

EARLY CHRISTIAN GRAVE PAINTINGS IN NIŠ BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

On account of time constraints we can offer here only select examples, and unfortunately cannot consider greater detail of the monuments in their entirety.

Let us begin with the crypt with the image of an anchor (Fig. 1).¹ On the crypt's ceiling is a sphere (diameter of 10.5 cm) encircling a laurel wreath and a Christogram with Alpha and Omega (Fig. 2). Similar décor is in a grave in Vimiacium/Kostolac (Fig. 3),² in Grave No. 4 of the necropolis at Sv. Sofija in Serdica/Sofija,³ several in Thessaloniki (in Grave 89 of the east necropolis as well as in Graves 46, 53 and 57 in the west necropolis),⁴ and the easternmost area of the southeastern necropolis of Chersonesos at Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula (Fig. 4).⁵ Similarly, they are found in great numbers in the West on grave panels (Fig. 5) as well as on sarcophagi, such as the sarcophagus of Archbishop Theodorus in S.Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna (Fig. 6), the Prince or Sarigüzel sarcophagus in Istanbul⁶ and especially on the Passion sarcophagi (Fig. 7).⁷ It is also used in the northern regions of the Roman Empire,

¹ Complete details in M. Rakocija, *Painting in the Crypt with an Anchor in Niš*. In: M. Rakocija (Ed.), Ниш и Византија [Niš & Byzantium Symposium] 7. Ниш [Niš] 2009, 87 – 105.

² See M. Korać, *Slikarstvo Viminacijuma* (Serbian, English, German), Beograd 2007, 35.

³ In R. Pillinger – V. Popova – B. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Wandmalereien Bulgariens (Bant 21)*, Vienna 1999, 62 – 64 and Pl. 66, Fig. 125.

⁴ Compare E. Μάρκη, *Η νεκρόπολη της Θεσσαλονίκης στους υστερορωμαϊκούς και παλαιοχριστιανικούς χρόνους (μέσα του 3ου έως μέσα του 8ου αι. μ. Χ.)* (ADelt Demosieumata 95). Αθήναι 2006, Pl. 6 below and Pl. 23 above, 19 above and 14 below.

⁵ М. В. Ступко [M. V. Stupko] – Е. Я. Туровский [E. Ja. Turovskij] – А. А. Филиппенко [A. A. Filippenko], *О судьбах расписных склепов первых христиан Херсонеса* [On the painted graves of the first Christians in Chersones]. Sacrum et profanum 3 (2007) 189 – 192, esp. Fig. 1.

⁶ See A. Pasinli, *Istanbul Archaeological Museum*, İstanbul 4 2001, 142, No. 156.

⁷ Compare. A. Saggiorato, *I sarcophagi paleocristiani con scene di passione* (Studi di antichità Cristiane 1), Bologna 1968.

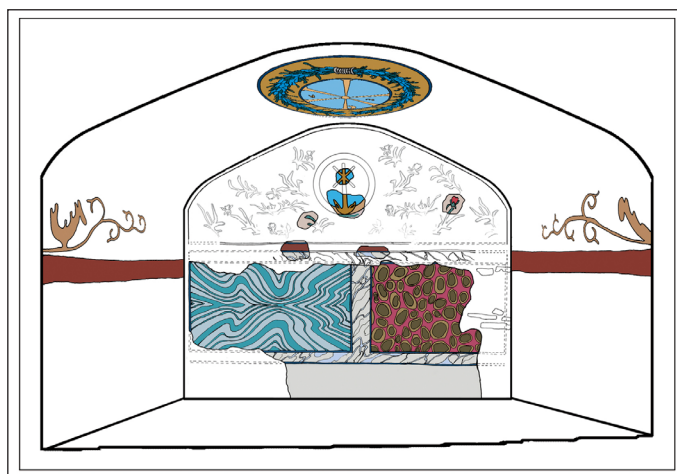


Fig. 1 Niš, Crypt with Anchor, Drawing J. Rakocija and M. Dimanić (in M. Rakocija [note 1], Fig. 27)

Сл. 1 Ниш, Гробница са сидром, цртеж Ј. Ракоција и М. Диманић (у М. Ракоција [напомена 1], сл. 27)



Fig. 2 Niš, Crypt with Anchor, Ceiling (Detail) (Photo: M. Rakocija)

Сл. 2 Ниш, Гробница са сидром, Таваница (детал) (фотографија: М. Ракоција)



Fig. 3 Kostolac, Early Christian Grave: Christogram (in M. Korać [note 2], 35)

Сл. 3 Костолац, ранохришћанска гробница: Христограм (у М. Кораћ [напомена 2], 35)

Fig. 4 Chersonesos, Grave 2003, (in: M.B. Ступко [M. V. Stupko] et. al. [note 5], Fig. 1)

Сл. 4 Херсонесос (Chersonesos), гробница 2003., (in: М. В. Ступко [M. V. Stupko] et. al. [напомена 5], сл. 1)



Fig. 5 Rome, MPC: Grave panel of Seberus, (in F. Mancinelli, *Römische Katakomben und Urchristentum*. Florenz 1981, Fig. 111)

Сл. 5 Рим, MPC: гробна плоча Себеруса (Seberus), (у F. Mancinelli, *Römische Katakomben und Urchristentum*, Florenz 1981, сл. 111)

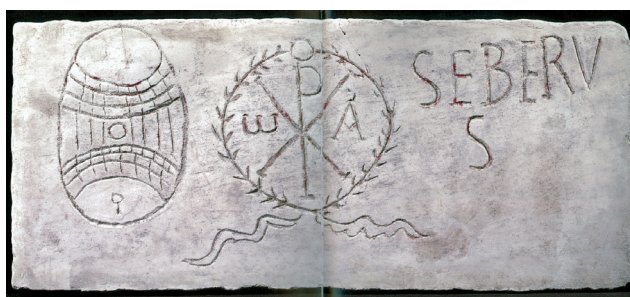


Fig. 6 Ravenna, S. Apollinare in Classe: Sarkophagus of Archbishop Theodorus, (Source: postcard)

Сл. 6 Равена (Ravenna), S. Apollinare in Classe: саркофар архиепископа Теодоруса (Theodorus), (извор: разгледница)





Fig. 7 Rom, MPC: Inv.-No. 171, (Photo: R. Pillinger)

Сл. 7 Рим, MPC: Inv.-No. 171, (фотографија: R. Pillinger)



Fig. 8 London, British Museum: Lullingstone Baptisterium (Detail), (in A. Donati [a cura di], *Dalla terra alle genti. La diffusione del cristianesimo nei primi secoli*. Mostra Rimini, Palazzi dell'Arengo e del Podestà 31 marzo – 1° settembre 1996. Milano 1996, Fig. 110)

Сл. 8 Лондон, Британски музеј: баптистеријум Лулингстоун (Lullingstone) (детал), (у А. Donati [a cura di], *Dalla terra alle genti. La diffusione del cristianesimo nei primi secoli*. Mostra Rimini, Palazzi dell'Arengo e del Podestà 31 marzo – 1° settembre 1996. Milano 1996, Сл. 110)



Fig. 9 Silistra, Archaeological Museum: Ring with Anchor, (in G. Atanassov [note 10], Fig. 2)

Сл. 9 Силистра (Silistra), Археолошки музеј: прстен са сидром, (у G. Atanassov [напомена 10], Сл. 2)



Fig. 10 Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla: Grave panel with Anchor, (Source: postcard)

Сл. 10 Рим, катакомбе Присциле (Priscilla): гробна плоча са сидром, (извор: разгледница)

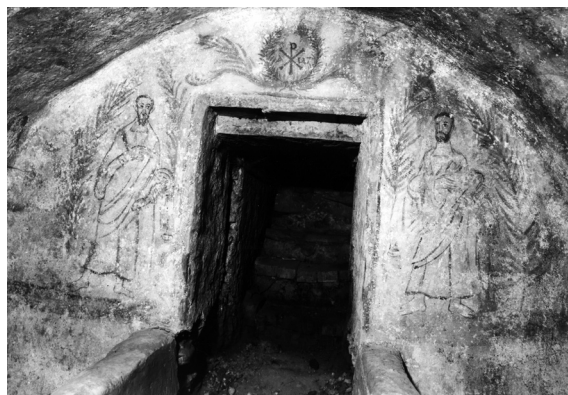


Fig. 11 Niš, Grave with Peter and Paul: East wall, (Photo: Niš, Narodni Muzej)

Сл. 11 Ниш, гробница са Петром и Павлом: источни зид, (фотографија: Ниш, Народни музеј)



Fig. 12 Niš, Grave with Peter and Paul: West wall, (Photo: Niš, Narodni Muzej)

Сл. 12 Ниш, гробница са Петром и Павлом: западни зид, (фотографија: Ниш, Народни музеј)



Fig. 13 Niš, Grave with Peter and Paul: East wall (Paul), (in M. Ракоција [M. Rakocija], *Нова сазнања о ранохришћанској прошлости Ниша* [New insight into the early – Christian past of Niš], In: M. Rakocija (Ed.), *Ниш и Византија* [Niš & Byzantium Symposium] VI, Ниш [Niš] 2008, [note 20], 52, Fig. 4)

Сл. 13 Ниш, гробница са Петром и Павлом: источни зид (Павле), (у М.Ракоција [M. Rakocija], *Нова сазнања о ранохришћанској прошлости Ниша* [New insight into the early – Christian past of Niš], In: M. Rakocija (Ed.), *Ниш и Византија* [Niš & Byzantium Symposium] VI, Ниш [Niš] 2008, [напомена 20], 52, Сл. 4

as evidenced by the baptistery of Lullingstone (Fig. 8).⁸ Such décor is also in the burial chamber in Sopiana/Pécs, which will be addressed later – though, like on the Sarigüzel sarcophagus, the apocalyptic letters Alpha and Omega are missing.

This image expresses the hope in the eternal life through Christ.

Returning to the grave in Niš, we see in the lunette on the west wall another anchor cross in the midst of roses. According to the instructions of Clement of Alexandria,⁹ this is frequently found over the signet images on gems and rings, such as the example made out of gold from a grave in Durostorum/Silistra (Fig. 9).¹⁰ It's likewise found on grave panels in the Roman cemeteries, as in the catacombs of Priscilla (Fig. 10).

The hope of the deceased through the resurrected Christ is expressed here as well.

The paintings of the tomb portraying Peter and Paul in the necropolis of Jagodin Mala are unfortunately very poorly preserved today. Color replicas are located in the national museum of Niš.¹¹

They depicted four unidentified figures: one on either side of the entrance, located at the eastern wall of the burial chamber (Fig. 11), and one on either side of the niche on the western wall (Fig. 12). The figures wear long white tunics with red clavi and pallia (Figs. 13 – 14). A Christogram within a laurel wreath, similar to the one on the ceiling in the previously-discussed grave with the anchor, decorates the wall above the entrance (Fig. 15); another is located over the niche. A garden, bordered by a fence of herms and continuing upwards onto the vault (Fig. 16), decorates the longitudinal walls.¹² It was painted with birds and grapevines bearing grape clusters (as in Grave No. 4 of the necropolis of Serdica around Sv. Sofija in Sofija,¹³ or on the vault mosaic of the mausoleum of the Julians in the necropolis under St. Peter's in Rome¹⁴). The archaeologist

⁸ Further in B. Brenk, *Die Christianisierung der spätrömischen Welt, Stadt, Land, Haus, Kirche und Kloster in frühchristlicher Zeit* (Spätantike – Frühes Christentum – Byzanz. Kunst im ersten Jahrtausend. Reihe B: Studien und Perspektiven 10), Wiesbaden 2003, 73 – 74 and 303 (Pl.).

⁹ Paed. 3,1 (GCS 1, 1905, 270). See also L. Eizenhöfer, *Die Siegelbildvorschläge des Clemens von Alexandrien und die älteste christliche Literatur*, JbAC 3 (1960) 51 – 69 and H.-D. Altendorf, *Die Siegelbildvorschläge bei Clemens Alexandrinus*, ZNW 58 (1967) 129 – 138.

¹⁰ In G. Atanasov, *Zur Topographie des frühchristlichen Durostorum (Silistra, Bulgarien) im 4. – 6. Jahrhundert*, MiChA 14 (2008) 27 – 52, Fig. 2.

¹¹ Compare M. Ракоција [M. Rakocija], *Рановизантијска гробница на свод код села Клисуре поред Ниша и кратак осврт на проблем за сведених гробница* [An Early Byzantine Vault Tomb in the Village of Klissura at Niš and a Brief Retrospect on the Problem of Vaulted Tombs], In: Ниш и Византија [Niš & Byzantium Symposium] 2, Ниш [Niš] 2004, 141 – 164 – with the most important older literature.

¹² See also M. Ракоција [M. Rakocija], *О параетној плочи из Ниша, пореклу и типологији палеовизантијских презграда* [On the Parapet Slab from Niš and on the Origin and Typology of Early-Byzantine Partitions], In: Ниш и Византија [Niš & Byzantium Symposium] 4, Ниш [Niš] 2006, 95 – 111.

¹³ Complete details in the literature cited in note 3 above, Pl. 66, Fig. 127.

¹⁴ On this compare P. Zander, *The Necropolis under St. Peter's Basilica in the Vati-*

Fig. 14 Niš,
Grave with Peter
and Paul: East
wall (Peter and
Paul), Replica in
Museum, (Photo:
M. Podesva)

Сл. 14 Ниш,
гробница са
Петром и Павлом:
источни зид
(Петар и Павле),
реплика у Музеју,
(фотографија: М.
Podesva)



Fig. 15 Niš, Grave
with Peter and
Paul: East wall
(Christogram),
(Photo: R.
Pillinger)

Сл. 15 Ниш,
гробница са
Петром и
Павлом: источни
зид (Христогам),
(фотографија: R.
Pillinger)



Fig. 16 Niš, Grave
with Peter and
Paul: South wall
(Garden), (Photo:
R. Pillinger)

Сл. 16 Ниш,
гробница са
Петром и
Павлом: јужни
зид (врт),
(фотографија: R.
Pillinger)





Fig. 17 Rome, S. Sebastiano:
Herm Fence, (Photo: PCAS)

Сл. 17 Рим, С. Себастијано (S. Sebastiano): Херме на огради, (фотографија: PCAS)

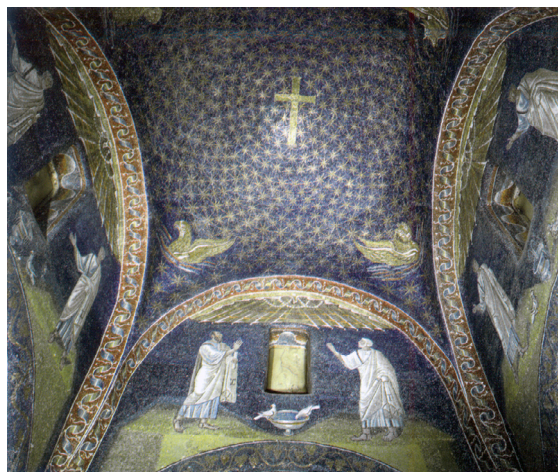


Fig. 18 Ravenna, So-called Mausoleum of Galla Placidia: Ceiling, (in C. Rizzardi, Ravenna. Otto monumenti. Patrimonio dell'Umanità. L'iscrizione di Ravenna nella World Heritage List dell'Unesco. Ravenna s. a. 18)

Сл. 18 Равена, такозвани маузолеј Гале Плацидија: Таваница, (у C. Rizzardi, *Ravenna. Otto monumenti. Patrimonio dell'Umanità. L'iscrizione di Ravenna nella World Heritage List dell'Unesco, Ravenna s. a. 18*)



Fig. 19 Niš, Grave with Peter and Paul: West wall (Replica), (Photo: M. Podesva)

Сл. 19 Ниш, гробница са Петром и Павлом: западни зид (копија), (фотографија: M. Podesva)



Fig. 20 Pécs, Burial Chamber with Peter and Paul: North wall, (in K. Hudak [note 23], Fig. 4)

Сл. 20 Печуј, гробница са Петром и Павлом: северни зид, (у K. Hudak [напомена 23], Сл. 4)

L. Mirković¹⁵ and F. Gerke¹⁶ identified this as paradise. The latter offers a number of comparative examples, such as those from Roman catacombs like San Sebastiano (Fig. 17). According to F.W. Deichmann¹⁷ the herm fence represents the actual garden design,¹⁸ the kepotaphium¹⁹. The two figures at the entrance were identified as Peter and Paul (the former with a *rotulus* in his left hand). The two other figures on the west side remain unknown. Noteworthy are first of all the palm branches, which already led M. Rakocija²⁰ to think of the saints. Dj. Bošković²¹ interpreted the figures as the deceased. I. Nikolajević also followed this interpretation.²² The deceased, however, are most commonly portrayed in bust portraits, in images of their occupation, frequently as orans figures, as well as in meal or scenic settings.²³ Furthermore, four comparable lunettes (Fig. 18) in the so-called mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna more closely resemble the apostles. Roses bloom above the niche (Fig. 19). The figure standing to the left points with both hands to the Christogram. An almost identical composition is in Sopiana/Pécs (Fig. 20).²⁴ There Peter also stands to the right of the Christogram (Figs. 21 – 22) and Paul to the left. Like the figures in Niš, here too both wear white tunics with red clavi and pallia as well as *rotuli* (no longer

can, Città del Vaticano 2009, 99.

¹⁵ Л. Мирковић [L. Mirković], *Старохришћанска гробница у Нишу* [An Ancient Christian Grave at Niš], *Старинар* [Starinar] N. S. V-VI, (1954 – 1955), Београд 1956, 53 – 72 and idem, *La nécropole paléochrétienne de Niš*. *AJug* 2 (1956) 85 – 100.

¹⁶ *Die Wandmalereien der neugefundenen Grabkammer in Pécs (Fünfkirchen), Ihre Stellung in der römischen Kunstgeschichte*, In: *Neue Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte des 1. Jahrtausends* 1. Baden-Baden 1952, 115 – 157 and idem, *Die Wandmalereien der Petrus-Paulus-Katakomben in Pécs (Südungarn)*. Ebd. 2. Baden-Baden 1954, 147 – 199. Compare here the sharp criticism by F. W. Deichmann, *ByzZ* 47 (1954) 432 – 435.

¹⁷ *ByzZ* 50 (1957) 561.

¹⁸ Also in the Villa of Armira in Ivajlovgrad. Further in Я. Младенова [Ja. Mladenova], *Античната вила Армира край Ивайловград* [The Ancient Villa Armira at Ivajlovgrad], София [Sofija] 1991.

¹⁹ For more details see И. Кузмановић Нововић [I. Kuzmanović Novović], *Симболика херми у сликарству ранохришћанских гробница* [Symbolik von Hermen im Bild frühchristlicher Gräber], In: *Ниш и Византија* [Niš & Byzantium Symposium] 9. Ниш [Niš] 2011, 65 – 72 and I. Поповић, *Motive "paradise fence" on the frescos and graves in Jagodin Mala (Naissus) and Čalma (Sirmium)*, in this volume.

²⁰ М. Ракоција [M. Rakocija], *Нова сазнања о ранохришћанској прошлости Ниша* [New Insight into the Early-Christian Past of Niš], In: *Ниш и Византија* [Niš & Byzantium Symposium] 6, Ниш [Niš] 2008, 45 – 58.

²¹ Д.ж. Бошковић [Dž. Bošković], *Еще несколько слов о раннехристианской стеной живописи в Нишском склепе* [Additional Comments on the Early Christian Wall Painting in a Grave from Niš], *ВизВрем* [VizVrem] N. S. 15 (1959) 144 – 147.

²² *Grabanlagen und Begräbniskulte in Moesien aus frühchristlicher Zeit*. *JbÖByz* 29 (1980) 303 – 314, esp. 310.

²³ Further in J. Dresken-Weiland, *Sulla rappresentazione di defunti nei sarcofagi paleocristiani*, *CorsiRavenna* 41 (1994) 109 – 130 and N. Zimmermann, *Verstorbene im Bild. Zur Intention römischer Katakombenmalerei*, *JbAC* 50 (2007) 154 – 179 and Fig. 18 – 26.

²⁴ On this see K. Hudak, *The Iconographical Program of the Wallpaintings in the Saint Peter and Paul Burial Chamber of Sopiana (Pécs)*, *MiChA* 15 (2009) 47 – 76 – with the most important older literature.



Fig. 21 Niš, Grave with Peter and Paul: East wall (Peter), (Photo: Niš, Narodni Muzej)

Fig. 21 Ниш, гробница са Петром и Павлом: источни зид (Петар), (фотографија: Ниш, Народни музеј)



Fig. 22 Pécs, Burial Chamber with Peter and Paul: North wall (Peter), (in K. Hudak [note 23], Fig. 5)

Fig. 22 Печуј гробница са Петром и Павлом: северни зид (Петар), (у К. Hudak [напомена 23], Сл. 5)



Fig. 23 Rome, Pontian Catacomb: Martyr crypt, (in V. Ficocchi Nicolai et. al. [note 30], Fig. 75)

Сл. 23 Рим, Понтијанова катакомба: крипта мученика, (у V. Ficocchi Nicolai et. al. [напомена 30], Сл. 75)



Fig. 24 Rome, SS. Giovanni e Paolo: Confessio, (Photo: R. Pillinger)

Сл. 24 Рим, SS. Giovanni e Paolo: Confessio, (фотографија: R. Pillinger)

visible today). Painted on the ceiling are f o u r (!) bust figures, which K. Hudak wishes to identify as the *IV coronati*.²⁵ Yet it is noteworthy that they worked in the Pannonian stone quarries (perhaps even in those of today's Fruška Gora).²⁶ This would imply that these saints also have a great relevance for Niš, since as early as the fourth century the city is named by Victricius of Rotomagus / Rouen²⁷ as a martyr city alongside Constantinople, Antioch, Thessaloniki and Rome; a martyr church²⁸ whose saints are unknown to us is also here. K. Hudak further sees Peter and Paul²⁹ as defenders of the true faith, namely orthodoxy, against Arianism. Even this had found its way to Niš.³⁰ In both cases (Sopianae and Naissus) its identification as a martyr crypt is suggestive especially because both have a niche at the terminating wall whose determination is not clear to this day, but would be consistent with a martyr cult on account of the storage of relics. In such cases a relic of original bones is not an absolute necessity, for it could also be a touchable relic in the form of cloths or similar items. Comparable situations are, for example, in Rome at the tomb of the Apostle Peter,³¹ in a martyr crypt of the Pontian catacombs (Fig. 23),³² and in the so-called Confession under SS. Giovanni e Paolo (Fig. 24)³³ as well as in the so-called mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna which was perhaps a memorial,³⁴ though in this example we are dealing with windows.

In closing it must be reminded that all comparative examples offered here for the grave painting in Niš have clearly demonstrated that there are, in reality, no iconographical differences between East and West in early Christian art³⁵.

I would like to thank R. Ohm for the translation into English as well as E. Lässig for proofreading.

²⁵ For an initial introduction into the problem compare LCI 8 (1976) Sp. 235 – 238 s. v. Quattuor coronati (H. Basjir-Hecht). An article of L. Nagy is in preparation.

²⁶ J. Maksimović, *Fruškogorski mučenici* (Martyrs of Fruška Gora). In: D. Damjanović (Ed.), 1700 godina svetih srijemskih mučenika, Zbornik radova s međunarodnog simpozija o 1700. obljetnici Sirmijsko-panonskih mučenika (304.-2004.), Biblioteka Diakovensia, Studije 17, Đakovo 2011, 269 - 278.

²⁷ De laude sanctorum 11 (CCSL 64 [1985] 86): *An aliter in Oriente, Constantinopoli, Antiochiae, Thessalonicae, Naisso, Romae, in Italia miseris porrigunt medicinam?*

²⁸ Further in M. Rakocija, *Frühchristliches Niš*, MiChA 17 (2011), 19 - 26.

²⁹ For a general overview compare A. Donati (a cura di), *Pietro e Paolo. La storia, il culto, la memoria nei primi secoli* (Mostra, Roma, Palazzo della Cancelleria 30 giugno – 10 dicembre 2000), Milano 2000.

³⁰ According to Hilarius, Collectanea Antiariana Parisina A IV 1, 3, 4 and 1, 27, 4 (CSEL 65 [1916] 51, 18 and 66, 10) Bishop Cyriacus of Naissus adhered to this belief.

³¹ See note 14 above.

³² In V. Ficocchi Nicolai – F. Bisconti – D. Mazzoleni, *Roms christliche Katakomben. Geschichte – Bilderwelt – Inschriften*, Regensburg 2 2000, 65, Fig. 75.

³³ See B. Brenk, note 8 above, 98 – 105 and 326 – 329 (Pl.).

³⁴ Further in F. W. Deichmann, *Ravenna, Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes II. Kommentar 1*, Wiesbaden 1974, 61 – 90.

³⁵ For more details see M. Kaplarević, *Frühchristliche Malerei in Serbien*, Dipl. Wien 2012 (work in progress).

Abbreviations

ADelt	Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον
AJug	Archaeologia Jugoslavica
Bant	Schriften der Balkan-Kommission der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, antiquarische Abteilung
CorsiRavenna	Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina
ByzZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
JbAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JbÖByz	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik
LCI	Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie, E. Kirschbaum u. a. (Hg.)
MiChA	Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie
MPC	Museo Pio Cristiano
PCAS	Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra
ВизВрем [VizVrem]	Византийский Временник [Vizantijskij Vremennik]
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche

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РАНОХРИШЋАНСКО ГРОБНО СЛИКАРСТВО У НИШУ
ИЗМЕЂУ ИСТОКА И ЗАПАДА

Кроз два одабрана примера, гробнице са сидром и једне из некрополе у Јагодин мали са Петром и Павлом овај рад укратко (једноставно из разлога временског ограничења) демонстрира да не постоје важеће иконографске разлике између Истока и Запада у ранохришћанском гробном сликарству.