

ISLAMIC CULT MONUMENTS IN MITROVICA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS 2

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Abstract

Islamic cult monuments in Mitrovica and its surroundings represent an important part of the cultural and historical heritage of this region. This paper aims to examine the role and impact of Islamic monuments on the cultural and religious development of Mitrovica and its surrounding area, including aspects of their construction, architecture, and function in different historical periods. Through an in-depth analysis of mosques, madrasas, cemeteries, and other Islamic cult monuments, this study seeks to shed light on the influence of the Islamic faith in this part of the Balkans, as well as how these monuments have shaped the cultural and religious identity of the Islamic community in Mitrovica and its surroundings. By researching historical sources and various documents, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of these monuments and their impact on preserving religious and cultural traditions. Part of this study also includes the presentation of the architecture and building style, as well as the role of these monuments in the spread of Islamic culture in this region of the Balkans.

Keywords: *Islamic cult monuments, Mitrovica, mosque, madrasa, Islamic cemetery, cultural heritage, religious identity.*

As works of the Islamic religion, mosques were built in all areas where this religion spread, from the Indonesian islands to the Iberian Peninsula. Regardless of the place where they were built, they were built in accordance with the canons of Islamic worship. All mosques have their functional components: the mihrab, the minbar, the mafil, the minaret, etc. But, from an architectural point of view, they are not everywhere the same. They also have important differences in their artistic content. The architectural and artistic composition of mosques was influenced by the cultural and artistic level of the local people. In addition to changes in space, mosques have also undergone changes over time. Consequently, the mosques of the Ottoman Empire present significant differences from the shrines of the mosques' homeland, in Saudi Arabia, not only in the first centuries of Islam, but also during the time of the Ottoman sultans. Even the mosques connected in the territories of the Ottoman Empire were not everywhere to do. the company speaks of an Ottoman architecture of mosques, but even this definition is not absolute. There are authors who define Ottoman architecture as a Turkish architecture. This definition is not correct either, because the distinctive features of Ottoman Mosque architecture were not elaborated by the masters of the Turkish nationality, but by the talents of the Islamized nationalities of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, even Ottoman Mosque architecture is not in itself uniform, since it was included in space and time. In all of it, the cultural components of the local populations left their stamp. For this reason, the architecture reached Islamic art in

Albania, (and among Albanians P.H.) although essentially remaining Islamic, was not identical with the Islamic art and architecture of other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Under the influence of local factors, Islamic art and architecture in Albania first acquired national and later Albanian features. In connection with this issue, it is necessary to give some historical considerations on the content of Ottoman architecture, Turkish architecture and Albanian Islamic architecture²¹

1. Sarajevo Mosque in Mitrovica

In Mitrovica, there were a number of mosques that were demolished at different times. The Sarajevo Mosque was demolished and never rebuilt, as evidenced by the facts and photographs taken during the demolition. The Sarajevo Mosque during World War II was bombed, then repaired and turned into a warehouse for a long time and kept closed by the Serbian occupying state, and later turned into a facility where games of chance were played, such as gambling and various lotteries. Then, a decision was made to demolish it and, as usual, the Serbs forced Albanians to do this work, with or without payment.



Figure 1 – 2. The Sarajevo Mosque in the center of Mitrovica, burned down by Serbs in 1926

2. Gazi Isa Bey Mosque – Mitrovica

Gazi Isa Bey Mosque - Mitrovica was first built in 1465, and then demolished. The Gazi Isa Bey Mosque was demolished several times, but was also rebuilt. The first building of the mosque was in the place called Jasharaj Square today, right in the old city center. Its reconstruction was carried out in 1725, from where it also changed its location, after a period, it was demolished again and its second reconstruction took place in 1983/85, but now its name had also been changed from Gazi Isa Bey to the Zall Mosque.

²¹ Gjergj Frashëri, Sylejman Dashi, "Zhvillimi i arkitekturës islame shqiptare të xhamive", "Monumentet", Nr. 2, Tiranë, 1986, <http://www.dritaislame.al/zhvillimi-i-arkitektures-islame-shqiptarete-Xhamive/> Posted on 08/05/2012, By Drita IslameHistori.



Figure 3. Gazi Isa Bey Mosque - Mitrovica being demolished

During the last war of 1998 - 99, the minaret of this mosque was bombed, and only the minaret was rebuilt after the war ended. This mosque also served as a mejtep, for teaching the Quran. This mosque stood like this until 2013, when a donation was offered for its reconstruction by the Turkish state, which demolished it and built a new mosque in the same place, but with its old name Gazi Isa Bey. The old mosque had only one minaret, while the construction of the new mosque now has two minarets, the hall, the central prayer hall which is covered with a dome, the premises in front of the hall from where you enter the two minarets and the central hall.



Figure 4 -5. Gazi Isa Bey Mosque - until 1999 and after 2013

3. Ibar Mosque

The Ibar Mosque was one of the oldest mosques in the city of Mitrovica, built in the distant year 1777, and served until May 2, 1999, when it was burned and destroyed by the Serbs next to the main bridge over the Ibar River. The building was burned and then the site was leveled with an excavator, where there are suspicions of a mass grave. The Ibar Mosque was one of the oldest buildings in the city center in the northern part of Mitrovica, on the banks of the Ibar River. In many photographs that are still preserved today from that part, the focus is always on the Ibar Mosque and the bridge over the Ibar River. The mosque was functional and religious services were held in it until the day of the fire. The mosque was built of stone and wood, with two windows on each of the four sides. From the main road leading to the Bosniak Quarter, the mosque was on the right and one had to descend 3-4 steps to enter the mosque's courtyard. In

its composition, the mosque consisted of a prayer hall, a portico and a minaret. The prayer hall occupied the main place and was part of a group of mosques with a wooden roof covered with tiles. According to witnesses, when the mosque was burned, the bodies of the murdered Albanians were also put there, and then set on fire. For this reason, the Serbs lost all trace of this monument of Islamic cult. In order to prove this, research should be carried out by forensic experts and justice structures on war crimes. In the city of Mitrovica, we also have several other mosques, but from more recent periods. Among them are: Hajji Veseli Mosque, which is located in the city, Bajri Mosque, a neighborhood of the city, Shipol Mosque, Ilirida Mosque, Zhabar Mosque, on the outskirts of Koshtova e Bobi Mosque, Vinarci Mosque, Kciqi i Madh Mosque, the Mosque in the First Tunnel, etc.²²



Figure 6 – 7. The Ibri Mosque before 1999 and during its burning by Serbs during the 1999 war

4. The spread of Islamic religion in the villages

In the Albanian villages the situation of religious belief is quite different. In 1571, the number of Muslim houses in (the villages of Kosovo, for example) was very small compared to the Christian ones. Within two decades the number of Muslim houses had tripled²³.

In the village, the process of Islamization proceeded more slowly. Apparently, economic factors did not have the same strength as in the city. In these circumstances the political influence was less than in the city.

In the Albanian village, as in all of European Turkey, mass Islamization began later. Colonization affected only the cities and did not affect the rural population. There, customary law was more effective. It was far from state institutions. On the other hand, the central government did not intend to impose it by force, because such an action would damage the state treasury, cutting off the main source of income²⁴.

The poll tax or jizya was paid on behalf of the state only by non-Muslim citizens without any discrimination. According to Sharia, those who paid this obligation gained freedom of belief (religion) and protection of life and property²⁵.

The payment of taxes in remote villages that did not have a developed agricultural economy, due to the flexibility of the configuration, the altitude that conditioned the spread of agricultural crops, the lack of irrigation of the lands that would yield more productive quantities of crops, and a series of other difficulties, resulted in the conversion from the old religion to the new

²² Pajazit Hajzeri, Church of St. Peter and the Mosque in Trepça, Jurnal of Applied Science – SUT, JAS-SUT, Vol. 8, No. 15-16/2022, Tetova, R. of North Macedonia, pp. 197-200.

²³ Petrika Thëngjilli, "Shqiptarët midis Lindje dhe Perëndimit 1506 - 1839, Fusha fetare 1", Tiranë, 2002, pp. 39, 44.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 45.

²⁵ Ibid.

religion, Islam. Among the 40 villages of Shala e Bajgora in the western part of Shala, about 20 km north of Mitrovica, is the village of Vllahi. The village is a hilly-mountainous settlement of the scattered type²⁶.

5. Mosque in the village of Vllahi

The village of Vllahi is located 7 - 8 km away from Trepça, which already had a mosque and a very widespread Muslim community. The inhabitants of the village of Vllahi, in addition to farming, were also engaged in the exploitation of ore from the Trepça mine. The influence of the Muslim community and contact with this community resulted in the Islamization of the inhabitants of this village among the first villages of Shala e Bajgora. After the Islamization of the inhabitants of the village of Vllahi, the need arose to build a mosque to perform religious services. The configuration of the village is divided into three small geographical units: the upper part in the north, the center of the village and the lower part in the south. The construction of the mosque in the village was decided to be in the center, although there were rumors that it would be built either in the upper or lower part of the village. The village center was also connected by the main roads that passed through the villages, and the distance from the other two parts was shortened. Although traces of construction date back to the ancient period, the oldest monument in the village is the village mosque built in 1792, 222 years ago, corresponding today to 2014. The initiative for the construction of the mosque came from the Hajzeri neighborhood, which also donated its land for its construction. The dimensions of the mosque are 13.19 x 10.30 m, it consists of a large prayer hall and an internal hallway, which is divided into two by stairs that descend from the hallway to the central hall. The hallway is raised from the base of the hall by about 0.50 m, and is completely surrounded by hand-made wood. The construction of the mosque was carried out by Dibrani craftsmen, who at that time were building towers in the village. The walls are made of stones and mortar, as well as wooden beams that reinforced the walls. The wall thickness is 0.70 m, the height from floor to ceiling is 2.85 m. It belongs to mosques with a wooden ceiling and a tiled roof. The interior arrangement consists of the Mihrab, the mimber and the hydbe, which is located on the right side of the mosque. In the middle of the mosque there is a wooden pillar measuring 20 x 22 cm, on which the beam weighs, which supports the entire weight of the ceiling and roof.

In addition to the entrance door, the mosque has two windows on each of the four sides, a total of eight windows, plus a smaller window at the level of the hydbe in the right corner of the mosque. In the hallway inside the mosque, the door of the minaret is located, which was built in 1962, from well-carved stones with the same levels. The minaret has a round shape and is somewhat wider at the base, while, as it rises, it narrows from the outside. Adjacent to the mosque was a mejtepi, where they taught Arabic reading and writing, in order to read the Quran. In this mejtepi, in addition to the children of the village, children from the surrounding villages, such as: Zhazhë, Zijaçë, Boletin, Bistrica, Maxherë, etc., attended the lessons. The imams who served in this mosque were: mullah Hasani of Gumnishte, a village in Shala e Bajgora, then mullah Ahmeti of Kaqiki in Rashan, then Halim Efendija, imam from the Hajzeri neighborhood, mullah Hasani of the same neighborhood, Hafuz Ismaili, his son, mullah Iliazi from the city of Mitrovica, mullah Hamiti of Shupkovci, mullah Shabani of Bistrica, mullah Smajli, mullah Rifati, mullah Shefqeti of Rezallë.

²⁶ Jusuf Osmani, *Vendbanimet e Kosovës, Mitrovica, Zveçani, Leposaviqi(Albaniku) dhe Zubin Potoku, Prishtinë, 2003, p. 131.*



Figure 8 – 9 . The Vllahia Mosque during renovation



Figure 10 – 11. The minaret and the appearance of the mosque after renovation

6. Mosque in the village of Bare

The village of Bare in Shala of Bajgora, about 22 km northeast of Mitrovica, is a hilly - mountainous settlement of the scattered type. In written documents, under the name Bara, it is mentioned in the cadastral register of the Sandzak of Vushtrri, the district of Trepça from 1566-74 and had 16 houses, 2 singles and 1 widow. Under the name Bara it is registered in the yearbook of the Vilayet of Kosovo from 1893 (1311 h), 1896 (1314 h) and 1900 (1318 h)²⁷. In 1877, a mosque was built in Bare (Bare Mosque), at the location where the Bare - Bajgorë - Kaçanoll, Bare - Vidishic - Melenicë, Bare - Selac roads intersect. The purpose of building this mosque in this place was as a meeting point for these surrounding villages and to make religious ceremonies easier. In the 80s of the last centuries, a family from the village of Kaçanoll bought this mosque and turned it into a residential house, while with the money from the sale, a new mosque was built, which now had a larger and more modern space. The mosque has these dimensions: 18.10 x 12.15 m. It consists of a central prayer hall, a half-floor for women to pray,

²⁷ J. Osmani, op. cit. p. 50.

and a courtyard. The mosque is built of brick and lime construction materials, the wall thickness is 30 cm. It belongs to the domed mosques, which, in addition to the dome over the central hall, has three smaller domes over the mosque's courtyard. The mosque also has a minaret, while inside it has a mihrab and a hydba, but no mimber. The mosque is located not far from the mesjid - the old mosque, in the middle of the village, on the right side of the Bare-Bajgorë Road.



Figure 12 – 13. The Mosque of Bara and its interior

7. The mosque in the village of Dedi

The village of Dedi lies on a plateau, in the Shala e Bajgora region, about 18 km northeast of Mitrovica.

This scattered settlement is old. This is evidenced by the existence of Gradinë, between this village and the other nearby village, Maxherë. In written documents, it is mentioned in 1455, in the Ottoman register of Isa - bey Ishak, the governor of Skopje, and had 10 houses²⁸. In the Bosnian Sandžak defenture of 1604, within the Zvečan District, there were 11 Christians with villages.

In the salnamen of the Vilayet of Kosovo of 1893 (1311 h), 1896 (1314 h) and 1900 (1318 h) it appears under the name Dedinje²⁹.

In the village of Dedi there was also a Mesjid (known by the people as a mosque), which was built in 1884. The Mesjid of Dedi did not have a minaret, the construction material was stone, the binding material was mortar, and wood. In a later period, there were interventions with other materials such as bricks.

Fig. 140. The Mesjid of Dedi, a war ruin

It belonged to the type of mosques (mesjids) with a tiled ceiling and roof, so it did not have a dome. During the war of 1998-99, out of the 30 houses that the village had, none had survived the fire, except for two men's rooms. Neither the village school nor the mesjid had been spared from the fire. After the war, the villagers were forced to abandon the village, as a result of the destruction that had occurred there, and as a result, the mosque was left in ruins from the war and very quickly in ruins since no one intervened to restore it and return it to a functional state.

²⁸ J. Osmani, op. cit. p. 63.

²⁹ Ibid.



Figure 14. The mosque in the village of Dedi burned and demolished by Serbs during the 1998/99 war



Figure 15. Dedi Mosque after reconstruction

8. Analytical overview of local craftsmanship and construction features

During the research, it was noted that there is a lack of detailed documentation on the formal education of the master builders of the mosques in Mitrovica, as a large part of them were local and anonymous craftsmen, who shared their craftsmanship in a traditional way. However, clear influences from the Dibrani construction school and from Ottoman construction practices adapted to local conditions are observed. Their craftsmanship is evident in the use of local materials, in the internal treatment of wood, as well as in the adaptation of volumes and plans to the terrain and climate. This testifies to a development of religious architecture that combines tradition, functionality and aesthetics. For further analysis, a detailed study of the constructions and techniques used in each mosque remains a valuable objective for future research, which would shed more light on the local characteristics and the development of Islamic architecture in this area.

9. Conclusion

The Islamic monuments in Mitrovica and the surrounding areas constitute an important segment of the religious and cultural heritage of the region, reflecting the historical development of Islamic architecture in the socio-political context of the Balkans. This study highlighted the

historical course, architectural transformations and cultural significance of mosques and other Islamic institutions, many of which have faced destruction, desecration or neglect, especially during periods of conflict. However, through reconstruction and preservation efforts, the resilience and continuity of the Islamic religious community is demonstrated. These monuments are not only places of worship, but also symbols of identity, collective memory and local craftsmanship.

Therefore, it is essential that their preservation and study be carried out through an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical, architectural, anthropological and cultural perspectives. This paper emphasizes the need for institutional commitment and scientific engagement to protect these values for future generations.

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