CHAPTER 13

Apple, Vine, Rose and Lily

Another very common motif on stećci and nišani is the hemisphere, usually interpreted as an apple. The finials on minarets are often a series of spheres topped by a leaf. These are crucially important motifs in the symbolic language under consideration.

In the myth of our beginnings in the Garden on the height, God forbids Adam to eat the fruit of one tree, saying: “Adam, dwell thou, and thy wife, in the Garden, and eat thereof easefully where you desire; but draw not nigh this tree, lest you be evildoers.”

God told us this on the height when still wholly pure. His will and ours were in perfect accord. What Adam wanted, saw and heard, where he went, whatever he reached out to touch, his will was as God’s – except for this one tree. Plucking its fruit transgressed the limit set. It is irrelevant whether he transgressed knowingly or had forgotten. Satisfying his desire for the forbidden produced a new state of the self. When he transgressed this limit, we lost our original innocence and became “evildoers.” Our will was in defiance of our Lord’s.

Since God is All-knowing, His will is inseparable from knowledge. It is never with ignorance. Our knowledge is always little and our will limited. The self cannot be kept inviolate without acknowledging our limitations. Reaching for the forbidden fruit, we derive our will from our opposition to knowledge, from our ignorance, and our inner self is obscured. Preferring action to restraint caused us to fall to the depths. Before, the self which “incites to evil,” was a hidden, unknown stain, action out of ignorance, a serpent; from that moment on, the stain spread to become our being in the depths of misfortune.

Reaching for the forbidden fruit comes from that part of our free will which turns away from confessing no god but God. The consequences of violating these limits are expressed in His Words: “Get you all down, each of you an enemy of each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time.”

Our fall from the height to the depths and our awareness that we could return back up the path of that fall mean returning what was picked to its place. This is the revelation of the Word as the tree of the world: “A good word

1 Qur’an, 2:35.
2 Ibid., 12:53.
3 Ibid., 2:36.
is as a good tree – its roots are firm, and its branches are in heaven; it gives its produce every season by the leave of its Lord."  

The vine is given complex symbolic meanings in every sacred tradition. Its many branches grow from one stock and the farmer prunes and trains them until only the sound and productive remain. One may think of it, like any other tree, as consisting of a visible part, the stock and branches, leaves and grapes, and a concealed part, the root. The part above ground is evidence of the root below, the centre of the vine’s being. As Jesus said:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.  

The vine stock symbolizes Jesus’ own self, entirely dependent on the Essence, which is the Principle that manifests in the stock as the perfect self and in the branches and fruit as individuality. The Principle, Unity, is the in and the out of that manifestation, its first and last. First and last, it bears fruit insofar as it realizes its original self.

Seeing a rose and inhaling its perfume recalls the presence of the Praised. This prompts the people of peace to say: “O Lord, bless the Praised!” Blessing him, they bless the angels and God, for they too bless the Praised.

When the Praised returned from his Night Journey, drops of his sweat fell on the ground and from each sprang a red rose. These roses denote the Praised as recipient and giver: he gives what he has received from God as His mercy to the worlds. The full-blown red rose symbolizes the exteriorization of inwardness, the blood in the vessel of the heart. Vessel and flower are connected as symbols and it is clear how both stand for the heart of the Praised and of every one of us as recipients of the Word, which the Spirit of Truth brought to his heart.

The lily is a sign of femininity or perfect receptivity. It represents the Virgin and is as common as the rose in Bosnian motifs. Rose and lily rarely feature in

5  John, 15:1–4.
6  See Qur’an, 33:56.
7  See Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger, 35.
8  See Qur’an, 21:107.
9  Ibid., 26:92–94.