Abstract/ A miniature eulogia token in the collection of the British Museum was originally listed in the register as depicting Christ’s Ascension into Heaven, yet its composition incorporates features that evoke images of the Adored Christ. This paper analyses the iconography on a number of comparable Late Antique pilgrimage eulogia produced in the Levant, revealing that this unique token would more accurately be defined as the Adoration of Christ in Majesty. The token also provides evidence of the prophylactic and apotropaic properties attributed to blessings of holy soil from sacred sites. The unusual composition of the artefact considered here offers a rare insight into the developing iconography displayed on Late Antique pilgrimage eulogia.

Keywords/ Late Antique, Pilgrimage, Eulogia, Token, Iconography, Christ in Majesty

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Christ in Majesty on a Late Antique *eulogia* token in the British Museum

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Christian travel to the holy places had developed into a phenomenal religious movement by the sixth century that mobilised large numbers of Christians who travelled vast distances and undertook perilous journeys over land and sea to reach the land of the Bible. Jerusalem was deemed the holiest city of all as it was the place where the final events in Christ’s life took place. Constantine I constructed shrines over the sites of His Crucifixion and Resurrection and of His Ascension on the Mount of Olives. Religious customs began to be established at the sacred sites. These included prayers and processions, scriptural passages were read at the relevant holy sites, the presentation of precious relics and even the re-enactment of events from the Bible. There were various motives for pilgrimage: pilgrims went to be baptised in the waters of the River Jordan, they sought healing, they went to reaffirm their faith in God, they wanted to worship the holy ground upon which Christ walked. Most significantly, however, they went to see and to touch. They believed that the spiritual power of a holy site, a holy being or a treasured relic was transferrable through touch. Material was thus consecrated through physical contact with other sacred matter. Pilgrims began to collect ordinary items from the sites that were infused with the holy. Contemporary written sources reveal that an array of natural objects were considered blessings or *eulogia* from the Holy Land and included pieces of wood, stones, bread, fruit and even fish. By the sixth century, holy oil, water and earth were the more standard items collected and a new form of art and craft was developed to contain and transport these sanctified substances. The array of material culture related to Late Antique pilgrimage in existence and the widespread location of their find spots suggests that manufactured blessings once existed in large numbers and were popular amongst the pilgrims from this early period.

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1 I am very grateful to Dr. Chris Entwistle, curator of Roman and Byzantine Collections at the British Museum, for granting me permission to study, photograph and publish this token. None of this research would have been possible were it not for Professor Emma Loosley, The University of Exeter, and the European Research Council whose funding has supported my Post-Doctoral position. I would also like to thank Dr. Guido Cornini, curator Musei Vaticani, and Professor Herbert L. Kessler, Johns Hopkins University, for their constant encouragement.


Tokens were common pilgrimage objects and they were constructed from blessed earth or clay shaped into the form of medallions of various sizes. Their reverses were stamped with images of holy figures, sacred events from the life of Christ, mandrake roots and some even contain inscriptions. According to Bissera Pentcheva, the stamping process of sealing an image onto the holy soil ensured the imparting of sacred energy to the earthly matter. The obverses were left undecorated often with the token makers’ palm print clearly visible on a large number of examples. Many of the tokens are convex in shape, though whether this was deliberate or merely an effect of poor firing is unknown. Pilgrims strongly believed the holiness from a saint was transferred to these tiny objects and that the curative power of the saint was readily available to them regardless of the distance from the holy shrine. Therefore the sight, touch and even substance of tokens were often called upon in time of need, such as during times of ill health or to ensure safe passage home. They have generally been dated from the late-sixth to the early-seventh century. However, a recent study of the collection of eight tokens discovered at Scythopolis (Bet Shean) in Palestine have been given a much earlier date to before 540 AD on the basis of archaeological evidence. The place of their origin has also divided opinion. Gary Vikan argues for a single place of manufacture at the shrine of St. Symeon the Younger’s “Miraculous Mountain” on account of the two-faced stamp discovered there and the number of tokens found in the region of Antioch. In contrast, Levi Yitzhak Rahmani believes they should be attributed to the holy place represented on each individual token. Those tokens depicting scenes of Christ’s Nativity, for example, would therefore have been produced with earth taken from the site of the Holy Stable in Bethlehem, whilst those depicting Christ’s Baptism would have been made with earth from along the banks of the river Jordan. It is unclear whether these eulogia had any monetary value or were simply given away to pilgrims for free. Eulogia tokens are held in museum institutions and private collections throughout the world and it is the British Museum in London that contains the largest grouping of all.
In 1973, the British Museum acquired a collection of eighty pilgrim tokens from a London-based antiquities dealer. The tokens were reportedly discovered in a glass bowl at or near to Qal‘at Se‘man in Syria, the church dedicated to the holy man Symeon Stylites the Elder. The scenes imprinted on the faces of this particular collection depict an array of events from the life of Christ and include images of the Annunciation, Nativity, Baptism, miracle working scenes of the Healing of the Blind Man and the Miraculous draught of fishes, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Angel at the Sepulchre, the Transfiguration and busts of Christ. Although the majority of scenes represented on the tokens are easy to identify, there are a number of examples whose complex iconography has been the subject of much contention. Interestingly, some tokens with scenes of Christ’s Entry

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8 A number of the tokens found at Scythopolis were discovered in the remains of a shop. Vicky Foskolou has discussed the emergence of a market in pilgrim mementos operating in parallel with ‘official’ tokens from holy sites. Vicky Foskolou, “Blessing for Sale? On the production and distribution of pilgrim mementos in Byzantium”, Byzantinische Zeitschrift, 105 (2012), pp. 53–84, sp. pp. 62–63.

4/ Detail of the “Ascension (z)” token: the curved objects held by the two angels, The British Museum, London, inv. no. 1973,0501, 6–7th century
into Jerusalem are also conflated with Greek inscriptions reading “St Sergius”\textsuperscript{10}. The multiplicity of interpretations for the scenes displayed upon Late Antique eulogia tokens presents a challenge to those studying the iconography of early Christian art.

A single token from the British Museum hoard was catalogued in the original museum register and by Richard Camber as the “Ascension (?)”, however, the presence of the question mark in both texts suggests that the identity of this token is ambiguous\textsuperscript{11}. It measures 15.4 mm in diameter, it is 7.5 mm thick and weighs 2.4 g /Fig. 2/. The heart-shaped half-bust of Christ takes up the upper central space of the token /Fig. 3/. He is faced frontally with shoulder-length hair and no facial features exist. Two hollow triangular motifs emerge from either side of His head whilst above is a larger and more prominent object that appears rectangular at its top. Two full-figured angels feature in the outer edges of the token and they flank the bust of Christ. They are both depicted in profile as they face Him. The angel to the right is better preserved than the one to the left as his short hairline is clearly visible and traces of his left eye and nose are present. This angel is also marginally taller than the other. The angel to the left of the scene appears to have longer hair and none of the facial features that may have once highlighted his face remain. The angels have large wings that measure the entire length of their bodies and they are dressed in gathered robes. Their outstretched arms positioned underneath the bust hold highly unusual curved items /Fig. 4/. The object held by the angel on the left is clearly visible, though the one to the right is less defined. In the upper right of the token is a six-pointed star and to the upper left is a crescent-shaped moon. Three roundels are piled above one another on the ground directly beneath Christ. Its obverse is unadorned and no remnants of palm prints are evident /Fig. 1/.

The token is generally in a good condition though it is unfortunate that the lower edges, especially to the right, have worn away as details that may once have existed below the three roundels and to the angels’ feet are now lost. The stamp used to impress the image onto the token must have had deep-cut grooves as the figures are prominently raised against the plain ground. The skill of the craftsman is also evident in the detail carved into the stamp: from the drapery and wings upon the angels, the facial features still visible on one of them, the triangular motifs surrounding Christ’s head, to the strange curved objects held directly below Him. The image of Christ is now very worn, it is easy to presume however that it was once decorated with facial features like the angel to the right. This token is unique, it is the only one of its kind and no similar imagery exists in any other form of Late Antique art. The image of Christ flanked by angels could represent the Ascended Christ but its additional features such as the star and moon, the roundels piled on the ground, the rectangular motif above Christ’s head and the strange implements held by the angels are problematic as they do not conform to general readings of this scene. This paper will now analyse comparative scenes impressed or cast onto other pilgrimage eulogia from this period to discover whether these examples help to clarify the true identity of the token in the British Museum.

The Ascension on pilgrimage eulogia

During the accounts of Christ’s Ascension in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, the narratives do not give any insight into the way in which He was taken up to Heaven. In the book of Mark it is said: “Soon then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God”\textsuperscript{12}. The passage in the Gospel of Luke reads: “And he led [the Disciples] out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven”\textsuperscript{13}. This lack of description may have allowed for greater artistic license on the part of Late Antique artisans working in Palestine\textsuperscript{14}. It has long been debated that their inspiration may have come from the monumental mosaics and frescos that decorated the many churches across the region built to enshrine the loca sancta\textsuperscript{15}. A token held in the collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem is the only known terracotta eulogia to be

\textsuperscript{10} See the token in the private collection of Shlomo Moussaieff and published in Israeli and Mevorah, “Cradle of Christianity” (n. 9), p. 212.
\textsuperscript{11} The British Museum inv. no. 1973,0501,54. For a bibliographical reference, see Camber, “A Hoard of Terracotta Amulets” (n. 9), p. 104.
\textsuperscript{12} Mark 16:1-9.
\textsuperscript{13} Luke 24:50.
defined as the scene of the Ascension /Fig. 5/. It was constructed of greyish earth and measures 36 mm in diameter and 11 mm in thickness and is therefore substantially larger in size than the small token of the British Museum16. A circular frame borders the token. The full-figure of Christ takes up the upper central space: He wears a crown that is surrounded by a nimbus, His left hand holds a gospel book whilst His right hand is raised in benediction. Rahmani records that He is seated on a throne17. There is little evidence for a throne on the token itself, what appear to be two legs of a throne could also be interpreted as Christ’s feet. Two winged and nimbed angels flank Christ. Unlike the British Museum token, they are not stood upright but appear to be in flight, carrying Christ aloft to Heaven. A small cross is present directly below the figure of Christ and represents the True Cross on which He was crucified. Seven elongated forms flank the cross with four to the right and three to the left and are likely to be illustrations of the Disciples. The images of the Disciples are smaller than those featured above, they also decrease in size towards the edges of the token all of which helps to focus the viewer or pilgrim on the image of Christ. Although the far left of the token is missing, it can be deduced that an eighth Disciple was originally represented and mirrored the image to the right. The token maker may have added the witnessing Disciples and the True Cross to conflate the scene of the Ascension with the Adoration of the Cross, a fusion that was not uncommon during this period as shall be addressed later on in this study18.

Another type of Late Antique eulogia took the form of small flasks (ampullae) constructed from clay, pewter or glass. They were used to contain and transport holy substances such as oil from the lamps that burned at the holy places, water from the River Jordan or earth from a site associated with a particular saint. Images were cast or stamped onto the sides of the flasks and featured representations relating to the holy site where its blessed substance was taken from. Many of the pewter flasks contain scenes from the life of Christ and the Greek inscriptions around their borders attest that they once held “Oil of the Wood of Life from the Holy Places of Christ” or that they were a “Blessing of the Lord from the Holy
The vast majority of them are contained in the Basilica of John the Baptist in Monza and the Abbey of Saint Columban in Bobbio, both located in Northern Italy\(^\text{19}\). Images of the Ascension were cast onto fourteen of them. In all instances this scene was presented on the obverse of the flasks and only two were rendered from the same mould\(^\text{20}\). Four of them are part of a complex narrative detailing the main events from Christ’s life, such as His immaculate conception, Nativity, Baptism, Crucifixion, Resurrection and although the number of tiny scenes depicted, the events shown and the positioning of the roundels upon the flasks differ, they each include the Ascension\(^\text{21}\). They share many iconographical features with the token in the Israel Museum. The scene of the Ascension on flask B\(\text{b18}\) is positioned towards the very top of the flask and though much of this section

\(^{16}\) Israel Antiquities Authority, inv. no. 52–126. This token was found during excavations of a large mansion in Scythopolis that has been attributed to a wealthy Christian family on account of its size and the finds discovered there. For further work surrounding this token, see Levi Yitzhak Rahmani, “Eulogia Tokens from Byzantine Bet–She‘an”, *Atiqot*, 22 (1993), pp. 109–119, sp. p. 111; Yael Israeli, “Eulogia Tokens” (n. 9), p. 212. The measurements were taken from the former reference.

\(^{17}\) Rahmani, “Eulogia tokens” (n. 16), p.111.

\(^{18}\) Rahmani, “Eulogia tokens” (n. 16), p.111.


\(^{20}\) The Ascension is presented upon M\(\text{1, 2, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20}\), B\(\text{2, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20}\) and one in the Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. no. 1999.46.a. Those from the same mould are M\(\text{14 and 16}\). Ernst Kitzinger has argued that the faces of the *ampullae* with the inscriptions are the reverse, whilst the uninscribed should be classified as the obverse. Ernst Kitzinger, “Reflections on the Feast Cycle in Byzantine Art”, in *Studies in Late Antique, Byzantine and Medieval Western Art*, vol. 1: *Late Antique and Byzantine Art*, Ernst Kitzinger ed., London 2002, pp. 530–568. For further work on images of the Ascension on the Monza and Bobbio *ampullae*, see Christopher Braddock, “L’Ascensione nella prima arte bizantina: le ampolle di Monza e Bobbio”, *Studi Monzesi*, 6 (1990), pp. 45–57.

\(^{21}\) The Christological cycles include flasks M\(\text{2, 17, 18 and 19}\). Flask B\(\text{17}\) will not be discussed in any detail as it is so badly corroded that its Ascension scene is only partially visible. Grabar states that only its frame can be seen. Grabar, *Ampoules* (n. 19), p. 40.
is now missing it is still possible to view its general composition. Christ is stood within a mandorla and is supported by two angels in flight to the left and right of the scene. The lower section is filled with a single row of eleven Disciples who decrease in size towards the edges of the roundel. The same scene on M2 is also positioned towards the top of the ampulla. Christ is stood within the mandorla, the two angels support Him and His right hand is raised in benediction. In contrast to B18 and the token in the Israel Museum, Mary takes the place of the cross or a Disciple in the lower central space. She is nimbed and her hands are raised in the orant gesture as she looks up to the ascended Christ. The scene upon B19 differs from the previous two Christological sequences as it lies in the centre of the flask and its roundel is of a far greater size than the other scenes. Even though its lower section is fragmented, it is still possible to read the key features of the image. Two angels flank the half-bust of Christ, they are full-faced and their arms aid the lifting of the orb. An additional pair of angels is included in this medallion and they lay horizontally at the lower end of the mandorla, their faces are in profile as they face Christ. Mary faces the right, she is depicted in profile and her arms are outstretched in front of her rather than above. Due to the now lost section of the flask, the exact number of Disciples is unclear: six are positioned in a single row to the left and there are at least five to the right. It was cast from an ornate mould as eyes, mouths, hair, drapery and feathered wings are extant.

In addition to the miniature scenes displayed upon the four Christological ampullae, the Ascension is the chief design on the faces of nine flasks in the collections of Monza, Bobbio and the Cleveland Museum of Art in Ohio. The extra space allows for greater detail and adornment in all instances. Many share the same elements cast on to M1. Christ is seated upon an ornate throne with a cruciform nimbus and surrounded by the oval mandorla. In His covered left hand is a gospel book whilst His right hand is raised in blessing. Only on two other large scenes is He stood within the mandorla. Similar to those depicted on B19, there are two pairs of angels. Two feature in half-bust above and two full-figured below. In slight contrast, the two angels at the lower end of the mandorla do not look to Christ but instead face the outer edges of the flask. Mary is present directly below the figure of Christ. In this particular example she faces frontally, she is nimbed and her hands are raised to her side as she signals to Him. On other ampullae, she is shown in profile facing either the right or the left with her arms outstretched in front of her body. On six flasks, the space between the top of Mary’s halo and the bottom of the mandorla is adorned. A simple round ball is attached to the halo on M1 and B13. On M14 and M16, it features in the central space between the two items. With their upraised hands, Mary and the Disciples appear to be aiding the movement of this roundel upwards and it therefore may represent the Holy Spirit ascending to Heaven. The same space upon M10 was treated far more elaborately than those previously mentioned as rays of light, the hand of God and a descending dove emerge from the mandorla all of which allude to the event of Christ’s Baptism. B20 has an eight-pointed star that is flanked by two flamed torches to represent the sun and the moon.

Each of the five large Ascension scenes from Monza depict the twelve Disciples positioned in two rows either side of Mary. They are far more animated than those on the smaller medallions as they point and signal to Christ. Two even hold Gospel books whilst another raises a small cross. The Disciples upon the Bobbio and Cleveland flasks were instead rendered in a far simpler manner. Their elongated forms with no facial features are more comparable to those on the miniature Christological sequences. Their numbers also vary from seven to twelve. The Ascension scene on B20 is the only pewter ampulla to omit representations of the Disciples. To the left of Mary is the figure of John the Baptist. He is identified by the words he is said to have spoken that are inscribed in Greek beside his body, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world”. He has long hair, is bearded, nimbed and he wears a tunic along with a fur coat. John’s right hand is also raised to Christ as he recognises the ascended figure as the Son of God. André Grabar distinguishes the figure to the right of Mary as the priest Zechariah, John’s father. His tunic is held together by a round clasp that may represent his priestly garb. Zechariah has a halo and carries a censer on its chain in his right hand. The image of a small, standing angel is present to the far right of the flask, beyond Zechariah. The cloak covers its hands and its head is bowed in veneration. The same image of a second angel is also mirrored at the opposite end of the ampulla beside the figure of John the Baptist, though much of it is now lost.

An unusual rendition of the Ascension is presented on flask B2 as it is framed by both an inscription
around its circumference and busts of the twelve Disciples in individual roundels below. Christ is bearded and long-haired, He holds a Gospel book with a covered left hand and blesses with his right. He is enthroned within the mandorla and is supported by two angels in flight who look to Him. In the lower half of the medallion, the images of Mary and the flanking Disciples have been replaced with the scene of the Adoration of the Cross. The cross is at the centre. It is not the simple cross depicted on the token from the Israel Museum but instead is highly detailed with symbolic branches and appears to be a living tree. It also has a small roundel at its core with three additional lobes at the end of each arm. The cross is placed on a three-mounded ground and its top features a rectangular-shaped object. Two angels adore the cross: they are shown in profile as they look to the sacred object, both arms are outstretched and covered by drapery. They also appear to be approaching it as one foot is depicted before the other. This ampulla is very reminiscent of the large token in the Israel Museum as it is a conflation of the Ascension and the Adoration of the Cross. It also shares similar features with the rare "Ascension" token of the British Museum. A study of comparable Adoration of the Cross scenes on other eulogia will now be undertaken in order to discover whether the British Museum token can be similarly labelled as this scene.

The Adoration of the Cross on pilgrimage eulogia

A simple, tapered cross at its centre adorns the obverses of four ampullae in the collections of Monza and Bobbio. On M4, the cross has small roundels at each of its eight ends, it is placed on three steps and a garland surrounds it. An inscription and various borders of stars and garland motifs encircle this particular flask. M12, M13 and B8 were cast from the same mould. The cross displayed upon all examples is flared with small roundels at each end and is also framed by two ornate columns as well as garland above. The faces of the twelve Disciples also feature in small medallions encircling the ampulla with a further border of stars beyond. However, none of these four examples feature adoring angels. The only truly comparable scene to B2 is that displayed upon B1. The cross in the centre is reminiscent of the type used on B2 as it is highly stylised and has roundels at each of its four ends. It is surrounded by a mandorla that is filled with dots. The cross is also placed upon a prominent mound. The bust of a nimbed Christ is positioned above the cross and mandorla. He is bearded, has long hair and features such as brows, eyes, nose and lips are discernable. Four angels surround the cross. Two are present above and two below. The two angels presented above are pictured in bust form, their wings are outstretched and they touch the orb with their hands. The two flanking the cross below are stood upright; they both face the cross and their arms are raised in front of them as they motion to the cross. They appear to hold a long cylindrical object in their right hands. An inscription around the circumference of the flasks remains in poor condition and suggests that this was the principle image.

The image of the Adoration of the Cross is only depicted on two other pilgrimage eulogia and they are both part of the token hoard of the British Museum /Fig. 6/. They are smaller in size than the

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22 Grabar, Ampoules (n. 19), pp. 40–41.
23 Ibidem, pp. 18–20.
24 Ibidem, pp. 41–43.
25 The full list of full-bodied Ascension scenes include: M2, M10, M11, M16, M19, B2, B13, B14, B20 and the Cleveland flask.
26 Grabar, Ampoules (n. 19), p. 17.
27 Christ is depicted in this way on M20, M12, M14 and on M19. However, as the upper spaces on B13 and B14 are now missing it is problematic to discover whether these two flasks follow the type shown on the other examples.
28 B20 and Cleveland.
29 M20, M11, B13 and B20.
30 B14 and the Cleveland flask.
31 M13 and M14.
32 The rounded within a void space is only present on one other pew- ter ampulla. M5 features the scene of the Resurrection on its obverse. The centre of the flask comprises of an elaborate depiction of the Anastasis Rotunda as it appeared in the sixth century with its domed roof, twisted columns and opened grilled gates leading to Christ’s tomb. The two Mary’s stand to the left of the scene signalling to the empty tomb and the angel is seated to the right. Located within the upper space of the tomb, directly between the grilled gates is a small ball, which may signal the risen and resurrected Spirit. In his commentary, Grabar makes no reference to this object. Grabar, Ampoules (n. 19), pp. 22–23. For further discussion of the appearance of the tomb and various interpretations, see Barag, Wilkinson, “Monza-Bobbio flasks and the Holy Sepulchre” (n. 19).
33 M2, M10, M11, M14 and M16.
34 B13, B14 and the Cleveland flask.
35 John 1: 29.
36 Grabar, Ampoules (n. 19), p. 43.
38 Ibidem, p. 22.
39 For the bibliography on flasks M12 and M13, see Grabar, Ampoules (n. 19), p. 29. For B8, see Grabar, Ampoules (n. 19), p. 37.
40 Grabar, Ampoules (n. 19), p. 33.
41 This flask is badly damaged and a portion of the left section has completely broken away from the flask. It is therefore difficult to read the two angels to the left.
42 The photograph of this ampulla is of a poor quality and it is therefore difficult to identify this object. In addition, Grabar makes no reference to it in his description of the scene.
43 The British Museum, inv. no. 1973,0501.55–56. For Camber’s description of this scene, see Camber, “A Hoard of Terracotta Amulets” (n. 9), p. 104.
“Ascension” token from the same collection as they measure 10.75 mm and 11.67 mm respectively, 3.21 mm and 3.53 mm in thickness and weigh 0.5 g and 0.6 g. The tokens are identical and were presumably printed from the same mould. It features a simple scene: a long and thin cross with a bar at its top takes the central space of the token and it is placed on a three-mounded ground. Two angels flank the cross: they have haloes, their faces are shown in profile as they look to the cross and details such as their hair, noses, eyes and mouths are visible. Their wings curve downwards with the shape of the token and their arms are both outstretched in front of their bodies with hands covered by their garments.

**Understanding the “Ascension(?)” token**

Images of Christ’s Ascension into Heaven on Late Antique pilgrimage art are formed from similar elements regardless of the size of the scene. Full-faced Ascension images on the *ampullae* are highly decorative and feature Christ seated on a throne within an orbed mandorla. In many of these examples, He holds a Gospel book in one hand whilst the other is raised as He blesses the Disciples below as described in the Gospel narratives. Four angels support the cross, the figure of Mary is present directly beneath the orb and the twelve followers signal to Him beside her. The more ornate examples also feature representations of the sun and moon. The smaller scenes that form part of the Christological sequences also share similar iconographical features as Christ, the mandorla, the Gospel book, the blessing and the Disciples are all present. However, seemingly due to lack of space, the Disciples are merely given simple elongated forms and do not gesticulate to the wonder above as in the larger examples. Depictions of Mary and the second pair of angels are also absent from many of the smaller scenes. In addition, the pairing of the Ascension and Adoration of the Cross scenes was also a common fusion in Late Antique pilgrimage art as reflected by the token in the Israel Museum and 12. The sheer number of Ascension and Adoration scenes displayed on *eulogia* and the variety of elements used to depict them suggests that both scenes were integral to pilgrimage art and to the pilgrims themselves. This creates a difficulty when attempting to classify the “Ascension(?)” token in the British Museum as it features characteristics of both scenes and yet it is markedly different from them.

The features impressed on to the “Ascension(?)” token in the British Museum are dissimilar to those that follow the standard Ascension iconography of this period. It is a much-reduced image and features the bust of Christ, two standing angels, representations of the sun and moon and mounds of earth below Christ as well as the unidentified items held by the angels. Christ is not seated on an ornate throne within a mandorla nor does He hold a Gospel book with His left hand or bless with His right. Mary and the Disciples are not present and the angels are not in flight carrying Christ to Heaven. The small size of the token and the lack of space for the additional motifs should not be used to argue that this is an Ascension scene as the three figures of Christ and the two angels could have been reduced to allow for the addition of the missing elements. This token should therefore not be classified as the scene of Christ’s Ascension. Nor should it be categorised as the Adoration of the Cross. The token shares a similar
composition to B1 as it features the bust of Christ, two standing and adoring angels and the mound, yet omitted from the token is the central image of this scene: a full depiction of the True Cross.

The miniature token in the British Museum represents the scene of the Adoration of Christ in Majesty. It features a triumphant Christ who was crucified to abolish the sins of mankind. The True Cross is a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice and though it features in many examples of Late Antique pilgrimage art, in this particular eulogia Christ is the embodiment of the Cross and this is the reason it is not depicted in its entirety. The Cross is symbolised instead by the two triangular motifs that emerge from His head. The rectangular-shaped bar above may also represent the titulus, the charge brought against Christ and displayed at the top of the Cross during His Crucifixion to identify Him as “The King of the Jews”44. This feature is also part of the iconographical scheme on the Adoration of the Cross tokens in the British Museum as well as on B2. The three mounds of earth piled directly below the image of Christ also signify the hillock where Christ’s Crucifixion took place: Golgotha. Again, this was a common motif in early eastern Christian art. The Cross was often placed on one large mound, three smaller roundels and some examples even include tiers of three steps to allude to the holy ground upon which it was once placed. See for example the image of the crux gemmata or ornamented cross stood on a prominent hill impressed onto the handle of a pottery vessel /Fig. 7/45. The presence of the crescent moon and the six-pointed star above Christ’s head is a puzzling addition to the composition. They can hardly be stated as unique additions to early pilgrimage art as they feature most commonly on scenes of the Crucifixion. On most examples, the six-pointed star is positioned to the left of Christ’s bust and the crescent moon to the right46. They are in reverse order on the token. The star and moon also appear on the two miniature Resurrection tokens in the British Museum /Fig. 8/47. On these tokens, the angel is sat to the right of the scene and his left hand points to the empty tomb to the left of the composition. The six-pointed star is positioned in the sky above within the crescent-shaped moon. The lack of space may have forced the token maker to depict them within one another. The star and moon were not purely reserved for images of Christ’s Passion as they also appear on images of the Annunciation. Two crescent moons, a star and small cross feature in the upper space between Mary and the angel Gabriel on a large terracotta ampulla in the Israel Museum48. The presence of the star and moon on images of the Annunciation, the Resurrection and Christ in Majesty could have been used to suggest the imparting or leaving of the Holy Spirit.

44 Mark 15: 26.
45 The Israel Antiquities Authority, inv. no. 42.413. Yoram Tsafrir, “The Spread of Christianity in the Holy Land”, in Cradle of Christianity (n. 9), p. 43.
46 See for example the image of Christ’s Crucifixion on a pewter ampulla held in Dumbarton Oaks, inv. no. 1948.18 in Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Volume I: Metalwork, Ceramics, Glass, Glyptics, Painting, Marvin Chauncey Ross ed., Washington 1962, inv. no. 87. The star and moon motif is also present on the Crucifixion medallion on B18.
47 The British Museum inv. no. 1973.0501.51 & 1973.0501.53. A third Resurrection token also once existed but has now completely corroded 1973.0501.52 (thanks to Dr. Entwistle, British Museum for this information). The original museum register indicates that it was identical in size and iconography to the other two examples.
48 Yael Israeli, “Christian Images and Symbols”, in Cradle of Christianity (n. 9), p. 149.
When considering the image of Christ on the Majesty token, all facial features and nimbus are absent from the portrait. This is even more surprising when looking to the nine highly detailed images of Christ in the same token collection of the British Museum /Fig. 9/. In this grouping, His head and shoulders fill the entire surface of the tokens: large eyes, brows, a nose, thin lips and a pointed beard all feature. Long, thick hair was formed from the grooved lines in the original stamp as too were the creases within the garment draped over His shoulders. A cruciform nimbus frames His head. Art historians have long discussed the notion that the image of Christ was reflective of the fierce theological debates that divided opinion in the early church surrounding the nature in which Christ came down from Heaven and whether he was human or divine. During this early period, two portraits emerged: Christ as the eternal, unbearded youth or Christ as the wise, older man with a full beard and long hair. The image set on the tokens represents the latter tradition. It is likely that the same detail once existed on the Majesty token albeit in minute form, especially as the eyes, nose and mouth are visible on the angel located to the right of Christ. He clearly has hair to the length of His shoulders. The raised surface of the token has a smooth, polished black appearance, which suggests that the details that may once have been present were rubbed from the token as its owner(s) venerated and touched His image.

In terms of its current condition, the lower right side of the token is missing, which could simply be due to general wear and tear. If the views of Rahmani, Vikan and Tsafrir are to be considered, the token may have been deliberately defaced. These scholars all believe that during Late Antiquity scrapings of the holy soil or earth were made, the holy matter was mixed with water or saliva and the substance was then ingested by the devout in order to help a sickness or to act as a form of protection. The token’s iconography may also further attest to its prophylactic and apotropaic qualities. The two angels to the left and right of the scene hold highly unusual curved objects directly beneath the figure of Christ. The objects do not touch His body and nor do they appear as an aid in holding Him aloft. No other precedent for these objects exists in Late Antique art and as such it is very challenging when attempting to identify them, to clarify their function and to ultimately understand their incorporation into the token’s composition. They may be elaborate staffs that the angels carry and are purely decorative. However, when reading the words spoken by Christ to His Disciples as He Ascended to Heaven in the Gospel book of Mark, another interpretation is that they emulate the words: “And he said to them, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe, in my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” The two curved objects may be serpents as described in this passage. The angels are able to handle them without fear as they are Christ’s true followers and they are therefore able to cast them from the figure of Christ. The imagery, sacred matter it was constructed from and possible biblical reference all fuse together in this token to protect its owner(s) from ill health and evil spirits.

Images depicting the final events in Christ’s life, such as the Adoration of the empty Cross and His Ascension into Heaven, were very popular scenes to engrave or cast onto early pilgrimage artefacts. The problematic “Ascension (?)” token from the British Museum features ambiguous elements that together have no other precedents in Late Antique art. It is an image of the Adoration of Christ in Majesty. It is a unique scene as it is the only one of its kind known to exist. The presence of the token suggests that this previously unknown scene was once popular with pilgrims from this period. The fact that this artefact is part of a wider collection of tokens, many of which feature identical scenes, suggests that this too may once have existed in far greater numbers. The token from the British Museum has preserved a rare early illustration of the Adoration of Christ in Majesty from the region of the Levant and significantly adds to our understanding of Late Antique pilgrimage art.

50 For further information, see Valentina Cantone, Ars Monastica. Iconografia teofanica e tradizione mistica nel mediterraneo altomedievale (v–xi secolo), Padova 2008; Robin Margaret Jensen, Face to Face: portraits of the divine in early Christianity, Minneapolis 2005; Claudine A. Chavannes-Mazzei, “Popular Belief and the Image of the Beardless Christ”, Visual Resources, 19/1 (2003), pp. 27–42.
52 Mark 16:15–18.
Článek představuje relativně neznámou, pozdně antickou poutní upomína (angl. „token“) ze sbírky Britského muzea. V minulosti byла označena jako „Nanebevstoupení (?)“ zřejmě proto, že její ikonografie je porovnatelná s ranými vyobrazeními této scény. Tato poutní upomínka zobrazuje bustu Krista, Kříž a titulus kolem Kristovy hlavy, slunce a měsíce, pahorek Golgoty a dva adorující anděly s neobvyklými zahnutými předměty v rukou. Esej analyzuje obě vyobrazení, Nanebevstoupení a Adoraci Kříže, na srovnatelných poutních eulogii a odvrací se od předchozích argumentů pro Nanebevstoupení. Namísto toho argumentuje pro správné označení ikonografie upomínky jako Adorace Krista v majestátní. Článek také vyzdvihuje přítomnost zahnutých předmětů v rukou andělů, které jako vyobrazení hadů odkazují ke slovům Krista během jeho vstoupení na nebesa. Dále také upozorňuje na profylaktickou a apotropaickou moc, která je upomírkám vytvořeným z posvátného prachu svatých míst přisuzována. Scéna znázorněná na této eulogii je jedinečná, a přestože jiné vyobrazení tohoto druhu v raně křesťanském umění nenacházíme, její existence naznačuje, že se mohlo jednat o běžný motiv na poutních předmětech k připomnění důležitého obrazu Krista ve slávě. Upomínka z Britského muzea tak významně obohacuje naši znalost a pochopení pozdně antického poutního umění.