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IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY: APOLLONIUS VERSUS JULIAN– REPRESENTATION ON AN OIL LAMP FROM THE BELGRADE CITY MUSEUM

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Abstract. The subject of the paper is a depiction of a bearded man on an ancient North African oil lamp from the 5th century, housed in the Belgrade City Museum (Antique Archaeology Collection). The bearded man is depicted with a laurel wreath in his hair. Based on earlier interpretations, it has been assumed that this figure might represent Christ, or rather Emperor Julian the Apostate (361–363). In previous research, the author proposed the thesis that the depicted figure should be identified as the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana, a claim examined in depth in the present paper. The article provides a comparative analysis of known and confirmed representations of Apollonius of Tyana and Julian the Apostate. Of particular importance is the latest research on Julian's portraits, as well as textual sources that confirm the relevance of Apollonius of Tyana in Roman North Africa.

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Introduction

Utility objects, such as lamps, have often been regarded as secondary material, particularly from the standpoint of art history, due to their mass production and the abundance of finds. However, when it comes to artefacts from Late Antiquity, there is ample reason to reconsider this perspective. The term *Late Antiquity* was introduced in the 19th century by Alois Riegl,[3] but it was Peter Brown's work that sparked significant interest in the period.[4] Brown (1980, p. 17) contributed to a shift in perspective, emphasising that the signs of cultural decline were observable in the western provinces of the Empire, while urban life continued to thrive in the East, with artistic and production centres flourishing in Late Antiquity. He paid special attention to the applied arts and utility objects—being mass-produced art intended for the lower classes—which offer valuable insights into the lives of ordinary people. Brown (1980, p. 17) emphasised the openness among art historians to a renewed appreciation of Late Antiquity, noting that they established clear criteria for assessing the artistic transformations of the postclassical world and showed a willingness "to look with more tolerant eyes on the nonclassical and the exotic".

These tendencies have contributed to a significant shift in the perception of applied art objects within contemporary visual culture studies. Such objects are increasingly valued for their artistic qualities and meaning, rather than solely for

[3] Riegl introduced the term *Spätantike* in 1901 in his book *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, where, instead of promoting a narrative of artistic decline, he argued that the art of Late Antiquity represents a logical progression in the development of form, reflecting the changing demands that a community places on art and, consequently, on aesthetic ideals. For his contributions regarding the formal language that continues to define late antique art and his impact on modern art history, see Demandt, 2007, pp. 155–161; Elsner, 2002, pp. 358–379; Panofsky, 1981, pp. 17–33; Riegl, 1893, p. 273; Riegl, 1985, p. 158.

[4] Brown (1971, p. 189) questioned the traditional perception of Christianity as a predominantly European religion, highlighting its Eastern Mediterranean origins. Equally significant is Brown's emphasis on the importance of the written word for understanding the visual culture of Late Antiquity.

their utilitarian function (Walker, 2012, pp. 169–172). Elsner (2006, p. 11) noted that during Late Antiquity, there was a taste for "exquisite miniatures". While his observation refers to works made of ivory, precious metals, glass, gemstones, and illuminated manuscripts, a similar trend can be observed in numerous everyday objects, which often adopt iconographic motifs from high-quality craft and artistic production. The decorativeness characteristic of "exquisite miniatures"—particularly the intricate patterns found in works made of luxurious materials—is likewise exemplified by the lamp from Singidunum, which is the focus of this research.

Fig. 1. Oil lamp with a representation of a bearded man, 5th century, Belgrade (*Singidunum*), Belgrade City Museum, inv. no. AA/2930. © Public domain photo

Overall Context

After the Second World War, in 1947, during construction work near the Technical Faculty building, King Aleksandar Boulevard, Belgrade, a well-preserved, high-quality North African lamp was discovered. Made of red clay with a fine texture, it is painted red and polished. Its body is pear-shaped, measuring 12.8 × 7.8 cm. The discus is flat, with two openings and a channel connecting the discus to the spout. The handle is solid, and the base is ring-shaped. Traces of burning are visible on

the top of its reconstructed nozzle (Krunić, 2005, p. 81; Крунић, 2011, p. 315; Крунић, 2011a, p. 29; Тодоровић et al., 1956, p. 84). On the shoulder, a stamped decoration is applied, consisting of alternating concentric circles and *chevron* ornaments.[5] The discus, framed by a circular medallion with a decorative border of circles, each containing a central dot, bears a portrait of a man. The figure is characterised by thick hair adorned with a laurel wreath, a long, thick, and unkempt beard, large eyes, prominent cheekbones, an elongated and pronounced nose, and a small mouth.

Although the context of the find is not described in detail, its discovery within the area of the southeastern necropolis of Singidunum, near damaged and disturbed graves (Krunić, 2005, p. 82; Pop-Lazić, 2002, pp. 13–14, 26; Крунић, 2011, pp. 314–315), suggests that the lamp was part of grave goods. In the absence of more precise archaeological context and close parallels, a tentative dating to the second half of the 4th century and Alexandrian provenance has been proposed (Krunić, 2005, p. 81; Крунић, 2011, p. 314; Крунић, 2011a, p. 29). Based on its formal characteristics and quality of workmanship, the lamp belongs to the Hayes IIa type (Hayes, 1972, pp. 310–314; Herrmann & Van den Hoek, 2002, p. 7; Herrmann & Van den Hoek, 2019, pp. 81–84; Krunić, 2005, p. 81), a type produced from the beginning of the 5th to the mid-6th century in workshops in central Tunisia. In an email correspondence, John Herrmann proposed that "the lamp of exceptional decoration most likely originated in *Sidi Marzouk Tounsi*, probably between 420 and 470" (Тешић Радовановић & Јанковић, 2019, pp. 179–180).[6] The dotted motifs and miniature ornamental decoration found on the shoulder and medallion border of the Belgrade lamp are characteristic features of this production centre (Mackensen & Schneider, 2002, pp. 131–134).[7]

[5] The four ornamental motifs are repeated, the first pair consists of concentric circles and triangles/*chevron*, and in the second variant, the same motifs are repeated, now filled with dots. These motifs largely correspond to Bussière's categories Ce 17, Cg 17, Da 25 and Dh 10 (Bussière & Rivel, 2015, pp. 40–47).

[6] I owe my gratitude to Professor Annewies van den Hoek, lecturer in Jewish and Early Christian Greek at Harvard Divinity School, and Dr John Herrmann, curator emeritus at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for their collegiality, the time they devoted to discussing my hypotheses, and their generous help with references. Their decades-long engagement with ARS ceramic iconography has resulted in numerous works, including *Light from the Age of Augustine: Late Antique Ceramics from North Africa (Tunisia)* and *Pottery, Pavements, and Paradise. Iconographic and Textual Studies on Late Antiquity*, which renders their suggestions particularly valuable.

[7] *Sidi Marzouk Tounsi* was an important centre in central Tunisia. The workshop complex began producing pottery in the mid-3rd century, specialising in vessels with relief decoration. The high quality of production was maintained until the end of the 6th century (Mackensen & Schneider, 2002, pp. 131–134). The presence of an identical bordure on the medallion from a vessel produced at *Sidi Marzouk Tounsi* indicates a shared provenance, while the decoration itself imitates metalwork (Mackensen & Schneider, 2002, p. 151).

North African lamps are often referred to as early Christian due to a number of iconographic themes and motifs that convey Christian symbols and narratives. However, both pagan and Christian imagery appear on these lamps, alongside scenes from everyday life and representations of animals. From the third decade of the 5th century onward, pagan motifs become increasingly rare. Of the total number of preserved lamps, only about 12% are decorated with pagan representations, while the remainder feature either neutral ornaments or Christian symbols (Lund, 2001, pp. 201–202). Initially, it was assumed that the portrait on the discus depicted Christ—an interpretation proposed in earlier and repeated in some later interpretations (Јанковић, 2000, p. 26; Тодоровић et al., 1956, p. 84). Although representations of a bearded Christ are recorded in this period, the iconography was not yet standardised; typically, He is shown with a halo, which is not the case here (Jensen, 2000, p. 103; Levine, 2012, pp. 68–70). Christ is also depicted on lamps in well-established iconographic forms—often in full figure, with a halo and a cross in hand—none of which are paralleled in the representation on the Belgrade lamp. Christ and the apostles are usually depicted frontally, bearing prominent Christian attributes. In contrast, pagan deities are shown in half-profile and rendered in a classicising manner that evokes older iconographic conventions (Herrmann & Van den Hoek, 2002, pp. 68–69; Schoolman, 2017, p. 168).[8] An alternative interpretation was soon proposed for the unusual image on the lamp from Singidunum, suggesting a resemblance to certain portraits of Julian the Apostate (331–363) (Krunić, 2005, p. 81; Бирташевић, 1960; Крунић, 2011, pp. 313–315; Крунић, 2011a, p. 29).[9] There appears to be sufficient evidence to refute the identification of the figure as Christ, given the iconographic deviations and the absence of Christian attributes. However, the question remains whether the formal features of the image and its social context support the hypothesis that it depicts Emperor Julian the Apostate. Ultimately, in the syncretic world of Late Antiquity, iconographic motifs were often interwoven and reinterpreted across diverse contexts. "Philosophers were fashioned in the likenesses of the gods"; Roman intellectuals emulated philosophers, and some even regarded Christ himself "as one of the philosopher-sages" (Marsengill, 2020, pp. 129–130). Therefore, the depiction of a bearded man on the discus of the Belgrade lamp must be examined from multiple perspectives.

[8] In an email exchange in March 2018 with Dr John Herrmann it was suggested that Jupiter was occasionally depicted with a laurel wreath. Nevertheless, considering the prevalent iconographic type of Jupiter on lamps from North Africa, it is improbable that the lamp artisan would have opted to depict him with an unusual, frontal bust. Unidentified characters are also depicted on lamps, generally in profile or semi-profile, and are illustrated in a simplified, schematic manner (Ennabli, 1976, pp. 55–58; Paleani, 1993, pp. 70–73; Zych, 2020, p. 98).

[9] This interpretation has been accepted by most scholars (Petković et al., 2015, p. 83; Rogić et al., 2012, p. 352; Цвјетићанин, 2013, pp. 215, 344). The exceptional quality of the lamp has been noted, and it has been proposed that it could be a portrait of the emperor (Curta, 2016, p. 58), although alternative interpretations have also been offered (Тешић Радовановић, 2019, pp. 222–234; Тешић Радовановић & Јанковић, 2019, pp. 179–184).

Being Julian the Apostate: Julian's Self-Presentation

After Christianity was proclaimed the state religion of the Roman Empire during the reign of Theodosius I (379–395), and following the emperor's anti-pagan measures (393–395), the production of North African lamps featuring pagan themes continued, albeit at a reduced frequency. During the reign of Theodosius II (408–450), and especially after the Vandal conquest (429–439), such motifs gradually disappeared. This may have been a consequence of the strong opposition to pagan cults shown by the Vandals (Lund, 2001, pp. 205–206). Although the emperor Julian was depicted in art with a beard, in the spiritual climate of the 5th century, to which the lamp is supposed to be actually dated, it would have been unlikely to find a lamp depicting an emperor who persecuted Christians. Despite his efforts to restore polytheism, he was not fully understood even among pagans (Cameron, 2010, p. 65). Furthermore, the figure on the lamp appears older than Emperor Julian himself, who was only 31 or 32 years old at the time of his death. A brief overview of the most significant events in Julian's life, as well as a reconsideration of known visual representations, is necessary to support this claim.

Julian the Apostate (r. 361–363) was the last ruler of the Constantinian dynasty and the last Roman emperor not to embrace Christianity. He was the grandson of Constantius Chlorus (r. 305–306) and of Constantine's stepmother, Theodora. Although Constantine (r. 306–337) had granted the title of Caesar to some of Theodora's descendants, recognising them as legitimate heirs, after his death Constantius II (r. 337–361) adopted a different stance and ordered the execution of members of this dynastic branch. Only the six-year-old Julian and his brother Gallus survived (Hunt, 2008, pp. 42–43). Raised under Constantius' supervision, the brothers spent most of their youth at the imperial estate called *Macellum* near Caesarea in Cappadocia (Ιουλιαν. Αθην. 271b, c, d), enjoying a status befitting princes (Hunt, 2008, pp. 44–45; Norris, 2008, p. 77). However, Julian never forgot the suffering of his family and felt as a hostage. The circumstances of his upbringing and the influence of his eunuch tutor Mardonius (Ιουλιαν. Μισοπ. 351a–353a), who introduced him to Greek culture, turned him towards pagan philosophy and away from Christianity, which ultimately culminated in an attempt to restore polytheism. Julian entered a church for the last time at Constantius II's funeral (Gr. Naz. Or. 5, 16–17). Long before that, he had engaged in the study of Neoplatonic philosophy and, during his twenties, became involved in mystical cults in Ephesus—an experience he considered transformative, believing that pagan deities had assisted in his elevation from captivity to emperorship (Hunt, 2008, p. 46; Norris, 2008, p. 77). After Gallus' execution, Julian was summoned to the court in Milan, where he was held in custody for several months (Ιουλιαν. Αθην. 272b–274d). He was eventually allowed to continue his education in Athens, a period he considered time spent in his true homeland. Soon afterwards, he was recalled to Milan and, in 356, appointed Caesar in Gaul (Hunt, 2008, pp. 47–48).

Although initially unprepared for the rule, he proved capable in his conflicts with barbarian tribes. He was honoured as the restorer of civilisation in Gaul, and his popularity grew. In 360, his troops proclaimed him Augustus in Paris (Amm. Marc. Gest. 20. 4. 17–19). Subsequently, Julian found himself in a conflict with Constantius II, which compelled him to lead the army eastwards. Constantius II led his army to confront the usurper but died during the campaign, having named Julian his successor (Hunt, 2008, pp. 55–60).

Following the funeral of his predecessor, Julian formally broke with Christianity and openly encouraged participation in pagan cults (Amm. Marc. Gest. 22. 5. 2). He erected an altar to Sol Invictus in the imperial palace in Constantinople (Hunt, 2008, pp. 60–62; Telea, 2014, p. 179) and reformed imperial ceremonies, promoting modesty and a return to early Roman traditions.[10] He attempted to convert Christians by revoking their privileges; when this failed, he implemented repressive measures (Löhr, 2008, p. 43). The situation escalated in Antioch, where the population refused to participate in pagan festivals, openly declaring themselves Christians. Following the destruction of the Temple of Apollo by fire (Amm. Marc. Gest. 22. 13. 1), Julian commenced persecutions, closed churches, and designated an anti-Christian governor before embarking on a campaign against the Persians—a campaign during which he ultimately lost his life (Hunt, 2008, pp. 68–70; Norris, 2008, p. 78; Telea, 2014, p. 180).

Sources attest that a radical crackdown on Christians also took place in various regions of the Empire (Gr. Naz. Or. 4). Churches were burned, martyriums desecrated, and bishops killed. Some of the persecuted were proclaimed martyrs (Telea, 2014, pp. 185–193; Van Nuffelen, 2020, pp. 380–392). It was not only Christians who resented the emperor, who would later be referred to as the Apostate. Even in polytheistic circles, there was scant sympathy for the intellectualised form of paganism he advocated, nor for the fervour with which he sought to promote animal sacrifice (Amm. Marc. Gest. 22. 12. 6–7; Cameron, 2010, pp. 65, 727; Hunt, 2008, p. 69).[11] The circumstances of Julian's death remain unclear. One tradition holds that he was killed by a spear from a soldier of Shapur II (Hunt, 2008, p. 77; Kitisakon, 2023, p. 45; Rebenich, 2020, p. 397). Other accounts suggest that his own soldiers accidentally caused his death—a fate interpreted by Christians as a sign from God—ensuring that the pious Christian Jovian (r. 363–364) ascended the throne and once again raised Constantine's labarum before the army (Norris, 2008, p. 79; Јовановић, 2006, pp. 361–365).

[10] He initially halted the persecution of the Orthodox, which had taken place during the reign of Constantius II, a supporter of Arianism. For further discussion of Julian's religious policy, see Mleczek, 2020; Trovato, 2023; Wiemer, 2020.

[11] Julian wrote polemical and philosophical writings, which reveal his understanding of polytheism, see Cave Wright, W. (Tr.). (1913). *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, I-II. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Julian's contemporary and comrade-in-arms, Ammianus Marcellinus (Gest. 25, 4, 22), described the emperor as follows:

> "He was of medium stature. His hair lay smooth as if it had been combed, though his beard was shaggy and trimmed so as to end in a point. His eyes were fine and full of fire, an indication of the acuteness of his mind. His eyebrows were handsome, his nose very straight, his mouth somewhat large with a pendulous lower lip. His neck was thick and somewhat bent, his shoulders large and broad. Moreover, right from top to toe, he was a man with a straight, well-proportioned body frame and was strong as well as a good runner as a result."

In contrast to this flattering description, a satirical text written by Julian in Antioch mocks his own physical appearance, particularly his long beard (Ιουλιαν. Μισοπ. 338b, c, d). From the *Letter to the Athenians* (Ιουλιαν. Αθην. 274c, d), written in 361, in which he recalls being summoned to Milan, it can be inferred that he already wore a beard and dressed like a philosopher during his stay in Athens (Guidetti, 2015, pp. 14–15).[12] A less than favourable portrayal of Julian was left by Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390), who had known him since their youth, when they studied together in Athens. Gregory's account focuses primarily on Julian's emotional instability, along with tics and gestures that, in his view, revealed irrationality, including shaking shoulders, a wandering gaze, and restless legs (Gr. Naz. Or. 5, 23; Guidetti, 2015, pp. 13–14; Guidetti, 2022; Somville, 2003, pp. 161–164).

Fig. 2. Julian Caesar, gold coin (*solidus*), minted in Arles (*Arelate*), 355–359, London, British Museum, inv. no. 1853,0716.64. © The Trustees of the British Museum

[12] "some of them, as though they had come together in a barber's shop, cut off my beard and dressed me in a military cloak and transformed me into a highly ridiculous soldier, as they thought at the time" (Ιουλιαν. Αθην. 274c, d).

The most numerous portraits of Julian—and the only ones that can be deemed unquestionably reliable—are those preserved on coins, while scholarly opinions differ regarding the identification of the emperor in sculptural portraits.[13] Despite the fact that the residents of Antioch mocked Julian for sporting a beard in emulation of the philosophers-emperors and Hellenophiles from the 2nd century, he nonetheless embraced this appearance in the final years of his life (Guidetti, 2015, p. 35; Hunt, 2008, pp. 68–70). A significant aspect of Julian's reign was his active role in shaping his public image, a practice that continued the Constantinian tradition and can be traced back to the moment he was proclaimed Augustus (García Ruiz, 2018, pp. 204–206; Guidetti, 2015, p. 17). It has been suggested that changes in his representation corresponded to changes in status: Caesar in Gaul, self-proclaimed Augustus, rival to Constantius, and finally, legitimately recognised as Augustus—a phase in which the familiar depiction with a long, pointed beard emerged (García Ruiz, 2018, p. 204; Guidetti, 2015).[14] As Caesar in Gaul, Julian was portrayed in the manner of other members of his dynasty. Constantine's imperial policy had long employed visual imagery as a tool of propaganda, and the return to iconographic models of revered and "good" emperors—above all Trajan—served to associate the ruler with periods of peace and prosperity (Kitisakon, 2023, p. 39). Gallus and Julian were thus represented in this way as a visual expression of the transition of power. This interpretation is supported by the previously mentioned account (Ιουλιαν. Αθην. 274c, d), which describes his transformation from young philosopher to young Caesar, including a deliberate adjustment of his physical appearance (Guidetti, 2015, p. 15). With minor variations, Julian would retain this model in official numismatic portraits throughout his reign.

Portraits from the period when he was proclaimed Caesar in Gaul represent the earliest known visual representations of Julian the Apostate. On numerous coins, he appears in the canonical iconography of a young prince of the Constantinian dynasty, signifying not only his dynastic affiliation but also the harmony in relations between the Caesar and the Augustus Constantius (García Ruiz, 2018, p. 206; Guidetti, 2015, p. 15; Kitisakon, 2023, p. 39). He is shown beardless, with a

[13] Guidetti (2015, pp. 12, 25) points out that no sculptural portrait has survived that can be reliably identified as representing Julian, especially noting that the identification of the famous statue in Paris—previously believed to represent Julian as a priest—has been disputed. Contrary to Alföldi's belief (1962, p. 404), it is unlikely that the bronze bust from the Lyon Museum depicts Julian. Guidetti (2015, p. 31) concludes that the only monumental portrait of Julian is a Sassanid rock relief, located at Taq-e Bostan, which depicts him slain at the feet of the Persian king Shapur II. García Ruiz (2018, p. 204) also regards numismatic evidence as reliable, while considering other portraits questionable. Some researchers (Kitisakon, 2023, p. 44) do not reject these identifications, but additionally associate other sculptures with Julian.

[14] Or, as others have summarised: Caesar, Augustus, and defeated emperor (Kitisakon, 2023, p. 36).

hooked nose, broad cheeks, and hair carefully styled in the Constantinian manner. He wears a *cuirass* and a *paludamentum*, fastened with a prominent fibula. The oldest known depiction appears on a solidus from *Arelate* (Arles) (Alföldi, 1962, p. 403; García Ruiz, 2018, p. 206; Guidetti, 2015, p. 16).[15] Significant evidence for the adoption of imperial iconography on North African ceramics is found on a group of rectangular platters—more precisely, on their rims—decorated with a frieze of medallions depicting Helios, the victor, and the Caesar (Herrmann & Van den Hoek, 2002, pp. 80–82).[16] The central medallion shows a beardless man wearing a military cloak, attached to his right shoulder and draped over his left shoulder. He has a strong jaw, and his hair is combed both forward toward his forehead and downward toward his neck. According to Herrmann and Van den Hoek (2002, p. 80), the image broadly resembles imperial portraits on coins dated from 350 to 390. Salomonson (1962, pp. 81–85) argued that the figure represents the emperor—the only worthy counterpart to the Sun.[17] However, the absence of a diadem on the figure raises questions about this claim. Herrmann and Van den Hoek (2002, pp. 80–81) note that from 351 to 361 the Caesars, including Julian and Gallus, were portrayed without a diadem, and they identify the figures accordingly, taking the year of Julian's death as the terminus ante quem.[18]

While Julian, as Caesar, could not influence his official portraits, from the time of his proclamation as Augustus in 360, one may begin to speak of his self-presentation. The emperor's coin portraits reveal a carefully crafted self-presentation, that is, the political messages conveyed by Julian himself. In the earliest portraits after the proclamation, such as the solidus from *Arelate*, the established iconography continues, now featuring a diadem with two strings of pearls. As Hunt (2008, p. 58) noted—he was "openly parading the regalia of a reigning Augustus" (Amm. Marc. Gest. 21. 1. 4). At this stage, Julian, though accepting the title conferred on him by the soldiers, still acknowledged Constantius' authority as senior Augustus (Guidetti, 2015, pp. 20–21, fig. 4). Following the conflict with Constantius II in the spring of 361, a shift becomes evident. Julian then presented himself as a sovereign ruler whose legitimacy rests on military prowess. The most

[15] A departure from this pattern is the solidus minted in Rome in 357. It was issued in honour of the victory over the Alemanni and emphasises Caesar's warrior qualities (Guidetti, 2015, pp. 17–18, fig. 2).

[16] Rectangular platters (lanx) were modelled on those made of silver, and the victor's iconography suggests that they celebrated either a military victory or the sponsorship of a public spectacle in a circus or amphitheatre. Some objects were modelled on ivory consular diptychs (Herrmann & Van den Hoek, 2002, pp. 80, 83). Salomonson (1962, pp. 81–85) argues that the frieze on the medallions was taken from bronze coffin lids found in the Balkans.

[17] This coincides with the thesis proposed by García Ruiz (2018, p. 205), namely, that Julian's self-representation portrayed him as Helios' representative on earth.

[18] For further information on rare imperial portraits on lamps, see Raselli-Nydegger, 2005, p. 72; Zych, 2020, pp. 98–99. For a different interpretation, see Paleani, 1993, pp. 70–73. For lamps decorated with the impressions of gold solidi, see Ennabli, 1976, p. 192.

Fig. 3. Julian Augustus, gold coin (*solidus*), minted in Arles (*Arelate*), 360–361, London, British Museum, inv. no. 1950,1201.32. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Fig. 4. Julian Augustus, gold coin (*solidus*), minted in Thessaloniki (*Thessalonica*), 361–363, London, British Museum, inv. no. 1860,0329.89. © The Trustees of the British Museum

striking innovation in these portraits is the beard.[19] The self-proclaimed Augustus appears with a medium-length beard, a long nose, and hair in the Constantinian style, topped by the imperial diadem with a prominent central stone, and clothed in the imperial purple cloak *paludamentum* fastened with a richly decorated fibula. A variety of portraits emerge in this period. Several monumental sculptures, as well as statuettes and glyptics, have been associated with this phase of

[19] These are coins from the Illyrian mints of Siscia, Sirmium, and Thessalonica, minted during the campaign to the East (Guidetti, 2015, p. 23).

Julian's portraits, although these identifications remain debated (Alföldi, 1962; García Ruiz, 2018; Guidetti, 2015; Kitisakon, 2023). In some portraits, Julian is idealised to the point of resembling Alexander the Great.[20] Julian also appears on the contorniates.[21] The only surviving frontal portrait is on a control weight with the inscription *EXAGIUM SOLIDI*. Here Julian is depicted with strikingly large eyes, a long nose, a carefully arranged Constantinian hairstyle, and a beard rendered with meticulously folded vertical lines. He wears a diadem, and on the right side of his neck is a round fibula (Alföldi, 1962, p. 405; Guidetti, 2015, p. 31).

A series of portraits and representations on coins illustrate Julian's transformation from a beardless Caesar into a bearded philosopher, idealised to resemble the Hellenophile emperors of the 2nd century (García Ruiz, 2018, p. 219; Guidetti, 2015, p. 38). In most portraits, he retains a Constantinian hairstyle, with his hair carefully combed to frame his face on all sides. He is typically shown wearing a diadem with a prominent central stone and a richly decorated fibula fastening his cloak. In the final phase, Julian appears with a longer, pointed beard (late 362), as on solidi minted in Antioch and *Sirmium* (Guidetti, 2015, pp. 25–27; Поповић & Борић-Брешковић, 2013, p. 323). The representation still follows Constantinian iconography, emphasising his warrior status, imperial robes, and the round fibula with three strings of pearls—insignia of the dignity of Augustus. In short, Julian is not only always shown with the attributes of imperial power, but particular attention is likewise given to the insignia (Guidetti, 2015, p. 26). It has been noted that Julian's depictions on coins match the description given by Ammianus Marcellinus (Somville, 2003, p. 166). Although Roman portraiture can sometimes demonstrate significant peculiarities when it comes to unofficial portraits of rulers,[22] this does not seem to have been the case with Julian. A portrait statue, long believed to depict Julian as a priest and thus departing from the official iconography, has recently been redated to the reign of Hadrian, thereby correcting a long-standing scholarly misconception (Guidetti, 2022, pp. 1, 12).

[20] This visual parallel also evokes certain portraits of Constantine presenting Julian through an association both with Alexander, the archetypal conqueror of the East, and with Constantine, especially in the context of his campaign against Licinius. In doing so, Julian legitimised his campaign and emphasised a dynastic link to Constantine, while deliberately overlooking Constantius. The warrior iconography also aligns him with the Illyrian emperors of the 3rd century, particularly Claudius Gothicus (r. 268–270), thereby highlighting his origins (García Ruiz, 2018, pp. 211–212; Guidetti, 2015, p. 23; Kitisakon, 2023, p. 43).

[21] Alföldi (1962, p. 404) thought that Julian resembling Alexander was depicted on a contorniate from the Archaeological Museum in Florence. However, this assumption has been rejected (Guidetti, 2015, p. 28; Mittag, 2015, p. 263). Alan Cameron (2010, p. 696) notes that Julian's depictions are missing from contorniates, while Guidetti (2015, p. 29) concludes that while some contorniates bear a Julian image, the one from the Cabinet des médailles, despite the inscription *Julian*, actually depicts the figure of Valentinian III (r. 425–455).

[22] For this, see M. Vasić's (2003, pp. 79–106) interpretation of the herms from Mediana, particularly in the context of Julian's religious policy.

However, there are several sculptural portraits that are associated with Julian based on similarities to the depictions on coins. Suppose these are portraits of Julian that depict him as a pagan priest. In that case, it is worth noting that he almost always wears a diadem, indicating his primary status as emperor rather than any other role (Kitisakon, 2023, pp. 43–45; Lévêque, 1960).

Broadly speaking, the portraits on the solidus minted in Antioch, kept at the *Cabinet des Médailles* in Paris, as well as those from Sirmium and Constantinople, show certain similarities to the lamp portrait (Alföldi, 1962, p. 404; García Ruiz, 2018, p. 212; Guidetti, 2015, p. 26; Поповић & Борић-Брешковић, 2013, p. 323). In this period, Julian is depicted with a slightly longer beard, and this is a key distinction. His hair and beard are still carefully shaped, with the beard beginning low beneath the lower lip. He wears a richly jeweled diadem adorned with pearls, and his cloak is fastened with a round fibula, likewise decorated with pearls. Based on the analysis of several reliably identified portraits of Julian the Apostate, it can be concluded that he appears with prominent insignia (Guidetti, 2015, p. 26), though the diadem was absent while he held the rank of Caesar. Although he emphasised in his texts a preference for the appearance of a philosopher, none of his portraits conveys an ascetic or dishevelled image. The portraits from the time of his proclamation as Augustus exhibit a considerable level of idealisation, with no parallel in the lamp depiction.

Additionally, Julian is featured on contorniates from the late 4th and early 5th centuries, adopting types from official iconography (Guidetti, 2015, p. 29). The period is close to the time when the representation on the lamp emerged; however, there are no visual analogies between these images. The appearance of Julian's figure on the contorniates can be explained by the Romans' desire to emphasise continuity with their glorious past, despite the inevitable changes, not the emperor's popularity. By contrast, the idea that the Apostate would have been depicted on North African lamps mass-produced during the Theodosian dynasty—whose imperial anti-pagan policies were championed by Saint Augustine (354–430), highly influential bishop of Hippo—at a time when memories of Julian's repressive measures were still vivid, does not seem plausible.[23] In addition, it is not negligible that Julian's policies created the conditions for the rise of Donatism, and that the lamp was made precisely at a time when Donatism was suppressed thanks to the activities of Aurelius of Carthage (390–430) and Saint Augustine (Löhr, 2008, p. 40). Besides that, the man depicted on the lamp appears older, and the facial treatment differs from other portraits of Julian. He also lacks imperial insignia. When these formal characteristics are considered alongside the social context in

[23] Augustine comments on Julian's measures against Christian culture and education, specifically the exclusion of Christian teachers and the prohibition of education for Christians (August. Confess. 8,10; August. De civit. 18,52). For the Christian reception of Julian, see Rebenich, 2020; Trovato, 2023; Van Nuffelen, 2020. For anti-pagan measures, see Karivieri, 2010.

which Julian experienced a form of *damnatio memoriae*,[24] all these factors call into question his appearance on the lamp. Recently, Stefano Trovato (2023) has reexamined Julian's status in Byzantine culture, concluding that as emperor he was sometimes seen as a positive figure, but his religious policies doomed him to be "an object of censure in a way that became somewhat of a leitmotiv". As he further concludes, Julian as an enemy of Christians is present in medieval *mirabilia*, where his statues were perceived as dwelling places of demons, and their removal and destruction are also mentioned, for example during Justinian's rebuilding of Hagia Sophia (Trovato, 2023, pp. 3, 18–19).

Being Apollonius of Tyana: Representation of a "Pagan" Holy Man

Elsner (1997, p. 178) begins his text on the origin of the icon with a description of a sacred vision experienced by Emperor Aurelian of Pannonia (r. 270–275) on the night he conquered the rebellious city of Tyana, while considering whether to massacre its inhabitants. According to the *Historia Augusta*, "the deified first-century holy man", Apollonius of Tyana (ca. 15–100) appeared before the emperor (Hist. Aug. Divus Aurel. 24.2–9). The text also provides an illustration of Apollonius on a contorniate medallion, which strikingly evokes the representation on the lamp that is the focus of this paper. This "sudden epiphany" provides an opportunity to reflect on both the personality explained in literary sources and the visual representations of Apollonius.

The portrait of Apollonius on the contorniates is shown in profile and accompanied by the inscription *APOLLONIVS TEANEVS*. The philosopher is depicted wearing a tunic and pallium (Cameron, 2010, pp. 693–702; Visconti, 1808, pp. 72–73). He has thick hair with a laurel wreath and a long, dense, dishevelled beard in uneven strands—features that closely correspond to the representation on the lamp preserved in the Belgrade City Museum (Тешић Радовановић & Јанковић, 2019, pp. 180–184). There is no scholarly consensus regarding the purpose of the contorniates. It has been suggested that they were tokens for board games (King, 1871, pp. 210–216; McDowall, 1906, pp. 232–233). Alföldi (1962, p. 404) proposed a widely accepted theory that, in the mid-4th century, contorniates replaced older commemorative medallions distributed during New Year celebrations. A wide repertoire of themes can be found on the contorniates, including mythological episodes, circus games, imperial portraits, reproductions

[24] While Julian did not receive a formal *damnatio memoriae*, Christians challenged Julian's pagan policies during his reign and immediately after, and this would shape the emperor's image for centuries to come (Trovato, 2023; Van Nuffelen, 2020, p. 360). Theodosius' measures against coins and statues of the Apostate are mentioned in medieval sources (Trovato, 2023, p. 33).

Fig. 5. Julian Augustus, gold coin (*solidus*), minted in Antioch (*Antiochia ad Orontem*), 362–363, London, British Museum, inv. no. 1867,0101.928. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Fig. 6. Oil lamp with a representation of a bearded man, detail, 5th century, Belgrade (*Singidunum*), Belgrade City Museum, inv. no. AA/2930. © Public domain photo

Fig. 7. Draped bust of Apollonius of Tyana with laurel wreath, facing right (the inscription *APOLLONI-VS TEANEVS*, laurel wreath, hair, and eye area are retouched), contorniate medallion, c. 355–423, Rome, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. no. 145216. © Münzkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedemann) [Public Domain Mark]

of artworks, and historical figures. However, Alan Cameron (2010, pp. 693–702) rejected Alföldi's assumption, arguing that the bronze—sometimes silver-plated or gilded—contorniates, issued from the mid-4th to mid-5th centuries, were associated with Roman games and had a secular rather than polytheistic function.

He also questioned Alföldi's thesis of a pagan revival in the latter half of the 4th century, based, among other things, on his interpretation of the contorniates as instruments of pagan propaganda. According to Cameron (2010, pp. 694), polytheists in the 4th century could, at best, hope for religious tolerance. Therefore, he interpreted the classicist tendencies in late 4th-century art as a product of the spirit of the age in which both polytheists and Christians—by returning to classical taste—expressed a somewhat sentimental connection to the glorious past.[25]

Apollonius of Tyana (ca. 15–100) was a travelling Neopythagorean philosopher and healer. Around 220 AD, Philostratus of Athens (c. 170–240), wrote a biography of Apollonius commissioned by Empress Julia Domna (r. 193–211).[26] In the *Vita Apollonii* Philostratus transformed Apollonius' reputation from that of a magician to a prototype hero of Hellenistic civilization—a figure who would later become the subject of polemics between pagans and Christians (Bowie, 2009, p. 29; Jones, 2018; Platt, 2009, p. 132). For the polytheists of Late Antiquity, Apollonius was a model philosopher with semi-divine status and a prominent figure in the resistance to Christianity. The "passing pagan intelligentsia" recognised the necessity of providing a religious and moral exemplar of the "old ways" in order to counteract the increasing impact of Christianity (Dzielska, 1986, p. 171). Anti-Christian polemicists, such as Porphyry (c. 234–305) and Sossianus Hierocles (fl. 290–303), used Apollonius to diminish the significance of Christ's miracles. They questioned Christ's divine nature, claiming that everything Christ had done—including the resurrection of the dead—had also been performed by the holy man Apollonius (Cameron, 2010, p. 371; Dzielska, 1986, p. 175; Elsner, 1997, p. 24; Elsner, 2009, pp. 655–656; Jones, 1980, p. 193). In many ways, Apollonius resembles Christ: he was a healer and philosopher who lived a life of celibacy, criticised gladiatorial games, public baths, luxury, and blood sacrifices, rejected accusations of sorcery, and openly opposed Emperor Domitian (r. 81–96). According to Cameron (2010, p. 699), Apollonius of Tyana may have had a negative reputation in the East, where he was regarded as a magician, while in the West he was not seen as a prominent pagan figure.[27] Christopher Jones (2018) also highlights the contrasting receptions of Apollonius among Christians in the East and West. He quotes from *The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla*, noting that all who had heard of Apollonius were familiar with his "repulsive and cursed talismans" and his skills in sorcery.

[25] He notes that they also depict several unpopular emperors, such as Nero, who was poorly regarded by the Roman pagan aristocracy of the 4th century. On the other hand, Saint Helena (c. 246–330), the prototype of the pious Christian empress, appears alongside the reigning emperors (Cameron, 2010, pp. 693–702; see also Dzielska, 1986, p. 173).

[26] For other biographers and sources mentioning Apollonius, see Dzielska, 1986, p. 180.

[27] Apollonius was forgotten in both the East and the West during the Middle Ages, only to be rediscovered in the late Byzantine period in the East, and the Renaissance in the West, primarily thanks to texts in Arabic (Porecca, 2014).

Fig. 8. Draped bust of Apollonius of Tyana with laurel wreath, facing right (the inscription *APOLLONI-VS TEANEVS*), contorniate medallion, c. 364–375, private auction. © Public domain photo

In the West, Roman conservatism preserved the memory of Apollonius. Sidonius Apollinaris (c. 439–490), late antique Latin writer, diplomat, and bishop of Clermont, translated Philostratus' work on Apollonius at the request of Leo of Narbonne (fl. 460–480).[28] In that transcript, he mentions that a Latin translation had already been made in Rome at the end of the 4th century for the senator Nicomachus Flavianus (fl. 382–432), a prominent pagan figure at Rome (Cameron, 2010, p. 389; Dzielska, 1986, pp. 171–172; Jones, 2018; Smith, 1990, p. 143). Apollonius is mentioned by Christian writers, including Arnobius (d. 330), Eusebius (c. 260–339), Lactantius (c. 250–325), and Jerome (c. 342–420) (Elsner, 2009, p. 658; Porecca, 2014, pp. 160–162). These authors problematise the comparison between Apollonius and Christ but also engage with Apollonius' opposition to Roman societal conventions, particularly his trial before Domitian. During the trial, like Christ before Pilate, Apollonius refused to give straightforward answers and, at one point, reportedly disappeared from the courtroom (Cameron, 2010, p. 390; Elsner, 2009, p. 664). Accounts granting him a certain degree of recognition can be found in the writings of Jerome and Augustine (Jones, 2018; Porecca, 2014, pp. 160–163).

As the anonymous author of *Historia Augusta* recounts, when Aurelian conquered the rebellious city of Tyana, he initially intended to massacre the population. However, he had a vision that changed his mind: Apollonius of Tyana appeared in his tent and persuaded the Pannonian emperor to show mercy, speaking to him in Latin to ensure he understood. Apollonius is described as a sage

[28] Sidonius was in exile in the vicinity of Carcassonne. It is not possible to determine reliably from the surviving copies of the text whether Sidonius copied or translated Philostratus (Cameron, 2010, p. 309; Porecca, 2014, pp. 165–166).

of great fame and authority, a true friend of the gods, a philosopher of bygone days, who could even be considered a supernatural being. It was emphasised that the emperor recognised the philosopher by his distinctive features and the many statues visible in temples (Hist. Aug. Divus Aurel. 24.2–9). This account indicates not only the extensive existence of Apollonius' portraits in the second half of the 3rd century, but also a practice similar to the later Christian cult of icons: the veneration of pagan holy figures and their visual depictions (Dzielska, 1986, pp. 175–176; Elsner, 1997, p. 177). In the 3rd century, Apollonius had the status of a semi-divine figure whose temple attracted pilgrims, emperors, and even drew Christian interest. It is recorded that Alexander Severus (r. 222–235) kept a portrait of Christ, Abraham, and Apollonius in his *lararium* (Hist. Aug. Severus Alex. 29, 2; Elsner, 1997, p. 196; Marsengill, 2020, p. 129; Visconti, 1808, p. 74). In the 4th century, his popularity grew further in the West (Dzielska, 1986, p. 175). Around 333, a pilgrim from Bordeaux mentioned visiting the sanctuary of Apollonius (Itiner. Burd. 578.1). Lactantius (Div. instit. V, 3, 14) wrote that "he was both adored by some as a god, and that his image was set up under the name of Hercules Alexicacus and is even now honoured by the Ephesians". Of the numerous statues and paintings mentioned in the sources, the majority have been unfortunately lost.[29] Six contorniates depicting Apollonius have survived to date, and along with the haematite intaglio, are the only reliably identified representations of the philosopher.[30] Intaglio depicts a nude figure standing to right and holding staff on one side, while the other shows a harbor, with a lighthouse and churches. The image of the depicted figure is damaged, but the inscription confirms that it is Apollonius. It dates to the 5th or 6th century (Dalton, 1901, p. 88; Spier, 2007, p. 107). Paul Zanker (1995, pp. 265–266) argues that a statue discovered in Gortyna, dated to the 2nd century, represents a travelling philosopher, possibly Apollonius. A group of portraits of philosophers from the 5th century, including a shield portrait of Apollonius, were discovered in Aphrodisias. They stood in the apse of a building that was possibly a philosophical school. They were removed in the 6th century, and their heads were deliberately mutilated (Smith,

[29] The Epigram on Apollonius of Tyana currently in the Adana Museum (5th c), found on a large stone block, possibly serving as a lintel or architrave, describes him as a divine being whose spirit ascended to heaven after his death; it is suggested that Apollonius was worshipped as a holy man or deity both during his lifetime and posthumously (Dzielska, 1986, p. 182; Elsner, 1997, p. 178; Jones, 1980, pp. 190–194).

[30] Two contorniates bear the inscription *Diva Faustina Avg(usta)* on the reverse, while the remaining four depict a quadriga (Cameron, 2010, p. 380; Dzielska, 1986, p. 182; Sabatier, 1860, p. 44). In 2020, a supposedly unknown version of the contorniate appeared at a private auction: laureate and bearded bust of Apollonius of Tyana, togate over tunic, hand in fold of toga. Rev. Round-headed arch on columns with Corinthian capitals; beneath, shopkeeper, and male and female costumer, at: https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?term=contorniate&category=1&en=1&de=1&fr=1&it=1&images=1&currency=usd&order=0 (accessed July 20, 2025).

Fig. 9. Shield portrait of the philosopher, with the inscription *APOLLONIOS*, damaged, 5th century, Aphrodisias, according to Smith, 1990, Pl. XI, fig. 7.

Fig. 10. Haematite Intaglio with the depiction of Apollonius of Tyana, inscribed *ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙC Ο ΤΟΥΑΝΕΟΥC M*, 5th-6th century, London, British Museum, inv. no. 1886,0616.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum

1990, pp. 130, 141–144). The head of Apollonius has completely disappeared, making it impossible to determine his appearance, but the inscribed medallion, as well as the intaglio, provide evidence that his depictions were made in the 5th century and that he was placed alongside famous philosophers. According to Roland Smith (1990, p. 151) he was paired with Pythagoras, because they were considered "Neoplatonic saints".

In Philostratus' account, when Apollonius identifies himself as a Pythagorean, he mentions his linen clothing and long hair. In the brief description of Apollonius given by Sidonius Apollinaris (Epist. 8, 3, 4–5) it is stated "that [he] was abstemious among the feasters and went in coarse linen among princes robed in purple; [he] was grave amid luxurious follies; [his] hair was matted, [his] face was rough and hirsute among smooth, perfumed peoples" (Porecca, 2014, p. 165). The long hair and beard constituted a key part of the philosopher's visual identity.[31] The importance of this aspect is evidenced by the fact that Domitian ordered the arrested Apollonius' hair and beard to be removed (Zanker, 1995, pp. 260, 262). The laurel wreath on Apollonius' head may symbolise either a reward for his asceticism or his prophetic powers and miracles (Visconti, 1808, p. 74). Dzielska (1986, p. 172)

[31] This is also evidenced by the group from Aphrodisias, i.e, portraits whose heads have survived. They depict ancient philosophers and contemporary intellectuals. It is striking that some philosophers are copied from older models yet stylistically harmonized with contemporary artistic production (Smith, 1990, p. 155).

notes that in the latter half of the 4th century, interest in Apollonius intensified, and his appearance on contorniates—intended for wide distribution—suggests that he must have been known beyond narrow intellectual circles.[32]

Apollonius' popularity in Rome almost certainly resonated in North Africa, then experiencing a period of great prosperity. The aristocracy of the North African provinces maintained close ties with Rome, as evidenced by Saint Augustine's sojourns in Italy and Rome.[33] Moreover, Apollonius himself stayed in Carthage during his travels, and some ancient authors mention his influence on Apuleius (c. 124–170), another prominent "Africanist" (Dzielska, 1986, p. 179; Lund, 2001, p. 199; Porecca, 2014, pp. 161–162). Saint Augustine's relationship with Apollonius is particularly noteworthy, as themes in Augustine's writings appear to resonate with the iconography of North African pottery (Herrmann & Van den Hoek, 2002). In Saint Augustine's epistles, Apollonius is mentioned three times (Dzielska, 1986, p. 179; Porecca, 2014, pp. 161–162). In the epistle from 409 (Aug. Epist. 102), written in response to the priest Deogratias—who had informed him of pagan objections to Christian teaching and claims that the miracles recorded in the Bible had actually been performed by pagans—Augustine replies that, if such pagan miracles did indeed occur, including those attributed to "Apollonius of Tyana, by whom they boast, though unsupported by reliable testimony, that many wonders were performed", then such miracles must have been performed (or enabled) by demons. He adds that the triumph of Christianity is at hand, and pagan ridicule will ultimately rebound upon the pagans themselves. In another letter from 412 (Aug Epist. 136), Marcellinus asks Saint Augustine to clarify the claim that Christ had not performed greater miracles than Apollonius or Apuleius. Saint Augustine responds by urging patience with those who make such comparisons and offers a critical reflection on the juxtaposition of Christ and Apollonius:

> "Who can help feeling that there is something simply ridiculous in their attempt to compare with Christ, or rather to put in a higher place, Apollonius and Apuleius, and others who were most skilful in magical arts? Yet this is to be tolerated with less impatience, *because they bring into comparison with Him these men rather than their own gods; for Apollonius was, as we must admit, a much worthier character than that author and perpetrator of innumerable gross acts of immorality whom they call Jupiter.*" (Aug. Epist. 138)

[32] This is indirectly supported by an inscription discovered on a house wall in Rome (Dzielska, 1986, p. 172).

[33] Among the senatorial families with African connections were the Roman Anicii: one served as prefect of the city of Rome in 382, while two others are recorded as consuls in the West in 408 and 431. The crisis caused by Gothic and Hunnic incursions into the European provinces made Italy and Rome increasingly dependent on the North African provinces, for food supplies and as a place of refuge (Van den Hoek, 2005, pp. 179, 185).

A brief mention of Apollonius in Saint Augustine and the recognition he bestows on him (Dzielska, 1986, p. 179; Porecca, 2014, pp. 161–162) confirm that the philosopher was a subject of discussion both in pagan and Christian circles of Roman North Africa. Herrmann suggests that the connection or antithesis between Apollonius and Zeus may also be reflected in the presumed portrait of Apollonius on the lamp preserved in the Belgrade City Museum. Therefore, while Christian iconography on ARS ceramics often shows a direct influence of theological themes addressed by Saint Augustine on visual culture, in the case of the lamp from Singidunum, the reverse effect may be observed. The potential depiction of Apollonius of Tyana on this lamp indicates his popularity, which Augustine addresses in the aforementioned epistles, acknowledging that some believed Apollonius to be superior even to Jupiter.

The quality and precision with which the scene is depicted on the lamps suggest that the original template was made from a precious material—possibly a medallion in ivory or gold. Herrmann notes that such a practice did exist, and as a close example, he refers to a panel and cover with the depiction of the prefect Anicius Auchenius Bassus (fl. 382–384), flanked by Saints Peter and Paul (Van den Hoek, 2006). Commenting on the lamp, Herrmann writes:

> "The report that the lamp was found in Serbia and the color photograph convince me that it is authentic. It is a masterpiece of its kind, comparable in its ambition and craftsmanship to the ARS plaques of Anicius Auchenius Bassus. Perhaps the medallion-portrait of your lamp was also cast from a medallion of precious materials, whether ivory or gold. I tend to agree with you about the identification as Apollonius of Tyana. He apparently was shown with a wreath in the famous contorniate. Philosophers are not normally shown with wreaths, nor are Christ or the saints. Another possible identification is Jupiter, who is often shown with a wreath, but this seems less likely than Apollonius: there was a long tradition of representations of Jupiter, and a lamp-maker would have had no need to create something so unusual as this frontal bust."[34]

Ceramic platters and ceramic covers for *scrinia*—chests used to store documents, valuables, or relics—were decorated by pressing an ivory object directly into the clay to create a mold for production (Spier, 2003; Van den Hoek, 2005; Van den Hoek, 2006; Van den Hoek & Herrmann, 2013, p. 323).[35] Spier (2003, pp. 350–354) concludes that the influence of imperial ivory and silver on the production of ARS ceramics has long been assumed and that the panels depicting the consul confirm this. By analogy, a similar process can be proposed for

[34] This and other comments are published here with the permission of Dr Herrmann.

[35] In North African workshops, this was not an isolated phenomenon (Spier, 2003), suggesting that the mold used to produce the lamp may have been based on a medallion crafted from a precious material. Moreover, as noted above, the coin imprint was in some cases used to create decoration.

the exceptional scene on the lamp from Singidunum. In the first centuries of the Common Era, portraits of philosophers were common decorations in homes, whether in the form of busts, paintings, or mosaics (Marsengill, 2020, p. 127). Portraits from Aphrodisias attest that this practice continued until the 6th century. Marsengill (2020, p. 127) points out that their role is not merely decorative, but that they express "the values of the elite and well-educated Romans of the time", an expression of the cult of philosophers, particularly encouraged by Neoplatonism. She concludes that philosophers were the subjects of veneration, and their images reflected this role. She also notes that images of philosophers show them clothed and bearded, as if male divinities, resembling, for example, Zeus, Poseidon, or Asclepius, and that Marcus Aurelius' *lararium* contained golden images of famous teachers. These conclusions support the possibility that a medallion made of precious material, depicting a philosopher, once existed and may have served as the template for the depiction on the lamp.

Conclusion

The assumption of the existence of a valuable medallion depicting a pagan philosopher—though highly hypothetical—would nonetheless support the view that he was highly esteemed by the Roman aristocracy of North Africa in the 5th century. The lamp may therefore have been produced for this same elite circle. Van den Hoek (2005, pp. 184–185) argues that the plaque depicting the consul Bassus, flanked by Saints Peter and Paul, was created in response to the controversy between Orthodox Christians and Donatists in North Africa.[36] The iconographic template, used for the ceramic cover—showing a striking blend of secular and religious themes, and symbolising the alignment of church and imperial power—reflected the prevailing religious or political contexts. In this light, the appearance of Apollonius, whose prominence in debates between Christians and pagans is well attested in written sources, would not be surprising.[37]

In the late 4th century, Saint Augustine (De haer. 7) describes Marcellina kneeling before images of Pythagoras, Plato, Christ, and Paul. Although he does

[36] When the conflict escalated and began to disrupt the functioning of the cura annona (state grain distribution), the imperial administration intervened in an effort to restore religious unity. At the council held in Carthage in 411, the orthodox faction around Augustine ultimately prevailed (Van den Hoek, 2005, pp. 184–185).

[37] Apollonius underwent a rehabilitation in the Eastern Roman Empire during the late Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods, when the popular astrological manual *Apotelesmata* was attributed to him (Dzielska, 1986, p. 182). According to legend, he became an advisor to Constantine during the founding of the city and was also regarded as a prophet who foretold the coming of Christ. He was depicted in some church frescoes among pagan philosophers who, in the Christian understanding, had recognised true philosophy and the true God (Cameron, 2010, p. 388; Jones, 2018; Speyer, 1974, p. 62).

not mention Apollonius, this passage nonetheless confirms the existence of portraits of philosophers during that period. Further evidence comes from the Aphrodisias group, which best illustrates Brown's (1971, pp. 22–24) position. He argues that classical and pagan heritage did not simply lose its meaning in late antique culture; rather, it represented a continuation and reformulation of paganism in many respects, adapted to the development of urban culture and the private sphere of art, and intended for both pagan and Christian aristocracy. According to Marsengill (2020, p. 130), the earliest written source on Christian portraits is found in the 2nd-century *Apocryphal Acts of John*, where a man named Lycomedes sets up a portrait of John in his chambers, "garlanded and censed it, and placed oil lamps in front of it". It is not difficult to imagine the Belgrade lamp functioning in a similar context—bearing an image next to the light or positioned before an image of the pagan saint Apollonius, comparable to the Aphrodisias medallion, which was found in the context of the Neoplatonic school of philosophy. The high quality of the lamp's workmanship suggests that it was produced in a developed centre and later brought to Singidunum—either as private property or as a form of pilgrim paraphernalia—where it was ultimately deposited in a tomb, reflecting aspects of the owner's identity. Its discus depicts a man with distinctive hair and beard, crowned with a laurel wreath—attributes through which, as Dzielska (1986, p. 172) notes, Apollonius of Tyana could be readily recognised. Unlike contorniates, which were inexpensively produced and artistically unrefined, the depiction on this lamp may have been derived from glyptic art or from objects made of precious materials, a practice documented in North African workshops. All of this supports the hypothesis that the lamp depicts the mystic and polytheist holy man Apollonius of Tyana, who, despite being perceived as a rival to Christ, shared moral and ascetic ideals, as well as the Platonic and Stoic ideas that resonated with Christians. On the other hand, it is precisely the Christian reception of Julian, together with the broader social context, that calls into question the assumption that his image appeared on the lamp made in Roman North Africa in the 5th century.

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In Search of Identity: Apollonius Versus Julian—Representation on an Oil Lamp from the Belgrade City Museum

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У потрази за идентитетом: Аполоније *versus* Јулијан – представа на уљаној лампи из Музеја града Београда

Резиме

Касноантичко друштво обележено је трансформацијом класичног наслеђа, ширењем нових религија и синкретизмом у којем различите религиозне групе деле сличне идеје, култну праксу и аспекте визуелне културе. У раду се, уз нову аргументацију, разматра идентитет брадатог мушкарца приказаног на диску античке северноафричке лампе откривене у Сингидунуму, која се данас чува у Збирци за античку археологију у Музеју града Београда. У ранијој литератури изнете су различите хипотезе о приказаној личности, које су у раду анализиране поређењем са визуелним материјалом и текстуалним изворима, а у складу са рецентним научним сазнањима. Посебна пажња усмерена је на портрете Христа, Јулијана Апостате и Аполонија из Тијане, односно иконографске особености њихових представа у касној антици, будући да су у ранијој литератури изнете претпоставке да су управо они приказани на светиљци. Разматрани су и провенијенција лампе, културне прилике у Северној Африци у V веку и контекст настанка, као и могући контекст налаза светиљке из Сингидунума. На основу аналогија и свих познатих извора, у раду је изнето мишљење да је личност приказана на лампи Аполоније из Тијане.

Кључне речи: северноафричке уљане светиљке; Аполоније из Тијане; Јулијан Апостата; иконографија; касна антика.