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FISH SYMBOL AND MARITIME MOTIFS ON LATE ANTIQUE LAMPS FROM CENTRAL BALKANS

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Abstract. Elements of Christian visual culture appeared in various media in monumental and applied art during the late antique period, from painted decoration in the catacombs, through funerary monuments, to utilitarian objects such as jewellery and lamps. The paper analyses the symbolic meaning of fish and maritime motifs in the context of the late antique visual culture of the Mediterranean and their meaning within the *Interpretatio Christiana*, as well as the appearance of these motifs on late antique lamps. Ten lamps with maritime motifs or in the form of fish or dolphins are known from the territory of the Central Balkans. Elements of decoration are considered in relation to analogies, textual references, and the context of the finds.

The fish motif and maritime themes were often depicted in the Late Antique art. Such representations can be traced back to prehistoric times, and in the Mediterranean world, fish had a special meaning that was manifested over time through representations in the visual culture of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syro-Palestine, and the Greco-Roman world (Scheftelowitz, 1911, pp. 368–369; Schloessinger, 1950–51, p. 86). It is not surprising that the sea and its rich fauna and flora, an important natural and economic factor in the life of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean, have interested artists very early on. It is obvious that people have always been receptive to the vivid beauty of the deep sea. At the same time, sea creatures found their place in religions and myths of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean coast. That is why maritime scenes and sea creatures appear in visual representations with a decorative function and symbolic meaning, which are often intertwined. In Late Antiquity, the fish motif is especially associated with Christianity, although the symbolism of this motif goes back several millennia and it is really difficult to fathom when the fish became an unquestionably Christian symbol in the visual culture of antiquity. The symbolic and apotropaic meaning of the fish has survived to this day in the Mediterranean world, where amulets in the form of fish are worn as a symbol of fertility and immortality, believed to ward off evil forces (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 3–4; Schloessinger, 1950–51, pp. 86–87).

The meaning of the fish motif, its history, and the formation in Christianity have been given a lot of attention by scholars, but without a final answer as to whether *ΙΧΘΥΣ* is a Christian invention or is based on an older tradition. The textual and epigraphical material was analysed by Morey (1910–1912), among others. Dölger (1928–1957) gave an exhaustive overview of the material culture. Scheftelowitz (1911) and especially Goodenough (1953–1968) contributed to the interpretation from the standpoint of Jewish visual culture, the latter particularly with a comparative presentation of Christian and Jewish material. In recent decades, fish symbolism has been dealt with by Kant (1993) in his thesis *The Interpretation of Religious Symbols in the Graeco-Roman World: A Case Study of Early Christian Fish Symbolism*. This work is important because of the contemporary approach to the topic and reinterpretation that re-examines

the uncritical connection of image and text and emphasizes that “interpreters must consider two kinds of projection (a double projection)—their own and that of past viewers” (Kant, 1993, pp. 16–17). Stroumsa (1992, pp. 199–206) writes about messianic symbolism, while Rasimus (2012, pp. 327–349) provides an overview of the historiography and considers the connection between the acronym $IX\Theta Y\Sigma$ and the wheel motif, more precisely the formation of a pictorial-textual sign. Relying on the aforementioned scientific studies and the premises described therein, the paper analyses the appearance of fish and maritime motifs on late antique lamps from the territory of today’s Serbia, paying special attention to the layers of meaning in relation to the choice of motifs, iconographic narratives and the context of the findings.²

In the visual culture of the ancient world, the fish motif is closely related to the representation of dolphins, mythical sea monsters, and other maritime motifs, from marine flora and fauna to the representation of a ship. These motifs appear on votive objects, dishes, lamps, tombstones, but also in monumental art, as evidenced by Egyptian and Cretan frescoes,³ or Greco-Roman statues (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 14, 17–22). The quality of execution ranges from skillful, plastic modeling to clumsily carved drawings, which does not affect the principal meaning. Unlike earlier, often simplified and exclusive interpretations of the origin and meaning of symbols, the multivalent nature of symbols has been correctly observed in recent scientific literature (Kant, 1993, pp. 16–17; Rasimus, 2012, p. 328), which requires that the Christian fish motif be viewed on the plane of meaning it had conveyed before Christianity emerged. Late antique visual culture uses various compositions that include fish, among which the most common are fish as a zodiac sign, fishing scenes, maritime scenes, and representations in which the fish is given a messianic, i.e., eschatological meaning, then as a Christological symbol and a symbol of the Eucharist (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 4–14; Rasimus, 2012, pp. 327–328). Iconographic and textual analysis has shown that even these explicitly Christian symbols have a non-Christian prehistory (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 4–14; Scheftelowitz, 1911, p. 27; Schloessinger, 1950–51, pp. 84–95).

² The text is partially based on research executed for the purpose of doctoral dissertation: D. Tešić-Radovanović, *Representing Light. Symbolism of Early Christian Lamp Decorations from Central Balkan Region (4th till 7th Centuries)*, PhD thesis, University of Belgrade, 2019.

³ For example: Tomb of Nebamun (Thebes) (Strudwick, 2006, p. 176); Dolphin from Knossos (Koehl, 1986, pp. 407–417).



Fig. 1a, b Polychrome glass vessel in the form of a fish, 18th Dynasty, Egypt, Amarna, British Museum, inv. n. EA55193 © The Trustees of the British Museum; Tilapia Lamp, 2nd–3rd AD, Egypt, Brooklyn Museum, inv. n. 86.226.12 © Brooklyn Museum (Gavin Ashworth,er), 86.226.12_Gavin_Ashworth_photograph.jpg)

In the visual culture of Egypt, the fish were depicted in scenes involving water, hunting, and fishing, although vessels in the shape of fish also appear, and from the Roman period, lamps as well.⁴ The fish does not seem to have a particular symbolism in Egyptian religion, although there were a number of taboos related to fish. Some examples indicate that it could be associated with Osiris and as such was considered a symbol of immortality, resurrection and rebirth, which occurs as a common place in Eastern Mediterranean beliefs associated with fish (Goodenough, 1956, p. 14; Schloessinger, 1950–51, p. 8). In Mesopotamia, the fish appears as a symbol in the 5th millennium BC. The abundance of material testifies to the complexity of meaning, and some aspects of the symbolism persist to this day (Goodenough, 1956, p. 21). The fish appear in scenes involving water, depictions of birds tearing apart fish, as an offering or food at ritual banquets. It is associated with several gods, and the meaning ranges from a symbol of life and rebirth to a chthonic role and eschatological symbolism. The fish had a role in fertility and funeral rituals, with the meaning of life and renewal of life, and it is the idea of rebirth that is the basis of the eschatological meaning (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 14–16). The material culture testifies to the mystical idea of a fish-like deity, which should be eaten in order to be resurrected, and some representations also hint at the idea of “small fish” as followers of the “big fish”.⁵

⁴ For example: Bailey, 1988, p. 150, Q 2190; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/X_23; <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3520> accessed November 1, 2022.

⁵ This idea is close to the symbolism that occurs in both Judaism and Christianity (Goodenough, 1956, p. 16).

In Phoenicia, i.e., Syro-Palestine, the fish was very important, with a meaning close to that it had in Mesopotamia. According to a myth, the fish saved the mother of the gods Atargatis, the goddess of fertility and life, and because of this they were taken to heaven. Writers of the classical era generally associate the sacred fish with Atargatis, whose symbols of fish and dove are taboo as food. More specifically, fish is forbidden in the daily diet, but is eaten as part of a consecrated meal, through which the faithful connect with the goddess. Punic colonists probably carried this tradition to North Africa, where the fish frequently appears on tombstones and mosaics (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 16–17; Schloessinger, 1950–51, p. 89).⁶ In the Greek world, fish was an important part of the diet, and it seems to have few religious connotations, apart from the dolphin. Written sources contain almost no information about symbolism, but material culture testifies that in the geometric and early archaic periods, fish symbolized fertility and immortality among the Greeks, as well as in the East, attesting to the intercultural continuity of symbols (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 19–20). In the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, possibly as a consequence of more direct contact with the East, the symbolism of fish reappears: a fish meal for the dead accompanied sometimes by loaves of bread as an eschatological meal was created in the pagan world⁷ and Jews and Christians could have taken it over (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 20–21). The syncretism of Aphrodite (Venus) with Eastern deities resulted in her cult's mystical meals including the consumption of sacred fish.⁸

Although the connection of the fish symbol with the Jewish tradition has been neglected for a long time, it seems that there are more than enough evidence, especially those belonging to the visual culture of late antiquity, which confirm the permanent and multilayered symbolism of the fish (Rasimus, 2012, pp. 327–349; Stroumsa, 1992, pp. 199–206). By analyzing the textual and visual

⁶ Traces of the cult practice were also preserved in late antiquity, so Egeria, on her travels, saw pools full of fish in the palace in Edessa, near Haran, the birthplace of Abraham (Egeria, *Itinerarium Peregrinatio*, XVIII, 7). In Edessa – Sanliurfa, even today, the sacred fish (once probably connected with Atargatis) are respected within the cult of the forefather Abraham. In the courtyard of the mosque there are pools of fish, created when Abraham was miraculously rescued from the furnace into which he was thrown by Nimrod, a tradition recorded in apocryphal and rabbinic literature and Islamic legends (Jacobs & Gottheil, 1906, at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5431-edessa>, accessed October 15, 2022; Hirsch et al., 1906, at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11548-nimrod>, accessed October 15, 2022).

⁷ Especially in the Neopunic world, and beyond, for example, fish is an important segment of the sacred meal, that is, an important food of the mystery cult, in the representations of the Thracian Horseman (Goodenough, 1956, p. 21).

⁸ Fish was consumed on Fridays as a sign of respect for these goddesses. This meal is the possible basis of the Jewish, and then the Christian, consumption of fish on Fridays, i.e., *cena pura*, *parascueve* (Jn 19:42) (Димитрова, 1995, pp. 49–50; Dunnigan, 1987, p. 346 according to Bubić, 2011, p. 239; Goodenough, 1956, pp. 42–47).

material Goodenough developed Scheftelowitz's theses on the importance of fish in the Judaic tradition. Starting from the four levels of fish symbolism discussed by Schetflowitz: believers as small fish, Messiah as large fish, sacramental food and symbol of hope for immortality, Goodenough (1956, p. 32) finds confirmation in the Old Testament texts and rabbinic literature, adding the level of the mystical source of life in which fish live, and the analysis of motives that often accompany fish (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 32–54). An extremely detailed analysis⁹ can be briefly reduced to the consideration of the fish as one of the archetypal symbols, which the Jews accepted from the older pagan tradition and whose symbolism was then confirmed textually, primarily in the non-biblical material. He comes to the conclusion that Jewish symbolism is of earlier date or contemporaneous with Christian and that as such it could have been taken over together with the other heritage of Judaism in Christianity (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 32–34, 75). For the meaning of fish in Christianity, a comparative analysis of the material is especially important, as well as parallels Christ – Joshua – fish, Leviathan as a messianic meal and Leviathan – sea monster – Jonah (Goodenough, 1956, pp. 35–41, 52–53).

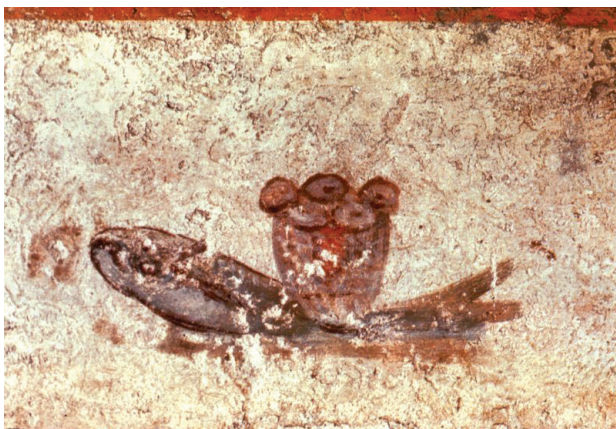


Fig. 2 Eucharistic bread and fish, ca. beginning of 3rd AD, Catacombe di San Callisto, cripta di Lucina, Roma
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When looking at the long history of the use of the fish symbol, the question arises why is the fish perceived as a recognizable Christian sign. The fish

⁹ In the text *The Early Christian Fish Symbol Reconsidered*, Stroumsa (1992, p. 201) evaluates his work as panmystical and not enough of a trustworthy analysis of the material (although he accepts the propositions), while Kant believes that his work represents “the only truly comprehensive attempt by any historian of the ancient world (whether historian of religion, social historian, art historian, or archaeologist) to take a hermeneutical stance ... regarding symbols from the Graeco-Roman world” (Kant, 1993, p. 13).

appears in Christian visual culture as one of the earliest motifs, which together with the representations of the dove, anchor, ship, good shepherd, and early forms of the cross served to show belonging to the Christian community. The recognition of the fish as an explicitly Christian symbol could be associated with a change in the nature of the symbol from an archetypal one, based on the unconscious and “inexplicable”, to a religious-code symbol, based on a signal, an association, the meaning of which can be adequately explained (Kant, 1993, pp. 40–41). Thus Grabar (1968, p. 8) elaborates: “We know, of course, that the frequent use of any sign in a certain context permits surprising abbreviations. One may cite the famous paintings in the crypt of Lucina which show a fish that serves as a support for a small basket filled with white ring-shaped objects. The Christians who went there knew how to decipher such a painting: communion”.

The content of the Christian image is based on the Holy Scriptures and patristic commentaries, which imply that the viewer has prior knowledge of the text and rituals to which the representations refer to. Christian art has an emblematic-symbolic dimension created at the time when it was one of the numerous mystical oriental cults in the Roman Empire. With the emergence of Christian monumental art, symbolic representations acquire a theological interpretation, but also a polemical dimension (Elsner, 2006, pp. 11–13). In addition to the question of the reception of the image, an important aspect for the understanding of early Christian art is the way pagan content was appropriated and the models of their resemantization within the *Interpretatio Christiana*. Symbols such as the fish, ship, the good shepherd or dove were very popular in the pagan culture of antiquity and suited the nature of early Christian art. According to Grabar (1968, p. 8), the reduction of meaning to an image/sign was one of its most important aspects. Thus, the essence of religion could be presented in simple representations, which instead of describing suggested a deeper meaning, leaving the intuition of the observer to think through the layers of symbolism of the image (Baert, 2004, p. 20; Jensen, 2000, p. 36). Clement of Alexandria’s recommendation to his followers testifies to the importance of symbols: “And let our seals be either a dove, or a fish, or a ship scudding before the wind, or a musical lyre, which Polycrates used, or a ship’s anchor, which Seleucus got engraved as a device; and if there be one fishing, he will remember the apostle, and the children drawn out of the water” (Paedagogus, III.11).¹⁰ When it comes to the research of representations on lamps, the question arises as to what degree the decorative patterns on pagan lamps influenced the repertoire of Christian motifs, as well as whether and to what extent the decorations on pagan lamps were acceptable to Christians.¹¹

¹⁰ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02093.htm> accessed October 31, 2022.

¹¹ For example, whether a lamp with a stag/buck belonging to the goddess Artemis/Diana in the pagan sphere was acceptable to Christians as an illustration of Psalm 42:1, or



Fig. 3 Epitaphs bearing a fish motif and acronym IXΘΥΣ, Necropolis under St Sebastian out of the walls, ca. 150–220 AD, Rome, via Appia, according to Felle, 2018, p. 41

The symbolism of the fish in Christianity relies on the different meanings of this symbol in the late antique world, to which the first Christians belonged. Usual layers of meaning are: the common connections with death, bucolic setting, sexuality and prophecy; astrological ideas (Pisces marking the end of an era and the beginning of a new one); dolphin as a savior; gods metamorphosing into fish, fish as pets, common foodstuff, fishing as a socially marginal occupation etc (Kant, 1993, pp. 495–498; Rasimus, 2012, pp. 336–337). During the 2nd century, Christian visual representations that include a fish or the acronym IXΘΥΣ, which acquires a pictorial-textual nature, began to appear (Felle, 2018, pp. 40–42). It cannot be asserted with certainty which are the oldest representations since they appear on glyptics and epitaphs,¹² often out of context, which makes dating difficult (Kant, p. 513; Rasimus, 2012, p. 344). The Christian symbolism of the fish draws on Jewish tradition, which builds on pagan practices. Although there is

when two zodiac fish from pagan visual culture took on a Christian meaning. Symbols such as fish, ship, dove, good shepherd could have non-Christian associations also (Chrzanowski & Zhuravlev, 1998, pp. 114–118; Bubić, 2011, pp. 238–239)

¹² According to Felle (2018, pp. 40–41), the funerary corpus on Via Appia, under St Sebastian out of the walls, represents a group of the oldest Christian epigraphs, dated between the middle of 2nd and the beginnings of 3rd century AD, found in situ.

no way to prove the assumption, Goodenough (1956, pp. 37–41) believes that it was precisely the archaic beliefs and practice of sacred meals containing fish that received textual coverage in Judaism in late antiquity. For the Jews, fish was food for the blessed, likewise bearing a messianic dimension. Namely, on the basis of the biblical text about the triumph of the Messiah over Leviathan (Isa. 27; Job 41) in rabbinic literature, the belief arose that the messianic meal will include the meat of Leviathan (Ps. 74, 14), and the righteous will dine on fish after the arrival of the Messiah. However, the connection is most clearly manifested in the story of Jonah, who was swallowed by a giant fish, identified with Leviathan (Jensen, 2000, p. 55; Stroumsa, 1992, pp. 200–201). The relationship between Jonah and the Messiah, created in the Jewish tradition, is confirmed in Christianity by the connection between Jonah and Christ (Mt. 12:40), where, according to patristic interpretations, Jonah is a prefiguration of Christ. Thus, the messianic dimension of the big fish is also transferred to Christ. Stroumsa (1992, pp. 202–204) suggests another plan for connecting Christ and the fish. Namely, he points to Joshua, also an Old Testament prefiguration of Christ, and to the etymology of his name *Yoshua Ben Nun*, where *nun* is the Aramaic word for fish. He bases his assumption on rabbinical texts, where it is said: “it is the son of the man called fish who leads the children of Israel into the Holy land”.¹³ Stroumsa (1992, p. 203) believes that through the analogy of Joshua – Jesus Christ, the messianic meaning of the fish is transferred to the latter, and that the symbolism must have originated in the Aramaic speaking area.¹⁴ The first direct allusion to Christ the fish (Jensen, 2000, pp. 48–49; Stroumsa, 1992, p. 199) is recorded in Tertullian’s treatise *De baptismo* (I, 3),¹⁵ in which he says that Christians who follow Christ receive eternal life and forgiveness of sins by being baptized in water: “But we, little fishes, after the example of our *IXΘΥΣ* Jesus Christ, are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water.”

Through the acronym *IXΘΥΣ*, the fish becomes a visual representation of Christ, which began to appear on inscriptions in necropolises in the middle of the 2nd century (Felle, 2018, pp. 40–42). At the same time, the fish also represents Christians, Tertullian’s small fish in relation to Christ as a fisher of men. Christ calls at least 7 fishermen, raw and uneducated, to be his disciples, thus alluding to their role as fishermen for people (Mk 1, 17; Mt 4:19), which will continue the messianic harvest begun by Jesus (Ryken et al., 1998, p. 290). The symbol of the fish is also connected with Jonah’s trilogy (Jonah 1:1–16, 2:1–11), episodes of miraculous fishing (Lk 5: 1–11; Jn 21, 3–15), multiplication of loaves and fish (Mt 14, 13–21; 15: 32–39; Mk 6: 30–44; 8: 1–20; Lk 9: 10–17; Jn 6: 1–14),

¹³ Genesis Rabba 48.16 according to Stroumsa, 1992, p. 203.

¹⁴ Through other meanings, the fish then becomes a recognizable symbol even to those who did not know the basic association (Stroumsa, 1992, p. 205).

¹⁵ <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/ecf/003/0030723.htm> accessed October 31, 2022.



Fig. 4 Funerary stele of Licinia Amias, early 3rd AD.
From the area of the Vatican necropolis, Rome, National
Archaeological Museum, inv. no 67646 © public domain

which is a frequent theme of early Christian art. The episode of the miraculous fishing that takes place after the resurrection of Jesus is particularly significant (Jn 21:3–15). The resurrected Lord eats fish with his disciples, which is an allusion to the Last Supper and the establishment of the Eucharist, while the miraculous fishing is associated with the messianic feeding of the multitudes and the recommissioning – in this case Peter is re-established (Ryken et al., 1998, p. 290). The fish, that is, the sorting of the catch (Mt 13:47) alludes to the Last Judgment, an interpretation that has an Old Testament foreshadowing (Ryken et al., 1998, pp. 31, 290). These statements by no means exhaust the meaning of fish in Christianity. The prevailing view is that the baptismal symbolism of Christ as a “big fish” and Christians as “small fish” was decisive for the popularity of the fish as a recognizable Christian symbol (Jensen, 2000, pp. 51–52), although the layers of meaning are so intertwined that it is impossible to demarcate the messianic, baptismal, eucharistic and eschatological levels of meaning.

Lamps with a depiction or in the shape of fish, dolphins or other sea creatures are relatively numerous. However, despite the dominantly Christian meaning of the fish in late antiquity (Karivieri, 2001, p. 192), the interpretation of the motif must be approached with caution. Namely, lamps with these motifs, like the motif itself, have a pagan prehistory, and in late antiquity they also appear

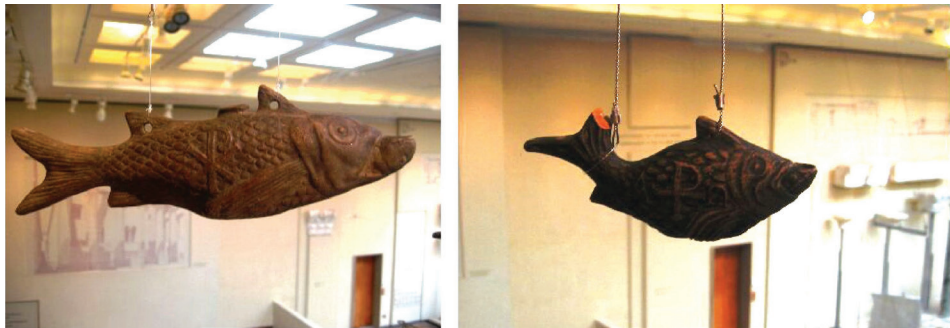


Fig. 5 a, b Lamps in the form of a fish, probably created as souvenirs in Naples in the 19th century, Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens, inv.n BXM11; BXM12 © photo of the author

in Judaism (Schloessinger, 1950, pp. 84–95) and can be determined as Christian by the context of the find or the appearance of undoubtedly Christian motifs in the decoration. One of the problems regarding the theme is related to the iconic lamps in the shape of a fish with a striking cross and Christogram on the body.¹⁶ In the second half of the 20th century, the lamps were assessed as fakes by some researchers (Bailey, 1988, p. 435, fig. Q 3420), which was confirmed by the thermoluminescence analysis carried out on the lamp from the museum in Bonn (Buora & Ristow, 2015). Despite these findings, they are still cited in the scientific research as representative examples of early Christian lamps and the highlights of museum collections (Buora & Ristow, 2015, p. 237). The problem is current when it comes to material from the Balkans, but it challenges the general opinion about objects of early Christian visual culture, which is sometimes formed on material of undetermined provenance and originality. When the disputed objects are excluded, bronze lamps in the form of fish, lamps with a fish motif on a disc from the Greek workshops of Corinth and Athens and their copies, North African lamps with the representation of fish, Egyptian fish form lamps and lamps from Syro-Palestine usually appear as typical examples of lamps with the representation of fish.¹⁷ In the late antique material originating from the territory of today's Serbia, there are ten lamps with maritime decoration or in the form of fish, i.e. dolphins. The figural lamps feature one ceramic and

¹⁶ These are hanging lamps of large dimensions; several similar types appear. It is believed that they were created as souvenirs in the workshops of Naples in the 19th century. The group of potential forgeries (26), which should definitely be confirmed by the analysis, includes specimens from British Museum London, Byzantine and Christian Museum Athens, The State Hermitage Museum Saint Petersburg, Bonn, Barletta, Timisoara, Jerusalem etc. (Boura, 2015, pp. 717–738; Boura & Ristow, 2015, pp. 239–241). For example: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1982-0302-40 accessed November 1, 2022.

¹⁷ For example: Karivieri, 2001, p. 192; Herrmann & van den Hoek, 2002, p. 15; Schloessinger, 1950–51, pp. 84–85; Walters, 1914, p. 84.



Fig. 6 Lamp in the form of a fish, found near Obrenovac, 3rd–4th AD, the Belgrade City Museum, inv. n. AA/5077
© public domain photo



Fig. 7 Lamp in the form of a fish, Vatican Museum, inv. n. 60950
© photo of the author

three bronze lamps in the shape of a fish or dolphin. Maritime symbolism is also evident on a lamp in the shape of a sea snail, as well as two lamps in the shape of a ship. Maritime motifs appear on a large number of Roman lamps from the area of today's Serbia, with especially numerous representations of dolphins and shells (Korać, 1995, p. 408; Крунић, 2011, pp. 366–367; Црнобрња, 2006, pp. 119–130). While maritime motifs are found on about a hundred lamps dating from the early imperial period when it comes to the late antique material that number is insignificant. The representation of two fish is on one ceramic lamp, while two bronze lamps have a cover in the shape of a scallop shell.

A ceramic lamp in the shape of a fish, which was found at an unknown site near Obrenovac, kept in the Belgrade City Museum, dates back to the 3rd or 4th century (Крунић, 2011, p. 280; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 215). It is modelled in the form of a fish with an open mouth, the eyes are made of plastic circles, the scales are marked with semi-circular notches, and the tail is trapezoidal. The body of the lamp tapers towards the head and tail, the upper surface is slightly rounded, while the lower part is flat. On the upper part of the body there are two holes, a nozzle near the head and pouring hole closer to the tail, once raised in relation to the body, now damaged. The dorsal fin is represented by a rectangular field, between the holes, in which an illegible inscription is stamped. The lamp was made of red clay and painted black (Крунић, 2011, p. 276, 280; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 215). Krunic (2011, pp. 276, 280, 380) emphasizes that the lamp is a significant and rare find. She believes that it may belong to a Christian circle or a pagan cult of the dead, which cannot be resolved without the context of the find or deciphering the markings on the lamp (Крунић, 2011, p. 380). A lamp from Frankfurt dated to the 1st century is cited as an analogy of similar dimensions.¹⁸ Krunic (2015, p. 276) emphasizes that there is a similarity with

¹⁸ The lamp is probably of Egyptian provenance, since it comes from Kaufman's collection (Selesnow, 1988, p. 45, fig. 21/154 according to Крунић, 2011, p. 276). Fish-shaped

the lamp that Bailey (1988, p. 431, fig. 134, Q 3420) assessed as a replica, but does not question the authenticity of the lamp from Obrenovac.¹⁹ The closest formal analogy is perhaps a lamp from Egypt in the Bouvier collection, dated to 7th–8th AD (Chrzanovski, 2019, p. 362). A variation on the theme is also a copy from the Vatican Museum.²⁰

The motif of two fish appears on the disk of a ceramic lamp discovered at the Glasija site by the ramparts of the Niš fortress, now in the National Museum Niš. It is a lamp with a circular body shape, with a small trapezoidal nozzle. The shoulders are straight, decorated with an S-shaped ornament. On the slightly concave disc is a representation of two fish. It dates back to the second half of the 3rd or 4th century and is considered a local copy of Attic lamps (Јовановић, 1976, p. 66, fig. 6; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 215). In the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens there is a similar lamp of much finer workmanship. It dates back to the second half of the 4th century. On it, the details of the decoration that have almost faded on the Niš copy – two hooked fish, can be detected clearly (Papanikola-Bakirtzi, 2002, p. 567, cat. 789). Researchers agree that the motif has a Christian meaning (Karivieri, 2001, p. 192; Papanikola-Bakirtzi, 2002, p. 567; Јовановић, 1976, p. 66; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 215).



Fig. 8 Lamp in the form of a dolphin / fish, found at Gradište Kalaja (Bujanovac), 5th or beginning of 6th AD, Archaeological Collection of the University of Priština, Kosovo/1244RSC according to Shukriu, 2003, p. 20

lamps dated to the 1st century, although formally different from the one from Obrenovac, were also published by Walters (1914, p. XXIII) and Schloessinger (1950–51, pp. 84–85).

¹⁹ However, it cannot be completely ruled out.

²⁰ Inv. n. 60950, dated 4th–5th AD, without further details. Noticed by the author in the museum, perhaps mentioned by Buora (2015, p. 270).

Out of the four bronze figural lamps, only one undoubtedly belongs to the Christian cultural circle. Three lamps have the shape of a dolphin or fish (type 14 according to Xanthopoulou, 2010), and one is shaped in the form of a shell snail. A lamp in the shape of a dolphin from an unknown location is now kept in the National Museum of Serbia. It is dated to the 5th century. The representation is quite stylized. On the upper side of the head, the eyes are made in the form of three concentric circles, above the widest part the fins are accentuated. The tail is raised, the right side is damaged (Ilić, 2006, p. 53, fig. XIII/1; Јеличић, 1958–59, p. 80; Jeličić, 1972, p. 151, cat. 318; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 216). Another lamp in the shape of a dolphin comes from Viminacium (Shukriu, 2003, p. 21; Илић, 2008, p. 135; Спасић-Ђурић, 2015, p. 12, fig. 3 according to Melchart, 1997, p. 123, 124, fig. 198). Spasić-Ђurić (Спасић-Ђурић, 2015, p. 12, fig. 3) mentions the lamp as an example of material that ended up in private collections, and dates it to the 2nd–3rd century. The lamp is less stylized than the previous one, the body has retained its organic shape and volume. The eye is made by puncturing, and a nozzle protrudes from the open mouth. The tail is raised, and above the tail fin there is a pouring hole in the form of a tube, without a lid. The third lamp in the shape of a dolphin, i.e., a fish,²¹ dated to 5th or beginning 6th AD, was found at the Gradište Kalaja site near Bujanovac. It was discovered in a hoard, outside the fortress, together with a bronze lamp with a handle in the form of a floral wreath surmounted by a cross. The body of the lamp is in the form of a fish or dolphin with a raised tail fin in the shape of an open leaf, and a pouring hole in the centre. The fish's head, fins, and mouth are figuratively shaped, while the eyes are carved. A long nozzle protrudes from the mouth. The fish head is surmounted by a cross, with arms flared in a straight-line shape (Ilić, 2006, p. 53, fig. XIII/3; Shukriu, 2003, pp. 17–23; Илић, 2008, pp. 134–136).

The lamp in the shape of a shell snail from Diana, kept in National Museum of Serbia, (collection in Kladovo) is an exceptional example of a figural lamp. The functional parts are skilfully integrated so that they do not disturb the organic form. There are three ring feet on the bottom. The wide opening of the shell served as a wick hole, and on the upper part there is a pouring hole with a lid. In the middle of the lamp is a vertical rectangular chain holder, with a heart-shaped opening. Along with this lamp, the mounting equipment, consisting of the chain and hook, was also preserved. It dates back to the end of the 3rd century (Кондић, 1993, cat. 144; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 345, cat. 162). Such lamps have a long pagan tradition. Similar examples have been made since the 1st century BC (Walters, 1914, p. 6), and since the 4th century maritime themes have most often been associated with Christianity (Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 216).

²¹ It is kept in the Archaeological Collection of the University of Priština, Kosovo/1244RSC. Shukriu (2003, pp. 17–23) interpreted as a fish, although Xanthopoulou (2010, pp. 23–24) uses the term dolphin. A close analogy is a lamp 23 LA 14.014, 199 (Xanthopoulou, 2010, pp. 23–24).

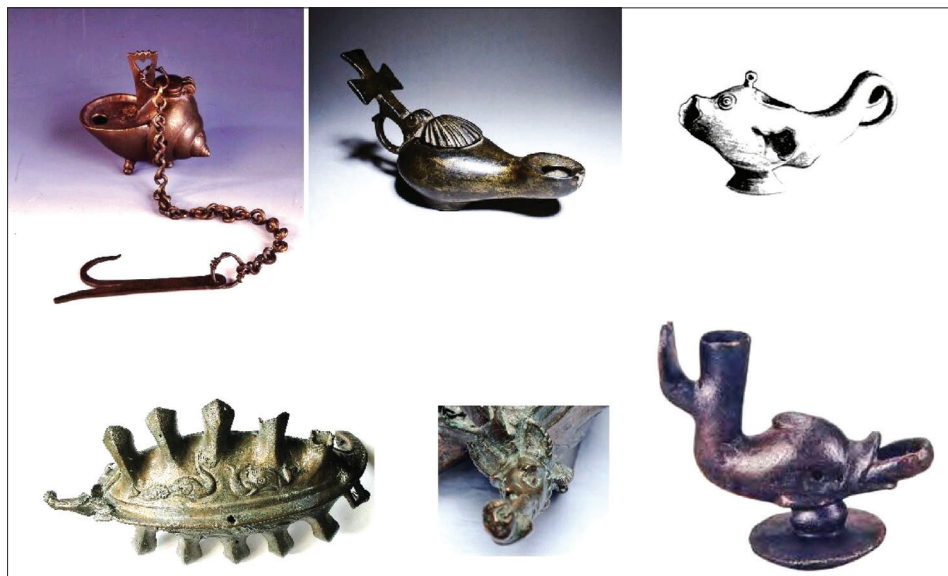


Fig. 9 Maritime Motifs on Late Antique Lamps from Central Balkans, from left to right as follows: shell snail lamp, Diana, end of the 3rd AD, National Museum of Serbia, AM Đerdap, inv. n. 228 © public domain photo; lamp with cross handle and a shell-shaped lid, provenance unknown, ca. 5th AD, the Belgrade City Museum, inv. n. AC/741 © the Belgrade City Museum; lamp in the form of a dolphin, provenance unknown, 5th AD, National Museum of Serbia, inv. n. 127/IV, according to Ilić, 2006, p. 53, fig. XIII/1; lamp in the form of a ship, details, found in Mezul site, 4th AD, Smederevo museum, inv. no A 145© public domain photo; lamp in the form of a dolphin, Viminacium, 2nd–3rd AD, private collection according to Спасић-Ђурић, 2015, p. 12, fig. 3.

Two bronze lamps, type 3 according to Xanthopoulou (2010), include maritime motifs. Although this form was introduced during the Hellenistic period, lamps with Christian motifs, which belong to type 3, were mass-produced from the 5th to the 7th century. Most often they have a high handle in the shape of a simple cross, although there are variations.²² One lamp with a shell-shaped lid is kept in the Belgrade City Museum,²³ and the other one in the National Museum of Serbia in Belgrade. The lamp from the collection of the Belgrade City Museum is in very good condition. It has a carinated body, an elongated

²² They were made in Egypt and Syria, although other Mediterranean centers for this very popular type cannot be ruled out. Xanthopoulou (2010, p. 6) notes that there is a formal similarity between Type 3 bronze lamps and Balkan-type ceramic lamps with a cruciform handle.

²³ A lamp of a similar shape, but without a lid, also kept in Belgrade City Museum, was found on Kosmaj. It is poorly preserved; the lid and handle are missing, so it is not possible to judge the decorative repertoire (Vujović, 2013, p. 137).

funnel-shaped nozzle and a low foot in which there is a rectangular opening, intended for fixing on a stand. The lid of the lamp is made in the shape of a shell, and above the ring handle there is a massive cross with flared arms i.e., *c. pattée* (Vujović, 2013, pp. 135–143; Јанковић, 1997, p. 312; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 216). The lamp kept in the National Museum of Serbia was found at the Pavlovac site. It is similar to the previous one, with a biconical discus and a shell-shaped lid. It is presumed to have contained a disc-shaped reflector above the handle, ornamented with incised concentric circles, which may have formed a cross or a Christogram (Vujović, 2013, p. 139; Јеличић, 1958–59, p. 79; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 216).

Two bronze lamps in the shape of a ship were found on the territory of Serbia. A lamp in the shape of a ship with a figure of a legionnaire in a short tunic comes from Mediana. It is kept in the National Museum in Niš and dates back to the end of the 3rd or 4th century. The rather stylized boat ends with a prow in the shape of a ram's head. In the middle of the discus a standing figure of a legionnaire dressed in a short tunic is applied, holding an oar in his right hand, while touching a helmet with his left hand (Karović, 2002, pp. 461–466; Дрча, 1985, p. 57; Дрча, 2004, p. 179). It has no Christian features, but it is included in this paper, because bronze lamps in the shape of a ship are rarely found, and from the 4th century they have a dominant Christian meaning.²⁴ Another lamp in the shape of a ship was discovered at the Mezul site in Dobri Do. It is kept in the Smederevo Museum and represents an exceptional find, which is why it has sparked considerable interest among researchers.²⁵ It is a lamp of impressive dimensions.²⁶ Despite different views, dating the object to the 4th century has prevailed among researchers.²⁷ The lamp has been repaired

²⁴ For analogies see: Tešić Radovanović & Gugolj, 2020; Tsamakda, 2018; Xanthopoulou, 2010. In addition to two ships from this territory, the author is aware of four other bronze lamps in the shape of a ship (Tsamakda, 2018, pp. 159–171; Xanthopoulou, 2010, pp. 224–225).

²⁵ See: Gavrilović, 2021, pp. 141–159; Karović, 2002, pp. 461–466; Pavlović, 1972, p. 136; Tešić Radovanović & Gugolj, 2020, pp. 151–158; Tsamakda, 2018, pp. 159–171; Valeva & Vionis, 2014, p. 326; Xanthopoulou, 2010, p. 26; Јовановић, 2006, pp. 41–45; Павловић, 1966, pp. 123–129; Петровић, 1993, p. 338; Поповић, 1970, pp. 323–330; Црнобрња, 2006, p. 88.

²⁶ Dimensions are 41.5 × 17 × 23 cm, it weighs 4,875 kg and could hold 0.5 l of oil (Павловић, 1966, p. 123).

²⁷ For this opinion see: Gavrilović, 2021, pp. 141–159; Петровић, 1993, p. 338; Tešić Radovanović & Gugolj, 2020, pp. 151–158; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 346; Karović, 2002, p. 464. Some researchers have suggested the 2nd century (Павловић, 1966, pp. 125–126, 128; Поповић, 1970, p. 329). Јовановић (2006, p. 45) links the storage of the lamp with the persecutions of Trajan Decius and hoards of money and dates it to the 3rd century, which influenced some researchers (Xanthopoulou, 2010, p. 26; Valeva & Vionis, 2014, p. 326), but the connection is not confirmed.

several times during its use. The ellipsoid body of the ship is cast from thin bronze and secured by a semi-circular profiled keel, which extends into the stern and bow. The bow is shaped in the form of a sea monster, from whose jaws springs a human figure up to the shoulders.²⁸ At the top of the hull are ten pentagonal nozzles connected to the rim, to imitate oar openings. On the sides of the hull, marine fauna is shown in shallow relief: dolphins, fish, cuttlefish and octopuses. The central place on both sides is occupied by a pair of dolphins that swallow cephalopods on one side and fish on the other side. A smaller dolphin, perhaps a calf, follows a pair of dolphins that are gobbling up octopuses and cuttlefish. Based on analogies with other ship-shaped lamps, one might expect that there were figures on the deck, now lost. On the bow and stern there is an inscription, which in one variant reads as follows: *IN DOMU DEI TERMOGENES VOTUMFECIT* (Karović, 2002, pp. 461–466; Tešić Radovanović & Gugolj, 2020, pp. 152–154; Павловић, 1966, pp. 123–129; Поповић, 1970, pp. 323–330). The dedication involving the *domus dei* and the appearance of Jonah's narrative define it as a Christian object.

An examination of the lamps with maritime motifs has shown that some of them are clearly marked as Christian, primarily by the representation of the cross, while others are connected to Christian visual culture based on the symbolic meaning of the representations, dating and context of the finds. The opinion that, some motifs, such as a fish or a ship, had a predominantly Christian meaning from the 4th century, has been established. In some cases, as with the lamp from Niš with the representation of two fish, found in the Glasija site, there is an unequivocal claim in the literature that it is a Christian object (Јовановић, 1976, p. 66; Цвјетићанин, 2013, p. 215; Црнобрња, 2006, p. 83), based on to the Christian meaning of the fish motif in late antiquity (Karivieri, 2001, p. 192, Papanikola-Bakirtzi, 2002, p. 788). Crnobrnja (Црнобрња, 2006, p. 83) states that the lamp may have been found in the grave, hence in accordance with the previously mentioned symbolism of the fish, one can recognize the eschatological dimension – the hope of resurrection through Christ and gaining eternal life through the sacrament of baptism. The lamp in the shape of a fish found in the vicinity of Belgrade, in addition to the aforementioned meanings, could also be a reduced expression of Christian identity, the sign *ΙΧΘΥΣ* given in a three-dimensional form. Such lamps could also have a role during the sacrament of baptism, in which light plays an important role.²⁹

²⁸ In the literature, the monster is called a dragon (Павловић, 1966, p. 124; Петровић, 1993, p. 338; Поповић, 1970, p. 323), Scylla or Ketos (Јовановић, 2006, p. 41), sea monster (Karović, 2002, p. 463; Tsamakda, 2018, p. 162; Xanthopoulou, 2010, p. 26). However, the hybrid representation of the whale/Ketos is nothing unusual in Jonah's narrative, in fact the whale never resembles a whale, but is represented as a crocodile, a snake, a dragon, a large fish.

²⁹ It should be added that since the 4th century the baptismal pool has been called a *piscina* (Jensen, 2000, p. 51).

Bronze lamps in the form of dolphins probably did not have a Christian meaning at the time of the formation of the type. Lamps of this form were often made, because the dolphin, as a symbol of Apollo, i.e., his solar aspect, was brought into relation with light. As a symbol of Dionysus, the dolphin symbolized eternal life. Dolphins are believed to provide transport for deities and according to one version of the myth, the young Sol emerged from the primordial ocean on a dolphin. The intelligence of dolphins, frequent interaction with humans and testimonies of dolphins as sailors' rescuers, influenced the creation of the myth of the dolphin as a psychopomp in the Mediterranean (Jensen, 2000, pp. 47–48; Срејовић & Цермановић-Кузмановић, 1992, pp. 40). Dolphins were believed to carry the souls of the righteous to the Isle of the Blessed, so lamps with dolphins were very common in funerary contexts (Јовановић, 2006, pp. 41–45; Крунић, 2011, pp. 366–367). In the Christian meaning, the pagan symbolism of the dolphin, as a psychopomp, is combined with the maritime dimension and messianic context of Jonah's story (Herrmann & van den Hoek, 2002, p. 15; Werness, 2006, p. 141). On lamps from the Central Balkans, the Christianization of the motif is confirmed by a cross, placed vertically on the body of the lamp from Gradište Kalaja. The context of the find suggests that the lamp was part of the equipment of an unknown church in the fortress or in the immediate vicinity.³⁰ Dolphin symbolism is often associated with the meaning of fish. Gavrilović (2021, pp. 151–157) recently proposed a new interpretation of “the motif of a dolphin swallowing an octopus, a fish and a squid” in early Byzantine art, “interpreted as the image of Christ's total triumph over Satan... as an allusion to the Resurrection of Christ”.

The lamp in the form of a snail's shell probably belongs to the group of decorative maritime motifs, favoured in late antique visual culture. Although the shell has a meaning in Christian symbolism, as the lamp has no other Christian motifs, it cannot be definitively identified as Christian. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that shells are connected to water, that is, to the primordial ocean from which life originates. Also, the spiral shape of the snail's house is sometimes associated with the solar and astral principle, more precisely with the movement of the Sun and galaxies or the shape of the firmament (Werness, 2006, pp. 175–176, 369). On the other hand, the snail and sea slug motif possessed both positive and negative connotations in early Christianity. In the Old Testament tradition (Ryken et al., 1998, p. 686), the snail is a symbol of sin and decay of those who choose material things over spiritual growth (Ps. 58, 8). Also, there is a metaphorical connection between the image of the snail in the house, which spends the winter in the ground and “resurrects” in the spring, with Christ

³⁰ Found with another lamp, with a cross on the handle. They were found in a large pithos with other metal objects (Shukriu, 2003, pp. 17–19). On the connection between the representation of the dolphin and the Christogram, see Гавриловић, 2020, pp. 281–294.

in the grave (Werness, 2006, pp. 175–176, 369), although the symbolism is not widespread. When it comes to the scallop shell that appears on the lid of the two bronze lamps, the motif is probably taken from older pagan lamps. Although it could have been decorative, it should be emphasized that the scallop shell had a symbolic meaning in both pagan and Christian cultures, being common accessory in graves, so it is not wrong to assume that the echo of that symbolism was preserved in the design of the lamp's functional detail. Shell is known as an attribute of Aphrodite, symbolizing life-giving water, fertility, sexuality, love, happiness and immortality (Bałowska-Czerner & Czerner, 2021, pp. 72–74). In the funeral context, it is the symbol of *Venus Funeraria*, protector of marital harmony even after death. It is also associated with the journey of the soul across the sea to the blessed Isis (Крунић, 2011, pp. 372–373). In Christianity, it is a symbol of the grave that protects the body until the time of resurrection. That is why saints are often depicted in shell-shaped niches. Through association with water and birth from water, the shell also becomes a symbol of baptism (Werness, 2006, p. 369).



Fig. 10 Lamps in the form of a ship; to the left ship-shaped lamp with ten nozzles, found in Mezul site, 4th AD, Smederevo museum, inv. no A 145© public domain photo; to the right boat-shaped lamp found in Mediana, the end of the 3rd or 4th AD, Niš National Museum, inv. n. 731/P © public domain photo

Bronze lamps in the shape of a ship are often mentioned in sources as part of lighting equipment in sacred buildings.³¹ Relatively few such lamps have been preserved, which makes the two examples from the territory of Serbia precious. The ship is a motif that often appears in the visual culture of the late antique period, as part of genre scenes, mythological episodes or with the complex meaning it takes on in Christianity. The ship symbolizes the church

³¹ Ship-shaped lamps are common in Egyptian church inventories (Montserrat, 1995, p. 436). Silver lamps in the shape of a ship, which “float in the air” are mentioned by Paul Silentiarius in the description of St. Sophia (Paul. Silent. Descr. S. Soph. 839).

that provides safe passage through the turbulent sea of man's external world. The mast of the ship is often shown in the form of a cross, and the anchor, a symbol of hope for salvation, is also associated with the cross (Jensen, 2000, pp. 138–140). The soteriological dimension of the symbolism of the ship derives from the Old Testament narrative about the flood and Noah's ark (Gen. 6:14), which was the only safe refuge from the rising water. The ship often appears in the presentation of Jonah's trilogy, as in the case of the lamp from Smederevo (Gavrilović, 2021, 141–159; Tešić Radovanović & Gugolj, 2020, pp. 151–158; Tsamakda, 2018, pp. 159–171; Јовановић, 2006, pp. 41–45; Павловић, 1966, pp. 123–129; Поповић, 1970, pp. 323–330). In Christianity, Christ appears as the helmsman of the ship, i.e., the church (Јовановић, 2009, p. 167), an understanding based on the event from the Sea of Galilee, when Christ stopped the storm and saved the apostles from drowning (Mk 4, 37–39). The ship-shaped lamps sometimes contain figures interpreted as Christ and the apostles, as is the case on the votive lamp from Florence (Xanthopoulou, 2010, p. 26). The lamp from Mezul with its iconographic narrative and votive inscription points to a Christian context and was most likely intended for some sacral building.³² Scenes of dolphins eating fish, cuttlefish and octopuses are depicted on the hull. On the bow is the representation of a monster from whose mouth a man emerges, that is, a representation of Jonah and Ketos, a whale or Leviathan, as the monster is also called.³³ The Christian aspect of the scene is reflected in the messianic connotation of Ketos – Leviathan and Jonah as a prefiguration of Christ. When it comes to representations of dolphins swallowing fish and cephalopods, they express the archetypal conflict between good and evil, from which dolphin the psychopomp emerges victorious (Јовановић, 2006, pp. 41–45).³⁴

A bronze lamp found in Mediana has no decorative elements that would indicate a Christian meaning. Drča (Дрча, 1985, p. 57) believes that it depicts a legionnaire in a short tunic, who is rowing with his right hand while touching a helmet with his left hand. Karović (2002) assumes that the lamp is a votive gift of a naval recruit of the VII Legion CLAUDIA.³⁵ If we take into account the widely accepted opinion that the ship acquires a dominant Christian meaning

³² In the central Balkans, the symbolism of the fish, Jonah's trilogy and maritime themes in general could take on a specific dimension in the early Christian period, taking into account the executions of Christian martyrs by drowning in the river – water (Bratož, 2005, pp. 112, 125). For more on this opinion see: Tešić Radovanović & Gugolj, 2020, pp. 155–157.

³³ For more on the motif of the sea monster and the connection with the symbolism of fish in Judaism and Christianity see Goodenough, 1956, pp. 27–30, 35–40.

³⁴ On the appearance of the motif of a dolphin swallowing a fish in early Byzantine imperial iconography and its association with Christ's triumph, see: Gavrilović, 2021.

³⁵ The conclusion is based on an inscription recorded on a stele from Niš, which mentions a naval recruit (Karović, 2002, p. 462).

from the 4th century, it is necessary to consider whether there is a basis for such an interpretation in the given case. Xanthopoulou (2010, p. 26) interprets the myth of Odysseus as an appropriation of pagan iconography with a Christian meaning, that is, an allegory of the church, which, guided by the Holy Spirit and the sign of the cross, resists the seduction of heretical movements. On the lamp from Mediana, the figure's head is very sketchy, the facial features and the shape of the helmet are not discernible. However, the oar held by the soldier recalls the club of Heracles. In the numerous adventures of Heracles, his ride on the boat (goblet) of Helios is also described, during the performance of the tenth task imposed by Eurystheus (Apollod. 2.5.10; Davies, 1988, pp. 278–279).³⁶ The solar dimension of the theme makes it suitable for representation on the lamp, and the departure of Heracles to the far west to bring Geryon's cattle and the return, which also includes an episode in Thrace, may be the reason for the appearance of this motif on the lamp from Mediana. The symbolic dimension of Heracles' triumph over Geryon, which has a chthonic nature, is apparently a triumph over death, so if this interpretation is confirmed, the lamp could be part of the funeral rite in addition to its votive function.³⁷ The cult of Heracles played a significant role in the religious policy of the emperors of the 3rd century, especially during the first tetrarchy. The discus of ceramic lamps often depicts Heracles and his 12 labours, and the association of Heracles with *Sol Invictus* is noted (Karivieri, 2001, p. 185). The veneration of Heracles was witnessed in Mediana, whereas one of the rulers of the first tetrarchy, Maximian Herculius, was under the divine protection of Heracles, and Constantius Chlorus was connected to the Herculean dynasty by marriage.³⁸ By analogy with the interpretation of Odysseus myth that Xanthopoulou (2010) refers to, one can hypothetically mention the connection of the iconography of Christ with *Sol* and the proven pagan heroes who gained immortality by descending into the underworld, such as Odysseus, Dionysus and Heracles.³⁹

³⁶ With an overview of mentions of Heracles' voyage in the solar boat/ goblet at: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Apollod.+2.5.10&fromdoc=Perseus%3A-text%3A1999.01.0022>. accessed October 31, 2022.

³⁷ Geryon has elements of a chthonic deity, such as ruling in the far west, a monstrous appearance with three heads and six arms, and the cattle of Hades also appear in the myth. Also, Heracles rides in the goblet in which the weary Helios returns from the far west, only to rise again at dawn (Davies, 1988, pp. 277–290; Срејовић & Цермановић-Кузмановић, 1992, pp. 94–95; 456–457; 464–465).

³⁸ Jovanović observes that already with Claudius Gothicus (268–270) due to his Dardan origin, a parallel was made with Aeneas and Dardanus and their connection with the Roman Empire, and that the connection of the rulers of these areas with Heracles was emphasized during the time of the first tetrarchy, primarily by Maximian Herculius (Јовановић, 2006, pp. 59, 105, 289).

³⁹ Early Christian art borrows from pagan iconography the type of Christ “youthful hero” in scenes of miracles and healings (Jensen, 2000, p. 120).

In the late antique material from the territory of the Central Balkans, the usual types of lamps in the form of fish and with maritime motifs appear. The absence of North African lamps with the representation of fish is striking, which may be related to the relatively small number of these lamps found in the interior of the peninsula. On the other hand, some unique and representative specimens appear, such as the lamp from Mezul, on which a multitude of maritime symbols and their individual meanings are skilfully incorporated into the narrative of Jonah's deliverance from the womb of Ketos. In addition to lamps with an undoubtedly Christian meaning, those that continue the Roman pagan tradition in terms of form and decoration have been preserved. Finally, it can be said that the representations on late antique lamps, found in Serbia, reflect the trends of the period and their meaning fits into the general picture of the symbolism of fish and maritime motifs, which in some cases may also receive a specific local interpretation.

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Резиме

Мотив рибе и маритимна тематика често су приказивани у уметности касне антике. Овакве представе могу се пратити од праисторије, а у медитеранском свету риба је имала посебно значење које се током времена манифестује и кроз представе у визуелној култури Месопотамије, Египте, Сиро-Палестине и грчко-римском свету. Море и његова богата фауна и флора били су важан природни и економски чинилац живота становника Медитерана. Због тога се маритимни призори и морска створења на визуелним представама појављују са декоративном функцијом и у симболичном значењу, која се неретко преплићу. У доба касне антике мотив рибе посебно се доводи у везу са хришћанством, мада симболика овог мотива сеже неколико миленијума уназад и заиста је тешко докучити када се у визуелној култури антике риба може сматрати неупитно хришћанским симболом. У визуелној култури старог века мотив рибе блиско је повезан са представом делфина, затим са митским морским чудовиштем и другим маритимним мотивима, од морске флоре и фауне, до представе брода. Ови мотиви појављују се на вотивним предметима, посућу, светиљкама, надгробним споменицима, али и у монументалној уметности. У хришћанској визуелној култури риба се појављује као један од најранијих мотива, који је заједно са представама голуба, сидра, брода, доброг пастира и раних форми крста служио да прикаже припадност хришћанској заједници. Преовлађује став да је баптисмални симболизам Христа као „велике рибе“ и хришћана као „малих риба“ био пресудан за популарност

рибе као препознатљивог хришћанског симбола, мада су слојеви значења толико испреплетани да је немогуће разграничити месијанске, баптисмалне, евхаристичке и есхатолошке планове значења. У касноантичком материјалу који потиче са територије данашње Србије налази се десетак светиљки са маритимном декорацијом или у форми рибе, тј. делфина. У раду су представе рибе и маритимни мотиви на касноантичким светиљкама разматрани у односу на преовлађујуће научне ставове, а анализирани су и слојеви значења у зависности од избора мотива, иконографских наратива и контекста налаза.

Кључне речи: лампа; светло; риба; шкољка; брод; маритимни мотиви; иконографија.



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