

Balkan and Ukrainian experience of protection and preservation cultural heritage during military operations

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This essay is devoted to comparing the experiences of countries that have experienced wars on their territories and whose cultural heritage has undergone large-scale destruction. We tried to analyze what steps have been taken for conservation, protection and restoration of heritage in the Balkans and how we can use this experience in Ukraine.

Key words: Balkans, Ukraine, cultural heritage, protection of monuments, war.

Introduction

Wars around the world always have similar consequences: they lead to terrible civilian casualties, massive population displacement, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. One of the manifestations of such violations is the destruction of cultural heritage. In 1954, a convention on the protection of cultural values in the event of armed conflict was signed in The Hague.

Since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the impact on the archaeological heritage of Ukraine has been devastating countless precious objects and sites have been damaged or destroyed and museums looted.

This is one of the innumerable aspects of the Russian war, which has direct consequences for the heritage of all mankind, and such consequences have already occurred in the world in the past. During the conflict in the Balkans, during the war in Afghanistan, during the war in Iraq and in Syria.

The task of this work is to take a look on the international legislation of cultural heritage protection, to draw attention to the experience of the Balkan countries in the protection and monitoring of cultural heritage during military operations, compare the foreign experience with the Ukrainian one, understand which methods we can use, and which, on the contrary, are different.

How and when did the international heritage protection legislation appear?

UNESCO specialists called this process of sys-

tematic destruction of cultural monuments the term “cultural cleansing”. “The main goal of cultural cleansing is the clear destruction of the cultural heritage of the enemy or the opposing ethnic group” (Jan Hladik, specialist of the UNESCO program). “This destruction is often also facilitated by geographical proximity and shared knowledge of places and cultural heritage, as well as the culture of the adversary.”(Hladík,1999)

In the 20th century, the process of protecting cultural monuments during military operations began to emerge, after the Second World War, this process intensified, many important lessons were learned regarding cultural heritage, which are fundamental and should be applied today:

- the need to take preparatory measures in peacetime to protect cultural heritage,
- creation and regular updating of lists of movable and immovable cultural heritage;
- training the army to conduct combat operations near cultural heritage sites;
- punishment for crimes against cultural heritage in criminal codes, as well as prosecution of persons who committed or ordered crimes against cultural heritage.

These arguments culminated in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, according to which cultural heritage is considered the heritage of humanity. Today, this agreement is a landmark in the field of monument protection activities during military conflicts. The idea behind the convention is that

each culture and each heritage from the past is unique and should not be sacrificed as a result of one generational disputes.

When war begins, a mechanism based on the provisions of the Hague Convention and its Second Protocol of 1999 comes into play. (Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention, 1999) However, the strictness of the requirements for the inclusion of objects in the International Register of cultural values under special protection becomes an obstacle to their effective protection. An important problem in the application of the legal provisions of the international legal regime for the protection of cultural values is the ignorance of the warring parties with its main provisions.

What's the situation with the Ukrainian cultural heritage?

In Ukraine, as a result of the full-scale invasion of Russia, which has been going on for

more than 12 months, the Ukrainian cultural heritage has suffered a lot of destruction: from monuments and museums to settlements and mounds. And if the problem of the destruction of architectural, artistic, and cultural monuments is quite obvious, the destruction of archaeological monuments is not so noticeable, but they are huge in their scale.

For example, (according to MCIP) *as of March 25, 2023, 1,373 objects of cultural infrastructure have already been damaged*, not including objects of cultural heritage. Counting the number of destroyed objects of cultural heritage is currently not possible at all. However, do those included in this number know about dozens and even hundreds of destroyed archaeological monuments? Of course not, because most of them are in the so-called “hidden state” and have not been recorded as monuments and could not be known to scientists to this day, so the scale of destruction is much greater (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The Polovtsian Stone Women destroyed by the russians on Mount Kremenets, near Izyum. Photo: MCIP

Рис. 1. Зруйновані росіянами кам'яні половецькі баби на горі Кременець, поблизу Ізюма. Фото: МКІП

Ukrainian cultural monuments, and archeology in particular, suffer from constant rocket and artillery attacks. At the same time, ancient barrows, hillforts, ramparts, settlement territories, even during the time of construction, were built on the most profitable parts of the territory, which has not changed over the centuries. Therefore, these areas are still used for the construction of fortifications and fortifications, because they were always built in the most advantageous positions. In this way, archaeological sites are being destroyed throughout the country, because fortified structures must be built everywhere to defend against enemy attacks.

As a result of the unprovoked aggression on the Russian Federation, which has been going on for six months now, we are witnessing the large-scale destruction of historical landscapes, thousands of archaeological sites that were in the process of research or were not even opened yet were damaged.

Currently, cultural heritage protection activities in Ukraine are focused mainly on “visible” heritage objects, such as architectural monuments and objects of monumental art. On the other hand, monitoring the state of archaeological heritage objects faces certain difficulties. Their search and recognition is much more difficult, because they exist in an “unmanifested state”.

Because of this, the vast majority of archaeological sites are not included in the lists of monuments of cultural heritage, and the necessary complex of monument protection measures is not applied to its territories.

The specificity of archaeological monuments

is that their discovery is often directly related to catastrophic events, and in this case — the destruction of landscapes as a result of military operations. It should be noted that the recording of the destruction of archaeological sites as a result of military aggression should take place not only in the territories where military actions took place, but in the entire territory of Ukraine.

Unlike other objects of cultural heritage, monitoring the state of archaeological objects is very complicated. It requires not only the fixation of external damage, but also obtaining information through the study of the facts of the destruction of cultural layers, which involves the direct presence of researchers on the territory of the monument, conducting necessary stages of archaeological research and scientific interpretation of the obtained data.

Large-scale hostilities have been going on in Ukraine for more than 12 months, and war is going on for 9 years, which affect a large area of the country and, accordingly, a large number of archaeological monuments. Due to this fact a number of different scientists decided to create an inter-institutional group of monitoring the destruction of archaeological landscapes, ALMG, a part of which I am. (Fig.2). It works on conducting monitoring, preventing destruction and stopping criminal activity in relation to movable and immovable objects of archaeological heritage:

- monitoring of earthworks during and after the construction of fortifications and military structures, communications in view of the possibility of discovering new archaeological objects;

- monitoring the state of preservation of known archaeological sites in order to determine the degree of damage due to military operations;
- termination of illegal activities related to the search for archaeological objects, which are carried out without appropriate permits;
- detection of facts of illegal circulation of archaeological objects and antiquities.

The result of the activity of this group, which is in process, while the war goes on, is the development of an interactive questionnaire, the purpose of which is to record the destruction of archaeological heritage objects directly in the field, to create a database and a map of the damaged archaeological sites and territories.



Fig. 2. Archeological Landscapes Monitoring Group's logo.

Рис. 2. Логотип Групи моніторингу археологічних ландшафтів.

What about Balkan experience of cultural heritage protection?

If we think about how we should act with the destroyed heritage after the war, it is worth looking at the experience of other countries that also experienced hostilities on their territory and are currently actively rebuilding.

The massive intentional destruction of cultural heritage during the Balkan war, targeting a historically diverse identity provoked global condemnation and became a seminal marker in the discourse on cultural heritage. It prompted an urgent reassessment of how cultural property could be protected in times of conflict and led to a more definitive recognition in international humanitarian law that destruction of a people's cultural heritage is an aspect of genocide. (Walasek, 2018)

If we look at the Balkan experience of the destruction of cultural and, in particular, archaeological heritage during the war, we can see that the consequences of the destruction were also terrible, in particular, they affected thousand-year-old monasteries and churches throughout the Balkans, as well as dozens of archaeological monuments, in the largest number, Roman settlements and Ottoman cities (Fig 3, 4).

The international legal regime for the protection of cultural values during military operations in the Balkans had low effectiveness, in particular due to the warring parties' ignorance of the rules of handling cultural heritage and its involvement in the theater of hostilities.

However, after the stabilization of the situation, a number of actions were taken by international conservation organizations in cooperation with local ministries of culture and heritage to protect culture in the future in the event of new armed conflicts:

- began the restoration of destroyed monuments of exceptional historical value;

- created a comprehensive scheme for creating a personnel reserve for officials of ministries and administrative personnel responsible for the protection of historical and cultural monuments;
- established a specialized center for the restoration of cultural heritage objects;
- trained specialists who will specialize in traditional arts and crafts to restore lost intangible heritage.



Fig. 3. Hermitage and Monastery of St. Peter of Koriša, which was the target of vandalism.

Рис. 3. Скит і монастир Св. Петра Кориського (Косово).

For example, in 2005, a UNESCO conference was held on the protection of cultural heritage in the territories where military operations took place in the former Yugoslavia. As a result of the conference, a catalog was created with a brief description of each monument, a description of the destruction caused to it,

a photo and a list of actions necessary to preserve this monument, as well as a budget for these actions. (Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Kosovo. Consolidated Summary.)



Fig. 4. Sarajevo's National Library. The iconic building was hit by a mortar and burned down during the Bosnian Serb siege of the city. Almost two million books were destroyed after the building's shelling and fire in August 1992.

Рис. 4. Національна бібліотека Сараєво. Знакова будівля згоріла під час облоги міста боснійськими сербами. Майже два мільйони книг були знищені після обстрілу та пожежі будівлі в серпні 1992 року.

Archaeological monuments were also included there. For example, Ulpiana, a Roman city, VIII century BC, which is considered one of the most important archeological sites of Balkans. A budget of 150,000 euros was planned for the restoration, protection in the future. And for improvement conditions in the museum, where collection from excavations will be stored (Fig.5).

The damaged Zvechan fortress, XIth century, during the excavations of which older monuments were also found, was also identified as an object in need of protection and research.

Monastery of St. Uros, XIVth century, which is an archeological site, was blown up in 1999. In the catalog, it is suggested to carry out archaeological research at this place, because it is totally destroyed, its artistic value is lost and it is impossible to rebuild it (Fig.6).

Budgets for the conservation and protection of these monuments were allocated by various foundations and organizations, including UNESCO. And after the complete monitoring of the state of cultural heritage in the Balkans, the publication of catalogs and collections of publications on the destruction and the need


		History: Inhabited since the VIII century B.C., the Roman city of Ulpiana was built on the site and first mentioned in the second century A.D. when it became a city. After an earthquake in 518 A.D. Justinian reconstructed the city changing its name to Justiniana Secunda. Subsequently it became an important episcopal seat.		
		Significance: It is the most important archaeological site in Kosovo, with major finds to date.		
		Condition: In general very poor condition of the remains discovered. Site not protected and neglected.		
V 05	ULPIANA ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE Graçanicë/Gračanica Prishtinë/Priština municipality	Proposed Interventions		Budget
		UNESCO: Cleaning, protecting and rehabilitating the site, revitalisation of the research programme		150,000 €
Sources: UNESCO Mission 2003 (p. 118) CoE Prioritised Intervention List (p. 27)				
Remarks: - Ulpiana is considered as one of the most important archaeological sites of the Balkans, which may be far from being fully and systematically excavated. - Excavations on this site and other archaeological sites in Kosovo need significant investments. Existing and future archaeological finds need to be preserved and exhibited in the museums of Kosovo. The conditions of the museums in Kosovo need to be improved. The PISG recommends 1,000,000€ for this purpose.				

Fig. 5. Ulpiana, archeological site, which was not destroyed by war, but was also included to the catalog, as it needs to be researched.

Рис. 5. Ульпіана, археологічна пам'ятка, що не була пошкоджена війною, проте також включена до каталогу, так як її необхідно дослідити.


		History: Originally built in the XIV century over the tomb of Stephan Uros it was abandoned in the XVI century. After renewal it was abandoned and ruined again in 1705. In the XIX century it was rebuilt up to the vaults. It was covered by a concrete roof around 1990.	
		Significance: The significance is mainly historical. The building has disappeared. The site can be treated as an archaeological site or as a monument of culture.	
		Condition: The church was completely blown up in June 1999. The only standing part of the building is the northern wall. There are remains still on site, which do not seem to have been cleared	
O 09	MONASTERY OF ST. UROŠ Nerodimja e Epërme/Gornje Nerodimlje Ferizaj/Uroševac municipality	Proposed Interventions	Budget
	Sources: UNESCO Mission 2003 (p. 39)	Fencing, supervised clearing, preservation of findings. Consolidation and research of remains.	250,000 €
Remarks: - The amount of 250,000 € is necessary for the preparatory stages of a large scale intervention which would require significantly more funds -The possible artistic value seems to be completely lost, but from the historic and archaeological point of view the site deserves strong intervention. -The site is very isolated, but the area is basically inhabited by Albanians. Serbian quarters and other churches nearby have also been completely destroyed.			

Fig. 6. Monastery of St. Uroš was completely destroyed in 1999. Proposed interventions are research of remains and preservation of findings.

Рис. 6. Собор Святого Уроша, був повністю знищений у 1999р. Каталог передбачає дослідження руїн та збереження знахідок.

for further action, the process of conservation and protection of these monuments began.

One more organization, that worked on the protection of cultural heritage on Balkans was Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB), founded in Sweden in 1995 to preserve heritage damaged in areas affected by conflicts or natural disasters. It was founded precisely because of the Yugoslavian Wars. CHwB worked with 19 projects in 8 cities and villages between 1996–2008. In the beginning the organization worked with single buildings such as the mosque and guesthouse in Maglaj, as well

as with the Serb Orthodox church at Zavala monastery and the archives at the Franciscan monastery Kraljeva Sutjeska. After being active some years in BiH the foundation started to work with bigger areas instead of just single buildings. In 2001 they restored some bazaar buildings at the bridge abutment in Mostar and started on the historic city core in Jajce.

What we can use in Ukraine from the Balkan experience of cultural heritage protection during war?

One of the important conclusions during the

work of the CHwB group was the understanding that during the restoration of destroyed cultural objects, each of them should be approached individually, taking into account the situation in a specific community, the level of destruction and the expediency of preservation. Their research shows that the preservation of cultural heritage to a large extent depends on the engagement of the community itself, and not on one-time conservation projects carried out by professionals. If there is insufficient involvement from the local community buildings and other heritage resources will decay and finally vanish. Furthermore, wars and other disasters change our perception of the past, which means that conservation cannot undo history. The material traces of a conflict, then, will in some ways remain visible for a very long time to come. Wars and the processes that follow them change the landscape indefinitely.

An important opinion, that I made for myself was the need to preserve traces of war in damaged objects of cultural heritage, because military actions are now also part of the history of this monument. For example, the ruins of a medieval temple with bullet marks on them cannot be restored and rebuilt into a new temple, even with the use of authentic materials.

The situation is the same with archaeological monuments. As an example, we can use the burial mound of Boldyni Hory, which are located in Chernihiv. Fire positions, trenches and dugouts were set up on the territory of the burial ground, which caused damage to some mounds (about 10). 27 trenches and 2 shell hits were also recorded (Fig.7).

In my opinion, this is an important part of our

history that also needs to be preserved. That is, in this case, several tasks arise for archaeologists and preservationists: to investigate the territory, record the damage, and then understand in what format the monument should be restored. On the one hand, it is necessary to restore the archaeological landscape, and on the other hand, it is necessary to leave the consequences of the war. In such cases, the solution may be the complete restoration of the landscape of the monument, but the installation of information stands near it with photos and information about the destruction and the cause of these destructions.

So, the traces that the war left on the monuments must be preserved. After all, this is now part of the history of this monument, it is a memory for future generations about the events that took place at this place and it is a memory of the aggressor who started the war.

Another point, which we can take from the Balkan experience is the widespread involvement of a large number of foreign organizations and partners in the research and reconstruction of the damage. After all, during large-scale wars, which is currently the Russian-Ukrainian war, a lot of cultural monuments that are valuable for all of humanity suffer, so representatives of different countries may be interested in financing and participating in the study of these sites.

Here, as an example, it is worth citing the above-mentioned systematic work of UNESCO in the Balkans. The most significant action from them was the development of a series of catalogs listing all the damaged heritage in the territory of these countries. This list included the history of it, significance, it's damage, pro-



Fig. 7. Damaged burial mound Boldyni Hory in Chernihiv. Photo: vovkcenter.org.ua.

Рис. 7. Пошкодження курганного могильника Болдині гори у Чернігові. Фото: vovkcenter.org.ua.

posed interventions and a budget.

Such a catalog with a list of monuments is critically lacking for Ukraine, because without structuring the destruction, it is impossible to plan future reconstruction. Therefore, the cooperation of various groups specializing in the preservation of heritage is critically necessary now, so that after the end of the war we have a complete list of monuments with which it is necessary to carry out works on restoration and preservation.

In Ukraine, it is worth starting the process of recording and monitoring archaeological monuments that were damaged by the war now, because their number will only increase by the end of the war and will suffer even

greater damage, which will no longer be possible to restore. It is because of this, the creation of the Archaeological Landscape Monitoring Group, which is engaged in the identification, recording and research of archaeological monuments destroyed as a result of military actions and the formation of a database on them. This is a very important process that will include documentation of the loss of the archaeological/historical landscape in the liberated territories. Discovery of new monuments, the existence of which archeology was not aware of.

The monitoring of destroyed monuments will help Ukraine to fulfill the conditions of the Hague Convention and to hold Russia accountable for the destroyed heritage, because the reports on the destroyed archaeological

heritage, as part of the cultural heritage, will be used to form a full-fledged report on the material and cultural damage caused to Ukraine by the invasion of Russia. Subsequently, this data can be used in international courts and lawsuits against Russia.

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Балканський та український досвід охорони та збереження культурної спадщини під час військових дій

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Наслідки воєн в усьому світі завжди однакові: вони призводять до жахливих жертв серед цивільних, масового переміщення населення, порушення прав людини та міжнародного гуманітарного права. Одним із проявів таких порушень є знищення культурної спадщини.

У 1954 році, в Гаазі, була підписана Конвенція про захист культурних цінностей у разі збройного конфлікту. Відтоді, як Росія розпочала повномасштабне вторгнення в Україну в лютому 2022 року, вплив на культурну, і, зокрема, археологічну спадщину України був руйнівним — незліченні дорогоцінні об'єкти та місця були пошкоджені або знищені, а музеї пограбовані.

Це один із незліченних аспектів російської війни, який має прямі наслідки для спадщини всього людства. Такі ж наслідки вже мали місце у світі в минулому: під час конфлікту на Балканах, під час війни в Афганістані, під час війни в Іраку та в Сирії. І саме досвід інших країн є надзвичайно цінним для захисту української спадщини.

Завдання даного нарису — ознайомитися з міжнародним законодавством охорони культурної спадщини, привернути увагу до досвіду балканських країн щодо охорони та моніторингу культурної спадщини під час військових дій, порівняти іноземний досвід з українським та зрозуміти, що можливо використати в українських реаліях.

Ключові слова: Балкани, Україна, культурна спадщина, охорона пам'яток, війна.