

## Brac

### Island of Stone Sunshine and Sea

By Peter Simunovic

Brac pronounced Brach.

On this island man and stone have lived and fought each other from time immemorial. This island is my rock. Olives writhe and cypresses slumber in its cracks. Today fewer vineyards burst into leaf on its terraced slopes and, in the spring, fewer lively goats and unruly colts riotously race each other in its grassy vales.

My island is full of heaps of stone piled up through the centuries by hard working hands which picked out the stones from the barren clearings in order to wrest the thin layers of soil from the karst and plant in it the vine to yield dry "plavac" and the sweet "vugava" wines.

At the dawn of history such heaps of stone, hill forts and tumuli were silhouetted, on the ridges of Brac. Watering places were dug and paths cleared everywhere in the bare rock, and later settlements, churches and ports were built. The bowels of the island yielded the marble for the huge Palace of Diocletian and many other magnificent buildings throughout the world. The people of this island have always, struggled for their land, always dependent on the mercy of the skies: would they send rain to the parched terra rossa or fire to burn the fruits of the earth defiantly maturing in the stone?

This island evades, superficial judgment and hasty comparisons. It will conceal its true identity from the observer, and will bestow a smile rather than shed a tear as bitter as wormwood and as clear as grape-brandy.

Brac is at its most hospitable in summer when it opens up its heart and presents: its small towns, and villages and its coves. In summer, the population doubles on its shores, which stretch for more than a hundred miles. Sage, xeranthemum, heather, lavender and rosemary bushes bloom on its slopes and fill one's nostrils with their scents. A multitude of colors meet the gaze: ripe dog berries, bearberries, barberries, mallow, the swollen fruits of blackthorn, blackberry and mahaleb bushes. The deafening song of crickets chirping tirelessly on the knotty jasmines, junipers and spruces, has given the island its name, "island of crickets".

I watch the herds of sheep resting in the deep shade of the tree tops. The heat has stilled the bells around the necks of the bellwethers, and led the shepherds to rest in the shade and carve flutes from service tree bark. I hear the plaintive music echoing along the long valleys, the music of satyrs, from the Arcadia of Brac, like a melancholy Dalmatian song sung in the parks and under girls' windows.

Heat shimmers in the air, warms the stone, lulls the sea to sleep, dries up the

wells in the villages and the ponds in the pastures. In his later years Nazor expressed his gratitude to this island, accustomed to thirst: "Thank you, waterless isle for having taught me to thirst and long for something all my life" (Brac, 1940).

This is the island of sweat, which drops and evaporates on the hazy whiteness of the heated stone in the quarries of Brac, in front of the infernal doors of the red-hot lime-kilns, in the fields where only the swing of the hoe enables you to distinguish the tanned backs of the laborers from the cleared patches of terra rossa.

The sounds and fragrances harmonize with the hundreds of bright colors, as in Ignat Job's paintings of Brac.

Another Brac splashes in the coves. Here it gives itself to the sun, like a naked girl on a rock beneath a myrtle in a hidden cove, in the solitude of noon, listening to the amorous whispering of the pines and the calm sea.

Brac has chosen summer for its festivities. More guests visit it in summer, thus giving it greater opportunities to be hospitable. This is the Brac of feasts, youthful abandon, lavish lunches under the arbours, noisy fairs, cunning horse-traders, and desperate, almost hopeless singing in the churches: "Lord, grant rain to Thy land", rain for the vine and the olive, and the cracked soil, hardened like the palm by the oar, hoe and flail; rain for the fruits shriveled like my mother's cheeks on which toil, worry and sorrow have written everything there is to be written.

Brac is full of wrinkles, on its stone and on its people, like the corroded surfaces of the sculptures of V. Michieli: this is Brac in shriveled bronze.

Brac is at its most somber and saddest in autumn. The vineyards blush with red and the swollen black bunches of grapes await the harvest. At the turn of the century, when the entire island was a huge vineyard, grape-picking was a laborious and festive affair, with pickers, grape-crushers, basket-carriers and mule drivers everywhere. The songs and shouts indicate whether the barrels will be full, the must plentiful and the wine strong enough. Fishermen wait for dark in order to set sail, in their lantern-decked boats, for the fishing grounds allotted to them. The white beaches lie bare, "like a girl's virginity", in the quiet solitude of the deserted coves.

The departure of the swallows is followed by the first rains. The stone slab roofs are coated with lime to disinfect the water which will flow into the cisterns from the gutters under the eaves. The flowers in the windows, and porches come to life again. Red-textured mushrooms shoot up under the tangled mass of fallen pine and spruce needles, and shepherds gather them into umbrellas turned upside down. The thirsty earth drinks its fill. The stone assumes a blue-grey hue, like the tombs, which, with the dead days, await the sad processions of long talks with the deceased. The cypresses give in to the caresses of the sirocco which seems to introduce a strange, plaintive note into people's lives.

This is the autumn described by Tin Ujevic, who chose such days of memento mori to visit his mother's island, to sing of his own sadness: "There, there to travel / there, there to grieve. . ." (from the poem "Departure").

By St. Martin's Day the wine has settled. It has fermented and awaits the buyers. The mark left over in the barrels is put into sacks and taken to the still. Spruce twigs, and handfuls of mint, fennel and sage are added on top. After a while, the boiling still yields the first drops of the invigorating and healthy herb brandy of Brac.

Brac is most beautiful in autumn. At this time of the year it is left to its own resources, abandoned and alone. It listens to the must fermenting in the casks, and watches the ripening of the black berries on the olive trees. Autumn brings its gifts of wine and oil, saturated with the sweetness of the sun and the vigor of the climate. Both mostly leave the island for other people's tables . . .

When Christmas announces winter, and the porkers are hung on double hooks so that the chops may be cut out and the hams nicely rounded, the wailing bura plunges down the slopes of Mosor and whistles across the Canal.

"The coolness sends a shiver through the body, and the wind plays hesitating and wavering melodies ... What is the wind saying? It tells of the crying of imprisoned hearts, the resignation of the will bowing to fate, the lonely solitude of widows, the lily pure smile of infants, the thoughts of a faraway world, the last breath of those who lost their lives on the seas of the world. The wind communicates like a soul, and wails like a cello". (Tin Ujevic', Supetar on Brac, 1929).

On these windy evenings thousands of stars grace the sky above the island, showing shepherds and seamen the time and the way in the nocturnal waylessness of the rocky expanses and the sea.

This is the season of the yule log and New Year's songs, rollicking festivities which have cloaked their pagan Slav origins in Christian apparel. The fire crackles and warms your knees, and the pine torch blazes and lights up the sooty ceilings ... I recall my childhood, full of stories, about demons and vampires climbing the chimneys and up the chain on which the kettle hangs above the fireplace, about witches and evil spirits which haunt men in their beds, unbaptized children's souls, mountain fairies, about the Greek treasures in the tumuli, about evil fairies and witches, galley-slaves, and misers, the Spanish plague, hardships and miseries, about the hard life of the colony of Brac , those exploited on their own island and those who wasted away their strength and health toiling for foreign masters in Australian mines, on South American plantations, on strange seas and under alien captains. By these open winter fireplaces I first learnt about the history of my people from Kacic, and about the hard times of my island from my grandparents.

In the winter months, when the bura chills to the marrow, the people of Brac cut jasmine, hornbeams; and boxwood. In olden times, countless mule loads of best

firewood were taken to the towns to heat the homes of the rich, thus, providing a meager wage for the woodcutters. On bright winter mornings the peasants would leave their homes, their woolen stockings tied to the handles of their hoes, for the first banking up of the vineyards, while the "makinari", tired and sleepy after a hard night's work at the oil cake press hurried home to rest after being relieved by the next shift.

Almond trees blossom on the island in winter, like a carpet of snow around the villages by the sea. The first lambs are weaned in winter. I know of no softer fur than that on the neck of a scared, new born lamb, which I would take away from the herd and bring to the village, together with the ewe, to warm it by the fire and then offer it the swollen udder of its mother.

Rains fill the ponds on the highlands, the grazing grounds of droves of semi wild mules and unguarded herds of sheep, which water themselves unheeded at the ancient pools, left over from Roman times. Shepherds check the herd only now and then, and in the meanwhile look to see if the marten's paw has sprung the trap in front of its hiding place among the cracks in the solid rock, and collect up the dormice caught in the springy traps placed on jasmine shrubs and the black birds and thrushes caught under the thin stone slabs near puddles in the rock. This is winter in the wayless expanse of Brac.

"O island without paths, you taught me how to walk, wherever I went., with invulnerable feet and firm ankles." (V. Nazor, *ibid.*).

Island of the Carnival. Rollicking masquers on the village roads. In the small dance halls by the flickering light of carbide lamps, young people hop about to the rhythm of the polka and schottische, the "ciciljana" and "avilota". They

dance "our way", the "Apulian way", the "modern way". The young men seize moments when the mothers are engrossed in gossip to clasp the girls close and satisfy their lustful hands on the hot, quivering and sweaty curves. This is the time for the first sly and wanton winks, met by the shy blushes of the maidens. Such gay evenings give rise to first loves, soon to blossom with the first violets in the hollow roots of the olives.

In spring the island dons its gala dress. When the March buras have stripped the almonds of their blossoms, the vineyards burst into bud and a carpet of new green grass, covers the dales and fallow land again. St. George's Day, so they say, as did their pagan ancestors who rejoiced at nature's reawakening, is the true beginning of the year. The sap of life begins to flow in plants, animals, and people. The herds leave the barren highlands for the grassy lowlands, break into fenced vineyards, browse on the shoots, and cause damage. The shepherds' nights grow shorter, their eyes quicker, and their ears keener for the sound of the bells on the rams and mules.

The last rains in April bring out the snails. The shepherds catch them and brush the dried sage leaves off their slimy undersides then string them on twigs.

Hornbeams, oaks and ashes burst into bud on the highlands below Mount Vidovica and along the edge of Dugi Dol. Hawthorn blossoms in the cracks and along the paths a mass of round quivering medallions. Thousands of cones appear on the Austrian pines, a rarity in these parts. The fragrance of rosemary, sage, laurel, pyrethrum, lavender and mint pervades the countryside. The blossoming crowns of sour cherry and cherry trees adorn the banked up vineyards. The peasants apprehensively await the exasperating dry "pasjunki jugo" (sirocco), which can destroy the buds and blossoms and thwart all the peasants' hopes and the labor put into the meager rocky soil, just as the first fruits are being born.

In the vineyards diggers gently bank up the budding stems lest they should damage them while working. They move in long rows, one behind the other, as in the mournful Good Friday procession when in Christ's suffering they recognize their own. Processions again on Rogation Day: "Please drive away lean years and pests from the sown fields, the vineyards and all the trees. . ." They crawl like centipedes along the village paths, following the cross, beseeching heaven to spare the healthy fruits of their labors and cursing the pests, the evil fiends that prey maliciously upon their harvest. And when the sun "blazes like a bonfire" as spring turns into summer and the days are at their longest, midsummer bonfires are lit at dusk on the crossroads and the peasants leap over them, to tame them and appease the evil spirits: "From St. John's to St. John's, lest our feet should burn!"

In this ancient folklore which still survives' on this Slav periphery, we recognize the pagan faith of our ancestors woven into Christian fabric.

Of all the magnificently colored flowers and intoxicating fragrances of the Mediterranean macchia the people of Brac have fallen in love with just two flowers: those of the vine and the olive. They watch over them as they blossom and the petals drop after pollination, until the small berries grow into juicy grapes and olives which, in late autumn and winter, ferment in the casks and percolate in the stone vessels.

"O island of vines and olives, you give me the daily drunkenness of summer days and the ever burning light in all the winter nights of my life" (V. Nator, *ibid.*).

In spring Brac is full of lambs and wild asparagus. I will never forget the springs in the rocky pastures when, as a shepherd I used to drowse on dry jasmine leaves bathed by the warm May sun, with lambs and horned vipers as my neighbors.

Spring is most beautiful in the coves of Brac, particularly on the unpopulated western coast of the island, where the steep wooded slopes are overgrown with wild Mediterranean pine and the small beaches resemble strings of pearls.

The coves are drowsy in the morning as dreams and melancholy abandon them for a while, and they are awakened by the dawn and the trembling breeze in the pine needles, and flurried by the fishermen who haul in their nets on the promontories. The silvery riot of frightened sardines ruffles the morning calm, blue like the molten vitriol in the small eye-like troughs in the vineyards. They are

somber at noon, dazed by the sunshine, the fragrance of pines, heather, thistle ... and by the deafening chirp of the crickets in the jasmine, spruce and chaste-tree bushes. They are in love in the late afternoon, when the maestrale gives way to, calm and ceases to caress their pearly pebbles, whose solitary whiteness is exposed and washed like the naked skin of a sleeping girl who abandons herself to the caress of the midday sun, the breeze and sea. And when they finally quiet down in the violet dusk, the shadows, of the pines grow longer, the caves become mysterious, and the sea dark and full of sparks. They say that fairies, and satyrs, meet then on these lonely beaches, and dance until the moon goes out and dawn drives them away.

Brac is not inclined to reveal itself to superficial visitors who have no feeling for the wrinkled cracks in the rock, the dales, and bottomless chasms in the karst where pigeons, perch around the edge; to people who show no interest in its pools, its vast terraced slopes and lonely little churches on the ridges, in the writhing of the olives and sadness of the cypresses on the stone graves. How can one love this rocky landscape and these people without a deliberate effort to feel in the stone of this complex mosaic the fleshliness of Rendic's thoughtful marble fairies on the graves, the autumn sadness of Tin Ujevic, and the summer exultation of Nazor who, recognizes the melody of his island in the chirping of the crickets.

One must penetrate into this landscape, the blood-red rutted terra rossa, which clings to the stone walls, in order to keep out of the gullies, and stay on the terraces. One must understand the stone heaps scattered all over the island, soaked in the sweat of labor and the blood of blistered hands and woven harmoniously into the unique architecture of the karst expanse like monuments to work. How can one experience the island without understanding the sorrow underlying the frequent departures, of sons, brothers and lovers who seek their daily bread across the seas, on voyages, from which, there is no return? How can one remain indifferent to, the enduring faith of the woman who says farewell to a husband to whom she has barely had time to donate her virginity and awaits his final return from strange lands, when he will bring her old age and infirmity in return? How can one, love the island and not feel sympathy for the grief in the tears dried in the wrinkles, and in the weeds of mothers and widows donned with the first death in the family and only cast aside at their own passing away.

No camera can record such scenes. Their image and meaning has been changed by rapid post-war transformation. But they are worthy of acquaintance. Not as a melancholy return to one's childhood before the second war, but for the sake of comparison with present-day Brac and its development, as a starting point and measure of its growth.

The sea divides Brac from the mountains of Mosor and Biokovo. It lies between Hvar and Split, at the junction of the modern east-west coastal road and the historical, neglected route which leaves the sea and crosses the gorges of Split and Klis for the interior.

Brac has much in common with the adjacent mainland, which does not affect any of its insular features. One of its major advantages is the proximity of Split. Brac is the largest Dalmatian island - it is 40 km long, and 4 to 13 km wide. The area of the island is 394 square kilometers.

The terraced northern slopes of the asymmetric ridge drop gradually to the sea. These are limestone stretches with a very developed karst formation. In the western and eastern parts of the island the terraces are smoother, the relief less rugged, and the valleys and fields larger. The southern part of the ridge is narrower and steeper. Here Vidova Gora soars to 778 meters above sea level. This is the highest peak on all the Adriatic islands. In the late 19th century all of Brac was covered by terrace vineyards. When phylloxera destroyed the grapevines, many of these were abandoned. Erosion reduced their workable surface and created follow areas with stretches of genista, spruce and sparse olive groves. The vineyards, retreated to the better land in the valleys, where tractors are now replacing hoes.

Brac has a truly Mediterranean climate. The summers are long and dry, the winters mild and rainy. The wettest months are November and December, the driest July and August. The temperature only very occasionally drops below 0-C; on the other hand, more than a hundred days have a temperature of more than 25-C, and more than fifty days above 30-C. The settlements, on the western and southern coast of the island have the hottest climate.

Cool (northern) and warm (southern) winds alternate during the colder part of the year. The best known are the bura and the jugo (sirocco). In summer, the commonest winds are the burin and the maestrale. The tramontana (northwestern), ostro (southwestern), levant (eastern) and lebic (western) are less frequent.

The island enjoys more than 2,700 hours of sunshine annually; it is one of the sunniest regions in Croatia.

Brac has entered history as an island of animal husbandry. According to the writings of the Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder it was well-known for its goats, (*et capris laudata Brattia*). Today the goats are few, and are mainly tethered lest they should nibble the shoots in the macchia.

The macchia of Brac abounds in many typically Mediterranean species. It is made up of jasmine, juniper, bladder-nut, terebinth, box-wood, genista, the strawberry-tree, the carob-tree, spruce, mahaleb, cherry, rosemary and vines. Only the hardier shrubs, are found at heights exceeding 400 meters: jasmine, box-wood, juniper and spruce. Grazing has destroyed the macchia over substantial areas, where it turns into undergrowth and rocky stretches with occasional juniper patches, thorn bushes and aromatic herbs. This is behind the fame of the honey and cheese of Brac, and the delicious flavor of the meat of its kids and game. The black pine grows autochthonously in an unmixed community over a vast area of 2000 hectares at a height of above 400 meters. The people of Brac call it "the highland pine". The Aleppo pine grows wild in the southwestern part of the island

in the environs of Blaca, Obrsje and Dragovoda, and in the coves on the southern coast. Of the deciduous trees, the most typical are ash, hornbeam, oak, common maple, hawthorn, blackthorn, terebinth and "divuza", which grow in the northwestern part of the island. One-fourth of the area of the island is covered by forest.

One half of the island consists of pasture-land, with sage, fennel, xeranthemum, mallow, flea-bane, furze, heather, knee-holly, wild marjoram, thistle, and many other aromatic plants. Mediterranean crops, the most prized and widespread being still the vine and the olive, today occupy only one-sixth of the island's area. Today Brac has fewer inhabitants than a century ago.

It was settled in prehistoric times, but little is known about its population, as regards numbers, until the 15th century. The Croats appeared on Brac in the 7th century. They came from the Neretva region and settled the interior of the island. In the early 15th century the population of Brac was about 6000; soon, however (1425-1427) pestilences of various kinds reduced the number to barely two thousand. Panic-stricken, they abandoned their abodes, burnt everything that had been contaminated, fled to the forests and founded new hamlets, well away from each other.

The Turkish conquest of the region on the other side of the Canal drove many people to seek shelter and a new domicile on the island. The population increased again. In the mid-19th century, 16000 people lived on the island. The highest figure - 24,408 - was reached at the very turn of the century, in 1900. Then came phylloxera, and destroyed the vineyards, while the steam engine drove sailing ships off the seas. On top of everything came World War One and its calamities. Hunger threatened the people of the island, and drove them to seek their daily bread in faraway over-seas countries. But it was hard and gloomy there too, as longing for home grew and hope of return waned. Men in their prime emigrated from the island, leaving behind the old people and the women. Depopulation threatened Brac.

Today Brac has an indigenous population. Out of its 12900 present-day inhabitants, 93.5 per cent were born on the island. There are hardly any "intruders". Population density - 33 per square kilometer - is, below the average for Dalmatia (88), Croatia (78). A substantial proportion of the population are more than 60 years old (18 per cent). The leading economic activity is agriculture (providing employment for 38 per cent of the economically active population), with an additional 20 per cent working in factories.

No trace at all has survived of the large patriarchal families. 18 per cent of all households consist of one member, 20 per cent of two members. The proportion of households with three or more members is decreasing steadily. Some settlements in the interior of the island are faced with total emigration and the possibility of disappearing. This is a serious problem which requires an urgent solution. The living potentials of the island - which now has power, water and a road network are



great and every advantage should be taken of them.

The first occupation of the inhabitants of Brac was animal husbandry. They dug pools to water their stock. Later on they cleared and burnt forests in order to obtain arable land. They worked in the ancient quarries, fired lime-kilns, kept bees, cut and sold the good jasmine fire-wood. During the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times, a few rich families became owners of the vast pastures, and the best farmlands, forcing the majority of the population into serfdom. Rents were high and the taxes, oppressive, running up to three-fifths of a man's crops. The people called them "the evil fifths"; the memory of that foreboding name. has survived to the present day.

Both farming activities and the population reached a peak in the late 19th century. The island boasted more than 12000 hectares of vineyards on the terraced slopes, which used to yield up to 200,000 hectolitres of good wine. In the late 18th century Brac had half a million olive-trees, and produced 800 wagon loads of oil, more than the rest of Dalmatia.

These figures sound incredible when compared with those of the present. Today Brac' produces 16,373 hectolitres of wine, no more than 3,670 hectolitres of oil (1969) and about 4,000 quintals, (400 tons) of sour cherries. Once famous for its animal husbandry, today the island has only 500 horses, 1000 mules, 800 asses, 6250 sheep and about 2000 goats.

However, other activities, have developed on the island: industry and tourism. These economic activities are in full swing. Industry provides work in quarrying, which employs more than 500 people, fishing and canning (230 employees), foodstuffs processing (200) and manufacturing (65).

The tourist trade has just begun to develop. Today Brac can accommodate 15,000 visitors at any one time: 2000 in hotels, 10688 in private homes, 2217 in holiday homes, and 700 in children's and youth hostels open in the summer.

The agreeable climate and the coast, 175 km long with more than twenty quiet and picturesque coves, offer much greater possibilities, of development. The proximity of the mainland, fresh water piped from the Cetina river and available all over the island, new wide and modern roads to every settlement, strongly support such prospects.

It is to be hoped that this island - which has been witnessing the departure of its population for seventy years now - will succeed not only in stopping emigration but also in making a return to the island possible. Brac will need many workers. It is gradually and surely assuming a role which it deserves considering its position, advantages and potentials. It is up to Brac - and to all of us - not to miss this opportunity and gamble the chance away.

The history of Brac is first and foremost the history of a struggle against stone, on which the people had to persevere and survive.

The first historical record of Brac dates from the 4th century B. C., at which time the Greek geographer Scylax (338-335) called it Krateiai. Other, later records mention it under the names Brectia, Elaphusa, Brattia ... All these names are of pre-Roman origin and imply the notion of a horned animal: elaphos, and brenthos mean 'deer', and the name of Brac may very likely be associated with the name given this charming horned animal kept by Artemis, goddess of hunting, in her sacred groves.

The old chroniclers always wanted to find an "appropriate" origin for their native region. Thus the chroniclers of Brac also quote a legend according to which Antenor landed on Brac, after the Trojan war, with Greeks from Ambratia. This, allegedly, gave rise to the later name of Brattia (Brac). However, in spite of the still living legends about the Greeks and their treasures, in the tumuli of the island, no Greeks ever lived on Brac.

The first inhabitants of whom a little more is known were the Illyrians. They lived in the interior of the island and built huge defensive hill forts on strategic rises. In the 4th, century B. C. the Greeks colonized Vis, (Issa), Korcula (Kor kyra), Hvar (Pharos), Trogir (Tragurion), Stobrec (Epetion) .. Brac was, bypassed, a fact history has so far not been able to explain.

Dissatisfied with the Greek domination of the Dalmatian shores, Teuta, the Illyrian queen, called on the Romans to help. By the year 228 the latter proved to be the final victors and consolidated their power in the newly-founded province of Dalmatia, whose capital, Solin (Salona), boasted a population of no less than 60,000. Roman domination lasted until the decline of the Western Roman Empire in 476.

In the Roman period, hundreds of slaves toiled in the quarries of the island under the supervision of veterans of the Roman legions. They left a few records of their life and worship on stones and sacrificial altars.

After the split in the Roman Empire, Christianity became a free religion under the Emperor Constantine in 313, and underground catacombs were replaced by numerous basilicas and monasteries, built all over Dalmatia and the islands, Brac included.

In the 7th century, the citizens of Solin and Split fled before the Avar and Slav onslaught to the nearby islands. Subsequent Byzantine control of the island was lax, and the island was conquered by Croats from the Neretva region, who settled mainly in the interior on the sites of the old Illyrian settlements.

In the 8th century the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne conquered Dalmatia and the islands. Thus began the conversion of the Croats to Christianity. In their introduction to, western Christian culture, a special role was played by the Benedictines, who had several monasteries on the island - near Postira, Pucisca and in Povelja. The Croatian language and script was fostered in these abbeys. The first charter in the Croatian language, one of the most valuable cultural

monuments of the island was written in the Povlja monastery in 1184 (1250). it is still extant.

In the 9th century the influence of the Frankish Empire waned as the power of the Croatian princes grew. In the same century the Dalmatian coast suffered from raids by the Saracens from Crete. Thus Bol was raided in 872.

In the 10th century Brac was part of the Croatian state. In the 11th Venice assumed control. Nerezisca appears to have been the seat of the Brac commune as early as the year 1000. In the mid-10th century Brac again became part of the Croatian kingdom during the reign of King Kresimir IV (1058 -1074).

From the 12th century to 1420 Brac belonged to the Croato-Hungarian state. In the latter year, Venice took advantage of the weakening might of the Byzantine Empire in order to establish their rule over the Dalmatian islands and towns. Thus Brac again fell into Venetian hands. The Venetian Republic was mainly interested in trading links with the faraway Levant and it let the Dalmatian towns grow stronger and more independent. At the time Brac was a bone of contention between Trogir, Split, Dubrovnik and especially Omis, ruled by the famous family of Kacic.

The pirates of Omis used to raid Brac as early as the 11th century. In 1145 they plundered the Abbey of Povlja. In 1277 they struck again, this time against Nerezisce, burnt the town hall down and destroyed the rich archives of the Brac commune. The monastery at Povlja was again pillaged in 1294. Feeling insecure, the monks abandoned the monastery for good in 1357. The raids continued to follow one another until 1420 when the Venetians gained a firm hold in Dalmatia. Brac had no town proper at the time. Many specific features concerning the administration of the island, contained in the Povlja Charter as early as 1250, are also included in the Charter of Brac which, like that of Poljica, displays a much higher share of Slav common law than the charters of other Dalmatian communes. Although fairly independent in its internal structure, Brac remained under Venetian control until the fall of Venice, in 1797.

1797-1805

Having conquered Venice, Napoleon ceded the former Venetian territories. Dalmatia included, to Austria, by the peace treaty of Campoformio. The Austrian administration, which promised social reforms, lasted a short time, until 1805, in which year Napoleon defeated Austria. and annexed Dalmatia.

1805-1813

After several hundred years of rather apathetic existence under Venetian rule, the French brought a new drive to Dalmatia: they built roads, developed settlements and connections between them. The road from G. Humac, the highest settlement on the island to Bol, the only place on the southern coast of the island, was built in this period.

1814-1914

After the fall of Napoleon, Dalmatia again became part of Austria, which forced Italianization upon the population, introducing the Italian language in schools and public administration. Resistance against this policy led to the awakening of Croatian national consciousness and a general national revival. On Brac the struggle against the autonomists was hard and long, and lasted well into the 20th century. The workers' and rural social movements also grew stronger along with the Croatian national revival. Pan-Slavic ideas spread among the intellectuals, especially in Selca and Povelja. For the small erstwhile neglected island with no town proper nor urban population, these movements contributed greatly to arousing the consciousness and educating the people exploited by the owners of the quarries, land and ships.

1914-1941

As phylloxera destroyed the vineyards, and sailing ships disappeared from the seas, at the beginning, of the present century the island, at that time quite highly populated, began to suffer from the mass emigration of the most active part of the population - people in the prime of life. Then came World War One which took the lives of many men who fought in foreign, Austrian armies on the fronts, of Soca and in Galicia, for the lost causes and interests of foreign powers. After the war and following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, new disappointments awaited the people under the dictatorial regime of pre-war Yugoslavia. Brac grew poorer and poorer, while its population continued to decrease.

1941-1945

The second world conflict swept over Brac in 1941. This time the experience was much more painful, and the scars deeper. The freedom-loving people of the island rose up in arms. Every tumulus, became a pillbox, every jasmine bush a shelter, and every death doubled the defiance and the spirit of revolt and vengeance. The Italian and German fascist soldiery devastated the island, burnt villages, (Selca, Novo Selo, G. Humac, Pucisca, Praznica, Bol, Dracevica, Obrsvje and Dragovoda), arrested and killed people who meant nobody any harm. The liberation movement on the island successfully organized resistance from the very beginning of the war. The enemy fortifications in Supetar, above Nerezisca, on Mount Vidovica, and around Sumartin were strong and it took a long time to conquer them. The partisan attacks from the island of Vis found allies in every inhabitant of Brac. The resistance movement involved practically the whole of the population. The forests became hiding places, the karst chasms warehouses, and the stone huts, in the fields were turned with the aid of pine needles, and jasmine leaves, into sleeping quarters and hospitals. Throughout the war the island witnessed merciless fighting. Thousands, of fighters from the island, mainly in the 12th brigade of the 26th division, experienced the calvary of war from the Sutjeska to the Soca. Brac was also the jumping-off area, for the partisan units on Vis for the mainland and

on along the victorious path up to Istra and Trieste. Hundreds of young lives, were lost in the battlefields, of the Neretva, Sutjeska, Knin . Hundreds of mothers put on weeds for their children - fighters buried in graves never seen. For hundreds of girls their first loves. were snuffed out by the storm, of war and buried who knows where in the dawn of Freedom which lit the fighting island.

I was but a little boy in these days, but I still clearly remember the grave of an unknown partisan alongside a heap of stones which he had used as a breastwork under a gnarled olive-tree which cast its meager shade, like a monument, upon the blood-soaked red earth of the fighter's grave, above the sea in Supetar. Later on the bones, were transferred to a common grave, while the earth spread the dust of the unknown fighter among the roots of the olive. Only the stones and the olive-tree are left today - and a memory of a wonderful tomb. Its symbolism. summarizes, the entire history of the island.

"Island without history!

Yes - at first one could really say that. It never heard the clash of swords and shields, the firing of guns and the rumble Of cannon. It never echoed a well-known name, be it a brigand or tyrant imposing himself upon human memory, or a bright figure whose splendor never wanes in the memory of succeeding generations ... There are neither names that glitter with glory nor those that darken with shame, neither happy nor unhappy occasions, neither virtues nor long remembered outrages: and all these are the subject matter with which we are -accustomed to build history, both that of others and our own.

But true history is something else. There are histories without storms with flashing lightning and rumbling thunder seen and heard from afar; there is also a quiet history which flows along the bed of time like a river that knows of no waterfalls, whirlpools and floods, yet full of life, full of events, the more tragic they are the less noise they make. It is to the latter kind that the history of Brac belongs.

In the past of Brac there are no sensations no dramatic moments., no events worthy of epic poems and tragedies, romantic tales and novels: here human destiny unwinds and flows along peacefully and quietly and yet too often perhaps full of long, hard struggles, struggles that could be cruel and merciless. A drop of blood spilt by anyone, once and for ever, cries to the sky and everybody bears that cry; the river of sweat that flows for centuries down the brows of countless generations is soaked up by the mute earth and soundlessly disappears. The cry of anger is heard from afar, the sigh of suffering dies without an echo.

Which sort of history is more difficult to grasp, discover, study, describe? That of blood or that of sweat? The answer to this is easy: the history of that which does not clamor with color and noise, which is quiet, continuous and everyday, the deep foundation and the even deeper root-of human events. This is history! True human history! But it is much more difficult to write about this than about the other." (V. Nazor: Brac', Island Without History).

## Tumuli and Hill forts

As the past of the island is best discovered in the work of those who dwell there, its spirit is best displayed in its, cultural monuments. The first monuments of this rocky island are the piles of stone: stone shelters, tumuli, guard-posts and forts.

The largest and the most significant of these were the "hill forts built at various strategic points: Rat in the western part of the island near Lozisca, Vela Gomila on Velo Brdo southeast of Dracevica, Kostilo, above, Bol, several hill forts near G. Humac (Hum, Gradac, Vesta, Brkata, Malo Gracisce), and the eastern most one on Velo, Gracisce near Novo Selo. The number of the tumuli is much larger. Not all the tumuli have even been listed, and only a few have been explored. Their layout, size and mode of burial suggest that some of them are not of prehistoric date. They were also used by the Croats as tombs and ritual monuments in the first centuries, after their arrival on the island.

## Roman Monuments

Soon after conquering the Dalmatian coast the Romans discovered the value of the stone of Brac and developed several quarries, especially near Skrip and Splitska. They left there many inscriptions carved in stone, and a beautiful mausoleum in the foundations of the Radojkovic Tower atop the Illyrian walls. Several sarcophagi, a pool dug in stone, a rustic relief of Hercules in Rasota, etc., have been preserved in this part of the island. Similar Roman monuments have been found in Bunja near Dracevica, Bunja near Pucisca and Bunja near Novo Selo.

The Romans had estates with farm buildings on Brac. Such villae, rusticae were built in Bol, Bunja, D. Humac, Pucisca, Supetar, Postira, Nerezisca and Povelja. The Romans left several sarcophagi in Skrip, Splitska, Postira, Novo Selo, Dracevica, D. Humac, Nerezisca, Bol and elsewhere. Another mausoleum, besides the one in Skrip, has been preserved in Sutulija near D. Humac.

After 313, with the start of the public profession of the Christian religion, several Roman basilicas were built on Brac: St. Ivan in Sutivan, St. Petar in Supetar, St. Lovro in Stobrec near Postira, St. Jadro, near Splitska,, St. Tudor Southwest of Nerezisca and the largest, best known and best preserved - St. Ivan's in Povelja, with a baptistry and other ancillary spaces and still extant frescoes.

## Early Croatian Monuments

The Croats became masters of Brac as early as the 7th century. They came as pagans from the "Pagania", i. e., the Neretva region. The rich heritage of their ancient Slav beliefs was gradually assimilated into western Christian culture. They kept up the cult of hill-top worship and as Christians, built their first small churches on the ridges next to, the ancient prehistoric tumuli. They built these first primitive but symmetrical "cathedrals" out of roughly hewn stone. They are small and follow a rectangular plan, with a square or semi-circular apse and barrel vault. Blind tracery gave the interior of the sanctuary a monumental appearance.

Not used to stone as a material, these early builders lined the walls on both sides with plenty of mortar, and covered the roof with stone slabs. These small churches bear the imprint of the pre-Romanesque period, 9th - 12th centuries, and are valuable monuments of the earliest Croatian church architecture.

These prized monuments are quite a pleasant sight on top of the hills from which wondrous views open up across the rocky expanse and the sea and bring ancient Slav myths and early Christianity to one's mind and imagination. Such are the small churches of St. Nikola above Sumartin, St. Mihovil above Dol, St. Ilija near D. Humac, St. Jure above Nerezisca, St. Kliment and St. Jure near Praznice, the church of the Holy Ghost in Skrip, of St. Kuzma, and Damjan on Smrcevik, St. Nedelja on Grac, St. Toma above Selca,, All-Saints near the abandoned medieval settlements of Dubravica, and Mosulja,, and St. Martin above Bobovisca.

As far as their position is concerned the sites of these small pre-Romanesque churches almost coincide with the original Illyrian settlements in the interior of the island. In those troublesome times, pirates made the interior much safer than the coast, where the pastures were lusher and the watering-places more numerous.

### Romanesque and Gothic Period

The small churches of Stomorica northeast of Lozica, Sutivan between Dol and Praznice and St. Luka between D. Humac and Supetar are similar to those described above; however, they display more explicitly the characteristics, of the Romanesque, such as dressed stone walls, bands, under the vault, and doors, with lintels which are more deeply set than the jambs.

The small churches which were built later in the 13th and 14th centuries bear the imprint of the Romanesque substratum and Gothic admixtures. This may be seen in the pointed arches and rib vaults, the Gothic rose windows in the form of a four-leafed clover on the facades (as decorative windows), the tiered bell-towers and the details on these. Such are the small churches of St. Nikola, the Holy Trinity and St. Jadro near Nerezisca, of St. Mihovil and the Holy Ghost in G. Humac, of St. Jure at Pucisca, St. Ciprijan in Praznice and the parish church of St. Mary in D. Humac with a valuable 13th century fresco. These churches, including those with more marked Gothic characteristics such as St. Petar's and St. Mare's in Nerezisca, and St. Fabijan's and St. Sebastian's in D. Humac, are no longer situated on prominent ridges. The cult of hill-top worship disappeared, and the temples became practical places of worship and descended into the settlements.

In domestic architecture, Gothic features are displayed in the biforia of the summer house in Bol (late 15th and early 16th century).

### Renaissance and Baroque

As Renaissance art flourished in the 15th century Dalmatian towns, on this island of cattle breeders and peasants exhausted and decimated by pestilence, the people

began to descend to the sea and found coastal settlements. These nuclei were built in sheltered coves upon the remains of ancient Roman settlements. The Turks were a constant threat especially in the 16th century. Instead of sumptuous Renaissance structures the people of Brac built defensive forts in the newly-developed coastal settlements: in Pucisca, Splitska, Skrip, Milna, Bol, Sutivan, Postira and Povelja. The old 'capital' of the island in the interior was left unfortified.

Traces of Renaissance art are left in many stone reliefs to be found in the small churches all over the island. They are the work of local masters strongly influenced by the schools founded in Dalmatia by J. Dalmatinac (? - 1473), A. Alesi (1430? - 1504?) and N. Firentinac (? - 1505). The most noteworthy are the triptych in the church of St. Ciprijan, the reliefs of St. Klement and St. Jure in the churches bearing the names of these saints in Praznice, the reliefs, of St. Mihovil and St. Mary in G. Humac, of St. Martin near Bobovisca, of St. Jure and the Madonna of Batak in Pucisca, and of St. Petar in Nerezisce. In the 17th and 18th century the churches on the island acquired many valuable Venetian paintings such as the Tintoretto altar piece in Bol and the altar pieces showing the Madonna in Split, L. Bassano's (1577 - 1622) altar piece in Nerezisca, C. Rindolfi's (1594 - 1658) in Milna (Ricci); four altar pieces by Palma the Younger (1544 - 1628) in Skrip and one in Pucisca; several Venetian Settecento paintings in the hermitage of Blaca, and in the monasteries at Bol and Sumartin.

Baroque made its appearance in the architecture of the island in the 18th century. At this time the small cramped churches were given their present-day spaciousness with their slender bell-towers and the lively lines of their facades, Such for example are the churches in Nerezisca, Skrip and Milna. Baroque influences can also be seen in the church organ in Nerezisce and many other objects in churches and their treasuries. The Baroque gave a particular imprint to: the large and luxurious mansions of the owners of large estates, and ship owners, with profiled doors, balustrades on balconies and outside staircases, and ornamental cartouches, volutes and iron railings on windows and balcony doors.

The Baroque left its most explicit mark on altars, made of polychrome marble or carved wood, in almost every parish church.

The churches were also painted by local masters. Thus T. Kokolia (1661 - 1713) painted the ceiling and the choir balustrade of the parish church in Bol, while F. Tironi painted two reliquaries and altar pieces in the church at Supetar.

### Monuments of Our Own Time

The sterile atmosphere of the nineteenth century which prevailed, under Austrian administration, in the small communities of the island, left nothing of artistic significance. Austrian rule, mutely resisted by art, "made up" for it by erecting large school and administration buildings on the shore thus covering with these ill-suited sets of spiritual poverty the harmonious and unobtrusive stone dwellings of the local population in the background.



The parish church in Selca, built in 1919, combined the styles of early Christian basilicas, and of Romanesque and Gothic churches; the whole is felt as a foreign presence in the symmetrical square with its pure planes and outlines which display in every detail the untroubled perception of stone.

In spite of its high degree of artistic attainment, Rosandic's mausoleum in the cemetery of Supetar, with its Byzantine-Oriental characteristics within the harmony of the Mediterranean graveyard, does not fit into the whole. Rendic's bell tower in Lozica, excessively ornamented, is not in stylistic accord with the stone which requires flat surfaces in keeping with the Dalmatian tradition of slender belfries with pyramidal spires. 1. Rendic, B. Deskovic and V. Michieli, sculptors from Brac, mainly worked elsewhere.

Three significant cultural ventures mark recent times. There is first of all the "Brac' Papers", a collection of scientific treatises and monographs whose publication started in 1939. Ten volumes, have been published so far. Few communities, especially poor in resources like Brac, can boast such a valuable publication, with contributions covering a wide range of historical and contemporary problems.

The second is the "B. Deskovic" art gallery in Bol. It includes more than 150 works by renowned Croatian artists who found the source of their inspiration in this Mediterranean environment and introduced the public to the interesting and intimate world abounding in structures deposited there by ancient cultures and woven by them into the life of these southern shores. It also contains several significant sculptures, the work of outstanding sculptors who are natives of the island (Rendic, B. Deskovic, V. Michieli, M. and T. Ostojica). The gallery is particularly proud of the rich collection of paintings by Ignjat Job who discovered in this landscape the rich intensity of color which plays such an important role in his incandescent pictures.

In Skrip the oldest settlement on the island and the richest in cultural monuments, a regional museum has been founded, with a large collection of monuments. In stone, an ethnographic collection and other exhibits illustrating the material and spiritual culture of the population of the island. The Museum will soon include several permanent exhibitions, presenting the development of maritime activities, the island's economy, quarrying, tourism, and the island's rebellious past. The place of the museum could not have been chosen more appropriately, for Skrip abounds in monuments and is a monument itself.

Brac has always been attractive to many artists who knew how to grasp man's laborious, struggle against stone in order to wrest the fruit of their labours from its miserly cracks. Faced with its landscapes many painters were driven to a lively play of the brush over a rich palette of colors; sculptors modeled the meaning of life and perseverance in the wrinkled faces beaten by the sun, wind and salt, in rough bronze or in the dazzlingly white stone, yielding pliantly as the sculptor's chisel bestows upon it the fleshly form of a virgin.

In late autumn, Tin Ujevic frequently used to visit the island of his mother ("the little places of my heart"). He absorbed and experienced the moaning of the bura, the starry skies, the melancholy of the landscape and the sorrow of emigration while still a child. Some of his most beautiful poems and travel writings can be traced to the island. To Nazor his native island was always an inexhaustible spring of most interesting motifs, associations and inspirations forming a continuous strand throughout his opus.. No island has been described so much and in such a way as Nazor's Brac. The island also captured the imagination of M. Kakucin Bencur (1844-1911), the renowned Slovak realist, who worked on the island as a physician and whose writings revolve around island topics. Subsequently Bencur returned to his home country, but left it again, dissatisfied with the social and other conditions in Slovakia, for South America, where he again found himself among his beloved people of Brac, who again became the characters in books written on that faraway continent.

A. Kacic-Miosic, G. Martic, A. Radic, A. Tresic-Pavicic, A. Trumbic, S. Kranjcevic, I. Cipiko, M. Begovic, I. Vojnovic etc., visited the island for periods of varying length. I. Job, E. Vidovic, M. Tartaglia, M. Konjovic, O. Postruznik, S. Sohaj, L. Ivancic, I. Mujadzic, E. Kovacevic, J. Mise, A. Kastelanic, F. Simunovic and many other artists painted it.

The cultural monuments of the island of Brac are numerous and significant. They are worthy of a more detailed acquaintance than can be provided by this brief and incomplete survey; never staling, in the long historical sequence that leads to the present day, they capture our attention with their harmony and unobtrusiveness. Except for the piled-up heaps of stones! They capture one's gaze as, huge, mute and indestructible stone exhibits moist with sweat and wet with blood. They are the symbol of the island, uncounted and uncountable, dating from prehistoric times to the present, scattered all over Brac. They have been heaped up by tireless hands which cleared the land in order to wrest from the karst the small fields and steep slopes on which grapevine and olive slips were planted.

These heaps are the pride of the island, a lasting monument to the work and arduous struggle of the people of Brac against the stone. The first inhabitants of this rocky island lived in caves, many of which are still unexplored. In the Kopacina cave, which has been explored to a certain extent, traces of fireplaces have been discovered, as well as numerous stone and bone weapons and even a part of the horn of a deer, the animal to which Brac' allegedly owes its name.

Nowhere else on the Croatian part of the Adriatic coast do we find so many well-preserved "bunje", conical dry vault stone huts, the most widespread ancient Mediterranean dwellings with a round plan. Their primitive structure combines the vault and the roof. In more recent times they have been used as field huts, sheltering peasants and shepherds from the winter rains and the scorching summer heat.. They are still built on the island, especially in its western part.

At the dawn of history, the Illyrians built huge defensive fortifications. Many of

these hill forts have survived to, the present day; the one in Skrip shows Greek influence and also includes Roman and Croatian elements. The Romans built farmhouses on the island, with cisterns, and grape and olive presses. They were built on spurs overlooking the coves on the northern coast of Brac and next to fertile plains: in Bunja near the Vejak plain, on the edge of the Bunje plain near Triscenik, and in some other spots as shown by findings and place-names (e. g., Polace - Latin (polatium", 'stately mansion'). Herds grazed on the plateau, where pools (Trolokve, Vrmica, Glogovica, Zurmo) and many cisterns were dug and paths cleared.

Thousands of slaves toiled in the quarries of Roman Skrip (olim civitas), but hardly anything has remained of their dwellings. During the great migration of nations which led to the disintegration of the Roman Empire and brought about the destruction of Roman Salona, many Romans sought refuge on Brac. The Croats reached Brac as early as the 7th century and settled in the interior next to ancient Illyrian settlements. They chose the sites of their dwellings on the sun ward slopes close to ponds and prehistoric tumuli.

Their cattle seemed to, take to, the stone better than their masters, who, found the karst alien and inhospitable, and stone strange, and unfamiliar as a material. Once assimilated with the native population and drawing upon their heritage, they built dry-walled shepherd dwellings. These were small huts with small windows and recesses, and an open hearth in the middle of the earthen-floored unpartitioned room used as both living and sleeping quarters. Attached to it were ancillary structures, cow sheds and cellars, with an open trough in the yard where both people and cattle watered themselves.

One such settlement was Gradac near the present-day church of St. Nedjelja, most probably the oldest Croatian center on the island and the birthplace of Dujam Hrankovic the first historian of Brac. His Chronicle (1405) tells us of the following settlements: Nerezisca, D. Humac, Skrip, Dol, Praznica, Strazevnik, G. Humac, Pothume, Mosuja, Dubravica and Podgracisce. In the early 15th century their population reached the figure of 6000. Then pestilence struck the island and many settlements were abandoned (Strazevnik, Pothume, Mosuja, Dubravica, Podvie). The dwellings were torn down and the stone used to build walls round the nearby estates. Their appearance survives in the poorly preserved remains of these settlements, in the huts which still exist in all present-day villages, and the majority of the numerous recently abandoned shepherd abodes. In 1423 privileged inhabitants of the island were successful in acquiring ownership over many pastures and new sites by the sea. This was in fact the beginning of the present-day coastal settlements. In 1444 Venice finally subdued the Omis pirates and, in 1452, extended her rule over the Makarska coastal region as well. The sea no longer spelt danger for the first Croatian houses in the coves on the northern coast of the island, next to ancient Roman dwellings, where spring water was, available as attested by the place-names 'Vrilo' and 'Soline' (i. e., spring) in Milna, Sutivan, Supetar, Postira, Pucisca, Bol and Murvica. These small places developed in the coves, on their innermost, shores shaped like amphitheaters (Pucisca, Supetar,

Bobovisca, Milna) and on their sun ward, northern slopes protected from the bura and exposed to the sun (Splitska, Povelja, Sumartin, Bol, Murvica). The wise old builders erected no buildings at the outer ends of the coves but left them free for the air currents to flow in during the hot summer evenings.

Although fortified by castles around which the small houses clung for protection, in the beginning the coastal settlements consisted of separate manors and courtyards which gave the whole the appearance of numerous settlements. Hence the plural form of the names of villages, and hamlets on Brac: Bobovisca, Loziska, Pucisca, Povelja, Nereziska, Praznica, Mirca, Selca, Nasela, Osvilci, Fontovi Doci, Prodoli, Pothume, etc.

These settlements only acquired the appearance and atmosphere of small Mediterranean towns a century or so ago. Today, there are twenty-odd settlements on the island. The coastal places are of more recent date and more populous: Sutivan, Supetar, Splitska, Postira, Pucisca, Povelja, Sumartin, Bol, Milna and Bobovisca Na Moru. The settlements in the interior are older, richer, in cultural and historical monuments and much more interesting architecturally: Skrip (olim civitas), Nereziska (the old Brac 'metropolis'), D. Humac, Mirca, Dracevica, Loziska, Bobovisca, Murvica, G. Humac, Praznica, N. Selo and Selca.

In the beginning, these small towns were divided into several separate parts with a courtyard enclosing a cellar, bread oven, grindstone, grape and wine press, and an open cistern filled from the lime-cleaned roof. Later on the cisterns were covered and the first terraces with porches built.

As time went by the area of common land decreased, while both the population and their discontent grew. This process was supported by the movement of increasing numbers, of people from the interior to, the coastal settlements, and by the growing number of immigrants from the mainland. The spaces between the houses filled up, streets grew narrower, and the small towns began to acquire their typical closely-knit appearance.

The privileged landowners seized more and more land, and leased it to the poor peasants, under exorbitant terms. The great demand for wine, turned Brac into a huge vineyard interspersed with olive-trees. The first vine-growing and oil-producing cooperatives in Dalmatia were founded in Bol and Povelja, respectively. Economic progress fostered the growth of the maritime trade and ship-building. In the mid-19th century the shipyards at Milna alone launched 16 ships with a total capacity of 1328 tons, which was 253 tons more than the tonnage turned out by the shipyards in Split and more than the shipyards of Hvar, Komiza and Trogir put together. In the 19th century Brac had quite a few sailing ships and was the leading Dalmatian island in this respect. Many of these were of medium capacity for navigation in the Adriatic, while more than thirty vessels were registered for sailing to the Levant and the Black Sea, all over the Mediterranean and across the ocean.

The houses of Brac, now built on the sea front, larger and richer, with big gates, enjoyed increasing affluence in money, objects d'art and ideas reaching them from all the shores which saw the sails of the ships of Brac.

The 19th century houses were mainly single-storey buildings, with a cellar at ground-floor level. An external staircase ending in a porch in front of the door, led to the first floor. Inside, a corridor led to the bedrooms, while an internal wooden staircase by the door climbed to a vast garret until recently used as a kitchen.

The great kitchen, with an open hearth and benches, all around, for a long time formed the main living quarters; it also served as a pantry where supplies were kept in chests, shelves, jars. and stone vessels. Hams, goat ribs, lamb skins, octopus arms and fish strung on wire rings were dried and smoked near the eaves. The kitchens were full of smoke, soot and - more often than not - poverty. In the long evenings, the numerous members of the family sat up late around the open hearth, held together by the flickering light of the small oil lamp, until grandfather had finished his story and grandmother had spun her wool.

The houses had a slab-top double-pitched roof. The chimneys had all kinds of fancy tops, not for the sake of ornamentation but rather to protect the fire in the open hearth from rain. In the early 19th century houses of the better-off people, the kitchen gradually stopped being the central living area, and its role was taken over by dining rooms with luxurious furniture, expensive chandeliers, and tapestries: on the walls. In the small and narrow streets, in which light and shadow engaged in lively, picturesque play, new housing space was sought higher up. The roofs were opened up and small picturesque mansards, built. The windows, and doors, were lined with sills, and the arbours and stair cases with stone columns. Stone everywhere: on the houses, in the streets, and on the graves ... In the 16th century Glagolitic monks from Poljice settled on the unpopulated southern coast of the island, in Murvica and Blaca. During their relatively short development from the 16th to the 20th century, their small hermitages duplicated the thousand-year development of the island settlements. Their first dwellings, as in prehistoric times, were the caves: Ljubitovica at Blaca, Drakonjin,, or the Dragon's Cave above Murvica, etc.

As the monks prospered thanks to their labours the caves were abandoned for primitive huts and finally, large sumptuous buildings packed with luxuries, riches and works of art amidst the pathless wilderness. In these solitary parts of the island the monks owned large estates, ships, and also a large library and their own printing shop.

The monastery in the wilderness of Murvica ceased to exist in the period between the two wars; only ruins and the interesting Dragon's Cave are left today. The monastery in Blaca, however, is quite well preserved and protected as a cultural monument, and attracts everyone's attention with its luxurious furnishings, plaster work, valuable paintings, astronomic apparatus, and rich collections of clocks and weaponry. Until recently Blaca was a well-known astronomical

observatory which exchanged the results of its observations and scientific work with many famous observatories all -over the world. The place is an authentic ethnographic exhibit: all the objects and instruments, are where they were when in everyday use, as if laid down just now and as if waiting for the old hermits to use them again. This historical, religious, scientific, cultural and ethnographic monument surprises, us with its architectural splendor and the richness of its collection amidst the wilderness. Blaca is also, a well-known excursion point, and one of the best known places on the island.

Population does not define a town. Today the settlements on Brac number from 300 to 1500 inhabitants, and this would seem to make them villages, rather than towns. Their social structure, way of living, well-cared-for streets, squares and loggias, harbors and small marinas, shops, fish markets, trades, schools, medical facilities, the cultural heritage expressed in the way they live and communicate with each other the open, public, simple and noisy Mediterranean way, with common entertainments and common meeting places all these make them small towns proper in the true meaning of modern urban science.

Here, where people have always had to rely upon one another, where fear in the past brought them closer together, where the stone helped to make living possible, better and nobler the Croats, especially on this island, knew how to integrate their Slav character into the rich Mediterranean heritage.

"These gentle places" - wrote Tin Ujevic' - "have such a quiet, serene, freshly washed appearance: they are like beautiful girls that only bathe in rain-water, and there is something dovelike about them".

[Back](#)