

Stevce TODOROVSKI

## EAGLE AND SNAKE RELIEF ON THE CLOCK TOWER IN BITOLA

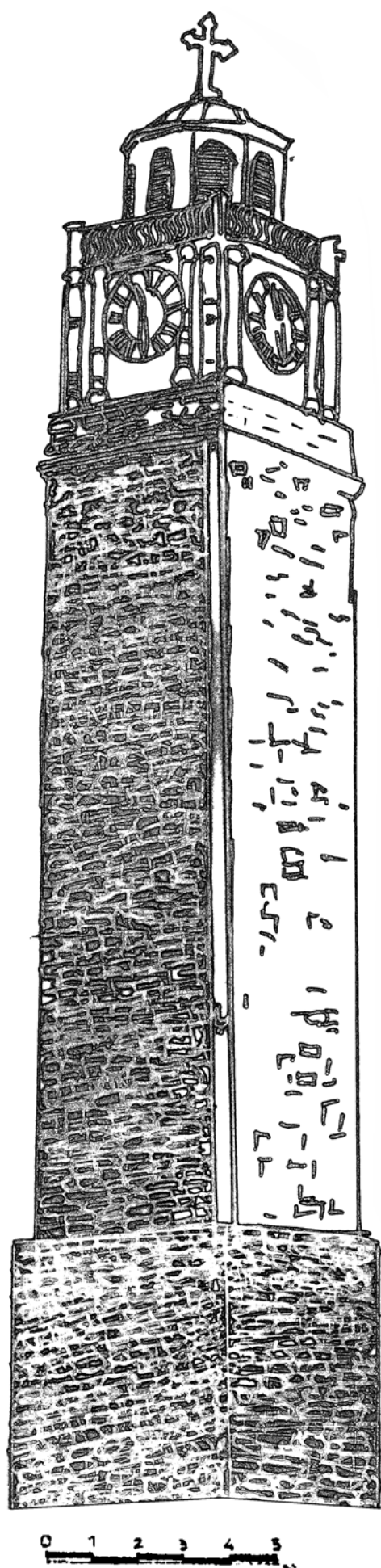
Key words: *Clock Tower, Bitola, Relief, Eagle, Snake, Thracian, Macedonian, Bible.*

*Abstract: The article begins by describing the site where the Clock Tower is located, its relief and its original reference in the preliminary publication. This is followed by the metrics of the object and analysis of the relief with the description of the eagle and the snake and its relation to other stories in Northern Greece. The significance and meaning of the eagle is noted in Ancient Greek and Roman mythology and is connected to the ancient gods, Zeus and Jupiter. This points to the symbolism of the snake and its positive mythical significance in the Ancient world and the use of its symbol in medicine. The interpretation of the symbols of eagle and snake in Christianity is discussed, which is directly taken from the Bible, namely from the last book of Revelation. On the other hand, it explains how Islam interprets living beings and images in Islam art. It will conclude with a commentary on the significance of the symbolism of the image of the fight between good and evil. At the same time, the mason himself left his seal certifying that the object was build in Turkish period from a Christian mason.*

Near the right bank of the river Dragor in the centre of the city you can see the Clock tower on the square in Bitola. The Clock Tower has been mentioned on many occasions from the point of architecture and construction in many written records from the 1628/29<sup>1</sup>, but since there is no description of the tower we are not certain that it is the same building.

Our intention with this article is to discuss the relief on this building.

The height of the Clock Tower, including the cross on the top, is 34 meters, according to unofficial records. On the south-east edge of the tower, made from broken granite-stone, with flattened edges



<sup>1</sup> M. Tefik, *Kratka istorija na bitolskiot vilaet*, Bitola, 1911, 39 - 40; Bitola Municipality Archive



which expand in a triangle with a crossed front angle, on the fifteenth row of the wall, from the pedestral<sup>2</sup> up, on the height of an average of 10 meters we can see the relief (due to the height I was not able to perform exact measurements). It is a shallow relief where we can see an eagle in flight attacking a snake, preparing to grab its head with its beak. This illustration in Northern Greece and Aegean Macedonia from the antic period to the middle ages, and even more recently, has been published in the second half of the last century<sup>3</sup>, at least in the literature I could consult. Usually, relief as a work of art is considered as a transfer form between sculpture and painting, from sculpture it takes the form and from painting it takes the composition and the schedule of the two dimensional surface. The relief was painted brown red and it is made prominent, marked and easily noticeable. Today, due to the atmospheric influence, the color partially faded, it mostly remains in the indentions of the relief. The mason made the eagle with half-cir-

cled, irregular feathers which resemble scales similar to the ancient birds that start from the top of the head and the neck all the way back longer feathers on the tail. The wings are raised in a descending flight and the claws are spread looking for stable ground to kill the snake, which is stretched in two parts.

In ancient Greek and Roman mythology, the eagle is connected to the Supreme God, Zeus and Jupiter. The eagle is the symbol of Zeus, the guardian of his scepter who stands by his throne.<sup>4</sup> To the Romans, the aquila (eagle) were carried before the legions as the symbol of Jupiter, of bravery and freedom.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the snake is the symbol of the demon from the underground and we can see the head of Medusa<sup>6</sup> and in the hands of the Fury.<sup>7</sup> The only

<sup>2</sup> In the pedestral on the north-western edge there is a marble burial mark with Ancient Greek inscription in three lines, also on the edges there are three broken marble pieces.

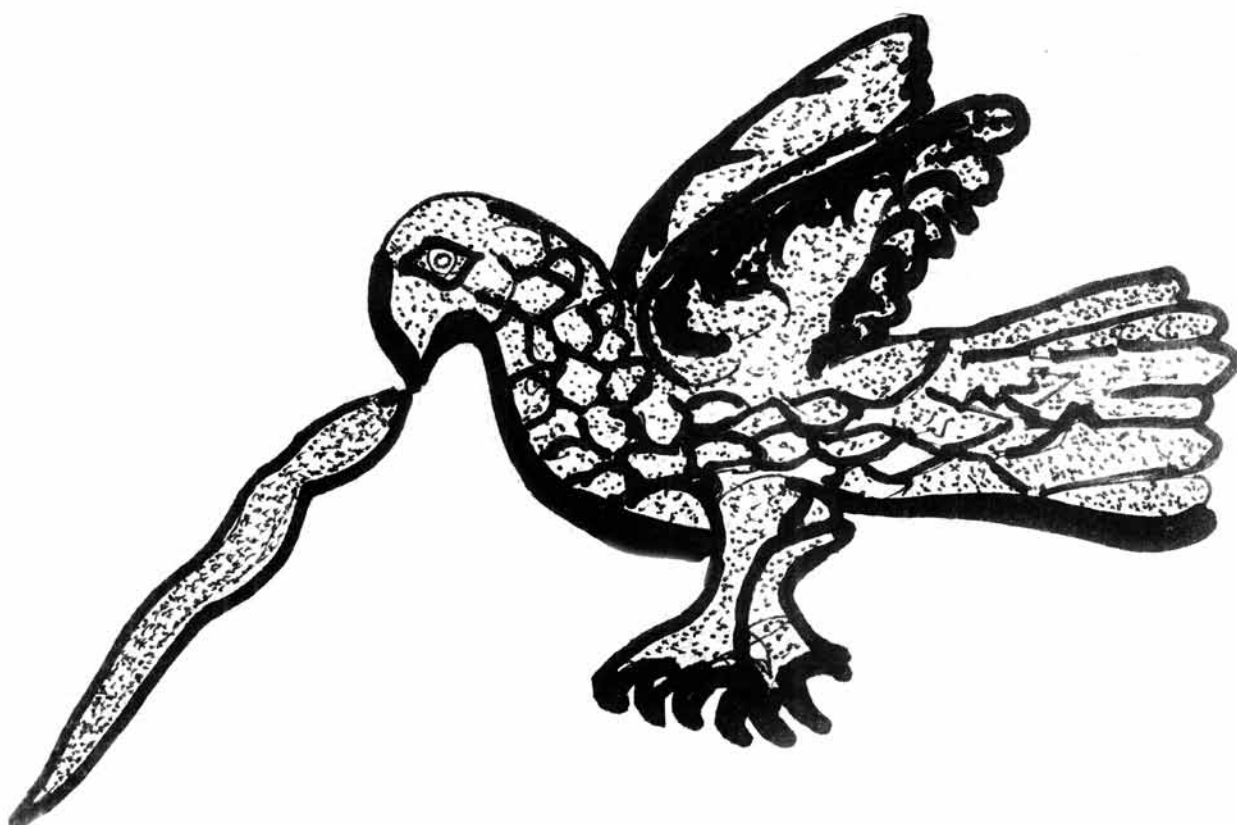
<sup>3</sup> C. Picard, AIGLE ET SERPENT, SUR LES DIVERS SENS D'UN SYMBOLE RELIGIEUX À TRAVERS LA GRÈCE DU NORD: D'APRÈS UNE OENOCHOË DE BRONZE DU MUSÉE DE BELGRADE, *Старинар* XIII - XIV/ 1962 - 1963, Београд, 1965, 1-7, in reference to aforementioned sources.

<sup>4</sup> Д. Срејовић, А. Цермановић, *Речник грчке и римске митологије*, Београд, 1987, 335-336.

<sup>5</sup> To the importance of the aquila we know from written documents that Octavian Augustus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century sent Roman legions to take Germany, from the other side of the Rhine, but in the Forest of Teutoburger they met the uniter of the German tribes Hermann, who as hired soldier served in the Roman army and was called Arminius. Familiar with the Romans war strategy he managed to defeat them. After the defeat Octavian sent his military leader Germanicus in the Forest of Teutoburger to at least retrieve the Roman symbols.

<sup>6</sup> Д. Срејовић, А. Цермановић, *op. cit.*, 98.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 442.



positive attribute is that the snake is intervened in the scepter of Asklepius, the son of Apollo,<sup>8</sup> revealing to him healing herbs that can be found in the plants of the outside world.

In late antics, in the time of Christianity and the Bible, the snake has an ambivalent meaning. On the one hand it is the source of evil, and on the other hand it brings people salvation and healing, in the case of Moses and the copper snake.

### Commentary on the relief

Here I will dedicate my attention to the relief. In addition I would like to call on other experts to say something concerning the relief.

The scene of the eagle and the snake is influence from the Orient, transferred to northern Greece, the Balkans (Thrace - Macedonia), as Phrygia, and variously prevalent around the Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> It is the symbol of victory of Thracian and Macedonian,<sup>10</sup> transfer from Orphic cult, early antics to late antic and through Byzantium into the middle ages. In the

National Library in Paris, in the book "Apocalypse of St. Sever" from 11th century, there is a picture<sup>11</sup> similar to the one on the relief in Bitola, where the eagle is attacking the snake. In fact, the idea that this scene is not characteristic of Islam broaches the subject that living creatures and images of divinities is prohibited in Islamic art.<sup>12</sup>

The eagle and the snake show the eternal struggle between good and evil. In this case, the symbolism is interpreted as Jesus Christ (the eagle) destroying Satan, the ancient snake, ties its head to the mouth for thousands of years. In the Bible, the struggle between good and evil, is symbolizes with personified images that we can see in the Old and New Testament. At the same time in all the books of the Bible the struggle is equal, only in the last book, Revelation, the apostle John, who we can see on the icons with his mark the eagle, reveals the victory of Christ over the devil, the personification of the snake.

We can conclude that the scene itself symbolizes the end of the world and its happy ending, the victory over evil.

What did the unknown mason who worked on the tower in Bitola tried to tell us? First, that this, magnificent building was build by Christians during the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>9</sup> C. Picard, op. cit., 6. According to the illustration in the text a dilemma appears whether the image is a peacock or an eagle. By using little knowledge of ornithology, it is known that peacocks do not attack snakes.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem. pic. 8.

<sup>12</sup> H. Redžić, *Islamska umjetnost*, Zagreb, 1967, V-VI.

Turkish occupation, second that they were familiar with the Bible and thirdly that they were aware of the placement of this relief, which the Turks were not

familiar with, that is set in stone and will testify to the efforts of the masons.

Стевче ТОДОРОВСКИ

## РЕЉЕФ НА ОРЕЛ И ЗМИЈА НА СААТ-КУЛАТА ВО БИТОЛА

### *Резиме*

Во близина на десниот брег од реката Драгор, во централното градско подрачје се издига саат-кулата на плоштадот во Битола. Архитектонски и градежно саат-кулата е третирана, во пишувани податоци се споменува во 17 век, но бидејќи не постои опис на оваа кула не знаеме дали се зборува за истата градба.

Висината на саат-кулата, заедно со крстот на нејзиниот покрив, по слободна проценка е околу 34 метри. На југоисточниот раб од кулата, кој е направен од кршен камен - гранит, со плоснати рабови, кои кон внатрешноста се шират во вид на триаголник со пресечен преден агол, на петнаесеттиот ред сидан камен, броено од крајот на цоклето нагоре, на висина од околу 10 метри се наоѓа релјефот. Изведен во плиток релјеф, претставен е орел кој во борбен налет напаѓа змија, подготвувајќи се со клунот да ја фати за главата. Каменорезецот орелот го изделкал со полукружни, неправилни пердуви, кои личат на крлушките на праптиците и се спуштаат од горниот дел на главата и вратот до задните, подолги пердуви од опашот. Крилата се подигнати во лет на спуштање, а канците се раширени барајќи стабилна почва за со клунот да ја усмрти змијата, која е растегната со две превиткувања.

Од друга страна, пак, змијата е симбол на демонот од подземјето и ја гледаме на главата на Медуза и во рацете на Фурија. Единствено позитивен атрибут змијата има испреплетена на скиптарот на Асклепиј, синот на Аполон, откривајќи му ги лековитите треви, по кои се движи низ растенијата.

Сцената со орелот и змијата е влијание од Ориентот, пренесено преку Северна Грција, Балканот (Тракија - Македонија), како Фригиски, претежно на Медитеранот. Тоа е симбол на победата на Тракијците и Македонците, кој се пренесува од култот на Орфеј во раната антика и во доцната антика, а преку Византија и во средниот век.

Всушност, идејата дека оваа сцена не е карактеристична за исламот, ја наметнува темата дека живи суштества и слики од божества се забранети во исламската уметност.

Орелот и змијата ја прикажуваат вечната борба меѓу доброто и злото. Во случајот, симболиката се толкува како Исус Христос (орелот) ја уништува сатаната, старата змија, и ја врзува со главата за устата за илјада години. Низ целата Библија, борбата меѓу доброто и злото е симболизирана меѓу овие персонификувани слики што ги среќаваме и во Стариот и во Новиот завет. Воедно, во сите книги на Библијата борбата е изедначена, само во последната книга т.е. Откровението, дефинитивно, апостолот Јован кој на фреските го гледаме со неговото обележје - орелот, ја открива победата на Исус Христос над ѓаволот, олицетворен во змијата.

Што сакал нам да ни остави непознатиот протомајстор што работел на кулата во Битола? Прво, дека оваа величествена градба ја граделе христијани во турско време, второ, дека библиски биле писмени и трето, дека биле свесни за поставувањето на овој релјеф кој Турците не го познавале, а во каменот ќе остане и ќе сведочи за печатот на градителите.