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A Contribution to the Research of the Symbolism and the Context of the Double-Headed Eagle in Byzantine and Serbian Medieval Art

Abstract: The motif of the double-headed eagle appeared very early in the ancient cultures of the Orient, from where it then reached Europe and later medieval Serbia. Much has been written about this motif in international scholarly circles, as numerous examples have been preserved. The paper shows that the motif of the double-headed eagle in Byzantine and Serbian medieval art has a different meaning depending on the context in which it is found (Figs. 1–4b). Particular attention is paid to selected examples of the double-headed eagle motif (Figs. 1–3), which show that in addition to the heraldic meaning, which is emphasized and most often attributed to it, the double-headed eagle motif also carried a strong Christian symbolism, as an emblem and image of paradise and heavenly habitations.

Keywords: double-headed eagle, Serbian medieval art, Byzantine art, symbolism, emblem of paradise.

The motif of the double-headed eagle appears very early in the ancient cultures of the Orient in various iconographic formulas, from where, after a long period of time, it was gradually transferred by influences from the Near East to Byzantium and then to medieval Serbia.¹ Since the earliest extant representations of the double-headed eagle are known from seal cylinders from the city of Lagaš (2500 BC), and the first extant example of the motif in Eastern Christian art dates from between the 10th and 11th centuries, there are many lacunas in the large time span between these two examples, some of which only the surviving artworks can answer.² In this sense, the analysis of the double-headed eagle motif is also motivated by the conclusion reached in earlier studies, according to which, despite the numerous opinions and hypotheses of researchers, the exact meaning of the motif is still unknown.³

¹ On the ways in which the motif of the double-headed eagle might have come to Byzantium via Asia Minor, cf. СОЛОВЈЕВ 2000b, 295, 303; Androudis 2012, 133–134; ANDROUDIS 2018; on the motif of the double-headed eagle in general, cf. РЕКЕР 1989; СНОТЗАКОГЛОУ 1996; РЕКЕР 2000; АЦОВИЋ 2008, 127–161; ПОПОВИЋ 2005, 62–68; ОДАК 2015, 236–248; ПОПОВИЋ 2020, 320–322.

² DALTON 1911, 707; MARSHALL 1975, 164 (with bibliography); СОЛОВЈЕВ 2000b, 67, T. XXI.1; LEBRUN 2004; LEBRUN 2006.

³ ANDROUDIS 2012, 135; MELVANI 2013, 24.

Early representations of double-headed eagles, with the exception of examples from Lagash and certain Hittite representations, were generally characterized by more complex iconography. They usually depicted an eagle – the double-headed eagle is in a fight with other animals, crushing or holding them in its talons and defeating them.⁴ In another variant, the double-headed eagle was depicted without prey in its talons or beak.⁵ Both types of depictions are characteristic of the art of the Hittite capital Hattus.⁶ In this context, it is important to note that both iconographic types of the double-headed eagle – the more complex one and the simpler one – were adopted in both Byzantine and Western European art. The motif of the double-headed eagle, which predominated in Western art in a more complex iconography, also appears in Asia Minor art at a much later date, for example, on the portals of mosques in the 13th century.⁷ In India, where the earliest example of the motif deviates from the iconographic form mentioned above and where a particular iconographic type of the double-headed eagle appears (stupa in Taxila, Sirkap, 30 BC – AD 80), the more complex and stylized type of the double-headed eagle motif gradually established itself, which was later represented in areas of Western Europe that were under the strong influence of different civilizations and religions, such as Sicily and Spain.⁸

As far as Eastern Christian art is concerned, one of the oldest extant examples of the double-headed eagle motif belongs to a simpler iconographic type and comes from a stone slab from Beroe (Stara Zagora, Bulgaria), now kept in the Archeological Museum in Sofia (10th–11th century or earlier; fig. 1).⁹ Judging by the preserved material, the motif of the double-headed eagle represents a real rarity in Byzantine or Eastern Christian art in the broadest sense of the word at that time. A single other surviving example of the double-headed eagle comes from a church in the ancient Armenian city of Tigranakert or Tigranocerta (Miafarqin), now called Silvanus and located near the ancient Mesopotamian city of Amida (now Diyarbakır).¹⁰ It is important to note that the bas-relief slab from Stara Zagora with the double-headed eagle forms a conceptual unit with three other slabs with representations of a lion, a

⁴ For Hittite examples, see LEBRUN 2004; LEBRUN 2006; СОЛОВЬЕВ 2000b, T. XXI.2 (with bibliography).

⁵ СОЛОВЬЕВ 2000b, T. XXXI.1, 3; LEBRUN 2004; LEBRUN 2006.

⁶ ANDROUDIS 2013, 210; see previous footnotes as well.

⁷ ANDROUDIS 2013; ANDROUDIS 2016; ANDROUDIS 2018. It should be noted that the simpler type of double-headed eagle motif also appeared on the soil of Asia Minor, whose context of appearance is closely related to its appearance in Byzantine art: see above.

⁸ MARSHALL 1975, 164; СОЛОВЬЕВ 2000b, T. XXI.5–6; ANDROUDIS 2013; ANDROUDIS 2018.

⁹ КОНДАКОВ 1929, 115; GRABAR 1976, 72–73; BOŽKOV 1980, 104–105; ALCHERMÈS 1997, 326–326 (no. 220B); СОЛОВЬЕВ 2000 b, 302, T. XXII.5; ANDROUDIS 2013, fig. 1.

¹⁰ The slab is now in the British Museum, see STRYGOWSKY / VAN BERCHEM 1910, 365–366, Abb. 317; ANDROUDIS 2013, 317, n. 29.

griffin and two peacocks, and according to some authors also with a damaged relief showing a flutist or centauride (?).¹¹

Regardless of whether the figure of the musician was part of this bas-relief unit, we believe that the slab with the double-headed eagle was in some way part of the church furniture or part of the architecture sculpture when viewed from the perspective of the whole. According to one earlier opinion, the sculptures were once parts of a templon, or sanctuary divider, which we believe is a correct assumption. Based on the appearance of the nude female flutist, it has also been hypothesized that the slabs were not part of the church furniture, but a kind of stone screen or canopy that embellished an aristocratic house or garden.¹² Wherever the slab with the double-headed eagle from Stara Zagora was located, we agree with Solovjev that it did not represent the emblem of the ruler, the image of the coat of arms, the symbol of the Byzantine emperor or any other status symbol of power;¹³ he points out that “it is by no means an individual emblem that could be considered as a personal coat of arms” but is “only one of many ornamental motifs”.¹⁴ This second part should be taken with some reservations. For although the double-headed eagle is only one of many motifs in art (which the same author later emphasizes),¹⁵ it was hardly an “ornamental motif”, that is, a mere decoration without meaning. Some analogies will demonstrate that the motif of the double-headed eagle in the context in which it appears in Stara Zagora was neither an individual emblem, nor a personal coat of arms, nor an ornament without meaning. The work of art that could best support such an opinion and demonstrate its meaning in the aforementioned context, is the fresco with the double-headed eagle motif from a much later period, which is part of the Last Judgment cycle in the kathilokon of the Zrze Monastery dedicated to the feast of Transfiguration of Christ. It has been executed on the third fresco layer belonging to the beginning of the 17th century (1624/1625; fig. 2).¹⁶ Being

¹¹ See previous footnote.

¹² Alchermès opines that sculpture ensemble included both animals and flutist (ALCHERMÈS 1997, 326–327 [no 220B]), while Grabar treated the flutist slab separately from the five that bear animal reliefs (cf. GRABAR 1976, 74–75; ALCHERMÈS 1997, 327, n. 5).

¹³ On the double-headed eagle motif as an image of the ruler, his coat of arms or as a status symbol, see, e.g., ФЕРЈАНЧИЋ 1960, 24–25; МАРЈАНОВИЋ ДУШАНИЋ 1994, 116–117; СНОТЗАКОГЛОУ 1996; ALCHERMÈS 1997, 327; ГАВЕЛИЋ 1998, 141; СОЛОВЈЕВ 2000a, pass; СОЛОВЈЕВ 2000b, pass; ГАВЕЛИЋ 1998, 141; ВІТАЛІОНЕ 2011, 182; ANDROUDIS 2012; MELVANI 2013, 24–25, 148, 149–150; ANDROUDIS 2015; ÇAĞARTAY 2018; БОЖИНОВИЋ 2019, 310; ТОМИЋ ЂУРИЋ 2017, 550–558.

¹⁴ СОЛОВЈЕВ 2000b, 302.

¹⁵ СОЛОВЈЕВ 2000b, 303.

¹⁶ On the representation of the Last Judgment in Zrze, see ВАСИЛЕСКИ 2015; ГОЛАЦ 2019; GOLAC 2022; on the heraldic meaning of the double-headed eagle, ВАСИЛЕСКИ 2020, 310; on the illustration of the Last Judgment including the double-headed eagle, ВАСИЛЕСКИ 2015, fig. 1; for the history of the church, its founders and the phases of fresco painting, GOLAC 2019, 19–23 (with bibliography); Vasileski 2020, 13–16, 35–44, 326–342, *passim*.

both unstudied and crucial for the present paper, this fresco will receive special attention in the following discussion.

The fresco depicting a double-headed eagle on the eastern wall of the porch in Zrze monastery, on the north side of the church entrance, testifies to the fact that the tradition of depicting this motif, in a way it was executed in Stara Zagora, continued and survived many centuries later, while being firmly rooted in the deep past. The motif of the double-headed eagle in Zrze is crucial for the study of the meaning of this motif and the study of its context, since apart from the technique in which it was executed, it represents a direct analogy to the motif of Stara Zagora in terms of meaning, adjacent motifs and programmatic context. The Zrze fresco is also of great importance because, as mentioned above, it has only been analyzed in terms of its heraldic meaning.¹⁷

The double-headed eagle in Zrze (fig. 2) is located in the socle on the north side of the entrance to the church. The slab from Stara Zagora was in some way certainly connected with the same zone, as we will discuss later. The socle in Zrze actually represents a kind of “conclusion” of the entire cycle of the Last Judgment. Being a highly nuanced and developed artistic narrative, the cycle at Zrze as a whole essentially reaches its climax in the zone of socle, especially in light of the iconographic and conceptual details of the composition of the Last Judgment at Zrze (more below). All registers of the cycle as well as other compositions and figures are framed by a thin red border. In northern, southern and upper parts, wide and richly decorative strip of heart-shaped palmettes forming complementary “zigzag triangles” frames the Last Judgment cycle scenes. The decorative strip of floral motifs arranged in “zigzag triangles” framing all the episodes of the Last Judgment, including the socle zone, proves that this part of church decoration was conceived as part of the cycle of the Last Judgment in which it was depicted. The motifs of the socle on the north side of the entrance (double-headed eagle, two birds with a flower vase and trees) are painted in black color, resembling drawings and sketches, while the background common to all motifs is in shades of yellow (in the upper part), blue (in the centre) and green (in the lower part of the register). In this way, the motifs of the socle form a unique visual whole.

The characteristics of the double-headed eagle in Zrze (and in Stara Zagora; fig. 1, 2) are the following: a scale-like body covered with feathers, curved semicircular wings in the upper part with a pronounced upper contour, and an accentuated long tail covered in dense feathers, longer than the legs.¹⁸ While the neck and the head of the eagle in Zrze are covered with feathers, the body and the upper part of the wings

¹⁷ ВАСИЛЕСКИ 2020, 310.

¹⁸ The tail in Stara Zagora is not as long as that in Zrze, but just as dense, and the arrangement of the feathers corresponds to that of the eagle in Zrze.

of the eagle in Stara Zagora are executed in the same way. The eagle representations from both Zrze and from Stara Zagora are iconographically simpler, that is, there are no animals against which they fight and which they defeat. In this way, both are reduced to a single symbolic sign. Next to the double-headed eagle in Zrze, several cypress-like trees are shown from the north, next to which two confronted birds stand on the rocks in a paradisiacal environment, flanking a vase with flowers. All of these motifs are linked iconographically and in terms of their meaning in a specific way: the way in which the wings of these birds are painted corresponds to the way in which the body of the double-headed eagle is depicted, while the background of all the motifs is the same. Clearly, they form a single symbolic whole. The motif of the two confronted birds and the aforementioned similarities confirm that the entire group of these motifs, including the double-headed eagle, alludes to the heavenly habitations and represents a recognizable image of Paradise. To the right of the birds there is also a row of cypress-like trees. Relevant for the present inquiry is another iconographic and programmatic feature of the Last Judgment cycle on the west wall of the porch in Zrze. Namely, the entire northern part of the socle with the representations of the double-headed eagle, cypress-like trees and affronted birds with vase of flowers is located under the fresco depicting Paradise, more precisely under a fresco depicting the Righteous: a fenced Garden of Paradise with a fiery cherub, three patriarchs and a Good thief; the representation of a double-headed eagle is placed directly under the wise virgins entering heaven with burning lamps and the apostle Peter with the keys of Heaven at the head of the procession of the apostles and the Righteous.

In this way, the painter once again emphasizes the meaning of the double-headed eagle motif as a “symbolic sign” of the socle zone: just like the two confronted birds, next to which it is depicted in Zrze, its programmatic position – under the depiction of the Garden of Eden itself – shows that this motif is a symbol of Paradise and heavenly habitations.

This interpretation is supported by an important iconographic and conceptual feature of the depiction of the Last Judgment in Zrze and its emphasized eschatological connotation.¹⁹ Both the motif of the two confronted birds with the vase full of flowers and the depiction of the double-headed eagle are in accord with the artist's intention of emphasizing the positive outcome of the Last Judgment and the hope of salvation and the attainment of eternal, heavenly habitations. This intention is expressed and emphasized by the “specific” iconography of Last Judgment in Zrze, namely, by the absence of torments in hell, by the image of the Royal Deesis on the south side of the church entrance and by the text on the Gospel that Christ holds

¹⁹ On the strong eschatological meaning of the Last Judgment scene in Zrze, with special reference to the theme of Royal Deesis, see *ВАСИЛЕСКИ* 2015.

in his hands in the same scene: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matt. 25.34).²⁰

In terms of date, iconography and programmatic position, the direct analogy to the motif of the double-headed eagle from Zrze can be found in the church of Saint Athanasius of Alexandria near the village of Žurče in the present-day Republic of Northern Macedonia (1617; fig. 3).²¹ This double-headed eagle is depicted in the east side of the southern window of the nave, as a counterpart to the image of the cross with cryptograms “Jesus Christ Victory.” This example shows that the motifs of the socle can also be depicted in the area next to the windows. As in Zrze, the artist has depicted both fields in the same way (with red border and yellow frame) and placed them next to each other as counterparts, in the same symbolic context. A very similar example is preserved in the Lesnovo monastery (on which more below).

Here we will mention another similar example of the double-headed eagle motif, executed in the same symbolic context as the motifs in Zrze – in the socle of the porch. It is a very interesting depiction of a double-headed eagle in the old church of St. Athanasius in Moscopole, in the area of Korçe, on the territory of present-day southern Albania, not far from Žurče. Although this motif contains some iconographic details that do not appear in Zrze and Žurče, its programmatic context and iconographic position within the depicted Paradise strongly suggest the same meaning – as in Zrze, in the church of Moscopole the two-headed eagle is literally transferred to the Garden of Eden in the socle of the porch. In this example, the painter has gone the furthest in this endeavour. He painted three flower vases, and depicted a double-headed eagle in one of them, symbolically and iconographically equating the fantastic bird with the Paradise flowers.

Finally, the bas-relief slab with the motif of two peacocks flanking the Tree of Life from Stara Zagora – part of a sculptural ensemble of several slabs – and the presence of the similar motif in Zrze next to the double-headed eagle, testify to the same meaning of, in line with what has been said so far, that the slab with the double-headed eagle in Stara Zagora as those in Zrze, Žurče and Moskopole.²²

It should be noted that in Serbian medieval art during the period of state independence, the double-headed eagle was often depicted in the socle, either in the form of

²⁰ On the iconography of the Last Judgment in Zrze without the depiction of the torments in hell, see ВАСИЛЕСКИ 2015; GOLAC 2022.

²¹ Vasileski mentions the double-headed eagle motif in the socle in the church of St. Athanasius in Žurče, but he does not refer to the literature, nor brings the image of it, since the motif remained unknown and unpublished (ВАСИЛЕСКИ 2020, 310). I sincerely thank my colleague Jehona Spahiu for letting me use her photo and giving me the permission to publish it. For the motifs of birds in the socle in general (Zrze and Slepče), see АТАНАСОСКИ 2017, 161, fig. 281, 282; for the frescoes in the socle of the porch of Žurče monastery and above them, see СПАХИУ 2015a; СПАХИУ 2015b.

²² КОНДАКОВ 1929, дрв. 43; see footnotes 9 and 12 above.

a fresco, as in the church of St. Peter and Paul in Bijelo Polje (Montenegro) or in the church of the Mother of God Ljeviška in Prizren, Serbia (in the nartex and the altar), or in the form of slabs attached to the facade, as was common in the architecture of Moravian Serbia, which will be discussed later.²³ In the fresco technique, the double-headed eagle was usually depicted in red on a white background with golden or gold and green folds, as was common in Byzantine art as confirmed by the same motif in the church of St. Anthony in Durrës (XIV century);²⁴ in later periods the same motif could also be depicted in the socle in different variants with different motifs.²⁵ In this context, it is worth remembering that the double-headed eagle was not only represented as a main motif on the draperies in the socle, repeated in the form of an arabesque, often with cross-shaped motifs, but also painted with other motifs on the podesas and church cloth. For example, the double-headed eagle was painted as an arabesque together with other motifs on the podesa of the icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria in the scenes of the Akathistos Hymn (12th oikos) in the church of St. Demetrius in the Monastery of Marko or in the church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in the Krepičevac Monastery.²⁶ The detail of the double-headed eagle on the liturgical fabrics testifies to the erudition of the painters who worked in Krepičevac and to the founders' decision to pay special tribute to the Constantinopolitan icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria, the dedicatee of Krepičevac, which was emphasized several times in the wall paintings of the church.²⁷ In both churches, the double-headed eagle is depicted in circular rings forming medallions. In the Monastery of Marko, the podesa is depicted in one piece, and double-headed eagles are executed in white and yellow (golden) color on red background, while in Krepičevac the podesa is divided vertically into two parts by stripes and the double-headed eagles are shown in white color on a green background. Although there are differences in the color of the fabrics, their essential role is the same, as shown by the adjacent motifs next to the eagles in the

²³ On the fresco in the church of St. Peter and Paul, see ЉУБИНКОВИЋ 1959, 114, fig. 20; on the frescoes from Mother of God Ljeviška, see ПАНИЋ / БАБИЋ 1975, 62, Т. II, дрв. 1, 18–19; on the Moravian examples, see below.

²⁴ On the double-headed eagle in the altar of the church of St. Anthony in Durrës, see ВІТАΛΙΩΤΗΣ 2011, 180–183, fig. 3, 4, 5a.

²⁵ On different variants of the motif in Serbian art of the later period, see СУБОТИЋ 1980, 29, fig. 4, and 38, fig. 15.

²⁶ ТОМИЋ БУРИЋ 2019, 332–334, fig. 159 (Monastery of Marko); КНЕЖЕВИЋ 2021, 83, fig. 48, 49 (Krepičevac).

²⁷ In Krepičevac, above the entrance, a fresco of the Mother of God Hodegetria is preserved, indicating that, like the church of the Mother of God Hodegetria in the Patriarchate of Peć, the church in Krepičevac was dedicated to both the feast of Dormition of the Mother of God and the Mother of God Hodegetria (КНЕЖЕВИЋ 2021, fig. 4, 5). On the fresco icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria on the facades, see ГАВРИЛОВИЋ 2023; on the unified celebration of the Mother of God Hodegetria and the feast of Dormition, ГАВРИЛОВИЋ 2018, 20–33.

form of crosses and stars in Krepičevac or stylized single-headed birds (eagles or herons?) in Monastery of Marko.²⁸ It is interesting that the double-headed eagles are depicted in two different ways on the same podea in the Monastery of Marko. The first double-headed eagle in the first row (from left to right) is simpler (similar to the original Indian iconographic type of the double-headed eagle), while the other double-headed eagles on the podea are stronger, larger, more hieratic and much more carefully executed, similar to the depictions on the socle of the church of the Mother of God Ljeviška. It is important to note that a lily is depicted in both monuments between the heads of the eagles, either in the form of a tripartite flower (Monastery of Marko) or stylized in the form of a circle (Krepičevac).²⁹ In both monuments the painters made a clear difference between the podea of the icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria in the representations of the 12th kondak and the 12th oikos of the Akathistos hymn: in the scenes of the 12th kondak the podea is embellished with rhomboid and floral motifs, and only in the scenes of the 12th oikos, the podea is adorned with double-headed eagles.³⁰

In addition to the icon of the Mother of God in the Akathistos cycle, the double-headed eagle is also depicted on the Holy Table cover in the scene of the Communion of Apostles in the conch of the apse in the church of Christ Pantocrator in Dečani.³¹ Besides the eagle arabesque motif, the Holy Table cover in Dečani is also decorated with the embroidered cross on each side. The double-headed eagle is depicted on this liturgical cloth, since it covers the Holy Table. In connection with the meaning of the motif and the reasons of its depiction, it is significant to note that the fresco is located above the Holy Table itself. The rare example of the surviving painted decoration of the Holy Table in the church of Archangel Michael in Lesnovo Monastery confirms that the double-headed eagle motif had strong symbolic connection with the Holy Table.³² It is executed on the front of the Holy Table in blue color on a white background with lilies between the heads of the eagle and framed with red border. Next to the double-headed eagle in Lesnovo, “two stars were also painted, which indicate the appropriateness of the entire field with the eagle in the altar area” and its symbolic connection with the Holy Table as the image of Christ’s tomb.³³ It has been assumed that the double-headed eagle in the socle “most likely also represents here the status symbol of the donor, Jovan

²⁸ For the opinion that in the Monastery of Marko swamp birds (cranes or herons) are depicted next to double-headed eagles, see Томић Бурић 2019, 333.

²⁹ Cf. Томић Бурић 2019, 332–334, fig. 159 (Monastery of Marko); Кнежевић 2021, 83, fig. 48, 49 (Krepičevac).

³⁰ Cf. Томић Бурић 2019, fig. 159, 161; Кнежевић 2012, fig. 48, 49.

³¹ Тодич 2005b, fig. 313.

³² Гавелић 1998, 141.

³³ *Ibid.*

Oliver³⁴ In this context, it should be noted that on the fresco with the depiction of the double-headed eagle from Lesnovo in the socle of the Holy Table, a lily branch springs directly from the eagle's neck, which shows that this fresco is a direct analogy to the motif of the double-headed eagle in Moscopole in terms of iconography and meaning. This iconographic detail, as well as the fact that colors of the double-headed eagles varied in different monuments, indicate that the color of the eagle motif is not uniform, but that the double-headed eagles were usually depicted with floral motifs or motifs in the form of a cross or other, with the exception of extremely reduced iconographic examples. If no ornament was depicted next to the double-headed eagle, the artist indicated the meaning of this motif either by the shape of its plumage or by adjacent motifs. It can be concluded that the double-headed eagle in the socle of the Holy Table in Lesnovo Monastery was not only a supposed status symbol, but also a symbol of Paradise and heavenly habitations.

This interpretation would also apply to other examples of this motif in the socle, including those usually referred to as signs and symbols of the ruler or the heraldic symbols. Some of these examples are the double-headed eagles in the socle of the Mother of God Ljeviška or the motif on the east parapet slab in the north biphora of the Chilandar's outer nartex and others.³⁵ In these examples the body of the eagle is highly stylized, entwined or fused with floral motifs; in Chilandar the parapet slabs above the double-headed eagle are decorated with cherubs and crosses, while in Kalenić the lunette above the eagle motif in south biphora of the nartex is decorated with a relief sculpture of the Mother of God with the Christ Child flanked by cherubs.³⁶ The double-headed eagles that adorn the biphores and the window frames in Lazarica, Kalenić and Naupara are very similar to them in terms of iconography, meaning and programmatic position,³⁷ especially the motif

³⁴ ГАВЕЛИЋ 1998, 141.

³⁵ КАТАНИЋ 1988, 204 (fig. 19), 205 (fig. 17), 206–207; ШУПУТ 1998; БОЖИНОВИЋ 2019, 299, 310, fig. 4 (with earlier bibliography); VOŽINOVIĆ 2021, 11, 117, fig. 6, 22.

³⁶ КАТАНИЋ 1988, 206 (fig. 21), 207 (fig. 24); ШУПУТ 1998 (Chilandar); СТЕВОВИЋ 2006, fig. 10, 23 (Kalenić). Tripartite floral and foliate motifs are connected to or intertwined with the stylized double-headed eagle motifs in Kalenić and on the parapet slabs on the north and south facade in Chilandar's outer nartex. In this sense, it should be noted that even the helmet, which is in previous literature interpreted as the coat of arms of Prince Lazar, has floral ornaments on its top, which connect it to the other parapet slabs of the Chilandar outer nartex, with which it forms a unique symbolic whole. The identical detail is found in the south biphora in the Kalenić monastery (east slab; cf. СТЕВОВИЋ 2006, сл. 10, 23). As analogies for such a solution, can serve, the lion sculpture on the slab from Stara Zagora, whose body parts are stylized in the form of lieves (cf. ALCHERMÈS 1997, 326, No 220A). This type of floral decoration is usually interpreted as a lily with which the double-headed eagle is usually depicted. On the symbolism of the lily, see БУРИЋ 1985, 58–59; ТОДОРОВИЋ 1991, 106–107; ПОПОВИЋ 2005, 68–69; СТЕВОВИЋ 2006, 173–174 (with fn. 37).

³⁷ For Lazarica, see КАТАНИЋ 1988, 48 (fig. 12), 49 (fig. 16), 55 (fig. 22, 23); for the representations in Kalenić and the general meaning of the facades of the Moravian churches, see СТЕВОВИЋ 2006, fig.

of the double-headed eagle and the group of motifs on the marble arch on the west wall of the nave crowning the passage to the nartex in the Parigoritissa church in Arta, and the “decoration” of the same type on the headpiece of the Gospel which is now kept in Saint Peterburg (Cod. D. gr. 276, 14th century).³⁸ The latter two examples support the interpretation of the meaning and the context of the double-headed eagle motif in Stara Zagora in Bulgaria, that is, the conclusion that the motif of the double-headed eagle and other adjacent motifs were integral parts of a templon or sanctuary divider or a related structure of church furnishings or façade decoration.³⁹ In this sense, one can observe that the programmatic context of the double-headed eagle in Stara Zagora corresponds to the context of the same motif in Moravian architecture in general. The motif of the double-headed eagle in Naupara is unique in Serbian architecture and art by its position in the ring of the large rose window on the west façade.⁴⁰ Along with the examples above, it also explains the appearance of the double-headed eagle in the vault of the passage under the tower in the Žiča monastery. Comparing these motifs of the double-headed eagle, we find that they are juxtaposed with the motifs varying the sign of the cross and Paradise flowers. Double-headed eagles depicted in the circular fields next to the crosses in the vault of the passage under the tower in Žiča, by their iconography fully correspond to the double-headed eagles depicted in the socle of churches. The double-headed eagles in Žiča by their programmatic place in the highest topographical register of this part of the church, next to the scene “If you should not be like this child”, the Martyrdom of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste and stylized cruciform forms next to them, should also in our opinion be understood as a literal allusion to the Kingdom of Heaven.⁴¹ Đurić argues that no ornamental border similar to the one containing double-headed eagles in the vault of the Žiča tower is attested in Serbian medieval art.⁴² And yet, it can be seen that the programme of the painted decoration in the nartex of the church of the Mother of God Ljeviška corresponds to the painted decoration in Žiča and in Zrze with regard to the depiction of the double-headed eagles and the motifs accompanying them. The double-headed eagles in the frieze next to the portrait of King Milutin on the east wall of the nartex of the church of the Mother of God Ljeviška are framed by double circles, as in Žiča, and like

10, 22, 26a, 27a; for Naupara, see КАТАНИЋ 1988, 24 (fig. 7), 98, 99 (fig. 9), 100 (fig. 11; I); ПОПОВИЋ / БУРЧИЋ 2000, 37–38.

³⁸ On the marble arch of the west wall of the nave in the church of Parigoritissa in Arta, see MELVANI 2013, 53, 136, 148, fig. 41, Drw. 1; for the headpiece of the Gospel from Saint Peterburg, see ANDROUDIS 2017, 189, fig. 9, 10.

³⁹ See below.

⁴⁰ For Naupara, see above; for Žiča, ĐURIĆ 2000, esp. 125–127.

⁴¹ For the interpretation of double-headed eagle motif in the context of the relationship between royalty and priesthood, see БУРИЋ 2000.

⁴² БУРИЋ 2000, 125–126.

these, they are depicted with tripartite floral ornaments forming a kind of triangle, corresponding to the ornaments in Žiča or the heart-shaped palmettes on the wide decorative strip in Zrze. In Žiča, one sees the “shortened” version of the cross motif, which appears as painted “ornamental border”, for example, of the tambour carée of the church of Holy Apostles in the Patriarchate of Peć,⁴³ and which also appears in the apex of the vault of the west bay of the same church.⁴⁴ The motif in the apex of the vault of the west bay in the church of Holy Apostles speaks for the fact that the motifs in Žiča and in Holy Apostles are the same, namely that the motif in Žiča is a variant of the motif used in Holy Apostles. Instead of the double-headed eagles seen in Žiča, the anonymous artist in Peć depicted various floral motifs. The same conclusion is reached if one compares the ambo in Pridvorica decorated with the double-headed eagle and the ambo in Krepičevac adorned with a floral motif.⁴⁵ It should also be noted that in the church of the Mother of God Ljeviška there is a cross with the inscription “Jesus Christ Victory” on the doorposts, with which the double-headed eagles are often associated or depicted next to it.⁴⁶

Finally, as a special analogy to the motif of the double-headed eagle in the outer nartex of Chilandar (and to the other examples above), one should consider the representation of the double-headed eagle from the Serbian Munich Psalter illustrating Psalm 33 (fol. 33r; fig. 4a). Previously, this motif like the mentioned motif in the socle of the Chilandar’s outer nartex, was interpreted as a heraldic symbol and emblem of the donor, that is of the commissioner of the manuscript.⁴⁷ We believe that the motif of the double-headed eagle in the pictorial representation of the psalm with a strong eschatological character is to be understood as a symbol of paradise with an equally strong eschatological meaning, which in this sense is depicted in the heavenly abodes. Like the double-headed eagle in the church of Zrze, its place in the miniature is entirely consistent with the representation of Paradise embodied in the Hand of God with the souls of the righteous, representing the image of the future salvation and the age to come. It is also noticeable that the red color of the double-headed eagle matches the color of the rocks on the land and the other motifs in the water (rocks and bull’s head). Likewise, the paradisiacal trees in the upper part of the miniature perfectly match in form the trees illustrated next to the double-headed eagle in the socle of Zrze. The position of the double-headed eagle under the four rivers of Paradise on the miniature also corresponds to the one in Zrze.

⁴³ КОРАЋ 1990a, fig. 8; КОРАЋ 1990b, fig. 54; КОРАЋ 1990c, fig. 61, 62.

⁴⁴ БУРИЋ 1990, fig. 70, 71.

⁴⁵ For Pridvorica, see ЧАНАК МЕДИЋ 1995, 142–143, fig. 25, 51, 52; for Krepičevac, see КНЕЖЕВИЋ 2021, fig. 33.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., ANDROUDIS 2017, 36–39.

⁴⁷ БОЖИНОВИЋ 2019, 310 (with bibliography); ВОЖИНОVIĆ 2021, 117; МИЛОРАДОВИЋ 2022, 22–23, 158 (with previous bibliography).

In line with the discussion above, we believe that the second example of the double-headed eagle motif from the same manuscript on the miniature of the one hundred fiftieth psalm from the Serbian Munich Psalter is to be seen in the same context (“Let everything that breathes sing praises to the Lord”, fol. 185r; fig. 4b). From the point of view of colors, it is important to note that both examples from the Serbian Munich Psalter were rendered in red (as the motifs in the socle in the nartex of the Ljeviška Church, in the passage under the Žiča’s tower and elsewhere). The motif of the last psalm is depicted in the midst of numerous animals, leaning slightly to the left and is placed almost in the center of the scene, which is shifted slightly to the left. Although small, its presence is important, because it subtly indicates that the scene takes place in heavenly realm. If we consider the two representations of the double-headed eagles from the Serbian Munich Psalter and from Chilandar in the absence of earlier hypotheses about their meaning as heraldic emblems, their position in the decoration of the church and in the miniature representing the Kingdom of Heaven seems logical.

Let us mention a few more examples of the double-headed eagle motif, which are significant in the context of the overall picture of the appearance of this motif: the depiction of the double-headed eagle on the ring found in tomb no. 4 in the Banjska Monastery attributed to Constantine,⁴⁸ the son of King Milutin (1282–1321), and the double-headed eagles on the sarcophagus of the granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor Theodore II Lascaris (1254–1258), the Italo-Byzantine Princess Vatača Lascaris di Ventimigla, now in the Old Cathedral of Coimbra (1336; Portugal),⁴⁹ whose symbolism matches with the meaning of the representations of the double-headed eagles on the ambones⁵⁰ and choroï of Serbian churches in general.⁵¹

⁴⁸ БИКИЋ 2016; БИКИЋ 2017.

⁴⁹ MACLAGAN 1975; REI 2013, 159, 164, fig. 3 (with previous bibliography); ANGELOV 2019, 227.

⁵⁰ Ambones with double-headed eagle reliefs are preserved in Pridvorica, Banja Pribojska, Ljubostinja, Dubocica and other churches (cf. ЧАНАК МЕДИЋ 1995, 142–143, fig. 25, 51, 52; ПЕЈИЋ 2009, 61, fig. 38–39; БУРИЋ 1985, 58, fig. 53; ПЕТКОВИЋ 1995, 77, fig. 10). The practice of carving double-headed eagles on ambones was adopted from Byzantium, as evidenced by the ambo with the double-headed eagle in the Metropolis in Mystra (cf. MELVANI 2013, 136, 203, fig. 73). These later examples of ambones are a reflection of earlier ones built on the foundations of early Christian art, as can be seen when observing the ambo with a relief of a single-headed eagle from the church of St. Sophia in Ochrid, a similar representations on the door of St. Nicholas Bolnički (cf. КОНДАКОВ 1909, drw. 231, I, II; Pazaras 1987), or the aforementioned example from Tigranokerti (Miafarqin; cf. STRYGOWSKY / VAN BERCHHEM 1910, 365–366, Abb. 317; cf. also fn. 10, above). The sculpture of the single-headed eagle on the apse window of the Studenica Monastery and the double-headed eagle on the apse window of the Dečani Monastery come from this repertoire of bas-relief motifs (cf. МАКСИМОВИЋ 1986, fig. 68, 83; ЧАНАК МЕДИЋ 2005, 284–285, fig. 214).

⁵¹ On the representations of the double-headed eagles on choroï, see ТОДОРОВИЋ 1991, 99–124, fig. 1, 15 (Psača), 16 (Iesnovo), 25 (Dečani), Т. 3 (Dochiarion); ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998, pass (Iesnovo); ТОДИЋ 2005a, fig. 184, 188 (Dečani); БУРИЋ 2017, 553–554 (Monastery of Marko).

The motif of the double-headed eagle on the ring found on the tomb no. 4 in the Banjska monastery and attributed to King Milutin's son Constantine should be interpreted in an eschatological sense, since it has already been established that the decorative program of the Constantine's ring in the form of tendrils, palmettes and flowers is to be understood as a representation of a heavenly, fragrant garden.⁵² The context of the finds supports this view. The double-headed eagle motif is also found on the sarcophagus of Theodore II Lascaris' granddaughter, the Italo-Byzantine princess Vataça Lascaris di Ventimigla. It is a sarcophagus with gisant. On the longer sides of the sarcophagus are three depictions of a double-headed eagle under a trefoil arch. The iconography of birds matches with the representations on the slab from Stara Zagora. The eschatological meaning of the motif is also indicated by the fact that in Western Europe numerous fabrics with double-headed eagles motifs have been found in the tombs of saints.⁵³ The elaborate and very carefully executed iconography of the double-headed eagles on them (whose bodies are formed from the floral motifs of the Garden of Paradise) clearly point to their symbolism.⁵⁴ Finally, on this occasion, as an analogy to the motifs on the sarcophagus of Italo-byzantine princess, we will only mention the marble slab with the motif of double-headed eagle defeating dragons from the Dormition Church in Ano Volos, which belonged to the sarcophagus of Anna Malliasene.⁵⁵

As noted at the beginning, numerous examples of the double-headed eagle motif have survived in various cultural settings. They raise numerous questions that require further interdisciplinary research. Some of these include both the manner and purpose of its transfer from one cultural matrix to another and the consideration of the motifs from the perspective of multiple cultural matrices, a topic that remains for future investigation. One ultimate question arises: can we assume that the motifs of the double-headed eagles not only represent the symbol of the ruler, but also special "symbolic decoration" of the garments of the represented donors of different classes, who, through the donor's act of building endowments or donating icons and other gifts, through this symbol express their hope that they will attain eternal life and be accepted among the righteous?⁵⁶

⁵² БИКИЋ 2016, with bibliography; for the interpretation of the programme of the ring, see 82–85.

⁵³ ANDROUDIS 2018, fig. 6; ANDROUDIS 2013, fig. 2; for Byzantine textiles, see MUTHESIUS 1997, 44–55.

⁵⁴ Cf. for example ANDROUDIS 2013, fig. 2.

⁵⁵ ANDROUDIS 2018, fig. 12; PAZARAS 1987.

⁵⁶ The origin of illustrations: 1) Public domain; 2) Andela Gavrilović; 3) Jehona Spahiou; 4a) public domain (<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00106322%3Fpage%3D296?page=68,69>); 4b) public domain (<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/view/bsb00106322?page=296?page=372,373>).

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Прилог тумачењу значења и изучавању контекста појаве двоглавог орла у византијској и српској средњовековној уметности

Апстракт: Мотив двоглавог орла јавља се веома рано у древним културама Оријента одакле је потом пренет у Европу и касније у средњовековну Србију. О овом мотиву је у међународној науци доста писано, будући да су бројни примери очувани. У раду је указано да мотив двоглавог орла у српској средњовековној и византијској уметности носи различито значење у зависности од контекста у којем се налази (сл. 1–4b). Нарочита пажња посвећена је одабраним примерима мотива двоглавог орла (сл. 1–3) који показују да је уз хералдичко значење, које је у литератури истицано и најчешће му приписивано, мотив двоглавог орла такође носио и снажну хришћанску симболику, као амблем и слика раја и рајских насеља.
Кључне речи: двојлави орао, српска средњовековна уметност, симболика, амблем раја.

Illustrations



Figure 1: Double-headed eagle, Beroe (present-day Stara Zagora in Bulgaria), 10th–11th century or earlier



Figure 2: Double-headed eagle, Transfiguration church, Zrze, 1624/1625



Figure 3: Double-headed eagle, St. Atanasius Church, Žurče, 1617



Figure 4: Serbian Munich Psalter, fol. 33r, the end of XIV century



Figure 5: Serbian Munich Psalter, fol. 185r, the end of XIV century