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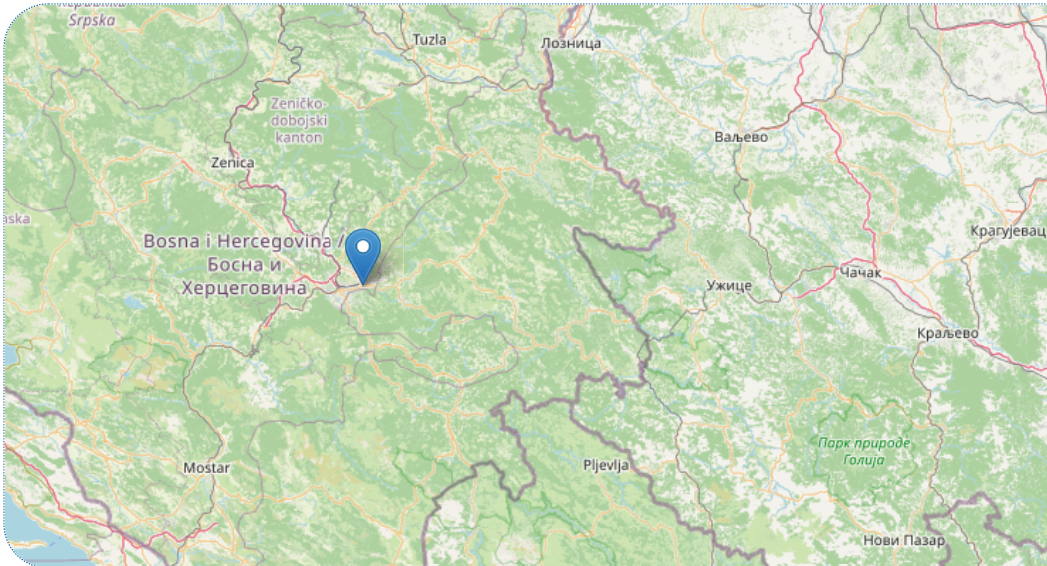
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Ottoman Mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina



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Overview

Bosnia-Herzegovina owes its architectural heritage, which formed during more than four centuries of Ottoman rule (1463–1878), to several distinguishable factors: its specific geographical location, the legacy of the Byzantine architecture, particular skills of the local builders and artisans, and the pre-existing artistic and architectural heritage in the area. Mosques are arguably the most representative type of Ottoman architectural heritage; they are the most widespread and the most documented structures, and they present the focus of Muslim communities' religious, social, educational, and political activities. Moreover, they functioned as landmarks of Ottoman sovereignty in the region. Mosques also served as the means for organized urbanization in direct connection to the Islamization process of the Ottoman Empire's newly dominated areas.

The Balkan Peninsula was conquered by the Ottomans in two main waves: the first one between 1352 and 1402 and the second one between 1415 and 1467. The Bosnian campaign, undertaken by the sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–46, 1451–81) in 1463, is a key moment in history, which brought about the definitive Ottoman conquest of the majority of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the time of its conquest, Bosnia-Herzegovina was divided into two parts; Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Ottomans maintained the same territorial division. The area of the modern Bosnia-Herzegovina was initially part of the Ottoman Rumelia province and it was divided between three *sancaks* (Ottoman administrative units): the Sancak of Bosnia (Bosna), the Sancak of Herzegovina (Hersek) and the Sancak of Zvornik (Izvorinik). Around 1525, the Ottomans created Eyalet of Bosnia (*beylerbeylik*; large administrative entity), which was subdivided into the Sancak of Bosnia, the Sancak of Herzegovina, the Sancak of Vičitrina, the Sancak of Prizren, the Sancak of Klis, the Sancak of Krka, and the Sancak of Pakrac. The borders of the *sancaks* and of the *eyalet* continued to change through time. Bosnian territory firstly bordered the Hungarian kingdom and the Venetian Republic and later the Hapsburg Empire, the Venetian Republic and the Dubrovnik Republic (Ragusa). It accordingly played an important role as the furthest oriental outpost in Europe, an important military area and a landmark of the Ottoman territory.

With the arrival of the Ottomans in the Balkans, the process of Islamization started. Bosnia-Herzegovina seems to be a particular case because of the considerably high percentage of converts, in comparison to the other areas of the Ottoman Balkans. In Bosnia-Herzegovina in just nine decades after the Ottoman conquest, roughly speaking, approximately 46% of the population was listed as Muslims. Following the conquest, there was a need to stabilize the Ottoman sovereignty in the Balkans, not only through the administration system, but also by visual means. This was performed through urbanization, which was closely linked to the process of Islamization of the new territories. New types of buildings appeared in this geographical area in response to the arrival of Islam, which strongly impacted the public and private lives of worshippers.

The 16th century is the moment when the Ottoman architecture reached its peak under the rule of the sultan Sulayman the Magnificent. Above all, during his rule, in the Empire's capital, Istanbul (and later in the city of Edirne), Sinan's indisputably creative and unmatched architectural masterpieces were constructed. Because of the stability of the Empire and general welfare during that time, this period corresponds to the peak of architectural production also in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the 17th century, the power, integrity, and stability of the Ottoman Empire were partially halted. Nonetheless, some historic events (for example, the Siege of Vienna in 1683) show that the power of the Empire was not yet in decline. Due to several unsuccessful attempts of expansion of the Empire and uprisings of peasants in the borderlands, the Ottoman architectural production in Bosnia-Herzegovina had partially started to halt.

According to the 1933 census, there were 1,120 mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina, out of these, 70% featured a wooden, rather than a stone minaret. Regional differences can be observed in this respect: in Bosnia region 81% mosques featured a wooden minaret and in Herzegovina region wooden minarets amounted to only 13%. Among these, a total of 36 historical mosques featured monumental architectural form with a stone minaret and prayer hall covered by an external monumental dome. Out of these 36 mosques, 28 mosques were constructed in the 16th century, while others were built between the 17th and the 18th century. The majority of these mosques were badly damaged or entirely destroyed during the Yugoslav dissolution war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–96) and they were rebuilt afterwards.

Monumental domed mosques can be further divided between mosques with single-space prayer halls and mosques with the main prayer hall consisting of several architectural spaces. Ground plans for these monuments were fully defined in the center of the Ottoman Empire and subsequently transmitted into the south-eastern European space, likely via plans and by mosque construction supervisors sent from the center of the Empire. Minarets of mosques in south-eastern Europe assume considerable heights and feature a masterly level of stonemasonry. It has been proposed that special groups of minaret builders were mobile across the Balkan Peninsula for minaret construction, but this hypothesis would require further evidence. For Bosnia-Herzegovina, especially the Herzegovina region, archives of Dubrovnik hold extensive evidence of Dubrovnik stonemasons being mobilized for church and mosque construction in the Herzegovinian *sancak*.

The classical Ottoman architectural activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina lasted between approximately the 1540s until the late 16th century. They were marked by the adoption of the domed single-spaced mosque with an adjacent exterior porch and the minaret as the main type of structure for monumental patronage. One of the best-known monuments of Bosnia-Herzegovina, destroyed in the armed conflict, and recently reconstructed through rebuilding, was the Alaca mosque in Foča (1550–51); it featured structure consisting of square prayer hall flanked by entrance portal and minaret, but its unique feature were wall painting decorations on the portal and in the interior of the prayer hall. Perhaps the most monumental of the mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the Ghazi Husrev Bey mosque in Sarajevo (1530–31). It features a tripartite monumental prayer hall preceded by a monumental portal and flanked by one of the largest minarets. Recent research of the mosque uncovered several layers of wall paintings in its interior spaces. Further significant mosques of the given mosque type comprise: the Karadzozbeg mosque in Mostar (1557–58), the Ali Pasha mosque in Sarajevo (1560–61), the Ferhad Pasha mosque in Sarajevo (1561–62), and the Hajji

Ali mosque in Počitelj (1557–58). Other domed mosques constructed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, even the ones built later than the 16th century, share similar characteristics and dispositions of the floor plan, but are slightly different in their cross-section plan, execution and lesser harmony of proportions. This may be considered an argument suggesting that Ottoman architects from the center of the Empire were not present at mosque construction sites, but rather, local master builders and master stonemasons built mosques according to plans and instructions as well as existing structural models. Some examples comprise the Balaguša mosque in Livno (constructed no later than 1586), the Sultan Süleyman mosque in Blagaj (1520–21), the Čekrekčija Mosque (1526) and the Bašćaršijska Mosque (1528) in Sarajevo.

The period from around the late 16th century until the middle of the 18th century is marked by a considerably less monumental architectural production in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, it has been shown that some larger complexes were still constructed in that period. For example, the Mehmed Pasha Kukavica complex (1751/1752) in Foča, the Koski Mehmed Pasha mosque (1612–18) in Mostar, the Tekijska (1579) mosque in Konjic, the Esme Sultanije mosque (1749/1750) in Jajce, the Kuršumlja mosque (1560, construction date disputed) in Maglaj and the Colored Mosque (present day structure is from 1757) in Travnik. One of the most striking mosques is the Colored (Šarena) Mosque in Travnik which features a monumental wall painting repertoire comparable to that of the Et'hem Bey Mosque in Tirana (construction started in 1793–94 and concluded in 1822–23) and the Colored (Šarena) Mosque (first structure from 1495, present day structure from 1785 and 1833–34) in Tetovo/a. Further Ottoman structures erected in Bosnia-Herzegovina which display comparable construction technology and are indisputable architectural masterpieces, are the Višegrad Mehmed Pasha Sokolović bridge built between 1571–77 and designed by Sinan himself, and the Mostar Old Bridge (Stari most) constructed in –53 (subsequently destroyed and rebuilt).

Key Issues and Debates

Ottoman architecture in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the broader Balkans tends to be frequently considered of provincial nature. Accordingly, Ottoman architectural heritage is often misunderstood as simple identity markers not worthy of closer attention and analysis of their artistic and architectural value. Within the Ottoman Empire, Bosnia-Herzegovina was always a borderland; initially, it had an important role as a stronghold for further expansion of the Empire towards the West and in the later period, it assumed its significance as a fortification to defend the imperial territories. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Eastern and Western cultural and religious influences met the rich local tradition, interacted, coexisted in symbiosis and catalyzed the transformation and development of a complex and multicultural society. Even if this architectural production can be simply labeled as a provincial attempt to imitate the capital's larger and more elaborate prototypes, the so-called creativity of this interpretation should not be devalued. The local society did not only gradually adapt to the new religion, lifestyle and material culture, but above all adapted the new culture to their needs and tastes. The following results from this relationship: differences in style, scale, function, type of patronage and execution of structures.

In respect to the rest of the Ottoman Balkan lands, Ottoman mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina were conditioned by the pre-existing architecture, their role as landmarks, regional characteristics and skills of local builders. This group of mosques is rather varied and has diverging characteristics. However, when compared to the rest of the Balkans, extraordinary regionalization of architectural production is the first visible characteristic. Moreover, the local, rather liberal interpretation brought more diversity when compared to the rest of the Balkan mosques. It can also be suggested that in the interpretation and execution of mosques, the domestic component in all three styles of mosques was stronger than the Ottoman component.

Regional differences between mosques, evident mainly in the construction material and building techniques, result in distinct architectural styles and consequently in overall appearance of the mosques. Differences can be observed in monumental domed mosques but they are even more striking and evident on mid-sized and small mosques. One quarter of mosques built in Bosnia-Herzegovina are mosques with a four-sloped roof and a stone minaret, while 70% of all mosques built (before 1933) in Bosnia-Herzegovina are four-sloped mosques with a wooden minaret. The founders of these structures were mainly locals. Therefore, no guidelines or surveillance could have been implied on these endowments from the center of the Empire. These regional differences are the most pronounced in the roof form, application of different kinds of roof coverings and minaret designs. The four-sloped roof mosque with a wooden minaret can be considered as showing the highest level of the creativity, skill and invention of local builders. The major absence of the dome, the presence of the wooden interior dome, the high frequency of wooden minarets and a four-sloped roof are some of the striking outcomes that manifest it.

The significance of Bosnian Ottoman mosques and their strong symbolic value for the Bosniak community also manifested itself during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. On the basis of ethnic conflicts between Bosnian Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), the Yugoslav dissolution wars manifested themselves as a war on culture. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–96) Muslim, Christian and Jewish architectural religious heritage played a

significant role as markers of religious and ethnic identities, and it was systematically destroyed. This systematic destruction of religious structures can be linked to war crimes and ethnical cleansing. A survey, conducted for the Cultural Heritage Division of the Council of Europe, provides an independent assessment of the state of cultural heritage after the Bosnian War in the year 2002; it reports that a total of 332 Muslim sites, 277 of which were mosques, have been documented in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and out of these 60% of monuments (161 sites) were mosques, out of which 136 mosques were almost entirely destroyed. In the post-war reconciliation process, these mosques – markers of Muslim presence – assumed further importance. The question of the reconstruction of mosques proved to be a sensitive issue. In the past, locating and constructing a mosque was largely a political act and currently, reconstruction interventions on these monuments, or their denial, are also politically charged.

Further Reading

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