

A CASTING MOULD OF A PILGRIM FLASK WITH THE DEPICTION OF ST. SYMEON STYLITES THE YOUNGER

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Keywords: Eulogy *ampulla*, casting valve, St. Symeon Stylites the Younger, middle Byzantine period, *Mons admirabilis*, Samandağ, Antioch-on-the-Orontes, Hatay, Gaziantep, south-eastern Turkey, north-western Syria

Cuvinte cheie: *ampulla* inscripționată, valvă de tipar, Sf. Simeon Stylites cel Tânăr, perioada bizantină mijlocie, *Mons admirabilis*, Samandağ, Antiochia de pe Orontes, Hatay, Gaziantep, sud-estul Turciei, nord-vestul Siriei

The museum of Gaziantep in south-eastern Turkey (Fig. 1) preserves an interesting object in its depot, a steatite (soapstone) casting valve for a lead eulogy *ampulla* inscribed in Greek which is reduced today to two fragments (Fig. 2a-b). The other side of the *ampulla* – presumably with the representation of a Patonce cross – had to be prepared with another valve, now lost. Currently we do not know any lead *ampullae* produced with our mould from Gaziantep.

Accession no. 145.

Measurements: H 13,5 cm, diameter of the *ampulla* 7.5 cm and width 9,5 cm.

Find spot: *Mons admirabilis*, modern Samandağ in the province of Hatay in south-eastern Turkey?¹

Typological description and state of preservation: The flattened, hexagonal body part of this small, nearly globular, handle less flask appears in the centre of the mould. In its lower part the *ampulla* presents two circular recesses for fixing

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¹ Whereas *eulogiae* tend by their very nature to be dispersed far from their place of origin, the artifacts used to produce them can be expected to be found near the place of production. Therefore, this piece could most probably be originated from the pilgrimage site of Saint Symeon Stylites the Younger in Samandağ.

another piece and another similar recess is visible in the upper part. There is also a trapezoidal recess towards the lower edge which corresponds to another decorated “basket”, weaving in the upper part for the neck of the flask. Its two fragments do not match perfectly.

Epigraphic description: In a strip between two flat bands a circumscription with Εὐλογία [Κ]υρίου καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου [θαυματουργοῦ] γού appears which should be translated as “Eulogia of the Lord and saintly thaumaturgist -a performer of miracles-”. A double bar marks both the beginning and end of this inscription. Among the double bars, at the top, there are some unclear letters, possibly as ΥΤΙΑ = ὑγία/“for health!” or just ὑγία/“health!” This acclamation can sometimes be found in some Christian texts on small objects in this position².

Decoration: Another decorated band with crossed elements alternating with full circles delimits the field, which is divided into two parts. In the upper one there is the well-known figure of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger who is seated in the middle (in fact the legs had atrophied for long permanence on a column) flanked by two angels in a gesture of veneration, perhaps waving palm leaves. Below, in a lower part, very damaged, flanking the column are two stylized knights riding two mounts in a heraldic position, with a very thin stem and a small cubic base: behind each of them is a cross, in the manner of the cruciferous lambs that appear in Western art in the early Middle Ages, *i.e.* seventh century A.D. The column appears very thin: this goes parallel with the tradition that assigns a considerable height to the (second) column of Symeon. The presence of the two knights constitutes an *unicum* and would justify an innovation comparable with a late dating.

Dating: Between A.D. 969 and 1074 in which period *Mons admirabilis* was functioned as a pilgrimage site and production centre as a revival during the Byzantine reoccupation.

The cult of Saint Symeon (or Simeon) Stylites the Younger (also known as “St. Symeon of the Admirable Mountain”; A.D. 521–† May 24, 592) is well

² The practice of distributing stamped bread is known as *hygieia* and this practice was identified at pagan shrines by some scholars, as the precursor of the later Christian practice of distributing *eulogia*: Walter 1997, 199. Cf. for “ὑγεία” in the reliquary of Konon: P. Nowakowski, *Cult of saints*, E01085 <<http://csa.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E01085>>; or “ὑγία” in an inscribed horse brass with Greek invocations, found in Iconium in Lycaonia, dating probably to the seventh century A.D.: P. Nowakowski, *Cult of saints*, E0092 <<http://csa.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E0092>>; or in a Greek invocation of Theodotos, probably a Montanist martyr from Ancyra: P. Nowakowski, *Cult of saints*, E00991 <<http://csa.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00991>>. The practice of distributing stamped bread is known as *hygieia* and this practice was identified at pagan shrines by some scholars, as the precursor of the later Christian practice of distributing *eulogia*.

attested by pilgrimage objects: so far we know c. 40–50 late antique terracotta tokens, c. 16 lead medallions³ and corresponding two middle Byzantine moulds, but no lead *ampullae* yet, except the our mould from Gaziantep.

Stylites were ascetics who lived on platforms atop columns and Syria was home to large numbers of stylites. As the life of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger from Antioch-on-the-Orontes records, at the age of only six years he retired to John the Stylite, where he remained until the age of twelve or thirteen years. Initially he had a forty-foot column erected for himself, then moved to Seleucia ad Belum (Σελεύκεια πρὸς Βήλω; today Qennisrin, near modern 'Is) on a new column for eight years, before, in A.D. 541, the monks built on *Mons admirabilis* (“wondrous mountain”, “Θαυμαστὸν ὄρος” in Greek; modern Samandağ⁴ in the Turkish province of Hatay, Fig. 1), named after the miracles he worked there, 17 kilometres southwest of Antioch-on-the-Orontes, on halfway between Antioch and Aleppo, a monastery with a new column in the middle of an octagonal court, where he remained for another fifty years⁵. As a consequence, he became the most famous stylite of the sixth century A.D. and his fame produced numerous pilgrimages, made during his life and after his death. Thus, Mons admirabilis functioned as a pilgrimage site until the arrival of the Arabs. His celebrity supplanted that of St. Symeon Stylites the Elder (c. A.D. 389–459), was the first stylite and whose column was venerated at Qal'at Sim'an (قلاط سيمآن in Arabic)⁶. After the reconquest of the area by Byzantine troops in A.D. 969, the monastery⁷ and the cult of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger⁸ started to flourish again. As part of this development, the production of pilgrim's eulogies was reintroduced there until A.D. 1074. The site was visited by many pilgrims and monks from afar and the nearby harbour site became known as “Portus St. Symeonis”, the main port of call for the principality of Antioch which was established as a consequence of the First Crusade⁹ in A.D. 1098.

Initially – during his lifetime – the pilgrim's eulogies were first made of stamped earth, clay, mixed with wax and objects of the saint himself like hair,

³ Xyngopoulos 1948, *eulogia passim*. Cf. also Loosley Leeming 2018, 79–84.

⁴ Turkish name of “Samandağ” (sometimes unofficially as “Seman Dağ”) was formerly known as “Süveydiye” (سويدييه, *Süwaydiyyah* in Arabic and Մեծ Սեան, *Svedia* in Armenian) which is a Turkish form for “Jabal Sem'an”, i.e. “the Mountain of St. Symeon”.

⁵ *Arcadii episcopi Constantiensis Vita Symeonis Stylitae iunioris*, cap. 113 (Van den Ven 1962, 91–93); Lafontaine-Dosogne, Orgels 1967, 85–86; Aykıt 2012.

⁶ On St. Symeon Stylites the Elder cf. Tural 2018.

⁷ Djobadze 1986, 97–98; Giankou 1991, 48–49; Rey-Coquais 1991–1992, 204–214; and Belgin 2018.

⁸ *Nicephori Urani magistri Vita Symeonis iunioris* (PG 86, cols. 2987–3216); Doens 1954; Lafontaine-Dosogne, Orgels 1967, 68–69; Nasrallah 1972, 139; Caseau, Fayant 2017, 709–713.

⁹ Nasrallah 1972, 142.

who himself gave it to visitors (σφραγίδες¹⁰ in Greek). Stylite figures also appear on small bottles that might have been used to collect oil taken from the lamps at Symeon's tomb in Antioch-on-the-Orontes¹¹. The tomb was part of a large monastic complex—built upon the site of his second pillar—that drew numerous pilgrims even during Symeon's lifetime. Those objects were no longer produced after the Arab conquest in the A.D. 630's¹². Yet sometime after the Byzantine reconquest of A.D. 969, a production of lead medallions and *ampullae* was initiated¹³. They were produced by casting moulds like the one we are dealing with.

As our inscription expressly states, it is – or rather it contains – an “εὐλογία”. This Greek term means adulation, praise, blessing or gift and applies to several categories of objects. It refers to a divine blessing and in relation to the saints it has the meaning of contact relics which were usually given to visitors and pilgrims. In the case of St. Symeon that's known to have been done at the site in late antiquity¹⁴, and may be surmised also for the later period. In general, they could be tokens containing eulogy dust, or containers filled by an eulogy, in terracotta, metal or glass, but by the middle Byzantine period there were apparently understood as metal-cast medallions, which did not contain any contact relic. They were given to pilgrims and served as an attestation of the pilgrimage accomplished or as a gift for the faithful who remained in their homeland. They have various formats and different iconography, often adapted to the saint worshipped in famous shrines, but also referring to important points of Christian doctrine. Most often many craftsmen used iconographies already employed for other saints: it is typical for the case of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger for whom images related to St. Symeon Stylites the Elder were used as a paragon. But it should also be stressed out that it is difficult to distinguish depictions of the two saints on objects without inscriptions.

We know several moulds for both the *ampullae* and the medallions. Very similar is a mould from Jerusalem, somewhat smaller, which was used for the preparation of late antique *ampullae* related to the Monza-Bobbio group which was found in 1903 in the excavation within the Latin cemetery of Mount Zion, a broad hill south of the Old City's Armenian Quarter¹⁵. The hemispherical holes

¹⁰ *Arcadii episcopi Constantiensis Vita Symeonis Stylitae iunioris*, cap. 231, 40 (Van den Ven 1962, 206).

¹¹ Ratliff 2012, 96.

¹² For the eulogies cf. Ritter 2017.

¹³ Ritter 2017.

¹⁴ Vikan 2010, 28.

¹⁵ Piccirillo 1994, 585, fig. 1 (mould A) and 586, fig. 2 (mould B). The inscription on the mould A is reinterpreted in *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*, 44–45, 1997, Pleket H.W., Stroud R.S., Strubbe J., Gieben J.C. [eds], 471, no. 1359.

for fixing the corresponding valve and the lower recess for casting the molten metal appear in such moulds. Yet the moulds for the lead medallions of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger have a different form: one was found in 1969 at al-Fawz on the road from Aleppo to Laodicea ad Mare (Latakia), and is now housed in the Louvre¹⁶. The Kelsey Museum of Archaeology of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor preserves a second example, dated to the tenth century A.D.¹⁷.

Among the devotional objects related to St. Symeon Stylites the Younger there is a certain variety in the scenic motives and the circumscriptions to be detected, although the representation of the saint between the two angels is a constant feature. Below, the St. Martha from Edessa¹⁸, the mother of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger, and Conon, the saint's disciple, have to be expected, because they were always depicted on the late antique tokens. Yet, in our case on our matrix the unusual scene of the two figures on horseback, which somehow recalls St. Menas flanked by two camels, appears to be peculiar, perhaps for reasons of size. It reminds of the antipodal representations of the warrior-saints, *i.e.* St. Theodore the Recruit or St. George, very common in Byzantine art since the tenth century A.D. Yet on the mould, any accompanying inscription to the depictions is lost.

So far, late antique terracotta tokens, and medallions and *ampullae* of middle Byzantine period are known to be related to the cult of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger. In 1967 Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne with Bernard Orgels has counted 19 terracotta tokens housed in the museum of Hatay in Antioch-on-the-Orontes. Many more can be added, *e.g.* in the Franciscan School and Church of Aleppo there were five other terracotta tokens. Furthermore, Lafontaine-Dosogne recorded eleven lead medallions related to the cult of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger¹⁹, to which must be added the other five considered by Philippe Verdier from the north American and western European collections²⁰. In our case the field is clearly divided into two parts and the presence of the two people on horseback at the base of the column appears as an innovative element. As it is an evolved type, belonging to A.D. 969 and 1074 in

¹⁶ Steiner 2011, fig. 4. Lafontaine-Dosogne, Orgels 1967, 145, no. 1; Lassus 1960, 149, fig. 6.

¹⁷ Accession no. 87.517. It was exhibited in the exhibition of "Cavafy's world", set up in the museum between February 21 and May 5, 2002 and published on p. 102 of the exhibition catalogue.

¹⁸ St. Martha from Edessa suggested a monastery to be built around the column on the Mountain of Miracles and spent most of her time at the base of the column; therefore, she was depicted on some of the medallions made in honor of the stylite. On St. Martha cf. Van de Ven 1970.

¹⁹ Lafontaine-Dosogne, Orgels 1967, 146.

²⁰ Verdier 1980.

which period *Mons admirabilis* was functioned as a pilgrimage site and production centre as a revival during the Byzantine reoccupation. Being repetitive scenes, probably the vitality of the subjects and their representations was very long. There is no doubt that the pilgrimages to the monastery where St. Symeon Stylites the Younger had lived, enjoyed a great popularity already in the early Byzantine period, as testified by e.g. the Anonymous Pilgrim of Piacenza, a sixth-century A.D. pilgrim from Piacenza in northern Italy who travelled to the Holy Land at the height of Byzantine rule in the A.D. 570s and wrote a narrative of his pilgrimage.

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MATRIȚA UNEI PLOSCUȚE DE PELERIN, CU IMAGINEA SF. SIMEON STILITUL CEL TÂNĂR

Rezumat

În acest sumar articol va fi prezentată o inedită valvă de turnare pentru o *ampulla* metalică folosită pentru orație, din patrimoniul Muzeului orașului Gaziantep, în sudul Turciei. Matrița, din steatit, prezintă inscripția Εὐλογία [Κ]υρίουκαίτοῦΑγίου [θαυματορ] γού (elogiu Domnului și sfântului taumaturg – „făcător de minuni”). Vasul prezintă, de asemenea, imaginea Sf. Simeon Stilitul cel Tânăr, din secolul al VI-lea d.Ch., și a doi cavaleri călare, în compoziție heraldică amplasată în partea de jos a carafei. Matrița din Gaziantep poate fi datată în perioada bizantină mijlocie, mai precis, în perioada cuprinsă între anii 969 și 1074 d.Cr. Matrița pare să fie unică atât datorită dimensiunilor sale cât și prin prezentarea a doi pelerini (?) călare.



Fig. 1. Places in Asia Minor and elsewhere referred to in the text
(by S. Pataci, 2018). / Locuri din Asia Minor și din alte zone,
la care se face referință în text (de S. Pataci, 2018).

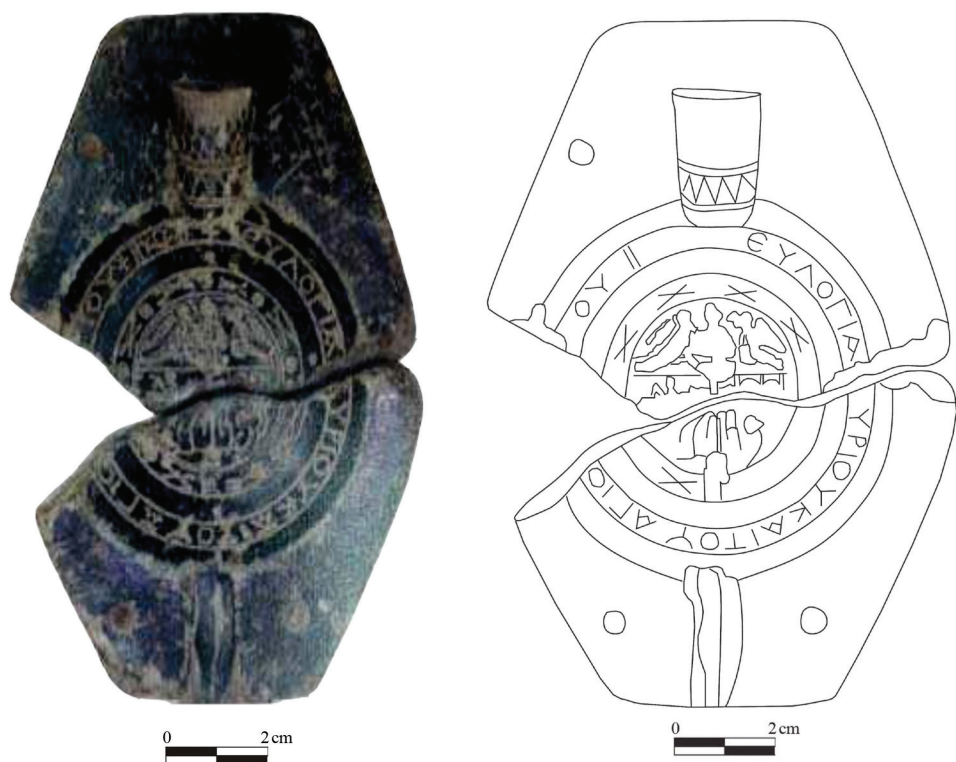


Fig. 2a-b. A casting mould of a pilgrim flask with the depiction of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger from the museum of Gaziantep, south-eastern Turkey (photo and drawing by E. Laflı, 2005). / Matrița unei carafe de pelerin, cu imaginea Sf. Simeon Stilitul cel Tânăr, din Muzeul Gaziantep, în sud-estul Turciei (foto și desen de F. Laflı, 2005).