

Once More about the Silver Orant from Gardun

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Abstract: The silver figurine of orant from Gardun (ancient Tilurium) was acquired for the Archaeological Museum in Split in 1886. From the first publication on it to date, it has been dated and attributed differently in the literature. L. Jelić (1894) assumed that the figurine originates from the early Christian era, Th. Klauser (1959) thought it was a Roman cult pagan figurine, and M. Nikolanci (1989) thought that it displays the priest of Izida, or some other oriental cult. N. Cambi (2007) has designated it as an Italic-Etruscan ritual sculpture, and I labeled it as an early Byzantine Christian product (2007). Here, I argue that none of the previous opinions is acceptable since this figurine is actually a forgery made by blacksmith Petar Pezelj in the surroundings of Trilj in the last decades of the 19th century.

Keywords: orant, Gardun (ant. Tilurium), Petar Pezelj, archaeological forgery

It was a mistake when in the CBIANUBiH Annual 34/2007 (pp. 169–180) I determined the figure of an orant from Gardun as, culturally and chronologically, a product of Early Byzantine Christianity, of approximately the 6th century.¹ I was moved to a discussion of this artefact by the fact that this uncommon and intriguing find had been by that time variously interpreted and very widely dated in the scholarly literature.

Let us recapitulate. This is a silver figurine² of a beardless, barefooted man, with short hair that is rather sparse on the forehead. It is 5.6 cm high, and is kept today in the Archaeological Muse-

um in Split, inv. no. AMS-H1754.³ It shows an orant in upright stance, legs together, and arms that, raised unequally high, are turned palms-out to the observer. He is dressed in a tunic, with sleeves of light cloth that go down to his below the wrist and to his ankles, and a toga, a short cloak, cast over his left shoulder. This is made of thicker cloth and falls down his body to the knees in heavy folds (Fig. 1).

In the Archaeological Museum of Split archival records, Gardun, i.e., the Roman legionary camp of *Tilurium*, is given as the finding site. It is also noted that it was bought for four florints in 1886. There is a marginal note by F. Bulić in the inventory book, stating that all the objects inventoried on that page were paid for from the 1888 grant. There is no mention, unfortunately, of the vendor, which would be at this moment a very

¹ Milošević 2007, 169–180; 2007a, 65–69.

² In the literature it is said to be of silver; in the inventory of the museum, however, it says that it was cast of lead and subsequently silvered. But it is after all a silver cast, as was recently shown by an examination made by Marko Rogošić, one of the best Croatian museum restorers. For the chance of reviewing the statuette again, I am grateful to the kindness of colleague Dr Sanja Ivčević, museum adviser in the Archaeological Museum in Split, and for the excellent photographs of the orant, the respected Antun Z. Alajbeg, photographer in the Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments.

³ In my first publication I gave its number as 1154. This was clearly a printing error and was taken from: Jelić / Bulić / Rutar 1894, 164, where the following is written: “1154 statueta antica cristiana di argento, reppresentante un orante (T. XIX, 1154)”.

important item of information, as will be seen in the sequel.⁴

The Gardun orant was introduced to the literature by Luka Jelić in publications that were printed to mark the holding of the First International Congress for Early Christian Archaeology which was organised in Split and Solin, from August 20 to 22, 1894.⁵ However, Jelić also failed to provide any information about the provenience of this object. In his short essay about the significance of the find, he points out that it is hard to define it in terms of iconography, particularly if it is a pagan deity at issue, since it wants the usual attributes capable of explaining it. Hence, because of its general characteristics and the prayerful stance of the orant, and also because of the very rustic workmanship, he ventured to say that the figurine did indeed represent some Late Antique Christian cult object of regional characteristics, and without any particular hesitation, he gave it as his opinion that the civilian clothing would suggest one of the Salona martyrs (St Venantius or St Anastasius), since they were shown thus on the mosaic of the Chapel of St Venantius in the baptistery of the Church of St John Lateran in Rome.⁶

Jelić's rational and logical idea about the Christian character of the Gardun orant was challenged by Theodor Klauser.⁷ In his discussion he analysed a large number of depictions of orants that had by then been discussed in publications and explained as Christian artefacts. He then referred to numerous examples of such motifs in Ancient Greek and Roman art, and in many cases attempted to revise such an opinion. In the case of the Gardun find, he inaccurately says that the left shoulder is bare, which he then used to argue that in this given case it was an

orant that could not be unreservedly connected with Christianity.

The opinion of Klauser that a depiction of a human figure with wide open arms in a suppliant stance was not of an exclusively Christian nature was well supported by research that showed with numerous examples that suchlike iconographic motifs were well known in the history of humankind much before the appearance of Christianity. It was known by almost all the important cultures of the Ancient World, as was very well shown at a thematic exhibition organised in Ravenna.⁸ This exhibition also showed that depictions of orants, although present in the art of the Ancient World, were strikingly more frequent in the art of the Christians.

After Klauser, Mladen Nikolanci addressed the statuette of the orant from Gardun. But he too did not look very carefully at the figurine, and, drawing on the previously mentioned viewpoint of Klauser and his own inaccurate remark that the head was shaven, he derived the conclusion that this was not a Christian artefact, rather the figure of a priest of the cult of Isis, or perhaps from the cult of some other eastern religion.⁹ Subsequently, Nenad Cambi addressed the views of Klauser and Nikolanci. He very reasonably drew attention to the inconsistencies on which they built their hypotheses, saying: "Klauser's ground for this kind of assumption was that the figure had, allegedly, a bare right shoulder, which would refute any attribution to Christianity... However, Klauser studied the figurine but poorly. It is clear that the man is dressed in a long tunic that falls to the ankles, only the feet being free. The tunic can be seen on the right and left wrist, which means that it had sleeves (*tunica manicata*) and in line with this, he could not have had bare shoulders. A cloak is cast over the tunic, in fact a short, simple toga, which in its character is Late Republican. However, it is not even entirely accurate that Christianity did not know the bare shoulder, when sometimes even Christ is shown just with a pallium on his bare chest, like an Ancient philosopher. According to the shape of the robe, then, the Christian interpretation could not be ruled out, but this cannot be considered for some other reason... But not even Nikolanci

⁴Sincere thanks for help in obtaining archival data go to Arsen Duplančić, manager of the library and archives in the Archaeological Museum in Split. He examined the financial accounts for 1886, 1887 and 1888. In documents for 1886 there is no mention of the acquisition of metal objects; for 1887 it was briefly mentioned that on metal objects from inv. no. 1200 to 1720 (Catalogue H), 114.88 florints were spent. In the accounts for 1888, because of the Bulić notes, there is also only a summary note that 211.14 florints were spent on metal objects from no. 1721 to no. 2327 (Catalogue H).

⁵Jelić 1894, 30–31, fig. on p. 31; Jelić / Bulić / Rutar, 1894, 164, T. XIX/1154.

⁶Jelić 1894, 30–31, fig. on p. 31; Milošević 2007, 171.

⁷Klauser 1959, 126, n. 52, T. XI.

⁸Donati / Gentili 2001.

⁹Nicolanci 1989, 154, n. 36.

looked hard at the figure. It is not a matter of the bald or shaven head of Egyptian priests, for the man does have hair, lying from the back straight forward, and on the brow the short and straight strands can clearly be seen, shaped like a fringe. This is an Italic manner of arranging the hair.”¹⁰

Cambi put forward this viewpoint as part of a discussion about two bronze Etruscan figurines from the Archaeological Collection of the Franciscan Monastery in Sinj. He also used the occasion to list and put a value on all such finds from Dalmatia and its wider hinterland. He concluded that such finds are not particularly numerous, that they are not local products, and occur in this area as Italic imports. In both the cases he mentions, which are to do with naked, stylistically uniform male and female figurines, with elongated bodies and very slender limbs without any very obvious musculature, the details of the faces are indicated diagrammatically. According to their typological and stylistic classification in Etruscan art, such products appear very early on (some examples can be dated to the 7th century BC), belonging to what is called the elongated figure style.¹¹ In the continuation of his discussion, Cambi recalls the Etruscan figurine from Studenci by Ljubuški, which is not naked, but shows a woman dressed in a long robe, which he

¹⁰ Cambi 2007, 190–191, n. 19, fig. 7–9. (Croatian text: “...Th. Klauseru za takvu pretpostavku argument bijaše da je liku, tobože, bilo golo desno rame, što bi opovrgavalo kršćansku atribuciju... Međutim, Th. Klausner je loše proučio figurice. Naime, sasvim je jasno da je čovjek odjeven u dugu tuniku koja pada do gležnjeva (samo su stopala slobodna). Tunika se vidi i na lijevom i na desnom zapešću, što znači da ima rukave (*tunica manicata*) i sukladno tomu da nema golo rame. Preko tunike prebačen je plašt, zapravo kratka i jednostavna toga koja je po svom karakteru kasnorepublikanska. Međutim, čak i nije u potpunosti točno da kršćanstvo ne pozna golo rame, jer se ponekad i Krist pokazuje samo s palijem na golim prsima, poput antičkog filozofa. Prema obliku haljine, dakle, ne bi bilo isključeno ni kršćansko tumačenje, ali to ne dolazi u obzir iz jednog drugog razloga... No ni M. Nikolanci nije dobro proučio lik. Nije posrijedi ćelava i obrijana glava egipatskih svećenika, jer čovjek ima kosu pruženu od straga prema naprijed i na čelu se jasno vide kratki i ravni pramenovi, oblikovani poput resa. To je italjski način češljanja...”)

¹¹ Because of the paucity of such finds in Dalmatia, Cambi wondered whether the figurines in the Franciscan Museum in Sinj might be forgeries, for he knew that such products were being sold in the Trilj area at the end of the 19th century. At that same moment, he dismissed the idea, particularly with respect to the female figure (Cambi 2007, 190).

says is typically Etruscan.¹² Her dress reaches to the knees, is not covered by a cloak and is opulently decorated with ornaments in some dotted arrangement. The workmanship of this figurine, like that from the Sinj Franciscan collection, was the reason that Cambi conjoined the Gardun statuette to the same group of Italic figures, saying literally: “The phenomenon of Etruscan imports is indicated by the also silver (clearly still more precious) statuette of an orant from Gardun with raised arms. This figurine has identically shaped facial features (nose, eyes, hair). It too undoubtedly belongs to the same Italic-Etruscan grouping.” At the end of note 19, he concludes: “The figure is probably from the 2nd to 1st century BC. Accordingly, neither an Isidian nor a Christian characterisation can be considered, without question, and without hesitation. The gesture of both, with the unevenly raised arms, dependably indicated a ritual sphere. It is very like an invocation to a deity, and is of Italic origin.”¹³ Everything Cambi wrote about the Gardun orant was prompted by the ideas of Klausner and Nikolanci. At this moment, because of the evidence put forward, it seems to me easier to accept all other assumptions than Cambi’s and I would conclude this part of the discussion in a paraphrase of Nenad Cambi, saying that the Italic-Etruscan character of the Gardun statuette can without question or hesitation be ruled out.

I have several times referred to the silver orant from Gardun in earlier writings. On the whole I have supported the proposition of Jelić that it must be an artefact from the sphere of a Christian cult. I have several times used it to supplement the picture of the possible earliest traces of Christianity at Gardun, and then in the wider area of Trilj or, perhaps, the area of the Cetina

¹² Cambi 2007, 190–191, n. 18.

¹³ Ibid., 191, n. 19. (Croatian text: “Na pojavu etrušćanskog importa upozorava također i srebrni (očito još dragocjeniji) kipić ‘oranta’ iz Garduna s podignutim rukama. I taj kipić ima identično oblikovane pojedinosti lica (nos, oči i kosu). I on nedvojbeno pripada istoj italjsko-etrušćanskoj skupini.” At the end of notes 19 concludes: “Figurica je vjerojatno iz 2.-1. st. pr. Kr. Dakle, izidinski kao i kršćanski karakter statuete nedvojbeno i bez okolišanja ne dolaze u obzir. Gesta s obje, nejednako podignute ruke pouzdano upućuje na obrednu sferu. Po svoj prilici posrijedi je zazivanje (invokacija) božanstva i italjskog je podrijetla.”) Cambi previously put forward such view of the Gardun orant in conversation, later published in the journal *Triljski most*, no. I/1, Trilj, 2006, p. 38.

in general. I found support for such an interpretation in numerous, very similar such depictions on Christian monuments of the same time, particularly in Roman catacombs and in various different, Late Antique, primarily funerary monuments throughout the Roman Empire.¹⁴ I discussed it at length a few years ago when I hypothesised that the silver orant from Gardun is an Early Byzantine art product, which can be dated generally to between the 5th and the 7th century.¹⁵ As already broadly hinted however in the first sentence above, I have now definitely given up on this opinion, for the following reason.

In the last decade of the 19th century, several texts appeared in the archaeological literature about archaeological fakes from the area around Sinj. The problem surfaced when in Sinj,¹⁶ the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo bought here objects cast in bronze for its collection: a small bull and two figural compositions almost identical in size and content, in which a half standing man, with drawn short sword, attempts to murder a helpless woman seated on a three-legged stool with a back. As stated in the literature, these figural compositions were found in 1880 in Čačvina Fort, not far from Sinj, Dalmatia, and I shall below call them, colloquially, after the place of purchase, the *Sinj group* (fig. 2). Since it is precisely this artefact that is interesting for the continuation of my discussion, here I shall reproduce the high quality photograph of it published at that time and the interesting details (not seen in the picture) from the description of Moriz Hörnes, then curator in the Imperial-Royal Natural History Collection in Vienna (today's Naturhistorisches Museum).¹⁷

¹⁴ Milošević 1981, 60; 1998, 245; 2003, 11; 2005, 55. This opinion was preliminarily accepted by Delić / Škarica 2006, 41 with figure.

¹⁵ See n. 1.

¹⁶ I assume that they were acquired from some Sinj collector for it was well known that the collection of coins and archaeological items flourished among rich Sinj merchants in the second half of the 19th century; cf. Milošević 1998, 24-25.

¹⁷ Kenner / Hörnes / Frimmel 1890, 19. These objects are no longer in the museum in Sarajevo. In correspondence with a courteous colleague of that museum, Dr Andrijana Pravidur, head of the archaeological collection of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it became clear that they had probably stayed in Vienna, where they were sent for appraisal, between 1886 and 1890; after it had been established that they were fakes, I assume there was no particular interest in having them returned to Sarajevo.

Hörnes said it was a group of two figures, linked by their subject, cast in bronze with a uniform fine dark-green patina. There were traces of partly preserved silvering, which is seen in the area of the belt of the male figure. The maximum width and height is 11.6–13 cm, the height of the female, seated figure being 11.3 cm and that of the half-standing male figure 13 cm. The height of the three-legged stool with back was 7.5 cm. Hörnes also wrote, and this will be crucial in the continuation, that the heads of both figures were disproportionately large. From top of the head to chin they were 3 cm high (for orientation, the upper part of the body, from waist to head as 3.5 cm). The features of the face were clearly and sharply expressed (fig. 3). The hair is represented with deep incisions, although this manner of workmanship was a little lost towards the top of the head. The actual faces are shown with a fair degree of naivety and look like scarecrows, but still have all the details: the nostrils, the relief rhomboidal pupils in the eyes, and in the big ears round holes are precisely bored, the objective being to present narratively the aperture of this organ of hearing, the mouth with the protuberant lips are half open a little more in the female figure, because of current situation. The whole composition consists of three elements (male and female figures and stool), cast in separate moulds and then linked into a whole. In addition, the arm of the man with the short sword were cast separately, and linked on the shoulder with some kind of join that at the time of the appraisal was shaky. At some time or another back leg of the stool was broken and then joined again. According to Hörnes, it had a quadrangular seat and three curving legs that curved out additionally in the bottom. The backrest, sloping backwards, was decorated with a fantastic animal with the head of a snake or turtle with a wide open mouth and big tongue. And there are two bent legs that also end in serpent heads.

My attempts to follow the trail of these figurines in some Viennese museum or other were not successful. Today they are not in the Kunsthistorisches Museum and in the archives of the museum there was no sign of the appraisals that were carried out. For this information, I heartily thank Dr Georg Plattner, director of the Antikensammlung (Ephesos Museum), which is part of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. There is then some slight hope that something might be found in the Naturhistorisches Museum.

The whole composition of the *Sinj group* was taken by Hörnes as a naïve expression of some historical theme, and the action was of a different, an older, origin than the actual visual execution, which in a more recent time was created by a maladroit hand.

He left a more extensive visual and stylistic appreciation to Theodor Frimmel, the curator at the time in the Imperial-Royal Art Historical Collection in Vienna (today the Kunsthistorisches Museum).¹⁸ He also brings out its naïve visual expression, underlining the fact that it is hard to locate it in any known art history setting. He cautiously assumed that, because of the want of style and iconographic options, it could be placed among similar Central European bronze productions of the last centuries of the Middle Ages, at the time when the dilapidated ancient and Early Christian traditions were in at odds with various barbaric and semi-barbaric elements. At that time, according to Frimmel, in sculpture, as well as in painting and architecture, works were produced in which the drawbacks in the artistic production of details were often made up for by the total impression, which had to be imagined by the viewer. He assumed then that the work was produced between the 16th and 17th century, and as he knew the area from which it came, he assumed within it, particularly in the brutality of the whole scene in which male dominance far outstripped the strength of the woman, unprotected and resigned to death, the influence of the South Slav folk epic. For at that time the collection of the folk heroic epics had begun, in which there were motifs similar to those shown by the composition.

In the same place, Friedrich von Kenner too put forward his own expert opinion about the group; at that time he was curator of the Imperial-Royal Art Historical Collection in Vienna.¹⁹ Here I transmit a part of his overall evaluation

¹⁸ Ibid., 21–24.

¹⁹ Ibid., 18–19. (Croatian text: “Kip od bronca, štoto je u dva eksemplara nagjen u Dalmaciji, ne stoji u savezu ni s kojim štilom, koji uopće nalazimo u Dalmaciji, niti se u njem razabire pravac klasičke, niti vizantinske i romanske umjetnosti, niti renesance. Spoljašni oblici, kano vjenčanje muške glave lovor-vijencem, koji nas sjećaju na antiku, ili oblik stolice, koji nas sjeća na romansko orugje, valjaće možda svesti na reminiscencije od starijih kipotvorina, koje je saljevač one grupe kadkad vidio, ali po nutarnju bitnost njene umjetnosti slabo šta vrijede.”)

for it is concise and substantial: “The bronze statue, found in two examples in Dalmatia, is not allied to any style that we generally find in Dalmatia, nor are there discernible in it any trend of Classical, or Byzantine or Romanesque art, nor of the Renaissance. The external forms, like the wreathing of the male head with a bay wreath, which recalls Antiquity, or the form of the stool, which suggests Romanesque product, can probably be brought down to reminiscences of older sculptures, which the founder of this group sometime saw, but in the internal being of its art is worth but little.” In the continuation he expresses an opinion that because of the marked naturalism in representation of movement, the sculpture-maker was of South Slav origin, and that he found his inspiration for the composition in the heroic poems “as preserved in the oral tradition with the half-savage tribes that lived behind the Dalmatian hilly regions.”²⁰ Just like Frimmel, he assumed that the work was created in the 16th and 17th century.

This article in the *Glasnik* of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the editors conceived in such a way as to excite heated arguments, perhaps producing new understandings that would help in the ultimate solution, quickly produced a reply from the Rev. Frane Bulić.²¹ From his correspondence that is today in the archives of the Conservation Office in Split,²² it is clear that Bulić had some knowledge of these forgeries even before the article was published in the *Glasnik*. In a letter addressed to the head office of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo he says:²³ “This group, with

²⁰ Croatian text: “...kakve su se očuvale u usmenoj predaji kod poludivljih plemena, koja su živjela za dalmatinskim bregovitim pokrajinama.”

²¹ Hörman 1890, 309.

²² For this information, thanks go to colleague Vanja Kovačić.

²³ Archives of the Conservation Department in Split: Letter of Frane Bulić to the directorate of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo of June 5, 1890. Information was given about the smith Petar Pezelj, ascertained to have forged archaeological objects. (File no: No. 10/V '90, K Br 25/90/K, No. 25/JK). (Croatian text: “Ova grupa o kojoj se Glasnik bavi bila je podpisanom ponudjena na prodaju 1885. ili 1886. od neke gospodje iz Trogira, kao predmet velike cijene (predstavljajući ubojstvo Agripine po Neronu), a kada je on izjavio da je to falsifikat uvjerena o tomu zahitjevala je fior 15, pa i mnogo manje. Podpisani, koji kupuje prigodno uz malu cienu i moderne falsifikate, a to za znanstvene svrhe, bio bi platio koji fiorin za ovi predmet, da

which *Glasnik* is engaged, was offered for sale to the undersigned in 1885 or 1886, by some lady from Trogir, as an item of great price (showing Nero's murder of Agrippina), and when he stated that it was a forgery, convinced of it, she asked 15 florints, and much less. The undersigned, who buys on occasion for small prices even modern forgeries, for scholarly purposes, and would have paid a florin or two for this object, if the above mentioned lady had wanted to give it. Sometimes the same objects come back again, as allegedly found in some other place. For example, the NERONION group was offered him in 1883 as having been found around Sinj, and a year later as found on the island of Hvar.”

Before he sent the letter to the *Glasnik* editorial board, Bulić tried to find out a little more about the author of the composition, and from correspondence with V. Čaleta,²⁴ a teacher in Dolac Donji, “confidentially” found out that it had been cast by a local smith, Petar Pezelj Ilijin. Bulić himself, as he says in the letter, could not investigate the situation for the forger had avoided him out of fear of being publicly exposed. At the same time, also in Dolac Donji, Petar's relative, Pavao Pezelj son of Jozo deceased was active as a coiner, and for this activity had been sentenced to a year's incarceration,²⁵ but that our forger was Petar and not Pavao, the teacher Čaleta confirmed in his letter.²⁶

Part of this letter, as well as other information that he had obtained from Bulić were repeated by Ljudevit Thallóczy in a lengthy article the purpose of which was to warn the public about the

gorirečena gospodja bude ga htjela dati. Kadikad tako isti predmeti povraćaju se kao tobože nadjeni na drugom mjestu. Na pr. grupa NERONION bila mu je ponudjena god. 1883. kao našasta u okolici Sinjskoj, a godinu dana kasnije kao nadjena na otoku Hvaru.”)

²⁴ Archives of the Conservation Department in Split: Letter of Frane Bulić to the directorate of the elementary school in Donji Dolac of April 24, 1890. Information about a smith of the place suspected of having forged archaeological objects was sought. No. 25/K.

²⁵ Archives of the Conservation Department in Split: No place or date given; note of Frane Bulić about Pavao and Petar Pezelj of Donji Dolac, forger of antiquities (File no: K no 25/C).

²⁶ Archives of the Conservation Department in Split: Answer of V. Čaleta of Donji Dolac to Frane Bulić of May 6, 190. Collected information about the smith Petar Pezelj suspected of forging archaeological objects is supplied. (File no. 43/r. p. n.).

forgeries of Petar Pezelj.²⁷ This text was partially written because it was necessary to justify the staff of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the eyes of the public for their badly-judged purchase,²⁸ and in some way to apologise to Frane Bulić, who had not been consulted previously,²⁹ although it would have been entirely logical to do so, since the object derived from the area that Bulić knew very well. In this procedure, in which the then experts of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina sought assistance from those in Vienna, and not from Bulić, I perceive the same kind of poor relations among fellow professionals that we can find today. In the same letter, Thallóczy gives information about other forgeries of Petar Pezelj. He states for example that the then director of the Imperial-Royal Natural History Collection in Vienna, the zoologist Franz Steindachner, travelling around Dalmatia in 1881, bought the bronze figure of an ox, as a find from *Tilurium*, even after Bulić had warned him that it was a forgery, and presented it to the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. Also mentioned is the fact that the Russian Consul, Vasilij Passek, had bought in Dubrovnik the already well known group of *Kraljević Marko*, also established to have been a Pezelj forgery. From the Thallóczy article little else was also found out about one of two iden-

²⁷ Thallóczy 1890, 321–330.

²⁸ On p. 324, Thallóczy writes: “We don't need to apologise for the purchase, for the price, because it is so inconsiderable, is not worth mentioning” (Croatian text: “Kupnju nam nije od potrebe izvinjavati, jer cijenu zbog neznatnosti njene ne vrijedi da spominjemo.”) He quotes a passage from P. Eudel, 1884, who in his book (p. 6) considers similar issues and says that there is no famous collection at all in which in spite of the knowledge and caution of the conservators there are no notorious fakes. In the continuation of his article Thallóczy mentions a dozen such examples from big European museums.

²⁹ Ending his letter to the director of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulić wrote: “The undersigned thought it his duty, in the interest of scholarship, to report this to the Directorate, and leaves them, with reference to the respected persons that assessed the object under discussion as being old, from the 16th or 17th century, to use or not use this information in the *Glasnik*. The undersigned only cares about truth in scholarship.” (Croatian text: “Podpisani je smatrao svojom dužnosti, u interesu znanosti, javiti ovo tomu Slavnomu Ravnateljstvu, a pripušta istomu da, se obzorom na štovane osobe koje su predmet o kojemu se govori, prosudile kao starinski iz XVI ili XVII vieka, posluži ili ne ovim viestima u Glasniku. Njemu je samo do istine u znanosti.”)

tical sculptures from the *Sinj group*, which had been appraised by Viennese experts. One of them was once in the collection of Hugo Jedlička in Mostar. It too was said to have been bought from some peasant close to Sinj.

During his stay in Dalmatia, in July 1890, Ljudevit Thallóczy decided to go in detail into the case of the forger Petar Pezelj, in which he was helped in Sinj by the then head of the district, Baron Petar Ljubibratić and the forester Jelušić. According to the data he gathered, of which he convinced himself in a visit to the village of Rošca where Pezelj lived, he wrote that Petar Pezelj was a worthy and intelligent “man of all trades” (Croatian: “sveznadar”) who successfully ran his farm, and for his leisure, engaged in blacksmithing, repairing and ornamenting muskets and other metal objects. He said that he also made locks for doors, which could be opened without a key by a man skilled in the matter. Thallóczy found out that Pezelj had started to produce forgeries about 1875, and found inspiration for them in the artworks in the cities of Dalmatia and in Split Museum. He describes his house, which he had made himself and decorated with numerous carvings. He had stopped dealing in fakes a bit before 1890, for he had been found out, and was not able to sell enough to pay for the work he put in. He also wrote that he worked “not only for profit, but according to his inner urge. If he had had knowledge, perhaps he would have become an artist, as it was he remained a peasant genius of fakery”.³⁰

From this distance it can be said that this “peasant genius” from the Dalmatian hinterland partially succeeded in his aim, although we have no complete overview of everything he did. Some objects are known of only according to brief descriptions, and a few only are recorded in drawing or photograph. It is not likely that it will ever be established, because many whom he managed to cheat, whether individuals or institutions, kept quiet about their proceedings so as not to appear ignoramuses or gulls.³¹

³⁰ Thallóczy 1890, 329. (Croatian text: “...samo radi koristi, već i po nutarnjem nagonu. Da mu je bilo nauke, možda bi postao umjetnikom, ovako ostade seljački krivotvorački ženij.”)

³¹ Čatipović 1980, 56–58 (in the chapter: Bronze figurines from the surroundings of Sinj). Čatipović also mentions another Pezelj creation that was in the possession of art

What I find it important to say now is that there is no dilemma at all about the figurines that were appraised by the Viennese experts being the forgeries of Petar Pezelj. It is not known where this group is today, but luckily, we have a high quality photograph of it, that can help us very well in a visual analysis of the Gardun silver orant.

In a detailed description of the *Sinj group*, Hörnes drew attention to a feature of them – that their heads and bodies were not in proportion, i.e., their heads were too big for their bodies, which is also a characteristic of the Gardun orant (fig. 1). The faces on all the figurines are very similar. Hörnes also says, and one has to agree with him, that the individual features are expressed clearly and sharply, that they are shown with a fair degree of naivety and that they look like scarecrows (fig. 4).

A common feature of the faces on all the statues is that they have an emphatic and fleshy chin, half-open mouth, broad nose with perforated nostrils, large eyes with rhomboidal relief pupils and wide arched eyebrows produced by incisions. The hair on the head of the men with the laurel wreath from the *Sinj group* is very similar to that on the Gardun statuette. It was produced with broad incisions going from the forehead to the top of the head. A very interesting detail on the face of the Gardun orant are the wide, long sideboards, done more precisely on the right hand side of the head (it seems that the man of the *Sinj group* had them too), which as a fashion detail on a man's face appeared only in the 18th century (fig. 5). They came into wide use in the second half of the 19th century, which could also be an important indicator of the time when the statuette was made. The fingers on the hands of the Gardun statuette were produced by additional work after the casting, with the use of a trian-

historian and diplomat Antun Kolendić. This was a figure of Kraljević Marko (Prince Marko) with mace and sheathed sword on which in Cyrillic “Marko Kraljević” was written. (From the short description it is clear that it is not the same figure of Prince Marko that was bought by the Russian consul in Dubrovnik, Vasilij Passek). It is said that his father, Petar Kolendić, received it as a gift after World War I while he was headmaster of a high school in Sinj. Afterwards, he moved to Belgrade, where he was a long-term University professor and member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. For Petar Pezelj, see also in: Čapeta Rakić 2016, 11–12 (well known facts from the literature are retold).

gular file. In the same way were made the fingers and snake's head of the *Sinj group*, and this is one more detail that links the two sculptures through the workmanship (fig. 6).

In conclusion, I assume that I have given arguments enough to prove that both of the artefacts discussed here were the product of the same hand, i.e., that both were made by Petar Pezelj in the last decades of the 19th century.

The Gardun orant arrived in the collection of the Split Archaeology Museum, as already stated, in 1886, and Theodor Klauser stated that it was purchased, as a find from Gardun, by Frane Bulić. These factual details are confusing, for this purchase happened at the time when Bulić already knew of the *Sinj group*, which was offered to him at about the same time, and only four years before Pezelj was unmasked as a forger, for which Bulić himself was exclusively responsible. Whether he then saw their artistic similarity cannot now be confirmed. I think that he did not, for he put the find into the museum inventory. It was also clear that he did not buy it as a modern fake, which would – as is said in one of his letters – serve scholarly purposes, for he took part in the announcement of the Gardun orant, stating that it was a little old Christian statuette showing a man at prayer.³²

I presume that in his article I have given sufficient evidence for it to be able to be ascertained that the orant from Gardun is another Petar Pezelj forgery, and accordingly all earlier ideals about Italo-Etruscan, Roman-pagan, Early Christian or Early Byzantine origins for the Gardun silver statuette do not, indubitably and without hesitation, come into consideration. *Fit fabricando faber!*

English translation: Graham McMaster

Ponovo o srebrnom orantu s Garduna

Srebrna figurica oranta s Garduna (ant. *Tilurium*), za *Arheološki muzej* u Splitu otkupljena je 1886. godine. Od prve objave pa do danas u literaturi je bila različito datirana i atribuirana. L. Jelić (1894.) je pretpostavio da pripada starokršćanskom dobu, Th. Klauser (1959.) je mislio da je riječ o rimskoj kulturnoj poganskoj figurici, a M. Nikolanci (1989.) da prikazuje svećenika Izidinog ili nekog drugog orijentalnog kulta. N. Cambi (2007.) ju je odredio kao italo-etrusku obrednu skulpturicu, a ja kao ranobizantski kršćanski proizvod (2007.). U ovom tekstu sam pokušao dokazati da ni jedno od ranije iznijetih mišljenja nije prihvatljivo jer je uistinu riječ o krivotvorini koju je napravio kovač Petar Pezelj iz okolice Trilja, u zadnjim desetljećima 19. stoljeća.

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³²Jelić / Bulić / Rutar 1894, 164.

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Fig. 1. *Gardun orant* (photo: A. Z. Alajbeg)



Fig. 2. *Figural composition (the Sinj group), a forgery from the end of the 19th century (after: GZM, 1890)*



Fig. 3. *Comparison of the heads of the Sinj group*



Fig. 4. Comparison of the heads of the Gardun orant and the man from the Sinj group.



Fig. 5. Sideboards on the face of Gardun orant (photo: A. Z. Alajbeg)



Fig. 6. Comparison of the details on the figures of the Gardun orant and the Sinj group