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WREATH - ITS USE AND MEANING IN ANCIENT VISUAL CULTURE¹

Summary

Wreath is one of frequently used motives, both in funerary and decorative arts. This paper addresses these two aspects. Primarily, the paper deals with the visual identity of this motif in painting, mosaic, sculpture and relief, its functions and meaning as a utilitarian object, but also in the wider symbolic context, as an instrument of sovereign ideology. The basic idea is in the interpretation of pagan and Christian symbolism of the wreath, and inheritance of the role it had during different periods of time, where its meaning has been retained up to the present. The question that paper opens is the transformation of wreath to the crown, namely the extent to which the crown from it was developed.

Keywords. *Wreath, crown, laurel, palm, plants, symbolism, visual art, pagan, Christian triumph.*

Introduction

As an object, wreath had a clear function and symbolism. Its presence was usually reflected on the meaning and role of the person who was wearing it, or the space where it was present. Because of these implications, it was transferred to art readily, where its functions and meaning were kept. By crowning the Roman emperors heads and marking them victors, as a motif, wreath became dominant factor in glorification, triumph and apotheosis. Like many other pagan motives, with similar connotations it was conveyed into the Christian art, where it participated in new theological reality, together with the prominent symbolic arrangements.

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The use and meaning of the wreath

Wreath implies the band, created by braided flowers, leaves, branches or any other material. It symbolizes the victory, loyalty, dedication, memory and the transition to eternal life (Hunter, 2000, 4). The circular shape² signifies eternity,³ completeness, perfection, wholeness, but also the time and sky (Gerbran, Ševalije, 2004, 444).

Besides the wreaths in circular shape, this term includes garlands and festoons. Thus, tombs, curule seats,⁴ triumphal chariots and building interiors, were decorated with *Corona longa* (Rich, 1875, 362). The tradition of making wreaths can be traced back to ancient Persians, who used to make circular diadems in order to express the idea of the kingdom, the importance and honor.⁵ In wide range of applications, wreaths have been used during the wedding ceremonies, festivals, dances, rituals and funerals.⁶ When the crown was on the head of rulers of Greece and Rome, it demonstrated the sovereignty, but also it signified profession of a person, rank, status and his achievements (Sebesta, Bonfante, 2001, 82). It had a mediating role, by helping a bearer to get closer to a specific deity. Plants, which were braided in wreaths, could have been dedicated to various deities: oak to Zeus, laurel to Apollo, herbs to Ceres, vine to Dionysus, and myrtle to Venus. Athletes, poets, soldiers, and winners were awarded with wreaths, which were also symbols of art,⁷ literature and education in Roman society. Priests bore them on the head or around the neck, in order to signify important dates and celebrate religious festivals (Hunter, 2000, 4). During these events wreaths had a dual role, besides decorative, they spreaded spirituous scents, depending on which plants they were made of.⁸ They also had another effects: they could cool, be the cause of stupor or acting analgesic⁹ and trill.¹⁰ Also, they had been used during the deceased sending off (to attract divine protection) or to tribute honor to the departed. In paganism winter solstice was celebrated in December, which marked the

2 The circle is a universal symbol of unity, wholeness, spirit, various goddesses and female power. It represents the Mother Earth (Mother Nature) and the sacred space (Gerbran, Ševalije, 2004, 444-448).

3 Same as Ouroboros (Uroborus) (depicting serpent eating its own tail) an ancient symbol of eternity (Eire, 2010, 29).

4 *Lat. Sella curulis* is a seat with curved legs forming a wide X, and during the ancient Roman period it represented the symbol of power (Rich, 1875, 363).

5 Persians wore diadems made of cloth and decorated with precious stones.

6 *Corona Funerbris* and *Sepulcharis* were the crowns (wreaths) which were borne at funerals, and hearse, graves and decedents, were decorated with them (Pliny, XXI, VII-VII); These wreaths were made of parsley in ancient Greece (Plutarch, 1920, 325).

7 Ovid, Roman poet, was often depicted with the laurel wreath.

8 Myrtle has alleviated the smell of wine.

9 Wreath of roses could relieve a headache.

10 Acacia or marjoram, exciting acts on the nerves.

path of death and rebirth in anticipation of spring. Then, wreaths were made of ever green leafy branches.

The best-known wreaths recorded in the history and visual arts have been made of: laurel, palm, myrtle, oak, olive, ivy and vines. Wreaths of various flowers and other plants or fruits were also used.

Laurel wreath

One of the most popular types of wreaths is a laurel wreath. Romans took it over from the Greek tradition. It is a symbol of peace, eternity, victory, unrequited love¹¹ and the supreme ruler. The highest medal was the *Corona Triumphalis*, wreath or crown made of laurel leaves, which was granted by the Senate, to victors coming back from wars (Pliny, XV, III-V).

As an integral part of the composition of triumph, the laurel was element always presented in the hands of the goddess Victoria. The goddess was often shown at the moment of crowning gods or emperors. This kind of glorification and triumph became a model, not only for the triumphal arrivals from the war campaigns, but also for the deification of Roman emperors, where the laurel wreath together with a few generally accepted symbols, implied the idea of terrestrial and celestial power (Charlesworth, 1943, 1-10).

Once adopted, as the main pivot of triumph, laurel wreath meaning was transmitted to different areas of human activity, art, and even death – where the most important thing was the victory over it.

In the ancient sources laurel was mentioned as the outstanding attribute of dignity. There were two types of laurel: from the Delphi and the Cyprus. Laurel from the Delphi was green with a larger reddish-green fruitage.¹² Generals who had triumphed in Rome were crowned with this wreath. It was also stated that the laurel from the Cyprus was consisted of short black wrinkled leaves that curved upward. Sources also mention very leafy Pelasgian laurel belonging to the daphnoides¹³ of which the crown of Alexander the Great was made (Sebesta, Bonfante 2001, 82).

According to Pliny, laurel brought peace, apropos it was the sign of cessation of hostilities. For Romans it was specially referred to celebrate the victory. Also, Pliny tells us that laurel bush planted by man protects the house from thunder stroke. During a storm, Emperor Tiberius was wearing a laurel wreath on his head, in order to get a protection from lightning and thunder (Pliny, XV, XXXIX). It is well known depiction of this emperor, from the monument in the Kelfkenbos (Museum in Nijmegen, Holand), which celebrates Emperor's victo-

11 Myth about Apolo and Daphne (Grevs, 1991, 73).

12 Pliny wrote about different sorts of laurel (Pliny, XV, XXXIX; Pliny, XV, XL).

13 The laurel dedicated to Daphne was a big tree, with larg leaves and berries (Pliny, XV, XXXIX); one who was crowned with such wreath was named daphnephoros.

ries in the Germanic wars, where he is represented with the laurel wreath on his head, in the moment when goddess Victory is crowning him (Panhuysen, 2002, 6, 11-17, 32-38).

Laurel wreath represented the medium through which divine power was transferred (Gerbran, Ševalije, 2004, 511).¹⁴ Laurel grew inside of the Delphi shrine,¹⁵ supplying clergy with leaves that they were chewing before prophecy. Its branches were used for cleaning sacred places. Laurel branches were held by the priests, as well as prayers, and also by people in the parades. Branches were also used to decorate houses and portals. Laurel wreaths were granted to the winners of Pythian Games,¹⁶ physicians¹⁷ and poets.¹⁸ In the scene from the wall painting - "Chiron teaching the young Achilles" (Herculaneum 75 A.D.) centaur Chiron is wearing a laurel wreath on his head.¹⁹ On the pilaster with tetrarchs, in the medalion of the military labarum, there is a laurel wreath which signifies the imperial dignity (Живић, 2010, 114-115, fig. 70).

Agrippina who crowns her son Nero with the laurel wreath is represented in the sculpture from I century AD kept in Aphrodisias Museum in Turkey. This is probably a variation on the theme of Victoria who crowns emperor with the laurel wreath, since it is an essential part of this composition, as it was mentioned in the most cases, even when the wreath is not preserved, it is assumed by most of the authors (Спасић Ђурић, 2011, 277-286). Coins with the emperor crowned with laurel wreath emerged in Rome. From the Octavian August coins to the first Christian emperor - Constantine the Great coins, even in the time of religiously defined Christianity of emperor Justinian, Victoria with a laurel wreath (not always in the scene of crowning the ruler, but as the bearer of the same symbolical tradition), remained a hallmark of the reverse side of coins, and emperor's portrait crowned with a wreath. (Charlesworth, 1943, 1-10; Wright, 1987, 493-507; Saylor Rodgers, 1989, 233-246; Goodenough, 1946, 144). Christian image took over this form, already from the time of Constantine, where Victoria was transformed into an angel, who in the late Middle Ages continued a role of a mediator in the coronation of the God-given power of rulers (Pohlsander, 1969, 597). So, it is not surprising, the solution of Gračanica painters, who depicted two angels, in the scene where they descend from heaven, bearing the most important royal in-

14 In Latin, Laurel is also a male name (Pliny, XV, XL).

15 Laurel is an antioxidant, analgesic, antiepileptic, anti-inflammatory, anticonvulsant, and cosmetic. Laurel oil was extensively used in medicine, as well as against head lice (heads of falcons were rubbed with it). Usage of the laurel leaf in cooking was very tight as it is today.

16 Pythian Games dates back to VI century B.C.

17 Physicians gained laurel wreaths, because it was thought that the laurel is the most salutary plant.

18 *Laureate* is a poet crowned with glory, and bearer of the laurel wreath.

19 Fresco from Naples National Archaeological Museum (Zajder, 1976, 72).

signia-crown to the heads of Serbian medieval Queen Simonida and King Milutin (Тодић, 1988, 171).

Christian art easily and quickly adopted the motive, meaning and symbolism of the laurel wreath, by inheriting and applying experiences of pagan past. In the first place, there is a contrast between crown of thorns, with which the winner over the death – Christ was crowned,²⁰ and the laurel wreath of triumphal Roman emperors. The striking difference, which was supposed to indicate the origin of the triumph character, i.e. profane triumph (the imperial power, authority, victory in war) and sacred triumph (Christ's victory over death and resurrection, through which the fate of mankind was saved). Later, when the Christian religion and philosophy became an instrument of power, Constantine's vision before the battle on the Milvil Bridge appeared, in which he saw initials of the Christ name (Chi Rho), within laurel wreath (Lactantius, 19, 27, 1-2; Eusebius, 1961, 28-29; Eusebius, 1989, 33). As he was told in vision - with that sign he would win, it is possible that the laurel wreath regained symbolic strength and power, which it once had, but now in a different, Christianized context. It was easy to transfer that form of winning the battle to the entire victory of Christianity, and from there to the victory of the resurrection. Hence it is not surprising that from that period on, in the funerary art, the Christ monogram, began to appear in the place where once, in paganism, a portrait of the deceased stood, with all the attributes of triumph and glorification, such as garlands,²¹ floral and zoomorphic motives. Thus believer was identified with the greatest symbol of Christianity, which, itself contained all the necessary eschatological symbolism of salvation. In Christian art laurel wreath represents the triumph of the deceased over death and resurrection. Christ's monogram in the laurel wreath is painted in the tomb G-5517 from Viminacium.²² Sarcophagus from the same period, from the catacombs of Domitilla presents a passionate scene, where in the central panel the *Crux Invicta* is located, surrounded by the victorious laurel wreath. On the one hand, it symbolizes Christ's death (the cross), and on the other resurrection (laurel wreath). The two panels on the left side are presenting Roman soldiers who crowned Christ, not with crown of thorns, but with a laurel wreath. In the early Byzantine art, Christ's monogram in the laurel wreath will continue to appear in the decoration of the sarcophagi, both in the East and the West, and also as one of the favorite motifs

20 With these acts of wearing purple rope, crowning with crown of thorns and by putting of bulrush in Christ's hand, in gospels mockery of Roman soldiers to the Christ as Judea's emperor was stressed (Mathew XVII, 28, 29; Mark XV, 17-20; John XIX, 2, 3).

21 Garlands were made of threaded leaves, flower petals, whole flowers, branches or fruits, and were often decorated with ribbons and bows. They were a favorite motive of ancient funerary art, where they could signify saintity, honor and life after death. Painted over the dead connotes his victory over death (Рогић, Анђелковић, 2012, 98).

22 The "Christian tomb" dated to IV century AD, Kostolac, Serbia (Кораć, 2007, 34). Similar wreath is represented in the Sofia tombs 1 and 9 (Миятевь, 1925, 6, 7, 93).

of Ravenna's art (Bustacchini, 1988, 88-89). A wreath in the form of two linked branches is presented on the floor mosaic of the early Christian basilica in Ilisos.²³

In the light of imperial ideology, Napoleon wore a wreath on his head, as Roman emperors did. In modern art, laurel wreath symbolizes peace and victory. Monuments dedicated to the victims of the World War I are marked with the laurel wreath.

In the folk tradition laurel is considered as apotropaic plant that made witches running away and had anti-demonic power. People use its leaves and berries as medicine (Чајкановић, 1994, 144).

Palm wreath

Palm motif relates to rise and victory,²⁴ both athletic and spiritual. Theseus had performed winning dance over the Minotaur, with palm branches in his hands (Thompson, Griswold, 1963, 26).

In Christianity, the motif of palm tree is a symbol of triumph over death, and it is often a symbol of martyrdom. Palms are signs of a happy ending in heaven and belonging to the kingdom of heaven (Мирковић, 1966, 272; Revelation VII, 9). In this context, palm trees are set up within the processions of male and female martyrs, in San Apollinare Nuovo (Ravenna), who, offer wreaths made of silver leaves in their hands, decorated with precious stones, to the Christ. This could be analogue to sacrifice of victorious wreaths, formerly to pagan gods, while male and female saints, offer their martyrs' crowns to the Christ.²⁵ In iconography Christ is often depicted with the palm branch. The well known scene is *Christ's entry into Jerusalem*, where people greet Redeemer with palm branches.²⁶ Palm tree is an attribute of St. Christopher (saint from the III century AD). Painted motives of palm wreaths can be recorded in two late Roman tombs from the territory of Serbia. One is the "Tomb with an anchor", and the other is an early Christian tomb "Tomb with the figures of Peter and Paul" from the Jagodin mala in Niš.²⁷ Palm wreath within the Christ monogram reminds us of Christ's martyr death, which should be the ideal for every Christian (Ракоција, 2009, 91). Examples of such wreaths are numerous in late antiquity.

23 Basilica was built on the island Ilisos (Greece). Mosaic is now in Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, and it dates back to V century.

24 Traditionally, besides palm leaves, fern was also a symbol of victory, but also of the humility and sincerity.

25 It is possible that there is a connection with triumphales coronae, with which Emperors of Byzantium and Rome were honored, when they celebrated their triumphs. (Мирковић, 1966, 262-264).

26 Only John's Gospel explicitly states about branches of palm trees, in the context of greeting the King of Israel, who is coming in the name of the Lord (John XII, 13).

27 Both dated from IV century AD (Ракоција, 2009, 85-105; Мирковић, 1956, 53-71).

Myrtle wreath

Myrtle²⁸ symbolizes immortality and it was dedicated to Venus in ancient times.²⁹ Wreaths made of myrtle's branches were worn by Greek athletes. Fragrant myrtle wreaths were used at weddings because of their association to Aphrodite-Venus. Also, the crown of initiation in the Eleusinian mysteries was made of the myrtle (Papadopoulos *et. al*, 2007, 142).

During the celebration of victory over the Sabines, consul Publius Postumius Tubertus wore on his head a wreath of myrtle - *Venus Victrix* (Pliny, XV, XXXVII). These wreaths were worn by generals in public celebrations. Lucius Piso testified that Papirius Maso (general who defeated the Corsicans at Alban Hills) had the habit to wear a myrtle wreath, while he was watching games in the circus (Pliny, XV, XXXVII). Another type of a myrtle wreath was *Corona Ovalis*. It was less important, and it was awarded to commanders who deserved ovations, for victories obtained in easier way (without bloodshed) (Aul. Gell. V, 6). Myrtle was used for the anointment of kings. Among other gifts,³⁰ three Kings (Biblical Magi) were carrying the myrtle for Christ's birth, with the purpose of celebrating the birth of the new King of the Jews (Matthew II, 11). This could mean that they recognized the newborn King of Jews in the same way as the barbarian princes accepted the supremacy of the Roman emperor, when in their worship they were offering the gifts typical for their countries (Мирковић, 1966, 263). The resin of this plant (myrrh) mixed with wine was given to crucified Christ to drink, and along with aloe, according to Jewish custom, Christ's dead body was anointed before burial (Стошић, 2006, 169-170).

Oaken wreath

Oak symbolizes strength, longevity, attracts lightning and it was dedicated to Zeus. Through its leaves,³¹ "holy" oak gave the prophecies in the oracle of Zeus at Dodona. Different types of oak grow in Greece: the deciduous so-called real oak (*Quercus robur*) evergreen oak (*Quercus ilex*) and holy oak (*Quercus coccif-*

28 Myrtle - *Myrtus communis* is a typical Mediterranean bush, which leaves and fruits are in use. It is used as an antiseptic, stomachic, aromatic, as a spice or in cosmetics. According to the Bible and the Talmud it was used during various ceremonies and for healing. Myrtle is an evergreen plant, with white flowers and small blue fruits.

29 Venus was the goddess of female beauty, love, awakens of nature, spring. A legend says that the goddess Venus (Greek Aphrodite) was born from the sea foam and by riding the waves she reached the shore, where she covered her nudity with myrtle.

30 Other two gifts were gold and incense (Стошић, 2006, 169).

31 Oak leaf could have been the decoration of the pendant, which was worn on chain around neck, and than it had the function of an amulet for the one wearing it (Димитров, Чичикова, 1986, 60, fig. 45). A corn was considered as a symbol of fertility and it was often produced as a gold pendant.

era). *Corona Civica* was the crown made of three different types of oak (Pliny, XVI, III). On several statues emperor Claudius was depicted with the crown with alternating oak leaves and acorns. (Smith, 1978, 109). According to honor and importance it was in second place, and it was received by soldiers who saved the other Roman citizens (Pliny, XVI, IV-VI). This was a special type of medal that was awarded at the time of the Roman Republic and early Empire. *Corona Etrusca* imitated oak leaves, but it was made of gold, richly adorned with jewels and ribbons (Pliny, XXI, IV; Pliny XXXIII, IV). This crown was also called *Corona Lemniscata* (Rich, 1875, 363).

In the Serbian folk tradition oak is highly respected. In old rites, many antique trees were considered for the deities and had their cult. Respect of an oak still exists today. In some parts of Serbia oak-inscription is well known (in Serbian *hrast - zapis*), and in Serbian Orthodox custom, through ancient respect of the young God, only oak is taken as Christmas tree (*badnjak*) in Serbian Orthodox custom (Чајкановић, 1994, 206-207, 209).

Olive wreath

As an award,³² the winners of the Olympic Games³³ were given with *kokinos* (Greek- κότινος), wreath made of sacred olive branches that grew behind the temple of Zeus.³⁴ Olympic champions later held their wreaths on the walls of their houses. Wreath marked a new life by hanging on olive tree after the birth of a male child. Olive wreath was on the head of the Phidias's statue of Olympian Zeus (Rice, Stambaugh, 2009, 21). The olive³⁵ is a symbol of longevity and union with God. Goddess Athena donated an olive tree to the Athenians, which they later grew and got food and oil from it (Thompson, Griswold, 1963, 22).

Unlike those wreaths made of entire branch, *Corona Tonsa* or *Tonsilis* was made only of olive or laurel leaves (Rich, 1875, 363). *Corona Oleagina* was the honorable wreath, made of olive leaves, which was awarded to officers through whose arms a triumph was achieved (Rich, 1875, 361). In Agrippa Odeon the pillar that holds the tritons is decorated with a motif of olive wood with a snake which wraps the tree in the lower part (II century BC). This is the Hellenistic version of the ancient oriental motif - serpent of wisdom on the tree of life (Thompson, Griswold, 1963, 22).

³² As an award they got an amphora with olive oil.

³³ Olympic Games date back to 776 BC. The Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II prohibited them because of their pagan character (the Olympics Games were a religious festival dedicated to the gods of Mount Olympus).

³⁴ Olympic Games were dedicated to Zeus, and reserved only for men. According to legend, this olive was planted by Hercules.

³⁵ Olive (Latin-Olea) is an evergreen plant with blue edible fruit. Hippocrates wrote about its medicinal properties.

Corona Natalitia was a wreath which was hung on the doors of the porticoes in Athens and Roman houses, where the child was born. When a male child was born in Athens, a wreath was made of olive, and if a female child was born, it was made of wool. In Rome, they were made of laurel, ivy and parsley (Rich, 1875, 362).

The first plant that has sprung up after the “Great Flood” was the olive tree, and according to legend, the Holy Cross was made of olive and cedar tree (Moses 8, 11; Gerbran, Ševalije, 2004, 550).

Ivy and grapevine wreaths

Ivy was associated with death and immortality, yet because of its evergreen color symbolized longevity and eternal life (Ferguson, 1961, 33). Grapevine and ivy leaves were worn at the festival of Dionysus. Dionysus himself (Roman Bacchus), usually was crowned with an ivy wreath, as well as his entire escort (Silenus, satyrs, maenads, bacchantes), or anyone who was associated with him. At the head of “Dionysus from Sirmium” an ivy wreath was painted, and at the “Mosaic with Dionysus” from the *Felix Romuliana* he is depicted in vine, with ivy wreath and blue halo (Popović, 2008, 28; Срејовић *et al.*, 1983, 75). According to legend, he wore a wreath to relieve headaches. As a boy, Bacchus with an ivy wreath on his head was represented at the mosaic “Tiger Rider” (House of the Faun, at Pompeii, 80 BC) (Zajder, 1976, 22). On the wall painting from Pompeii (50-60 AD), which represents a triumphal procession, Ariadne and Dionysus have ivy wreaths on their heads, just like “Floating Maenad” (Pompeii, 54-68. AD) has.³⁶ At the fresco of wedding preparation or “Aldobrandini wedding”, (Rome, Vatican City, around 20 BC) among others, the goddess of love is depicted wearing a wreath of green leaves, as well as the groom, but now of vines and grapes (Zajder, 1976, 29). Hercules is depicted with a grapevine wreath on his head.³⁷

After Herod’s order that every first-born son had to be killed, Roman soldiers put ivy branch to each house that they visited as a mark. Self-sown ivy grew on Christ’s house, so He was saved (Чајкановић, 1994, 49-50).

In folk beliefs and rites ivy has a strong apotropaic power, and it protects the children. It is used in love divinization, when girls make wreaths of it, sleep with it and then see their beloved one in a dream. In Serbian custom, at St. George’s day, girls make wreaths of ivy, with which they ornament wedding procession (Чајкановић, 1994, 49).

The crown of vine leaves was dedicated to Bacchus and it was considered as a symbol of maturity and decay. Tacitus stated that when a Roman knight saw

³⁶ Fresco is now exhibited in Naples National Archaeological Museum (Zajder, 1976, 45, 47).

³⁷ Fresco is now exhibited in Naples National Archaeological Museum (Zajder, 1976, 64).

the emperor Claudius with such a crown on his head, he predicted that the emperor would not survive the autumn (Rich, 1875, 361).

Since the grapevine belongs to the deciduous plants, with its rebirth associated to awakening of new life, and is connected with the resurrection, therefore, it is often represented on sepulchral monuments,³⁸ but also it was a common motive in art of pagan and Christian tombs.³⁹ The best known usage of this symbol is in the Dionysian cult. The vineyard is a protected God's place, of which God-the winegrower Himself takes care of, and where Christ represents the vine (John, XV, 1; Ferguson, 1961, 39, 33).

One of the Serbian folk customs was that the vines were planted on the graves, which could probably be related to the ancient symbolism of the decline, and resurrection. Also, the people considered it as the holy shrubs, because it was associated with the holy blood of Christ through the Eucharist ceremony, so all those who thought that they were obsessed by demons found shelter in a vineyard (Чажкановић, 1994, 56).

Wreaths of other herbs and fruits

Pliny mentions a crown of parsley leaves for the winners of Isthmian Games,⁴⁰ then a crown of pine (*Pinea Corona*) and the crown of peach for the winner in the non –

specific games (Pliny, XV, IX, XII).

Corona Obsidionalis was the honorable crown for the military achievements of generals who broke the siege. It was made of grass, weeds or wild flowers and it is also named *Corona Graminea* (Pliny, XXII, IV, VII). *Corona Nuptialis* was the bridal wreath, made of flowers which were picked by the bride herself (otherwise it would have meaning of disease) (Rich 1875, 362). The Romans made it of the verbena⁴¹ and this wreath was worn under the veil (*flammeum*).

Ammianus Marcellinus named the wreath, which was worn by the person who made the sacrifice, as *Corona Sacerdotalis*. It was worn by priests and their ministers. It is not certain what it was made of, but most probably it was an olive or gold wreath. Sometimes it was made of corn ears. This crown was called by wheat - *Corona Spicea*, and it was known as Ceres's crown, one of the oldest

38 It is typical decoration of tombstones from the Danube basin between 1st and 4th century. During the 3rd and 4th century this motive becomes more stylized and geometrical (Миловановић, 2001, 110; Kondić, 1965, 167-169).

39 Vine motive is painted in tombs of Viminacium: G-5464, G-5517, G-2624, G-160, than in "Tomb with an anchor" and in "Tomb with St. Peter and Paul" in Niš, as well as in the tombs of Beška, Čalma, Pécs and Sofia (4, 6 and 7) (Рогич, Анђелковић, 2012, 102).

40 Isthmian Games were named after the Isthmus of Corinth, where they were held. Isthmian Games were held both the year before and the year after the Olympic Games.

41 *Verbena officinalis* (*Verbenaceae* family) is one-year plant.

of the Romans'. It also appeared on the medal as a reminder of the civil war between Antony and Brutus (Rich, 1875, 362).

Corona convivialis was the wreath that was used on festive parties among the Greeks, and it originated from bonding woolen band around the head worn in order to mitigate the effects of intoxication. They were made of various flowers: violets, roses and myrtle branches, ivy, holly,⁴² and parsley (Rich, 1875, 362). It was not allowed to Romans to wear these wreaths in public, unlike the Greeks (Rich, 1875, 362). *Corona pactilis* was made of flowers, shrubs, grass, ivy, wool, or any other flexible material (Rich, 1875, 363).

Corona subtilis was the wreath which has been used by Salii (priests) in their festivals. In the beginning it was made of any kind of flowers which were planted together, but after, only rose with selected leaves was used (Pliny, XXI, VIII). On the mosaics from Casale (Piazza Armerina, Sicily, IV century AD) athletes in swimsuits were depicted.⁴³ One of them has a palm branch in her hand and crown of roses on her head.

Painted Satyr in the "Triumphal procession of Dionysus and Ariadne" on his head has a crown of spruce branches (Zajder, 1976, 45). *Sub corona vendere* was a wreath of flowers which was worn by slaves or prisoners (Dumesnil, 1809, 164).

Conclusion

Etymologically speaking, the Latin word *corōna* (Greek *κορώνη*) means a wreath and a crown. Pliny used this term for plant arrangements which were granted to the various achievements and merits.⁴⁴ Later, the term crown was associated with the wreaths made of precious metals which were often decorated with precious stones.⁴⁵ Terms wreath and crown were associated in antiquity, but later wreaths made of precious metals became the royal crowns.

Wreaths and garlands were worn at weddings, and as motives they were used as a decoration of building interiors and exteriors, as well as in funerary architecture (Hunter, 2000, 4). Greeks and Romans decorated statues of Gods with wreaths made of herbs which were dedicated to them.

42 Latin *Phillyrea latifolia* is the Mediterranean plant, species is related to an olive, and it grows by the sea and coastal. It grows up to one meter, with a small bright green leaves and small fruits.

43 It was not allowed to women to participate or not even to watch Olympic Games.

44 Crowns and wreaths for military achievements and merits were: *castrensis*, *civica*, *muralis*, *obsidionalis*, *valaris-rostata* i *triumphalis*. *Corona Navalis* ili *Rostrata* (it is not certain if these mark the same crown) were granted for naval victories (Dumesnil, 1809, 164).

45 In the song of gratitude to God for His benefactions and winnings of gifted Emperor, a wreath of precious stones was mentioned: "Because you met him with the graceful blessings, you put on his head a wreath of precious stones" (David Psalms 21).

The main attribute of the goddess Victoria was the wreath. When it was worn on heads of the Roman emperors, it meant the triumph of imperial rank, which was eventually transformed to developed forms of crowns worn on the heads of medieval kings and queens.

There are numerous examples of usage, function and meaning of the wreath throughout history, whether it has been represented as a mimic of its natural look, or in precious material. Such examples can be traced back to prehistoric times,⁴⁶ through famous Faiyum portraits,⁴⁷ to the ancient funerary art.⁴⁸

Within the imperial cult, the wreath on the head always signifies someone from the imperial family, but in the official art, when it stands next to another sign or motive, it often has the function of emphasizing the meaning of it.⁴⁹

In Christianity, wreath represents the resurrection of Christ and thus eternal life, apropos the victory of life over death. With this meaning, it has been a popular motif in art, especially in funerary context.⁵⁰

46 On Etruscan grave painting from the “Tomb of the Leopards” (about 500 BC, Tarquinia) revelers with wreaths on their heads were depicted. On fresco “Peelus recognizes Jason” (around 10 AD) Jason with his daughters were depicted decorated with “sacrificial” wreaths. Ceres was represented with wreath of grain on her head.

47 Heads of Faiym portraits are often crowned with laurel wreaths but there are also examples of olive wreath crowns. (fragment of a male portrait (125-150 AD) is crowned with an olive wreath (Δοξιάδη, 1995, 181, fig. 120); portrait of Irini belongs to the period of Caligula rule and the beginning of Claudius, there is a typical laurel wreath on the head painted with green and ocher color (Δοξιάδη, 1995, 173, fig. 111). Sometimes decedents were depicted as members of a certain cult which was marked with its symbol in the middle of the wreath. (priest of the Serapis cult, had a star of seven rays in his hair, which represents the emblem of the sun, and is the iconographic symbol of god Serapis himself (Δοξιάδη, 1995, 49, fig. 31); young man with short hair and crown which indicated that he was the member of Greek cultural elite, not sportsman (Δοξιάδη, 1995, 76, fig. 67); unusual double motive in the center of the wreath was connected with the cult of Isis; Portrait of a man, done in natural size iconographically resembles to god Chorus, who was represented with the laurel wreath (Δοξιάδη, 1995, 104-105, fig 74).

48 They were painted as grave goods in the tomb of Kerch (III century AD) (Rostovtzeff, 1919, 153).

49 On the olive lamp from the Belgrade City Museum (Inventory number AA/2930, second half of the IV century) male portrait with the long beard and laurel wreath is depicted. These two characteristics were helpful during the attribution of this portrait to the pagan emperor and philosopher Julian the Apostate (Крунић, 2011, 361). On the bowl from the Belgrade National Museum, (Inventory number 146 and 147) there is the inscription LICINI AVGVSTE SEMPER VINCAS, which is surrounded with the wreath (probably the laurel one) with the votive inscription SIC X SIC XX on it (Срејовић, 1993, 307). As a signatory of the Edict of Toleration of Christianity from the 311, Licinius took the wreath motif as a sign of celebration of his decennialia. It was accepted as a form of triumph by Constantine in the wreath of Christ’s monogram, which is known throughout the Christian universe. Laurel wreath is the crown of the inscription *Felix Romuliana*, where the engraved ivy leaves are arranged around the letters (Чанак-Медић, Стојковић-Павелка, 2010, Plan XVI, 67-70).

50 Such a connotation has the wreath wich surrounds martyr inscription from the hall of three-conchal basilica in Tebesa - IV century AD, Theveste (Février, 1994, Pl. CCXLI). On seven tombstones from Viminacium, there is the wreath depicted (Milovanović, 2001, 109). There are ex-

Although Christian art and symbolism of the IV century had been already developed, secular art continued its development in parallel, where all well-known motives were involved, with all the reminiscences of ancient art.⁵¹ The wreath was not always made of flowers, but it also has its own meaning and significance if different things were made in that form. One of the finest Roman breads was made in the form of a wreath and it was called the *panis corona* (SHA, XL-VIII, 287). This kind of bread was depicted on the plate of the servant from the tomb G-2624 in Viminacium (Korać, 2007, 99). In this context, this bread is part of the complex composition of an offering (procession), typical for pagan painted tombs from III and IV century, where it symbolized a spiritual food for the deceased. Also the bread in the shape of the wreath (*corona, rotola*) became an Eucharistic symbol in early Byzantine art (Мирковић, 1963, 62).

As it was mentioned above, Christian art was pictorially supplied from the pagan sources, but with the acceptance of Old Testament legacy, which states: “At that time Lord will be a glorious crown over the armies, and a honorable wreath to the rest of His people” (Isaiah 28, 5).

It is interesting that in Serbian language the term wedding (“venčanje”, the origin of the word is ‘venac’ which is wreath in English) has been named by the use of crown-wreaths with which the bride and groom are crowned during the holy ceremony.⁵² Originally these marital wreaths were made of flowers, leaves and vines, according to the wreaths used in the traditional Roman ceremonies, and later, when developed forms of royal crown were in use, making the metal marital wreaths began. Various floral motives has always symbolized the future happiness and blessing of married couple (Стошић, 2006, 38-39).

The cult of trees and plants is one of few ancient cults, with which the church has reconciled, and that is popular even today. The cult of plant has commonly been associated with women, who used to pick medicinal or magical plants for the holidays (St. George’s day, St. John’s day, Holy Spirit day) and made wreaths from them.⁵³

amples where the wreath is combined with other vegetative motives. Wreaths are also visible on certain tombstones, within semicircular friezes. Within these, smaller wreath, rosette or star can be set (rosette represented the decedent crowned with wreath, while semicircular archivolt represented the border between two worlds (Миловановић, 2001, 113). Star represents the astral symbol, apropos universe - place where souls go after the death (Миловановић, 2001, 114).

51 About this testifies the mosaics of Roman villa in Casale, (Sicily, Piazza Armerina, IV century). These luxury polychrome floor mosaics can be compared, by style, with mosaics of North Africa. There can be extracted the medallion from the bedroom from this villa, the so called “erotic scene” where embraced man and woman are surrounded with the wreath. Also, the same wreaths are visible on the mosaic of the vestibule, which is surrounded with animal heads (Pace, 1955, Figs. 12, 13). These wreaths are rich with green leaves and decorated with golden strips. On the heads of “Muses” from Sirmium, there are painted green wreaths (Popović, 2008, 24).

52 Here we are speaking about Serbian Orthodox wedding rite.

53 Again, here we are speaking of Serbian folk rites (Чажкановић, 1994, 169-182, 243, 337).

All these folk practices and rites of today are a reminder, which in an archetypal sense of collective consciousness, indicates how important the cult of herbs and a circular, cyclical form of the wreath in ancient past was. Centuries-long, continuous tradition of using wreaths, as well as its later transposition in the more developed forms, as crowns, not only that mean and symbolize the same thing today, but are an essential part of our religious and practical life.

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**WREATH - ITS USE AND MEANING
IN ANCIENT VISUAL CULTURE**

Rezime

Kružni aranžman od cveća i lišća naziva se vencem. Venac je najčešće bio nošen na glavi, a bio je predstavljan i u umetnosti: u arhitektonskoj ili slikanoj dekoraciji, u skulpturi, na novcu ili upotrebnim predmetima.

Prvobitno, venci su bili pravljani od svežeg bilja. Vremenom su dobijali različite ukrase, a kasnije su često bili pravljani i od drugih materijala. Kada su bili od zimzelenog lišća ukazivali su na večnost i trijumf, a korišćeni su u sportskim i cirkuskim igrama. Pored darivanja simboličkog pobedničkog venca, pobeđnicima Olimpijskih, Pitijskih i Istamijskih igara su ukazivane velike časti i nagrade, poput doživotnog izdržavanja, dok su filozofi bili nagrađivani samo palminim grančicama i vencima.

U kontekstu pobeđe, venac je ovenčavao i glave rimskih imperatora, koje je često nagrađivala sama boginja Viktorija, u likovnom obrazcu koji će kasnije postati osnova krunisanja u okviru vladarskih ikonografija.

Stekavši značajnu simboličku ulogu, već svojom primenom u svakodnevnom životu antičkog čoveka, venac je postao i jedan od omiljenih motiva zagrobne umetnosti, gde je obezbeđivao trijumf nad smrću. Bilo da kruniše vojnika ili običnog čoveka, učestvujući u funkciji antičke heroizacije ili u životu hrišćanskog vernika, on predstavlja pobeđonosni znak izabranih, nagrađenim vencem slave. Tako je postao i neizostavan element Hristovog monograma, koji u palminom ili lovorovom vencu, za vernike predstavlja vrhunac eshatološke ideje o pobeđi nad smrću i vaskrsenjem.

Tokom svog daljeg razvoja, venci su pravljani od plemenitih metala, ukrašavani dragim kamenjem, te određene vrste kruna, vode direktno poreklo iz forme venca, tako i dalje podsećajući moćne vladare srednjeg veka da su svoju zemaljsku vlast primili od Boga koji je na nebu.

Da se u podsvesti ljudi neke ideje i koncepti ne menjaju vekovima, a nasleđe ostaje duboko utkano u ono od čega smo svi arhetipski sazdani, pokazuje i mnoštvo narodnih običaja sačuvanih do danas, u kojima je venac taj koji označava ljubavnu sreću, zdravlje, zaštitu i uvek pobedu.

Ključne reči: Venac, kruna, lovor, palme, biljke, simbolika, vizuelna umetnost, paganski, Kristijan trijumf