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SIGLE ȘI ABREVIERI / SIGLE E ABBREVIAZIONI¹

<i>AIA</i> Iași	<i>Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie „A. D. Xenopol”</i> Iași.
<i>AMN</i>	<i>Acta Musei Napocensis</i> , Cluj-Napoca.
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> , II, <i>Prinzipat</i> , Berlin-New York.
<i>ArhMold</i>	<i>Arheologia Moldovei</i> , Iași.
<i>ASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i> , Paris-Rome, 1863 (3 rd edn).
<i>AȘUI-Istorie</i>	<i>Analele Științifice ale Universității din Iași – Istorie</i> .
<i>BHAC</i>	<i>Bonner Historia-Augusta Colloquium</i> .
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> .
<i>EAIVR</i>	<i>Enciclopedia arheologiei și istoriei vechi a României</i> , București.
<i>EDCS</i>	<i>Epigraphische Datenbank Clauss-Slaby</i> (http://www.manfredclauss.de/).
<i>EphNap</i>	<i>Ephemeris Napocensis</i> , Cluj-Napoca.
<i>FHDR</i>	<i>Fontes ad historiam Dacoromaniae pertinentes</i> , București, I, 1964; II, 1970.
<i>HD</i>	<i>Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg</i> (http://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/).
<i>JAHA</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology</i> , Cluj-Napoca.
<i>NP</i>	<i>Der neue Pauly Enzyklopädie der Antike</i> , Herausgegeben von H. Cancik und H. Schneider (Stuttgart-Weimar, 1 (1996) –
<i>ODB</i>	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , editor in chief A. Kazhdan, New York-Oxford, 1991.
<i>OPEL</i>	<i>Onomasticon Provinciarum Europae Latinarum</i> , Ex materia ab A. Mócsy, R. Feldmann, E. Marton et M. Szilágyi collecta, Composuit et correxuit B. Lőrincz, vol. III: <i>Labarum-Pythea</i> , Wien, 2000; vol. IV: <i>Quadrati-Zures</i> , Wien, 2002.
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca</i> , Paris.
<i>PIR</i>	<i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani. Saec. I.II.III</i> .
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina</i> , Paris.
<i>PLRE</i>	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , I, A. D. 260-395, by A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris, Cambridge, 1971; III A, A.D. 527-641, by J. R.

¹ Cu excepția celor din *L'Année Philologique* și *L'Année épigraphique* / Escluse quelle segnalate da *L'Année Philologique* e *L'année épigraphique*.

	Martindale, 1992.
<i>PSB</i>	<i>Părinți și scriitori bisericești</i> , serie nouă, București.
<i>RE</i>	<i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> (Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll), Stuttgart-München.
<i>SCIV(A)</i>	<i>Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie</i> , București.
<i>TD</i>	<i>Thraco-Dacica</i> , București.

THE JONAH SARCOFAGUS FROM SINGIDUNUM: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ART IN THE BALKANS*

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Keywords: Singidunum, sarcophagus, Early Christian art, Jonah, Good Shepherd, iconography.

Abstract: *The subject of the paper is the so-called Jonah sarcophagus from Singidunum (Belgrade). The sarcophagus belongs to the pagan, Pannonian type sarcophagi that were often decorated with Noric-Pannonian scrolls. What makes it unique in the region of Moesia is its relief decoration on the front side. In the field usually used for an inscription, one finds carved scenes from the Old Testament story of Jonah and the Good Shepherd. The sarcophagus is considered in the context of the growing Early Christian community in Singidunum and surrounding area. The iconography is discussed in close proximity with analogous images of Early Christian art that may have impacted the development of its iconographic program.*

Cuvinte-cheie: Singidunum, sarcofag, artă creștină timpurie, Bunul Păstor, iconografie.

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Rezumat: *Subiectul articolului este așa-numitul sarcofag al lui Iona din Singidunum (Belgrad). Sarcofagul aparține tipului de sarcofage pannonice păgâne, care erau adesea decorate cu benzi. Ceea ce-l face unic în regiunea Moesiei este decorația în relief de pe partea frontală. Pe câmpul folosit, în mod obișnuit, pentru inscripție, se găsesc sculptate scenele din Vechiul Testament, respectiv istoria lui Iona și Bunul Păstor. Sarcofagul este privit în contextul creșterii comunității creștine timpurii din Singidunum și din împrejurimi. Iconografia este discutată în strânsă legătură cu imagini analoge ale artei creștine timpurii, care au putut avea un impact asupra dezvoltării programului iconografic.*

At the end of the nineteenth century, a remarkable sarcophagus was excavated in Belgrade, probably dating from the mid- to late-fourth century (**Fig. 1**)³. The sarcophagus is embellished on its front side with figure of the Good Shepherd and scenes from the cycle of Jonah (**Fig 2**). It is a unique example of Early Christian art in the province of Moesia. To date, the sarcophagus has not received substantial scholarly attention. The aim of this paper is to reevaluate its significance and to elucidate its importance in light of the Early Christian community in Belgrade, in particular, and within the province of Moesia, in general.

The sarcophagus is constructed out of limestone and rectangular in shape. Its massive lid resembles a pitched roof with acroteria at its four corners and one in the middle of the lid's front and back side (**Fig. 3**). The sarcophagus measures 218 x 98 x 74 cm and the lid, 229 x 116 x 28 cm. Only the front side of the sarcophagus is decorated with the low relief⁴.

The relief is roughly cut without final polishing and remains partially unfinished. On the spectator's left side, one finds a representation of the Good Shepherd with a lamb on his shoulders. On the right hand side of the rectangular panel are the Biblical scenes from

³ The sarcophagus was found at the corner of Captain Mišina and Jovanova streets in Belgrade, while digging foundations for a house of Marko Marković in 1885. Today it is in the National Museum in Belgrade, inv. no. 1564 / IV. For the literature on sarcophagus and for dating see, Valtrović 1886, 70-71; Valtrović 1891, 130-142, T. 11-12; Klauser 1966, 163, n. 2; Brenk 1985, 308, fig. 378c; Caillet, Loose 1990, 22, Fig. 13; Pop-Lazić 2002, 21-22, cat. G-116, fig. 9; Vasić 2013, fig. 70, cat. 83.

⁴ The dimensions of the panel with the relief are 143 x 73 cm. One of the earliest and most detailed descriptions of the relief is by Mihajlo Valtrović see, Valtrović 1891, 130-142.

the life of the Old Testament prophet, Jonah⁵. The panel's side edges are decorated with Noric-Pannonian scrolls.

While the representation of the God Shepherd is of a standard type, the Jonah scenes are more complex. Several scenes from the Jonah cycle are combined in the central, compact composition. The far right side of the relief contains a large sailboat or ship bearing three or four sailors (**Fig 4**)⁶. The main masts form a cross. A paddle held by one of sailors protrudes from the ship into the water. The disproportionately large figure of Jonah has been ejected from the boat, face down, and is shown naked from the back and positioned directly in the path of the sea monster. Below the sea monster is a pair of fish resembling dolphins. Next to the sea monster swallowing Jonah, one finds another spiting him out while he spreads his arms toward the Good Shepherd in front of him (**Fig. 5**). Just above the rescued Jonah and next to the ship, one finds a representation of a large gourd plant with fruit hanging from it. A bird is nestled amongst the branches on the side of the gourd tree closest to the ship (**fig. 6**). Likely a matching representation was formerly found on the other side of the tree but it is difficult to discern due to the poor condition of the stone. A *putto* rides a dolphin between the two sea monsters (**Fig. 7**). With his left hand, the *putto* holds onto the dolphin while grasping a whip or similar object with his right.

Mihajlo Valtrović has correctly suggested that the sarcophagus was probably reused⁷. The construction of the Belgrade Jonah sarcophagus is similar to the majority of Pannonian sarcophagi. These sarcophagi are recognizable by typical lids resembling pitched roofs with acroteria placed at the corners and in the case of sarcophagi from *Mursa* and *Cibalae*, in the middle of the front side⁸. Like Pannonian sarcophagi, the Belgrade sarcophagus has a tripartite division on the front in the middle of which was a field for an inscription. While on Late Antique sarcophagi, that field was usually reserved for the in-

⁵ Bezalel Narkiss suggests that the Book of Jonah represents a late compilation from the early Hellenistic period; see Narkiss 1979, 63.

⁶ Due to the poor condition of the stone it is hard to tell if there is another figure on the front deck of the ship.

⁷ According to Valtrović a different, more skillful hand executed the Noric-Pannonian scroll decoration on the side of the central relief panel, Valtrović 1891, 142.

⁸ Dautova-Rušeljan 1983, 108ff.

scription, here it is carved with an Early Christian relief. Noric-Pannonian scroll decoration occurs in the second half of the second century, but became widespread on the sarcophagi at the time of Severians⁹. Perhaps the closest examples of a sarcophagus with Pannonian volutes originate from *Mursa*¹⁰, and from *Viminacium*, on which we also find representations of Amor and Psyche¹¹.

The Old Testament scenes of Jonah (Jonah 1-4) are amongst the most commonly reproduced scenes in Late Antique and Early Christian art and appear in variety of media and contexts until the fifth century¹². Besides sarcophagi, the Jonah story has been found in catacomb paintings, on gems, ivory, mosaics, statuettes, etc.¹³. The oldest known representation of scenes illustrating the story of Jonah is from the third-century Catacomb of Callixtus in Rome¹⁴.

The story of Jonah is about an unwilling and disobedient prophet, who God sent to Ninivah as a messenger to preach against the infamy of its people. On his way to Ninivah Jonah decided to change the direction of the ship and not to obey to God's will. To punish him, God sent a storm and in order to preserve their lives, the sailors cast Jonah into a sea on his request, where he was swallowed by a sea monster or *ketos* sent by God as well¹⁵. After three days and three nights in the belly of the *ketos* during which he prayed, Jonah was spewed out onto dry land. This time Jonah obeyed God and successfully preached to the people of Ninivah after which God decided to spare them from destruction. Being dissatisfied with God's decision, Jonah went outside the town to rest and God provided a shelter from the Sun by seeding a gourd¹⁶. The next morning, however, a worm ate

⁹ Erdélyi 1974, 116-117; Dautova-Rušeljan 1983, 104-106; Pochnarsi 1998, 195; Mráv 2005, 209-212.

¹⁰ Dautova-Rušeljan 1983, 106, Tav. 5/8, cat. 169 and 170.

¹¹ Pilipović 2007, cat. 6 (*IMS II*, 63)

¹² Jensen 2000, 172, Couzin 2013, 168.

¹³ For an early catalogue showing examples of the representation of Jonah see, Mitius 1897. For more recent scholarship and bibliography on Jonah see, Couzin 2013, 168-169.

¹⁴ The images are in the Crypt of Lucina in the Sacrament chamber 22, Jensen 2011, 12-16.

¹⁵ The model for the sea monster comes from Greek and Roman art, see Lawrence 1962, 294-295. For the name *ketos* see, Couzin, 2013, 188, n. 28.

¹⁶ There is a dispute among scholars over the translation of the word for the plant and its botanical accuracy. Hebrew texts refer to this plant as *qiqayon*, a vari-

the plant and left Jonah burning in the sun, asking God for death. God explained to Jonah that he had wanted Him to destroy the Ninevites and their city that he created and had selfishly complained about the destruction of a plant that Jonah had not cared for. In this way God showed Jonah the reward of salvation for those who obey Him.

The story of Jonah was usually represented as multi-scene narrative by artists of the pre- and post-Constantine periods¹⁷. Otto Mitius has placed them into three main categories: first, Jonah on the ship and being cast overboard; second, in which Jonah swallowed by a sea monster, which is often combined with the first; and the third, showing Jonah being disgorged by the *ketos* and resting under a gourd plant¹⁸. Though, the story is based on scriptural narrative, in abbreviated forms, many important details are omitted, such as the representation of Jonah in the belly of the *ketos*, or him preaching to the Ninevites and their conversion. In many cases, only the scene of Jonah resting under the gourd tree is represented¹⁹.

The popularity of Jonah imagery in Early Christian art, especially in the pre-Constantinian period is attributable to the range of associations that an observer can have when beholding it. The scenes from the Book of Jonah are often observed in a typological manner, as foreshadowing of Christ's Resurrection²⁰. The episodes representing Jonah being cast into the sea, disgorged, or resting under the gourd tree, can be viewed as soteriological, showing his death, salvation or resurrection, and final peace in paradise. The last scene in which Jonah is resting, though disconnected from the scriptural narrative, may allude symbolically to the Resurrection and the peace of the soul in Heaven.

The typological connotation of the Jonah scenes is closely connected with Jonah's scriptural role in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew (12:38-41) and Luke (11:29-32), Christ promised a sign to

ety of the castor-oil plant, *ricinus communis*. In the Septuagint it is translated as Κολοκύνθη and in Vetus Latina as *cucubita*, which is a gourd plant, see Heller 1985, 67-116.

¹⁷ Grabar 1968, 7-8; Elsner 1998 153-155; Jensen 2000, 171-173.

¹⁸ Mitius 1897, 97-98.

¹⁹ Narkiss 1979, 64-66.

²⁰ Wischmeyer 1981, 263; Elsner, 1998, 196; Jenesn 2000, 173; Tkacz 2001, 70; Dulaey 2001, 86; Couzin 2013, 195-205.

the Pharisees, “the sign of Jonah the prophet.” In these Gospels Christ refers to different aspects of the prophet’s story. In the Gospel of Matthew when Christ talks of a sign, He refers to the “sign of the prophet Jonah: For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40). By linking Jonah’s period in the belly of the whale with the time spent by the Son of man in the heart of the earth, Matthew created a typology by which Jonah’s story prefigured that of Jesus. Jonah becomes a symbol of resurrection, and of post-mortem bliss²¹. In the Gospel of Luke, Christ addresses “an evil generation” that requires “a sign” with the words: “For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation” (Luke 11:29-30).

To better understand the context in which the Jonah sarcophagus from Belgrade was used, it is necessary first to have a short overview of the Christian community in the late third century and the fourth century in *Singidunum* (Belgrade). The place where the sarcophagus was discovered, *Singidunum*, was one of the most important cities of the provinces of Upper Moesia and of Moesia Prima. The information that we have today on ancient *Singidunum*, although extensive, is nevertheless fragmentary because contemporary Belgrade developed over top of the Roman city. The erection of a series of later Byzantine, Serbian, Austrian and Ottoman fortifications destroyed most of the remains of the ancient city. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence indicates that Christianity in the former Upper Moesia expanded gradually. This is evident by the existence of the relatively small number of Early Christian epigraphic monuments²². It seems that the residents of local provinces remained faithful to pagan cults for a long period. The situation in the Pannonian provinces is somewhat different. Already in the second half of the third century, during the reign of the Roman emperors Valerian and Gallienus, there were well-organized Christian communities, one of which developed in *Sirmium*, a town of great importance for the history of Early Christianity.²³

²¹ Gregg 2015, 372.

²² Mirković 2007, 99; Ferjančić 2013, 33–34.

²³ Mócsy 1974, 325ff; Milin 2001, 253–259; Jeremić 2006, 167–200; Ferjančić 2013, 34; Popović 2013, 102–117; Popović 2013b, 138–159.

The data that we have on Early Christian communities in *Singidunum* derives from records of their persecutions of the late third and early fourth century. According to tradition, one of the early martyrdoms took place during the time of emperor Diocletian's (284-305 CE) persecutions, when the presbyter Montanus and his wife Maxima escaped from *Singidunum* to *Sirmium* (AA.SS III, 615-7), one of four former capitals of the Roman Empire²⁴. Their hagiographies describe how Sts. Montanus and Maxima fled persecution but were captured, beheaded, and their remains thrown into the Sava River after refusing to renounce their Christian faith²⁵. The river carried the bodies nine miles to the place where they were buried. According to Martyrology of pseudo-Jerome, parts of which originated in the fifth century, and mentioned in patristic texts *PL*, this likely took place on March 26, 304 CE. Details of the story are also found in the *Passion of Pollio* (*Passio sancti Pollionis et aliorum martyrum*) (AA.SS II, 425). It is difficult to tell from it whether the elogium in honor of these two saints was based on an earlier, now lost legend²⁶. Their bodies were translated to Rome and there are no preserved epigraphic monuments from Late Antique *Sirmium* as evidence of the proliferation of their cult²⁷. *Sirmium* was the center where the court of the prefect of Pretoria was established, which explains the trials and convictions of many Christians from the surrounding region such as Sts. Montana and Maximus from *Singidunum*²⁸.

Another martyr from the early fourth century *Singidunum* was deacon Ermilus who converted his jailer Stratonicus to Christianity²⁹. Scholars disagree about the exact date of this event. Milena Milin has argued that Ermilus and Stratonicus were not martyred during Diocletian's persecutions, and Jacques Zeiller's dating of 307-311 CE is

²⁴ Delehaye, 1912, 294; Jarak 1996, 287; Milin 2001b, 10–11, Janković 2003, 17; Jarak, 2011, 58–60; Ferjančić 2013, 34; Špehar 2014, 32.

²⁵ Their cult spread to the west but did not gain popularity there in contrast to those of other *Sirmium* martyrs, Zeiller 1967, 105ff, 121ff; Milin 2001b, 11.

²⁶ For more on *Passio sancti Pollionis et aliorum martyrum* see, Bilić 2013, 815-840.

²⁷ Jarak 1996, 287; Milin 2001b, 11.

²⁸ Zeiller 1967, 105-106, Mirković 1979, 21; Janković 2003, 18ff; Mirković 2008, 115; Špehar 2014, 32.

²⁹ Delehaye 1912, 283; Zeiller 1967, 106-107; Popović 1995, 50; Milin 2001b, 15-16; Špehar 2014, 38.

unpersuasive.³⁰ Miroslava Mirković has offered the more convincing date of 315 CE³¹. The story of Sts. Ermilus and Stratonicus is mentioned in various sources and has been analyzed by Milin³². One source, the *Passio* in the *Menologium of Symeon Metaphrastes* (PG CXIV, 553-66), is a tenth century, extended version of an earlier text that includes some questionable details such as the questioning of Ermilus by the emperor Licinius, which is unlikely to have occurred; notably, there is no mention of *Singidunum*³³. There is another, older text, published in *Analecta Bollandiana* [89 (1971), 10-20]³⁴. According to legend, Ermilus was tortured for refusing to sacrifice animal offerings to the Gods and his guard, Stratonicus, was touched by Ermilus's suffering and wept in compassion. The Roman emperor ordered both to be killed and thrown in the Danube River at *Singidunum*. Their bodies arose from the depths after eighteen miles and were then discovered and buried³⁵. There is an indication that they were placed in a painted tomb in Brestovik, near Belgrade, but this has been difficult to definitively establish³⁶.

In the middle of the fourth century, *Singidunum* along with *Sirmium*, *Margum*, *Viminacium*, *Horreum Margi*, *Naissus* and *Remesiana*, became an episcopal seat. The bishop of *Singidunum*, Ursacius (about 335-370 CE), played an important role at the time in the strengthening of Arianism together with Valens, bishop of Mursa³⁷. Acting together, the two clerics expelled the orthodox bishop from *Sirmium* and set up the heretic Euterius in his place. Other bishops of Pannonia, and the heads of the church seats of Moesia, mostly remained faithful to the Nicene doctrines, which effected Ursacius and Valens' decision to return to orthodoxy at the Council of *Serdica* in 343 CE. Bishop Ursacius was succeeded by bishop Secundian (circa 370-381 CE), who was convicted of the heresy of Arianism at the

³⁰ Zeiller 1967, 105; Milin 2001b, 16.

³¹ Mirković 1979, 21-27; Milin 2001b, 16.

³² Milin 2001b, 15-16.

³³ Zeiller 1967, 106ff; Milin 2001b, 15-16.

³⁴ Also translated in serbian, Todorović 1998, 15-26.

³⁵ Both martyrs are mentioned in Prologue of Ochrid, as well as in the Synaxarium of the Church of Constantinople, where they were celebrated on January 13, Milin 2001b, 15.

³⁶ Mirković 1979, 23. On the painted tomb in Brestovik see, Valtrović 1907, 128-138; Stričević 1958, 411-413.

³⁷ Johnson 2012, 95-102; Ferjančić 2013, 34.

Council of *Aquileia* in 381 CE³⁸. Although records indicate that *Singidunum* was a significant Christian center in the fourth century, archaeological finds with Christian motifs are not numerous³⁹. Although it was a large urban center, only a few of the surviving oil lamps from the fourth and fifth century can be identified as Early Christian⁴⁰. This is also the case with quotidian objects such as vessels, of which we have few examples with Christian iconography⁴¹. A rare survival, however, is an Early Christian lead sarcophagus decorated with four crosses whose arms end in arrowheads⁴². The lack of Early Christian artifacts from *Singidunum* underscores the importance of finds such as the Jonah sarcophagus from Belgrade.

As we have seen, the Christian community and the cult of martyrs were well developed in *Singidunum* by the fourth century. The representation of a Biblical theme on the Belgrade sarcophagus reveals the prominent role played by scripture in the daily life of Early Christians, when belief in resurrection was an essential part of their faith⁴³. This belief is emphasized on the sarcophagus through the juxtaposition of the story of Jonah with the representation of the Good Shepherd.

The image of the Good Shepherd was one of the most commonly depicted during the first four centuries of Christian art⁴⁴. Shown as a youthful shepherd carrying a sheep or ram and dressed in a short belted tunic, this was an image derived from the Greco-Roman art⁴⁵. The Good Shepherd was acceptable to Christians due to the parallels in literary sources, especially the New Testament. In the Gospel of John 10:1-19, Christ calls himself the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth

³⁸ Zeiller 1967, 150.

³⁹ On Early Christian small objects see, Ilić, 2005.

⁴⁰ A oil lamp from Singidunum with a handle in the shape of a cross and the lid in the shape of a shell see, *Konst. Vel.*, cat. 164.

⁴¹ A pot with two handles decorated with alteration of fish and vine motives, and a plate with a representation of a fish at the bottom, *Konst. Vel.* cat. 148 and 149.

⁴² On the territory of *Singidunum* it was excavated seven lead sarcophagi but unfortunately non of them have been preserved until our days and the archaeological records are destroyed. Pop-Lazić 2002, 51. On survived lead sarcophagus see, Crnobrnja 2003, 313-330.

⁴³ Jensen 2000, 156-158.

⁴⁴ Jansen 1983, 375-378.

⁴⁵ Grabar 1968, 11; Jensen 2000, 37-41; Provoost 2004, 1-36.

his life for the sheep”(John 10:11). The Gospels of Matthew (18:12-13) and Luke (15:3-7) likewise addressed the parable of the lost sheep⁴⁶. Further evidence of the association of the Good Shepherd with Christ is found in Early Christian texts. Christ is identified as a shepherd several times in the “Hymn to Christ the Savior”, attributed to Clement of Alexandria from the second century *Instructor*, or *Pædagogus*⁴⁷. According to André Grabar, the Good Shepherd symbolizes Christ carrying a Christian soul, allegorically shown as a lamb⁴⁸.

By juxtaposing scenes from the Jonah narrative with the Good Shepherd, the designer(s) of the Belgrade sarcophagus underlined its typological meaning and reference to resurrection and salvation. This pairing suggests that as Jonah was saved from the belly of the monster, Christians will find salvation through Christ. The role of the Good Shepherd on the sarcophagus is further emphasized by the omission of the most popular scene from the Jonah’s story, that of him resting under a gourd tree in pose of an ancient Endymion⁴⁹. Here, instead of reclining, Jonah is shown as being spit out by the *ketos* with arms outstretched toward the Good Shepherd as if reaching out to Him in hopes of being saved⁵⁰. The entire scene is placed under the gourd plant, which serves as a compositional divider between the ship and the Good Shepherd. That Jonah can expect eternal life it is not only indicated by the presence of the gourd plant, but also the presence of the bird on it (**Fig. 6**)⁵¹. Prior scholarship on the sarcophagus has failed to note this detail⁵². Due to the rough cutting and the bad condition of the limestone it is difficult to tell which kind of the bird is depicted, however, it has a long beak and tail of medium length. Comparing it to representations preserved in tomb frescoes from the Balkan territory,

⁴⁶ Couzin 2013, 244-254.

⁴⁷ *Paed.* 1.7 and 3.12, for the translation see, Roberts, Donaldson, vol. 2 1956-1957, 480 and 631-633.

⁴⁸ Grabar 1968, 11.

⁴⁹ On the ancient Endymion and iconographic parallels with Jonah see, Lawrence 1961, 323-324; Mathews 1993, 30-32; Elsner 1998, 152-153; Jensen 2000, 173; Couzin 2013, 229-241.

⁵⁰ A similar scene with Jonah reaching toward the Good Shepherd is represented on the NY Copenhagen sarcophagus, however, the latter also includes the scene with Jonah reclining; see Østergaard 1996, 156-157, cat. 67.

⁵¹ Couzin, 2013, 191-193.

⁵² Mihajlo Valtrović did not mention any bird it in his detail description of sarcophagus, see Valtrović 1891, 130-142.

like the one on the ceiling of the Christian tomb in Jagodin Mala, the bird on the sarcophagus could be identified either as a female peacock or a dove⁵³. For Christians, a peacock placed within a funeral context usually referred to the incorruptibility of the body and resurrection of the flesh⁵⁴. A sardonix gem now in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, depicts Jonah sitting beneath a tree on top of which sits a dove⁵⁵. A ship is situated beside them. In both cases, the bird symbolizes resurrection and eternal life is paradise. In addition to the Holy Spirit and paradise, the dove is also associated with the pure and pious souls of Christians in Christian art⁵⁶.

Symbolism of a pious soul may also be identified on the Belgrade sarcophagus in the form of the *putto* riding the dolphin (**Fig. 7**). Representations of antique *putto* are rare in Jonah cycles. Few sarcophagi survive that display winged *putti* holding a *tabula ansata* with an inscription but are not directly involved with the narrative⁵⁷. The dolphin was common in sepulchral settings and its meaning derived from Greco-Roman symbolism⁵⁸. The soul was associated with a small *putto* in late Roman art⁵⁹. Often placed on dolphins, together they symbolized an ocean of blessed souls or as carriers of the soul⁶⁰. It was believed that dolphins saved drowning people by taking them to the shore⁶¹ and they became emblems of salvation for men drowning in the "wild seas of our material world". It was also believed that dolphins took the souls of the dead to the Blessed isles⁶². Some scholars have linked images of dolphins to Christ⁶³.

The central and dominating element on the Belgrade sarcophagus is the ship (**Fig. 4**). A ship was an ancient Christian sign for the Church,

⁵³ Djurić 1985, 157.

⁵⁴ Jensen 2000, 158-159.

⁵⁵ Bonner 1950, 312, pl. 19, no 347; Klauser 1961, 140, fig. 6b.

⁵⁶ Djurić 1985, 218.

⁵⁷ Wilpert 1932, Tav. CLXII, 1; CLXVIII, 3, 4.

⁵⁸ Narkiss 1979, 65, n. 21 and 29; Jansen 2000, 47-48, 159.

⁵⁹ Narkiss 1979, 66.

⁶⁰ Turcan 1999, 116.

⁶¹ Myths with dolphins in the role of rescuers are numerous, see Pilipović 2003, 230.

⁶² One of the best known examples of a dolphin functioning as a courier is that of the one which brought Amphitrite to her husband-to-be, Neptune, who placed it among the stars out of gratitude, Cumont 1942, 155, n. 4;

⁶³ Leclercq 1920, 283-296.

which navigates the sea of disbelief and carries souls to safe harbor. In the words of Paulinus of Nola (354-431 CE), “May Christ bring them like vessels laden with his riches into the port of salvation, may he also joyfully place green garlands on these prows that have proved victors over the waves”⁶⁴.

The salvific context of the ship on the Belgrade sarcophagus is made plain by the cross that is formed by the intersection of the two masts. That this is not an coincidence is confirmed by the apologist Justin Martin writing circa 150-160 CE that all things created by God are held together by the form of the cross which is visible in everyday objects, one of which is the masts of a ship: “For the sea is not traversed except that trophy which is called a sail abide safe in the ship”⁶⁵. It is noteworthy that the ship sails in the direction of the gourd plant and the representation of the Good Shepherd.

The iconographic program of the sarcophagus from Belgrade emphasizes both the resurrection of the body and the soul. Its representation of Jonah’s disgorgement confirms the principle of physical resurrection, while the bird, dolphin, and ship refer to the resurrection of the soul. The inner struggle of Jonah, his prayer to God, death, and rebirth can be associated with the sacrament of baptism. For faithful baptism, is a guarantee of resurrection and eternal life. The scene of Jonah on the sarcophagus and its funerary context is associated with an understanding of baptism as a type of death and rebirth⁶⁶. This is further confirmed in the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, a canonical and liturgical compilation originating in fourth century Syria which prescribed a formula for the blessing of the water as follows: “Look down from heaven, and sanctify this water; give it grace and power so that he who is baptized according to the command of thy Christ may be co-crucified with Him and co-buried, and may co-rise unto adoption which is in Him”⁶⁷. In the words of Jensen “Without doubt, espe-

⁶⁴ *Epistola XXIII*, 30 (CSEL 29, p. 187, II. 23-25) as cited in Rahner 1963, 349; On ship as a symbol of a Church see, Stuhlfauth 1941, 111-141; Jensen 2000, 138-140

⁶⁵ Justin Martin, *The First Apology* (55:2-5), see Roberts, Donaldson, vol. 1, 1885, 483.

⁶⁶ Jensen 2000, 173-176.

⁶⁷ *The Constitution of the Holy Apostles*, VII. 43, for translation see, Roberts, Donaldson vol. 7, 1986, 1050.

cially in a funeral context the symbolism of baptism points directly to the expectation of resurrection from death”⁶⁸.

Jonah’s nudity was often compared to similarly unclothed candidates for baptism who would be reborn after immersion in the baptismal font⁶⁹. For textual evidence of the connection between Jonah and baptism one may examine Early Christian prayers, liturgy or catechism and the writings of Early Church fathers⁷⁰. Catechumens likely familiar with naked baptism, which would echo Christ’s being naked in scenes of His baptism. This connection is demonstrated on the sarcophagus from Santa Maria Antiqua, where a scene of Jonah is juxtaposed with that of Baptism of Christ (**Fig. 8**)⁷¹. On the Belgrade sarcophagus, the presence of the *putto* with a dolphin as well as a bird as a potential symbol of the Holy Spirit, underscores the association with the sacrament of baptism. This is further stressed by a comparison with an early fourth century mosaic showing a Jonah cycle in the presbytery of the basilica in Aquileia, which prominently features a sea full of fish and winged *putti* that are fishing from the boats. Figures of fisherman were common allusions to Christ’s fishing for souls⁷². Scholars argue that this image had a catechetical function linked to the function of the space in the basilica⁷³.

The Jonah sarcophagus from Belgrade is a unique Early Christian sarcophagus from the area of the Roman Balkan provinces⁷⁴. The closest finds in the surrounding area with images depicting the cycle of Jonah are from Pannonia in *Sirmium* and *Sopianae*. The Old Testament story of Jonah is shown on the side walls of the tomb discovered in the street Mika Antić in Sremska Mitrovica (*Sirmium*) (**Figs. 9-10**)⁷⁵. A ship with Jonah and sea monster is depicted on the south wall, while on the northern wall, one sees a gourd tree with Jonah reclining underneath. The tomb in *Sopianae* has its east wall painted with a Jonah cycle. In this tripartite composition, Jonah is painted

⁶⁸ Jensen 2000, 88

⁶⁹ de Bruyne 1943, 244-245; Jansen 2000, 173.

⁷⁰ Jensen 2000, 172-175, especially n. 55 and n. 65; Couzin 2013, 204.

⁷¹ Sarcophagus is located in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome. For the reproduction see, Bovini, Brandenburg 1967, 747, fig. 22.

⁷² Grabar 1968, 8.

⁷³ Pelizzari 2010, 38-128.

⁷⁴ Mócsy 1974, 334.

⁷⁵ Popović 2011, 231-234, fig. 13-15; Popović 2014, 147-148, fig. 68 a and b.

being cast into the sea, disgorged by a *ketos*, and finally resting under a pergola⁷⁶.

The story of Jonah is also rendered on a small fragment of a “sigma type” marble *mensa* discovered in *Sirmium* in the area around the city forum (**Fig. 11**)⁷⁷. It shows the sea monster that swallows Jonah. There is another fragment from the same object with the scene of Jonah resting under the gourd tree, which was discovered in 1852 in *Sirmium*, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna⁷⁸. Though it is difficult to discern whether this *mensa* was a sacred or funerary object, a similar artifact discovered in Salona near Spilt in Croatia, now in the Archeological Museum in Zagreb, is a useful comparable⁷⁹. Namely, this sigma type object from *Salona* (Solin) displays scenes from the Jonah story, the disgorging from the *ketos* and him resting under the gourd tree, while the rest of the *mensa* is covered with figures of apostles, evangelists and prophets. In terms of the objects with a representation of the Good Shepherd, the closest Moesian examples are a bronze figure from Smederevo⁸⁰ and a silver ring from *Remesiana* with carved Gospel scenes, including a representation of the Good Shepherd.⁸¹

The Belgrade sarcophagus is unique example of iconography from the Roman provinces in the Balkans. Its sophisticated iconographic decoration with a typical early Christian salvific theme bears witness to the existence of an organized church in *Singidunum* in the fourth century. At that time, *Singidunum* was already a growing episcopal seat and witnessing the formation of cults of early martyrs. The pagan elements in the decoration of the sarcophagus testify to the coexistence of two religions and the sarcophagus can therefore be regarded as a product of a transitional period. The owner of this elaborate object, however, still remains a mystery. Since the archaeological records from the nineteenth century do not exist, we can only speculate of its former resident. Likely, it was destined for a high church dignitary or wealthy patron, or was reused as a resting place for an

⁷⁶ Hudák, Nagy 2005, 38, fig. 2; Heidl 2005, 42-46.

⁷⁷ Milošević 2001, 133-134; Jeremić 2004, 71-72, fig. 23; Popović 2014, 147-148 cat. 80.

⁷⁸ Kitzinger 1960, 22; Popović 2014, 147-148, fig. 69.

⁷⁹ Brenk 309, fig. 382a.

⁸⁰ *Konst. Vel.*, cat. 86.

⁸¹ *Konst. Vel.*, cat. 71.

early Christian martyr. In either case, it represents a valuable witness to the life and faith of Early Christian community in *Singidunum*.

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**Fig. 1****Fig. 2**



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

**Fig. 5****Fig. 6**



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

**Fig. 9****Fig. 10**



Fig. 11

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