

**Manda Horvat, ethnologist, conservator**  
Ministry of the Sea, Tourism, Transport and  
Development  
Zagreb  
manda.horvat@mmtpr.hr

**Katica Mutak, B.A. in history, conservator**  
Ministry of Culture  
Administration for the Protection of Cultural Heritage  
Zagreb  
katica.mutak@min-kulture.hr

UDK 39:72(497.584 Lastovo)  
Professional paper  
Received: August 15, 2006.  
Accepted: October 18, 2006.

## Architecture of the Island of Lastovo

*As part of the regular program 'Research and evaluation of the ethnological material in the Republic of Croatia', the conservators from the Ministry of Culture, Administration for the Protection of Cultural Heritage from Zagreb, and from the Conservation Institute from Split, carried out, during October 2003, an inventory of ethnological heritage of the Island of Lastovo.*

*Prior systematic researches were not conducted, except for the ones which were carried out for specific purposes, i.e. for the design of the Urban Development Plan and Physical Plan of the Lastovo County in 1983 and Amendments to the Plan in 2000 and for the writing up of the Program of Integral Development of the Lastovo region.*

Key words: rural architecture, Lastovo

### Geographical characteristics of the island

Lastovo is the remotest and the southernmost Croatian island. Its area is 46.9 km<sup>2</sup>; it is 11 kilometers long and around 6.5 kilometers wide. Between peaks of mountains composed of limestone, the highest peak being Hum (417 m), there are many Karst valleys, of which the most important ones are Prgovo, Pržina, Lokavje and Vinopolje. Forests cover around 60% of the island, and are mostly composed of macchia, Aleppo pines and evergreen Holm-oak.

Because of its geographical position out in the open sea, the island was an integral part of sailing routes connecting Western and Eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea from Neolithic times.

## History of Lastovo

The island was inhabited in the Neolithic period, which could be established from the archeological finds of pottery in the Rača cave (above Skrivena Luka) and in Pužavica (between Prgovo and Pržina). From the animal and plant remains in the Rača cave, it could be concluded that the inhabitants of Lastovo from that period were hunters, gatherers, cattle breeders and, partly, agriculturalists.

At the end of the Bronze Age, the island was inhabited by the Illyrians who built hill-fort settlements, and according to the archeological finds on the hill of Glavica situated above the town of Lastovo, it seemed that one of these settlements was situated on the site of today's Lastovo, above which there was a pre-historic fort, and the other was situated on a plateau south to the Soznja hill.

Even though the island was mentioned for the first time in a written text in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (in the works of the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porfirogenet), it is believed that the Croats inhabited the island in the early phase of their arrival to these regions, and this can be partly confirmed by place names found on the island which are mostly of Croatian origin. Hence, already in Constantine's work, when Lastovo, most probably, was not any more a part of the Byzantine Dalmatia, but was under the government of Croatian rulers, the island was mentioned under the Croatian name of Lastobon, which is an older variant of today's name.

## Life of the islanders according to the Lastovo Statute

The islanders were organized in a free county with internal autonomy. This enabled them to voluntarily join, in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the County of Dubrovnik, which promised to allow them to preserve all their old customs. New amendments were being added to the Statute, which was passed on 1310, until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Statute guaranteed the islanders all their rights. From the old Slavic tribal organization, the Statute preserved the custom of joint decision-making of all the house lords on all the questions significant for the life of the community, on an assembly in front of the church. A class of richer and more influential citizens separated themselves from the rest and founded a Council, the members of which had to be Lastovo born, while the position in the Council was inherited. Judges, treasurers and captains were selected from their ranks.

The Statute of Lastovo is a valuable source for the study of a past time. From it we can learn the following: *'Lastovo was rather poor and the number of inhabitants was small. The people of Lastovo lived from agriculture, cattle breeding, wine growing and fishing. Even though the conditions for the development of agriculture were quite good, they did not take too much advantage of the fertile soil, because they were far away from the market. This seems to be the reason why Dubrovnik aristocrats never showed any interest for the island, because they could not expect to gain any material profit from it. It is assumed that the people of Lastovo sur-*

*rendered themselves to Dubrovnik County so as to protect themselves from an intrusion of some other county or state. Dubrovnik County guaranteed to the people of Lastovo a preservation of their old customs and laws, and that meant a certain type of autonomy. It seems that already at that period the people of Lastovo were the private landowners. According to that prevailing opinion, the people of Lastovo were free peasants. The land was cultivated under their supervision – whether the owners themselves cultivated the land or by the help of hired day laborers or sometimes even by free laborers who had, for one reason or another, the status of slaves. Here we could not talk about agrarian-legal relationship in which the land of the aristocrats was cultivated and which would have had certain elements of the Western type of feudalism. Furthermore, the land on Lastovo was not usually leased to tenants who would pay in, for example, half of the products, or in any kind of money lease, so the relationship which is usually referred to as the Dalmatian colonat, was also quite unknown here' (Lučić 1974).*

From the Statute we can also find out that the people of Lastovo could pass and confirm general laws and regulations on their public gatherings:

*'How much it was paid for the stolen sheep, goat, lamb, ox, ram or kid and what was the amount of compensation the owner received for the damage, and what was the amount received by the Lastovo County and the officers if they reported the theft.*

*That the real estates begotten or received as a dowry, land, vineyards or house, if sold or given to a third party, can be done so only with a notarial certificate. The transaction is not valid without the certificate!*

*If someone is given, while entering a marriage, a part of mother's or father's property through notarial certificate, they have to be satisfied with the received and should not ask any part of the property in the future.*

*If a woman's husband dies, and she wants to remarry, she cannot take with her anything apart from her own dowry which she brought to the late husband's household.*

*All pastures on the island have to be common property of all the inhabitants of Lastovo, only if someone should own a certain land or vineyard inherited from his father, this should belong to him and to his children.*

*No one should graze their cattle on the vineyards of the island.*

*No one should plough, sow or graze the cattle on the little islands belonging to the county of Lastovo, or will be fined by 5 perpers for each time.*

*The one who will be the governor of Lastovo will not be permitted to buy a house or vineyards or some other property, besides what is needed for subsistence of him and his family.*

*When vineyard guards will be appointed in the vineyards of the whole island, they are obliged to remain on the vineyards until all the grapes will be picked. If they leave before that, they will have to pay damages to the owner of the vineyard.*

*The father is the owner of all property, movable and immovable, and he can give them to whomever he wants, and a daughter or a son can not oppose him.*

The Statute lost its function with the fall of the Venetian government, when Lastovo again became the part of Dubrovnik County, which repressed the autonomy of Lastovo and imposed its laws. After that, the island saw neither the Rector of Dubrovnik nor its own autonomy.

## Economy

The people of Lastovo engaged in agriculture, cattle-breeding, wine-growing, coral industry and fishing. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a shipping industry and trade were on the rise, and the port of St. Peter (today Ubli) developed in that period. Fishing was also important in this period. Besides for their own use, they used to prepare salted fish and sell it to the tradesmen from Apulia and Calabria. Roughly at that time, they abandoned coral industry. Next to agriculture and cattle-breeding, they engaged in forestry (they sold oak wood to the shipyards).

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century plant disease struck vineyards. Since they started protecting their vines from this disease later than in other regions, their vineyards took longer time to recover.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the people of Lastovo engaged mostly in olive growing, vine growing, as well as growing fruits and vegetables. They had to import cereal crops. Forestry was still an important branch of economy. Fishing industry was on the rise as well, so a sardine factory was built in the town of Ubli in 1931.

## Architecture of the island of Lastovo

Historical events and economic circumstances have influenced the development of settlements and the ways of building of houses and farmsteads. The characteristic element of the traditional architecture of the Adriatic area is the stone house which, initially, was very modest. It was built from stone which was processed manually and connected by mortar (lime and sand) or sometimes even bound together without any connective material – ‘dry’ technique. The usage of wood was limited only to the most elemental parts – ceiling and roof beams, floors and roof laths. The oldest houses were covered by panels and farm buildings by straw, and only later the houses were covered by tiles.

Traditional architecture of the island of Lastovo is more developed than in any other rural region in Croatia. The reasons for this are not completely unknown, because from the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., when Romans invaded the island, many *vilae rusticae* were built on the island, on the edges of fertile valleys and in attractive coves. Since that period, Lastovo has survived many changes and many different rulers.

Little is known about architecture of the island of Lastovo in the period before 15<sup>th</sup> century, but we can conclude, on the basis of the medieval sacral objects that the culture of housing was important from the earliest times (this is confirmed by the appearance of the oldest houses Antice, Rešić and Antičević). During the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the settlement was growing in size and many representable houses were built, together with churches, a castle and a new governor's residence. Private elementary school existed on the island of Lastovo as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> In 1652 the settlement had more than 200 houses and more than 1000 inhabitants.

Because of the attacks of Turkish pirates, frequent lootings and taking people away into slavery, from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century, guards were organized on the island of Lastovo which would warn the people about approaching enemy ships.<sup>2</sup>

When the danger from the pirates stopped in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the people of Lastovo turned towards the sea. They were allowed to build only drywall shelters in the coves, and fish manufactures in the region of Lučica.

Economic circumstances have influenced the development of Lastovo and its architecture. According to C. Fisković's research, many houses in Lastovo have Gothic and Renaissance stylistic elements, which can be observed in the shape and decorations of the doors, windows and wells – *šterni*, as well as in the parts of stone furniture preserved till today.

The settlement was spreading in the form of an amphitheatre. Houses were built on slopes, while fields, gardens, olive and vine yards were situated in the valleys. The most common type of house was a one-storey house built on a slope. They were built from chiseled stone, and covered by tiles. On the ground floor there was a cellar (*konoba*) with large doors overlooking the yard or the street. Houses which were not built on slopes usually included a yard. Door-posts, window-sills, consoles with rings, wall cornices and gutters were chiseled out of the Lastovo white stone – *škrpjel*, which was found on the small island of Arženjak. They were chiseled to the order by the craftsmen from Korčula and Gruž. Terraces, called *sulari* in Lastovo, were more spacious and better equipped than in other regions of Dalmatia, and they were very important in the architecture of Lastovo. The first reason stems from the well-known fact that at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there were around 30 to 40 houses in Lastovo which were built on the model of country houses from the Dubrovnik region, even though the peasants, fishermen and seamen of Lastovo lived in them.<sup>3</sup> Another reason is the skill of the builders and stone-masons, who deliberately introduced architectural elements of the aristocratic houses and cottages to these houses.

---

<sup>1</sup> These first schools were initially organized by priests, later by lay people. A world famous printer Dobrić Dobričević, who, besides printing business, engaged in diplomacy for Venice, went to school here.

<sup>2</sup> Memory of the pirates' attacks is preserved in carnival customs, during which a Maori doll is burned as the symbol of all the pirates which threatened the island, from the Catalanians in the 15th century, to the Turks, Arabs and the Maori.

<sup>3</sup> From archival data we can obtain information about the last names of the families who lived in specific parts of the settlement, but we do not know their occupations.

After finding houses with authentic stylistic elements from that period on the outskirts of the settlement, Cvito Fisković concluded that the village area was not expanded since the late medieval times. The oldest preserved houses on Lastovo were from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the ones from earlier periods, from the Romanesque period, were mentioned only in the written sources. Today we can still find remnants of the houses from the Gothic period (15<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century), Renaissance (16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century) and Baroque (17<sup>th</sup>- 18<sup>th</sup> century).

Stylistic elements were mostly used for decoration of door-posts and window sills, and on the roofs we can observe chimneys (*fumari*) of various shapes, which are characteristic for this region. It is important to point out that the settlement was not built according to a plan, but that it was created spontaneously, following the configuration of the ground, where each house tried to achieve the functionality of the ground-plan (Turnšek, 2005).

Lastovo begun to grow during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as well as in earlier periods. Old Gothic and Renaissance houses acquired new forms by building of new wings or making alterations. New houses and farmsteads were built and halls and streets were becoming narrower. Houses leaned on each other; they were expanded vertically and connected by vaults (*volte*) of the terraces (*slar; tarace*). Vaults were built over street passages, so as to enlarge the existing terraces. Many contemporary inhabitants of Lastovo were skilled in processing of stone, so they would build and improve their houses themselves, while the rich house lords would continue to pay foreign craftsmen – masons to built new or alter the old houses. The excessive decorations were gone, and the new element which marked the 18<sup>th</sup> century were the chimneys which, through their appearance, reminded of minarets, and symbolically represented the houses of rich villagers. It is assumed that this type of building was an influence which came from the neighboring Italian coast and the villages in the region of Puglia (C. Fisković).

About the architecture on the island we can find out from the accounts of the Uncle Petar Pavao (1915):

*'In the old times, when you wanted to build a house, you had to obtain permission from the authorities. The stone was 'picked' next to St. Ilija, and carried on mules and donkeys to the place where the house would be built. Stone, lime and sand were brought over a year before the house was built. Lime pits were burning around the village of Lastovo. They collected wood for burning lime, or exchanged wood for lime. Lime was extinguished in smaller pits which were situated near the houses. The sand was obtained in the central part of the island, and lime and sand were the basic connective materials for stone.*

*First houses, the oldest in Lastovo, were built by brothers together with their father, and they were later divided, together with the other property – land, vineyards, and olive yards. The outer part of the house was built from large pieces of chiseled stone, and the interior walls from smaller pieces of stone. In the foundation of the house, the builder would built in a bottle of wine, a jug of water and two glasses – for luck and so that there would always be wine in the house. When*

*the house was built up to the roof, a cluster of olive twigs was placed on the construction, for the main builder.*

*Roof construction was made of wood – which was bought in Korčula or Dubrovnik.*

*Consoles for doors and windows, škripele, were ordered in Korčula, and tiles were mostly imported from Italy. Carpentry was done by Korčula craftsmen.*

*On the ground floor there was a cellar, konoba or stranj, the door of which had to face north, so as to ensure that the konoba was always cold, of the constant temperature, since oil, wine and other foods were kept in it. Containers, in which oil was kept, kamenice and pitari, were also placed in the cellar; together with the wine barrels and different tools for cultivation of vineyards and fields.*

*On the first floor there was a sala – a big living room and a kitchen –komin, which contained a fireplace with a fireplace hood, kominata, for the drainage of the smoke. Baker's oven was also situated there. Smoke from kominata and baker's oven was leaving the house through a chimney – fumar – and the people of Lastovo used to build chimneys that could not be found anywhere in Croatia. Several benches were present in the kitchen, as well as the chests for the storage of lentils, some shelves for the tableware, and by the window, a sink, lastovsko pilo, for washing the dishes. Each house had a grindstone.*

*Stairs were leading to the attic – šufit – with two small rooms (depending on the size of the house).*

*The old families from Lastovo were Antica, Lešići, Čučevići, Dražinić, Kokot, Đivoje. Many captains, priests and seamen were from these oldest families.'*

## **Instead of a conclusion**

The development and preservation of cultural-historical and natural treasures of the island of Lastovo deserve better care. The development of the island will be possible only if the number of inhabitants will increase, and their number is diminishing since the First World War when many emigrated to the South America and after the Second World War when people emigrated to Australia and America. According to the data from 1991, there were 734 inhabitants on Lastovo, which is half the number of 1562 inhabitants who were registered in 1948.

The absence of job opportunities and life choices, with no developmental strategies, has started a wave of emigration, especially of young people, to other parts of Croatia and abroad. Small number of people immigrated to the island. These were mostly girls who married Lastovo men. But even these were few, because there were always enough women on Lastovo. Young people who remained on the island partly emigrated because of jobs or continuing education, and small number of older families engage in their primary occupations and economic survival for their own needs, as much as their old age allows them.

In the last decade, tourism has started to develop which, in the future, could be viewed as an important branch of economy for which younger generations have shown significant interest. With good organization of the tourist sector, this could be the chance for Lastovo to revive again, through preservation of natural resources, architectural heritage, revival of traditional customs and festivals and traditional economy. Together with the development of traditional economy, special emphasis should be placed on the renewal and adaptations of traditional objects and fishermen's houses, and to their (new) functions.

New building should be stopped, and the old houses should be used in the way which is most appropriate for the preservation of their cultural and historical architectural features which represent the island of Lastovo, and this is the highly developed style of building with recognizable *salari*, elaborate Gothic and Renaissance stylistic elements, and valuable sacral and archeological heritage.

The most valuable houses, which were also the oldest, survived many changes in annexes and inappropriate adaptations, or they were simply deserted or inadequately taken care of; however, they are the witnesses of the high culture of housing from as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and still confirm this by their appearance.

The politics of the development and preservation of the island should be primarily organized by the local community and county through various developmental state projects. In the past 'the city halls, schools, parish houses and pubs' used to create the material and non-material basis of the 'independent' life of a community. These traditional gatherings have now mostly disappeared. Craftsmen and fishermen have moved away, other places were closed down; there are no distinguished individuals who could serve as a model. For several years now, a citizens organization called 'Save Lastovo' is active on the island, which showed through their previous activities and projects that they can become 'a model', because they are trying to save and preserve natural and cultural heritage of the island.

Translated by Tanja Bukovčan