

# A staurotheke of Serbian provenance in Pienza\*

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*The paper discusses the virtually unpublished reliquary of Serbian provenance now kept in the Museo Diocesano in Pienza. It tackles the issue of the typology of the staurotheke, its decoration and symbolic significance. Based on its Old-Serbian inscription, “Sava, the first archbishop and patriarch of the Serbs”, the reliquary is dated to the last quarter of the fourteenth century and related to the programme of the Serbian Patriarchate. The surviving sources make it possible to reconstruct the road the staurotheke travelled from the treasuries of Žiča and the Patriarchate of Peć to Pienza.*

*Keywords: relic of the True Cross, staurotheke, St Sava of Serbia, Žiča, Patriarchate of Peć, Pienza*

It is now almost fifty years since Mirjana Šakota, an indefatigable explorer of Serbian monastery treasuries, made the observation, as true today as it was then, that Serbian medieval monasteries are known for their exquisite architecture and wall painting, much less for their treasuries, the “silent repositories of valuables that best complement our idea of the former glory of ancient royal foundations”.<sup>1</sup> One of many and palpable effects of countless adversities in Serbian history – discontinuous statehood, wars, exoduses, plunders – was that once rich treasuries brutally shrank or, even worse, disappeared entirely. As a result, our insight into medieval Serbian *ars sacra* is inevitably patchy and dependent on the relatively scanty written sources and, of course, on the few treasuries that have survived owing to a concatenation of fortunate circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

It is understandable then, that every newly-acquired piece of information about objects that used to be deposited in the former treasuries is worthy of our undivided attention. In that sense, the reliquary of the True Cross bearing an Old-Serbian inscription, now kept in the Diocesan Museum in the Tuscan town of Pienza, has almost exemplary value. This sumptuous reliquary is not only an outstanding and prestigious piece of medieval goldsmiths’ work, but for many reasons it can also be considered a first-rate primary source both for Serbian and for Italian history. It is therefore quite difficult to explain why it has been condemned to obscurity for so long, receiving only marginal attention both from museum professionals and from scholars. Italian scholars have made mention of it only rarely and in passing.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, to those best equipped and most motivated – Serbian scholars – the reliquary has not been immediately accessible, and thus our knowledge about it, *via facti*, has

remained utterly superficial, amounting to an insufficiently legible black-and-white photograph, a summary description and a “translation” of the inscription.<sup>4</sup> I examined the reliquary in May 2012, as part of the monograph project on the monastery of Žiča.<sup>5</sup> Considering that it has not hitherto been properly published, a detailed description does not seem out of place.

The reliquary has the form of a double-armed cross 36 cm tall and 18.5 cm wide. Its wooden core is sheathed in metal, apparently silver-gilt and richly decorated. The two crossbars are fixed to the upright shaft, whose lowest part (9.3 cm in length), which bears the inscription, is encased in gold and functions as a handle. All arms of the cross are of equal thickness (2.4 cm). The front of the reliquary features two cruciform apertures giving visual access to the relic of the True Cross. The larger of the two (2.8 × 2.6 cm) is cut at the intersection of the vertical arm and the lower and wider crossbar. The relic that is visible through it is sheltered by an oval rock crystal cabochon (3.6 × 2.6 cm) set in an ornate mount affixed

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<sup>1</sup> M. Šakota, *Riznice manastira u Srbiji*, Beograd 1966, 5.

<sup>2</sup> The most important treasuries are those of Hilandar (D. Bogdanović, V. J. Djurić, D. Medaković, *Hilandar*, Beograd 1978; B. Radojković, in: *Manastir Hilandar*, ed. G. Subotić, Beograd 1998, 331–344); Studenica (M. Šakota, *Studenička riznica*, Beograd 1988); Mileševa (D. Milosavljević, *Izgubljena riznica manastira Mileševa*, Beograd 2010); Dečani (M. Šakota, *Dečanska riznica*, Beograd 1984); and St. Nicholas in Dabar (M. Šakota, *Riznica manastira Banje kod Priboja*, Beograd 1981).

<sup>3</sup> E. Carli, *Pienza. La città di Pio, II*, Rome 1966, 115, 134, fig. 64 (n. 48 offers an Italian translation of the inscription, and the interesting information that it was read and translated by Prof. Svetozar Radojčić during his visit to Pienza on 18 April 1963); M. Pierini, *Pienza. Guide to the town and surroundings*, Pienza 2007, 36.

<sup>4</sup> B. Radojković, *Metal srednjovekovni*, in: *Istorija primenjene umetnosti kod Srba, I, Srednjovekovna Srbija*, Beograd 1977, 81, fig. 35; cf. also, B. Radojković, *Les arts mineurs du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle en Serbie*, in: *L’art byzantine du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. V. J. Djurić, Beograd 1967, 135; cf. also, V. J. Djurić, “Presto svetog Save”, in: *Spomenica u čast novoizabranih članova Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti*, Beograd 1972, 97, fig. 6 (photograph reproduced from Radojković).

<sup>5</sup> The project is organized by the Belgrade-based National Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Culture. In my research, I had the assistance of Dr. Marko Popović. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Prof. Gabriele Fattorini, Director of the Museo Diocesano in Pienza, for ensuring optimum conditions for my work at the Museum.



Fig. 1. Staurotheke from Pienza, front



Fig. 2. Staurotheke from Pienza, back

to the metal base. At the ends of the arms of the aperture are small square plaques with the finely engraved letters of the cryptogram: ϥ ϣ ϥ π [φ(ως) Χ(ριστοῦ) φ(αίνει) π(ᾶσιν) = the light of Christ shines upon all]. The smaller aperture (2.4 by 2 cm) is cut at the intersection of the vertical arm and the upper and shorter crossbar. At the ends of its arms are small plaques engraved with the letters: **Is-hs-nl-ka** [Ι(ησοῦ)ς Χ(ριστὸ)ς νικᾷ = Jesus Christ conquers].

The reliquary is elaborately decorated. All surfaces of the cross, its front, back and sides, are covered with ornaments fashioned from thin metal strips (unlike the twisted or plaited threads typical of filigree) applied perpendicularly to the metal surface, much like cloisonné work without inlays. They form an intricate and dense symmetrical design based on circles, lozenges and triangles. These geometrical shapes are filled with quatrefoils, semi-palmettes, spirals, rosettes, and heart-shaped and *soleil tournant* motifs. The front and back of the cross are also adorned with gemstones and pearls arranged according to the same ornamental pattern: at the end of each arm is a precious stone held by claws in a finely fashioned golden box setting, or six stones on each side: four sapphires in various shades of blue and two purple amethysts.<sup>6</sup> Every gem is surrounded with four pearls, each pierced and riveted to a golden hexafoil.

The lowest part of the shaft, functioning as a handle (9.3 cm), is especially important because of the inscription that it bears. The inscription is worked in the repoussé technique in sheet gold, using calligraphically stylized, elongated and markedly decorative letters with ligatures. The inscription fields are carefully bordered with incised parallel lines, and the areas between them are densely covered with punctured dots and stylized floral motifs, suggesting the craftsman's penchant for ornamental solutions, even a *horror vacui*. The inscription, running in four lines on both the front and back, reads:

|             |          |
|-------------|----------|
| sav<a>      | <i>patri |
| pr%q&vi     | arhq     |
| ar(q)hi     | srqpq    |
| ep(i sko)pq | ski      |

(Sava, the first archbishop and patriarch of the Serbs).<sup>7</sup> The significance of the inscription in a broader context will be discussed later.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to gemologist Prof. Danilo Babić for gem identification.

<sup>7</sup> The inscription was accurately read by Svetozar Radojčić (cf. n. 3 supra); it is probably his reading that was taken over by Radojković, *Metal*

It is important to note that the inscribed handle is not in its original position. Namely, the opening part of the inscription (“Sava, the first archbishop”) is now on the back of the cross, while the front shows its ending (“and patriarch of the Serbs”). The reasons for the switch being unknown, a possible link between some alterations made to the reliquary and the seal featuring the coat of arms of Giuseppe Pannilini, Bishop of Pienza (1775–1823), now affixed to the back of the cross, must remain tentative.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the case may have been, close examination leaves no doubt that at some point the inscribed part of the casing was cut off and removed from the wooden core. Done inaptly and carelessly, the cutting damaged both the front and back of the golden casing with the uppermost part of the inscription, but its legibility has fortunately remained uncompromised. At some later point, however, the casing was put back into place and fixed to the sides of the wooden core with two coarse iron nails driven through the casing. As the Old-Serbian text must have been incomprehensible to the then owner of the reliquary, the casing was put back into place haphazardly, and so front and back switched sides. That this is what happened is obvious from the present state of the ornament on the sides of the upright arm. The ornamental pattern is interrupted, but if the handle is horizontally rotated 180 degrees, two parts of the ornament slide logically into place, forming a pattern that runs uninterruptedly the length of the cross.<sup>9</sup> Concurrently with this intervention on the cross, a slapdash attempt to repair the damaged golden casing was made by inserting irregularly-shaped silver plaques under its damaged upper edges, while leaving the wooden core partly exposed. These plaques have been the likely reason for the wrong assumption that an “even older silver casing is discernible” under the present one.<sup>10</sup> This damage and subsequent interventions set aside, the reliquary is in fact in a quite good state of preservation. The missing pieces of cloisonné work are negligibly small and the loss does not affect the integrity of the ornamental pattern. Also missing are a pearl from the front of the upper crossbar, which was still in place in a photograph taken sometime in the 1970s, and two pearls from the back of the lower shaft.<sup>11</sup>

The cross from Pienza is a staurotheke, the reliquary specifically intended as a shrine for fragments of the True Cross, the holiest of Christian relics, one endowed with the strongest transcendent power rendering it effectual in many different ways and, therefore, amenable to a wide array of possible functions.<sup>12</sup> By its shape and construction, it is a double-armed cross (*crux gemina*). Although the shape of a reliquary was not prescriptively dependent on its content in the Christian world, some types may be considered characteristic. Very popular in Byzantium, notably from the tenth century, were panel-shaped staurothekai.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, as shown long ago and recently corroborated with fresh evidence, doubled-armed reliquary crosses may also be considered a typically Byzantine shape. The first appearance of such reliquaries in Byzantium may be traced back to the late ninth century, to a period following the Iconoclastic Controversy. It did not become paradigmatic because of the shape of the “historical” Golgotha cross, but through the powerful influence of the legend of the discovery of the True Cross and its visual depictions. At any rate, the shape of a doubled-armed cross became not only usual for Byzantine staurothekai, but also a metaphor for the relic itself. In this way, it assumed a recognizable identity, which with time, especially in the West, came to point to the Byzantine origin of

a relic and, therefore, to serve as a warrant of its authenticity.<sup>14</sup> Typologically speaking, some other features of the cross from Pienza are also essential to understanding its original function. These above all are two long-recognized elements typical of cross-shaped reliquaries. One is a cross within the cross (*alia crucicula*), the equal-armed cross formed by the upper shaft and the upper crossbar. The other is the lowest part of the shaft, in fact a handle, which gives the staurotheke its elongated shape and classifies it as a subtype intended for particular uses. Namely, it has been shown that the reliquaries of this type had liturgical use, or were used in processions and rituals performed for the feast of the Exaltation of the True Cross.<sup>15</sup> We shall return to this particular issue later in the text.

An essential element of the Pienza cross is certainly its decoration. As we have seen, it consists of rock crystal, precious stones – amethysts and sapphires – and pearls arranged on a metal support, which is gold and silver-gilt cloisonné. It is obviously a *crux gemmata*, jewelled cross, the type whose origin can be traced back to late antiquity and which occurs in a variety of forms and media, such as monumental mosaic depictions in apses, e.g. in Santa Pudenziana in Rome (420), Sant’Apolinare in Classe in Ravenna (549) and Santo Stefano Rotondo, also in Rome (ca. 659), or processional and pectoral crosses. Even early exegetical literature interprets the *crux gemmata* in the context of the second coming of Christ, as an emblem of victory.<sup>16</sup> The idea underlying its different materializations was virtually the same and depended on the classical and, subsequently, medieval notions of the nature and significance of precious stones: they were seen not as inanimate but as animate matter. The *lapides vivi* were thought of as being of paradisiacal origin, directly associated with the creation of the world and retaining their intrinsic, God-given effectiveness – *innata virtus* – even after the fall and expulsion from paradise. Precious stones were believed to play such a role on the eschatological level as well, and this belief was substantiated by the well-known passage from the Book of Revelation speaking of twelve kinds of precious stones adorning the foundations

*srednjovekovni*, 81. The language of the inscription is the Serbian recension of Old Slavonic. It uses capital letters in the upright ductus. The use of ligatures was probably dictated by the limited space, and this need for economizing on space was the likely reason that some vowels are not pre-iotized. The morphological features of the inscription suggest the second half of the fourteenth century. I am thankful to Dr. Irena Špadijer for her reading and commentary; cf. also n. 38 infra.

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Gabriele Fattorini for his identification of the coat of arms.

<sup>9</sup> This has been proved beyond doubt by a virtual Photoshop reconstruction of the ornament.

<sup>10</sup> Radojković, *Metal srednjovekovni*, 81.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 6 (the photograph is identical to the one reproduced in Carli, *Pienza*, fig. 64).

<sup>12</sup> From the ample literature on the relic of the True Cross, I refer the reader to the still unavoidable study of A. Frolov, *La relique de la Vraie Croix. Recherches sur le développement d’un culte*, Paris 1961; and now, esp., *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. J. Durand, B. Flusin, Paris 2004, and H. A. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz: Die Geschichte einer Reliquie und ihrer künstlerischen Fassung in Byzanz und im Abendland*, Wiesbaden 2004 (with all relevant sources and literature).

<sup>13</sup> A. Frolov, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix*, Paris 1965, 93–115; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*, 100–101 and passim.

<sup>14</sup> Frolov, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix*, 124–134; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*, 51–54, and 197.

<sup>15</sup> Frolov, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix*, 134–136 (with examples).

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of the subject, v. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*, 98–100 (with sources).



Fig. 3. *Staurotheke from Pienza, inscription*



Fig. 4. *Staurotheke from Pienza, upper part of the cross*

of the walls of Heavenly Jerusalem, the city whose streets are “pure gold” (Rev. 21:18–21).<sup>17</sup> Gold was a usual means, with a great associative potential, to palpably evoke this vision of an unearthly paradisiacal abode illuminated by ineffable light; hence the use of gold as an essential component of medieval reliquaries and of *ars sacra* at large.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, as research has shown, medieval exegetes tended to equate gold to fresh spring greenness based on their shared luminous properties – radiance, shimmer, glitter – which led to the notion of gold as an equivalent of the lush and flowery garden of paradise. These notions should be borne in mind in

interpreting ornamented gold-sheathed objects that had religious functions, such as icon revetments and reliquaries.<sup>19</sup>

The Book of Revelation offered still other meaningful sources of inspiration. One of them was the pearls of which twelve gates of Heavenly Jerusalem are made (Rev. 21:21). Interpretations of the pearl were powerfully influenced by early Christian writers. For Origen, the pearl symbolized the Word of God in the Kingdom of Heaven; Clement of Alexandria used it as a metaphor for Christ; while Ephraim the Syrian elaborated his idea by interpreting the pearl as a symbol of Christ’s dual nature, by virtue of its being at once of mineral and organic origin.<sup>20</sup> Of the patterns provided by the Apocalypse, numerological were especially influential. They offered a wealth of inspiration for adorning reliquaries, *staurothekai* in particular. John’s vision of Heavenly Jerusalem, with its four corners, twelve foundations and twelve gates, and its Tree of Life bearing twelve fruits, was translated into a material form, the purpose of which was evocation and anticipation of the heavenly city.<sup>21</sup>

The most highly prized gemstone was rock crystal, not at all by accident. Transparent, flawless and colourless, it became a privileged metaphor for the divine light. Also, it was likened to the bodiless angels and the transfigured, enspirited body of Christ. A salient motif of Old and New Testament visions, crystal featured as a powerful symbol in theological interpretations. In this case, too, verses of the Apocalypse were particularly inspiring. In John’s vision, there is, before the throne of God, “a sea of glass like unto crystal” (Rev. 4:6). Crystal is one of the precious stones from which the walls of Heavenly Jerusalem are built (Rev. 21:18, 21), and “a pure river of water of life” flowing from the throne of God is likened to a crystal (Rev. 21:1).<sup>22</sup> Apart from its *innata virtus*, crystal also possessed *claritas*, a radiance of unearthly origin, the very light that enables man to contemplate the divine and constitutes an important component of the *corpus spiritale*, the enspirited, luminous bodies of saints, which exegetes also likened to crystal.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On the symbolism and significance of precious stones, still fundamental syntheses are: Frolow, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix*, 196–204; C. Meier, *Gemma Spiritalis. Methode und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese vom frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1977; H. R. Hahnloser, S. Brugger-Koch, *Corpus der mittelalterlichen Hartsteinschliffe des 12. bis 15. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1985; T. Jülich, *Gemmenkreuze. Die Farbigkeit ihres Edelsteinbesatzes bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*, Aachener Kunstblätter 54/55 (1986–1987) 99–258; and now, a reference study: G. Toussaint, *Heiliges Gebein und edler Stein. Der Edelsteinschmuck von Reliquiaren im Spiegel mittelalterlicher Wahrnehmung*, Das Mittelalter 8 (2008) 41–66 (with sources and bibliography); cf. also B. Buettner, *From bones to stones. Reflection on jeweled reliquaries*, in: *Reliquiare im Mittelalter*, ed. B. Rendenbach, G. Toussaint, Berlin 2005, 43–59.

<sup>18</sup> D. Janes, *God and gold in late antiquity*, Cambridge 1998, 63–84, 139–152; cf. also L. James, *Light and colour in Byzantine art*, London 1996; eadem, *Color and meaning in Byzantium*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11/2 (2003) 223–233; for medieval Serbian art, v. S. Radojčić, *Zlato u srpskoj umetnosti XIII veka*, in: *Odabrani članci i studije*, Beograd 1982, 199–210.

<sup>19</sup> Janes, *God and gold in late antiquity*, 100; B. Pencheva, *The performative icon*, *The Art Bulletin* 8/4 (2006) esp. 640–648; eadem, *The sensual icon*, University Park, Pa., 2010, 1–16, 121–154.

<sup>20</sup> Meier, *Gemma Spiritalis*, 95–96, 323; Jülich, *Gemmenkreuze*, 125, 130.

<sup>21</sup> Toussaint, *Heiliges Gebein und edler Stein*, 48–49.

<sup>22</sup> On the meanings of crystal: U. Henze, *Edelsteinallegorese im Lichte mittelalterlicher Bild- und Reliquienverehrung*, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54/3 (1991) 428–451 (with an overview of previous research); cf. also Meier, *Gemma Spiritalis*, 111–122.

<sup>23</sup> A. Angenendt, “*Der Leib is klar, klar wie Kristal*”, in: *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter*, ed. K. Schreiner, Munich 2002, 387–398; Toussaint, *Heiliges Gebein und edler Stein*, 50–56.



Fig. 5. *Staurotheke from Pienza, intersection of the arms with the relic of the True Cross*



Fig. 6. *Staurotheke from Pienza, decoration, details*

The use of rock crystal for reliquaries, *staurothekai* in particular, had yet another, and very important, aspect related to visibility – the *ostensio* of relics. The *virtus* of a relic was believed to be particularly effective if the relic was exposed to view, thus enabling miraculous, “saving vision”.<sup>24</sup> For this reason, rock crystal had, especially from Carolingian times, a distinctive role and significance as an adornment of *staurothekai*, especially those in the form of a cross, as evidenced by a group of sumptuous *cruces gemmatae* of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries with a rock crystal covering the recess at the intersection of the arms of the cross and granting visual access to the relic of the True Cross.<sup>25</sup> No wonder then, that the *ostensio* of relics directly influenced



Fig. 7. *Staurotheke from Pienza, side view, detail*

the design of reliquaries. The complex and variously interpreted problem of the form, chronology and origin of the reliquaries fostering visual contact with relics goes beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, what seems certain is that from the thirteenth century on there was a growing tendency, especially in the West, to make relics accessible to view, a tendency which formed part of a broader phenomenon accommodated to the spirit of the age and its pattern of piety.<sup>27</sup> This markedly “visual piety” found expression in the use of rock crystal, which as a rule covered the relic at the intersection of the arms of the *staurotheke*. The relic under the transparent rock crystal was not only visible, but the crystal was cut in such a way that it functioned as a magnifying lens. It is important to note that this type of *staurothekai* had a profound significance, since crystal was a symbol of Christ and of the eternal uncreated light of Heavenly Jerusalem, the city where “the Lord God giveth them light” (Rev. 22:5), the light “like unto a stone most precious” (Rev. 21:11). It was this *mysterium luminis* that substantially enhanced the *virtus* of the relic.

It is understandable then, that gems, including rock crystals and pearls, were much more than a mere adornment to medieval reliquaries. They carried complex meanings, in the context of Christian theology and exegesis, as convincingly evidenced by numerous medieval *Lapidarii* – texts devoted to classification and interpretation of precious stones

<sup>24</sup> A. Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich 1997, 155–162; cf. also A. Legner, *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult zwischen Antike und Aufklärung*, Darmstadt 1995, 88–119.

<sup>25</sup> Henze, *Edelsteinallegorese*, 440; G. Toussaint, *Die Kreuzreliquie und die Konstruktion von Heiligkeit*, in: *Zwischen Wort und Bild. Wahrnehmungen und Deutungen im Mittelalter*, ed. H. Bleumer, H.-W. Goetz, S. Patzold, B. Rendenbach, Cologne 2010, 69–75 (with earlier literature).

<sup>26</sup> The view that the Byzantine world tended to “safeguard and conceal relics”, as opposed to the Western world, which tended to present them to view, was put forward early on by Frolov, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix*, 125; a different opinion, that Byzantine reliquaries were “more transparent” than Western, was offered by R. Rückert, *Zur Form der byzantinischen Reliquiare*, *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 8 (1957) 7–36; quite the opposite, the *ostensio* phenomenon in the case of Byzantine reliquaries has recently been interpreted as a result of Western influences by D. Diedrich, *Vom Glauben zum Sehen: Die Sichtbarkeit der Reliquie im Reliquiar. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sehens*, Berlin 2001, 34; influence of the Byzantine reliquaries taken to the West after 1204 on the design of reliquaries has been discussed by G. Toussaint, *Die Sichtbarkeit des Gebeins im Reliquiar: Eine Folge der Plünderung Konstantinopels*, in: *Reliquiare im Mittelalter*, Berlin 2005, 89–106.

<sup>27</sup> This pattern was manifested in several ways, but most of all in a change in liturgical practices which reached its culmination in the act of displaying or, more precisely, elevating the host, G. J. C. Snoeck, *Medieval piety from relics to the eucharist*, Leiden 1995, 55–56.

based on their properties and, especially, colour.<sup>28</sup> In that sense, the decoration of *staurothekai* was to carry the weight of remarkably complex meanings. Joining the True Cross and select precious stones together in one whole conferred a *virtus* of unequalled transcendent powers upon the relic.<sup>29</sup> In other words, this powerful potential resulted from a particular symbiosis: from the synergy of the relic of the True Cross and precious stones. Bearing the imprint of the Saviour's body and sprinkled by his blood, the wood of the Cross was imbued with the real *praesentia* of Christ, while the gold and the glistening stones of various colours were a recognizable and suggestive emblem of paradise and Heavenly Jerusalem. It has been rightfully suggested that *staurothekai* carried the weight of symbolically expounding, with the aid of studied emphases, the whole sacred history – from the Creation of the world and the Garden of Eden, over the Passion and Redemption, to the eschatological finale epitomized by the Second Coming of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven – New Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> The likening of the wood of the Cross to the tree planted in paradise by God himself – widely used in exegesis – gave rise to the interpretation of the *crux gemmata* as the Tree of Life, whose fruits give immortality.<sup>31</sup> In terms of reception and “aesthetic” notions of the period, reliquaries with a thus conceived system of decoration – as well as their equivalents among icons – had a powerful “performative” effect. It depended on a distinctive “synesthetic” vision – polychromy and polymorphy of matter and, especially, dynamic light effects – the purpose of which was to transport the faithful, by means of visible and tangible matter, into an invisible, spiritual reality, and thus evoke in their minds the beauty and perfection of paradise.<sup>32</sup>

This excursion on *staurothekai* and their decoration seemed to me an indispensable framework for understanding the place and significance of the cross from Pienza in the group of related objects. On the whole, it appears that virtually all of the above-cited general observations apply to this reliquary, too. In our concrete case, it comes down to the following: the reliquary from Pienza is a prestigious example of the *crux gemmata* type of *staurothekai* in the shape of a doubled-armed cross. Its elongated proportions and especially the presence of a handle suggest that the rites in which it was used involved its being raised. The materials of which it was crafted, gold and silver-gilt, as well as the cloisonné ornament evoking a stylized but recognizable paradigm of the Tree of Life in the middle of a blossoming paradise, were usual metaphors for celestial abodes. The selection and arrangement of gems is also quite indicative. Namely, the sapphire, by virtue of its blue colour, alluded to the celestial and spiritual realm, the throne of the Lord and God's glory, while the purple amethyst was taken as a symbol of the resurrection and eternal life of humankind.<sup>33</sup> There are views that combination of the blue colour of precious stones and the iridescence of pearls, recognized in some groups of *cruces gemmatae*, was a deliberate and meaningful solution.<sup>34</sup> Anyhow, whether a coincidence or not, it is a fact that sapphire and amethyst were supposed to adorn the ceremonial robes of Aaron as high priest (Ex. 28:17–20) and are among the precious stones of which the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem are built.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the arrangement and number of gems adorning the *staurotheke* from Pienza – six precious stones and twenty-four pearls on the front and as many on the back of the cross – are consistent with numerological patterns of the Apocalypse of John. The physical and conceptual focus of the *staurotheke* was also shaped with utmost care. Not

only does the rock crystal cabochon at the intersection of the arms magnify the relic of the True Cross, but the associated cryptogram directly refers to the “light of Christ”, the source of eternal uncreated light. The other cryptogram, at the upper intersection, refers to Christ's triumph and the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. The significance of apotropaic inscriptions on crosses, the purpose of which was to enhance their *virtus* and protective powers, is well known.<sup>36</sup> The practice was widespread in medieval Serbia as well, as evidenced by many examples in different artistic media.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, both the cryptograms and other, theologically grounded and carefully nuanced solutions employed in the decoration of the cross from Pienza, show clearly that the Serbian spiritual elite was well-acquainted with the significance and function of the holiest Christian relics as well as with the means of translating their central messages into a material form.

The *staurotheke* from Pienza does not derive its importance only from the complexities of its meanings and messages. As pointed out above, it is a prestigious piece of medieval goldsmiths' craft. Its style and workmanship provide a solid basis for its dating.<sup>38</sup> Its characteristic cloisonné work without inlays composed of thin strips of silver-gilt soldered to a metal base constitute a well-known technique which has been observed and thoroughly studied on a sample of medieval Byzantine silver icon revetments. These were made for a group of icons which, apart from a few exceptions, are kept in the Athonite monasteries of Vatopedi and the Great Lavra.<sup>39</sup> Besides the abovementioned technique, they also share an ornamental repertoire, which consists of geometric elements – circles, squares and lozenges filled with rosettes, spirals, palmettes, heart-shaped and diverse floral motifs. It has been convincingly shown that this type of ornamental

<sup>28</sup> Meier, *Gemma Spiritalis*, 56–138; cf. also G. Friess, *Edelsteine im Mittelalter. Wandel und Kontinuität in ihrer Bedeutung durch zwölf Jahrhunderte*, Hildesheim 1980, 1–23.

<sup>29</sup> On the *virtus* of relics, Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien*, 155–158.

<sup>30</sup> On this issue, very enlightening, Toussaint, *Die Kreuzreliquie und die Konstruktion von Heiligkeit*, 33–77.

<sup>31</sup> Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*, 115–116 (quoting sources).

<sup>32</sup> Pencheva, *The performative icon*, l. c.; eadem, *The sensual icon*, passim.

<sup>33</sup> Meier, *Gemma Spiritalis*, 156–161, 331, 174 and passim; Jülich, *Gemmenkreuze*, 125, 130.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>35</sup> Hahnloser, Brugger-Koch, *Corpus der mittelalterlichen Hartsteinschliffe*, 8, 11–12.

<sup>36</sup> Ch. Walter, *ΙΕ ΧΣ ΝΙΚΑ. The apotropaic function of the victorious cross*, REB 55 (1997) 193–220; J. A. Cotsonis, *Byzantine figural processional crosses*, Washington DC 1994, 40–42; D. C. Skemer, *Binding words. Textual amulets in the Middle Ages*, University Park 2006, esp. 75–124 (with sources and bibliography).

<sup>37</sup> Dj. Trifunović, *Azbučnik srpskih srednjovekovnih književnih pojmova*, Beograd 1990, 140–141; D. Popović, B. Todić, D. Vojvodić, *Dečanska pustinja. Skitovi i kelije manastira Dečana*, Beograd 2011, 199–200 (with basic literature).

<sup>38</sup> The date of the *staurotheke* is also indicated by the palaeographic features of the inscription (notable the letters A, B and P) which suggest the second half of the fourteenth century, v. G. Tomović, *Morfologija ćirilskih natpisa na Balkanu*, Beograd 1974, nos. 56, 58, 60, 64, 67, 77; cf. also n. 7 supra.

<sup>39</sup> The revetments are: Mandylion icon (Genoa, S. Bartolomeo degli Armeni, before 1388); two small icons of the Virgin and Christ (Vatopedi, end of 14th c.); icon of St. John the Theologian (Lavra, 14th c.); icon of the Virgin Hodegetria (Liege, St Paul's cathedral, late 14th c.); Holy Trinity icon (Vatopedi, end of 14th c.); icon of the Virgin and Christ (Vatopedi, end of 14th c.); icon of the Annunciation (Vatopedi, ca. 1400); later revetment of the icon of the Virgin of Vladimir (Moscow Arsenal, 1410), A. Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du moyen âge*, Venice 1975, 60–72 (with the earlier literature).

design is exclusive to the Palaiologan age and that all revetments date from the second half or the end of the fourteenth century. Their outstanding workmanship and aesthetic quality have led researchers to ascribe them either to Constantinopolitan workshops or to Constantinopolitan craftsmen active in Thessaloniki or on Mount Athos. How widely admired and popular these works of decorative art were is obvious from the fact that sometime in the early fifteenth century craftsmen of this circle reached as far as Russia, where they made prestigious works of recognizable workmanship and ornamentation.<sup>40</sup>

There is no doubt that, based on its style and workmanship, the staurotheke from Pienza should be included into the abovementioned group of goldsmiths' works. Some of these are so close to it that they even may be attributed to the same workshop. Among these is the revetment of the icon of St. John the Theologian from the Great Lavra, which has a border decorated with a spiral heart-shaped motif almost identical to the ornament on the sides of the Pienza cross.<sup>41</sup> Another very close analogy is the revetment of the icon of the Holy Trinity from Vatopedi, especially the ornamental design composed of lozenges filled with symmetrically arranged heart-shaped motifs.<sup>42</sup> These analogies allow the cautious assumption that the staurotheke from Pienza was crafted by a workshop from Thessaloniki or Athos, and certainly by a master who might have been trained in the capital of the empire. Whether following the wish of the patron or some of the models that circulated at the time, he crafted the staurotheke in the spirit of the hallowed Byzantine tradition, manifest in its typology and decoration. On the other hand, the conspicuous *ostensio* of the reliquary seems to point to an influence of Gothic art and its marked predilection for heightening the sense of sacredness by visual, "performative" means. The staurotheke from Pienza may therefore be joined to a small but exceptionally interesting group of goldsmiths' works of the Byzantine Palaiologan age which, as has been convincingly shown, bears a distinctive imprint of the ideals and vocabulary of Gothic art.<sup>43</sup>

Another piece of evidence for dating the Pienza cross is the inscription, which refers to "Sava, the first archbishop and patriarch of the Serbs". As pointed out above, reliquaries, including staurothekai, often bore inscriptions. Research done so far allows a precise enough insight into the nature of such inscriptions and their main emphases. As a rule kletic or votive, they express their patrons' prayerful hope for divine forgiveness, salvation and protection.<sup>44</sup> The inscriptions on sumptuous reliquaries donated by members of the elites, royalty or prelates, were not essentially different: their primary purpose, apart from interceding before Christ, was to render the name of the donor a lasting part of liturgical memory, of prayers ensuring eternal remembrance.<sup>45</sup>

The reasons for and circumstances of the occurrence of the name of St. Sava on the staurotheke from Pienza require a lengthier explication. Sava, the founder and head of the autocephalous Serbian Church, and the main ideologist of the Nemanjić state, is certainly the one to be credited with inaugurating, in the early decades of the thirteenth century, an approach to the cult of relics, the True Cross above all, which had not been previously seen on such a grand scale in Serbia.<sup>46</sup> In the focus of Sava's endeavour were the first foundations of the Nemanjićs – Studenica, Hilandar and Žiča – where sacred foundations for the independent Serbian state were being laid in a well-thought-out manner. Hence the particular significance of the solemn procession bringing to Studenica,

the mausoleum of the founder of the dynasty, a pectoral containing relics of the True Cross, and of the miraculous cure of Stefan, the first Serbian ruler crowned king, whom his brother Sava restored to health with water sanctified with the True Cross.<sup>47</sup> It could not have been a coincidence therefore, that Sava of Serbia donated a staurotheke with a fragment of the True Cross – a gift to him from the Byzantine Emperor John III Vatatzes – to the monastery of Hilandar, the Serbian base on Mount Athos and the "New Sion" of the Nemanjić state.<sup>48</sup> Yet, there is no doubt that the most impressive relic programme was realized at Žiča, Serbia's first cathedral and coronation church. The text of the foundation charter (1219/20), whose fresco replica survives on the walls of the entrance tower, reports that apart from other and usual gifts, the ktetor, King Stefan the First-Crowned, with his son Radoslav, donated some of the holiest of Christian relics to his foundation: fragments of the True Cross, relics of Christ's Passion, parts of the Virgin's belt and maphorion, a part of the head and the right arm of St. John the Baptist, as well as relics of the apostles, prophets, martyrs and other saints.<sup>49</sup> This donation, unparalleled in Serbian royal ktetic practices in terms of both the underlying idea and its realization, played a role in providing sacred legitimation to the state. It made use of a well-proven means – emulation of the holy city of Jerusalem and its "reconstruction" in one's own midst, and through the most highly revered Christian relics.<sup>50</sup> The importance and wide range of functions that relics, especially those associated with the main protagonists and events of sacred history, had in the Byzantine Empire

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–9 and passim; for analogous goldsmiths' works from Russia, cf. A. V. Bank, *Vizantijskoe iskusstvo v sobraniiah Sovetskogo Soiuza*, Moscow 1966, figs. 160, 295.

<sup>41</sup> Grabar, *Les revêtements*, 62–63, figs. 71, 72; cf. also M. Chatzidakis, *Une icône en mosaïque de Lavra*, JÖB 21 (1972) 73–81.

<sup>42</sup> Grabar, *Les revêtements*, 66–67, figs. 81–83.

<sup>43</sup> J. Durand, *Innovations gothiques dans l'orfèvrerie byzantine sous les Paléologues*, DOP 58 (2004) 333–354 (with examples and bibliography).

<sup>44</sup> Frolov, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix*, 187, 194–195 (with examples); Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, 29–32.

<sup>45</sup> S. Lerou, *L'usage des reliques du Christ par les empereurs aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles: le Saint Bois et les Saintes Pierres*, in: *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. J. Durand, B. Flusin, Paris 2004, 165.

<sup>46</sup> Apart from an apotropaic function, the pectoral cross of Stefan Nemanja, the founder of the dynasty, also functioned as an insignia, S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *Nemanjin naprsni krst. Iz naše stare insignologije*, Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta 17 (1991) 203–215.

<sup>47</sup> The biographers of St. Sava of Serbia gave detailed accounts of these events; on the bringing of the True Cross to Studenica: Stefan Prvovenčani, *Sabrani spisi*, ed. Lj. Juhas-Georgievskaja, Beograd 1988, 83; Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, ed. R. Marinković, Beograd 1988, 287–298. On the miraculous cure of Stefan the First-Crowned, Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i život svetoga Simeona*, 142; Teodosije, *Žitija*, ed. D. Bogdanović, Beograd 1988, 202.

<sup>48</sup> B. Miljković, *Hilandarski Časni krst i stara manastirska stavroteka*, ZRVI 38 (1999/2000) 287–297; on the symbolical role of Hilandar, S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *Hilandar kao Novi Sion srpskog otačastva*, in: *Osam vekova Hilandara*, ed. V. Korać, Beograd 2000, 17–24.

<sup>49</sup> For editions of the Žiča charters, v. D. Sindik, *Jedna ili dve žičke povelje?*, Istorijski časopis 14–15 (1963–1965) 309–315; G. Subotić, *Treća žička povelja*, Zograf 31 (2006–2007) 51–59; cf. also the latest edition, *Zbornik srednjovekovnih ćirilčkih povelja i pisama Srbije, Bosne i Dubrovnika*, I, 1186–1321, ed. V. Mošin, S. Ćirković, D. Sindik, Beograd 2001, 89–95; S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *La charte et l'espace sacré. Les actes royaux transcrits dans les peintures murales serbes (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles) et leur contexte symbolique*, Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes 167/2 (2009) 391–416.

<sup>50</sup> D. Popović, *Sacrae reliquiae Spasove crkve u Žiči*, in: *Pod okriljem svetosti. Kult svetih vladara i relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, Beograd 2006, 207–232; eadem, *Relics and politics in the Middle Ages: the Serbian approach*, in: *Eastern Christian Relics*, ed. A. Lidov, Moscow 2003, 161–180.

is well known.<sup>51</sup> A special place among them was held by the True Cross, which was considered a prerogative of the basileus and a token of his Christ-given authority. From the earliest times, the wood of the Cross, as the main instrument of the emperor's military triumph and a vehicle for likening him to Constantine the Great, played a key role in military contexts. The use was widespread of the True Cross at church councils, court trials, oath-giving ceremonies, diplomatic activities, and there was not a shred of doubt about its healing and prophylactic powers.<sup>52</sup> The cult of the True Cross took especially striking forms in ceremonial contexts – during the liturgy, during Holy Week celebrations or in civic processions. Yet, the veneration of the True Cross found its supreme expression in a set of elaborate observances, the solemnest of which was the feast of the Exaltation of the True Cross, celebrated on 14 September.<sup>53</sup> Given the well-known fact that Sava of Serbia was perfectly familiar with the significance and possible uses of relics in the Byzantine world, there is good reason to assume that the Žiča relics were meant to play a similar role; even more so if we know that the intended role of Žiča as the cathedral and coronation church was the pivotal point of the royal ideology of the Nemanjićs and of the programme of the Serbian Archbishopric.

St. Sava's programmatic undertaking should certainly be looked at against the backdrop of a broader process, characteristic of the Christian world after the fall of Constantinople in 1204. Under the completely different circumstances and a new balance of power, the purpose of various forms of the "translation" of Jerusalem was to assert royal identity, dynastic representation and legitimacy of newly-created polities.<sup>54</sup> It goes without saying that the unrivalled model for these relic programmes was the illustrious "holy chapel" of the Byzantine emperors, the Virgin of the Pharos.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, it does not seem beside the point to remember the ways of procuring valuable Byzantine relics after 1204. Before the crusaders conquered the capital city and plundered its treasures, the Byzantine basileis had used to present as a gift, on the odd occasion, a relic from their rich repositories – as a rule enshrined in a small reliquary – and this generous gift giving was accompanied by ceremonial gestures whose purpose was to stress the pre-eminence and superiority of the gift giver, the privileged possessor of holy relics, over the recipient of the gift. After 1204, however, these practices underwent radical change and the acquisition of relics by purchase or even theft became common, just as relics themselves, to put it crudely, became a "commodity", though one endowed with sacred properties.<sup>56</sup> How Sava of Serbia came into possession of so valuable relics is not documented in the surviving sources. His biographers made mention, more than once, of lavish gifts he had been given – and gave in return – on formal occasions, at his meetings with the highest secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries during his journeys to the illustrious centres of the East.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the possibility should by no means be ruled out that he acquired the relics by purchase. Bearing in mind Sava's high standing, connections and means, he undoubtedly was in the position to come into possession of valuable relics of undisputed origin and authenticity. This line of thinking finds strong corroboration in the relic of the Baptist's right forearm, enshrined in a lavish reliquary engraved with the name and title of Sava of Serbia, deposited in Siena cathedral since 1464.<sup>58</sup>

The history of the relic of the True Cross and other valuables of the Žiča treasury – except, to an extent, the Baptist's right forearm and the relics of the Passion – is not docu-

mented in the surviving sources. What is known, however, is that sometime around 1290, when the north of the kingdom became vulnerable to Kuman incursions, many important functions of the Archbishopric were transferred from Žiča to a new seat at Peć (Metohija). The most valued of the Žiča relics were also transferred. Taking over the function of the church see, Peć did not abolish the status of Žiča, but rather identified with it, and an important role in the process must have been played by the treasures taken over from the Mother of churches.<sup>59</sup> At any rate, that the practice established by the first Nemanjićs had a strong echo in subsequent times is

<sup>51</sup> N. H. Baynes, *Supernatural defenders of Constantinople*, in: idem, *Byzantine studies and other essays*, London 1974<sup>2</sup>, 248–260; I. Kalavrezou, *Helping hands for the Empire: Imperial ceremonies and the cult of relics at the Byzantine court*, in: *Byzantine court culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire, Washington 1997, 53–79; a wide-sweeping text on the subject, with an overview of earlier research, S. Mergiali-Sahas, *Byzantine Emperors and holy relics*, JÖB 51 (2001) 41–60.

<sup>52</sup> Frolow, *La relique de la Vraie Croix*; Mergiali-Sahas, *Byzantine Emperors and holy relics*; Lerou, *L'usage des reliques du Christ* and Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*, 19–88, provide relevant sources and literature.

<sup>53</sup> The issue is discussed in detail in the following contributions to the edited volume *Byzance et les reliques du Christ* (n. 12): H. A. Klein, *Constantine, Helena and the cult of the True Cross in Constantinople*, 31–59; B. Flusin, *Les cérémonies de l'Exaltation de la Croix à Constantinople au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après le Dresdensis A 104*, 61–89; v. also H. A. Klein, *Sacred relics and imperial ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople*, in: *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft. Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen. Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, ed. F. A. Bauer, Istanbul 2006 (Byzas, 5), 79–99.

<sup>54</sup> From the ample literature on the subject, I refer the reader to: B. Flusin, *Les reliques de la Sainte-Chapelle et leur passé impérial à Constantinople*, in: *Le trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle*, ed. J. Durand, M. P. Lafite, Paris 2001, 20–31; A. Eastmond, *Byzantine identity and relics of the True Cross in the thirteenth century*, in: *Eastern Christian Relics*, ed. A. Lidov, Moscow 2003, 204–216; G. P. Majesca, *The relics of Constantinople after 1204*, in: *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, 183–190; E. Bozóký, *La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint Louis*, Paris 2006, 120–169; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*, passim.

<sup>55</sup> P. Magdalino, *L'église du Phare et les reliques de la Passion à Constantinople (VII<sup>e</sup>/VIII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, in: *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, 15–30; A. M. Lidov, *Tserkov' Bogomateri Farosskoj. Imperatorskij khram-relikvarij kak konstantinopol'skij Grob Gospoden'*, in: idem, *Ierotopiia. Prostranstvennye ikony i obrazy-paradigmy v vizantijskoj kul'ture*, Moscow 2009, 71–109.

<sup>56</sup> H. A. Klein, *Eastern objects and western desires: Relics and reliquaries between Byzantium and the West*, DOP 58 (2004) 283–314 (with sources and literature); cf. also P. Geary, *Sacred commodities. The circulation of medieval relics*, in: *The social life of things. Commodities in social perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai, Cambridge 1986, 169–191; idem, *Furta sacra. Thefts of relics in the central Middle Ages*, Princeton 1990.

<sup>57</sup> This issue deserves a separate study in the light of recent methodological and factual findings, cf. A. Cutler, *Gifts and gift exchange as aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies*, DOP 55 (2001) 247–278. On St. Sava's journeys and their reflection on medieval Serbian art, cf. B. Miljković, *Žitija svetog Save kao izvori za istoriju srednjovekovne umetnosti*, Beograd 2008; M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje svetog Save u Palestinu i njegov značaj za srpsku srednjovekovnu umetnost*, Beograd 2009.

<sup>58</sup> The relic of the Baptist's right forearm still awaits proper publication. Basic information, based on a photograph, has been published by P. Popović, *O srpskom natpisu u Sijeni. Prilozi za književnost, jezik i folklor* 16/1 (1936) 214–220; v. also M. Čorović-Ljubinković, *Pretečina desnica i drugo krunisanje Prvovenčanog*, *Starinar* 5–6 (1956) 105–114 (with earlier literature). I had the opportunity to examine the relic during my study visit to Siena in April 2010, and a paper on it is in the process of being prepared for publication. I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church and His Grace Bishop of Bačka Dr. Irinej, whose recommendation made my work in Siena possible. I owe a debt of gratitude to His Excellency Mons. Antonio Buoncristiani, Archbishop and Metropolitan of Siena, for granting permission to examine the relic, and to Don Enrico Grassini, Secretary to his Excellency, for his generous assistance during my stay in Siena.

<sup>59</sup> On this, v. Popović, *Sacrae reliquiae Spasove crkve u Žiči*, 221–224 (with sources and reference literature).



convincingly shown by the royal practice, documented for all three medieval Serbian dynasties, Nemanjić, Lazarević, and Branković, of bestowing a relic of the True Cross on a royal foundation or a distinguished church seat.<sup>60</sup> It is certainly not irrelevant to our subject that some of these staurothekai had the form of a lavishly decorated cross and that they bore the inscription of the donor. Two prestigious examples date from the late thirteenth and early decades of the fourteenth century: the golden reliquary that Queen Helen, wife of King Stefan Uroš I, donated to the monastery of Sopoćani, and the silver doubled-armed cross decorated with rosettes and cruciform ornaments, a gift of King Stefan Uroš II Milutin to the church of Sts Peter and Paul at Ras.<sup>61</sup>

This broader historical and cultic context should be borne in mind in examining the origin and function that the cross from Pienza might have had in the Serbian environment. The invaluable nature of the relic itself, the possession of which was a privilege of the highest institutions of state and church, the “programmatically” and “artistically” features of the reliquary, as well as its exquisite workmanship, leave no room for doubt that it was an object of supreme status. If we remember the usual practice of commemorating the donor’s name on reliquaries, the inscription with the name of Sava of Serbia on our staurotheke provides serious reasons for assuming that we have before us the relic of the True Cross that the first Serbian Archbishop had acquired for Žiča. The assumption may be further corroborated by the fact that Sava’s name and title occur on the reliquary that enshrines yet another invaluable relic, the Baptist’s arm, acquired on the same occasion and with the same purpose.<sup>62</sup> In discussing this issue, it is important, of course, to separate the relic from the reliquary in which it was enshrined. As for the staurotheke from Pienza, it has been shown above that it undoubtedly belongs into a distinctive group of goldsmiths’ works of the Palaiologan age, dated to the second half or end of the fourteenth century. The same chronological boundaries are indicated by the repoussé inscription on the handle of the staurotheke, where Sava of Serbia is designated as the first archbishop and patriarch of the Serbs. Scholars have long observed that the title is peculiar, given the well-known fact that the head of the Serbian Church did not bear the patriarchal title until 1346, when, under Stefan Dušan, Serbia was elevated to the rank of empire and its church to that of patriarchate. The usual title of St. Sava of Serbia throughout the medieval period and even later was “the first archbishop of the Serbs” or “the most reverend archbishop of the Serbian land and the Littoral”.<sup>63</sup> There is a single other instance where Sava is designated as the “first patriarch of the Serbs”: the inscription accompanying his formal fresco portrait painted above the so-called “throne of St. Sava” – the marble seat in the narthex of the Patriarchate of Peć where, among other things, important synods were held.<sup>64</sup> The exact date of this portrait is still a matter of scholarly debate, but there is complete agreement that it should be understood against the background of the political and ecclesiastical situation in Serbia between Dušan’s proclamation of patriarchate in 1346 and the reconciliation of the Serbian and Byzantine churches in 1375. The reconciliation not only overcame the crisis, which had left a deep imprint both on the life of the church and on the overall political life of the country, but one of its essential outcomes was the recognition of patriarchate status to the Serbian Church.<sup>65</sup> It has been widely accepted in scholarship that Sava’s representative portrait with the title of patriarch arose as an echo of this momentous event. At

the Peć church see, where the cult of the founder of the autocephalous Serbian Church had understandably been carefully fostered, this portrait obviously was “propagandistic” in character and a sort of the Patriarchate’s policy statement. The title of patriarch, legitimate from 1375, was projected back into the past, whereby, in conformity with the notions of the times, its attribution to all previous heads of the autocephalous Serbian Church became justified.<sup>66</sup> An argument in favour of this interpretation and of the dating of the portrait to about 1380 is provided by an important analogy: the text *On the patriarchs of the land of the Serbs*, written immediately after 1378, which expressly states that the “bishop and teacher Saint Sava” was “the first” in the succession of Serbian patriarchs.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, a different line of thinking also deserves to be further tested, the one that dates Sava’s portrait with the title of patriarch to a period prior to the reconciliation of the two churches in 1375, arguing that the reasons for its “propagandistic” use had been much stronger at that period.<sup>68</sup>

However this issue may be resolved eventually, there is no doubt that the staurotheke from Pienza was an immediate reflection of the policy of the Serbian Church, which had been building its authority on the sanctity of its founder and the succession to the “throne of Saint Sava”. Or, to use a statement that drives the point home, the policy was predicated on the notion of St. Sava’s being the “permanent holder of the right to the office of the head of the church”.<sup>69</sup> Taking all the described facts and circumstances into account, what seems to have been the most likely course of events is that the relic of the True Cross, transferred from Žiča to Peć in the late thirteenth century, was enshrined in a new reliquary sometime in the second half or towards the end of the fourteenth century. The probable donor of the reliquary was the serving Serbian patriarch, a successor to the throne of St. Sava. None of the surviving documentary sources can help us identify the patriarch who oversaw this “renewal”, but whoever he may have been, he did not fail to perpetuate – in the inscription – the memory of the original donor of the relic and abiding role model of all subsequent heads of the Serbian Church. Incidentally, the practice of enshrining a

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 223, n. 80 (where examples and relevant literature are cited).

<sup>61</sup> Fr. Miklosich, *Monumenta serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae, Bosniae, Ragusii*, Wien 1858 (repr. Graz 1964), 70, 83, LXVII, LXXVI; Frolow, *La relique de la vraie croix*, 443–444; on double-armed reliquary crosses from the Slavic world, Frolow, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix*, 126.

<sup>62</sup> V. n. 49 supra.

<sup>63</sup> On Sava’s formal portraits and identifying inscriptions, B. Todić, *Reprezentativni portreti svetog Save u srednjovekovnom slikarstvu*, in: *Sveti Sava u srpskoj istoriji i tradiciji*, ed. S. Ćirković, Beograd 1998, 225–249.

<sup>64</sup> Djurić, “*Presto svetog Save*”, 93–104; V. J. Djurić, S. Ćirković, V. Korać, *Pečka Patrijaršija*, Beograd 1990, 236–238 (V. J. Djurić).

<sup>65</sup> D. Bogdanović, *Izmirenje srpske i vizantijske crkve*, in: *O knezu Lazaru*, Beograd 1975, 81–91; Dj. Slijepčević, *Istorija srpske pravoslavne crkve, I, Od pokrštanja Srba do kraja XVIII veka*, Beograd 1991, 160–175.

<sup>66</sup> This view was put forward by S. Radojčić, *Staro srpsko slikarstvo*, Beograd 1966, 187; and Djurić, “*Presto svetog Save*”, l. c.; *Pečka Patrijaršija*, l. c. (V. J. Djurić).

<sup>67</sup> Lj. Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, Beograd – Sr. Karlovci 1927, 104; Djurić, “*Presto svetog Save*”, 97.

<sup>68</sup> This view was put forward, without specific arguments to support it, by M. Radujko, “*Presto svetog Simeona*”, *Zograf* 28 (2000–2001) 78, and Marković, *Prvo putovanje svetog Save*, 130, n. 90.

<sup>69</sup> Radujko, “*Presto svetog Simeona*”, 75–80 (with sources and earlier literature); cf. also D. Kašić, *Presto svetog Save*, in: *Sveti Sava. Spomenica povodom osamstogodišnjice rođenja, 1175–1975*, Beograd 1977, 334–339.

particularly valued relic into a new reliquary, or of refurbishing the existing one, was widespread, and is attested to by plentiful examples. Moreover, such undertakings highlighted the preciousness of the relic and its high status, which was reasserted with every new refurbishment and “embellishment”.<sup>70</sup> As a result of the scantiness of our sources, one of many open questions surrounding the staurotheke from Pienza is the place of its manufacture. Namely, the disintegration of the Nemanjić Empire and the transfer of the seat of government to its northern areas led to a revitalization of Žiča’s former role. However, this revival of Žiča, where, from the time of the Patriarch Spiridon (1379–1389), heads of the Serbian Church resided ever more frequently, did not entail the abandonment of the Peć see. On the contrary, the available information shows that the “Mother of churches” was active until 1455, and suggests that the two church seats operated side by side without rivalries or conflicts. At which of the two Sava’s cross was commissioned and used cannot be known with certainty.<sup>71</sup> Yet, the fact that the inscription on the staurotheke from Pienza finds its immediate functional analogy in the inscription above the bishop’s throne at the Patriarchate of Peć may, with conceivable caution, tip the scales slightly in favour of the latter.

The available sources are silent about the possible uses of the staurotheke from Pienza. Nonetheless, known analogies from the Byzantine world, supported by written and illustrative sources, allow us to make some informed assumptions. Research has shown that richly decorated reliquary crosses were used on various occasions and that the feast of the Exaltation of the True Cross, on 14 September, was celebrated in a particularly solemn manner.<sup>72</sup> Different stages of this complex ceremonial, including its high point, when the patriarch would step up onto the ambo of the Constantinopolitan Hagia Sophia and lift up the staurotheke containing the relic of the True Cross, are known both from written and illustrative sources. That the reliquary had the form of an elaborately decorated doubled-armed cross with a handle is attested to by relatively numerous Byzantine manuscript illuminations of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the most representative of which are contained in the Menologion of Basill II (*Vat. gr. 1613*, p. 35), the Gospel Lectionary from the Vatican Library (*Vat. gr. 1156*, fol. 248, 248v, 250v) or the Lectionary from Vatopedi (*cod. 2*, fol. 189v).<sup>73</sup> Manuscript illuminations are also a precious visual source supplementing the written information about some other rituals, processions for example. Such occasions as a rule involved the carrying of sumptuously adorned processional crosses (*litānikos stauros*).<sup>74</sup> However, according to an interpretation based on the terminological analysis of sources, apart from the “precious” processional cross, also used in processions were staurothekai, i.e. the “sacred and life-giving” crosses.<sup>75</sup> It is probably to such ritual contexts that the use of the staurotheke from Pienza should be related.

A series of open questions surrounding our reliquary includes the unknowns as to how it ended up in Pienza. Regrettably, both Serbian and Italian sources are silent about it.<sup>76</sup> Yet, some assumptions, underpinned by the available data and certain historical circumstances, seem possible even in this case.

These assumptions largely revolve around an illustrious humanist, Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405–1464), subsequently Pope Pius II. This man of “multiple identity” – a politician and theorist of ecclesiastical and secular governance, on the one hand, a lover and connoisseur of art, writer,

traveller and collector, on the other, was one of the most remarkable figures of his time and a participant in many momentous events.<sup>77</sup> An interesting aspect of the Pope’s work, which seems to escape the attention of researchers, was his activity associated with relics. Pius II is known to have come, in the early 1460s, into possession of some highly valued Eastern Christian relics, such as the forearm of St. John the Baptist and the head of the apostle Andrew. These relics were transferred to him, in exchange for a generous sum, by Thomas Palaiologos, Despot of Morea, brother of the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI. The surviving sources provide credible information on how the relic of the Baptist’s forearm arrived in Italy. It had been possessed by the Serbian reigning family, but the imminent threat of Ottoman conquest led the widow of Despot Lazar Branković, Helen, to entrust the relic to her father, Thomas Palaiologos. Not much later, in 1461, the Despot of Morea, facing the Ottoman threat himself, was forced to flee his realm. Taking his valuables with him, he found refuge in Italy. Shortly upon his arrival, Thomas Palaiologos relinquished the head of St. Andrew and a valuable mantle to Pius II, and a year later, the arm of St. John the Baptist, for which he received one thousand ducats.<sup>78</sup> Pius II donated the Baptist’s arm, in a very solemn ceremony, to the cathedral of Siena, his family’s native town, and confirmed the origin and authenticity of the relic in his donation charter of 1464.<sup>79</sup>

St. Andrew’s relics had a different fate. Most of the head was taken, with much pomp, to the church of St. Peter in Rome, while the mandible and the abovementioned mantle were donated by Pius II to Pienza, the town where he was born and which was renamed after him. It undoubtedly was a studied programmatic gesture, which should be viewed in the context of one of the most interesting projects of this outstanding person. Namely, the motive behind the transformation of the small town of Corsignano into Pienza was the idea of the ideal city as an orderly embodiment of urban beauty and harmony.<sup>80</sup> Since Pius II intended for his native town

<sup>70</sup> Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, 32.

<sup>71</sup> M. Kašanin, Dj. Bošković, P. Mijović, *Žiča. Istorija, arhitektura, slikarstvo*, Beograd 1969, 44–48 (M. Kašanin); *Pečka Patrijaršija*, 224–229 (Ćirković); S. Ćirković, *Žiča kao arhijerejsko sedište*, in: *Manastir Žiča*, ed. G. Subotić, Kraljevo 2000, 11–14.

<sup>72</sup> V. n. 51 supra.

<sup>73</sup> A detailed description of the ceremonial, based on the available sources and furnished with illustrative material, can be found in: Flusin, *Les cérémonies de l’Exaltation de la Croix*, 78–89; Klein, *Constantine, Helena and the cult of the True Cross in Constantinople*, 45–51; idem, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*, 59–68; for depictions of the Exaltation of the True Cross, v. S. Der Nersessian, *La ‘fête de l’exaltation de la croix’*, *Annuaire de l’Institut de philologie et d’histoire orientales et slaves* 10 (1950) 193–198.

<sup>74</sup> Cotsonis, *Byzantine figural processional crosses*, 14–23.

<sup>75</sup> Klein, *Constantine, Helena and the cult of the True Cross in Constantinople*, 53–55; idem, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*, 47–68.

<sup>76</sup> Carli, *Pienza*, 115.

<sup>77</sup> For an exhaustive and enlightening introduction to the man and his work, v. *Selected letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II). Reject Aeneas, accept Pius*, ed. Th. M. Izbicki, G. Christianson, Ph. Krey, Washington 2006 (with an extensive bibliography).

<sup>78</sup> O. Ambrož-Bačić, *O desnici Sv. Ivana Krstitelja sa starosrpskim natpisom u Sieni*, *Prilozi za književnost, jezik i folklor* 9 (1929) 71–82 (with published archival documents).

<sup>79</sup> The charter is as yet unpublished. A photograph of the charter has been provided with permission of His Excellency Mons. Antonio Buoncristiani, Archbishop and Metropolitan of Siena, and through the kindness of his Secretary, Don Enrico Grassini (cf. n. 58 supra). The text of the charter has been transcribed and translated into Serbian by Milena Joksimović Rajović, and will be published on a different occasion.

<sup>80</sup> Carli, *Pienza*, 11–46.

the role of a bishopric and seat of important ecclesiastical institutions, his acts of donating relics and other valuables were a form of *signum pietatis*.<sup>81</sup> What should be borne in mind in discussing this issue is that especially valued in the West, at the time of the Crusades flooded by Byzantine relics, not infrequently of dubious provenance, were the relics of unquestionable authenticity, which the original reliquaries and Greek inscriptions confirmed in a particularly convincing way.<sup>82</sup> It seems that Pius II had an especial, ideologically tinted attitude towards Eastern Christian relics. The initiator of a crusade against the Ottomans and staunch advocate of a united and orderly Christian commonwealth (*respublica christiana*), with state as well as church as its support points, he emphasized that the Roman Catholic Church not only provided safe haven for refugees from the East, but was also the keeper and protector of their legacy.<sup>83</sup>

All these circumstances may be seen as a solid basis for assuming that Pius II obtained the staurotheke with the name of St. Sava in the same way as St. John the Baptist's arm and St. Andrew's head – through Thomas Palaiologos. In that case, of course, the lack of any reference to it in the sources requires explanation. The reason may be hidden in the fact that the relic of the True Cross experienced a high "inflation" in the late medieval West and that, consequently, possessing it ceased being a matter of prestige. There circulated a multitude of "secondary relics", pieces of wood that had purportedly been in contact with the authentic relic.<sup>84</sup> It is not quite irrelevant to our subject that an "expert" assessment of the authenticity of relics of Constantinopolitan provenance, including that of the True Cross (carried out in 1359), is associated with Siena.<sup>85</sup> Quite telling is the view of Bernardino of Siena, Pius II's contemporary and fellow citizen, who scornfully and harshly criticized current forms of devotion to the True Cross, overtly calling those who practised them swindlers. He stated that so many pieces were in circulation that, if they were piled together, not even six pairs of oxen would be enough to pull them. He also left us an interesting piece of information; namely, that these replicas of the True Cross were being made from a special, Egyptian, fire-resistant fig wood.<sup>86</sup>

Anyway, a hypothetical reconstruction of the history of the staurotheke from Pienza, based on what we know at present, and with an appropriate measure of caution, may

be as follows: in the early decades of the thirteenth century the Archbishop Sava of Serbia acquires some of the most highly valued Christian relics, including the relic of the True Cross, for the cathedral church of Žiča. In the turbulent period around 1290, the treasury of Žiča, and the relic with it, is transferred to Peć, a new seat of the Archbishopric. Sometime in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, after the reconciliation between the Serbian and Byzantine churches, the relic gets enshrined in a new staurotheke which bears the inscription that may be seen as a condensed policy statement of the Serbian Patriarchate. In the last and tumultuous period of Serbia's independence, the relic comes into the possession of the ruling Branković house, in whose realm the Patriarchate of Peć is situated. Facing the Ottoman threat, the widow of Lazar Branković entrusts the staurotheke to her father Thomas Palaiologos, Despot of Morea. The Despot takes it with him to Italy and consigns it, with other relics, to the Pope Pius II. Eventually, the staurotheke ends its journey in Pienza. During the Serbian phase of its history, the relic, apart from a cultic role, served the goals of the royal ideology and of the policy of the autocephalous Serbian Church. It does not seem to have lost its *virtus* and ideological potential even in its new, historically and culturally different environment.

Photographs taken by Prof. Gabriele Fattorini  
Translated by Marina Adamović Kulenović

<sup>81</sup> G. Chironi, *Pius II and the formation of the ecclesiastical institutions in Pienza*, in: *Pius II "el più expeditivo pontifice". Selected studies on Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405–1464)*, ed. Z. Von Martels, A. Vanderjagt, Leiden 2003, 171–185.

<sup>82</sup> Mergiali-Sahas, *Byzantine Emperors and Holy Relics*, 58; Klein, *Eastern Objects and Western Desires*, 306–309.

<sup>83</sup> *Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)*, 5–7 and passim.

<sup>84</sup> Toussaint, *Die Kreuzreliquie und die Konstruktion von Heiligkeit*, 59.

<sup>85</sup> G. Derenzini, *Le reliquie da Constantinopoli a Siena*, in: *L'oro di Siena. Il tesoro di Santa Maria della Scala*, ed. L. Belloso, Siena 1996, 67–78; v. Klein, *Eastern Objects and Western Desires*, 308–309 (with sources and literature).

<sup>86</sup> Toussaint, *Die Kreuzreliquie und die Konstruktion von Heiligkeit*, 59–60; on the reception of the cult of the True Cross in the West, v. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*, 175–282.

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## Ставротека српског порекла у Пијенци

Даница Поповић

Реликвијар Часног крста с натписом на старосрпском језику који се данас чува у тосканском граду Пијенци (*Museo Diocesano*) репрезентативно је дело средњовековног златарства и историјски извор првога реда у контексту како српске тако и италијанске повести. Упркос томе, реликвијар је остао на маргинама научног интересовања. Истраживање ставротекe обављено је 2012. године у оквиру рада на монографији о манастиру Жичи, у организацији Републичког завода за заштиту споменика културе. Будући да реликвијар досад није прописно публикован, у раду се најпре доноси његов детаљан опис.

Реликвијар је у облику издуженог двокраког крста с ручком, а конструисан је тако што је преко дрвене подлоге превучена метална оплата од позлаћеног сребра. Делови реликвије Часног крста видљиви су кроз два крстолика отвора на чеоној страни крста, око којих су урезана слова криптограма: Ϝ ϫ ϝ π [Ϝ(ως) Χ(ριστοϹ) Ϝ(αίνει) π(αίν) – *Свeтлoстī Хрисџова обасјава све*] око доњег, а **Is-hs-nl-kz** [I(ησοϹ)ς Χ(ριστοϹ)ς νικᾶ – *Исус Хрисџос љобећује*] око горњег.

Метална оплата крста садржи раскошан украс типа *cloisonné*-а, само без испуне. Чини га сложена композиција у виду густог, симетрично компонованог орнаментa, сачињеног од геометријских и флоралних мотива. На укрсници кракова крста, преко реликвије, налази се крупан горски кристал, док су обе стране ставротекe украшене драгим камењем — сафиром и аметистом — и бисерима. Дршка реликвијара, урађена од златног лима, носи натпис калиграфских својстава, изведен у техници искуцавања: Sav<a> pr%q&vi ar(q)hi ep(i sko)pq <i> patri arhq srqpqski („Сава, први архиепископ и патријарх српски“).

Реликвијар, намењен чувању честица Часног крста, припада типу крста с двоструким крацима (*crux gemina*), који се сматра карактеристичним обликом византијске ставротекe. Тај облик је с временом, посебно на Западу, стекао парадигматску вредност и био је сматран потврдом аутентичности, то јест византијског порекла реликвије. Други важан типолошки елемент јесте продужени доњи крак крста, у виду ручке, што указује на функцију ставротекe — коришћене, судећи по писаним изворима, приликом литургије, у процесијама, као и обредима на празник Уздизања Часног крста. Битан елемент реликвијара из Пијенце јесте његов украс. Матери-

јал од којег је начињен, а то су злато и позлаћено сребро, као и орнаментика *cloisonné*-а, представљао је уобичајену метафору небеских обитавалишта и Дрвета живота усред расцветалог раја. Избор и распоред драгог камења такође су веома индикативни. Тумачење њиховог смисла почива на античком а потом и средњовековном схватању природе и значења драгог камења, сматраног живом материјом рајског порекла, која је и након првог греха задржала своју иманентну, богомдану делотворност. Распоред и број драгуља на ставротечи из Пијенце — по шест драгих каменова и двадесет четири бисера са чеоне и задње стране — доследно следе поруке и нумеролошке обрасце *Ойкривења Јовановог*, у којем се говори о дванаест врста драгог камења, темеља на којима почивају зидови Вишњег Јерусалима (Откр. 21, 18, 21), док бисери означавају дванаест капија Небеског града. Према симболици драгог камења, сафир је због особене плаве боје указивао на небеску и духовну сферу, док је љубичаста аметист словио за симбол човековог будућег васкрса и вечног живота. Горски кристал, најцењенији међу драгуљима, представљао је моћан симбол захваљујући својој прозирности и чистоћи. Тумачен је као метафора божанске светлости и био је упоређиван с бестелесним анђелима и преобразеним, одуховљеним телом Христовим. На ставротечи из Пијенце кристал на укрсници кракова представља њен смисаони фокус: он не само што оптички повећава реликвију Часног крста већ, пратећи криптограм, непосредно алудира на „светлост Христову“ као извор вечне, нестворене светлости. Као и када је реч о другим реликвијарима, тако су и овде злато, бисери и драго камење били носиоци сложених значења, у контексту хришћанске теологије и егзегезе. У Часном дрвету била је садржана реална Христова *praesentia*, док су злато и светлуцаво разнобојно драго камење били препознатљиво знамење раја и Небеског Јерусалима. Са становишта рецепције и „естетских“ схватања епохе, такав систем декорације имао је снажно „перформативно“ дејство, које је почивало на особеној „синестетској“ визији — полихромији и полиморфији материје, као и динамичним светлосним ефектима — чија је сврха да верника посредством видљиве и тактилне материје транспонује у невидљиву, спиритуалну реалност и тако му приближи лепоту и савршенство раја.

Стилске и техничке одлике ставротекe из Пијенце пружају поуздане основе за одређивање времена њеног

настанка захваљујући блиским аналогијама са скупином златних и сребрних окова византијских икона које се чувају у атоским манастирима Ватопеду и Великој лаври, а које потичу из друге половине и с краја XIV века. Њихов заједнички именитељ није само технички поступак (типа *cloisonné*, без испуне) већ је то и уобичајени орнаментални репертоар који се састоји од геометријских елемената — кругова, квадрата и ромбова испуњених мотивима као што су палмете, срцолики украси, розете и различити флорални орнаменти. Тај тип украса карактеристичан је искључиво за златарске радове из доба Палеолога, а на основу високог техничког квалитета и естетских вредности окови се сматрају делом цариградских радионица или престоничких мајстора који су деловали у Солуну или на Светој гори.

За датовање крста из Пијенце једнако упориште пружа и садржина натписа у којем се помиње „Сава, први архиепископ и патријарх српски“. Тај податак у раду је подробно размотрен у контексту историје култа Часног крста у средњовековној Србији. За његово утемељење највећа заслуга припада светом Сави Српском и његовим програмским активностима у вези с првим задужбинама Немањића — Студеницом, Хиландаром и Жичом. Изнета је такође претпоставка о томе да је реликвија Часног крста у ставротечи из Пијенце првобитно припадала жичкој ризници, чију је судбину поделила крајем XIII века, када су, због несигурности која је завладала у северним областима државе, многе функције архиепископије пренете у ново седиште код Пећи. Чињеница да је у натпису Сава Српски означен не само на уобичајен начин, као архиепископ, већ и као патријарх у раду је тумачена по аналогији са истоветном титулом коју садржи натпис око његовог репрезентативног портрета насликаног изнад такозваног престола светог Саве у припрати Пећке патријаршије. Смисао таквог решења разматран је у контексту политичких и црквених прилика у српским земљама након измирења српске и византијске цркве 1375. године, када је српској цркви признат ранг патријаршије. У том смислу, ставротеча из Пијенце представљала би непосредан одраз програма српске цркве, која је свој ауторитет градила на светости и наслеђу свог оснивача. С обзиром на познате чињенице и околности, изнета је претпоставка да је жичка реликвија Часног крста, која је крајем XIII века пренета у Пећ, негде у другој половини или крајем XIV века добила нов реликвијар. Његов поручилац, по свој прилици, био је актуелни српски патријарх, који није пропустио да у натпису сачува сећање на правог

дародавца светиње, уједно и оног који је био трајан узор свим потоњим архијерејима.

Иако је познија историја ставротече из Пијенце скопчана с низом отворених питања и непознаница, могуће је изложити хипотетичну реконструкцију путева њеног напуштања Србије и приспећа у Италију по аналогији са судбином Претечине деснице, која је такође била део најпре жичке ризнице, а потом пећке. На основу писаних извора зна се да је у последњем, метежном раздобљу српске државности Претечина десница доспела у посед владарског дома Бранковића, на чијој се територији налазила Пећка патријаршија. Пред турском опасношћу удовица Лазара Бранковића предала је ставротечу морејском деспоту Томи Палеологу, свом оцу, који је, тек нешто доцније, такође кренуо у избеглиштво, ка Италији. Са собом је понео најважније драгоцености, међу њима и реликвије — Претечину десницу и главу светог Андреје — које је, за богату надокнаду, уступио папи Пију II (1405–1464). Тај знаменити човек, политичар и хуманиста, иницијатор крсташког рата против Османлија и заговорник јединственог хришћанског комонвелта, истицао се и као чувар и баштиник православног света, због чега је имао посебан однос и према његовим светињама. Део главе светог Андреје даровао је цркви Светог Петра у Риму, а Претечину десницу Сијени, граду из којег је потекла његова породица. Познато је такође да је део реликвије главе светог Андреје папа поконио Пијенци, граду у којем је рођен и који је понео његово име. Био је то програмски потез, у функцији стварања бискупског седишта и идеалног града, оличења урбанистичке лепоте и хармоније. Упркос изостанку писаних сведочанстава, разложно је претпоставити да је ставротечу са именом светог Саве Српског Пије II прибавио из истог извора као и Претечину десницу и главу светог Андреје. Разлог за изостанак њеног помена могао би лежати у чињеници да је у раздобљу позног средњег века управо реликвија Часног крста на Западу доживела велику „инфлацију“, због чега је њено поседовање престало да буде питање престижа.

Након дугог путовања ставротеча је завршила у Пијенци. У српском раздобљу своје повести та реликвија је, поред важне култне улоге коју је имала, била и у непосредној функцији владарске идеологије, као и програма аутокефалне српске цркве. Свој идеолошки потенцијал чини се да није изгубила ни у свом новом и измењеном историјском и културном амбијенту.