

# The iconography of light. A possible interpretation of the decoration of a three nozzle lamp from Viminacium\*

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*This paper focuses on offering a possible iconographic interpretation of the decoration of a rare three nozzle lamp discovered in the ancient city of Viminacium, on the locality of a necropolis called Pećine, dated to the early fourth century. Among the numerous lamps unearthed at the site of this prominent Roman city, capital of Moesia Superior, this example stands out for its rectangular shape, three nozzles and a decoration of high artistic merit consisting of geometric and floral ornaments. Considering the function and meaning of lamps within the framework of Early Christian teachings, liturgy and burial practices, this imagery can be understood as visualization of concepts related to perceptions of eternity and otherworldly, divine light.*

*Keywords: lamp, necropolis, light, geometric and floral motifs*

The collections of the National Museum in Požarevac (Serbia) include numerous examples of lamps discovered on necropoles of the ancient city of Viminacium, the capital of Moesia Superior in late Roman times. In this area and its wider surroundings, in the period from 1977 to 2002, hundreds of lamps, dating from the first to the seventh century, have been discovered.<sup>1</sup> The ancient city of Viminacium was the capital city of the Roman province Moesia Superior and is situated at the confluence of the Mlava and Danube rivers, in the vicinity of the contemporary town of Požarevac. It was founded in the first century and developed into a very significant political and cultural centre, so as to become, in the fourth century, an important bishopric and urban centre. It is assumed, therefore, that a Christian community was present there rather early in its history.<sup>2</sup> Still, based on existent results of archeological research and with the available

historical sources we are unable to accurately determine the level of existence and expansion of Christianity and Christian churches on this site, but having in mind the importance this city had in Late Antiquity, as well as the fact that it was one of the most prominent bishopric centers, we can assume the existence of a large number of sacral edifices and necropoles.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of Pećine necropolis, which was used for burials of mostly Christian citizens of Viminacium in the period from the second half of the third to the middle of the fifth century, lies, among other things, in the discovery of vast numbers of lamps. Ceramic lamps in general appear in considerably large numbers among the preserved objects of material and visual culture of the Early Christian period. These eulogies had great socio-religious significance and occupied a prominent place in the everyday life of an individual, from houses to churches and necropoles. The lamps from Viminacium speak of burial rites and the development and expansion of Christian religion, and therefore provide evidence of the existence of first Christians on the territory of Moesia Superior.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, moulds from which lamps were cast have been unearthed at Viminacium and this testifies of the existence of local workshops. Thus, ceramic mould-made lamps from this site, possibly also cast there, have enormous potential in our understanding of different social, economical and political events, trade routes, circulation of objects of material and visual culture. In an equal measure they offer insight into the process of structuring of 'new' society and its funeral rituals, beyond the self-evident data of inscriptions and iconographical interpretation and analysis of the motifs they are decorated with.<sup>5</sup> It must also be noted that all broad trends in lamp production from the

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<sup>2</sup> O. Špehar, *Nastanak hrišćanske sakralne topografije urbanih prostora centralnog Balkana: od Milanskog edikta do početka 7. veka*, Belgrade 2012 (unpublished PhD thesis) 87; M. Korać, R. Pavlović, N. Mrdić, *Viminacijum – daljinska detekcija i GIS*, *Arheologija i prirodne nauke* 1 (Beograd 2006) 24; D. Spasić-Đurić, *Tragovi hrišćanstva u Viminacijumu*, *Majdan* 2 (Kostolac 2013) 1–14.

<sup>3</sup> To this day only Lj. Zotović and O. Špehar have done reviews of Christian sacral buildings and necropoles in Viminacium, v. Lj. Zotović, *Rano hrišćanstvo u Viminacijumu kroz izvore i arheološke spomenike*, *Viminacijum* 8/9 (Požarevac 1994) 59–72. Almost identical text was translated and published in 1995, titled *Early christianity in Viminacijum* in journal *The age of tetrarchs*, edited by Dragoslav Srejović, cf. Špehar, *op. cit.*, 87.

<sup>4</sup> Zotović, *op. cit.*, 60; Špehar, *op. cit.*, 87.

<sup>5</sup> K. da Costa, *Shining a light on shifting frontiers: cultural uses of ceramic lamps during late antiquity*, in: *Shifting cultural frontiers in*

time of Augustus to the end of the seventh century are well-known and should be considered in order to gain better and fuller insight into the materiality and symbolic usage of these objects of material and visual culture.

Based on confirmed stratigraphic layers, shape, size and decoration of lamps we are able to determine more closely and accurately the time of their production and use depending on the place where they were found, whether in graves or houses of the city's inhabitants. In other words, revealed in their entirety or in fragments, depending on the place they were found, we can acknowledge the specific social and cultural framework to which they belonged to. By the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century lamps were common and often the only source of light both in private homes and in public buildings and were used for burial or liturgical needs, as street lightings etc. Furthermore, being recovered from a wide range of contexts lamps are forming an essential piece of evidence in economic and social history providing us with the information regarding the trade between different parts of the Roman Empire.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, lamps that are cast from the same type of mould (as is the case with the lamp from Viminacium presented in this paper) are indeed linked in a map of trade and usage patterns.

Lamps were mainly deposited in graves and necropolises, whether as part of a burial ceremony or as votive offerings.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, they were used in sacred edifices because the light that came from the lamps indicated mystical light that is closely related to the liturgy and, therefore, to the presence of God. Namely, fire and light were perceived as symbols, that is, vivid and visible manifestations of the Divine presence. Light that came from the oil-based fuel source emphasizes the spiritual light during prayers, worship and religious ceremonies. Certain lamps that were closely linked (related) to the pilgrimage, as they materialized the memory of saints and/or specific event in salvation oikonomia in church history have been the subject and purpose of worshiper's homage (adoration).<sup>8</sup> Lamps which pilgrims brought home, especially the ones from the Holy Land, had great significance and role in giving protection to the faithful from evil forces but also as sources of divine light.<sup>9</sup>

Lamps made in the fourth century are generally oval in shape, usually decorated on the discus, handle and bottom with different symbols such as simple geometric, floral and, at times, figural motifs. Decoration can also be found on the shoulder belt that follows the shape of the discus and at the top of the beak where the hole for the fuse is situated.<sup>10</sup> Discus on roman lamps is also called



Fig. 1. Three nozzle lamp, necropolis Pećine, Viminacium, fourth century, front side

‘Bildlamp’<sup>11</sup> and it presents a flattish area on the top of the lamp that provided a canvas for a vast array of motifs. Different motifs found their place on discus and can be of pagan source such as mythological scenes, images of eastern gods, gladiator fight scenes, erotic scenes, floral motifs, geometrical ornaments, but also one can find images of apparent Christian symbolism such as the cross,<sup>12</sup> Christogram,<sup>13</sup> fish,<sup>14</sup> vine,<sup>15</sup> and combinations of two or more symbols such as cross in a vine rinceaux<sup>16</sup> or narrative scenes, like the battle between David and Goliath, or images of Christ treading the beasts.<sup>17</sup> All of these motifs were widely recognized, not just in Rome but through the entire Roman Empire, and their concept became known from fresco paintings, stucco or mosaic depictions, architectural or sculpture decoration, glyptic art.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> S. Krunic, *Antičke svetiljke iz muzeja grada Beograda*, Beograd 2011, 33.

<sup>12</sup> D. M. Bailey, *A catalogue of the lamps in the British Museum: Roman Provincial lamps*, 3, London 1988, 30, 196; V. Perko, A. Nestorović, I. Žižek, *Ex oriente lux. Rimskodobna svetica iz oljenke iz Slovenije*, Ptuj 2012, 76; J. Perlzweig, *Lamps of the Roman Period: first to seventh century after Christ*, Princeton 1961, 180–182, T. 40–41; Krunic, *op. cit.*, 380.

<sup>13</sup> Perlzweig, *op. cit.*, 136, T. 24, 178–180, T. 39–40; Bailey, *op. cit.*, 24–30, 192, 194–196; O. Broneer, *Terracotta lamps*, Princeton 1977, 78, T. 34; Perko, Nestorović, Žižek, *op. cit.*, 78; Крунич, *op. cit.*, 380.

<sup>14</sup> Krunic, *loc. cit.*, no. 421; Bailey, *op. cit.*, 88; Perlzweig, *op. cit.*, 130, T. 12, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Perlzweig, *op. cit.*, 131, T. 21; Broneer, *op. cit.*, 67; Krunic, *op. cit.*, 380.

<sup>16</sup> Perlzweig, *op. cit.*, 180, no. 2499, 2501. Combinations of, for example, cross and Agnus Dei can also be found, v. Bailey, *op. cit.*, 30, no. Q 1842, or combination of a cross and stars like on no. Q 3123.

<sup>17</sup> *Age of spirituality: late antique and early Christian art third to seventh century: catalogue of the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. K. Weitzmann, New York 1979, 384–385, 526.

<sup>18</sup> Costa, *op. cit.*, 168.

late antiquity, eds. D. Brakke, D. Deliyannis and E. Watts, Farnham–Burlington 2012, 167.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>7</sup> H. C. Evans, *Byzantium: faith and power (1261–1557)*, New York 2004, 97.

<sup>8</sup> K. Totev, *Thessalonican eulogia found in Bulgaria: lead ampules, enkolpia and icons from the 12th–15th centuries*, Veliko Tŕrnovo 2011, 15. For pilgrimage v. G. Vikan, *Byzantine pilgrimage art*, Washington 1982; R. Ousterhout, *The blessings of pilgrimage*, Urbana 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Totev, *op. cit.*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> The presence of ornaments, inscriptions, images, i.e. firm lamps, which are placed at the bottom of the lamp, indicate the name of the workshop or the artist who made them. It is, therefore, a seal of a certain workshop.



Less commonly, lamps can take forms of different animals, birds, plants etc. and therefore more directly allude to either pagan or Christian worship, like the lamp of a fish that was excavated near the city of Obrenovac in Serbia. Being an apparent Christian soteriological emblem it directly alludes to Christ and to each Christian individually.<sup>19</sup> Also, in the area of Singidunum and its surrounding vast numbers of lamps were excavated whose shape and decoration indicate the presence of Christianity. Moreover, due to iconographical analysis of symbols one can more precisely determine the date and typology of lamps, and in some cases workshops in which they were produced.<sup>20</sup> Inscriptions are also very common on pagan and Christian lamps. Usually, those are the names of workshops or artists who made them, placed at the bottom of the lamp, or in some cases we can find prayers like 'The light of Christ shines upon us', 'Blessing of the Mother of God' or 'The light of Christ shines upon us graciously' at the discus or other parts of the lamp.<sup>21</sup> The image and the text that is written on the lamps point out to an even greater significance of these sacral objects, as K. Totev calls them.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that the shape and decoration of the lamps were adjusted according to their location within the interior, whether it's a private home, necropolis or a church.

The lamp from the National Museum in Požarevac, catalogue no. 2031, was found at the locality of Pećine, at the depth of 1.55m. It was made of red pottery, painted in red, and measures 8.8cm in length. It is rectangular in cross-section, has three nozzles and a handle in the form of a leaf.<sup>23</sup> The base is flat and closely follows the shape of the recipient. The base is decorated with vine rinceaux and grapes placed in the rectangular field. The discus of the lamp has one hole in which oil was poured. It is framed with doubled rectangular field (that is, with two concentric rectangles) decorated with vine rinceaux and grapes, resembling the base. The shoulder strap that forms a square is decorated on its outer side with volutes, rosettes and palmettos. The handle is decorated with two vertical ribs which are split down the slanted lines leaving the impression of palms, leaves or even menorah. It resembles the lamp that was found on today's Student's Park in Belgrade and is now kept in the Belgrade City Museum under the number AA/5109.<sup>24</sup>

This type of lamp, with three nozzles, can be found throughout the Mediterranean and, as most scholars agree, probably originates from North African workshop, in Fayum, Egypt, and from where it was widely exported. It can have up to nine nozzles and was most common in its production in the second and first century BC. The production of this type of lamp lasted until the fourth century AD.<sup>25</sup> In Viminacium, besides a vast number of these types of lamps, a mould from the necropolis 'Više global-

ja' was found.<sup>26</sup> The presences of a mould, as opposed to wheel-made ones, point out to the developed local workshop. Therefore lamps can be traced not just to a particular region of manufacture but to a particular mould. Furthermore it reveals all trade routes and the expansion of network between Viminacium and other parts of the Roman Empire as well as the patterns of their usage.<sup>27</sup>

As previously noted, iconography on this lamp probably came and developed through common and well-known motifs in temples, churches, sculpture, floor mosaics, paintings, coins, etc. as part of antique, roman, art and in the art of the early Christians and as such will influence its future artistic and above all symbolic meaning. Namely, iconography on lamps should not be neglected nor treated as mere decoration, especially if lamps were used for religious or burial purposes.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, this paper aims to show one of probably many potential readings of meanings of motifs on the lamp from Viminacium.

Iconographic content found on this lamp is highly developed and can be traced through history on almost every object of worship, carrying special meaning depending on the time it was made and culture it belonged to.<sup>29</sup> We can almost for certain claim that these motifs developed on floor mosaics since they were main carriers and heirs of Hellenistic and Roman as well as Christian art.<sup>30</sup>

Since discus claimed to provide the best surface for the message the object had to carry it displayed motifs and ornaments that were most common and most recognizable in the art and culture of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, a comprehensive study of different motifs, their development and meaning within the Roman Empire during the time of extreme religious syncretism of the third and fourth century has not been done so far. Besides D. Bailey's catalogue of the British Museum's collection and J. W. Hayes' smaller publication on lamps in the Royal Ontario Museum other scholar's works are rather chronologically, geographically, historically and artistically limited.<sup>31</sup> On the discus of the lamp from Viminacium we can see images of vine rinceaux and grapes which are common in pagan and Christian works of art, or objects. Namely, floral motifs found their place in sacral edifices, church floors, furnishings and objects of everyday use. It is interesting to note that almost certainly these motifs

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 189. We must also emphasize that the existence of mould indicates a certain local workshop in which these lamps were produced. Also v. Costa, *op. cit.*, 168.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>29</sup> Individual motifs and images numerous scholars have investigated, and we are going to name just some of them: M. Vegas, *Die römischen lampen von Neuss*, Limesforschungen 7 (Berlin 1966) 63–127, esp. 68, 84; D. M. Bailey, *A catalogue of the lamps in the British Museum: Roman lamps made in Italy*, 2, London 1980, 6–7; H. Eckardt, *Illuminating Roman Britain*, Montagnac 2002, 121; Krunic, *op. cit.*, 355; J. Lund, *Christian lamps: motifs in context*, in: *Late antiquity art in context*, Copenhagen 2001, 199–214.

<sup>30</sup> Costa, *op. cit.*, 177–178; Lund, *op. cit.*, 205.

<sup>31</sup> D. M. Bailey, *A catalogue of the lamps in the British Museum*, 1–4, London 1975–1996; J. W. Hayes, *Ancient lamps in the Royal Ontario Museum I: Greek and Roman clay lamps*, Toronto 1980; Costa, *op. cit.*, 169; A. Karivieri, *The Athenian lamp industry in late antiquity*, Helsinki 1996, 61–62; V. Sussman, *Samaritan cult symbols as illustrated on oil lamps from the Byzantine period*, Israel – People and Land 4 (Tel Aviv 1986/1987) 13–14 (English), 133–146 (Hebrew). Other works are either chronologically or geographically limited.

<sup>19</sup> Krunic, *op. cit.*, 380.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Totev, *op. cit.*, 17; L. Humphries, Y. Piatnitsky, V. Zalesskaya, *Pilgrim treasures from the Hermitage: Byzantium, Jerusalem*, Zwolle 2005, 75–76.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Regarding this type of lamps v. Krunic, *op. cit.*, 188–189.

<sup>24</sup> Krunic, *op. cit.*, 183, catalogue no. 299.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

were ‘problematic’ when they were extracted and survived in the newly formed Christian art and culture, but this time carrying a different meaning. Anti pagan law from the fourth century was explicit in forbidding the use of vine in pagan rituals.<sup>32</sup> But considering that vine had ambivalent connotations and that it was used in both pagan and Christian purposes, the problem was finally solved, as we can see, on floor mosaic of the Christian church Paphos Chrysopolitissa in Cyprus with an inscription ‘I am the true vine, and my Father in the gardener’ (Jn 15:1), so as to separate Christian from pagan worshipers. Therefore, besides being associated with Greek god Dionysus or Roman god Bacchus and with the cult of Libera, goddess of wine and trade, in Christianity vine rinceaux and grapes became standard in presenting Eucharist and the Tree of Life.

Churches are often decorated with a diversity of images of plants and flowers, mainly set on floors, so as to present God’s world.<sup>33</sup> Namely, Early Christian art until the beginning of the eight century and iconoclasm abounds with motifs taken from nature with meticulously highlighted and edited differences between diverse species of plants and animals.<sup>34</sup> Most floral and animal motifs were taken from real life forms and they carry within themselves a profound symbolic meaning of heavenly eternal bliss. Certainly the most commonly found image in all antique and Early Christian floor mosaics is that of a magnificent garden composed of floral motifs like acanthus, vine, lotus, grass, trees, and flowers. Flowers, leaves and stems, either copied from nature or at times invented, can be visualized in many different ways but they always carry the same meaning. They are, as O. Grabar noticed in his book *The Mediation of Ornament*, construed in psychological and visual context and when being used and set on certain object, wall, floor, become mediators between the observer, in this case a worshiper and the work of art. They are arbitrators between perception and understanding of all visual shapes.<sup>35</sup>

The geometric frame, rectangle, which accommodates the vine rinceaux, is very common in ancient and Early Christian art and presents an example of aniconism invented in the East Mediterranean. If geometric patterns

<sup>32</sup> H. Maguire, *Nectar and illusion: nature in Byzantine art and literature*, New York 2012, 24.

<sup>33</sup> If the church symbolically represents the cosmos than the floors represent the earth, the one God created in first six days of creation. It can be seen best on the example of floor mosaic in Herakleia Lynkestis, v. B. Vranešević, *Slika raja na ranohrišćanskim podnim mozaicima na Balkanu: od 4. do 7. veka*, Belgrade 2014 (unpublished PhD thesis), 129–143, esp. 132–136.

<sup>34</sup> The best example illustrates the narthex of the Great basilica in Herakleia Lynkestis, on the territory of present day Republic of Macedonia, dated in the sixth century, with images of the earth surrounded with ocean. R. E. Kolarik, *The Floor Mosaics of Eastern Illyricum. The Northern Regions*, Actes du Xe Congrès International d’Archéologie Chrétienne I, Città del Vaticano 1984, 445–479; *The floor mosaics of Eastern Illyricum*, Hellenika 26 (1980) 173–203; H. Maguire, *Earth and ocean: the terrestrial world in early Byzantine art*, University Park 1987, 36–40; Idem, *Nectar and illusion*, 106–107. Similarly we can find in the basilica Dumetios in Nikopolis, with images of garden portrayed in accordance with biblical allusions of Eden, or paradise, since they are in art as well as in exegesis equated. E. Kitzinger, *Studies on late antique and early Byzantine floor mosaics I. Mosaics at Nikopolis*, DOP 6 (1951) 81–122.

<sup>35</sup> O. Grabar, *The mediation of ornament*, Princeton 1992, 202.

are repeated or are being organized in concentric repetitions, as in our case, it leads us to the conclusion that they start to function as magical agents, in the sense of apotropaic or propitious.<sup>36</sup> What remains as unresolved issue, around which in the Early Christian period, as well as today, debates have evolved is whether these symbols carry magical powers and if so are they related to pagan cults. By reiterating the pattern, is the power of the sign increasing like when worshiper is asked to repeat a prayer in order for it to be fulfilled? Or is it just a question of mere ornament?<sup>37</sup> How can we explain the presence of what was clearly pagan ritual in Christian art and culture? What we must take into consideration is that every nation, whether pagan or Christian, carries a very strong local religious practice which at all times either competed or complemented what was at the time state religion. What archaeologists concluded is that numerous findings show that throughout history of every civilization charms and amulets were widely used. Therefore, in pursuit of a specific meaning, Christian or pagan, we must bear in mind that these symbols were carrying the same or at least similar meaning of protection from mostly evil forces. Besides squares one can find other shapes such as swastikas, crosses, Solomon’s knot, etc. M. Eliade supported this idea adding that every symbol has more than one meaning especially since, as he points out, numerous scholars tried to explain *coincidentia oppositorum*.<sup>38</sup> Complexity of meaning is important in understanding and discussing the nature and function of symbols. Every symbol is multivalent in structure, has multiple meanings and is revealed through cosmos. Therefore, rectangle, being repeated or multiplied and since it is consisted of four sides it carries a clear cosmological meaning.<sup>39</sup> As H. Maguire notices “The endless repetition of the geometrical pattern invoked the concept of continuous protection”.<sup>40</sup> Also, the protection is not reserved solely to the spiritual or religious realm, especially since it was placed in the necropolis. It is for ‘for the entire time’.<sup>41</sup>

A palmetto on the handle of the lamp is also very common motif in this period and place where it was found. Like other motifs it is also common in both pagan and Christian culture. Its shape refers (resembles) to the Tree of Life and therefore is closely linked to the place where the entire human race will find redemption.<sup>42</sup> The Tree of Life is a central motif that linearly and chronologically as well as vertically, in the axis, connects all the

<sup>36</sup> H. Maguire believes that repetition of certain shapes, primarily geometrical, the function of magic is being highlighted, v. H. Maguire, *Magic and geometry in early Christian floor mosaics and textiles*, JÖB 44 (1994) 265–274; *The Glory of Byzantium: art and culture of the Middle Byzantine era, A. D. 843–1261*, eds. H. C. Evans, W. D. Wixom, New York 1997, 290; Vranešević, *op. cit.*, 129–143, esp. 132–136.

<sup>37</sup> Maguire, *Magic and geometry*, 269.

<sup>38</sup> M. Eliade, *Images and symbols: studies in religious symbolism*, Princeton 1991, 39.

<sup>39</sup> Vranešević, *op. cit.*, 137.

<sup>40</sup> Maguire, *Magic and geometry*, 274.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> On the Tree of Life v. B. Baert, *A heritage of Holy Wood: the legend of the true Cross in text and image*, Leiden –Boston 2004; Vranešević, *op. cit.*, 161–178; P. T. Lanfer, *Allusion to and expansion of the Tree of Life and Garden of Eden in Biblical and pseudepigraphal literature*, in: *Early Christian literature and intertextuality*, 1, eds. C. A. Evans, D. Zacharias, London 2009, 96.



cultures and heaven and earth. It has a prominent place in visual arts from the times of ancient Mesopotamian and Persian cultures, from where it was imported and modified in the structure of Judeo-Christian oikoumene. Therefore, the Tree of Life is one of the most common motifs of the antique world since it provides eternal youth and bliss to the believer.<sup>43</sup> Taking all the above mentioned into consideration symbolism of the lamp with funeral function is clear as the palmetto motif ensures to the believer eternal bliss in heaven.

The light that was coming from the lamp, candelabra or a candle, along with the scent of frankincense and oil (mostly olive oil) had a very important role in the construction of the sanctity of space of both Christian and pagan world.<sup>44</sup> We should not neglect the value of candlesticks that has repeatedly being mentioned in the Bible (Gn 25:5; 1 Kgs 7:49; 2 Kgs 4:10; Mt 5:15; Rv 1:13,20). Since the lamp was excavated on the necropolis, and having in mind the fact that it consists of three nozzles, it indicates the importance of the amount of light being necessary for the room with burial site as well as memorial cult.<sup>45</sup> It had special role in funeral and commemorative ceremonies since metaphysical experience of the divine light paved the way to eternal resting place to the deceased.<sup>46</sup> Also, the living would try to experience the union with God through the same light, as is implied in numerous texts and songs that were chanted during burial rituals.<sup>47</sup> The light served as a reminder on the eternal bliss to which we all strive. Therefore lamps had a prominent place in not just illuminating the sacred space but also the place where they were placed was of outmost importance, and that was usually above the grave of the martyr or a saint who carried key role in the cult of reliquaries.<sup>48</sup> Church fathers were among the first to establish a direct link between the illuminated interior of the room, burial chapel or a church where the funeral ceremony took place with heavenly light.<sup>49</sup> The light actually enabled the deceased to find his resting place, the Garden of Eden, „*lux perpetua*“, with ease or in some instances the light served to disperse all demons.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Vranešević, *op. cit.*, 161–178.

<sup>44</sup> We have to note that we are dealing only with artificial sources of light, such as candles, lamps, and candelabras.

<sup>45</sup> About the meaning and the role of light in funeral ceremonies v. D. Kotoula, *With respect to the lavishness of the illumination: the dramaturgy of light in the burial chapel of the monastic founder in Byzantium*, in: *Hierotopy of fire and light in the culture of the Byzantine World*, ed. A. Lidov, Moscow 2013, 185–199. In some monastic chapels the amount of light that came from the lamps dictated the general plan of the decoration of the sacred space. About the meaning of light in roman tombstones v. G. McN. Rushforth, *Funeral lights in Roman sepulchral monuments*, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 5 (1915) 149–164.

<sup>46</sup> D. Abrahamse, *Rituals of death in the Middle Byzantine period*, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 29 (1984) 125–134, esp. 129–133; J. Kyriakides, *Byzantine burial customs: the care of the deceased from death to prothesis*, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 19 (1974) 37–72, esp. 54–57; M. Alexiou, *The ritual lament in Greek tradition*, Cambridge 1974.

<sup>47</sup> Kotoula, *op. cit.*, 199.

<sup>48</sup> M. Xanthopoulou, *Les lampes en bronze à l'époque paléochrétienne*, *Turnhout*, 2010, 65–70; Kotoula, *op. cit.*, 185–186.

<sup>49</sup> G. Galavaris, *Some aspects of symbolic use of lights in the Eastern Church: Candles, lamps and ostrich eggs*, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 4 (1978) 69–78, esp. 71–73.

<sup>50</sup> Rushforth, *op. cit.*, 163.



Fig. 2. Three nozzle lamp, necropolis Pećine, Viminacium, fourth century, bottom side

Certain images of floral, geometrical or figural motifs, that appear in churches, chapels, wall paintings, furniture, coins, find their place on lamps and in our case most directly since the observer is trying to experience metaphysical reality of divine light and finally connects to God through contemplation. Light became structural and essential part in the creation of *hierotopos*,<sup>51</sup> that is a sacred place with non-material and at the same time a very material substance, function and characteristic which takes place in the necropolis or burial chapel.<sup>52</sup>

Looking at Christian context only, whether liturgical or spiritual (since they are mutually dependent and thus represent the whole) light is directly connected to Christ. Images of light and darkness can be traced and read in the first chapters in the Bible (Gn 1:3–4) and Gospel of John (Jn 8:12–32). The same idea permeates the hymns of Eucharist liturgy and in Christmas hymns. In one of the oldest Christian mosaics found under the altar of the old St Peter's Church in Rome, in the Vatican necropolis (mausoleum M) from around 240 AD image of Christ on chariots is depicted. He is represented as *sol invictus*, in the middle of vine rinceaux (as a symbol of immortality i.e. eternal life), on the golden background, in chariots (Helois) as descending from heaven. Behind his head is a cross shaped nimbus with radially arranged seven rays of light. If we analyze only the iconography of this mosaic we can conclude that overtaking roman as well as mithraistic motifs was aimed at spreading Christian faith and at the same time hiding from prosecution, since this new religion had not yet been recognized. Therefore, this type of presentation is common and deliberate. One other example shows us the most direct link between Christ and light, and that is in the narthex of the church St Sophia in Constantinople. Above the royal door is an image of

<sup>51</sup> A. Lidov, *Hierotopy: the creation of sacred spaces in Byzantium and medieval Russia*, Moscow, 2006; Kotoula, *op. cit.*, 199.

<sup>52</sup> Kotoula, *op. cit.*, 199.

Christ with inscription 'I am the light of the world' (Jn 1:9). The world was created and will end in light.

Considering all the above mentioned we can see profound symbolism of lamps. Namely, in the first four centuries of Christianity, a major socio-political significance that eulogies, such as reliquaries, lamps and ampoules, had on spiritual as well as everyday life of a believer, expanded. To the people in the first centuries of Christianity a lamp was not simply an object that provided light but rather one which represented a symbol of life, because of its use in both liturgical and funeral rituals

indicated the presence of God (Ex 2:20–21). Along with its decoration, whose symbolism is highly significant to this purpose, the burning of incense and chanting created a sacred space and as such was considered a key element in providing eternal life for the deceased. This lamp from Viminacium, and many others excavated from the same necropolis, is decorated with motifs which belong to a large repertoire of imagery with strong references to eternal and the life ever after, i.e. to the Second Coming and the eschatological realm.

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## Иконографија светлости. Могуће тумачење декорације лампе са три кљуна из Виминацијума

Бранка Вранешевић

Аутор се бави могућим тумачењем декорације светиљке са три кљуна из раног IV века, пронађене на некрополи Пећине античког града Виминацијума. Лампа, која се данас чува у Народном музеју у Пожаревцу, истиче се по свом правоугаоном облику, три кљуна и декорацији која се састоји од геометријских и флоралних елемената. С обзиром на функцију и значење лампи у оквиру ранохришћанског учења, литургије и чина сахрањивања, њена декорација може се схватити као визуелизација концепта везаних за живот у вечном блаженству и божанској светлости. Будући да говоримо о периоду израженог верског синкретизма, сложеност иконографских решења на предметима свакодневне употребе, попут ове светиљке, може нам дати одговоре о развоју и ширењу хришћанске вере на тлу Горње Мезије, као и о присуству различитих верских обреда у оквиру једног античког града.

Светиљка је од црвено печене и бојене керамике, правоугаоног пресека, са три кљуна и дршком у облику листа. Дно је равно, прати форму реципијента, и украшено виновом лозом и гроздовима смештеним у правоугаоно поље. Диск светиљке, са једним отвором за уље, орнаментисан је дуплим правоугаоником (два концентрична правоугаоника), у чијој се унутрашњости налази представа винове лозе са гроздовима међу којима је отвор за уље. Рамени појас лампе украшен је волутама, розетом и палметама. Дршка по средини има два вертикална ребра, од којих се рачва низ косих линија што стварају облике палмете, листовца, или пак меноре.

Винова лоза и грозђе јесу мотиви који су присутни, осим на лампама, и у сакралним објектима, на подовима, мобилијару и предметима за свакодневну употребу. У хришћанству се везују за чин евхаристије, а могу да буду и симбол Дрвета живота. Геометријски

оквир, правоугаоник, у који је смештена винова лоза, као један облик аниконичне уметности и иновације источног Медитерана, чест је у античкој уметности. Палмета је, такође, врло чест мотив не само у уметности светиљки већ и у широј паганској и хришћанској уметности. Њен облик најчешће указује на Дрво живота, које је уско везано за место где ће се остварити искупљење читавог људског рода. Дрво живота је централни мотив који праволинијски и хронолошки спаја културе света и прожима у поимању вертикалне линије (*axis*) која спаја небо и земљу, које вернику обезбеђује вечну младост и блаженство.

С обзиром на изложене чињенице, дубока и значајна симболика лампи је очигледна. У првим вековима хришћанства ове еволуције имале су велики друштвено-политички значај и заузимале су важно место у свакодневном животу појединца како приликом сахрањивања тако и у сакралним објектима. Људима првих векова хришћанства лампа није била само предмет који је одавао светлост већ и симбол живота због своје намене како у литургији тако и приликом сахрањивања и указивала је на Божије присуство (Изл 27, 20–21). Уз декорацију, светлост која је допирала из лампи, канделабра или свеће, са мирисом тамјана и уља, имала је важну улогу у конструисању светости простора и паганског и хришћанског света. У некрополама су светиљке омогућавале покојнику да лакше пронађе пут ка свом вечном пребивалишту, рајском врту, месту вечног блаженства, *lux perpetua* и обезбеђивале су души светлост која растерује демоне. Можемо закључити да је, као и бројне друге лампе из некрополе, лампа из Виминацијума украшена мотивима који су припадали богатом репертоару слика с јасном алузијом на вечност, односно други Христов долазак.