

Vanishing Heritage: Values of Wooden Minaret Mosque Brezovača

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ABSTRACT

Under different local influence, in different part of the world introduced to the faith of Islam, diversity of architectural forms was produced. After Ottoman took control over Bosnia in 15th century, new religion of Islam was embraced and followed with construction of the mosques, a symbol of the Islam. Except big central mosques in urban areas, in each neighbourhood and villages with Muslim population mosques were constructed. Applying local materials those mosques were adopted to the local environments. In context of Bosnia and Herzegovina wooden minaret mosques were specifically built in Bosnia, using wood as suitable local material for construction, while in Herzegovina predominantly stone structures were constructed. Wooden minaret mosques are more than examples of the local architecture; moreover, they contain local skills in applying wooden constructions. Yet, there is obvious lack of understanding the values embedded into those structures.

This paper aims to explain values of wooden minaret mosque of Bosnia. Furthermore, case study of Brezovača mosque located in northern part of the county was elaborated and the aim of this paper was to justify need to regain original shape and to explain proposed interventions relating on similar structure from the close vicinity. This approach was accepted due to lack of source that would confirm exact information about this building.

To meet such aims, this research was focused on two points; 1) to introduction of the local wooden minaret mosques values, expressed more as intangible values inbuilt in the structure. In addition, setting of the structure and its integration with natural surroundings is highlighted; 2) to study the limited available sources about selected case study of Brezovača mosque, and brief introduction to the current condition of the mosque. In the end, referring to the preserved examples from the surrounding, interventions to regain original shape of the mosque are proposed, and method of analogy is suggested as appropriate one.

Keywords: wooden minaret, mosque, vanishing heritage, Bosnia and Herzegovina

INTRODUCTION

Spreading of Islam in different areas (areas conquered by the Arabs, in referring to the very beginning of spreading Islam), different types of building in different styles and manner were constructed. Locally-found architectural elements were adopted to the need of new life conditions. They will be used as a model for Islamic architecture diversity according to the region. Distinguished spaces of the built environment with elements specific to a particular region were created over time. Each of these elements carries cultural habits and characteristics of the region in which they have occurred. In its correlation they have created a spirit of a place.

After Bosnia became part of the Ottoman Empire, in 1463 during Ottoman conquest of the Balkan territory toward rest of the Europe, Islam as new religion was fully accepted and Islamic culture became a part of local culture.

To understand circumstances under which Islamic architecture emerged and developed inside Bosnia, it is important to link basic principles of Islam with specific local character. Religion of Islam is based on five basic principles, namely: faith, pray, Hajj, fasting and zakat. Affiliation to the Islam represents commitment and acceptance of the lifestyle following certain principles. Redžić (1983) explained that the basis of Islam is contained in the notion of God as the purest spirit. He stated that Islam is monotheism in its purest form, a simple and easily understandable. The basics of Islam are integrated in a holy book The Quran and for all Muslims it is common to learn the Quran in Arabic language. That would be base for development of common Islamic culture, and Quran was bridging

factor in Islamic culture. Islam also contains specific rules and some of them have had influence on expression in the art e.g. absence of human figures. These rules were initiation for development of decorative art, art of ornamentation, poetry and writing. This was reflected in other types of art including the architecture.

The mosque is a core of Islamic architecture and it represents as a symbol of the faith. The initial mosque was a place of gathering believers or community and mosques were more than just a place of worship and pray it was usually a center, a meeting point, a place of discussion and exchange of information. In its essence mosque represent common prayer space as a form of the house, with simple interior without the sanctity and the altar. Within its simplicity mosques contains symbolic elements dome, minaret, mihrab and minbar among others.

Accepted and preserved as one of the major religion in the country, as it is the case today, Islam was not understood simply as belonging to the one of the main monotheistic religion, but rather perceived as tradition and custom. Acceptance of new culture was accompanied with socio-economic changes and new life principles, reflected into different aspects of life. Karić (2011) stated that Islam in the Balkans is an extremely complex phenomenon and needs to be viewed within the context of religious, cultural, political, economic and military factors.

Answering how Islamic culture was reflected to different sphere of the life inside Bosnia will determine principles of for that time newly occurred achievement in architecture. Numerous public buildings with Islamic character were constructed all over the country, after Ottoman administration was established. Islamic character of public buildings was already known for Ottomans in pre Ottoman Anatolia, while on the soil of Bosnian those buildings were innovative. Intermingling of tradition and local character with Islamic culture resulted in a variety of Islamic buildings and richness of the architectural forms, in creating variety of shapes, forms and volumes.

Integrating tangible and intangible values many valuable assets, tows and structures will become specificum of the country, expressing relation of the man and environment. Certain characteristics of the space were gained as reflection of habits and customs of people and their activities. Those activities included application of local material and skills in applying material, with difference of Bosnia where it was mostly wood while in Herzegovina it was stone. "The monuments represent great value of every city, they incorporate memory of the places and the message to its inhabitants with significant cultural interpretations of the space and shape of traditions, as solid background of national identity." (Salihović,2002 pg.260)

According to the physical and structural characteristics of the monuments Ottoman architecture of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be divided into several groups: the mosque and tomb, public baths (hammam), madrasas and caravanserai, covered markets, shadvans and fountains, shops and storerooms, fortified towns, bridges. Each of these monuments reflects certain peculiarities, and they can be found in all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a legacy of Ottoman architecture, which is directly related to Islamic culture.

Among important particularities of the Islamic architecture is harmonization with the environment. The specificity of the Ottoman period is also depicted in the principle of forming the houses that reflected characteristics of the area in which they were form. Following definition of Norberg-Schulz (1975) that architectural space is considered primarily as a concretization of man's existential space, as result of interaction of the man and environment, this attitude could be recognized in the traditional urban settings established by the Ottomans. Houses were adopted to the morphology of the terrain and to the climatic conditions. Bosnian traditional houses were constructed creating architectural space in the human scale and for the people. Similar concept was applied for the the design of mosques as

well, mostly local neighbourhood mosques, reflecting the local character. Absence of an explicit distinction between the sacral and the profane caused a similarity in a construction.

According to Bećirbegović (1990) since 15th century inside Bosnia two types of mosques were built: with domes and with hipped roof that could have stone or wooden minaret. Even though wooden minarets mosques were most common type of mosque still researches were not focused on this type of mosques. However, mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina were subject of changes, destruction and deterioration due to different causes. Selected case study for this paper is wooden minaret mosque Brezovača, located in the village Ribnica, in northern part of Bosnia. The goal of this paper is to define values of this quite simple structure, and to determine appropriate approach to preserve this kind of structures of further neglecting attitude.

The mosque was documented and inspected in situ in order to determine the current state of conservation, especially of the characteristic elements, including open porch, roof and minaret. Since the mosque is still actively in use, it gives potential to consider as worth of being preserve. The occurred changes have destroyed some valuable part of the mosque such as porch that should be replaced with new one relaying on the available data and relaying on examination of similar examples dating from the same period and being placed in the same part of the country. Due to the lack of recent accurate research about this and other similar mosques, for the purpose of this research, in order to confirm initial shape of the mosque, interviews with the oldest inhabitants and available photo documents were taken into account as well.

WOODEN MINARETS MOSQUES

Inside Bosnia and Herzegovina there was 1,120 mosques among which 70% were mosques with wooden minarets. (Bećirbegović, 1990). However, it is important to indicate gap in research, analyses and statistical data related to this type of mosques, as well as about current condition and restoration interventions. The most accurate research focusing on the wooden minaret mosque is summarized in book *Mosques with wooden minaret in Bosnia and Herzegovina* by Bećirbegović (1990), while there is no deep research conducted after the war (1992-95) when many of cultural heritage monuments including mosques were totally destroyed, with obvious decreased number of preserved mosques.

Mosques with wooden minarets are related to the Bosnia as the most commonly applied type since the Ottoman conquest. Those mosques were constructed as endowment of different founders, mostly citizens themselves. The wood was available material and this construction type is specific itself done by local masters. Form of the wooden minaret mosques emerged from the traditional architecture as a simple cube with hipped roof. In a picturesque landscape of Bosnian inhabited area mosques were part of its cultural landscape. The principles under which neighbourhoods emerged refers to the several aspects: to follow the terrain morphology, to use in situ materials, to respect human scale, and to preserve vistas and to provide enough sun for each house. The mosques with wooden minarets were perfectly incorporated into this approach.

Most of these mosques are single space with few examples of space with columns. They might vary in size and inner space organization. Basic concept of this mosque included porch that was covered and supported with columns. The entrance to the mosque was set in the middle of the porch. Both sides of the porch were used as sofa or praying space outside the mosque. Interior is quite simple and includes basic elements such as mihrab, mimber, curs and mahafil. Inside Bosnia this type of mosque evolved into different concept according to the material and position of its elements.

Under different socio economic circumstances, different approaches in perceiving values impacted built environment. Many of wooden minaret mosques have been changed over time, replacing them with new one or some of its part, replacing wooden minaret with masonry one or they have vanished due to lack of maintenance, or else due to inappropriate rehabilitation or they have been destroyed during war 1992-95.

BREZOVAČA MOSQUE - HISTORY OF THE PLACE

Brezovača Mosque is located in the village Ribnica between towns Zavidovići and Banovići. During Ottoman time this area belonged to different nahi (Maglaj and Dramešin). There is lack of written data about this area in the first years under the Ottomans. This area was far from any bigger center and it might be assumed also that this area was unsecure due to fact that the closest fortress was Bobovac (quite far from the village). End of XVI and beginning of XVII century Vlachs inhabited this area and they have constructed monastery (During 18th century monastery was abounded and destroyed and in 1859 church was constructed on its foundation).

Increased number of Muslim population was followed with increased number of constructed mosques. Defter documents related to this area contain information about Muslim inhabitants but there is no mentioning of the mosques. (Alihodžić, 2010). Today's the oldest preserved mosque in this area is mosque Brezovača dating back to 1890. Also around 1850, two other mosques were constructed in the vicinity of this location, in villages Slivići and Gare.

First accurate information about mosques in this area are related to Austro Hungarian (AU) maps from 1882, prepared immediately after Bosnia came under AU control. Those maps showed eight mosques in surrounding villages of this area, including Brezovača mosque. Accordingly, one can assume that mosques were existing during late Ottoman period. In local narratives it is mentioned that the oldest mosque in this area was constructed in 1850. Also, inventory of religious building conducted in 1895 includes Brezovača mosque. (Mujkić, 1999)

In Defter documents from 1565 and from 1604, Municipality of Zavidovići, to which village Ribnica had belonged for years, was mentioned as village of Zavidovići. Author Mujkić found that several other villages from the surrounding were detected in defter from 1604, while names of some other villages couldn't be certainly distinguished as current names of villages. (Mujkić, 1999)

According to the census done in the 1879 (first out of 4 census done by Austro Hungarian administration) village Ribnica had 380 inhabitants out of which 307 were Muslims. The number of inhabitants was increased to 1392 in 1910, out of which 986 were Muslims. (Mujkić, 1999)

Today Ribnica belong to Municipality of Banovići, the town that emerged as an outcome of coal mine development and youth actions after 1949, during period of ex-Yugoslavia. After village was divided among two municipalities, according to census from 1991 (last census before the war 92/95) population of the village Ribnica was 2328, out of which 1627 were Bošnjaks (Muslims). In 2013 (first census after the war) number of population in village Ribnica (Zavidovići) is 1095 and together with part that belongs to Banovići municipality (villages Čatići 361 and Mrgan 278) population is 1734 inhabitants. Today mostly Bosnjaks live in this area that gravitate to this mosque as major religious building. Recently in close vicinity of this village, new domed mosque was contracted applying new trend and style unknowns to this area.

SITE

The mosque Brezovača is set on the plateau above river Ribnica, a tributary of the river Krivaja, in the area between two Municipalities Zavidovići and Banovići. A Steel Bridge is crossing river and connects the site to the main local road toward valley of the river Krivaja. The site of the mosque is surrounded with the greenery and forest, while village is set on the hill starting from the other site of the gravel road as main approaching road toward mosque.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Small, in dimension of 11,5m x 7,5m, Brezovača mosque once was consisted of two parts: entrance porch and main praying space. Currently porch is closed with masonry walls. Inside porch there is inbuilt chimney for purpose of heating mosques during winter time. Structural particularities of the Brezovača mosque were achieved using local materials, including usage of stone for walls, and wood for roof, minaret and mahfil. Corpus of the mosque is built in stone with thickness of the wall 66-75cm. Walls are plastered and stone is not visible on the facade. There are 6 small windows on the façade and 2 more windows in the front part (old porch). Main door is simply shaped. From the entrance part, old arched opening is leading to the main praying hall. Inside the hall there are main interior elements of the mosque, simple in shape and with no specific decoration. All elements are made of wood. Mahfil is set across the mihrab along the entrance wall. Mahfil set on the upper gallery, covers almost half of the ground plan.



Fig.1: Brezovača mosque around 1975/80 (left) and today (right)
(Source: Nuraga Softić)

Mosque is covered with pitched roof maid of wooden beams, covering both, porch and main praying hall. Currently clay roof tiles are used as roof covering, while originally for the roof covering was used wooden shingle as it was commonly used in Bosnia. Base of minaret is placed in the roof and total height of the minaret is around 16 m from the terrain and 8 m from the peak of the roof. Minaret is maid of wooden skeleton with spiral stairs that is toward top enlarged into balcony (serefe). Minaret cuts the surface of the roof and it is fixed for the roof construction in the place of section point of roof and minaret. Gallery of the minaret is covered with small openings. Today minaret is completely covered with sheet metal.



Fig. 2: Brezovača mosque condition in 2012

These mosques are not a piece of art or of outstanding universal values but they rather integrate local expression of the constructing skills and spirit of the local population inbuilt in them. Brezovača mosque reflects the idea of how place for the mosque construction was chosen, next to the village and on the plateau above the river to feel synergy with its surrounding. Therefore, value of this mosque is rather determined as ambiental. The mosque is the main center for the village and therefore should be seen as a structure bearing intangible values. This mosque is example of vernacular architecture of this part of Bosnia witnessing also identity of the inhabitants of this village.

CURRENT CONDITION:

As first step it was needed to document current condition of the mosque and to conduct survey inspecting structure in situ. This was the first time that this mosque was documented with technical details.



Fig. 3: Brezovača mosque condition of the wall and roof beams in 2017

According to the site inspection mosque is still in use and this is the main mosque for the surrounding villages. Survey of the Brezovača mosque showed some of the inappropriate interventions including replacement of open porch with closed walls, replacement of traditional roof covering with clay roof tiles and wooden minaret is fully covered with metal sheet. Unfortunately, with this interventions authenticity of the mosque is harmed. Basic structure of the building does not reflect any severe damage or cracks. Roof beams are dating back to 1988, without permanent protection and therefore most of them should be replaced with new one.

Around the mosque tomb stones are placed. Recently on the plateau around mosque imam house was constructed while rest of the plateau is still intact. According to old muteveli

Hasić Brajko, Šemso Mujarić who was muteveli in 2010 and Suljo Kudumović member of the local mosque board, in 1974 several interventions of the mosque were conducted when mosque gain current shape. Those interventions included covering of the wooden minaret with metal sheet, replacement of the wooden shingle with clay roof tiles. In this action also porch was closed by walls and new facade plaster was used instead of lime plaster.

FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

Understanding values of the wooden minaret mosques, it is possible to determine approach in preserving this historic building. Many of them were constructed in rural area and areas out of the main road or far from big centers and therefor there is obvious lack of information about historic background and details about those buildings. According to the available sources the Brezovača mosque is one of few of this type preserved till current time. In deciding about possible interventions it is important to follow Principles for the preservation of historic timber structures adopted by ICOMOS. (ICOMOS, 1999, pg.1) Following best practice example, it is possible to learn about methodology and decision making in case of lacking accurate information about original elements. One of the example is Handanija mosque with wooden dome inside the roof. The restoration process was well documented including research, proposals and discussion about choice for the roof that was totally destroyed, as it was proposed by authors Zecevic M, Causevic A., Rustempasic N. (2012).

For Brezovača mosque future interventions should include structural enhancement to ensure stability of all structural parts with possible replacement of worn out elements (roof beams). Both interiors and exterior of the mosque should be improved with correcting some of the mistakes occurred due to lack of proper technical guidance and maintenance, using inappropriate materials (color of façade, roof and minaret covering etc.). Since Brezovača mosque is a village mosque it is possible to assume that there was no rich decoration.

Due to lack of knowledge of its original shape it is possible to analyze elements of the other mosque in this region such as mosques of Tuzla region. Some of the still existing wooden minaret mosque from this area e.g. Brdska mosque and Mejdanska mosque in Tuzla, depict the manner in which they were shaped. The porch was one of the main element of the mosques of the time in which they have been built. Therefore, beside above mentioned interventions, the mosque should regain its local character with open porch.



Fig.4: Brezovača mosque proposed restoration

Inspecting mosque there is obvious difference in wall thickness of main corpus and walled porch. This fact once more confirms that structure had open porch in the front part. According to the above mentions narratives of old mutevelis of the mosque porch had two story and this might be confirmed due to existing niche in the gallery wall inside the mosque. The niche was possibly place of door to the upper gallery of the porch.

CONCLUSION

Interventions in the ambient of a recognizable identity, established architectural language and visual codes, require an understanding of values formed in the given space and time. The richness of the traditional architectural, cultural and historical heritage and current global efforts and knowledge on the protection of heritage requires evaluation with special attention and sensitivity. All this is important for the recognition and preservation of original or inherited values of elements that creates the identity of a specific place.

According to current condition of wooden minaret mosques inside Bosnia and due to many examples that have permanently vanish, attempt to preserve Brezovača mosque is in the same time contribution in preserving tradition and culture as elements of identity.

In absence of recorded information about historical structure, as it is case for the Brezovača mosque, it is recommended to use possible similar structure from the close vicinity or region, as model for analogy. From the existing preserved sample, it is possible to determine basic elements of the structure, to discover way of constructing, relation and proportions of elements. Relaying on several existing examples in the region the open porch was determined as one of peculiarity and for the Brezovača mosques it was possible to confirm this assumption relaying on the narratives and traces in the wall. Following all available information, including narratives, old photo documents and inspecting structure in situ the shape of elements are confirmed. Gained results were used for the proposed reconstruction of destroyed part of the porch and restoration of the mosque (figure 4.)

The lessons of the past can give us a determinant for future performance, and certainly the importance of preserving traditions, traditional building, architectural heritage is acknowledged in allowing future generations to learn from the lessons of the past.

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