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The ninth Century Great Moravian figural Motifs of Orantes

UDK: 904 : 739.046 (437.2) "08"

Original scientific paper

Received: 1. 7. 2008.

Accepted: 7. 7. 2008.

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The study presents new finds of gilded copper plaques with figural motifs depicting orantes, which were discovered at the Great Moravian Bojná I-“Valy” hillfort in Slovakia. The plaques, together with the collection of belt endings excavated at the Great Moravian “Valy” hillfort near Mikulčice (Moravia, Czech Republic), are studied using the comparative and iconographic analysis. The author concludes that Moravian belt endings were produced in a manner similar to Carolingian belt endings from the second third of the ninth century, but the style of figural decorations of orantes, as well as that of the plaques from Bojná, resembles Byzantine patterns. They are decorated by angels of various orders related to the oldest preserved Byzantine Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus of the ninth century. These orders of angels were also inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite writing on the “Celestial Hierarchy”. Both written documents were very popular in the Constantinople court in the latter half of the ninth century.

The study concludes that both complexes of Great Moravian artistic craft are closely connected to the Byzantine mission of Sts. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius.

Key words: Great Moravia, orans, orders of angels, belt endings, Byzantine coinage, Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

DISCOVERED at the Great Moravian Bojná I-“Valy” hillfort near Topolčany, the copper-gilded plaques with unique figural decoration have recently attracted a great deal of attention in Slovakia.¹ They were purchased by the Ponitrianske Múzeum in Nitra from a private owner in 2003 and examined by experts of the Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences for three years. The finds were published in the book *Bojná. Economic and Political Centre of the Nitra Princedom*.² Although it was impossible to date the plaques by means of comparative archaeological techniques or by means of scientific dating according to the examination results, the authors of the discovery report dated the collection into the first half of the ninth century based on the overall classification of the Bojná I. hillfort.³

Their figural motifs have not yet been studied in the context of known figural Great Moravian relics from the “Valy” hillfort near Mikulčice. First of all, researchers K. Pieta and A. Ruttkay have come to the conclusion that the collection of the plaques from Bojná related to Latin Western Christianity. They considered the plaques to be an evidence of the presence of a new religion in Great Moravia even a few decades before the arrival of the Byzantine mission.⁴ Studying the plaques from a technological point of view, Austrian researchers M. Mehofer and V. Leusch, unlike the Slovak scholars, drew attention to a comparative analysis of belt endings from “Valy” near Mikulčice. At the same time, and without a detailed iconographical analysis, they only stated that there were “orantes” and angels wearing similar clothing depicted on all the plaques. Therefore, they came to the conclusion that the collection of plaques from Bojná can also be related to domestic workshop production.⁵

As it is apparent from the present state of research, nobody has yet made a conducted analysis nor comparison of the plaques from Bojná with the Great Moravian figural motifs. This is what the present study aims to achieve.

COMPARATIVE AND ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE PLAQUES FROM BOJNÁ

Plaque no. 1 represents a figural motif of a winged figure with the cross nimbus. It has three trapezoidal rays in the form of a cross around its head. Its left hand is bent upright in a greeting gesture with three embossed feathers. The wing with four sails grows out of the back instead of the right arm. On the surface under the left hand there are five embossed letters in the form of a majuscule with a triangular bevel, of which only the last three are clearly readable: “V A M” [Fig. 1]. The figural motif on plaque no. 1 is comparable to the solidus of Byzantine Emperor Michael III, which was discovered in grave no. 480 next to the “three-nave” basilica in Mikulčice.⁶ On the its obverse Jesus Christ is depicted with a similar cross nimbus [Fig. 2] that truly copies the coinage of Pre-iconoclastic times, especially the coins of Justinian II from the turn of the seventh century⁷ [Fig. 3]. A fragment of a bronze sheet-metal cross discovered in the graveyard around the church, no. 12, at the “Valy” hillfort near Mikulčice is also known from the Great Moravian area. On the cross, Jesus Christ is schematically depicted with the cross nimbus around his head and his left hand in a greeting gesture, which is analogous to plaque no. 1. According to J. Kaván it is the typical Byzantine motif *Maiestas Domini*, which was made as a copy of wall paintings in a church in Mikulčice⁸ [Fig. 4]. On the other hand, in A. Novák’s opinion, the cross was made by a secondary cut-out of an older plate with several figures, which is apparent from several lines on the sides of Christ. Therefore, he deduced that it was an iconographical motif *Flagellation of Christ*, or the elder Arian iconography of *The Three Saints*,⁹ although it is less probable considering the level of preservation of the artefact. Moreover, the stippled background of the cross proves to be of a typical Great Moravian provenance. However, the deduction of B. Kavánová is more acceptable; he says that the cross, a part of the reliquary decoration, was placed under the ground in the church presbytery where the reliquary *capsula*¹⁰ was discovered.

With respect to the fact that the figure on plaque no. 1 from Bojná has the cross nimbus (a typical at-

1 The collection of copper gilded plaques consists of four circular plaques approximately 15 cm in diameter and quatrefoil-shaped plaques approximately 13.3 cm in diameter. The edges of the plaques were decorated by stamping either with triangles edged by astragals or interconnected squares with pearls in the centre. Three circle frames approximately 19.2 cm in diameter belong to the collection of plaques.

2 Pieta, Ruttkay, Ruttkay 2006.

3 Pieta, Ruttkay 2006, p. 31, 54.

4 Pieta, Ruttkay 2007, p. 15.

5 Mehofer, Leusch 2006, p. 80, 108.

6 Poulík, 1960, p. 101, fig. 235, Tab. XXVII.

7 Grierson 1999, pp. 8-9.

8 Kaván 1993, pp. 193-209.

9 Novák 2007, pp. 293-294.

10 Kavánová 2001, pp. 210-211, 221.



Fig. 1. Plaque Nr 1 from Bojná.

tribute of Jesus Christ¹¹) and the wing symbolizing an angel, the figure on the plaque can be interpreted as an unusual iconographical type of *Christ – the Angel of the Great Council*. He was constellated by the Prophet Isaiah in his Vision (Is 6, 1-4), by the Prophet Malachias (Mal 3, 1-2). Moreover, he is also mentioned in patristic literature and by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*De Caestri Hierarchia*, 4, 4).¹² Therefore, the illumination of the Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus (Bibliothèque nationale Paris gr. 510) dated 880-886 AD¹³ is considered the first known depiction of the winged Christ in art history. *Christ – the Angel of the Great Council* is displayed here on fol. 285¹⁴ in the context of “Vision of the Prophet Habakkuk”. Christ appears in the Habakkuk prayer towards the Lord (Hab 3, 1-19), in which his destiny as the saviour of Israel is mentioned. In the Paris miniature, there is the depiction of the Prophet Habakkuk announcing his vision to Gregory of Nazianzus in its lower part, with St. Paraskevi standing on the left side with St. Helen, *Christ – the Angel of the Great Council* hovers above them in mandorla with the crutch cross in his hand surrounded by an assembly of angels [Fig. 5].

Plaque no. 2 shows a figural motif similar to the orans pose, because both arms of the figure are raised in a prayer-like gesture. But the figure holds a kind of a stick in the shape of the letter “T” with a trian-

11 Pieta, Ruttkay 2006, p. 38.

12 Luchesi Palli 1968, p. 398.

13 Der Nersessian 1962, pp. 197-228; Brubaker 1985, pp. 1-13.

14 Brubaker 1999, pp. 205-206, fig. 29.



Fig. 2. Byzantine gold solidus of the Michael III with the portrait of Jesus Christ from the grave Nr 480, Valy near Mikulčice.



Fig. 3. Byzantine gold solidus of the Justinian II with the portrait of Jesus Christ.



Fig. 4. Reliquary cross from the grave near Church Nr 12, Valy near Mikulčice.

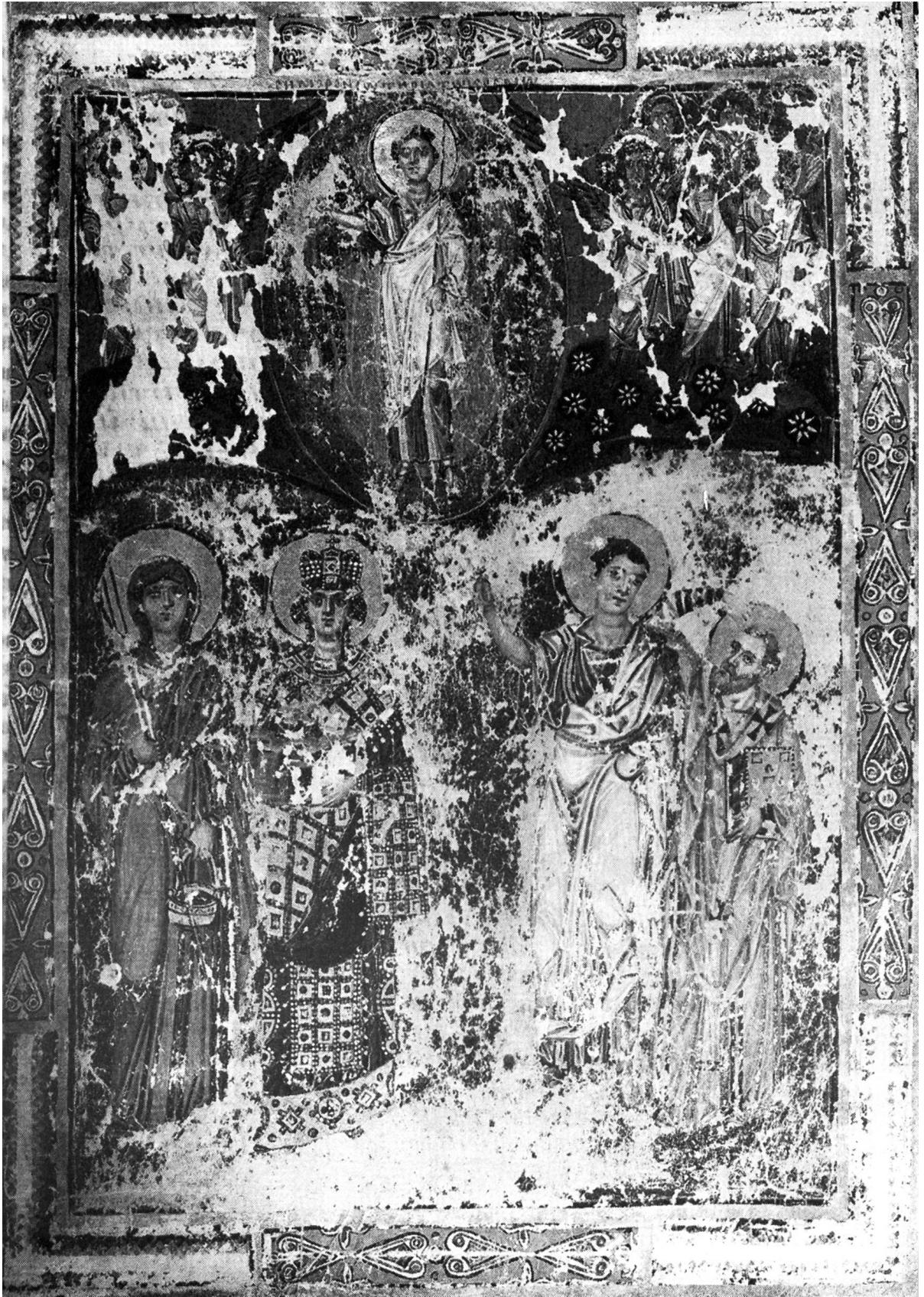


Fig. 5. Jesus Christ – The angel of the Great Council, Folium Nr 285 of the Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus, Bibliothèque nationale Paris gr. 510.



Fig. 6. Plaque Nr 2 from Bojná.



Fig. 8. Obverse of byzantine gold solidus with the portrait of the Michael III from the grave Nr 480, Valy near Mikulčice.

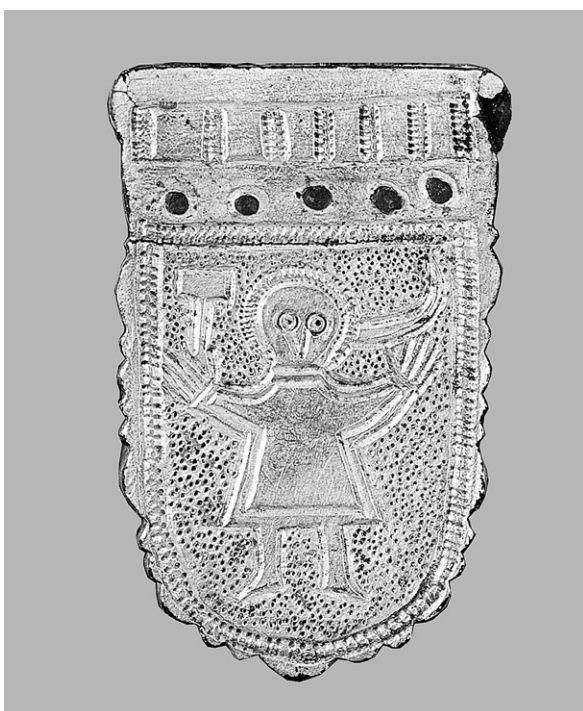


Fig. 7a



Fig. 7b

gular base in his left hand and with a triplet feather embossed under both elbows [Fig. 6]. An analogy to the figural motif can be found on the belt ending with an orans from grave no. 240 discovered near the “three-nave” basilica in Mikulčice, which was already mentioned by M. Mehofer and V. Leusch.¹⁵ On the reverse of the gilded bronze belt ending, the figure of a man in tunic is engraved even more schematically than the figure from Bojná. In his right hand he holds

an object in the shape of the letter “T” and in the left we can see an object in the shape of a horn. The face of the figure consists of two concentric circles with dots representing the eyes, between them there is an engraved sharp avian nose in the shape of the letter “V” [Fig. 7]. The iconography of the belt ending has already been explained by V. Denkstein. He supposed that it is a depiction of a prince with the attributes of a sovereign; a flag – *labarum*, the symbol of the dignity of the emperor in one hand, and the “horn of plenty”, the Old Testament vessel with sacred oil for the sac-

15 Mehofer, Leusch 2006, p. 80, 108.



Fig. 9. Copper gilded plate of Lombards King Agilulf, 7th Century.

rament of kings, in his other hand.¹⁶ B. Svoboda and J. Poulík held a similar opinion. They interpreted the attributes according to the divine power of Byzantine emperors [Fig. 8] based on the example of the *labarum* on the reverse of the already-mentioned solidus of Michael III from Mikulčice.¹⁷ The obverse of the belt ending is decorated by the animal motif of the “frog” in the centre. In J. Poulík’s opinion, such a style was closely connected to Frankish art of the reliquary of Gandersheim.¹⁸ He also came to a conclusion that Prince Mojmir I¹⁹ might have been buried in the grave with the belt ending. Despite the imperial symbolism of the figural motif, it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that the reverse of the belt ending usually had a protective function,²⁰ so the holder of the belt had to be a sovereign himself, whose mission was to protect all members of his tribe by means of divine power. There are also other interpretations of the figural motif that appear on the belt ending from

grave no. 240. For instance K. Benda and J. Šmerda thought that it is a stylized depiction of the goddess Victoria, who usually holds the plate with the inscription “Victoria” in the one hand, and the horn of plenty in the other. This was considered evidence of continuity of Antique symbolism in Great Moravian art.²¹ Z. Klanica and R. Hošek were other scholars who interpreted this belt ending on the basis of pagan gods. Klanica concluded that the figure held an axe and a rhyton – reputed attributes of the Slavic god Perun,²² while in Hošek’s opinion it was the Celtic god “Sucellus” holding a hammer and a sickle.²³ Finally, out of a curiosity, the opinion of A. Novák can be mentioned. He considered the figure on the belt ending a depiction of a shaman wearing a bird mask, or a combination of a human being with a bird’s head, as is the case of the Egyptian god Horus.²⁴

With regard to the fact that the figure on plaque no. 2 from Bojná has a triplet of feathers under its elbows, similar to *Christ – the Angel of the Great Council* on plaque no. 1, it is obvious that the feathers have the

16 Denkstein 1962, p. 510.

17 Poulík 1975, p. 79-80.

18 Poulík 1971, p. 58.

19 Poulík 1971, p. 59; Also, J. Kotas identified this belt ending with Prince Slavomir, ruler of the Great Moravian Empire during Svatopluk’s imprisonment – Kotas 1974, p. 24-36.

20 Poulík 1975, p. 64.

21 Benda 1973, p. 87; Šmerda 2004 – this interpretation be found at <http://www.mikulcice-valy.info/default.asp?cont=104>.

22 Klanica 1996, p. 102.

23 Hošek 1965, pp. 253-256.

24 Novák 2007, p. 271.

substitute symbolism of wings.²⁵ Thus it must be the depiction of an angel. The figure can be specified in a greater detail on the basis of an individual attribute – the object in the shape of the letter “T” in context of the Mikulčice belt ending from grave no. 240. Here, it is possible to exclude the interpretation of K. Pieta and A. Ruttkey since they identified the orans to be St. Anthony the Great holding the cross in the shape of the letter “Tau”.²⁶ The T-shaped object is probably a schematic description of a Byzantine sovereign’s banner called *labarum*, which represented both the temporal and divine powers of the emperor. The winged figure with the *labarum*, which used to represent the goddess Victoria in Classical Antiquity, has been reinterpreted as an angel in Christian culture. Such a depiction appears, for instance, on the gilded copper Lombard board called the Agilulf board (after their king²⁷) which dates back to the beginning of the seventh century. Next to the enthroned king, there are winged figures of angels holding flags, *labarum*,²⁸ bearing the inscription VICTVRIA in the right hand and the horn of plenty in their left [Fig. 9]. The winged angels with *labarum* have usually been depicted in Byzantine art, e.g. *Archangel Michael* on the mosaic of St. Apollinare in Classe (Ravenna) from the sixth century²⁹ [Fig. 10]. *Archangel Elish* on fol. Cv. in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Bibliothèque nationale Paris gr. 510) also holds the *labarum*. He is standing next to the emperor Basil I and Archangel Gabriel³⁰ [Fig. 11]. The winged figure on plaque no. 2 from Bojná can be linked with the Byzantine iconography of archangels. Whereas the figure with the *labarum* from grave no. 240 in Mikulčice is analogous to the Byzantine depiction of a sovereign Michael III on the gold solidus from Mikulčice. The sovereign’s symbolism of the belt ending can also be confirmed by the motif of consecration occurring also in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris Gr. 510) on fol. no. 174 such as the

25 Pieta, Ruttkey 2006, p. 39.

26 Pieta, Ruttkey 2006, p. 39.

27 Hubert, Porcher, Volbach 1968, p. 367, No. 271.

28 *Labarum* was the piece of square fabric fastened down on the bar in shape of the letter “T” with Christian symbols. It originated in the military Roman standard – Vexillum, which contained pagan symbols. These were replaced by Christian symbols, e.g. by the Christ monogram XP, at Constantine’s behest.

29 Simson 1948.

30 Brubaker 1999, fig. 5, p. 158-162; On the problem of the iconography of archangels in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus see Maguire 1995, pp. 63-71.



Fig. 10. Archangel Michael from the St. Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna, 6th Century.



Fig. 11. Archangel Elias, the byzantine emperor Basileus I. and archangel Gabriel, fol. Cv Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Bibliothèque nationale Paris gr. 510.



Fig. 12. Chrism of the King David by the prophet Samuelom, fol. 174 Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Bibliothèque nationale Paris gr. 510.

act of the consecration of King David by the Prophet Samuel (1Sam16, 1-13). Therefore, these iconographical models must have been known in Byzantium in the ninth century [Fig. 12].

Plaque no. 3 represents the figural motif also in a prayer gesture. The triplets of feathers are embossed in the same way as on plaque no. 2. The clothing of the figure of an angel with the skirt tied around the waist is analogous to the figure of an orans on the reverse on the gilded silver belt-ending from grave no. 100, which was discovered near church no. 2 at the “Valy” hillfort near Mikulčice. The typology of the clothing of the orans was analyzed by J. Poulík very authentically – the orans wears a *casula* (shirt) tucked into an *alba* (skirt) with folded drapery and the sleeves ended by *perikhapion* (metal wristbands), a typical Byzantine³¹ feature. The orans is embossed by a simple line, his forearms stretched towards heaven. Hanging on his neck he has a cross with broadened arms at its ends. According to J. Poulík, the orans represents a priest, a saint, or a bishop.³² Without any detailed reasoning, A. Novák interprets the figure to be a wandering bishop.³³ As to the provenance of the iconographical motif, T. Capelle, who dealt with it in the context of Carolingian art, considered this motif an import from the Byzantine Empire.³⁴ J. Poulík reckoned that the belt ending had been inspired by Carolingian art³⁵ due to its obverse decoration with the motif of the mask and the human eye. According to him, the motif of the orans was inspired by the crosses and reliquaries from the Byzantine periphery.³⁶ [Fig. 14].

Another example of a Great Moravian orans is the figure embossed on a thin copper plate that has been found in one of the graves at the burial place in “Kosteliště” in the vicinity of the Mikulčice³⁷ hillfort. The adoration gesture is the most similar to the figures on plaques no. 2 and 3 from Bojná. According to the disposition of the arms and body, the figure seems to be squatting. The figure’s clothing is decorated by parallel vertical grooves, whereas the flat parts between the arms and the head are chased slightly di-

31 Poulík 1975, p. 64.

32 Poulík 1960, p. 97; Poulík 1975, p. 64.

33 Novák 2007, p. 270.

34 Capelle 1968, p. 242, note 23.

35 Poulík 1971, pp. 57-58.

36 Poulík 1975, p. 66.

37 Šmerda 2004. These interpretation can also be found at <http://www.mikulcice-valy.info/default.asp?cont=104>.



Fig. 13. Plaque Nr 3 from Bojná.

agonally. It gives the impression that the figure has wings. Thus it could be an angel [Fig. 15]. According to J. Šmerda, it is the goddess Victoria.³⁸ The figure of the orans on plaque no. 3 can be interpreted as an angel based on the subsidiary symbolism of feathers under

38 Šmerda 2004. See also at <http://www.mikulcice-valy.info/default.asp?cont=104>.

the elbows. With respect to the absence of other individual attributes, a more detailed specification of the figure is not possible. In the same way as the figures on the previous plaque, this angel does not contrast to the Byzantine examples, either. Taking into consideration the fact that the Moravia-Pannonia Episcopate was established after the arrival of Constantine and Methodius in Great Moravia, the figure of an orans/bishop can be interpreted in the same context as well.

Plaque no. 4 definitely represents the figural motif of an angel, as it has the visibly preserved left wing. The arms of the figure are placed on its chest, and the wing, which has been destroyed by corrosion, protrudes from behind the left-hand thumb. The engraved inscription with majuscule ND, with the fragment of the third, not very well preserved, letter identified as “E” has been preserved by the left elbow [Fig. 16].

Compared to the previous figures, the different shape of the clothing of the angel on plaque no. 4 is apparent. However, the rectangular shape with the central herring-pattern of the clothing is analogous to the one worn by the crucified Christ depicted on the leaden cross from Sady by Uherské Hradiště. On the obverse, there is also the oldest known palaeographic relic of the Great Moravian Empire written



Fig. 14. Reverse of the bronze belt endings with the orant's motive from the grave Nr 100, Valy near Mikulčice.



Fig. 15. Copper plate with the orant's motive from the locality „Kostelisko“, Valy near Mikulčice.

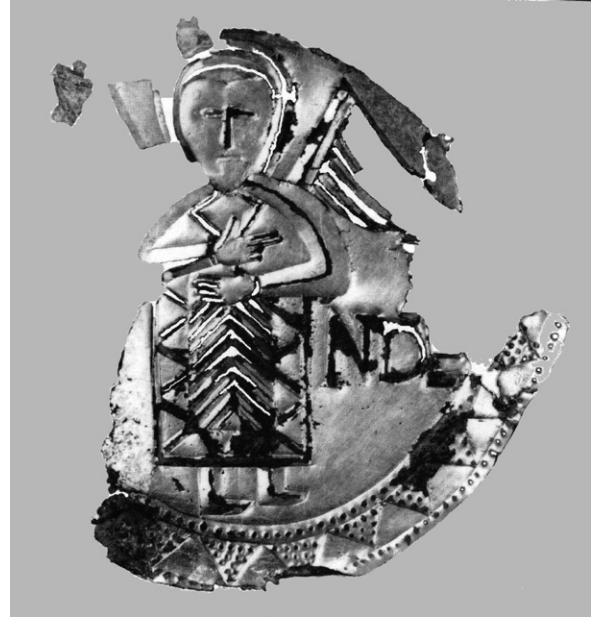


Fig. 16. Plaque Nr 4 from Bojná.

in Greek - IC ΦΩC XC – NH ZΩH X(Ω). The text in the translation of R. Hošek means: ΦΩC ZΩH – *Light, Life*; NH X(Ω) – *Victory (to the Lord)*, IC XC – *Iesus Christos*³⁹ [Fig. 17].

The gesture of the right hand of the angel on plaque no. 4 can also be classified to the Byzantine sphere, since it is similar to the arabesque in the letter of Patriarch Photius addressed to Cleodionis II on Folium no. 216 of the Homilies of Gregory Nazian-

39 Havlík 1993, p. 295.



Fig. 17. Plumbeous cross with byzantine inscription from the ecclesiastical area „Sady“ near Uherské Hradiště.



Fig. 18. Plain initial „E“ from the letter written by patriarch Photios to Kleodonis II, fol. 216 Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Bibliothèque nationale Paris gr. 510.



Fig. 19. Plaque Nr 5 from Bojná.

zus (Paris gr. 510)⁴⁰ (Figure no. 16). As in the case of plaque no. 3 from Bojná, the absence of individual attributes, whereby the angel could be identified, can be observed here as well [Fig. 18].

Plaque no. 5 undoubtedly represents the figural motif of an angel without arms, with two wings growing from its shoulders [Fig. 19]. An analogy can be found between the decoration of the angel's clothing and already known depictions of orantes from Mikulčice in grave no. 390.⁴¹ The angel wears bell-shaped clothing with a triangular tie – *plastron*. The orans on the belt ending from the silver plate found has a kind of a bell-shaped skirt with a triangular motif. The decoration of the reverse has been made by engraving with strongly marked relief and salient edges like on the plaque from Bojná. The figure has a dominant short skirt (above the knees) bound around the waist, the trousers jutting from under the skirt, and wearing boots. Apart from the skirt, it is obvious that the orans also wears a shirt (*casula*) with cuffs on the shoulders. According to J. Šmerda, the orans is clothed in a caftan and trousers, which he believes constitutes political symbolism of a magnate dressed “in the Slavic style”.⁴² Other researchers deem the figure to

be a depiction of a Slavonic medicine-man – “volch”⁴³ [Fig. 20]. In Š. Ungerman's opinion, there is no reason to suppose that this figure is dressed in old Slavic style because we do not know their habiliment.⁴⁴ As far as we can see in the context of the plaque from Bojná, the decorations of the clothing were inspired by Byzantine fashion. Also the decorations on plaque no. 5 imitate the astragal framing on the coin of Michael III, as well as the nail-head ornament on the quatrefoil plaque, which is analogous to the decoration of the clothing of the emperor on the reverse of the coin. The angel on plaque no. 5 has a specific horn-like shape above its head, which has been interpreted either as an aureole,⁴⁵ hair or flames.⁴⁶ Because there is not a single depiction of the figure of an angel with hair on the plaque, it is, with highest probability, an individual attribute of the angel, e.g. of “the angel in fire”, who has already been mentioned in the Old Testament, and that first appeared to Moses and later also to Samson (Sdc 13, 20). According to the hierarchy of angels in heaven, which had set up by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in his work *De Caelesti Hierarchia* (Chapter 6 – 10),⁴⁷ the highest choir of Angels consists of *seraphs* (meaning fiery or burning).⁴⁸ In the Old Testament, we can find their description by the Prophet Isaiah in the Vision on God enthroned and surrounded by angels called *seraphs* (Is 6, 1-3), where they are depicted as beings with six wings. These angels are the guardians of the God's throne and are often depicted with six wings, just like in the upper register fol. 67 in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus⁴⁹ illustrating the vision of the Prophet Isaiah [Fig. 21]. Therefore, plaque no. 5 captures, with the highest probability, a *seraph*.

On plaque no. 6 we can see the figural motif of an angel with four wings. The front upper part of the body is overlapped by two wings; another two wings come out from behind the figure of the angel. Behind the wings of the figure, there are arms raised horizontally sideways [Fig. 22]. The figure of the angel on plaque no. 6 has no apparent connection with the above-mentioned endings of orans from Mikulčice. This might be determined by a difficult figural com-

40 Brubaker 1999, pp. 158-162.

41 Pulík 1975, p. 82.

42 Šmerda 2004. This interpretation can be found at <http://www.mikulcice-valy.info/default.asp?cont=104>.

43 Novák 2007, p. 272.

44 Ungerman 2002, p. 226.

45 Štefanovičová 2006, p. 29.

46 Pieta 2006, p. 43.

47 Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita 1986.

48 Parello 2006, columns 1405-1406.

49 Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita 1986.



Fig. 20. Reverse of the silver belt endings with the orant's motive from the grave Nr 490, Valy near Mikulčice.

position; obviously the artist had to deal with the shape of a quaternion of wings, among which the ends of sideways raised arms can be seen, like on the depiction of Christ on the leaden cross from Sady by Uher-ské Hradište. However, the oval face which narrows down is similar to the orans on the ending from grave no. 390. The angels with four wings are mentioned in the Old Testament in the Vision of the Prophet Ezekiel (Ez 1, 4-12). They are called *tetramorphs* or *cherubs*, which can be interpreted as the God's throne or a war carriage⁵⁰ in the Vision of Ezekiel. According to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, it belongs to one of the highest choirs of angels.⁵¹ The *cherubs* are described also in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris Gr. 510) on fol. 67v⁵² representing the Vision of the Prophet Isaiah about God Enthroned (Is 6, 1-3). On the folio, we can find a depiction of *Christ in mandorla* "carried" by six *seraphs* with six wings, under which there are another six angels with four wings, i.e. *tetramorph cherubs* with two gold-plates and two white wings.⁵³ In the lower part, the Prophet Isaiah is kneeling surrounded by a crowd of angels and saints.

50 Parello 2006, columns. 1405-1406.

51 Pseudo-Dionysius Aeropagita 1986.

52 Brubaker 1999, pp. 281-284.t.

53 Brubaker 1999, p. 282.

Under the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, both the seraphs and the cherubs have often been depicted so in Byzantine art. They can be found, for instance, on the gold reliquary of Staurotheka of Limburg (the treasure in the Dome) made between 968 and 985⁵⁴ [Fig. 23]. The angels/cherubs are depicted in a similar way on the plaque from Bojná, and also on the mosaic of *The Last Judgement* on the western wall of the cathedral in Torcello of the twelfth century. The front part of their body is hidden behind two wings. Another two wings are at the back. Between the wings, the arms raised sideways can be seen.⁵⁵

THE QUESTION OF THE STYLE OF THE GREAT MORAVIAN FIGURAL MOTIFS

According to the state of research mentioned above, most figural motifs of "orantes" were interpreted in the context of a political symbolism of Great Moravian holders of belt endings from graves no. 240 and 390. According to Š. Ungerman, who carried out the most recent iconographical research of Great Moravian belts, there is no reason to suppose that

54 Christie, Losowska, Recht, Velmans, 1994, p. 226, fig. 329.

55 Talbot Rice 1968, pp. 180-181, fig. 164.

the Great Moravian rulers held belt apparel with self portraits because it could have been in opposition to Early Medieval conventions. In his opinion, the fashion of the Great Moravian belt sets was inspired by Carolingian imports.⁵⁶ On the reverses of Carolingian belt endings, there were usually Christian symbols, such as Christ, prophets and saints with the protective function of amulets. That is why he concluded that the magic depictions of “orantes” had been derived from the Late Antique heritage intermediated by Carolingian art.⁵⁷ On the other hand, belt gear was also typical of the Avar magnates and had political and protective symbolism. That is why Great Moravian rulers could have used belts with the same ideological function. They were the successors of the Avars and were able to cope with changes of new Carolingian fashion.

The belt endings already mentioned were truly inspired by the Carolingian foundry workshops from the second third of the ninth century. For example, we can mention a silver gilded belt ending from Stentinget in Denmark fabricated in Lorraine around the middle of the ninth century. Its edges consist of acanthus ornaments with a double palmette in the centre and small niello crosses. This type of ornament is usually derived from the Manuscript School of Metz.⁵⁸ The Great Moravian belt endings were produced in a fashion similar to the belt ending from Stentinget. On the other hand, figural motifs on the Great Moravian obverses of belt endings may have been inspired by Carolingian prototypes but their style is close to figural motifs from Bojná made according to Byzantine models. That is why the plaques from Bojná are a clue to the interpretation and provenance of figural motifs of “orantes” from the Great Moravian hillfort in Mikulčice. The schematic character of the plaque, its circle shape and decoration in the form of an astragal are analogous to the Byzantine gold solidus of Michael III (Byzantine emperor, 842-867) discovered in grave no. 480 near the basilica in Mikulčice. On the obverse, there is a depiction of Christ with cross nimbus, like on plaque no. 1, and on the reverse, a portrait of Byzantine Emperor Michael III with *labarum* in his hand, like on plaque no. 2. At the same time, the obverse of the coin with the portrait of Christ copied older coins of the Pre-iconoclastic coinage of Byzantine Emperor Justinian II (685-695, 705-711), which has already been mentioned above. During the



Fig. 21. Angels Seraphims and Cherubims around the Christ in Madorla, fol. 67 Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Bibliothèque nationale Paris gr. 510.

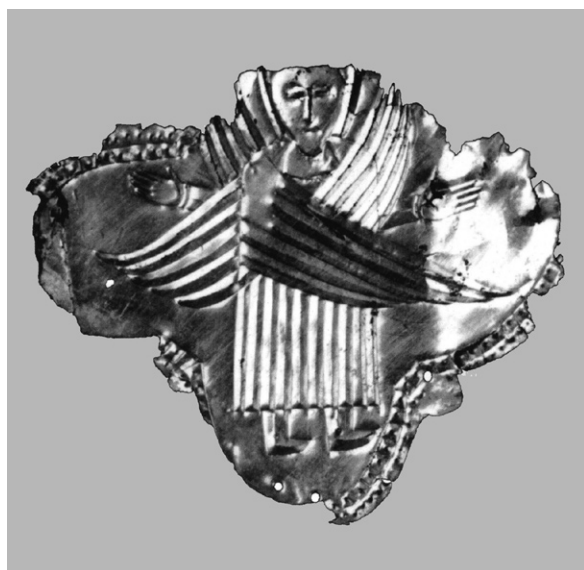


Fig. 22. Plaque Nr 6 from Bojná.

56 Ungerman 2001, pp. 231-236; p. 253.

57 Ungerman 2002, p. 111.

58 Stiegemann, Wemhoff 1999, Vol. 2, p. 757, Cat. No. 40.

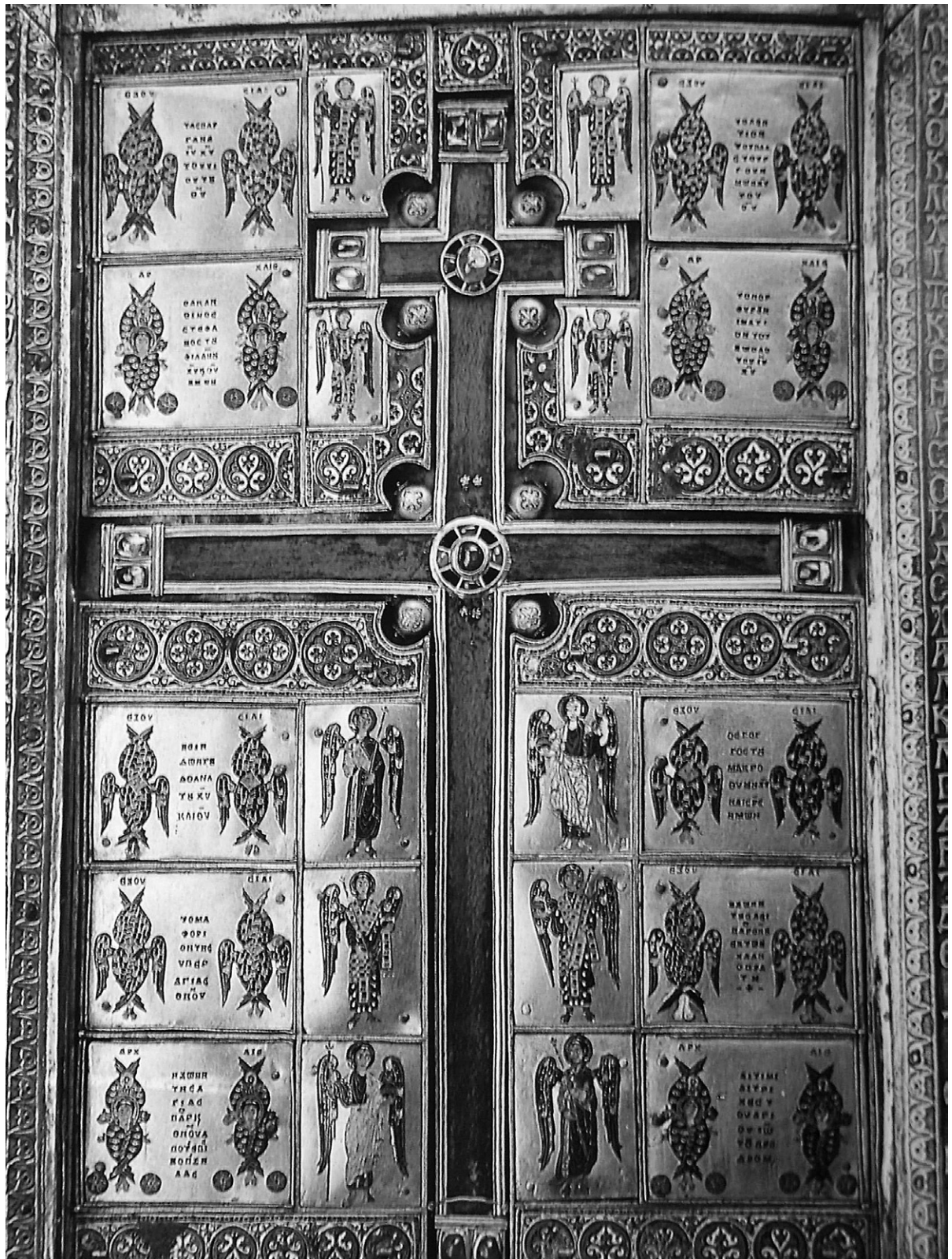


Fig. 23. Hierarchic level of the Angels' orders from Seraphim, cherubs and Archangels inside the reliquary of St. Cross, Staurotheka of Limbourg, 968 – 985.

iconoclasm era of the eighth century, the Christological motifs were removed from coins and replaced by portraits of the emperors' family, which appeared on the obverse of the coins. The character of coins be-

came more abstract, executed in a linear style, and the character of portraits depicting emperors totally disappeared. The return to the Pre-iconoclastic iconography of coins can be dated to the accession of

Michael III. However, the linear abstract character of depicted figures remained there.⁵⁹ But the circular shape of the plaques were apparently not derived from Byzantine coinage, because the form of plaques have already been known in Avar art, followed by Great Moravian handicrafts. For instance, we can mention a well-known silver plaque with a “hawker” from Staré Město,⁶⁰ or the pitch pad used for hammering plaques from the Bratislava Castle.⁶¹ The unusual patterns of quatrefoil plaques were also used in Byzantine art. Such a decorative geometrical shape can be seen in an illuminated initial in the letter of Patriarch Photius to Cleodionios II in fol no. 216, the part of the code of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris gr. 510).⁶² Here again, the edging of plaques no. 5 and no. 6 in the form of squares with astragals, so called nail-heads, is analogous to the clothing of Emperor Michael III on the gold solidus. In spite of the high-quality art of the Byzantine court in the ninth century, confirmed by illuminations of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus with the style coming from the realistic examples of Late Antiquity, Byzantine coinage retained its hieratic schematic character according to the coinage era of Iconoclasm. That is why the coins of Michael III, which were allegedly brought into Great Moravia by Constantine and Methodius, could have influenced the style of domestic metal craftsmen.

From the technological point of view, the plaques from Bojná are connected with the Great Moravian metal-beating represented by the silver ending with orans from grave no. 390 in Mikulčice, and by the copper plate, with an orans or angel, from the “Kosteliště” burial site in Mikulčice. The Great Moravian depictions of orans from graves no. 100 and no. 240 in Mikulčice on the reverses of belt endings were forged from bronze or silver. However, they can be also linked to the plaques from Bojná due to the identical formal items of Byzantine-type clothing such as: *casula*, *alba*, and *perikhapion*. At the same time, different details of clothing and faces are determined by the size of the belt endings which are nearly three times smaller.⁶³

GREAT MORAVIAN FIGURAL MOTIFS AND BYZANTINE CULTURE OF THE LATTER HALF OF NINTH CENTURY

The collection of plaques from Bojná with the iconography of angels does not have to come from the portable altar, as has been presumed by many researchers,⁶⁴ but from the reliquary. The reliquary, which may have also contained plaques from Bojná, was probably made of wood and covered in leather since several pieces have been found with nails to fix plaques with lengths of 6 to 17 mm. Moreover, quatrefoil-shaped plaques no. 5 and 6 had triangular protrusions due to being affixed into a leather base.⁶⁵ Such a hypothesis can be made based on the Byzantine Staurotheka of Limburg – the reliquary made for the Emperor Romanus I containing the relic of the Holy Cross – framed by goldsmith work with motifs of *seraphs*, *cherubs*, *archangels* and *angels*.

References on various angels have already been mentioned by the Prophet Daniel in the Old Testament, later also in patristic literature, for instance in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus written in the fourth century. Finally, they can also be found in the “Celestial Hierarchy” (*De caelesti Hierarchia*) written by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the sixth century. The Greek theologian and representative of the Neoplatonic philosophy of fifth/sixth centuries classified the angelic orders according to hierarchical levels, the so-called triads. There were exhaustively described Cherubim, Seraphim and Thrones at the highest level, Dominions, Virtues and Powers at the second, and Principalities, Archangels and Angels at the third.⁶⁶ The writing of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite was preserved in Byzantium until the ninth century and then sent to the West as a gift from the Byzantine Emperor Michael II the Stammerer (820-829) to the Frankish King Louis the Pious as late as 827. The manuscript was later translated by Frankish theologians, for instance by an Abbot Hilduin, or Johannes Scottus Eriugena.⁶⁷ However, it was written in Greek and that is why the first Frankish translations were very inaccurate. Thus, angelic orders could not have been known in Great Moravia in the first third of the ninth century, i.e. before the arrival of the Byzantine mission of Sts. Constantine/Cyril and St. Methodius.

59 Grierson 1999, p. 8-9.

60 Benda 1963, pp. 41-66.

61 Štefanovičová 1974, pp. 111-121.

62 Brubaker 1999, pp. 158-162.

63 Measures of belt endings: Grave no. 100 – 5.1 × 3 cm; no. 240 – 5.2 × 3.4 cm; no. 390 – 7 × 4.6 cm.

64 Pieta-Ruttikay 2006, p. 51; Friesinger 2006, p. 18.

65 Pieta, Ruttikay 2006, p. 49.

66 Meyndorff 2003, p. 267.

67 Meyndorff 2003, pp. 263-264.

Based on an iconographic and comparative analysis of the figural motifs of the plaques from Bojná, it is apparent that the most similar motifs can be found in the Byzantine art. Primarily in coinage it is represented by the gold solidus of Michael III and in the illumination of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Bibliothèque nationale Paris gr. 510).⁶⁸ This illuminated manuscript was made at the court of the emperor in Constantinople as a gift of Patriarch Photius to the Byzantine Emperor Basil I between 880 and 886, and is the oldest preserved Greek copy of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus.⁶⁹ The illuminated codices were assigned for the highest circles of the emperor's court.⁷⁰ St. Constantine/Cyril, arriving in Great Moravia directly from Constantinople together with Methodius apparently in 863, had developed intellectually in the emperor's court and became a member of the student group of Patriarch Photius. It was namely Gregory of Nazianzus, who was both his spiritual and literary ideal, and in whose honour St. Constantine/Cyril composed the panegyric poem (*enkomion*), preserved in the translation of the Life of Constantine.⁷¹

As a philosopher, and after all, also the friend of Patriarch Photius (*fortissimus amicus Photii*),⁷² St. Constantine/Cyril was very familiar with the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and even could to cite them by heart, as it is stated by Anastasios, a Roman librarian.⁷³ Worth mentioning also is the fact that several well-preserved translations of the Homilies by Gregory of Nazianzus originating in the Slavic area in the Balkans are analogous to other preserved literary records of the mission of Sts. Constantine/Cyril and Methodius. The oldest of them, dating as far back as the eleventh century, is written in Greek and contains thirteen homilies, which have probably been translated into the archaic Slavic-language "Cyrillic alphabet" as early as in so called Cyril-Methodius era.⁷⁴ The homilies by Gregory of Nazianzus had therefore a deep effect on the Slavic world, in both the Moravian milieu during the mission of Sts. Constantine/Cyril and Methodius and in the area of the Ohrid School

which was established by Clement,⁷⁵ an outstanding pupil of Sts. Constantine/Cyril and St. Methodius. Therefore, the plaques from Bojná came into existence independently and probably earlier than the oldest preserved Paris manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris Gr. 510).

However, there is no doubt that they relate to the contemporary Byzantine theology practised in the court of Constantinople. The only relic which can be undisputedly dated to the period of the Byzantine mission of Sts. Constantine/Cyril and Methodius is the leaden cross with a Greek inscription from the location of "Sady" near Uherské Hradiště. The figural motifs of orantes on the belt endings from the hillfort "Valy" near Mikulčice can be included into this cultural milieu.

75 Avenarius 1992, p. 145, p. 264, note 517.

68 About St. Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389) see more in Keller 2006, column 1004.

69 Der Nersessian 1962, pp. 197-228; Brubaker 1999, p. 1-13;

70 Fiala 1992, p. 458.

71 Vašica 1996, p. 229.

72 Vavřínek 2001, p. 416.

73 Vašica 1996, pp. 258-259.

74 Vašica 1996, p. 258.

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Velikomoravski likovi oranta iz 9. stoljeća

Ključne riječi: Velika Moravska, oranti, anđeoski korovi, pojasni jezičci, bizantski novac, Homilije Grgura Nazijanskog, Pseudo-Dionizije Areopagit

STRUČNA JAVNOST odnedavna posvećuje znatnu pozornost pozlaćenim bakrenim pločicama s figuralnim dekorom i natpisima iz velikomoravskoga gradišta Bojna I – Valy, koje se smatraju jednim od najstarijih dokaza kršćanstva na području Velike Moravske. Pločice su kupljene od privatnog skupljača i smještene u Ponitrianski muzej, a 2003. nalazište je podvrgnuto reviziji Karola Piete. Prema K. Pieti i A. Ruttkayu šest pločica s motivima oranta pripadalo je izvorno prijenosnom oltaru koji se veže uz franačku misiju s početka 9. stoljeća.

S ikonografskoga gledišta, na pločicama iz Bojne nisu prikazani oranti, nego anđeli iz raznih anđeoskih korova: Anđeo Velikog savjeta na br. 1, kerubin na br. 6, serafin na br. 5, arhandeli na br. 2, anđeli na br. 3 i 4. Takva je hijerarhija anđela prvi put predložena u radu Pseudo-Dionizija Areopagita, neoplatonističkog teologa iz 5.-6. stoljeća, *De caelesti Hierarchia* (poglavlje 4.). Tekst se čuvao u Bizantu i tek se godine 827. pojavljuje na Zapadu kao dar cara Mihajla II. Mucavca (820.-829.) franačkom vladaru Luju Pobožnom. Na latinski su ga preveli franački teolozi i filozofi opat Hilduin i Johannes Scottus Eriugena. Stoga pločice iz Bojne nisu mogle nastati pod franačkim teološkim utjecajem, a nema ni potrebe da ih se veže uz prijenosni oltar, već ih treba vezati uz relikvijar. Takvo mišljenje podupire bizantska stauroteka iz Limburga, relikvijar načinjen za Romana I., s relikvijom sv. Križa u zlatnom okviru i s prikazima serafina, kerubina, arhandela i anđela.

Pločicama se bavilo nekoliko stručnjaka. Matthias Mehofer i Verena Leusch zaključili su da su pločice izradili velikomoravski majstori. Točno je da pojasni ukrasi iz grobova 100, 240 i 490 pokazuju sličnosti s pločicama. U stilističkom smislu znakovit je i bizantski solid iz groba 480 s prikazom Mihajla III. koji drži labarum na reversu, te Krista s nimbom, s križem na reversu, a također i relikvijarni križ nađen uz crkvu br. 12.

Najbliža slikana analogija ikonografiji pločica nalazi se u *Homilijama* Grgura Nazijanskog. Rukopis je nastao 880.-886. na carigradskom dvoru kao dar patrijarha Focija caru Baziliju I. To je najstarija sačuvana

grčka kopija propovijedi Grgura Nazijanskog. Sadrži 46 minijatura na cijeloj stranici i više od 200 prikaza koji ne prikazuju samo scene iz Staroga i Novog zavjeta već i motive iz života Grgura Nazijanskog i cara Bazilija. Rukopis nije mogao biti uzorom pločicama iz Bojne, jer je bio isključivo posvećen Baziliju I.

Iluminirani kodeksi koristili su se u najvišim krugovima bizantskog carskog dvora. Skupljali su ih, proučavali i naručivali istaknuti teolozi i učenjaci, pa i članovi carske obitelji. Sv. Konstantin koji je u pratnji Metodija došao u Veliku Moravsku 863., služio je na carskom dvoru prije svojega povijesnog putovanja. Njegov intelektualni razvitak temelji se na bizantskoj dvorskoj kulturi i na porukama kršćanske antike i patrologije, te poznavanju bizantske ikonografije. Bio je prijatelj Focijev i poznao je spise Pseudo-Dionizija Areopagita, kako to opisuje rimski knjižničar Anastazije. Grgur Nazijanski utjecao je intelektualno i teološki na sv. Konstantina, koji mu je posvetio pjesmu tijekom studija u Carigradu. Pločice iz Bojne nastale su neovisno i ranije od najstarijega sačuvanog primjera *Homilija* iz Pariza (B. N., Gr. 510), i ne može se tvrditi da postoji izravna veza između njih i tadašnje bizantske imperijalne ikonografije.

Prijevod: Vladimir P. Goss