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ICONIC AND PERFORMATIVE IN SACRED LANDSCAPE.
THE CAVE MONASTERY OF THE ARCHANGEL
MICHAEL AT RAS AND ITS IMAGERY

The narrowest focus of my paper is on the graffiti — images and inscriptions — carved on rock faces in the surroundings of the cave monastery of the Archangel Michael at Ras near Novi Pazar, southwest Serbia. In contrast to the monastery complex, which has recently been made the subject of an extended study¹, the petroglyphs are virtually unknown to the scholarly community². Yet, my main goal here is not publication of the material, however interesting and little known. The graffiti at Ras form an integral part of a broader and multidimensional whole made up of a natural setting with its sacral ingredients and the underlying historical context in which it arose. It may therefore be subsumed under the distinct category termed *figured landscapes* or *inscribed landscapes*. This phenomenon, which spans a quite long period of time, has been described as “signing the land” or, in other words, place making through physical and metaphysical marking. It indicates a cultural presence and gives the land social significance³. What adds complexity to our case is the fact that the graffiti form part of an “historic environment”, an ascetic sacred landscape manifestly endowed with iconic power and performativeness.

¹ Popović D., Popović M. The Cave Lavra of the Archangel Michael in Ras // *Starinar* XLIX. 1998 (1999), p. 103–130.

² The only exception is Mitrović Dj. Ликовни и писани документи пронађени у пећини “Испосници” на Расу // *Saopštenja XIV* (1982), p. 221–230; the results of my research on the graffiti, systematically surveyed and recorded as long ago as 1983, are being prepared for publication.

³ Bradley R. *Rock Art and the Prehistory of Atlantic Europe: Signing the Land*. London, 1997; Wilson M., David B. Introduction // *Inscribed Landscapes. Marking and Making Place* / Eds. B. David and M. Wilson. Honolulu, 2002. P. 1–9; Chippindale C., Nash G. *Pictures in place. Approaches to the figured landscapes of rock-art* // *Pictures in Place. The Figured Landscapes of Rock-Art* / Eds. C. Chippindale and G. Nash. Cambridge, 2004, p. 1–36.

My decision to address the problem from this particular perspective has been encouraged by some very inspiring work done within landscape archaeology and anthropology. Modern scholarship has been developing an ever broader and more diffuse notion of *landscape*, crossing the boundaries of many traditional academic areas and classifications. Its proponents argue for an integrated approach and a constructive coupling of various disciplines, while rejecting the notion of landscape as a “passive object” and any idea of abstract “absolute landscape”. Quite the contrary, they see it as an “unstable concept” whose meaning and significance are the result of specific human preconceptions or the expression of particular artistic or scientific viewpoints⁴. The physical dimension of the *landscape* is not considered its essential property — equally important in experiencing it are different kinds of stimuli, such as sounds, smells, touch or the ambience. Such “mental images and constructs”, which may be generated through memories of actual experiences, do not physically exist, yet they constitute the images that serve to represent what has been or can be experienced⁵. In most cases this strain of thinking highlights the social dimension of landscape as paramount and sees it as a “social construct”. The notion that there is no such thing as a “natural landscape” gives rise to the claim that a “landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring, or symbolizing surroundings”⁶. Briefly, the disciplines that may be broadly defined as landscape studies have long abandoned the notion of landscape as something “out there” or synonymous with the countryside. “Today the most prominent notions of landscape emphasize its socio-symbolic dimensions: landscape is an entity that exists by virtue of being perceived, experienced, and contextualized by people”⁷. It is a “signifying system through which the social is reproduced and transformed, explored and structured”⁸.

⁴ Among the pioneering books is the edited volume *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* / Ed. B. Bender. Oxford, 1993; see also: *Carmichael D. et al. Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*. London, 1994; *Tilley C. A Phenomenology of Landscape. Places, Paths and Monuments*. Oxford–Prudence, 1994; *Fowler P. J. Writing on the countryside // Interpretative Archaeology: Finding Meaning in the Past* / Eds. I. Hodder *et al.* London, 1995, p. 100–109. The inspiring results of this research have not been sufficiently exploited in medieval studies.

⁵ *Schama S. Landscape and Memory*. London, 1995.

⁶ *Daniels S., Cosgrove D. Introduction: iconography and landscape // The Iconography of Landscape* / Eds. D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels. Cambridge, 1988, p. 1–10.

⁷ *Knapp A. B., Ashmore W. Archaeological landscapes: constructed, conceptualized, ideational // Archaeologies of Landscape. Contemporary Perspectives* / Eds. W. Ashmore and A. B. Knapp. Oxford, 1999, p. 1–30 (with a historical overview of the studies); see also *Layton R., Ucko P. J. Introduction: gazing on the landscape and encountering the environment // The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape. Shaping Your Landscape* / Eds. J. Ucko and R. Layton. London–New York, 1999, p. 1–20; *Gojda M. Archaeology and landscape studies in Europe: Approaches and concepts // People and Nature in Historical Perspective* / Eds. J. Laszlovsky and P. Szabó. Budapest, 2003, p. 35–51.

⁸ *Tilley C. Op. cit.*, p. 1–34.

Two of many aspects of this highly complex and quite popular topic are of particular interest to the subject of this paper. One pertains to the notion of *landscape* as memory, or a space where elements of personal and social histories become materialized. The idea put forth long ago is that, in principle, any landscape can be the symbolic centre of the universe, the *axis mundi*, and that such places form an integral part of all cultures and traditions⁹. Subsequent work has shown that “sites of memory” constitute a very broad concept which may encompass anything from cemeteries and churches to ideas, rituals and symbols, all of that actively influencing the creation of a nation’s social, ethnic and political identity¹⁰. This particularly goes for visually striking landscapes or for locations associated with important past events. Collectively recognized as sacred and symbolic, they constitute landscapes as identity¹¹. Landscapes invested with sacred attributes constitute a distinct group. Charged with energy and pervaded with an aura of spirituality, such spaces are “gates to heaven”, as it were. There the divine force manifests itself powerfully, enabling human beings to establish the essential vertical: ascent towards the transcendent and descent into the depths of their souls¹². In modern scholarship “sacred landscape” may be defined as a totality of topographic elements and sectors modified by social actors in an otherwise natural landscape. For a landscape to acquire sacred qualities, a particular space needs to be transformed by a cultural group to respond to its particular spiritual needs, creating specific contexts. Spiritual and religious ingredients infused into such landscapes highlight their symbolic and mythic character, turning them into spaces of memory and commemoration, and supporting their role in transmitting the knowledge of historical events and myths that are part of a particular tradition¹³. A special place among “sacred landscapes” is held by monastic *deserts*, paradigmatic ascetic spaces whose natural features as a rule are highly associative and meaning-bearing. Natural features such as mountains and springs, cliffs and caves, have always elicited conflicting emotions such as *tremendum* and *fascinans* but, in a seemingly paradoxical

⁹ Eliade M. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York, 1959.

¹⁰ Nora P. *Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire* // *Representations* 26 (1989), p. 7–25; Schama S. *Op. cit.*

¹¹ Knapp A. B., Ashmore W. *Op. cit.*, p.13–16 (with a selected bibliography on these issues); see also: Gojda M. *Op. cit.*, p. 39–40.

¹² Such a manifestation of the sacred is termed *hierophany* by M. Eliade (*Op. cit.*, p. 11); cf. also *The Spirit & Power of Place. Human Environment & Sacrality* / Ed. R. P. B. Singh. Banaras, 1994; Crumley C. L. *Sacred landscapes: constructed and conceptualized* // *Archaeologies of Landscape*, p. 269–276.

¹³ Arsenault D. *Rock-art, landscape, sacred places: attitudes in contemporary archaeological theory* // *Pictures in Place*, p. 69–82 (with an extensive relevant bibliography).

manner, the *desert* was above all else seen as an evocation of the garden of paradise and heavenly Jerusalem¹⁴.

It is precisely that type of landscape that constitutes both the natural setting and the intended scenery for the cave monastery of the Archangel Michael at Ras. It seems pertinent to note that Ras — an area in the upper course of the Raška river with a fortress of the same name — is a landmark in the history of the Serbian nation and “historical memory” in the narrowest sense of the word. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, this relatively small valley in the borderland between the western and central Balkans was the scene of decisive historical events surrounding the emergence of the independent Serbian state under the Nemanjić dynasty, and also the area where the first royal seat was set up¹⁵. Its centre and defensive stronghold was the fortress of Ras, built on a commanding rocky elevation at the confluence of the Sebečevska and Raška rivers. From the perspective of present-day research, the fortress forms part of an archaeological complex comprised of several chronologically remote sites concentrated within a small area. Apart from the cave monastery of the Archangel Michael, which is the focus of this paper, the complex includes a three-aisled Byzantine basilica, four churches dating from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, a large necropolis, and a proto-urban market settlement attestedly in existence in the fourteenth through the seventeenth century¹⁶. These facts suffice to illustrate the locality’s deep stratigraphy and its social, economic and sacral *longue durée*.

The fortress of Ras too had a long life and a strongly delineated content. Archaeological excavations have revealed several occupation horizons: a Roman fortification, on whose foundations a Byzantine one was built, which in turn was restored in the late twelfth century, in the reign of the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty (Nemanja), to serve as a royal refuge. Its walls protected the

¹⁴ Baridon M. Naissance et renaissance du paysage. Paris, 2006, p. 208–220; Endsjø D. Ø. Primordial Landscapes, Incorruptible Bodies. Desert Asceticism and the Christian Appropriation of Greek Ideas on Geography, Bodies and Immortality. New York etc., 2008, p. 17–101; Rapp C. Desert, City, and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination // The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West / Eds. J. Dijkstra, M. Van Dijk, Church History and Religious Culture 86. Leiden, 2006, p. 93–112; Popović D. Desert as Heavenly Jerusalem: The Imagery of a Sacred Space in the Making // New Jerusalem. Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces / Ed. A. Lidov. Moscow, 2009, p. 151–175.

¹⁵ Ćirković S. Der Hof der serbischen Herrscher: von der Burg zur Residenzstadt // Höfische kultur in Südosteuropa / Eds. R. Lauer and H. G. Majer. Göttingen, 1994, p. 74–85; Popović M. The royal residence of Stefan Nemanja in Ras // Stefan Nemanja — Saint Simeon Myroblite: Histoire et tradition / Ed. J. Kalić. Belgrade, 2000, p. 233–247 (in Serbian with an English summary and earlier literature).

¹⁶ Popović M. The Fortress of Ras. Belgrade, 1999, p. 123–139 and 278 (in Serbian with an English summary); Milošević G. Housing in Medieval Serbia. Belgrade, 1997, p. 131–133 (in Serbian with an English summary).

royal treasury, as indicated by the first mint striking Serbian currency from about 1230. Not much later, however, the fortress was demolished and, since the royal capital was moved to the south, it was never rebuilt¹⁷. From the perspective of landscape studies, it seems important to note the commanding sight of the fortress perched atop the cliffs and the kind of messages such a sight must have emitted. As observed long ago, hilltop fortresses and the hills on which they were built formed organic wholes, bringing natural landscapes and humanly made structures into harmony¹⁸. In the middle ages such a sight must have made a powerful visual impact and helped the process of creating *historical memory*¹⁹. Also, such a product of human intervention in the landscape conveyed a forceful political message. Briefly, it was an explicit assertion of domination over a given area²⁰.

The cave monastery of the Archangel Michael is situated in the rocky cliffs beneath the eastern wall of the Ras fortress. Two chronological horizons have been archaeologically attested: an older, dated to the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and thus coeval with the Serbian horizon of the fortress; and a younger, which indicates a restoration of the monastery in the mid-sixteenth century and its occupation throughout the following century. Unfortunately, this highly important monastic complex is scantily documented. The most important reference is certainly the one contained in the handwritten note in Vukan's Gospel made in 1202 by *abba* Simeon²¹. This document is important in more than one way and provides some clues as to the power struggles in Serbia in the early thirteenth century. Furthermore, Simeon's statement that he wrote the book "in the cave in the fortress of Ras" is indicative of a phenomenon typical of medieval Serbia; namely, of the practice, pursued throughout the middle ages, of monastic writing and copying being done in anchoritic *kellia*, traditional abodes of the monastic elite and spiritual hubs²².

¹⁷ Popović M. The Fortress of Ras, *passim*.

¹⁸ Classen K. H. *Burg // Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, Vol. 3. Stuttgart, 1954, p. 132–134.

¹⁹ For the role of visual images in the shaping of historical and cultural *memory*, mostly from a psychological perspective, see *Visual Memory* / Eds. S. J. Luck and A. Hollingworth. Oxford, 2008.

²⁰ Warnke M. *Berge und Burgen // Politische Landschaft. Zur Kunstgeschichte der Natur*. Munich, 1992, p. 47–61, 180–181; for these issues see *Landscape and Power* / Ed. W. J. T. Mitchell. Chicago–London, 2002.

²¹ Vrana J. Вуканово еванђеље. Belgrade, 1967, p. 486; on the historical content of Simeon's text, Marjanović-Dušanić S. Historical notes on the monk Simeon's dedication of the so-called Vukan gospel // *Starinar* XLIII–XLIV (1992–1993), p. 201–210 (in Serbian with an English summary).

²² Examples and bibliography in Popović D. The deserts and holy mountains of medieval Serbia: Written sources, spatial patterns, architectural designs // *Heilige Berge und Wüsten. Byzanz und sein Umfeld* / Ed. P. Soustal. Vienna, 2009, p. 57–59.

As we have seen, the notion of landscape as a social construct, especially in connection with “historic environments” or “historic landscapes” where one is “momentarily taken back into history”²³, finds corroboration in many elements of the Ras complex. In that sense, the cave monastery of the Archangel Michael might have been a vehicle for important and multilayered messages. Namely, it might have been centred round the cave where Stefan Nemanja had been imprisoned by his brothers during their feud over power. According to Nemanja’s son and biographer, future king Stefan the First-crowned, Nemanja was miraculously rescued from prison by Saint George, which happened to be a major step towards his accession to the Serbian throne²⁴.

Viewed as a physical structure, the cave monastery of the Archangel Michael was a fully developed whole comprising a variety of components, both sacral and profane. The monastery church was erected under a large rock overhang, a nearby cave contained *kellia* and a working area, and further to the east a granary and a reservoir were built. The cells intended for solitaries were set up in the surrounding caves, some of which were barely accessible. They communicated with each other, and with the monastery, by way of rock-cut paths, still partly passable²⁵. The monastic community was founded on the side of a rocky elevation whose “not-made-by-man” cliffs and caverns possess, in terms of medieval monastic tradition, archetypal and iconic properties. Caves and “rock architecture” in general have had an established meaning in the Eastern Orthodox world. In the borderland between the upper and nether worlds, caves were seen as mystical points and places especially suited for contact with the divine²⁶, a belief that drew strength from the fact that some major events in biblical history are associated with caves, including the central stages of the *oiconomia* of salvation — the birth, entombment and ascension of Christ²⁷. Speaking of *topoi*, it should be noted that yet another major principle of the cave architecture of the Byzantine world was consistently implemented at Ras, namely the harmonious rela-

²³ Darvil T. The historic environments, historic landscapes, and space-time-action models in landscape archaeology // *The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape*, p. 106.

²⁴ Stefan Prvovenčani. Сабрани списи // Ed. Lj. Juhas-Georgijevska. Belgrade, 1988, p. 68–69.

²⁵ Popović D. and Popović M. Op. cit., p. 105–119 (with the earlier literature).

²⁶ Benz E. Die heilige Höhle in der alten Christenheit und in der östlich-orthodoxen Kirche // *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1953, Vol. XXII (1954), p. 365–432; Daniélou J. Le symbole de la caverne chez Grégoire de Nysse // *Mullus, Festschrift Theodor Klauser, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 1* (1964), p. 43–51.

²⁷ According to Eusebius of Caesarea, this “triad of caves”— those at Bethlehem, Jerusalem and on the Mount of Olives (Eleona) — was described as “the holiest” and “saving”, see Walker P. W. L. *Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the Fourth Century*. Oxford, 1990, p. 184–217; Wilken R. L. *The Land Called Holy, Palestine in Christian History and Thought*. New Haven–London, 1992, p. 88–91.

tionship between natural features, understood as “divine” or “not-made-by-hand” creations, and man-made architecture²⁸.

The Ras complex contains several elements characteristic of anchoritic cave communities. One of them is the fresco, probably of a patron saint, painted on the face of an imposing cliff. Once visible from afar and now almost illegible, that image in that particular space was a clear sign indicating a sacred place. The practice of painting rock icons in the open air is attested in the Balkans by a number of eloquent examples²⁹. As a way of creating sacred places and cult spots in a natural setting, it formed part of a broader process of the sacralization of a particular space³⁰. One of the central components of the Ras complex is also endowed with iconic power and significance: a pillar-like rock, presently accessible only with the aid of rock-climbing equipment³¹. Visually and morphologically, the rock is reminiscent of the *stylos*, the real or symbolic dwelling of extreme ascetics. As is well known, the original concept of stylitism, especially characteristic of Syrian monasticism³², was considerably expanded in the middle ages³³. In many sources, hagiographic in particular, the term *stylos*, sometimes coupled with the epithet *acheiropoitos*, does not necessarily refer to a literal pillar; it may also refer to its functional and conceptual substitute such as a barely accessible rocky peak or a tall structure. Accordingly, their dwellers are called *stylites* to emphasize their commitment to the highest form of ascetic endeavour³⁴. The presence of that concept in the

²⁸ Ćurčić S. Cave and church. An Eastern Christian hierotopical synthesis // Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia / Ed. A. M. Lidov. Moscow, 2006, p. 216–235.

²⁹ Particularly valuable examples have survived in Macedonia, e.g. in the surroundings of the monastery of Treskavac: Smolčić-Makuljević S. The Sacral Topography of the Monastery of Treskavac // Balcanica XXXV (2004), p. 307–310 (in Serbian with an English summary); or on the sites of Velika Prespa and Markovo Kale near Prilep: Subotić G. L'école de peinture d'Ohrid au XV^e siècle. Belgrade, 1980, p. 42 (in Serbian with a French summary).

³⁰ On the mechanisms of creating sacred spaces and their function, see the reference work: Lidov A. Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History // Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia. Moscow, 2006, p. 32–48; and, in the same volume, especially relevant to our topic: Bakirtzis N. The Creation of an *Hierotopos* in Byzantium: Ascetic Practice and its Sacred Topography on Mt. Menoikeion, p. 126–149.

³¹ Popović D. and Popović M. Op. cit., p. 112–113, 122–123.

³² Peña I., Castellana P. and Fernandez R. Les stylites syriens. Milan, 1975.

³³ Delehaye H. Les saints stylites. Brussels–Paris, 1923; Morris R. Monks and laymen in Byzantium, 843–1118. Cambridge, 1995, p. 60–61.

³⁴ Examples in Schiemenz G. P. Die Kapelle des Styliten Niketas in den Weinbergen von Ortinsar // Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik 18 (1969), p. 254–256; Rodley L. Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia. Cambridge, 1985, p. 184–189; the unavoidable material for the idea and practice of stylitism in Byzantine monasticism is contained in The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion. An Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint // Introduction, Translation, and Notes by R. P. H. Greenfield. Washington D.C., 2000.

medieval Serbian environment is revealed by, for example, the Life of St Peter of Koriša, a late twelfth-century hermit, where his dwelling — a tall rock on a mountainside of Rusenica (Metohija, Serbia) — is explicitly likened to a pillar³⁵. The Ras example seems to demonstrate a well-thought-out and purposeful implementation of that general concept in an actual local setting. On the flat top of the abovementioned pillar-like rock, which offers an amazing view of the area, the remains have been discovered of a monumental solidly-built structure. It is tempting, and not altogether groundless, to think of it as the place where *abba* Simeon copied Vukan's Gospel. Along the perimeter of the top, among the ruins, grow clusters of irises. Considering the expert opinion that these cannot be wild flowers, their presence is quite indicative: they may be the last vestige of a former garden set up in imitation of the heavenly abodes that awaited the *kellioi* monks³⁶.

To understand the full significance of the Ras complex, one should take into account the fact that the anchorite community and the military stronghold were not only on the same hill but in immediate proximity to one another. The coexistence of the two very different components, archeologically ascertained beyond any doubt, is only seemingly paradoxical. Namely, an entire ideology, deeply rooted in the Byzantine legacy, was developed round the concept of "spiritual warfare" resting upon the belief in the efficiency of holy men's prayers in the struggle against the enemy³⁷. This belief may account for the presence of anchoritic communities along the walls of fortresses, especially numerous in neighbouring Bulgaria³⁸. In Serbia, this concept received an enthusiastic response even in the earliest period of her sovereignty, and lost little of its relevance even later³⁹.

This iconic landscape and historic environment was the ideal setting for a very interesting rock-art assemblage, which, from the dated inscriptions,

³⁵ *Teodosije. Житија* / Ed. D. Bogdanović. Belgrade, 1988, p. 271; see also Popović D. The Cult of St Peter of Koriša – Stages of Development and Patterns // *Balkanica XXVIII* (1997), p. 202–203.

³⁶ *Talbot A.-M. Byzantine monastic horticulture: The textual evidence* // *Byzantine Garden Culture* / Eds. A. Littlewood, H. Maguire and J. Wolsche-Bulmahn. Washington D.C., 2002, p. 37–41.

³⁷ *Morris R. Op. cit.*, p. 108, 140–141, 281 (with sources and bibliography).

³⁸ Anchoritic cave communities were set up round the early-thirteenth-century fortress of Krasen: *Ангелов Н. Към историята на скалния манастир при с. Иваново* // *Археология* 3 (1962), p. 16–20, and the fortresses of Shumen: *Антонова В. Шумен и шуменската крепост*. Shumen, 1995, p. 5–9, and Cherven: *Йорданов С. Скални обители край средновековния град Червен* // *Годишник на музеите от Северна България VII* (1992), p. 90–96, both from the thirteenth/fourteenth century; cf. also *Curta F. The cave and the dyke: A rock monastery on the tenth-century frontier of Bulgaria* // *Studia Monastica* 41 (1999), p. 129–149.

³⁹ *Popović M. Вештина ратовања и живот војника* // *Приватни живот у српским земљама средњег века* / Ed. C. Marjanović-Dušanić and D. Popović. Belgrade, 2004, p. 240–241.

may be assigned to the second phase in the life of the monastery that began with its restoration in the mid-sixteenth century. The assemblage consists of graffiti which, much like modern ones typically found in urban landscapes, are an important component of the *iconosphere* of a given place⁴⁰. Of particular interest to us is their spatial distribution pattern and iconography. Namely, it is clear that petroglyphs are not located everywhere or anywhere, but purposely positioned in the landscape⁴¹. Therefore, the researcher's main task, and the greatest challenge too, is to try to decipher the motives that led a person to choose a particular place or rock to communicate a message by drawing or inscribing. In our case, the highest concentrations of images and inscriptions are found on flat rock surfaces in the immediate vicinity of the cave church of the Archangel Michael. A considerable number of graffiti can also be found on the smooth and easily accessible rocks round the one of nearby caves that seems to have served as a prayer space⁴². Their frequency decreases and content changes towards the south, on locations which are at a greater distance from the monastery and considerably less accessible. In formal terms, virtually all the graffiti show simplified and stylized shapes typical of naïve art. To be noted, however, are a few different drawings. A beautifully shaped head of the Virgin and interlace ornament typical of manuscript illumination betray the skilful hand of a trained illuminator⁴³. On the whole, there predominate "iconic" images — static, frontal, and lacking interaction, but there also are "narrative" representations, which show more complexity in terms of composition and combination of motifs⁴⁴. It has been suggested that the principal virtue of this kind of images is their immediacy or the fact that they are direct material expressions of human concepts, of human thought. In our case, they are an authentic expression of their makers' popular piety. Which is precisely why it seems prudent to bear in mind the warning that "rock-art is a more immediate record, both easier to see and harder to make sense of. So interpretations of its nature and meaning have been famously eccentric: some still are"⁴⁵.

Even though the content and meaning of some of the graffiti elude understanding, their overall "programme" and "iconography" can be suffi-

⁴⁰ Chmielewska E. Framing [Con]text: Graffiti and Place // *Space and Culture* 10 (2007), p. 145–169; <http://sac.sagepub.com>

⁴¹ Wilson M. and David B. Op. cit., p. 2.

⁴² Mitrović Dj. Op. cit., p. 221–230.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 222, 225, 229.

⁴⁴ An excellent and more broadly applicable classification in Klassen A. Icon and narrative in transition: contact-period rock-art at Writing-On-Stone, southern Alberta, Canada // *The Archaeology of Rock-Art*, p. 42–72.

⁴⁵ Taçon P. S. and Chippindale C. An archaeology of rock-art through informed and formal methods // *The Archaeology of Rock-Art*, p. 2.

ciently grasped. They are directly determined by the function of the place where they are sited, and their imagery is relatively consistent and may be generally described as prayerful and pilgrim-related. Namely, there is no doubt whatsoever that the cave monastery of the Archangel Michael, with its inaccessible *kellia* inhabited by anchorites, was considered a sacred place and that it attracted visitors and pilgrims. Paying pious visits to hermits was a distinctive form of pilgrimage, which in turn was a characteristic phenomenon of medieval piety and culture⁴⁶. It is evidenced by the long tradition of devotional travel to the illustrious deserts and holy mountains, and not only by monks, inspired by the highest ideal of monasticism, but also by lay persons, whose motivation for visiting famed ascetics, holy men, was to seek forgiveness for their sins, counsel and, in particular, a miraculous cure⁴⁷. What earned these holy men such distinction and charisma was their ascetic endeavour in the desert, which gave them the ability to work miracles and the “boldness” in approaching (*parresia*) and interceding with the Deity⁴⁸. Given the content and function of the monastery of the Archangel Michael, it comes as no surprise to find the depictions of hermits, “earthly angels and heavenly men”, shown in their caves, at times in company with their role models, the “bodiless powers” or angels. Judging by the stylized “composition” which shows a man climbing the rope ladder to reach a hermit in his cave on the top of a rock, some of the Ras hermits may have enjoyed special respect, perhaps even the status of “holy men”. Among the stylized human figures or heads depicted on the cliffs at Ras some may be identified as “portraits” of the visitors/pilgrims, and some may even have had a special meaning in the given context, considering that *homo viator* was the usual metaphor for *xeniteia*, the highest form of which was the eremitic way of life⁴⁹. Anyway, distinctly pilgrim accou-

⁴⁶ *Maraval P.* Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient. Histoire et géographie. Des origines à la conquête arabe. Paris, 1985, p. 50; *Frank G. A.* The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrimage to Desserts Ascetics in the Christian East during the Fourth and Fifth Centuries / Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University 1994.

⁴⁷ *Talbot A.-M.* Pilgrimage in the Eastern Mediterranean between the 7th and 15th Century // *Egeria, Monuments of Faith in the Medieval Mediterranean* / Eds. M. Kaxakou and V. Skoulas. S. d., p. 46.

⁴⁸ *Morris R.* Op. cit., p. 89–90; cf. also *Popović D.* The miracle-working of St Sava of Serbia // *Under the Auspices of Sanctity: The Cult of Holy Rulers and Relics in Medieval Serbia*. Belgrade, 2006, p. 97–118 (in Serbian with an English summary).

⁴⁹ *Lanne E.* La “*xeniteia*” d'Abraham dans l'oeuvre d'Iréné. Aux origines du thème monastique de la “peregination” // *Irénikon* 47 (1974), p. 163–183; *Guillaumont A.* Le dépaysement comme forme d'ascèse dans monachisme. Aux origines du monachisme chrétien. Paris, 1979, p. 89–116; see the contributions to the volume *Strangers to Themselves: the Byzantine Outsider* / Ed. D. C. Smythe. Aldershot, Burlington USA etc., 2000: *McGuckin J.* Aliens and Citizens of Elsewhere: *Xeniteia* in East Christian Monastic Literature, p. 23–38, and *Ševčenko N.* The Hermit as Stranger in the Desert, p. 75–86.

trements, such as boots for example, are included in graffiti imagery in many cave shrines in the Balkans⁵⁰.

Considering medieval man's belief that prayers are much more efficient if offered at a sacred place, it is not surprising to find that the emphasis is laid on the idea of intercession. The most efficient intercessor, the Virgin⁵¹, is shown alone, or with Christ, or sometimes with the faithful addressing their prayers to her. The Virgin's remarkably important role in popular piety and worship needs no further elaboration here. A merciful intercessor and protectress against all sort of misfortunes, unclean powers and temptations, she is a favourite heroine of apocryphal literature and popular legend⁵². Prayers are addressed to various saints, many of whom are characteristically female saints. The great popularity that female saints, for example Paraskeve and Kyriake, enjoyed in the post-Byzantine period, especially in rural environments, stemmed from the belief that they were quick helpers and able to provide protection against diverse misfortunes to all who should call upon them⁵³. It is on the same semiotic level that operate the acts of devotion whose object is reduced to a sign — the cross, the cryptogram, or the geometric substitute for the church⁵⁴.

Particularly important for understanding the "sense of place" at Ras are plentiful engraved inscriptions⁵⁵. There predominate markings made by the pilgrims and devotees visiting the place which the contemporaries obviously found charismatic. The inscriptions are usually quite simple and almost without exception contain the formula: "let it be known that [the visitor's name] was here". The fact is telling because it reveals that the pilgrims sought to become partakers in the sacredness of the space as indi-

⁵⁰ Овчаров Д. Български средновековни рисунки-графити. Sofia, 1982, p. 63 and Pls. LXXXVIII, LXXXIX, CX, CXI, CXXV.

⁵¹ A comprehensive study on the images of the Virgin *Mediatrice* in the art of Eastern Christendom: Djordjević I. M. and Marković M. On the dialogue relationship between the Virgin and Christ in East Christian art. Apropos of the discovery of the figures of the Virgin Mediatrice and Christ in the naos of Lesnovo // Zograf 28 (2000–2001), p. 13–48 (with an exhaustive bibliography).

⁵² Толстой Н. И. Богородица // Славянские древности. Этнологический словарь. Vol 1 / Ed. Н. И. Толстой. Moscow, 1995, p. 217–219; on the Virgin in the apocrypha: Апокрифи новозаветни. Vol. II / Ed. and transl. T. Jovanović. Belgrade, 2005, p. 9–224.

⁵³ Petković S. Wall Painting in the Territory of the Patriarchate of Peć. Belgrade, 1965, p. 68–69 (in Serbian with an English summary).

⁵⁴ Such graffiti-images are also common in Bulgaria and Romania: Овчаров Д. Op. cit., Pls. XCIV, XCV, CXIV, CXXVI, CXXX; Barnea I. Les monuments rupestres de Basarabi en Dobrudja // Cahiers archéologiques XIII (1962), 187–208.

⁵⁵ Graffiti-inscriptions in Serbia, although abundant, have not been systematically studied or published.

vidually identifiable persons⁵⁶. An extraordinary case seems worthy of note: a Velimir wrote his name in four different places round the monastery, and in two of these added his “picture”. This reflects a conspicuous phenomenon of late medieval culture and mentality, namely the process of the secularization of society and the growing self-awareness of its lower strata⁵⁷. The same intention to leave a precise self-referential mark is evidenced by several graffiti containing the year of the visit. As for the visitors’ social class and rank, the rock faces round the monastery show signatures of lay persons, but expectedly there predominate those of clerics and monastics, the most literate social class at the time. In addition to the inscriptions testifying to the visits paid to the shrine, several inscriptions referring to the rite of monastic tonsuring have also been registered.

On the rock faces at Ras, however, different contents were also performed. Going south, towards the cave cells on steep and barely accessible locations, the frequency increases of prophylactic signs — crosses and cryptograms. The crosses as a rule are highly stylized and lack the formal diversity characteristic of the graffiti in Bulgaria⁵⁸. The cryptograms are also simple and usually contain the standard formula: ΙΣ ΧΣ ΝΙΚΑ⁵⁹. This is an instance of the practice, widespread in anchoritic cave communities, of engraving the sign of the cross in dangerous places as the most effective protection against peril, demonic included⁶⁰. The Life of St Lazaros of Galesion offers a very eloquent testimony: “...when he [Lazaros] reached the rock where there is the extremely narrow passage, he finished the office he was singing and, being about to say the prayer, stretched out his right hand and made the sign of the cross on

⁵⁶ How widespread the practice was in the Balkans can be seen from, e.g., an interesting assemblage of graffiti, identical in nature, discovered on a cave site near the village of Tsatrevevs in Bulgaria: *Мичев М.* Скални надписи и рисунки при с. Царевец, Врачанско // *Археология* VI/2 (1964), p. 34–38.

⁵⁷ *Davis N. Z.* Some tasks and themes in the study of popular religion // *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* / Eds. C. Trinkhaus and H. A. Oberman. Leiden, 1974, p. 307–336; *Schmitt J.-C.* “Religion populaire” et culture folklorique // *Annales E.S.C.* 31 (1976), p. 141–153; *Le Goff J.* Pour un autre moyen âge. Paris, 1977.

⁵⁸ *Овчаров Д.* Op. cit., p. 79–81 and Pls. XCVI, XCVII.

⁵⁹ On cross lettering see *Šakota M.* A propos d’un antiquité de Dečani peu connue. La croix du “starac” viellard Nestor // *Saopštenja XIV* (1982), p. 53, 56–57 (in Serbian with a French summary); *Babić G.* Les croix à cryptogrammes, peints dans les églises serbes des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles // *Byzance et les Slaves, Mélanges Ivan Dujčev*. Paris, s. d., p. 1–13; *Trifunović Dj.* Азбучник српских средњовековних књижевних појмова. Belgrade, 1990, p. 140–141 (with bibliography); *Walter Ch.* ΙΣ ΧΣ ΝΙΚΑ. The Apotropaic Function of the Victorious Cross // *REB* 55 (1997), p. 193–220.

⁶⁰ *Popović D.* Medieval caves-hermitages in the region of Prizren // *Istorijski časopis XLIV* (1997), p. 135 (in Serbian with an English summary); *Popović D.* Монах-пустињак // *Приватни живот у српским земљама средњег века* / Eds. S. Marjanović-Dušanić and D. Popović. Belgrade, 2004, p. 584.

the rock; he kissed it, said his prayer and then passed the place”⁶¹. The apotropaic role of the cross and the custom to mark dangerous places with it are deeply ingrained in Slavic folk cultures⁶². That the prophylactic signs found on our site were carved with good reason can be seen from the graffito on a steep rock surface marking the place where someone, whose name is now illegible, “broke his neck”. Some other inscriptions also suggest that the space was perceived as strange, inducing a sense of anxiety, tension and threat. Such is the terse outcry: “Ay, Milosav”. On the other hand, the name of the author of an inscription and the cause of his anger are now lost, but the terrible curse survives: “May he remain graveless!” This is an act of imprecating, a curse. The curse, a verbal formula, holds a special place in popular culture in the Balkans. It stems from the belief in the magic power of words to harm or cause damage to the “culprit”, and in terms of effect, can range from “mild” to “strong”, “bitter” and “deadly”. In our case, it obviously falls into the second category, and occurs in Serbian folk culture in several varieties, such as: “May the black earth jumble his bones!”⁶³, or “May his grave be unknown!”, or “May he crave a grave!”⁶⁴

The culmination of a thus intoned programme is marked by the graffiti carved at the top of a tall and slender rock, where a confronted image of the head of the devil and an owl is clearly visible beneath a subsequently carved and now illegible inscription. The presence of the devil in the given context — that of an anchoritic cave community and a focus of pilgrimage — is undoubtedly meaningful. Demons are unavoidable inhabitants of the monastic deserts and the ascetics’ most dangerous adversaries. The struggle with them is a standard element in the repertoire of ascetic endeavours, and hence also a standard *topos* of eremitic hagiographies⁶⁵. It was the hermits’ immediate and intense experience with the demonic realm that made them the most efficacious healers — expellers of evil spirits⁶⁶. It should be noted that

⁶¹ Greenfield R. P. H. *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*. Washington D.C., 2000, p. 128.

⁶² Белова О. В. Крест // Славянские древности 2 (1999), p. 651–658.

⁶³ Stefanović Karadžić Vuk. Српске народне пословице // Сабрана дела Вука Стефановића Караџића. Vol. 9. Belgrade, 1987, p. 306.

⁶⁴ Stojičić Dj. Српске народне изреке. Vol. 1. Belgrade, 2009, p. 107.

⁶⁵ Regnault L. *La vie quotidienne des pères du désert en Egypte au IV^e siècle*. Paris, 1990, p. 196–207; Špidlik T., Tenace M. and Čemus R. *Questions monastiques*. Rome 1999, p. 235–236; on the *topos* of the struggle with demons, see Pratsch T. *Der hagiographische Topos. Griechische Heiligenviten in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit*. Berlin–New York, 2005, p. 160–165.

⁶⁶ On the methods of defence against demons, see Joannou P.-P. *Démonologie populaire — démonologie critique au XI^e siècle*. La vie inédite de S. Auxence par M. Psellos. Wiesbaden, 1971, p. 21–26; Grün A. *Der Umgang mit dem Bösen*. Munster, 1980 (on psalm chanting p. 63); Russel J. B. *Lucifer. The Devil in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca–London, 1984, passim; Greenfield R. *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology*. Amsterdam, 1988, p. 135–152.

this aspect of ascetic practice was familiar to the Serbian environment, and so were the methods used in the struggle against the devil⁶⁷. From that perspective, the message conveyed by these graffiti should be seen as being in accordance with the traditional Christian notion of the monastic desert: a warning, readily understandable by every anchorite, that the monastic desert is an ambivalent space where ascetic paradise can swiftly turn into a demonic playground. Nonetheless, it seems to me that our case requires a more concrete perspective, both in chronological and in culturological terms. Therefore, my considerations should inevitably encompass the issues of popular demonology — a phenomenon which touches upon all areas of traditional Slavic cultures. If we are to judge by popular beliefs, the difficult terrain round the monastery of the Archangel Michael was a desirable adobe for demons, who, among other loci, tend to inhabit all kinds of borderline spaces, such as caves and chasms, acting harmfully from there. One of the typical attributes of demons is the power of transformation, the ability of changing their outward appearance⁶⁸. Our case shows one of the most widespread “hypostases” of the devil: the anthropomorphic image with zoomorphic elements such as pointed ears and a goat’s beard. In traditional culture the owl occupies a special place, too. It is a “nocturnal bird”, the kind believed to be the bringer of bad news, an omen of illness and death. Its association with the demonic realm is especially relevant in interpreting the image. Namely, the owl was believed to be of devilish origin and the embodiment of the evil spirit, and thus in collusion with chthonic powers. For that reason it played an important role in magical rites and in traditional medicine⁶⁹. Perhaps these facts may help us to at least begin to understand the motives behind the creation of the strange graffiti, extraordinary both in terms of content and location.

On the whole, the graffiti discussed above may be interpreted as a popular, folkloric, expression of Christian beliefs. They belong to the so-called “lower” layer of medieval culture, the one that remained vitally tied to mythopoeic and magical thinking. Such contents are, as stressed long ago, the expression of a worldview which rests upon an intricate and often conflicting interaction between the legacy of folkloric traditions and the Christian system of beliefs⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Popović D. Монах-пустыняк, p. 73–574; Popović D. The Cult of St Peter of Koriša, p. 181–212.

⁶⁸ Левкиевская Е. Е. Демонология народная // Славянские древности 2 (1999), p. 51–56.

⁶⁹ Djordjević Tih. R. Природа у веровању и предању нашега народа. Vol. II. Belgrade 1958, p. 40–44; Гуря А. В. Символика животных в славянской народной традиции. Moscow, 1997, p. 568–586.

⁷⁰ Gurevich A. Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception. Cambridge, 1988, p. xv–xvi and passim.

The Ras site, however, contains drawings of a different nature as well. We find them in the caves on a south-facing hillside which, being farther away from the monastery, may be seen as a formally less binding place from the standpoint of the official Christian hierarchy of sacredness. In the drawings discovered there iconic images give way to narrative, and Christian motifs to folkloric and symbolic. The preferred motifs include mounted warriors and hunters, as a rule surmounted by solar symbols. Such images are commonly found in rock-art across the Balkans, but the Bulgarian graffiti created throughout the long period of the middle ages provide close analogies. The solar symbols are the expression of the ancient, pre-Christian, and universal worship of the Sun, which was considered the life-giving force in the regeneration of nature. They show various geometric stylizations, and some animals, such as the horse, the deer or the eagle, have a similar meaning. Just as interesting are the anthropomorphic representations of the Sun disc, which probably are the expression of the folk belief that the Sun represents the “face of God” and that it possesses a number of human properties, same as the Moon⁷¹. Depictions of mounted warriors are especially frequent. As in our case, they carry arms and warrior equipment such as bows, swords, spears and standards, relatively realistically depicted⁷². Interesting arguments have recently been proposed in favour of a connection between some motifs occurring in this “graffiti-art” — such as horsemen or various animals — and the *Ladder* of John Climacus, a piece of ascetic writing par excellence⁷³. I am much more inclined to look at them in a different key — as images embedded in archaic mythological consciousness and related to the solar cult, deep-rooted and long-lasting in the Balkans, moreover closely connected with the ancestral cult. In that system, horse riders are an element of standard cosmological depictions, such as that of the cosmic Sun hunt⁷⁴. This interpretation may find corroboration in the engraved solar symbols. It is worthy of note that seal-amulets showing an identical depiction have been discovered within the Ras fortress, in a layer reliably dated to the twelfth century⁷⁵. Finally, important from the hierotopic standpoint is the fact that these images are found in the caves in the sunniest, south-facing side of the hill — and there

⁷¹ Овчаров Д. *Op. cit.*, p. 64–70; on the meaning of the solar motif in folk beliefs, Djordjević Tih. R. *Op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 20–44; Азимов Э. Г., Толстой Н. И. *Астрономия народная // Славянские древности* 1 (1995), p. 117–119.

⁷² Овчаров Д. *Op. cit.*, p. 44–53, Pls. LI–LIX, CXI; Рашиев Р. *Конникът в старобългарско изкуство // Археология* 26 (1984), p. 2–3, 61, 62, 66.

⁷³ Curta F. *Op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁷⁴ Овчаров Д. *Op. cit.*, p. 77; images very similar to those at Ras, in Pls. LXXXIV, LXXXV, LXXXVIII, CXXV.

⁷⁵ Popović M. *The Fortress of Ras*, p. 247, fig. 206.

only. In addition to all unknowns and dilemmas urging caution in interpreting these images, a crucial question also arises: do the rock faces and caves beneath the fortress of Ras display two religiously and culturally different notions of sacredness and, if so, what is their chronological relationship?

Taken as a whole and with reference to the broad range of their meanings and purposes, our graffiti perfectly illustrate the term *mindscape of landscape* or the notion of rock-art as an expression of world-understanding⁷⁶. Based on the current definitions of landscape in terms of character and significance, the complex at Ras, by virtue of being a religious community in an outstanding landscape, appears to be most readily assignable to the category of *associative cultural landscapes*. But it may also be viewed as a *conceptualized landscape*, by virtue of its great religious, artistic or historical significance incorporated into the chosen natural setting, and also as a *sacred and symbolic landscape* or as a *landscape of mind*⁷⁷. Anyway, the locality's essential elements, conceptual and visual, environmental and transcendental, have a strong association with the kind of spatial image and sacred place that result from the "permanent relation and intensive interaction between hierophany (the mystical) and hierotopy (actually made)"⁷⁸.

This paper was conceived as a case study and I sought, along the lines of modern landscape studies, to apply the general framework and fundamental principles of these disciplines to a regional sample. It seems to me that the results of the research I undertook substantiate the notion that any sacred landscape is universal, complex and dynamic in nature: on the one hand, it is a symbolic universe with archetypal natural properties and a powerful aura, while, on the other, it always reveals a specific context — a local cultural construct and historical memory.

⁷⁶ Ouzman S. Towards a mindscape of landscape: rock-art as expression of world-understanding // *The Archaeology of Rock-Art*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ Bernard Knapp A. and Ashmore W. Op. cit., p. 5–19.

⁷⁸ Lidov A. The Creator of Sacred Space as a Phenomenon of Byzantine Culture // *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale* / Ed. M. Bacci. Pisa, 2007, p. 137.

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ИКОНИЧЕСКОЕ И ПЕРФОРМАТИВНОЕ
В САКРАЛЬНОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ.
ПЕЩЕРНЫЙ МОНАСТЫРЬ СВ. МИХАИЛА АРХАНГЕЛА В РАСЕ

Данная работа основана, в первую очередь, на граффити — изображениях и надписях, вырезанных на поверхности скал, окружающих пещерный монастырь Св. Михаила Архангела в Расе, неподалеку от города Новый Пазар на юго-западе Сербии. В отличие от монастырского комплекса, который недавно стал предметом углубленного исследования¹, петроглифы остаются почти неизвестными научному сообществу. И все же главная цель работы — не публикация материала, каким бы увлекательным и малоизученным он ни был. Граффити Расы являются составной частью более широкого и многомерного целого, созданного природной средой и ее сакральными компонентами, историческим контекстом, в котором было сформировано это пространство. Следовательно, можно выделить все явление в самостоятельную категорию, определив ее как «фигуративный пейзаж» или «пейзаж с надписями»². Если быть более точным, наши граффити составляют часть эстетического сакрального ландшафта, подчеркнута наделенного иконическими смыслами и перформативностью.

Такой подход к предмету изучения основывается на весьма вдохновляющих примерах исследований в области ландшафтной археологии и антропологии, дисциплин, которые давно отказались от понимания термина «ландшафт» как некоего простого «пространства снаружи» или сельской местности. «Сегодня самое рельефное определение ландшафта подчеркивает его социо-символическое измерение: ландшафт как целостность, существующая в восприятии, переживании и контексте понимания людьми»; это знаковая система, через которую «репродуцируется и трансформируется, исследуется и структурируется социальное»³. Ландшафты, обогащенные сакральными смыслами, образуют особую группу.

¹ Popović D. and Popović M. The Cave Lavra of the Archangel Michael in Ras // *Starinar* XLIX–1998 (1999), p. 103–130.

² Inscribed Landscapes. Marking and Making Place // Eds. B. David and M. Wilson. Honolulu, 2002, p. 1–9; Pictures in Place. The Figured Landscapes of Rock-Art / Eds. C. Chipindale and G. Nash. Cambridge, 2004, p. 1–36.

³ Tilley C. A Phenomenology of Landscape. Places, Paths and Monuments. Oxford–Princeton, 1994, p. 1–34; The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape. Shaping Your Landscape / Eds. J. Ucko and R. Layton. London–New York, 1999, p. 1–20; Archaeologies of Landscape. Contemporary Perspectives / Eds. W. Ashmore and A. B. Knapp. Oxford, 1999, p. 1–30 (с историографическим обзором).

Наполненные духовной энергией, такие пространства служат «вратами на небеса». В них наиболее полно являет себя божественная сила, позволяя людям устанавливать насущную вертикаль: восхождение к трансцендентному и нисхождение в глубины души. Особое место среди таких ландшафтов занимают монашеские *пустыни*, парадигматические аскетические пространства, предполагающие широкий круг ассоциаций и обилие символических смыслов. Природные объекты, такие как горы и источники, утесы и пещеры, всегда вызвали противоречивые эмоции, скажем, *tremendum* и *fascinans* (трепет и восхищение), но, каким бы парадоксальным это ни показалось, прежде всего *пустыня* виделась как напоминание о райском саде или Небесном Иерусалиме⁴.

Именно такой ландшафт, включающий в себя и природную среду, и намеренный замысел, характерен для пещерного монастыря Св. Михаила Архангела. Монастырь был основан за стенами крепости Рас, на скалистой возвышенности, «нерукотворные» утесы и пещеры которой обладали, с точки зрения средневековой монашеской традиции, архетипическими и иконическими свойствами. Построенная на месте византийских укреплений рубежа XII–XIII вв., крепость служила убежищем для королевской семьи Сербии. Помимо мощного визуального впечатления от созерцания горной крепости, созданной в средние века, этот ландшафт, со следами явного человеческого вмешательства, передает определенное политическое послание, связанное с очевидным доминированием над окружающей областью⁵. Значение ландшафта как социально-исторического явления хорошо прослеживается в комплексе в Расе, главную часть которого составляет пещерная церковь Св. Михаила Архангела, возведенная, как и многие другие храмы конца XII в., на месте великого чуда — спасения Стефана Немани из заточения в пещере, ставшего важнейшим эпизодом в истории его восхождении на сербский трон. Близость расположения двух откровенно несопоставимых объектов, а именно военной крепости и общины отшельников, — феномен, вполне известный в средневековом православном мире⁶. Он проистекает из идеи духовной битвы, веры в то, что молитвы святых — наиболее эффективное оружие против врага. Изучение монастырского комплекса в Расе позволило обнаружить, что по соседству находятся отдельные кельи отшельников в пещерах, зачастую почти недоступных.

⁴ Baridon M. Naissance et renaissance du paysage. Paris, 2006, p. 208–220; Endsjo D. Ø. Primordial Landscapes, Incorruptible Bodies. Desert Asceticism and the Christian Appropriation of Greek Ideas on Geography, Bodies and Immortality. New York etc., 2008, p. 17–101.

⁵ Warnke M. Politische Landschaft. Zur Kunstgeschichte der Natur. Chap. 'Berge und Burgen'. Munich, 1992.

⁶ Curta F. The Cave and the Dyke: A Rock Monastery on the Tenth-Century Frontier of Bulgaria // Studia Monastica 41 (1999), p. 129–149.

Другой значимый элемент — фреска с изображением святого покровителя на лицевой стороне скалы. Некогда она была видна из алтаря, а сейчас с трудом читается, но исключительное положение образа недвусмысленно указывает на сакральное значение места. Центральный элемент комплекса в Расе также имеет иконический смысл: это утес столпообразной формы, в настоящее время на его вершину можно забраться только с помощью скалолазного оборудования. Визуально и морфологически этот утес напоминает столп («*стилос*») — реальное или символическое жилище сурового отшельника-столпника. На плоской вершине утеса, с которой открывается поразительный вид на все окрестности, сохранились остатки монументальной постройки, среди руин которой растут ирисы — последнее напоминание о некогда существовавшем здесь саде, имитирующем небесные пределы, ожидавшие монахов-отшельников.

Визуальный и иконический ландшафт был идеальной декорацией для весьма любопытного комплекса наскального искусства. Судя по датированным надписям, эти памятники могли быть созданы на втором этапе существования монастыря, который начался после его реставрации в XVI в. Это собрание включает граффити, которые, подобно современным, присутствующим в городской среде, составляли важную часть иконосферы данного места⁷. Особенно интересно для нас пространственное распределение орнаментов и иконографии. Наибольшая концентрация образов и надписей обнаружена на плоской скальной поверхности в непосредственной близости от пещерной церкви Св. Михаила Архангела и вокруг одной из соседних пещер, которая, судя по всему, была молитвенным помещением. Репертуар сравнительно стабилен. Доминируют образы Богородицы и святых, а также изображения предстоящих им в молитве людей — и монахов, и мирян. Учитывая «дух места», ничего удивительного, что в пещерах столько изображений креста и «бесплотных сил» (ангелов), а также их земных подражателей (отшельников). Но иногда встречаются весьма неожиданные включения, например образцы каллиграфического почерка или орнамента, словно перед нами «упражнения» писца, украсившего ландшафт мотивами, обычными для рукописей. Кроме того, есть множество других граффити, оставленных, по большей части, паломниками и благочестивыми посетителями священной обители.

Однако на скальном фасаде комплекса Рас представлены также объекты совсем иной природы. Если двигаться к югу от пещерных келий, по почти недоступным для прохода тропам, все чаще можно увидеть охра-

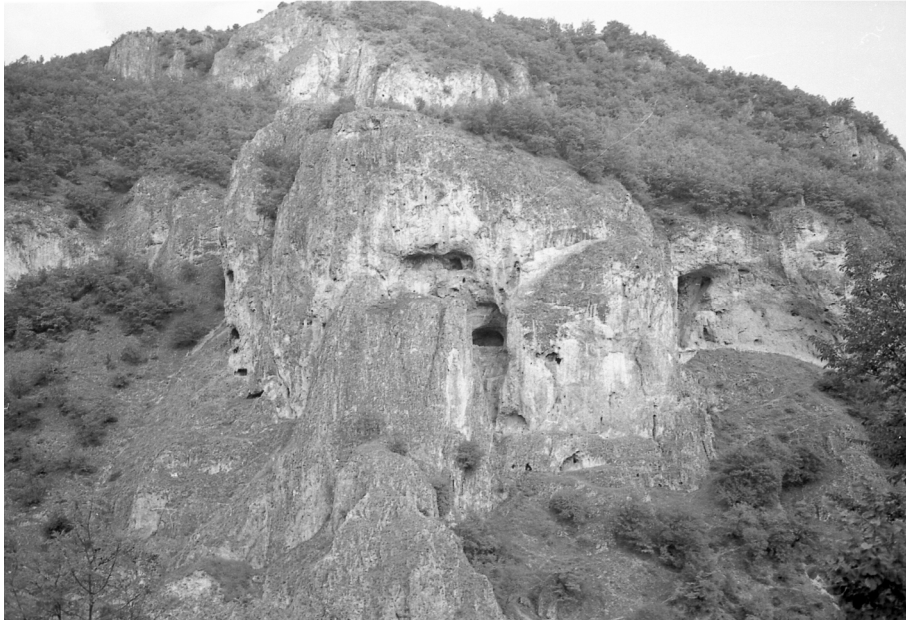
⁷ Chmielewska E. Framing [Con]text: Graffiti and Place // Space and Culture. 2007, p. 145–169, <http://sac.sagepub.com>.

нительные знаки, криптограммы, обычно встречающиеся в монашеских жилищах. Назначение этих граффити становится ясным, если взглянуть на изображения на крутой скале, отмечающей место, где «сломал шею» некий человек, имя которого теперь не читается. Образы на вершине тонкой и островерхой скалы могут быть интерпретированы подобно предыдущему: голова дьявола и сова — предупреждение об опасности, вполне внятное любому отшельнику, поскольку монашеская *пустыня* была амбивалентным местом, где аскетический рай легко мог превратиться в площадку демонических игр. Наконец, есть и другая красноречивая находка: в самых дальних от монастыря пещерах, на обращенном к югу горном склоне, находятся граффити, на которых иконические образы уступают место нарративу, а христианские мотивы — фольклорным. Здесь мы видим изображения всадников и воинов, зачастую увенчанные солярными символами, — такая иконография широко известна в наскальных рисунках по всем Балканам. В целом, а также в контексте всех значений и функций, наши граффити отлично иллюстрируют понятие «*mindscape of landscape*» — «умозрительный пейзаж», или понимание наскальных изображений как выражения своеобразного мировосприятия⁸.

Основываясь на современных определениях ландшафта, комплекс в Расе как религиозная община, существовавшая в необычном пространстве, в полной мере относится к категории «ассоциативных культурных ландшафтов». Но его также можно рассматривать как «концептуализированный ландшафт» в силу его выдающегося религиозного, художественного и исторического значения и включенности в удачно выбранную природную среду, а также как «сакральный и символический ландшафт» или «ландшафт умозрения». В любом случае, существенные элементы местоположения, концептуального и визуального, приводили к появлению особого типа пространственной образности и сакрализации места, результатом чего стало «постоянное соотношение и интенсивное взаимодействие между иерофанией (мистическим) и иеротопией (созданным в действительности)»⁹. До недавнего времени внушавшее изрядный страх место, где полно змей под ногами и орлов над головой, пещерный комплекс в Расе постепенно становился предметом сознательного разрушения. Вместо того, чтобы стать объектом иеротопических исследований, он вскоре может превратиться в объект исчезающего культурного наследия.

⁸ Ouzman S. Towards a mindscape of landscape: rock-art as expression of world-understanding // The Archaeology of Rock-Art / Eds. C. Chippindale and P. S. C. Taçon. Cambridge, 1998, p. 4.

⁹ Lidov A. The Creator of Sacred Space as a Phenomenon of Byzantine Culture // L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale / Ed. M. Bacci. Pisa, 2007, p. 137.



1. Monastery of the Archangel Michael beneath the Ras fortress



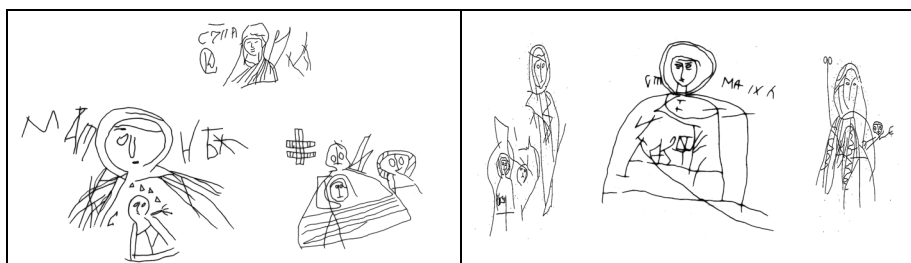
2. Cave *kellia* round the monastery



3. Fortress of Ras



4. Pillar-like rock — *stylos*



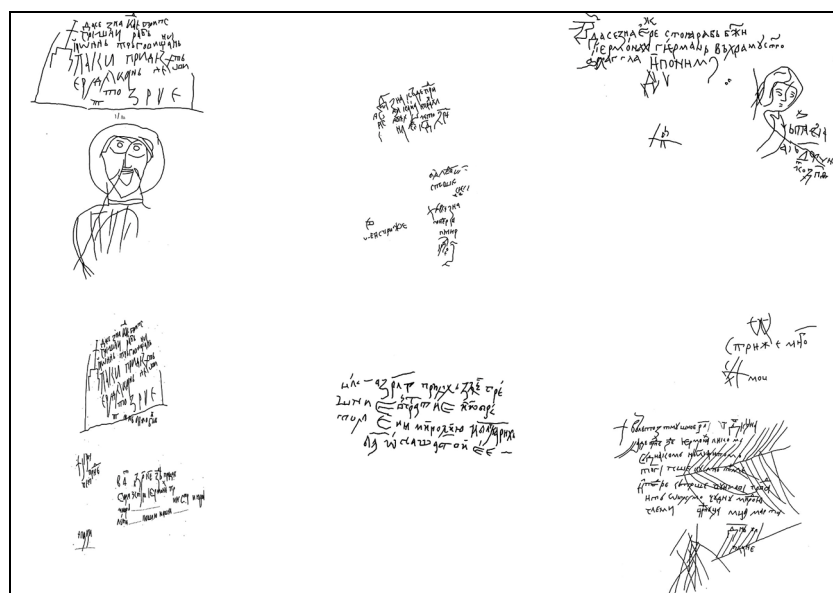
5. Images of the Virgin

6. Images of female saints

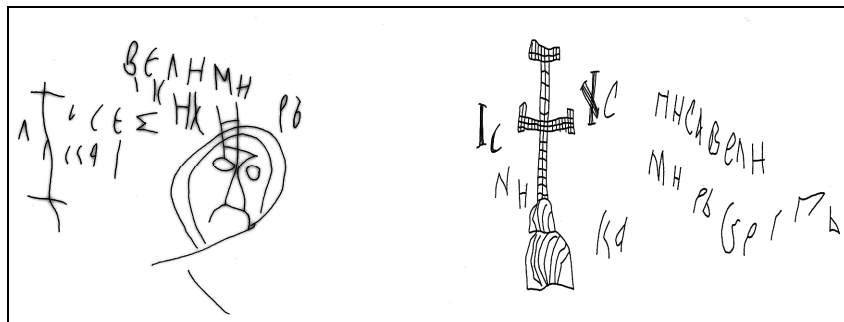


7. Praying pilgrims

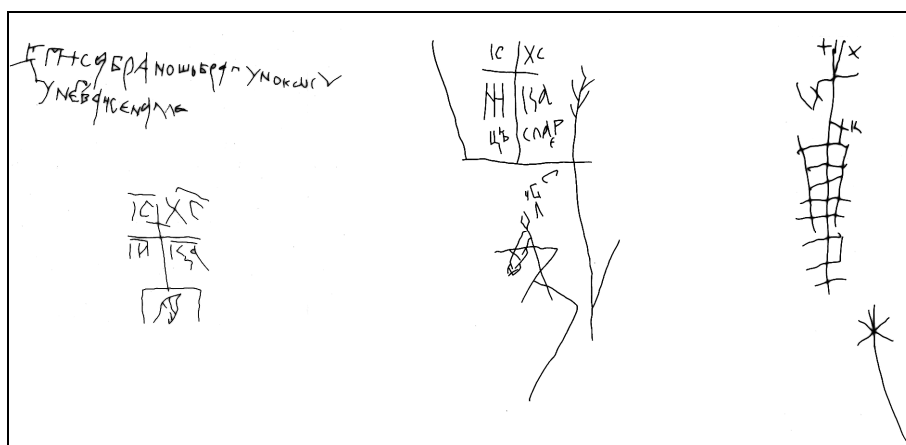
8. Hermits in their caves



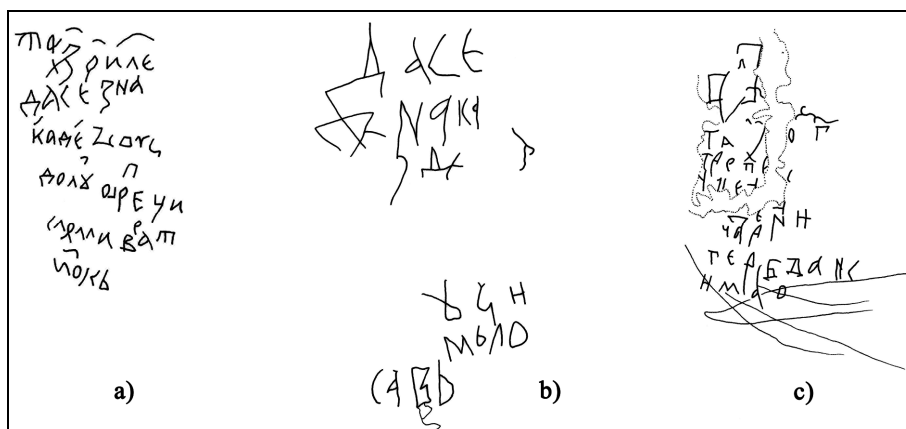
9. Engraved inscriptions



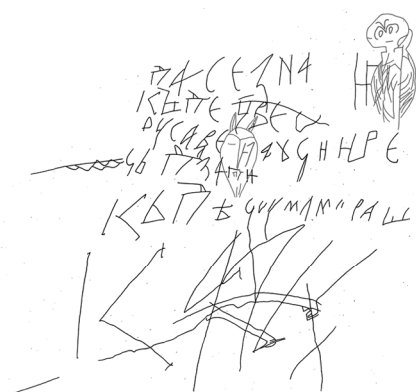
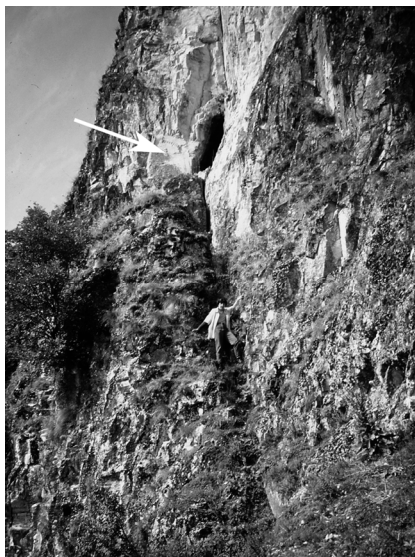
10. Pilgrims and their “signatures”



11. Prophylactic signs — cryptograms



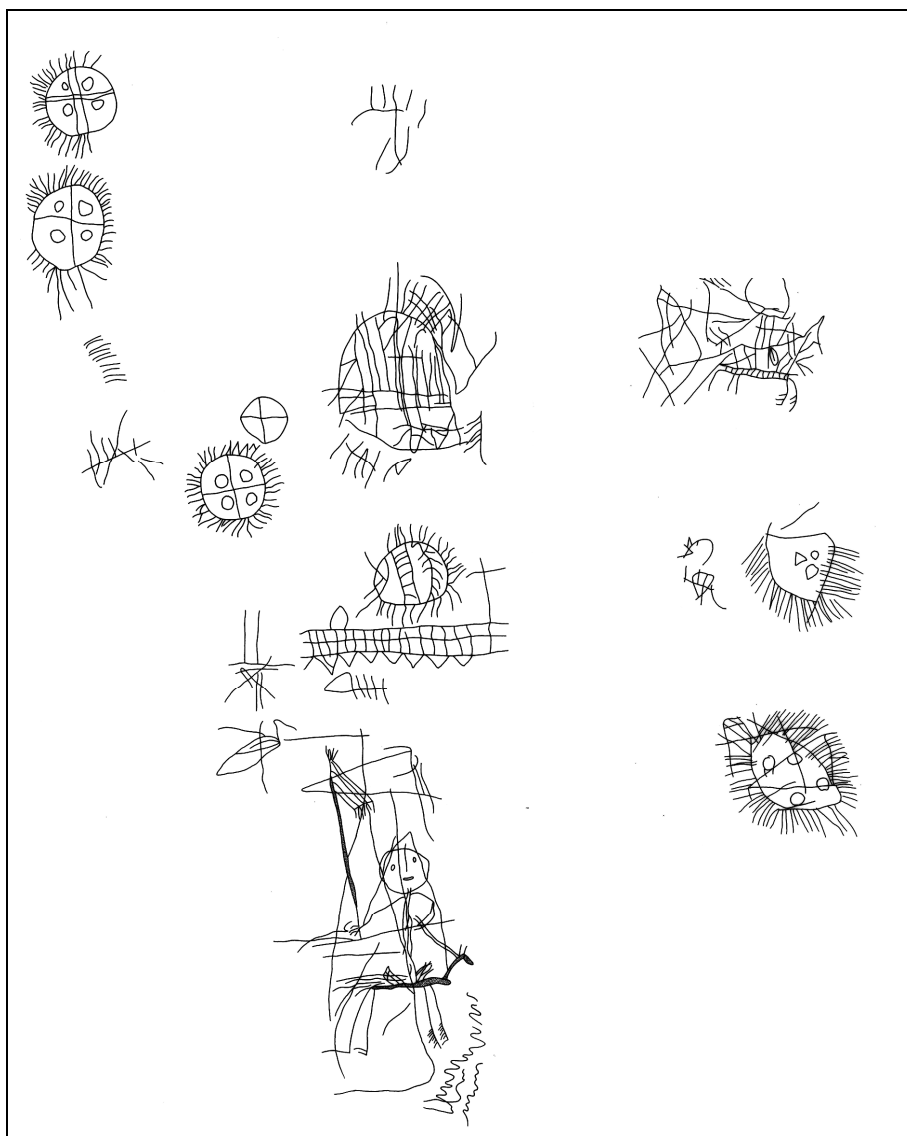
12. Graffiti: a) “...NN broke his neck right here”; b) “Ay, Milosav”; c) “...may he remain graveless”



13. A pointed rock engraved with the devil's head and the owl



14. Caves on a south-facing hillside



15. Graffiti: horsemen surmounted by solar symbols