

Stećci, Medieval Tombstones – Cultural Heritage, the Promoter of Interstate Cooperation

ABSTRACT

Ancient cemeteries and their stone marks with colorful shapes, distinctive decorations and meanings have captured the attention of researchers since the last decades of the 19th century, when their systematic study began. Due to many characteristics, primarily monumental, formative, symbolic and decorative, a significant group in science known as *stećci* stands out. Their study began on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the exceptional intensity of their spread was recorded, with the establishment of the Museum Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1884 and the establishment of the National Museum in 1888.

After the Second World War, thanks to the establishment of the Federal (Yugoslavian) Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments and other newly founded protection institutions in the republics of the former Yugoslavia, a new period in the study of this unique funerary art began. Cultural historian Šefik Bešliagić from Sarajevo paid special attention to the recording, classification and description of these monuments, organized cooperation with experts in neighboring republics and thus laid the foundation for the modern methodology of studying this cultural heritage.

The common medieval cultural heritage, which was studied decades earlier in this area, became the basis of the cooperation of experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, who gathered in 2010 to prepare a nomination file with the intention that the *stećci* become part of the exceptional heritage of the world. In the paper, we present a statement on the exceptional universal value of this property, as well as the course of events that followed the submission of the file to the World Heritage Center.

KEYWORDS

Stećci, UNESCO, World Heritage, Nomination,
Outstanding Universal Value

INTRODUCTIONS

Stećci (singular: *stećak*) are unique medieval tombstones in Europe and the world. They are characterized by a special artistic expression that arose in specific historical circumstances imbued with different cultural influences. They bear witness to the deepest roots and origins of the European people in the central Balkans. They appeared in the 12th century, and especially in the period of the 14th and 15th century, and later, these stone tombstones were placed both on the graves of soldiers, craftsmen or monks, as well as on the graves of rulers and respectable men. On *stećci*, you can read a historical record and a folk tale, a centuries-old fairy tale that intertwines with the carved motifs on the surface of the stone. The medieval man carved a complex message on *stećci* about the time of wars, difficult life, numerous losses and victims.

Monumental tombstones, which today we professionally call *stećci*, are located on the territory of four countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. The ministers of culture of these four countries, by signing a letter of intent in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), in November 2009, supported the initiative to launch the interstate regional project “Joint nominations of medieval tombstones – *stećci* for inscription on the World Heritage List”. The proposal originated from the project “Cultural heritage – a bridge a bridge towards a shared future”, which is implemented by the UNESCO Regional Office for Science and Culture in Europe located in Venice.¹ The project is based on the principles expressed in the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), which recognize that such heritage constitutes a world heritage for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to co-operate (Article 6, paragraph 1). This was the beginning of the first major interstate project in the field of culture in the Balkans in the 21st century, which proved that the cooperation and teamwork of a large number of experts successfully led to an exceptional end result – the inscription of the property on the World Heritage List.

RECORDING AND STUDY OF STEĆCI FROM THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Stećci were mentioned in written sources in the 17th and 18th centuries in the travel reports of certain bishops. They were also mentioned by travelers who passed through Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dalmatia and Montenegro in the 18th and 19th centuries, and passed on the stories of the locals about villas carved into the stone. In 1875, Arthur Evans, as a young journalist traveling in Dalmatia and Bosnia, noted that *stećci* could be Bogomil grave-stones. Thanks to the fact that he became a world-renowned archaeologist, the thesis about *stećci* as Bogomil tombstones took root in European and South Slavic historiography.²

1 M. Đorđević, *Stećci – predlog za Listu svetske baštine*, Glasnik Društva konzervatora Srbije 36 (2012) 7–11.

2 Dubravko Lovrenović dedicated a special chapter titled “Bogumilska interpretacija Arthura Evansa i Janosa von Asbótha” (Bogomil interpretation of Arthur Evans and Janos von Asbóth) in the book *Stećci, bosansko i humsko mramorje srednjeg vijeka*, Sarajevo (2009), to the analysis of impact which arose from the observations by A. Evans.



Fig. 1

Stećci – Medieval
Tombstones
in Bosnia and
Herzegovina, site
Ravanjska vrata
(Kupres)

(www.steccihw.org)

The beginning of the professional recording and study of stećci occurred when the Museum Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina was founded in 1884, the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina was founded in 1888, and the Gazette of the National Museum was launched, in which the first scientifically valuable articles on stećci were published. Furthermore, in Croatia, the beginning of the study of stećci is linked to the establishment of the Croatian Antiquarian Society in Knin and the opening of the first antiquities museum in Knin in 1893. Before 1899, the National Museum had documentation on 59,500 tombstones and a map with their marked location. This data was presented by the director of the National Museum, Kosta Herman, at the Eleventh Russian Archaeological Congress in Kyiv in the same year, presenting the Imperial Russian Archaeological Association with a geographical map of the distribution of stećci with the attached listed data. The results were based on the extensive action of the National Government undertaken during 1887 and 1888, then before 1899, when through the district offices, i.e. through gendarmes, lugars, roadmen, princes-mukhtars, teachers and priests, a number of stećci was carried out, their numerical status and territory of distribution determined.³ This period was spent in constant questioning of the origin of stećci and their belonging to specific peoples.⁴

In the European framework, the cultural and scientific value of stećci was particularly emphasized by the exhibition *Medieval Art of the Yugoslav Peoples*, which was held in Paris in 1950. Miroslav Krleža, a prominent Yugoslav writer, oversaw the concept of the exhibition and is the author of the foreword for the exhibition catalogue. He defined stećci as Bogomil marbles (from *mramor*).⁵ Krleža expressed his opinion that a stećak is the embodiment of a Bosnian mountaineer standing upright with his head and hand raised, primarily inspired by the depictions of the man on the monuments in Radimlja near Stolac.

In the period after the Second World War, modern recording and scientific study of stećci began. The role of Šefik Bešliagić, a cultural historian, who was engaged in the study of medieval and later stone monuments, and who devoted his professional and life energy especially to stećci, is very important in this.⁶ He was appointed director of the National Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments and Natural Rarities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1952, and from Sarajevo he organized cooperation with experts from neighboring republics, laying the foundation for the modern

3 D. Lovrenović, *Stećci, bosansko i humsko mramorje srednjeg vijeka*, Sarajevo 2009, 24–25; D. Lovrenović, *Medieval Tombstones and Graveyards of Bosnia and Hum*, Sarajevo 2010.

4 Lovrenović, *op. cit.* chapter „Srbizacija i kroatizacija stećaka” (Serbianisation and Croatianisation of stećci), 23–24.

5 “Bogomil art” was exhibited in Hall III: M. Krleža, *Bogumilski mramorovi, Srednjovjekovna umjetnost naroda Jugoslavije, Eseji V*, Zora, Zagreb (1966); Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža: <https://krlezijana.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=1217> (accessed March 2023).

6 E. Kurtović, *Bibliografija Šefika Bešliagića (1908–1990), (djelo posvećeno izučavanju materijalne kulture)*, Hercegovina, časopis za kulturno i historijsko naslijeđe 15–16 (2003) 215–233.



Fig. 2

Stećci – Medieval
 Tombstones
 in Bosnia and
 Herzegovina, sites
 Radimlja and
 Boljuni (Stolac),
 Gvozdno and
 Čengića Bara
 (Kalinovik), Dugo
 Polje (Blidinje),
 Dolovi (Umoljani)

(www.steccihw.org)



methodology of studying this cultural heritage.⁷ More important necropolies and individual areas have been studied in detail and numerous monographic studies have been published about them as the basis of scientifically organized materials for further research. Bešliagić devoted himself especially to recording the position, number and shape of the monuments, and thus created material that still today represents valid data for the situation on the ground and initial knowledge for understanding the significance and value of stećci. He published the first major synthesis in 1971 in the monograph *Stećci – kataloško-topografski pregled (Stećci – catalog-topographic review)*, and he also published a large number of other texts and publications.⁸ In this period, numerous authors in Yugoslavia deal with the scientific analysis of the Middle Ages and the origin of stećci. A significant step forward in the interpretation that stećci were not Bogomil monuments was represented by Marian Wenzel's comprehensive study on decorative motifs.⁹

After such an intensive period of study, documentation and publication, there was a lull when the interest in studying this type of tombstones was completely lost. In the last decade of the 20th century, several authors appeared, who, using different approaches, re-established the methodology of studying stećci. Emina Zečević, archaeologist, defended her master's thesis in 1996, and in 2005 published the monograph *Mramorje, stećci u zapadnoj Srbiji (Mramorje, Stećci in West Serbia)*, for which she toured the site and reviewed the material collected by experts of the Archaeological Institute in Belgrade in the 1970s as part of a joint project documenting stećci. This publication represents an exceptional contribution to a comprehensive overview of the state of medieval cemeteries with marbles in Serbia.¹⁰

In Croatia, in the Klovićevi dvori Gallery in Zagreb, in 2008, Jasminka Poklečki Stošić and a group of co-authors organized the exhibition *Stećci*. The exhibition shows finds in graves under stećci, plaster casts of monuments from the collection of the HAZU Glyptotek in Zagreb, documentary photographs, and a couple of original monuments that were brought from certain localities in Croatia. The exhibition was accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue, a collection of works by several authors from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. The exhibition was organized with the intention of pointing out the rapid disappearance of stećci, and archaeologists in Croatia conducted a special topographical survey on this occasion and recorded another 200 previously unidentified localities.¹¹

7 Experts of the Federal, later Yugoslav, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, an institution that was founded in 1950, until 1967 carried out reconnaissance of stećci: M. Filipović, *Proučavanje stećaka*, Zbornik zaštite spomenika kulture I, Savezni institut za zaštitu spomenika kulture, Beograd (1951) 131–137; D. Vidović, *Bibliografski podaci o stećcima*, Zbornik zaštite spomenika kulture III, Savezni institut za zaštitu spomenika kulture (1953) 149–180.

8 Kurtović, *op. cit.* the entire bibliography of Šefik Bešliagić was exhibited.

9 M. Wenzel, *Ukrasni motivi na stećcima*, Sarajevo 1965.

10 E. Zečević, *Mramorje, stećci u zapadnoj Srbiji*, Beograd 2005.

11 M. Tomasović, D. Perkić, I. Alduk, *Topografija stećaka u Hrvatskoj*, exhibition catalog *Stećci*, Zagreb 2008, 58–117.



Fig. 3

Stećci – Medieval
Tombstones in
Croatia, sites
Velika and Mala
Crljivica (Cista
Velika)
and St. Barbara
(Konavle)

(www.steccihw.org)



Dubravko Lovrenović, historian, as part of his scientific research, dealt with the medieval period in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and he deepened his interest by studying the phenomenon of death on monuments – stećci.¹² In 2009, he published an extensive monograph, *Stećci, bosansko i humsko mramorje srednjeg vijeka (Medieval Tombstones and Graveyards of Bosnia and Hum)*, with the intention of drawing the attention of a wider audience to the partially neglected heritage. In the presentation of this book, Esad Kurtović analyzed the phenomenon of the *Dubravko Lovrenović stećci*, whose public appearance and published monograph reawakened awareness of this heritage and initiated numerous controversies in the sphere of daily politics and the media.¹³

At the time of the preparation of the monograph, Dubravko Lovrenović started the initiative to have the stećci in Bosnia and Herzegovina inscribed on the World Heritage List.¹⁴ At that time, the disintegration of the federal state of Yugoslavia was completed, and the new states, former republics, became members of UNESCO and ratified the Convention Concerning the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage as separate political entities. Furthermore, the UNESCO project “Cultural heritage – a bridge towards a shared future” was launched, which was related to the gathering and cooperation of experts in the countries of the South-Eastern Balkans.¹⁵ All this contributed to the proposal to start the nomination from the national level to the international level, with the aim of inscribing the monuments in four countries on the World Heritage List.¹⁶ The proposal was complex and risky to carry out on several levels: since the first records and research, stećci were the subject of debate regarding their national and religious origin, and the federal state disintegrated primarily due to national conflict.¹⁷

OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE OF STEĆCI

In April 2010, an interstate expert team was formed in Sarajevo for the preparation of the preliminary list, nomination file and other documents, which was coordinated by Dubravko Lovrenović on behalf of the Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The beginning of the creation of the file included the creation of a tentative list for which 30 of the 3,300 recorded medieval cemeteries in the entire territory were selected. This choice was the result of a studious consideration and analysis of all the necessary factors, with the intention of meeting

12 E. Kurtović, *Dubravko Lovrenović (Jajce, 30. 8. 1965. – Sarajevo, 17. 1. 2017)*, Radovi (historija, historija umetnosti, arheologija) 5 (2018) 17–20

13 E. Kurtović, *Stećci Dubravka Lovrenovića* (Dubravko Lovrenović, *Stećci, Bosansko i humsko mramorje srednjeg vijeka*, Ljevak, Zagreb 2013, 452), Gradina 2 (2013) 179–182.

14 At the time, Bosnia and Herzegovina had two properties inscribed on the World Heritage List: Old Bridge Area of the Old City in Mostar and Mehmed Pasha Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad.

15 The project was launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is led by Siniša Šešum, director of the Antena office in Sarajevo, as a representative of the UNESCO Regional Office for Science and Culture in Europe, located in Venice.

16 Đorđević, *op. cit.* 7–11.

17 https://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hronologija_raspada_SFR_Jugoslavije (accessed March 2023).



Fig. 4

Stećci –
Medieval
Tombstones in
Montenegro,
sites Grčko groblje
and Bara Žugića
(Žabljak)

(www.steccihw.org)



the strict criteria for admission to the World Heritage List.¹⁸ Experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina chose 22 localities on the territory of 20 municipalities, among which the key is the necropolis of Radimlje near Stolac, with monumental monuments depicting men – warriors. Two necropolises have been proposed from the territory of Croatia, on Cista Velika near Imotski there are monuments with motifs of hunting and knightly tournaments. In Montenegro, three necropolises were chosen on the territory of two municipalities, each specific in terms of decorative motifs, inscriptions or location in the exceptional natural landscape of Durmitor. In Serbia, as well, three necropolises were chosen on the territory of two municipalities. Particular attention is drawn to the monuments in the village of Hrta near Prijepolje, which, based on their location and carved motifs, lead to the conclusion that this is a cemetery where members of a noble family were buried (fig. 1–5). Cemeteries with tombstones – stećci were placed next to churches, on the remains of older settlements, necropolises and tumuli, in accessible places next to old trade routes, river banks and in mountainous areas which are difficult to reach.

The tentative list was submitted to the World Heritage Center in April 2011. This was followed by work on the creation of the file. The work process took place in the constant discussion of experts from four countries, coordination and decision on all elements.¹⁹ In addition to writing and preparing the eight mandatory chapters of the file, the team members had to make and adopt a series of decisions that affected the content of the document. The most important task was to follow the recommendations in the Operational Guidelines²⁰ for the creation of a declaration of exceptional universal value based on the selection of appropriate criteria for inscribing the property,²¹ and statements of authenticity, integrity and management of the property. The expert team decided to justify the universal value of stećci with criteria *ii*, *iii* and *vi*.

Criteria *ii* – to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design. This criterion is explained by the fact that the original artistic expression of medieval sacred art

18 Dorđević, *op. cit.* 7–11.

19 In 2015, as part of a study on dissonant heritage in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, Višnja Kisić treated as a special case study the process of preparing a nomination file for stećci with the intention of proving how a common heritage is created through the World Heritage List. On this occasion, she spoke with all members of the expert team from four countries and, based on their statements, analyzed how the experts cooperated with each other, made decisions, and how they mastered politically sensitive narratives: V. Kisić, *Creating Common Heritage Through the World Heritage List*, in: *Governing Heritage Dissonance: Promises and Realities of Selected Cultural Policies*. Amsterdam (2016), European Cultural Foundation, 97–139; V. Kisić, *Transnational Nominations for the UNESCO World Heritage List as a Policy Tool in post-war contexts: the Case of Stećak Medieval Tombstones*, (2023) Inventory of inclusive cultural policies, INVENT project Horizon 2020.

20 Operational guidelines is a document that interprets the implementation of the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage and applies the decisions made by the World Heritage Committee based on new concepts, knowledge and experiences: UNESCO World Heritage Center – The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

21 UNESCO World Heritage Centre – The Criteria for Selection.



Fig. 5

Stećci – Medieval
Tombstones in
Serbia,
sites Mramorje
(Perućac),
Mramorje
(Rastište) and
Grčko groblje
(Hrta)



(www.stecciiwh.org)



is best preserved in all the selected necropolises and monuments. The influences of prehistoric and ancient traditions on the territory of creation and duration, as well as a significant permeation of cultural influences from the West and the East, were observed on *stećci*. A significant exchange of values is represented by the fact that these monuments mark the graves of members of all social classes and all three medieval Christian communities.²²

Criteria *iii* – to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared. The criterion is justified by numerous factors. The first one tells about the number of recorded localities (3,300) in the entire area and about the number of individual listed monuments (70,000 *stećci*). Then, the exceptional value is found in the fact that no monument is identical to another, neither in terms of shape, dimensions nor in the way of decoration. There are lying and upright monuments: a slab, a chest and a gabled roof *stećak* with a base or without a base, while the upright monuments are in the form of a stele, a pillar and a cross. Another factor is the numerous decoration motifs on the surface of *stećci*: social and religious symbols as well as numerous vegetal and geometric ornaments. On the surface of individual *stećci* there is a combination of human and animal figures, floral motifs, vines bordering the edges, and an inscription, and the motifs can be performed on several sides of the monument. However, more often there is only one motif or only an inscription on the surface. The main symbol that testifies to the status of the deceased is the coat of arms, followed by weapons, such as a sword, knife, spear, bow and arrow, but also tools. The shield is the basic part of the coat of arms, sometimes in combination with the sword, and on its surface can be engraved the family emblem, crescent and star, lily, cross, rosette. A large number of religious symbols – crosses in various forms – were recorded. Motifs in the form of a solar circle or disc, new moon, star and spiral belong to the group of religious symbols.

Human figures mostly represent men in various poses. The depictions of men on *stećci* in Radimlja near Stolac are unique. They are shown standing, in military gear, with raised right arm and unnaturally enlarged fist, surrounded by religious symbols, weapons or inscriptions. However, on other monuments the figures are not represented in such detail. Riders and warriors are depicted, and the scenes are associated with tournaments or war undertakings. There are scenes representing hunters with dogs and their prey, deer and roe deer. Female figures are rarer, they are represented alone, in pairs with a man, next to a man on a horse while holding the reins, or between two horsemen. In the interpretation of funeral customs, the representation of the funeral procession, is important, and it testifies to the taking over of motifs from an older tradition that was artistically recorded in antiquity. Female figures in long, simple dresses hold hands, and there is rarely a man among the women mourning for the deceased person. Animals are depicted in hunting scenes, or in processions or in

22 In the report of ICOMOS technical review of the file, it was indicated that criterion I does not justify universal value, given that the authors did not prove the cultural processes of exchange. The World Heritage Committee did not adopt criterion *ii* at the session during the inscription of the property.

combination with other various motifs. Some fantastic animals, especially dragons, are represented on stećci.

A special type of motif consists of architectural decorations – arcades, which are characteristic of the southern belt of the spread of stećci. The arcades are semi-circular Romanesque, lancet-Gothic, and horseshoe-Saracen. They are carved as a shallow relief and occupy the entire sides with the intention of making the monument look like a temple or an eternal house under which the deceased rests. A large number of stećci are decorated along the edges with bands filled with plant and geometric elements, vines, leaves, circles, crosses inscribed in a circle, rosettes and spirals.

Carved inscriptions – epitaphs are a particularly important argument for the evaluation of stećci within criterion *iii*. Inscriptions are not numerous and their carving on stećci depended on the literacy of the text compiler and the skill of the stonemason to convey the content. The inscriptions usually contain a simple mention of the name of the deceased, followed by prayers addressed to God and patron saints, and there are also curses on those who dare to desecrate the final resting place under stećci. They are written in Cyrillic, and their content is religious and secular. The inscriptions represent messages intended for the deceased for the repose of his soul and messages from the deceased for the religious upliftment of the living. The basic need was to preserve the identity of the deceased, which was a significant trend in medieval European states. In this way, a kind of anthology of the names of the deceased was preserved on stećci.

Criteria *vi* – to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance – it is justified by the fact that stećci have been deeply rooted in various customs and beliefs since their inception, and especially from the time when they were no longer made, until today. Such processes exist despite a kind of interruption of historical memory and inheritance of these monuments, which was mostly caused by various migrations during the late Middle Ages and early modern centuries. The names of cemeteries, such as Divsko groblje, Mašete, Mramori-Mramorje, Grčko groblje, Tursko groblje, Kaursko groblje, arose in a later period, as an expression of respect and admiration for the immense dimensions of the monument, its age and relief representations. Criterion *vi* is justified by the statement that epigraphy and numerous motifs carved on stećci significantly influenced literature and other forms of art in the 20th century. The contribution of Mehmedalija Mak Dizdar, a poet from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who dedicated the collection of poems *Kameni spavač* (Sarajevo 1966) entirely to stećci and carved motifs on these monuments, is particularly significant.²³

23 Mehmedalija Mak Dizdar (1917–1971) was a Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Yugoslav poet, writer and journalist. He was inspired by the Bogomil culture of Bosnia before the Turkish conquest, the culture of Islamic mystics and the tradition of the vernacular from the 15th century. Medieval stećci are an important motif in his poems, and for him they represent a metaphorical path between the grave and the stars. The monument on his grave is in the shape of a stećak. Rajko Petrović Nogo (1945–2022), a Serbian poet, who in the collection *Ne tikaj u me* (Beogradska knjiga, Beograd 2010), published poems inspired by motifs on stone books – stećci, was omitted from the list of listed writers.

The integrity of the selected components is justified by the state of preservation of cemeteries and monuments and their legal protection, which is applied in all countries. The authenticity of the selected components is justified by the historical context in the Middle Ages throughout the territory, the position of the necropolis, the way the monuments were made, numerous carved motifs, the existence of inscriptions, as well as a long period of expert study of this heritage. In this way, stećci are justified as a unique cultural heritage that was created and lasted in a limited historical period of the Middle Ages, and which were used as tombstones by peoples of three Christian religions. All the mentioned factors represent the explanation of the outstanding universal value of stećci, which the members of the expert team derived from the previous long-term comprehensive records, analysis, scientific study and interpretation of stećci.²⁴

DECISION ON INSCRIPTION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The file with extensive supporting documentation was submitted to the World Heritage Center in January 2015. In order for the World Heritage Committee to obtain an independent opinion on the file, an expert mission was carried out in September 2015.²⁵ The authors of the nomination were presented with the preliminary content of the report at the headquarters of ICOMOS in Paris, on 1 December 2015, in the sense that the recommendation will be to postpone the registration of stećci (deferral).²⁶ The remarks of ICOMOS experts related to the explanation of the outstanding universal value of the proposed good; insufficiently highlighted value by comparison with other goods; lack of explanation for the selection of the proposed thirty necropolises compared to the other 3,300 recorded; inappropriately determined boundaries of the narrower and wider protection zones at individual necropolises; selection of criteria, i.e. that the universal value is not highlighted by the choice of criterion *iv*.²⁷

The World Heritage Committee held its fortieth session in Istanbul, Turkey, from 10 to 17 July 2016.²⁸ Proposals for inscription were discussed on 15 July 2016, the nomination file on the Stećci was presented by Alfredo Conti from Argentina, Vice President of ICOMOS. His presentation was accompanied by a richly illustrated presentation

24 Nomination file *Stećci Medieval Tombstone Graveyards*, Chapters 2 and 3, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1504>.

25 ICOMOS experts Cynthia Dunning, an archaeologist from Switzerland, and Sergiu Musteata, a historian from Moldova, visited 30 sites in four countries in September 2015 and, in addition to consulting with experts, the authors of the nomination, they spoke with local residents and representatives of municipalities and other organizations that participated in the process of creating the file.

26 Toshiyuki Kono, vice president of Icomos, presented the information to those present, and it was explained in detail on the basis of which the experts of Icomos made such a decision.

27 The interstate expert team had the opportunity to develop *Additional information* with appropriate supplemented documentation and submitted it to the World Heritage Center in February 2016.

28 M. Đorđević, *Stećci upisani na Listu svetske baštine Uneska*, Glasnik Društva konzervatora Srbije 40 (2016) 13–17.

of stećci, from the shape, ornamental motifs and inscriptions, to the presentation of each necropolis individually. A. Conti confirmed the recommendation to postpone the inscription of the property on the World Heritage List until the parts of the file related to the declaration of universal value are completed and amended.

The first speaker of the World Heritage Committee who submitted an amendment to the proposal for a decision on the postponement of the inscription was Jud Tabot, an architect from Lebanon, the vice-president of Heritage Without Borders based in Paris. He pointed out that this project shows the strength and ability of interstate cooperation, that the criterion *vi* indicates the intangible essence of stećci, which is based on traditions, beliefs, fairy tales that last for centuries and are present to this day, as well as that local communities respect and preserve their heritage. Most of the representatives of the Committee spoke and indicated that this project sends a strong message of dialogue and understanding and that it has built a cultural bridge in this region.²⁹ This was followed by a revision of Decision 40 COM 8V.24 and the cultural property *Stećci – Medieval Tombstones Graveyards* was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Some of the recommendations of ICOMOS were adopted: the name of the property was amended, two necropolises in BiH were omitted, making 28 necropolises inscribed, and the outstanding value of stećci was highlighted as a criteria *iii* and *vi*.³⁰

In the spirit of joint work on the preparation of the nomination file and other documents, most of the members of the expert team continued their cooperation in the function of managing the good of the world heritage. The structure of the acquisition management in the four states consists of the Transnational Coordination Committee, the national organizational structure, the managers of individual localities and the secretariat.³¹ This structure is based on the Management Plan document, which was an integral part of the nomination file, and as such is binding for the stated intentions and activities. The Transnational Coordination Committee consists of experts and representatives from each of the four member states and is responsible for all activities concerning the necropolis, including the development of common strategies, principles and standards, capacity building, exchange of research results, strategic communications, presentations, which are important for the management of the good. The result of this type of management is the creation of the official website <https://www.steccihw.org/> in English since the beginning of 2018, as well as the creation and adoption of several documents that regulate various obligations in the management process.

29 After the representative of Lebanon, the amendment was introduced and the representatives of the following countries, members of the Committee, discussed: Portugal, Turkey, Indonesia, Poland, Burkina Faso, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Korea, Philippines, Peru, Azerbaijan, Zimbabwe, Finland, Cuba, Tunisia, Jamaica and Tanzania. Except for the representative of Finland, all representatives of the Committee emphasized the importance of interstate cooperation.

30 Decision on the inscription of cultural property on the World Heritage List: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6802>.

31 M. Đorđević, *Upravljanje stećcima – dobrom upisanim na Listu svetske baštine*, Glasnik Društva konzervatora Srbije 42 (2018) 32–36.

STEĆCI – WORLD HERITAGE

Stećci are archaeological, historical, cultural, monumental, national, and since 2016 world heritage. Inscription on the World Heritage List did not stop the polemic about who stećci belonged to, which has been going on continuously since the beginning of professional study at the end of the 19th century, and today it is recognized as a polemic about dissonant heritage.³² The key point is that stećci were “used” for inscription on the World Heritage List with the intention of establishing a cultural dialogue between experts in countries that were in national conflict. This is seen in the expert literature,³³ in the media,³⁴ and in the public discussion in which the failures of the nomination are analyzed.³⁵ On the other hand, the inscription of stećci on the World Heritage List encouraged new connections in the course of archaeological research,³⁶ promotion through exhibitions,³⁷ and tourist visibility.³⁸

Interstate cooperation, which implies strong ties in the management, use, promotion and protection of stećci, is certainly necessary to be strengthened in the future with new research projects of material and immaterial values, as well as

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- 32 M. Dragičević Šešić, Lj. Rogač Mijatović, *Balkan Dissonant Heritage Narratives (and Their Attractiveness) for Tourism*, American Journal of Tourism Management 2014, 3(1B): 10–19; V. Kisić, Dissonant Heritage or Heritage Dissonance? in: *Governing Heritage Dissonance: Promises and Realities of Selected Cultural Policies*. Amsterdam (2016), European Cultural Foundation, 49–76.
- 33 R. Trako, *Stećci – božanska igra brojki i slova*, Socijalna Ekologija 20 (2011), 71–82; R. Trako, *Debogumilizacija bosanskog srednjovekovlja, uloga bogumilskog dualizma u stvaranju srednjovekovnog bosanskog identiteta*, Zagreb 2017; V. V., Mihajlović, *Stećci kao (inter)nacionalno nasleđe: tri studije slučaja*, Etnoantropološki problemi, n.s. god. 13, sv. 3 (2018) 677–692; G. Ž. Komar, *Stari ćirilčni natpisi istočne Hercegovine* (2014, 2015, 2016); *Ćirilčni natpisi na stećcima* (2018); *Knjiga o stećku* (2019); *Linija, razvojna linija srpskog pravoslavnog obrasca u Bosni i Humu / Hercegovini – izbor epitafa* (2022).
- 34 Jelena Čalija, *Bosanska borba za srpsko nasleđe: Tvrtko moj, divni mili*, RT Balkan, 1. januar 2023 <https://rt.rs/news/13620-srpsko-srednjovekovno-nasledje-prisvajanje-bih/> (accessed March 2023). In the text, several interlocutors comment on the appeal for the protection of the cultural and historical heritage of the Serbs in the territory of today's Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina, considering that the falsification of historical facts about the medieval past of the Serbs is a frequent occurrence. Stećci are also used as arguments to prove nationality.
- 35 G. Dizdar, *Slučaj UNESCO ili kako su Stećci postali spomenici bez identiteta* (2017, Available at: https://www.academia.edu/34954300/Slucaj_UNESCO_ili_kako_su_stecci_postali_spomenici_bez_identiteta (accessed March 2023): the author states that in the nomination file “the ideological determinants of the cultural tradition that stećci represent are not established”, that this document “does not represent an adequate cultural conceptualization of the stećci phenomenon”, and that it can contribute to the “potential paradigm shift of Bosnian memory”.
- 36 L. Grahek, M. Milosavljević, S. Čaval, *Hatelji (BiH) – izkopavanja prazgodovinske gomile s stećki*, Arheologija v letu 2019: dediščina za javnost: zbornik povzetkov. Slovensko arheološko društvo (2020) 24–25; S. Čaval, *Social landscapes as multicultural spaces: stećci in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Antiquity 2021, Vol. 95 (380), 1–9; E. Zečević, *Nova saznanja i problem u proučavanju mramora (stećaka) sa teritorije Srbije*, Hercegovina – časopis za kulturno i povjesno nasleđe 6 (2020) 63–98.
- 37 I. Alduk, M. Getaldić, *Stećci nekad i danas*, katalog izložbe, Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umetnosti, Gliphoteka, Zagreb 2019. In the catalog, in the text entitled *UNESCO and stećci*, the process of creating a nomination file and the procedure for inscribing stećci on the World Heritage List are summarized, 27–28.
- 38 In 2017, Senad Šabović founded the *Stećak Foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina*: Andrea Aleksić, *Bh. stećke čuvaju ponos i inat*, Balkan Diskurs, 25 November 2022, available at <https://balkandiskurs.com/2022/11/25/bh-stecke-cuvaju-ponos-i-inat/> (accessed March 2023).

deeper interpretations of cultural and historical flows of their significant territorial distribution.

However, by inscribing Stećci on the List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, their universal importance was placed under the auspices of an international legal instrument – the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Its role for 50 years represents the foundation on which the idea of preserving Outstanding Universal Values of heritage, embodied in the unity of material, immaterial and spiritual aspects of human creativity of the most diverse cultures and peoples of the world, has been developed.

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МАЈА М. ЂОРЂЕВИЋ

Републички завод за заштиту споменика културе
Београд

СТЕЋЦИ, СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНИ НАДГРОБНИ СПОМЕНИЦИ – КУЛТУРНО НАСЛЕЂЕ ПОКРЕТАЧ МЕЂУДРЖАВНОГ ПОВЕЗИВАЊА

Међудржавно серијско културно добро *Stećci – Medieval Tombstones Graveyards* уписано је на Листу светске баштине Унеска, Одлуком 40 СОМ 8В.24, коју је 2016. године усвојио Комитет за светско наслеђе на заседању у Истанбулу, Турска. Номинациони процес започео је 2009. године када су министри културе Босне и Херцеговине, Црне Горе, Хрватске и Србије потписали писмо о намерама да се покрене међудржавни регионални пројекат „Заједничке номинације средњовековних надгробних споменика – стећака за упис на Листу светске баштине“. Предлог је потекао из пројекта „Културно наслеђе – мост ка заједничкој будућности“, који спроводи Регионална канцеларија Унеска за науку и културу у Европи са седиштем у Венецији. Међудржавни стручни тим чинили су стручњаци из четири државе који су израдили прелиминарну листу, номинациони досије и друга докумената.

На Листу светског наслеђа уписано је 28 од 3.300 евидентираних средњовековних гробаља на целој територији простирања, а изузетна вредност стећака истакнута је критеријума *iii* и *vi*. Критеријум *iii* оправдан је великим бројем евидентираних локалитета, различитим облицима камених споменика од којих ниједан споменик није идентичан другом, ни по облику, димензијама, начину украшавања. На површини стећака су уклесани социјални и религиозни симболи као и бројни биљни и геометријски орнаменти. Натписи су писани ћирилицом, а по садржају су верски и световни. Критеријум *vi* оправдан је тиме да су стећци од настанка, а посебно од времена од када се више не израђују, па све до данас дубоко укореењени у различите обичаје и веровања. Такође, бројни мотиви и натписи који су уклесани на стећцима значајно су утицали на књижевност и остале видове уметности у 20. веку.

Интегритет изабраних компоненти оправдан је стањем очуваности гробаља и споменика и њиховом правном заштитом, која се примењује у свим државама. Аутентичност изабраних компоненти оправдана је историјским контекстом у средњем веку на целој територији распрострања, положајем некропола, начином како су израђени споменици, бројним уклесаним мотивима, постојањем натписа, као и дугим периодом стручног проучавања овог наслеђа.

Образложење изузетне универзалне вредности чланови стручног тима су извели из претходне дугогодишње свеобухватне евиденције, анализе, научног проучавања и тумачења стећака која је почела крајем 19. века, док је модерно документовање настављено средином 20. века и траје до данас.

У духу заједничког рада на изради номинационог досијеа и других докумената, већина чланова стручног тима наставила је сарадњу у функцији управљача добром светске баштине. Структуру управљања стећцима у четири државе чине Међудржавни координациони одбор, национална организациона структура, управљачи појединачних локалитета и секретаријат. Ова структура утемељена је у документу *План управљања* који је чинио саставни део номинационог досијеа, и као такав је обавезујући за исказане намере и активности.

Упис на Листу светске баштине није зауставио полемику о томе чији су стећци, која се у континуитету одвија од почетка стручног проучавања крајем 19. века, а данас се препознаје као полемика о дисонантном наслеђу. Кључни став је да су стећци „искоришћени“ за упис на Листу светске баштине с намером да се успостави културни дијалог између стручњака у државама које су биле у националном сукобу и који је допринео распаду савезне државе Југославије. Овај став се сагледава у стручној литератури, у медијима, и јавној расправи у којој се анализирају пропусти номинације. С друге стране упис стећака на Листу светске баштине подстакао је ново повезивање у току археолошких истраживања, промоције путем изложби, и туристичке видљивости. Очекивано је да се у будућности међудржавна сарадња настави новим пројектима истраживања материјалних и нематеријалних вредности и тумачењем културних и историјских токова који произилазе из изузетне вредности средњовековних стећака.