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Ottoman Mosque in the Balkans as the Legacy for the Contemporary Expression

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Abstract

The paper explains main characteristics of existing Ottoman monuments in several Balkan countries. Ottoman architectural activity in the Balkan provinces largely reflected architectural styles founded in the principal centers of the Ottoman Empire. A few buildings were designed by the principal architects of the Empire. Traces of local diversity can be found in the designs together with certain variations in building typology, which reflect prevailing social and environmental conditions as well as local traditions, building technique and materials. Among the remaining monuments of urban environments, besides bridges, *hans*, *hammams*, and other building types, mosques largely witness a long and rich architectural Ottoman past. Concerning the typology of a mosque, mostly a single-domed type with a three-bay portico and slender minaret was the common model throughout the Balkans from the 16th to 18th century. Today this model still remains in the eyes of many Muslim communities and individuals the ideal model of an Islamic place of worship. The twentieth century, however, has revealed a divergence in approach to the mosque design. While numerous mosques in some Balkan countries are designed on the populist vision of the Ottoman model, a growing number of architects seek to develop a contemporary idiom in mosque design as an appropriate expression of Muslim societies.

Keywords: Ottoman architecture, Balkans, the contemporary mosque, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Introduction

When we talk about Ottoman art generally, we usually accent the major achievements that appeared in the main centers of the empire, notably Bursa, Edirne and Istanbul. The monuments in provinces on the other hand, including the Balkans, reflect the artistic context of the specific country or city. These variations were the result of the temporal and spatial context in which Ottoman art has evolved.

The Ottoman architectural heritage, created relatively far from the main artistic centers of the Empire, often contains more or less perceivable features of the local architectural tradition. In provinces where local tradition was weaker, Ottoman heritage showed more stylistic purity in its expression. There is some evidence of this stylistic trend, but it needs to be more deeply investigated.

The relatively stable decades in the Balkan provinces, notably during 15th and 16th centuries, stimulated Ottoman building activities. A large number of different types of buildings, mostly resulting from new construction projects, were initiated by province governors, city administrators, military leaders and wealthy individuals. Following the examples of Bursa, Edirne and other centers of the Empire, almost every city was honored with larger or smaller endowment – the *külliye*. A *külliye* consists of a group of sacred, educational, public and charitable buildings established by its founder and their operation and existence were constituted by the institution of the *waqf*. From the moment of identification, a *waqf* endowment becomes public property that is financed from donor revenue. The income could come from land management, farms, stores, or other services. For example, modest endowments may contain only a public fountain (*çesme*). In the case of a larger *külliye*, it may include a central mosque, one or more schools (*madrassa*), public bath (*hamam*), soup kitchen for the poor (*imaret*), han, covered market (*bedestan*), hospital (*darüşşifa*) and mausoleum of the founder (*türbe*). The earliest Ottoman *külliyes* were founded in Iznik, Bilecik and Bursa, in XIV century, while the largest ones were established in Istanbul by Sultan Fatih (1463–1470) and Sultan Suleyman (1550–1557). Similar endowments, although smaller in scale, were founded throughout many Balkan cities and towns.

Notable Examples of the Ottoman Mosque in the Balkan Countries

Among the many monuments that were built since the early 15th century, a number of particularly valuable mosques testify to the development of the Ottoman style in the Balkan countries as well as to the specific regional characteristics.

One of the earliest monuments in the Greece is the Çelebi Sultan Mehmed Mosque at Didymotheico (Dimetoka), completed in 1420–21 (*Pic. 1*). The architect of this exceptional sultan's mosque in Greece was Hacı İvaz Pasha^{2,3}, who also designed the famous Green mosque at Bursa. The plan is square enclosed by heavy walls topped by the pyramidal roof. Inside the prayer hall, there are four square pillars forming symmetrical layout of nine bays of unequal size. Original three-bay portico has long since collapsed. The minaret rises from the northwest wall corner.



Pic. 1: Çelebi Sultan Mehmed Mosque in Didymotheico (Dimetoka), 15th century



Pic. 2: Osman Shah (Kurşunlu) Mosque in Trikala, Greece, 16th century

Another praiseworthy monument is Osman Shah (*Kurşunlu*) mosque in Trikala (*Pic. 2*). It is nicely proportioned single domed mosque with five-bay *riwaq* extended beyond the corners of the mosque. It was built in the middle of 16th century and is known as the only monument in present-day Greece designed by the famous Ottoman architect Sinan.⁴ The walls are made by alternating brick-stone courses, typical in domestic Byzantine building tradition. The existing portico is replica of the original which has collapsed earlier. A part of the minaret above the gallery is still missing.⁵

Dissimilar to the monument in Trikala, the Tzistarakis mosque at Athens shows a distinctive Byzantine influence. This single-domed mosque from the middle of the 18th century has an odd triple portico with unequal bays. In accordance with local tradition, domes were covered with mission tiles. Today this building functions as a museum of the folk art.

As in Greece, there are several preserved mosques and numerous ruins in present-day Bulgaria, as witnesses of the long and rich architectural history during the Ottoman domination. Most of the buildings vanished in period after Bulgaria achieved independence from the Ottoman rule.⁶ A few examples are mentioned here to show how mosque development generally coincided with Ottoman architecture. Şihabuddin Pasha Mosque at Plovdiv is an example of an early *zaviye* type. Two hypostyle mosques were built according to the models of Ulu Cami at Bursa and Eski Cami at Edirne. These are early 15th century Muradiye Mosque in Plovdiv and the late 15th century Büyük Mosque in Sofia.⁷ Eski Cami (Hamza-Bey

² The mosque is severely damaged in fire in 2017.

³ Ahmed Ameen M.M. Fatouh, A. *Byzantine influence on early Ottoman architecture in Greece* (Thesis), University of Athens, 2010, p.38. <http://phdtheses.ekt.gr/> (Dec. 30, 2012).

⁴ *Ibid.* p.128.

⁵ Regarding more Ottoman monuments in Greece, see the above mentioned thesis.

⁶ Stephen Lewis, "The Ottoman Architectural Patrimony of Bulgaria Revisited: Infrastructure, Intentionality, and the Genesis and the Survival of Monuments." p.17. <http://balkanpazar.org/30Lewis.pdf> (Dec. 28, 2012)

⁷ *Ibid.* Since the early-20th century, this mosque is the home of Bulgaria's National Archaeological Museum. p.5.

Mosque) in Stara Zagora built in 1409 is an early example of single-domed type. Although without minaret now, this is the only intact mosque at this city. The mosque is turned to museum of religions in 2011.⁸ The most important work in the 16th century is Ibrahim Pasha Mosque at Razgrad (*Pic. 3*). The construction began in 1535, but the works ended in 1616. It is the single-domed structure with single minaret, one of the largest in Balkans. It is characteristic by the minaret-like turrets at the top of four wall corners. It has a solid walls pierced on three sides with thirteen windows arranged in four levels. This monument is in the UNESCO's World Heritage List dating from 1967.⁹



Pic. 3: Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Razgrad, Bulgaria, 1535-1616



Pic. 4: Şerif Halil Pasha in Shumen, Bulgaria, 1740-1744

The single Ottoman complex, which is still intact in Bulgaria, is the *külliye* of Şerif Halil Pasha at Shumen (Şumnu) built from 1740 to 1744 (*Pic. 4*). Also known as Tombul Cami, is the largest one in Bulgaria, comprising square single-domed prayer hall with high octagon transitional zone and shallow dome with eight turrets. There is a slender 40-meters high minaret with single gallery adorned with *muqarnas*. The courtyard is enclosed by *riwaq* and twelve madrasa's cells. The monument represents an example of fine stone workmanship.

⁸ "It is one of the numerous mosques systematically appropriated by the Bulgarian authorities from the Muslim community in the country and at present is the only mosque intact in Stara Zagora. There is no act of state property, but it is not used by the Muslim community. Hamzabey Mosque was usurped from the Muslim community on the grounds that it would be turned into a museum of religions. The Ministry of Culture transformed the mosque into museum of religions in total disregard of the will of the Muslim community. We have repeatedly expressed our opposition to this project, however the project was implemented without consent of the Muslim community. Around 5.000 Muslims live in Stara Zagora and they have not a mosque to pray. So called "museum of religions" was inaugurated on 16 September 2011." State of Affairs of the Human Rights in Bulgaria in relation to the Muslim Minority. (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/82972>) 20.01.2017.

⁹ <http://www.bulgariainside.eu/en/articles/Ibrahim-Pasha-Mosque/823/index.html>



Pic. 5: Mustafa Pasha Mosque in Skopje, FYRO Macedonia, 1492



Pic. 7: Et'hem Bey mosque in Tirana, Albania, 1789–1823

Ottomans held the present-day Former Yugoslav Republic Macedonia from the early 14th until the beginning of the 20th century. During six centuries of domination, they left permanent traces in the cultural and economic rise of cities and towns. The majority of profane and sacral monuments originate from the 15th and 16th century, especially mosques, baths, madrasas, bedestans, caravanserais, bridges and other facilities. A number of these buildings are well preserved. However, some of them were destroyed during earthquakes or vanished by the lack of appropriate care and use.

One of the first buildings erected by Ottomans in Skopje was Ishak Bey Mosque (1438–39). It is a *zaviye* type of building with domed central room and vaulted prayer *eyvan*. The former side rooms were subsequently integrated into the central space. There is a wide five-bay *riwaq* supported by four hefty piers and side walls. Most of original decorative elements vanished during the earthquake in 1963. The only sultan's endowment in Macedonia is Sultan Murat mosque at Skopje. It was built in 1436–37, and reconstructed in several times during its life. It has unusual basilica-like three-nave prayer space with flat ceiling and hip roof, preceded by wide portico. Gazi Isa Bey's Mosque is an example of “*Bursa*” type with double domed central space with side *zaviye* rooms. The mosque is built from 1475–6, in alternating stone-brick technique.

Mustafa Pasha Mosque in Skopje is well preserved, intact and decently proportioned monument, completed in 1492 (*Pic. 5*). It is the sole part of the kulliye, which consisted of madrasa, mekteb, imaret, caravanserai and turbe. It belongs to single-domed mosques with a three-bay *riwaq* and slender minaret, which was the most favored type throughout the Balkans during the 15th and 16th century.

Another relevant example in Skopje from the early beginning of 16th century is Yahya Pasha Mosque, an edifice with fine stone workmanship, originally built with dome that was lost in fire in 1689. The present-day state has pyramidal roof covered with metal. Original side *tabhane* rooms and five-domed portico were also changed. Main entrance portal shows elaborated work with stalactite vaulting above.

Ishaq Çelebi Mosque is the largest mosque at Bitola, completed in 1506, is the single-domed mosque with high dome with 12-sided drum. Externally, it has an emphasized square transitional zone with squinches at four interior corners. A slender minaret is a characteristic of numerous mosques in Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Comparing to Macedonia, not as many Ottoman monuments remained preserved in present-day Albania. It may be due to a nonreligious regime, which lasted half of the 20th century. Many mosques have been reopened and put in the function after the establishment of the new rule. Some of them deserve a brief



Pic. 6: The mosque in Vlore, Albania, 1542

attention. A handsome mosque in Vlore, built around 1542, is constructed in alternating ancient stone–brick technique (*Pic. 6*). The walls have five arched windows on each side and without any portico at the north side. The shallow dome with blind drum is covered with Spanish roof tiles. Although designed in little–bit unorthodox proportion, the minaret shows fine stone workmanship with *muqarnas* hanging bellow the *şerefe*. Another noteworthy building is Et'hem Bey mosque in Tirana, built from 1789 to 1823 (*Pic. 7*). It is unpretentious example of single–domed building with a slender minaret and spacious verandah supported by arcades on three sides.

The name of Bushati family, who ruled in northern region of Albania from the mid–18th century to around 1830, is related to various construction activities. One of them is the longest bridge in this part of the Balkans. The Mes Bridge over the Kir River near the Shkodër, crosses the valley in the length of 108 meters with a single arched interruption just across the water stream. Another monument in the Kir River valley is the Lead Mosque, completed around 1774. Its name comes from the original dome cover, what may lead to conclusion that the lead had not been favored dome cover over this area. The mosque comprises modest single–domed prayer hall preceded with unusually tight courtyard surrounded with four porticoes. The hemispherical dome is set on octagonal drum pierced with small windows. The upper part of the minaret has collapsed. The design of this mosque may be concerned as an odd choice in terms of the concept in non–urban environment.

Going northern from Albania, throughout Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, one can find several pleasantly balanced single–domed mosques with lofty minarets.¹⁰ One of the earliest examples of classical Ottoman style in Kosovo is Mehmed II Mosque in Prishtina, built in 1461 (*Pic. 8*). It has a typical square prayer hall under the dome with high 12–sided drum pierced with windows at each side. A slender minaret is rebuilt after it has collapsed during the earthquake in 1955. A later one is Sinan Pasha Mosque in Prizren, also in Kosovo (1608–1615). It has a square prayer hall covered by the dome on low drum, with smaller mihrab extension covered with the half–dome. The portico has been restored recently (*Pic. 9*).

¹⁰ In short discussion about minor mosques in provinces, Goodwin points out the slenderness of minarets in the Balkans: “If the Balkans contributed anything to its development in the second half of the sixteenth century, it was the loftiness of the minarets.” Goodwin, G. A History of Ottoman Architecture, London, 1971, p.314.



Pic. 8: Mehmed II Mosque in Prishtina, Kosovo, 1461



Pic. 9: Sinan Pasha Mosque in Prizren, Kosovo, 1608–1615

Although large number of monuments was built in present-day Serbia and Montenegro, a small number of preserved buildings testify on several centuries of Ottoman presence. Evliya Çelebi asserts hundreds of mosques in Belgrade, what may be exaggerated.¹¹ However, there is only one mosque left in Belgrade – Bayrakli Mosque (around 1575). It is single-domed square unit, a bit peculiar in proportions with very high drum and shallow dome. However, there is a very handsome Husein Pasha Mosque in Pljevlja, in Sancak area of Montenegro. It was built between 1575 and 1594. It is recognizable by small turrets rising from the corners of the cubic form. The dome has octagonal drum with corner shallow pilasters and pierced with narrow windows. Its minaret is lofty and slender, like in many other Balkan mosques. At the north side there is a portico covered with three smaller domes.

During the Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the second half of the 15th century until 1878, a considerable number of mosques, madrasas, tekkes, hamams, and other buildings had been built. The oldest mosque built in Bosnia could be the one in Ustikolina (1446),¹² a small town in eastern Bosnia held by Ottomans from the early 15th century. It had been rebuilt several times and destroyed by Serbs during the 1992–95 war. Originally, it had a square plan with deep portico, both covered by the hip roof.¹³ The minaret was built in classical manner with single *şerefe* and conical lead roof.

Majority of domed mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina were built in 16th century. The most common type of the mosque is single-domed unit with three-bay portico covered by three smaller domes, where the central one is usually little higher.¹⁴ The portico vaulting system rests on four columns, typically joined by ogee arches. The minaret with single *şerefe* and conical roof is attached to the western corner. The square form of the prayer hall is typically 9–13 meters wide inside. The cubic form usually turns to circular basis of the dome by means of the octagonal or dodecagonal drum, pierced with narrow arched windows. Transition from square to circle is typically achieved by squinches, sometimes adorned with the *muqarnas*. Domes and minaret were originally covered by the lead, which was replaced by the copper after the World War I. Some of the examples have mihrab, entrance portal and window frames adorned with shallow relief stonework. The most successful examples are: Bascarsijska Mosque (1528) and Ali-Pasha Mosque (1561) in Sarajevo, Hacci Alija Mosque at Pocitelj (1563) (*Pic. 10*), Aladza in Foca (1551), Karadžoz Bey Mosque at Mostar (1557), Kalavun Jusuf Pasha Mosque (Kursumlija) in Maglaj (1560), and Koski Mehmed Pasha at Mostar (1618).

¹¹ Evliya Çelebi, *Putopis*. Trans. Hazim Šabanović, Sarajevo – Publishing, Sarajevo, 1996. p.85.

¹² Mehmed Mujezinović, E. Dimitrijević, Džamija na Ustikolini, (<https://www.fmks.gov.ba/download/zzs/1954/11-1954.pdf>) 14..12.2018.

¹³ Ibid. 142.

¹⁴ See more in: Bejtović, A. (1954). Spomenici Osmanlijske arhitekture u Bosni i Hercegovini.



Figure 10: Hacci Alija Mosque in Pocitelj, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1563



Figure 11: Balagusa Mosque in Livno, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1530–1550

A more specific are domed mosques in Livno. Climate conditions with strong winds in Herzegovinian town Livno, caused a bit sturdy look emphasized with lower domes and stumpy minarets. As a protection of winds, all have triple-bay porticoes enclosed by walls at the northeast and southwest ends of the sofa. Those are Balagusa Mosque (1530–1550) (*Pic. 11*), Mosque of Hacci Ahmet Dukatar (Glavica) (1562–1574) and Lala Pasha Mosque (1578).

Some of the valuable Ottoman monuments in Bosnia were heavily damaged or destroyed during the last aggression. A less number is restored, like Hacci Alija Mosque at Počitelj and Ferhadiyye mosque in Banja Luka, whilst most of them are still waiting for reconstruction.

Besides single-domed mosques, two monuments in Bosnia have been built with more elaborated plan. Gazi Husrev Bey Mosque in Sarajevo was built during 1530 to 1531. The architect was Alaüddin, also known as Esir Ali (Azerbaijan or Persian Ali), a possible author of Yavuz Selim Mosque in Istanbul, completed in 1522.¹⁵ The largest mosque in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been designed in accordance with similar early Istanbul mosques with side extensions and five-bayed portico, such as Rum Mehmed Pasha Mosque at Üsküdar (1469) and Atik Ali Pasha Mosque at Istanbul (1497). The central square hall is covered with the dome with stalactite pendentives. It is 13 meters in span and 26 meters high, and it is not a true hemisphere but rather shallow, like in the above mentioned imperial mosque in Istanbul. The large arches are integrated in the massive walls. The domed side extensions are integrated to the main hall by large arches. The mihrab eyvan is vaulted by the semi-dome, also on pendentives. Externally, the dome rises from the cubic form with the drum pierced by narrow windows. Between them, the base of the dome is reinforced with plain pilasters and eight flying buttresses.¹⁶ The large portico is enclosed by the walls on two sides. There are four marble columns, which support five pointed arches. In courtyard, on the left side of the mosque, there is a mausoleum of its founder, built in classical manner as an octagonal domed unit. Besides the mosque, Sarajevo's greatest donor Gazi Husrev Bey left the madrasa (1537), hamam, bedestan, two hans, and several shops in Bascarsija (Old marketplace in Sarajevo). Gazi Husrev Bey madrasa, whose entrance portal faces to his mosque across the street, is the oldest educational institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The architectural concept of this monument follows typical Ottoman plan. Known also as Kursumlija after the lead cover of its domes, is composed of twelve domed cells with dershane facing to open square courtyard.

¹⁵ Godfrey Goodwin, *A History*, p.187

¹⁶ Such scheme can be observed in later buildings, like the Mihrimah Sultan Mosque at Üsküdar (1546–48) and Selimiyye Mosque at Konya (1558–70).

Ferhadiyye Mosque in Banja Luka, is the second example of complex plan. The founder of the mosque and kulliye respectively, was Bosnian sancakbey Ferhad Bey Sokolovic (1574–1580). In the time of foundation, his endowment consisted of madrasa, mekteb, hamam, bedestan, caravanserai, clock tower and cemetery. This UNESCO's list monument has been completely knocked down by the Serb forces in 1993, and finally reconstructed in 2015. The mosque is formed with the central square hall flanked by shallow lateral extensions and mihrab eyvan covered by semi–dome. The main dome itself is not as big as the Husrev Bey's in Sarajevo is, but the height is two and a half times larger than its span (6,58m). Such small dome has a drum perforated with twelve windows. By adding over twenty windows at all, the result is quite impressive – bright and monumental interior. At the entrance side, there is a standard portico covered by three small domes. It is formed by four columns, two of them with stalactite capitals and two with *baklava* capitals. The minaret with single *şerefe*, classical in form and over the 41 meters high, is attached to the north–western corner.

The end of Ottoman domination over the Balkan countries was marked by turbulent time at the end of 19th and during the first half of 20th century. Besides the enormous human casualties during the two world wars, cultural heritage in general has suffered tremendous damage. Numerous monuments and buildings have been lost forever, and among them are many who have been destroyed due to religious and ethnic intolerance. Ottoman heritage was particularly targeted in some countries. The physical traces of the Ottoman past were deliberately neglected, misused and finally systematically destroyed.

Reflections of the Ottoman Tradition in the Contemporary Context

Generally speaking, building types and architectural forms in Ottoman opus has evolved over the time according to prevailing circumstances, and none of these forms had been 'frozen' forever. Since the mosque is the only building type which continued to be built in modern times, its architecture was subjected to different formal and stylistic interpretations. The Ottoman concept of the mosque design left profound traces in general understanding of the mosque design. Most of the mosques built in independent Balkan countries date from the second half of the 20th century onwards. The first decades after the World War II are characterized by modest structures, usually with simple square plan preceded by portico and covered by hip roof. The whole silhouette is finalized by stone minaret of reasonable height with a single gallery. The interiors are commonly adorned by a simple and sometimes cheap paintings and calligraphic inscriptions.

Last decades of 20th century encouraged mosque designers to show their affiliation to domed solutions. A significant number of single–domed mosques were built especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and southern Serbia. They are recognizable with high and slender minaret and portico covered with smaller domes, in some cases completely enclosed (Pic. 12; 13).

In past several decades, some Balkan countries experienced increasing number of recently built mosques, especially after the last wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, as well as in Albania after the fall of communist Enver Hoxha regime in 1991. The primary reason should be the growing needs of Muslim communities as well as the reconstruction of a huge number of devastated mosques in past wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–95) and Kosovo (1998–99). However, it becomes obvious that many newly made–up examples tend to focus on a completely new goal – a hybrid way of the community self–expression.

Following the fundamental characteristics of Ottoman single-domed concept with the dome, minaret and three-bay portico, the majority of newly built mosques can be situated in a few different prospects. In a considerable number of examples, architects imitate this concept without having a minimum substantial knowledge about the historical circumstances and the context of its development (many have twin minarets). In another one, apparently similar understanding, the mosque concept is interpreted in free, overemphasized and non-critical way. Both of these approaches are historicist in origin but with ever-increasing populist tendency. There are plenty of discernible examples whose quotation would be irrelevant here. Lots of them are recognizable by the concrete hemispherical domes. The dome shapes are often proportionless and the functionality is not related to logic of the applied material. Minarets are often disproportionately lofty and slender comparing to historical models. In many cases, an illogical ratio between heights of the dome and minaret undermines the fundamental harmony of the Ottoman mosque.



Pic. 12: An example of populist design in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the mosque in Kiseljak



Pic. 13: An example of populist design in Serbia: the mosque Delimedje near Novi Pazar

Contrary to populist approach, a negligible number of new mosques show appreciable contemporary approach to the design.¹⁷ Although still insignificant, most of modern designs among the Balkan countries are found in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among few recent examples, the new Curcinica mosque in Livno attracted attention of believers as well as whole publicity (*Pic. 14*). The new mosque is built on the site of the knocked down old Curcinica mosque. The designer masterfully arranged interlocked spaces on pretty tight plot with several graves. The mosque is shaped with plain geometrical surfaces with human-scale and balanced proportions. It contains traditional elements of Islamic prayer space – minaret and dome, both created in a modern way. The overall outline fully respects the existing urban and landscape values. Another example is a new mosque in Jablanica, Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Pic. 15*). It is obvious that the designer has searched the way to express his vision of the Islamic prayer space in a contemporary way. He shaped the

¹⁷ About architectural expressions in the contemporary mosque design, see in: Jahić, E. (2008). Stylistic Expressions in the 20th Century Mosque Architecture, *Prostor*, 16, 2–21.

mosque form with plain geometrical surfaces and gave them balanced proportions. The overall outline fully respects the existing urban and landscape values.



Pic. 14: An example of modern approach to design in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Curcinica mosque in Livno, 2014



Pic. 15: The contemporary approach to mosque design in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Carsijska mosque in Jablanica, 2013

In the last decade, the construction of two large mosques in the Balkans have attracted the attention of the professional as well as the general public. Both ideas formally come from the official Islamic Community of Albania and Kosovo. However, the construction of two central mosques in the center of Tirana and Prishtina has far wider connotations. International competitions were held in which more than a hundred entries were examined, mainly from European design offices.

The international jury for the new mosque in Tirana awarded in 2011 a contemporary and modern design. Based on the master plan, the new mosque has a triangular layout of three bold prismatic volumes, smoothly curved towards to open places between them (Pic 16). White facades with a fine pattern of small rectangular windows are inspired by traditional *mushrabiyya* screens. The overall effect is aimed to “restore and reinvent Albanian identity.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, the realization of this modern project has been replaced by a conservative solution that resembles well-known historical models.



Pic. 16: The award winning design of the new central mosque in Tirana, 2011, design by BIG Copenhagen (Courtesy of BIG)

¹⁸ Madryga, D. (2017). Restoring and Reinventing Albanian Identity: A New Mosque and Museum of Tirana & Religious Harmony.

Unlike the decision of the jury for the mosque in Tirana, the International jury for the mosque in Prishtina awarded only two second awards. Among completely different approaches to design, the first one tends to be modern, while the second one imitates the favored Ottoman mosque type from the XVI century. In the meantime, the long-awaited beginning of the construction once again put the conservative solution to the forefront, which mostly follows the masterpieces of Mimar Sinan in Edirne.

The epilogue of these two designs has deep roots in the case of the Kocatepa mosque in Ankara from the early 1960s, when the modern design was canceled in favor of a conservative design of a selatin cami.¹⁹

Concluding Remarks

The above highlights of the Ottoman architectural past in the Balkan countries undoubtedly point to the origin of this artistic style, but at the same time they speak about the influences of local traditions that have contributed to specific expression and design solutions. Although many of the mosques were built by imported and experienced architects of the empire, the proportions and shapes can vary in accordance to a local understanding. For example, very often slender minarets have been popular in Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro. The exceptional example of lofty minaret can be seen in Husein Pasha Mosque in Pljevlja, Montenegro. The harmonious ogee arches are characteristic in several mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina, dating the second half of the 16th century. Some examples may also have quite unusual characteristics, such as the minaret-like turrets at the top of the four wall corners of the Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Razgrad, or similar corner turrets in the Husein Pasha Mosque in Pljevlja.

The concept of the Ottoman mosque has largely been kept in the minds of the Muslims of the Balkans and beyond, as the widely accepted and understandable one. This is particularly noticeable in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the 92-95 war, and at some extent in southern Serbia and Kosovo, where a large number of newly built mosques follows the historic model. Although some architects follow the traditional patterns of designing new mosques in order to satisfy the taste of the majority, populist idiom should not be the way to modernity. Unlike the prevailing historicist and populist approach to design, there is a minor number of new mosques in the Balkan countries that are designed in a contemporary way. Among them, the most are built in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The concept of today's mosque is not a problem of the architectural design. It is deeply rooted in nostalgic understanding of the mosque in the entire Muslim community. That is why it requires comprehensive investigation. Well-trained and educated designers, in relationship to Muslim communities, should search for appropriate contemporary expression and meaning of the present-day mosque architecture. Symbolic forms established in the past may be used as an impetus for the creativity. However, they have to be examined and applied in a subtle way as to acquire clear and understandable contemporary meaning. This is not only the true way of expressing our own understanding of Islamic architecture, but also the way of respecting and preserving our valuable heritage.

¹⁹ Batuman, B. 2016, 328.

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Picture 2: <http://bilgimimzeynepkoseoglu.blogspot.ba/>

Picture 3: http://visit.guide-bulgaria.com/a/443/ibpahim_pasha_mosque.htm

Picture 4: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk>

Picture 5: www.virtualltourist.com

Picture 6: <http://summitcountyvoice.com/2012/05/18/friday-fotos-holy-places/mosque-1/>

Picture 7: www.123rf.com

Picture 8: <http://r-l-p.co.uk/> (photo: Andrew J. Müller)

Picture 9: www.en.wikipedia.com

Picture 10: Author

Picture 11: Author

Picture 12: <http://www.dzamiye.info/index.php?p=objekte&f=show&id=1358>

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Picture 15: <https://mizbijeljina.ba/vijesti/jablanica-svecano-otvorena-carsijska-dzamija/>

Picture 16: <https://archinect.com/news/article/5197588/big-to-design-major-cultural-center-in-albania>