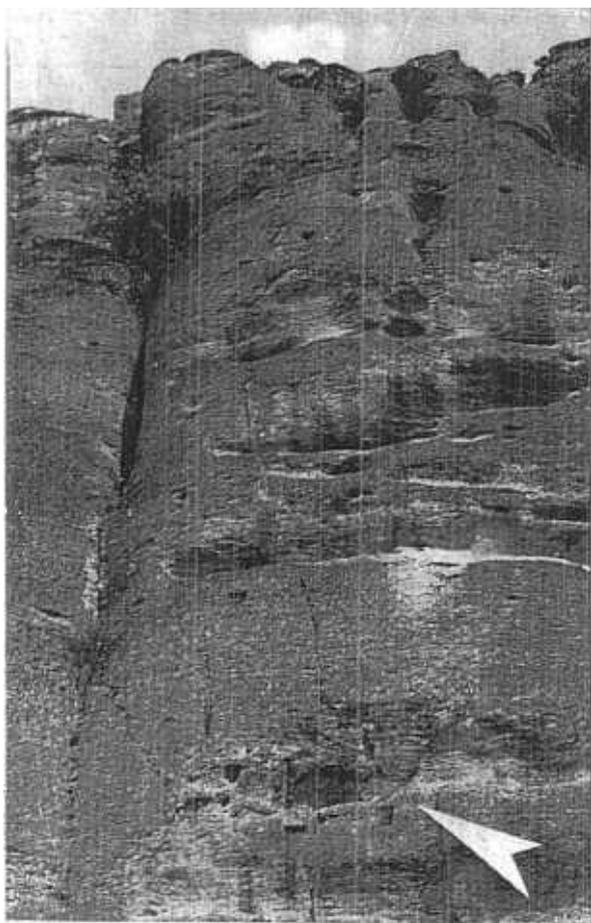


THE MADARA HORSEMAN

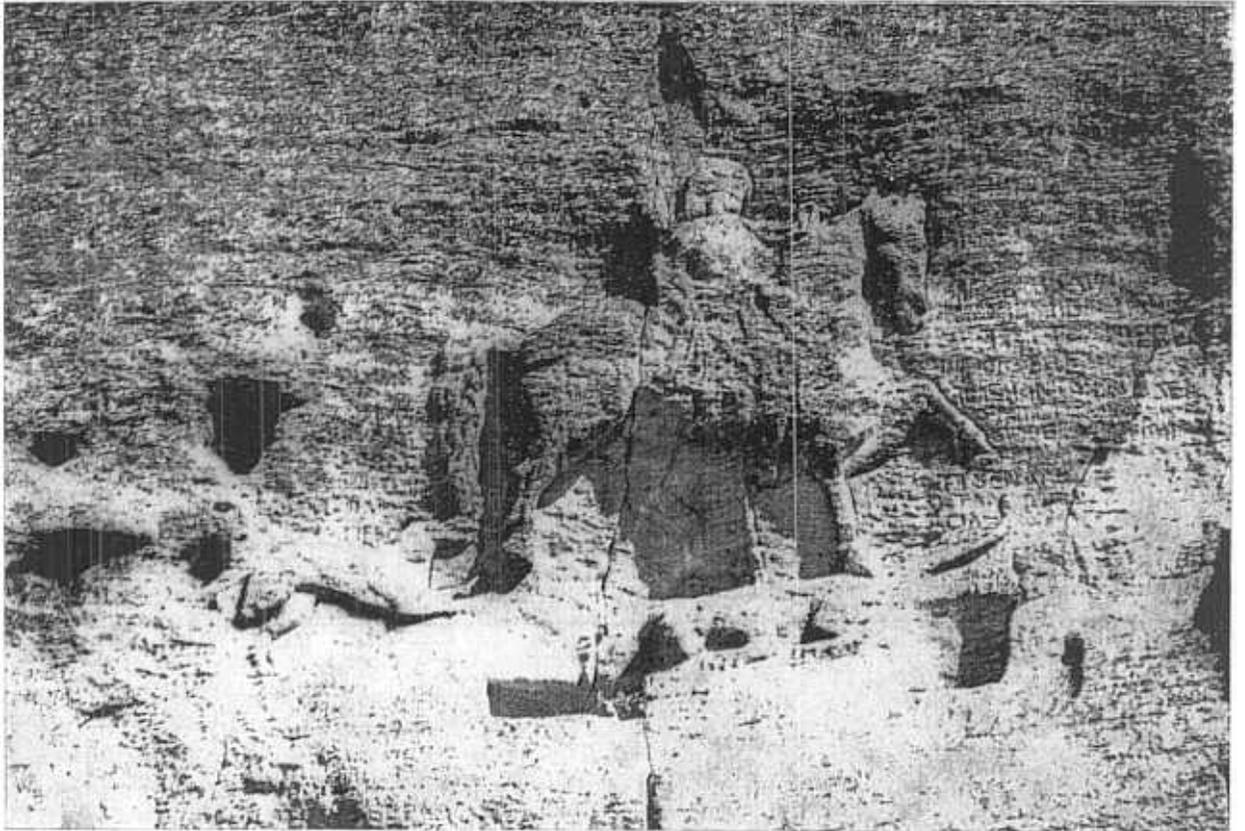


Madara

ancient monument of world significance, the Boyana Church in Sofia and the Rousse di-

“The Madara Horseman” is a name given to a monumental rock relief with an inscription. It is near the village of Madara (NE Bulgaria) — the cult centre of the pagan Bulgarian State. The monument* is chiselled at a height of 23 metres, on a 120-metre-high rock and in a scenic locality rich in archaeological monuments. The relief is a horseman riding a big stallion in a rightward direction and in the company of a bird and a dog. The horse tramples over a speared lion. A three-part Greek inscription in Greek characters tells of events in the early history of the Bulgarian State.

Much has been written about the monument. Opinions varied in the different stages of exploration. Initially, it was dated back to Late Antiquity; later — to Early Middle Ages. An important phase was the 1954 expedition of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences which published the results in the *Madarski Konnik* collection (Sofia, 1956) with full bibliography on the problem. The expedition made a detailed observation on the condition of the relief and the inscription: some new facts were discovered; it was reasserted that the relief is similar to the rock reliefs in Persepolis, Iran, and the carvings with images of horsemen in Saltovo, Soulek, Pliska and Preslav; the relief is ascribed to the Proto-Bulgarian tradition; connection with the Thracian horseman was denied; a second attempt was made to decipher and complete the inscription. The monument is in quite bad condition. Beside surface erosion — the result of the rock’s weak physico-mechanical properties, it is endangered by vertical cracks which cross the relief field with the inscription. What is clearly seen of the relief are the bigger forms of the figures and some anatomical details. Certain details are clear as form but not as meaning. The heads of the horseman, the lion and the stallion are effaced; the bird in front of the latter’s face and the halo around the horseman’s head remained hidden for the eyes of explorers. Some parts of the inscription are also effaced or unintelligible. The beginning — some ten lines behind the stallion — which probably contained



2. The Madara Horseman relief today. *The horseman's halo, the hollow on the horse's forehead and the bird flying in front of it are clearly visible*

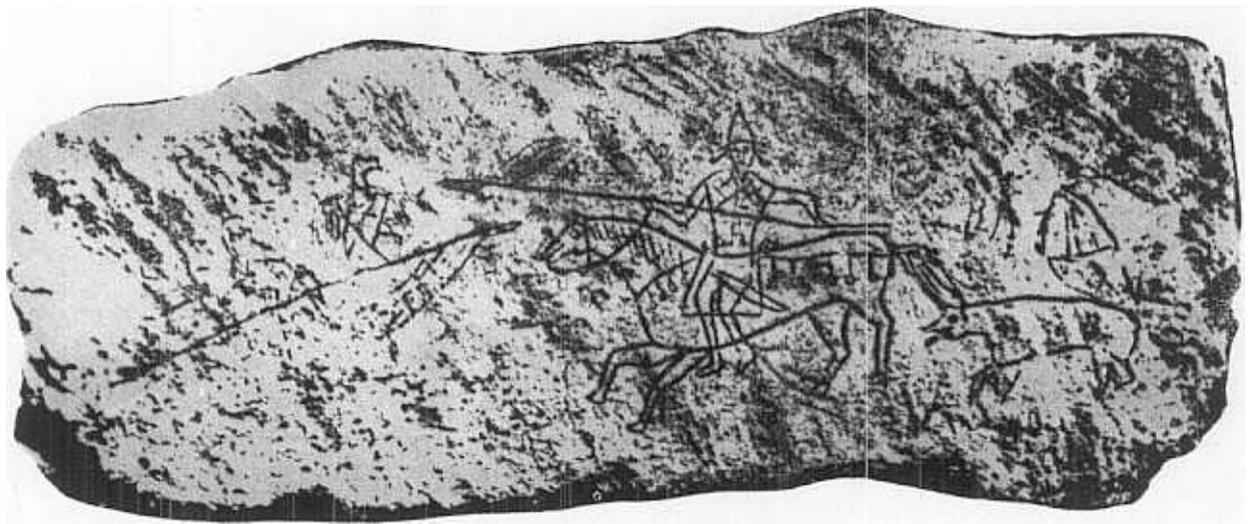
3. The Madara Horseman relief — a China-ink drawing by Rafail Popov (1934). *It shows very well the stallion's unnatural ambling pace with head turned to onlookers, the rider's feminine posture, the stirrup and the dog wagging its tongue*



the decipher key, is totally effaced. This condition and the lack of appropriate parallels are, in our opinion, the reasons for different interpretations given to the details and to the relief scene and for the inaccuracy in dating the monument and in identifying the ruler from the inscription.

Despite the bad condition, the monument presents some hints in what direction to look for its origin as a piece of art and tradition and how to identify some details in the relief effaced beyond recognition, and to form a well-grounded concept of its origin, dating and significance with the help of appropriate parallels and analogies.

Similar valuable parallels of the Madara Horseman were discovered by the author while studying the ethnogenesis of the so-called Proto-Bulgarians, the Asian roots of their culture, and their migration to Europe (time and route differing for each tribe and for each of the people who formed their unstable state unions). I mean the cult images — cast bronze, wooden engravings and wall paintings — created amidst central Asian peoples of horse-



4. The Preslav horseman. Primitive graffito on a stone block of the fortress wall of Veliki Preslav (9th-10th century). *The dog following the horseman and the flying bird are situated the way they are on the Madara relief*

breeders amongst whom the Proto-Bulgarians lived before they left for Europe. (See images opposite here) The images are the result of a long syncretism of different ideas and beliefs (from pre-historical cannibalism and Orenda to Zoroastrianism and Buddhism) and of the convergence of traditional iconographies. Some are illustrations of the heroic horseman from the epics of the above-mentioned peoples in which he is accompanied by a bird and a dog. The parallels — most often a horseman riding on clouds and to the left, sitting aside and in the company of a bird and dog — supplied much material for comparative analysis and allowed us to see unknown but very important details — the bird, the halo of the horseman, the dog's collar, etc. and to identify the unknown spherical object in the horseman's right hand with the skull cup of Lha-mo, to decide the kind and material of the vanished ornament appliquéd on the forehead of the Madara stallion.

Sometimes there was amazing similarity between the above-described images and those of the Madara relief except for the different direction and this circumstance drew attention to a definite type of votive tables showing the Thracian horseman in which he also rides rightwards accompanied by a dog and lion. The Madara relief contains exactly the same group.

It is highly probable that the Madara Horseman combines cult images of the Thracian and Proto-Bulgarian peoples who were horse-breeders. To Proto-Bulgarian tradition, in general, we owe the appearance of relief in its monumental size and icono-

5. Tsamba-Maidur — 8th-9th century (National Gallery, Ulan Bator). *The deity has a halo round the head and a feminine riding posture. The ambling horse flies in the air, accompanied by a dog and a bird (above the halo)*





6. Thracian horseman. A votive tablet of the 4th-5th century. Archaeological museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia. *The horseman rides rightwards and is followed by a dog and a lion (in counter movement)*



8. Lha-mo. A lamaist deity from an early pre-Buddhist cult (17th century), bronze gilted statuette (author's collection). *The mule has a disk between its ears — a symbol of the sun, and is arbling. Lha-mo holds a skull-cup in his hand*

graphy and of all established details: the stirrup, halo, skull-cup, bird, etc.

The Thracian horseman may have been the source for the rightward direction in the Madara relief and the latter may have borrowed, for one purpose or another, the lion which is the only figure on the relief that stands on the ground. The inscription, arranged in the way encountered with some wood engravings, cannot be isolated in time

7. Revanta. Indian deity (Pratihara Museum). *The author is familiar with about 40 images which provide abundant material to study parallels of the Madara Horseman*



from the hundred or so Proto-Bulgarian inscription on stone of which none was inscribed earlier than the beginning of the 9th century. The skull-cup in the hand of the Madara Horseman and the inscribed Greek form of Kroum's name *Κρομμειος* referred us to Byzantine chronicles that tell how khan Kroum made a cup from the skull of the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I Ghenyk who invaded Bulgaria in 811 and was killed here. Chroniclers also tell how the new emperor Leo V laid an ambush at the walls of Constantinople and how the credulous Kroum was wounded there by... "the lion"! These circumstances permit to search the relief scene for a definite magic meaning agreeing with old beliefs and practices: the desire of the Bulgarian khan to triumph over an unworthy enemy.

As a piece of art, the Madara relief — a climax in pagan Bulgarian art — must be accepted as from the 9th century, an age when mediaeval Bulgarian society and state experienced an all-round boom in creating their own culture and art (round sculpture included), in agreement with the traditions of the main ethnic components of the present-day Bulgarian people: Slavs, Thracians and Proto-Bulgarians.

The Madara Horseman is one of the examples showing the ways in which the culture and art of new-European peoples was formed: the Great Migra-

tion of Peoples breathed new life into Late Antiquity heritage and added to it the old but vital traditions of the barbarian new-comers who brought with them part of the culture belonging to great Asian civilizations. The monument testifies to a considerable exchange of cultural values among the Asian peoples and the mobile culture of the nomadic horse-breeders deserves special mention for that.

The Bulgarian National Institute of Cultural Monuments has always taken special care in the monument as can be seen from the conference on problems of the Madara Horseman's conservation held in Shoumen in 1974 and attended by Bulgarian and foreign specialists. Many reports were read and suggestions made about how to conserve the monument. When delegates had had their say on the reports and seen what the monument was like for themselves they voted a document — Motions — which recommended to obtain additional data (Article One, items 1-7) and to map out measures and provide facilities to conserve the monument on the spot: anchorage of the rock pieces between the cracks (Article One item 2) and to design a movable protection for the relief and the inscription in bad weather (Article One, item 3). A special work group was formed to design a transparent heating chamber.

The extremely bad condition of the monument is obvious from:

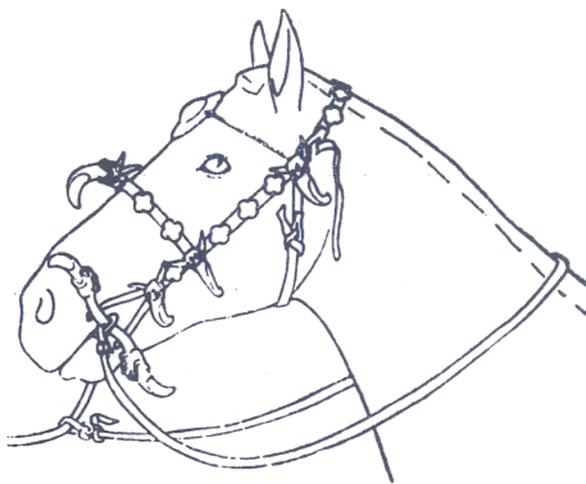
- the strongly eroded surface of the entire rock massif,
- deep vertical cracks directly affecting the monument,
- very poor physico-mechanical properties of the rock,
- incipient disintegration of the sharp edges of the vertical cracks on the surface of the rock in the relief field.

Besides the destructive effect of many other different factors on the entire surface of the monument, the lack of firm conservation method for such a monument in the open and other objective difficulties led to the opinion that practical decisions about the protection of the Madara Horseman would not have the desired and expected effect.

So far the question of taking down the monument to a museum was mentioned just as a possibility in one of the principal reports at the conference in Shoumen (V. Venkov, *Conservational Problems of the Madara Horseman*, p. 6, 6.1.1.) but not developed as a concrete project. As an alternative, however, this possibility should be borne in mind, especially after reconsideration of the calculated



9. Copy of a wood engraving showing the Central Asian "happy" flying horse (author's collection). The texts are situated the way they are on the Madara relief.



10. Scythian reins from Altai (Pazirik). Reconstruction after archaeological finds (S. I. Rudenko)

effacement speed — 22 milimetres within 12 centuries — which has been accepted to be a low one. Insignificant as the lost layer might seem to be, it was enough to efface not only the head of the horseman and the horse, but details of the horseman's garments, the limit of the relief field, the horseman's halo and whole parts of the inscription and made the bird entirely invisible to explorers. (The figure of the bird was discovered by Velda Mardi-Babikova, an art historian at the National Institute of Cultural Monuments in So-

fia and one of the reviewers of the report on the Madara Horseman submitted by the author to the International Committee of World Cultural Heritage in October, 1979).

All the problems mentioned above require an urgent solution, especially now that the Madara Horseman has acquired the status of a cultural monument of world significance. This provides an opportunity to consult UNESCO experts on the matter.

Slavi DONCHEV

RESUME

L'auteur propose de voir dans le relief monumental, sculpté sur un rocher près du village de Madara (au nord-est de la Bulgarie) et connu sous le nom de „Cavalier de Madara“, une synthèse d'images religieuses traditionnelles, résultat d'un syncrétisme continu de croyances antiques des peuples de l'Asie centrale qui pratiquaient l'élevage des chevaux. Certaines de ces peuples seront connus, plus tard, en Europe sous le nom de proto-bulgares. Ce processus s'est poursuivi plus tard sur le territoire de la Bulgarie danubienne médiévale, en y intégrant des effigies de cavaliers thraces.

Des comparaisons entre le relief de Madara et des oeuvres d'origine asiatique, effectuées par l'auteur, lui permettent d'identifier certains des éléments de la sculpture, à demi-effacés, d'en découvrir de nouveaux et de confirmer l'origine bulgare de ce monument.

L'auteur apporte de nouvelles preuves à l'appui de la thèse selon laquelle le monument daterait du IX^e

siècle.

Le Cavalier de Madara est un témoignage des relations culturelles importantes qui se sont maintenues entre les différents peuples de l'Eurasie, avant, pendant et après des Grandes Invasions.

L'auteur constate le très mauvais état du monument et traite brièvement de sa sauvegarde.

1. Le rocher avec le relief du Cavalier
2. Le relief du Cavalier de Madara aujourd'hui
3. Le relief du Cavalier de Madara, dessin à l'encre de Chine
4. Le Cavalier de Preslav graffiti primitif découvert sur un bloc de pierre du mur d'enceinte de Veliki-Preslav (IX^e — X^e siècle)
5. Tsamba-Maidar, VIII — IX^e siècle (Galerie nationale d'Oulan Bator).
6. Cavalier thrace. Plaque votive du IV^e ou V^e siècle
7. Revanta. Divinité hindoue (musée Pratihara)
8. Lha-mo. Divinité lamaïste d'un culte pré-bouddhiste (XVII^e siècle)
9. Gravure sur bois représentant le cheval volant „bienheureux“ de l'Asie centrale
10. Rênes scythes d'Altai (Pazirik)