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## THE LION MASK MOTIF ON THE PILLAR OF ST. SYMEON THE WONDER-WORKER IN LESNOVO (1349). ITS ORIGIN AND MEANING\*\*

**Keywords:** *fresco, lion mask, pillar, St. Symeon the Wonder-worker, 14th century, Lesnovo Monastery, the serpent of old – Satan.*

**Abstract:** *The motif of the so-called “maskeron” or “lion mask motif” on the pillar of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker in the narthex of the monastery of Lesnovo (1349) has caught scholars’ attention long ago. In previous literature it has been pointed out that this detail originated in classical art, being the reminiscence of antique art and tradition, which was confirmed several times. Different meanings have been attributed to this motif. Although a large number of similar motifs have been the object of research in a wider sense of the word, more concrete meaning of the particular lion mask on the pillar of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker in Lesnovo and the reasons for its placing on the column remained to be revealed. Thus, this paper analyses the specific context of this motif as well as its meaning and offers close iconographic analogies, whose meaning corresponds to the meaning of the lion mask in Lesnovo. It is concluded that this lion mask has profound Christian connotations, being the image of “a great dragon”, “the serpent of old” – Satan and that the fresco of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker conveys a powerful apotropaic image, whose function is to repel the evil from entering the church.*

**Introduction and historiography.** In the art of the Byzantine Empire and in the art of the lands under

Byzantine cultural influence in general numerous and various masks, that is, “maskerons” of classical inspiration were depicted in different contexts, on the painted architecture, warriors’ armor, shields etc.<sup>1</sup> Although present in all periods of Byzantine art, this iconographical detail is not a common phenomenon, but reveals a highly classical taste of the patron of the work in question and of the artists as well. One very unusual, fantastic, lion mask (ill.3, 4), depicted on the fresco showing St. Symeon the Wonder-worker (St. Symeon the Younger or St. Symeon of Taurastan Oros) in the Serbian church of St. Archangel Michael and Gabriel in Lesnovo, in today’s FYR of Macedonia, broadly speaking, belongs to this group of motifs. However, strictly speaking, the context of the Lesnovo mask differs from these masks, while the iconography of this highly unusual mask is unique in Serbian monumental painting and even broadly speaking in Byzantine art as well. This unusual lion mask will represent the subject of the present paper.

As it is well known, the ktitor of the Lesnovo monastery was Great Duke, later Despot, Jovan Oliver, a distinguished noble at the court of Serbian king and later tzar Stefan Dušan (1331-1346, king; 1346-1355, tzar). Thanks to the sources we know that the main church in Lesnovo was built in 1341/1342, while Teodosius was the hegumenos of Lesnovo monastery.<sup>2</sup> The addition of the narthex to the church (1347 or 1348), which was painted in 1349, is certainly connected with the proclamation of the Serbian patriarchy in 1346 and the fact that the monastery of Lesnovo became the seat of the newly established Zletovo Episcopate. The content of the majority of the paintings of the narthex was determined by their ritual purpose. Illustrations of the Baptism cycle, next

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<sup>1</sup> See below footnote no 3.

<sup>2</sup> С. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и живопис*, Београд 1998, 27 pass.



Ill. 1 *The Pillar of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker, Lead disc, 7th c., Syria*



Ill. 2 *The Lion Mask Motif, the Pillar of St. Alypius, Ms Par. Gr. 580, fol. 2v, National Library Paris, 11th century*

to the baptismal font, speak for themselves in this respect, while many other scenes and figures indicate funerary and commemorative services. Other customary rituals were certainly also carried out in the narthex, some of which were not liturgical. When dealing with the unusual lion mask motif from Lesnovo, one is reminded of a special feature of the Lesnovo painting of both the nave and the narthex in general – its unique and rare illustrations.

In previous bibliography, only a few scholars dealt with the motif of masks, among whom Doula Mouriki occupies the primary position, her paper published in 1981 still representing the primary source for all further investigations.<sup>3</sup> She briefly enumerates the types of masks which appear in Byzantine art and their contexts. She follows the appearance of the phenomena of mask motifs deep into the past, to the period of classical art, and makes a survey of these motifs throughout the history of Medieval and late Byzantine painting. Concerning the Late Byzantine painting under the dynasty of Paleologoi (1261-1453), she grouped the masks into several categories, according to the context where they are painted and she also put forward the assumption about their prophylactic function. However, because of the difficulties with the investigation following the general lack of textual evidence on this subject as well as the very nature of her paper, she does not engage in a more detailed discussion about the meaning and reasons of the appearance of these motifs in Byzantine art on

individual examples. Having in mind her statement that the examples of masks in the paper “do not exhaust all instances of the appearance of this motif in the churches of Mistra”, it is clear why she does not mention the lion mask from the monastery of Lesnovo (1349) in her paper.

On the other hand, in Serbian literature, the representation of this particular mask motif in the narthex of Lesnovo under Symeon the Wonder-worker was noticed long ago and different opinions about the interpretation of the meaning of this lion mask have been expressed.

Ivan Đorđević states that the lion mask from Lesnovo represents reminiscence on classical art and opines that the mask represents “lion-ocean”. He also notices that the lion mask from Lesnovo “deviates from the pure late ancient copies from the beginning of the (sc. 14th) century”, pointing out that the unusually large ears “make him resemble a monster.”<sup>4</sup>

Smiljka Gabelić suggests that this lion mask should be linked with “a prophylactic character, its power to frighten and repel evil”, warning of the effect of frightening of the beholder, referring to the epigram of Manoiles Philes.<sup>5</sup> Smiljka Gabelić further concludes that the representation of the lion mask should be thought of as “a complement to the protective powers which are, in fact, attributed to the depicted saint.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> D. Mouriki, *The Mask Motif in the Wall Paintings of Mistra. Cultural Implications of a Classical Feature in Late Byzantine Painting*, *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 10 (1981) 309–337.

<sup>4</sup> И. М. Ђорђевић, *Загонетни лик на капителума у Новој Павлици*, in: И. М. Ђорђевић, *Студије српске средњовековне уметности*, Београд 2008, 34–35.

<sup>5</sup> Габелић, *Лесново*, 203, footnoteno 1503.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.



Ill. 3 St. Symeon the Wonder-worker, Lesnovo Monastery, narthex, western wall, 1349



Ill. 4 St. Symeon the Wonder-worker, Lesnovo Monastery, detail, the lion mask, 1349

However, in previous literature on Serbian medieval art there has been no further analysis on the narrower context of the origin of the motif of the lion mask on the pillar of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker in the narthex of Lesnovo. Therefore, in this paper we will offer a more specific interpretation of the meaning of this mask and of its origin, as well as some analogies for this peculiar iconographic solution.

**Placement, iconography and analogies.** The fresco depicting the Holy Stylite Symeon the Wonder-worker on the column we are dealing with is found in the narthex of the church of Lesnovo and is placed beside the west entrance door, on the southern part of the west wall, in the register of the standing figures. Its placement on the narrow surface between the door and the wall, just next to the entrance is usual.<sup>7</sup> However, the detail of the mask is quite rare in Byzantine art and in the art of its cultural sphere.

The above-mentioned detail of the fantastic lion mask is painted on the capital of the column of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker. The part of the fresco which depicts the face of the mask (the area of eyes, nose, and slightly below it) is damaged. The lion-like,

human-like mask has huge eyes, emphasized eyebrows, and a distant gaze, highlighted cheekbones, mouth and moustaches. Beside the huge eyes and accentuated eyebrows, the most striking attribute of this unusual creature are notably its huge, tear-shaped ears, which are drooping. The mask is done in red and gray hues: the main part of the face is executed in a reddish color, while the highlighted parts are done in gray tones.

The so-called “lionmask” or “maskeron” on the capital of the pillar of certain holy stylites represents a very rare motif in Byzantine art, and its presence in Lesnovo testifies that the mask in question constitutes a salacious, richer iconographic solution, which complements the meaning of the illustrated narrative. There are only three known masks which decorate the capital of Stylites in entire Byzantine art.

The first known mask on the capital of a certain stylite is the mask on the capital of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker, dating from the 7th century (ill. 1).<sup>8</sup> The mask is executed on a lead disc, the so-called “*eulogia*”, the artefact which transmits sanctity and healing powers of the saint. In the center of the disc one sees the Holy Stylite on the pillar with the distinctively ornamented capital in the form of the mask,

<sup>7</sup> И. М. Ђорђевић, *Свети столпници у српском зидном сликарству средњег века*, in: И. М. Ђорђевић, *Студије српске средњовековне уметности*, Београд 2008, 67.

<sup>8</sup> Α. Ξυγγόπουλος, *Ευλογία τού αγίου Σημεών*, *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 18 (1948) 90–93.



flanked by saint's mother St. Martha and Konon, his follower. Two angels are represented above the saint.

The next example of the maskeron on the capital of a stylite is the mask on the capital of St. Alypius the Stylite, on a miniature of the Greek Manuscript No 580 in the National Library in Paris, dating from the 11th century (ill.2).<sup>9</sup> Here the lion-like head is illustrated in the midst of acanthus leaves decorating the capital.

The head of the lion on the capital of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker in the narthex of the church of Archangel Michael in Lesnovo (1349) represents the third known example of this kind in Byzantine art in general and the unique example of this phenomenon in Serbian medieval art (ill. 3, 4).

Observing the rarity of the mask motif and its possible meaning, one may suppose that the unknown painter who executed the frescoes in Lesnovo had borrowed the lion mask as a visual model that had already been used in art. The chosen visual model would be dictated by its purpose. It would further mean that this model also carried its peculiar meaning – depicting the crucial moment in the life of St. Symeon, which matches the one from the life of St. Alypius the Stylite (ill. 2, 3). Namely, following the data from the vita of St. Alypius the Stylite, the pillar of St. Alypius was depicted with the motif of the lion mask in Byzantine art. The only example that survives today is the above-mentioned portrait of St. Alypius the Stylite on the miniature which is kept in Paris today (ill. 2).<sup>10</sup>

When investigating the enigmatic motif in the church of Nova Pavlica, painted around 1386, Ivan Đorđević noted that “St. Alypius the Stylite, whose capital bears a head in leaves, a head which should represent the Ocean, but looks like a lion instead, is depicted on the folio of the saints celebrated in November, (November the 26th).”<sup>11</sup> Namely, in his study, Ivan Đorđević is of the opinion that human-like and not lion-like masks are as a rule depicted on the capitals of the columns in Byzantine and Serbian art, symbolising Ocean, “Okeanos”, the ancient Sea-God“ which served as a decoration of the painted architecture”.<sup>12</sup> Obviously there existed iconographic subspecies of the masks whose presence had special meanings. Thus, we can differentiate between the lion-like or the human-like mask. However, this is not always the case. On the contrary, a precise distinction

<sup>9</sup> H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VIe au XIVe siècle*, Paris 1929, 50, Pl. CII (fol. 2v).

<sup>10</sup> Omont, *Miniatures*, 50, Pl. CII.

<sup>11</sup> Ђорђевић, *Загонетници*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.



Ill. 5 Plaque found near Ma'aret in Noman in Syria (6–7th century), Louvre Museum, BJ 2180

between the human face and lion face is not often possible.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, although the iconography of the masks can vary, we believe that the context of the represented mask decisively influenced both the meaning of the mask and its iconography. When dealing with this particular mask and the miniature of St. Alypius the Stylite, it is important to note that Henry Omont refers to this mask as the animal head *ταυρολέων*.<sup>14</sup> This is a highly distinctive term, which literally means “lion-bull” and which applies to the lion mask of St. Alypius the Stylite in particular.

Due to the exceptional rarity of the motif in Byzantine art in wider sense and in Byzantine literature, its importance and the direct relationship between the literary source and the visual motif depicted in art, we will direct special attention to the term *ταυρολέων*. For the same reason, we will mention several crucial moments from the life of St. Alypius the Stylite.

***Ταυρολέων, hagiographical sources and conclusion.*** The term *ταυρολέων*, mentioned in the vita of

<sup>13</sup> С. Пејић, *Античке „позајмице“ у српском зидном сликарству од средине 15. до средине 16. века*, Српски језик, књижевност и уметност : Зборник радова са VI међународног научног скупа одржаног на Филолошко-уметничком факултету у Крагујевцу (28-29. X2011). Књига III, Језик музике: Музика и религија. & Реч и слика. Иконографија и иконографски метод – теорија и примена, Крагујевац 2013, 54.

<sup>14</sup> Omont, *Miniatures*, 50, Pl. CII.



Ill. 6 Manuscript Vaticanus Graecus No 749, fol. 25r

St. Alypius the Stylite has been examined by scholar Andreas Xungopoulos, who dedicated a whole study to it.<sup>15</sup> The interpretation of Hypolite Delehayé that *ταυρολέων* is “un animal fantastique, moitié taureau, moitié lion” does not seem to Xungopoulos to be certain.<sup>16</sup> He rather underlines the fact that there are no preserved representations of this fantastic animal that is half-lion, half-bull in art, which “does not permit us to form a clear, definitive picture of this piece of work.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, he is of the opinion that reliable ideas concerning the form of the so-called *ταυρολέων* should be sought in related monuments, the most notable of which *Βουκολέων*, the famous Imperial palace in Constantinople. Further, Xungopoulos drew the conclusion that the tauroleon which St. Alypius threw off represented a marble group, “which show a lion slaying the bull.” He leaves the question of the meaning of this group open: And the meaning of this group as a funerary monument is not up to me to interpret.<sup>18</sup> Concerning the marble group Xungopoulos also points out: “I find it useful to point out that these two animals, the lion and the bull, are individually present on Hellenistic tombs.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> A. Ξηγγοπουλος, *Ταυρολέων*, Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας 5 (1969) 309–314.

<sup>16</sup> H. Delehayé, *Lessaintsstylites*, Paris 1962, LXXXI–II; Ξηγγοπουλος, *Ταυρολέων*, 309.

<sup>17</sup> Ξηγγοπουλος, *Ταυρολέων*, 309.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Certain masks present in Serbian medieval wall painting show tombs decorated in such a manner. Name-

Based on the description of the appearance of Constantinopolitan Imperial palace of Boukoleon, which is provided by Peter Zen, the representative of Venice to Turkish sultan in 1532, Xungopoulos wrongly concludes that the *ταυρολέων* marble group executed on the pillar of the Holy Stylite also represented a lion slaying a bull and that such a group was certainly present in front of the Constantinopolitan palace of Boukoleon.

Leaving aside at the moment the appearance and the form of the *ταυρολέων*, we can conclude that due to the fact that this marble sculpture at the top of the column of St. Alypius the Stylite was addressed as *ταυρολέων* in the hagiographical sources it must have been depicted as such on the miniature with

ly, one finds the representations of lion-like and bull-like sculptures depicted on the tombs. The practice of depicting masks on the tombs is attested by the fresco from the narthex of the monastery of Dečani (1347) illustrating the death of St. John the Theologian. Here on the sarcophagi one sees different masks and may suppose that they indeed reflect medieval funeral practice (for the fresco of the death of St. John the Theologian and the details of masks see <http://www.srpskoblag.org/Archives/Decani/exhibits/Menologion/September/CX4K3481.html>; accessed: february the 20th 2018); for the position of the same fresco in the programme of the church see Д. Војводић, С. Кесић Ристић, *Менолог*, in: В. Ј. Ђурић (ур.), *Зидно сликарство манастира Дечана*. Грађа и студије, Београд 1995, 380, Т. II, 3).



representations of Saints of the month of November from the Paris National library. In other words, the artist in this case certainly followed the text of the life of St. Alypius the Stylite when illustrating the lion mask at the capital of the pillar. In order to present the data from the hagiography in a more detailed manner, we will make a brief survey of the vita of the saint.

The biographer of the older version of life of St. Alimpius the Stylite states that the saint has departed from his hometown of Hadrianopolis in Paphlagonia (Asia Minor) and came to some nearby mountain. There he found a deserted area with a huge number of ancient tombs and made a decision to withdraw into solitude. On one of the tombs there was a column which an ancient piece of art, the *tauroleon*, was standing. St. Alypius intended to topple the *tauroleon* and to climb onto the column. So the saint brought an icon of Christ, a cross and an iron lever from Hadrianopolis and overturned the *tauroleon*.

The funerary monument that represented the mythical animal (*tauroleon*) on a column was particularly appealing to St. Alypius the Stylite. He spoke to the statue with affection and even embraced it: “I greet you, very precious to me; worthless, you have been assigned for use as a funeral monument by those who built it; I welcome you, because being a cornerstone you are appropriate for me; you have been created as a cornerstone by God and are marvellous to look at. I greet you, stone, in Christ, because Christ himself, the unshaken power, is called ‘true’ stone, on which I wish to support my feet. I have chosen this place as a residence in eternal rest.”<sup>20</sup> Symeon Metaphrastes, in a later version of the Life of St. Alypius the Stylite, gives a somewhat different interpretation of the saint’s predilection for the tombstone: the tombstone was suitable to his needs since he was preparing himself for voluntary death.<sup>21</sup> The end of the story is quite interesting and very important for our investigation: the saint brought from the city an icon of Christ, a cross, and a lever; he demolished the monument and replaced it with the cross and the icon, so that the enemy army of the demons would be an object of ridicule.

As we can see, the saint spotted the stone statue at the top of one column on the old graveyard that had been serving as the ornament of the funeral monument. It represented the decoration of a certain pagan tomb. At first St. Alypius expressed special sympathy for this statue, embracing it. Previously, while in the

<sup>20</sup> Delehaye, *Lessaintsstylites*, 154 (13–16); H. Saradi-Mendelovici, *Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monument in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990) 55.

<sup>21</sup> Delehaye, *Lessaintsstylites*, 176 (26–29); Saradi-Mendelovici, *Christian Attitudes*, 55.



Ill. 7 Manuscript Vaticanus Graecus No 749, fol. 238r

service of the pagan cult, the statue was worthless, but later, when the saint discovered it, it became very precious, due to its function – it was the symbol of death. Standing on the stone, the saint would literally rest his feet on it. One can conclude that before the demolition, the *ταυρολέον* served as a tomb monument and later at first it maintained its function as such. It was a symbol of the demons and evil spirits who dwelled on the graveyard.

We believe that the above-mentioned extract with the description of the details from the vita of St. Alypius the Stylite can explain the presence of this kind of sculptural decoration on the painted pillar of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker in the narthex of the Monastery of Lesnovo. In order to depict a particular detail from the life of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker, the artist may have borrowed the already present iconographical model. However, one must be cautious with such a conclusion, due to the fact that we today know of only three examples of the masks represented on the pillars of Holy Stylites and that the example of the mask on the pillar of St. Symeon (7th century) predates the example of the mask on the pillar of St. Alimpius (11th century). Regarding the present state of preserved examples, one may draw a rather opposite conclusion. Still, bearing in mind the general similarities of the lives of two stylites, who were both committed to a most zealous way of ascetical life, the fact that the iconographical solutions of the masks on their pillars as well as their placement

at the top of the column match each other too seems quite logical.

We believe that the very unusual lionmask motif from the narthex of the monastery of Lesnovo, originally a mark of pagan culture, must bear negative symbolism. One can recall that in the life of St. Alypius the Stylite it is stated that St. Alypius toppled the *ταυρολέων* in order to make demons the object of ridicule. Although masks in Byzantine art have a wide range of implications, we are of the opinion that the lion mask from Lesnovo, being found on the deserted place, is associated with the dwelling place of demons and evil spirits. At least two iconographical details of the fresco from Lesnovo can serve as support for this conclusion. St. Symeon the Wonder-worker is there depicted with the cross in his hand and with the cross on his analabos.

Neither of the lives of St. Alypius the Stylite offers a description of the statue of the *ταυρολέων* and we do not know the exact source of inspiration the artist used. Still we can assume that the source of the artist's inspiration, the model for such an iconographic solution and the reason to depict such an imaginary, frightening creature can be found in the artistic works and motifs that bear strong Christian connotations – that the ancient, pagan motif of *ταυρολέων* in Lesnovo is wrapped into profound Christian symbolism. Regarding the mythical beast on the pillar of St. Symeon the Younger in Lesnovo, some motifs, depictions of beasts, deserve our special attention. There are several exclusive iconographical analogies that in our opinion bear the same meaning as the *ταυρολέων*.

The enormous, monstrous serpent coiling around the pillar is depicted on the portrait of St. Symeon the Stylite (Elder or Younger?) on the partially gilded silver ex-voto plaque found near Ma'aret in Noman in Syria (6–7th century) and kept in Louvre under the number BJ 2180 (ill. 5).<sup>22</sup> Although some scholars think that this creature is portrayed to evoke the specific episode from the life of St. Symeon the Elder, we do believe that this monstrous serpent should

be understood as the image of devil i.e. “the coiling serpent” (Is. 27:1).

One other example should be especially pointed out, namely, the miniature from the manuscript Vaticanus Graecus No 749 on the folio 238r. That miniature features Leviatan, the fantastic beast, the sea-monster described in the Book of Job as “the King of All Beasts” (Job 41:25), depicted as a lion-headed coiled snake, which shows that this creature, as well as Behemot, represents the mixture of several beasts – of a lion and a snake (ill. 7).<sup>23</sup>

In the same manuscript another image of the devil should also be mentioned, the one of the miniature on the folio 25r (ill. 6).<sup>24</sup> Here we can see the three-headed serpent-like monster emerging from the sea. The serpent-like creature also consists of several beasts – it has a head of a wolf, of a lion and of a serpent and there is no literary source which describes the appearance of this monster, as is the case with the above-mentioned image of Leviatan from Vaticanus Graecus No 749, fol. 238r.

On this occasion, we will also mention the example from the church of St. George in Kurbinovo as well. There, in the scene of the Ascension of Christ, we see the lion in the sea, next to marine creatures, below the figure of Christ sitting on a rainbow.<sup>25</sup> We suggest that this creature from Kurbinovo portrays Leviatan, the sea-monster mentioned in the Old Testament (Job. 40:20; Ps. 104:25–26; Is. 27–1), representing the visual synonym of the same monster from the manuscript Vaticanus Graecus No 749, fol. 238r (ill. 7) and showing that the sea of glass in this context bears strong negative connotation.<sup>26</sup> As Hadermann Misguich noticed: “Elle (sc. la mer) n'est toujours symbole de vie.”<sup>27</sup> She also brings the verses from the book of prophet Zachariah: “En ce jour-là, sortira de Jérusalem une eau vive, moitié vers la première mer et moitié vers la dernière; il sera de même en été et au printemps. Et le Seigneur sera roi sur toute la terre...” (Zach. 14:8–11).<sup>28</sup> The depiction of lion-ocean, according to Ivan Đorđević, implies

<sup>22</sup> J. Lassus, *Une image de saint Syméon le Jeune sur un fragment de reliquaire syrien du Musée du Louvre*, in: *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot*, Vol. 51, 1960, 129–150; K. Weitzmann (ed.), *The Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art. Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, No 529 (N. P. Ševčenko); M. Mundell Mango, *Silver from early Byzantium. The Kaper Kaoran and Related Treasures*, Baltimore 1986, 240–241, no 71; A. Shalem, *Jewels and Journals: The Case of the Medieval Gemstone called Al-Yatima*, in: G. Necipoğlu (ed.), *Maqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of Islamic World*, Vol. 14 (1997) 45, fig. 2; R. Milburn, *Early Christian Art and Architecture*, London 1988, 261.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. P. Huber, *Iob. Dudler oder Rebel. Byzantinische Miniaturen zum Buch Hiob in Patmos, Rom, Venedig, Sinaï, Jerusalem und Athos*, Düsseldorf 1986, Abb. 82.

<sup>24</sup> Huber, *Iob*, Abb. 69; Ch. Walter, *The Iconography of Iob, Δελτιον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 29 (2008) 70–71, fig. 1.

<sup>25</sup> L. Hadermann-Misguich, *Kurbinovo. Les fresques de Saint-Georges et la peinture byzantine du XIIIe siècle*, Bruxelles 1975, 172–173, pl. 85.

<sup>26</sup> For the opinion that the lion from Ascension in Kurbinovo has the form of Leviatan, see Ђорђевић, *Загонетни лик*, 36.

<sup>27</sup> Hadermann-Misguich, *Kurbinovo*, 172.

<sup>28</sup> Hadermann-Misguich, *Kurbinovo*, 174–175.

“the sea of glass” near the throne of God mentioned in Revelation (Revel. 4:6; 15:2). However, he deprives it, in the case of Nova Pavlica, of the negative symbolism.<sup>29</sup>

The color of the fantastic beast on the capital from Lesnovo is also worthy of attention – the lion mask is painted in red color, which is the color of the δράκων πυρρόδς μέγας that is of “the great red dragon” mentioned in the Book of Revelation: “And another sign was seen in heaven; and behold, a great fire-red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads” (Rev. 12:3). According to Andreas of Caesarea: “Heaven is to be understood as the air, and the fire-red dragon is the one whom, after he was created, was mocked by the angels of God, as it has been written in Job. He is fire-red either because of his murderous nature and delight in bloodshed or because of the fiery angelic nature, even though he fell from (among the) angels.”<sup>30</sup> According to the Methodios of Olympus words: “The great fiery dragon with the seven heads who is pulling down one third of the stars and who stood watching in order to devour the child of the woman in labor, he is the devil.”<sup>31</sup> Speaking of Lesnovo church, one might, here, also point out to the position of the fresco of St. Symeon the Wonder-worker at the very church entrance. He is depicted here as the guardian of the Lesnovo catholicon itself and of the Church in general. In this context the following interpretation of Methodios is very significant and instructive, especially if we have in mind that the saint is a stylite and that he is depicted on the pillar: “*But he (sc. a devil) misses the pray and is unsuccessful (because) those who are reborn are snatched and carried upwards*

*to the heights* (highlighted A. G.); a third of stars it called the portion of those utterly wrong (regarding) one of the Trinity.”<sup>32</sup> “The desert, into which the Women (the Church) came to be nourished, is destitute of evils and barren of decay.”<sup>33</sup> And the following he says concerning his crowns: She had struggled before against the devil and after she had deadened the seven heads of the seven crowns becomes self-disciplined (with respect to virtue).”<sup>34</sup> Having in mind the above-said interpretation, one should also point out that under the woman is meant most manifestly “the Church, endowed with the Father’s Word, whose brightness is above the sun.”<sup>35</sup>

To conclude, we suggest that the monstrous lion mask from Lesnovo, the ταυρολέων, represents “the great dragon, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9), which is the meaning of the above-mentioned motifs too. In spite of quite different forms of portraying the ancient serpent, in fact, these motifs represent visual synonyms. The problem with deciphering those forms, lies on the one hand, in the fact that the literary source describing these beasts does not exist and, on the other hand, in the fact that the serpent of old is depicted in different forms. However, no matter how different these forms are on the first gaze, they still, from the iconographical point of view, maintain the main traits: lion-like, serpent-like and other forms. In accord with the above-mentioned, we can conclude that the fresco of St. Symeon the Wonderworker with its unusual capital in the form of lion-like, beast-like mask has powerful apotropaic meaning.

<sup>29</sup> Ђорђевић, *Загонетни лик*, 39.

<sup>30</sup> PG 106, 321 A–B.

<sup>31</sup> PG 106, 321 C.

<sup>32</sup> PG 106, 321 C–D.

<sup>33</sup> PG 106, 321 D.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Ph. Schaff (ed.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 6 (Fathers of the Third Century: Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius and Minor Writers, Methodius, Arnobius)*, Grand Rapids, MI [1885] 808.



Анђела ГАВРИЛОВИЋ

**МОТИВ ЛАВЉЕ МАСКЕ НА СТУБУ  
СВЕТОГ СИМЕОНА ЧУДОТВОРЦА У ЛЕСНОВУ (1349)**

*Порекло и значење*

Тема овог рада је значење и порекло веома необичног фантастичног мотива тзв. лавље маске тј. тзв. маскерона на стубу светог Симеона Чудотворца припрати лесновског католикона, посвећеног Светим Арханђелима Михаилу и Гаврилу (1349; сл. 4). Фреска са ликом светог Симеона Чудотворца налази се у зони стојећих фигура на узаној површини са јужне стране западног портала. У српској уметности је ово јединствен пример постављања фантастичне маске на капител стуба столпника. У ранијој литератури је истакнуто да је овај детаљ пореклом из античке уметности – реминисценција на античку уметност и традицију, што је више пута потврђено, док су самом мотиву придавана различита значења. Иако је велики број, у ширем смислу речи сродних, маскерона представљао предмет пажње истраживача, конкретније значење лавље маске на стубу светог Симеона Чудотворца није детаљније испитано. У раду се стога овај мотив подвргава детаљнијој анализи, а понуђене су и ликовне аналогије, које су лежале у основи идејног решења приказивања маскерона на стубу столпникау лесновској припрати.

Поменути мотив фантастичне лавље маске насликан је на капителу стуба светог Симеона Чудотворца. Део фреске који приказује лице (предео очију, носа и предео испод носа) је оштећен. Полу-лавља, полу људска маска има крупне очи,

наглашене обрве, претећи поглед, наглашене јагодице, уста и бркове. Поред крупних очију и наглашених обрва, најупечатљивији атрибут овог необичног створења су огромне, оборене уши капљичастог облика. Глава фантастичне животиње је изведена у црвеној боји са сивим акцентима (обрве, бркови, предео испод очију и делови ушију). На основу изгледа чудовишног маскерона у Леснову, података из житија светог Алимпија Стоплпника, као и ликовних аналогијаовом лесновском мотиву уочених наевлогији у виду оловног диска пренађеног у Сирији (VII век; сл. 1), наминијатури рукописа BNF 580, fol. 2v (сл. 2), сребрној ex-votoплочи из Лувра BJ 2180 (сл. 5), затим на минијатурама рукописа Vat. Gr. 749, fol. 25r (сл. 6), 238r (сл. 7) идеала лава-океана са фреске Вазнесења у цркви Светог Ђорђа у Курбинову, закључено је да лесновски мотив фантастичне лавље главе представља велику, стару змију, која се зове ђаво и сатана, која заводи сву васељену (Откр. 12:9), коју је свети Симеон Чудотворац победио својим страдањем за Христа. У раду се разматрају и разлози приказивања фантастичне маске у црвеној боји, који потврђују дата тумачења. Закључено је да фреска са ликом светог Симеона Чудотворца носи снажну апотропјеску функцију, што је и разлог њеног постављања уз сам улаз лесновске цркве.

