

Stone on the Stone: The Old Town Srebrenik in Bosnia

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Abstract— *The Old Town Srebrenik is a medieval town-fortress of the Bosnian Ban Stjepan II Kotromanjic (1292-1353). It was mentioned for the first time in 1333, in connection with the dispute over Ston, between the Bosnian ban Stjepan II Kotromanjic and the Serbian king Dusan. It is located on the border of the Pannonian plains and the mountainous part of Bosnia, and was a fortress that protected Bosnia from the Hungarians. The Old Town Srebrenik is located on the northeastern slopes of Majevisa, in the Gornji Srebrenik village, about 5 km from the Srebrenik town (Geographical coordinates: 44°42'12.06"N, 18°31'52.16"E, elevation: 416). The city was built on a high, steep and almost inaccessible rock above the Tinja river valley. It is 5 km from the main road Sarajevo-Tuzla-Orašje. The Old Town Srebrenik, as we see it today, bears the hallmarks of a strategic facility. It was originally built as a feudal castle, but in addition to its residential function, it had the character of a 'guard' in the system of fortified limes between flat Pannonia and predominantly mountainous Bosnia. He played this role of defender of wide areas, with more or less success, for several centuries, even during the rule of the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Old Town Srebrenik is a suitable example for the presentation of the theory of 'Architecturally Defined Space (ADS)', which the author of this work published in 1988 with his doctoral dissertation entitled "Defining architectural space on the example of an oriental-type town house in Yugoslavia". According to this theory, architecture is based on four basic elements: Environment, Man, Boundaries and Perspectives.*

Keywords— *Old Town Srebrenik, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Stjepan II Kotromanjic*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Old Town Srebrenik is a medieval town-fortress of the Bosnian Ban Stjepan II Kotromanjic (1292-1353). It was mentioned for the first time in 1333, in connection with the dispute over Ston, between the Bosnian ban Stjepan II Kotromanjic and the Serbian king Dusan. It is located on the border of the Pannonian plains and the mountainous part of Bosnia (Figure 1), and was a fortress that protected Bosnia from the Hungarians [1,2,3]. The Old Town Srebrenik is located on the northeastern slopes of Majevisa, in the Gornji Srebrenik village, about 5 km from the Srebrenik town (Geographical coordinates: 44°42'12.06"N, 18°31'52.16"E, elevation: 416). The city was built on a high, steep and almost inaccessible rock above the Tinja river valley. A deep moat was built under the most accessible part of the city, so that the site can only be reached via a bridge. It is 5 km from the main road Tuzla-Orašje. Folklore says that Srebrenik was created when three queens competed to build the most beautiful city. The first built a town in Sokol, the second in Srebrenik, and the third in Grad. Speaking about the kind of city she built, the

second queen said that it 'shines like silver', and that's why it got the name Srebrenik. Although medieval towns were named after mining sites, sources say that there was never a silver mine here, so this tradition is accepted as an explanation of the geneology of the Srebrenik toponyms. The Old Town Srebrenik, as we see it today, bears the hallmarks of a strategic facility. It was originally built as a feudal castle, but in addition to its residential function, it had the character of a guard in the system of fortified limes between flat Pannonia and predominantly mountainous Bosnia, thus protecting the area south of the Sava river from the aspirations of the potestat of the crown of St. István. He played this role of defender of wide areas, with more or less success, for several centuries, even during the rule of the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The city represents the most beautiful example of using completely inaccessible rock to build an impregnable city (Figures 1,2).



Figure 1. Old Town Srebrenik. Location
Source: Google Earth. Accessed: 11.30.2022.

II. ENVIRONMENT

By 'environment' we mean every possibility in the space in which man can realize his existence [4].

Natural Environment

By 'natural environment', we mean all those features that nature gave, and on which man (mostly) did not exert his influence: geographical location, geomorphology, watercourses and reservoirs, plant and animal life, available soil, climate^[4], for example.

For the conditions of the 'social environment' (the Middle Ages marked by numerous wars), an ideal location was found for the construction of a city-fort: a high, inaccessible rock with a source of drinking water at its foot (Figures 2,3,4,5).

Social Environment

By 'social environment' we mean everything that man has created and that separates him from the world of other living beings^[4]. It includes both physical structures (various material, more or less ordered products of their activity) and the immaterial world that we know with the intellect (science, philosophy, religion, law, morality) through an ordered system of abstract symbols (letters, signs)^[4].

History of the Old Town Srebrenik. The Old Town Srebrenik is located between flat Pannonia and the mountainous part of Bosnia, which is why it had great strategic importance in certain historical periods. In the Middle Ages, it protected the area south of the Sava river from the aspirations of the Hungarians. During the time of the Omani Empire, at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century, when the political and military aspirations of the Hungarians and the Ottomans, and then of the Austrians in the 17th and 18th centuries, tended to occasionally and in opposite directions, it gained importance again. The city is located on the military road that led through the Bosna river valley. The Old Town Srebrenik first fell into Hungarian hands in 1393, during the military campaign of King Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368-1437). The Hungarian crew then came to Srebrenik, but with great difficulty retained that property. In 1405, the Bosnian army launched a counterattack, targeting, among other things, the silver crew. At the head of the army is King Tvrtko II of Bosnia (reigned 1404-1409, 1420-1443). The war lasted three full years (until 1408), and ended with the heavy defeat of the Bosnian army under Dobor. In order to weaken Bosnia, the Hungarian king Sigismund in 1408 only nominally gave the Srebrenik town to the Serbian despot Stefan Lazarevec (1377-1427). The Hungarian crew remained in the city, where according to historical documents it was recorded as early as 1430. At that time, the Dubrovnik craftsmen, at the invitation of Prince Matej, "faithful subject of the Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxembourg", carried out certain construction works in the Srebrenik town. It seems that in 1433, the Bosnian king Stephen Thomas (1411-1461) managed to bring Srebrenik back under his rule^[1,2]. In 1452, the area of Usora and the Srebrenik town belonged to the Serbian despot Djuradj Brankovic (1377-1456), who in the same year returned it to the Hungarian governor John Hunyadi (Hungarian: Hunyadi János, 1406-1456). In that period, Srebrenik meant a lot to the Ugars, Bosnians and Ottomans, and frequent battles were fought over it. In the summer of 1426, the Ottomans made two incursions into Usora parish and came under Srebrenik. It was finally conquered during the penetration of the Ottomans into

Bosnia in 1462, when the people of Dubrovnik reported in a letter dated October 13 of that year that the entire parish of Usora had been occupied. With the capture of a large part of Bosnian territory in 1463, the strategic importance of Srebrenik increased. Now the same border towns have become important strategic points between two zones of interest: Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. In the autumn of 1464, the army of the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus (Hungarian: Hunyadi Mátyás, 1443-1490) struck northeastern Bosnia with the intention of expelling the few Ottoman garrisons left in the conquered fortifications and creating a defensive line from Belgrade to Jajce. His main goal was the conquest of Zvornik, which was not achieved in that campaign. At the same time, he first occupied Srebrenik and some other fortifications. There is no doubt that the fortification was repaired and strengthened during the time of the Srebrenik ban of the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus from 1464 to 1512, when the town of Srebrenik was the seat of the ban, due to the impending danger from the Ottomans. Northern Bosnia (Donji Krajevi and Usora) came under Hungarian rule. Jajačka and Srebrenička banovina were founded from these territories. The latter included Usora, Soli, and Spreča with regional towns, and its center was in the town of Srebrenik. However, all the time there were fights between the Hungarians and the Ottomans on the territory of northeastern Bosnia^[1,2]. The first truce between them was concluded for the period from 1503 to 1510, and the second for the period from 1520 to 1523. In the first truce of 1503-1510, Srebrenik with its banovina remained to Hungary, among other important cities. After the accession (1512) to the throne of Sultan Selim I (1470-1520), the activity of the Ottoman army in Bosnia was intensified. It is not known exactly when Srebrenik was conquered, but most authors agree that it was between 1510 and 1519^[1,2].

The Old Town Srebrenik, as a military fortress, was abandoned in 1835, when it was left to the ravages of time^[1]. Its restoration began a few years ago, when it became an important tourist destination.



Figure 2. The Old Town Srebrenik, half of the 18th century (left) and today's appearance (right)

Source: Basler, Dj. (1957). "The old town of Srebrenik and the problem of its conservation", in: *Our Antiquities, IV*, Institute for the Protection of Monuments of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo (in Croatia), left
Source: Author (8.7.2021.), right

III. MAN

Space acquires meaning only if it stands in some relation to man. This relationship ranges from the relations of the already known dimensions of space, through those that can be sensed, to those that are currently beyond the reach of human

imagination. In other words, man is a being on the way, a being who continuously learns, a being of open possibilities. The

term 'man' is a huge question, the essence of which he himself tries to decipher within his own limits, within the limits of the Earth and the limits of the Universe [4]. Together with the rest of the living world, it participates in the process of circulation of matter and energy in nature, sharing the same fate with it, being born and dying against its will. Endowed with reason, will and feelings, he is the only one in the living world who can discover the given laws of the organization of nature.

Stjepan II Kotromanic was born (1292) in Old Town Srebrenik, and died (1353) in the royal town of Bobovac near Kraljeva Sutjeska. He is from the ruling house of Kotromanic. He was the ban of Bosnia from 1322 to 1353. The uncle is Tvrtko I (1338-1391), the first Bosnian king. During his reign, the largest territorial expansion of Bosnia took place until then. With clever government and good diplomatic connections, he set all the conditions for his successor Tvrtko I to create the strongest independent Bosnian and South Slavic state at that time. He was the first Bosnian ruler to mint his own money. Stefan Uros IV Dusan (Stefan Nemanjc, 1308-1355) conquered Bosnia up to Imotski in 1350, but was defeated by Ban Stjepan II Kotromanic. It is believed that the royal town of Bobovac was built by Stjepan II Kotromanic in the middle of the 14th century, and that the additions were continued by the kings: Tvrtko II (around 1380-1443), Stjepan Ostoja (1378-1418) and Stjepan Tomas (1411-1461). Bobovac was considered the capital of the Bosnian state. The Bosnian royal crown was kept in that city. Stjepan II was born in the family of Ban Stjepan I (1242-1314) and Serbian royal Jelisaveta Nemanjic, daughter of King Dragutin. After the marriage (1353) of his daughter Elizabeth to the Croatian-Hungarian king Louis I (Croatian: Ludovik Veliki, 1326-1382), he became even closer to the king. During his reign, Catholicism grew stronger in Bosnia, and the Franciscans expanded their activities, establishing a special vicarage in 1339. He influenced the economic development of Bosnia, encouraging the exploitation of iron, silver and copper mines and trade, especially with Dubrovnik and other coastal cities. He minted his own silver coins and supported the development of cities [6].

Ban Stjepan II spent the last years of his reign in peace, with the exception of minor disputes with the Republic of Dubrovnik and Venice over looted caravans in Bosnia. He managed to marry his two daughters well, thus becoming the son-in-law of the Count of Celje, and on June 20, 1353, the King of Hungary to his sovereign Ludovic I. However, he was already seriously ill and died on September 28 of the same year. His brother Ninoslav had no legitimate sons and handed over power to his nephew Tvrtko I, that is, to his brother and co-ruler Prince Vladislav as regent. He chose the church as part of the Franciscan monastery of St. Nikola in Mila near Visoko [6].

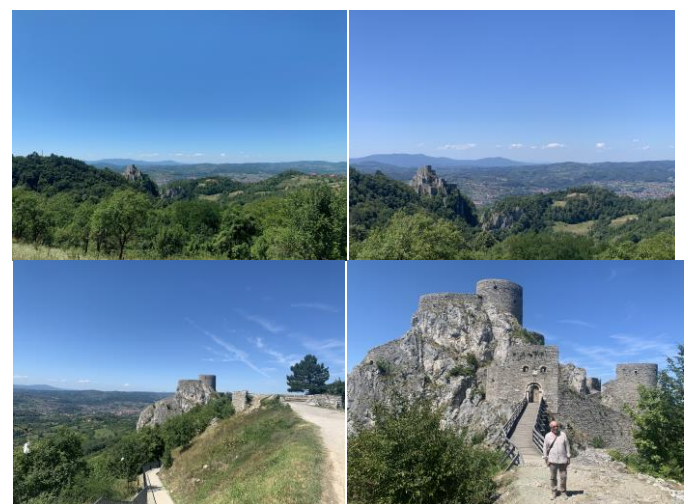
Boundaries

Boundaries are those places in the environment where the situations encountered are controlled according to very specific human needs. Conditions are all those discovered and undiscovered phenomena in space that have a stimulating or degrading effect on humans. Boundaries, therefore, have the task of enabling the selection of influences. In the architectural sense, they enclose, but also include a person in the conditions of a certain environment [4].

Layout of the Old Town Srebrenik. Old Town Srebrenik, as a whole, follows the patterns of the creation of fortress cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and in Europe) in the Middle Ages. Certain contents of the city-fortress got their disposition according to the configuration of the location (natural rock). The following structures are organized within the Old Town Srebrenik: Access bridge (built during the administration of the Ottoman Empire), entrance tower, southern inner courtyard ('obor'), northern inner courtyard ('obor'), eastern tower, northern tower (remodeled in mosque during the administration of the Ottoman Empire), a central (large) tower, a cistern and a residential building (Figure 3). Every single piece of content is located and arranged in the most expedient way so that its function has the best potential.



Figure 3. The Old Town Srebrenik. Today's situation (bird's eye view) Source: <https://turisticki-leptir.com/index.php/component/k2/item/44-stari-grad-srebrenik>, Accessed: 11.17.2022.



Source: Lejla Hadrovic (8.7.2021.)



Figure 4. The access bridge to the Old Town Srebrenik (View from the town-fortress towards the access from the outside)
Source: Lejla Hadrovic (8.7.2021.)

The protective wall of this pen was built in the 18th century. The construction of the wall does not show any traces of partition or addition to some already existing walls, and according to its structure it is identical to the objects of the Ottoman period (Figures 3,7).



Figure 6. East tower
Source: Lejla Hadrovic (8.7.2021.)
Source: Author (8.7.2021.)



Figure 5. Entrance to the Old Town Srebrenik. View of the entrance from the access bridge (left) and view from the entrance tower towards the access bridge (right)

Source: Author (8.7.2021.)



Figure 7. View from the northern inner courtyard ('obor') of the surroundings
Source: Author (8.7.2021.)

According to old people, the north tower was still an active mosque at the end of the 19th century. It is completely different from other buildings in terms of construction method. There is a round opening in the floor, the size of an ordinary small well. The foundation walls extend in various directions, so the tower appears to us only as a superstructure of some other, previously demolished building. Light gray limestone, bound with lime mortar, was used as a building material. According to the construction method, it is certainly a medieval building. This is supported by a seemingly insignificant detail in the construction of the walls. Namely, a system of wooden reinforcement ('hatule') was used for their construction. Created in modest technical conditions, medieval cities were built of amorphous stone with abundant use of lime mortar as a binding agent. The binding power of wet lime, regardless of any other admixtures, was developed, however, by drying over a very long period of several years (even decades). The stone lining of the face of thick walls often served only as a formwork for the amorphous mass of thrown stone and lime plaster in the inner core, and in no case as a means of ensuring the strength of the wall (Figures 3,5).

The main (central) tower is connected to the upper part of the city by stairs, which lead next to the cistern, which consists of the main tower (donjon), a residential building for the crew and a cistern for collecting rainwater. To the south of the residential building is a small fenced area, and an inner yard ('obor'), which served as a small city garden. During its existence, it was intended for the residence of the master. During the renovation in the 18th century, the basic layout of the old castle was retained, now adapted to new circumstances

The entrance tower has a rectangular base, and is built on two floors separated by a stone arched vault (Figures 3, 4, 5). On the outside, on the ground floor, there is a wide semi-circular arched door. The floor is paved with stone slabs. The light in the upstairs room came through two windows on the outer facade of the tower. There is a small loophole diagonally above the left shaft. The walls of the tower are almost completely preserved, so the current level of the attic can, with minor repairs, serve as a base for the roof construction. The original roof was pyramidal in shape. The documentation about the roof has not been preserved, so it cannot be said with certainty whether the covering was made of shingles or of stone slabs. Next to the tower there is a small annex with a trapezoidal base, vaulted with an archaically shaped dome ('cemer'). According to tradition, here was the city kitchen. From the entrance tower, a wall descends to the north, which after ten meters turns in the direction of the eastern tower. In the lower part of that wall, at the bend, a side exit was built, which today is used for communication with the city (Figure 3).

The eastern tower has a rectangular base with a semicircular side in the southeast. Due to the shape of its base, it could have been covered by a high roof with a shingle covering. The tower was divided into two floors by a light wooden structure. The only openings were loopholes (Figure 5).

The northern inner yard ('obor') is the 'buffer zone' of the city-fortress, where cannons were stationed for its defense.

and a changed living culture. The main tower (donjon) has a base in the form of a right triangle with a semicircular hypotenuse. The width of the walled area varies between 9.5 and 11 meters. The foundations of the walls reach a thickness of 2.85 meters in places, and the thickness in the attic is 1.6 meters. In addition to the ground floor, there were two more floors, separated by a wooden structure. The tower was covered with wooden shingles. The floors were accessed by wooden stairs. The beam beds were preserved (Figures 3,9).



Figure 8. North tower (remains of the former mosque)

Source: Author (8.7.2021.)

for ritual washing ('abdestluk'). The drainage of the liquid from the ablution was carried out by stone grooves that fell out of the wall by about 15 to 20 cm. The northern room also had a window in the northern wall, which in the southern room corresponds to two niches in the wall ('dolafi') in the southern wall.



Figure 10. Access stone staircase to the residential building and the southern inner courtyard (left) and inner courtyard-garden (right)

Source: Author (8.7.2021.)



Figure 9. Main (central tower)

Source: Author (8.7.2021.)

The cistern next to the tower has a capacity of about 2 m³ of water. The interior lining of red hydraulic lime is the formwork for its wall. In addition to this cistern, the inhabitants of Stari Srebrenik also used the source of living water at the foot of the town. We judge this by the thick wall that surrounded and protected that source. It can be assumed that there was a secret road leading to that source from the city, which during the siege could be used at night to supply the crew with drinking water (Figure 3).

The residential building together with the main tower represents the central building of the Old Town Srebrenik. The current building, by its characteristics, belongs to the Ottoman period. The building has an elongated rectangular base. A long corridor, lit by two windows next to the northeast corner, was carried through the eastern part. At its southern end, two latrines with appropriate sewage were installed in niches. From the corridor, you enter four identically decorated rooms, each of which had one window, a large clay oven and a niche



Figure 11. Residential building

Source: Author (8.7.2021.)

The partitions between the rooms were made of light material. Namely, the reinforcement consisted of beams whose bearings were preserved and show us the size of individual rooms. The floor was made of wood, and the ceiling was covered with

boards. The building was covered with stone slabs that were taken from the same Maidan where the stone for the walls was obtained. The roof was low. Former fire pits were insulated against the wall with tufa slabs. The excessive percentage of limestone in the stone, from which the city was built, made it resistant to fire, and this property was known to the builders. Below these rooms, a basement extends the entire length of the building, which is divided by a vestibule into a smaller vestibule and one long hall (Figures 3, 10, 11).

The building outside the Old Town Srebrenik is located at the cut by the access bridge. The building has relatively thin walls and no openings. Also, no connection with the entrance tower of the city-fortress can be noticed. There is no opening on the building, so it was impossible to enter it, except through the roof. On the walls, moreover, there are no architectural designs that would be necessary to support the construction of the suspension bridge. It looks as if there was no suspension bridge on Srebrenik in the 18th century, but you climbed up the stairs. The shape of the land within the city did not provide the possibility to bring horses and carts, so that there were only spaces for people in the city, and therefore a suspension bridge was not needed (Figures 2, 3, 4).

IV. CONCLUSION (PERSPECTIVES)

By the term 'Perspective' (within the framework of the theory of Architecturally Defined Space), we mean "that dynamic relationship that connects now - future, existing - possible, achieved - desired" [4].

Old City Srebrenik is an example that clearly and vividly confirms the theory of Architecturally Defined Space (ADS), i.e. the synergy of four fundamental elements of architecture: Environment (Natural and Social Environment), Man, Boundaries and Perspectives. The 'Social Environment' has 'found' the ideal 'Natural Environment' [4]. For the construction of a fort in the 'lime of forts' located along the rivers Drina, Bosna, Vrbas and Una (which flow from south to north, from 'hilly Bosnia' to the Sava river in the Pannonian lowland) which should defend 'hilly Bosnia' from strong invaders from the direction of Pannonia plains from the north, the ideal was found - a natural high and difficult to access rock. At the same time, the material from which 'nature built the rock' (stone-limestone) was used for the construction of artificial (architectural) structures. In addition to stone, which symbolized stability and durability throughout the history of architecture, wood was also used (for the construction of ceiling and roof structures and roof coverings-shingles) taken from the site or the immediate surroundings. And while stone has remained stable since the construction of the Old Town Srebrenik (1333) until today, wood, as an organic material, has decayed over time. Old drawings of the Old Town Srebrenik (as well as information about other fortress cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and preserved traces of these structures on the spot can be used for the reconstruction of wooden structures.

Throughout the long life of its existence (around 700 years), the Old Town of Srebrenik 'collected and preserved within itself enormous energy' which became its 'embodied energy' and which 'fed' each subsequent generation of the

surrounding population as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole [7,8].

In modern times, the Old Town Srebrenik was often a spatial environment where various artistic performances were held (filming, dramas, organizing painting and art colonies, folklore events, for example). The famous film of Bosnian cinematography "Hasanaginica" was mostly filmed (1983) in the Old Town of Srebrenik (Figure 12). The famous ballad "Hasanaginica" was revived here, which was composed in 1646-1649, and which, due to its exceptional artistic power, was translated by many famous writers: Alberto Fortis (1774), J.W. Goethe (1775), Walter Scott (1798), A. S. Pushkin (1835), Adam Mickiewicz (1841), for example.

Thanks to the fact that the Old Town Srebrenik is built of stone ('eternal material'), its physical durability is ensured, and its 'embodied energy' will continue to generate new forms of human creativity in the future.



Figure 12. Scenes from the "Hasanaginica" movie filmed in 1983 (Scenes shot in the Old Town Srebrenik)

Source:

https://www.google.com/search?q=film+hasanaginica&source=lmns&tbm=vid&bih=969&biw=1920&rlz=1C1GCEA_enBA814BA814&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiA2oPWtdj7AhUCw7sIHb7zAVwQ_AUoAXoECAEQAQ#fpst=ive&vld=cid:a6fc8988,vid:u-m2U8xE7hY, Accessed: 12.1.2022.

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