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## A PORTRAIT OIL LAMP FROM *PONTES* – POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS AND MEANINGS WITHIN EARLY BYZANTINE VISUAL CULTURE\*

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*Abstract.* – The subject of this paper is a fragmented oil-lamp, discovered at *Pontes* (east Serbia) dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, whose handle ending is shaped as a woman's head. The question posed in this paper is whether the image of this woman could be identified as a portrait of some particular person or if it is just as a pictorial sign with some complicated symbolic meaning.

The suggested identification alludes to the image of some of the empresses from the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

*Key words.* – Oil lamp, image, portrait, early Byzantine, empress.

The archaeological site of *Pontes* is situated on the right bank of the Danube, a few kilometres downstream from the modern town of Kladovo (Map 1). It was excavated in several campaigns, from 1979 to 1988.<sup>1</sup> The excavations revealed the existence of a fortification, rectangular in shape, with rounded corners and inverted towers, which was built to protect the bridge across the Danube. The building of the bridge took place simultaneously with the building of the *castrum*, and it is estimated to have begun in the period between the years 103 and 105.

After the province of Dacia was lost, the *castrum* was no longer in use as a fortification. A settlement consisting of primitive houses of simple construction came into being. It is ascribed to the *limitani* or the *ripareses*. The most recent phase of the site, phase V, was defined through a huge number of pits. It is dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

During the excavation of the *Pontes castrum*, 65 oil-lamps have been discovered.<sup>3</sup> Most of them chronologically belong to well-known types of Roman lamps, but eight lamps belong to the early Christian period. Unlike the Roman lamps, the early Christian ones have almost no parallels in Pannonia or in the western parts of the Roman Empire. Therefore, it can be concluded that they were produced from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, in the eastern parts of the Empire, in the provinces *Moesia Prima*, *Dacia Ripensis* and *Moesia Secunda*.<sup>4</sup>

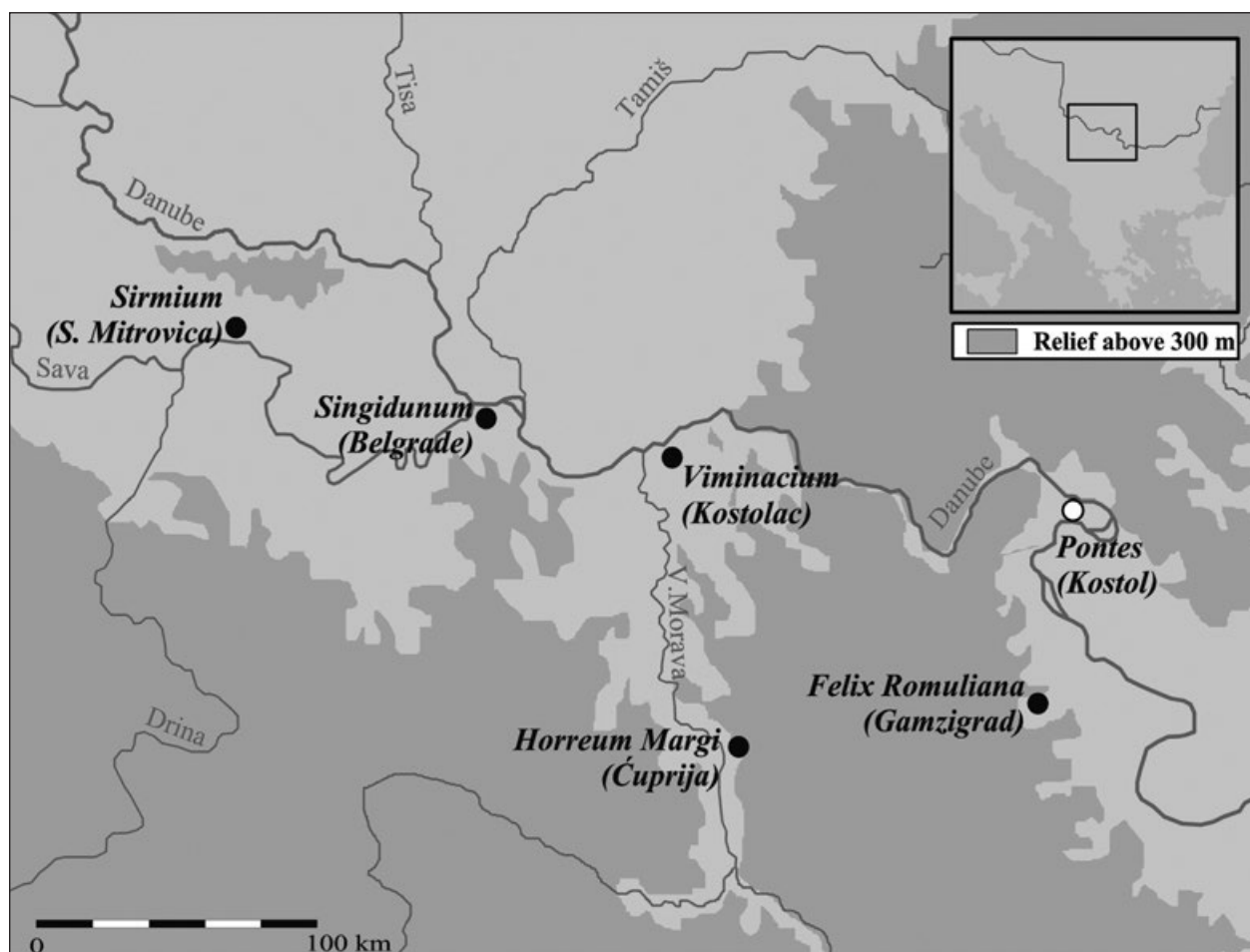
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<sup>1</sup> Garašanin, Vasić, Marjanović-Vujović 1984, 25–85; Garašanin, Vasić 1987, 71–116.

<sup>2</sup> Garašanin, Vasić, Marjanović-Vujović 1984, 25, 27–28.

<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned lamps were prepared for publishing by S. Petković.

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Map 1. The position of Pontes and other important Roman sites in Serbia (map by V. Ilić)

Карта 1. Положај Понџеса и осталих значајних римских налазишта у Србији (мапу направио В. Илић)

The subject of this paper is a fragmented oil-lamp (C-501), dating from the Early Byzantine period, discovered in 1986 in square L/13, in pit 343. It was made of fired clay in a mould. It is made from poor materials and is of a reddish-yellow colour. It has a pear-shaped body, a heart-shaped disc and a broad canal and a beak. Its handle is shaped like a woman's head, with her hair combed to the back of the head in a bun. The features of the face are rough and schematic although some details, like her ear-rings, are depicted (Fig. 1). The shoulder is decorated with ray-shaped plastic lines.

The lamp was ascribed to the C. Iconomu's type XXXIII.<sup>5</sup> The ornamentation is similar to the Iconomu's type XXXII. It differs from the type XXXII in the shape of the handle, which is big, band-shaped or in the shape of a cross, a human head or an animal's head. According to the analogies given by Iconomu, and to

the parallels from the sites of Mokranjske stene<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 4) and Gamzigrad (*Felix Romuliana*)<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 5), it can be dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> From an earlier period, similar expressions of human portraits can be seen on a lock from Ravna (Fig. 3), dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Iconomu, 1967 (Dobrogea), 28–29; Tudor 1968, 470–474, Fig. 147/5 (Sucidava); Кузманов, 1992, 44, 123; No. 325 (Bulgaria); Hayes, 1992, 83, 435–436 (Constantinopolis); Bailey, 1996, 398–399, Q3225–Q3228 (Romania); Залеская, 2006, 173–174 (Odessos – Варна); Šrehar 2007, 91, T. XV/353 (Најдуčka vodenica).

<sup>5</sup> Iconomu 1967, 28–29.

<sup>6</sup> Sretenović 1984, 221–225, Sl. 216/8.

<sup>7</sup> Јанковић 1983, 132, 134, кат. 175.

<sup>8</sup> Iconomu 1967, 28–29, Fig. 182.

<sup>9</sup> Петровић, Јовановић 1997, кат. 20, 77.

### IDEALISED PORTRAIT OF LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY BYZANTIUM

At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, apart from the analogies on lamps, a typical pattern for depicting human faces can be seen in the art of that period, when schematic and spiritual portrait pictures come into being. An idealised picture, emphasizing big thoughtful eyes as a reflection of spirituality, suppresses the naturalistic depiction of portraits. Starting with the so-called Romula's portrait on the capital from Felix Romuliana<sup>10</sup>, overly schematic portraits on gemmas and cameos of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>11</sup> the lock-lid from Ravna<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 3), even a steelyard weight with a picture of an empress from Belgrade's National Museum<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 2), women are always depicted in a similar manner. A striking change, compared to the method of antique portraiture, can be noticed on cameos of the late Antique – early Byzantine period, whereby portraits are usually shown *en face*.<sup>14</sup> Also, it is important to mention that an analogous image of a woman was used as decoration on some other utilitarian objects. Heads of women, rendered in a similar manner,<sup>15</sup> are encountered on two patera handles from Caričin Grad (*Iustiniana Prima*),<sup>16</sup> and it is possible that the same decoration was used for a patera handle from the same site, but this did not remain preserved.<sup>17</sup> With its appearance and features, the female face from the oil-lamp hardly reveals any portrait characteristics, although it fits well into the expression of modelling female portraits listed above. Owing to the schematism and simplification, it

is difficult to estimate her age. On the woman's face a small mouth can easily be seen, as well as a straight nose, big emotional eyes and hair styled with a parting in the middle, and falling down to her ears (Fig. 1). Such hair-styles are typical of the portrait busts of the Theodosian dynasty.<sup>18</sup> On the portrait, ear-rings in the shape of pearls are also visible, although there are no other imperial insignia, such as a diadem or a wreath, which would undoubtedly indicate that one is dealing with the portrait of an empress. However, it is of great importance that, due to their high price, only women of substantial wealth and high social status could afford, or were permitted, to wear pearls.<sup>19</sup> This culminated in the 5<sup>th</sup> century when the Byzantine emperor Leo (457–474) reserved pearls and emeralds only for members of the imperial family.<sup>20</sup> Thus, pearls became part of the empresses' regalia and here is maybe the only motif which is directly connected with the image of an empress. On the other hand, it is possible that here the same problem occurred as on cameos, where it is very difficult to distinguish an empress from a woman of high social standing who is following the fashion of the time, as determined by the empresses.<sup>21</sup>

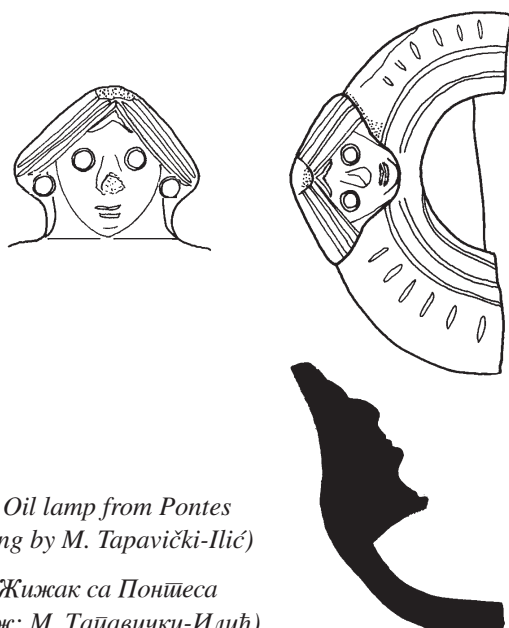


Fig. 1. Oil lamp from *Pontes* (drawing by M. Tapavički-Ilić)

Сл. 1. Жијак са Понџеса (цртеж: М. Тапавички-Илић)

<sup>10</sup> Срејовић 1983, 88–89, кат. 35; Живић 2010, 110–111;

<sup>11</sup> Sreјović 1987, 242, Cat. 239; Valeva 2009, 67–76; Кузмановић Нововић 2009, 77–86; Поповић 2009, 55–66; Поповић 1992, кат. 1,2.

<sup>12</sup> Петровић, Јовановић 1997, кат. 20, 77.

<sup>13</sup> Татић-Ђурић 1962, 115–126, ТАБ I.

<sup>14</sup> On an oval-shaped cameo made of black opal, a bust of a woman is depicted *en face* in relief. The woman depicted has a heart-shaped face, with an upturned chin, small mouth, round cheeks with the area of the eyes exaggerated. Her eyes are voluminously modelled, without eyeballs but with short eye-brows. Her hair is parted in the middle and depicted using deep incisions. It falls down to her shoulders, where big curls are formed. The lower part of the bust ends in a bow. Around her neck, a large broad necklace is depicted in relief. The necklace worn by the depicted woman, consisting of several parts, is encountered on female portraits from the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Weitzmann 1977, 344–345, No. 327) which, combined with its general stylistic characteristic, indicate the dating of the cameo. Поповић 1992, 403.

<sup>15</sup> Faces are dominated by large, accentuated eyes, a straight nose and small lips, surrounded with hair at the level of the chin.

<sup>16</sup> Here, the authors of this paper would like to thank Dr. Vujadin Ivanišević, who suggested these analogies.

<sup>17</sup> Bjelajac 1990, 172–173, pl. XVI/18.

<sup>18</sup> Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1968, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Kunst 2005, 138–139.

<sup>20</sup> *Codex Iust.* XI, XII (XI).

<sup>21</sup> Поповић 2009, 55–66; Поповић 1992, кат. 1,2.



Fig. 2. Steelyard weight with a picture of an Byzantine empress, from the Belgrade National Museum (Documentation of the National Museum in Belgrade, photo by V. Ilić)

Fig. 3. Padlock with human face, from Ravna (after P. Petrović, S. Jovanović 1997, 77, cat. 20)

Сл. 2. Теџа за мерење са представом византијске царице из Народної музеја у Београду (документација Народної музеја у Београду, фотографија: В. Илић)

Сл. 3. Каљанац са људским лицем из Равне (према: Петровић, Јовановић 1997, 77, кат. бр. 20)



Fig. 4. Oil lamp from Mokranjske Stene (photo: technical documentation of the Krajine Museum in Negotin)

Fig. 5. Oil lamp from Gamzigrad – Felix Romuliana (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, photo by N. Borić)

Сл. 4. Жижак са налазишта Мокрањске Стене (фото: техничка документација Музеја Крајине у Негошину)

Сл. 5. Жижак са Гамзиграда – Felix Romuliana (документација Археолошког института, фотографија: Н. Борић)

Human face masks often appear on early Roman oil-lamps, shown either as comic or tragic, but in either case represented with massive lips whose corners are turned upwards or downwards.<sup>22</sup> This is not in accordance with the serious and tranquil face on the oil-lamp from Pontes, although the ornament of the lock-lid from Ravna is described as a human mask (Fig. 3).<sup>23</sup>

### VIEW OF THE DEPICTED WOMAN THROUGH THE PRISM OF SOCIAL CONTEXT

Disregarding the typology and quality of the oil-lamp itself, the image depicted should be observed through the prism of the early Byzantine period and the iconological method. In the first place, one should recognise the pattern of the image shown, i.e. determine it as a symbolic character or a specific portrait, either a private portrait of an unknown person or public portrait of an empress.

In order to recognise the image presented, it is necessary not only to find parallels among portraits presented on oil-lamps, but also among similar iconographic patterns in other artistic media.

Although, according to archaeologists, there are only a few early Byzantine oil-lamps known with either female or male private portraits,<sup>24</sup> portraits are known in other artistic media. Such images indicate the high status of the person depicted, actually a person who is, in her manner and fashion, very close in appearance to that of an empress. Besides the similar accent on large eyes which, apart from the straight nose and small mouth, mostly dominate the image, the shape of the hair-style is also quite similar. The hair, modelled in such a manner that it falls down to the ears, from where it is gathered backwards and tied into a bun, is seen on the fresco from the Viminacium "Pagan tomb". Here, on the deceased's head, a fine painted net is added, which cannot be expected in the modelling of an oil-lamp, on which lines are mostly reduced to a minimum. The deceased from this tomb also wears ear-rings, but not of pearls.<sup>25</sup> Still, her necklace consists of pearls, also seen on other female images of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Similar features of a small mouth, a straight nose and accentuated eyes can also be found on a woman depicted, together with her family, on a medallion at the bottom of a vessel with a ring-foot and an inscription *vivas in deo*.<sup>26</sup> From the 5<sup>th</sup> century, similarly modelled *en face* images appear as cameo decorations.<sup>27</sup>

During late Antiquity, and most certainly during the early Byzantine time, there is only a small number of analogies with depictions of ordinary women,<sup>28</sup> shown not only on oil-lamps, but also on other artistic media. There is the impression that the majority of images are connected to the imperial ideology and cult. Because of this, attention should be paid to the iconological and iconographical method when investigating a portrait concerned with an imperial image, which, in the case of the oil-lamp from Pontes, could be the portrait of an early Byzantine empress. Since the oil-lamp is dated into the 6<sup>th</sup> century, models should be sought within certain chronological frames.

### IMPERIAL PORTRAIT AS A POSSIBLE OIL-LAMP DECORATION

Very few imperial portraits, either male or female, are known on oil-lamps.<sup>29</sup> On an oil-lamp from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the emperor Julian the Apostate is depicted.<sup>30</sup> In accordance with the chronological frame and the authentic image of a man, wearing a long beard and crowned with a laurel wreath, it is easier to identify the person depicted. From the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>22</sup> Крунић 2011, 364–365.

<sup>23</sup> Петровић, Јовановић 1997, кат. 20, 77.

<sup>24</sup> Oil-lamps with portraits or images of common people are rare. Such isolated examples are encountered from Gaul to Africa, and are called "pseudo-plastic" lamps by several authors. Крунић 2011, 361; Goethert – Polaschek 1985, 243, motive M. 150, M. 151; Bailey 1988, Fig. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Корац 2007, 69–142.

<sup>26</sup> Срејовић 1993, 326, cat. 131.

<sup>27</sup> Поповић 1992, 403.

<sup>28</sup> Even when there are no insignia which would point to a royal status, experts mostly relate unidentified female depictions to ladies of imperial status.

<sup>29</sup> Images of historical persons can rarely be found on oil-lamps. Only two such lamps from the Roman period are known. On one of the lamps, classified according to the Loeschcke's typology as type 4, an image of the emperor Hadrian can be seen, while another, unidentified image of a woman is encountered on one of the lamps of this type 8. Крунић 2011, 360–361; Bailey 1980, 44, Fig. 47, Q 1073; Menezel 1969, 325; Sapelli 1979, 224; Bailey 1988: Fig. 54, Q 2060; Hübinger 1993, no. 123, Taf. 15/124. Portraits can mostly be encountered on the so-called African lamps from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. They bear female or male portraits, mostly in profile, but sometimes also facing forward. Bailey 1988: fig. 54, Q 1805, 1837, 1752, 1803, 1804, 2225; Larese 1983, 188.

<sup>30</sup> Крунић 2011, кат. 474, 315.

there is also an oil-lamp<sup>31</sup> on which there is a composition of a cross between a man and a woman. These two figures, most likely because of the cross between them, were identified as St. Helen and St. Constantine.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, in late Byzantine art, in a purely artistic sense, this composition has its parallels, especially on coins. The halos on the heads of the imperial couple, as well as the stylised decoration of the imperial stema on “Helen’s” head, have their origins in the art of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Such decoration is a major characteristic of Ariadne’s images,<sup>33</sup> Euphemia’s bust,<sup>34</sup> Theodora’s depiction in the church of San Vitale<sup>35</sup> and Sophia’s image on coins,<sup>36</sup> which also confirms the time frame of the image, owing to imperial images preserved from later periods. On them, one can notice that certain historical persons are not depicted in the fashion of their own time, but in the fashion of the time in which their images were produced by the artists. It is also known that the empresses of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries were depicted together with a cross in the composition, along with the emperor.<sup>37</sup> The two figures on the oil-lamp are also dressed in imperial costumes, with decoration visible on the lower parts of the dress. Knowing that every-day utensils were often used as imperial propaganda, another possibility for identifying the persons depicted would be that the iconographic pattern was transferred from coins onto the oil-lamp disc. If we accept the suggested identification of the image, this would mean that in the period of the 6<sup>th</sup> century it was not unusual for a portrait of an emperor/empress to decorate an object like an oil-lamp. It is therefore possible to search for iconographic analogies in other artistic media.

### IMAGE OF AN EMPRESS IN THE ART OF THE 6<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

One of the most often represented empresses in visual art was Ariadne, the wife of the emperors Zeno and Anastasius. She made a major break with the past and introduced a new poetic of image depiction. Her portraits are known in ivory consular diptyches, coins and sculpture.<sup>38</sup> This empress seems to have been a real virtuoso of propaganda and marketing. Ariadne was on the throne of the Eastern Roman Empire from 474 to 515. The image of the empress on the steelyard weight from the Belgrade National Museum is ascribed to the empress Ariadne (Fig. 2).<sup>39</sup> Although this was a time when similarity to the real model did not represent the real quality of the image, some general characteristics

and authentic features were incorporated into the schematic picture of spirituality. By observing the known images of the empress Ariadne (consular diptyches and two busts from The Louvre and The Lateran Museum),<sup>40</sup> one instantly notices a similarity in features when compared to the woman depicted on the oil-lamp from Pontes (Fig. 1). One striking difference is the crown, which on official portraits represents a clear imperial insignia. If one ignores this difference, several portrait characteristics are present and are similar to the image depicted on the oil-lamp. In both cases, the accent is on the large, emotional eyes. Also, in both cases this should be considered a general feature of the style and manner of the period we are referring to, and had been so ever since the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Her nose is long and broad at its lower end, her mouth is narrow and clenched, which is typical for both of the portraits. Although the main characteristics of Ariadne’s portraits are spirituality and schematism, the similarity of the images is noticeable. Ariadne’s portraits bear the characteristics of style from the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, which in her case is more sophisticated, making it possible to read common artistic poetics as individual features.<sup>41</sup> Such images of an empress served as a reminder of the imperial presence.

Empress Euphemia, as a consort of Emperor Justin I, ruled from 518 to 523/524. She was not particularly involved in state politics and, therefore, there are no images of her. Aside from the bust from Milan, the head from Balajnac is also considered to be Euphemia,<sup>42</sup> although in more recent studies it has been ascribed to Ariadne. This is most likely because Euphemia hardly

<sup>31</sup> The oil-lamp was discovered during the excavation of the foundations of the building for the Patriarchy of the Serbian Orthodox Church (СПЦ).

<sup>32</sup> Бирташевић 1955, 43–46; Кузмановић Нововић 2009, 77–86.

<sup>33</sup> Angelova 2004, 1–15.

<sup>34</sup> Srejić 1987, 248, Cat. 255.

<sup>35</sup> Стричевић, 1959, 67–76.

<sup>36</sup> Грбић 1939, 109–110; Кондић, Поповић 1977, 226.

<sup>37</sup> Spain 1977, 285.

<sup>38</sup> Angelova 2004, 1–15.

<sup>39</sup> Srejić 1987, 248, Cat. 254; Тагић-Ђурић 1962, 115–126.

<sup>40</sup> McClanan 2002, 65–92, Fig. 3.6, 3.7.

<sup>41</sup> Breckenridge 1979, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Srejić 1987, 248, Cat. 255; Срејовић, Симовић, 1959, 77–86.

<sup>43</sup> McClanan 2002, 87–88.

existed in historical notes and there are no images of her preserved.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most famous Byzantine empresses was Theodora (527–548), the wife of Emperor Justinian. Theodora's influence on religious matters mostly went through unofficial channels, while the enormous love of Justinian made her, according to some sources, the dominant political and state partner, so much so that she was often described as a co-ruler.<sup>44</sup> Despite her political power, which she surely had, only two portraits can, with any certainty, be ascribed to her. One of them is on a wedding ring,<sup>45</sup> while the other, more famous one, is on the mosaic composition of the San Vitale church.<sup>46</sup> Although this disproportion of power and image is less possible, the judgement of time should also be considered, in which the public comprehension of this empress depended a lot on Procopius' "Secret history".<sup>47</sup> When portrait features are compared, one can notice that in the depictions of Theodora's image there is a mannerism of longitudinal forms, a departure from the pure Oriental schematism which dominates the oil-lamp. Theodora was less powerful than her predecessor Ariadne and her heir Sophia, while she owed most of her popularity to Procopius' "Secret history".<sup>48</sup> There are no images of her on coins.

Sophia was the wife of Emperor Justin II and was on the Byzantine throne between 565 and 578. According to sources, she was as powerful as Theodora but, unlike her, she was publically recognised and accepted. Sophia was not only depicted together with Justin II on coins<sup>49</sup> and public monuments, but Justin also named a port, public baths and palaces after her.<sup>50</sup> Since there are no other images preserved, her visual depiction is only known from coins, and it is not possible, therefore, to determine her portrait characteristics in any detail. However, since it is known that she took care of imperial propaganda and, for a while, was also the carrier of the imperial throne, one should consider the possibility of mass production in art. In her piety, she was depicted on the *Crux Vaticana*, in which, in the middle, appears God's lamb and at either end of the arms of the cross appear Sophia and Justin II, both in the position of Orants.<sup>51</sup> Although consular diptyches are mostly ascribed to Ariadne, in recent research there has been an attempt to ascribe the two diptyches (from Florence and Vienna) to Sophia.<sup>52</sup> Although Ariadne played an important role in politics, there is no image of her on the throne since, unlike Sophia, she never possessed the status of co-ruler. Sophia had full responsibility for, and contributed to events within, the Empire and,

therefore, also had the privilege of being depicted on the throne holding one of the most important ruler's insignia – the *globus cruciger*.

## CONCLUSION

In the eyes of the public, the most important attribute of an empress was not her feminine identity, but her imperial identity. The use of the term "portrait" must be used with caution, because it was not a true representation, but one of an idealised type. Similarity to the real model was not important, rather the "appearance of an empress". Contrary to individual portraits, typological portraits were intended for public use and were found across the entire Empire (coins, weights, and lamps). Such an image incorporated presence, especially on items used in every-day life. For steelyard weights, images of an empress were chosen as symbols of "good-balance" and "precise measure". Therefore, it is not unusual to encounter small objects or miniatures (either with male or female imperial images) which incorporated imperial virtue and which also encouraged common people into private worship of the imperial cult.<sup>53</sup> In such methods of presentation of imperial images (like the ones on steelyard weights), one should, therefore, consider not only the image of the woman/empress, but also the symbolic image of the personification of imperial virtue, i.e. its presence.<sup>54</sup> On such items, there was certainly no room for details or individual portrait features. Most certainly, a diadem always represented an empress, whilst jewellery (ear-rings and a necklace) could represent any woman of aristocratic origin along with her fortune or, in the case of pearls from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onward, only an empress. In combination with other attributes, it was possible to identify empresses depicted on steelyard weights, although researchers

<sup>44</sup> Garland 1999, 29–30.

<sup>45</sup> Garland 1999, Pl. 2, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Стричевић 1959, 67–75.

<sup>47</sup> Procopius IX, XVI.

<sup>48</sup> McClanan 2002, 121.

<sup>49</sup> Грбић 1939, 109–110; Кондић, Поповић 1977, 226.

<sup>50</sup> Garland 1999, 47–48.

<sup>51</sup> McClanan 2002, 163–168, Fig. 7.5.

<sup>52</sup> McClanan 2002, 168, Figs. 7.6, 7.7.

<sup>53</sup> Herrin 2000, 9; St. Clair 1996, 147–162.

<sup>54</sup> Herrin 2000, 10.

mostly agree that on such weights, no images of specific empresses were depicted, but that they incorporate the style of an empress, especially visible in the “hybridisation” of this form.<sup>55</sup> Since the symbolic image of an empress meant “good-balance” or “precise measure”, the question arises as to what an imperial portrait would represent on an oil-lamp? After individual preference or within a funerary context, oil-lamps hold different symbolic meanings, among which the most important is that it provides light for happiness.<sup>56</sup> According to the Bible, light represents God’s presence, since He is the one who turns darkness into light.<sup>57</sup> In Christian Byzantine art, it is not impossible that an image of an empress embodied something of this eschatological idea, since imperial ideology was already mostly based on God’s providence. An emperor was God’s regent on Earth and therefore “imperial” religion within Byzantine art was used to glorify the god-given power.<sup>58</sup> It is possible that the image of a woman on a handle of an oil-lamp represents a reflection of the idea of the divine, apropos imperial presence, intended to be visually actualised either by the purchaser or by the workshop in which it was produced. Previously, the iconographical content of oil-lamps had indicated the wide popularity of certain deities and now it was most likely adjusted to help spread the imperial cult.<sup>59</sup>

The image of a woman on the oil-lamp from *Pontes* most likely presents a typical image of an empress,

with a symbolic meaning of the propaganda carrier of the imperial ideology, virtue and the God-given and God-guarded power. It can hardly be identified as a portrait in the full meaning of the word. Still, by just following the similarity principle, the image on the *Pontes* lamp would bear the closest resemblance to the empress Ariadne. In accordance with what is known from the archaeological context and about the political power of the empresses who ruled in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the female portrait on this oil-lamp could represent a portrait with the function of the ideological and imperial propaganda of some of the empresses from the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Observed through the finding conditions and archaeological context, the oil-lamp and its image do not lose any of their importance. Found in a pit, in a settlement of *limitani* or *riparenses*, the common but extremely important border defenders, the image of an empress carries a strong message to this distant part of the Empire. Its former owner, probably just a common armed farmer, was aware of the significance of the imperial family and the strength it incorporated.

In the period from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century simply shaped utensils were produced, and thus minutely rendered representations known from the early Roman era oil-lamps are rare. Therefore, the poor materials and the simple shape of the lamp do not reduce its value as a carrier of the message from the Imperial family.

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<sup>55</sup> McClanan 2002, 37–50, Fig. 2.16.

<sup>56</sup> Крунић 2011, 356.

<sup>57</sup> 2 Samuel 22:29; Psalm 119:105.

<sup>58</sup> Мијовић 1968, 103.

<sup>59</sup> Крунић 2011, 355; Vegas 1966, 68, 84; Bailey 1980, 6–7; Eckardt 2002, 121.



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**Резиме:**

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**ПОРТРЕТНИ ЖИЖАК СА ПОНТЕСА (*PONTES*)  
 – МОГУЋЕ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЈЕ И ЗНАЧЕЊА  
 У ОКВИРУ РАНОВИЗАНТИЈСКЕ ВИЗУЕЛНЕ КУЛТУРЕ**

*Кључне речи.* – жижак, слика, портрет, рановизантијски период, царица.

Портретни жижак је откривен на локалитету Понтес (*Pontes*), на десној обали Дунава, у источној Србији. Од 65 жижака откривених током ископавања, осам примерака припада ранохришћанском периоду. Будући да нема аналогија у Панонији (*Pannonia*), нити у западном делу Римског царства, може се закључити да су такви жишци били израђивани у источном делу Римског царства, у периоду од IV до VI века.

Фрагментовани жижак, израђен од печене земље моделоване у калупу, има крушколико тело, срцолики диск, широк канал за уље и кљун. Дршка је израђена у облику женске главе. Пошто је лампа датована у VI век, у раду су дате неке од паралела везаних за производњу лампи или визуелне уметности уопште током рановизантијског периода. Иако су идеализовани портрети познати у уметности с краја III и током читавог IV и V века, сличан ликовни израз се наставља и у VI веку – кроз доминирајући спиритуални израз у стилу, са акцентом на великим, замишљеним очима.

Због свега овога, тешко је идентификовати жену приказану на лампи. Читава представа је изведена схематично, на лицу се препознају мала уста, раван нос, велике и емотивне очи, а фризура, са раздељком на средини и косом ко-

ја пада до ушију, типична је за жене Теодосијеве династије. На ушима жене налазе се минђуше у виду бисера. С обзиром на то да на портрету нема посебне царске инсигније (дијадеме или венца), као што је уобичајено за царске портрете, ову женску представу је тешко одредити као царицу (јавни портрет) или неку даму високог ранга (приватни портрет) која је у изгледу, држању и фризури могла да прати царичин узор. Пошто постоји свега неколико рановизантијских лампи са представом приватних портрета и пошто је број приватних портрета у визуелним уметностима исто тако смањен током овог периода, стиче се утисак да је већина слика из овог периода у највећој мери, ипак, везана за царску идеологију и култ. Посматрајући визуелна сведочанства о моћи коју су жене имале у раној Византији и знајући да термин „портрет“ не значи увек подражавање, слика са лампе највероватније представља идеализован тип царице, са посебном симболиком царског присуства и врлине. Према Библији, светлост подразумева Божанско присуство, у овом случају, преко портрета који лампу декорише – присуство царице, што је било важно за ширење и поштовање царског култа.