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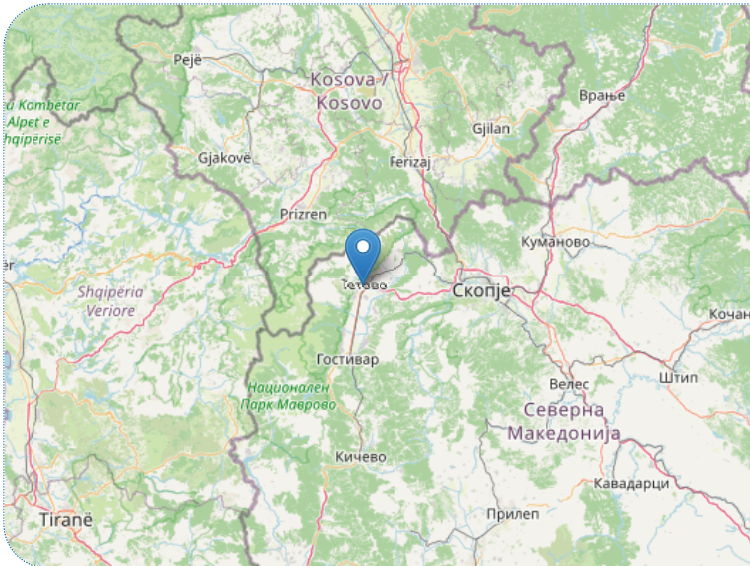
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Colored Mosque of Tetovo/a



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Description

The Colored Mosque (also known as the Decorated Mosque, Painted Mosque, Šarena džamija, Xhamia e Larme, Alaca cami, Pasha's Mosque) is located in the heart of the old city center of Tetovo/a, on the southern bank of Pena River in the Republic of North Macedonia. In addition to the mosque, the *küllye* (building ensemble) consists of the ablution fountain, the mausoleum, and income-producing dependencies. The mosque formed through several construction and decoration phases (1438/1495?; 1785; 1833–34). With its interior dome and painted decorative program, the mosque stands out as one of the most splendid Ottoman Baroque mosques of South-Eastern Europe (1740s–early 19th century, period of European Baroque impact on Ottoman architecture and art). The latest conservation undertakings on the ensemble were completed in the period between 2010 and 2011.

The first mosque was allegedly built by two female patrons in 1438 following Tetovo/a's conquest by the Ottoman armies in 1382–92. Following further construction activities around 1495, the original monument was subsequently demolished, rebuilt, and redecorated in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, under the sponsorship of the Sultan's governor of Tetovo/a, Abdurrahman Pasha. This current mosque was completed in 1833–34 (1249 AH), according to its marble chronogram (dedicatory text). The mosque's main prayer hall (10.20 x 10.05 m) is preceded by a two-story portico on its north-western side, which forms the interior *mahfil* (raised platform providing prayer space) for female devotees and theological teaching. The mosque's minaret is adjacent to its south-western wall and it is not integrated into the structure; this may reflect the minaret's earlier date. The mosque's *minbar* and *mihrab* are made out of carved marble, featuring forms characteristic of Ottoman Baroque art and architecture.

The mosque's exterior and interior wall paintings have been attributed to master painters of Debar, but this hypothesis requires further evidence to be fully established. They feature imitations of architectural decorations, vegetal and geometric motifs, and landscapes, some of which are identifiable. The mosque enclosure comprises the mausoleum (*türbe*) – an irregular octagonal open structure housing the remains of the initial patrons: the sisters Hürside (d. 1524) and Mensure Khatun; and an ablution fountain (*şadirvan*). Income-producing dependencies, such as the nearby hammam, were built in the mosque's vicinity.

Significance

The Colored Mosque of Tetovo/a is a monument of outstanding significance for the understanding of Ottoman Baroque architecture in the Balkans, in part due to its monumental and distinctive wall painting program. This painting repertoire is outstanding because of its extensive covering of most of the mosque's interior and exterior surfaces and because of its specifically advanced painting quality, compared to related monuments in the Balkans and in Anatolia.

The wall painting program was produced in tempera technique (painting on dry support) using roughly 30,000 egg yolks as binders. However, there is no published data concerning archaeometric analyses of these wall paintings, which could reveal the used binders and pigments, and shed light on the artistic technique for the wall paintings. Nevertheless, this mosque is of special importance for our understanding of Islamic and Ottoman architecture due to its wall painting decorative program. This decoration offers links between Ottoman Baroque wall painting in Istanbul and Anatolia (especially in secular structures) and adaptations of this painting style in the Balkans, for mansions and religious buildings, thus pointing to the transfer of ideas, artistic technologies, and visual expressions between Anatolia and the Balkan Peninsula.

The exterior of the mosque's portal showcases Baroque elements of acanthus derived vegetal compositions, marble imitations and vases. The floor of the portal features similar decorations, which frame calligraphic inscription panels with hadiths, and the marble historic inscription and chronogram. The decorative program of the mosque's portal does not match the craftsmanship of the other exterior surfaces and interior of the prayer hall, thus indicating that this part of the mosque was painted by a different group of painters or perhaps apprentices of the master painter who executed the mosque's interior murals. The exterior surfaces of Tetovo/a's mosque supporting walls are divided into four tiers by painted columns. Diverse patterns are employed to mimic the painted marble plaques filling the spaces between these painted columns. Baroque window openings are visually framed by columns and topped by painted imitations of acanthus-derived compositions. Comparable wall paintings emulating polychrome marble architectural decorations are frequently found in Baroque mosques in the capital of the Ottoman Empire. This tradition, however, stems from the Byzantine architectural tradition and it is also encountered in the Byzantine monuments of South-Eastern Europe.

The architectural lines of the prayer hall's interior are emphasized with wall paintings featuring Baroque architectural elements and geometrical bands. The wall surfaces are divided into two registers, which are topped by the large interior wooden dome. The walls feature additional cartouches with Hadith inscriptions. The *qibla* wall (the wall of the mosque oriented towards Mecca, indicating the direction of prayer) features an exceptional depiction of Mecca, which also comprises gilding (possibly a later addition). The three balconies forming the mosque's *mahfil*, are masterly painted with compositions of vegetal elements featuring trompe l'oeil elements characteristic of Baroque painting. The upper row of windows is worth pointing out; they are some of the few window openings featuring Baroque forms, despite their recent restoration. The top areas of the supporting walls forming the prayer hall are framed by a painted cornice featuring landscapes, connected to Istanbul. The area of the dome is divided into registers with architectural elements displaying medallions with vegetal bouquets and landscape scenes, further culminating in bands of geometrical ornamentation and a monumental acanthus-derived rosette.

The closest parallel to the wall paintings of the Colored Mosque of Tetovo/a is found in the nearby Bektashi tekiyya of Arabati Baba, also in Tetovo/a. In fact, the patron of the mosque also sponsored works at the *tekiyya* (gathering place

of the Sufi brotherhood) and the now ruined castle of Tetovo/a. Depictions of marble imitations and the vegetal elements still preserved at the *tekiyya* can be directly connected to the Colored Mosque. Furthermore, the signature of the master painter and the date of production of the wall paintings at the *tekiyya* “Usta (master) Zerze Haki 1813” provide the name of the master painter of the Colored Mosque. Although the decorative program of the Colored Mosque of Tetovo/a is comparable to the one at the Et’hem Bay Mosque in Tirana (1791/1794?; 1819/1821), the two monuments are unlikely to have been painted by the same painters’ workshop due to differences in the painting styles and iconography of these two monuments.

The wall paintings of the Colored Mosque of Tetovo/a and related monuments are characterized by elements of Western Baroque painting combined with religious and architectural landscapes, as well as vegetal and geometric compositions. These wall paintings feature linear perspective, three-dimensional features, and use shadow and light to model forms. This wall painting style and especially its themes were popular for the decoration of Ottoman houses and mansions in Western Anatolia, with some of the earliest dated examples and masterly painted landscapes still preserved in the Topkapı palace in Istanbul.

In contrast to the Anatolian context, in South-Eastern Europe, architectural and religious landscapes were popular in mosque wall paintings. Moreover, exterior architectural surfaces were also painted in order to monumentalize buildings that were relatively modest in size. These exterior wall surfaces are some of the distinctive features of the Colored Mosque at Tetovo/a. Although we know little of this tradition of exterior decoration, further research could help shed light on these monuments and enable our understanding of the differences between Anatolian and Balkan painted monuments of the Ottoman Baroque period.

Further Reading

Pavlov, Zoran. *The Most Significant Values of the Cultural and Natural Heritage: Painted Mosque – Tetovo*. Skopje, 2015.

A brochure monograph about the monument, offering a summary in English of the building’s history and details.

İbrahimgil, Mehmet. “Kalkandelen (Tetovo) Alaca-Paşa Camii” [The Colored Mosque of Tetovo]. *Vakıflar Dergisi* 26 (1997): 249–66.

Article providing a detailed study of the history and architectural structure of the Colored Mosque at Tetovo/a.

Hartmuth, Maximilian. “Ottoman Architecture in the Republic of Macedonia: A Critical Survey of Key Monuments from the Fifteenth through Nineteenth Centuries,” working paper in English (published in Macedonian in 2013) to be published in the forthcoming monograph, 2017. 1–33.

Article in English providing an overview of the most significant Ottoman mosques in North Macedonia between the 15th and 19th centuries, including the Colored Mosque of Tetovo/a.

Günsel, Renda. *Batılılaşma Döneminde Türk Resim Sanatı (1700–1850)*. Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1977.

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Günsel, Renda. “Westernisms in Ottoman Art. Wall Paintings in 19th Century Houses.” In *The Ottoman House: Proceedings of the Amasya Conference, 24–27 September 1996*, edited by S. Ireland and W. Bechhoefer, 103–9. London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1998.

Article in English discussing Western elements of wall paintings in Ottoman secular architecture of the 19th century.

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Article in English discussing characteristics of wall paintings in Ottoman secular buildings with a focus on Anatolian monuments of the Baroque and Rococo periods.

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