

Astral Symbolism on the Pre-Romanesque Relief in Keutschach (Hodiše)

Zmago Šmitek

The author attempts to prove that the pre-Romanesque relief on the facade of the parish church of St George in Keutschach (Hodiše) in Austrian Carinthia is a depiction of the Orion constellation. He justifies his theory with historical and art-historical facts. The main emphasis is laid on the fact that traces of late Classical astral mythologisation and deification are also recognisable in the Slovenian folk tradition.

The relief, which is carved into a damaged plate of white limestone of irregular dimensions (124 x 70 cm) and inserted into the southern facade of the parish church of St George in Keutschach (Hodiše) in Austrian Carinthia, has long awaited a convincing expert interpretation.¹ The relief depicts a mysterious anthropomorphic being with a halo, with a cross in place of the head and arms raised. Dr Emilijan Cevc, member of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts, writes that this "seemingly mediocre though highly significant art monument [...] at least to a certain extent sheds light on spiritual life in the earliest stages of Slovenian history [...]".² Dr Vlado Nartnik, who drew a comparison between the Slovenian folk tradition and astronomical premises, was the first to indicate a connection between the Keutschach relief and the Orion constellation.³ I agree with both authors that the Keutschach relief has a symbolic, spiritual, mythological or religious meaning. Starting from different directions, they both drew close to the truth. But Cevc did not grasp the true content of the image since he was convinced that it depicted Christ in prayer, while Nartnik failed to give a more detailed explanation as to why Orion had been so important that the artist depicted it on a rock. My argument is based on three foundations: the context of the historical period and the geographical area; the interpretation of iconographic components; and certain ethnological parallels.

¹ An overview of research conducted so far and a bibliography were provided by Emilijan Cevc. (Dvoje zgodnjerednjeveških figuralnih upodobitev na slovenskih tleh, *Arheološki vestnik* 3 (1952), No. 2, pp. 214-249; Predromanski relief v Hodišah na Koroškem, *Razprave* 15, Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Razred za zgodovinske in družbene vede, Ljubljana 1986, pp. 3-23 and 157-158). See also: Friedrich W. Leitner, *Das keutschacher Seental in der Geschichte*, in: *Seental Keutschach*, Klagenfurt 1989, p. 20; Andrej Pleterski, *Arheologija in nastanek Brižinskih spomenikov*, *Zbornik Brižinski spomeniki*, Ljubljana 1996, pp. 31, 33.

² Cevc 1986, p. 4.

³ Vlado Nartnik, *Zvezdne poti. Poskusi novega branja slovenskih ljudskih pesmi*, Kranj 1991, pp. 59-60; idem., *Sveti Jurij in začetki glagolice*, *Riječ* 1 (1995), No. 1-2, pp. 27-32.

1. Beliefs surrounding the Orion constellation in the late Classical Period

In the ancient cultures of Europe and the Middle East, Orion was perceived as a celestial temporal boundary and served as a foundation for the calendar. That such calendars did exist in Europe was recently confirmed by an analysis of several geometric designs discovered on pottery from Vinkovci from the period of Vučedol culture (around 3000 BC). The carved symbols, encrusted in white and sometimes covered in red ochre, represent different constellations, with special emphasis on the Sun and the Orion constellation, which signified the end of winter and the beginning of a new annual cycle. Equally astonishing is a fragment of another clay pot with an anthropomorphic image dressed in a short tunic and with raised arms. This means that Orion was depicted (and worshipped?) by Indo-European herdsmen and farmers from the Vučedol culture during the early Bronze Age.⁴ Since most pottery was discovered in graves, it is possible that their artistic content speaks of what awaited the deceased after death. The symbolic and mythological meaning of the most visible planets and constellations survived into later periods and was particularly present in the thought of the late Classical period, when the deification and mythologisation of stars reached a peak under the considerable influence of Orphism and Pythagoreanism. Even Neo-Platonists, who otherwise resisted an exaggerated belief in stellar power, remained under the influence of astrological knowledge. Orphic star worship is preserved in hymns dedicated to the Sun, the Moon and other celestial bodies. It gave rise to ideas on the salvation and immortality of the soul and the soul's journey through the celestial spheres to the place of its deserved repose. But since this journey was obstructed by evil planetary forces, it was necessary to resort to cult rituals, magic formulas and spells to ensure that the soul reached its final destination. These beliefs were particularly susceptible to the teachings of Hermeticism, which were a blend of elements of philosophy, magic and religion, and cosmogonic speculations and theories of natural science.⁵ Hermeticism was based on an Egyptian tradition which had attracted the Greeks from at least the time of Herodotus. According to Herodotus, most of the gods of ancient Greece were taken from Egypt, while Plutarch, who moved along more moderate lines, proposed in his discourse *De Iside et Osiride* (around 120 AD) that Egyptian gods belonged to the whole of the human race since, after all, every nation worshipped the same gods, only under different names and in different ways.⁶ Alexandria, a shortcut to Egypt, was at the time a cosmopolitan port with a large Greek-speaking population. The influence of Egyptian iconography is visible in Greek astronomical manuscripts from the 2nd century BC onwards. A manuscript roll from that time, *Eudoxus* (kept in the Louvre, Paris), identifies the Orion constellation as the god of the land of the dead, Osiris.⁷

Different currents of thought from the 1st century AD, which included beliefs about the soul, its origin and relationship with the transcendental, are characterised as Gnostic. They were a blend of different ideas and practices from Greece, the Middle East, Egypt and

⁴ Aleksandar Durman, Vučedolska terina i Orion, *Opuscula archaeologica* 23–24 (1999–2000), pp. 1–9.

⁵ Wilhelm Gundel and Hans Georg Gundel, *Astrologumena. Die astrologische Literatur in der Antike und ihre Geschichte*, *Sudhoffs Archiv, Beihefte*, Heft 6, Wiesbaden 1966, pp. 305–311.

⁶ Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, ed. J. Gwynn Griffiths, University of Wales Press 1970, pp. 223, 225 (67).

⁷ Kurt Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex. A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration*, *Studies in Manuscript Illumination*, Vol. 2, Princeton 1947, p. 67 and Fig. 37.

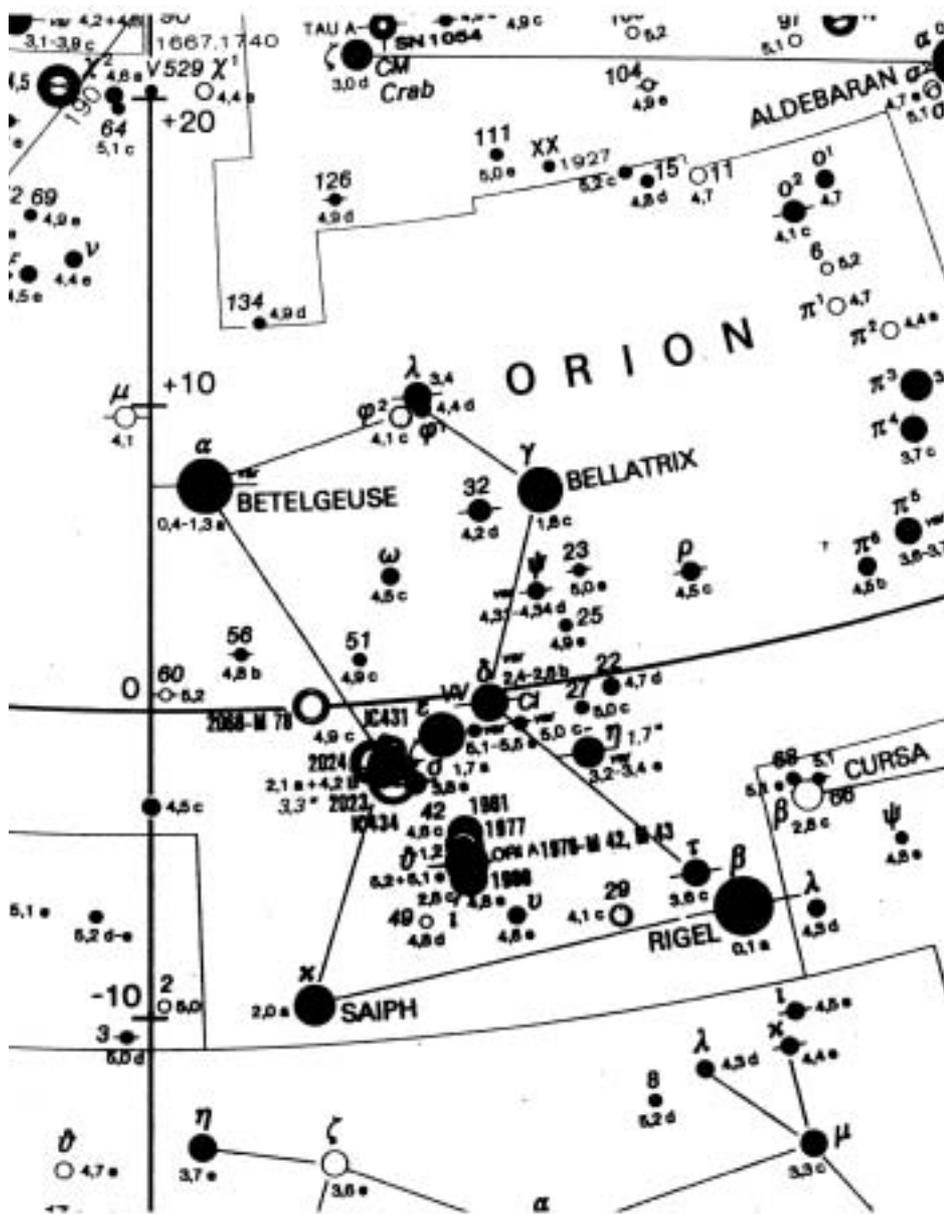


Fig. 1: Position of the Orion in the Sky (indicating the brightness of the stars)

India, and all were, to a certain extent, influenced by Christianity.⁸ Despite the fact that Christian theologians categorically rejected Gnosticism, the astrological tradition remained popular within the ranks of the Church.⁹ Pagan mysteries survived in secrecy until the 4th and 5th centuries (e.g. the cults of Cybele, Isis, Mithras and Orpheus), and discourses by ancient authors such as Porphyrius and Macrobius still retained their authority.¹⁰ Until at least the 12th century Macrobius's commentary on Scipio's dreams (*Commentarii in somnium Scipionis*) remained one of the most important Neo-Platonic sources for medieval scholastic thought and science.¹¹ In reality this discourse contained much more than is indicated in its title: it is a compilation of chapters 9 to 26 of the 6th volume of Cicero's *De re publica*, which the author expanded with an extensive explanation of different contemporary branches of science. Of immediate interest to us is the passage according to which those who took care of the common good and donated to this end during their lifetime moved to heaven after death, where they lived a blissful existence. The place in the sky where these righteous souls dwelled was the Milky Way.¹² From there, souls occasionally returned to the earth through a door in the constellation of Cancer and rose back to heaven through the constellation of Capricorn.¹³ This was already described by the 3rd century Neo-Platonic philosopher Porphyrius, who followed Numenius, a Platonist and Pythagorean: the door through which souls descended to earth and left for the next world was on one side defined by the Tropic of Cancer and on the other by the Tropic of Capricorn. The two were connected with the Moon and Saturn; one of these two celestial bodies was the closest to humans and the other the farthest.¹⁴ In the middle of this cosmic gap, the constellation of Orion was located.

Much later an illuminated astrological manuscript belonging to King Venceslas of Bohemia described the Milky Way as follows: "*In ea parte regnant collegia spirituum sapientissimorum*" (In this part of the sky, groups of the wisest spirits reign).¹⁵ Orion was located above the Equator, mysteriously emerging and disappearing in different seasons of the year. Its splendour has always been admired by the observers of the night sky. In Antiquity it was considered the "leader under whom the constellations wheel through the whole of heaven".¹⁶ Its anthropoid figure symbolised the hunter or the warrior. According to Graeco-Ro-

⁸ For the connection between Gnosticism and Christianity see: C. J. Blekker, *The Egyptian Background of Gnosticism*, in: *The Origins of Gnosticism*, Ugo Bianchi (ed.), Leiden 1967, pp. 229–237; L. Kákosy, *Gnosis und aegyptische Religion*, op. cit., pp. 238–247.

⁹ Gundel, op. cit., p. 336; Ugo Bianchi, *Probleme der Religionsgeschichte*, Göttingen (1964), pp. 40–41.

¹⁰ Pierre Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and Their Greek Sources*, translated by H. E. Wedeck, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1969, pp. 217–218.

¹¹ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, translated with an introduction and notes by W. H. Stahl, *Records of Civilisation, Sources and Studies*, No. 48, Columbia University Press, New York 1952; Hubert Silvestre, *Note sur la survie de Macrobe au Moyen âge*, in: *Classica et mediaevalia* 24 (1963), pp. 170–180; Pierre Courcelle, *La postérité chrétienne du Songe de Scipion*, in: *Revue des études latines* 36 (1958), pp. 205–234.

¹² Macrobius..., pp. 93–94.

¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 133–134.

¹⁴ Michael P. Speidel, *Mithras – Orion. Greek Hero and Roman Army-God*, *Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire Romain*, M. J. Vermaseren (ed.), Vol. 81, Leiden 1980, p. 19.

¹⁵ Robert Eisler, *The Royal Art of Astrology*, London 1946, p. 59.

¹⁶ Manilius 1.395; quoted after: A. E. Housman, *M. Manilii Astronomicum*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 1937, Vol. 1, p. 40.

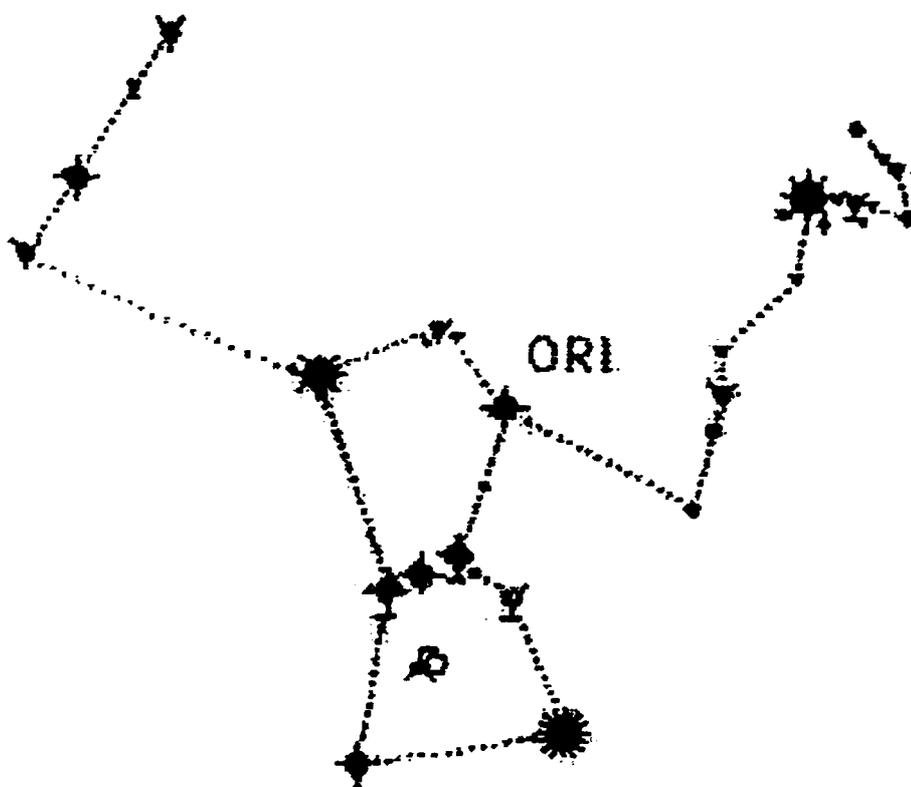


Fig. 2: Anthropomorphic figure of the Orion constellation

man beliefs, the river Eridanus or Okeanos flowed from under its left foot; it was the source of all terrestrial waters (*Iliad* 21. 195-197) and the celestial river from which the Sun and the stars emerged and into which they disappeared again (*Iliad* 5. 5-6; 18. 489; *Odyssey* 5. 275). Orion already featured in myths about the Sumerian and Babylonian god of vegetation Tammuz, and later in myths about the dead and reborn gods Osiris, Dionysius, Adonis and Attis, and the Orphic gods Zagreos and Phanes. But since the soul of the deceased was closely connected with the sky, depictions of the Moon and stars on Greek gravestones were profoundly symbolic and were additionally explained by inscriptions.¹⁷ Man merged with the macrocosm after death; he turned into “macroanthropos”, best represented by the constellation of Orion.¹⁸ Therefore the nymphs or Nereides on Roman gravestones (e.g. at Šempeter near Celje) were “ethereal visions [...] of the souls of the deceased disappearing from the sight of mortals into the celestial heights”.¹⁹

¹⁷ For examples see: Gundel, *Astrologumena...*, pp. 174-175.

¹⁸ Carsten Colpe, Die “Himmelsreise der Seele” ausserhalb und innerhalb der Gnosis, in: *The Origins of Gnosticism*, p. 437.

¹⁹ Jože Kastelic, *Simbolika mitov na rimskih nagrobnih spomenikih. Šempeter v Savinjski dolini*, Slovenska Matica, Ljubljana 1998, p. 267 (Fig. 72).

Given all this, would it be too far-fetched to speculate that Orion also left its mark on the famous pre-Romanesque relief in Keutschach (Hodiše) in Austrian Carinthia? The answer is undoubtedly hidden in the artistic details of the artefact itself. For iconographic analysis it is possible to rely on the two studies by Dr Emilijan Cevc (particularly that from 1986).

2. An interpretation of the iconographic elements of the Keutschach relief

The invaluable contribution made by Dr Emilijan Cevc is that he collected and commented upon important comparative material, placing the Keutschach relief in a broader artistic and cultural context. Cevc drew attention to the gravestones in Aquileia featuring similar figural scenes (late 4th and 5th century). But he pointed out a difference between the Aquileian reliefs and the relief from Keutschach: "... in the former, greater emphasis is laid on the orant figures as the symbols of the dead whose souls have attained bliss and now pray for the living".²⁰ Generally speaking, this conclusion is correct, but it is also true that Orion (which was sometimes difficult to distinguish from the orant figure) was an important gravestone motif as well, and it was older, evidently associated with the (night) sky and carried more symbolic content than the orant motif. It can therefore be concluded that, in terms of function (gravestones) and meaning (the soul in the sky), there was no significant difference between Aquileia and Keutschach. Differences lie in the individual points of emphasis in the representation itself. This can be supported with several examples.

In his treatise *Sphaera Barbarica*, which he edited himself, Teukros of Babylon (1st century), a Hellenistic astrologer and interpreter of the Hermetic tradition, identified the Three Graces as the three bright stars in Orion's belt.²¹ The fact that these beliefs survived for quite some time is confirmed by a sarcophagus from Tunisia (Bardo C 1113) from around 300 AD which features Orion leading the Three Graces.²² A Roman bas-relief from the period of Flavius, which is kept in the Berlin State Museum, on sarcophagus 890, is adorned with a depiction of the three nude Graces, and a seated and fully dressed girl (the deceased) who is waiting to join them as the fourth and somewhat darker star in Orion's belt, *theta Orionis*.²³ Associated with Orion, the Three Graces often featured on Roman sarcophagi and had a mystical Gnostic and astronomic meaning.²⁴

If the Keutschach relief indeed depicts Orion, Cevc's dilemma concerning the explanation of the body rendered in linear outline, and palms and feet presented as shallow and soft surfaces, could be solved. In the overall composition, the latter were less important aesthetic additions and were therefore depicted differently. For this reason I do not agree completely with Cevc's conclusion that the "anatomy and plasticity of the body [...] were not important to the artist" and that "the artist's task was not to create harmony of composition

²⁰ Cevc 1986, p. 14.

²¹ Eisler, p. 59.

²² Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae III-2, Zurich and Munich 1986, p. 156, Fig. 37.

²³ Op. cit., III-1, p. 206, No. 48; III-2, p. 162, Fig. 48.

²⁴ Hellmut Sichtermann, Charis, Charites, Gratiae, in: Lexicon iconographicum... III-1, p. 210.



Fig. 3: Relief on the wall of St. George's church in Keutschach (Hodiše), (photo Z. Šmitek)

and realism of design”.²⁵ The condensed style of the relief nevertheless contains a certain kind of logic and subtlety. If schematic and linear drawing was less acceptable in depictions of human faces and bodies, it was completely admissible in representations of the geometric position of stars, which was an autonomous symbolic unit by itself. The asymmetrical representation of the figure is not coincidental, it is intentional. The characteristic asymmetrical position of the arms in the Keutschach relief represents Orion with his left arm high in the air (usually holding a club or a sword) and his right arm raised and wrapped in an animal hide. The position of the arms could also be reversed. This gesture is therefore not a sign of “freedom similar to natural movement”²⁶ but an accurate rendering of Orion’s “body” and, as such, proof that it was not a result of the artist’s clumsiness. The distance between the shoulder and the foot on the left and right sides of the figure accurately correspond to the distances between the stars in Orion. This is even more precisely indicated by crosses carved in the stone, which stand for the brightest stars of the 14 that make up the constellation of Orion (ancient Greek astrologers thought there were 17): two of the stars are above the “shoulders”, two under the “feet” and one on “Orion’s belt”. The crosses on the left vertical of the Keutschach relief are in accurate alignment with the respective stars in the Orion constellation while the upper right cross is located more towards the inside than the lower right cross, corresponding to the position of the *Bellatrix* star in relation to *Rigel*. The basic symbolic meaning behind the crosses is the position of the most visible stars in Orion and not (or only indirectly) the number of Christ’s wounds or Christ’s monogram, as proposed by Dr Vlado Nartnik.²⁷ The crosses are somewhat brighter than the rest of the relief²⁸ and more deeply and clearly carved into the stone, which possibly confirms the theory that they were added at a later stage as a sign of the adoption of Christianity, or when the slab may have been used as the top of an altar (possibly in the 12th or 13th century), as was proposed by Dr Emilijan Cevc. This would also mean that the anthropomorphic figure from Keutschach may not be a monument of the systematic conversion of Slovenians to Christianity but, rather, a vestige from the time when Slovenian ancestors in the second half of the 6th century encountered the Romanised indigenous population. It must be added that, in connection with this, Cevc guessed that it belonged to the “heritage of late Classical figural art”²⁹ and therefore hinted at a possible spiritual continuity despite the fact that the artist could definitely not compete with the supreme artistic skill and tastes characteristic of Classical art. Cevc also drew attention to the fact that the stonemason did not make the slightest attempt to polish the front of the slab. The ascetic linear depiction (of Orion) on the Keutschach slab also completely contradicts the aesthetics of Antiquity. But the five crosses that were added later conform with the meaning of the relief and could therefore have been carved only as long as the myth of Orion was still alive, which in my opinion could have happened by the year 1000 at the latest. In addition to the ideological continuity of the two stages of execution, we can also agree with Cevc’s conclusion that “Christian missionaries possibly tried to convert the former pagan cult monument by consecrating it and putting it to the service of the Church as an altar top, having chipped off part of it and

²⁵ Cevc 1986, pp. 5, 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁷ Vlado Nartnik, Še nekaj o zvezdnih imenih med Slovenci, Zbornik razprav iz slovanskega jezikoslovja, Tinetu Logarju ob sedemdesetletnici, Ljubljana 1989, p. 196.

²⁸ I thank Dr Andrej Pleterski for drawing my attention to this fact, which I later verified in Keutschach.

²⁹ Cevc 1986, p. 13.

marked it with crosses, with which they attempted to show symbolically that the defeated pagan beliefs had to serve Christianity”.³⁰ Nevertheless, we must dismiss another proposal by the same author, namely that the Keutschach relief was created as a “pagan response to Christian symbolism, or literally as a pagan transformation of an originally Christian image”.³¹

Last but not least, the possibility that the slab depicts Orion offers a solution to the question of whether it shows a naked human body or a human skeleton. These interpretations had already been categorically rejected by Cevc, particularly speculations that the naked figure represented Christ suffering on the cross.³² For this reason I agree with Cevc that the figure depicted is wearing a short tunic. Some researchers mistook the folds of the tunic for ribs in outline, but this does not correspond with human anatomy: the six pairs of “ribs” in the relief cannot be compared with the seven pairs of “true” and five pairs of “false” ribs. In addition the “rib” in the bottom left part of the body is carved askew so that it joins with the “rib” above it, and two “ribs” in the bottom right part of the chest are placed so close together that there is practically no space between them. The twelve “ribs” from Keutschach probably carry some numerological or alphabetical meaning, since practically identical signs are carved next to the head of a pre-Romanesque figure in a relief on the facade of the chapel of St George in Svete Gore above the Stola river. Let’s give an example: in the manuscript *De cursu stellarum* (Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Patres 61, fol. 79r) we find a drawing of the Sun as a bearded man, crowned with twelve rays, which represent months or signs of the Zoodiac.³³ As a result, Cevc identified the Keutschach figure as a fully dressed Christ in the praying orant posture.³⁴ This is all very well, but from late Antiquity (or even the Vučedol culture) onwards, Orion was also depicted as an anthropomorphic figure wearing a short tunic.³⁵ And this is how Orion was still represented in an early 9th century illuminated manuscript from the Vienna National Library (Cod. 387, fol. 119v).³⁶

Cevc also pointed out affinities between the Keutschach relief and Egyptian art, comparing the former with two Coptic stelae featuring a representation of the *ankh* (the looped cross or “Key of the Nile”) from the Cairo museum.³⁷ This symbol of “new life” was transplanted from the Coptic art to western Christianity as reported by Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomenus and Rufinus (5th century).³⁸ For example, Egyptian influences can be traced in stylised reliefs from Faha near Trier and the gravestone (!) relief from Irschen in Carinthia.³⁹ His interpretation that the artist from Keutschach “worked in the atmosphere of [...]

³⁰ Cevc 1952, p. 244.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

³² Cevc 1986, pp. 7–8.

³³ Stephen McCluskey, Gregory of Tours, Monastic Timekeeping and Early Christian Attitudes to Astronomy, *Isis* 81 (1990), No. 306, p. 13 (note 16).

³⁴ Cevc 1986, p. 12.

³⁵ Catherine Lochin, Orion, in: *Lexicon iconographicum...* VII-1, 1994, p. 80, Fig. 13.

³⁶ *Lexicon iconographicum...* VII-2, 1994, p. 57 (Fig. 14).

³⁷ Cevc 1986, pp. 15–16.

³⁸ Maria Cramer, *Das altägyptische Lebenszeichen im christlichen (koptischen) Ägypten*, Wiesbaden 1955, pp. 7–8.

³⁹ Cevc 1986, pp. 16 and 158 (Figs. 4a, 4b).

figural conceptions of the Middle East” is therefore well founded.⁴⁰ He nevertheless rejected the possibility that the image might have articulated a Gnostic idea of life after death. In contrast to the statement quoted above, he insisted that these kinds of belief were “possible only in the East” and that “there is little possibility of finding them in the Keutschach relief”.⁴¹ But the truth is exactly the reverse: traces of Gnosticism can be found in vestiges of the Slovenian folk tradition (discussed later in the article). The Egyptian (Coptic) influences “which, with the mediation of Ireland, reached the ancient Germanic cultures have not yet been proven, although they are possible”; Coptic models also “accelerated the development of western monasticism [...] and left an indelible mark behind them”.⁴² The best evidence is, perhaps, the decoration (six Coptic relief ivory plates) on the pulpit of the Aachen cathedral. In his *Martirology of Tallagh (Feilire)*, at the end of the 8th century, Irish saint Oengus or Aengus mentioned names of some Coptic monks which fled from Egypt to Ireland after the arabic invasion (640-641) and were buried there.⁴³ In lands populated by Slovenians, such tradition could have been a result of either late Classical culture and bizantine influences between the 6th and 8th century⁴⁴ or the activities of Irish missionaries.

Accordingly the Keutschach relief was either part of a gravestone of an important deceased individual who was personally connected with Orion (through his military social status)⁴⁵ or, more probably, the figure is a symbolic representation of the final abode of righteous souls. If the relief is the work of a Christian artist, it is possible that the figure represents somebody who died in the service of religion and the Church, possibly a martyr (St George, the patron saint of the Keutschach church) or, according to Cevc, even Christ, but projected into the constellation of Orion. This corresponds with the fact that most of the early Christian churches in Gaul and northern Italy (built between the 4th and 7th centuries) were consecrated to martyrs. Veneration of the martyrs and their relics quickly spread across the christian East and West from the beginning of the 4th century. According to Church interpretations, the martyrs will mediate with God in favour of the devout christians. It was, consequently, a special fortune and honour to make a pilgrimage to a martyr’s church or to be buried in its vicinity.⁴⁶ Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636), in his cosmological discourse *De natura rerum* (26.9), wrote: “Orion represents martyrs, for just as he is born in the winter sky, martyrs multiplied in the Church during persecution. When Orion appears in the sky, the sea and the earth grow restless and when martyrs rise, the hearts of

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴² Emma Brunner-Traut, *Kopti. Življenje in nauk zgodnjih kristjanov v Egiptu*, translated by J. Virk, Hieron series, Ljubljana 1992, pp. 39, 52–53.

⁴³ Monique Blanc-Ortolan, Pierre du Bourguet S.J., Art, Coptic and Irish, in: *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Aziz S. Atiya (ed.), Vol. 1, New York, Toronto etc. 1991, p. 253.

⁴⁴ About the “orientation of the Slovenian territory towards the East” in that period, see: Peter Štih, *Ozemlje Slovenije v zgodnjem srednjem veku. Osnovne poteze zgodovinskega razvoja od začetka 6. do konca 9. stoletja*, Ljubljana 2001, str. 49–50.

⁴⁵ Wilhelm Gundel, *Individualschicksal, Menschentypen und Berufe in der antiken Astrologie*, in: *Jahrbuch der Charakterologie* 4 (1927), Bd. 4, p. 151.

⁴⁶ Franz Glaser, *Frühes Christentum im Alpenraum. Eine archäologische Entdeckungsreise*, Regensburg, Graz, Wien, Köln 1997, pp. 52–55.

those immersed in the secular world and non-believers tremble in the storm”.⁴⁷ But this interpretation does not contradict what has been said so far and in many ways draws from the late Classical tradition, such as the belief that the rising and setting of Orion brought rain and storms.⁴⁸ A martyr (St George, Christ?) depicted in the sign of Orion would symbolise death and resurrection, an individual who has defied death, while in this case the old man-cosmos and microcosm-macrocosm pattern would be used in the allegorical, Christian context. If it is possible that the relief was created under the influence of Isidore of Seville, the vehicle of this influence was most probably Irish missionaries, since *De natura rerum* was probably known in Ireland as early as the first half of the 7th century, or most definitely by 685.⁴⁹ But since Isidore drew from earlier sources, the Christian allegory of Orion might have been known to the Christian indigenous population of the local area very early on.⁵⁰

3. The Slovenian folk tradition and Orion

The belief that the deceased were stars in the sky was known among the ancient Egyptians. It was adopted by the Greeks and Romans, and it has survived in the folk traditions of European nations to the present day. According to Egyptian mythology, the final abode of the dead (and the kingdom of the god Osiris) was in the constellation of Orion, where the deceased continued to cultivate fields of reeds in an ideal landscape resembling the Nile valley. According to early Greek beliefs, the underworld was inhabited by souls in the form of wandering shadows which knew neither joy nor suffering. Later Orphic interpretations completely transformed this view of the underworld: it became a place where sinners were punished in the abyss of Tartarus and the righteous ones were rewarded for their good deeds on earth in the underground or celestial Elysium. Quoting the poet Pindar, Plato states that the “righteous will live in the next world without having to plough the land or sail the sea. They will live with gods without having to shed a single tear.” Accordingly, Greek depictions of the Elysian Fields represent the deceased feasting, chatting, playing, making music and dancing. The fertile soil nourishes them of its own accord, without any effort on their part.⁵¹

The opposition between the earth and the sky first resulted in the establishing of a certain isomorphism between the structures of the celestial upper world and the middle terrestrial world, which led to the celestial “sacred topography” which followed terrestrial

⁴⁷ Isidore de Seville, *Traité de la nature*, ed. de J. Fontaine, Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études hispaniques, Fasc. 28, Bordeaux 1960, pp. 270–271.

⁴⁸ Also according to Iranian and Indian cosmology, Orion (the month of June - *Tistr(y)a*) brings rain and floods (Robert Eisler, *Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt. Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Urgeschichte des antiken Weltbildes*, Bd. 2, Munich 1910, p. 483, note 2; Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *Orion or Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas*, reprint, Poona 1916, p. 138).

⁴⁹ For more on the subject see the introduction by Jacques Fontaine in: *Isidore de Seville...*, pp. 75–78.

⁵⁰ Using his own method, Dr Vlado Nartnik established that the relief could date from 749 if the cross in the circle in place of the head indeed represents the full moon at Christmas above the constellation of Orion (Nartnik 1995, p. 28).

⁵¹ Compare Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*, Sather Classical Lectures, Vol. 46, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1981, pp. 72–75.



Fig. 4: Relief on the facade of St. George's chapel in Svete gore (photo Z. Šmitek)

models. For example, ancient Indians believed that the source of the Ganges was in the sky, along with the path to the kingdom of the dead ruled by the god Yama. Ancient Egyptians speculated that the Milky Way represented the celestial Nile, while the Kets of Siberia represented it as the River Jenisey.⁵² Tungus (Evenki) shamans believed that our Middle World

⁵² Vladimir N. Toporov, *Beleške o budističkoj likovnoj umetnosti u vezi s pitanjem o semiotici kosmoloških predstava*, Treći program. Radio Beograd 3 (1979), No. 42, p. 495.



Fig. 5. Stećak from Radimlja near Stolac (Miletić, p. 52, il. 320)

is connected with the Upper and the Lower by a World River.⁵³ Slovenians and other Southern Slavic nations called the Milky Way “Kumova slama” or “Godfather’s Straw”. In Slovenia, people told stories about how one godfather stole straw from another godfather (he later had a change of heart and returned it), or how straw was transported across the land and scattered on the way.⁵⁴ Serbs knew tales about how a godfather stole a cartload of straw from another godfather. While carrying it, he scattered it along the way and, as an eternal reminder, God turned it into the Milky Way in the sky.⁵⁵ This interpretation was already known in ancient Greek literature and was common to different ethnic groups from the Middle East and Ethiopia to Morocco, and from south-eastern to northern Europe. An an-

⁵³ V.V. Napolskikh, Proto-Uralic World Picture: A Reconstruction, in: Mihály Hoppál and Juha Pentikäinen (eds.), *Northern Religions and Shamanism*, *Ethnologia Uralica* 3 (1992), p. 13.

⁵⁴ Milko Matičetov, *Zvezdna imena in izročila o zvezdah med Slovenci*, *Zbornik za zgodovino naravoslovja in tehnike* 2 (1974), pp. 72–73.

nual repetition of this myth in the form of a ritual could be found in the form of stealing straw or hay from one's neighbours (even from as many as *nine* of them) in different parts of Slovenia. It took place on Christmas Eve either to obtain stalks for witchcraft or to feed to livestock. In either case people believed that the stolen hay or straw magically improved fertility. Elsewhere in Slovenia, grass was fed to livestock on Christmas Eve, which was cut on Midsummer Night before sunrise and dried in the shade.⁵⁶ This conforms to the Indo-European tradition of scattering hay or straw around the house on Christmas Eve, which was primarily the feast of the deceased. It was believed that, on that evening, the souls of the deceased returned home to eat and warm themselves by the fire. In winter, hay or straw symbolised fertility, just like grass in spring and summer.⁵⁷

“Reapers”, as Slovenians (and many other European nations) in the past referred to the three bright stars of Orion's belt, stood across the Milky Way. In Slovenia (and elsewhere in Europe) other names apart from “reapers” were used for Orion's belt. These were closely connected with chores in the fields and tools: *threshers*, *yoke*, *harrow* and *plough*.⁵⁸ The origin of Orion's belt is explained in a story from Zamladinec in Zagorje, Croatia. A feeble old man passes by three brothers who are cutting grass in a meadow. After feeding him and offering him shelter where he can



Fig. 6: Tomb stone from Bukovik, district Arandjelovac (Bešlagić, p. 554, il. 216)

⁵⁵ Vuk S. Karadžić, *Srpski rječnik*, 3rd edition, Belgrade 1898, p. 325. See also: Jadran Kale, Multiple Features in the Orion Constellation as Recognized in Croatian Folklore, in: *Narodna umjetnost* 33 (1996), No. 1, p. 219.

⁵⁶ Niko Kuret, *Praznično leto Slovencev. Starosvetne šege in navade od pomladi do zime*, Vol. 2, Ljubljana 1989, p. 373.

⁵⁷ Veselin Čajkanović, *Božična slama*, in: *Studije iz srpske religije i folkloru 1910–1924, Sabrana dela iz srpske religije i mitologije*, Vol. 1, Belgrade 1994, pp. 186–195.

⁵⁸ Matičetov, p. 47.



Fig. 7. Anthropomorphic cross on stečak from Sošice (Rogatica) (Bešlagić, p. 181, il. 45)

rest, it turns out that the old man is God himself. He thanks them by taking the three brothers and their mother to heaven. The three bright stars in Orion's belt are therefore the three brothers (reapers); the fourth is their mother. Three scythes or three people drying hay also appear in some versions.⁵⁹

It is therefore no coincidence that in the Slovenian folk tale about a "cave leading to the other world", a hero who descends on a rope into the vertical pit finds a group of reapers in a bright Arcadian landscape: "I saw beautiful green meadows, willows growing along a stream that flowed in a smooth and winding riverbed. It was like a miniature heaven.

⁵⁹ M(atija) Valjavec, *Narodne priče, navade, stare vere (Kosci ali kose)*, Slovenski glasnik 10 (1867), pp. 349–351.

Handsome young men were cutting grass. When they saw me, they gave me a scythe and asked me to cut three rows of grass ...".⁶⁰ If we ignore the humorous introduction and the ironic overtone of the story (the fact that a priest who is supposed to know most about the "next world" sends an ignorant peasant to explore it), it is clear that the nucleus of the tale is the vision of the next world. The story can obviously be compared with the Egyptian underworld, where the fortunate deceased cultivate land. But why is the cutting of grass more important than any other farm chore? For two reasons. First, grass cutting symbolises fertility and the renewal of nature; second, reapers always stood diagonally so that, while cutting grass in straight rows, they did not obstruct their comrades to the left and right. And this coincides with the position of the three bright stars in Orion's belt or the celestial meadow; the pyramids in Giza, Egypt, were built according to this same pattern.

Why would anyone descending on a rope into a pit suddenly find himself in a celestial landscape? Maybe because of the ambiguous topographic position of Elysium: a journey into Hades, the realm of the dead, is described in Lucian's *Nekyomantia*. According to early Greek beliefs, Elysium was located underground, but at the time of Lucian (2nd century) it had already been relocated to the sky.⁶¹ The motif of Jurčič's story belongs to that large group of tales about the journey to the "next world" in which the main hero descends or climbs a tree or ladder. The fact that he travels alone, without a guide (angel), could be an archaic feature. The description of the next world is more a reflection of a folk belief than an individual's imagination. Like ascension through the night sky, the journey through a dark underground passage symbolises the next world and death.

Slovenian folk names for Orion or Orion's belt are taken from three saints: John, Peter and Andrew (the Staff of St James, the Drill of St Joseph, the Key of St Peter, the Cross of St Andrew, etc.). The last of the three saints is present due to the fact that the position of the brightest stars is in the shape of the letter X.⁶² The connection between this trinity of Christian saints and a constellation which is constantly "reborn" and "dying" becomes clear once we review 83 variants and passages of traditional Slovenian poetry and prose on the burnt and reborn man, most of which feature St Andrew, with the apostles Peter and John occasionally appearing as well.⁶³ Accordingly, St Andrew appears in the story of Christ summoning three of his apostles – Thomas, John and Andrew – and telling them to fast. Having crossed a vineyard, he orders them to spit out whatever they have in their mouths. St Andrew spits out three grapes – only he had broken the fast. Christ tells him that to atone for his sin he has to be reborn in order to become an apostle once more. St Andrew builds a pyre for himself and burns himself to death. Of his body only his heart is left and the three travellers take it with them. They reach an inn and stop for the night. Dur-

⁶⁰ Josip Jurčič (J. Zavojšček), *Spomini na deda*, Novice 1863, p. 331; Jakob Kelemina, *Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*, Znanstvena knjižnica, Vol. 4, Celje 1930, p. 313 (no. 228.I).

⁶¹ Rudolf Helm, *Lucian and Menip*, Leipzig and Berlin 1906, p. 32; D. W. Bousset, *Die Himmelsreise der Seele*, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 4 (1901), pp. 164–165, 260–261.

⁶² Matičetov, pp. 51–52.

⁶³ Milko Matičetov, *Sežgani in prerajeni človek*, Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Razred za filološke in literarne vede, Dela 15, Inštitut za slovensko narodopisje 4, Ljubljana 1961, pp. 21–27 (no. 22–67); 31–32 (no. 1–37); see also p. 131. We must reject the author's opinion that St Andrew's Cross was not a Slovenian folk name for Orion.



Fig. 8: The stone monument from the vicinity of Krkavče (photo V. Šribar?, Provincial museum Koper, neg. 86, R 1756)

ing the night the innkeeper's daughter finds St Andrew's heart, takes a bite and immediately conceives. When the apostles wonder where the heart is, Christ answers:

“Let God take care of this,
For God knows what to do,
To bring St Andrew back to life”⁶⁴

The Gnostic motif of metempsychosis and a purifying fire that destroys the sinful body and liberates the soul in this poem is connected with what Ovid wrote in *Metamorphoses* (15.165-171): “All things are changing; nothing dies. The spirit wanders, comes now here, now there, and occupies whatever frame it pleases. From beasts it passes into human bodies, and from our bodies into beasts, but never perishes. And, as the pliant wax is stamped with new designs, does not remain as it was before nor keep the same form long, but is still the selfsame wax, so do I teach that the soul is ever the same, though it passes into ever-changing bodies...”⁶⁵ Ovid would undoubtedly have agreed with the message contained in two Slovenian fairytales (from Bela Krajina and Prekmurje) about a girl who is reborn after death as a fish; in her next life, she is born as a tree and in the third as a human being.⁶⁶ In his *Second Olympian Ode*, Pindar tells us that the chain of rebirths continues until after three sinless lives in a row, the soul takes to the “divine road” and moves to Cronus's land of the blissful. Long afterwards a folk belief was recorded in the Temenica valley according to which “every man is born three times: the first time as a rich man, the second time as a beggar and the third as a gentleman”, while, according to a belief from Podbela in Kobariški Kot: “Every man is born twice; the soul released by the deceased moves to the body that will be born”.⁶⁷

Milko Matičetov drew obvious parallels between the Slovenian folk tale “St Andrew is Born Again” and the Egyptian “True Story of Scribe Satmi and His Son Senosiris”, which was recorded in the 2nd century and is probably part of a much older tradition.⁶⁸ Both stories contain the motifs of metempsychosis (the migration of the soul from plant to man) and the journey to the next world (in the Egyptian version, the kingdom of the god Osiris). He proposes Sicily as the possible mediator between the two cultures.⁶⁹ Naturally, this is not the only non-European analogy. The *Katha Upanisad* (1.1.6) states: “Man ripens as wheat and is reborn as wheat”.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Slovenske narodne pesmi, ed. K. Štrekelj, Vol. 1, Ljubljana 1895-98, pp. 557-558 (no. 582); this and two other versions in: Slovenske ljudske pesmi I., ed. Z. Kumer, M. Matičetov, B. Merhar and V. Vodusek, Ljubljana 1970, pp. 284-287 (no. 49/1-3). See also: idem, 1961, p. 203; idem, Der verbrannte und wiedergeborene Mensch, *Fabula* 2 (1958), pp. 94-109. The astral symbolism of the song about the reborn St Andrew was briefly mentioned by Vlado Nartnik, *Zvezdne poti. Poskusi novega branja slovenskih ljudskih pesmi*, Kranj 1991, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, transl. by F.J. Miller, Vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 43, London - Cambridge, Massachusetts 1968, p. 377.

⁶⁶ Matičetov 1961, p. 85.

⁶⁷ Idem, 1961, p. 92 and note 139; p. 91 and note 137.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 184-188 (SS6, summary of a longer text); F. L. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*, Oxford 1900, Slovene summary in: Matičetov 1961, pp. 124-127.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 133-134.

⁷⁰ Tamara Ditrich, *Katha Upanisad: o življenju, smrti in nesmrtnosti*, Poligrafi 5 (2000), No.17/18, p. 66.

In Slovenia (and elsewhere), people looked up to Orion at night to tell the time and the seasons of the year, and “Rimšce” – possibly Orion’s sword – warned travellers against highwaymen hiding in the dark of the night.⁷¹ It is, maybe, significant that Egyptian and Greek papyrus texts named Orion’s (Osiris’) enemy Seth as a thief, transgressor, traitor and rebel.⁷² An ancient model for the folk belief that human life was connected with stars and that, when a child was born, a new star emerged in the sky, can be found in Pliny’s *Naturalis historia* (2.28). Just as individuals differed according to their external appearance and social status, “their” stars differed according to their brightness and size. When a person dies, “his” star vanishes in the form of a shooting star. Proof of the fact that these simplified late Classical models persisted almost until the present day is provided by the Orphic motif of Zagreos-Dionysius in the Slovenian oral tradition about the burnt and reborn man, the song about the fiddler (Orpheus) at Hell’s gate, songs about St Thomas, who refuses to go to India, the wailing formula from Bela Krajina (similar to Orphic texts), and the feast of “Borovo gostüvanje” or “Pinewood Marriage” as heir to the ritual honouring of Cybele and Attis.⁷³ Even the Slovenian folk-song about the Faronika, giant fish which carries the Earth on her back, could have parallels in the Coptic tradition.⁷⁴

My interpretation of the Keutschach relief is based on the idea of the consistently employed visual elements, and the connection between the symbolic formula and its consistent visual representation. The keen observer who wrote that “the significance of this simple linear relief goes far beyond the importance of Keutschach” was right.⁷⁵ The closest analogy can be found on the facade of the chapel of St George in Svete Gore above Bistrica ob Sotli: the figure depicted in this relief is also characterised by the somewhat asymmetrical position of the arms, the round head, the short tunic, and thin, “stick-like” limbs.⁷⁶ According to Nartnik, the figure is a representation of the Midsummer sun above the constellation of Orion, for to the left and right it is flanked by a black new moon and a waning full moon above the constellation of Aquila.⁷⁷ A similar motif can be found in the relief adorning a capital in the church of St George in Plomin in Croatian Istria.⁷⁸ Is the fact that the churches in Keutschach, Svete Gore and Plomin are all consecrated to St George a coincidence? Is it possible that the images were created under the influence of motifs such as

⁷¹ Matičetov 1974, p. 75 (information from Poljanska dolina, 1950).

⁷² Plutarch, *Über Isis und Osiris*, 1. Teil, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar von T. Hopfner, Monographien des Archiv Orientalní, Bd 9, Praha 1940, p. 134.

⁷³ Milko Matičetov, *Rezijanska pripovedna pesem*, *Etnolog* 17 (1944), pp. 29–30; idem, *Godec pred peklom*, *Sodobnost* 17 (1969), No. 2, pp. 204–206; idem, *Elementi preslavi nella narrativa popolare slovena*, *Alpes Orientales* 5 (1969), pp. 207–208; idem, 1961; Zmago Šmitek, *Kristalna gora. Mitološko izročilo Slovencev*, Ljubljana 1998, pp. 44–45, 139–156; Slavko Ciglencečki, *Late traces of the Cults of Cybele and Attis. The Origins of the Kurenti and of the Pinewood Marriage (“Borovo gostüvanje”)*, *Studia mythologica Slavica* 2 (1999), pp. 21–31.

⁷⁴ Georg Ebers, *Sinnbildliches. Die koptische Kunst. Ein neues Gebiet der altchristlichen Sculptur*, Leipzig 1892, p. 55.

⁷⁵ Marijan Zadnikar, *Po starih koroških cerkvah, Družba sv. Mohorja v Celovcu* 1984, p. 114.

⁷⁶ Cevc 1952, p. 215.

⁷⁷ Nartnik 1995, p. 30.

⁷⁸ Cevc 1952, p. 233, Fig. 8.

the orant, Daniel between two lions, and Noah in the ark, as has been proposed by several Slovenian authors?⁷⁹

Or is the Orion motif discussed here connected with the symbols of the anthropomorphic cross, which can be recognised on a stone near Krkavče in Slovenian Istria and even more so on the *stećci* gravestones in Bosnia, where at least 80 such examples have been recorded so far?⁸⁰ This cross is often represented on *stećci* together with the sun, a star and a crescent moon, and sometimes with a spiral, rosette and stylised tree as well, all of which are celestial symbols.⁸¹ The proof that all this is no coincidence is evident from the representations of the *ankh* (the Coptic ideogram for Christ and resurrection) which can be found on *stećci* between Konjic, Nevesinje and Mostar and in the area surrounding Nikšić.⁸² We can follow them to the South as far as Bulgaria, where they appear on tombstones.⁸³ The origin of the motif is undoubtedly the same as in Keutschach – eastern Christianity – only that it probably took a different route, with the mediation of Bizant, Neo-Manicheism and the Bogomils. To be more precise, a *stećak* from Radimlja (Stolac, Bosnia) features a human figure in a short tunic and with raised hands. To the right, a circle is carved, possibly a celestial symbol, while to the left we see a bow which could point to the Classical celestial hunter – Orion. The chest of the figure is decorated with “ribs”, 12 altogether, exactly the same number as in Keutschach or Svete Gore.⁸⁴

Serbian ethnologist Petar Ž. Petrović rejected the theory on the Bogomil origin of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian *stećci*, arguing that they bore pre-Christian motifs. He further argued that the figure with raised hands did not represent a person praying but the deceased travelling to the other world, because the feet of these figures invariably hang in mid-air. According to Petrović, the kingdom of the dead is the Moon (he does not mention Orion at all), which is often depicted on the parts of *stećci*. This claim is not entirely correct, however, since the Moon merely accompanies the anthropomorphic Orion, emphasising its celestial character. Another interesting feature of Petrović's work is his interpretation of the anthropomorphic cross as the trident or the decussate cross (the cross of St Andrew). He defines the latter as a “woman's” symbol, since it appears in traditional embroidery and spindles from the Balkans⁸⁵. Different variants of the decussate cross are featured on the pottery of the Vučedol culture and on ritual earthenware, shaped as a black goddess with a bird's head, which was discovered at lake-dwellings in the Ljubljana marsh. The venerated of this divinity lived in the Copper Age (around 2000 BC) and were probably Indo-

⁷⁹ Zora Tuner, Relief na kapeli sv. Jurija na Svetih gorah, Varstvo spomenikov 35 (1995), pp. 77–78; Milan Sagadin, Krščanska motivika na staroslovanskih najdbah, in: Pismo brez pisave, catalogue, Narodni muzej Ljubljana 1991, pp. 36–46; Milenko Strašek, Hoja za skrivnostjo, Novi tednik 2000, No. 31–34; idem, Kresno sonce nad ozvezdjem Lovca, Svobodna misel 2000, No. 18, pp. 12–13.

⁸⁰ Šefik Bešliagić, Stećci, kultura i umjetnost, Biblioteka kulturno nasljeđe, Sarajevo 1982, p. 183.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 178.

⁸² Ibid., p. 186. See also: Nusret Idrizović, Kolo svetog broja, Biblioteka Globus, Zagreb 1990, pp. 63–73; Nada Miletić, Stećci, Belgrade-Zagreb-Mostar 1982, pp. 42 (Fig. 20), 60, 97.

⁸³ Maria Cramer, Lebenszeichen – Kreuze in Alt-Bulgarien, Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo, Bd. 15, 1. Teil, Wiesbaden 1957, pp. 41–46

⁸⁴ Miletić, pp. 52, 53, 68 (Figs. 30, 31, 38).

⁸⁵ Petar Ž. Petrović, Narodni motiv uskrnuća pokojnika u Hercegovini, Bosni i Srbiji, Glasnik Etnografskog muzeja 30 (1967), Beograd 1968, pp. 79–90.

Europeans, although their culture was obviously influenced by the Mediterranean. The shape and the posture of the figurine, resembling a clepsydra with outstretched arms (one of which is missing), and the ornaments on its robe (squares with the decussate cross) resemble the Orion constellation.

We can therefore expand Milko Matičetov's inspirational monograph on the burnt and reborn man with new information and depictions that shed new light on the topic. Several decades ago Matičetov wrote modestly that his contribution merely "points to a fascinating subject matter which still needs to be explored in greater detail".⁸⁶ We can now look forward to a more accurate overview and interpretation of cultural vestiges from the past which were still mystery not so long ago.

⁸⁶ Matičetov 1961, p. 84.

Astralna simbolika predromanskega reliefa v Hodišah (Keutschach)

Zmago Šmitek

V razpravi skuša avtor dokazati, da predromanski relief na pročelju župnijske cerkve svetega Jurija v Hodišah na Koroškem prikazuje ozvezdje Oriona. Svojo domnevo utemeljuje z zgodovinskimi, umetnostnozgodovinskimi (ikonografskimi) in etnološkimi argumenti. Tako najprej opozori na pomen Oriona kot koledarskega znamenja na grobni keramiki Vučedolske kulture (približno 3000 pr. n. št.) in na njegovo povezanost z miti o sumersko-babilonskem bogu vegetacije Tamuzu ter miti o umrlih ali na novo oživiljenih bogovih Ozirisu, Dionizu, Adonisu, Atisu. Egipčanske astrološke predstave o Orionu/Ozirisu in bivališču mrtvih so pomembno vplivale na poznoantično mišljenje, kar je naposled prispevalo k izoblikovanju ideje o onstranskih Elizejskih poljanah. Gnostiki, zlasti pripadniki orfično-pitagorejskih ločin, so z zvezdnim nebom, Rimsko cesto in še posebno z ozvezdjem Oriona povezovali nauk o prerojevanju človeka (o potovanju njegove duše v nebo in ponovnem utelešenju na Zemlji). Ob tem kaže omeniti vpliv spisov Porfirija in Makrobija (*Commentarii in somnium Scipionis*) na srednjeveško znanost in sholastiko. Izidor iz Seville (6.-7. stol.) je v svojem kozmološkem traktatu *De natura rerum* zapisal, da ozvezdje Oriona "ponazarja mučenike, saj so se enako, kot se on rojeva na nebu v zimskem času, množili mučeniki v Cerkvi v času preganjanja". Mučenik (ali Kristus) v znamenju Oriona bi torej označeval smrt in ponovno vstajenje. Ker ležijo Hodiše na slovenskem etničnem ozemlju, bi morebiti lahko pričakovali celo vpliv irskih misijonarjev, ki so tod delovali od 8. stoletja in so se že stoletje prej seznanili s spisi Izidorja iz Seville.

Pomembno je, da so sledovi takšne astralne mitologizacije in deifikacije prepoznavni tudi v slovenskem ljudskem izročilu: v dolenski zgodbi o nebesnih "koscih" ("Kosci" so slovensko ime za tri svetle zvezde v Orionovem pasu) ter v ljudskih pesmih in pripovedih o sežganem in prerojenem človeku, kjer v vlogi reinkarnirane osebe največkrat nastopa sveti Andrej ("Andrejev križ" je slovensko ljudsko ime za ozvezdje Oriona). Gnostične ali orfične prvine lahko zaznamo še v slovenskih ljudskih pesmih o svetem Tomažu, ki noče v Indijo, o Godcu pred peklom (Orfeju) in v formuli naricanja iz Bele krajine, ki je podobna orfičnim tekstom na zlatih ploščicah (npr. tistemu iz Petelie). Vse to dokazuje močan poznoantični substrat na etničnem ozemlju Slovenije, ki je zelo verjetno botroval tudi nastanku hodiškega reliefa. To misel potrjuje podrobnejša ikonografska analiza spomenika ter sorodni vzorci na Slovenskem (Svete gore, Krkavče), v hrvaški Istri (Plomin) in na južnoslovanskih stečkih, ki doslej niso bili pravilno interpretirani.