

DOLPHIN REPRESENTATIONS ON STELAE FROM UPPER MOESIA

Abstract: This paper is an attempt to understand both the significance and the meaning of the dolphin motif on funerary monuments of Upper Moesia. The wide distribution of this motif not only on monuments in Upper Moesia but also on the ones in neighboring provinces was discussed, as well as its possible courses from North Ital funerary art.

The images of dolphins are present in various and numerous archeological materials of the Upper Moesia province. They were represented unaccompanied, or in complex iconographic images as polysemic funerary symbols or attributes to the divinities like Venus, Apollo, or Neptune. For this very reason this paper will treat only one segment of this comprehensive subject, the representations of dolphins on funerary stelae, meaning on their triangular fields outside of tympanum.¹ The large numbers of these monuments, as well as their grouping, represent the cause for their more detailed treating in this paper.

The representations of dolphins on funerary stelae of Upper Moesia (Moesia Superior) have not been treated in more detail, except for the observation of V. Kondić that this motif is frequently present in the funerary stelae from the area of Viminacium.² More attention was paid to researching the importance of this motif in sepulchral art of the neighboring provinces. In his unpublished doctoral thesis on funerary monuments of the province of Dalmatia, M. R. Vasić³ not only presented the monuments with the dolphin motifs and their closest analogies, but also pointed out the meaning of this polysemic symbol, and gave the list of the most important early treatments of this subject mater. Later, V. Dautova-Rusevljan⁴ and R. Zotović⁵ in their papers on funerary monuments in the Lower Pannonia province and in the eastern part of the Dalmatia province, in a smaller number, emphasize anew the importance of this topic. Studying the funerary monuments of north Bulgaria, D. Dimitrov noticed various iconographies where the dolphin motif was presented.⁶

The research into the distribution of the motif of the dolphin positioned nose down on funerary stelae of Moesia Superior (Table I) showed that such motif, as the ornamental motif of the

¹ In addition to this group of stelae, the dolphin appears in the following sepulchral monuments: along with aplaustre on the votive altar from Viminacium (Јовановић А. 2001, 203–207), with the trident on the sides of two memorial funerary monuments from Timacum Minus (Petrović P, 1995. no. 23 and 36) and on the stela created in the spirit of the religious syncretism from Viminacium, Mirković M. 1986 no. 167.

² Кондић В. 1965, 268.

³ Vasić M. R., 310–314.

⁴ Dautova-Ruševljan V. 1983, 48.

⁵ Zotović R. 1995, 54–55.

⁶ Димитров Д. 1942, 78–79.

triangular field outside of tympanum, appears almost exclusively on the stelae in the Danubian part of the province, most frequently in the territory of the towns of Viminacium,⁷ Singidunum,⁸ and then in Kosmaj area⁹, as well as in one stela from the Ratiaria¹⁰ territory. Outside of this Danubian part of the province, only the two stelae from the territory of Scupi with this motif represented¹¹ were found, as far as is known today. The dolphin on them is not represented in the corners of the gable, but in the very centre of the tympanum, or in its outside frame.¹² All these stelae from Upper Moesia are dated in the long period from the end of 1st to the end of 3rd or the beginning of 4th centuries, dating from the most part from 2nd and 3rd centuries.¹³

Exploring the decorations of acroteria, of triangular fields outside the tympanum, or of relief fields with semi-circle frame of the funerary stelae in the province of Upper Moesia, indicated the existence of connection between certain motifs and areas of their presence. In addition to the dolphin as the dominant motif in the Danubian part of the province, the most widespread motif in the central part is the motif of acanthus, a more or less stylized leaf, while in the southern part of the province the most popular motif for decorating these fields was semi-palmette. Furthermore, triangular fields outside the funerary stela gables are characterized by most various iconographies in the Danubian part of the province. They contain the representations of genii, lions, dolphins, fantastic animals – griffon and hippocampus, but also various floral elements like grapevine, palmette, semi-palmette, sometimes in combination with other floral elements, and rosette.¹⁴ Despite this iconographic diversity, the Upper Moesian Danubian region stelae are still dominated, as already emphasized, by the dolphin motif.

Before we look further into the possible reasons leading to such popularity of the dolphin as the decoration motif on the funerary stelae in the Danubian part of Upper Moesia, we should say something about the meaning of this polysemic funerary symbol. The dolphin is frequently represented as accompanying Apollo, Aphrodite, Neptune or Dionysus, and then, if the divinities themselves are not represented, its more concrete meaning is suggested by the elements surrounding it.¹⁵ However, the dolphin may express also more general symbolic values, like on acroteria or triangular fields outside the gables of the funerary monuments. The dolphins there may initially have been understood as purely decorative elements; however, if we accept the

⁷ Mirković M. 1986, no. 57, 89, 128, 179, 190, 200; Вулић Н. 1931, no. 314.

⁸ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 34, 41, 52, 56, 70.

⁹ Dušanić S., Mirković M. 1976, no. 122, 125, 128, 133.

¹⁰ Димитров Д. 1942, no. 80/27.

¹¹ Dragojević-Josifovska B. 1982, dolphin in the center of the stela gable: no. 157, and dolphin in the outside frame of the gable: no. 51.

¹² The stelae from the area of Scupi, regardless of the diversity of their types, normally do not have a triangular field outside the gable or relief fields with semi-circle frame. They are finished either in the shape of the gable or tympanum itself, then triangle, pentagon, or semi-circle, or, much less frequently, do not have the gable at all. All these stelae always have acroteria which may be independent or emphasized on the tympanum itself, cf. Dragojević-Josifovska B. 1982, 37–40.

¹³ One of the oldest stelae is the stela from Singidunum (IMS I 34) and it is dated in the period 150 years later, while the most recent one is the other stela from Singidunum (IMS I 41) dated in 3rd or the beginning of 4th centuries.

¹⁴ For the purpose of more precise attribution of these decorative elements it is necessary to pay attention to iconographic similarities between semi-palmette and aplaustra. Bearing in mind that the complexity of this subject matter calls for more detailed analysis of the drawings of these reliefs on the acroteria of Upper Moesian monuments and that it is not the subject of this paper, and accepting the earlier interpretations of these reliefs as semi-palmettes, these issues are only mentioned here.

¹⁵ The attributes like the trident, shell, tripod, and others, indicate the understanding of dolphin as the follower of Neptune, Venus or Apollo, while the presence of dolphin within the setting of Dionysian iconography indicates its relation with this divinity. In addition to these divinities, the dolphin may be linked also to mythological characters like Heracles or the famous poet Arion, Campbell Cooper J. 1978, 32–33; Chevalier J., Gheerbrant A. 1983, 132–133.

opinion that the reason for their representation was more than simple decoration,¹⁶ their polysemic symbolism may be discussed as well.

F. Cumont states that the dolphin, in keeping with its nature related to water, is an expression of the water element or the Oceanus/Okeanos.¹⁷ In this context, the dolphin also appears in the iconography of the divinities like Neptune or Venus. The belief that dolphins saved the drowning people by taking them to the shore was also widespread,¹⁸ therefore becoming the symbols of the salvation for the drowning men in the “wild seas of our material world”,¹⁹ as well as the belief that dolphins took the souls of the dead to the Blessed Isles.²⁰ M. R. Vasic, studying the representations of dolphins on the funerary monuments of the province of Dalmatia, showed that these beliefs most probably merged into one, that the dolphin – the image of Oceanus, which the souls must cross, turned into the dolphin – carrier of souls, psychopomp. He feels that these beliefs were present simultaneously and concurrently.²¹ In accordance with that, dolphins in the corners of the gable of funerary stelae of Upper Moesia should be understood as polysemic symbols of the Oceanus as well as psychopomps, not neglecting their apotropaic and prophylactic values.

The dolphins on the triangular fields outside of tympanum or relief fields with semicircular frame of Upper Moesian stelae were most often represented independently.²² On the two stelae from Singidunum they were represented with a fish,²³ and on one, also from Singidunum, they are facing the capital with trefoil decoration,²⁴ while on one stela from Scupi the dolphins are facing acroteria with the relief reminiscent of stylized semi-palmette.²⁵ These elements most probably emphasize the principal underlying symbolic meaning of the dolphin already mentioned. The fish present in front the head of the dolphin points out its meaning of the water element,²⁶ while semi-palmette thus may be representing its compatible element – the earth. In order to understand better the compositions on the stela from Scupi with the dolphins facing the semi-palmettes, perhaps we need to go back to the mentioned similarity between the palmette²⁷ and the aplustre²⁸, for the very

¹⁶ Their form was highly suitable for decorating triangle geometrical forms outside the corners of the gable of funerary stelae.

¹⁷ Cumont F. 1942, 157.

¹⁸ The myths with dolphins in the role of rescuers are numerous. They saved Keran, the inhabitant of the island of Paros or Milet, taking him after the shipwreck to the shore (Atheneus Grammaticus XIII, 606 and on; Aelianus, *De Natura Animalium*, VIII, 3). They also helped Telemachus, Odysseus and Penelope's son, when he fell into the sea (Plutarchus, *De sollertia animalium*, 36). The myth about a dolphin saving the famous poet Arion from the conspiracy of the sailors, and taking him on its back to the cape Tenara, is particularly well-known (Hdt., I. 23–24). In order for this event to be remembered, Apollo took the dolphin, like he did with Arion's lyre, to the stars (Serv., *Ecl.*, VIII, 55; Ov., *Fast.*, II, 79; Hyg., *Fab.*, 194; Hyg., *Astr. Poet.*, II, 17).

¹⁹ Cumont F. 1942, 155, note 4.

²⁰ Cumont F. 1942, 155, note 4; One of the best known roles of the dolphin as the carrier was when it brought Amphitrite to her husband-to-be Neptune, who placed it among the stars out of gratitude, Eratosthenes, *Catasterismoi* 31.

²¹ Васић М. Р., 313 with extensive list of earlier bibliography on this subject.

²² Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 34, 56, 122, 125, 133; Mirković M. 1986, no. 89, 128, 179, 190, 200; Вулић Н. 1931, no. 314.

²³ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 41, 70.

²⁴ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 52.

²⁵ Dragojević-Josifovksa B. 1982, no. 51.

²⁶ The dolphin shown eating fish is the symbol of upper waters, Cumont F. 1942, 154, notes 3 and 155, note 4.

²⁷ The decorative motif based on the fan shape of a palm tree leaf, one type resembles the flower of honey-suckle, and the other a palm leaf, Burden E. E. 2001, 232.

²⁸ An aplustra or aplustre could often be found in the back upper part of the ship. It represented the highest part of the stern, and had the form that corresponds to the acrostolion on the prow. It stood immediately above the steersman, and to a certain extent served to protect him from rain and wind. Sometimes in addition to an aplustre there was a

reason that the dolphin was represented together with the aplustre as well.²⁹ The stylized form of elements on the acroteria of the funerary stela from Scupi, which the dolphins are facing, does not allow for a more precise attribution and therefore its definition as semi-palmette, given in previous research, will be accepted.³⁰

These representations of the dolphins in the triangular field outside of tympanum should not be considered as independent values, but within the framework of iconographic programs, first of the very gables themselves, and then the entire stelae. If only the upper sections just above inscription field are taken into consideration, the most numerous are those whose gable centres feature rosettes; those are the stelae from Viminacium,³¹ Singidunum,³² from Kosmaj area,³³ and then Scupi as well.³⁴ The rosettes on them are represented in wreaths.³⁵ The dolphins on their flanks complement their astral and chthonic symbolism. The rosette on these monuments is most probably an astral symbol and represents the Sun, while the dolphins take the souls of the deceased to this final destination. Chthonic character of these compositions is emphasized if the rosette is represented in a wreath; it can be then understood as a metaphor for the deceased, or his soul, and the wreath stands for his divinization.³⁶

The next most numerous stelae are those whose tympana feature the head of Medusa, and they are from Viminacium.³⁷ The motif of Medusa's head had apotropaic and prophylactic, and, later on, astral character as well. The Orphics place Medusa in the Moon's circle, and thus, instead of scaring people, it encourages them, reminding them of the journey across the Ocean to the Blessed Isles and the eternity of stars. Medusa's head can therefore be understood as an astral symbol of the destination where the dolphins take the souls of the deceased.³⁸ According to their number, the next are the stelae whose tympana feature a palmette and they are from Singidunum.³⁹

pole with taenia, which served as ornament, but also served to indicate the direction of the wind. One of the important representations of aplustre in art is on the column of Trajan, where the depiction of one of the ships of the Roman fleet contains aplustre with the lamp hanging from it above the deck and in front of the helmsmen. The aplustre usually consisted of thin planks and was turned towards the sky. Due to the conspicuous place and beautiful form it was often an emblem of maritime affairs: it was carried off in triumph by the victor in a naval engagement, and even Neptune was sometimes presented on the medals as holding an aplustre, in appropriate woodcut, in his right hand. Similarly, in famous Apotheosis of Homer, today in the British Museum, a female personification of Odysseus shows the same emblem, which in that context refers to the voyages of Odysseus, Schnitz L. 1875, 783–792; For the representation of Neptune with aplustre on intaglios see *LIMC* VII s.v. Nephthunus, no. 61. and 62; it is important to point out that the ship prow is shown as one of the attributes of the god Danuvius, *LIMC* III, s.v. Danuvius, 343–344.

²⁹ On the votive altar from Viminacium the dolphin is facing aplustre, Јовановић А. 2001, 203. On the stela from Emona, the author did not attribute this motif, but stated that those were the diving dolphins. The similarity between these representations with the stela from Emona and those from the votive altar from Viminacium is undisputable.

³⁰ Dragojević-Josifovksa B. 1982, no. 51 with bibliography of earlier works.

³¹ Mirković M. 1986, no. 89, 128, 179, 190.

³² Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 56, 70.

³³ Dušanić S., Mirković M. 1976, no. 128, 133.

³⁴ Dragojević-Josifovksa B. 1982, no. 51 and 157.

³⁵ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 56; Mirković M. 1986, br. 128; Dragojević-Josifovksa B. 1982, no. 157.

³⁶ The papers on the symbolism of this motif are numerous. For their list, as well as for distribution of rosette as the motif on funerary monuments in Dalmatia, see Васић М. Р., 287–297; cf. Зотовић П. 1995, 50–53; On the rosette on funerary monuments of Lower Pannonia cf. Dautova-Ruševljan V. 1983, 45; On this motif on funerary stelae of Viminacium see Миловановић Б. 2001, 112–113.

³⁷ Mirković M. 1986, no. 89, 200; Вулић Н. 1931, 314.

³⁸ On symbolism and meaning of Medusa's head in Roman funerary art see Fuchs M. 2001, 79–84; cf. Васић М. Р., 303–310 with bibliography of earlier work, as well as list of the monuments with this motif in the territory of the province of Dalmatia; On this motif on funerary monuments in Lower Pannonia cf. Dautova-Ruševljan V. 1983, 46–47.

³⁹ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 122 and 125.

This very popular decorative element symbolizes immortality, triumph and rise, and as such symbol it may indicate the successfulness of the dolphin psychopomp represented beside.⁴⁰ On one stela, also from Singidunum, the tympanum features an eagle with spread wings.⁴¹ The eagle was a familiar solar symbol who also had a role of psychopomp⁴² and in that context expressed ideas complementary to the dolphins represented in triangular fields.

After the attempt to show the significance of the decoration on the tympanum of Upper Moesian stelae, it is necessary to consider the entire programs of these stelae. The fields in between feature reliefs with portraits in the largest number of these stelae,⁴³ then at the level of individual cases, a funerary banquet⁴⁴ or a kantharos with grapevine.⁴⁵ Near these reliefs, on some stelae there are architraves with grapevine⁴⁶ or bucrania and wreaths.⁴⁷

On the whole, within the iconography of these stelae, the dolphins, as elements in their contents, express their apotropaic value, the role of psychopomp, or symbolize the ultimate destination for the buried deceased shown in the portraits, other symbolic compositions or the very names mentioned in the epitaphs. This idea is especially emphasized if the reliefs of the portraits or funerary banquet(s) were placed under the baldachin in the shape of a shell (*cardium*).⁴⁸ Such are the examples of the two stelae from Singidunum.⁴⁹ The representation of a popular theme of kantharos with the grapevine and grapes in the internal relief field below the gable of the stela from Viminacium,⁵⁰ expressing the idea of death and rebirth, also emphasizes the mentioned ideas.

In order to understand better the origin of dolphin as the decorative motif on these Upper Moesian stelae it is necessary to point out their distribution in neighboring provinces and, as far as is possible, the origins of the inhabitants of Upper Moesia who showed such inclination towards this symbol.

The dolphin as a funerary motif was very popular in Rome, especially in the area of Ravenna and in the watershed of the Po River. There it was most often presented together with the head of Medusa in the centre of the gable.⁵¹ In the province of Noricum as well it was a frequent motif for decoration of funerary monuments, especially on stelae from Celeia and Virunum.⁵² The

⁴⁰ On palmette, its symbolism, as well as on its distribution in funerary stelae from Viminacium, cf. Миловановић Б. 2001, 114.

⁴¹ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 56.

⁴² Васић М. П., 325–328 with bibliography of earlier works on this motif. On the motif of eagle with spread wings on monuments from Lower Pannonia see Dautova-Ruševljan V. 1983, 46.

⁴³ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 41, 52, 122, 125, 128; Mirković M. 1986, no. 190; Димитров Д. 1942, 80/27.

⁴⁴ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 34.

⁴⁵ Mirković M. 1986, no. 179.

⁴⁶ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 133; Mirković M. 1986, no. 89, 200.

⁴⁷ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 41; Dragojević-Josifovska B. 1982, no. 51.

⁴⁸ In funerary rites the shell signifies resurrection, and also indicates the journey across the sea. It is the emblem of Venus and her birth, Campbell Cooper J. 1978, 167; The shell in funerary monuments represented in baldachin- type form or as the form of the very funerary stela expresses a certain protectiveness and care of the divinities for the dead and through the image of the naiskos indicates the hero-like qualities of the deceased, Jovanović A. 2000, 12.

⁴⁹ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 34 and 52.

⁵⁰ Mirković M. 1986, no. 179.

⁵¹ Mansuelli G. 1967: stelae with the head of Medusa in the centre of the gable: figures 35, 40, 41, 46, 53, 57, 59, 66, 80; with the pine cone in the centre of the gable: figures 49, 51, 52, 60, 76; with the rosette in the centre of the gable: 64, 81; stelae with no relief in the centre of the gable, or the relief not preserved: figures 43, 47, 62, 82, 84, 137.

⁵² Dolphins are present in the following monuments from Celeia, Schober A. 1923, no. 63, 212, 184; Hoffiller V., Saria B. 1938, no. 19, 51, 52, 61; they are present also in the famous tombstones of the Ennii and of Prisciani, as well as on one marble cipus also from the territory of Celeia, Klemenc J. 1961, 39, 41, 58–60; Dolphins are presented also on a stela from Virunum, Schober A. 1923, no. 49.

stelae where the dolphins were presented in Upper Pannonia are numerous as well, especially in the territory of Emona,⁵³ where they were most often presented together with rosette or portraits in the gable. The dolphins were also frequent on the stelae from other Upper Pannonia towns like Poetovio, Savaria, Vindobona, Brigetio or Carnuntum, and there they were most often represented together with the head of Medusa.⁵⁴ In Lower Pannonia they are frequent as ornaments on the stelae from Solva and Lussonium,⁵⁵ Mursa, Sirmium or Bassiana,⁵⁶ Aquincum and Intercisa.⁵⁷ In the coastal part of Dalmatia the dolphin appears on the stelae from Narona, Salona and Ostrozac, and that in various iconographic wholes.⁵⁸ On the monuments of the eastern part of this province, according to R. Zotovic, the images of dolphins are not so frequent in decorating the tympana of the stelae.⁵⁹ They appear on triangular fields outside the gable or relief fields with semicircle frame on the stelae from Kremane, Komine, Crvica and Tegar.⁶⁰

In Dacia the dolphin appears solely on funerary stelae from the territory of Transylvanian Dacia, or in Dacia Superior.⁶¹ That this is the case of the existence of a certain type of these stelae is shown by the following facts: for the most part they originate from Apulum, and there the dolphins were most often represented above the medallion with the portraits.⁶² In Lower Moesia the representations of dolphins are not so frequent, and they can be followed at the level of individual examples. Such is the stela of unknown place of origin where the dolphin is represented above the portrait.⁶³ In the territory of the province of Macedonia, as far as is known, no monuments were present whose acroteria or triangle fields above the gable feature dolphins.⁶⁴

⁵³ Monuments from Emona: Hoffiller V., Saria B. 1938, no. 172, 174, 181, 184, 185, 189, 192, 193, 195, 196, 198, 200; Šašel-Kos M. 1997, no. 39, 43, 68; monuments from Roman *vicus* near Ig: Hoffiller V., Saria B. 1938, no. 129, 130, 134, 136, 138, 142, 145–147; Šašel-Kos M. 1997, no. 86, 87, 89; monuments west of Emona: Hoffiller V., Saria B. 1938, 209, 213, 216, 219.

⁵⁴ Stelae from Poetovio, Schober A. 1923, 84, 116, 294; Hoffiller V., Saria B. 1938, 395; Schober A. 1923: stelae from Savaria no. 26 and 71; stelae from Vindobona no. 278, stelae from Brigetio no. 167 (at the foot of the stela) and 221, and stelae from Carnuntum no. 61, 74, 115, 118, 134, 177, and at the foot of the stela no. 178.

⁵⁵ Schober A. 1923: stelae from Solva no. 16, 17, 64, 65, 78, 80, 81, 234, 281, 295, and they most often feature an eagle in the tympanum; ara from Lussonium no. 173.

⁵⁶ Dolphins are shown in the corners of the gable of the stela for the freedwoman Urbana and the stela for horseman Velagen from Mursa, then on fragmented stela with the busts of the dead from Sirmium as well as from Bassiana, or the one with the entire figure from Becmen, Dautova-Ruševljan V. 1983, 48, T. 1/2, 1/3, 2/3, 4/2 i 9/3.

⁵⁷ Schober A. 1923: stelae from Aquincum no. 110, 190, 228, 253, 296; stelae from Intercisa no. 180, 189, 190 and 263; stela from “Gradina” in Petrovci near Ruma, Brunšmid J. 1908/9, 221 no. 511; dolphins are represented also on the sides of a sarcophagus, Dautova-Ruševljan V. 1983, 108, no. 43.

⁵⁸ The dolphin on the stelae from Solin, Васић М. П., no. 210, 211, 340, 412, 413, 414, 545; Schönauer S. 2001 no. 1; on a stela from Narona, Schönauer S. 2001, 228–230, no. 12; on a stela from Ostrozac, Васић М. П., no. 534.

⁵⁹ R. Zotovic (1995, 54–55) believes that this motif is not so frequent in Dalmatia, but also that that fact should be considered in light of a small number of stelae with the gable preserved. The dolphins in this province, as well as in Dacia, are more often represented on pyramidal altars.

⁶⁰ Зотовић Р. 1995, no. 5, 6, 11, 31, 64.

⁶¹ In addition to being represented on pyramidal altars, the dolphin was present also in the triangle fields outside the stela tympana, and most frequently above medallions with the bust of the dead of the funerary stelae, Bianchi L. 1992, 138–139, figures 5, 42, 46, 53, 59, 71–73, 76, 83, 85, 94, 132, 136–137.

⁶² Bianchi L. 1992, stelae from Apulum with dolphins above medallions with busts, figures 71–73, 76, 83, 85, 94, 132, 136 and 137; the stela from Napoca (figure 160) belongs to the mentioned type of stelae.

⁶³ Димитров Д. 1942, 41/20.

⁶⁴ In her study on stelae from the area of this province Alexandresku-Vianu M. (1975, 183–200) points out their different types as well as iconographic values. She mentioned the motifs for decorations of the corners of the gable like acanthi, palmettes, semi-palmettes, lions or tritons, she, however, did not mention the representations of dolphins.

The examples given here show that the dolphin as the motif for decoration of funerary stelae was especially popular in the area of Ravenna, and then in Noricum and Pannonia and in Transylvanian part of Dacia. The consideration of these examples may show that the routes for the movements of this motif started from Italy, from where it most probably reached Upper Moesia by way of Dalmatia and Pannonia. A far greater frequency of the dolphin motif in the province of Pannonia, as well as the proximity of Pannonian centres from which these stelae originate, however, speak more in favor of those North Ital influences on the Danubian region of Upper Moesia coming for the most part from this province. From this Danubian Upper Moesia, as well as from Pannonia, they traveled further to Upper Dacia. It is important to mention that the population in the Transylvanian part of Dacia, in otherwise heterogeneous Dacia, as epigraphic monuments indicate, for the most part originated from Dalmatia itself.⁶⁵ Therefore, the courses of the traveling of the dolphin motif from North Italy should be looked for within the mentioned context.⁶⁶

The research into the origins of dedicants from Upper Moesian villages, though not so concrete, may be of use in contribution to these conclusions. For the most part they belonged to Romanized population and had Roman gentilicia *Aurelius* (IMS I 41, IMS I 125, IMS II 123), *Ulpus* (IMS I 56) or gentilicium *Valerius* (IMS I 133). That the dedicants originated from western provinces is confirmed by the inscriptions on the two stelae from Kosmaj. The first shows that it was an emigrant family from Dalmatia (IMS I 122), and the other that it was the family of Liburnian origin (IMS I 129).⁶⁷ The domicile mentioned on a stela from Scupi (IMS VI 51) shows that this veteran of the VII *Claudia* legion also came from Dalmatia, from Salona. The epitaph on a stela from Viminacium (IMS II 89) shows *origo* in Spain, where the soldiers of the IV *Flavia* legion were recruited from.⁶⁸ The epitaph from Singidunum testifies to the Sirmium origin of the IV *Claudia* legion veteran (IMS I 34). His name *L. Albanus Septimius* appears also on the other stelae from Singidunum (IMS I 52) with dolphins in the corners of the gable. The origin of the other dedicant from the territory of Scupi (IMS VI 157) is not so evident. His name *Hyperephanus* is very rare, and B. Dragojevic-Josifovska states that this is the incidence, as is also in the case of his wife, of the names of Hellenic origin.⁶⁹ The epitaph on a stela from Singidunum (IMS I 70), as well as on a stela from Kosmaj (IMS I 128)⁷⁰ indicates the oriental origin of the dedicant.

In order to understand better the reasons for the concentration of stelae with dolphins in the corners of the gable in the Danubian part of the province, it is necessary to pay attention to two separate examples from Scupi. There as well the influences from the West Balkan provinces of the Empire may be discussed. On the first stela from Scupi (IMS VI 51), as already mentioned, the inscriptions states that the dedicant was from Salona, which is further emphasized by the iconography presented. The dolphins on this stela are shown in the outside frame of the tympanum, which is slightly unusual, and that is why it is important to mention the similar

⁶⁵ The Illyrians from the vicinity of mines in Dalmatia were intensively settled in this area, probably because this territory was rich in gold, and they were already very skillful in mining this ore, Bianchi L. 1985, 5. Cf. Protase D. 1987, 127–135.

⁶⁶ The presence of the dolphin motif may be traced back to Greek funerary art, where it is rather rare in comparison with Etruscan, where it is more often, Bacuh M. P., 310, note 433.

⁶⁷ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, 108 and on.

⁶⁸ Mirković M. 1986, 37 and on.

⁶⁹ Dragojević-Josifovksa B. (1982, 35, 38, 143–144 no. 157) speaking of this rare name, mentions also one inscription in Dalmatia (CIL, III, 3186), but still points out the the origin of the decoration of the stela of this freedman most probably was Asia Minoer.

⁷⁰ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, 110 and on.

example of the stela from Sarmizegetuza in Transylvanian part of Dacia, where the dolphins were also presented on the outside face of the tympanum,⁷¹ and the decoration of the stelae from this territory, created under the influence of sepulchral art from the western provinces of the Empire, has already been discussed.⁷² The decorative frieze on this stela from Scupi with the garlands carried by bucrania is present in Upper Moesia and on one of the stelae from Singidunum, whose triangular fields outside the gable also feature the reliefs of the dolphins.⁷³ The other stela from Scupi (IMS VI 157) has the architectural form of the gable without triangular fields, characteristic for this area. Although B. Dragojevic-Josifovska states that this is the case of Asia Minor influence in its decoration, it is interesting to point out the similar disposition of dolphins in the following stelae: dolphins on the flanks of the central motif on the tympanum of a stela from Carnuntum⁷⁴ and on one stela from Salona.⁷⁵ On the stela from Salona the dolphins also flank the rosette like on the tympanum of the stela from Scupi, with the difference that with the stela from Scupi the rosette is placed on the patera.

* * *

The general conclusion arising from this research is that the dolphin as a decoration motif on funerary monuments in the Roman province of Upper Moesia was present in the period from the end of 1st till the end of 3rd or the beginning of 4th centuries, and that it is distributed in the Danubian part of Upper Moesia, and centres like Singidunum, Viminacium and the area of Kosmaj. Its presence is the result of Ital influences extending through Dalmatia and Pannonia, and in this context their presence on the two stelae from the territory of Scupi may be understood.

If we look into the distribution of the dolphin motif in other archeological material from the province of Upper Moesia, it is obvious that, in that respect as well, the dolphin was most frequently represented in the Danubian part of the province, where it appears on intaglios and jewelry,⁷⁶ a bronze sculpture,⁷⁷ bronze lamps,⁷⁸ terra sigillata⁷⁹ and silver dishes.⁸⁰ It is interesting to point out that fifty lamps from Viminacium with the dolphin relief are preserved.⁸¹

The reasons for this concentration of the dolphin motif in the Danubian part of the province may be diverse. First of all, it should be once again pointed out that this motif is the result of the influences arriving from Rome in this area by way of Pannonia and perhaps, to a smaller extent, of

⁷¹ Bianchi L. 1985, figure 5.

⁷² For more detail, see page 7, notes 61 and 62.

⁷³ Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 41.

⁷⁴ Schober A. 1923, no. 118, figure 55.

⁷⁵ Васић М. П., no. 412.

⁷⁶ The dolphins are represented on the intaglio of the ring of gold and opal from Obrenovac, on the intaglio of the ring of gold and cornelian from Viminacium, on a ring of gold of unknown origin, while on the intaglio of the ring of gold and opal of unknown origin they were shown together with the human mask and water bird, Поповић И. 1992, no. 8, no. 33, no. 117 and no. 57

⁷⁷ This bronze sculpture of the dolphin is from Singidunum, Крунић С. 1997 cat. no. 65 with bibliography of earlier works.

⁷⁸ The dolphin was represented on the bronze lamp from Tekija (Цермановић-Кузмановић А. 1991, 172, no.2), as well as on one early Christian bronze lamp from Smederevo with the inscription *Dei in domu Termogenes votum fecit*. On this relief they are represented together with a smaller fish and an octopus, Mirković M., Dušanić S. 1976, no. 83.

⁷⁹ Bjelajac Lj. 1990, br. 67, 176, 177.

⁸⁰ Imported, cantharos from Jabucje with the representation of Amor and dolphins, Цвијетићанин Т. 1995, 164, figure 2.1.

⁸¹ The dolphin is one of the most popular motifs for decoration of Viminacium lamps. As for its frequency, the dolphin closely follows the stick, rosette and palmette motifs, and comes before other decoration motifs, Копаћ М. 1995, Т. on page 409.

Dalmatia. Bearing in mind that those influences in this Danubian part of the province were strongest, the monuments originating from these parts are characterized by richest iconography, not only concerning the decoration of stelae gables.⁸² One of the reasons for the popularity of this motif is also its suitable symbolic meaning, doubtlessly known at least in general terms, but also the very drawing of this motif, extremely well suited for the geometrical shape of the triangular field outside the gable (the fields that are non-existent or simpler in form on the stelae from the southern part of the province).

In addition to these, perhaps other possible reasons should be pointed out, perhaps not giving rise to the presence and dominance of this motif on the stelae from Danubian Upper Moesia, but certainly influencing the creation of the cultural background where this phenomenon originated. First of all, it is the presence of the cult of Neptune, of which the dolphin was a recognizable symbol, especially in this part of the province.⁸³ This cult in Viminacium and Danubian parts is confirmed by the inscriptions mentioning also the existence of the temple dedicated to this divinity,⁸⁴ the votive altar without inscription whose relief decoration was interpreted by A. Jovanovic⁸⁵, and by other archeological material.⁸⁶ The cult of Neptune is evident in other parts of the province as well, but still to a lesser extent.⁸⁷ On the other hand, the other characteristic of this part of the province should be pointed out, the one related to the river traffic and the existence of the Roman fleet. In the close vicinity of Singidunum there was a very important centre *Classis Flavia Pannonica* in Taurunum⁸⁸, and the scientists confirmed also the existence of *Classis Flavia Moesica* on the Danube in Upper Moesia.⁸⁹ Original data on river ports and the fleet in Upper Moesia are quite rare. The inscriptions confirm the existence of the ports in Viminacium, Margum, Egeta and Ratiaria, and a very important port probably existed in

⁸² The works by N. Vulic from the beginning and middle of 20th century in the *Spomenik* magazine, then to date unpublished and the only one synthesized the study of Upper Moesian monuments and their iconography of V. Kondic (1965), all the volumes of the *IMS* and numerous shorter studies on this issue, they all resulted in these conclusions.

⁸³ In the province of Upper Moesia the dolphin probably acts as the attribute of Neptune in most cases. The instances where we find it more concretely linked to Apollo or Aphrodite are not so numerous: within the cult of this goddess, the dolphin is present on two stone sculptures, unknown place of finding, Вулић Н. 1931, no. 617 and no. 622; in the cult of the god Apollo the dolphin is present on one intaglio from Singidunum where in its central part the cantharos on a tripod is flanked by cornucopias and dolphins, Бојовић Д. 1984/1985, 146, no. 33.

⁸⁴ Mirković M. 1986 no. 38 and 61.

⁸⁵ Јовановић А. 2001, 203–207.

⁸⁶ Six bronze fibulae in the form of trident, one of the most important symbols of this cult, were found in the Danubian part of the province (Landol near Smederevo, Kostolac, Stara Palanka, Karatas, Ljubicevac, Prahovo etc), Jovanović A. 1994, 160–162, note 1; One bronze fibula in the form of the dolphin with the trident was found in Singidunum, Петровић Б. 1997, 236; the bronze sculpture of Neptune with the dolphin is from Karatas, Veličković M. 1972, no. 80.

⁸⁷ Two memorial funerary monuments in the form of a massive stone block with inscriptions on one, and reliefs of dolphins and trident on the other side of the block, from Ravna, testify to the presence of the Neptune cult in the heart of the province, Petrović P. 1979 no. 23 and 36; One sculpture of Jupiter – Neptune originates from the vicinity of Donji Milanovac, Veličković M. 1972, no. 2.

⁸⁸ Starr Ch. G. 1970, 140 with the list of historic sources; Димитријевић Д. (1996, 143–157) gives an outline of all research to date on *Classis Flavia* and the ports from *Cusum* to Taurunum.

⁸⁹ *Classis Flavia Moesica* was for the first time found as late as AD 92 on a military diploma from Dacia (CIL, XVI, 37), although it was generally thought that it had existed since the times of August. To further emphasize the importance of this fleet, P. Petrovic cites an order by the emperors Honorius and Theodosius which indicates that there was also a need to better equip and replace old battleships, Petrović P. 1991, 207–208 with bibliography of earlier work.

Singidunum as well.⁹⁰ This subject was researched by P. Petrovic in his paper on *Classis Flavia Moesica* on the Danube in Upper Moesia.⁹¹ He used the numerous examples of fortified stations and ports, differing both by form and purpose, to show the importance of *Classis Flavia Moesica*. Furthermore, two inscriptions from Viminacium mention the persons dealing with maritime transportation and trade, which indicates the possible existence of the seafarers' association (*collegium nautarum*).⁹² On one fragment, also from this area, Annona was shown with the prow of the ship, an allusion to the role of maritime trade in the supplying food to the population.⁹³

The mentioned characteristics certainly were not the cause of the presence of dolphins on the stelae from Danubian Upper Moesia, nor do they indicate their different meaning, but they do testify to the characteristics of the area where the preference for this water element originated, the preference which was not only reflected on the stelae, but was also expressed in other archeological material. Finally, it is necessary to point out that in this paper an attempt was made to examine the dolphin motif only in one of the contexts in which they appear, in the triangular fields outside the gables of funerary stelae. The complexity of the meaning, the intricacy of iconographies and the diversity of archeological material where the dolphin as the motif was represented, nonetheless call for a more extensive research, and that is why this paper should be understood as the first step towards the further exploration of this subject.

TABLE I

Representations in corners on the gable	Danubian Part of Moesia Superior	Central Part of Moesia Superior	South Part of Moesia Superior
Genii	IMS II 106; Димитров 34/6.		
Lions	IMS I 29; IMS II 167		
Dolphins	IMS I 34; IMS I 41; IMS I 52; IMS I 56; IMS I 70; IMS I 122; IMS I 125; IMS I 128; IMS I 133; IMS II 89; IMS II 123; IMS II 128; IMS II 179; IMS II 190; IMS II 200; Споменик LXXI 314; Димитров 80/27.		in the centre of the gable: IMS VI 157 in the outside frame of the gable: IMS VI 51
Fantastic animals	IMS I 120		

⁹⁰ The existence of the port in Viminacium was indirectly confirmed by an inscription from 2nd century, of ports in Margum, Egeta and Ratiaria by the Notitia Dignitatum, while the fleet in Singidunum was confirmed only in 6th century, Mirković M. 1968, 35.

⁹¹ Petrović P. 1991, 207–216.

⁹² Mirković M. 1986, no. 31 and 61.

⁹³ This fragment of votive sculpture with the inscription most probably represents Annona since it was found not far from Kostolac, Mirković M. 1986, no. 49.

Griffons	IMS II 84		
Hippocampi	IMS I 119	IMS III/2 35	
Grapevine and grapes	IMS I 35; IMS II 78; IMS II 131; Споменик ХСVIII 14		
Floral ornaments		Споменик LXXI 247	IMS VI 243
Palmettes and semipalmettes	IMS I 40; IMS I 121; IMS I 131; IMS I 135; IMS I 136; IMS I 139; IMS II 13; IMS II 87; IMS II 88; Димитров 49/1.	IMS III/2 24; IMS III/2 65; IMS IMS III/2 90; IMS IV 81.	IMS VI 33; IMS VI 38; IMS VI 47; IMS VI 48; IMS VI 51; IMS VI 63; IMS VI 70; IMS VI 73; IMS VI 74; IMS VI 81; IMS VI 90; IMS VI 92; IMS VI 104; IMS VI 117; IMS VI 120; IMS VI 124; IMS VI 128; IMS VI 138; IMS VI 139; IMS VI 140; IMS VI 142; IMS VI 143; IMS VI 151; IMS VI 157; IMS VI 180; IMS VI 181; Споменик LXXI 279, Споменик ХСVIII 272.

Palmettes with floral ornaments	Мирковић 1997 3; Димитров 13/32; Димитров 31/2; Димитров 37/14; Димитров 78/28.		
Acanthus	Димитров 81/26.	IMS III/2 44; IMS III/2 56; IMS III/2 67; IMS III/2 69; IMS III/2 73; IMS III/2 89; Споменик ХСVIII 191; Споменик ХСVIII 194.	
Stylized acanthus		IMS III/2 28; IMS III/2 34; IMS III/2 45; III/2 71; IMS III/2 96; IMS III/2 26; IMS III/2 66; Споменик ХСVIII 188/1; Споменик ХСVIII 188/2; Споменик ХСVIII 188/2.	
Rosettes	IMS I 38; IMS II 22; IMS II 32; IMS II 121	Споменик LXXXV 188.	

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Godišnjak</i>	<i>Godišnjak</i> , Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja, Sarajevo.
<i>VHAD</i>	<i>Vjesnik hrvatskog arheološkog društva</i> , Zagreb.
<i>IMS</i>	<i>Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure</i> I, II, III/2, IV, VI, Beograd 1976–1995.
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> , I–VIII, Zürich, Munich, 1981–1997.
<i>Споменик</i>	<i>Споменик Српске академије наука и уметности</i> , Београд.

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- Pl. 13 Stela from Viminacium (IMS II 200)
- Pl. 14 Stela from Viminacium (Споменик LXXI 314)
- Pl. 15 Stela from Ratiaria (Димитров 80/27)
- Pl. 16 Stela from Scupi (IMS VI 51)
- Pl. 17 Stela from Scupi (IMS VI 157)

Представе делфина на горњомезијским стелама

Резиме

Представе делфина, симбола психопомпа и Небеског Океана јављају се на троугаоним пољима изван забата на надгробним стелама у подунавском делу провинције Горње Мезије. Најчешће се јављају на подручју града Виминацијума, Сингидунума, у области Космаја и на једној стели са територије Рацијарије, а изузетак представљају две стеле са територије Скупа. Најчешће, делфини фланкирају фронтон у коме је розета, понекад приказана у венцу. Након тога по бројности следе стеле на чијим фронтонима је приказана глава Медузе. На централним пољима ових стела најчешћи су портрети, а затим на нивоу појединчаних примера фунерална гозба или кантарос са лозом.

Сагледавањем распрострањености мотива делфина у сепулкралној уметности других провинција може се уочити да је на простор подунавског дела Горње Мезије овај мотив доспео преношењем утицаја северно-италиске уметности преко Паноније, а можда и мањој мери и преко Далмације. Ови утицаји су се даље ширили у трансилванијски део провинције Дакије управо преко Паноније и овог подунавског дела Горње Мезије.

Највећи део дедиканата ових споменика је потицао из романизованог становништва и носио је царска генитилна имена *Aurelius* и *Ulpus*, или генитилно име *Valerius*. На порекло дедиканата из западних провинција указују следећи натписи: IMS I 34, IMS I 122, IMS II 89, IMS VI 51 и можда IMS I 52, док о оријенталном пореклу дедиканта говоре следећа три натписа: IMS I 70, IMS I 128, IMS VI 157.

Разлози за ову уочљиву концентрисаност мотива делфина на стелама подунавског дела провинције, као и на другом археолошком материјалу, су вишеслојни. На првом месту мотив делфина се овде појавио као последица утицаја који су на ово подручје долазили из западних провинција. С обзиром да су ови утицаји на подунавском делу провинције били најснажнији, споменици ту настали се одликују најбогатијом иконографијом. Представе делфина су својим цртежом биле веома погодне за декорацију троугаоних поља изван забата, али су имале и пригодно симболично значење, која је сигурно било познато макар и у основним цртама. Поред тога важно је напоменути и следеће карактеристике овог горњомезијског подунавља које сигурно нису условиле наклоност према овом мотиву изражену на надгробним стелама али ипак говоре о специфичностима у којима се ова наклоност изразила. На првом месту, у овом делу провинције Нептунов култ, чији је делфин био препознатљив симбол, је био развијенији него у осталим њеним деловима, а такође и потврђени значај речне флоте *Classis Flavia Moesica* специфичности су овог поднебља у којем се

изразила наклоност пема овом воденом елементу као мотиву декорације не само надгробних споменика.

У овом раду учињен је покушај сагледавања значења као и значаја мотива делфина у горњомезијској сепулкралној уметности. Комплексност значења, сложеност иконографија, али и постојање различитог археолошког материјала на којем је делфин представљан ипак захтевају опширније истраживање и због тога би се овај рад требао разумети као један прилог поручавању ове сложене теме.