Destruction of a common heritage: the archaeology of war in Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina.

By J. Chapman

The civil war in the former Yugoslavia, the largest conflict in Europe for half a century, is more than incidentally about objects from the past and proofs of past possession. Here is a report on some of the specifics and some of the generalities.

A cultural landscape at war

The war in Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina is a war about cultural identity and traditions. While the aims of the war are couched in terms of ethnicity and nationalism, the struggles are advanced through enforced changes in settlement pattern, language, religion and landscape. Destruction of cities, towns, villages, hamlets and farms proceeds relentlessly, with special attention paid to urban settlements where multi-ethnic community living is more deeply rooted than in the more homogenous, if still mixed, rural settlements. Forced migrations lead large numbers of refugees to leave the region, settle in empty shells of former settlements or occupy a new class of monument -- the camp (for a distribution map, see Ihsanoglu 1993: 41). The differentiation of Serbian from Croatian is sponsored by the respective Academies of Science, whose specialist linguistic commissions are inventing parallel sets of divergent vocabulary to replace the previously common language of Serbo-Croat. Forced conversions between Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic religious affiliations are not as common as the targeting of destruction on to religious monuments. The result of these interlinked policies is as rapid a change in the cultural landscape as has ever been witnessed in the west Balkans.

The physical and social landscape of a region is more than a palimpsest of long-term settlement features; it is an imprint of community action, structure and power on places. The significance of place in the landscape is related to place-value created by individuals and groups through associations with deeds of the past -- whether heroic and transient or commonplace and repeated. Time is captured through persistence of cultural form, in material culture of all kinds. While monumental architecture may be concerned with elites wishing to symbolize the differences between communities, the material culture that is found at the household level -- whether in pottery-making, the brewing of slivovica (plum brandy) or in techniques of carpentry and wooden decoration -- emphasizes the common strands in the heritage of Serbs, Croats and Muslims living in the west Balkans. Of course, the same ethics of hospitality and sharing once characterized this communality of non-material culture as well.

Cultural identity in this 'ethnic shatter-belt' is forged through association with the monuments and artefacts of past ancestors, for there was often strong residential and manufacturing continuity in towns and villages from late medieval to modern times. This is all the more true of urban centres, where political power and authority has been underpinned by specifically ethnic forms of urban construction and planning. The identity of place is reinforced by the linguistic double-meaning of the word narod as both 'nation' and 'people'. The twin signification links place-value and ancestors to ethnic affiliations in a matrix always enriched by religion. In such a landscape, heavy with ancestral symbolism, a war could hardly be anything but a question of culture.

In a cultural war, the conquest of territories and the 'ethnic cleansing' of settlements is insufficient. Nothing less than the destruction of past historical identities is needed. If the identities between past nations and their landscapes are best symbolized by their monuments, it is these monuments which have been prime targets in this cultural war. Mosques for Serbs and Croats, Orthodox churches for Muslims and Croats, Catholic monasteries for Serbs and Muslims -- each monumental symbol fatally attracts the cultural warriors. Designation of a building for UNESCO Protection marks out buildings for special destruction. Even the reduction of standing monuments to rubble may not be sufficient: Povrzanovi (1993) refers to instances in newly-conquered Serbian territory where even ruined Catholic churches are an affront to Serbian settlers. Denich (1993) calculates that the term 'genocide' must now be extended from forced migration to include the 'disappearance of cultural markers from a territory' (1993: 50). Halpern issues a barbed new challenge to students of material culture: the creation of an 'ethno-archaeology of architectural destruction' (1993: 5). We now turn to the materials for such a field of study.
Catalogue of destruction and damage

The catalogue of the destruction of, or damage to, cultural sites and monuments in Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina can never be complete nor up-to-date, since this is a continuous process. This partial account incorporates information from published sources up to mid 1993, as well as personal communications up to November 1993.

Bosnia and Hercegovina

The main source is special issue 31 of the Newsletter of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (Ihsanoglu 1993). There has as yet been no investigation of the damage done to archaeological sites and monuments as listed in the massive 7-volume series Arheoloski Leksikon i Karta Bosne i Hercegovine, edited by B. Covic for the Zemaljski Muzej Sarajevo (Covic 1988).

There is scarcely a town or city remaining in Bosnia & Hercegovina whose historic core has not been badly damaged. The strategic shift in allegiance of the Croat forces away from their former Bosnian comrades has led to an all-round intensification of destruction to monuments everywhere in the republic. The urban core of towns such as Banja Luka, Foca, Travnik, Bihac and Jajce have all been destroyed. In Mostar, all 291 historic buildings in the Old Town (Stari Grad) have been badly damaged, with 50% of the historic buildings in a wider area covering a 2-km stretch of the river Neretva some 600 m across. In addition to the Stari Most (Old Bridge), dating to 1566, the most significant buildings now destroyed are the largest Orthodox church in Bosnia and Hercegovina, the Orthodox Bishop's Palace with its library of 50,000 historic books, and the Catholic Cathedral of Sveti Petar i Pavao.

In Sarajevo, buildings of all periods have been attacked; the Austro-Hungarian structures have survived the best, Muslim buildings least well and old mosques moderately well. The Muslim market core of Bas Carsija has been shelled continuously since April 1992, the Town Hall has been burnt and the Institute for Oriental Studies devastated. The Zemaljski Muzej managed to relocate the vast majority of its archaeological collections to 'safe' underground storage but the building, located on 'Snipers' Alley', has been hit by over 60 shells. However, the natural history collections have suffered badly, since many items were too fragile or large to move, and much of the library was damaged when the basement storage area flooded.

**TABLE 1. Destruction of or damage to the Bosnian Islamic cultural heritage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>destroyed</th>
<th>damaged</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mosques</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communal buildings *</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cemeteries</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Includes buildings such as the mesjid (small mosque or place of prayer), the medrese (school), the tekke (place of rest), the mekteb (place of work), the Imam's house and the vakf (community centre) house.

The core of Ihsanoglu's (1993) Newsletter comprises a list of 815 known mosques in Bosnia and Hercegovina, together with over 2000 other religious buildings. The list of damaged or destroyed religious buildings up to April 1993 is summarized in stark simplicity in **TABLE 1**.

Amongst the list of cultural casualties are some of the finest Islamic buildings in southeast Europe. Foca was particularly badly damaged, with the loss of 2 mesjids, the 18th-century medrese and all its 14 mosques, including the Sultan Bayazid Imperial mosque built in 1500 and the beautiful 16th-century Aladja mosque. Near to Foca, the oldest mosque in Bosnia, the Ustikolina, built in 1448, has been razed to the ground.

The spectacular Turkish Baroque architecture of the 19th-century Tekke of Blagaj, above the source of the river Buna (next to the Neolithic Zelena pecina), was badly damaged.

The Jusuf Pasha mosque in Maglaj, considered one of the seven most beautiful mosques in the whole of the Balkans, was badly shelled, and repeated attempts have been made to raze it to the ground.
The oldest mosque in Bihac, the early 16th-century Fethija mosque, has been badly damaged.

The centre of Sarajevo has been especially badly hit: the fine Gazi Husreb Bey mosque, built in 1530 and renowned for its architectural subtlety, has been shelled for over one year. The Kurshumliya medrese, built in 1537, was also damaged by shells, as was the Imperial mosque built in 1565 and restored in 1991. Heavy damage was suffered by the Ali Pasha mosque, built in 1560.

The magnificent 16th-century Hanavadgina mosque in Donji Vakuf was ruined by mortar attack.

Three early-16th-century mosques in Nevesinje were destroyed, including the Chelebichi mosque with its famous 15th- and 16th-century tombstones.

The 17th-century mosque at Kazanci had long been in ruins, but even these ruins have been destroyed.

The oldest mosque in the region of Tesanj, the Ferhadija mosque in Tesanj, built in the early 16th century, was heavily damaged by shells.

Since over 50% of known mosques have been damaged or destroyed, the war constitutes an irreparable loss to Islamic cultural heritage in the west Balkans. The British equivalent would be the burning down of every second parish church and cathedral throughout the country.

**Croatia**

A valuable source of information is the Obavijesti (Newsletter) of the Zagreb office of the Hrvatsko Arheolosko Drustvo (Croatian Archaeological Society), in which there are regular reports on 'Arheologija i rat' (Archaeology and the war: for Editorial commentary on Issue XXIV/1 (1992) with a description of the destruction of Dubrovnik, see ANTIQUITY 66 (1992): 577-8).

**TABLE 2.** Individual cultural monuments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>palaces &amp; mansions</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fortresses</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Categories: A = World Heritage List; B = national/international importance; C = regional importance; D = local importance; E = uncategorized.
In the first phase of the war, the destruction of Vukovar and Vinkovci, in eastern Slavonia, together with the occupation and extensive damage by a Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija (JNA) tank regiment of the key prehistoric site of Vucedol, has led to the loss of a wide range of prehistoric and medieval sites. The destruction of the Town Museum of Vukovar is matched by the apparent removal of all the finds from the recent Vucedol excavations to Beograd in army lorries. We look forward to the prompt return of this cultural property to Croatian museum authorities.

The chief concern for the sites, monuments and museums in Croatia still in the war zone is directed at the Krajina and the coastal zone of north Dalmatia. The town of Gospic has been shelled continuously for over a year, with one in two buildings, including a small historic core, being badly damaged or destroyed. The town of Karlovac, only 50 km from Zagreb, has also been repeatedly shelled, although the Archaeological Museum has survived.

Daily shelling and mortar attacks continue on Zadar, with less frequent attacks on Sibenik and even fewer on Split. Although major monuments in the Old Town of Zadar have suffered from enemy fire, the Arheoloski Muzej has survived so far unscathed, with all the portable artefacts stored in the basement or in Italy and the monumental architectural sculptures well padded against direct hits. The Archaeology and History Departments of the Filozofski Fakultet at Zadar are also in reasonable shape, with classes still continuing through the spring semester. The old town in Sibenik continues to be shelled, and the cathedral roof has been badly damaged. The Museum of Croatian Monuments in Split has been shelled, with damage mainly confined to architectural sculpture, but the Archaeological Museum has so far avoided damage. The Roman and Byzantine city of Salona has been damaged less by shelling and mortaring than by the city council-sponsored construction of the new by-pass in 1990!

The main body of information on war damage to the cultural heritage of Croatia has been collated by the Hrvatsko Arheolosko Drustvo (1993). Analysis of these data includes distribution maps which quantify the war damage on a district-by-district basis. Tabulated information on 801 individual monuments and 350 ancient and historical settlements is presented in the report.

In terms of the destruction and damage of archaeological sites in Dalmatia, it is clear that all the hilltop sites investigated by the Neothermal Dalmatia Project (1982-86: Chapman & Shiel 1993) were until recently occupied by the JNA and many of them have been badly damaged by military trenching. The worst-affected is the most important municipium of Nadin-Gradina (Roman Nedinum), which suffered from a tank regiment. All these sites were systematically mined when the JNA moved out, preventing site visits in perpetuo. Since many hillforts in the rest of Croatia were located for similar strategic reasons and have been recently 're-occupied', it is certain that they, too, will have been badly affected.

**TABLE 3. Old cities and settlements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Categories: A = World Heritage List; B = national/international importance; C = regional importance; D = local importance; E = uncategorized.*
Serbia

As with other branches of science in Serbia, archaeology had been badly hit by funding crises prior to the UN embargo. The loss of 800 academics (Ph.Ds and Masters) through emigration from Serbia has already impoverished the community, and worse is sure to come. The embargo has precipitated a rapid decline in archaeological research, with the breakdown in international relations leading to the cancellation of all major international projects (e.g. those directed by Professors Hensel, Tringham and Whallon, and Dr Greenfield), and the collapse of book and periodical exchanges. This has led to the impoverishment of all archaeological libraries, a problem exacerbated by hyper-inflation, currently running at approximately 1% per minute. The consequences for research will be worse the longer the embargo continues.

University of Belgrade students have abandoned their 'Dosta!' ('Enough!') protests of the summer of 1992; the students find themselves stymied by the new Law on Universities, passed on 5 August 1992 and giving total control to the Serbian Government (Prosic-Dvornic 1993). Studies go on in overcoats because of the almost total absence of fuel to heat faculty buildings. Nevertheless, a week-long conference on the archaeology of the 'Tetrarchy' -- the four Late Roman general-emperors of rural stock born within the territory of modern-day Serbia -- was organized by Professor Dragoslav Srejovic of the Serbian Academy of Sciences in September 1993 and proved a great success.

Commentary

The destruction of archaeological and historical sites and monuments in the former Yugoslavia goes far beyond a desire for political and economic reform -- it reaches back to the roots of communities' pasts. One reading of the war is that it embodies a change from identities associated with place to identities associated with ethnicity, with the latter's powerful symbolic associations with the past, the ancestors, kinship and blood (Olsen 1993). However, in regions such as the west Balkans, the ethnically-specific ancestors are already one of the most important components of place. Rather, the war is based on a false ideology of perceived historical pasts, manipulated by political elites (Halpern 1993). The basic falsity in these perceived pasts is that each contested part of the west Balkans once upon a time was ethnically homogeneous and can be once again. The conceptual basis of this ethnic homogeneity is the 19th-century nation state, with its fixed, impermeable boundaries, and the single, united allegiance of its inhabitants. In reality, ethnicity is a more complex and malleable concept, negotiated within the relative and historically-determined contexts of power and constraint (Denich 1993; cf. the parallel debate within archaeological terminology between 'cultures' and 'social networks': Chapman & Dolukhanov 1993). The practical question is clear: will it be possible to build this complexity and relativity into a political process subverted by the banalities of 'ethnic cleansing'?

What options are still open for those who care about what remains of a cultural heritage in the west Balkans? Certainly not the scheme mooted by Belgrade political leaders in April 1992 to rebuild Vukovar in 'Byzantine' style (Povrzanovi 1993)! Certainly not a mute hope that all can be restored with UNESCO funding once the shooting is over!

Three suggestions may be made towards the creation of a framework for reconstituting a shared west Balkan landscape:

1. Recognition that identities in this region are formed in dialectical opposition to each other and that choosing to be a Serb, a Croat or a Muslim is denying oneself and others part of that common cultural heritage;
2. Taking responsibility for re-writing a (pre-) history of the west Balkans which gives due credit to each social group for their very real contributions to the past; and
3. Support for urban multi-ethnic initiatives in any serious political, religious and cultural context.

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References


