
Stećci – Medieval Tombstones (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia) No 1504

Official name as proposed by the States Parties
Stećci – Medieval Tombstones

Location

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Municipality of Stolac (FBiH)
Municipality of Konjic (FBiH)
Municipality of Nevesinje (RS)
Municipality of Rogatica (RS)
Municipality of Novi Travnik (FBiH)
Municipality of Jablanica (FBiH)
Municipality of Kalinovik (RS)
Municipality of Bileća (RS)
Municipality of Ljubuški (FBiH)
Municipality of Kladanj (FBiH)
Municipality of Olovo (FBiH)
Municipality of Tuzla (FBiH)
Municipality of Goražde (FBiH)
Municipality of Trnovo (FBiH)
Municipality of Sokolac (RS)
Municipality of Berkovići (RS)
Municipality of Pale (RS)
Municipality of Šekovići (RS)
Municipality of Foča (RS)
Municipality of Kupres (FBiH)

Republic of Croatia:

Municipality of Cista Provo (Split-Dalmatia County)
Municipality of Konavle (Dubrovnik-Neretva County)

Montenegro:

Municipality of Žabljak
Municipality of Plužine

Republic of Serbia:

Municipality of Bajina Bašta
Municipality of Prijepolje

Brief description

More than 70,000 distinctive medieval tombstones called *stećci* are found in over 3300 burial ground sites in south-eastern Europe. The serial nomination of 30 sites (containing 4100 *stećci*) has been selected from Bosnia and Herzegovina, western Serbia, western Montenegro, and central and southern Croatia to represent these grave yards, and the regionally distinctive *stećci*, or medieval tombstones, which date from the 12th to the 16th centuries. The cemeteries are laid out in rows as was the common European custom from the Middle Ages. The *stećci* are mostly carved from limestone, and are found according to five types/shapes; they feature a wide array of decorative motifs and inscriptions that represent both continuities within medieval Europe and older locally-distinctive traditions.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of 30 *sites*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

Bosnia and Herzegovina - 18 April 2011
Republic of Croatia - 21 April 2011
Montenegro - 21 April 2011
Republic of Serbia - 7 May 2011

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

29 January 2015

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation visited 19 of the nominated sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 15-22 September 2015; and a second ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the remaining 3 sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and each of the nominated sites in Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, 20-27 September 2015.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the States Parties on 7 October 2015 requesting further information on the rationale, methodology and criteria for the selection of the nominated *stećci* sites from the very large number of existing sites, the unique additional contribution of each site component to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the serial property, clarification of the 'contact zone' for component 12 (Stare Kuće, Donje Breške, Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina), and the location of inhabitants in relation to the buffer zones for components 23-24 (Velika and Mala Crljivica, Cista Velika, and St Barbara, Dubravka, Konavle in Croatia). The four States Parties responded to these queries on 4, 6 and 12 November 2015.

As requested by the revised *Operational Guidelines*, the States Parties received an Interim Report on 15 January 2016. Further information was provided by the four States Parties on 1 February 2016 in relation to the issues raised. This included revised text for some parts of the nomination dossier (Executive Summary and parts of Chapter 3), further descriptive information about each selected component, further information about the method of selection of the thirty components, information about the number of inhabitants in the buffer zones of several components, and revised maps and plans for

many of the components detailing proposed changes in property boundaries and/or buffer zones.

All additional information provided to ICOMOS by the States Parties is incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

11 March 2016

2 The property

Note: Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, not all sites in this series have been described. In the nomination dossier and the additional information provided by the States Parties, each of the components is described in text, mapping and images.

Description

Stećci are medieval tombstones found through almost all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the western parts of Serbia and Montenegro, and in central and southern Croatia. The stećci represent an artistic and cultural tradition that can be linked with others in Europe, but is particular to south-eastern Europe.

The serial nomination is selected from a total of more than 70,000 stećci at 3300 sites. The nominated property consists of 30 sites containing 4100 stećci within the borders of the four States Parties. In the nomination dossier, the total area of the nominated serial property was 70.88ha (revised by the States Parties in January 2016 to 51.38ha), and the total area of the buffer zones was 1798.42ha (revised by the States Parties in January 2016 to 334.93ha).

The 30 components included in the series are as follows:
Bosnia-Herzegovina

- [1] Radimlja, Stolac
- [2] Grčka glavica in the village of Biskup, Konjic
- [3] Kalu in Krekovi, Nevesinje
- [4] Borak in the village of Burati, Rogatica
- [5] Maculje, Novi Travnik
- [6] Dugo polje at Blidinje, Jablanica
- [7] Gvozno, Kalinovik
- [8] Grebnice, Radmilovića Dubrava, Baljci, Bileća
- [9] Bijača, Ljubuški
- [10] Olovci, Kladanj
- [11] Mramor in Musići, Olovo
- [12] Stare kuće, Donje Breške, Tuzla
- [13] Kučarin in Hrančići, Goražde
- [14] Boljuni, Stolac
- [15] Dolovi in the village of Umljani, Trnovo
- [16] Luburića polje, Sokolac
- [17] Potkuk in Bitunja, Berkovići
- [18] Mramorje in Buđ, Pale
- [19] Bečani, Šekovići

- [20] Mramor in Vrbica, Foča
- [21] Čengića Bara, Kalinovik
- [22] Ravanjska vrata, Kupres

Republic of Croatia

- [23] Velika and Mala Crljivica, Cista Velika
- [24] St. Barbara, Dubravka, Konavle

Montenegro

- [25] Grčko groblje, Žabljak
- [26] Bare Žugića, Žabljak
- [27] Grčko groblje, Plužine

Republic of Serbia

- [28] Mramorje, Perućac, Bajina Bašta
- [29] Mramorje, Rastište, Bajina Bašta
- [30] Grčko groblje, Hrta, Prijepolje

The medieval tombstones, known since the 19th century as stećci, were created in the period from the second half of the 12th century to the 16th century, and most were made in the 14th and 15th centuries. It is assumed that these cemeteries and the stećci ceased to be used during the 16th century because of the introduction of practices of confessional differentiation of graveyards (according to the different Christian traditions).

The stećci are mostly made of limestone, which is commonly sourced in the region and suitable for carving (although there are examples made from other types of stone, such as serpentine, slate, conglomerate, and tuff). The heavy stones for the stećci were quarried in the vicinity of the sites where they stand, so the cemeteries are located close to stone sources. Surveys at extant quarry sites suggest that the basic forms were likely to have been formed at the quarry, but that the decorations were carved closer to the cemeteries or at the grave sites.

The sites were mostly formed as 'cemeteries in rows' as was the common European custom from the Middle Ages. The stećci were located on the tops of graves and were oriented in the same direction as the graves, but were not constructed as 'lids' for the graves or sarcophagi as was the tradition elsewhere. Although each grave could contain multiple burials, there is only one stećak per grave site.

The States Parties have identified five basic types of stećci based on their shape, decorative carving and installation: slab, chest, *sljemenjak* (gabled roof stećak), monumental cross and pillar. The chest and slab types are the most commonly found, and are assumed to be the earliest and basic forms. The *sljemenjak* are the most recognisable form and are mostly associated with burials dated to the 15th century. The pillar and monumental cross types are fewer and are dated to the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Some historic toponyms are related to this phenomenon.

The stećci are often undecorated, but can also be adorned with bas-relief carvings, and occasionally also sunk relief (intaglio) carvings. The ornamentation includes various religious and other symbols (such as crosses, weapons, tools, solar and lunar symbols, anthropomorphic lilies and snakes), figurative compositions (such as people dancing, jousting, hunting scenes) or geometric shapes (rosettes, circles).

Inscriptions in the Cyrillic script are found on the stećci, mostly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and contain both religious and secular content. The stećci were carved by master craftsmen called 'smiths', and in a few examples their names are included in the inscriptions. Other stećci have inscriptions that attribute them to regional nobility, although the analysis presented by the States Parties emphasises the diversity of the people buried in the graves in terms of their class, religion and ethnicity. The nomination dossier states that the inscriptions represent an organic element of Christian epigraphic culture in medieval Europe.

The States Parties explain that when these graveyards were established, they were commonly located away from areas of habitation in places of natural beauty; often alongside or near roads, on prehistoric tumuli, at prehistoric fortified settlements, or near churches or wells. Lone examples are rare, but the number of stećci in each graveyard varies, from family-based groupings to larger community cemeteries. Today, the locations of the selected sites are diverse, and many of them are located in relatively remote settings, and include locations in forests (eg. [4], [8]), on elevated land or tops of hills (eg. [7], [12]), near villages (eg. [11]), or along transportation routes (eg. [23], [30]). A number of the sites are located in or near a national park or biosphere reserve (eg. [2], [25], [27], [28], [29]).

History and development

The States Parties trace the historical development of the stećci to earlier periods, including prehistoric settlement, late antiquity and early medieval periods. However, the practice of laying out cemeteries in rows is a distinctive characteristic of the European Middle Ages and is the historical context for the stećci.

According to the States Parties, south-eastern Europe was a transition zone, influenced by both Eastern and Western Christianity and associated cultural influences, which can be seen in the use of inscribed epitaphs and in the ornamental repertoire. Culturally, the stećci belong to the spread of the Slavic language, as well as Glagolitic and Cyrillic literacy in this region.

The period of use of the stećci was a politically turbulent one in this part of Europe, yet the stećci were used in graveyards for a period spanning several hundred years, and changes over time in their form and decoration can be identified. While the preferences for the different types of stećci were influenced by various factors, the 'slab' form of stećak is the oldest and most widespread and is found from the 12th century; followed by the 'chest'

type from the mid-14th century; the 'gabled roof' type from the early 15th century; the cross form from the mid-15th century; and the 'pillar' form from the late 15th century.

The nomination dossier provides a summary description of the history of each of the 30 components that comprise the series; and further descriptive detail about each selected component was provided by the States Parties in January 2016.

Scholarly and scientific interest in the stećci dates from the 19th century to the present. There has been intense academic interest in the stećci, and there are many publications about their history and distribution. There are continuing debates about the archaeological, artistic and historical interpretations of the stećci. The transboundary project to develop the World Heritage nomination began in 2009. Following an intensive program of meetings and exchanges between the four States Parties, agreed Tentative List submissions were presented by each of them in 2011.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The *Operational Guidelines* require that serial nominations provide a clear rationale for the selection of the components, including information on how each contributes to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The nomination dossier explains that the component sites have been selected to ensure that the characteristics of the stećci are fully represented by the series. There was an intention to demonstrate the large number of stećci by choosing sites with a relatively large number of tombstones. Selection was also based on the desire to include a range of shapes (according to the five main types that have been identified), decorative elements (which were grouped into several categories to guide the selection), and inscriptions (which, while relatively rare are considered to be of extraordinary historical value). In addition to representing this range of characteristics, the sites with the best preserved and most artistically important stećci have been included. Selection of the series has involved comparing the attributes of the more than 3000 sites containing stećci.

During the evaluation of this nomination, information received from the participating States Parties at several points in the process has considerably augmented the nomination dossier in relation to the method of selection of the series.

While the bases of the selection are clearly explained, there is some variation in the selection factors used between the four States Parties. The means of determining the selected sites reflect some aspects of artistic appraisal and historical context, together with a

range of pragmatic concerns (such as legal protection, state of conservation and so on). Not surprisingly, given the larger number of sites to select from, Bosnia and Herzegovina has developed a relatively more detailed and rigorous application of its selection factors (outlined in the Management Plan and in the additional material provided by States Parties in January 2016), taking into account the historical and regional distribution of stećci, representativeness of the sites, and recognition of regional schools/workshops based on the carving techniques. While these are also used by Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, they are not systematically applied across all the sites containing stećci; and other factors have been added for some of the selected sites, such as local community support, presentation status, availability of documentation and mapping.

Each State Party has helpfully provided expanded explanations for each of the components in their territories. ICOMOS considers that while the additional information about each component has usefully augmented the descriptions, the specific contribution of each site to the series (and its necessity of being included) is not yet clearly explained. Depending on which criterion is considered, factors such as the representation of the different historical periods, and of different workshops or iconographic styles are relevant. It is also important for a consistently applied selection method to be demonstrated for the entire series (in this case, meaning across the territories of all four States Parties).

ICOMOS therefore considers that while the serial approach is justified for this nomination, the rationale for the selection of each component needs to be further deepened using a common set of selection factors which are more closely tied to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the series, and clearly expressing the necessity of including each component.

Considering the potential for the representation of stećci on the World Heritage List, the States Parties have developed the comparative analysis along several lines, and this was extended further in the additional information provided in January 2016. A wide range of existing World Heritage properties that specifically recognise tombs are discussed in the nomination dossier, such as the Bulgarian properties of the Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak ((i), (iii), (iv), 1979) and the Thracian Tomb of Sveshtari ((i), (iii), 1985), the Scandinavian Bronze Age Burial site of Sammallahdenmäki (Finland, (iii), (iv), 1999), and the Egyptian properties of Ancient Thebes and its Necropolis ((i), (iii), (vi) 1979) and Memphis and its Necropolis ((i), (iii), (vi), 1979). However, ICOMOS agrees with the conclusions reached by the States Parties that these are of limited comparative relevance due to their much earlier historical periods and different cultural contexts.

More relevant are the more than 50,000 remaining cross-shaped stone monuments called 'khachkars' in Armenia which were used from the 9th or 10th century to

the 17th century. The craftsmanship of the Armenian Cross-Stones Art was recognised in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. Also of comparative relevance for the stećci is the abundantly found Irish high or biblical cross which acts as a common artistic and monumental expression of the early Middle Ages. In addition to the different cultural influences evident in the Irish crosses, they are from an earlier period than the stećci, and were used for a wider range of consecrated places than just burials.

The inscriptions on the stećci are traced and compared to various Christian traditions in medieval Europe, including examples in Italy, England, Bulgaria, Sweden and Denmark (including the Jelling Mounds, Runic Stones and Church (iii), 1994). Likewise, the nomination dossier looks at the decorative elements of the stećci in light of examples drawn from a wide array of artistic traditions in Europe, finding both continuities and differences.

The comparative analysis looks at burial sites on the World Heritage List in terms of other aspects, including the extent to which earlier or prehistoric traditions are evident in later practices, such as at the site of Brú na Bóinne in Ireland ((i), (iii), (iv), 1993); mausoleum type burials from varying historical periods in Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkestan, India, Colombia and Serbia; and the 20th century cemetery of Skogskyrkogården in Sweden ((ii), (iv), 1994). These are of limited relevance to the comparative context for this nomination.

The nomination dossier acknowledges that a medieval form of sepulchral slab burial stone is commonly found in Serbia and southern Croatia which share some characteristics with the stećci. These are distinguished as being functionally different, forming the 'lid' of the grave, which is not the case for the stećci. In Croatia, these slabs are commonly found in cemeteries associated with churches or located within monasteries.

The nomination dossier considers the traditions of burial in stone sarcophagi in the Early Middle Ages which have some continuities with the gable-roof style of stećci. These can be found in the Dalmatian towns of Zadar and Split (Croatia) and Kotor in Montenegro ((i), (ii), (iii), (iv), 1979). As well as occurring in an earlier period, this style of burial was reserved for rulers rather than for people from all strata of society, and were used in association with churches and monasteries exclusively. It is worth noting in this context several existing Serbian World Heritage properties associated with medieval periods, namely Studenica Monastery ((i), (ii), (iv), (vi), 1986), Stari Ras and Sopoćani ((i), (iii), 1979), and the Dečani Monastery, part of the Medieval Monuments in Kosovo ((ii), (iii), (iv), 2004, 2006).

ICOMOS acknowledges the wide ranging nature of the comparative analysis and the additional information provided. ICOMOS considers that the task of comparison of funerary traditions and medieval artistic

traditions is challenging when three different criteria are under consideration. Clearly many of the artistic elements are found in the sepulchral practices of south-eastern Europe and elsewhere in Europe, yet there are also distinctive qualities and cultural traditions represented by the stećci.

While providing a useful overview, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis that is provided is not yet sufficiently systematic or comprehensive, partly due to the diverse criteria and justifications that have been established for the nomination. For example, there are few comparisons with funerary monuments of the 14th or 15th centuries for western or eastern Europe which seem specifically relevant to consideration of the stećci.

The comparative analysis seems to conclude that the stećci are a unique phenomenon. ICOMOS considers that this conclusion requires a more comprehensive and systematic analysis that directly refers to the justification for Outstanding Universal Value

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis does not yet justify the selection of the sites that comprise the serial nomination. ICOMOS considers that this could be addressed by placing the occurrence of the stećci more explicitly within their historical, cultural and social contexts, and by providing evidence that could more systematically demonstrate how the forms and decoration of the stećci reflect pre-Christian imagery that might be seen to have persisted in this part of Europe more strongly than elsewhere.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the States Parties to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The stećci and the archaeological evidence at the selected sites form a spectacular expression of a medieval culture, and an impressive number of stećci survive – estimated at 70,000 stećci in 3,300 sites, located throughout much of Bosnia and Herzegovina and parts of Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia;
- The stećci represent a distinctive tradition in south-eastern Europe, and the selected series of 30 sites represents the most well-preserved expressions of this form of medieval sepulchral art, including its iconography and epigraphy;
- The stećci reflect an inter-twining of cultural influences from both the western and eastern European Christian medieval traditions and also earlier prehistoric and local vernacular traditions that are specific to this part of south-eastern Europe;
- The stećci are a unique phenomenon with a high diversity of types, and richness of decorative motifs and inscriptions; and they mark the burials of members of all social strata, regardless of their ethnic, political and religious affiliations;

- The epigraphy and artistic elements of the stećci have influenced modern literature and artistic expressions in south-eastern Europe.

The serial approach is justified on the basis of the very large number of sites containing stećci in this part of south-eastern Europe; and the need to demonstrate their diversity in form and decorative elements over several centuries of medieval European life.

ICOMOS considers that these arguments present an appropriate general framing of the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the selected sites based on the characteristics of the phenomenon of the stećci; however, not all of these reasons are relevant for justifying their consideration above the regional level of significance.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

In the context of this serial nomination, integrity is evaluated on three different scales: the first is whether the selection of the components has the capacity to communicate the range of aspects required to illustrate the proposed Outstanding Universal Value; the second is whether there is sufficient rationale provided to understand how each selected component contributes to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value; and the third is whether each of the components has the required completeness to fully contribute to the aspect it represents. These aspects are considered in turn below.

The States Parties argue that the collection of selected components allows the large quantity and geographic range of the stećci found in south-eastern Europe to be understood, including the range of types and decorative elements. ICOMOS considers that this rationale is appropriate although additional considerations could usefully be included, such as the historical periods of the use of the stećci, and identified stylistic differences. ICOMOS considers that the use of the serial approach is justified.

In relation to the specific reasons for each site to be included in the series, the information provided in the nomination dossier is not detailed and ICOMOS requested further information on this aspect. While more detailed explanations were provided by the States Parties in January 2016, ICOMOS considers that the rationale for the selection of each component needs to be further deepened, using a common set of selection factors that are more coherently related to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the series. This is distinct from important practical considerations such as legal protection and state of conservation.

ICOMOS further notes that for some of the serial components, integrity is vulnerable due to their poor condition and lack of maintenance.

ICOMOS considers that the individual components of this serial nomination meet the condition of integrity but that the integrity is vulnerable in a number of cases due to their state of conservation. ICOMOS considers that the serial approach is appropriate, but that the selection of 30 components needs to be further reviewed and justified in terms of the significance of the components and their specific ability to contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value of the stećci.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the selected sites is demonstrated by the widespread occurrence of the stećci in south-eastern Europe, the archaeological evidence of the graveyard sites, the diverse types of medieval tombstones and their intact designs and inscriptions. Together, the sites reflect sepulchral art of the Middle Ages under the influence of western Europe and Byzantine cultures, as well as the local cultural and historical development of the Balkan Peninsula. The lack of subsequent intervention or later periods of use (in most cases) supports the authenticity of these sites.

ICOMOS considers that the condition of authenticity has been met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi).

Criterion (ii): *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 justified by the States Parties on the grounds that the medieval tombstones represent an artistic expression arising from the intertwining of different cultural influences – the eastern and western Christian traditions, and earlier prehistoric and vernacular traditions of the region where they are found. The practice of establishing burial grounds in rows is common throughout Europe from the Middle Ages. The States Parties argue that the interchange of values is demonstrated by the observation that individuals from different social strata, different ethnic identities and different medieval Christian communities were all buried in this way over a period of more than three centuries.

ICOMOS considers that while it is possible to trace many influences in the use, decorative elements and forms of the stećci, there is little focus on the cultural processes of interchange in the justification for this criterion. ICOMOS also questions whether the stećci – while impressive in their quantity and specificity to this part of Europe – can be seen as an important development in the *monumental arts*. For these reasons, ICOMOS considers that the arguments put forward by the States Parties for this criterion are more relevant for consideration according to criterion (iii).

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the States Parties on the grounds that the selected components of the series of stećci provide evidence of a specific expression of medieval European artistic and archaeological heritage, and this was elaborated further in the additional information provided in January 2016. The States Parties refer to the large number of stećci (70,000 documented monuments) relating to a specific historical period in south-eastern Europe. The diverse range of forms, reliefs and inscriptions in the selected sites are considered to provide an exceptional historical source and testimony to European medieval culture. The States Parties consider that the stećci therefore represent the cultures and history of the medieval states in this region (Serbian, Duklja-Zeta, Hungaro-Croatian and Bosnian), the growth of the Dubrovnik Republic and the communes on the Adriatic coast under Hungaro-Croatian and Venetian rulers, the establishment of feudal regulations and vassal relations, the emergence of upper and lower nobility and ecclesiastical authority, and the emergence of the Ottoman Empire.

ICOMOS considers that because the stećci belong to a cultural tradition of a specific region and important historical period, the arguments provided by the States Parties are appropriate for this criterion. In particular, the stećci can be understood as important material evidence of the development of the medieval states in this part of Europe. However, more systematic comparative analysis in relation to this potential justification is needed to establish that the serial nomination can meet this criterion over and above its obvious regional values. This will require both a deeper and broader consideration to place the serial property within the European traditions and within the specificities of local influences.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been demonstrated at this stage, but that it could be demonstrated in future by providing a stronger focus and evidence about the specific historical context of the stećci.

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the States Parties on the grounds that the stećci are deeply embedded in local folk tales and traditions, superstitions and customs. These cultural associations survive in the present, despite the long time that has elapsed since the periods when the stećci were made and used, and despite historical interruptions and migrations. This is demonstrated by the names given to the sites (which

indicate high cultural esteem), the use of inscriptions and reliefs in contemporary literature and art, and the long history of archaeological and artistic study of the stećci in this part of south-eastern Europe.

ICOMOS recognises that properties of this kind will typically exhibit intangible associations for the present-day society. However, while the States Parties have explained the cultural importance of the stećci in the region where they occur, the evidence is provided is minimal, and the Outstanding Universal Value of these associations has not been demonstrated.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the serial approach is appropriate, but that the selection of sites has not been sufficiently justified at this stage.

ICOMOS does not consider that the criteria have been justified at this stage, although criterion (iii) could be demonstrated following further work on the comparative analysis and the rationale for the selection of the series. ICOMOS further considers that consideration of criterion (iv) could also be relevant to the serial nomination.

4 Factors affecting the property

The States Parties have provided an exemplary risk analysis for each of the selected components contained in the management plans. There are many pressures affecting the cemeteries and the stećci, and currently only a few of them exhibit a good state of conservation.

The impacts of natural deterioration are evident at most of the cemeteries, and broken stones occur at many of the sites. Many of the sites are threatened by uncontrolled vegetation and/or erosion of the stones by water, wind and ice. [28] is at urgent risk due to the erosion of the banks of the Drina River; a stabilisation project is planned in collaboration with the Drina-Lim Hydroelectric Power Plan Company (which operates a dam downstream of the site).

Other problems affecting the condition of the stećci include:

- Highways or local roads passing through the properties: [1], [3], [4], [9]
- Damaging growth of lichen and/or mosses on the surfaces of the stećci due to high humidity: [2], [4], [8], [12], [13], [18], [22], [27], [30]
- Holes dug by animals: [4]
- Damage from tree growth: [11]
- Damage from humanly made fires to control vegetation: [3], [16], [17]
- Illegal excavations: [20]
- Damage from visitors walking on the stećci: [3]
- Holiday home developments in the vicinity: [6]

Preventive measures have been taken in only a few cases (eg. [1], [6], [9] and some limited work at [23], [24], [28]). In other cases, some cleaning has occurred, but this has not been fully effective and more specialist advice is warranted (eg. [30]). Plans for conservation of most of the components are included in the Management Plans.

At present, only a few of the nominated components are subject to visitation on an organised basis. Both of the Croatian sites [23] and [24] are vulnerable to future visitor pressure because they are close to the tourist resorts on the Dalmatian coast; [28] is located in a tourist area, although current visitor infrastructure at the site is minimal; [6], [25], [26] are located in regions popular for winter sports that are experiencing growth in tourism; and other areas containing components of the series are visited for light levels of nature-based tourism that could be extended to include the stećci and cemeteries (eg. [2], [6], [22]). ICOMOS is aware that many local authorities involved in the nomination processes would like to encourage greater levels of local tourism.

The best known and most accessible sites have basic visitor facilities and interpretation, such as small car parking spaces, benches and seats and interpretation panels; and [10] has some site information in the nearby city centre. However, most of the sites have minimal visitor infrastructure, many have no interpretation, and almost none of them have on-site toilet facilities. Many of the selected sites are in remote locations and lack good road access or directional signage. Road traffic adjacent to [23] presents a safety risk to visitors.

Access is difficult for sites [5], [11], [18], [22], [27], [30]; [21] has difficult access but has good basic visitor facilities. Literature for visitors is available for only a few of the selected sites (the 2010 EU HER.CUL program 'Valorization of Medieval Tombstone Cultural Heritage in the Western Balkans' has produced some of these).

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property differ across the 30 components, but that many are subject to insufficiently controlled natural processes of physical deterioration. Fires and road building have impacted on some sites in the past. Visitor levels are currently low for most of the selected sites, although it is a factor for the Croatian sites, and is anticipated to increase in future from the very low base at some of the other component sites. Improved visitor infrastructure, interpretation and access will be needed to support future growth in visitation.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

Property boundaries and buffer zones have been delineated for each of the 30 component sites. These

have been drawn according to cadastral arrangements, complemented by visual survey. Some of the component sites have fences or stone walls that indicate the property boundary, but in other cases, the boundaries are not physically evident on-site.

In the additional information provided by the States Parties in January 2016, maps indicating the boundaries and buffer zones for 13 of the components were shown as altered: [1], [6], [12], [13], [15], [17], [23], [25], [26], [27], [28], [29] and [30]. As noted above, the overall size of the serial property has been reduced from 70.88ha to 51.38ha, and the total area of the buffer zones has been revised from 1798.42ha to 334.93ha.

Some of these changes seem feasible and are consistent with discussions that occurred during the technical evaluation missions, or address mapping anomalies in the presentation of the nomination dossier. However, for the most part, ICOMOS considers that it is impossible to appropriately consider and evaluate these changed boundaries without the opportunity of a new mission. Clearly this is not possible within the short remaining time in the evaluation calendar established by the *Operational Guidelines*. It would therefore be necessary to consider these in the context of a future mission to the relevant properties.

ICOMOS notes the following issues requiring further review for the boundaries and/or buffer zones for some of the selected components:

- [1]: the further information provided by the States Parties in January 2016 appears to propose a more logical boundary and buffer zone for this component than the extremely large area initially proposed in the nomination dossier (20.16ha with a 1600ha buffer zone);
- [6]: the further information provided by the States Parties in January 2016 proposes to significantly decrease the buffer zone in this area, however, ICOMOS is concerned that this might not adequately protect the visual integrity of the site from holiday home building in the surrounding area;
- [19]: the buffer zone is provided only on three sides of the site. This may need to be reviewed to ensure a sufficient buffer zone on all sides;
- [12], [17], [30]: the additional information provided by the States Parties in January 2016 extend the buffer zones to all sides of the sites (where previously these were provided only on three sides of each site). This is likely to be an improvement, but needs on-site checking;
- [22]: the buffer zone could be redrawn to complement the topography of the setting;
- [23], [27]: the additional information provided by the States Parties in January 2016 has extended the buffer zones for these sites, but on-site checking is needed to evaluate these changes;
- [26]: ICOMOS supports the changes provided by the States Parties in the additional information (January

2016) to extend the buffer zone to the south, across the current road;

- [28]: ICOMOS welcomes the willingness of the States Parties to consider proposed changes to the property boundary, however, on-site checking is needed to confirm the adequacy of the revisions proposed in the additional information (January 2016) to protect the visual integrity of this site;
- [25], [26], [27]: the additional information provided by the States Parties clarify some of the problems with the maps provided in the nomination dossier. However, the properties cannot be mapped on the topographic maps provided due to the selected scales. This could be corrected for the benefit of the inventory materials required for World Heritage properties.

Because the proposals by the States Parties for revised property boundaries and buffer zones has occurred very late in the evaluation period, ICOMOS is also concerned to ensure that the necessary legal protection is fully in place for each of the boundaries and buffer zones.

Finally, ICOMOS suggests that, where feasible, associated quarries and landscape settings should be included in the buffer zones for properties where these connections are still extant.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property components and their associated buffer zones need further review and revision in order to adequately delineate and protect the nominated sites. ICOMOS notes that this would require a further mission.

Ownership

Most of the components of the serial nomination are in state ownership, although ownership varies and there are some that are wholly or partly privately owned including:

- State ownership: [2], [3], [5], [6], [7], [8], [10], [21], [22]
- Mixed ownership state/private: [1], [14], [17], [23], [29], [30]
- Private ownership [9], [11], [12], [16], [18], [19], [20], [25], [26]
- Private ownership (several owners): [4], [13], [15]
- Roman Catholic Church ownership: [24]
- Local community ownership: [27]
- Municipality and private ownership: [28]

Protection

Each of the States Parties is responsible for establishing legal protection for the nominated components of this property in their territory. In each case, the stećci have been afforded the highest level of national protection, including the buffer zones.

Each of the participating States Parties has signed international and European conventions relevant to the protection and management of the nominated property, including those that concern protection of archaeological heritage, landscape planning, protection of cultural

heritage in situations of armed conflict or natural disaster, and for the prevention of trafficking of cultural material.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: all the nominated sites have been declared national monuments by the Commission to Preserve National Monuments, and boundaries and buffer zones established. Protection measures are stipulated by the Law on Implementation of the Decisions of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments established through the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of the Federation of BiH, nos. 2/02, 27/02, 6/04, and 51/07; and the Official Gazette of the Republika Srpska nos. 9/02, 70/06, and 64/08).

Croatia: County and Municipality Spatial Plans and the Decisions on protection issues by the Ministry of Culture are supported by the Law on Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage. Conservation Departments in Imotski and Dubrovnik are responsible for implementing the protection measures for the nominated components in Croatia.

Montenegro: Legal protection is established by the Law on Protection of Cultural Property (Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 49/10) and the Law on Spatial Planning and Construction of Buildings (Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 51/08). The Ministry of Culture establishes the management plans for adoption by the Government.

Serbia: Legal protection is established by the Law on Cultural Property (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 71/94). The Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments – Beograd, and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Kraljevo are responsible for the implementation of protection and conservation of the nominated components within Serbia.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection provided by the participating States Parties is effective.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate.

Conservation

The stećci present a vast resource and focus for research. Inventorying of the stećci has occurred for over a century, but mostly in the post-World War II period, and especially since the 1970s. There is now a significant regional literature about the stećci. Despite this long period of interest, there is still a sense that there is considerable research and documentation yet to be done. The work done for the World Heritage nomination by the participating States Parties has in itself had a beneficial effect on this needed work.

Archaeological excavations have been conducted at only a few of the component sites (eg. [2] [23], [24], [28]).

Few of the component sites exhibit a good state of conservation, mostly due to natural processes of deterioration that are not sufficiently controlled. The limestone is sensitive to the effects of humidity and temperature changes; and many of the stones are eroded and broken, covered with moss and various lichens. There is a lack of maintenance, although the processes of preparing the nomination have allowed some good work to be done on condition assessments and planning of conservation interventions.

As noted above, preventive measures have been taken in only a few cases. To meet a higher standard of conservation, most of the sites will need to be included in active conservation programmes by skilled conservators. These activities are outlined in the Management Plans, but have yet to be implemented in most cases. The financial and human resources (including specialists and trained local people to take care of the maintenance) will represent a substantial commitment for the States Parties, particularly for Bosnia and Herzegovina (where the majority of the selected components are located). It would be desirable to develop a more detailed projection of these resource requirements and timeframes in which they can be provided.

ICOMOS considers that the needed condition surveys and conservation planning have been completed, and should be implemented; and that continued work is needed to improve the state of conservation of the components of the series.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

Each State Party has appointed a coordinator, and together they form the International Coordination Body (or 'Transnational Coordination Committee') responsible for the development of common management principles and objectives for the nominated components. Upon inscription, this body will be responsible for coordinating the joint management, according to the roles specified in the management plan. ICOMOS considers that this arrangement is appropriate; and notes the activity plan outlining the agreed coordination, capacity building, research and communications actions in the management plans.

At the regional and local levels, activities are coordinated by the State Coordination Structures and by the site management structures. Financial resources for implementing the management system will be provided by each State Party for the components occurring on their individual territories.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

The participating States Parties have prepared common Management Plan documents (2013-2023) for the nominated sites within their territories in compliance with existing legal protection for cultural heritage and spatial planning. While not entirely identical in their structure, these plans are clearly formulated according to an agreed approach, and contain a common vision, uniform conservation standards, shared management principles, a range of shared interpretation objectives and models of tourism development. There are also site level management plans for most of the components.

Each of the Management Plans identifies factors and processes of deterioration of the stones, and proposes clear actions for each component site.

There are no data about current levels of visitors to the nominated components. As noted above, visitor levels are very low for many of the component sites, and there are no formal tourism activities. The management plans clearly outline the current tourist infrastructure provided at each component site, but visitor management is otherwise not very detailed in the management plans that accompany the nomination dossier. Several types of potential tourism are considered: cultural tourism, eco-tourism, country tourism and sports tourism, and strategies have been developed around these. For the most part, visitor management is planned and implemented at the site level, via the site management plans, but some further coordination of education, interpretation and promotion might be useful.

ICOMOS considers that the management system is adequate for the safeguarding of the nominated property, although ongoing efforts will be needed to ensure that coordination is maintained across the different levels of management planning. ICOMOS is concerned that the training and financial resources needed to achieve and maintain a good state of conservation across the nominated series will be challenging. Further development of a common approach to the conservation of the stones, and capacity building at the local levels will be beneficial to the conservation of the stećci.

Involvement of the local communities

The involvement of local authorities and communities seems variable between the 30 components of the serial nomination, and systematically presented information is not available on this aspect.

While local authorities appear to have been involved in preparing the nomination in most areas, the involvement of local communities is also evident in a few cases. Some good examples of community involvement were noted by the ICOMOS missions, including: at [10], the local NGO 'Karaula' is a partner with the municipality for cultural activities, including the preservation of stećci; at

[21] the local community has assisted with providing visitor infrastructure; at [23] group visits are organised by the local history association; and, at [13] and [23] some activities are done with the involvement of school students. The ICOMOS missions reported good relations between specialists and local communities throughout the visited areas; and sites [2], [5], [25], [28], [29], [30], are regularly cleaned and vegetation controlled by the local community.

Overall, there are many signs of community support for the nomination. However, ICOMOS is uncertain about whether there is effective involvement of local communities in the management of all the component sites, and urges the participating States Parties to build on the existing examples of community involvement, and provide for capacity building and community participation in the management system.

ICOMOS considers that while the management system seems workable, it is not yet fully functioning. The effectiveness of the management system will need to be monitored and evaluated, especially in relation to the coordinated management mechanism.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the management system is adequate, but is not yet fully operating and needs strengthening, continued coordination and the consistent and long-term involvement of local communities.

6 Monitoring

The nomination dossier outlines a set of seven indicators for monitoring the state of conservation by the participating States Parties. These focus on the condition of the stećci and the effectiveness of conservation measures. While one of the indicators measures the 'impact of development' on a monthly basis, this could be further elaborated, and include levels of visitation (where relevant).

ICOMOS considers that the specified indicators appropriately focus on the state of conservation of the stećci, but that these could be further augmented by indicators associated with visitation and use to assist with the management of the serial property.

7 Conclusions

The stećci are an impressive phenomenon of the medieval cultures of south-eastern Europe. They represent a remarkable regional spiritual expression and artistic tradition derived through various cultural influences. The use of the serial approach is justified by the astonishing number of stećci found in this part of Europe, the range of types and decorative elements they exhibit, and the long time span of their use. The four States Parties are to be commended for the immense

shared work that has been done to present this serial nomination for evaluation.

While ICOMOS considers that the *stećci*, the graveyards in which they occur, and the historical and cultural significance of the associated funerary practices have the future potential to meet the requirements of Outstanding Universal Value, it is essential that the basis on which this occurs is clearly demonstrated. The recommended further work consists of several key and inter-related aspects that need careful re-formulation.

ICOMOS observes that the *stećci* represent both continuities with other European medieval traditions as well as specificities to older local traditions in south-eastern Europe. In order to establish the significance of the series beyond a regional threshold, the comparative analysis should be augmented by deepening the consideration of the continuities with other European cultural practices, and the specificities and older traditions of the areas where the *stećci* are found.

This should also assist in improving the needed rationale for the inclusion of each of the components in the series, which despite the progress made by the States Parties in the further information provided in January 2016, is lacking in sufficient clarity in relation to the asserted values of the serial property. ICOMOS notes that par. 137 of the *Operational Guidelines* requires that serial nominations demonstrate how each component contributes to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property as a whole in a substantial and specific way. While considerable efforts have been made by the States Parties in relation to this requirement, ICOMOS finds that much of the framework established to aid the selection is based on pragmatic concerns (such as state of conservation, legal protection, number of *stećci*), rather than the significance of the *stećci* and the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the serial property; and that there are variations in the methods of selection used by each of the four States Parties, rather than applying a coherent agreed approach.

If invited to so do, ICOMOS has offered to work with the States Parties to improve this critically important basis of the serial nomination.

ICOMOS also recommends that the criteria on which this nomination rests be reconsidered. Based on the material that has been presented, ICOMOS does not see future possibilities for inscription according to criteria (ii) and (vi), but criterion (iii) could form the basis of a revised nomination. For criterion (iii) to be demonstrated, ICOMOS recommends that the States Parties provide more explicit consideration of the specific cultural tradition or civilization, particularly in relation to how the tombstones (and graveyards) illuminate in an important way the cultural traditions of the area where they are found. Alternatively, the States Parties might wish to also give renewed consideration to criterion (iv) as part of this review, since it will allow for a more typological valuation of the *stećci* graveyards as a specific type of burial

structure. Given that the selection of criteria shapes the requirements for the evidence to be presented, the comparative analysis, and in some instances, the designation of boundaries, ICOMOS urges the States Parties to carefully review these possibilities, and offers to work with the States Parties on this aspect if requested.

The condition of authenticity is satisfied, and the serial approach is appropriate for the nomination of the *stećci*. As discussed above, further justification of the selection of the 30 component sites is needed so that the condition of integrity can be fully satisfied.

The main threats to the component sites relate mostly to lack of maintenance and insufficiently controlled processes of natural deterioration. This has been recognised by the States Parties, and there are conservation plans provided that are awaiting implementation. The conservation work carried out at several of the sites has been effective at mitigating these threats.

While visitor levels are generally very low, there are some component sites that require attention to visitor pressures; and all sites could benefit from a higher level of visitor infrastructure, including site interpretation. These have been clearly analysed as part of the processes to develop the World Heritage nomination, and actions for future works identified.

ICOMOS has also identified a number of adjustments to the boundaries and buffer zones of the selected sites that could be made in order to better reflect the values of the *stećci*, and to improve their protection, management and presentation. If feasible, it might also be worthwhile to include some of the extant quarries in the buffer zones of selected sites.

Legal protection and the management systems are adequate, with evidence of good coordination between the four States Parties. The monitoring indicators are few, but focus appropriately on the condition of the key attributes of the nominated serial property.

ICOMOS acknowledges that the four States Parties have responded energetically to the issues raised during the evaluation period. This is particularly demonstrated in the additional information provided in January 2016 (which included some revised sections of the nomination dossier). However, the time available to the States Parties and to ICOMOS during the formal evaluation process is not sufficient to reformulate and re-assess a nomination on this scale, and ICOMOS therefore concludes that a recommendation to defer the nomination is necessary in order to resolve these matters. ICOMOS has proposed a future Advisory Mission to the States Parties as a way of reformulating this nomination.

8 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS notes that this transnational serial nomination powerfully demonstrates that heritage can be a catalyser for peace, and acknowledges the importance of the efforts made by the four States Parties to work together to propose the inscription of their shared heritage of the stećci for inclusion in the World Heritage List.

While noting the considerable additional information provided by the States Parties in response to ICOMOS' Interim Report, including the revised nominated property boundaries, ICOMOS recommends that the examination of the nomination of Stećci – Medieval Tombstones, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, to the World Heritage List be **deferred** in order to allow the States Parties, with the advice of ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre, if requested, to:

- Reformulate the justification for Outstanding Universal Value to clearly address criteria (iii) and/or (iv), placing the stećci more clearly within their social, cultural and historical contexts;
- Demonstrate how the forms and decoration of the stećci reflect pre-Christian imagery that might be seen to have persisted in this part of Europe more strongly than elsewhere;
- Further develop the comparative analysis to more explicitly establish the importance of the stećci beyond the regional level, and to support the systematic selection of the components of the series according to their significance;
- Provide a clear and specific rationale for the inclusion of each of the component sites in the nominated series in terms of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value;
- Continue to review and revise the property boundaries and buffer zones as needed to ensure the protection of the visual integrity of the cemeteries and to improve the ability for the sites to be understood within their natural and historical landscape contexts, particularly where there are nearby extant quarry sites and historical settlements/fortresses;
- Implement and strengthen the management system through continued coordination and local community involvement, addressing the maintenance needs of the stećci, and ensuring adequate resourcing and capacity building for local caretakers.

ICOMOS considers that any revised nomination would need to be considered by an expert mission to the site.

ICOMOS remains at the disposal of the States Parties in the framework of upstream processes to advise on the above recommendations, if requested to do so.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS recommends that the States Parties give consideration to the following:

- Further improving the consistency of mapping and description of the selected components of the series;
- Augmenting the inventories to include other architectural and archaeological features found within some of the selected sites, such as archaeological material, churches, ruins, tumuli and cairns;
- Continuing to improve the state of conservation at selected sites through the development and implementation of active conservation programs based on the advice of skilled conservators;
- Improving the presentation of the sites through on-site and off-site interpretation and visitor infrastructure;
- Considering changing the name of the serial property to "Stećci Medieval Tombstone Graveyards" in order to place the tombstones in their important contexts.



Map showing the location of the nominated properties within four States Parties



St. Barbara – Dubravka, Croatia



Grčko groblje – Hrta – Prijepolje, Serbia



Grčko groblje - Žabljak, Montenegro



Grčka glavica in the village of Biskup – Konjic, Bosnia-Herzegovina