

Decision : 40 COM 8B.24

Examination of nominations of cultural properties to the World Heritage List

The World Heritage Committee,

Having examined Documents WHC/16/40.COM/8B and WHC/16/40.COM/INF.8B1,

Inscribes Stećci Medieval Tombstone Graveyards, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (iii) and (vi);

Welcomes acceptance of ICOMOS recommendations by the States Parties, namely in reducing the number of components proposed for inscription by removing the “Stare Kuće, Donje Breške, Tuzla” and “Mramorje in Buđ, Pale” components, Bosnia and Herzegovina, modifying the boundaries and buffer zones of the property and amending the name of the property;

Takes note of the following provisional Statement of Outstanding Universal Value:

Brief synthesis

The serial nomination of medieval tombstones (stećci) includes a selection of 4000 stećci at 28 necropolises (out of a total of approximately 70 000 stećci at 3 300 sites) on the territory of four states: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Croatia, Montenegro and Republic of Serbia. Medieval monolithic stone tombstones (stećci) were created in the period from the second half of the 12th century to the 16th century, while they were most intensively hewed during the 14th and 15th century. Stećci bear an exceptional testimony to the medieval culture of Southeast Europe that was developed within a unique historical context in an area where medieval cultures and traditions of the European West, East and South meet. In addition, in some respects, stećci also drew influences from much earlier traditions.

As much as they are associated with the general medieval sepulchral practice, it is the multitude and monumentality but also the interconfessionality of stećci as elements of cultural heritage that make this region stand out from the overall corpus of the medieval European heritage.

Criterion (iii): Although immersed in medieval European culture, the historical context and specific regional space where we find them, with traces of earlier influences (prehistoric, ancient and early medieval), stećci, by several aspects, remain a unique phenomenon in the medieval European artistic and archaeological heritage. The 28 selected sites attempt to present all the characteristics of the stećci phenomenon.

Their main specificity is precisely in their number not recorded anywhere else in Europe – of approximately 70 000 monuments.

A distinctive feature is also the diversity of their forms. Today, the following basic forms are known to us: slabs, chests, gabled roof tombstones, pillars, and monumental crosses. In the scope of this Nomination, all of them are represented in the selected sites. However, each of them comes in different versions depending on the skills of the craftsmen-stonecutters and the wishes of the owners of the tombstones or clients. Their reliefs are an extraordinary testimony of medieval culture which has disappeared and of which stećci are often the only remaining traces. The reason for this is in the incredible richness of reliefs of different contents – scenes from everyday life, symbolic and religious motives, and decorative reliefs.

Criterion (vi): Ever since they were first created and especially since the times when they were no longer made (beginning of the 16th century) up until the present day, medieval tombstones – stećci – have been deeply rooted in various traditions and beliefs.

Those processes exist despite a kind of discontinuity in the historical memory and heritage of these monuments mainly caused by different migrations during the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Age. Therefore, the phenomena associated with stećci (toponyms of the sites, superstitions, folk traditions and tales) show a few very similar patterns encountered in the entire area of outspread, which still speaks of the uniqueness of this cultural phenomenon.

Throughout the stećci outspread area, it has been noted that a number of cemetery names show respect and admiration for the grandiose dimensions of the tombstones, their age and relief representations (Divsko groblje – Giants' cemetery, Mašete – big stones, Mramori-Mramorje – marble blocks, Grčko groblje – Greek cemetery, Tursko groblje – Turkish cemetery, Kaursko groblje – Giaour's cemetery).

For centuries, folk and fairy tales have been drawing their motives from the medieval chivalric milieu carved on stećci attributing their carving and setting to fantastic creatures (fairies, giants) and linking them to legendary wars and conflicts, etc.

Over a long period of almost 150 years (more precisely as of the second half of the 19th century) of scientific and institutional interest in them, we have witnessed confrontations of different opinions and views as to their archaeological, artistic and historical interpretation.

The epigraphy and the reliefs on stećci have also significantly influenced contemporary literature as well as other forms of art. They have represented, and still do, an inspirational theme for sculptors (Boško Kućanski), painters (Mario Mikulić, Mirko Kujačić, Zdravko Anić, Lazar Drljača, Ibrahim Novalić, Danko Brkić, Gabrijel Jurkić, Petar Šain, Virgilije Nevjestić, Dževad Hozo, Nedim Tahirović, Seid Hasanefendić), poets (Mehmedalija Mak Dizdar, Skender Kulenović, Petar Gudelj, Janko Bubalo, Ivan Kordić, Kemal Mahmutefendić), filmmakers (Jan Beran), writers (Miroslav Krleža) and photographers (Tošo Dabac, Dragutin Resner, Ado Šahbaz).

Integrity

All proposed sites with stećci have been preserved in situ and are in good condition despite all the problems. The borders of the core and buffer zones have completely enclosed the sites aiming to preserve their integrity within the landscape which they are integral part to.

Although some of the proposed sites are located along roads, the risk for the monuments is minimized given the constant monitoring by competent authorities as well as restriction of any activity (primarily construction works) in the immediate vicinity of the sites. The strict criteria enabled for the selection of precisely those sites with stećci which are representative of their outstanding universal value.

Authenticity

The proposed necropolis with stećci, their archaeological and historical context, the diversity of types of tombstones and the content of inscriptions represent the overall aspects of the phenomenon and the study of stećci.

The necropolis in the scope of this serial nomination have the highest degree of authenticity among the necropolis with stećci and were therefore selected for this Nomination. Basic documentation work has been conducted on all proposed sites (development of a study of the present situation, shots of the present situation, photographic documentation, drawings and 3D scans in some cases) as a basis for all further conservation and restoration interventions aimed at better conservation and management of each individual site.

Protection and management requirements

All components of this serial transnational property enjoy the highest degree of protection in accordance with the legislation of each of the countries, despite different legal and administrative systems for the protection and management of cultural heritage. The management mode for each individual site is defined by individual Management Plans specific in terms of national legislation, legislation of Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and local administrations, as well as the capacities of each of the individual states. There are several priorities in the implementation of these plans in the future, with an emphasis on preventing further deterioration of stećci mainly caused by various climate influences. An interstate coordination is anticipated to be established in the future with regard to the management and conservation of these monuments.

Recommends that the States Parties give consideration to the following:

further improving the consistency of mapping and cataloguing of the selected components of the series in line with the management mechanism,

continuing to improve the state of conservation at selected sites through the development and implementation of active conservation programmes based on the advice of skilled conservators,

developing monitoring indicators to assess the impact of development and tourism on the attributes of the serial property,

ensuring the operational coordination of the various bodies and planning instruments involved in the management of each of the elements that comprise the property in order to ensure the most appropriate management,

integrating a Heritage Impact Assessment and Disaster Risk Management approach into the management system, so as to ensure that any programme or project be assessed in relation to its impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property,

Recognizes the exceptional multicultural aspects of the stećci and their contribution to the enhancement of regional cooperation and cooperation among the States Parties thus ensuring peace, reconciliation, stability, sustainable development and sustainable management of common cultural heritage;

Requests the States Parties to submit to the World Heritage Centre by 1 December 2017 a report on the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 42nd session in 2018.