son's questorship in 393, Symmachus wanted to obtain some African lions and some bears,<sup>158</sup> but a letter, written in

<sup>153</sup> Mundell Mango, "The Sevso Treasure Hunting Plate," 5.

<sup>154</sup> Roger J. A. Wilson, *Catteddi on the Tellaro. A late Roman Villa in Sicily and its Mosaics* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 111-14. For the Seuso ox cart scene, *ibid.* 131, n. 25.

<sup>155</sup> George Jennison, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1937), 140-53.

<sup>156</sup> See e.g.: Roger J.A. Wilson, "The fourth-century villa at Piazza Armerina (Sicily) in its wider imperial context: a review of some aspects of recent research," in *Bruckneudorf und Gamzigrad: spätantike Paläste und Großvillen im Donau-Balkan-Raum: Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums in Bruckneudorf vom 15. bis 18. Oktober 2008*, eds. Gerda von Bülow – Heinrich Zabełlicky (Bonn: R. Habelt, 2011), 66. For the Carthage mosaic workshop, see: Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, "The mosaic workshop in Carthage around AD 400," in *New Light on Ancient Carthage*, ed. John G. Pedley (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 73-83; Roger J. A. Wilson, "Roman mosaics in Sicily. The African connection," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86 (1982): 413-28.

<sup>157</sup> Jennison, *Animals for Show*, 94-95.

<sup>158</sup> Symmachus, *Epistulae*, 2, 46, 76-77.

394 reveals that most of the animals were killed in a shipwreck on the way to Rome.<sup>159</sup> For the 401 games, besides *Libycae ferae*, he had impalas, crocodiles, and antelopes on his wish list.<sup>160</sup>

It is clear that only the wealthiest men, the elite, could afford the use of animals captured in remote countries in amphitheatres.<sup>161</sup> It is conceivable, but by no means certain, that Seuso was stepping up the higher levels of *cursus honorum* or had some sort of provincial rank (governor, etc.). That is why the reference to wild beast capture was present on his plate, along with the name of the apparently famous racing horse, Innocentius. Still, we do not know of a man called Seuso who worked either in administration or in the army in the fourth century.<sup>162</sup>

As already seen the wreathed Chi-Rho (Fig. 9), dividing the circular inscription, was more likely a symbol of imperial authority in the mid fourth century discussed than a symbol referring to the owner's actual Christianity. To this we can add that the very presence of the wreath reinforces this supposition, but, at the same time, we must point to an interesting – and probably not accidental – coincidence: one of the closest parallel of the Seuso Hunting Plate, in the axis of the Piazza Armerina “Little Hunt” mosaic (Fig. 32) we can find a sacrificial scene to a statue of the goddess Diana in roughly the same area as the spot where we find the Chi-Rho symbol on the Seuso Plate (Fig. 7).

Martin Guggisberg's argument that Diana is not just the goddess of hunting but also of Outside and Nature par excellence is very convincing, and the picture on the Seuso Hunting

<sup>159</sup> Symmachus, *Epistulae*, 9, 117.

<sup>160</sup> William Christopher Epplett, *Animal Spectacula of the Roman Empire*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation (University of British Columbia, 2001), 54-55.

<sup>161</sup> Epplett, *Animal Spectacula of the Roman Empire*, 128-57. Michael Mackinnon, “Supplying exotic animals for the Roman amphitheatre games: new reconstructions combining archaeological, ancient textual, historical and ethnographic data,” *Mouseion* 6 (2006): 1-25.

<sup>162</sup> Cameron, “Observations on the distribution and ownership of late Roman silver plate,” 185.

Plate can also be combined with the religious connotation of *locus amoenus* (“pleasant place”).<sup>163</sup> Thus the religious dimension of a picture composed to display happiness and enjoyment of life was adopted in a Christian context.<sup>164</sup> In the Late Roman period fashions in the depiction of hunting were closely connected with social changes. Hunting imagery represented the patron’s – or in the case of the Seuso Hunting Plate, the patron’s and the recipient’s – aristocratic lifestyle:<sup>165</sup> “a good life”.<sup>166</sup> This imagery, as we can see, lacks any kind of spontaneity; certain parts of the picture had a century-long tradition behind them, and all the artist did was – obviously on the request of the patron – individualise the scenes a little, for example by adding name labels, so that the composition and the inscriptions should refer to a specific place, a specific event, a specific horse. The deeper understanding of the pictures and especially the hunting scenes requires a detailed iconographic and stylistic analysis. Here I have only attempted to show how many possible meanings can be revealed by a close reading of the images.

## The Picnic

The representations of hunt and picnic are well documented since the second half of the third century A.D. on the lids of both pagan and Christian sarcophagi( Fig. 33).<sup>167</sup> Bucolic scenes, the idyllic notion of country life appear more and more frequently on sarcophagi and other

<sup>163</sup> Karin Schlapbach, “The Pleasance, Solitude and Literary Production. The Transformation of the *locus amoenus* in late Antiquity,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 50 (2007): 34-50; Eadem, “Locus amoenus,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Vol. 23 (2010), s.v. 231-44.

<sup>164</sup> Guggisberg, “Das Jagdpicknick. Ein neuer Lebensstil der Spätantike oder Flucht in Eine Heile Welt?” 77-78.

<sup>165</sup> Susanne Muth, “Eine Kultur zwischen Veränderung und Stagnation. Zum Umgang mit den Mythenbildern im spätantiken Haus,” in *Epochenwandel? Kunst und Kultur zwischen Antike und Mittelalter*, eds. Franz Alto Bauer and Norbert Zimmermann (Mainz: Antike Welt, 2001), 114-16.

<sup>166</sup> Raeck, *Modernisierte Mythen*, 42-48; Maguire, “The Good Life”.

<sup>167</sup> Norbert Zimmermann, “Mahl VI (Architektur und Darstellungen).” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 23, (2010), sv. 1105–35, especially 1115-19.

objects, expressing a general desire for a good life, *vita felix*,<sup>168</sup> irrespective of the religious worldview. It is not uncommon that on the sarcophagi the banquet seems to place itself in the same place and time as the hunt. This iconography has nothing to do with the typical funerary or *kline* banquet, but derives from the "hedonistic" banquet scheme, associated with iconographies typical of Dionysian symposia widely documented on the lids of the sarcophagi from the Hadrianic age.<sup>169</sup> Since there is no such episode in the literary tradition or in the Greek or Etruscan iconography that the hero Meleager, the host of the Calydonian boar hunt, passed his time with outdoor dining after the hunt, Ghedini hypothesizes that it was the custom actually practiced by the Romans to finish the hunting in festive gastronomic meetings. The introduction of this absolutely original feature of Roman funerary iconography in mythological sarcophagi could have been the result of an actual practice.<sup>170</sup> This hypothesis is supported by the presence of dogs on the Seuso Hunting Plate or on a fourth-fifth century textile roundel from Brooklyn (Fig. 34)<sup>171</sup> and in the Tellaro mosaic (Fig. 35), where one of the participants of the banquet is reaching out towards one of the dogs: either giving him a treat or is going to stroke the dog.<sup>172</sup>

The hunt and the picnic had the same iconographic meaning, that is why it featured on more and more sarcophagi, silver plates, etc. between the third and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries and became a sort of status symbol. While until the third century heroic lion and boar hunt was the most widespread image, from the Severan period onwards more realistic hunts for deer or hare was

<sup>168</sup> Borg, *Crisis and Ambition*, 202.

<sup>169</sup> Ghedini, "Caccia e banchetto: un rapporto difficile," 78.

<sup>170</sup> Ghedini, "Caccia e banchetto: un rapporto difficile," 79.

<sup>171</sup> Gerard Brett, "The Brooklyn Textiles and the Great Palace Mosaic," in *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum*, (Bulletin of the Byzantine Institute, II, 1950), 433-41.

<sup>172</sup> Ghedini, "Caccia e banchetto: un rapporto difficile," 82.



increasingly frequent due to the fact that the significance of country life and villa culture grew for the status of the elite.<sup>173</sup> As Barbara Borg rightly concludes, these images:

refer to élite pastimes in the real world where not lions and wild boars but stags and other animals were hunted, and to the wealth of the estate owner, who possessed these rich hunting grounds, and indulged his guests at open-air dinners with an abundance of food and attention by multiple staff.<sup>174</sup>

At the same time, we can see that when the two topics appear together, the hunt is much more emphatic than the banquet,<sup>175</sup> and the Seuso Hunting Plate is no exception to this. Although at first glance the imagery of the plate may seem to be an improvised depiction, it is still obvious that it is based on a carefully composed system of symbols based on two traditions: the hunt and the *convivium*. Originally, *stibadium* and sigma-meals were ad-hoc meals after the hunt, but from the Hellenistic period onwards these became staged as romantic, simple meals outdoors, in fact based on a defined choreography.<sup>176</sup> As observed by Rita Amedick,<sup>177</sup> the atmosphere of such events was well expressed by Philostratus the Younger's third ekphrasis, *Hunters*, which describes a meal after a successful hunt in a *locus amoenus* as an occasional meal. However, we know that these events had their own set choreographies and everything had its appointed place from guests, servants, accessories, and even the landscape:

This improvised couch, made of nets, I think receives those whom we may rightly call "the leaders of the hunt." They are five in number. You see the midmost of them, how he has raised himself and has turned towards those who lied above

<sup>173</sup> Borg, *Crisis and Ambition*, 181-182.

<sup>174</sup> Borg, *Crisis and Ambition*, 182.

<sup>175</sup> Guggisberg, "Das Jagdpicknick. Ein neuer Lebensstil der Spätantike oder Flucht in Eine Heile Welt?" 74-75.

<sup>176</sup> Katherine M. Dunbabin, "Triclinium and Stibadium," in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991), 121-48; *Eadem*, "Convivial Spaces: Dining and Entertainment in the Roman Villa," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 9 (1996): 68-88.

<sup>177</sup> Rita Amedick, *Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben 4. Vita Privata*, Volume 1. (Berlin: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1991), 25-45.

him, to whom, it seems to me, he is relating the story of his contest and how he was first to bring down one of the two wild beasts which are suspended from the trees in nets, a deer apparently and a boar. For does he not seem to you to be elated and happy over what he has done? The others gaze on him intently as he tells his story; and the second of them as he leans back on the couch seems to be resting a while and planning soon to describe some exploit of his own in the hunt. As to the other wing of the company, the man next to the central figure, a cup half full in one hand and swinging his right hand above his head, seems to me to be singing the praises of Artemis Agrotera, while his neighbour, who is looking towards the servant, is bidding him hurry the cup along.<sup>178</sup>

In the carefully constructed scene, everything, even the gutting scene has its own tradition, which goes back to popular depictions especially on earlier sarcophagi, but they can also be found on the enigmatic Danubian Rider plaques (Fig. 36).<sup>179</sup>

### **A very short history of the picnic iconography**

The common features of Roman picnic scenes are three to seven diners reclining around a curving bolster under an awning spread between two trees, a small table centrally placed in the curve of the bolster holding a plate, and often the presence of servants. This pervasive

<sup>178</sup> Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*, 3. in *Elder Philostratus, Younger Philostratus, Callistratus*, translated by Arthur Fairbanks, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 256 (London: William Heinemann, 1931).

<sup>179</sup> Rita Amedick, "Zur Motivgeschichte eines Sarkophages mit ländlichem Mahl" *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 95 (1988): 205-34; Popović, "Observations sur le plat d'argent à scènes de chasse du trésor de Seuso,"; Steven Hijmans, "Material matters: object, authorship, and audience in the arts of Rome's empire," in *Beyond Boundaries. Connecting Visual Cultures in the Provinces of Ancient Rome*, eds. Susann E. Alcock, Mariann Egri, and James F. D. Frakes (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2016), 84-102.

iconography, found in various media and places was simple enough to evoke on portable objects, but complex enough to carry diverse meanings.<sup>180</sup>

Over the past few decades, the study of Roman dining has provided new insights into some of the issues of the outdoor dining iconography and its place in diverse social and religious contexts, but the history of the Roman picnic is still largely untapped. This research has been focusing on the significance of the banquet in Roman society<sup>181</sup> and its relationship with the villa in the Late Republic and the Early Imperial Period<sup>182</sup> and in Late Antiquity.<sup>183</sup> The study

<sup>180</sup> Elżbieta Jastrzębowska, "Les scenes de banquet dans les peintures et sculptures chrétiennes des IIIe et IVe siècles." *Recherches augustiniennes* 14 (1979): 3-90, in 46-54; Zimmermann, "Mahl VI (Architektur und Darstellungen)"; *Idem*, "Zur Deutung spätantiker Mahlszenen: Totenmahl im Bild," in *Rituale Identitätsstiftende Handlungskomplexe*, eds. Danek, G. and Hellerschmid, I. (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 171-85; Elisabeth Paneli, "Zur Motivgeschichte des s-Mahles auf Sarkophagen, Katakomben und byzantinischen Handschriften." *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 36 (2015): 245-62.

<sup>181</sup> E.g. Josef Engemann, "Die Ehrenplatz beim antiken Sigmamahl," in *Jenseitsvorstellungen in Antike und Christentum. Gedenkschrift für Alfred Stuiber*, eds. Theodor Klauser, Ernst Dassmann and Klaus Thraede (Münster: Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsbände, 9, 1982), 239-50; Lise Bek, "Questiones Conviviales. The Idea of the Triclinium and the Staging of the Convivial Ceremony from Rome to Byzantium," *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 12 (1983): 81-107; Harald Mielsch, *Die römische Villa: Architektur und Lebensform* (München: C. H. Beck, 1987), 95-140; Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*; Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 223-45; Simon Malmberg, "Visualising Hierarchy at Imperial Banquets," in *Feast, Fast or Famine: Food and Drink in Byzantium*, eds. Wendy Mayer and Silke Trzcionka (Brisbane: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2005), 11-24; Simon Malmberg, "Dazzling Dining: Banquets as an Expression of Imperial Legitimacy," in *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry (Luke 12:19)-Food and Wine in Byzantium. Papers of the 37th Annual Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, In Honour of Professor A.A.M. Bryer*, eds. Leslie Brubaker, Kallirroe Lindardou, (Williston: Ashgate, 2007), 75-91.

<sup>182</sup> Paul Zanker, "Die Villa als Vorbild des späten pompejanische Wohngeschmacks," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 94 (1979): 460-523; John D'Arms, "Control, Companionship, and Clientela: Some Social Functions of the Roman Communal Meal," *Echos du Monde Classique* 28 (1984): 327-48; Alfred Frazer, "The Roman Villa and the Pastoral Ideal," *Studies in the History of Art* 36 (1992): 48-61; Dunbabin, "Convivial Spaces: Dining and Entertainment in the Roman Villa,"; John D'Arms, "Performing culture : Roman spectacle and the banquets of the powerful," *Studies in the History of Art* 56 (1999): 301-19; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 338-53; Mantha *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 179-211.

<sup>183</sup> E.g. Schneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild*, 100-23; Thébert, "Private Life and Domestic Architecture in Roman North Africa"; Ellis, "Power, Architecture, and Décor: How the Late Roman Aristocrat Appeared to His Guests"; Jeremy Rossiter, "Convivium and Villa in Late Antiquity," in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991), 199-214; Eric Morvillez, "Les salles de reception triconques dans l'architecture domestique de l'antiquité tardive en Occident." *Histoire de l'art*, 31 (1995): 15-26; Scott, "The Power of Images in the Late Roman House"; Muth, *Erleben von Raum – Leben im Raum*, 61-70; Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 310-13; Maguire, "The Good Life"; Grassigli, "Il regno della villa. Alle origini della rappresentazione della villa tardoantica"; Isabella Baldini Lippolis, *La domus tardoantica: forme e rappresentazioni dello spazio domestico nelle città del Mediterraneo* (Milan: Dipartimento di Archeologia, Università degli Studi di Bologna, 2003), 79-83; Barbara Polci, "Some aspects of the transformation of the Roman domus between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages," *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology*, eds. Luke Lavan and William Bowden (Leiden: Brill, 2013); 79-109; Scott, "Elites, Exhibitionism

of the Roman garden and its place in landscape painting in Pompeii and elsewhere has drawn attention to the importance of the Roman picnic, such as the research on Nilotic scenes, luxury and sexuality in the villas of the Bay of Naples.<sup>184</sup>

The picnic has also remained isolated from scholarship on imperial architecture, although some research has been done on outdoor dining in the context of grottos, fountains, and water triclinia. Villa architecture is part of identity representation with the specialized rooms and installations for open-air dining, such as the semi-circular dining couch, the *stibadium*; not only in the Early Imperial Period,<sup>185</sup> but also in Late Antiquity.<sup>186</sup>

From the middle of the third century AD, outdoor dining scenes appeared on sarcophagi with increased frequency to convey the patrons' messages. This new iconography spread widely throughout the provinces of the empire.

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and the Society of the Late Roman Villa"; Ken Dark, "The Archaeological Implications of Fourth- and Fifth-Century Descriptions of Villas in the Northwest Provinces of the Roman Empire," *Historia*, 54, no. 3 (2005): 331-42; Muth, "Überflutet von Bildern. Die Ikonophilie im spätantiken Haus"; Joanita Vroom, "The archaeology of late antique dining habits in the eastern Mediterranean: A preliminary study of the evidence," In *Objects in Context, Objects in Use. Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity*, eds. Luke Lavan, Ellen Swift, and Tom Putzeys (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 313-61; Swift, *Style and Function in Roman Decoration*, 105-138; Kim Bowes, *Houses and Society in the Later Roman Empire* (London: Duckworth, 2010), 54-60; Carile, "Memories of Buildings? Messages in Late Antique Architectural Representations"; Wilson, *Caddeddi on the Tellaro*, 1-25.

<sup>184</sup> E.g. Stefan Ritter, "Zur kommunikativen Funktion pompejanischer Gelagebilder. Die Bilder aus der Casa del Triclinio und ihr Kontext," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 120 (2005): 301-72; John R. Clarke, "Three uses of the Pygmy and the aethiops at Pompeii: Decorating, "Othering", and warding off demons," in *Nile Into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World: Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Isis Studies, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, May 11-14, 2005* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 155-69; Paul G.P. Meyboom – John Miguel Versluys, "The meaning of Dwarfs in Nilotic scenes," in *Nile Into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World: Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Isis Studies, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, May 11-14, 2005* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 170-208.

<sup>185</sup> Pietro Soprano, "I triclini all'aperto di Pompei," in *Pompeiana: raccolta di studi per il secondo centenario degli scavi di Pompei*, ed. Amadeo Maiuri (Naples: Gaetano Macchiaroli Editore, 1950), 288-310.

<sup>186</sup> Dunbabin, "Triclinium and Stibadium"; Eric Morvillez, "Sur les installations de lit de table en sigma dans l'architecture domestique du Haut et du Bas-Empire," *Pallas, Revue d'études antiques*, 44 (1996): 119-58; Giuliano Volpe, "Stibadium e convivium in una villa tardoantica (Faragola – Ascoli Satriano)," in *Studi in onore di Francesco Grelle*. eds. Marina Silvestrini, Tullio Spagnuolo Vigorita, Giuliano Volpe (Bari: Edipuglia, 2006), 319-49, Vroom, "The Archaeology Of Late Antique Dining Habits In The Eastern Mediterranean".

Research on the late antique funerary banquet in the context of Early Christian art has provided valuable insight into the problem of tomb-side dining and its religious and social contexts,<sup>187</sup> but only limited research has been done on the Late Roman picnic in general.<sup>188</sup>

A brief review of the corpus shows five mosaics (Thmuis/Egypt; Piazza Armerina/Sicily; Caddeddi/Sicily; Hippo Regius/Algeria; Ostia/Italy [Fig. 37]), two silver plates (Sevso; Cesena), three illuminated manuscripts (Ilias Ambrosiana; Vatican Vergil; Roman Vergil), four tomb paintings (Hypogeum of Vibia/Rome; tomb in Constanța/Romania [Fig. 38]; tomb in Marsala/Sicily; Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter/Rome), about thirty sarcophagi (mostly from Rome),<sup>189</sup> and one textile (Antinoë/Egypt) with similar iconography.

From this it is clear that the central scene of the Seuso Hunting Plate (although it probably does not lack some referentiality, and it is possible that it refers to an actual picnic near Lake Balaton attended by both the patron and Seuso) is part of a relatively new tradition, going back to about a hundred years, which became very popular by the beginning of the fourth century, rather than being an ad-hoc composed scene. The makers of the plate used a stock imagery popular in the central Mediterranean, and personalised it with some details, like the

<sup>187</sup> E.g. Engemann, "Die Ehrenplatz beim antiken Sigmamahl"; Josef Engemann, *Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 106-22; Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London - New York: Routledge, 2000), 52-59; Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 175-90; Regina Gee, "From Corpse to Ancestor: The Role of Tomb-side Dining in the Transformation of the Body in Ancient Rome," in *The Materiality of Death. Bodies, Burials, Beliefs*, Fredrik Fahlander and Terje Oestigaard, BAR International Series 1768, (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008), 59-68; Robin M. Jensen, "Dining with the Dead: From the Mensa to the Altar in Christian Late Antiquity," in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context. Studies of Roman, Jewish, and Christian Burials*, eds. Laurie Brink and Deborah A. Green (Berlin - New York: W. de Gruyter, 2008), 107-43; Zimmermann, "Mahl VI (Architektur und Darstellungen)"; Emma Jayne Graham, "Dining *al Fresco* with the Living and the Dead in Roman Italy," in *Consuming Passions: Dining from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Maureen Carroll, Dawn Hadley and Hugh Willmott, (Tempus, Stroud, 2005), 49-65; Jutta Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort. Untersuchungen zu Jenseitsvorstellungen von Christen des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner Verlag, 2012), 181-212.

<sup>188</sup> Graham, "Dining *al Fresco* with the Living and the Dead in Roman Italy"; Guggisberg, "Das Jagdpicknick. Ein neuer Lebensstil der Spätantike oder Flucht in Eine Heile Welt?"

<sup>189</sup> For open-air dining scenes on Roman sarcophagi, see Amedick, *Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben*: nos. 8, 29, 35, 37, 38, 51, 54, 59, 62, 71, 74, 78, 100, 108, 129, 146, 153, 158, 187, 188, 223, 224, 241, 244, 260, 267, 279, 286, 293, 313.

presence of a woman at a meal, which can be considered unusual if we speak about a picnic after a hunt, but could not be called unusual if the picture depicts a wedding meal.<sup>190</sup>

Both the packaging (from the side of the patron and the maker) and the decoding (from side of the owner and the viewers) of the messages and layers of their meaning presupposed at least some knowledge of the same cultural tradition, a shared visual vocabulary of Mediterranean elites designed to reflect a luxurious life to display class and a shared culture.

### Reading images

In conclusion, we can say that on the Seuso Hunting Plate and the Cesena Plate, the central theme is the outdoor picnic, which can be seen in a setting symbolizing abundance, wealth, and power.<sup>191</sup> If there is not enough space to display the villa estate, then it goes to the outer frieze on the rim. It was important that the owner be portrayed by the artist in the maximum of wealth surrounded by all the possible goods of his estate.<sup>192</sup> This would have been impossible in a scene set inside the house. I argue that this kind of scene did not depict an actual hunt or picnics, but rather the hunting picnics were a way of displaying the lavish countryside and the owner with his friends and family. The picnic scene results from the urge to represent the landscape: itself a sign of the owner's wealth. Images of the luxurious lifestyle of Late Roman elites must contain the villa with its the warehouses and slaves, as well as the abundance of nature, including animals and plants, and the activity of hunting, which symbolised values like courage, wealth, status and power. The banquet was a great opportunity for the owner to

<sup>190</sup> Cameron, "Observations on the distribution and ownership of late Roman silver plate," 185.

<sup>191</sup> Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society*, 1-10.

<sup>192</sup> Schneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild*, 100-23; Muth, *Erleben von Raum – Leben im Raum*.

show off his opulence and to call attention to food, as well as the importance attached to its variety, richness, and elaborate preparation.<sup>193</sup>

In the pictures of the Seuso Plate, we do not find the slight status dissonance observed when looking at the texts. The imagery of the plate – a composition of a villa, hunting, and banquet – are fully harmonious with the imagery of the elite display of the period, offering a sort of perfect essence. The complex messages of the texts and pictures of the plate, probably easily decoded by fourth century elite and sub-elite groups, perfectly matched the requirements of aristocratic self-representation. But we cannot find the place where the plate was made on iconographic grounds: it could have been made in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, but also in a workshop in the Balkans<sup>194</sup> if we presuppose the circulation of copy books among artisans of different artistic forms. From this perspective the North African origin would be the least surprising. Still, we can say that the words of Peter Stewart about the Mildenhall Great Dish (Fig. 39), another significant piece of silver from the fourth century, hold for the Seuso plate as well: “It betrays little sign either of provincial style or late antique ‘decline’. The craftsmanship is about as high as that of any Roman silver from any period.”<sup>195</sup>

To repeat: the patron and the maker of the plate did everything possible to please a certain Seuso, who – as suggested above – might have received the plate as a wedding gift. We can suppose that the individualisation of the plate, and naming the horse (*Innocentius*) and the water (*Pelso*) also gave a sort of referential value to the piece – the patron might have wanted to refer to a picnic held in a rural estate next to Lake *Pelso*.

<sup>193</sup> Emily Gowers, *The Loaded Table. Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, “Wine and water at the Roman convivium,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 6 (1993): 116-41; Dunbabin, “Convivial Spaces: Dining and Entertainment in the Roman Villa”; Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 141-74.

<sup>194</sup> For artistic transmission, see e.g.: Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, 302-303; Will Wootton, “A Portrait of the Artist as a Mosaicist under the Roman Empire,” in *Beyond Boundaries. Connecting Visual Cultures in the Provinces of Ancient Rome*, eds. Susann E. Alcock, Mariann Egri, and James F. D. Frakes (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2016), 62-83.

<sup>195</sup> Peter Stewart, *Roman Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 128.





## Conclusions

As we have seen, outdoor dining takes a central place in the self-representation of Roman aristocrats in the “long” fourth century. Feeding and entertaining guests and clients offered a perfect opportunity for the *dominus* to show off his luxurious lifestyle not only with lavish and exotic food and drink, but also with richly decorated mosaic pediments, quality dining sets and sculpture collections.

The ostentatious display of luxury is rooted in the autocratic nature of Late Antique society. In the Late Roman Empire, the role of communal feasts increased in parallel with the growing importance of Roman provincial aristocrats due to the decline of central government. Members of the aristocracy filled part of this power vacuum.<sup>196</sup> The greater political power of the upper class needed to be displayed in the decor of the reception rooms, the audience chambers, and the dining halls. Villa architecture became a part of identity representation with specialised rooms and installations for open-air dining, such as the *stibadium*.

As Lise Bek notes: ‘instead of being an entertainment of the participants, the convivium has become a performance to be staged. The display of social relations has become an official show or state ceremony.’<sup>197</sup> Once public acts became private, domestic space played an increasingly important role in public life. From Sicily to Syria, from North-Africa to Pannonia, much of the new ‘iconography of abundance’<sup>198</sup> was organised around the communal meal.

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<sup>196</sup> Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 473-81.

<sup>197</sup> Bek, “*Questiones Conviviales*,” 91.

<sup>198</sup> Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 197-99.

Recognising the increasing political power of the aristocracy, the 'middling' class, overwhelmed by taxes, was forced to resort to local patrons and become dependent on them. Social relations between patron and client became more formalised and ceremonial, as did the architectural settings of these encounters. As Barbara Polci noted, Late Roman aristocrats increasingly needed to differentiate between the various classes of guests as is clearly reflected by the presence of more specialised reception rooms in their residences.<sup>199</sup> Large houses built in the fourth century and after were provided with at least two specialised reception halls that served different functions. Simon Ellis has interpreted these halls as private audience chambers where the *dominus* could meet with his clients, perhaps for the *salutatio* or 'morning greetings' and as a triclinium for banquets.<sup>200</sup>

In the vast *stibadium* rooms, with the permanent semi-circular couch placed in an apse, an atmosphere of ceremonial formality and theatricality reigned.<sup>201</sup> Dining became a spectacle in the houses of the upper class. Mosaic pavements and silver tableware formed part of the spectacle. The splendour of entertainment that the host could offer was one of the main opportunities he had to impress his guests and clients, in the same way as the architecture of his house. Outdoor dining scenes moved indoors, where they became part of the luxurious architectural décor, taking the whole wealth of the *dominus* and the lavish and fertile landscape of the countryside with them.

The Seuso Hunting Plate was a typical object of this material and visual culture, and if we analyse its texts and pictures we can see that it was made to express an elite group identity, so

<sup>199</sup> Polci, "Some aspects of the transformation of the Roman domus".

<sup>200</sup> Ellis, "Power, Architecture and Décor"; *Idem*, "Late-antique dining: architecture, furnishings and behaviour," in *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, eds. Ray Lawrence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 22, 1997), 41-52.

<sup>201</sup> Margherita Carucci, *The Romano-African Domus. Studies in Space, Decoration, and Function* (BAR International Series 1731) (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 37-50.

the plate functioned as a visual border to outsiders too, even if it reveals some status dissonance on behalf of the patron.

In conclusion we can say that the verse inscription on the plate is not erroneous, even if from some features make us think that literature was not one of the most important pastimes of the poet (the patron?), probably a military or civil officer somewhere in the Empire. The two shorter inscriptions (*Innocentius*, *Pelso*) of the plate, or at least some parts of them, were most probably made later in another type of letters than the verse inscription, but the intentions behind these choices are not clear.

The text and the banquet scene hint at the possibility that the hoard was a wedding gift to a certain Seuso, at the same time we must say that the “false humility” referred to so many times in literature, which would give us information about the personality of the patron, does not hold, as it has been proved by the analysis of the use of the noun *uasculum* in late Latin. The Chi-Rho as a part of monogrammatic imperial culture had an important role in the visual projection of social power and status,<sup>202</sup> and not necessary refers to the faith of the owner.

The analysis of the visual language of the plate has shown that the iconography is not an ad-hoc depiction of a real picnic but a carefully constructed iconography referring to good life and a *locus amoenus*, and they fit very closely into the domestic décor of the age with the banquet scene, rural estate, and hunting scenes.

The maker, upon order from the patron, personalised some elements of the imagery (Seuso’s wife at the meal, *Pelso*, *Innocentius*, ox cart), thus emphasising the position of the objects as gifts. This personalisation is in accordance with the verse inscription.

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<sup>202</sup> Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity*, 148.

Even without a thorough stylistic analysis of the plate it seems probable that the maker was familiar with the North African copy books of his age, and having this stock imagery he used his own choices to fulfil the patron's wishes concerning the depictions.

We only know about Seuso that he belonged to the upper classes, he might have had some sort of official position, had a villa nearby Lake Balaton, but we do not know if he lived there permanently or temporarily, as Late Roman aristocracy had estates throughout the empire sometimes very far from each other.<sup>203</sup>

Our knowledge is very limited about the concealment of the Seuso Treasure, due to the fact that the original context of the Seuso Treasure is lost, however we know that at the moment of concealment none of the objects were crushed (Fig. 40). "They were packed into a copper cauldron with the four plates stacked face down at the bottom, where the interior corrosion of the copper vessel bears the imprints of their beaded edges: Seuso's Hunting Plate was put in last. (...) Textiles were apparently used to wrap the objects. (...) Chemical analysis has confirmed that the objects were concealed together in antiquity."<sup>204</sup>

Based on its shape and manufacturing technique, the cauldron belongs to a type widespread in the Rhine and Danube regions of the Roman Empire from the second to the fourth centuries AD. The most southern examples of this type were recovered in Pannonia, around Lake Balaton in Hungary.<sup>205</sup> Seuso or his descendants may have hidden the treasure in the last decades of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century, presumably when fleeing from a 'barbarian' attack.<sup>206</sup>

<sup>203</sup> Sessa, *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy*, 37-45.

<sup>204</sup> Mundell Mango, "The Sevso Treasure Hunting plate," 10.

<sup>205</sup> Mihály Nagy, "A Seuso-kincs pannoniai kapcsolatai / Connections of the Seuso treasure to Pannonia," in *The Sevso Treasure and Pannonia. Scientific contributions to the Sevso treasure from Hungary*, eds. Zsolt Visy – Zsolt Mráv (Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Régészeti Tanszék, Genianet, 2012), 58-61.

<sup>206</sup> Vulić et al. "The Vinkovci treasure of Late Roman silver plate," 149.

The plate could have been used for about two generations, most probably until the first decades of the fifth century.<sup>207</sup> Its inscriptions and images suggest the presence of an elite community, even if the various meanings of them were available to only some members of this community, or more precisely they had different meanings to the different members of the community. The images and texts suggest an elite identity, or, in a much more active way, they had a potential to shape it since this inscribed object had an agency reinforced by other physical features of the object, such as its materiality (silver), execution (high quality), value, size, but also other features “invisible” today such as the person of the patron or spatial connections (place of manufacture, mining, etc.) of the object.

I am convinced that if we take the materiality of the objects for granted, often not focusing on it whatsoever, we fail to notice some of their important characteristics and our results will be one-sided. Here, I only had the opportunity for a textual and visual analysis, but I think this has been sufficient enough to prove that “things are not isolated.”<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Cahn et al. “A Table Ronde on a treasure of late Roman silver,” 191.

<sup>208</sup> Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA; Oxford; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 3.

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## Illustrations



1. The Seuso Treasure (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/András Dabasi)



2. The Copper Cauldron (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/András Dabasi)



3. The four-legged silver stand (quadripus) from Polgárdi-Kőszárhegy (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/ András Dabasi)



4. Bust from the Polgárdi-Kőszárhegy stand (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/András Dabasi)





5. The Seuso Treasure in the Getty Museum in 1984 (Photo: Marion True)



6. The Seuso hunting Plate (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/ András Dabasi)





7. Seuso Hunting Plate, central medallion (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/András Dabasi)



8. Depiction of villa on the outer border of the Seuso Hunting Plate (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/András Dabasi)



9. Chi-Rho monogram on the Seuso Hunting Plate (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/  
András Dabasi)

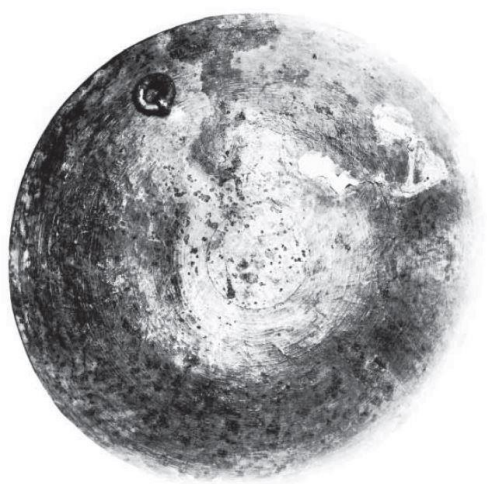




10. The *Decennalia* Plate of the Kaiseraugst Treasure (Römermuseum Augst)



11. Poculum Malacitanum (<http://www.anmal.uma.es/numero15/fernandez.htm>)



12. Largitio bowl from Kerch



13. Largitio bowl from Kerch



14. Largitio bowl from Kerch



Abb. 61: Zinnschale aus Montbellet, Durchmesser 22,5 cm. Chalon-sur-Saône, Musée Denon.



Abb. 62: Rückseite der Zinnschale in Abb. 61. Detail mit Ringöse aus Silber.

## 15. Bowl from Chalon-sur-Saône



## 16. Inscription B



## 17. Inscription C





18. Comparison of the letters 'L' of inscription A and inscription B.



19. Boar hunt mosaic, Carthage, Tunisia, circa 210-230 (Tunis, Bardo National Museum, Wikimedia Commons)



20. Picnic scene and the body of water on the Seuso hunting Plate (Hungarian National Museum/ András Dabasi).



21. Dominus Julius mosaic, Carthage (Tunis, Bardo National Museum, Wikimedia Commons)





22. Mosaic panel from a triconch apse from Tabarka (Bardo Museum, Tunis, Wikimedia Commons)



23. Mosaic panel from a triconch apse from Tabarka (Bardo Museum, Tunis, Wikimedia Commons)





24. Mosaic panel from a triconch apse from Tabarka (Bardo Museum, Tunis, Wikimedia Commons)



25. Cesena plate, central medallion (DAI, Rome)



26. Central medallion of a plate with a pastoral scene from the Vinkovci Treasure before restoration, (cat. no. 3) (Photo: Vinkovci Museum/D. Bota).



27. Seuso Hunting Plate, animal chase on the rim (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/András Dabasi).





28. Seuso Hunting Plate, animal chase on the rim (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/ András Dabasi).



29. Seuso Hunting Plate, scene with an ox cart (Photo: Hungarian National Museum/ András Dabasi).



30. Detail of the floor mosaic of the villa Catteddi on the Tellaro with an ox cart scene

(Photo: Italy Europe 24)



31. Ox cart scene from the Piazza Armerina "Great Hunt" corridor (Wikimedia Commons)





32. Piazza Armerina, “Little Hunt” mosaic (Photo: Bronislav L. Santchev)





33. Funerary banquet scene from a sarcophagus lid, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AN2007.46

(Jaś Elsner, Stefanie Lenk et al. ed, *Imagining the Divine. Art and the Rise of World Religions*. Ashmolean Museum, 2017, 57, Fig. 39.)



34. Textile roundel from Antinoe (Brooklyn Museum, 44.143c)

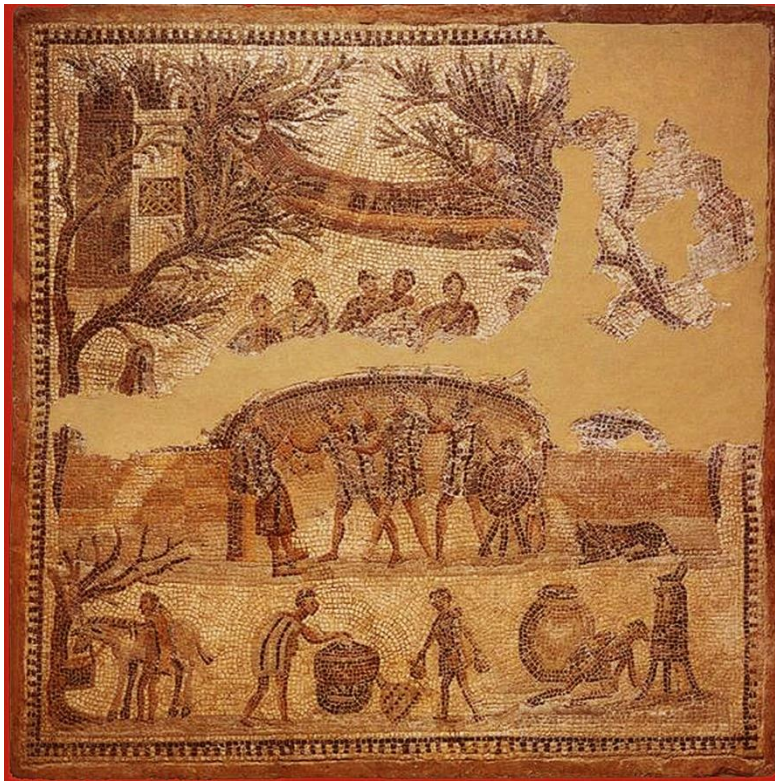


35. Picnic scene from the Tellaro hunt mosaic (R.J.A. Wilson, *Caddeddi on the Tellaro*, Fig.5.21.)



36. Votive Danubian rider plaque. lead (Museum of Fine Art, Boston, 1996.357)





37. Mosaic of an outdoor banquet, Ostia (?) (Christine Kondoleon, *Antioch. The Lost Ancient City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 185; Fig. 68.)

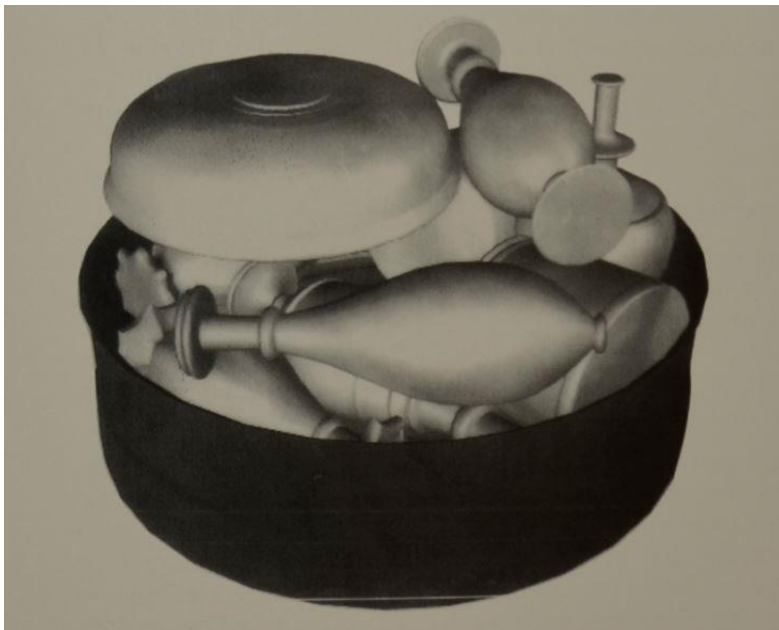


38. Funerary banquet scene in a tomb in Constanța, Romania  
(<http://www.cjc.ro/MINAC/en/harta-1.html>)





39. The Mildenhall Great Dish (Bacchic Platter) (Photo: British Museum)



40. Computer reconstruction of the concealment of the object of the Seuso Treasure in the copper cauldron (Mundell Mango – Bennett, *The Seuso Treasure*, 25, fig. A-6.)