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THE BEAUTY OF MACEDONIA IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MACEDONIANS - RESEARCH BASED ON EXAMPLES FROM THE FOLKLORE TRADITION

Abstract: In this paper we shall pay attention especially to these beauties of the Macedonian land, which are the cause for the aesthetic feeling to appear; and we intend to do this by considering two facts: firstly, the real beauty of nature being influenced by the human activities, which, on their part make the aesthetic experience possible; and secondly, the enjoyment the reader feels when reading the picturesque description of a certain object or locality.

Key words: Macedonia, beauties, lakes, rivers, mountain, monasteries, churches, folk tradition.

Macedonian folklore has plenty of examples, in which the natural beauties of Macedonia are glorified. Having in mind these examples, the people of Macedonia had been forming its sense for beauty through the centuries, simultaneously immortalizing the aesthetic way it perceived its fatherland, thus creating its own aesthetic ideal. And it has stated clearly and unequivocally that it possesses an acute sense for revealing beauty, whilst also demonstrating affection, love and respect towards the fatherland as something sacred and worthy. Love and admiration, when emotionally coloured and further assimilated into a highly exalted aesthetic feeling, have their own substance and devices of acquiring beauty. Beauty of nature is experienced in a different way when it happens to be enriched by the products of human labour. Thus, it acquires elements of cultural, spiritual, and patriotic feelings. The visual encounter with natural beauty, enriched by artistic performances, is gradually transformed into a harmony uniting nature and the human mind, which is, in its essence, creative. It is this very mixture that makes the superb aesthetic experience possible.

In this paper we shall pay attention especially to these beauties of the Macedonian land, which are the cause for the aesthetic feeling to appear; and we intend to do this by considering two facts: firstly, the real beauty of nature being influenced by the human activities, which, on their part make the aesthetic experience possible; and secondly, the enjoyment the reader feels when reading the picturesque description of a certain object or locality. For this purpose, we have classified the gathered material into two groups: 1. Natural beauty - such as mountains, lakes, rivers, etc. 2. Beauty which is result of human activities of sacred origin.

I. The Mountain in the Folklore Tradition.

1. The Mythical Dimension of the Mountain.

Mountains have always deeply impressed and emotionally moved man. Since ancient times, it has been considered a symbol of divinity, and a token of high rank and respect. According to some present Macedonian beliefs and legends, one can still hear the echo of the Pagan polytheistic religion up in the mountains. A god named Perun lived on the top of the Perun Mountain along with the other two gods - Dabog and Morena. The Tribor peak is in close proximity with the Perun Mountain. Probably the name of the peak is derived from the name of god Tribor. The toponym *Perun* is to be found in many places all around Macedonia ([Vrazhinovski 1998](#)) Another toponym, which is commonly met, is *Veles*, respectively *Volos*. Many research workers think that toponymics is an important study which helps the mythological structure to be reconstructed. It is believed that in Macedonian mountains there could be still found the so-called holy trees, which in the ancient times functioned as special places for the Slovenians to say their prayers.

In these beliefs very often some religious stones, or stones of a cult, scattered about the mountain, are mentioned. In the folklore tradition, sacred trees and stones of a cult are to be found in such places where cutting trees (usually oaks), as well as gathering stones for whatever reason, is strictly forbidden.

According to the local myths and beliefs, misfortune would befall the one who dares to disregard this prohibition.

The legends about healing waters are also very popular. In the depths of inaccessible mountains, jinnees stand guarding over the spring of the immortal water - the one which so many young men from fairy tales, and even Alexander the Macedonian himself, had been striving for! ([Vrazhinovski 1992:21-22](#)) In present times, sacred places' functions obtain new forms of vitality, which have a Pagan-Christian essence ([Vrazhinovski 1998](#)).

2. Diabolic Dimension of the Mountain.

Mountains are usually inhabited by demons, and most of all by dragons and wood-nymphs. By reading legends and fairy-tales, and by listening to songs, one enjoys more deeply the mountain beauties, especially when picturing all those magic mountain springs, and the tiny lakes hidden in the obscure mountain recesses. In this way, the beauty of nature and the beauty of the extra-natural creatures, such as, wood-nymphs, for example, are welded together. The nymphs usually come in contact with shepherds - as beautiful as they are, who play their pipes so well that they enchant the nymphs; and in their intoxication, caused by the shepherds' music, they dance naked by the light of the moon. ([Macedonian Folk Fairy-tales 1986 : 41-46](#)) Thus, an extraordinary synthesis takes place: the beautiful nature on one hand, and the majestic beauty of the wood-nymphs and the men, on the other; the picture is additionally decorated by the enchanting music played by the shepherds, and the fascinating, unearthly dance of the naked nymphs.

The mountain is full of joy, but sometimes it is also sorrowful, which makes the hero ask why it isn't as jolly as it used to be:

- *Slushaj, goro zelena!*
Shot ne is tolku vesela,
kaku si tolku zelena,
ushche da imash voda studena,
kako tebe ne ke ima druga. ([Penushliski 1983 : 117](#))

The answer is as follows: Because the nymphs have closed the spring. In most of the folk songs, there exists a symbolic pair: **mountain - water**. The greatest hero ever, Marko Krale, is the one who will free the running waters of the "locked" spring. Thus, the mountain will restore to life, and the hero will be able again to satisfy his thirst by drinking from its waters. The mountains, as well as the mountain springs symbolize sources of life.

And as regards the dragons, what they usually do is kidnap the prettiest girls, taking them away to their dens up in the mountains. ([Macedonian Folk Legends 1986 : 195-202](#))

3. Biblical-Religious Nature of the Mountains.

According to some other legends, mountains possess the same beauty as the one that has its origin in the Holy Bible. The names of the mountains also have a biblical origin. By the time of the Flood, old Noah succeeded in reaching the coast of Macedonia with his ark, and gave the names of the mountains on its territory: Shar, Korab, Pesjak, Luben, Bistra, Krichin, Pelister ([Tsepenkov Marko K., 1972, 7 : 191-192](#)) Jesus Christ himself, along with Apostle Paul and the other disciples, travelled all around the fields and mountains of Macedonia. One legend recalls how, when passing through unknown places, Jesus gave names to some towns and villages, and also predicted what their fate would be. This is how the names of the towns of Bitola and Resen, as well as the names of some small mountain villages appeared. ([Vrazhinovski T., 1995 : 21-22](#))

Mother Mary is a distinguished figure in the folklore traditional art. One legend tells us that it was her, who, with her son in her hands, laid the foundations of the monastery situated high in the Zlatovrv Mountain ([Ritual and Mythological Songs 1968 : 203](#)). Monasteries and churches were built also by other saints - St. Ilia ([Vrazhinovski T., 1970 : 44-46](#)) and St. Nicola ([Mihajlov P., 1924 : 40](#)); in some of the cases they built temples in order to protect the Orthodox Christians from being converted to Mohammedanism. Known for the wonders they had done, the famous hermits St. Joahim Osogovski, St.

Gavril Lesnovski, and St. Prohor Pchinski ([Vrazhinovski T., 1996 : 173-179](#)) lived in seclusion in the mountains.

It follows from what has been said above that mountains in Macedonian folklore possess strong mythological connotations; they carry in themselves a Biblical (respectively, a religious) message.

4. The Mountain-Man Relation.

In folklore, mountains are characterized by a lot of attributes, through which people are able to express their poetic potentialities, later revealed in wonderful stories, splendid paintings, and decorations. These enoble the human soul, and are exclusively attractive with the freshness and the rich colours that only Mother Nature is able to depict. In spring time, mountains change their look; they dress themselves in "green velvet" - exactly the way it is described in the following song:

*Kako mi dojde Gjurgjuovden,
sama se gora oblekla:
se vo zelena dolama,
se vo zeleno kadife.* ([Miladinovci 1996 : 361](#))

One of the essential attributes of the mountain is, no doubt, *the green colour*. The green magnificence of the mountain represents a manifestation of the eternal seek for beauty in life, as well as in love. Mountains are *high*, and its hills often become a love bed for the young lovers:

*Na rid imat do tri beli snega,
eden lanski, drugi olumlanski,
ovoj tretij, lele, godinashni;
a na srede malku raskopnato,
i na raskopnato postela poslana,
na postela ludo i devojka...* ([Shapkarev A.K., 1891-1894:1109](#))

The notion of the hill and the snow is, in fact, a rare projection of pure love poetically represented by the images of whiteness and the silence of nature. When spring comes, mountains become more playful and more attractive.

*Dojde vreme, dojde koa,
da rastzuti trendafilo,
da smirisa seta zemja,
seta zemja Rumeliska:
ot Bitoljsko do Prilepsko,
ot Prilepsko do Solunsko.* ([Love Folk Songs 1971 : 54](#))

Flocks of thousands of sheep cover the hills; birds are coming back from the Southern countries bringing joy to the people:

*Koleditsa, varvaritsa,
siva, siva gulabitsa,
doletala od planina
i donesla ubavina.* ([Ritual and Mythological Songs 1968 : 213](#))

Good news is coming from the mountains: all the sheep and goats have given birth to many youngsters:

*... od twoeto belo stado:
sive ovtsa s izjagnile,
so jagnina kaleshati,
site kozi s iskozile,
so jarina brnushati.* ([Ritual and Mythological Songs 1968: 218](#))

The girls gather herbs, and the lads who are in love pick flowers from the mountain meadows for their beloved:

*Ludo idet od gorata,
mlado idet od gorata,
v r'tse nose do dve kitki,*

do dve kitki temenushki. ([Miladinovci 1996 : 597](#))

5. From the Mountain to the Sea.

Many Macedonian rivers take their source from the mountains; a large percentage of them run into Vardar - the only river that connects the nowadays Republic of Macedonia with the sea, thus making the country scenery more agreeable: "from the spring to Thessaloniki", as the folk song says. Rivers bring fertility to the fields, which are cultivated by the peasants with sweat on their brows. There is a famous song about a hawk (a young man with silver arms/wings, and golden legs), which frequently comes to drink water from the Vardar River:

*Sokol pie na Vardare voda,
na glava mu bel trendafil ts'fti,
krilja mu se srebro do ramena,
noze mu se zlato do kolena!* ([Folklore Anthology : 64](#))

An exotic picture is presented here, a picture, which carries a strong erotic connotation. The image of the hawk is used as an equivalent term of the hero himself.

6. Historical Dimension of the Mountain.

Mountains are of a great importance for the history of the Macedonian people. They are praised as a shelter for the fighter for the liberation of Macedonia from the Turkish enslavers, and later also for the partisans.

*Razvivaj, goro zelena,
i ti le, shumo bukova,
da mojsh da kriesh kumiti!* ([Macedonian Revolutionary Folk Songs 1974 : 92](#))

For this reason, as well as for its beneficial qualities, the mountain is considered blessed, for no matter what time of the year it is, the mountain is always full of life and vitality, as it is sang in the following song:

*ni zime, goro, ni lete,
ni jesen, goro, ni prolet:
zime si p'lna em ramna,
zime si p'lna snegovi;
prolet si p'lna em ramna,
prolet si p'lna s'drvare,
ju leto p'lna s' ovchare,
a jesen p'lna s' komite.* ([Macedonian Revolutionary Folk Songs 1974 : 36](#))

The mountain has always been a meeting place for the fighters: for the ones who took part in the Ilinden uprising, as well as for the ones who participated in the Macedonian revolt during the Second World War.

The mountains and the fields are vivid, and are often represented as persons who demonstrate their feelings for the dead hero by mourning and crying:

*Rasplakala se gorata.
Gorata em planinata,
i od gorata dryjata,
i od poleto trevata,
zaradi Delche wojvoda.* ([Macedonian Folk Songs 1956 : 556](#))

According to some legends, even nowadays, in some upland places, one can hear the voices of the dead fighters. The wood-nymphs make improvised weddings for the young women who died in their prime during the Ilinden combats, without having the chance to give life to offspring. As regards the men from Mechkin Kamen and Sliva who died still young, it is believed that the earth has thrown their bodies out of the graves, so that they would continue their struggle until the freedom of their fatherland is finally achieved. ([Vrazhinovski T., 1992 : 283-309](#))

II. The Brilliance of the Macedonian Lakes.

The Macedonian people have always been able to enjoy beauty, or what is considered to be beautiful according to the age-old aesthetic criteria. In this connection, a very famous Dostoevski quotation just occurred to me: "Beauty, he says, will save the world." One can prove for oneself that the writer was absolutely right, if only one visits the town of Ohrid and its vicinity, famous for all those splendid and sacred places, which have contributed so much not only to the development of the Slovenian culture, but also to the development of the European culture as a whole.

There is a legend that also supports Doestoevski's concept. The legend is about the life of St. Naum Ohridski, and is entitled *Heavenly Place* ([Risteski S., 1990 : 49](#)). The paradise place mentioned in the story is the very Lake Ohrid, with all those mountains surrounding it, and the St. Naum Monastery situated nearby; it is a place perceived by every Macedonian as a symbol of a gorgeous natural beauty, enriched with the good human deeds. People usually picture Paradise as something out-of-this-world and out-of-this-time, something not liable to acquisition by the senses of the human beings; it is a beauty entirely idealized. The beauty and the aesthetic importance of Lake Ohrid obtained more significant dimensions when the Lord himself, while sitting in his golden throne up in Heaven, had to find a proper place in the Garden of Eden for St. Naum to live in forever. And because he couldn't find such a place in Heaven, he decided to look for a solution down here, on the Earth. At last, he succeeded in finding what he was looking for in Macedonia; the place was not far away from the Ohrid Lake - exactly where the saint later built his monastery. This place has become the saint's eternal home.

While in exile, the poet Kostadin Miladinov used to glorify the beauty of his native land:

*Tamo zorata greit dushata
i s'ntse svetlo zajvit v gorata,
tamo darbite na prirodnata sila
sos s'ta raskosh gi rasturila:
bistro ezero gledash beleit,
ili od vetar sino-temneit;
pole poglednesh, ili planina,
segde bozheva je hubavina.
Tamo po srtse I kaval da sviram,
s'ntse da zajdvit, ja da umiram.*

We may synthesize all that the author has written into a single sentence: *We shall live forever.*

Here, we have to mention the legends revealing the origin of the names of Lake Prespanskoto and Lake Dojranskoto. The first one got its name from Samuil's daughter, Prespa ([Archives of the Institute K-103](#)), and the second one was named by the pretty Dojrana ([Vrazhinovski T., 1995 : 57-58](#)) who, in her unwillingness to convert to Mohammedanism, killed herself by drowning in the clear waters of the lake. Despite the fact that the names of these lakes previously belonged to two beautiful women who died very young and in tragic circumstances, the legends still present a marvelous combination uniting the beauty of nature and the feminine beauty.

The lakes in the folk songs are always mentioned as silver, blue, and deep; their shores are as a rule of pure gold.

It is inherent to human nature that man thirsts for beauty. And of course, his thirst is demonstrated also in the Macedonian folklore.

III. Sacred, Cultural and Historical Dimensions of the Macedonian Monasteries.

The mountains and the shores of the lakes are adorned by magnificent monasteries and churches, related to the names of the saints Kliment and Naum Ohridski, then the monasteries of the hermits St. Joakim Osogovski, St. Gavril Lesnovski, the Holy Virgin Monastery situated near the village of Slepche, where one can still hear the prayers of the blinded King Samuil's soldiers; and also the St. Prohor Pchinski Monastery, where, in 1944, during the World War II the foundations of Macedonia were laid;

the Holy Virgin of Kichevo Monastery, the St. Jovan Bigorski Monastery, and many other monasteries and churches, which were recognized in the past as cultural and literary centres; they were the places where the Macedonian spirit was kept in a constant upsurge.

Gorgeous monasteries and churches are spread all over the Macedonian land. And the sight of these majestic buildings excites everyone. A certain question arises here: Is it possible that one only passes by them, or enters them and prays, while the eyes of the Lord and all the saints are staring at him, lights a candle, and then simply goes away? In such moments, however, one's heart swells with joy, for one's eyes are fascinated by how picturesque the icons are, covering the walls of the sacred buildings. And then, very tenderly and softly the beauty folds the man in its garments ([Vrazhinovski T., 1995 : 57-58](#)). In these moments of sovereign pleasure, caused by the touch with beauty, it is impossible not to admire the constructors whose creations have turned themselves into projections of their vivid imagination and extraordinary spirit.

In Macedonian folklore an excellent transition of the poetic thought into landscape paintings is observed; this is an extraordinary inspiration in experiencing beauty, enriched with human accomplishments - a chance for the Macedonian soul to open up and show its tenderness and great potential to its full extent. This proves to be unequivocal evidence for the unlimited capabilities of the Macedonian poetical language ([Nanevski D., 1971 : 19](#)).

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