

Ruins of Sarajevo Library Is Symbol of a Shattered Culture

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By JANE PERLEZ

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina -- Eerie with shattered beauty, the burned ruins of Bosnia's national library have stood for the last four years as a wrenching symbol of an attempt to destroy a city and its culture.

Now the gouged granite columns, the crumbling crenelated trim and the once resplendent copper cupola, shredded like lacework, stand for something else: the sluggishness of the restoration and reconstruction of Sarajevo.

"What is missing is money -- there are lots of ideas but no money," said Enes Kujundzic, the energetic library director, who has shown scores of international dignitaries, experts and financiers through the ghostly interior, where more than a million books and priceless manuscripts were reduced to ashes by Serb shells. "I say this is top priority for a country coming out of war. They say with this money we could rebuild several factories, and then rebuild the library."

Lofty promises of international financing to rebuild Sarajevo's library, along with its roads, airport and factories, have failed to materialize in the amounts envisioned after the signing of the Dayton peace agreement last December. Much of the reluctance is caused by uncertainty over how Bosnia will fare after next month's national elections and by unease over whether the Bosnian government could manage the funds.

But unlike many of the reconstruction projects being bandied about, Kujundzic says that his plan is simple and practical.

He wants to start giving basic library services to the people of Sarajevo, who were starved intellectually and deprived professionally during the fighting. The city lent him an unused army barracks in which to get a temporary, but functional, library going again. So Kujundzic's first need, he said, is financing to create on-line services, open research facilities and create a new book, periodical and archival collection.

The more romantic idea of restoring the fabulous century-old structure that fuses Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian architectural styles -- where Archduke Ferdinand of Austria had just attended a reception when he was shot in 1914 -- should be deferred until later, he said. Hasty patching to insure that the ruins do not crumble completely from exposure to snow, wind and sun will be finished before the winter.

"Obviously the building attracts much more attention," Kujundzic said, looking out

windows that are patched together with plastic in his temporary office a few blocks from the ruins. "But everyone forgets the people who are alive and willing to do research. And people forget that this country can't be rebuilt without resources of science and technology. People say you are a cultural institution. I say we're also an educational and scientific institution that has to help this country compete."

The library in Sarajevo served the University of Sarajevo, and was a national repository of Bosniaca -- with works devoted to subjects about Bosnia or published in Bosnia, many of them centuries old. Some of these were irreplaceable handwritten manuscripts, though many of the books can be found elsewhere.

When Serb artillery bombarded the library in August 1992, flames engulfed almost 50,000 feet of wooden bookshelves and burned a central atrium, richly carved staircases and the ceremonial auditoriums of the structure, built in 1896 as the town hall. The auditoriums had become reading rooms in 1951, when the building was converted to the national library for the republic within the Yugoslav federation. Books, original manuscripts, the archives of Serb, Croat, Bosnian and Jewish writers, the entire catalogue system, microfilm, computers and photo labs were all destroyed.

Three months earlier, the Serbs shelled the Sarajevo Oriental Institute, devastating a collection of medieval literature in Arabic, Persian and Turkish and priceless works in four alphabets -- Latin Arabic, Cyrillic and an alphabet that predated Cyrillic, known as Old Bosnian.

Immediately, librarians in the United States and elsewhere tried to come to the rescue.

To recapture as much of the collection as possible, Tatjana Lorkovic, the curator of Slavic and East European collections at Yale University Library, started playing detective. With funds from the Yale library as well as the library at Harvard, the Library of Congress and other national data bases, Ms. Lorkovic is organizing a bibliographic record of Bosniaca.

"Those Stone Age people who destroyed the library destroyed their heritage too," said Ms. Lorkovic in a telephone interview. "Represented in the library were the personal archives of the very important Serb poet, Aleksa Santic, who lived from 1868 to 1924. When the Bosnians started to go to Turkey after Yugoslavia was formed in 1918, he wrote a poem, 'Ostajte Ovdje,' 'Stay Here,' to tell his Muslim brothers not to leave."

Once a bibliography is in hand, Sarajevo could end up with one of the world's most modern library services. The trend in libraries is away from being depositories of books and toward providing on-line services. The bibliography from Ms. Lorkovic's project would enable the Sarajevo library to offer many of the available Bosnian works as full-text electronic archives. Ancient manuscripts of Bosnian literature owned by libraries

elsewhere could be digitalized using the latest technology, Kujundzic said.

The 108-member staff of the library in 1992 has dwindled to 60. Some were killed, others went into the army, and others fled as refugees. With skimpy appropriations from the Bosnian government, Kujundzic struggles to meet monthly salaries and, so far, has not been able to provide training in new technologies.

There has been no money for supplies since March, he said. Some computers and some books have been sent from Unesco, which has also been working on long-term plans for reviving the library's collections, he said. But over all, the donations have been meager.

To illustrate his dire need for funds, Kujundzic said his staff had just completed a list of 450 journals and magazines to which the library would like to subscribe, at an annual cost of about \$300,000. The subjects, he said, were selected according to Bosnia's post-war requirements: in medicine, journals about trauma; in international relations, material about the United Nations; in architecture, periodicals about reconstruction. Widely read journals such as *Lancet*, *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *The Economist* were also on the list.

To show that they are not waiting around for a grandiose rebuilding project, Kujundzic and his staff have produced the first issue of a new library journal called *Bosniaca*. It is devoted to articles about Bosnian literature and is intended as an inspiration for those wanting to return the library to its former intellectual achievements.

While the librarians toil to meet the basic needs of a people emerging from the cocoon of war, the debate will persist about what to do with the library ruins, now largely frequented by gawking tourists.

Ms. Lorkovic, who emigrated to the United States from Belgrade in the 1960s, is on the side of both memory and modernity.

"I think the old building should be preserved the way it is -- like Coventry Cathedral -- as a remembrance," she said. "A new Sarajevo library should be bright, the biggest and the best and the whole world should help."