

## ROCK ART FROM LIPCI, MONTENEGRO

PIOTR DYCZEK\*

**Keywords:** Montenegro, Boka Kotorska bay, Lipci, rock art.

**Abstract:** Risan on the Boka Kotorska in Montenegro has been the object of research by archaeologists from Warsaw University's Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe for the past five years. The small settlement of Lipci lies about 2 km west of Risan. In 1961, P. Mijović reported the discovery of rock art on the ledge. Five figures of deer were represented on about 10 square meters of rock wall. The first issue is a matter of interpretation of the two artistic conventions used. One is quite realistic, the other entirely schematic. On the grounds of the first of the two representations, the riders from Lipci were interpreted as horsemen. The date of these images was the 8th century BC. Researchers have all naturally noted the resemblance of the Lipci paintings to the images from Valle Camonica in the Alps. The upper scene shows, in my mind, a realistic view of a herd of deer in its natural surroundings. The lower scene is much more complex in meaning. It is much more probable that the motif was not a swastika at all. Swastikas could be a reflection of the general shape of the bay. The technique and formal similarity to the deer depicted in Italy<sup>1</sup> indicates a date for the origins of the Lipci images in the 10th century or possibly early 9th century BC, that is, the IV phase at Valle Camonica.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Montenegro, golful Boka Kotorska, Lipci, artă rupestră.

**Rezumat:** Risan și Boka Kotorska în Montenegro au fost obiectul unor investigații arheologice efectuate de Universitatea din Varșovia (Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe) în 1961, P. Mijović a descoperit la Lipci, situat la 2 km vest de Risan, 5 picturi rupestre. Unele realiste, altele schematice ele sunt asemănătoare cu picturile rupestre din Valle Camonica din Alpi, datate inițial în sec. VIII a. Chr. Totuși, tehnica și asemănările formale dintre aceste reprezentări permit datarea imaginilor de la Lipci în sec. X - IX a. Chr., adică în faza Valle Camonica IV.

Risan on the Boka Kotorska in Montenegro has been the object of research by archaeologists from Warsaw University's Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe for the past five years.<sup>2</sup> Ringing the bay are high limestone mountains rising to 900 m a.s.l. The small settlement of Lipci lies about 2 km west of Risan (Fig. 1). Legend has it that Illyrian Queen Teuta committed suicide here after losing in battle to the Romans in the early 3rd century BC.<sup>3</sup> About half a kilometer from the seashore,<sup>4</sup> a rocky overhang rises 7 m above the surrounding plain (Fig. 2). At the top, a rock wall face recedes slightly along a narrow ledge above a vertical projection of the rock (Fig. 3). Iron ore stains the limestone red in places. A stream flows at the foot of the overhang. The region is rather dry with only the northern side of the bay between Risan and Morinje (settlement west of Lipci) having eight big streams, a fact doubtless of importance for ancient settlers.<sup>5</sup> In 1961, P. Mijović reported the discovery of rock art on

\*Warsaw University Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. Anati, *La civilisation du Valcamonica*, Paris, 1960, tab. 17.

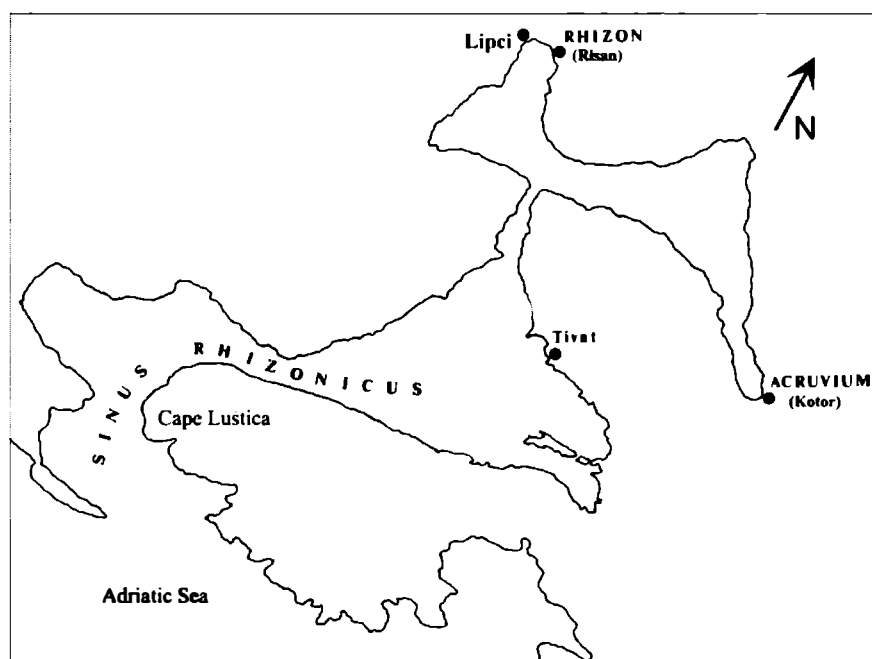
<sup>2</sup> P. Dyczek, *Rhizon, 2001-2003. Preliminary Report on the Excavations of the Center for Archaeological Research – Novae*, Warsaw University, *Archeologia* 55, 2004, p. 101-118.

<sup>3</sup> J. Pušić, *Preistorijski crteži na stijeni u Lipcima*, *Godišnjak Sarajevo* 4, 1966, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> P. Mijović, *Kulture Crne Gore*, Titograd, 1987, 5; P. Mijović, M. Kovačević, *Gradovi i utverđenja u Crnoj Gori*, Beograd -Ulcinj, 1975, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Pušić, *op. cit.*, 187.

the ledge (in "Danas" periodical);<sup>6</sup> his analysis of the images appeared in 1980.<sup>7</sup> The first drawings were made in 1966 by Đ. Mitrović and were published by P. Mijović and M. Kovačević in 1975.<sup>8</sup> Some 50 m in front of the overhang, a section of wall made of rough stones, big and small, bonded in earth, was discovered. This wall, which was 2 m thick, set off a semicircular area below the overhang.<sup>9</sup> The excavators judged the fortifications to be of Late Illyrian date. Illicit digging in the area brought up sherds of handmade pottery, which were recognized as prehistoric, even if not attributed to a specific period.<sup>10</sup> Paintings are found on the overhang and the said rock outcrop (Fig. 4). They were painted directly on the rock surface, using a local lime stained red by iron ore, which gave in effect a slightly pinkish line. Mijović believed the paint to have been mixed of kaolin with casein as binder.<sup>11</sup> The brush stroke was c. 0.8 cm wide, the paint layer c. 1.5 mm thick. There is an impression of flat relief owing to the relative thickness of this paint coat, which must have been quite thick itself. Animals were outlined with one continuous stroke of the brush (?) or wooden (?) spatula, a style Mijović described as "framework".<sup>12</sup>



Five figures of deer were represented on about 10 square meters of rock wall. They are from 35 to 45 cm long and are depicted walking in a row to the right. Compared to real animals, the images are four times smaller. One stag was painted in very realistic fashion on the rock outcrop, another walking left, sketched only schematically, two more schematic images of riders, four "swastika"-like motifs and one complicated geometric pattern (Fig. 5). The paintings from Lipci have been studied repeatedly, although the results of these researches, concerning the date, nature and significance of these images, are frequently contradictory.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. L. J. Drobnjaković, *Risan prvih hiljadu godina*, Beograd, 2002, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> P. Mijović, *Umjetničko blago Crne Gore*, Beograd – Titograd, 1980, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Mijović, Kovačević, *op. cit.*, fig. 2.

<sup>9</sup> D. Garašanin and M. Garašanin, in M. Đurović (ed.)..., *Istorija crne Gore I*, Titograd, 1967, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. C. Praschniker, A. Schober, *Archäologische Forschungen in Dalmatien und Montenegro*, Wien, 1919, p. 86 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Mijović, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. V. Bianco Peroni, *Die Schwerter in Italien* (Le spade nell' Italia continentale), PBF IV/1, München, 1970, p. 84-93.

<sup>13</sup> Đ. Bošković, *O poreklu kompozicije sa predstavama lova na jelene u Lipcima*, *Starine Crne Gore III-IV*, Cetinje, 1966, p. 13-21; M. Garašanin, *Praistorija Crne Gore*, Beograd, 1967, p. 14; idem., *Neue prähistorische Festbilder an der adriatischen Küste der Crna Gora*, *Germania* 46/2, 1968, p. 231-224, Mijović, *Peinture rupestre de Lipci au Monténégro*, Nice, 1976, p. 499.



Fig. 2. Position of the site on the shore of Kotor Bay (Boka Kotorska), photo J. Reclaw.



Fig. 3. Rocky overhang in Lipci, photo J. Reclaw.



Fig. 4. Representation of the stag from Lipci, photo J. Reclaw.



Fig. 5. Drawing of rock art from Lipci, drawn by M. Marciniak, P. Matyaszczyk, M. Kowalczyk.

The first issue is a matter of interpretation of the two artistic conventions used. The realistic images undeniably represent stags: characteristic body outline, head with antlers and lines depicting musculature. Altogether there are seven stags (including six in realistic form) and one doe.<sup>14</sup> Certain scholars would like to see a dog in one of the stags,<sup>15</sup> presumably due to the change in drawing scale. The composition reflects well-known deer habits. The ancient artist depicted a herd of deer on their way to their haunts in spring, stags characteristically leading the way, followed by the does and one or more dominant bulls. Archaeozoologist Prof. A. Lasota-Moskalewska estimates the age of the animals at from 5 to 10 years. These are hardly primitive drawings, as one opinion holds;<sup>16</sup> with very modest means at his disposal, the artist achieved a realism that is indicative of his observation skills and a closeness to nature.

The images of riders present a bigger problem of interpretation (Fig. 6). One is quite realistic, the other entirely schematic. On the grounds of the first of the two representations, the riders from Lipci were interpreted as horsemen.<sup>17</sup> Yet upon closer analysis, this conclusion cannot be upheld easily – the riders appear to be riding on does. For that matter, it is difficult to imagine riders on horses chasing deer through the steep and impenetrable mountains of the region. Consequently, all of the animals depicted in Lipci have to be considered as quietly walking deer.

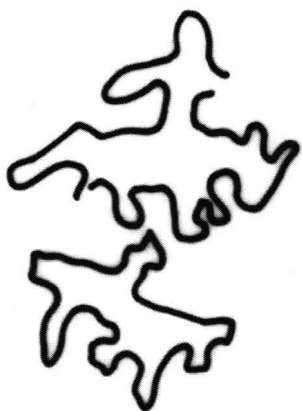


Fig. 6. Representation of so-called riders, drawn by M. Marciniak, P. Matyaszczyk, M. Kowalczyk.

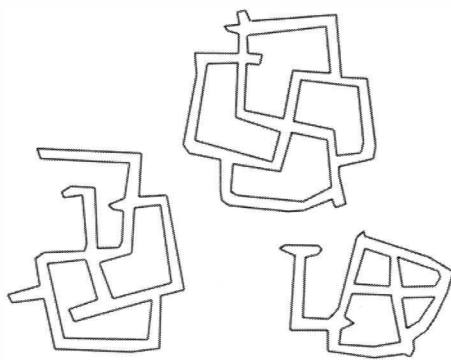


Fig. 7. Representation of different types of so-called swastikas, drawn by M. Marciniak, P. Matyaszczyk, M. Kowalczyk.

This part of the composition also contains four geometric figures, the biggest measuring 50 x 50 cm, the smallest c. 30 x 30 cm, recognized so far by all researchers as swastikas<sup>18</sup> and accorded symbolic and cult meaning<sup>19</sup> (Fig. 7). To my mind, however, this conclusion is too hasty in view of the fact that swastika motifs were typical of the Illyrian Umfield Culture.<sup>20</sup> A complex geometric pattern of criss-crossing vertical and horizontal lines is observed below the swastikas. Researchers agree, based on the oldest known image on pottery from the Adriatic region, a vessel from Hvar,<sup>21</sup> that it represents a boat<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 8).

Scholars have also been surprisingly in agreement as regards the subject of the said scene. It has been interpreted as a deer hunt by all interested, with some researchers further attributing a magic meaning to it.<sup>23</sup> It is believed that we are dealing with a kind of sanctuary for hunters, where ceremonies and rituals were observed in order to improve hunting results. M and D. Garašanin have even suggested that Lipci

<sup>14</sup> Pušić, *op. cit.*, 188. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Alicja Lasota-Moskalewska of the Institute of Archaeology of Warsaw University for information and for consulting with me on the subject of this article.

<sup>15</sup> D. Garašanin and M. Garašanin, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Mijović, Kovačević, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Mijović, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Drobnjaković, *op. cit.*, p. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> D. Garašanin and M. Garašanin, *op. cit.*, p. 72; Mijović, *op. cit.*, 7; Drobnjaković, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Đ. Stipčević, Kukasti krst (svastika, crux gammata) kod starih Ilira, *Gjurmene albanologjikë* 1-2, 1070, 112; Mijović, *op. cit.*, p. 56-60; Drobnjaković, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Stipčević, *op. cit.*, p. 118 f.

<sup>21</sup> G. Novaek, *Najstarija slika ladje u Evropi, najdjena na Hvaru*, *Jugoslovenski mornar* 9, 1951, p. 204 -205.

<sup>22</sup> Mijović, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Drobnjaković, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> D. Garašanin and M. Garašanin, *op. cit.*, p. 72-74; Mijović, *op. cit.*, p. 22-26.

served as a cult place of a fertility deity later identified by the Illyrians with the Greek Pan or Sylvanus. Whatever the case, these theories have not contributed significantly to the interpretation of the paintings.

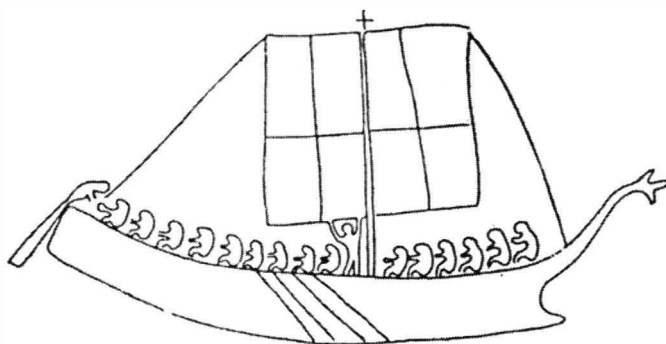


Fig. 8. Drawing of ancient ship from Hvar, see: P. Mijović, *Kulture Crne Gore*, Titograd 1987, fig. 6, elaborated P. Dyczek, J. Janowski.

The date of the painting is also controversial. At an archaeological conference, where the subject was presented, the date agreed upon for the creation of these images was the 8th century BC.<sup>24</sup> All deer representations from the territory of modern Italy are dated from the second half of the 9th to the first half of the 8th century BC and most researchers agree with a similar general date for the Lipci paintings. Dissident voices in the discussion, like P. Mijović, refer the composition to the second phase of the Neolithic,<sup>25</sup> while M. Garašanin believes them to originate from the Bronze Age, between 1600 and 1200 BC.<sup>26</sup> Đ. Bošković is of a different opinion, suggesting that they were made as late as the Middle Ages.<sup>27</sup>

Both the composition and the details of the Lipci paintings have been widely compared with other examples of rock art. The technique of execution is very much like the paintings from Grbaji, for example, where three groups of hunters with bows and arrows and a horse were depicted at 1300 m a.s.l.<sup>28</sup> As at Lipci, certain images are realistic and others schematic. Such is the case also of similar compositions from Žlijeb (near Vyšehrad)<sup>29</sup> and Srndalj (near Jastrebac). These parallel compositions are similarly dated to the 8th century BC, the sole exception being the medieval images from Spila (near Ten in Albania).<sup>30</sup>

The ethnicity and cultural origins of the artist who painted the deer from Lipci has also been the object of discussion. Mijović and Kovačević tend to think of him as an Illyrian, recalling similar complexes of caves or rock overhangs and walls known from Svač and Listoj. Consequently, a Bronze Age chronology for the Lipci images is a foregone conclusion.<sup>31</sup> Researchers have all naturally noted the resemblance of the Lipci paintings to the images from Valle Camonica in the Alps<sup>32</sup> and a closer analysis could perhaps facilitate the interpretation of the Montenegro finds.

In taking up a study of the origin and meaning of the Lipci rock art, it is essential to recognize and understand the compositions. Foremost, we appear to be dealing with two independent scenes. Despite not knowing what the rock face had once looked like, we can be fairly sure that the artist or artists executed two separate scenes. One was painted directly on the overhang and in 1:4 scale, and the other, in

<sup>24</sup> Mijović, *op.cit.*, p. 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> D. Garašanin and M. Garašanin, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>27</sup> Bošković, *op. cit.*, p. 13-21.

<sup>28</sup> Mijović, *op. cit.*, p. 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> Đ. Stratimirović, *Arheološki prilozi II. Stjena pod pismom kod Žlijeba*, Glasnik Zemeljskog Muzeja 3, 1891, p. 285-286.

<sup>30</sup> M. Korkuti, *Pitturi e Trenit*, Studime historike 23/2, 1969, p. 127-132; idem, *Vendbanimi preistorik i trenit*, Illiria 1, 1971, p. 31-37; R. Vasić, *Crteži na stieni kod Gusinije*, Starinar 23, 1972, p. 131-135; Đ. Bošković, *Reflexions sur les peintures cynegtiques du rocher de Spile*, Illiria 5/2, 1976, p. 169-179.

<sup>31</sup> Mijović, Kovačević, *op. cit.*, p. 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> E. Anati, *La civilisation de Valca Monica*, Monde Ancient 4, 1960 passim; idem, *IL datazione dell' Arte Preistorica Camuna*, Brescia, 1963, passim.



a smaller scale, appeared on the rock projection below. To my mind, the two should not be connected *a priori* and analyzed together.

The upper scene shows a realistic view of a herd of deer in its natural surroundings. The manner in which the artist showed the heads and antlers is suggestive of a quiet procession, the animals walking in biologically fixed order to their haunts. They are in no way like the hunted deer, disoriented and scattered, depicted in swift movement in a hunting scene from Rocchia Grande in Naquane Park (Valle Camonica).<sup>33</sup> This part of the Lipci rock art represents a scene taken from nature.

The lower scene is, to my mind, much more complex in meaning. Foremost, the riders here are no horsemen. Even today there are ethnographically confirmed cases of Siberian tribes taming and riding does of deer. The animals in the lower scene are clearly recognizable despite the schematic drawing. They are calm, the human figures apparently only accompanying them while they feed. The differences in drawing scale can be attributed presumably to an intuitive perspective employed by the artist, the objects in a distant background, like the schematic buck, being as if blurred, because far from the observer. This scene could be a narrative continuation of the previous one. Taking into consideration the habits of wild deer, it can be assumed that the scene takes place in spring, most certainly before May when calving begins.

The alleged swastikas and presumed boat were supposed to set the scene. If the swastikas were indeed meant as symbols, we would be faced with two kinds, one turned to left and the other a mirror reflection. This defies explanation and it is much more probable that the motif was not a swastika at all. Indeed, if one looks at the Boka Katorska bay and traces the shores or more precisely the mountainous rocks rearing up from the waters, one can easily see how the alleged swastikas could be a reflection of the general shape of the bay. The bay with its developed shoreline and dangerous rocks lurking for the unaware sailor was a haven for pirates already in Illyrian times. A narrow passage, the Veriga, leads from the sea to the inner part of the bay; it seems to be the centerpoint of the said geometrical 'swastikas'. Considering three of the motifs in the light of bay topography, we get a "plan" of the entire Boka starting from the Adriatic mouth (Fig. 9 a,b,c), the central part with the entrance through the passage, and the inner part. The depiction of a boat serves to make believable the idea that the 'swastikas' actually constitute a sort of nautical map immortalized on the rocky outcrop. The formal resemblance between the Lipci image and representations of boats, liburnae especially, is striking (Fig. 10). Taking into account the date of the paintings proposed in this article, the Lipci image puts the origins of this kind of boat in entirely new light.

Moreover, a small dash on the 'swastika' that I consider as a plan of the inner part of the bay can be construed as marking the position of Lipci.

Having arrived at this point, one has to wonder about the importance of Lipci, because if anything is clear, it is that it was hardly an ordinary place. There is no reason not to consider it as a cult place, especially as deer were definitely of religious significance for the people of the region. Suffice it to mention the figure with deer antlers from Valle Camonica, interpreted as a deity, Dio Chernunnos from Naquane.<sup>34</sup> Such worship is hardly surprising considering that the Boka region was unsuitable for agriculture and deer must have been prized for their milk (does must have been domesticated, if they could be ridden), meat, hides, and precious antlers. They could have even been essential for human survival. Therefore, Lipci may be deemed a sanctuary of sorts. The space inside the walls and the proximity of a stream makes it ideal for keeping a herd of deer and for welcoming visitors. It remains to be seen when and for what purpose.

The topography seems not to have changed since Antiquity. The rock overhand must have been clear then, as it is now, for there are no geological formations like caves anywhere in the vicinity, which could have collapsed in the meantime. Taking into account modern changes of landscape, including broken and tumbling rock, different plant cover and the obvious fact of placing the painting as high as possible, we can suggest a function for this site. Lipci lies almost exactly facing south, hence it seems that the sanctuary by the rock overhand could have been used in spring. It is then that the sun shining across the mountain ridges starts to light up the rock face, culminating on the day of the spring equinox. Recalling the focus on solar significance in Iron Age cultures, it seems very likely that the Lipci complex, paintings and stone structures, can have been used for ceremonies connected with the spring equinox. The symbolic/magic or mythological importance of the spot for the entire Boka could have survived in the said myth about Teuta.

<sup>33</sup> A. Priuli, *Preistoria in Valle Camonica*, Capodiponte, 1979, p. 28-29.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 35.

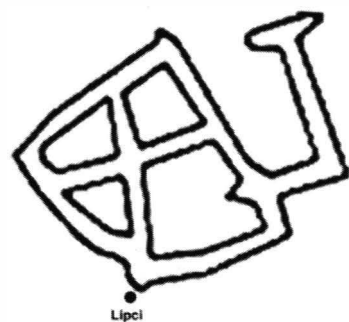
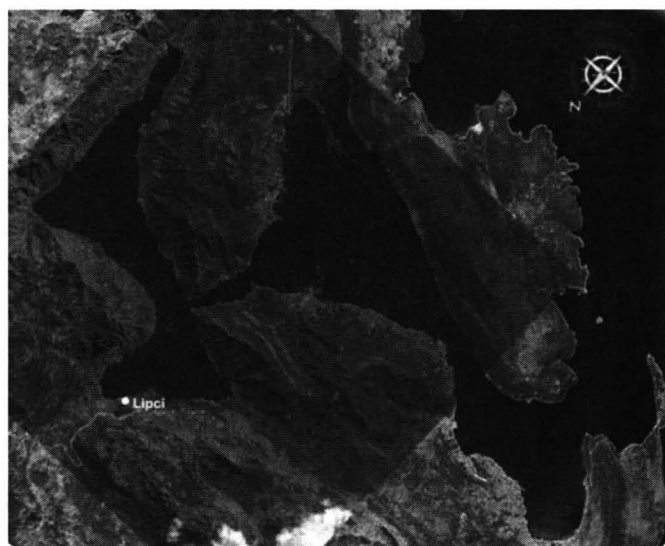
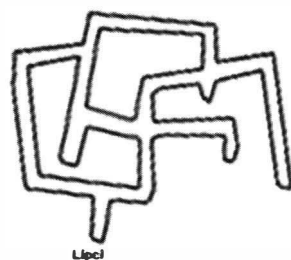
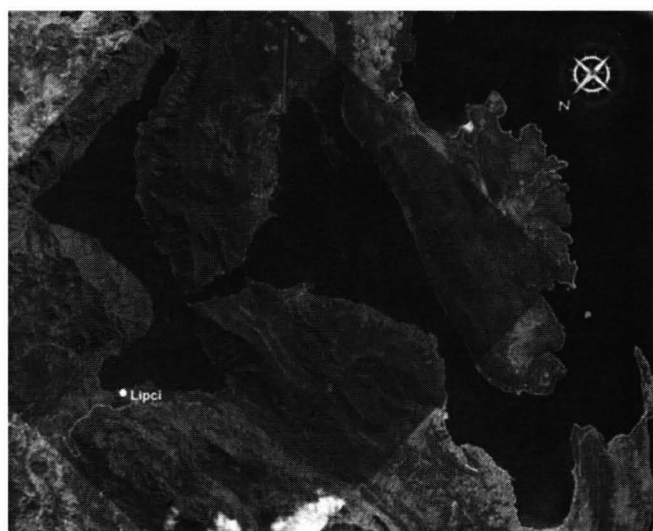
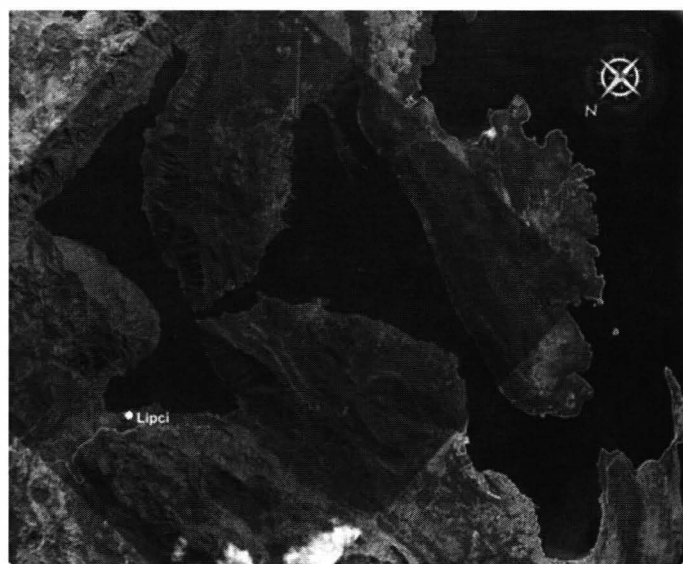


Fig. 9. a. The “plan” of entire Kotor bay starting from the Adriatic mouth, elaborated P. Dyczek; b. The “plan” of Kotor bay – the central part with the entrance through the passage, elaborated P. Dyczek; c. The “plan” of Kotor bay – inner part, elaborated P. Dyczek.



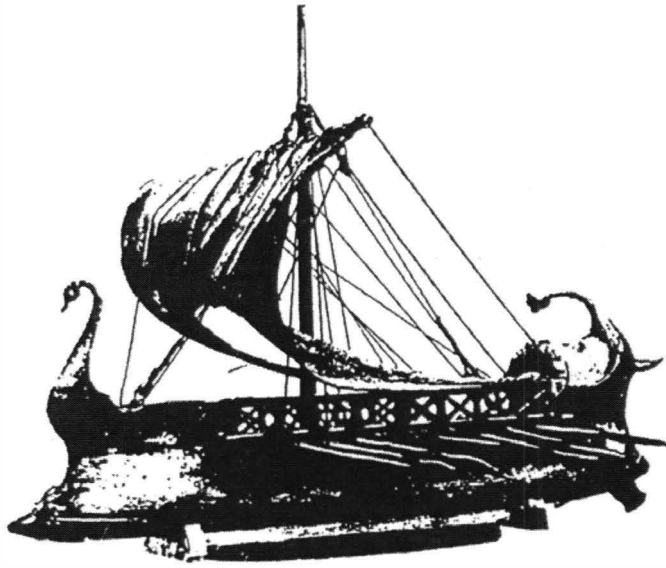


Fig. 10. Representation of liburna, see: L. J. Drobnjaković, *Risan prvih hiljadu godina*, Beograd, 2002, fig. 9.

Dating with C<sup>14</sup> failed to provide an answer to the question of when the paintings and consequently the sanctuary came into existence. Among parallels, the only surely dated rock paintings are the Valle Camonica finds. The technique and formal similarity to the deer depicted in Italy<sup>35</sup> indicates a date for the origins of the Lipci images in the 10th century or possibly early 9th century BC, that is, the IV phase at Valle Camonica (not the III as thought until now).<sup>36</sup> Close ties in terms of style are also evident with the art from Naquane.<sup>37</sup>

The importance of the Lipci rock art for the history of Boka Kotorska cannot be underestimated. It is evidence for close intercultural ties with the Alpine region, while the picture of a boat suggests that sailing was the preferred mode of contact. It is not clear whether the artists from Lipci lived here or only passed through occasionally, perhaps on a seasonal basis. The latter seems more likely considering that a settlement contemporary with the paintings has yet to be discovered in the immediate vicinity of the rock overhang. A small group of people may have lived close-by to the sanctuary, but tumbled rock excludes any verification of the idea.

Whatever the case may be, the Lipci rock art is tangible proof of people from what is today Northern Italy having good knowledge of the Adriatic in the Bronze Age. It also clearly indicates the existence of close ties and cultural influence that have gone largely unnoticed so far.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, 22; cf. E. Anati, *La civilisation du Valcamonica*, Paris, 1960, tab. 17.

<sup>36</sup> D. Garašanin and M. Garašanin, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Priuli, *op. cit.*, p. 71-76.