

THE RELIEF PRESENTATION OF THE BIRDS ON THE GRAVE MONUMENTS OF THE EASTERN PART OF THE ROMAN PROVINCE OF DALMATIA – CONNECTION WITH THE GODS AND SOUL

Radmila ZOTOVIĆ

Archaeological Institut Beograd, Serbia

On the territory of the roman province of Dalmatia (western part of the territory of nowadays Serbia, eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and northeastern part of Montenegro) there are three types of roman grave monuments: stelae, cippi and grave cubes. On the grave monuments of this territory we find numerous decorative – symbolic relief presentations, for which we can tell that they represent the abundance of geometric, vegetable and animal presentations. But, the most rare among them are the presentations of the birds¹.

These presentations we find only on the ten grave monuments: 5 stelae, 4 cippi and 1 grave cube². The presentations of the birds we find them on the 7 grave monuments: four stelae, two cippi and one grave cube. Such presentation we find on the monuments from the village Kolovrat near Prijepolje (fig. 1), and in villages Fakovići and Tegare near Foča and Skelani in the eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (fig. 2). But, the presentation of the birds can be connected with the relief presentation of the trees, which are also very rare on this territory. The relief presentations of the trees we find on two grave monuments type of cippi. The both of the monuments are from the surrounding from Užice (fig. 3 and 4)³. The presentations of the birds and trees we find mostly in the relief fields, and only in two cases on the top of the most and in the basiment of stela and cippi.

On the grave monuments of this part of the roman province of Dalmatia, we can find the birds in the hand of the death person, or in the presentation together with the trees or vegetable corona. If we find them in the hand of the death persons, we find such presentation allways in the relief field of the grave monuments. In the hands of the death persons we find more often and more numerous the another attributes: usually the cup, flower, volumen, egg, even sometimes the key. It is interesting to notice that the bird we can only see in the hand of the female persons in the relief fields. The usually attributes in the hand of the female persons are all already mentioned, except volumen which is attribut of the male persons. The attributes in the hand of the female persons are characteristic of their position in the life; the key are telling she was taking care about the haus, the distaff – she was doing with it for her life, or of expectation in the another life, after death: the flower are the beauty of the fields on the heaven, the cups are the cups with the vine, the drink of the god Dionysys and the marry enjoy in the afterlife life. But the presentation of the birds are very rare on the first place, and on the second place we can find them not only in the hand of the women, but also in the hand of the child⁴. If we try to find the

¹ This work is the result of the work of the Project of the Ministry of Science of the Republic of Serbia (Project number 1770077).

² Зотовић 1995, p. 115, n. 75; p. 117, n. 85; p. 120, n. 103; p. 122, n. 111 (cipusi); p. 102, n. 5, p. 104, n. 18; p. 105, n. 20; p. 106, n. 25; p. 113, n. 64 (stela); p. 129, n. 155 (grave cube).

³ Зотовић 1995, p. 115, n. 75, p. 117, n. 85.

⁴ Зотовић 1995, p. 104, n. 18, p. 113, n. 64 – monuments from Kolovrat and Tegare. For analogy see for example the grave monument from surrounding of Prilep: Вулић 1941 – 48, p. 176, n. 370.

traces of this symbolic presentation and even the connection of the bird and the children, we can go further in the past in the prehistoric period, in the time when the people did not have the grave monuments for the presentations in cutting symbols and attributes, but they put that in the tomb as the grave inventory. We know for the find of one prehistoric tomb from the village Mokrinj, locality Mokranjske stene, near Vranje (fig. 5), which in fact is the tomb of one child. In this tomb, together with other grave inventory, mostly the pottery, was found behind the skeleton of child the bones of one bird⁵. In this meaning, the connection between the afterlife life, soul and the bird, existed from the prehistoric period and further on in the period of roman times.

In the roman period, in the symbolic meaning, the presentations of the birds are the presentations of the soul or what is narrow to it, which is going on the heaven after the death. We can only suppose for the roman period where or what was connection between the soul and the birds. For example, the presentation of the birds can also be connected to the cult of the roman goddess Venus. In this meaning Venus as protector of marriage and motherhood is represented with the pigeon as her symbol. But also the birds can be symbol of Venus Funeraria, who is protector of those who died to early. When we understand the symbolic meaning of the birds in this way, we can understand that the symbol of Venus Funeraria is also the symbol of purity of the soul, and the soul as the pneuma which is flying in the preheritance land of Musas⁶. Then we can understand why is the bird always in the relief presentation on the grave monuments in the hand of the child or female persons. Also, the pigeon could be the symbol of Afrodita and marks the purity, virtue and the love. The pigeon on the stela from Pljevlja in the connection with the rosetae and corona, is symbol of purity of the soul on its way in the uprising on the heaven where it will be connected with the sun.

We also find on the eastern part of the roman province of Dalmatia, the presentation of the birds with the relief presentation of corona or huge volutas⁷. Such relief presentation on the monument type of cipi is very rare and unic. There is no doubt that such presentation came from the roman sepulchral art, especially because of the presentation of the voluta. Also what makes this monument unique is relief of three human heads, of which nowadays is visible only one. Since the inscription field and relief field on the right side are very damaged on this monument, we do not know how many death persons are mentioned in inscription. We can suppose that the heads presented in the relief field together with volutas and birds are in fact the death persons who are in the heavens garden among the birds and the vegetabiles. On two grave monuments, on already mentioned stelaes from Pljevlja and Fakovići, we can see the birds in the pediments of monuments. If we understand the pediments of the stelaes as the heaven (the top of the most of the God's house where the death persons are going), we can understand the birds with corona, according to the certain authors as the symbolic attributes of happiness and the heaven in everlasting life⁸. On one monument from Basiana⁹ there is behind the bird represented the wing of the eagle. Such presentation helps to connect the presentation of the bird with solar symbols, i.e. the Sun. At the same time the eagle was the attributes of the main god of the roman panteon, Jupiter, who was also on the top of the most of the sky, i. e. heaven.

The presentation of the trees is also connected with the perhaps the fields on the heaven in the afterlife life, or even with the gods. Usually we can assume that the presentations of the trees

⁵ Popović, Kapuran 2011, p. 297 – 305.

⁶ Јовановић 2009, p. 73.

⁷ Зотовић 1995, p. 115, n. 75 – monument from Otanj, near Užice.

⁸ Димитров, 1942, p. 77, n. 23, p. 58, 84.

⁹ Dautova – Ruševljan 1983, p. 51, T. 4/3.

are symbolic presentations of the heavens gardens or the Roman god of the woods and fields, Silvan¹⁰ God Silvan had numerous characteristic; but he could be also protector of the woods, fields, and everything what grow, i. e. all plants and vegetation.¹¹ In this meaning the god Silvan could be in the connection with the world of death. In the afterlife life the death persons will come on the heaven's fields and woods where the god Silvan will be again with them or where they will come because of his help and leadership. So, the usually opinion is that on the grave monument, on the cippi from Užice, the relief presentation of the wood are in fact the symbolic presentation of the god Silvan (fig. 4).

The presentations of the birds and trees are not often on the grave monuments and on the territory of other provinces of the Roman Empire. The birds as the symbol of the after death life appear on the territory of north Italy in the period of Julio – Claudio dynasty¹². On the territory of nowadays Slovenia we find the closest analogy in the way of presentation to the grave monument from the eastern part of the roman province of Dalmatia, on which is the presentation of the child with the pigeon in the hand. On the grave monument from Slovenia we find the presentation of the pigeon in the hand of woman who died¹³. In inscription was marked the age when she died; she was twentytwo years old. The woman in another hand holds the mirror, and with those two symbols, mirror and the pigeon, (fig. 6, 6a), we are again close to the symbolic story which in fact represented the goddess Venus Funeraria as the protector of the women who died young. In nowadays Istria we find the relief presentation how the bird is eating the grapes on one damaged grave monument (fig. 7)¹⁴. In this case we could connect the bird with god Dionysys, because of the grape, or at least with the Satyr, who is always marry follower of Dionysys, whose devine wine is drink on the haeven as well as the wine is his drink on the earth for the alive people as well as for those one who recently died¹⁵. Also, on the same territory we find analogy for the presentation of the tree¹⁶. Closer to our territory, on the territory of nowadays Bosnia and Herzegovina, we find the relief presentation of the trees in one dish with the genius and Satyr behinde it (fig. 8)¹⁷. What is interesting it is that this relief presentation is on the votive monument, i. e. votive ara. This fact shows that such symbolic relief presentation on the votive ara is connected with the certain god, and throught this we can not have doubt at all that such sybolic relief presentations on the grave monuments are also connected with the deities.

All of this monuments could be dated in the period from the end of II to the beginning of IV century. As the finaly conclusion we can tell that the presentation of the birds can be connected with the Venus Funeraria, as the protector of young died persons, or with the god Silvan, the ruler of the haeven's fields and woods. If we let us to imagine more, we can imagine the both of the gods as the protector and the ruler of the haeven's not only fields and woods, but the gardens with the fruits and flowers, the gardens where is in fact the beauty. Again with that we can connected the Venus Funeraria who was also for the life of female persons protector of their love

¹⁰ Зотовић 1973, p. 34.

¹¹ Замуровић 1936, p. 374 – 375.

¹² Reljefni prikazi na rimskim nadgrobnim spomenicima u Arheološkom muzeju Istre u Puli/ Depictions in Relief on the Roman Funerary Monuments of the Archaeological Museum of Istria at Pula, Pula 2006, 3 p. 7.

¹³ Kastelic 1988, p. 501–502, n. 196 – the grave monument from Aquileia.

¹⁴ Reljefni prikazi na rimskim nadgrobnim spomenicima u Arheološkom muzeju Istre u Puli/ Depictions in Relief on the Roman Funerary Monuments of the Archaeological Museum of Istria at Pula, Pula 2006, p. 53, n. 4.

¹⁵ About the cult of Bachus and various atributs of it see in detail: Пилиповић, 2011.

¹⁶ Reljefni prikazi na rimskim nadgrobnim spomenicima u Arheološkom muzeju Istre u Puli/ Depictions in Relief on the Roman Funerary Monuments of the Archaeological Museum of Istria at Pula, Pula 2006, p. 283, n. 83 and 84.

¹⁷ Imamović 1997, p. 164, n. 404.

and beauty, and with the Silvan who was the protector of plants and vegetables, the protector of the enjoy in haevens gardens and fields of the male persons. When we have in the mind the finds from Mokrinj, we can conclude that such believeing in the connection of the birds with the the cult of death and afterlife life existed in the period of prehistory. Such believeing could survive much later in the future, in the period of the roman time and be connected with the roman cult and with that with the roman sepulchral art. In deeper meaning, the presentation of the birds on the grave monuments of the roman period, represented the cult sincretism beetwen the autoch-tonic and roman religious believeing.

List of illustrations

Fig. 1 – Stela, Kolovrat.

Fig. 2 -Skelani, grave cube.

Fig. 3 – Cippus, Otanj.

Fig. 4 – Užice, cippus.

Fig. 5 – Mokranjske stene, tomb of child, detail

Fig. 6 – Slovenija, grave monument, detail.

Fig. 6a – Slovenija, grave monument, detail.

Fig. 8 – Bosna i Hercegovina, votive monument spomenik, detail.

Fig. 7 – Pula, grave monument, detail.

Bibliography

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Dautova – Ruševljan 1983 | = | V. Dautova – Ruševljan, <i>Rimska kamena plastika u jugoslovenskom delu provincije Donje Panonije</i> , Novi Sad 1983 |
| Димитров 1942 | = | Д. Димитров, Надгробните плочи от римско време в северна България, София 1942. |
| Imamović 1977 | = | E. Imamović, <i>Antički kultni i votivni spomenici na području BiH</i> , Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo 1977 |
| Јовановић 2009 | = | А. Јовановић, Прилог истраживању античких цитата у савременој ликовној уметности, Гласник Српског археолошког друштва 25, Српско археолошко друштво, Београд 2009. |
| Kastelic 1998 | = | J. Kastelic, <i>Simbolika Mitov na Rimskih nadgrobnih spomenikih</i> , Slovenska Matica v Ljubljani, Ljubljana 1998. |
| Пилиповић 2011 | = | С. Пилиповић., Култ Бахуса на централном Балкану I – IV в., Балканолошки институт, Београд 2011. |
| Paškvalin 2012 | = | V. Paškvalin, <i>Antički sepulkralni spomenici s područja BiH</i> , Djela knj. LXXXIII, Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja, Sarajevo 2012 |
| Popović, Kapuran 2011 | = | P. Popović, Al. Kapuran, <i>La tombe de Mokrinj, Archaeology: making of and practice. Studies in honor of Mircea Babeş at his 70th anniversary</i> , Piteşti 2011. |
| Reljefni 2006 | = | <i>Reljefni prikazi na rimskim nadgrobnim spomenicima u Arheološkom muzeju Istre u Puli / Depictions in Relief on Roman Funerary Monuments of the Archaeological Museum of Istria at Pula</i> , Arheološki muzej Istre, Pula 2006. |
| Замуровић 1936 | = | А. Замуровић, Митолошки речник II, Књижаре Славија, Нови Сад 1936 (издање књижаре Славија). |
| Зотовић 1973 | = | М. Зотовић, Југозападна Србија у доба Римљана, Ужички зборник 2, Народни музеј Титово Ужице, Титово Ужице 1973 |
| Зотовић 1995 | = | Р. Зотовић, Римски надгробни споменици источног дела римске провинције Далмације, Кадињача, Ужице 1995 |
| Вулић 1941 – 1948 | = | Н. Вулић, Антички споменици наше земље, Споменик СКА ХCVIII, Српска Краљевска Академија наука и уметности Београд 1941 – 1948. |

THE RELIEF PRESENTATION OF THE BIRDS ON THE GRAVE
MONUMENTS OF THE EASTERN PART OF THE ROMAN PROVINCE
OF DALMATIA – CONNECTION WITH THE GODS AND SOUL
(Abstract)

On the grave monuments of the eastern part of the roman province of Dalmatia, stelae, cipii and grave cubes, there are very rare relief presentation of the birds. The birds can be represented in the hand of the female death persons or in the presentation of the vegetabil coronae. The birds can be atributes of the godness Venus Funeraria, protector of those who died early. The trees and the birds also can be symbols of the heaven's garden and throught that in the connection with the god Silvan. But, also we have to acount with the prehistoric inheritance and beeiving in the connection of the birds and the souls of the dead persons. All of this monuments could be dated in the period from the end of II to the beginning of IV century.