

World Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis and Conflict: Close-up View

ABSTRACT

The paper is dedicated to the problem of the endangerment of World Cultural Heritage in times of crisis, conflicts and conflict situations. The modern world abounds in areas where social intolerance simmers, and cultural heritage is the first to be attacked in such areas. In addition to direct attacks on monuments, they are often the subject of various (mis) uses – violent repurposing, deconstruction of meaning, reinterpretation, negation of the past, and the like. In such situations, the maturity of the heritage protection service, that is, the role and importance of international conventions for its preservation, is questionable. That is why in this paper special attention is devoted to World Heritage sites which, according to the Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, are significant for humanity as a whole. However, in times of crisis in unstable areas, their vulnerability manifests itself and transforms in accordance with changing social factors. The destruction of colossal Buddha statues in Afghanistan and monuments on the territory of Syria, the recent repurposing of the Hagia Sophia museum in Istanbul, and the reinterpretation and use of Medieval Monuments in Kosovo, are examples in which we will examine contemporary ways of endangering World Cultural Heritage, i.e. the importance of the Convention as part of legal protection for their survival.

KEYWORDS

World cultural heritage, conflicts, endangered heritage, negation of monuments, modern times

In crisis situations and war climates, objects and buildings have always perished in along with people. Not only were they incidental damage, but their suffering was tendentious and proportional to their importance for a nation or community that created them. An aggressive act towards such an achievement, which today we consider a monument, is the result of a change in the system of values, politics and government, religious understandings, identity affiliations and so on. The burning of the Library of Alexandria by the Romans, Christians, and then Muslims, and the removal of the sculptural decoration of the Parthenon to Britain are proofs of that. There are countless similar examples – the destruction of the original appearance of the Egyptian Sphinx, or of pagan statues that could not survive in monotheistic Christian communities, are as much a part of human history as is the creation of the most valuable artistic and cultural buildings.

History has also shown that not all destruction of monuments is equally devastating, at least not in the physical sense. Sometimes the usefulness of other people's ancient monuments is recognised by the societies that exerted "domination" over them, so they are not completely destroyed, but partially reshaped and transformed in order to get a new purpose and a new identity. Even the first Christian bishops saw the usefulness of pagan temples and statues, whose survival and new purpose could attract people to the new religion. We also know that the Parthenon in Athens was used as a church and later even a mosque. The Pantheon in Rome was also transformed into a church, and it still functions as such today. Similarly, some of the medieval churches were converted into mosques, for example the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople, St. Sophia in Ohrid or Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren.¹ The Ottomans did not alter those temples to preserve them, but to symbolically emphasize the religious meaning of their conquests, however, due to historical circumstances, the aforementioned churches serve again today as relatively well-preserved testimonies of Christian art.²

CONTEMPORARY ENDANGERMENT OF HERITAGE – BETWEEN PHYSICAL AND SEMANTIC DESTRUCTION

This brief reminder that the destruction, desecration and repurposing of the *heritage of others* has been going on forever, is not given to justify such undertakings, but to direct our gaze towards contemporary lives of heritage. The question arises whether the destruction of monuments in times of crisis (in various conflict areas today) takes place in the same way? Also, could awareness of the concept of heritage and the development of sciences and institutions dealing with it protect heritage from intentional harm?

After the Second World War, in which entire cities and cultural legacies of some people were destroyed, numerous legal acts were passed on to ensure the preservation

1 A. Andrejević, *Pretvaranje crkava u džamije*, Zbornik za likovne umetnosti 12 (1976) 99–117.

2 J. Pavličić, Serbian monumental patrimony in Kosovo and Metohija in view of Contemporary cultural heritage theories, in *Artistic Heritage of the Serbian People in Kosovo and Metohija: history, identity, vulnerability, protection*, Belgrade 2017, 485.



Fig. 1 Afghanistan, Bamiyan, One of the colossal Buddha statues before and after the destruction in 2001

(Wikipedia)

of heritage in specific situations, in peace and in war, and protection institutions were developed in Europe.

However, despite that, the motives that encourage violence have not disappeared, and the destruction of heritage is still carried out in an organized manner. During the occupation of a part of Cyprus by Turkey – as it was considered at the time, one of the last war conflicts in the Balkans after the Second World War – it was noted that “*the vandalism and sacrilege are so methodical and widespread that they amount to institutional obliteration of everything sacred to a Greek*”.³ Then the sacral heritage suffered first, which, in addition to being destroyed and given a completely different form by changing its purpose, was also dismembered in order to be sold on the markets of Western Europe, America and Japan.⁴

Systematic and organized destruction of heritage continued throughout the world in the following decades. It is paradoxical that the end of the last century was crucial for the development of new disciplines on heritage and the past, while at the same time heritage was increasingly threatened. It has become the subject of various (mis)uses in newly founded and transition countries. We would say, certainly, in the service of new identity narratives.⁵

WORLD HERITAGE LIST – A PRIVILEGE OR AN OBLIGATION?

This is precisely why the relationship of society and the individual towards the past is recognized as crucial for the preservation of heritage. In 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO adopted the *Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, the anniversary of which we celebrate with this publication. It expresses the aspiration towards standardization regarding the understanding and management of heritage.⁶ The Convention indicates the coherence between culture and nature, that is, the universality of values that must be preserved in cultural memory under the common name of culture.

When determining priorities in heritage protection, that is, nominations for the UNESCO World Heritage List, certain criteria are observed, i.e. the values of heritage objects are recognized and their importance is assessed.⁷ This effort to recognize the different values of monuments in order to categorize the entire heritage as precisely as possible, was actually designed with the intention of adequate management of specific

3 M. Miltiadou (ed.), *The loss of a civilization: Destruction of cultural heritage in occupied Cyprus*, Nicosia 2012, 9.

4 *Ibid.*

5 On the relation of heritage and identity: P. van Mensch, *Towards a methodology of museology*, PhD thesis, University of Zagreb, Zagreb 1992; I. Maroević, *Uvod u muzeologiju*, Zagreb 1993; L. Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, London; New York 2006; T. Šola, *Javno pamćenje. Čuvanje različitosti i mogući projekti*, Zagreb 2014.

6 *Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, (UNESCO, Paris 1972), Official Gazette of SFRY, no. 56/1974; v. i: *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (UNESCO, Paris 2005). <https://www.kultura.gov.rs/tekst/sr/5139/.php> (accessed January 2022).

7 H. Mikić (ed.), *Biznis plan za rehabilitaciju nepokretnih kulturnih dobara*, Priručnik za izradu i implementaciju, Belgrade 2014, 30–31.



Fig. 2

Istanbul, Hagia Sophia

(National Geographic
 Serbia)

Fig. 3

Istanbul, Christian
 paintings covered with
 curtains on the walls
 of the Church of Saint
 Sophia, now a mosque

(<https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/255157/hagia-sophia-being-rendered-closed-and-silent/>)



heritage. In this endeavor, the engagement of different social communities is counted on, primarily involving the memory (and empathy) of a society and individuals. Namely, in addition to international conventions that regulate the attitudes of various interested parties towards heritage, and in specific conditions (armed conflicts, conditions of occupied territory...),⁸ the Convention on the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage was created for the purpose of recognizing and then guaranteeing effective protection, as well as the more active popularization of cultural and natural heritage that represents universal value according to the criteria prescribed by UNESCO.⁹ The heritage that meets those criteria,¹⁰ and which was proposed by a country that signed the Convention, is entered on the World Heritage List, which actually acquires the status of privileged heritage, the preservation of which should be supported by the entire international community.

However, the Convention and the heritage conservation measures recommended and provided for by it are not binding. It is only a recommendation and a possible model for the modern understanding of heritage protection. Thus, monuments that have been on the World Heritage List for a long time can become endangered and even completely destroyed. The inefficiency and inability to react to the contemporary phenomena of endangering the monumental heritage is best seen in the example of the heritage of Syria and specifically the city of Palmyra, which has been on the World Heritage List since 1980, and since 2013 on the World Heritage in Danger List.¹¹ After the destructive attacks of the terrorist organization Islamic State, this ancient city suffered the damage to an extent unknown even to UNESCO experts, for whom it was inaccessible for a long time after the attack.¹² Although there are efforts for a UNESCO expert mission to reach the site in order to determine the state of affairs and propose immediate protection measures, the approach to this heritage will necessarily be transformed. Numerous artefacts from the site reached Europe through illegal trade¹³, while the ruins of Palmyra survive as bearers of new meanings in a war-torn and altered reality, in which it is difficult to advocate the idea of Irina Bokova, former Director General of UNESCO, that "Palmyra belongs to all humanity and to all Syrians. All Syrians together must be able to reclaim that heritage as a symbol of identity and dignity."¹⁴

8 *Convention for the Protection of Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, Official Gazette of FNRJ dated April 2, 1956. The Convention was signed in The Hague in 1954, and was ratified in the FNRJ in 1955; The Protocol on preventing the export of cultural goods from the occupied territory is part of the convention.

9 *Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, Art. 5, 6, 11.

10 Criteria for the selection of the monumental heritage that will be inscribed on the World Cultural Heritage List. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/> (accessed January 2022).

11 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23> (accessed January 2022).

12 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73-2iXkrAyM> (accessed January 2022).

13 *Ibid.*

14 "(...) The protection of heritage is inseparable from the protection of human lives, taking into account the wounds and sufferings of the population during the ongoing conflict." <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1479/> (accessed January 2022).



Fig. 4 and 5

Gračanica, KFOR
soldiers guard the
Gračanica Monastery

(© J. Pavličić Šarić)



The destruction and displacement of artifacts in the name of ideology, but also of economic gain, reached tragic proportions in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, with the destruction of colossal Buddha statues and the blowing up of their remains (fig. 1).¹⁵

It is frightening that the mentioned attacks on cultural heritage in our “civilized” age are much more frequent, reckless and destructive than ever before in history. Of course, heritage suffers first in those countries and in those areas where it is difficult to carry out supervision and apply a defined legal framework, but the help of the most powerful, the most culturally developed and therefore the most responsible is too slow and ineffective. As observed in most cases, violence against heritage in the modern age has had its own “methodology” and institutional, political support.

In this sense, it is important to mention the example of the Church of Saint Sophia in Istanbul and the modern conversion of this monument.¹⁶ It was turned into a mosque in 1453 after the city fell under the Ottoman Empire. The mosaics of the church soon succumbed to the laws of Islam, and were covered with a layer of plaster and new ornamental painting, while the faces of the seraphs from the pendants were covered with masks. Angels, as a common heritage of the Christian and Muslim world, were spared from (total) hiding. This attitude towards the found Christian place of worship was documented and presented scientifically when the building became Saint Sophia Museum in 1934. Afterwards, the work on the discovery of Byzantine painting was undertaken. The added four minarets (fig. 2), as well as the mihrab and mimber in the interior have been preserved, as witnesses of the later conversion of the church. It should also be mentioned that the newer, Islamic painting was never completely removed. Bearing in mind the time period of seven decades during which the discovery of medieval wall paintings has been conducted, it is clear that the question of the reconstruction of the former church is problematic.¹⁷ The discovery, cleaning and presentation of the “old paintings” show the cultural value and splendor of the Byzantine Empire, but the “new” ones remind us of its defeat, the end of one history, and the beginning of another civilization, whose successor is modern Turkey. The intention of the “restorer” and “guardian” of this heritage, laden with visual symbolism, became evident in the context of contemporary competing “claims” over this temple. On one hand, there was a proposal to return Saint Sophia to the Muslim community, while on the other hand, there were calls for its return to the Orthodox community, as a counterbalance.¹⁸ Although it was difficult to imagine that even one of the proposals was feasible, bearing in mind the

15 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/208> (accessed January 2022).

16 We also wrote about this case in: J. Pavličić Šarić, *Baština Bogorodice Ljeviške i očuvanje pamćenja*, Zvečan 2021, 145–146.

17 The architects Gaspard and Giuseppe Fossati (Gaspard and Giuseppe Fossati) worked first on cleaning the mosaics and their restoration in 1847–1849. However, their work was related both to the discovery of mosaics and to their re-covering. From 1931 to 1949, the Byzantine Institute from Washington worked on the discovery and cleaning of the mosaics (*Byzantine Institute of America*). See: T. F. Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul, A Photographic Survey*, London 1976, 263; N. B. Tatariatnikova, *Mosaics of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul: The Fossati Restoration and the Work of the Byzantine Institute*, Washington, DC 1998; R. Nelson, *Hagia Sophia: 1850-1950: Holy Wisdom Modern Monument*, Chicago; London 2004.

18 <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21601895-talk-haghia-sophia-once-again-becoming-mosque-church-mosqueand-back> (accessed January 2022).



Fig. 6 Prizren, Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren after burning in March 2004.

(Provincial Institute for the Protection of Leposavić Monuments)



Fig. 7 and 8 Prizren, View of the interior of the damaged and desecrated Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša after the March 2004 pogrom

(© Ž. Vukelić, Center for the Preservation of the Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija "Mnemosyne" and the Provincial Institute for the Protection of Monuments Leposavić)

status of the museum that Hagia Sophia has had for a long time and the consensus about the common heritage promoted by UNESCO, on whose list the monument has been since 1985, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque again in July 2020.¹⁹ Such a sudden act, on which UNESCO was not consulted, has implications for the preservation of the monument's universal values, which was appealed to by UNESCO itself.²⁰ The Christian mosaics are already covered and inaccessible to tourists (fig. 3).²¹

THE CASE OF ENDANGERMENT OF MEDIEVAL MONUMENTS IN KOSOVO

The unavailability of monuments, the destruction of monuments' integrity and the endangerment of heritage are the problems we encounter locally as well. During the armed conflicts in Kosovo and Metohija, a significant part of the cultural heritage was destroyed. The repression against the non-Albanian, primarily Serbian, but also Roma population, and their cultures continued, and in particular, a massive and widely organized eruption of Albanian violence took place between 17 and 19 March 2004.²² As the *heritage of others*

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- 19 https://www.b92.net/zivot/vesti.php?yyyy=2020&mm=07&dd=10&nav_id=1705501; <https://www.dw.com/en/like-hagia-sophia-turkey-to-reconvert-chora-museum-into-mosque/a-54713753>; <https://istanbulclues.com/chora-church-kariye-museum-entrance-fee/> (accessed January 2022).
- 20 <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-statement-hagia-sophia-istanbul> (accessed January 2022). Hagia Sophia is part of the Historic Areas of Istanbul, a property inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. "Hagia Sophia is an architectural masterpiece and a unique testimony to interactions between Europe and Asia over the centuries. Its status as a museum reflects the universal nature of its heritage, and makes it a powerful symbol for dialogue, said Director-General Audrey Azoulay. It is regrettable that the Turkish decision was made without any form of dialogue or prior notice. "It is important to avoid any implementing measure, without prior discussion with UNESCO, that would affect physical access to the site, the structure of the buildings, the site's moveable property, or the site's management," stressed Ernesto Ottone, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Culture. Such measures could constitute breaches of the rules derived from the 1972 World Heritage Convention.
- 21 <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Istanbul:-Hagia-Sophia-mosaics-hidden-from-visitors-50789.html> (accessed January 2022). At the same time, it was promised that the frescoes and mosaics will be visible to visitors, and covered with removable curtains only during Islamic prayer. In reality, people who wanted to see the gems of Byzantine art found themselves in front of white sheets that hide the paintings. The reason lies in the fact that Hagia Sophia, in its transition from a museum to a mosque, was placed under the Directorate for Religious Affairs and is no longer - as before - under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, although its employees still work in the building. "The mosaics are now completely covered. We don't know when it will open", said some of the employees of the Ministry in an interview with the newspaper BirGun. "Mosaics are not displayed outside of prayer, because they are covered. A retractable system was supposed to be installed, but we have no information on when that will be done".
- 22 In these destructive attacks by thousands of Albanians throughout Kosovo and Metohija, more than 4,000 people were forced out of their homes, 28 people died, and more than 900 people were seriously injured. 19 cultural monuments of the first category and 16 Orthodox churches that were not categorized were destroyed. Also, about 10,000 valuable monuments of fresco painting, icons, religious objects and relics were destroyed. A chronology of events during the March Albanian attacks is available on the website: <http://www.eparhija-prizren.org/?p=14823> (accessed January 2022). O martovskom pogromu See also: B. Jokić (ur.), *Martovski pogrom na Kosovu i Metohiji: 17–19. mart 2004. godine: s kratkim pregledom uništenog i ugroženog hrišćanskog kulturnog nasleđa*, Belgrade 2004, as well as the electronic source: https://sr.m.wikipedia.org/sr-ec/Martovski_pogrom_2004.#CITEREFMarković16_3_2014. (accessed February 2022). The suffering of the Serbian monumental heritage in the period after 1999 was also written in a recent study: D. Radovanović, M. Đekić, *Following the adoption of Resolution 1244 (1999–2017), in Artistic Heritage of the Serbian People in Kosovo and Metohija: history, identity, vulnerability, protection*, Belgrade 2017, 393–413.



Fig. 9 Prizren, Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša surrounded by barbed wire, modern condition

(© J. Pavličić Šarić)

for the new political community, the Serbian heritage has not only physically suffered brutal destruction, but it has also been interpreted and treated differently over time: it was presented as Albanian, and was used in accordance with the needs of current politics.

Particularly important and illustrative examples of the endangered monuments are four Orthodox churches and monasteries, which have been inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger since 2006 under the name Medieval Monuments in Kosovo. Under such a unified name, the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren entered the List together with the monasteries of Gračanica, Peć Patriarchate and Dečani, which was the only one added in 2004²³ – the very year marked by the March pogrom of Albanian perpetrators against the Serbian population and their heritage. At the time, threats to religious heritage were continuous, but the UNESCO Committee did not immediately put Dečani on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, which then nominated this cultural asset, did not insist on it. Nevertheless, shortly after this important unfortunate event, the national commission for cooperation with UNESCO made a decision that through the process of expanding the existing cultural property, the Gračanica monasteries, Peć Patriarchate and the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša should be added to Dečani, in order to receive more effective protection as soon as possible. The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro submitted a nomination file for the registration of a set of monuments under the name Serbian Medieval Monuments in Kosovo and Metohija, and they were officially entered on the List in 2006 under the name Medieval Monuments in Kosovo, Serbia.²⁴ The attitude of ICOMOS as an advisory body contributed to the removal of the national designation, while the Secretariat of the Committee most likely influenced the removal of Metohija from the title.²⁵ Despite this, as well as similar changes in the nomination files, in Serbia the inscription of the monuments was experienced as a great “success in protecting state and national interests”,²⁶ while the reasons for the mentioned changes and possible consequences were not publicly discussed in the following years.

The endangerment of the Orthodox Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren can be taken as an exemplary case for understanding the relationship of contemporary Albanian society in Kosovo and Metohija towards Serbian medieval monuments, i.e., for understanding why the Medieval Monuments in Kosovo are under threat.

The church itself was physically attacked and damaged several times. Already in June 1999, it was robbed and mined.²⁷ This also meant the termination of its

23 The initiative to register some of these monuments on the List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage was started in 1985. A series of political and social changes that followed contributed to the fact that monuments in Kosovo and Metohija were added to the UNESCO List more than two decades later. More about this: V. Džamić, The inclusion of Serbian monuments on the World Heritage List, in *Artistic Heritage of the Serbian People in Kosovo and Metohija: history, identity, vulnerability, protection*, Belgrade 2017, 465–469.

24 *Ibid.* 474–475.

25 *Ibid.* 481.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Z. Garić, *Urbano graditeljsko i spomeničko nasleđe Prizrena i okoline danas*, Glasnik DKS 26 (2002) 40–41.

functions, as a cultural monument and as a church. After the arrival of KFOR, the church was demined, locked and surrounded with barbed wire. It was guarded by a special unit of this military organization, and this is the case with other churches as well (fig. 4, 5). Since the area around the church was not completely demined, it remained inaccessible for use. In March 2004, during new riots, the church was seriously damaged for the first time (fig. 6, 7, 8). Car tires were set on fire in the outer vestibule, the altar area was desecrated, and the holy table was broken. On this occasion, the frescoes were also damaged and disfigured. KFOR soldiers did not provide protection during this attack.²⁸ Since 2015, the church has been active and has its own priest. Today it is guarded by the Kosovo Police, but it is still surrounded by barbed wire (fig. 9) and is not open to visitors without notice to the clergy and the police.

Physical attacks on the Prizren church have never completely ceased. In the meantime, there have been concerning interpretative tones in the public discourse related to the falsification of the church's history and its appropriation by the Albanian cultural community in Kosovo.

Although the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren is one of the few medieval churches with a large number of inscriptions and historical portraits preserved on the façades and interior walls that clearly speak about its founder, the time of construction, as well as the dedication of the temple,²⁹ such data are often ignored. King Milutin's endowment was built on top of the remains of an earlier church that served as the seat of the Serbian bishopric of Prizren as early as the 13th century, and after the restoration of an older Byzantine basilica (10th–11th centuries). In the same place, in the 6th century, there was an even more ancient Christian cult building whose fragments were incorporated into the present walls. However, the dedication of none of the churches from the four mentioned historical phases of the site, based on scientific facts, cannot be connected with an alleged Illyrian sanctuary of the "Goddess of Fertility and Birth" that some Kosovar sources insist existed on the site, under that name which is supposedly still used today.³⁰ Such opinions are not scientifically proven, supported by archaeological or historical sources, but are uncritically disseminated.

From the institutional Albanian interpretations of the Prizren church, as evidenced by the database of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, of the so-called

28 B. Jokić (ed.), *Martovski pogrom na Kosovu i Metohiji: 17–19. mart 2004. godine: s kratkim pregledom uništenog i ugroženog hrišćanskog kulturnog nasleđa*, Belgrade 2004, 34.

29 S. Nenadović, *Bogorodica Ljeviška, njen postanak i njeno mesto u arhitekturi Milutinovog vremena*, Belgrade 1963, 23–33 and further.

30 We wrote about this in: J. Pavličić, *Dissonant Heritage and Promotion of Tourism in the Case of Serbian Medieval Monuments in Kosovo*, *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, Volume 14, Issue 3 (Special Issue: Tourism, conflict and contested heritage in former Yugoslavia), London 2016, 193–197; J. Pavličić, *Serbian monumental patrimony*, 500–503; J. Pavličić Šarić, *Baština Bogorodice Ljeviške*, 255–257; J. Pavličić Šarić, *Između negacije i apropijacije: kulturno nasleđe drugih u savremenoj albanskoj javnosti na Kosovu i Metohiji*, in *Zaštita, očuvanje i afirmacija srpskog kulturnog nasleđa na Kosovu i Metohiji*, Tom 1, Belgrade 2023, 173–204.

the Republic of Kosovo³¹ on the monumental heritage, then from the popular tourist guides,³² as well as from some “expert“ publications³³ in which the Illyrian identity of this building, embedded in the foundations of an earlier building, is explicitly emphasized, we may see that 1) certain, best-preserved, layers of heritage are being suppressed as they point to the Serbian past, and also 2) Albanians try to appropriate this heritage and proclaim it their own by emphasizing the sometimes fictional, sometimes real historical layers that point to the Illyrian and Ottoman past as the desired pillars of the national and religious identity of Albanians.

The historical and artistic values for which the church is recognized as World Cultural Heritage, which date from the Middle Ages, and are the result of the actions of the founder of the church, Serbian King Stefan Uroš II, Milutin Nemanjić, and the art workshops he engaged, have been downplayed. Such a sudden appropriation of the church, after its primary undesirability in Albanian society, its looting and burning, indicates the politicization of heritage. It is most pronounced in the period after the declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosovo, as well as after the inscription of Serbian medieval monuments on the World Heritage List, making it a desired, significant heritage that Kosovo society now wants to preserve and present as its own.

Other monastery churches which were included in the aforementioned UNESCO list under the common name Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia) along with Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren, were not spared from suffering and historical falsifications either.³⁴ Those monuments were the target of attacks, fortunately, more often thwarted than realized, but threats against them are still evident to this day.³⁵ The church of the Dečani Monastery is often falsely presented as an Albanian Catholic temple, which was created by a builder of Albanian origin, which is completely unfounded and in disagreement with the authentic medieval sources (monastery charters, frescoes, etc.).³⁶ Furthermore, the monastery's property is contested and usurped, and the protected zone of cultural property is violated by the construction

31 *Baza podataka kulturnog nasleđa Kosova*: <https://dtk.rks-gov.net> (accessed February 2022).

32 B. Basha, *Prizren, Kosova – The Visitor*, Prizren 2012.

33 E. Shukriu, *Kisha e Shën Premtes në Prizren*, Buletin i Fakultetit Filozofik 21, Prishtin (1993) 90–102; Idem, *The Flight of Saint Prenda Church*, Presentation on the Third international „Muhu Workshop“ Flight and Emigration in Medieval Space and Mind, Gryka e Valbones (Albania), August 20–22, 2011; Idem, *Kisha e Shën Prendës – Prizren*, Prishtin 2012.

34 We refer to Visoki Dečani, Peć Patriarchate and Gračanica monasteries. http://spc.rs/old//Vesti-2004/03/17-3-04_14.html. (accessed February 2022).

35 „It was attacked four times with weapons, two mortar attacks were carried out in 2000, during the March pogrom in 2004, eight mortar shells were fired at the monastery, and in 2007, another mortar attack was carried out, which resulted in a court verdict. (...) in 2014, graffiti “KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) ISIS“ was written on the walls of the monastery, and in January 2016, four armed Kosovo Albanians were arrested in front of the monastery.“ More about the attacks on the Visoki Dečani monastery at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/546295/visoki-decani-najcesce-napadan-objekat-spc-na-kosmetu.php> (accessed November 2021).

36 M. Tomić, M. Živković, Falsifikovanje podataka, krivotvorenje identiteta i marginalizacija srpske srednjovekovne baštine na Kosovu i Metohiji, in *Zaštita, očuvanje i afirmacija srpskog kulturnog nasleđa na Kosovu i Metohiji*, Tom 1, Belgrade 2023, 353–422.

of the main road. Thus, in 2021 the Visoki Dečani Monastery was inscribed on the “List of the 7 Most Endangered Heritage Sites in Europe“ of the pan-European organization Europa Nostra.³⁷

WORLD HERITAGE LIST: SIGNIFICANCE AND CHANCE FOR HERITAGE?

The cultural-historical-artistic values of the mentioned Serbian Medieval Monuments nominated them for inclusion on the World Heritage List, and fulfilling the criteria II and III due to the events described here they were inscribed on the World Heritage in Danger List.

World Heritage in Danger, UNESCO’s project of recording the most endangered monuments in the world, envisioned in the Convention from 1972, was created to inform the public about the existence of danger for the continued survival of monuments that are significant not only for a smaller social community but for the whole of humanity. The goal of the project is to encourage actions that correct this situation, and, in this sense, foresees the protection, popularization and rehabilitation of endangered heritage, i.e. UNESCO offers professional support in the creation of a preservation methodology and the implementation of the necessary protection measures, but also makes available funds from the World Heritage Fund for that purpose.³⁸

The Medieval Monuments in Kosovo have been in the category of endangered monuments for more than fifteen years, with no prospect that they will soon be removed from the List. The data stored in the database of this important institution, and available on its official website (do not) tell us what kind of protection methodology is involved, at least when we talk about the mentioned monuments in Kosovo and Metohija. On the one hand, the aggregate values of the group of monuments are shown. On the other hand, problems are presented, i.e. risks due to which the monuments are endangered. These risks relate to issues of security, ownership and the absence of a stable political situation in Kosovo and Metohija, which affect the problem of heritage management and the possibility of its technical protection.³⁹ Furthermore, from the official reports of this organization from 2007 to today, we conclude that almost nothing has changed, and that the problems that caused the mentioned monuments to be included on the List remain the same. According to the latest report from 2021, the risk factors involve: civil unrest, the legal framework, the management plan and the unsatisfactory level of preservation and maintenance of monuments.⁴⁰

37 *Inclusion of The Dečani Monastery on the 2021 List of 7 Most Endangered Heritage Sites In Europe (Statement by the Board of Europa Nostra adopted at its meeting held on 1 June 2021).* <https://www.europanostra.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/20210602-EN-Statement-Decani-Monastery.pdf>. (accessed November 2021). v. i <http://europanostraserbia.org/poseta-evropa-nostre-i-institutita-evropske-investicione-banke-kosovu/> (accessed April 2023).

38 *Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, Art. 11, 12, 13. As well as: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/158/> (accessed February 2022).

39 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/4033> (accessed February 2022).

40 *Ibid.*

The risks defined in this way divert attention from the material threat to the essential problem of heritage preservation in Kosovo and Metohija, but they do not show more precisely how the danger manifests itself, how it can be monitored, and how to prevent its consequences. Although the Convention itself was adopted “noting that cultural heritage and natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction, not only due to classic causes of decay but also due to changes in social and economic life, which complicate the situation by introducing new phenomena of damage and destruction”⁴¹, these *new phenomena* received the least attention in the aforementioned reports, as well as the conservation methodology applied following the categorization of a monument as World Heritage.

The paradox that further highlights the recognized dangers for the preservation of these monuments is that in recent years the self-proclaimed state of Kosovo has been fighting for membership in UNESCO with the pretensions to independently manage the Medieval Monuments in Kosovo, a heritage that has been repeatedly attacked and desecrated by the Kosovo Albanians. The fear that such illogical aspirations will come true is growing due to the fact that four Serbian Orthodox churches were inscribed on the World Heritage in Danger List without the prefixes “Serbian” and “Orthodox”, and as existing on the territory of “Kosovo” and not “Kosovo and Metohija” as it was proposed by Serbian experts from the Republic Institute for the Protection of Monuments in the nomination file. The attitude of the members of ICOMOS, who were the last to revise and approve the request for the inscription of the monuments,⁴² brought dissatisfaction and unrest in the domestic public, which, admittedly, appears only when the story of Kosovo’s possible entry into UNESCO is actualized.⁴³

The contents of the publication “Kosovo in UNESCO – AS WE ARE: Stories from a country in the making”, published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo, which was created with the aim of promoting Kosovo during its candidacy for membership in UNESCO, clearly testify to the tendencies of the official Kosovo. It briefly presents four monuments – Medieval Monuments in Kosovo as unquestionably Serbian, without any unscientific, politicized claims.⁴⁴ In a certain way, although affirmative, it is inconsistent with the previous attitudes of the Albanian cultural public in Kosovo, which we have partly shown, and it is clear that the aforementioned publication is intended for another target group, international experts, for whom a different approach to heritage would be reprehensible and additionally distancing Kosovo from the international organization UNESCO. In reviewing the mentioned

41 *Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage.*

42 V. Džamić, *The inclusion of Serbian monuments.*

43 In 2015, Kosovo was a candidate for admission to UNESCO. Albania then submitted a request for candidacy on behalf of Kosovo. That request passed in the session of the Executive Council, but not in the General Conference, which makes the final decision. 92 countries voted for Kosovo’s admission, and 50 of them were against, so Kosovo lacked only three votes for admission, since two-thirds of the votes of UNESCO members participating in the session were necessary. <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/385692/Male-sanse-Kosova-za-clanstvo-u-Unesku> and <https://www.espreso.co.rs/vesti/kosovo/167045/odustali-konacno-kosovo-ove-godine-bez-kandidature-za-unesko>. (accessed November 2021).

44 F. Kelmendi, R. Meta (eds.), *AS WE ARE: Stories from a country in the making*, Prishtina 2015, 30–35.

monuments, the publication notes that they are part of the World Heritage, but not “in danger”.⁴⁵ Such a determination would, logically, require additional clarifications from the signatories of the publication.

We have seen, therefore, that neither the physical destruction of monuments, nor the distortion of historical facts and new interpretations for the sake of using the past, which have gained momentum in recent decades, are not entirely new phenomena. Nowadays, in Kosovo and Metohija, however, thoroughness and systematicity in the concealment and identity theft of a large number of monuments have been observed, which has given a new dimension to the endangerment of cultural heritage. The focus of destructive intentions has shifted from physical negation to theoretical, i.e. historiographical and presentational falsification of heritage identity. Therefore, in addition to the material threat, there is also a semantic one, which requires special treatment in the heritage protection system.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

According to the UNESCO reports on the monuments that we have analyzed in this paper, both in Kosovo and Metohija, as well as those in Palmyra⁴⁷, Bamiyan⁴⁸ and Istanbul⁴⁹, certain measures of mainly technical protection have been implemented or recommended in recent years. Civil unrest and ideological changes as recognized threats cannot be overcome with such measures, and there were no attempts to rectify that by local heritage institutions - often, under the pretext of the political situation, i.e. unfavorable general social conditions. However, when suitable conditions are created for the realization of the basic objectives of the protection service, it may be late: “when the time comes, the restoration of the cultural heritage itself will already be at odds with the real needs of its inheritors, i.e. that the title remains preserved while the custodians are already suffering from amnesia.”⁵⁰

In this regard, do the recommended protection measures also protect the inheritors? Are they protecting living heritage or just antiquity?

The aforementioned Convention on the Protection of World Heritage (Article 5) prescribes the duties of states that have ratified this convention “to adopt a general policy aimed at giving cultural and natural heritage a certain function in the life of the community and to include the protection of that heritage in general planning

45 *Ibid*, 31, 32, 33, 77.

46 J. Pavličić, Serbian monumental patrimony, 487.

47 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/4051/> (accessed April 2023).

48 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/4019/> (accessed April 2023).

49 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/7775>; https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&id_search_properties=356 (accessed April 2023).

50 This question was asked in 1999 by the lecturers of the Seminar for Museology and Heritage Protection of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, D. Bulatović and A. Milosavljević, during the war conflicts and the consequent suffering of heritage in Kosovo and Metohija. D. Bulatović, A. Milosavljević, „Baština i rat: cinizam nužnosti“, 241.

programs. “ This obligation, however, is the most difficult to implement, especially in conflict and post-conflict societies. In the plans defined by the competent institutions of the countries whose heritage is threatened, and in cooperation with UNESCO, there is generally no mention of the social aspects of heritage protection. In fact, in addition to the problem of legal protection and efforts to implement technical protection, the idea of social protection, which in a broader sense rests on the idea of individualization of human values, i.e. takes heritage as a social measure of value and then as a public good, is neglected.⁵¹

Nevertheless, some of the principles of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage relate precisely to the social aspect of protection, and we believe that they will be insisted on in the future. It calls for “the establishment of an efficient system of collective protection of heritage of exceptional general value, which would be organized on a permanent basis and in accordance with modern scientific methods.” It also encourages work in order “to establish national or regional training centers in the field of protection, maintenance and popularization of cultural and natural heritage and to stimulate scientific research in that field” (Article 5). In fact, it points to the need for a close and continuous examination of the monument, its condition and needs, in order to determine adequate protection. It was also recognized by the Association of Conservators of Serbia back in 1978, and embodied in its mission, which was published in the 1st issue of the Gazette of the Association of Conservators of Serbia: “Mutual rapprochement, openness, objective information, sincere cooperation, professional assistance, education and training, on the one hand, and more determined connection and direct cooperation with all social, professional and scientific subjects, on the other hand, are the basic prerequisites for conservators to achieve true success in their generational task and overcome existing difficulties”. It is essential to remember and keep this in mind, always, but nowadays especially.

51 D. Bulatović, *Od trezora do tezaurusa: Teorija i metodologija izgradnje tezaurusa baštinjenja*, Nova srpska politička misao, posebno izdanje 1 (1999) 44–45.

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УГРОЖЕНОСТ СВЕТСКЕ КУЛТУРНЕ БАШТИНЕ У ВРЕМЕНИМА КРИЗЕ И СУКОБА: ПОГЛЕД ИЗБЛИЗА

Савремени свет обилује просторима у којима тиња друштвена нетрпељивост, а културно наслеђе је прво на удару у таквим подручјима. Поред директних напада на споменике они су често и предмет различитих (зло)употреба – насилне пренамене, деконструкције значења, реинтерпретације, негације прошлости и слично. У таквим ситуацијама упитна је зрелост службе заштите наслеђа, односно улога и значај међународних конвенција за његово очување. Зато је посебна пажња у овом раду посвећена местима Светске баштине која су према Конвенцији о заштити светске културне и природне баштине значајна за човечанство у целини. У временима кризе на нестабилним подручјима њихова угроженост се испољава и трансформише у складу са променљивим друштвеним факторима. Неефикасност и немогућност реаговања на савремене феномене угрожавања, види се најбоље на примеру наслеђа Сирије и града Палмире, који је на листи Светске баштине од 1980, а од 2013. на Листи Светске баштине у опасности. Након деструктивних напада терористичке организације Исламска држава овај антички град је страдао у мери која је непозната и експертима Унеска. Упркос напорима да експертска мисија Унеска дође до локалитета како би утврдила стање ствари и предложила хитне мере заштите, приступ овој баштини нужно ће се трансформисати. Уништавање и измештање артефаката у име идеологије, али и економске добити, досегло је трагичне размере у Бамијану, у Авганистану, уништавањем колосалних статуа Буда и разношењем њихових остатака. Заstraшује то што је насиље над наслеђем у модерном добу знатно учесталије и разорније него икада раније у историји. Оно има своју „методологију“ и институционалну, политичку подршку. У том смислу је значајан пример Цркве Свете Софије у Истанбулу и савремена пренамена овог споменика. Његов византијски идентитет, надограђен значајем који је имао у периоду османског царства, музеализован је у музеју Свете Софије који као такав функционише од 1934. године. Универзалне вредности овог споменика Светске баштине су ипак потиснуте, па чак и буквално прекривене, када је 2020. године поново претворен у дамију. Унеско није консултован о овом акту, нити су апели упућени надлежним органима одлучивања у Турској имали резултата.

Недоступност споменичких вредности, нарушавање јединствене целине споменика те угроженост баштине проблеми су које имамо и у домаћој средини. Посебно су важни примери угрожености споменичких вредности четири

православне цркве и манастира који су под називом *Средњовековни споменици на Косову* уписани на Унескову Листу Светске баштине у опасности од 2006. године. Реч је о цркви Богородице Љевишке и манастирима Грачаница, Пећка Патријаршија и Дечани који је једини уписан 2004. године – управо у години коју је обележио мартовски погром албанских насилника над српским становништвом и њиховим наслеђем на Косову и Метохији. Као наслеђе других за нову политичку заједницу, српско наслеђе је не само физички страдало у бруталном разарању, него је и временом тумачено као властито и коришћено је у складу са потребама актуелне политике од стране косовских Албанаца. Црква Богородице Љевишке била је паљена и скрнављена више пута од ратне 1999. до данас. Поред оштећења њених фресака и архитектуре, фалсификована је њена историја. У албанској културној јавности на Косову и Метохији приметно је својатање те цркве, као и манастира Дечани. Такво изненадно присвајање споменика, након њихове примарне нежељености у албанском друштву, указује на политизацију наслеђа. Оно је најизраженије у периоду након проглашења независности Р. Косово, као и након уписа српских средњовековних споменика на Листу Светске баштине, чиме они постају жељено, значајно наслеђе о коме сада жели да се стара косовско друштво и прикаже га својим. Иако су Средњовековни споменици на Косову већ више од петнаест година на Листи Светске баштине у опасности, не чини се да ће ускоро бити уклоњени са ње. Унеско охрабрује заштиту и рехабилитацију угроженог наслеђа, те нуди помоћ у стварању методологије очувања и спровођења потребних мера заштите, али се она не чини делотворном. Новим феноменима разарања је посвећено најмање пажње, односно друштвеној заштити која би једина била у стању да превенира насиље над наслеђем и очува га, активно га укључујући у живот заједнице која га окружује.