

The Siena relic of St John the Baptist's right arm*

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The paper takes a systematic approach to the hitherto unpublished relic of St John the Baptist's right arm which is kept in a cache in Siena cathedral. It includes the available historical information about the relic's journey from Serbia until its arrival in Siena (1464) and the circumstances in which it came into the possession of pope Pius II. It provides a detailed description both of the relic and of the reliquary, an exquisite piece of medieval goldsmithing and filigree work with few direct analogies. Particular attention is devoted to the inscription on the reliquary lid: "Right arm of John the Forerunner, cover me, Sava the Serbian archbishop." Based on the inscription, the reliquary is identified as one of the founding objects of the treasury of the monastery of Žiča (the Serbian cathedral and coronation church) which was gradually built up in the first decades of the thirteenth century through the effort of Sava of Serbia. Discussed in the context of this topic are also the "veil" and the "cushion", the luxurious textiles in which the Baptist's arm was brought to Siena.

Keywords: relic of St John the Baptist's right arm, St Sava of Serbia, monastery of Žiča, Siena, pope Pius II, reliquaries, medieval goldsmithing

The relics of St John the Baptist are among the most highly-revered Christian relics, and quite understandably so, as this saint, who at once epitomizes the Old Testament prophetic tradition and, as a contemporary of and participant in Epiphany, announces Christ, is one of the main protagonists of biblical history. In the Byzantine world, John the Baptist, as a person closest to the Saviour, save for the Virgin, had the status of a powerful intercessor and his relics were under imperial patronage on account of the ideological and ceremonial significance attached to them.¹ Apart from the Baptist's head, the veneration of which in Constantinople can be traced as far back as the fourth century,² his right arm

was also a focus of devotion. In 956 it was solemnly translated from Antioch to the capital city under the imperial aegis of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos. According to a later, eleventh-century source, the relic was kept in the imperial palace, most likely in the chapel of the Virgin of the Pharos, where it remained until the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204. The well-known account of Anthony of Novgorod, who paid reverence to the Baptist's arm in the treasury of the Virgin of the Pharos sometime around 1200, contains a claim—albeit insufficiently reliable—that the relic was used in the ceremony of imperial coronation. What this claim, along with other original testimonies, shows beyond doubt is that the relic was brought into direct association with the Byzantine *basileus*, and thought of as being a source of a supernatural, divine force and, consequently, as guaranteeing spiritual and political authority.³

The relic of the Baptist's right arm possessed many layers of meaning and a great symbolic and "performative" power. It belongs to a highly-valued category of Christian relics—the hands or arms of saints as their physical legacy. These body parts were considered to be the locus of saints' power and one of the main instruments of their activity. By analogy with the *dextera domini*, the right hand of God, they were used for performing symbolic gestures—for making the sign of the cross, blessing, anointing. Hence the important ceremonial role that the reliquaries in the shape of a hand or arm used to play, especially in the Christian West.⁴ Hence the added weight of the theological and ideological message carried by the Baptist's hand: it was with it that John pointed to Christ as the saviour of the world, and with it that he baptized him on the banks of the river Jordan.

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¹ I. Kalavrezou, *Helping hands for the Empire. Imperial ceremonies and the cult of relics at the Byzantine court*, in: *Byzantine court culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire, Washington, DC, 1997, 53–80 (with sources cited).

² On the history of the cult and relics of John the Baptist's head v. J. Wortley, *Relics of "the friends of Jesus" at Constantinople*, in: *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. J. Durand, B. Flusin, Paris 2004,

145–153 (with sources and bibliography); v. also J. Durand, *Reliques et reliquaires constantinopolitains du chef de saint Jean-Baptiste apportés en Occident après 1204*, *Conta* 218 (2007) 188–221; E. Bakalova, *Kovcheg dliā glavy Predtechi kak kniāzheskoe darenie. Relikvarii Niāgoe Basaraba iz muzeiā Tpopkapy v Stambule*, in: *Russian medieval art. Idea and image. Studies in Byzantine and Russian medieval art*, ed. A. Batalov, E. Smirnova, Moscow 2009, 437–471.

³ Kalavrezou, *Helping hands*, 67–79.

⁴ C. Hahn, *Strange beauty. Issues in the making and meaning of reliquaries, 400 – circa 1204*, University Park, Pennsylvania 2015, 135–141 (with bibliography).



Fig. 1. Forearm of St John the Baptist

After 1204 the story of the Baptist's right arm becomes more and more convoluted and less and less reliable. It seems that the relic had undergone minor fragmentation even before the first fall of Constantinople. One of its fingers was reportedly enshrined in the Stoudios monastery about 1200.⁵ According to the accounts of a few travelling pilgrims, in the fourteenth and fifteenth century the arm was deposited in the Constantinopolitan church of the Virgin Peribleptos.⁶ With the passing of time the relic came to share the fate of many illustrious Constantinopolitan relics, the common denominator being the emergence of replicas and their distribution all across the Christian world. This phenomenon puts before researchers a number of difficult and frequently unanswerable questions concerning the authenticity and antiquity of relics, their provenance, peregrinations, owners and uses. This topic, undoubtedly intriguing in more than one way, has recently been the subject of a scrupulous study devoted to the so-called Rhodes hand of St John the Baptist. It provides so far the most complete list of the known relics of the Baptist's right arm, both those extant—in Istanbul, Turkey; Siena, Italy; and Cetinje, Montenegro—and those only known from the sources—in Châteaudun and Cîteaux, France; and Barcelona, Spain.⁷ Our study is de-

⁵ *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, ed. S. P. Khitrowo, Osnabruck 1966, 98.

⁶ G. P. Majeska, *Russian travelers to Constantinople in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries*, Washington, DC, 1984, 40, 96, 146, 164, 186.

⁷ I. Sinkevič, *Afterlife of the Rhodes Hand of St. John the Baptist*, in: *Byzantine images and their afterlives. Essays in honor of Annemarie Weyl Carr*, ed. L. Jones, Farnham 2014, 125–141; for an illustrative example of the contamination of the cult of John the Baptist's hand v. J. Durand, *A propos des reliques du monastère du Prodrome de Pétra à Constantinople. La relique de saint Christophe de l'ancien trésor de la cathédrale de Cambrai*, *Cahiers archéologiques* 46 (1998) 151–167.

voted to the one kept in Siena cathedral since the fifteenth century.⁸

The Siena relic of the Baptist's right arm has a short and quite meagre history of previous research, no doubt disproportionate to its importance.⁹ One of the main reasons is the fact that even today, after so many centuries, the relic has not become a museum exhibit but enjoys the status of a cultic object to which the faithful of Siena, and not only they, come to pay reverence. Ever since 1464, when pope Pius II (1405–1464) donated the relic to Siena cathedral, it is displayed once a year, on Whit Monday, for the faithful to pay veneration to it. All the other days, it remains in its purpose-built shrine. Namely, in 1482, some

⁸ This topic has been partly covered in: M. Čanak-Medić, D. Popović, D. Vojvodić, *Manastir Žiča*, Beograd 2014, 50–55 (D. Popović).

⁹ To the best of our knowledge, the first who took steps in that direction was a Franciscan, Eusebius Fermedžin, who had the opportunity to examine the relic in 1892; he published the results of his examination, which was focused on the inscription, in a brief report which was subsequently included in: A. Bačić, *O desnici sv. Ivana Krstitelja sa starosrpskim natpisom u Sieni*, *PKJIF* 9 (1929) 71–82. Apart from a brief discussion, Bačić's article included four appendices, old texts concerning John the Baptist's right arm. In the 1930s Bačić's article drew the attention of a few scholars, but despite attempts they did not get to examine the relic first hand. A reading of the inscription from poor transcriptions in Latin and Italian sources (the appendices to Bačić's article) was proposed by M. Ivković, *O natpisu na okovu ruke sv. Jovana Preteče u Sieni*, *PKJIF* 11 (1931) 154. Basic information about the relic and the textile in which it had been brought to Siena, based on obtained photographs, was published by P. Popović, *O srpskom natpisu u Sijeni*, *PKJIF* 16/1 (1936) 214–220; v. also S. Stanojević, *O desnoj ruci Krstitelja Jovana*, *Jugoslavenski istorijski časopis* 3/1–4 (1937) 252–259; M. Laskaris, *Povodom srpskog natpisa u Sijeni*, *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor* 17/1 (1937) 122. A thorough discussion of John the Baptist's right arm based on the then available sources and knowledge was offered by M. Čorović-Ljubinković, *Pretečina desnica i drugo krunisanje Prvovenčanog*, *Starinar* 5–6 (1954–1955) 105–114.

twenty years after the arrival of the relic in Siena—which will be described in greater detail later in the text—a chapel dedicated to St John the Baptist was built in the north arm of the transept of the cathedral to provide a shrine for it. Most of the credit for this undertaking goes to Alberto Aringhieri, a distinguished Siennese nobleman and a knight of the Order of St John which fostered the cult of this saint, including his relics, with particular dedication.¹⁰ This domed circular structure contains a cache, a very small room accessed by a narrow staired corridor. Sitting in the middle of the room is a large metal casket, reminiscent of a strongbox. Since its size makes it impossible to carry it through the narrow corridor of the chapel, it seems reasonable to assume that it was brought there or assembled on the spot at the time of the construction of the chapel. Ever since the fifteenth century it holds the Baptist's right arm and a cylindrical leaden container in which pope Pius II's original donation charter is deposited.

Access to the relic strictly follows a ritual which has not changed since the fifteenth century. To enter the room one has to go through three doors, of which two are inner doors—at the entrance to the staired section of the corridor and at the entrance to the room itself. Both inner doors are made of massive wrought-iron plates and fitted with complex lock mechanisms unlocked with the same pair of keys as the casket. The two keys are kept separately: one is in the custody of the archbishop of Siena, and the other is in the custody of the civic authorities. The casket and relic cannot be accessed without the consent of both keepers of the keys. Before the casket is unlocked, by turning both keys simultaneously, a prayer is recited.¹¹ It need not be said that the elaborate procedure lent our research a medieval flavour and a sense of excitement.

The relic is kept in an eighteenth-century chest which is about 60 cm in length, made of silver, partly gilded and decorated with ornate Baroque-style patterns (fig. 1). It has glass sides reinforced with metal at the corners and in the middle, and a massive lid. The arm is held in position by two massive gold hoops fixed to the bottom of the chest. The chest was sealed in the late eighteenth century and the relic has never left it since.¹² The fact that the relic is not directly accessible determined the nature of our examination, reducing it to observation from some distance and photographing under quite unfavourable conditions.

¹⁰ T. B. Smith, *Alberto Aringhieri and the Chapel of Saint John the Baptist. Patronage, politics, and the cult of relics in Renaissance Siena*, Electronic theses, treatises and dissertations, Florida State University, 2002.

¹¹ My research in Siena, as part of the work on the monograph on the monastery of Žiča under the auspices of the National Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Belgrade, was carried out during two study visits, in 2011 and 2012. I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church and His Grace Bishop of Bačka Dr Irinej, whose recommendation made my research work in Siena possible. I also owe a debt of gratitude to His Excellency Mons. Antonio Buoncristiani, Archbishop and Metropolitan of Siena, for granting permission to examine the relic, and to Don Enrico Grassini, Secretary to his Excellency, for his generous assistance during my research and for making a photograph of Pius II's donation charter available to me. Much of the credit for the success of my research should go to my husband, Dr Marko Popović.

¹² The information has been communicated to me by Don Enrico Grassini.



Fig. 2. A relic of St John the Baptist, part of the forearm

The relic consists of the embalmed, excellently preserved forearm, hand and fingers (fig. 2). It is dark brown in colour with still observable patches of tissue. The quite detailed description of the relic in Pius II's donation charter largely matches its present appearance and state of preservation:¹³ "The arm itself was cut off some place above the elbow joint. The hand was open, the fingers slightly bent. The middle finger missed the upper phalanx. The fourth, ring finger was broken and hanging by a small piece of skin and nerve. All the other fingers were whole and in no place mutilated" (*Brachium ipsum aliqua ex parte supra cubiti iuncturam recisum erat. Manus patula, digiti parumper contracti, digitus iunctura ultima deficiebat. Anularis digitus ac minimo proximus confractus erat, ac pendens pelle modica continebatur et nervo. Reliqui digiti omnes integri erat, et nulla parte mutilati*). It also testifies that: "The arm was dark brown and black in colour. The skin on all sides spoke of great antiquity" (*Brachium erat pullo et nigro colore. Cutis ipsa undique preseferebat vetustatem*). This scrupulous description speaks in itself of the importance attached to every detail concerning the relic. Apart from being worthy of attention from the standpoint of relic practices, the description is relevant to reconstructing the history of the relic of the Baptist's right arm. It shows that the Siena relic cannot be identified as the one which was kept in the Constantinopolitan church of the Virgin Peribleptos in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and which was believed to be the authentic one, originally deposited in the Virgin of the Pharos.¹⁴ Namely, the latter relic lacked two fingers, of which one, according to Anthony of Novgorod, had already been in the Studios by about 1200.¹⁵ Interesting in more than one way is also the following piece of information provided by

¹³ For all quotations from the charter included here see its transcription and translation in the paper of M. Joksimović in this issue of the *Zograf*. It should be noted that, given the focus of our interest, our study did not require a specialized, diplomatic analysis of the charter, only an insight into its relevant content.

¹⁴ V. n. 6 above.

¹⁵ *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, 90.



Fig. 3. Arm reliquary of St John the Baptist

the charter: “And then, turning the relic of the ring finger which was cut off and hanging, he [Pius II] said: “This particle, since it is cut off, we shall keep for our own devotion” (*Ac deinde, convertens anularis digiti particulam, que decisa pendebat: Hanc, inquit, nobis, quia precisa est, pro nostra devotione reservavimus*). This statement shows that the cult of relics in an Italian fifteenth-century town was not limited to its official, public dimension but could also take the form of private devotion—at least as far as the topmost strata of society were concerned. It also testifies to the endurance of the ancient practice of dismembering dead bodies of saints, which was based on the belief that even the tiniest piece of a saint’s body possesses all of his or her *virtus* and *dynamis*.¹⁶

The Baptist’s right arm is encased in a sumptuous medieval “sleeve”, a reliquary which shows two clearly distinguishable chronological phases—the original one and the one the relic was given upon its arrival in Siena. Our attention will focus on the original reliquary which, as we shall see, can be linked with the Serbian phase in the history of the Baptist’s relics (fig. 3). This older reliquary is briefly but clearly and informatively described in Pius II’s charter: “The upper part of the arm was sheathed in gilded silver up to the elbow. There were on it two lines of words and verses mentioned above, written in the Illyrian language. At the middle of the arm was a gold filigree hoop by which it can be lifted. Moreover, there was a silver arca covered in gold and many precious stones” (*Pars brachij eius suprema ad cubitum usque de aurato includebatur argento. In ea duo literarum ordines, ac versiculi conscripti Illirici, quos supra memoravimus. In medio autem lacerti, cingulum ex auro frigio, quo cum at tollitur comprehendendi possit. Insuper et argenteus arcus celatus auro et non nullis preciosis lapillis*). The information provided by the charter is highly relevant, all the more so because it can be checked against the actual object. It speaks not only about the appearance of the reliquary but also about its use, which is of particular importance for our further discussion.

¹⁶ N. Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints. Formation coutumière d’un droit*, Paris 1975, 62–67; A. Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich 1997, 152–155; S. A. Ivanov, *Blagochestivoe raschlenenie. Paradoks pochitaniiā moshchei v vizantiiskoi agiografii*, in: *Eastern Christian Relics*, ed. A. Lidov, Moscow 2003, 121–131; J. Wortley, *The origins of Christian veneration of body-parts*, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 223 (2006) 5–28; D. Krueger, *The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*, in: *Treasures of heaven. Saints, relics, and devotion in medieval Europe*, ed. M. Bagnoli, H. A. Klein, C. Grifit Mann, J. Robinson, New Haven – London 2011, *passim*; H. Klein, *Brighter than sun. Saints, relics, and the power of art in Byzantium*, in: *Knotenpunkt Byzanz. Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen*, ed. A. Speer, Ph. Steinkrüger, Berlin–Boston 2012, 635–639.

Our considerations of the older reliquary should begin with its form. Its basic design no doubt follows Byzantine tradition. Unlike the Latin West, where body-part relics were kept in closed reliquaries and hence inaccessible to view, in the Christian East they were wrapped with precious materials but remained visible, which was a way to emphasize the reality of the saint’s presence.¹⁷ This practice crucially determined the type of encasement. It as a rule was an opulently adorned silver or gold sheathing—consisting of hoops or bands, depending on the shape of the relic—which was quite frequently engraved with an identifying inscription.¹⁸

The older reliquary for the Baptist’s right arm is cylindrical and, following the shape of the arm, slightly tapers towards the wrist. Its upper end is covered with a shallow domical lid incised with Sava of Serbia’s donation inscription in Old Serbian. The reliquary is silver gilt and decorated with gold filigree, gemstones and pearls. The silver gilt casing is segmented into several bands, but the way they relate to one another and, in particular, their chronology is difficult to establish reliably under given circumstances. Since our conclusions could only be based on observation from a distance, they should be taken as tentative and open to revision. The original portion of the reliquary apparently consists of six bands of roughly the same width (1.5 cm – 1.8 cm) separated by thin shallow ridges. The ridges are additionally accentuated with rows of small pearls, of which now three rows remain. The bands are decorated with filigree patterns fashioned from gold wire applied to the metal surface and with large granules. The decoration of the lowest and narrowest band, which consists of dense filigree work, gemstones and large pearls, stands out from the rest by its opulence, and constitutes a kind of ornate border. The other bands are decorated with heart-shaped filigree motifs symmetrically divided into two halves by the pearl-studded ridges. The free ends of the filigree wire are curved into a spiral. The distinctive features of the filigree work are large granules set in the eyes of the spirals, the ornamentation which is not too strict or dense in composition, and the technique characterized by the “beady” structure of gold wire, double at places. These features, of relevance to the dating of our piece of gold work, will be discussed later. Besides filigree, two of the bands—the lowest and the one below the uppermost one—are each adorned with four large gemstones in oval settings.

To the portion of the casing that dates from before the arrival of the relic in Siena belongs yet another clearly distinguishable band which is a continuation of the main body of the reliquary (fig. 4). It is made of gilded silver, bordered with twisted wire and decorated with gemstones set in rectangular settings. This band is also decorated with gold filigree and granulation, but in patterns which are somewhat different and denser than those on

¹⁷ D. Diedrich, *Vom Glauben zum Sehen. Die Sichtbarkeit der Reliquie im Reliquiar. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sehens*, Berlin 2001, 34; G. Toussaint, *Die Sichtbarkeit des Gebeins im Reliquiar. Eine Folge der Plünderung Konstantinopels*, in: *Reliquiare im Mittelalter*, ed. B. Rendenbach, G. Toussaint, Berlin 2005, 89–106 (with bibliography).

¹⁸ Kalavrezou, *Helping hands*, 68–69; M. Bagnoli, *The stuff of heaven. Materials and craftsmanship in medieval reliquaries*, in: *Treasures of heaven*, 140–141 (with a few representative examples included).

the other bands. An element that is worthy of attention is the well-preserved hinge at its bottom side which lends it the appearance of a sumptuous bracelet. Apparently this band may be identified as the “filigree hoop” which is referred to in Pius II’s charter as mounted at the middle of the forearm and serving for lifting the relic. This function of the band is also suggested by its diameter, which is noticeably smaller than those of the others.

Finally, yet another element of the “sleeve” should be mentioned. It now forms an integral part of the reliquary but it obviously does not belong to its older portion: an ornate band adjacent to the “bracelet”. Unlike the other bands, it is not made of metal but the opulent jewelled decoration is affixed to a red fabric. Its surface once was entirely covered in pearls, which are largely still in place, surrounding a few large gems in octagonal settings.

From the standpoint of the medieval notion of artistic value, the Siena reliquary was not only an exquisite piece of the goldsmith’s work but also one that followed the “aesthetic” principles of its time. Like similar creations made of the most expensive materials such as gold, precious stones and pearls, and using the demanding filigree technique, it must have been seen as communicating complex messages and meanings. Most of all, the well-known belief that the objects fashioned from *aureus atque gemmis*, owing to their associative properties—above all colour and light effects—are a metaphor for heaven, an evocation of the heavenly city and, at the same time, a means of mystical ascent towards and knowledge of the divine.¹⁹ When used for the decoration of reliquaries, such materials conveyed particular meanings, including theological emphases. Gold and precious stones, *lapides vivi*, were thought of as being living matter endowed with the power, otherworldly in origin, to purify nonliving matter. They contributed in an essential way to the “vivification” of a human corpse and its transformation into the relics of a saint—*corpus spirituale*.²⁰ In direct contact with the relics, the reliquary itself was transformed: taking on the saint’s *virtus*, it also took on its holy properties and miraculous powers.²¹

The Siena arm of John the Baptist, in addition to being a precious object and a holy relic of the highest order, is also of the utmost scholarly interest—and not only for historical studies, including various aspects of relic practices, but also for the study of medieval *ars sacra*. In this respect, however, it raises more questions than it answers.

¹⁹ C. Meier, *Gemma Spiritualis. Methode und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese vom frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1977; H. R. Hahnloser, S. Brugger-Koch, *Corpus der mittelalterlichen Hartsteinschliffe des 12. bis 15. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1985; T. Jülich, *Gemmenkreuze. Die Farbigkeit ihres Edelsteinbesatzes bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*, *Aachener Kunstblätter* 54/55 (1986–1987) 99–258; D. Janes, *God and Gold in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 1998, 63–84, 139–152; L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine art*, London 1996; eadem, *Colour and Meaning in Byzantium*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11/2 (2003) 223–233; Bagnoli, *The stuff of heaven*, 137–147.

²⁰ G. Toussaint, *Heiliges Gebein und edler Stein. Der Edelsteinschmuck von Reliquiaren im Spiegel mittelalterlicher Wahrnehmung*, *Das Mittelalter* 8 (2008) 41–66; B. Buettner, *From bones to stones. Reflection on jeweled reliquaries*, in: *Reliquiare im Mittelalter*, ed. B. Rendenbach, G. Toussaint, Berlin 2005, 43–59; D. Popović, *A staurotheke of serbian provenance in Pienza*, *Zograf* 36 (2012) 159–162.

²¹ Hahn, *Strange beauty*, 38–44, 67–68 and *passim* (with sources and bibliography).



Fig. 4. Arm reliquary of St John the Baptist, detail

One of the most complex of them is certainly the chronology of the older reliquary and its decoration.

As we have already said, it is not difficult to determine that the original reliquary essentially follows Byzantine tradition in conception and form. What is much more difficult to do is to determine the features of its gold work with enough precision to be able to attribute it to the Byzantine art of goldsmithing.²² Researchers specializing in this field express understandable caution when it comes to basing the dating of works of goldsmithing only on techniques and morphology without some other sufficiently reliable corroboration. Filigree constitutes an especially characteristic case. This highly delicate metal-working technique using thin gold or silver wires and tiny granules has not only been in use since antiquity but also has a very wide geographical distribution. This fact has certainly contributed to the development of many types of filigree work and many types of wires applied to a metal background. It is generally held that the most common medieval types of wire are wavy, twisted, flat and beaded wires.²³ Yet, as researchers have repeatedly warned, pointing to the “timeless” nature of the technique, the accurate identification of the type of filigree work is not necessarily helpful in dating.

This problem, very relevant to our considerations, has recently been discussed in detail on a representative sample, the filigree decoration of the illustrious Hungarian regalia—the sacred crown (*corona sacra*, *Szent Korona*) and sceptre, and the collection of jewellery retrieved from the tombs in the royal mausoleum in Székesfehérvár.²⁴

²² For basic information v. J. Durand, *L'orfèvrerie, IX^e–XI^e siècle*, in: *Byzance. L'art byzantine dans les collections publiques françaises*, Paris 1992–1993, 304–335; idem, *A propos des reliques du monastère du Prodrome de Pétra*, 151–167; idem, *Innovations gothiques dans l'orfèvrerie byzantine sous les Paléologues*, *DOP* 58 (2004) 333–354.

²³ On technical characteristics and the techniques of filigree and granulation v. A. Lipinsky, *Oro, argento, gemme e smalti. Tecnologia delle arti dalle origini alla fine del medioevo*, Florence 1975, 253–268; *Ornamenta Ecclesiae 1, Kunst und Künstler der Romanik*, ed. A. Legner, Cologne 1985, 381; *The Grove encyclopedia of materials and techniques in art*, ed. G. W. R. Ward, Oxford 2008, 257.

²⁴ B. Z. Szakács, *Remarks on the filigree of the Holy Crown of Hungary*, *Acta Historiae Artium* 43 (2002) 52–61.

How difficult and even controversial the dating and attribution of such objects by the features of their filigree decoration may be is tellingly shown by the fact that earlier researchers dated them variously to the end of the eleventh century, the twelfth century and the first quarter of the thirteenth century.²⁵ This latest study is worthy of particular attention because it points with much more precision than before not only to the technological and stylistic features of the filigree decoration of the Hungarian royal insignia but also to their possible analogies both in Byzantine and in West European gold work. This approach to research and its outcome provide important points of reference for broader considerations in the field, including the subject of our present study.

Without any intention to offer definitive conclusions as to the origin and chronology of the oldest reliquary for the Siena arm of John the Baptist—which would require specialized enquiries—we shall point to examples which show similarities to it in some particular aspects. As far as the technique of filigree is concerned, we have already said that the Siena reliquary is decorated with beaded, at places double, filigree wires terminating in spirals inlaid with large granules. The use of beaded filigree wire—worked with a special goldsmith's chisel to create the impression of a series of tiny beads—was widespread in the medieval period.²⁶ It occurs on some representative pieces of *ars sacra*, which we are mentioning here because they share some other similarities with the Siena reliquary. The same type of filigree work using simple flat beaded wire occurs on the already mentioned Hungarian sceptre (eleventh century) where it forms heart-shaped ornaments with spiral ends.²⁷ Similar features in technological and, to some extent, stylistic terms are observable in some goldsmith's works crafted in Hildesheim in the second half of the eleventh century, such as the cross of St Bernward and the so-called crown of king Oswald.²⁸ To be mentioned in the same context are the staurotheke from Osnabrück, a masterpiece of the goldsmith's art from the last quarter of the eleventh century, and the famous Heinrichkreuz from Fritzlar dated to the first quarter of the twelfth century.²⁹

As far as Byzantine filigree is concerned, direct parallels with our piece are rare. Some similarities—a loose, not strictly symmetrical arrangement of motifs—are observable in the staurotheke from the treasury of San Giovanni in Laterano roughly dated to the tenth to twelfth century.³⁰ Some points of similarity such as heart-shaped

designs and granules set into spirals are shown by the filigree work decorating the Byzantine staurotheke from Mariengraden from the second half or end of the twelfth century.³¹ Quite close to the Siena reliquary is the filigree decoration of two twelfth-century staurothekai, whose Byzantine origin, however, remains a matter of controversy: both are two-armed crosses decorated with filigree and jewels; one is kept in Salzburg, Austria, the other in Angers, France.³² The one from Salzburg cathedral draws particular attention for its filigree work, heart-shaped motifs and, especially, large granules, all of which show great resemblance to the decoration of the Siena reliquary.

Finally, we should not lose sight of Venetian goldsmithing. In spite of lacunas in our knowledge of the works crafted before the great fire of 1231 which consumed the valuables deposited in the treasury of St Mark's, the basic features of Venetian filigree, the highly-valued *opus veneticum ad filum*, are known quite well. Especially characteristic was the fine filigree of beaded wire known as *a vermicelli*. Perfected from the eleventh and twelfth century on, the technique saw its flourishing days in the late thirteenth century and became adopted further afield, for example in Tuscan workshops. The technique of granulation, which was being developed in the same period, is another recognizable feature of Venetian gold work.³³ The surviving pieces, which date from the second half of the thirteenth century, can certainly be considered to be an analogy for the Siena reliquary crafted several decades earlier. At any rate, their unquestionable similarity in the structure and appearance of filigree work is reason enough to think of possible common prototypes.

The Siena reliquary for the Baptist's arm is engraved with an inscription the importance of which cannot be overemphasized. Inscriptions were quite usual on medieval reliquaries. Even though very diverse in form and content, they generally served the purpose of identifying the relic and emphasizing the virtues of its donor, i.e. of conveying his or her prayers to the saintly patron for protection and eternal memory. For understandable reasons, the inscriptions of members of the highest social strata—ruling families and high church hierarchy—as a rule have a broader historical and cultural importance.³⁴ The surviving written sources and reliquaries leave no room for doubt that the same practice existed in medieval Serbia. What is distinctive is that most of the surviving inscriptions occur on staurothekai, and those that were royal donations, which opens up a separate and very interesting research topic.³⁵ In any case, as a result of the ruin of

²⁵ J. Deér, *Die Heilige Krone Ungars*, Vienna 1966; E. Kovács, Z. Lovag, *The Hungarian crown and other regalia*, Budapest 1980; E. Tóth, *A Szent Korona apostellemezeinek keltezéséhez*, *Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae* 1996, 181–209; E. Tóth, *Das ungarische Krönungszepter*, *Folia Archaeologica* 48 (2000) 111–153.

²⁶ *Ornamenta Ecclesiae* 1, 381.

²⁷ B. Z. Szakács, *Remarks on the Filigree of the Holy Crown of Hungary*, passim, figs. 30 and 31 (with earlier literature).

²⁸ V. H. Elbern, H. Reuter, *Der Hildesheimer Domschatz*, Hildesheim 1969, 35–36, 84–85; Szakács, *Remarks on the Filigree*, 59, figs. 38, 39.

²⁹ *Ornamenta Ecclesiae* 3, 103–104, 106; 112–113.

³⁰ A. Frolow, *La relique de la vraie croix. Recherches sur le développement d'un culte*, Paris 1961, nos. 178, 256; this fragment is published in H. A. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz: Die Geschichte einer Reliquie und ihrer künstlerischen Fassung in Byzanz und im Abendland*, Wiesbaden 2004, Abb. 42g.

³¹ *Ornamenta Ecclesiae* 3, 118, 122–123.

³² *Ibid.*, 113, 116; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*, 197–198, Abb. 88a, 89, believes that the Salzburg and Angers staurothekai are replicas of the so-called "pilgrim crosses" that used to be brought from the Holy Land; the same author attributes to Mosan twelfth-century workshops the filigree work of the well-known Stavelot Triptych which houses two Byzantine staurothekai (*ibid.*, 210–211, Abb. 91d).

³³ D. Gaborit-Chopin, *Venetian filigree*, in: *The treasury of San Marco Venice*, Milan 1984, 233–236.

³⁴ A. Frolow, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix*, Paris 1965, 187, 194–195 (with examples); S. Lerou, *L'usage des reliques du Christ par les empereurs aux XI^e et XII^e siècles. Le Saint Bois et les Saintes Pierres*, in: *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, 165; Hahn, *Strange beauty*, passim.

³⁵ D. Popović, *Relikvije Časnog krsta u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, in: *Konstantin Veliki u vizantijskoj i srpskoj tradiciji*, ed. Lj. Maksimović, Beograd 2014, 99–121.



Fig. 5 Reliquary lid with the inscription of Sava of Serbia



Fig. 6. Reliquary lid with the inscription of Sava of Serbia, drawing

the medieval Serbian treasures and the dispersal of their valuables, the presence of an inscription is, as a rule, the only clue to identifying not only the donor but also the provenance of the reliquary itself. All these aspects should be taken into account in analyzing the inscription on the Siena reliquary.

We shall begin our analysis by presenting basic facts, within the limits allowed by the already mentioned circumstances in which our examination of the relic took place, and the latter, as we have seen, make some major questions difficult to solve. One of the knottiest arises from the insufficiently clear relationship between the original reliquary and the inscribed lid, which leaves unanswered the question as to whether they were crafted together or the lid is a subsequent addition. Careful observation of the reliquary would seem to favour the former option. The shallow domical lid of gilded sheet metal shows a central round field encircled by two concentric bands bordered with twisted filigree wire. In the middle of the central field is an incised bust of St John the Baptist, the lower part of which is damaged. The saint is identified by the inscription engraved to the left and right of the bust: *с(в)ѣты юван [Saint John]*. Inside the two bands that encircle the central field runs the well-preserved inscription in Old Serbian: *†прѣдѣтеѣва десница юванова. покори ме савѣ архиепископа сръбьскога [John the Forerunner's right arm, cover me, Sava the Serbian archbishop]* (figs. 5 and 6). The formal features of the inscription—text written between two imaginary parallel lines so that letters do not extend below or above them, and especially the archaic shape of some letters—are typical of the oldest Cyrillic script of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.³⁶

³⁶ Archaic features are particularly observable in the letters: *а*—the stem is vertical and the bowl does not sit on the baseline; *и*—the crossbar is straight and horizontal; *к*—the arm and leg are detached from the stem; *ω*—all strokes are of the same height; *ч*—the stem supports a cup-like upper part in the middle; *ь*—in one instance the stem rises from the middle of the bowl. It is also noticeable that the letters are not uniform in shape and size, perhaps because of the poorly planned use of the available space for the inscription. I express

The content of the inscription is included in the section of the charter of Pius II which describes the solemn transfer of the reliquary to Siena cathedral. This Latin “original” subsequently served for several, and varied, transcriptions of the inscription.³⁷ The part of the inscription identifying St John the Baptist was correctly translated in Pius’s charter, but the “Illyrian words inscribed in gold and silver” were understood only vaguely, which led to their erroneous translation into Latin: “pure right [arm] of John the Forerunner, protect [God’s] servant the archbishop” (*Grece littere sonant: Agios Johannes, quod interpretatur: Sanctus Johannes. Illirice vero, predece scuiويا desniza Johannova Christolona poerime savu servum archiepiscopa, que sonant latinis litteris: pura dextera Johannis Baptiste protege servum archiepiscopum* [emphasis D.P.]).³⁸ It is obvious that none of the participants in this event were aware of the fact that the impersonal expression “[God’s] servant the archbishop” actually referred to an important historical figure as the donor of the reliquary. That figure was Sava of Serbia (1175/6–1236), the youngest son of the founder of the holy Nemanjić dynasty Stefan Nemanja, the main ideologist of the newly-independent Serbian state and the first archbishop of the national autocephalous church.

There is no doubt that Sava Nemanjić was the prime mover of the grand introduction of the cult of relics in Serbia in the early decades of the thirteenth century.³⁹

my friendly gratitude to Prof. Irena Špadijer for the transcription and linguistic and morphological analysis of the inscription.

³⁷ Bačić, *O desnici sv. Ivana Krstitelja*, 75–82.

³⁸ Attempts to read and understand poor Latin transcriptions led to the expression “cover me” being misread as “remember me”. Ivković, *O natpisu na okovu ruke sv. Jovana Preteče*, 154; Ćorović-Ljubinković, *Pretečina desnica*, 110; cf. n. 9 above.

³⁹ This topic has already been an object of our attention: Popović, in: *Manastir Žiča*, 50–55; eadem, *A staurotheke*, 163–164; eadem, “*God dwelt even in their bodies in spiritual wise*”. *Relics and reliquaries in medieval Serbia*, in: *Sacral art of the Serbian lands in the*

This was an important segment of a sweeping project whose ultimate purpose was the sacral legitimation of the Nemanjić state and the inclusion of the Serbs, as a “New Israel”, into the spiritual community of Christian nations. The project of Sava of Serbia should be viewed against the backdrop of a broader process which marked the Christian world after the fall of Constantinople in 1204, when new polities began to arise on the ruins of Byzantium.⁴⁰ In the existing political circumstances, various ways of “translating” Jerusalem by means of illustrious relics originating from the Holy Land were undertaken with a view to asserting royal identities and the legitimacy of the newly-created polities.⁴¹ Such ideological projects did not come out of nowhere. Their roots lay in the traditional “custom” of rulers to collect eminent relics, which is evidenced by a number of well-known purposely created medieval treasuries.⁴² Their common, and unrivalled, model was, of course, the “holy chapel” of the Byzantine *basileis*, the Virgin of the Pharos.⁴³

It is clear from the written sources that Sava of Serbia had a profound appreciation for things holy and precious—saints’ relics, icons, sumptuous liturgical objects. A learned theologian and a man of the world, he was perfectly aware not only of the theological meaning of “holy relics” but also of their ideological and dynastic function. In the circumstances created by the Latin conquest in 1204, when Constantinopolitan treasures became the prey of unprecedented plundering, Sava acquired some exceptionally valuable relics.⁴⁴ The manners of acquisition were diverse. Apart from gifts he was presented with by persons of high rank he met with, he acquired most of the relics by purchase, in keeping with newly-established practices.⁴⁵ Given Sava’s royal standing, high repute and means, it is reasonable to assume that he was able to come into possession of eminent and authentic relics. This practice of Sava’s, which he kept pursuing with perseverance and passion, is confirmed by his biographers’ accounts of his

pilgrimage to holy places in the Christian East.⁴⁶ Stressing that he was particularly diligent in collecting saints’ relics, they do not fail to mention the purpose of his pursuit: “...if the holy archbishop found something honourable or holy, he would buy it with the intention to take it to his fatherland.”⁴⁷

Sava’s notions about the ideological importance of the veneration of icons and relics were made known several times, and in a very convincing manner. He imparted messages about the theological dimension of the veneration in the famous *Oration on the True Faith* he gave at the ecclesiastical and state assembly held at Žiča in 1221.⁴⁸ In the central part of the oration, which expounds the fundamental dogmas of the Orthodox faith, the first Serbian archbishop, among other things, lays out the meaning of icons and relics, interpreted by Orthodoxy as manifest, embodied holiness and, ultimately, as a confession of faith in the reality of Christ’s incarnation.⁴⁹ Theological instruction was only one aspect of Sava’s active concern with relics. He devoted much care to giving shape to the cult of relics. This is evidenced by many initiatives associated, not at all by chance, with the earliest Nemanjić foundations—Hilandar, Studenica and Žiča—where the bases for the sacral legitimation of the newly-independent Serbian state and church were being laid.⁵⁰ Quite telling in this respect is the instruction he gave on his deathbed at Turnovo in 1236 that the relics he had collected on his pilgrimages in the Christian East be taken to Studenica and Žiča.⁵¹

In direct connection with our topic is the relic programme of highest aspirations and outcomes that Sava carried out in Žiča, the cathedral and coronation church of the first Nemanjić kings. Despite the almost total loss of the objects that made up the original treasury of the Žiča monastery, its content is known from the surviving text of the foundation charter written in the technique of fresco painting on the walls of the passage through the monastery’s gate tower. We can learn from the charter that king Stefan the First-Crowned and his son Radoslav donated some of the most precious Christian relics to Žiča: a piece of the True Cross, relics of Christ’s passion, pieces of the

Middle Ages, in: *Byzantine heritage and Serbian art II, Sacral art of the Serbian lands in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. Vojvodić, D. Popović, Belgrade 2016, 133–136.

⁴⁰ A. Eastmond, *Local saints, Art and regional identity in the Orthodox world after the Fourth Crusade*, *Speculum* 77 (2003) 707–749; B. Cvetković, C. Hahn, *Imperial aspirations. Relics and reliquaries of the Byzantine periphery*, *Convivium* II/1 (2015) 182–200 (with earlier literature).

⁴¹ From the ample literature on the subject v. e.g. B. Flusin, *Les reliques de la Sainte-Chapelle et leur passé impérial à Constantinople*, in: *Le trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle*, ed. J. Durand, M. P. Laffite, Paris 2001, 20–31; A. Eastmond, *Byzantine identity and relics of the True Cross in the thirteenth century*, in: *Eastern Christian relics*, 204–216; G. P. Majeska, *The relics of Constantinople after 1204*, in: *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, 183–190; E. Bozóky, *La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint Louis*, Paris 2006, 120–169; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*, passim.

⁴² Hahn, *Strange beauty*, 161–198 (with bibliography).

⁴³ P. Magdalino, *L’église du Phare et les reliques de la Passion à Constantinople (VII^e/VIII^e–XIII^e siècle)*, in: *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, 15–30; A. M. Lidov, *Tserkov’ Bogomateri Faroskoï. Imperatorskii khram-relikvarii kak konstantinopol’skii Grob Gospoden’*, in: *Ierotropiia. Prostranstvennye ikony i obrazy-paradigmy v vizantijskoj kul’ture*, Moskva 2009, 71–109.

⁴⁴ Popović, in: *Manastir Žiča*, 50–55; eadem, *A staurotheke*, 163–164.

⁴⁵ H. A. Klein, *Eastern objects and Western desires. Relics and reliquaries between Byzantium and the West*, *DOP* 58 (2004) 283–314 (with sources and bibliography).

⁴⁶ On St Sava’s travels and their influence on medieval Serbian art v. B. Miljković, *Žitija svetog Save kao izvori za istoriju srednjovekovne umetnosti*, Beograd 2008; M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje svetog Save u Palestinu i njegov značaj za srpsku srednjovekovnu umetnost*, Beograd 2009.

⁴⁷ Teodosije, *Žitija*, ed. D. Bogdanović, Beograd 1988, 226, 246–248.

⁴⁸ *The Oration on the True Faith* is included in Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, ed. R. Marinković, transl. L. Mirković, Beograd 1988, 150; Teodosije, *Žitija*, 211; for a theological interpretation v. Jeromonah Atanasije Jevtić, *Iz bogoslovlja Svetoga Save. Žička beseda Svetoga Save o pravoslavnoj veri*, in: *Sveti Sava, Spomenica povodom osamstogodišnjice rođenja*, Beograd 1977, 176 and passim.

⁴⁹ G. Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York 1974, 44–53; H. Belting, *Likeness and presence. A history of the image before the era of art*, Chicago 1994, 144–165 and passim; K. Parry, *Depicting the word. Byzantine iconophile thought of the eighth and ninth centuries*, Leiden etc. 1996; J. J. Pelican, J. Herrin, *Imago Dei. The Byzantine apologia for icons*, Princeton 2011.

⁵⁰ It was certainly not by chance that it was to Hilandar and Studenica that he donated particles of the True Cross. Cf. Popović, *Relikvije Časnog krsta u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, 106–108; eadem, “*God dwelt even in their bodies in spiritual wise*”, 134.

⁵¹ Teodosije, *Žitija*, 247–248.

Virgin's maphorion and belt, the right arm and a fragment of the skull of John the Baptist, and relics of apostles, prophets and martyrs.⁵² These relics, needless to say, were of the highest order because they were linked with the central figures of Sacred History, those with whom the idea of *translatio imperii* by means of the *translatio Hierosolymae* was associated. There is no doubt therefore that the ultimate purpose of the Žiča relic programme was to transfer the idea and "reality" of the Holy Land to Serbia, thereby securing sacral legitimacy for the young kingdom. Nor can there be any doubt that the Baptist's right arm had an especial role and importance in such a context.⁵³

Another question of relevance to our topic is the chronology of the creation of the original Žiča treasury. It must have been built up little by little, already in Sava's lifetime. Its initial collection—the one mentioned in the foundation charter, which comprised illustrious relics originating from the Holy Land, including the Baptist's right arm—could have been created sometime in the 1210s, perhaps soon after the Žiča monastery church of the Saviour began to be built, which was about 1210. It may be assumed therefore that this collection of holy relics and liturgical objects constituted the bulk of the treasury's possessions at the time of the consecration of the church and of the ecclesiastical and state assembly held in 1221.⁵⁴ The sources, regrettably, say little about how and where Sava had procured these relics. The fact that they belonged to the category of the most highly revered ones suggests that they may have come from Constantinopolitan churches. Since it is known that Sava travelled to Constantinople several times about 1200 and that he visited the court of Alexios III Angelos, he must have been familiar with the capital city's treasures.⁵⁵ Whether he was able to procure relics of such eminence a few years later necessarily remains a matter of conjecture; considering all the known circumstances, however, it seems reasonable to assume that he acquired the Baptist's right arm in the disorderly times immediately following the 1204 fall of Constantinople.⁵⁶

Let us now, after this general but indispensable overview, return to our Siena reliquary and Sava of Serbia's inscription incised on its lid. The date of the inscription may be established with some precision. Given that he is titled as "Serbian archbishop" and that there is no epithet "saint" in front of his name, it necessarily follows that he made the donation after his election as archbishop in 1219 and before his death in 1236. This time span

may be further narrowed down if we take into account the reasonable assumption that the relic of the Baptist's arm could not have been just an item in the founding collection of the Žiča treasury, but rather that it must have played an important role at the assembly of 1221. We should also remember that the Siena reliquary is not the only one which the name of the first Serbian archbishop occurs. His name with the title of the highest-ranking church dignitary (patriarch) occurs in the inscription on a staurotheke which is now kept in the Museo Diocesano in Pienza, Italy. Even though this staurotheke dates from the last quarter of the fourteenth century, there are very good reasons to claim that the relic of the True Cross was Sava's donation to Žiča and that it formed part of its initial collection of treasures.⁵⁷

By its nature, the text on the Siena reliquary is a prayerful donation inscription beseeching St John the Forerunner to "cover", i.e. to watch over the donor.⁵⁸ On the whole, its content is usual for medieval reliquaries but it does have some distinctive features. One of them is Sava's addressing the holy patron in the first person singular. This manner of address strongly underlines the personal tone of Sava's prayer; moreover, it reveals yet another remarkable trait of his personality, *parrhesia*, the privilege of addressing the Lord with "bold" frankness.⁵⁹ It is this intimacy with God and the "impertinence" of speaking to him audaciously—which are the true source of a holy man's charisma and spiritual authority—that Sava's biographers stress more than once.⁶⁰

The hagiographical sources are explicit about Sava's distinctive relation to St John the Baptist. Domentijan likens even Sava's birth to the birth of the Baptist. Paraphrasing the evangelist Luke (1:41), he emphasizes an essential aspect of this typological similarity—the gift of the Holy Spirit by predestination: "...and he will be great before God, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even in the womb of his mother"; the biographer proceeds to emphasize the higher purpose of Sava's coming to this world, which is to create a "perfect", i.e. "orthodox", and spiritually rooted people: "...and he will turn many sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will walk before them with the spirit and power of Elijah [...] to prepare a perfect people for the Lord."⁶¹ Domentijan's reference to the prophet Elijah is certainly not accidental. John the Baptist is described in the Gospels as "Elijah who is to come" (Matt 11:14), and the distinguished prophet is explicitly referred

⁵⁷ Eadem, *A staurotheke*, 157–170.

⁵⁸ Judging by the surviving written material, the use of the term "cover" seems to be quite unusual. The only other example we have been able to find occurs in a considerably later text (seventeenth century): Patrijarh Pajsije, *Služba svetom Simonu*, Srbljak III, Beograd 1970, 339; T. Jovanović, *Književno delo patrijarha Pajseja*, Beograd 2001, 209.

⁵⁹ G. Scarpat, *Parrhesia. Storia del termine e delle sue traduzioni in latino*, Brescia 1982; E. M. Jeffreys., *Parrhesia*, in: ODB III, New York – Oxford 1991, 1591; J. Scedros, *Hagiography and devotion to the saints*, in: *The Orthodox Christian world*, ed. A. Casiday, London – New York 2012, 450.

⁶⁰ Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, 132; Teodosije, *Žitija*, 221; v. D. Popović, *Čudotvorenja svetog Save Srpskog*, in: eadem, *Pod okriljem svetosti. Kult svetih vladara i relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, Beograd 2006, 98–99; S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *Harizma i autoritet: skica za hagiografski portret svetog Save*, ZRVI 52 (2015) 277–289.

⁶¹ Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, 64–65.

⁵² The editions of the Žiča charters: D. Sindik, *Jedna ili dve žičke povelje*, IČ 14–15 (1963–1965), 1966, 309–315; G. Subotić, *Treća žička povelja*, Zograf 31 (2006–2007) 51–59; cf. also the latest edition: *Zbornik srednjovekovnih ćirilčkih povelja i pisama Srbije, Bosne i Dubrovnika I*, 1186–1321, ed. V. Mošin, S. Ćirković, D. Sindik, Beograd 2001, 89–95.

⁵³ Popović in: *Manastir Žiča*, 44–63 (with earlier literature).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁵ On Sava's visits to Constantinople v. Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, 103; Teodosije, *Žitija*, 139–140; Miljković, *Žitija svetog Save*, 81, 120–121.

⁵⁶ Later acquisitions for the Žiča treasury may be dated with much precision because they are bounded by Sava's two pilgrimages to the East, in 1229 and in 1234/5–1236. However, apart from the information about the particle of the True Cross he was given as a gift by emperor John Vatatzes, the available sources say nothing that could help identify them. Cf. Popović, in: *Manastir Žiča*, 44–46.

to as Sava's saintly role model in Domentijan.⁶² There was one more reason for Sava's choice of patron saints. It is well known that both St John the Baptist and St Elijah were considered hallowed role models by all Christian hermits, and Sava of Serbia joined the followers of this distinctive ascetic tradition not only by embracing their ideals in theory but also by pursuing the practice himself during his stays on Mount Athos.⁶³ That is what Domentijan has in mind when he describes Sava's departure for Athos: "...because he became fond of the eremitic way of life at a young age, in imitation of John the Baptist Forerunner of Christ."⁶⁴ Sava's status as "the second Forerunner" is emphasized by both of his biographers. Teodosije's account carries a special weight in this respect because of the already mentioned *Oration on the True Faith* which the first Serbian archbishop gave at Žiča and which his biographer conveys in a heightened, dramatic tone befitting the significance of the event. The climax of the rite, when those in attendance, like "the ancients in the Jordan", recited the creed, is described by Teodosije as "a sight worthy of God's grace: "everyone in church was standing professing the divinity and denouncing heresy [...] and the holy man, as the second Forerunner and Baptist in God, was standing amidst the crowd."⁶⁵ In this light, there can be no doubt that the Baptist's arm, along with the other Žiča relics, was a mainstay of Sava's "twofold missionary project"—of consolidating Orthodoxy and suppressing heresy among a still only partly Christianized people.⁶⁶ It is quite understandable therefore that Sava on his pilgrimages to the Holy Land did not fail to pay his deepest reverence to the most illustrious places associated with the Baptist.⁶⁷ He expressed his reverence in the visual language as well—by having the famous fresco icon of his saintly protector painted in a place of honour in the naos of the Studenica katholikon.⁶⁸

Many questions surrounding the Baptist's arm, as well as other medieval Serbian relics, are so difficult to answer because of the scantiness of surviving sources and the ruin of once rich treasuries. Among more important of such questions are certainly those relating to the safekeeping, public display and use of relics. The available comparative material provides only a few solid points of reference. As for safekeeping, the best documented practice suggests that there were no strict rules. In the most famous Constantinopolitan treasury, the Virgin of the Pharos, relics apparently were accessible to view but not to touch.⁶⁹ Accounts of pilgrims and travellers suggest that in Hagia Sophia a multitude of relics were displayed

at all times, and available for direct contact. In both cases they created a distinctive sacral topography, an evocation of the Holy Land and its landmarks.⁷⁰ Yet, the most valuable relics were not on display on a permanent basis, but rather only on special occasions and great holidays. They as a rule were kept in the sanctuary of a church or in the eastern part of a side chapel built specifically for that purpose. Some were deposited in the *skeuphylakion*—a chamber for keeping valuables whose location inside the church was not strictly prescribed.⁷¹

In the early medieval Christian West relics were usually kept in the sanctuary, displayed restrictively and forbidden from being touched. What seems to have been usual practice was the display of reliquaries on special occasions such as feast day services, processions or extraordinary events. In that way a "movable sacred space" which was not necessarily inside the church was created.⁷² The practice of building up treasuries, the beginnings of which may be traced back to the Carolingian period, gained momentum in the high middle ages. The veneration of relics at the time, as is well known, laid emphasis on their visual effects, which resulted in the emergence not only of distinctive types of reliquaries but also of spaces specially designed for their safekeeping—treasuries.⁷³

Virtually nothing is known about the ways in which relics were kept and displayed in medieval Serbia. The same goes for the original Žiča treasury where the Baptist's right arm was kept. This question has been discussed and variously interpreted, and we have also addressed it on an earlier occasion.⁷⁴ What seems to be the most plausible view—based on the comparative study of the sources and the uses of certain spaces in Byzantine religious architecture—is that there may have been two possible locations of the Žiča treasury. One would have been the *diakonikon-skeuphylakion* set up in the sanctuary, which was the reason why this "eastern side chapel" was established as a separate chamber which communicated only with the central part of the sanctuary. Such a *diakonikon-skeuphylakion* as a rule served for housing the most precious valuables. The rest of them could have been kept in the *skeuphylakion*-storeroom, one of the rooms on the *katechoumena* of the Žiča katholikon, which would be in keeping with the practice in the Byzantine world.⁷⁵ It is even more difficult to make any inferences about the way relics were displayed. According to a view proposed long ago, which should be taken with a measure of caution, the Žiča katholikon was equipped with ceremonial stone furniture for that purpose. It consisted of structures similar

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ D. Popović, *Pustinožiteljstvo svetog Save Srpskog*, in: *Kult svetih na Balkanu II*, ed. M. Detelić, Kragujevac 2002, 61–85 (with cited sources).

⁶⁴ Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, 59.

⁶⁵ Teodosije, *Žitija*, 211; v. also Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, 23.

⁶⁶ D. Bogdanović, commentaries to Teodosije, *Žitija*, 348–349.

⁶⁷ Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, 173–174, 176; Teodosije, *Žitija*, 224–225; v. also Marković, *Prvo putovanje svetog Save*, 40–42, 51–54.

⁶⁸ M. Kašanin et al., *Manastir Studenica*, Beograd 1986, 154 (B. Todić); D. Preradović, Lj. Milanović, *Pan-Christian saints in Serbian cult practice and art*, in: *Byzantine heritage and Serbian art II, Sacral art of the Serbian lands in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. Vojvodić, D. Popović, Belgrade 2016, 111.

⁶⁹ Cf. Magdalino, *L'église du Phare*, 15–30; and Lidov, *Tšerkov' Bogomateri Faroskoj*, 71–109, who amply cites sources; v. also Hahn, *Strange beauty*, 175–176.

⁷⁰ Majeska, *Russian travelers to Constantinople*, passim; the practice is perfectly illustrated by an anonymous English pilgrim from the early twelfth century who describes Hagia Sophia and says: "...totum enim templum sanctae Sophiae mixtum est cum sacris reliquis sanctorum", K. N. Cigaar, *Une description de Constantinople traduite par un pèlerin anglais*, REB 34 (1976) 249.

⁷¹ G. Majeska, *Notes on the skeuphylakion of Hagia Sophia*, VV 55/2 (1998) 212–215.

⁷² E. Palazzo, *L'espace rituel et le sacré dans le Christianisme. La liturgie de l'autel portatif dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen âge*, Turnhout 2008, passim.

⁷³ Hahn, *Strange beauty*, 199–208 (with sources and bibliography).

⁷⁴ Popović, in: *Manastir Žiča*, 62–63.

⁷⁵ M. Šuput, *O prostoru i njegovoj funkciji u crkvenoj arhitekturi iz vremena svetog Save*, in: *Sveti Sava u srpskoj istoriji i tradiciji*, ed. S. Ćirković, Beograd 1998, 189–201 (with sources).

to *proskynitaria*, canopied icon stands, mounted at either side of the altar screen. Particularly valuable relics could be displayed under them on important feast days, as was the case in the Constantinopolitan cathedral.⁷⁶

The surviving medieval Serbian sources provide no concrete information about the occasions on which and the ways in which the Baptist's arm could have been used. The comparative material and the broader ideological context in which the significance of this relic should be viewed allow some cautious suggestions to be put forward nonetheless. As we have already observed, the relic of a saint's right hand carried a strong metaphorical charge since the actual source of its effective miraculous power was the *dextera Domini*, directly referencing to Ps 118:16: "...The right hand of the Lord does valiantly." It is because of their powerful associative properties and theological basis that the relics and reliquaries of this type were used in rites involving blessing.⁷⁷ As one would expect, of particular relevance to our topic is Byzantine court practice. It is known from the sources that the arm of St Stephen—whose name (*stephanos*) alludes to the God-granted imperial wreath, i.e. crown—was used in such important ceremonies as coronation (*stepsis*) and wedding (*stephanoma*).⁷⁸ As for the Baptist's arm, one of the most illustrious relics in the Virgin of the Pharos, the only testimony, well known and much discussed, is that of Anthony of Novgorod. According to him, two relics of St John were used in the coronation ceremony of the Byzantine emperors: the right arm, for consecration, and the staff—made of iron, terminating in a cross—for blessing.⁷⁹ Although Anthony's explicit statement should, by common consent, be taken with reservations, the important role of the Baptist's relics in solemn court ceremonials has never been questioned.⁸⁰

It seems that the role the Baptist's arm might have had in Serbia should be viewed along similar lines. Even though there is no direct evidence for the long-advanced hypothesis that the relic was used in some way in the ceremony of the coronation of Stefan the First-Crowned, it should not be dismissed categorically.⁸¹ There are also good reasons to believe that the Baptist's arm played a significant role in the rites that were taking place in Žiža during the ecclesiastical and state assembly of 1221, when the historical mission of Sava of Serbia was explicitly likened to the Baptist's. That the relic was used in some rites, i.e. ritually raised into the air, seems to be confirmed by a telling detail—the filigree "bracelet" mentioned in Pius II's charter, i.e. the handle attached to the reliquary. It should be noted that it clearly follows from the text of the charter that the handle was an integral part of the reliquary in which the relic arrived in Siena. At any rate, viewed in a broader context, the basic function of the Baptist's arm in the whole of the Christian world and hence also in Serbia



Fig. 7. "Veil" (after S. Conti, C. Nencioni)

is perfectly illustrated by the well-known verse of Anna Komnene inscribed on the Châteaudun reliquary, stating that the relic "protects the empire, bringing it strength and prosperity".⁸²

There does not seem to be any doubt that the Siena relic of John the Baptist's arm can be considered exceptional in more than one respect—for its historical value and cultic status as well as for the exquisite craftsmanship of its reliquary. But it is exceptional for yet another reason. Namely, the textiles in which it was brought to Italy—which was a usual, if seldom documented, practice accompanying the cult of relics—have also survived till this day. Archival evidence shows that the arm was

⁷⁶ Čanak-Medić, Popović, Vojvodić, *Manastir Žiža*, 167–171 (Čanak-Medić).

⁷⁷ J. Braun, *Die Reliquiare: Des christlichen Kultes und ihre Entwicklung*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1940, 388–401; M. Junghans, *Die Armreliquiare in Deutschland vom 11. bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Bonn 2002; Hahn, *Strange beauty*, 137–140 (with bibliography).

⁷⁸ Kalavrezou, *Helping hands*, 61–64.

⁷⁹ *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, 98.

⁸⁰ Kalavrezou, *Helping hands*, 74–75.

⁸¹ Čorović-Ljubinković, *Pretečina desnica*, 105–114.

⁸² Du Cange, *Constantinopolis christiana*, lib. IV, Paris 1680, 104.



Fig. 8. “Veil”, detail of the embroidery (after S. Conti, C. Nencioni)

brought to Siena on a cushion and wrapped up in a costly cloth. These objects were referred to in association with the relic in every inventory list of the items kept in the treasury of Siena cathedral from 1467 until the first decades of the twentieth century. Fortunately for researchers, these textiles have survived and now are kept in the Museo dell’Opera in Siena.⁸³

The sources usually refer to the cloth in which the relic was wrapped up as a “veil” (*velo, tocca*). It is fashioned from translucent off-white gauze-like blend of linen and silk, originally 148 cm long (185 cm with fringes) by 40 cm wide (fig. 7). It was decorated with embroidery at the ends, of which only one is preserved. The decoration consists of three parallel stripes embroidered with coloured threads. The middle stripe is 15 cm wide and the outer two are 10 cm wide (fig. 8). The double black, green and dark red threads create complex, meticulously executed embroidery designs. The middle stripe is particularly rich in motifs. It is dominated by large rhombuses inscribed with an eight-pointed star. Between its arms, tiny motifs of rampant lions alternate with highly stylized anthropomorphic forms. The triangular fields between the rhombuses are filled with delicate geometric motifs, the most prominent of which is the stylized four-armed spinning sun (*soleil tournant*). Each side of the three stripes is bordered with a row of tiny confronted birds flanking a stylized tree of life. Material analysis, the fibre composition of the yarn, the embroidery technique and designs suggest that the “veil” should be attributed to Mamluk workshops, which were famed for exquisite craftsmanship in manufacturing luxurious textiles.⁸⁴ Based on known analogies, it has been dated to the first half of the twelfth century.⁸⁵

⁸³ I had the opportunity to examine these objects at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, where they had been brought for conservation. I owe great gratitude to Mrs Susanna Conti, Head of the Textile Department, for making it possible for me not only to take a close look at these objects but also to consult the conservation records (which include the archival data on the history of the relic after its arrival in Siena).

⁸⁴ B. J. Walker, *Rethinking Mamluk textiles*, *Mamluk Studies Review* 4 (2000) 167–216. M. Sardi, *Mamluk textiles*, in: *Islamic art, architecture and material culture. New perspectives*, ed. M. S. Graves, Oxford 2012, 7–14.

⁸⁵ S. Conti, C. Nencioni, “*Tocca e cuscino*”. *Reliquie mediorientali dal Reliquiario del Battista: osservazioni e approfondimenti sulla tecnica*



Fig. 9. “Cushion”, detail of the textile (after S. Conti, C. Nencioni)

The cushion on which the sources claim the relic of the Baptist’s hand was brought to Siena consists of three different pieces of cloth sewn together in a “patchwork” manner (39 cm × 45 cm). All three are of exquisitely manufactured silk brocade but differ in the colour of the background—white, green and red—and in decorative designs. The green and white pieces are especially richly decorated. The green piece is patterned with a row of connected circles (*rotae*) encircled with a braid border and inscribed with confronted fantastic animals. Between the circles are rosettes and stylized geometric and floral motifs (fig. 9). The brocade with the white background shows a row of large medallions filled alternately with geometric and floral motifs. Between the medallions are stylized heart-shaped plants terminating in spear-pointed leaves (fig. 10). The laboratory analyses have established the steps and manner of sewing these pieces into a cushion and all relevant technological characteristics of the material. Based on these characteristics and the repertoire and types of designs, the textiles have been attributed to oriental workshops and dated to between the ninth and the eleventh century.⁸⁶

The “veil” and the cushion, which, in a way, constitute a functional whole with the relic of the Baptist’s arm, are very rare surviving examples of their kind, and therefore all the more precious. Well-preserved and documented by written sources, they are a testimony to an ancient and widespread Christian practice associated with the cult of relics. The surviving sources and objects confirm that there was a close link between relics and the use of luxury textiles. Especially valued was brocade, which as a rule was used for fashioning the attire of secular rulers and ecclesiastical leaders.⁸⁷ Luxury textiles manufactured in famous workshops of the East reached the West in a variety

artistica, *OPD Restauro* 25 (2013), 377–384 (with earlier literature); for basic catalogue data v. M. Ciatti, *Drappi, velluti, taffetà et altre cose. Antichi tessuti a Siena e nel suo territorio*, Siena 1994, 102, no. 2.

⁸⁶ Conti, Nencioni, “*Tocca e cuscino*”, 384–389, Table 2, fig. 42.

⁸⁷ J. L. Ball, *Byzantine dress. Representations of secular dress in eighth- to twelfth-century painting*, New York 2005, 11–77, 105–127; M. Parani, *Cultural identity and dress. The case of late Byzantine ceremonial costume*, *JÖB* 57 (2007) 95–134; W. T. Woodfin, *The embodied icon. Liturgical vestments and sacramental power in Byzantium*, Oxford 2012, 133–207; B. Cvetković, *Textiles and their usage in the medieval Balkans*.

of ways, though usually through trade or as a rich gift.⁸⁸ It was in such textiles—of which a few surviving specimens are now kept in European repositories—that affluent pilgrims brought back with them precious relics from illustrious centres of the East.⁸⁹ Relics were generally kept in luxurious textiles for protection or were wrapped up in them on the occasion of translations, processions or even in the case of “holy thefts”. In the mind of medieval man, expensive materials and exquisite workmanship only could befit the preciousness of a relic and its foremost, spiritual and cultic, value. Being in direct contact with a relic, textiles received its immanent *virtus*, thereby acquiring the status of secondary relics. If, moreover, we take into account the fact that possessing luxurious textiles was a privilege of a few select members of social elites, it becomes possible to fully grasp the range of their meanings and uses.⁹⁰

What we currently know about the textiles associated with the Baptist's arm will serve as an essential basis for all future research in the various directions taken in contemporary medieval studies. A question which is of particular interest for our own topic, but on which, regrettably, we have no information whatsoever, is when and how these objects came to Serbia. Perhaps it would not be too far amiss to suggest, even if there is no evidence in the sources to support it, that the textiles and the Baptist's arm came to Serbia owing to Sava of Serbia, a proven connoisseur and lover of all things “holy and honourable”.

Unlike the other relics from the former illustrious Žiča treasury which, with rare exceptions, have sunk into complete oblivion, the fate of the Baptist's arm can be followed till this day, albeit with large gaps.⁹¹ It is known that sometime about 1290, when warfare made the northern areas of Serbia unsafe, the Žiča relics were relocated to the newly-established archiepiscopal see of the Serbian Church at Peć (Metohija).⁹² A piece of information vital to reconstructing their further fate is that king Stefan Uroš II Milutin (r. 1282–1321) on his visit to Peć bowed to its relics and—a detail which was particularly emphasized—kissed the “honourable hand of the holy and famous prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist”.⁹³ The

The royal context, in: *Clothing the sacred. Medieval textiles as fabric, form, and metaphor*, ed. M. Kapustka, W. T. Woodfin, Berlin 2015, 33–52.

⁸⁸ O. Grabar, *Trade with the East and the influence of Islamic art on the “luxury arts” in the West*, in: *Islamic visual culture, 1100–1800. Constructing the study of Islamic art II*, Ashgate 2006, 43–50; C. J. Hilsdale, *Byzantine art and diplomacy in an age of decline*, Cambridge 2014.

⁸⁹ *Ornamenta Ecclesiae* 2, 339–341, 442–445.

⁹⁰ M. Martiniani-Reber, *Le rôle des étoffes dans le culte des reliques au moyen âge*, *Bulletin du CIETA* 70 (1992) 53–58; C. Metzger, *Tissus et culte des reliques*, *Antiquité tardive* 12 (2004) 183–186; Hahn, *Strange beauty*, 151.

⁹¹ For a history of John the Baptist's right arm v. Popović, *A staurotheke*, 166–167; eadem, in: *Manastir Žiča*, 60–62 (with earlier literature).

⁹² As reported by Danilo Drugi, *Životi kraljeva i arhiepiskopa srpskih. Službe*, prir. G. Mak Danijel, D. Petrović, Beograd 1988, 210–211; v. also D. Popović, *Cvetna simbolika i kult relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, *Zograf* 32 (2008) 77–79.

⁹³ *Zbornik srednjovekovnih ćirilčkih povelja i pisama Srbije, Bosne i Dubrovnika* I, 533 (with earlier literature); the fact that the



Fig. 10. “Cushion”, detail of the textile (after S. Conti, C. Nencioni)

subsequent fate of the Žiča treasures can be reconstructed only fragmentarily, and indirectly, through the story of the Baptist's arm gleaned from Pius II's charter and a few other Latin, i.e. Italian sources.⁹⁴

Pope Pius II—born Enea Silvio Piccolomini—a politician, theorist of the church and the state, writer and art collector, had a particular attitude towards Eastern Christian relics. As the inspirer of a crusade against the Ottomans and fervent advocate of an all-Christian alliance, he stood, in his capacity as head of the Roman Catholic Church, not only for the refugees from the East but also for the preservation and promotion of their spiritual heritage.⁹⁵ By force of circumstance, this illustrious humanist had a decisive influence on the fate of some relics from the former Žiča treasury. He acquired them, for a generous sum, from Thomas Palaiologos, despot of the Morea and brother of the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI Palaiologos, who had been entrusted with the relics by his daughter Helen, widow of the despot of Serbia, Lazar Branković, in her attempt to put them out of the harm's way before the Ottoman invasion. Soon afterwards, the despot of the Morea, fleeing from the Ottomans himself, set out for Italy, taking his valuable possessions with him. He arrived there in 1461 and, not much later, relinquished a few relics to pope Pius II: the skull of St Andrew originally from Patras, a sumptuous mantle and, in all likelihood, a lavish staurotheke from the Žiča treasury. A year later, he gave up the holiest relic in his possession, the Baptist's arm, for which he was remunerated with one thousand ducats by the pope.⁹⁶

charter which contains this information is a fifteenth-century copy and therefore, in a way, a forgery, does not cast doubt on the presence of the relics in the church of the Holy Apostles at the Patriarchate of Peć.

⁹⁴ Transcriptions of these sources (S. Titius, 1528; O. Malavolti, 1599; J. Cugnoni, 1883; O. Fermedžin, 1892) were published by Bačić, 75–82.

⁹⁵ A very informative introduction about Pius II and his pontificate in: *Reject Aeneas, accept Pius. Selected letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)*, introduced and translated by T. M. Izbicki, G. Christianson, P. Krey, Washington 2006 (with an extensive bibliography).

⁹⁶ Pius II's donation charter II; v. also Bačić, 75–82; Smith, *Alberto Aringhieri*, passim. Most of the head of St Andrew was translated,

The subsequent fate of the Baptist's right arm is known well. Pope Pius II donated it to the cathedral of Siena, his family's town of origin. The purpose of this remarkable gift was vividly emphasized in the pope's donation charter. The Baptist's relic was meant to be "a lasting and imperishable monument to his [Pius II's] memory" and, to the town of Siena and its cathedral, "a link with John the Baptist Forerunner of Christ". The charter contains a detailed description of the magnificent ceremony of the *translatio* and *depositio* of the relic, which constitutes an outstanding source for the study of this aspect of relic practices.⁹⁷ As was customary, the ceremony was attended by the *omnis civitas*—as many as eight cardinals, all of the Siena clergy, the city governors and officials, as well as "a great multitude of people". The pope's generous gift was made "of his own volition and decision" and in due legal form, i.e. in accordance with "legal procedures, the holy canons, and the said pontifical authority". The Baptist's relic was delivered into the hands of the provost of the cathedral, the most reverend father Bartolomeo Benvoglianti, through the intermediary of two notaries public—who drew up the charter, signed it and certified it with the sign of the cross—and in the presence of numerous and distinguished witnesses, listed by name. Relevant to our knowledge of this type of ritual is the information that the pope addressed the attendant multitude, recalling the Baptist's two symbolic, already mentioned gestures, after which followed the climax of the event—having received the relic, the provost raised it in the air "so that all spectators may see it" and laid it on the altar.

It is indicative that the Constantinopolitan provenance of the Baptist's arm is emphasized more than once in Pius II's charter—as a fact to which "many reliable witnesses testified clearly and attested firmly". Among the witnesses mentioned by name is the famous cardinal Bessarion, who was a Greek. This great patron of art and guardian of the Byzantine heritage had in fact acted as the main intermediary between Thomas Palaiologos and pope Pius II in the transaction concerning the Baptist's arm.⁹⁸ He "testified credibly and avouched" the authenticity of the relic. This act may be seen as directly reflecting the circumstances surrounding the cult of relics in the West at the time. Since the post-crusade West had been

with great pomp, to the church of St Peter in Rome. A smaller part of the apostle's head, the mantle and the staurotheke with the name of Sava of Serbia were donated by Pius II to Pienza, the town in which he was born and which was renamed after him. It was a programmatic gesture motivated by Pius II's intention to establish Pienza as a new diocesan seat and, also, to recreate it into an ideal city, an embodiment of urban beauty and harmony. Cf. E. Carli, *Pienza: la Città di Pio II*, Pienza 1966, 11–46; G. Chironi, *Pius II and the formation of the ecclesiastical institutions in Pienza*, in: *Pius II, "El più expeditivo pontifice". Selected studies on Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405–1464)*, Leiden 2003, 171–185; cf. also Popović, *A staurotheke*, 166–167.

⁹⁷ Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints*, 193–216 and passim; M. Heinzelmann, *Translationberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*, Turnhout 1979; Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien*, 172–182; J. Ricker, *Reliquienkult und Propaganda: Translationsbildzyklen im Mittelalter*, Weimer 2013.

⁹⁸ *Bessarione e l'Umanesimo*. Catalogo della mostra, ed. G. Fiaccadori, Naples 1994, 4–19; "Inter graecos latinissimus, inter Latinos graecissimus". *Bessarion zwischen den Kulturen*, ed. C. Märkl, C. Kaiser, T. Ricklin, Berlin–Boston 2013; on the staurotheke of cardinal Bessarion and his attitude towards Eastern Christian relics v. *La stauroteca di Bessarione: restauro, provenienza, ambito culturale tra Constantinopoli e Venezia*, Venice 2013.

flooded with Byzantine relics, frequently of dubious provenance, the relics whose authenticity was deemed unquestionable were highly valued. Those particularly sought for were the relics enshrined in their original reliquaries, especially when these were engraved with inscriptions in Greek or Slavic.⁹⁹ Pius II's charter attests to yet another, and widespread, practice: the sale of relics "to Christians for money". According to this source, it had been exactly how the Baptist's arm came into the possession of the Serbian ruling house.

Once it arrived in Siena, the relic of the Baptist's arm ceased being part of Serbian history and began a new life under radically different circumstances. Since this stage in its history goes beyond the narrower scope of our topic, we shall only point to a few basic facts.

By order of pope Pius II a new reliquary for the relic was commissioned from the Sienese goldsmith Francesco d'Antonio. It is a sumptuous lidded silver chest decorated with relief compositions and gilded applications, with glass sides enabling a view of the relic. The lavish decoration included, among other things, a frieze with scenes from the life of St John the Baptist, cornucopias at the corners, and two medallions—one containing the Baptist's image, the other, the Virgin and Christ.¹⁰⁰ Of relevance to the history of the relic and its use is the fact that the lid of the chest could be lifted by a handle, which is to say that the relic was accessible until the eighteenth century or, in other words, that it could be used directly in appropriate rites. In the mid-eighteenth century the Baptist's arm was moved to another reliquary, the one it is still enshrined in. Since this new reliquary was sealed on that occasion, the status of the relic and the manner of its use significantly changed—it became accessible to the view of the faithful only through the glass walls of its lavish container.

An important role in the Siena phase of the relic's history was played by the Sienese nobleman Alberto Aringhieri. As already mentioned, this distinguished member of the Order of St John had in 1482 a chapel dedicated to St John the Baptist built in the cathedral as a shrine for the saint's relic. Aringhieri expressed his reverence for the relic by seeing to it that it received a new sheathing to protect its most fragile part, the hand and fingers. The renewed "reliquary", which is clearly distinguishable from the old one, is made of gold sheet. It covers the tips and knuckles of the fingers and wraps the part of the hand below the fingers, and the wrist. These gold elements are connected and consolidated by thin strips of gold sheet. The part of the forearm below the old reliquary was protected by a cylindrical gold bracer. The handle affixed to its underside must have served for lifting the relic up during rituals. It is a clear indicator of the way the relic was used at the time. On the upper side of the cylinder is a *tabula ansata* with a Latin inscription identifying the donor:

⁹⁹ Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien*, 162–166; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*, 175–282; Klein, *Eastern object and Western desires*, 306–309 (with sources); it may be interesting to note that an "expert" assessment of the authenticity of relics of Constantinopolitan provenance (in 1359) is associated precisely with Siena (v. G. Derenzini, *Le reliquie da Constantinopoli a Siena*, in: *L'oro di Siena. Il tesoro di Santa Maria della Scala*, ed. L. Bellosi, Siena 1996, 67–78).

¹⁰⁰ E. Cioni, in: *Da Jacopo della Quercia a Donatello. Le arti a Siena nel primo Rinascimento*, Siena 2010, 498, fig. 31. The reliquary is now kept in the Museo dell'Opera in Siena.

PIISSIMAALBE
RTIARINGHE
RIICVRALAM
INISAVREIS C
OMMVNITATUM

Piissima Albe/rti Aringhel/rii cura, lam/inis aureis c/ommunitatum

(By the pious care of Alberto Aringhieri reinforced with gold sheets.)

Aringhieri's pious and lavish gift, inspired by similar motives as the donation of Pius II—for the good of the whole community, i.e. the citizens of Siena—had yet another higher and, in the eyes of medieval man, important meaning. The custom of repeatedly renewing reliquaries

and of adorning them with *spolia*, usually precious stones, had an elaborate theological basis. It was believed that the renewal of old reliquaries was ultimately a way of imitating Christ himself who is ever renewing and animating matter. This capacity for change, the potential for transforming matter was seen as a virtue of the soul and a vital spiritual process which constantly recharges the power and effectiveness of a relic.¹⁰¹ It is in the light of this idea, the idea of giving the unchanging sacred core a new garment and enhancing its resplendence over and over again, that we may look at the different stages in the long journey of John the Baptist's arm—through many centuries and different cultural settings.

¹⁰¹ Hahn, *Strange beauty*, 9–10 (with sources).

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Реликвија Претечине деснице у Сијени

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Реликвија Претечине деснице, која је предмет ове студије, чува се у скривници капеле Светог Јована Крститеља катедрале у Сијени. Она не представља музејски експонат, већ има статус култног предмета, и то у континуитету од 1464. године, када је заслугом папе Пија II (1405–1464) поклоњена сијенској катедрали. Реликвија, сада похрањена у барокном реликвијару из XVIII века, чува се у металној шкрињи из XV века, заједно са оригиналном даровном повељом из 1464. године (сл. 1).

Реликвију Претечине деснице чини балсамована, одлично сачувана рука до лакта, укључујући шаку с прстима, тамномрке боје, са видљивим деловима ткива (сл. 2). Њен изглед и стање, који у великој мери одговарају данашњем, документовани су у даровној повељи папе Пија II. У даровници је укратко описан и првобитни реликвијар. Он је у виду омотача од позлаћеног сребра који, у духу византијских обичаја, обавија светињу, али је истовремено оставља делимично видљивом (сл. 3). Та старија оплата се јасно разликује од млађе, коју је рука добила након приспећа у Сијену. Реликвијар је рашчлањен на пет подеоних обруча, оивичених низовима бисера. Обручи су украшени драгим камењем и испуњени срцоликим мотивима, рађеним у техници филигран зрнасте структуре са крупним гранулама. Завршни обруч, такође богато украшен филиграном, бисерима и драгуљима треба препознати као „златну алку“, поменути у даровници Пија II, која је служила за подизање реликвије (сл. 4). Реликвијар сијенске Претечине деснице представља изузетно дело средњовековног златарства и филиграна. Ипак, због помањкања непосредних аналогича, тешко је одредити порекло мајстора, односно радионице. Проблем је утолико сложенији што његова орнаментална декорација – а нарочито техника филиграна и гранулације, мотиви и њихова композиција – показују одређене сродности како са византијским тако и са западним златарским радовима из раздобља XI–XIII века.

Реликвијар је затворен поклопцем у облику плитке калоте од позлаћеног лима. У централном

кружном пољу урезан је попрсни лик светог Јована Крститеља, обележен натписом: (в)ѣты юван („свети Јован“). Око њега, у две концентричне траке, тече добро очуван натпис на старосрпском језику: †прѣдѣтеѣва десница юванова. †покрни ме савѣ архиепископа срѣбьскога („Претечина десница Јованова. Покри ме Саву архиепископа српскога“) (сл. 5, 6). Одлике натписа, а нарочито архаична морфологија појединих слова, показују својства најстаријег ћирилског писма, из раздобља краја XII и првих деценија XIII века. По свом карактеру натпис је ктиторско-молитвени, а чињеница да испред Савиног имена изостаје епитет „свети“, указује на то да је донација учињена још за живота, и то након 1219. године, када је Сава добио титулу архиепископа. Садржина натписа потврђује исказе писаних извора да је свети Јован Претеча био један од важних светачких узора Сави Српском, о чему сведочи његов епитет „други у Богу Претеча и Крститељ“. По угледу на византијске обичаје, Претечина десница могла је бити коришћена приликом важних обреда, попут оних који су се одиграли у Жичи током великог државно-црквеног сабора 1221. године, укључујући чин крунисања Стефана Првовенчаног.

Претечина десница била је у саставу првобитне жичке ризнице, формиране у првим деценијама XIII века. Заслугом Саве Српског, који је искористио познате околности након пада Цариграда 1204. године, у српској катедралној и крунидбеној цркви нашле су се највредније хришћанске светиње везане за Христа, Богородицу, Јована Претечу и друге угледне светеље. Оне су ту чиниле део добро познатог програма *translatio imperii* посредством *translatio Hierosolymae*. Међу њима, захваљујући натписима, идентификоване су две, до данас сачуване реликвије – део Часног крста и Претечина десница – чија се судбина напореда прати у дужем временском раздобљу. Обе реликвије су од краја XIII века чуване у Пећи, у коју је премештено архиепископско седиште. У последњем, нестабилном раздобљу српске државе, Претечина десница била је у поседу владарске породице Бранковић. Пред

турском опасношћу, удовица деспота Лазара Бранковића предала је светињу свом оцу, морејском деспоту Томи Палеологу, који је мало доцније био принуђен да крене у избеглиштво, у Италију. Са собом је понео и драгоцености, између осталог и Претечину десницу, коју је за хиљаду дуката уступио папи Пију II. Овај знаменити хуманиста и велики заштитник уметности поклонио је светињу катедрали у Сијени, граду из којег је потекла његова породица, а своју изузетну донацију овековечио је у даровној повељи.

Сачувани архивски подаци указују на то да је у Сијену Претечина десница донета на јастучету и увијена у скупочену тканину. Ови изузетни предмети у континуитету се помињу заједно с реликвијом од 1467. године до првих деценија XX века у свим инвентарима ризничких предмета сијенске катедрале. Они се данас чувају у *Museo dell'Opera* у Сијени. Тканина, која се у изворима помиње као „вео“, израђена је од мешавине лана и свиле и украшена тракама у златовезу, са сложеним, минуциозно изведеним геометријским и зооморфним мотивима (сл. 7, 8). На основу материјала, технике израде и типа орнаментике, тканина је приписана мамелучким радионицама и оквирно датована у прву половину XIII века. „Јастуче“ је начињено је од три различита комада тканине, која творе неку врсту „пачворка“. Сва три комада израђена су од свиленог броката, врхунском техником, а међусобно се разликују по боји позадине – белој, зеленој и црвеној – као и по заступљеним мотивима (сл. 9, 10). На основу технолошких својстава, као и репертоара орнаменталне декорације, овај текстил је приписан оријенталним радионицама и опредељен у шире раздобље од IX до XI века.

Сијенски „вео“ и „јастуче“ чине својеврсну целину с Претечином десницом. Они сведоче о традиционалној, тесној вези реликвија и скупочених тканина коришћених у њиховој функцији. Будући у непосредном додиру са светињом, тканине су преузимале њен иманентни *virtus*, стичући и саме статус секундарне ре-

ликвије. Посебно занимљиво питање је време и начин приспећа сијенских тканина у српску средину, одакле су донете у Италију. На добрим разлозима почивала би претпоставка да су оне, као и Претечина десница, донете у Србију заслугом Саве Српског.

Приспећем у Сијену, реликвија Претечине деснице отпочела је нови живот, у битно измењеним околностима. Смисао донације Пија II истакнут је у даровној повељи, где стоји да би Претечине мошти требало да буду „трајни и непропадљиви споменик, по којем ће папа остати у сећању“, а за град Сијену „спона са Јованом Крститељем“. Повеља садржи и подробен опис величанствене свечаности уприличене поводом обреда *translatio* и *depositio* моштију, који представља изванредан извор за проучавање овог аспекта реликвијарне проблематике.

По налогу папе Пија II, за чување светиње поручен је нови реликвијар, који је израдио сијенски златар Франческо Д'Антонио (Francesco d'Antonio). Заслугом Алберта Арингијерија (Alberto Aringhieri), угледног припадника реда Јовановаца, уз катедралу је 1482. године подигнута посебна капела посвећена светом Јовану Крститељу, намењена трајном чувању Претечине деснице. Том приликом, реликвија је добила скупочену златну плату, која покрива и консолидује делове шаке. Она садржи и *tabula ansata*-у с латинским натписом: *Piissima Albe/rti Aringhel/rii cura, lam/inis aureis c/ommunitatum* (Побожним залагањем Алберта Арингијерија ојачано је златним платама).

Овај скупочен, побожан дар Арингијерија светом заштитнику града имао је још један виши, у очима средњовековног човека важан смисао. Уобичајена пракса обнављања реликвијара сматрана је процесом који непрестано обнавља и оживотворује материју. У светлу те идеје, да се непромењивој сакралној суштини увек изнова дарује ново рухо и појачава сјај, могле би се посматрати различите етапе дугог путовања Претечине деснице – кроз многа столећа и различите културне амбијенте.