

THE CHEST OF ST. SIMEON

THE CHEST OF ST. SIMEON IS MODELLED
AFTER THE ORIGINAL CHEST THAT STANDS
IN THE SANCTUARY OF ST. SIMEON IN ZADAR.
FIND IT AT THE LAUDATO GALLERY.

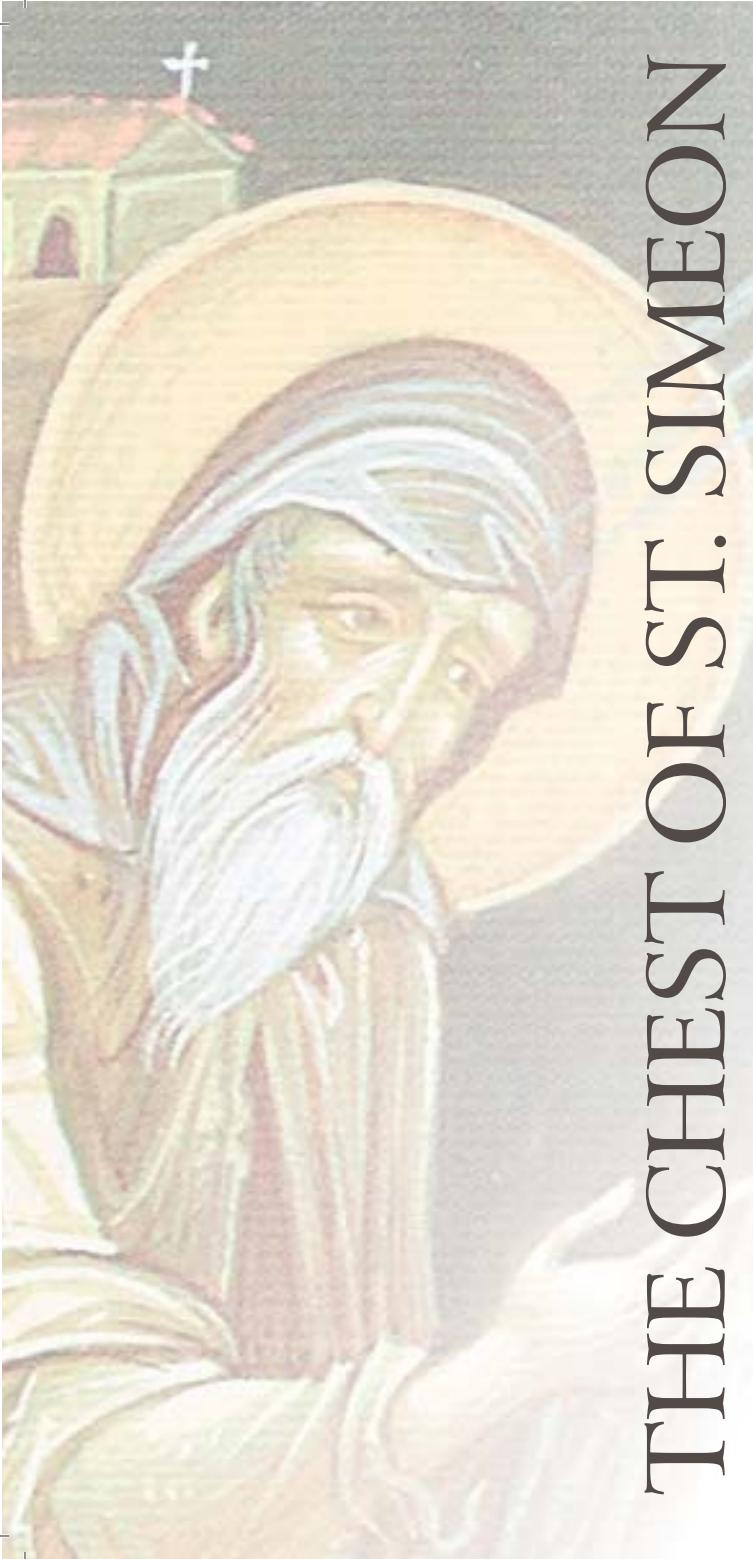


THE CHEST OF ST. SIMEON

the most valuable work of medieval
goldsmithing art in Croatia



Don Ive Prodana 11, Zadar (near the Sanctuary)
www.laudato.hr / laudato@laudato.hr
+385 (0)91 589 84 14 / +385 (0)23 300 749



THE CHEST OF ST. SIMEON

The chest of St. Simeon stands at the main altar of the Church of St. Simeon in Zadar, and is the most valuable work of medieval goldsmithing art in Croatia. It contains the preserved remains of St. Simeon, the beloved patron saint of the city, while scenes of important historical events and the appearance of Zadar and its residents during the Middle Ages have been eternalized on the chest.

TRANSFER OF THE SAINT'S BODY TO ZADAR

The Eastern Roman emperors seated in Constantinople from the 6th century collected reliquaries of saints in order to keep up with the Romans. The body of St. Simeon was originally transferred from Palestine to Constantinople and according to the Gothic inscription on the chest of St. Simeon, it can be concluded that the saint's body was then carried from Constantinople to Zadar in the 13th century, likely in 1273.

According to legend, it was a crusader, likely a Venetian noble, who carried the body of St. Simeon by boat to his city from Syria. Near Zadar, he was caught in a terrible storm. His ship was heavily damaged and he was forced to remain in Zadar. As the ship was repaired, he fell ill and took shelter among the hermit monks at the base of the Zadar port, where the parish Church of St. John stands today. In order to keep the hermit monks from learning about the saint's body, he told him that he was carrying the body of his deceased brother, and allowed the body to be buried temporarily at the local cemetery. However, when he realised he would soon die, he told the monks to look carefully through his things upon his death. They found notes about the miracles of St. Simeon around the man's neck, and the monks began immediately at dawn to dig up the saint's body, while three town rectors dreamed of this, each individually and all three rushed to the cemetery. The monks confirmed that their dreams were real and the body of the saint was transferred with the greatest honours to the church of the Assumption of Our Lady, where it remained for more than 300 years. The entire town soon heard and since then, Zadar began to openly workshop St. Simeon the Righteous. At that time, the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady was the most popular sacral structure in the city, where the Croatian tongue was used in addition by the Glagolitic clergy. In 1570, during the great defence from the Turkish offence, the Venetian Republic was forced to demolish part of the church to build the city's defensive walls. The intentions to construct a new church, however, were never realized due to the financial exhaustion of the city that was the results of constant wars. The chest containing the saint's body was placed in the Benedictine monastery, and later, on 16 May 1632, it was formally transferred to the Church

of St. Steven the First Martyr, to which the present day sanctuary was later added. The sanctuary was consecrated on 18 October 1705, as seen by the inscription on the plaque in the sacristry.

VOTIVE CHEST FOR THE SAINT

The chest of St. Simeon was ordered made by Croato-Hungarian Queen Elizabeth, daughter of Bosnian Ban Stjepan Kotromanić II and wife of King Ludvig I of Anjou – as a votive gift to the saint in the hopes that she would bear a son, the future king. King Ludvig I was in the midst of a bitter battle with the Venetians over Zadar. On 18 February 1358, the famed Zadar Treaty was signed with the Venetians in the sacristry of the Church of St. Francis in Zadar. Zadar received its long awaited peace, and in an effort to more closely associate the people of Zadar with his rule, Ludvig I had the queen's vow carried out – the creation of the chest of St. Simeon.

The chest was made in 1380 of silver by goldsmith Francis from Milan, who had a workshop in Zadar. He was assisted by local masters Petar Blažev from Rače, and Stjepan Pribčev, Mihovil Damjanov and Andrija Markov from Zagreb. On the back side of the chest, Master Francis engraved an inscription in Latin in lovely Gothic script, which translated means: “*Simeon the Righteous, holding Jesus, born of a virgin, in his arms, rests in peace in this chest, commissioned by the Queen of Hungary, mighty, glorious and majestic Elizabeta the Younger, in the year 1380. This is the work of Francis of Milan.*”

LAVISH AND PICTURESQUE SCENES

In order to make the chest weighing 343 kg, the queen donated 1000 marks of silver and authorised five Zadar nobles to enter into a contract with the master on the deadlines. The contract was signed in the city council building on 5 July 1377, and Francis promised to finish the piece in one year. However, the task was so great that it took three years until its final completion. The chest itself has a double lid made of cedar wood and is completely covered in thick silver plates, some partially gilded. Both the interior and exterior are decorated with relief scenes created using the stamping technique.

The front of the chest shows three separate scenes. In the middle is a composition of the Presentation in the Temple, and to the left is a scene of the monks exhuming the hidden saint's body. To the right of the Presentation is the scene of the entry of King Ludvig I into Zadar, with a series of details of the city walls with towers, people and ships with flags. On the front lid of the chest is a depiction of the

saint's body in formal attire, in high relief. On the left side is the ship in the storm saving St. Simeon, while the Anjou crest is at the peak of the side. On the other side is Queen Elizabeth with the king and Croatian noblemen, over which again stands the Anjou crest.

The interior side of the lid are three depictions of the saint's miracles. On the back of the chest, the middle panel is a relief stamped inscription mentioning who commissioned the piece – Queen Elizabeth and the year 1380, and under this the artist's signature. To the left is Elizabeth with her three daughters presenting the saint with the finished chest, and to the right is the depiction of the death of Bosnian Ban Stjepan II Kotromanić in the presence of St. Simeon. On the back of the lid are three more of the saint's miracles, and in the middle is a kneeling figure with goldsmith tools, which could be a self-portrait of Master Francis.

PATRON SAINT OF ZADAR

The chest of St. Simeon rests on the hands of large bronze Baroque statues of angels, cast from bronze received from seized Turkish cannons in 1648. Before the altar, in the middle of the sanctuary, is the stone sarcophagus with the image of St. Simeon from the 13th century, in which the saint's body was kept until the completion of the chest.

Just how dedicated Queen Elizabeth was to the saint is seen in the fact that she laid her travel crown into the chest with the body of St. Simeon. Only recently was the crown removed from the chest and can be viewed in the art collection of the Zadar Benedictine order.

Worshiping of St. Simeon, the patron saint of Zadar, is very strong even today. Visitors to Zadar can see this on October 8, when the city celebrates its patron saint. Many of the faithful from the city and surrounding areas fill the Church of St. Simeon and give testimony to their deep faith and piety towards St. Simeon the Righteous. Recently, the Jerusalem Patriarch also came to bow before St. Simeon, and on that occasion he received a reliquary of the body as a gift – on that occasions, doctors took a small piece of the saint's leg and testified that the body of Saint Simeon is still completely preserved.

The chest can be viewed daily, and the body of the saint can be viewed on October 8, on St. Simeon's Day, and during special church festivities when the chest is opened for public viewing.