

## CLASSICAL IMPERIAL MOSQUES IN KOSOVA



### Archaeology

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### Abstract

With the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, its military, political and administrative settlement specifically in Kosova (1455), among other things, began the spread of Islamic-ottoman religion and culture. In order to spread the new faith rapidly, the need for building new religious objects, mosques grew. Çarshi Mosque (1389-1461) and Fatih Mosque (1461) in Prishtina and Bajrakli Mosque (1461/72) in Peja, are representations of some of the first buildings of the Islamic religion in ottoman style with local elements in Kosova. These sacral buildings and mosques were imperial endowments. Furthermore, these mosques are the first single-spaced objects covered with dome in Kosova. Unfortunately, little or no significance has been given to this heritage and very few researchers have taken upon themselves studying ottoman heritage in Kosova. The purpose of this paper is to study, document, protect and promote this heritage, as a part of the cultural diversity of Kosova, which belongs to world heritage as well.

### Introduction

Ottoman Empire, like any other military, political, administrative and economic power of its time was keen on building sacral, profane and public architectural objects. These buildings of grave historical importance and values were mostly donations of Sultans or other important personalities from the political, military and economic background of the empire. Regarding greatness, artistic values and realization, objects differed greatly from each other, varying from the political and social status of the donor.<sup>1</sup>

The geographical position, importance of the region, respectively country or city that they were built in, played a significant role too. Hence, monuments that were built in Balkans differ from the ottoman territories in middle east, etc. Furthermore objects built by sultans differed from the ones that were built by vizier or pasha.<sup>2</sup>

In XVI century the Corpus of Architects of the Ottoman Empire was established. This institution overtook and supervised all constructions in the empire.<sup>3</sup> However, we must consider that the empire was stretched in three continents (Europe, Asia and Africa). Besides centralization, constructions in the periphery of the empire did not have the same treatment as the ones in the

<sup>1</sup> Fetvacı, E. (2013). *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, p.152.

<sup>2</sup> Hartmuth, M. (2011). The history of centres-periphery relations as a history of style in Ottoman provincial architecture. *Centre and Peripheries in Ottoman Architecture: Rediscovering a Balkan Heritage*, Report series No. 9/2010, Cultural Heritage Without Borders: Sarajavo, pp. 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> Hartmuth, M. (2011). The history of centres-periphery relations as a history of style in Ottoman provincial architecture. *Centre and Peripheries in Ottoman Architecture: Rediscovering a Balkan Heritage*, Report series No. 9/2010, Cultural Heritage Without Borders: Sarajavo, p.24; Kuran, A. (2012). *Architecture in Turkey from the Seljuks to the Republic*, Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları; İstanbul, p.429.

center.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, we should note the influence that other cultures had in ottoman art.<sup>5</sup> Such case is ottoman architecture in the Balkans where local building traditions were intertwined with the new islamic art, namely ottoman art.<sup>6</sup>

## OTTOMAN BUILDINGS IN KOSOVA

Along with territorial conquest in the Balkans, ottomans undertook numerous building activities. Important cities like Thessaloniki, Plovdiv, Skopje, Sarajevo, etc. gained oriental, ottoman look.<sup>7</sup> Similar changes took place in Kosovar cities too. Prishtina, Peja, Vushtrri, Prizren, Gjakova, Kacanik took different shapes. However, importance, architectural, constructive, artistic, easthetic values of buildings in this region are modest in comparison with buildings in big centers like Istanbul or Bursa.<sup>8</sup>

Monuments were built from second half of XV century until the first decade of XX century.<sup>9</sup> They were mostly of sacral character like mosques, mausoleums, madrassa libraries but also profane like baths, markets, bridges, etc. Objects were grandiose and monumental for the region and environment where they were built. In Kosova, we mainly have centrally planned mosques, covered with domes or roof.

Classical monumental buildings<sup>10</sup> covered with dome, preserved to date, contain characteristics of typological and stylistic development of ottoman art with local elements. In some cases buildings were realized by local masters.<sup>11</sup> They were experienced and had a long tradition in constructing objects of cult. Furthermore they were familiar with the masonry, building materials, structures and decorative techniques. Mosques were adapted to the environment, climate, social and economic factors by fitting accordingly to the surroundings they were built in. Later architectural realizations, specifically markets, were constructed, adapted around mosques but never surpassing the height of the sacral monument.<sup>12</sup> Thus, cities took a new urbanistic view under the oriental influence.

<sup>4</sup> Kuran, A. (2012). *Architecture in Turkey from the Seljuks to the Republic*, Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları; Istanbul, pp.429-431.

<sup>5</sup> Kuran, A. (1968). *The Mosque in Early Ottoman Architecture*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Kiel, M. (1990). *Studies on the Ottoman architecture of the Balkans*, Variorum Gower House and Gower Publishing Company: Aldershot Hampshire and Vermont, p. Introduction, IX.

<sup>7</sup> Ahunbay, Z. (2011). "Ottoman architecture in Kosova and restoration of Hadum Mosque in Gjakovo (Dakovica)", *Center and peripheries in Ottoman architecture: Rediscovering a Balkan heritage*, Report series No.9/2010, Cultural Heritage Without Borders: Sarajevo, p.16.

<sup>8</sup> Kuran, A. (2012). *Architecture in Turkey from the Seljuks to the Republic*, Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları; Istanbul, p.441.

<sup>9</sup> Drançolli, F. (2011). *Trashëgimia monumentale në Kosovë*, Prishtinë, p.100.

<sup>10</sup> Drançolli, F. (2004). *Rrënimet në kullës shqiptare, Destruction of Albanian Kulla*, Prishtinë, p.48.

<sup>11</sup> Rexha, I. (2004). "Monumentet sakrale dhe profane të periudhës osmanitëshe. XV-XVI në Kosovë", *Monumentet e Kosovës, Kosova Monuments*, IKMMK: Prishtinë, p.77.

<sup>12</sup> Drançolli, F. (2011). *Trashëgimia monumentale në Kosovë*, Prishtinë, pp.128-129.

## CLASSICAL IMPERIAL MOSQUES IN KOSOVA

The beginning of Islamic cult, namely Ottoman style buildings in Kosovo started with Sultan Murad Mausoleum in Mazgit (1389) and the foundations of Çarshi Mosque in Prishtina (1389-1461).<sup>13</sup> Today, in Kosovo we have three imperial mosques with Mehmed II the Conqueror as its donor. Two of them are built in city of Prishtina and one in Peja. In Prishtina we have Çarshi Mosque and Fatih Mosque (1461/62). Meanwhile in Peja Bajrak Mosque also known as Çarshi Mosque (1461/72).

### ÇARSHI MOSQUE IN PRISHTINA

It represents the first imperial building in Kosovo. It is located in historical zone, the core of Old Ottoman Prishtina. It is also known as Stone Mosque. The foundations were put by Beyazit in honor of the spirit of his father, Sultan Murad I. The work was continued by Mehmet I and Murad II but the mosque was not finished until the period of Sultan Mehmed II in 1461.<sup>14</sup> It has square plan. It is composed of praying hall, portico and a minaret. These are typical features that characterize all the classical domed mosques in Kosovo. Prayer hall is covered with dome. Dome stands on pendentives. It is illuminated by three rows of windows. Quadratic windows are placed in the first row, whereas in second row and a drum arched windows. In third row an oculus is placed on each side of the mosque. Before its restoration in 2011, the mosque had a two storey closed portico covered in three hip roofs. Now it has an open portico covered in three smaller domes.

The minaret is constructed on the right side of the mosque. It is a slim and polygonal minaret. Comprised of footing, pulpit, transition segment, shaft, balcony, upper shaft and spire with an ornament on top of it. Çarshi Mosque is constructed with irregular stones except the corners of the constructive walls and minaret which fully constructed with regular rectangular stones from footing to the spire, making it a unique example in the region. Hence it took the name Stone Mosque.

The interior of praying hall is characterized with rich elements and decorations. Mihrab stands out as the most decorated part of the mosque. A colorful niche decorated with muqarnas. On its right side stands the stoned minbar, whereas on the left side of mihrab a conic shaped kursi attached on the corner of the hall. In front of mihrab, in a slightly raised platform, the muezzin mahfil is located. Above it, standing in four wooden pillars, a mahfil reserved for females. Besides the constructive elements, prayer hall, is distinguished with its fresco secco decorations.

<sup>13</sup> Drançolli, F. (2011). *Trashëgimia monumentale në Kosovë*, Prishtinë, pp. 100, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Ayverdi H. E. (1981). *Avrupa'da Osmanlı mimariseleri Yugoslavya*, III Cild, 3. Kitap, Bilmen Basımevi: İstanbul, pp.157-158; İbrahimgil Z. M., Konuk N. (2006). *Kosova'da Osmanlı mimariseleri I*, I. Cilt, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları: Ankara, p. 493; Drançolli, F. (2011). *Trashëgimia monumentale në Kosovë*, Prishtinë, pp.106- 109.

Arabesques, geometrical and floral motifs painted in light tones of blue, green, purple, ocher, etc. in the light blue background are repeated and dominate the inner space. Decorations are concentrated around windows, in pendentives, drum and rosette in the dome. These decorative features are commonplace for every mosque in Kosovo.

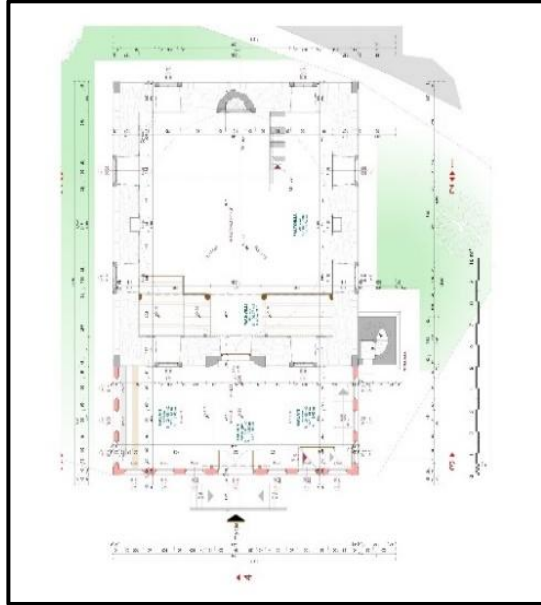


Figure 1: The ground plan of Çarshi Mosque in Prishtina. (Plan by: Gani Gashi)



Figure 2: Southwestern view of Çarshi Mosque in Prishtina.



Figure 3: Interior of Çarshi Mosque in Prishtina.

## GREAT MOSQUE OF PRISHTINA

Also known as Imperial Mosque or Fatih Mosque. It is the biggest mosque in the city of Prishtina. It was finished the same year as Çarshi Mosque (1461/62).<sup>15</sup> It is located in old part of Prishtina, in around 100 meters distance from Çarshi Mosque. Its compositional scheme includes praying hall, portico and minarete. The praying hall is covered with a dome which stands on pendentives and is illuminated by four rows of windows. The first row has quadratic windows and the rest of the windows, including in the drum, are arched windows.

Portico is opened and covered in three smaller domes. Minaret is constructed on the right side and contains the same elements as the minaret in Çarshi Mosque, however it is more elegant and spire is a wooden construction covered in lead. The mosque is built with regular rectangular shaped stones. The mihrab, minbar, kursi, and galery are elements that comprise the interior of the mosque. Mihrab and Minbar are rich with decorations both pictural and sculptural too. On the other hand arabesques, floral and geometrical motifs painted mostly in light blue enrich the white walls of the interior. Exterior of the mosque is decorated too. Monumental portal stands out with its rich relief on stone. Above the portal is the inscription with a building date and name of the doner. Furthermore, above inscriptions, two dimensional depiction of the mosque was painted too. Low relief is applied in the minaret and pillars of portico as well, thus elevating the eminence of the mosque.

<sup>15</sup> Ayverdi H. E. (1981). *Avrupa'da Osmanlı mimarî eserleri Yugoslavya*, III Cild, 3. Kitap, Bilmen Basımevi: İstanbul, p. 43; İbrahimgil Z. M., Konuk N. (2006). *Kosova'da Osmanlı mimarî eserleri I*, I. Cilt, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları: Ankara, p. 412; Drançolli, F. (2011). *Trashëgimia monumentale në Kosovë*, Prishtinë, pp. 110-112.

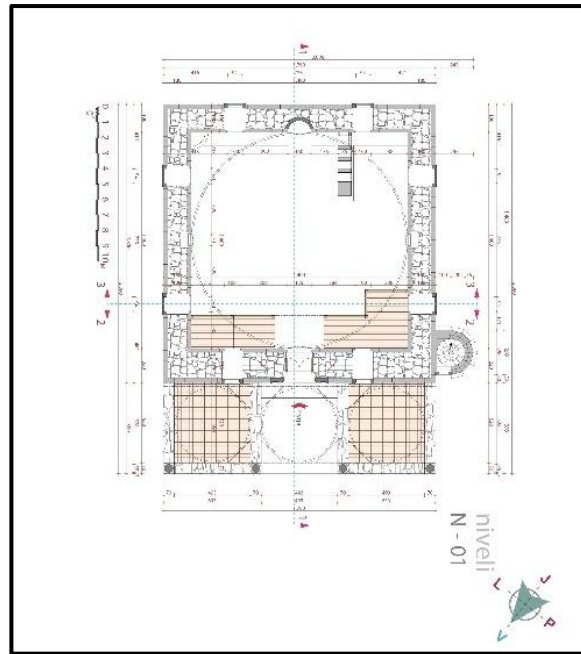


Figure 4: Ground plan of Great Mosque in Prishtina. (Plan by: Gani Gashi)



Figure 5: Front view of Great Mosque in Prishtina. Figure 6: Interior of the Great Mosque in Prishtina.

## BAYRAK MOSQUE

Bayrak Mosque or the Çarshi Mosque is the last of the three imperial sacral buildings that were built in Kosova. In contrast to previous ones that were built in Prishtina, Bayrak Mosque was built in the city of Peja. It was constructed between 1462/72 by Mehmed II The Conqueror.<sup>16</sup> It is the biggest mosque in Peja. It shares the same compositional plan. A praying hall covered in dome, open portico and a minaret on the right side. However it differs from the last two when it comes to construction of the dome. In this case, the dome stands on squinches. It is built with bricks and stones but currently the façade is covered with plaster. It is illuminated by three rows of windows. Just like in previous mosques the first row has quadratic shaped windows. Second and third row with arched windows. In mihrab wall an oculus is placed on top.

Portico is opened and covered with three smaller domes. Polygonal minaret consists the same elements as the minarets on Çarshi and Fatih Mosque in Prishtina. In comparison with the last two, but also other mosques in Kosova, Bayrak Mosque is much more decorated. It has rich and colorful interior with arabesques, geometrical shapes, medallions, floral, architectural and nature motifs. Mihrab stands out with its painting depicting heaven, muqarnas and two rosettes realized on low relief. Decorations in painting and relief cover the gallery which stands on ten stone pillars. Colors include shades of blue, green, yellow, red, etc. on white background. Meanwhile stars, rosettes and geometrical shapes are carved in mihrab, minbar, squinches, pedestals and capitals of pillars in portico and gallery too.

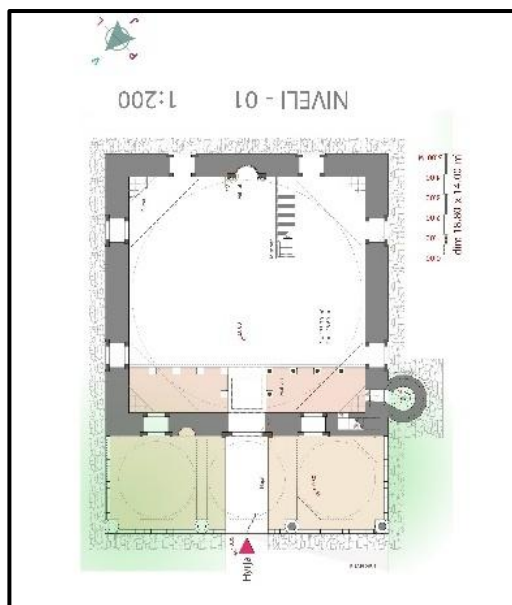


Figure 7: Ground plan of Bayrak Mosque in Peja (Plan by: Gani Gashi)

<sup>16</sup>Ayverdi H. E. (1981). *Avrupa'da Osmanlımimarî eserleri Yugoslavya*, III Cild, 3. Kitab, Bilmen Basımevi: İstanbul, p. 157; İbrahimgil Z. M., Konuk N. (2006). *Kosova'da Osmanlımimarî eserleri I*, I. Cilt, TürkTarih Kurumu Yayınları: Ankara, p. 338; Drançolli, F. (2011). *Trashëgimia monumentale në Kosovë*, Prishtinë, pp.117-119.



Figure 8: Northeastern view of Bayrak Mosuqe in Peja.

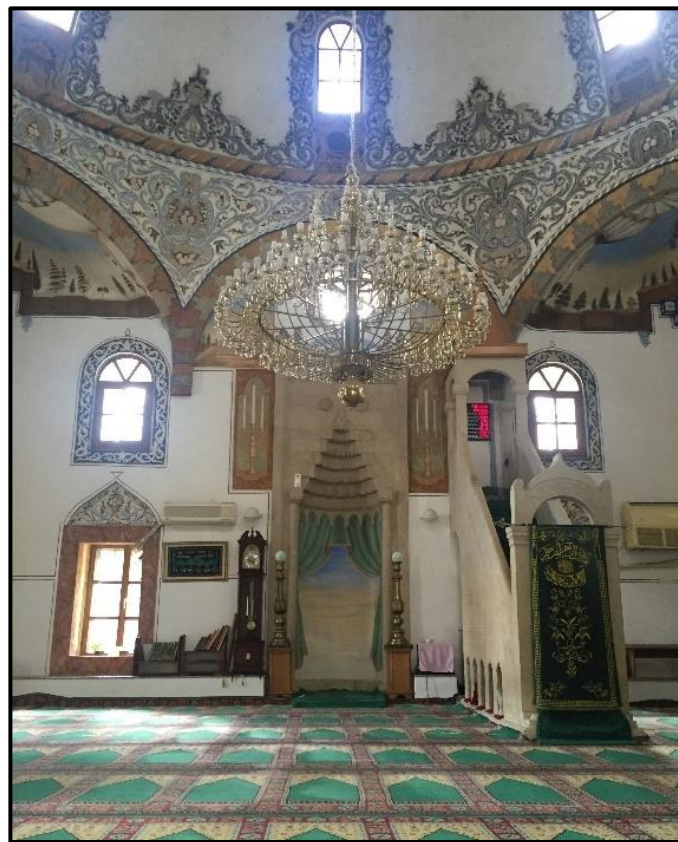


Figure 9: Interior of the Bayrak Mosque in Peja.



## CONCLUSION

Classical imperial mosques in Kosova are amongst the first examples of Islamic cult buildings with a central plan covered in domes in the region. In this short presentation of imperial mosques in Kosova we can conclude that compositional, architectural and functional plans are almost identical. Differences can be seen in techniques and systems of transition from square plan to the dome, masonry techniques and materials and decorations. Of course, these monuments in comparison with the mosques built by the same founder or other sultans, in bigger centers like Edirne, Istanbul, Bursa, etc. are not as grand. However, for the space and period where they were built they are monumental. They dominated the buildings and spaces where they were erected in XV century. Furthermore they served as nucleus for developing and shaping the Kosovar cities during the Ottoman period.

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