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Original scientific article
Received: 31 May 2020
Accepted: 10 June 2020

Stecaks and medieval cultural context (with selected examples that are interpreted and recontextualized)

Summary

Article "Stecaks and medieval cultural context" implies that traditional studying of stecaks is an obsolete paradigm, burdened with limiting stereotypes, and therefore it cannot give more meaningful answers related to their artistry. Starting from the fact that these monuments are the remaining part of the immersed or completely destroyed cultural and spiritual context, especially in the area of their appearance, this article seeks to reach its reconstruction. In that sense relief scenes are shown on the monuments of better quality as polyptych compositions broken on the sides of the stone cube. With their artistic balance and orientation they are represented as descriptors of completely receptive meaning.

Recognition of several relief presentations from single monuments in traditions of medieval Christian artistry shows that the mentioned reconstruction is quite possible and efficient. In that sense central part of the composition on the monument from Podgradinje in Gornje Hrasno, symbolic illustration of Christ's resurrection, varies with the presentation of confronted birds in the gable, whose original inspiration from Raventian sarcophaguses came to necropolises of the South Herzegovina. Relief presentation under that gable, in which a bear is attacked by a knight with weapon in the form of a cross and his head is covered with the cross of lilies, is recognized by comparison to similar presentation from the gothic illustrated codex *Speculum humanae salvationis* (Hs 2505), Christ's descent to limbo.

Illustration of the Biblical story about Jonah the prophet, which held the reminiscence to belief in resurrection after death from the earliest Christian days, is shown on the monument from Police on Visocica in its artistic devaluation, as the work of uneducated copyist and stonemason while the composition from Gvozno necropolis, which inspired him, refers to a good copy used by the stonemason on the basis of a very archaic pattern.

Holy Family flight into Egypt on the monument from Medjugorje near Glumina, which has been the only known example in the ornaments of the late medieval monuments, compatible in its basic motif repertoire with the most famous traditional relief and art presentations of the same topic, shows that the 15th century stecaks were opened to new inspirations from the area of sacral canonized visual arts. That is also confirmed by the topic referring to Jonah the prophet from Gvozno necropolis, which initiated, for the time being the only known copy from Police on Visocica.

Keywords: stecaks; artistry; Middle Ages; cultural context; symbolism.