

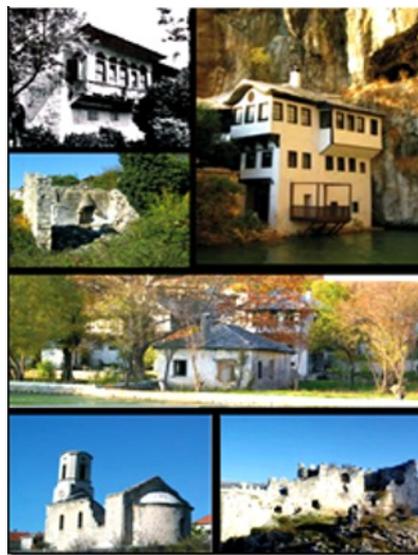
### ***Historical urban site of Blagaj***

Country or territory:  
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Name of organisation  
compiling the information:  
Commission to Preserve National  
Monuments

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Name and address of bulding(s) or site:

HISTORICAL URBAN SITE OF  
BLAGAJ

Inventory reference number(s):

Provisional List of National Monuments  
No.:413-420

Site type:

Natural and urban historic site

Main date(s):

Ranges from prehistoric times to  
present day

Current use(s):

Religious, public, educational, cultural,  
recreational, residential

Significance:

#### *Geographical and historical features*

The mediaeval fort of Blagaj, with the town below, which is referred to in documentary sources to this day by the same name, is situated on the edge of Bišće plain, above the source of the river Buna.

This region is specific in the diversity of its above-ground and underground hydrography. The source of the Buna is a fine example of an underground carsick river, one of the largest and most beautiful in Europe. The region is also known for the diversity of its flora and a number of endemic species. At lower altitudes, there are many evergreen plant and deciduous thicket species, while at higher altitudes in the hills there are sparse forest. Fertile cultivable land is suitable for the agriculture typical of the Mediterranean climate.

Specific natural and geographical features have always affected the development of communication infrastructure. The main Roman roads passed through this region, forming the shortest route from the Adriatic coast to the Sava and Danube valleys. The mediaeval roads followed the old Roman roads, but because of the reduced needs of caravans pulled by horses new roads were also built, particularly in the mountainous regions. In mediaeval times the main trade routes in the country ran through Bišće and Blagaj. A number of market towns developed along these routes.

The development of the present-day Blagaj region and its socio-political transformation can be traced from the prehistoric era to the present day. Paleolithic cave dwellings, "Pećina Ševrljica", Neolithic cave dwellings, "Zelena pećina" as well as important archaeological sites from the Copper, Bronze and Iron Ages have been discovered. The main Roman settlements were in Negočine – a major crossroads of four main roads leading to Naron, Stolac, Nevesinje and Konjic – Kosor and the Kosor bridge, over which the road to Blagaj ran. On the south-west summit of Blagaj hill, where the remains of Blagaj's mediaeval fortress now lays, fortifications in Roman times must have existed, at least judging from the archaeological material found on its slopes. The walls of a more solid Roman fortification, Mala gradina, still stand out on the opposite, north-east summit.

The Blagaj plaque, as it is known, belongs to the turn of the 12th and 13th century. The inscription on the plaque refers to the church of SS. Cosmos and Damian, and thereby to a major centre, at least in the local context. Findings from the late mediaeval period (12th to 16th centuries), in particular, attest to the prosperity of this settlement, an administrative centre and strategically very important fort in Blagaj, as indicated by the location of the rulers' court in Podgrađe near Blagaj, and the stone judge's seat found in the nearby village of Kosor. Stećak tombstones were also found, evidence of the artistic and spiritual expression of that time, and indicative of population density and socio-economic conditions in these settlements.

The major political centre of Hum land throughout the mediaeval period was represented, in the south-eastern part of the Mostar valley, in the Bišće and Blagaj area, by the following sites:

- a fortified town
- a crafts and trade township outside the ramparts (Podblagaj)
- the rulers' court (Bišće), and
- religious monuments.

It is hard to determine the administrative and political relations between Blagaj and Bišće. As well as their geographical proximity, documentary sources suggest that they were separate units within the system of local governance.

*Blagaj's mediaeval fortress* is first referred to in 948 AD in a work by Constantine Porphyrogenitus. With its favourable strategic position, it defended the access to Bišće polje from Nevesinje and the lower Neretva. Blagaj was owned by the barons of Hum, and was occupied by the powerful Kosača clan, Grand Duke Sandalj Hranić, and his nephew and heir Stjepan Vukčić, for whom the fort acquired the name "Stjepan grad". In 1452, Vladislav Hercegović occupied Blagaj fort in fighting between Herceg Stjepan and his sons. The Ottomans occupied Blagaj in 1465 and maintained a garrison there, under the command of a *dizdar*, until 1835. At that time Blagaj was no longer strategically important, and the soldiers lived in the township below.

The appearance of the fortified town can only be deduced from the ruins on the site and by comparison with other fortified towns and fortresses of the same period and region. The layout of the fort is a fairly regular polygon. It stands on a steep cliff, with access from the east. The fort is surrounded by high ramparts, with towers and numerous loopholes. To the west, where the fort narrows, was the main and largest tower, which was used for residential purposes.

#### *Urban development of Blagaj town*

The urban structure of Blagaj town and its spatial layout can be traced from the mediaeval township, which became a *kasaba* or town in the Ottoman period, and then an administrative centre. The Austro-Hungarian period brought no changes to the evolution of Blagaj. Historical documentary sources rarely refer to the mediaeval township outside the fortifications, Podblagaj, and its economic growth alongside the major role of the Blagaj fort in mediaeval times, as a prominent administrative centre. The earliest reference to Podblagaj dates from 1447. The township lay at the foot of Blagaj fort, where the road runs down from

the fort and intersects with the Nevesinje road. However, despite the major trade routes that ran through the region and the township that grew up outside the fortifications, the economy was predominantly a natural one. Trade was too small in volume to lead to the development of an economic centre. In an agricultural environment such as that of Blagaj, there was no basis for the development and evolution of an urban settlement.

#### *Urbanization 15th to 18th century*

The formation of Blagaj as an organised settlement which began with the arrival of the Ottomans in 1465, when they occupied the mediaeval fort of Blagaj, rapidly lost its strategic importance. The urbanization of Blagaj as we now know it was defined in the second half of the 15th century and structured during the 16th.

The new administration began with the formation of a settlement according to established town planning principles. Building land was marked out, thus defining the area to be occupied by the future town. The new town planning principles can be observed from the chronological erection of mosques and residential quarters or *mahalas*, which took place in Blagaj in the following order:

- *mahala Džamija (Varoš or Carska)* originated with the erection of a mosque in the name of Sultan Suleyman II the Lawgiver (the Magnificent) in 1520-21. This *mahala* is in the centre of Blagaj town, and acquired its name from the mosque built there;
- *mahala Bunsko* originated with the expansion of the mediaeval township and the construction of a mosque by the legator Čejvan Čehaja prior to 1554. This *mahala* is some 1.5 km from the town centre, and grew up along the road that until 1903 was the only road between Mostar and Nevesinje;
- *mahala Zir (Donja or Hasan-agina)* originated before 1664 with the erection of the Hasan-aga mosque. It is very close to the river Buna and the bridge over which the mediaeval road for Buna and Počitelj ran;
- *mahala Do* also originated before 1664, with the erection of a mosque that was the endowment of Hajji Husein ef. Bašba. Mahala Do is at the extreme northern edge of the town; Murat Spahija. This residential quarter is very close to the source of the river Buna;
- *mahala Galičići* originated in the first half of the 18th century. This residential quarter is very close to the source of the river Buna, on the left bank;
- other *mahalas* in Blagaj that are mentioned are *Podgrađe* and *Kosor*, which date from the existing mediaeval township. *Podgrađe* is about 2 km to the west of Blagaj centre, and *Kosor* between the rivers Buna and Bunica, south-west of Blagaj.

*The mediaeval fort of Blagaj (Stjepan grad)* is regularly referred to in documentary sources as a distinct territorial unit.

With the formation of these *mahalas*, the area and lines of development of Blagaj town were laid down, with clearly defined residential areas, and the trade and crafts centre of *čaršija*. With the construction of mosques, the basic roads network was also laid out, running parallel and at right angles to the river, and forming the shortest link to the town centre. The selection of areas to build residential quarters and their actual construction were based on topographical features, particularly access to water. The town developed along the river Buna, running right down to the river banks. The left bank is somewhat steeper and less suitable for building, as a result of which most of the residential quarters are on the right bank of the Buna.

Public buildings were placed deliberately in the urban structure as a whole. Among the first to be built was the Careva (Imperial) mosque in 1520/21, with which the settlement acquired the status of *kasaba*, followed by the Karađoz-beg bridge in 1570 and the Leho bridge prior to 1664. The *hamam* was built between 1570 and 1664, the *han* before 1664, and a number of shops and more solidly-built storerooms and residential buildings.

The business centre of the town, the *čaršija*, was planned from the start for the long term, with a view to building up the *kasaba* into a *šeher* or sizeable town. The most active period of building was the 16th century, when the town came to occupy its entire area. By the late 16th century Blagaj was a *šeher*, highly organized functionally, aesthetically and socially, but in the 17th century, when it was visited by Evliya Çelebi in 1664, Blagaj was a small *kasaba*.

The development of crafts and trade, and with it the economic prosperity of artisans and merchants, in the Ottoman period, also had some influence on the construction of Blagaj, reflected in the expansion of the *čaršija* and the development of the *mahalas*. In the early stages of Blagaj's urbanization an important part was played by its mills, initially built to grind corn for the army, and the *tekke* with its *musafirhana*, the role of which should be considered in the light of the work of the dervishes among the indigenous population.

### Cultural and historical monuments of the Ottoman period

#### Religious buildings

The Sultan Suleyman (Careva, Imperial) mosque was one of the first buildings to be erected in Blagaj township, in 1520/21. It is very close to the right bank of the river Buna in the centre of Blagaj, and is one of the oldest domed mosques in this region, with the features of a single-space domed mosque. The ground plan is a square. The main body is a cube pierced by small rectangular windows. Above this cube is an octagonal drum with pointed-arched windows. The mosque has an octagonal roof with sheet metal cladding. It is stone built, with plastered facades and very simple decoration. On the right-hand side, exterior wall is a slender stone minaret, octagonal in section below and polygonal above. Outside the building was a fenced courtyard or harem. The most recent repairs were carried out in 1986. A *mekteb* or Muslim religious school was built by the Sultan Suleyman (Careva) mosque prior to 1664.

#### Burial grounds (harems)

Burial grounds or harems form part of the *mahala* complex. The specific features of these burial grounds are their *nišan* tombstones, which reveal the indigenous influence of the *stećak* tombstones and of the orient. The decoration is diverse, based again on both the local tradition and oriental designs; the epitaphs are in Arabic, Turkish and Persian.

Harem by the Careva mosque

Harem by the mosque in Galičići

Harem in Podgrađe

The large harem in Blagaj

The shahids' (martyrs') necropolis in Blagaj in Bunsko mahala.

#### Other public buildings

As well as religious buildings, other public buildings such as the *hamam*, *han* and bridges occupy an important place in Blagaj.

The *Hamam* is on the right bank of the river Buna, very close to the Careva mosque and Karađoz-beg bridge. It was endowed by Mehmed-beg Karađoz, and built between 1570 and 1664. It is of small size, and has a layout of a single *hamam*, built of stone and brick and consisting of a *šadrvan*, *kapaluk*, *halvat*, *hazna* and *culhan* (apodyterium, tepidarium, caldarium, boiler room and hypocaustum). This is one of the few *hamams* built by a river, from which the water was drawn by means of a special channel. It is said that it was used as an abattoir for a long time, and was probably abandoned in 1814 after the plague that ravaged the country at that time. Most of the *hamam* is now in ruins and all that can be seen is part of the ground floor walls and part of the dome over the *šadrvan*. The river Buna, time and the elements, and human neglect, have resulted in only parts of the *šadrvan*, *kapaluk* and *halvat* of the Karađoz-beg hamam surviving.

All the surviving walls of the building are overgrown with vegetation, and earth has been piled up inside. Only the walls and part of the dome over the *šadrvan* have survived. It is

impossible to enter the building because of the piles of earth, weeds and fallen sections of the building.

When the river Buna is running high, it reaches the walls of the *hamam*. Haseći Ali-aga's *han* was built before 1664 very close to the Careva mosque. By 1700 it was already dilapidated. It was stone built, with two storeys. The ground floor housed the stables, storeroom and inn, and the first floor the rooms. The remains of three fireplaces are visible on the south courtyard wall, typical of such simple buildings, along the wall on a raised platform. The original appearance of the *han* was transformed by various alterations and additions, as can be seen from walled-up windows, new construction, and new windows. Most of the building is in state of neglect.

#### Bridges

Over its 8 km court, the river Buna has four bridges, two in Blagaj, one in Kosor and one in Buna. All are in use, but much altered in appearance. *The Karađoz-beg bridge* was endowed by Zaim hajji Mehmed-beg, known as Karađoz, and was built before 1570. The road to Stolac led over the bridge, which has five arches, of increasing span towards the centre. It has twice been repaired, following World War II bombing and following a major flood in 1960. The Karađoz-beg bridge is in use, and is in good structural condition. *The Lehina ćuprija* in Donja Mahala was built before 1664. The most recent reconstruction radically altered its original appearance.

#### Mills

Very close to the source of the river Buna, channels branch off leading water to power the mills. Several mills, stamping mills and two fulling mills were built. As a rule they are simple stone-built structures with gabled roofs clad with stone slabs, and with one or more mills.

#### Residential architecture of the Ottoman period

The town had several outstanding residential complexes of the Ottoman period: the Kolaković house, part of a residential complex (the building is in ruins and abandoned), the Velagić house, a complex in Galičići *mahala* on the left bank very close to the river Buna (abandoned, in ruins), and residential buildings in Bunsko mahala (in ruins) by the old Nevesinje road. The houses were built of local materials – stone and timber. The facades were plastered and whitewashed over quarry stone. Cut stone was used only for details.

The Kolaković house is one of the most striking examples of residential architecture in Herzegovina, and was clearly divided into business and family quarters. It was destroyed during the war in 1993. The remaining walls are overgrown with vegetation.

The Velagić residential complex was built before 1776. The entire complex was surrounded by a stone wall about two metres high separating the house and garden from the outside world. A narrow road leading to the complex runs from the road leading from the *čaršija* towards the source of the river Buna and the *tekke*. The basic building material was stone – stone walls, stone slabs cladding the gabled or hipped roofs. The business quarters were by the entrance gate. This complex consists of an extremely freely disposed house, stamping mill and water mill and is particularly attractive in the way water is led through the courtyard. All the courtyards are interconnected by walls and paved with river pebbles. Self-sown pomegranate trees were planted in the garden because of their exceptionally attractive flowers and fruit. The complex of the Velagić houses is also the most complete family houses with outbuildings, manifesting to full extent the lifestyle of the past in Herzegovina.

The Kosić tower, as an offshoot of mediaeval residential architecture, is a typical fortified house. It is stone-built and stands at the edge of the town, so it probably served some defense purpose, given that the Blagaj fort was on the other side. The tower is square in ground plan, and has three storeys. It has been abandoned. Around it there is a spacious courtyard surrounded by a high wall. Here there were probably other buildings forming part of the complex, but these have not survived.

The architectural ensemble of the Turbe and musafirhana of the Blagaj Tekke with the remains of the Tekke and mills stands by the source of the river Buna, not far from the centre of Blagaj. The *musafirhana* and *turbe* are tucked into the natural surroundings, constituting a single entity with the cliffs, source of the Buna and mills.

According to the nomination for the list of national monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina entitled Blagaj Townscape, drawn up by the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the source of the Buna and the cliffs above it constitute a geomorphological natural monument, and the source of the Buna itself a hydrological natural monument.

The architectural ensemble is in good structural condition, with the *musafirhana* of the Blagaj *tekke* and the *turbe* surviving. The *musafirhana* was built before 1664, and rebuilt in 1851; its original appearance is not known. The building was subsequently repaired on several occasions, and in 1952 the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of BiH carried out extensive works. A verandah was added to the first floor, projecting out towards the river. Here the traditional built-in cupboards known as *musandera* were replaced by niches that are now purely decorative. The *musafirhana* of the Blagaj *tekke* is a highly original residential building, with very marked features deriving from the influence of the baroque on Ottoman architecture. The baroque influence is reflected in the gable of the main facade, where the roof is slightly curved, a design that is not appropriate either to the style and stone slab roof cladding in Herzegovina or to the material of which it is made. A *turbe* was built by the Blagaj *tekke*, an elongated structure attached to the residential part, with two tombs.

*During the Austro-Hungarian period* the way of life changed, but Blagaj, as an urban entity, remained unaltered. New building which took place was not of such an extent as irrevocably to alter the scale and spatial relations of the historic centre of Blagaj, and to this day the layout and historic dimensions of the roads have survived. In the architectural sense, the influence of cosmopolitan architecture in a provincial interpretation is observable. The import of central European historical eclectic architecture is in fact insignificant, while the old Herzegovinian-Mediterranean-Oriental architecture is stagnating and dying out.

The construction of combined residential and commercial buildings and schools in the trade quarter of Blagaj began to alter the traditional image of the *čaršija* with shops and storerooms. The disposition of the buildings is free and simple, in harmony with the traditional manner and dimensions. At this period, two religious buildings were erected, the Orthodox Church of St Basil of Ostrog in 1892, in the neo-Romanesque style, and the Catholic Church in 1908, in the neo-Gothic style.

Categories of significance:

Of outstanding national importance

Categories of ownership or interest:

Of national interest

Documentation and bibliographic references:

Commission to Preserve National Monuments

Condition:

Poor

Amount of war or associated damage:

Damaged but can be repaired

During the war 1992-1995, the historic urban site of Blagaj was place of direct war attacks. All buildings were damaged, some more than others.

Grade of war and associated damages for most important monuments:

- Old town of Blagaj suffered no damage as a result of war action,
- Orthodox church suffered more than 30% of roof damage, with significant damage of walls, but can be repaired,
- Catholic church has small amount of damage sustained,
- Mosque suffered up to 30 % of roof damage, but can be repaired,
- Kolakovića house is destroyed (but may be a candidate for reconstruction),
- Velagića houses needs repairs on roofs, windows, doors, etc.,
- Tekki on Buna spring has small amount of damage sustained,
- Karađoz beys *hamam* suffered no damage as a result of war action. The *hamam* is in bad structural condition and with no use ,
- Karađoz beys bridge suffered no damage as a result of war action,
- Lehina bridge suffered no damage as a result of war action,
- Most of residential buildings suffered up to and more than 30% of roof damage, with significant damage of walls, but can be repaired.

#### Risk:

The historical urban site of Blagaj is in jeopardy from the construction without planning – illegal constructions - and pollution caused by fish plant industry.

#### Condition risk:

Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric, solution agreed but not implemented.

#### Technical assessment and costing:

Up till 2004, the mosque, *tekke* and most of the private residential buildings have been repaired. The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be duty bound to ensure the following:

- recording the current condition
- drawing up a detailed analyses plans (historical and cultural significance of the buildings and environment, condition of the buildings, condition of the natural assets, etc)
- undertaking the urgent protection measures on buildings to stop further deterioration (costing proposal for 15 most endangered buildings is app. 400.000 EUR)
- drawing up a detailed rehabilitation plan for the natural and urban historical site of Blagaj (in term of conservation, restoration, reconstruction and rebuilding)
- drawing up a programme for the protection and long-lasting preservation (detailed management plan),
- drawing up a detailed sustainable development plan of Blagaj.

The mentioned programmes and plans shall relate to the architectural and natural ensembles and to individual buildings within the historic core of Blagaj.

Costing proposals for projects/programmes have not been done.

The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has planned, within the budget, financial means, in total of 250,000 KM (=125,000 EUR), for projects and works on protection of the residential buildings and complexes in BiH. Velagića residential complex in Blagaj is one of six (6) residential buildings and complexes for which financial means are planned.

#### Ownership:

Public property – Old town Blagaj

Municipal/ state property – historical monuments (bridges, public bath, inn)

Private – residential houses

Private – industrial complex

Religious denomination – churches (Serb Orthodox Church and Catholic Church), mosque and *tekke* (Islamic community of BiH)

Occupation:

Fully occupied in regular use

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### Management:

The provisions relating to the protection and rehabilitation measures set forth by the Law on the Implementation of the Decisions of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments, established pursuant to Annex 8 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of the Federation of BiH nos. 2/02 and 27/02) shall apply to the National Monument.

The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be duty bound to ensure and provide the legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary to protect, conserve, display and rehabilitate the National Monument – the Historic urban site of Blagaj.

Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be duty bound to provide funds for the drafting and implementing the necessary executive urban planning documentation for the historic urban site of Blagaj.

### Summary:

Historic urban site of Blagaj represents one of the few left untouched (all recent changes are still not changing the landscape of the site) urban sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Regional Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina to 2000 registered the Old town Blagaj (fortress), the Careva (Imperiors) mosque, and the Tekke, as category I properties - of national importance.

The Regional Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina to 2000 registered the residential complex of Kolakovića house, and the Velagića residential complex as a category II properties - of regional importance.

The priority level of intervention is *high*.

NOTE:

### Condition

Poor

### Condition risk

Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric, solution agreed but not implemented.

Criteria employed for the Priority Intervention List:

- The monuments are designated as national monuments,
- They represent rare or unique examples of the typology or chronological - stylistic corpus,
- They were damaged/destroyed during the 1992-1995 war in BiH or they were endangered by the post war conditions (illegal constructions, lack of funding for restoration and maintenance, inexpert reconstruction,) and are subject to further deterioration,
- Their restoration will encourage the return process in BiH,
- Their restoration will support development of the region.

### Sign.and date:

Mirela Mulaluć Handan  
10.03.2004.