

THE BLACA HERMITAGE – CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

S u m m a r y

The monasteries on Brač which were built by Glagolitic hermit monks from Poljica are a particular phenomenon. All of these monasteries are situated on the steep south side of Brač Island, on the contour of the slope where the flysch zone changes into the rocky mass of the limestone mountain top. In the 16th century, hermits settled in the natural caves in the Blaca canyon, a dry river bed two kilometres from the deep bay of the same name on the seashore.

Blaca is not just an exceptionally valuable cultural monument, but also an absolute mark of the place, a centre for a complete eco-system comprising the monastery's fields and holdings, together with the pastoral hamlets and pastures scattered at the foot of Vidova Gora. The hermit monastery was the administrative and cultural centre of this micro-world which had a built-in infrastructure, such as the primary school which functioned right up to the 1960s.

In everyday life, it was a place where new agricultural methods were tried out. Exceptionally large amounts of olive oil and honey were produced there.

The Blaca valley as a whole offers a unique opportunity to analyse an outstanding environment. With regular care and maintenance on very limited financial resources the Blaca Hermitage has been turned from a distant and neglected location into a popular destination. The monastery and its farms, vineyards, olive groves and pastures situated in natural, uninhabited countryside on the south side of the island, together with the experimental project to renovate the cultivated area, represent a unique opportunity to observe and preserve the traditional balance of ecology in a place set between cultivated and wild parts of the island's landscape. With a well-balanced proportion of wild and cultivated areas it is possible to preserve the primary beauty of unspoilt nature. From the ecological point of view, the preserved part of the Blaca environment should become a protected biotope with animals and plants which would be safe there from the damaging effects of civilization. All produce, whether economic or experimental, would be grown on restored agricultural land, while the uncultivated areas should be maintained as a kind of nature reserve.

From the educational point of view, Blaca should be a teaching centre for experts and professionals at the right level in all the relevant areas. Special care has to be taken to protect the area from natural disasters, rockslides, landslides, erosion through flooding and torrential rain. There also has to be up-to-date protection from fire, including sophisticated observation systems from the air. The use of pesticides, insecticides and other kinds of poisons should be suppressed through strict control of agricultural practices. The tourist

potential of the Blaca slopes should be used within limits. The pollution damage caused by this type of economic activity must be monitored and eliminated. Related problems such as rubbish disposal and removal of sewage water have to be resolved and reduced to the minimum possible. Ecology should be the subject of a special study to ensure that the correct measures are taken to preserve the natural state and unspoilt character of Blaca Hermitage's cultural area.

Blaca could become a world example of a synergy in which the struggle for a clean environment and protection of unspoilt nature can co-exist with the scientific pursuit of knowledge to discover the world we live in.

Keywords: the Blaca Hermitage, island of Brač, cultural monument, eco-system, cultural landscape