



THE ETERNAL SYMBOLS

*Aleksandar V. Nasteski**

Abstract - The Eternal Symbols

I spent the last ten years accompanied by my cliffs, the signs on them, the carvings and pictures on them, and by my paintings, throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Macedonia and most of all on Shar mountain, in the canyon of the river Pena. This was an obvious sign of one thing: that in the prehistoric period and the time that followed on the Shar mountain life circulated, because our ancestors found a rich mountain full of life, fish, water and forests. Then with time they created a rich and interesting social life with culture, beliefs, rituals and traditions. On these rocks we are not talking about lone signs, and if I dare to say, these are true symbolic-narrative artistic compositions, one of the first in the world of art and painting in general. I named the first rock Adam from Pena. On it we can clearly observe the head, the body, the legs and what is the most important, the masculinity, and the other figures, two triangles, one cross, one circle and one snake, which tell us that this is a ritual rock used in the name of fertility and sexuality, in a rare and original way. The second rock is named the Fishes of Pena, with one complex composition with animals, a lynx, fish, a human head, a cross and a lot of male and female triangles, which are symbols for the sky-sun and for earth, the big mother, and its holy matrimony, heiros gamos. This should mean that this holy matrimony is responsible for the creation of the world, nature, animals, plants and humans. These rare compositions which are presented on these rocks I believe were created in the early part of the Mesolithic period. The artistic elements which are presented on these beautiful works of art are telling a story of an unbelievable, high level of comprehension of the world and life in general, the symbolism of the object and the capability of our ancestors to create symbols which have remained reliable for thousands of years, and which are in a way reborn again in more modern forms but with the same eternal meaning. Those symbols are eternal.

Riassunto - I simboli eterni

Ho trascorso gli ultimi dieci anni circondato dalle mie scogliere, dai segni e dalle incisioni su di esse, con la mia pittura ho attraversato tutto il territorio della Repubblica di Macedonia e soprattutto la montagna Shar, nel canyon del fiume Pena. Nel periodo preistorico ed anche successivamente la montagna Shar fu un centro vitale poiché i nostri antenati vi trovarono una montagna ricca di pesce, acqua e foreste. Poi con il tempo è divenuta un centro sociale, economico e culturale di particolare rilevanza. Su queste rocce non si trovano segni solitari: queste sono vere composizioni simbolico-narrativo-artistico, una delle prime al mondo per concentrazione di arte e pittura. Ho chiamato la prima roccia Adamo da Pena. Su di essa si possono chiaramente osservare la testa, il corpo, le gambe e quello che è il più importante, la mascolinità, e le altre figure, due triangoli, una croce, un cerchio e un serpente, che ci dicono che questa è un roccia usata in nome della fertilità e della sessualità, in modo raro e originale.

La seconda roccia è chiamata i Pesci di Pena, con una composizione complessa con animali, una lince, un pesce, una testa umana, una croce e una gran quantità di triangoli maschili e femminili, che sono simboli del sole, del cielo e della terra, la grande madre, e il suo matrimonio sacro, heiros gamos. Questo dovrebbe significare che questo sacro matrimonio è responsabile della creazione del mondo, della natura, degli animali, piante ed esseri umani. Queste composizioni credo stiano state e eseguite nella prima parte del periodo Mesolitico. Gli elementi artistici che vengono presentati in queste splendide opere d'arte raccontano una storia incredibile, rappresentano un alto livello di comprensione del mondo e della vita in generale, la simbologia degli oggetti e la capacità dei nostri antenati di creare simboli che sono tuttora validi, e che sono ritornano nel mondo moderno, ma con lo stesso significato eterno. Tali simboli sono eterni.

Résumé - Les symboles éternels.

J'ai passé la plus part des dernières dix années en compagnie de mes escarpements, des signes sur eux, des gravures et des images sur eux, et avec mes tableaux, à travers le territoire entier de la République de Macédoine, et en particulier sur le mont Šar, dans le canyon du fleuve Pena. L'art rupestre présent démontre que dans la Préhistoire et les périodes suivantes le mont Šar était peuplé et très vivant, parce que nos ancêtres y trouvaient un endroit plein de vie, de poisson, d'eau et de forêts. Ensuite, au cours des millénaires, ils y réalisèrent une vie sociale intéressante, riche de culture, croyances, rituels et traditions. Il ne s'agit pas tout simplement de signes isolés, j'oserais soutenir qu'il s'agit d'une des plus anciennes véritables compositions artistiques de type symbolique-narratif dans le monde de l'art et de la peinture en général. J'ai nommé le premier rocher « Adam du Pena ». On peut clairement observer sur lui la tête, le corps, les jambes et, ce qui est plus important, la masculinité, parmi les autres images (deux triangles, une croix, un cercle et un serpent), qui nous indiquent qu'il s'agit d'un rocher rituel employé pour des cérémonies dédiées à la fertilité et à la sexualité, d'une façon rare et originale. Le deuxième rocher s'appelle « Les Poissons du Pena », et il est caractérisé par une complexe composition avec des animaux, un lynx, un poisson, une tête humaine, une croix et beaucoup de triangles masculins et féminins, qui symbolisent

* Aleksandar V. Nasteski
painter and explorer
Republic of Macedonia



le Sol-Ciel et la Terre, la Déesse Mère, et leur matrimoine sacré, le hieros gamos. Le sens de cette composition est que le matrimoine sacré est à l'origine de la création du monde, de la nature, des animaux, des plants et des êtres humains. Je suppose que les rares compositions présentes sur ces rochers ont été réalisées dans la première part du Mésolithique. Les éléments artistiques qui distinguent ces magnifiques œuvres d'art témoignent un niveau exceptionnel de compréhension du monde et de la vie en général, la symbolique des objets et la capacité de nos ancêtres de créer de symboles valables pour milliers d'années, et qui dans un certain sens renaissent sous une forme moderne tout en préservant le même sens éternel. Ces symboles sont éternels.

I spent the last ten years accompanied by my cliffs, the signs on them, the carvings and pictures on them, and by my paintings, which are inspired by these beautiful prehistoric works of art. Traveling through the entire territory of the Republic of Macedonia, I found an enormous number of unbelievable silent witnesses from ancient prehistoric times. Most of them were found on the biggest mountain in Macedonia, Shar Mountain. For me, this was an unexpected and thrilling revelation because science claimed that the movement of tribal communities in prehistory was along the rivers Vardar–Morava, leading to Europe, so there should have been no signs of prehistoric life in these territories. However, the total opposite happened. Exactly here on this beautiful mountain, rich with water and forests, wild but at the same time tame, I found many cliffs and on them plenty of carvings, pictages and reliefs. For a long time I wondered why here, on this mountain, which is so far away from the already documented movements.

This was an obvious sign of one thing: that in the Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic periods and the time that followed, on the Shar Mountain and in the Polog Valley life was circulating. It was enough only to look at the map and to conclude that prehistoric tribal communities in the Mesolithic period did not immediately go on a long journey to central and western Europe. Instead, they moved through these areas while looking for more convenient places to live. After crossing the big river, Vardar, they came to the big mountain, Skardus, which is part of Katena Mundi – Shar Mountain, rich with animals and fish, where they probably met local tribal communities and got acquainted with a better life. Then a great concentration of tribal communities happened, which in time created a rich and interesting social life, with its culture, beliefs, rituals and new traditions, which can now attested by the large number of these ritual cliffs.

However, here, on these cliffs we are not talking about a few lone signs, and I dare to say that these are true symbolic, narrative artistic compositions, one of the first in the world of art and painting, in general. These are works of art which are an original and articulated expression of the people in that period of the past, with their beliefs and ceremonies, their comprehension of the meaning of life and social organization. Even today these works of art are so alive, that they can even seem modern, contemporary. The power of the magic, the rituals and the art was inseparable, and these movements happened in the periods that followed to the present time.

Here I will be giving more emphasis to the two ritual cliffs found in the canyon of the Pena River on Shar Mountain.

I named the first cliff Adam from Pena. It is 2.5 km northwest from the town Tetovo, which is at 700 metres above sea level, at 42 degrees and 1 minute latitude and 20 degrees and 56 minutes east longitude in the region called Banjice. This is a really interesting place, with an elliptical shape, about 500 metres long and 150 metres wide, where the Pena River probably created a small lake in prehistory and where we find one of the tallest and the biggest cliffs on Shar Mountain, called Iljadnica (Photo 1). In the cliff, even nowadays, there is a small cave where signs of life can be found, such as trails of fire, and a large quantity of cupolas, arches and scratching on the walls. In the past, the cave was significantly bigger and was a very convenient prehistoric habitat for life because the open part faces south and it is placed like a balcony over the river. A big part of this cave was ruined by the construction of the canal for the hydroelectric centre on the river in 1924. The part of the cave that had the shape of a balcony, and the river (and the fish and crabs in it), the forest, the animals, the deer, were an ideal environment for a place to live in the Mesolithic period.

About 100 metres above Iljadnica, where the real canyon starts, we see a group of five granite cliffs, and on them we can observe a large quantity of magnificent carvings, pictages and reliefs. The cliff Adam from Pena is 3 metres long, with one part of it in the river, 1.70 metres tall above the level of the river and 1.50 metres wide. On the front side it has two pictages. One of the pictages

represents a male figure about 80 cm long, 5–11 cm wide and with a depth of 1 cm. We can clearly observe the head, the body, the legs and what is the most important, the male organ. This is Adam from Pena (Photo 2). This is a really rare, maybe even the only male figure with these attributes, considering the fact that in that time the most represented figures were the female figures, Veneras. The proportions of the Adam from Pena, the head with the body, are extremely accurate and harmonious, which is confusing, and testifies to the great artistic mastery which our ancestors possessed.

On the right of the Adam from Pena, there is a complex, long and puzzling pictage, 120 metres long, 7 cm wide and 1.0–1.5 cm deep, which suffered damage from the river in spring when the water rises and hits the surface of this cliff. However, we can still clearly see a pair of legs quite plastically presented, resembling the legs of a woman.

On the top of this cliff there are: two triangles, one cross, one circle and one snake. One of the triangles, a pyramid to be more exact, is faced with its point up, and the other triangle/pyramid faces down. The triangle that is facing up is exactly above the figure of Adam from Pena and it is connected to it with a small channel carved in the cliff. Its dimensions are: 30 cm x 20 cm x 20 cm, and it is 13 cm deep. This is the male triangle, the symbol of the male principle. The second triangle/pyramid is a little smaller than the first one, at 20 cm x 18 cm x 18 cm, with a depth of 12 cm, and it is placed over the female figures, also connected with a small channel (Photo 3). This is the female triangle symbol of the female principle. The form of these triangles/pyramids and the small channels connecting them to the figures from the frontal side show us that in those ancient times they were ritually filled with a liquid that was spread through the figures. I tested this theory by filling the triangles with a coloured liquid which started spreading and filled the figures. This was probably a ritual which was practised in the name of fertility and sexuality, here presented in a rare, original and impressive way.

Other proofs that we are dealing with an ancient ritual of fertility and sexuality are the evidence encountered in the other symbols: the cross, dimensions 25 cm x 11 cm as a symbol of Mother Earth; the circle, with a diameter of 10 cm as a symbol of Father Sun, which together created life; and the snake which is 100 cm long and 5 cm wide and was a really powerful symbol, because it lived everywhere, which meant that it connects the worlds – the underground, the surface, the water and the trees (Photo 4). This means that it was a powerful symbol of fertility and a powerful symbol of transcendence, which was highly respected by shamans in all prehistoric and historic periods from the development of the humanity.

The second cliff is 5 metres higher than Adam from Pena and I named it the Fishes of Pena. This cliff is significantly larger than the first one, at 5 metres length, 3 metres width and 2 metres height, and it is on one of the river banks. It is possible that in a certain period in the past, these cliffs were on dry land, but with the many floods, most of which happened in the Mesolithic period, they were pulled towards the river. This cliff is also granite-based and of course this is why carvings and pictages are still visible on it (Photo 5). On this cliff, there are a lot of elements: carvings, pictages and reliefs. In the lower central part of the cliff, we see a representation of one of the most famous animals that lived on this mountain, the lynx, hunting a fish. Opposite the lynx there is a representation of the fish, a trout, and under them there is a human head (Photo 6), all made in the pictage technique. On the left, there are eight long and short parallel lines as a symbol of the water or the lake that existed nearby.

On this part, there are three unfinished pictages of fish and on their left side on the naturally higher part of the cliff, which is not even, there are five triangles connected in a row and next to them there are five more triangles (Photo 7). On the upper part of the cliff, there is one big cross with interesting decorations of plants and zoomorphic elements.

Starting from the beginning, a lynx with length of 30 cm, width 7 cm and depth 8 mm, made with the pictage, carved with a fire-stone, is presented at the moment of jumping while hunting a trout. Its head, ears, the body, short tail and both hind legs can be clearly recognized, while the front legs melt into the channel that goes to the human's head. The pictage of the trout fish is 33 cm long, 5 cm wide, and remarkably beautiful and masterful. Under the fish there is a slightly longer line representing the water. It is scientifically proven that fish were hunted, eaten and also presented in art in the Mesolithic period¹. Proofs that are worth comparing with this are the carvings of fish in the Lepen Whirl, which is a confirmed Mesolithic habitat in Serbia.¹ Under these two figures, there is

1 Dragoslav Srejavic and Ljubinka Babovic, *The Art of the Lepen Whirl*, Belgrade, 1983.



a presentation of a human head, 17 cm long and 14 cm wide, where the nose and the eyebrows are easily recognized, but the eyes and mouth are depicted in a more subtle way, which is very similar to the sculptures from the Lepen Whirl, River Dunav, Serbia.

On the left side of the lynx, there are eight long and short carved lines, a representation of the lake which probably existed at that time. On the left side of these lines, on the higher part of the cliff, there are carvings of triangles in a row which create a picture of an object that looks like a saw. Five of the triangles point upwards, and they have carvings, cupolas which symbolize the female principle, and the other five triangles point downwards close to each another. These five triangles symbolize the Earth: The Great Mother as the woman who gives birth to life, and the other five triangles pointing upwards symbolize the male principle, a symbol of the sky, which together depict their sexual contact – holy matrimony, *hieros gamos*. This should mean that this holy matrimony is responsible for the creation of the world, nature, animals, plants and humans and that all of these creations have their own spirits². The cross is positioned on the top of this cliff and it is quite suggestively carved, length 28 cm and width 17 cm. On the upper left side, there is one zoomorphic shape which resembles deer horns, and at the right the carving continues to develop either into a small cross or a small branch with leaves which means the Earth, its fertility, life, food, vegetation and well-being³.

The artistic elements which are presented on these beautiful works of art tell a story of an unbelievable, high level of comprehension of the world and life in general, the symbolism of the objects and the capability of our ancestors to create symbols which remained reliable for thousands of years, and which are in a way reborn again in more modern forms, but with the same eternal meaning. Those symbols are eternal⁴. According to the themes, the technique, the elements and the symbols which are used in these works of art, I conclude that they were created in the early Mesolithic period when a realistic manner of presenting objects was in use.

This is our priceless historical, cultural and religious treasure and heritage and it is pointless to be blind to this fact. The artists in those times created with and for nature, and felt a constant need to acknowledge their enrolment in life by expressing their faith in what once existed, now exists and will exist. This is applicable to modern art also – at least some of it.

For the last few years, my inspiration has these magnificent prehistoric compositions and symbols which were created by shamans and artists. These things show humans' iconic feeling, the beauty buried deep inside. This is why it can be said that those people were not just fighting for survival, but they also created masterful and unattainable works of art.

2 Nikos Chausidis, 2005, "Cosmological Pictures, Skopje, 2005.

3 Nikos Chausidis, *Cosmological Pictures*.

4 Karl G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, New York, 1964



Photo 1. Iljadnica (Thousand).

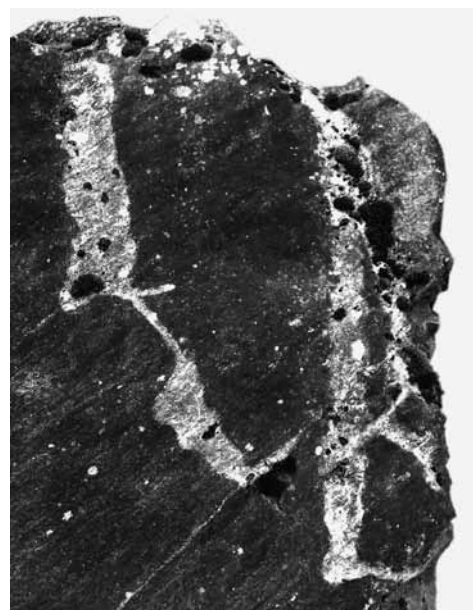


Photo 2. Adam from Pena.



Photo 3. The Triangles



Photo 4. Cross, circle and snake.



Photo 5. Fishes from Pena.



Photo 6. Human head.



Photo 7. Triangles from the fishes.