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## ISTRAŽIVANJE STRADANJA SAKRALNE BAŠTINE DANAŠNJE SISAČKE BISKUPIJE U DOMOVINSKOM RATU – POTREBA INTERDISCIPLINARNOG PRISTUPA

### Sažetak:

*U Domovinskom ratu 1991.-1995., kao dio agresije na hrvatski identitet, uz velika ljudska i materijalna stradanja iznimno je surovo uništavana kulturna baština, a među njom posebno sakralna baština. Rad govori o problematici istraživanja stradanja sakralne baštine na prostoru današnje Sisačke biskupije. Daje se pregled literature, izvora i arhivskog materijala o toj temi kao i lokacija na kojima ga je moguće pronaći te se opisuju problemi s kojima se istraživač suočava. Zatim se donose prijedlozi metoda za uspješno istraživanje te teme ukazujući pri tom na potrebu interdisciplinarnog pristupa.*

**Ključne riječi:** barok, domovinski rat, kulturocid, sakralna umjetnost, Sisačka biskupija, velikosrpska agresija na Hrvatsku, Zagrebačka nadbiskupija.

## RESEARCH ON THE DEVASTATION OF SACRAL HERITAGE OF TODAY'S DIOCESE OF SISAK DURING THE CROATIAN HOMELAND WAR – THE NEED FOR AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

### Abstract:

*During the Croatian Homeland War (1991 – 1995), as part of the aggression against Croatian identity, along with vast human and material cost, cultural heritage was systematically and ruthlessly destroyed, especially sacral heritage. The paper talks about the problem of researching the suffering of sacral heritage in today's Diocese of Sisak. It is given an overview of the references and sources on the subject, as well as the locations where it can be found and problems for the researcher are described. Then, suggestions of methods for successful research on the topic are made, pointing out the need for an interdisciplinary approach.*

**Keywords:** baroque, culturicide, greater Serbian aggression against Croatia, homeland war, sacral art, Sisak diocese, Zagreb archdiocese.

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## INTRODUCTION: Why Explore this Topic and What are the Challenges?

The Croatian Homeland War (1991 – 1995), during which Croatia, after being attacked by Greater Serbian and Yugoslav forces, managed to successfully fight for its newly declared independence and territorial integrity, brought extreme human suffering and material devastation.

The aggression against Croatia was driven by a Greater Serbian ideology marked by ruthless onslaughts on Croatian identity. Consequently, the war efforts also went in the direction of suppressing anything that testified to Croatian culture and identity or the historical presence of Croats in certain areas. The civilian population was a regular target of attacks, and among the material targets, as a rule, were civilian objects – especially historical, cultural and sacral (Catholic) heritage. Theft of parish registers, artworks, destruction of archives and libraries, as well as ruthless shelling and destruction of churches and church buildings were carried out in all areas of Croatia affected by the aggression.

During 1991, approximately one third of the Croatian territory was occupied – the far east of the country (Hrvatsko Podunavlje, where the city of Vukovar is located), part of western Slavonia, the area that included parts of the following regions: Banovina (a part of the present Diocese of Sisak is in this area), Kordun, Lika and Dalmatia and the far south of the country (Dubrovnik area) – not including the city of Dubrovnik, which was surrounded on all sides, but not occupied. At the end of 1991, Croatian forces managed to liberate part of the territory of western Slavonia, but the rest of the conquered area remained under occupation for a long time, despite the fact that an international recognition of independence of the Republic of Croatia came soon (January 1992). During 1992, Croatian forces liberated the south of the country – the Dubrovnik area. The occupied area of western Slavonia was liberated during the Croatian operation Flash in May 1995, and the occupied parts of Banovina (where part of the present Diocese of Sisak is situated), Kordun, Lika and Dalmatia were liberated in the same year in August during the Croatian operation Storm, which also marked the end of the war. The part of Croatia still under occupation – the far east of the country (Hrvatsko Podunavlje), was reintegrated into the national legal order of the Republic of Croatia peacefully, with mediation of the international community, in 1998.

The Diocese of Sisak, which existed in late antiquity and early medieval times (the most famous bishop of Roman Siscia (now Sisak) was

St. Quirinus, a martyr from Diocletian's period of persecutions), and then ceased to exist, was re-established in 2009 by the bull of Pope Benedict XVI. "Antiquam fidem", in the territory that was until then part of the Archdiocese of Zagreb. At the time of the Homeland War (1991– 1995), this area still belonged to the Archdiocese of Zagreb. Greater part of what is now the Diocese of Sisak was strongly affected by the war, suffered extremely severe attacks and destruction, and part of it was under occupation for as long as 4 years (since 1991 until the liberation during Operation Storm in 1995).

As in other parts of Croatia affected by aggression, the targeted looting, burning and destruction of churches, monasteries and sacral buildings in the occupied area and the strong shelling of those within reach of the war, became a reality of this area – an area extremely rich in valuable sacral heritage of the Baroque period. Illustrative is the information that in the part of the present Diocese of Sisak that was occupied – no Catholic church was left undamaged. Churches along the dividing line were also destroyed. According to data, a total of 88 churches of today's Diocese of Sisak were damaged, 14 of which were parish churches and one monastery church, which today serves as a parish church. (Barunčić-Pletikosić, 2017., 240-225; Sisačka biskupija, 2024). Numerous examples of destruction and devastation of churches committed after the occupation, i.e. after the cessation of fighting and warfare – therefore, targeted – clearly speak about the motives of the aggressor. It is in this area that examples of the destruction of churches to their very foundations and the removal of every trace of their existence have been recorded, such as the parish church of St. Lawrence in Petrinja, the parish church of the Holy Trinity in Hrvatska Dubica or the parish church of St. Bartolomew in Hrastovica.

Most churches have been restored, mostly to their original form, but irreversible damage is still visible. Primarily, inventories of the churches in the areas which were under occupation were destroyed or looted. Although some of the artworks from these inventories were saved, mostly those sent away to safer places at the beginning of the war, the interior of these churches is quite different today than it was before the war. Let's also mention church objects, dishes, chasubles, archival material and books that have disappeared. Finally, although there aren't many, there are still some churches, including one parish church (the one in Hrvatska Kostajnica) which are still in ruins and waiting to be rebuilt. Because of all this, researching this topic is particularly important and needed. The recent devastating earthquake in 2020 is another in a series of tragic

events that have befallen this area, and the current post-earthquake reconstruction and the need to revitalize the area provide an additional motivation for this research.

When researching this topic is discussed, it can safely be said that there is no work dealing solely with this problem, although there are references that touch on this topic. However, the need to carefully analyse the destruction of the sacral heritage of today's Diocese of Sisak during the Croatian Homeland War, which would include a systematic analysis of data on the number and scale of destroyed sacral buildings, as well as alienated and destroyed sacral objects and artwork, requires a separate scientific paper. The results of such work would contribute not only to the knowledge of the Croatian Homeland War and its consequences, but also to the historical and artistic knowledge and perception of the area.

The author who has scientifically touched on this topic is Julija Barunčić-Pletikosić, who in her book *Katolička crkva u Hrvatskoj i Domovinski rat 1991. – 1995.: stavovi, djelovanje, stradanja* (*Catholic Church in Croatia 1991 – 1995: Attitudes, Activities, Suffering*) also speaks about the topic of the devastation of sacral heritage and brings a list of damaged church buildings in Croatia classified by dioceses and archdioceses. The same author also wrote an article *Stradanja Sisačke biskupije u Domovinskom ratu 1991. i 1992. godine* (*Suffering in the Sisak Diocese in the Croatian Homeland War in 1991 and 1992*), which was presented at the scientific conference "Antiquam fidem" in Sisak in 2010 and published in the collection of papers from that conference in 2011 (Barunčić-Pletikosić, 2011., 421-440.). These two titles are an important initial step for further research and scientific engagement with this topic. Other references on this topic mostly consist of publications and editions that exhaustively list the destroyed Catholic churches, bringing information about when they were destroyed, or photos of the damaged churches and titles of the works that partially or from a certain angle touch on this topic. This gives us useful information and guidance for starting the research, but there are few titles that can be counted among scientific references. So, every researcher must then start looking for sources.

Research on this topic, which would include analysing the extent of damage to sacral buildings, answering questions about the circumstances and motives of the destruction, and tracing sacral heritage that has not been restored or located to this day, is an extremely complex task. The search for sources and data pertaining to the topic leads us to

different destinations and addresses, and the systematization of this data, as well as providing a rounded picture of the topic requires a studious and meticulous researcher and an interdisciplinary approach. The interdisciplinary approach is manifested primarily in the use of knowledge and methods of both historical science and art history, but also the use of various approaches needed to explore different types of available historical sources and data. A variety of material is available. The following may be found among it: photographs of damages and pictorial materials, various systematic forms with lists of war damages, but also newspaper articles and written memories of participants and eyewitnesses and oral testimonies of living witnesses to these events... Given the diversity of sources, different methods are also needed for better understanding and systematisation of the data.

The successful execution of this task is also important due to the establishment of a research model that could be applied to the research of the destruction of sacral heritage in other parts of Croatia during the Homeland War.

Therefore, in this article, I plan to briefly outline the main problems and issues encountered by researchers dealing with this topic, a description of the diversity of sources and data available to them, and the places and institutions where they can be found, as well as the difficulties in determining where certain data can be found and how to find it. Furthermore, reflections on the best possible approach to perceive and successfully explore all this data and sources will also be presented. This paper points out the possibility and need for an interdisciplinary approach and tries to provide some guidelines for successfully addressing this topic.

## 1. TOPIC CONTEXT – BASIC REFERENCES

To write about the devastation of the sacral heritage of today's Diocese of Sisak during the Croatian Homeland War involves, above all, presenting and reviewing basic information about the area and its geographical and historical features, as well as, of course, general information about the sacral heritage of this area – its origin, history and stylistic features. The dramatic and turbulent history of the area, which in the Middle Ages was a well-developed crossroads, and which the penetration of the Ottomans made into a border area and zone of continuous wars and looting that lasted for centuries, has left its mark to this day. Despite that, this area managed to resist bad

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influences, and its valuable historical and artistic heritage is certainly one of the indicators of this. Speaking about sacral heritage, it is mostly a rich Baroque legacy built after the liberation of this area from Ottoman rule. A detailed reference to this topic – the topic of history, stylistic features and artistic value, and sacral heritage – is certainly an extremely important initial step for researching the topic we are dealing with – the devastation of that same heritage in the Croatian Homeland War.

Furthermore, to write about this topic also implies presenting and reviewing basic information about the course of the Croatian Homeland War in this area. The Homeland War in this area began very early compared to other Croatian regions. The first attacks, expulsions and killings of Croatian civilians took place here as early as the summer of 1991. Attacks on cultural and, above all, sacral heritage, already began by then and the complex of the Franciscan monastery and church in Hrvatski Čuntić was the first cultural monument to be destroyed in the Croatian Homeland War. The war in this area is especially remembered for the targeted murder of the wartime television cameraman of the Croatian Radiotelevision, Gordana Lederer, while on assignment, for one of the largest mass executions of civilians in the Croatian Homeland War and, consequently, for the second largest mass grave found (the first is at Ovčara near Vukovar) – the one in Baćin, as well as for the concentration camp for detained Croatian defenders established by enemy forces in that area after the occupation – the one in Glina. This is also the area that is the closest to Zagreb of all the occupied parts of the Republic of Croatia, so these enemy attacks posed the greatest threat to the Croatian capital itself. The horrific scale of the tragedy that befell this area during those four years of war is manifested at all levels – from the suffering of people, which included torture and mass executions of both civilians and military prisoners, through the thorough destruction of material infrastructure, residential and commercial buildings, to the attack on identity symbols and values, and on historical, artistic and intellectual treasures – the destruction and theft of monuments, churches, books, archives and artworks. The devastation of sacral heritage, therefore, is only a part of the entire aggression against that part of Croatia and it is not possible to deal with it without knowing the course of events and the circumstances in which it took place. Therefore, knowledge of both the course of the Croatian Homeland War in general and its course at these locations is extremely important in this research.

For each of these two elements listed (art history in this area and the Croatian Homeland War in this area), several important titles and sources considered necessary initial references and sources for this research will be highlighted.

## 1. 1. General Information on the Sacral Heritage of the Area

First of all, to get to know this area and its sacral artistic heritage, there are several unavoidable titles available. These are: *Sakralna arhitektura baroknog razdoblja (Sacral Architecture of the Baroque Period)* by Đurđica Cvitanović, published in several volumes, the first of which, *Gorički i gorsko-dubički arhitektonski spomenici (Cvitanović, 1985)*, deals with the area of interest, a book by Katarina Horvat-Levaj, *Barokna arhitektura (Baroque Architecture)* (Horvat-Levaj, 2015), all 8 volumes of the *Hrvatska likovna enciklopedija (Croatian Art Encyclopedia)* (Domljan, 2015) and the CD-edition of *Hagiotopografija Hrvatske (Hagiotopography of Croatia)* by Anđelko Badurina (Badurina, 2006.). The following titles by art historian Anđela Horvat should also be mentioned: *Barok u Hrvatskoj (Baroque in Croatia)* (in co-authorship with Radmila Matejčić and Kruno Prijatelj) (Horvat, Matejčić and Prijatelj, 1982.), *Barok u kontinentalnoj Hrvatskoj (Baroque in Continental Croatia)* (Horvat, 1982.) and *Između gotike i baroka. Umjetnost kontinentalnog dijela Hrvatske od oko 1500. do oko 1700. (Between Gothic and Baroque. Art of the Continental Part of Croatia from Around 1500 to Around 1700)* (Horvat, 1975).

When making initial research of this topic, i.e. to this area and its sacral heritage, documentation of a kind that can be found at the Institute of Art History in Zagreb – for example, studies for the renovation of individual churches (also containing an overview of the history of certain buildings, photo documentation, floor plans and drawings of that building) can also be helpful. Some other documents that can be found in different archives can also be helpful, however, for this need, as a rule, in my estimation, it is enough to consult the references already listed above.

All of the above allows us to look at the history of this sacral heritage – everything kept in the here observed area, what a particular church looked like and what kind of equipment and art it possessed – everything that was later, during the Croatian Homeland War, in any way damaged, went missing or was (irreversibly) destroyed.

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## 1.2. General Information on the Homeland War in the Area

Another important segment that needs to be addressed is the course of the Croatian Homeland War with special reference to the observed area. Historian Davor Marijan's book *Domovinski rat* (Croatian War of Independence) may act as the reference for the most fundamental information on this (Marijan, 2016.). An article by the same author on the Banovina battlefield can be found in *Stvaranje hrvatske države i Domovinski rat* (Founding of the Croatian State and War for Independence) (Barić et al, 2006.). Useful are also contributions to the papers of the scientific conference on *Hrvatski Čuntić* (Kekez, Krpan and Raguž, 2012.), which will be mentioned later. About the Banovina battlefield write authors Đuro Gajdek – who was a journalist, war reporter and who, as a contemporary and eyewitness, recorded war events in Banovina, and later published several books and papers dealing with the war in the area (Gajdek, 2008-A; Gajdek, 2008-B; Pokorny and Gajdek, 2016.), as well as General Božo Budimir, who was also a participant in war events as a general of the Croatian Army (Budimir, 2008.), and historian Jakša Raguž (Raguž, 2007.; Raguž, 2012.).

In addition to the references above, different types of narrative sources and testimonies of participants in the events are also useful. In this regard, the book of the current Bishop of the Diocese of Sisak, Mons. Vlado Košić: *Župnik na prvoj crti* (Parish Priest on the Front Line) is especially worth mentioning, in which he describes his experience of the Croatian Homeland War as a parish priest in the war-torn Hrastovica and Petrinja (Košić, 1999.). Other testimonies of parish priests in the area about the war and war suffering have also been published. These were published in the 1994 book *Terra combusta, Ratna izvješća župnika Zagrebačke nadbiskupije 1991/1992* (Terra combusta, War Reports of Parish Priests of the Zagreb Archdiocese 1991/1992) (Kožul, 1994). These sources and some others like them will be discussed later in the paper.

## 2. REFERENCES AND SOURCES FOR TOPIC RESEARCH. PROBLEMS IN REACHING THE MATERIAL

Now for the key part – the very sources of data on the devastation of monuments and other sacral heritage of the Diocese of Sisak during the Croatian Homeland War. If all churches and chapels that have been damaged or demolished,

together with the associated inventory and other material heritage related to them, are to be designated as research samples, there are as many as 88 buildings to be considered. Where to begin the research? Below, the existing references that have so far more or less touched on this topic have been highlighted.

### 2.1. References

First of all, there is the already mentioned book by Julia Barunčić-Pletikosić *Katolička crkva u Hrvatskoj i Domovinski rat – Stavovi, djelovanje, stradanja* (Catholic Church in Croatia 1991 - 1995: Attitudes, Activities, Sufferings), which, among other things, brings a list of all the devastated churches in the territory of the Republic of Croatia classified by (arch)dioceses (Barunčić-Pletikosić, 2017.). It also provides more detailed information about individual churches' devastation, and provides data sources for each individual church in the notes. Therefore, this book is certainly indispensable for starting research on the topic.

There are also useful articles in periodicals, mostly in those published during the war – that is, while the events were taking place. *Službeni vjesnik Nadbiskupije zagrebačke* (Official Gazette of the Zagreb Archdiocese) from 1991, no. 5 brings the article *Stradali crkveni objekti na području Zagrebačke nadbiskupije* (Damaged Church Buildings in the Area of the Zagreb Archdiocese). (Službeni vjesnik Nadbiskupije zagrebačke, 78). *Godišnjak zaštite spomenika kulture Hrvatske* (The Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Croatia Annual) – double issue from 1998 and 1999 is dedicated to war devastation and reconstruction (Godišnjak zaštite spomenika kulture Hrvatske, 24/25 (1998/1999)). The same yearbook, only an earlier issue, one from 1991, brings an article by Vladimir Ukrainčik *Kulturna baština i rat na tlu Hrvatske* (Cultural Heritage and War on Croatian Soil) (Ukrainčik, 1991, 5-8.). A lot of information could be found in the daily and weekly newspapers and magazines of the time, such as *Vjesnik*, *Glas koncila*, etc., but it seems to be more appropriate to consider such articles historical sources, rather than references, while I would include the above listed thematic articles in specialized periodicals – among the references.

There are several collections of papers with appendices related to this topic, dealing with this geographical area. There is a collection of works published by the Diocese of Sisak and *Glas koncila* 2011.: *Antiquam fidem. Collection of papers from the scientific conference in Sisak 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> December 2010*. It contains two particularly useful

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works – the first by Valerija Macan, *Obnova crkvenih građevina na području današnje Sisačke biskupije nakon Domovinskog rata (Restoration of Church Buildings in the Territory of Today's Sisak Diocese after the Croatian Homeland War)* (Macan, 2011., 441-456.), and the second by Julija Barunčić-Pletikosić *Stradanja Sisačke biskupije u Domovinskom ratu 1991. i 1992. godine (Devastation and suffering in Diocese of Sisak in Homeland War in 1991 and 1992)* (Barunčić-Pletikosić, 2011, 421-440.).

The collection of papers of the conference *Osam stoljeća Čuntića 1211. – 2011. (The Eight Centuries of Čuntić (1211 – 2011))*, published 2012, contains several papers about Hrvatski Čuntić in the Croatian Homeland War, which are useful in researching this topic, both for the context and general information about the war at that location, as well as for researching the topic of the devastation of the Franciscan monastery and the church (Kekez, Krpan and Raguž, 2012.). Those are the following works: *Velikosrpska agresija na Hrvatski Čuntić i naselja Zrinske gore 1991. godine (Greater Serbian Aggression on Hrvatski Čuntić and the Villages of Zrinski Mountain during 1991)* by Jakša Raguž (Raguž, 2012, 353-409.), *Naselja župe Hrvatski Čuntić u svjetlu srpskih dokumenata – arhivsko gradivo o zbivanjima tijekom pobune hrvatskih Srba, agresije i okupacije na prostoru župe Hrvatski Čuntić (The Settlements of Croatian Čuntić Parish in the Serbian Documents Archival Sources About the Events during the Uprising of Croatian Serbs, Aggression and Occupation on the Territory of Croatian Čuntić Parish)* by Domagoj Štefančić (Štefančić, 2012, 411-506.), and *Sjećanje na Čuntić u Domovinskom ratu (The Remembrance of Čuntić in the Homeland War)* by Ivan Radošević (Radošević, 2012, 507-509.).

Ivan Rizmaul's book, *Obnova sakralnih objekata župe svetog Lovre u Petrinji 1995. – 2015. (Restoration of Sacral Buildings of the Parish of St. Lawrence in Petrinja 1995 – 2015)* (2016), deals with the reconstruction of churches in the Petrinja area (i.e., part of the area of the present Diocese of Sisak) after the Croatian Homeland War (Rizmaul, 2016.).

Certain references on this topic, therefore, exist, but, as already stated in the introduction, there is no work that would be systematically devoted solely to this topic in the manner of detailed scientific examination and analysis of the causes, motives and circumstances of the devastation of this sacral heritage in the Croatian Homeland War and detailed research and analysis of the extent and strength of the devastation, which would also

address the issue of irreversibility of what was done, i.e. the possibility of restoring or finding the damaged or stolen items. To systematically explore this topic, it is necessary to study all types of available sources. And they are very diverse, just as the path to them is demanding and full of various problems and obstacles. Below, I have tried to highlight some of the most important data sources and ways to access them.

## 2.2. Field Visit

What is certainly an important start is a field visit to the observed places and locations. A field visit includes visiting these places, photographing the current state of the heritage, visiting parish archives, and talking to the persons who manage the heritage, as well as those who have valuable first-hand information on the devastation of the heritage in the Croatian Homeland War, or can refer us to such persons.

For those buildings that have not been renovated to date, a field visit and photographic documentation is important, because that way, a record is created, and it is possible to see what the destruction was. (Among parish churches, an example of an unrestored church is the one in Hrvatska Kostajnica – which was completely destroyed and is still in ruins today, and the one in Glina, which was reduced to rubble, but not rebuilt due to the decision to build a larger parish church elsewhere). For those buildings that have been renovated, a field visit and photographs record how they look now, i.e. how they have been renovated. Considering that they were mostly renovated in the manner of facsimile reconstruction, therefore, their original appearance was restored, traces of war in these cases are not visible on the external vista. Instead, in these cases, we actually see the original building, as it was before the war, and its incorporation into the landscape, as well as an impression of its beauty and value that had been destroyed. We can get an impression of the extent of demolition and destruction in these cases indirectly by looking at the interior of these churches, and comparing that to paintings, drawings and photographs of their interior before the Croatian Homeland War. The former inventory, and in most cases, it was luxurious Baroque equipment, barely exists in any of them today. Churches in the occupied territory, at least the larger ones, were almost regularly thoroughly looted, burned and demolished. Therefore, the interior of churches today is often completely different from the one before – incomparably simpler and replaced by modern inventory and artwork.

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A field visit can also lead us to interesting information gained by inspecting memorials around sacral objects that were destroyed, exposed remains of demolished monuments and, in some cases, museum collections in which the period of the Croatian Homeland War was presented to the public through photographs, objects and material remains. Furthermore, the parish archives themselves keep certain materials there related to the destruction of their sacral heritage in the Homeland War – photos, documents, records of parish priests, etc. can also be found in those places. An important part of the field visit is also a conversation with parish priests and those managing the parish affairs. From some of them, we can hear first-hand testimonies of the devastation of the site and its sacral heritage, or they can convey the testimonies of eyewitnesses to us and refer us to these persons. The oral and written recollections of people associated with the events are important historical sources, which will be referred to later.

A field visit, therefore, is an important initial step for better knowledge of the area and topic of research. However, the further search for sources must be much deeper.

Below, I have highlighted some of the most important source groups and problems in reaching them.

### 2.3. Sources

Given the diversity of the material available, it could be divided into several categories for ease of reference. In general, all available sources could be classified into two basic groups: documents and narrative sources. Pictorial and photographic material, found in both groups, should also be considered. Documents would include systematic lists of war damage or some formal written material. Among the narrative sources, either oral or written testimonies of the participants in these events, newspaper articles (for example – articles in daily and weekly newspapers), correspondence (for example, parish priests and archdiocesan bodies), parish monuments and similar archival documents should be considered.

Given the provenance, the sources can be divided into ecclesiastical and state sources, i.e. at least roughly classified into one of these two categories, according to which institution they are kept in and which institution takes care of them.

First, the documents – those of state provenance. The official list of war damage is the first source to be consulted. After the liberation of the occupied area and its return to the national legal order of the

Republic of Croatia, Croatian state institutions recorded damage to cultural monuments throughout Croatia. The records were made by the *Posebna središnja komisija za popis i procjenu ratne štete* (Special Central Commission for the Inventory and Assessment of War Damage), which operated within the Ministry of Culture and Education of the Republic of Croatia (today the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia). The inspection of each individual building in the field was done by a three-member commission, and the data was recorded on systematised forms. The form for each individual monument contains the names of the members of the commission, date of the inspection, address of the building, its description (according to the condition before the destruction) and a description of the type and manner of damage, the time of damage and the perpetrator. Then photos of the current situation. The lists are kept in the archives of the Ministry of Culture and Media and are not yet publicly available in digital form. The records log cultural monuments, which means that they do not contain information about churches that do not have this status. However, the vast majority of churches of interest are cultural monuments, so this is an extremely important source of information.

Valuable and useful documentation is owned by the Institute of Art History in Zagreb. Their documents include conservation studies for some of the churches of the Diocese of Sisak, studies for the construction and historical development of a church and a proposal for conservation guidelines, floor plans and drawings of individual churches. The Institute also keeps photographs of individual churches from before the war, as well as after the war devastation. Note that the Institute itself did much to save and shelter art objects from the area on the eve of and at the very beginning of the war.

Documentation on the restoration can also be found in the Conservation Department of the Ministry of Culture in Sisak, as well as in the Conservation Department of the Ministry of Culture in Zagreb, which led part of the restoration in the area of interest. Part of the documentation of the Conservation Department in Sisak on this topic is stored in the State Archives in Sisak, so the procedure for obtaining this material is somewhat longer. To state institutions that should definitely be visited, the Croatian Homeland War Memorial and Documentation Centre should also be added. As an institution which focuses on the Croatian Homeland War, cooperation with it is also important for the researcher of this topic (there are certainly photos and documents in their material

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that are important for this paper), as well as for the Centre itself.

Regarding various narrative sources, an important source, for example, may be newspaper articles and interviews in daily and weekly newspapers.

When discussing sources of ecclesiastical provenance, the website of the Diocese of Sisak should be praised – as it brings basic data and photos of the devastation of their sacral heritage in the Croatian Homeland War. In the section *Križni put Sisačke crkve u Domovinskom ratu (Way of the Cross of the Sisak Church in the Homeland War)*, all parish churches and one monastery church, today serving as a parish church, that were damaged are listed in one place – a total 15 of them. Two photographs are available for each of them – a photograph of the church before, and after the destruction in the Croatian Homeland War (Sisačka biskupija, 2024).

Furthermore, the Archiepiscopal archives in Zagreb harbours other sources for dealing with this topic. Since the area of the Diocese of Sisak was then part of the Archdiocese of Zagreb, the Archiepiscopal archives keep documentation related to this topic, for example, documents on the post-war reconstruction of individual churches or correspondence between the parish priests and the diocese on the devastation and reconstruction of individual churches.

Furthermore, there are also individual parish archives, where it is possible to find interesting material on the topic of interest, as already stated in the field visit section. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account which parish archives were moved due to the devastating 2020 earthquake, whether they were returned and where to look for the necessary material.

There are many narrative sources that have been issued, collected or preserved by church persons or institutions, and they are a particularly important source. The already mentioned *Ratna izvješća župnika Zagrebačke nadbiskupije 1991.– 1992.* consolidated in a book published in 1994 are also essential (Kožul, 1994.). These are the testimonies of parish priests from the war-affected areas of the Archdiocese of Zagreb, including today's Diocese of Sisak. As first-hand information, talking about parishes and places that belong to this topic, and including descriptions of the devastation of churches and other sacral heritage in these places, they are an extremely valuable source.

Another important published source is the already mentioned book of the current Bishop of the

Diocese of Sisak, Mons. Vlado Košić, *Župnik na prvoj crti* (Košić, 1999.). Bishop Košić lived through the war as a parish priest in Hrastovica (1990– 1995), one of the occupied parishes, and Petrinja (1992 – 1995), which had also been occupied. After the hostile occupation of Hrastovica and the town of Petrinja, civilians from that area fled to safer areas, and the parish priest himself worked in exile for the rest of the war period – in Mošćenica – one of the branches of the Petrinja parish. Mošćenica itself was located along the dividing line with the occupied area and, as such, was also in the war zone. Almost day by day, and then month by month, the (then) parish priest Košić recorded the situation on the field and wrote about what was happening to his parish and the parishioners who were on the front lines. The book also describes in detail the destruction of churches by the aggressor and other sacral heritage that befell the area, and his memories of the period immediately before the outbreak of the war and many hostile statements of the inhabitants of the area who were of Serbian nationality (which the parish priest himself witnessed or had knowledge of them), which already announced the great destruction of sacral heritage that would occur, are also of note.

Testimonies about those events can still be heard from living witnesses or secondary – second hand. I myself had the opportunity to talk to several parish priests in the places of interest. Regarding the collection of oral testimony, attention should certainly be paid to the scientific manner and methodology of such work. First of all, one must try to get the same categories of data and comparable information for each place of interest – that is, to have prepared questions – same for each place and church of interest. Furthermore, the oral conversation should be recorded and, in cooperation with the author, written down, so that it is available to all interested parties, and testimonies shouldn't just be retold, thus losing authenticity.

Periodical publications of ecclesiastical provenance also wrote a lot about this topic – both during the war, while all this was happening, and later, during the reconstruction. In the part referring to sources, an issue of the *Službeni vjesnik Nadbiskupije zagrebačke* was already mentioned, but various newspaper articles can also be found in other church newsletters – for example, in the Catholic weekly Glas koncila.

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### 3. DATA PROCESSING

As described in the previous chapter, the material we deal with researching this topic is quite diverse. Different types of data and sources also require a careful approach, as well as careful planning about how data from this material can best be systematized and presented, so that some measurable results and well-founded conclusions may be drawn from it.

Therefore, through this chapter, some basic ideas and guidelines on how this material could and should be processed will be presented. Three important elements will be noted.

I consider the collection and research of photo documentation the first important element. Given the multitude and importance of visual, i.e. photographic material, special attention should be paid to photography-based research. The research should certainly aim to collect as much photographic material as possible that documents this heritage, both before the war and after war damage or demolition, and then, after the renovation, if it was carried out. The aforementioned lists of war damages of the Ministry already contain photos of the inspected buildings, and the website of the Diocese of Sisak also has photos of the damaged parish churches before and after the devastation. This collection could also be supplemented by what can be found in the archives of the Institute of Art History, which also keeps many photographs of buildings of interest, then the archives of individual parishes, the Archiepiscopal archives in Zagreb, the institutions of the Diocese of Sisak, in the mentioned references and periodicals and in other archival institutions mentioned in previous chapters (Croatian State Archives, Croatian Memorial and Documentation Centre of the Homeland War...), but also in contemporary photographs created by field visits as well as those that may be obtained from individuals from their private collections. It will be possible to discern and conclude a lot about the devastation itself and the manner and circumstances of the damage from the collected photographs.

Another important element is quantitative data analysis. It is necessary to read and extract all available systematic data on the manner, time and type of damage to the heritage we deal with, primarily the data that is in the official lists of war damages made by the Ministry. When all the data that is of interest to us and is required to be clearly stated is extracted, with the same criteria for each building, it is possible to further analyse and statistically process this data. How many churches

were completely destroyed, how many badly damaged and how many only lightly damaged? What is the number of damaged churches compared to the total number of churches? How many were destroyed during fighting and war actions and how many after the occupation – when there was no more fighting in that area? This is all quantitative data giving a clear and measurable view of those events and the possibility of comparison with some other affected areas, and thus material for making well founded conclusions.

The third extremely important element is the consideration of data that can be obtained from other types of sources – primarily narrative ones – whether written or oral testimonies, and from various newspaper articles, periodicals, interviews and various other types of sources. Many testimonies of direct eyewitnesses bring important information about the circumstances of the devastation of certain sacral buildings and objects. They complement the data found in systematic lists and other types of sources. By linking already known data and statistics from systematised forms with what is collected by different eyewitnesses or persons who were in some way connected with the events, we get a more complete picture of the topic of interest. Given the long period of occupation of a large part of the area (as long as 4 years), a comparison of what witnesses (either in writing or orally) convey about the devastation of a church before they had to leave their village or town, and what the state commission found and stated in the lists after the end of the war and the liberation of the area, is also very useful. Based on this, it is possible to determine what was destroyed after the occupation itself, when the aggressor's forces had already entered the area and what damage occurred during those four years after the intentional devastation, due to atmospheric conditions and the passage of time. Valuable data from some of the narrative sources and the memories of individuals can also help determine whether any of the artworks that are not in their original place or in the church they were situated in before the war, were saved before the war and sheltered in a safer area, but still haven't been returned to their original place. Different types of such sources and testimonies may bring some unknown details to the public and are therefore extremely valuable. Although the oral memories of witnesses are sometimes insufficiently reliable in some details, nevertheless, with sufficient caution by researchers and comparison of different testimonies and all available data and knowledge, they are extremely important for this research. They can shed light on a segment of the event that may be missing from

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other sources, and help complete the data and understand the circumstances and context of individual events.

Through these three main elements, it is necessary to process the sample we are investigating in such a way that, by first bringing basic data on the area (a particular place, city, village), its fate in the Croatian Homeland War and this sacral-artistic heritage in general – its history and its characteristics, the collected data on its devastation in the Croatian Homeland War are analysed and then, on the basis of all this, a complete picture of the devastation of this sacral building is painted.

All of this requires a careful interdisciplinary approach. Data processing and research enters the field of various sciences – history, art history, geography, historical topography, archival science, architecture, etc., and it is necessary to handle various disciplines and use an adequate methodology for processing different types of sources.

## **CONCLUSION: Why is an Interdisciplinary Approach Necessary?**

This paper presents a brief insight into the topic of the devastation of the sacral heritage of today's Diocese of Sisak during the Croatian Homeland War and the essential elements for its research. The paper was created on the basis of my previous research and I have tried, after presenting a review of the most important references, to describe the sources and types of data that can be found about it, to classify them into several basic groups, then list the institutions and places where they can be found and to describe the ways to reach them. After that, my thoughts on how to systematise and process data from this material in the best way possible were presented.

I believe that the benefit of this paper is that it has "diagnosed" the most critical problems in the research of this topic and tried to predict the way to overcome these problems, pointing out the need for an interdisciplinary approach. The biggest problems are manifested in the dispersion and non-systematic nature of the material related to this topic. This, of course, does not mean that the material is impossible to come by, but only that exploring this topic requires a lot of patience and time, especially in the initial phase.

The reasons for the described problem are not accidental. They certainly lie in the chaotic circumstances of war, as well as in the return process, during which restoration was carried out in order of priorities. At the very beginning of the war, many of the artworks, those this was still

possible for, were removed in a hurry and in a temporary way, and no attention was paid to recording the data about the new storage place or systematically classifying what was saved. Therefore, detailed data on this in some cases may be found only by speaking with individuals who worked on saving this heritage, now making it complicated to trace. Sometimes it is difficult to determine what was kept in a particular church at the time of destruction, as well as, given the long period of occupation, at which moment something was destroyed or stolen. After the end of the war and the return of the population and normal life to the area, the renovation of buildings and arranging the area took place gradually, according to momentary abilities. In the circumstances of the returning of the displaced people and refugees, each area first restored what was most necessary for living and the reconstruction took place in accordance with the possibilities. In that period, therefore, the priority was to restore the most necessary things as quickly as possible, and not always systematically and planned action and recording everything that was being done and in what order. Therefore, documentation on destroyed buildings and renovation is not always systematic and is not always easy to find. The most relevant and systematic data are those of the state commission that conducted the inventory and assessment of war damages after the war. They are the main guideline for further research, but, at the time of further search for data, the situation in the field, due to the described circumstances, is not at all simple.

The need for an interdisciplinary approach in dealing with this topic, which was emphasised in this paper, is manifested on several levels. This is a topic that belongs to both general history and art history. Furthermore, as mentioned, other sciences and disciplines such as historical geography and topography, archival science, architecture, etc. are touched upon through the processing of this topic. Given the diversity of materials and sources, all these different disciplines are needed, but also different methodologies in accessing and processing certain types of sources. Finally, as has been stated through the previous chapters, successful processing of this topic requires a lot of prior knowledge on the topic of the Croatian Homeland War, especially in the observed area, and knowledge of the rich art history of that area – so interdisciplinarity is also manifested through this. Only with sufficient prior knowledge of the Croatian Homeland War in this area, as well as prior knowledge of the art history of sacral buildings that stood there, can we understand and address the issue of their devastation well –

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connect the facts about the devastation with the sequence of war events and circumstances, explain the type of damage with regard to the historical and artistic characteristics of these buildings and draw conclusions on this basis. Therefore, the task of researching this topic is also a task of careful and studious work on linking the results and conclusions of different scientific disciplines and different areas of research.

In order to successfully process this topic, it is especially important, due to the extent of the damaged heritage, to clearly distinguish what should be put in the foreground and what should be paid more attention to, and what should be stated without delving into all segments and individual works of art in detail. I consider it logical to process primarily the architectural heritage – first of all, the most important churches – for example, parish churches and monastery complexes and churches with special artistic value, and then to pay some attention to all the smaller churches and chapels damaged. When it comes to inventories of churches, collections and objects belonging to a particular parish or church, it is unrealistic to expect that such research could enter a more detailed dealing with each such object, but the enumeration of individual collections and their most valuable works of art or objects, which could then be processed by scientists of different profiles in some later works, should certainly be an integral part of such research. An interdisciplinary approach and assessment based on several different criteria is also needed to determine the importance of the individual segments being investigated, i.e. to assess and distinguish what is essential from what is less important in this type of research. The goal is not to get lost in the sea of data coming from different sources and types of materials, but to process them in a logical and systematic way that will give clear and measurable results and present them not only to the scientific community but also to the interested public.

The structure of such a scientific paper should be organized in a clear and logical way through which the methodology will be explained, the entire research and the results and conclusions presented. The three elements proposed earlier as important in the research of this topic should have a prominent place in the research. Photo documentation should be given special attention – sorted by place and time, specifying the photographer and the owner, as an appendix to the textual part of the paper, described, and it should be pointed out what can be observed from them. Quantitative data analysis in table format is also particularly important. Some calculations that

could and should be made would be, for example – the total number of damaged sacral buildings – by type of damage, the ratio of the number of damaged buildings to the total number of sacral buildings of the Diocese of Sisak, the ratio of the number of damaged buildings according to a type of damage in the occupied area to the total number of sacral buildings in the same area etc. This would make the results measurable and comparable to similar research in other areas. The last element mentioned earlier is very important for explaining the circumstances and specifics of a particular place and its church that was damaged. For this element, it is especially important to highlight significant details from narrative sources and testimonies, as well as data and explanations from the references. If enough attention is paid to all this, the research could be successful and complete.

The importance of scientific dealing with this topic is manifested on many levels and by many indicators. It will contribute to the knowledge of the Croatian Homeland War and its devastating consequences, which have not yet been fully explored. Likewise, it is an important link in the research of the art history of the observed area, i.e. its sacral heritage, which is rich in cultural monuments and includes, for example, many extremely valuable examples of Baroque architecture.

Scientific dealing with this topic is also important in order for the culturicide that occurred to be saved from oblivion and remain recorded. The culture of remembrance and condemnation of the conducted misdeeds, as well as the systematic care for the restoration and return of the damaged and missing heritage, is a process in which the entire social community should participate, so more scientific research on this topic, which enables this process to be fully and properly implemented, is gaining importance. A sufficient delay from these events, which enables seeing them clearly and systematically, with a simultaneous closeness in time, so that there are still living witnesses and visible traces and indicators of what happened, opens up good opportunities to explore this topic and to systematize and analyse data that have not yet been scientifically examined. The results could perhaps bring significant insights into heritage and art objects that have disappeared and have not been traced to date, and which may not have been destroyed, i.e. it could perhaps help to find them. Furthermore, the results could also bring more detailed insight into when and how a monument was destroyed or alienated, and shed even more light on the circumstances of the devastation, thus

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helping to determine even more clearly the responsibility for what was committed.

The work that would bring clearly systematized data as part of the processing of this topic, and then quantitative analysis of these data, measurable results and conclusions, and look at the context and circumstances of these events in an interdisciplinary way, would certainly be

important in establishing a model that could be applied to the research of the devastation of sacral heritage in the Homeland War in other parts of Croatia. Such work could also serve as an example of dealing with such a topic in other countries in Europe and the world, which have recently faced war and merciless destruction of cultural and sacral heritage.

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