

BEAST FROM THE EAST: THE GRIFFIN'S JOURNEY TO DALMATIAN ELEVENTH-CENTURY SCULPTURE

Magdalena Skoblar

M. Skoblar
Independent scholar
E-mail: magdalena.skoblar@alumni.york.ac.uk

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This article argues that the introduction of griffins in Dalmatian eleventh-century sculpture was sparked by the increased exposure of the region's main ports to Byzantine and/or Islamic silks, which frequently featured these mythical creatures. This exchange was driven by Venetian merchants who benefitted from the trading privileges granted to Venice by Byzantine emperors in the tenth and the eleventh centuries. The documented routes of two individuals, travelling from Zadar to Constantinople and from Split to Antioch respectively, point to potential direct purchases from these two centres of silk production and trade. The article concludes with an examination of the griffin's symbolic significance in the carvings under discussion.

Key words: sculpture, griffins, Byzantium, silk, textiles, trade, Zadar, Split, Dalmatia

Nikola Jakšić identified the appearance of griffins in eleventh-century sculpture from the territory of the modern-day Diocese of Zadar as 'an indication of a new medieval bestiary.'¹ My contribution to this volume, which celebrates Professor Jakšić's rich career and insightful research on medieval sculpture, focuses on these fantastic beasts with a winged leonine body and an eagle's head. Although found in early medieval sculpture of France and Italy,² no Dalmatian examples are known from the period before the eleventh century.³ Only in the 1030s, the proposed date for the reconstructed *ciborium* of *proconsul* Gregory at Zadar which features griffins attacking prey (Fig. 1), do we encounter these animals in the carvings decorating churches in the port cities of Zadar and Split. In the tympanum of the portal from the church of St Lawrence at Zadar, dated to the late eleventh century, two griffins flank the central scene of the Ascension of Christ, each with a forepaw raised against a fruit-laden tree (Fig. 2). A strikingly similar piece from Majdan near Split – a fragment of a chancel screen gable with a griffin (Fig. 3) – is part of the same visual language.⁴

¹ N. JAKŠIĆ, *Skulptura u zadarskoj nadbiskupiji od VI. do XII. stoljeća*, in N. Jakšić and E. Hilje (eds.), *Umjetnička baština zadarske nadbiskupije, Kiparstvo I: od IV. do XVI. stoljeća*, Zadar, 2008, p. 31.

² For France, see a seventh-century sarcophagus at Charenton-le-Cher in A. FERDIÈRE and F. PRÉVOT, *Centre: Cher, Eure-et-Loir, Indre, Indre-et-Loire, Loir-et-Cher, Loiret*, in G. Barruol (ed.), *Les premiers monuments chrétiens de la France*, vol. 2, *Sud-Ouest et Centre*, Paris, 1996, p. 82. For Italy, see Sigwald's panel at Cividale from the mid-eighth century in M. BUORA (ed.), *La scultura nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia*, vol. 1, *Dall'epoca romana al gotico*, Pordenone, 1988, p. 222, fig.13.

³ The lintel on the south portal of Split Cathedral with medallions enclosing mythical animals, one of which is a griffin (Fig. 7), has been dated by some scholars to the second half of the seventh or the early eighth century, see T. MARASOVIĆ, *Dalmatia praeromanica: Ranosrednjovjekovno graditeljstvo u Dalmaciji*, vol. 3, *Korpus arhitekture – srednja Dalmacija*, Split, 2011, p. 255, 257–8, fig. 399a–b. A twelfth- or thirteenth-century date was put forward by Ivo Petricioli and Krno Prijatelj, see I. PETRICIOLI, *Pojava romaničke skulpture u Dalmaciji*, Zagreb, 1960, p. 66–7; K. PRIJATELJ and N. GATTIN, *Splitska katedrala*, Zagreb-Split, 1991, p. 17. Ante Milošević dated the jambs to the late eighth century and the lintel to the eleventh, see A. MILOŠEVIĆ, *Un intaglio ligneo altomedievale proveniente da Spalato*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 17, Zagreb-Motovun, 2011, p. 80.

⁴ I. PETRICIOLI, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 60, pl. 20.3; LJ. KARAMAN, *Starohrvatsko groblje na »Majdanu« kod Solina*, Split, 1936, p. 11–16.



Fig. 1. Ciborium of proconsul Gregory, arch with griffin predation, 1030–40, limestone, 153 x 250 cm.
Photo credit: © Archdiocese of Zadar, photo by Zoran Alajbeg

In this article I examine how the griffin might have entered the decorative repertoire of animal motifs in eleventh-century Dalmatian sculpture. My starting point is the entanglement between the griffin and luxury textiles imported from Byzantium and the Islamic lands. Griffins were a stock motif in silks from these territories and I will argue that Dalmatian ports were exposed to this motif with increasing frequency starting with the tenth century. This was due to the activities of Venetian merchants who played a major role in the import of silk fabrics in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The sudden appearance of griffins in the Dalmatian material remains relatively uninvestigated, despite being regarded as indicating a shift towards the beginning of Romanesque sculpture. In 1960 Ivo Petricioli ascribed the workmanship of animals on a set of sculptures from Split and Zadar – *proconsul Gregory's ciborium* among them – to the 'influence of oriental textiles', singling out the outlines of quadrupeds' thighs and birds' wings divided with a line as salient features of that influence.⁵ When referring to the workmanship of all animal figures in early Romanesque Dalmatian sculpture, Petricioli wrote that they reveal the 'apparent influence of oriental fabrics, adopted either directly from textiles themselves or through Byzantine bas reliefs produced under the influence of textile motifs.'⁶ These general statements were not elaborated further in his subsequent publications. In the light of more recent and more specific discussions on Byzantine and Islamic textiles and their mutual entanglements, the time has come to put Petricioli's assessment into perspective.⁷

⁵ I. PETRICIOLI, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 9.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

⁷ A. MUTHESIUS, *Silk, Culture and Being in Byzantium: How far did Precious Cloth Enrich "Memory" and Shape "Culture" Across the Empire (4th–15th centuries)?*, in *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 36, 2015, 345–62; A. MUTHESIUS, *Studies in Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk Weaving*, London, 2008; A. WALKER, *Islamicizing Motifs in Byzantine Lead Seals: Exoticizing Style and the Expression of Identity*, in *Medieval History Journal* 15/2, Bryn Mawr, 2012, p. 381–408.



Fig. 2. Tympanum from the church of St Lawrence, Ascension of Christ, griffins and trees, second half of eleventh century, limestone, 48 x 153 cm. Archaeological Museum, Zadar. Photo credit: © Archdiocese of Zadar, photo by Zoran Alajbeg

While it is difficult to establish whether all animals in early Romanesque Dalmatian sculpture drew on eastern textiles – only an in-depth analysis which involves a thorough examination of all types of fabrics would corroborate or contradict a statement as broad as that – griffins certainly did. They were among an exclusive set of animals – lions, elephants and eagles among them – reserved for decorative patterns on Byzantine and Islamic silks produced during the period corresponding to the Western Middle Ages. Griffin silks have been preserved in cathedral treasuries and abbeys across Europe. Pairs of griffins on the silk of St Chaffre at Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille (Fig. 4), a Byzantine tenth- or eleventh-century work, carry small quadrupeds in their beaks, while those on the tenth-century silk at Sion (Sitten) Cathedral treasury are rearing, addorsed and framed in medallions.⁸

The reason behind the survival of Byzantine silks in European church treasuries lies in the fact that they were used for wrapping relics in the medieval West. The silk of St Siviard at Sens Cathedral, dated to the late eleventh or early twelfth century, features medallions with beaded borders within which single griffins stand against a vegetal background.⁹ The tenth-century Byzantine silk in the Cathedral Treasury at Sion (Sitten) is also decorated with medallions encircling



Fig. 3. Fragment of chancel screen gable from Majdan, griffin with a pinecone and cross, second half of eleventh century, limestone, 34 x 25.5 cm. Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments, Split. Photo by Zoran Alajbeg

⁸ For the St Chaffre silk at Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille, see A. MUTHESIUS, *Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk* (*op. cit.*, n. 7), p. 349, pl. 6; for the griffin silk from Sion (Sitten) Cathedral, see A. MUTHESIUS, *Silk, Culture and Being in Byzantium* (*op. cit.*, n. 7), p. 353, fig. 5.

⁹ H. C. EVANS and W. D. WIXOM (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843–1261*, New York, 1997, p. 226.



Fig. 4. *Shroud of St Chaffre, griffin predation, tenth or eleventh century, silk, 65 x 52 cm. Abbey of St Chaffre, Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille. Photo by Julianna Lees*

addressed griffins.¹⁰ In the Adriatic, a griffin silk can be found at Ancona, directly across the sea from Zadar and Split, where a two-metre-long piece with rampant and addorsed griffins set in medallions, dated to the tenth or eleventh century, was used to wrap the relics of St Cyriacus, the patron saint of the city.¹¹

It was the luxury nature of silk and the fact that the West had no sericulture or silk weaving before the late eleventh and the twelfth century that made it an extremely desirable product, with imperial, royal and high-class-related connotations. In the early middle ages and as late as the eleventh century, silk could only be obtained in Byzantium and the Islamic lands, for example Syria, Persia and Egypt, or purchased from merchants who traded there. During this period and up to the thirteenth century, it is almost impossible to differentiate between Islamic and Byzantine patterns.¹²

¹⁰ A. MUTHESIUS, *Silk, Culture and Being in Byzantium* (op. cit., n. 7), p. 353, fig. 5.

¹¹ S. ROASCIO, *Le sculture ornamentali "veneto-bizantine" di Cividale: Un itinerario artistico e archeologico tra Oriente e Occidente medievale*, Borgo S. Lorenzo, 2011, p. 136; L. ZANNINI, *Telo di San Ciriaco*, cat. no. 62, in G. Morello (ed.), *Splendori di Bisanzio: Testimonianze e riflessi d'arte e cultura bizantina nelle chiese d'Italia*, Milan, 1990, p. 162–3.

¹² The tenth-century *Book of the Prefect* recorded five private silk guilds in Constantinople alongside imperial workshops, see A. MUTHESIUS, *Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk* (n. 7), p. 299–300. Sericulture was introduced to the Byzantine Empire in Late Antiquity and flourished until 1204. By the end of the eleventh century, Venice and Genoa started to manufacture silk, see D. JACOBY, *Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58, Washington DC, 2004, p. 228. Following the conquest of Thebes and Corinth, King Roger II of Palermo deported local silk workers to his court in 1147 (*Ibidem*, p. 225 and 227).

The openness of Byzantine art to Islamic patterns and designs began in the tenth century and continued in the early eleventh.¹³ It is evident not only in textiles but also in other so-called minor arts. For example, Alicia Walker has examined the appearance of griffins in middle Byzantine seals and interpreted their stylized manner of depiction as being dependent on Islamic or 'Byzantine Islamicising objects' in different media.¹⁴ She identified the following features which point to such prototypes: a linear rendition of animals depicted either in profile or in an 'unnaturally symmetrical, frontal pose' and distinctive details on the animals' bodies, for example beaded bands on their wings or shoulders and 'a tear drop motif' on their haunches, along with beaded borders encircling animals in general.¹⁵ The existence of such features simply points to the origin of a certain motif and not to the exact origin of a certain object.

Overall, the eleventh century saw an increase in the Byzantine production of silk; as a consequence, sericulture was no longer centralised at Constantinople and is encountered as a growing business at Thebes in Boeotia.¹⁶ According to David Jacoby, the demand for silk was driven by the 'urban lay society of south Italy', the origin of its spread to other western ports.¹⁷ Whatever the demand, prior to the twelfth century, the trade in silk between Byzantium and the West was effected through Venice; no other Italian city was the beneficiary of similar concessions in the silk trade.¹⁸ In 992 Emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII reinstated an earlier privilege of reduced passage fees for Venetian ships, while the *chrysobull* issued by Alexios I Komnenos in 1082 exempted Venetian merchants from paying trade tax.¹⁹

SILK IN DALMATIA

Looking at the items mentioned in the testaments of local dignitaries and other sources in Dalmatia, it is clear that local elites had access to silks from the early tenth century onwards. This is in the same century that Venetian merchants are known to have exported silks from Constantinople and enjoyed a trading privilege granted by Byzantine emperors.²⁰ What is more telling, at least judging from the surviving sources, is the fact that it was the lay elites who led the way, acquiring silks for personal use or donating them to churches and monasteries. At Zadar, in his testament of 918, *prior* Andrew left four silk cloths to four local churches and two silk-decorated objects – a leather bed spread and a felt garment – to a deacon called John.²¹ Agape, a daughter of tribune Dabro, owned five silk items which she left to the Abbey of St Chrysogonus upon her death in 999.²² At some point between

¹³ A. GRABAR, *Le succès des arts orientaux à la cour byzantine sous les Macédoniens*, in *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 3rd series, 2, Munich, 1951, 32–60.

¹⁴ A. WALKER, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 388.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 389.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 349; D. JACOBY, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 202 and 224.

¹⁷ D. JACOBY, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 228.

¹⁸ A. MUTHESIUS, *Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk* (n. 7), p. 119 and 127.

¹⁹ D. JACOBY, *Venetian Commercial Expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean, 8th–11th centuries*, in M. Mundell Mango (ed.), *Byzantine Trade, 4th–12th centuries: The Archaeology of Local, Regional and International Exchange (Papers of the Thirty-Eighth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St John's College, University of Oxford, March 2004)*, Aldershot, 2009, p. 375 and 387. For the *chrysobull*'s dating to 1092, see P. FRANKOPAN, *Byzantine Trade Privileges to Venice in the Eleventh Century: The Chrysobull of 1092*, in *Journal of Medieval History* 30, Amsterdam, 2004, p. 135–60.

²⁰ D. JACOBY, *op. cit.* (n. 19), p. 379.

²¹ J. STIPIŠIĆ and M. ŠAMŠALOVIĆ (eds.), *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. 1, *Diplomata annorum 743.–1100. continens*, Zagreb, 1967, p. 27.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 49. One item cannot be identified due to the damage sustained by the document. The other four are a netted hair cover (*artatikio*), a different cover transcribed as *investitura*, a pillowcase and a length of cloth. For the identification of the *artatikio*, see M. GROŠELJ, *De nonnullis vocibus in lexico Latinitatis medii aevi Iugoslaviae, fasc. I & II obviis*, in *Linguistica* 10/1, Ljubljana, 1970, p. 85.



Fig. 5. Fragment of chancel screen panel from the Abbey of St Chrysogonus, griffin predation, late eleventh or early twelfth century, limestone, 46 x 55 cm. Archaeological Museum, Zadar.
Photo credit: © Archdiocese of Zadar, photo by Zoran Alajbeg

1042 and 1044, the same abbey received a donation of a fully furnished church from *banus* Stephen of Croatia, who also held the Byzantine title of *protospatharios*. It included a staggering amount of silk fabrics compared to those possessed by Andrew and Agape: as many as fifteen cloths of silk, five chasubles and a curtain.²³ In 1018 the citizens of Rab promised to pay the doge of Venice an annual tribute in ten libras of silk.²⁴ Finally, two late-eleventh-century monastic inventories from Split take us back to smaller quantities: the Benedictines at Split had a silk veil and two silk maniples while the monastery of St Peter at Selo, founded by Peter Zerni, possessed three silk cloths and two silk maniples.²⁵ Dalmatian records, therefore, reflect the same demand for silks by the local lay society as that identified by Jacoby in south Italy.²⁶

While *prior* Andrew and Agape could have obtained their silks from Venetian merchants stopping at Zadar on their way home from Byzantium, silk fabrics could also have been brought home by Dalmatian travellers returning from the East. The fact that the aforementioned *ciborium* of *proconsul* Gregory is the earliest example of a griffin motif in Dalmatian sculpture (Fig. 1) might owe something to his brother Dobrona's three trips to Constantinople within the space of four or five years

²³J. STIPIŠIĆ and M. ŠAMŠALović, *op. cit.* (n. 21), p. 75.

²⁴*Ibidem*, p. 54.

²⁵*Ibidem*, p. 211–12.

²⁶D. JACOBY, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 228.

(1029–34). Dobrona visited Emperor Romanos III Argyros twice and received many gifts from him; however, when he made a further visit upon the accession of Michael IV, he was not well received and ended up in prison.²⁷ Considering that silks were given as diplomatic gifts by Byzantine emperors,²⁸ it is not difficult to imagine that Dobrona could have brought some with him after seeing Romanos III. Moreover, as is known from Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos' *De Cerimoniis*, the imperial audience took place in the *Chrysotriklinos* where silk imperial robes, two of which were decorated with griffins, were hung on display.²⁹

To Dobrona's visits to Constantinople which, as Jakšić demonstrated in 1982, are responsible for a large amount of Byzantine gold *solidi* of Romanos III discovered in Dalmatia,³⁰ I would also like to add another journey via which Byzantine and Islamic silks could have reached this region. In the second half of the eleventh century, Lawrence, the Archbishop of Split who assumed office around 1060, sent a personal servant to Antioch in order to 'learn the art of crafting works of gold and silver.'³¹ Upon his return, the servant made silver liturgical vessels 'in the Antiochian style', none of which survive in the cathedral and so the characteristics of this 'style' remain a mystery.³²

As it happens, Antioch was also a documented centre of both silk production and silk trade in the eleventh century, with Islamic fabrics arriving via Aleppo and being purchased in silver and gold.³³ As a Byzantine outpost at the border with Islamic lands, Antioch was a mercantile hub where Venetian as well as Amalfitan merchants are recorded as residing in the eleventh century; the trade links between these groups and the city go back to the early tenth century when it was still in Muslim hands.³⁴ The regular communication between Venice and Antioch meant that transport was available for pilgrims who wanted to go to the Holy Land and, as early as the 1060s, Venetian merchants

²⁷ V. WASSILIEWSKY and V. JERNSTEDT (eds.), *Cecaumeni Strategicon et incerti scriptoris de officiis regis libellus*, Amsterdam, 1965, p. 77–8.

²⁸ A. MUTHESIUS, *Silk, Power and Diplomacy in Byzantium*, in *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* 580, Lincoln (Nebraska), 1992, p. 101–4.

²⁹ J. M. FEATHERSTONE, *Δι' ἐνδειξίῃ Display in Court Ceremonial (De Cerimoniis II, 15)*, in J.-M. Spieser, A. Cutler and A. Papaconstantinou (eds.), *The Material and the Ideal: Essays in Mediaeval Art and Archaeology in Honour of Jean-Michel Spieser*, Leiden, 2008, p. 94; C. ANGELIDI, *Designing Receptions in the Palace (De Cerimoniis 2.15)*, in A. Beihammer, S. Constantinou and M. Parani (eds.), *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives*, Leiden-Boston, 2013, p. 479.

³⁰ N. JAKŠIĆ, *Solidus romanatus na istočnoj jadranskoj obali*, in *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, 3rd series, 12, Split, 1982, p. 182; N. JAKŠIĆ, *Il caso dell'arconte Dobrona e del proconsole Gregorio*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 13/1, Zagreb-Motovun, 2007, p. 138–141.

³¹ Thomas the Archdeacon, *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split*, in D. Karbić, M. Matijević Sokol and J. R. Sweeney (eds.), Latin text by O. Perić, Budapest, 2006, p. 74–5.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 75. In contrast to the late antique period, it is a struggle to find objects in precious metals from Antioch's medieval period. The late tenth-century reliquary of St Anastasios the Persian is one, see H. C. EVANS and W. D. WIXOM, *op. cit.* (n. 13), p. 460–1; W. B. R. SAUNDERS, *The Aachen Reliquary of Eustathius Maleinus, 969–70*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 36, Washington DC, 1982, p. 211–19. If a silver casket at the Vatican Museum, dated to the late eleventh century and assumed to be of Antiochian provenance is indicative, then the 'Antiochian style' refers to the damascening technique of metalworking in which one type of metal is inlaid in another. Carlo Cecchelli dated the Vatican casket broadly to the eleventh or the twelfth century, see C. CECHELLI, *Il tesoro del Laterano. II. Oreficerie, argenti, smalti*, in *Dedalo* 7/1, 1926–1927, p. 240–1. Boris Marshak refers to it as being from Antioch (ⲉ) and produced around 1098, see B. I. MARSHAK, *An Early Seljuk Silver Bottle from Siberia*, in D. Behrens-Abouseif and A. Contadina (eds.), *Essays in Honor of J. M. Rogers*, Leiden, 2004, p. 265, n. 22.

³³ D. JACOBY, *Commercio e navigazione degli Amalfitani nel Mediterraneo orientale: Sviluppo e declino* in B. Figliuolo and P. F. Simbula (eds.), *Interscambi socio-culturali ed economici fra le città marinare d'Italia e l'Occidente dagli osservatori mediterranei*, Amalfi, 2014, p. 106.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 105 and 107.

provided this service on their vessels.³⁵ Given that Antioch-bound Venetians would have stopped at Split for provisions on the Adriatic leg of their journey, it is not difficult to imagine how Archbishop Lawrence's servant made it to his destination. With regard to his return to Split, considering that in 1084 Antioch passed into Seljuk hands³⁶ and that the Archbishop died around 1099, it is likely that he came back before 1084.

ORNAMENT OR SYMBOL?

Was the transmission of the griffin from one type of object to another, for example, from a precious fabric to a stone carving, prompted only by the prestige and distinction of the motif, or was there an additional, symbolic significance? To approach this issue, it is worth distinguishing between griffins that form scenes with other animals or plants and those enclosed in medallions on their own.³⁷ The first group comprises those on the following carvings at Zadar: *proconsul* Gregory's *ciborium* (Fig. 1), the tympanum from the church of St Lawrence (Fig. 2) and the fragment from the Abbey of St Chrysogonus (Fig. 5). In and around Split, the relevant carvings are the chancel screen gable in the church of St Martin (Fig. 6) above the Golden Gate of Diocletian's Palace³⁸ and the gable from Majdan (Fig. 3).

Isolated griffins fill medallions alongside other animals on the eleventh-century lintel above the south portal of Split Cathedral (Fig. 7) and on a contemporary holy water stoup in the same church, as well as on a base from the Benedictine nunnery of St Mary at Zadar, which also may have supported a stoup.³⁹ These medallioned patterns with griffins and other animals echo the decorations on Middle Byzantine silks imitating those produced in the Islamic lands. In these cases griffins probably retain only the most general association as a motif typical of luxury fabrics. Here, it is worth bearing in mind that the south portal at Split Cathedral had a wooden door in the second half of the eleventh century, which was also decorated with animals akin to those on eastern textiles.⁴⁰ Ante Milošević plausibly attributed the three works from Split Cathedral to the pontificate of Archbishop Lawrence.⁴¹

Griffins in combat with other animals belong to the phenomenon of talismanic and apotropaic images of animal violence which Henry Maguire identified in Middle Byzantine art.⁴² As such,

³⁵ D. JACOBY, *Bishop Gunther of Bamberg, Byzantium and Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the Eleventh Century*, in L. M. Hoffmann with A. Monchizadehed (eds.), *Zwischen Polis, Provinz und Peripherie: Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte und Kultur*, Wiesbaden, 2005, p. 275, 278 and 283–4; D. JACOBY, *op. cit.* (n. 33), p. 109, n. 114.

³⁶ D. JACOBY, *op. cit.* (n. 33), p. 109, n. 113.

³⁷ A. KAZHDAN and A. CUTLER, *Griffin*, in A. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, New York-Oxford, 1991, p. 885.

³⁸ N. JAKŠIĆ, *Patron Saints of the Medieval Gates in Diocletian's Palace*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 9, Zagreb-Motovun, 2003, p. 188.

³⁹ T. MARASOVIĆ, *op. cit.* 2011 (n. 3), p. 255 and 257, fig. 399a–b (the portal); p. 259 and 261, fig. 341 (the holy water stoup). Marasović dated the stoup broadly to the early or high Middle Ages and considered it to be later than the portal. Milošević dated both carvings to the second half of the eleventh century, see A. MILOŠEVIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 78, fig. 7a–b. For the base from Zadar, see N. JAKŠIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 142. A griffin can be seen on an eleventh-century marble panel from Koločep, set within an interlaced ring together with two boys and a dog chasing a hare with which it does not communicate, see M. SKOBLAR, *Figural Sculpture in Eleventh-Century Dalmatia and Croatia*, New York-London, 2016, p. 159, fig. 5.5; Ž. PEKOVIĆ, *Četiri elafitske crkve / Quattro chiese delle isole Elafite*, Split, 2008, p. 89, fig. 101b.

⁴⁰ A. MILOŠEVIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 75–82, fig. 1. He dated the stone base from Zadar to the late eleventh or early twelfth century (*Ibidem*, p. 78).

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

⁴² H. MAGUIRE, *Profane Icons: The Significance of Animal Violence in Byzantine Art*, in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38, Chicago, 2000, p. 28; A. GRABAR, *Sculptures byzantines du Moyen Âge*, vol. 2, *XIe–XIVe siècle*, Paris, 1976, p. 59 and 119–20, pl. 26b.

these images were ideal gatekeepers and frequently appeared next to openings and chancel screens in Middle Byzantine churches. The space next to the windows at Hosios Loukas depicted a number of predators, including a griffin, attacking prey.⁴³ Anthony Cutler and Alexander Kazhdan highlighted the evil-averting power of the griffin as a possible reason for its presence in Byzantine textiles.⁴⁴

Two occurrences of the griffin snatching what seems to be a dog are present on Gregory's *ciborium* (Fig. 1) and griffin predation is carved on the fragment from St Chrysogonus (Fig. 5). This carving was ascribed to the early twelfth century by Jakšić on the basis of its workmanship in higher relief when compared to Gregory's *ciborium*.⁴⁵ In both examples from Zadar griffins have beards, which is a Byzantine trait and evident on the St Siviard silk at Sens and the shroud of St Chaffre (Fig. 4).⁴⁶ Their position on the *ciborium* and the chancel screen, the elements of



Fig. 6. Chancel screen gable with a cross flanked by a griffin and a bird in the church of St Martin at Split, late eleventh century, limestone, 268 x 190 cm (dimensions of screen).
Photo by Mark Ahsmann (cropped)

liturgical furnishings which act as doorways to the sanctuary area and the altar respectively, do fit into Maguire's explanation of the motif as apotropaic. However, to what extent the local community would have been acquainted with this quality of the griffin is uncertain without further research.

In a different publication, Maguire pointed out that the griffin was the only chimera inherited from the art of antiquity that escaped being censored as a pagan trait, and that Byzantines considered it 'an authentic work of the creator.'⁴⁷ On the *Earthly Paradise* ivory (c. 870) at the Louvre, it even appears among the animals of Paradise illustrating the orders of creation.⁴⁸ The heavenly connotation is an important one and Slobodan Ćurčić linked griffins with heavenly assumptions.⁴⁹ In the most famous case, Alexander the Great undertook a celestial journey in a chariot pulled by griffins

⁴³ H. MAGUIRE, *op. cit.* (n. 42), fig. 13; A. GRABAR, *op. cit.* (n. 42), pl. 26b.

⁴⁴ A. KAZHDAN and A. CUTLER, *op. cit.* (n. 37), p. 885.

⁴⁵ N. JAKŠIĆ, cat. no. 43, in N. Jakšić and E. Hilje (eds.), *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 142–3, fig. 43. Ivan Josipović and Ivana Tomas dated it to 'the period after the beginning of twelfth century' also on account of the carving's higher relief and the overall aptitude for anatomical correctness, presumably in relation to animals in eleventh-century sculpture, see I. JOSIPOVIĆ and I. TOMAS, *The Abbey of St. Chrysogonus in Zadar – Between Early Christian Sculpture and the Romanesque Architecture*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 23/1, Zagreb-Motovun, 2017, p. 301–2, fig. 14. Petricioli provided no date, see I. PETRICIOLI, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 61, pl. XXI, fig. 1.

⁴⁶ L. BOURAS, *The Griffin through the Ages*, Athens, 1983, p. 51.

⁴⁷ E. DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE and H. MAGUIRE, *Other Icons: Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture*, Princeton, 2009, p. 9.

⁴⁸ D. GABORIT-CHOPIN, *Les ivoires médiévaux*, Paris, 2003, no. 41; A. GOLDSCHMIDT, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser VII.–IX. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, Berlin, 1914, p. 77, pl. LXX.

⁴⁹ S. ĆURČIĆ, *Some Uses (and Reuses) of Griffins in Late Byzantine Art*, in C. Moss and K. Kiefer (eds.), *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Wetzmann*, Princeton, 1995, p. 599 and 601.



Fig. 7. Medallions with animals on the left half of the lintel above the south portal of Split Cathedral, second half of eleventh century, marble, 22 x 138 cm (dimensions of lintel).
Photo by Ante Milošević

and the scene was frequently depicted in Middle Byzantine and western medieval art.⁵⁰ I interpreted the scene in the tympanum from St Lawrence's (Fig. 2) as that of the Ascension of Christ and the presence of griffins and trees as markers of a heavenly setting.⁵¹ The griffins' aforementioned raised front paw, a typically Byzantine trait,⁵² is also present on the partially preserved gable from Majdan, where a griffin is touching a pine cone under a cross with its beak (Fig. 3). What these settings have in common, together with the gable in St Martin's at Split (Fig. 6), where a centrally placed cross is flanked by a griffin and a bird, is the connection between this fantastic beast and trees. The wooden cross on which Christ was crucified was the ultimate tree of life, since through the act of Redemption humanity obtained eternal life. The True Cross was even said to have been carved from the tree of life that the Book of Genesis (2: 9) mentions as standing in the middle of the garden of Eden. After the Fall, God placed cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life so that man could not eat from it and live forever (Genesis 3: 23–4). The word 'cherub' itself is a transcription of the Hebrew 'kerûb' which is the source of γρύψ, the Greek word for griffin.⁵³

⁵⁰ C. SETTIS-FRUGONI, *Historia Alexandri elevati per griphos ad aerem: Origine, iconographia, e fortuna di un tema*, Rome, 1973; L. BOURAS, *op. cit.* (n. 46), p. 51.

⁵¹ M. SKOBLAR, *op. cit.* (n. 39), p. 55–6.

⁵² L. BOURAS, *op. cit.*, (n. 46), p. 51. For the analysis of the Ascension scene and griffins on this tympanum see M. SKOBLAR, *op. cit.* (n. 39), p. 53–6.

⁵³ J. P. BROWN, *Ancient Israel and Ancient Greece: Religion, Politics, and Culture*, Minneapolis, 2003, p. 58; N. WYATT, *Grasping the Griffin: Identifying and Characterizing the Griffin in Egyptian and West Semitic Tradition*, in *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 1/1, Tucson, 2009, p. 31.

CONCLUSION

The transmission of griffin motifs followed the trade routes established by Venice linking the Adriatic with Byzantium and the Levant. These motifs were conveyed through textiles – not just any textiles but the silk fabrics which frequently bore griffin patterns. The presence of silks in Dalmatia is recorded in the tenth century, the same century in which Venice traded this coveted commodity and at the end of which it received trade privileges from Byzantine emperors, giving it an advantage over its competitors.⁵⁴ The urban elites at Zadar had the means to acquire silk for personal use and as gifts to local churches. In the eleventh century, a member of that very same elite, Dobrona, received many gifts from Emperor Romanos III including gold *solidi* and, based on the contemporary diplomatic practice of Byzantium, likely also silks. The scenes of griffin predation appear on the *ci-borium* his brother Gregory commissioned around the same time. The same subject matter has been preserved on a fragmentary panel (Fig. 5) from the Abbey of St Chrysogonus which, incidentally, was the recipient of silks left by the members of the Zadar elite in their testaments. In addition, the donation of a church to the same abbey by Stephen, banus of Croatia and an imperial *protospatharios*, included twenty-one silk items.

With regard to Split, apart from Venetian merchants stopping at its port to replenish supplies, local individuals could make their way to the eastern Mediterranean aboard one of their ships. A servant of Archbishop Lawrence travelled to Antioch, one of the main centres of silk trade outside of Constantinople, stayed there while being trained as a silversmith and returned to Split safely. This could not have been done without the financial backing and logistical support provided by the archbishop and the servant must have had the means to purchase whatever the archbishop requested. The lintel above the south portal (Fig. 7) of Split Cathedral displays a reliance on silk patterns composed of animals set in medallions with beaded borders so typical of Byzantine and Islamic workshops.

All in all, the sudden appearance of griffins in eleventh-century sculpture in Dalmatia makes sense when the evidence I have cited is fully considered. To Byzantines, the griffin had strong imperial connotations, frequently gracing the emperor's silk garments, while scenes of griffin predation, according to Maguire, conveyed apotropaic powers. In addition, the griffin's *longue durée* reputation as a guardian and a 'vehicle of heavenly transport' was widespread beyond Byzantium. As such, it had a secure place in the medieval bestiary which was emerging in eleventh-century Dalmatian sculpture.

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⁵⁴D. JACOBY, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 375.

Zvijer s istoka – grifon u dalmatinskoj skulpturi 11. stoljeća

U članku se povezuje pojava grifona u skulpturi 11. stoljeća u Dalmaciji s većim prisustvom svile uvezene iz Bizanta i islamskoga svijeta u odnosu na ranija stoljeća. Riječ je o grifonima na reljefima iz Zadra (ciborij prokonzula Grgura, nadvratnik iz crkve Sv. Lovre i ulomak pluteja iz Sv. Krševana) te Splita i okolice (nadvratnik južnoga portala splitske katedrale, škropionica iz iste crkve i ulomak zabata iz Majdana). Velik broj luksuznih svilenih tkanina odlikuju motivi grifona poput primjera iz relikvijara Sv. Siviarda u katedrali u Sensu ili pokrova Sv. Chaffrea u opatiji Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille. Na talijanskoj je obali Jadrana svila s grifonima uvezena iz Bizanta pronađena u relikvijaru Sv. Cirijaka u Anconi. Budući da prije 12. stoljeća na zapadu nema proizvodnje svile te da se potražnja zadovoljava uvozom iz bizantskih, sirijskih i perzijskih radionica, svila do dalmatinskih luka dolazi putem venecijanskih trgovaca. Oni su tijekom 10. i 11. stoljeća glavni uvoznici zahvaljujući privilegijama koje im dodjeljuju bizantski carevi.

Drugi smjer kojim je luksuzna svila mogla doći do dalmatinskih luka je direktan dodir s bizantskim centrima svile. Kako je poznato iz Kekaumenovog komentara o Dobronji – bratu prokonzula Grgura – koji posjećuje cara Romana III., on se u Zadar iz Carigrada vratio punih ruku. Nikola Jakšić je nalaze velikog broja bizantskih zlatnika iz doba Romana III. u Dalmaciji pripisao njegovu diplomatskom darivanju Dobronje, a s obzirom da je bizantska diplomatska praksa redovito uključivala darivanje svile, moguće je da je i Dobronja dobio takav dar. Zanimljiv je i slučaj slanja sluge u Antiohiju, trgovačko središte gdje se prodavala svila iz islamskih zemalja, kojeg je splitski nadbiskup Lovro otpremio da tamo izuči vještinu rada s dragocjenim metalima.

Na kraju članka razmatra se mogućnost simboličkog značenja prisutnosti grifona na spomenutim reljefima, poput onog koje se odnosi na grifonovu apotropejsku ulogu te njegovu povezanost s nebeskom sferom koja ime korijene u antici.

Ključne riječi: *skulptura, grifoni, Bizant, svila, tekstil, razmjena, Zadar, Split, Dalmacija*