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Two late antique eulogies from Samuel's Fortress – Citadel in Ohrid

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From the rich collection of archaeological material revealed during excavations on the site of the Citadel in Ohrid, two Late Antique eulogiae are particularly significant and will be described in this article.¹ These items of a religious character were discovered during excavations in 2008 - in a disintegrated layer of the Room D. This room was added to a larger Late Antique building located in the northern half of the citadel. (The building has been explored in detail during earlier excavations). The circumstances



Fig.1 Room "D" – floor level and a sewer north from it, Samuel's Fortress – Citadel, Ohrid

in which the eulogiae were found suggest that the destruction was due to a conflagration of the room, identical to the situation registered in other parts of the building.² A layer of charred wattle and daub containing fragments of building ceramics (two of them bearing relief representations of a cross), together with the burnt floor of the room, covered in with a

thicker layer of cinder and ash (Fig. 1), attest to a fire of high intensity with traces also evident in a collapsed wall of wattle and daub across the street to the north.

Several coins and fragments of vessels were found inside the room, amongst which was one of the eulogiae, while the second was discovered amongst the wattle and daub

1 For the given material and the ability to present it, I would like to express gratitude to Mr. Pasko Kuzman, head of the citadel project in Ohrid. The field photo documentation from 2008., used in the text, belongs to the members of the team: Milan Temelkoski and Miško Tutkovski. Drawings of the objects and computational processing were undertaken by Dejan Petreski..

2 Information obtained from the excavator of this particular site, Robert Petkovski.

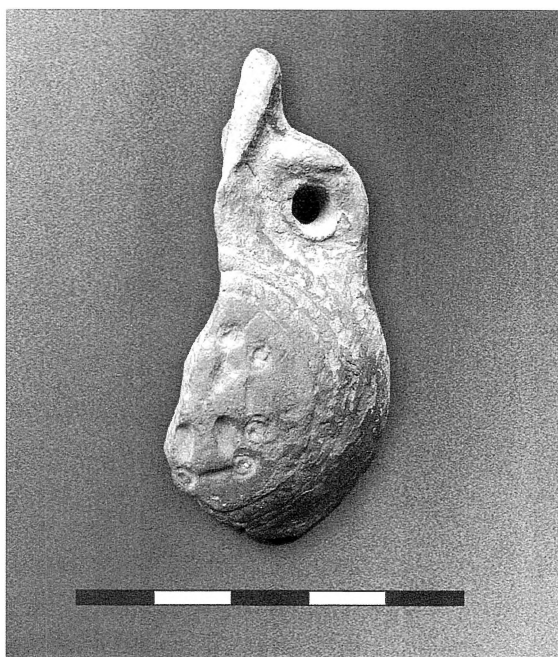


Fig. 2 Asia Minor ceramic ampulla Samuel's
Fortress - Citadel in Ohrid

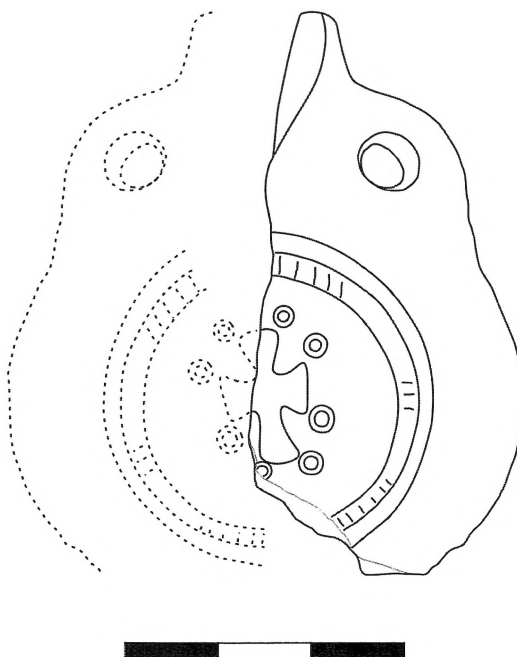


Fig. 3 Appearance of a ceramic ampulla
-reconstruction-

debris on the street. The lack of furnishing is reliable evidence that the room had been deserted by the time of its destruction, and analysis of the Late Antique coin hoard, previously found in the adjacent room of the building, has confirmed that the blaze, which caused the collapse, took place around 586/587 or 588/589 at the latest.³ This date marks a turbulent and dangerous historical period in this area, coinciding with the time of barbarian raids in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, during which many Late Antique cities were destroyed.⁴ There are archaeological indications that attempts were made to continue living in some cities after the devastation wrought by the barbarians. However, these settlements, reduced by now to a much smaller scale, were completely abandoned in the early years of the 7th, century marking the end of Late Antiquity in our area.⁵ The fire and destruction of the building in the Ohrid citadel, which was never rebuilt, confirms the end of life in Late Antique Lychnidos. The first eulogia is part of a ceramic ampulla with the field inventory no. K-8337, preserved at a height of 6.3 cm. and a width of 3.2 cm. (Fig. 2, 3).

The ampulla was created in a mold, from well refined clay with traces of mica. The colour achieved during the baking was ochre-grey, while the coating on its outer side had a dark grey tint. The container has a short cylindrical neck with a rounded lip, a flat, circular body and perforations between the neck and the body for handles.

The ampulla is decorated with a full Latin cross with expanded arms. Two pairs of small circles with indentions in their centres are impressed between. The cross is surrounded by two circular bands of varying width. The inner band is adorned with slanted lines that are barely visible. The whole decoration is executed in bas-relief.

³ Хаци-Манева М. 2008, 387.

⁴ Микулчић И., 1995, 252

⁵ Ibid, 253.



Fig.4, Fig.5 Eulogia with representation of the Ascension of Christ
Samuel's Fortress - Citadel in Ohrid

The second eulogia (field inventory number K-8629) is a fragment of a disk with a diameter of 4.8 cm and a thickness of 0.8 cm. (Fig. 4, 5). It is made of fine refined clay of a light grey colour. On one of its sides is depicted the left side of a scene from the New Testament in bas-relief. Six standing figures in two rows of three are depicted facing towards the central part of the composition, which is missing. The figures are not executed with great detail. The first figure on the left in the bottom row has a raised left hand holding a staff. A horizontal line at the end of the staff suggests the figure may have been depicted bearing a cross. The second figure also has a raised left hand, pointing towards the missing upper middle part of the central composition. The third figure in this row is not clearly defined.

The figures in the second row are quite indistinct, the exception being a figure in the middle with a raised hand. In the upper part of the disk, beside the line of the breakage, the lower half of another figure may be seen, placed horizontally in relation to the other standing figures, as if hovering above them. In the lower part of the disk, also along the breakage line, there is a curved trace that may be drapery. Around the edge of the disk is a raised line and a shallow groove. The edge itself is rounded and with a slight slant down to the flat back of the disk. From the preserved elements of the composition it can with great certainty be identified as a scene of Christ's Ascension.

Historically, the emergence of eulogiae objects is directly related to the emergence of Christian centres in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor, Constantinople and Thessaloniki.⁶ This process began in the fourth century and intensified over the next two centuries, producing a specific phenomena characteristic of the Late Antique period: from the fourth century to the early seventh century, the holy places located in the eastern regions of the Mediterranean became a destination for pilgrims from

6 Cameron A., 1993, 57-75; Hunt D., 2008, 238-276; Haal S. G., 2008, 731-744; Rousseau Ph., 2008, 745-780; Brown P., 2008, 781-810.

all over Christendom.⁷ The powerful concept of religious shrines led to the creation of specific kinds of religious objects, aesthetically and functionally designed for the needs of pilgrims.⁸ In these objects were stored, oil, water or *manna*.⁹ Any materials which had been in contact with sacred venerated relics became sacred themselves, acquiring the import of a blessing (*eulogia*).¹⁰

The iconography on eulogiae objects emphasized the effect of blessing and holiness with recognizable Christian themes, characters and symbols. These items thus became objects of adoration for believers and acquired votive, apotropaic and amuletic meaning.¹¹

The earliest type of eulogiae consists of small moulded *ampullae* usually made of terra cotta or lead alloys. On the basis of their typological features, and above all on their iconography, these ampullae seem to have been produced in three main regions: Northern Egypt, the Holy Land and Asia Minor.¹²

The features of the ampulla found in Ohrid identify it as belonging to the type of vials produced in Asia Minor. These were typically of small size, with a flat body of oval or circular shape and perforations on the sides for handles. What sets this type apart was the greater amount of diversity in their iconographic decoration as compared with the more fixed and recognizable iconography with accompanying text found on flasks produced in other areas.¹³ Greater variety in the manner and style of depicting certain iconographic motifs emerged due to the existence of several workshops in Asia Minor.¹⁴ Variations are most evident in the presentation of the cross. Although this symbol usually occurs alone as a single motif, it also appears in combination with figures or architecture.¹⁵ The absence of any text with the name of a saint or a specific message that would identify the shrine prevents precise identification of the centres in which vials of this type were produced.¹⁶

In early literature on this topic,¹⁷ Smyrna¹⁸ and Ephesus¹⁹ are identified as centres for the production of ampullae decorated with crosses. During excavations at Laodicea in Phrygia, a number of ceramic ampullae were found bearing variations in iconography, including a number of vials with a depiction of the cross, which suggests that Laodicea was also a centre for producing this type of objects in the Late Antique period.²⁰ The use of certain decorative elements in the context of the cross as a symbol has proved

7 Davis S. J., 2001, 113-115; Vikan G., 2002, 229-234; Maraval P. 2003, 63-72; Bakirtzis Ch., 2003, 175-179.

8 Cameron A., 1993, 76-78; Vikan G., 1982, 3-46; Syon D., 1999, 111-112; Vikan G., 2002, 236-263; Maraval P. 2003, 72-74; Foskolou V., 2007, 1-33.

9 On *manna* (holy dust), see: Vikan G., 2002, 240.

10 Cabrol F., Leclercq H., 1922, 733-734.

11 Kitzinger E., 1954, 96; Vikan G., 1984, 65-86; Russell J., 1995, 35-60.

12 Кондаков Н.П., 1914, 199-208, сл. 121-131; Davis S. J., 2001, 114-126, fig. 7-12; Anderson W., 2004, 81-82, fig. 1, 2; Foskolou V., 2007, fig. 8.

13 The study of the Asia Minor ampullae was not available for review: Metzger C., 1981, *Les ampoules à aulogie du musée du Louvre, Paris*.

14 Anderson W., 2004, 82-84.

15 Grifing R. P. Jr., 1938, 277, fig. 4, 5; Vikan G., 1982, fig 20 a,b; Robert L., 1984, fig. 4.

16 Only few examples of Asia Minor vials with an inscription Ο ΑΓΙΟC ΑΝΔΡΕΑC ΑΠΟCΤΟΛΟC are found and separated in a small sub-group. Grifing R. P. Jr., 1938, 277.

17 In older literature, museum specimens are processed for which no information on how and where they were found, and their origin was often identified by the places where they were redeemed or so.

18 Dalton O. M., 1901, 158, fig 908, Grifing R. P. Jr., 1938, 278, fig. 23.

19 Dalton O. M., 1901, 158, fig. 906;

20 Şimşek C., Duman B., 2007, 1-29.

to be a problem in identifying the workshops responsible for producing specific vials containing this image. For example, the emergence of single or double small circles like those on our finding was once considered to be an influence from Coptic art; for this reason, regardless of any characteristics typical of Asia Minor production, such vials were attributed to Egyptian origin.²¹ The lack of more information leaves no room to precisely locate the workshop in which the Ohrid ampoule was produced. Together with other examples with this representation, it is dated to the sixth century.²²

The second group of eulogiae comprises small disc-relief tiles with representations of Christian scenes and characters. The earliest known examples of this group are attributed to Simeon Stylites the Elder, a Syrian ascetic living in the 5th century.²³ These were made with soil taken from holy ground in the vicinity of the 6th century church built in honour of Simeon Stylites in Qalat Siman, near Antioch.²⁴ Simeon is typically shown sitting on the pillar, a symbol of his faith in Christ's teaching.²⁵ The eulogiae of Simeon Stylites the Younger, a 6th century ascetic from Antioch, bore similar iconography invariably accompanied by text mentioning his name, the 'Admirable Mountain' where his church was built, together with a quote from a psalm. Usually they were made from ceramics, lead or glass.²⁶ From Antioch also came a large number of small ceramic discs commonly depicting Jesus Christ, or the Madonna with a child, the worship of the Magi, the Myrrhbearers, etc.²⁷ Several ceramic eulogiae with similar themes from the New Testament, dating from the second half of the 6th century, have been discovered at archaeological sites in Beit She'an and Samaria in north-eastern Israel. These finds are on display at the National Museum of Antiquities in Jerusalem as part of its collection of Early Christian items from the Holy Land. Among them is one representing the scene of Christ's Ascension.²⁸ (fig. 6) Compared to our finding, there is a similarity in size, in the manner of the execution of the disk and in the style in which the figures are shown, which is poor and without much detail. In terms of composition, however, the two samples are quite different. On the eulogia from Israel, only eight of the twelve apostles are present, while at the centre there is a cross rather than the Virgin Mary.

The surviving part of the sample from Ohrid shows a more developed iconographic form observed in other items of Christian art. Indeed, this manner of depicting the Ascension is one of the earliest forms recorded. It is found, for example, in the Rabula Gospel, an illuminated Syriac Gospel Book dated to the year 586.²⁹ The Ascension of Christ is shown on several metal ampullae from the late 6th or early 7th century that are part of the Monza Collection.³⁰ The scene also appears on a several other items

21 Grifing R. P. Jr., 1938, 278, fig. 23.

22 Şimşek C., Duman B., 2007, 1.

23 Frankfurter T.M.D., 1990, 168-198.

24 Vikan G., 2002, 236; Talbot M. A., 2003, 154.

25 Verdier Ph., 1980, 22, fig. 17; Vikan G., 2002, fig. 8. 5.

26 A eulogia discovered with a representation of Simeon Stylites the Younger was found to have been made out of wood shavings hardened with vinegar was used, Verdier Ph., 1980, 19, fig. 18; Vikan G., 2002, fig. 8. 12.

27 Vikan G., 2002, fig. 8. 6-10.

28 Apart from the Ohrid eulogia, this is the second sample display of the Ascension of Christ that we have encountered. It seems that this scene is rarely represented in this type of case.

29 Now in Florence, Кондаков Н. П., 1914, 184, сл. 105, Wietzman K., 1974, 44, fig. 30;

30 Кондаков Н.П., 1914, 207, сл. 127, 128, 129, 130, 131; Wietzman K., 1974, 43, fig. 2, 26, 28.



Fig. 6 Ceramic eulogies from the
National Museum of Antiquities in Jerusalem

from the late 6th century: on a miniature icon on a wooden reliquary from Jerusalem;³¹ in the form of medallions as part of the Christological cycle on two silver bracelets – amulets;³² and on an icon from Sinai³³ These outstanding works are considered to be products of the Syrian-Palestinian art tradition, despite some conflicting opinions suggesting that these works were made according to aesthetic principles and influences from Constantinople.³⁴ Without entering into detailed stylistic analysis of the Ohrid finding here, we must note its closeness in style and date to the abovementioned examples. From this we conclude that the Ohrid eulogia depicting the Ascension of Christ was made in a workshop in Syria or Palestine by craftsmen highly familiar with the artistic and iconographic concepts of early Christian art in the 6th century.

Late Antique eulogiae in this form, especially those made of ceramic, continued to be made until the early decades of the 7th century.³⁵ One cause of their decline after this period was that many Christian shrines lost their role after the Arab conquest of the eastern territories of the Byzantine Empire. Iconoclastic decrees banning the depiction of figures were issued between the seventh and tenth centuries, further contributing to the near-disappearance of these forms of eulogiae.³⁶ They would only be produced again in the 11th century, intended for both Christian and Muslim pilgrims, with the renewal of the old religious centres and the establishment of new church centres in honour of newly canonized saints.³⁷ The ‘new’ eulogiae were continuations of the early Christian types from the Holy Land and were made of lead, though the style

31 Now in the Vatican Museum Кондаков Н. П. 1914, 212, сл. 134; Wietzman K., 1974, 43, fig. 29.

32 Maspero M. J., 1908, 246-258, fig. 1; Vikan G., 1991/1992, 33-51, fig. 7, 10

33 Wietzman K., 1974, 43, 50, fig. 27.

34 Wietzman K., 1974, 33-55. On influences from Constantinople, see: Grabar A., 1958, “*Ampoules de terre sante*”, Paris.

35 Foss C., 2003, 129;

36 Arad L., 2007, 64.

37 Foss C., 2003, 129-151.

of iconography was typically medieval.³⁸ The lead disk eulogiae of this period were decorated on both sides, functioning as medallions and as jewellery with amuletic meaning.³⁹ One of the centres of the production of lead eulogies was Thessaloniki, which produced vials representing figures of St. Demetrius and St. Theodora.⁴⁰ Several of these have been found in the Republic of Macedonia.⁴¹

The eulogiae have been studied in depth in terms of their style and artistic features, and always with particular reference to their symbolism.⁴² Seeking to determine the function and role of these objects on the archaeological basis of the circumstances of their discovery, W. Anderson has identified four functional categories: funerary, religious, commercial and residential.⁴³ According to Anderson, the presence of these items in secular sites was associated with high social status. Other evidence, however, has shown that this was not always the rule, as corroborated, for example, by excavations at the Palace of the Giants in the Athenian Agora. In the newly built rooms on the ground floor of this building, which had lost its initial meaning by the 6th century, several ampulla were found, one of them with a representation of a cross, together with other objects with Christian symbols. The circumstances and context associated with the discovery of these findings suggest that these rooms had a religious purpose, perhaps for gatherings of monks.⁴⁴

The two eulogiae from Ohrid Citadel with their explicit Christian symbolism and meaning are extremely significant findings for this region. The rarity of these objects raises the question of the role they played in the building in which they were discovered and to whom they belonged. The role of the building in the citadel raises an equally important question. We believe the recent review of all the results from previous studies so far undertaken of the Late Antique layer of this complex archaeological site will not only answer these questions but by doing so will illuminate a chapter in the life of the Lychnidos Citadel.

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38 Syon D., 2001, 112-115; Arad L., 2007, 61-86, fig. 1a, 1b; Foskolou V., 2007, fig. 14 a, b.

39 Verdier Ph., 1980, 24-25; Vikan G., 2002, fig. 8. 39a, b; Foskolou V., 2007, fig. 12.

40 Syon D., 2001, 112; Vikan G., 2002, fig. 8. 42a, b; Bakirtzis Ch., 2003, 183; Foskolou V., 2007, fig. 15a, b.

41 Bitrakova-Grozdanova V., 2006, 13, ph. 10; Битркова-Грозданова В., Маленко В., 2009, 89.

Two medieval lead vials from Thessaloniki were also discovered in Ohrid during the archaeological excavations of the sites of Samuel's Citadel and Plaoshnik.

42 Kitzinger E., 1954, 86-150.

43 Anderson W., 2004, 85-89.

44 Frantz A., 1988, 91, Pl. 72 b.

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Р е з и м е:

Две доцноантички Евлогии од Охридската Цитадела

Од богатата збирка на археолошки материјал кој произлезе како резултат на истражувањата на Цитаделата во Охрид, по својот карактер и значење сами по себе се издвоија двете доцноантички евлогии кои ги презентираме во оваа статија. Тие се откриени со ископувањата во 2008 год., во рушевинскиот слој на опожарената просторија „Д“. Анализата на депото со доцноантички монети, претходно откриени во објектот чиј што составен дел е и споменатата просторија, покажа дека нејзината деструкција се случила во 586/587 или 588/589 година, во периодот на варварски упади и пустошења на територијата на Р. Македонија, при кои биле уништени поголем број на доцноантички градови меѓу кои и Лихнид.

Првата од евлогиите е фрагмент од керамичка ампула декорирана со претстава на полн крст со проширени краеве, латински тип, изведен во плиток релјеф, помеѓу чии краци се втиснати по две кругчиња со вдлабнување во средината.

Втората керамичка евлогија со приказ на новозаветна сцена, изведена

во плиток релјеф, имала форма на диск кој е исто така сочуван во фрагмент. Според елементите кои се видливи во композицијата, со голема сигурност е идентификувана претставата на Христово Вознесение.

Појавата на доцноантичките предмети-евлогии историски се поврзува со процесот на формирање на христијански религиозни седишта во Палестина, Сирија, Египет, Мала Азија, Константинопол и Солун, кој се одвивал во периодот од IV до крајот на VI век. Овие предмети, произведени во самите светилишта или нивната околина, имале функционално и иконографско решение наменето за религиозните верници-ации кои во нив складираше благословени и осветени материи, од каде произлегува и самиот термин, евлогија. Ваквата комплексна дефиниција на овие предмети допринела тие да станат објект на обожавање, со вотивно, апотропејско и амулетско значење.

Првата група на евлогии од овој период ја сочинуваат малите калапени садови-ампули, најчесто изработени од кермика или метал, а поретко од други материјали, чии типолошки и иконографски специфичности се одлика на керамичарските, односно уметничките традиции на регионите во кои биле произведени. Најпознатите центри за производство на ампули се наоѓаат во: Северен Египет, Палестина и Мала Азија.

Ампулата од Охридската Цитадела, според своите карактеристики, е дел од малоазискиот производствен круг во кој функционирале поголем број на работилници. Освен препознатливите типолошки белези, за овој тип ампули е карактеристична појавата на иконографска разновидност со бројни стилски вариетети по што се издвојуваат од примерите од останатите региони. Во постарата литература како локации за изработка на ампули со крст посочени се Смирна и Ефес, а според показателите од поновите археолошки истражувања веројатно и доцноантичка Лаодикеја е еден од центрите за нивна изработка. Малубројните информации засега не ни дозволуваат со сигурност да определиме од каде произлегол нашиот наод кој, заедно со останатите примери со оваа претстава, се датира во периодот од VI-ти век.

Малите керамички дискови со релјефни прикази на христијански ликови и новозаветни сцени ја сочинуваат втората група на доцноантички евлогии. Најголемиот број од нив потекнувале од Антиохија. Неколку примероци се откриени и на локации од некогашната Света Земја кои денес претставуваат дел од збирката на Националниот Музеј за Антиквитети во Ерусалим. Меѓу нив е и една еулогија со приказ на сцената Вознесение. Споредувајќи ја со нашиот наод забележавме извесни сличности, на пример во димензиите или во стилската изведба, меѓутоа композициските решенија кај двете евлогии се сосема различни. Моделот, применет во сцената на Охридскиот наод, може да се идентификува според примерите од неколку ликовни ремек дела на ранохристијанската уметност, датирани во втората половина на VI век, кои произлегуваат од сириско-палестинската уметничка традиција. Сметаме дека тие се урнекот според кој била изработена и од каде што потекнува нашата евлогија.

Ранохристијанските евлоги во оваа форма опстојуваат се до крајот на VI век, а како употребни и уметнички предмети, повторно ќе се појават по XI век, како последица на променетите политички прилики во источните делови на Византија. “Новите” евлогии ќе бидат продолжение на своите предходници, меѓутоа стилот на уметничко изразување на нив е типично средновековен.