

SYMBOLS ON GRAVE MONUMENTS IN THE EASTERN PART OF THE ROMAN PROVINCE OF DALMATIA

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Abstract: *The symbols on grave monuments are divided into two groups: 1. figural, that include animals (hare, dolphin, bull, bird), various objects (egg, key, ascia, shoe-tree, scroll, goblet, spindle, three-legged table, bread) and flora (ivy leaf, vine, flower, apple, grapes); 2. geometric (circle, square, semicircle, meander, triangle, cross, zig-zag and wavy lines). A frequent figural symbol is a rosette. Certain objects represent social status (key, shoe-tree, scroll, spindle) while the majority of figural symbols are related to the ceremonial funeral feast (goblet, three-legged table, bread). The inhabitants of the eastern part of the Roman Province of Dalmatia accepted the religious belief in life after death through the symbiosis Dionysos–Apollo. The grave monuments belong to the period of 2nd–4th century.*

Keywords: *Province of Dalmatia, grave monuments, symbols, rosette, Dionysos–Apollo, 2nd–4th century.*

Apart from the article by Čremošnik (1957) and a short reference by Sergejevski (1934) and Gabričević (1987) little has been published on the meaning of the symbols on the Roman grave monuments in Serbia.¹ In order to recognise and define them properly, we would need to know the religious context in which they appear especially in regard to the relations between the autochthonous population and the cultural, social and economic elements, brought by the Romans during the period of Roman rule. Considering the relations between the autochthonous population and Romans we should also bear in mind the role and dynamics of the process of syncretism or *interpretatio romana* (Штаерман 1987: 232 ff.).² Although it is known that foreign deities were included in the local Pantheon, it is difficult to say exactly how the Pan-

¹ A few more recent works mainly refer to cultural analysis or decorative elements without considering their symbolic value (e.g. Зоровић: 1995: 41–79; Gugolj 1998).

² He considers syncretism in following aspects (Штаерман 1987: 232 ff.): 1. incorporating foreign gods in ones own Pantheon; 2. combining ones' gods with foreign by interpreting their significance in different ways and modifying the gods' image; 3. the effect which one religion has on another (e.g. orientation towards cult of the underworld); 4. assimilation of different religions which conditions the appearance of a new system; 5. uniting all the divine functions of different religions as the basic idea of one divine force with different functions and manifestations.

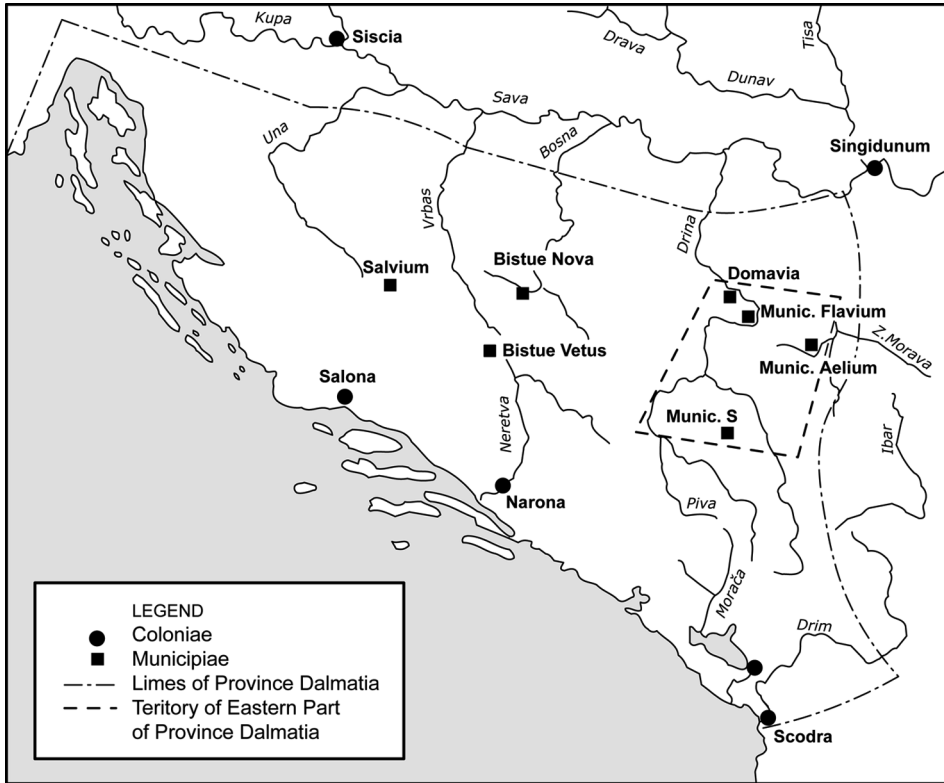


Fig. 1. Map of the Roman Province of Dalmatia.

theon of the autochthonous population looked in the first place, or to what extent and in what manner the Roman deities were accepted. A religion, that sometimes could also be expressed by religious representations in pictorial signs – symbols, in a way reflects a number of important aspects of a given society/community.

The eastern part of the Roman Province of Dalmatia (region around present day Skelani, Rogatica, Foča, Ustikolina, Užice, Požega, Nova Varoš Prijepolje and Pljevlja) (fig. 1) did not all develop socially and economically simultaneously: the appearance of certain symbols was conditioned by the process of Romanisation manifested by the presence of gravestones. The appearance of symbols, whether they are the outcome of the Roman influence or a revival of the older autochthonous traditions is of only relative significance in a certain chronological interval since in both cases symbols are to be seen on the particular territory only with the introduction of the Roman grave monuments. However, it is interesting to note that motifs corresponding to Roman sepulchral art were the first to appear on the earliest series of gravestones. This is

the case on the series of monuments in Pljevlja and Komini, as well as in Kremna from the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century where the rosette appears as one of the most widespread symbols on Roman sepulchral art. The gravestone in Ruduša testifies that a rosette was one of the first symbols to be accepted by the autochthonous population already in the first half of the 1st century (Gabričević 1987: 50–52, T. I–V). On the other hand, symbols which could be identified as a revival of an older autochthonous tradition broadly appeared only in the 3rd century, as compared with other regions of the province of Dalmatia like Ruduša, Krnjeuša or Golubići (Patsch 1914: 216), where they appear earlier. This phenomenon in the eastern part of the province of Dalmatia corresponds in general chronologically to the appearance of cultural elements of the older autochthonous culture.³ All symbols that appear on gravestones in this region may be divided, due to the form, into figural and geometric.

The Figural Symbols

The figural symbols consist of a large number of representations such as: animals (dove, serpent, hare, wild boar, dolphin, bull and fantastic animals); plants (ivy leaf, vine, flower, apple, bunch of grapes); different objects (key, scroll, goblet, egg, spindle, ascia, shoe-tree, three-legged table, bread). Figural symbols appear on all types of gravestones, such as stele, cubes and altars, from the 2nd to the 4th century.

Aside from the problem of how symbols are to be interpreted, there is a question whether in time symbols became merely decorative elements, or (besides their decorative use) they still retained some of their original symbolic meaning. According to Čremošnik (1957: 217) symbols gained a decorative character as a result of their frequent use, but this opinion is questionable if we consider the symbols on grave monuments as invariably related to the funeral cult. A good example is found in the decorative representation of vine leaves and grapes, or ivy leaves which, as decorative elements in the widest sense, conjure up the joy and happiness of the garden of paradise, merry Dionysian parades and the dissipated entertainment of his escorts. In other words, as long as a certain symbol retains an “echo”



Fig. 2. Grave monument of Pannonia Montana (after Zotović 1995: бр. 127).

³ For instance, older jewelry of prehistoric provenance in Rogatica in the 4th century (Fiala 1897: 261), dated in relation to Constantine I coins. Jewelry of the older prehistoric cultural tradition can be distinguished on the grave cube from Seča Reka (Zotović 1995: 126–127, No. 137).

in individual or collective consciousness it cannot be considered as a “dead” symbol (the “dead” are those symbols which no longer actively exist in individual or collective consciousness; Chevalier i Gheerbrant 1983: XVII–XIX). Each symbol has a meaning that can be understood in more than one way. Thus a symbol may also have an intermediary function related to the social community: a key in the hand of the deceased, as in the case of grave monument of Paconia Montana (fig. 2) (Цермановић-Кузмановић 1968: 202, Т. I/2, II/3–4) may be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the deceased as the mistress of a household (Зотовић 1995: 64–65), but since the symbols on grave-stones are always connected with funereal cult, the key may also be understood as the symbolic attribute of the goddess Hecate, who rules the souls of the dead, and a key in the hand of the deceased as a symbolic representation of the gods of ancestors, who keep the door of the kingdom of the dead (Gugolj 1998: 10–11). In fact, most symbols on the gravestones may be interpreted in different ways, as in the case of gravestones with the deceased holding an apple or some similarly shaped fruit (Зотовић 1975: 180, бр. 7, сл. 4; Mirković 1975: 99, br. 6; Цермановић-Кузмановић 1989: 8–10, бр. 5, сл. 5). An apple or perhaps pomegranate or other rounded fruit in the hand of the deceased may symbolise the fruits of the Garden of Eden (*ibid.*: 12). If we expand the idea of Dionysos who was at the same time god of the dead and god of vegetation, the fruit in the hand of the deceased may be seen as an expression of the belief that after death person, like all vegetation will be born anew.

Every symbol may also be considered on a functional plane whether this means material, earthly function or some supernatural function in the afterlife.

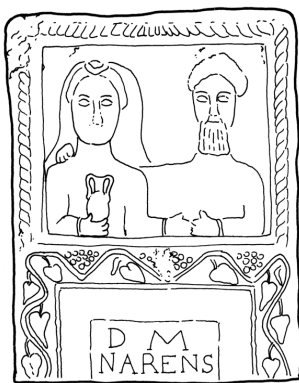


Fig. 3. Grave monument from Kolovrat (after Зотовић 1995: бр. 55a).

Among such figural symbols are those related to observing ritual funeral feasts, ploughmen and hunters, but also symbols such as the rosette with its floral as well as astral symbolism. Symbols relating to funeral feasts are the most numerous. Among them we can distinguish those which functionally illustrate the funeral feast in detail and those that only imply the funeral feast. Symbols that relate to the funeral feast include a three-legged table, bread and goblets. The goblet is almost always presented in the hand of the deceased. A servant holding a goblet, represented on one sides of the monument in Seča Reka, is an exception. Likewise, a goblet will never be found in a funeral feast scene of the deceased on a *kline* with wife and servant beside him, but only in relief representing a bust of the deceased (figs. 3–4).⁴

⁴ See: (Зотовић 1995: 111–112, бр. 55–56, – from Kolovrat). There is a whole series of monuments where, due to partial damage, we cannot identify the object that deceased held (*ibid.*: бр. 26, 28, 35, 37, 53, 65, 66).

Thus this symbol has the role of suggesting a funeral feast in abridged form and of putting forward the idea of participation in a collective feast of gods and mortals. In the realm of supernatural meaning, the goblet might be seen as a sign of future abundance and immortality. Apart from that, a goblet is at the same time an object used in libations and in secular feasts which at the same time connects it with the chthonic dark world of the dead, but also the worldly, merry welcoming present and future earthly life.

The three-legged table is the most frequently represented symbol on grave monuments with funeral feast scenes, while bread, *i.e.* the ritual loaf, is extremely rare. It appeared most probably on the grave stele from Vranjani (fig. 5) and Skelani (fig. 6) (Зотовић 1995: бр. 23, 32) and the grave cubes from Karan (*ibid.*: бр. 128). It is also possible to find it on the stele from Kolovrat (*ibid.*: бр. 20). Three-legged tables are found on a whole series of stele and, in lesser number, on grave cubes (Зотовић 1995: бр. 20, – Kolovrat; бр. 23, – Vranjani; бр. 25, – Tubići; бр. 32, – Skelani; бр. 51, – Radanovci; бр. 65, – Crvica; бр. 70, – Tegare; бр. 128, 138, – Karan; бр. 137, – Seča Reka; бр. 161, – Ustikolina). If we take into account that the funeral feast on grave-monuments in the eastern part of the Roman Province of Dalmatia appears in reduced form, most frequently the deceased is shown on a bed without a three-legged table in front, or even just as a bust, we can suppose that representation of three-legged tables, when they occur, had the function of emphasising a certain idea. This view is best illustrated by the three-legged table on the grave cube from Seča Reka (fig. 7), Ustikolina, and Crvica which is so large that it dominates the entire scene. Apart from symbolizing honour and heroism (it was presented to the winners of games or choirs) the three-legged table is a symbol of the god Apollo (Срејовић и Цермановић-Кузмановић 1979). Apollo was not only the god of music and art but also the god of vegetation and shepherds, safeguard from illness and god of death. He shared a shrine with Dionysos in Delphi because in the winter months he went to the land of Hyperboreans and left his shrine to the glorification of Dionysos dithyramps. Thus the rep-



Fig. 4. Grave monument from Kolovrat (after Зотовић 1995: бр. 58).



Fig. 5. Stele from Vranjani (after Зотовић 1995: бр. 23).



Fig. 6. Stela from Skelani, left side and front (after Зотовић 1995: бр. 32).

resentation of a three-legged table does not belong to an ordinary feast, but to a feast where an ordinary mortal, having achieved it by his honest life and good deeds, identifies himself with the gods of the heavenly banquet. This could not have been achieved unless the deceased was heroized. Thus the representation of a three-legged table on the cube from Seča Reka, where it is elevated to a level above the servant (*i.e.* material world) is understandable. It represents a higher level of mediation between man and god. The funeral feast takes place in both worlds, with participation of both the living and the dead, the deceased, the deceased ancestors and gods. It is

precisely the presence of the latter, with whom the deceased will unite in rebirth after death thus becoming immortal, that makes a toast be made with an expression of joyful expectation which is exactly what we tend to see on the face of the servant on the square from Seča Reka. Bread or ritual loaves also played an important role in emphasising certain ideas, judging by the fact that on the monuments from Vranjani, Karan and Skelani it is represented above the heads of the participants in the ritual feast (Зотовић 1995: br. 23, 32, 128). There is possibly a small three-legged table on the monuments from Karan and

Kolovrat as well (*ibid.*: 105, br. 20). Ritual vessels or food, as sacrificial offerings,⁵ are usually represented on the table (Cumont 1966: 437; Rusu 1991: pl. IX/9–10; Rusu-Bolindet 1994: pls. III/3, IV/4).

Bread symbolises life or the vital nourishment of body and soul. Sacrificial bread was usually round in shape and often broken in half during the ritual, which signifies divided life which is again united, just as life and death, after which eternal life evolves (Cooper 1978: 24). Unlike bread, eggs are not sacrificial food since they are considered to be immortal. A figure of Dionysos with an egg in hand, as a promise of a return to new life (Chevalier i Gheerbrant 1983: 214) was found in a Boeotian tomb. Other objects like

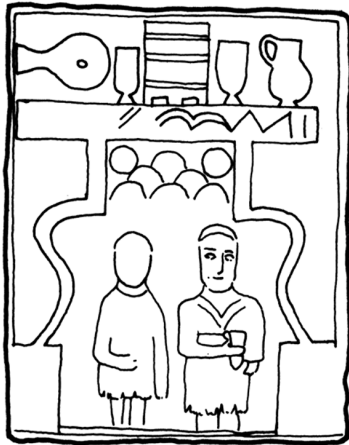


Fig. 7. Grave cube from Seča Reka (after Зотовић 1995: бр. 137).

⁵ Sacrificial food usually include bread or fish on a small three-legged table. It may also be presented as carried by servants, such as the scene on the monuments from Sirmium and Aquincum (Dautova Ruševljan 1983: 61, n. 239).

scroll (Зотовић 1995: бр. 23, – Vranjani; br. 30, – Sase; br. 67, – Klotijevci; br. 139, – Bajina Bašta; and perhaps, br. 29, – Kalušić), spindle (*ibid.*: 131–132, бр. 6), shoe-tree (*ibid.*: бр. 130) and probably a key, serve as symbols of one's social status/profession and provide a clear example of the iconography of Roman sepulchral art. All these symbols can be placed in the period from the 2nd to the 4th century, at the time when grave monuments were in use in this area.

As far as animal representations are concerned, we should mention the representation of oxen along with a ploughman from Kolovrat near Prijepolje (Зотовић 1975: 181, бр. 17, сл. 10–11). This fragment could probably not have been part of a grave monument but it can be defined as an object of sacral purpose, perhaps from a tomb of the *area maceria cinta* type. Scenes with a ploughman do not belong to the secular category but to the sacral group. They appear on grave monuments, sometimes as an entire scene of ploughman with his plough harnessed to oxen and sometimes limited to oxen in a funeral feast scene with a man on a bed and a woman beside him (Cumont 1966: 431, figs. 87–88; Bianchi 1975: 164, fig. 2). The appearance of this scene in funerary art is connected with the belief that man's diligent and correct attention to duties in this life is rewarded in the afterlife. Animals like boars (fig. 6 left) (Зотовић 1995: бр. 32, – Skelani) and hares (*ibid.*: бр. 117, – Rogatica) are found in the category of hunting scenes with the hare represented on the altar above a garland frame. A hunting scene is usual in Roman sepulchral art. The appearance of a serpent on the sides of the monument from Vranjani is unique in the eastern part of Roman Province of Dalmatia. The serpent is without doubt a chthonic symbol of the underworld and at the same time the other world. However, in a wider sense it is a symbol of heavenly fire and purification of the soul. Dolphins are adopted from Roman sepulchral art and they are usually considered a symbol of the heavenly ocean through which the soul travels to its final destination. At the same time the dolphin is a sacred animal of the god Apollo, that accompanies souls on their way to the Sun, where, having been purified, they will join the god. A bird is a symbol of the soul. Grave monuments are usually extensively damaged, so it is hard to say for certain what particular bird it is, but it is probably a dove (Зотовић 1995: 104, 105, 113, бр. 18, 20, 64). Fantastic animals, griffins or winged horses/Pegasus (Зотовић 1995: бр. 6, 125, – Kremna, winged horses; бр. 19, – Kolovrat, griffin) are symbols of the guides of the soul, while in a wider sense are symbols of power, light and constant awareness (Срејовић и Цермановић-Кузмановић 1979).

The rosette is among the most frequent figural symbols. It can be encompassed to astral symbols, and it symbolizes the identity of the deceased on his journey through cosmic space (Gabričević 1987: 20).⁶ The appearance of the rosette on steles in the eastern part of the province of Dalmatia is very frequent in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and may be represented in different ways (Salviat 1966: no. 38, fig. 6). It seems that its symbolism is suited to the religious concepts of

⁶ On some monuments from the Sinj area a rosette is a substitute for the deceased's head.



Fig. 8. Stela from Brodarevo (after Зотовић 1995: бр. 26).

the autochthonous population, because the first series of steles that appear in the 2nd century have a space for an inscription and a gable where the rosette is found. The rosette also symbolise a belief in immortality.

Ivy and grapevines point to Dionysos. They appear most frequently as decorative elements along the borders of the inscription or relief field on grave altars and stelae. Ivy leaves are rarely found on relief fields (Зотовић 1995: 106, бр. 26, сл. 26, – Brodarevo) (fig. 8). This probably suggests that ivy and grapevines had not yet lost their symbolic meaning in the 3rd century. The frequent presence of Dionysos in the cult of the dead is certainly related to his

attribute as god of the dead and vegetation, and in a wider sense to the belief that the dead and the other world powers rule this world's fertility and wealth, which they distribute to the living (Елијаде 1991: 307). The representation of an *ascia* on the gable of the stela from Komini from the end of the 2nd century (Зотовић 1995: 106, бр. 27) is one of few isolated figural symbols in the eastern part of the province of Dalmatia. The *ascia* appears most often on grave monuments in the Solin area, while in the Empire in general it is most frequently seen in Gaulle (Gabričević 1987: 219). The *ascia* should probably be considered an apotropaic symbol, which served as a safeguard for the deceased, against sale of his grave, its desecration or erasing of the inscription (*ibid.*: 222).

The Geometric Symbols

The group of geometric symbols encompasses spirals, meanders, triangles, circles, semicircles, so called “Hercules’ knots”, wavy or zig-zag lines and crosses. They are to be found on stelae, cubes and altars and appear as isolated examples already at the end of the 2nd century and continue till the 4th century (cross) but in the eastern part of the province of Dalmatia their appearance can be determined in the 3rd century.⁷ A cross as a mark of Christian burial (*cf.* Rusu-Bolindeț 1994) engraved on the monument from Kolovrat dated to the 4th century, hardly imply that only a single Christian is buried there but rather suggests that the entire family was Christian (*cf.* Kovačević 1964: 114).⁸ Some

⁷ For the appearance of such symbols on grave monuments see: (Зотовић 1995: 101–131, – with references).

⁸ A cross on the monument from Kolovrat isn't cut on the bread but above it. A characteristic of sculptors in the region was often lack of spatial orientation inside the frame provided for a relief, so the cross could not be found on the bread, but either beside the table or above it. According to M. Vasić (personal communication, October 2007) there is a possibility that the cross was carved much later, perhaps even in the Mediaeval period, when the monument was in secondary use at a local cemetery.

geometric symbols, like the meander (fig. 9) appear very rarely (Зотовић 1995: 127, бр. 144, – Komini, grave cube), while others like spirals (fig. 10) appear much more frequently (*ibid.*: 105, бр. 22, – Tegare; 110, бр. 45, – Vrbica; 111, бр. 52, бр. 80, – Karan; 113, бр. 65, – Crvica). Deprived of their original meaning, both symbols can probably be seen as decorative motifs, especially when we have in mind the long period when the spiral was used as a symbol (Sergejevski 1934). The original symbolism of the spiral and the meander may have signified solar and lunar meaning (Stipčević 1981: 11). On the other hand, having in mind the tendency of the

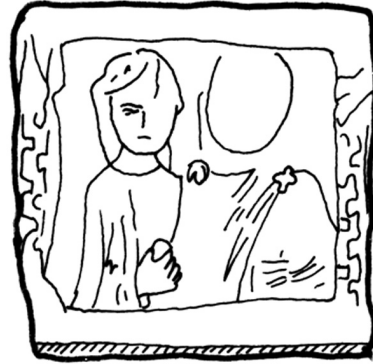


Fig. 9. Grave cube from Komini (after Зотовић 1995: бр. 144).

autochthonous population to reduce vegetative ornaments to geometric forms, it can be supposed that the spiral is a simplified geometric symbol of vegetative ornament along the edge of the relief or inscription field. Understood in this way, it may as a decorative-symbolic element on grave monuments, represent the promised happy life in the other world. Triangular ornaments also belong to the realm of decorative-symbolic motifs on grave monuments. Such ornament is represented on the border of the grave cube from Komini (Зотовић 1995: 128, бр. 145) and on the three-legged table on the cube from Seča Reka. The triangular motif, rarely found on gravestones, is also found on the monument from Ruduša near Sinj where it describes the hem of the deceased's dress (Gabričević 1987: 16), as well as on a stele from Rumania as an ornamentation (decorative draperies) on the bed (Stefan 1974: 251, figs. 1–2). However, on the three-legged table, represented on the grave cube from Seča Reka, there are wavy lines as well as triangular incisions. If it was just for the sake of illustrating the draperies, probably only one of these geometric ornaments would have been used. Wavy marks and triangles may symbolise water and rain, and thus purification of the soul. The wavy line (water) in a wider sense is associated with the Nereides, grandchildren of the Ocean, and through them with the wide-open sea. Under the three-legged table there are two circles and between them three rows of six alternating semicircles. Their closest analogies are found on the monuments from Krnjeuša and Golubići. On the monument from Krnjeuša there is a representation of a rosette, lyre and an ornament in the shape of an ivy leaf which undoubtedly indicates symbolically the connection Dionysos–Apollo. Apart from an identical rosette on the monument from Golubići there are wavy lines. It is clear that on both monuments the symbolism refers to the significance of the belief in a syncretistic cult Dionysos–Apollo for the redemption of souls who will be purified through the waves of the heavenly Ocean and fire as they arrive to the source of constant fire and re-

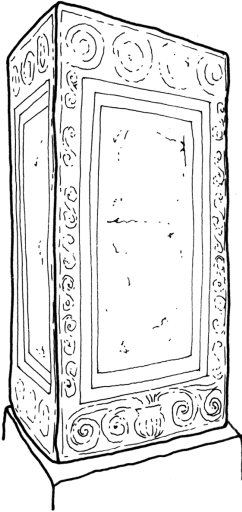


Fig. 10. Grave altar from Karan (after Зотовић 1995: бр. 80).

birth. If we study the gravestone rosette typology, it can be seen that the rosette in a symbolic representation could have been reduced to an ordinary circle (Salviat 1966: 38). A circle is at the same time the simplest symbol of the sun. On a vase in the Vatican Museum there is a three-legged table standing on the spread wings of an eagle or swan, while Apollo sits with a lyre in hand and a circle on each side. The elevated table symbolises the ascension of the spirit and the two circles are symbols of the sun and perfection (Chevalier i Gheerbrant 1983: 718). So it seems that the scene on the sides of the monument from Seča Reka should be associated with the god Apollo. The three-legged table, which is a symbol of Apollo, is raised on high to represent the rising of the spirit, that will be achieved by passing through fire and water of the heavenly Ocean. Two circles (left and right) beneath the table probably represent the sun and perfection, whether we understand them as the simplified geometric form of a rosette, or representation of abstract concepts via geometric symbols, whereas six semicircles could be interpreted (following the analogous representations on the monuments from Vranjani, Kremna and Skelani) as three broken sacrificial breads.⁹ The gravestone from Seča Reka is significant because it confirms that the population of the eastern part of the Roman Province of Dalmatia accepted the religious belief in life after death through the symbiosis Dionysos–Apollo. This monument also confirms that in the late 3rd century the population of this region used geometric ornaments for their symbolic not only decorative values. Another confirmation came from the Roman gravestone in the Holy Trinity church in Nova Varoš, where a geometric body is represented on the decorative band separating the relief and the inscription fields (Јовановић 2001: 229, сл. 6). The gravestone is so damaged that a square, rectangle and circle are all that remains visible. In geometric symbolism a square signifies earth or even heaven and earth together, *i.e.* the entire created universe. The circle was also a symbol of heaven and perfection and in association with the cult of fire signified heroes and divinities. A circle may also have apotropaic qualities against “wandering” souls and demons. An apotropaic function is also related to the so-called “Hercules’ knot” that appears on grave altars from Pljevlja and Komini (Зотовић 1995: 118, бр. 93; 124, бр. 127). In any case among the symbols on gravestones of the eastern part of the province of

⁹ The number three is a sign of spiritual order and the most frequent number of heaven. It also relates to three ways of creation that correspond to spirit, soul and body.

Dalmatia one can distinguish those adopted from Roman sepulchral iconography and those that expressed religious representations in a manner acceptable to the tradition of the autochthonous population. Among the latter symbols are the geometric symbols but it is probable that certain figural symbols, compatible with the ideal-religious bases of older autochthon sacral content, were adopted in the eastern part of the Roman province of Dalmatia. These grave-stones still remain as puzzling and mysterious as the smiles on the faces of the deceased.

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РАДМИЛА ЗОТОВИЋ

СИМБОЛИ НА НАДГРОБНИМ СПОМЕНИЦИМА
ИСТОЧНОГ ДЕЛА РИМСКЕ ПРОВИНЦИЈЕ ДАЛМАЦИЈЕ

Резиме

Симболи на надгробним споменицима источног дела римске провинције Далмације (области око данашњих Скелана, Рогатице, Фоче, Устиколине, Ужица, Пожеге, Нове Вароши, Пријепоља и Пљеваља) (сл. 1) могу се поделити у две основне групе: на групу фигуралних и групу геометријских симбола. У оквиру групе фигуралних симбола могу се разликовати симболи у виду животиња (зец, делфин, бик, птица), у виду различитих предмета (јаје, кључ, асција, калуп за ципеле, волумен, пехар, вретено, треножни сточић, хлеб) и као флорални симболи (бршљанов лист, винова лоза, цвет, јабука, грозд). Као геометријски симболи јављају се круг, квадрат, полукруг, меандар, троугао, крст, цикцак и валовита црта и крст. Одређени предмети, као кључ, калуп за ципеле, волумен и вретено, стоје у вези са римском сепулкралном иконографијом, према којој су осликавали друштвени статус, нпр. господарица куће (сл. 2), односно професију којом се покојник за живота бавио. Највећи број фигуралних симбола везан је за обред посмртне гозбе, тј. даће, као нпр. пехар (сл. 3–4), сто са три ноге (сл. 5, 6 десно, 7) и хлеб. Пехар, у сцени са попрсјем увек представљен у рукама покојника, наговештава идејни смисао обреда даће, док хлеб одаје смисао и однос живота и смрти. Треножни сточић осликава идеју хероизације покојника, или, пак, као на коцки из Сече Реке, представља симбол бога Аполона. Бршљанов лист (сл. 8) и винова лоза симболи су бога Диониса и најчешће се јављају као декоративно-симболички елементи по ивици рељефног или натписног поља надгробних споменика, док су јаје и јабука симболи бесмртности и оностраног. Представе животиња на надгробним споменицима могу се тумачити на различите начине. Птица, највероватније голуб, осликава саму душу, док су фантастичне животиње, грифони и крилати коњи, имали симболичну функцију водича душа. Представа орача са плугом у који су упрегнути волови на фрагментованом квадру из Коловрата највероватније је симболичко-декоративни рељеф на делу гробнице типа *area maceria cinta* и стоји у вези са веровањем да човек марљивим вршењем своје дужности за живота заслужује добро и пријатно место на ономе свету. Зец и вепар (сл. 6, лево) су саставни део жанр-сцена преузетих из римске сепулкралне уметности, које су на декоративно-симболички начин осликавале једно од уживања на другоме свету, док је делфин могао бити схваћен као психопомп или пак као симбол бога Аполона. Најраспрострањенији симбол јесте розета. Она се на надгробним споменицима источне римске Далмације јавља као најранији од свих симбола. Налази се на серији првих споменика из Комина

и Пљеваља и на једном споменику из Кремана из II и почетка III в. Геометријски симболи се јављају у много мањем броју. Неки од њих, као меандар (сл. 9) и правоугаоник, присутни су спорадично, и осликавају симболе земље, неба и свеколиког универзума. Спирала (сл. 10) на надгробним споменицима одражава склоност домородачког становништва да своди вегетабилне орнаменте на геометријске, чиме она тако постаје декоративно-симболички елемент на надгробним споменицима којим се по ивицама рељефних и натписних поља замењују витице бршљана или винове лозе. Међу изузетно занимљиве спадају геометријски симболи на левој бочној страни надгробне коцке из Сече Реке (сл. 7). Представа издигнутог троножног сточића одражава издизање духа, док су два круга испод њега симболи сунца и савршенства. Шест полукругова испод њега представљају три преломљена жртвена хлеба, судећи према сличним представама обредног хлеба на надгробним споменицима из Врањана, Кремана и Склана. Преломљени хлебови, представљени у три реда, изражавају виши ниво неба и три чина стварања који одговарају духу, души и телу. Урези у виду цикцак и валовите црте на троножном сточићу могу осликавати идејни смисао воде, а преко ње Небески океан којим душа путује до коначног одредишта. У сваком случају, симболичке представе на коцки из Сече Реке стоје у вези са религиозним схватањем загробног живота повезаног са веровањем у бога Аполона, што потврђују и аналогне представе на надгробним споменицима из Крњеуше и Голубића. У ширем смислу, овај споменик је, уз симболичне представе на осталим надгробним споменицима, потврда да је становништво источног дела римске провинције Далмације прихватило религиозно веровање у загробни живот преко култне симбиозе Дионис – Аполон. Усамљени симбол хришћанства, уколико није у питању знатно каснији додатак приликом секундарне употребе, налазимо на стели из Коловрата, из IV в., на којој је урезан крст. Праћење симбола на надгробним споменицима источног дела римске провинције Далмације могуће је у пуном распону, тј. од прихватања римских надгробних споменика у овим крајевима у II в., па све до IV в. до када и остају у употреби.

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