

Fatih Mosque in Prishtina

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Prishtina

Prior to analyzing and studying the Sultan Mehmet II Mosque, we must point out that Prishtina is mentioned in historical records since 1325, even earlier¹. Since ores like Novoborda, Kishinca and Trepca were located near Prishtina, we are dealing with a center where regional mining, economy and trade was developed. According to sources², Prishtina had direct contact with Novoberda, a famous and developed late medieval city (XIV-XV). It is also believed that there was a medieval castle in Prishtina³. However, the traces of this fortified settlement are yet to be found. We should mention that near the city, in a close distance of 2 km, some archeological sites like, “Tjerrtorja”, “Germia”, “Taukbashqe”, “Spitali i ri” are located.⁴ A bit further, in a distance of 7 km near Gracanica, the antic city of Ulpiana is located. It was rebuilt by Justinian in VI century⁵. In Gracanica we have the paleo Christian church, which in second decade of XIX century was adapted to byzantine orthodox liturgy⁶.

Classical Buildings of Sultan Fatih

Above we mentioned archeological sites and Monastery of Gracanica, which are located near Prishtina. Today, old town of Prishtina, is characterized with traditional cultural-historical heritage of ottoman style with local elements

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1 Skender Rizaj, *Kosova gjatë shekujve XV, XVI dhe XVII*, Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1982, s. 242-248.

2 Rizaj, *age.*, s. 243.

3 Rizaj, *age.*, s. 248.

4 Narcrt, *Opsti urbanisticki plan SO Pristine*, Pristina, 1987, s. 3-5; ZUP Pristina, OTAM Paris, *Regionalni prostorni plan SAPK, Osnovna studija, Spomenici kulture na Kosovu, Zastita prirode na Kosovu, Analiza i ocena stanja i mogucnosti razvoja*, Pristina, 1971, s. 121- 122.

5 Fejaz Drançolli, *Trashëgimia monumentale në Kosovë - Monumental heritage in Kosova*, 2011, s. 79.

6 Vladimir R. Petkovic, *Pregled crkvenih spomenika kroz povescnicu srpskog naroda*, SAN, posebno izdanje, knjiga CLVII, odelenje drustvenih nauka, Nova serija, knjiga 4, Beograd, 1950, s. 74; Svetozar Radojic, *Staro Srpsko slikarstvo*, Nolit, Beograd, 1966, s. 112; Drançolli, *age.*, s. 79.

that were built during Ottoman Empire rule. However, we can freely say that until today, in the location where first sacral, profane and public objects were built, traces of settlements from earlier periods have not been found. The first Islamic architectural buildings, religious and public alike, which were erected in the location where open market was⁷, started the creation and development of oriental –ottoman urban center. Besides religious monumental buildings, public baths, etc. shops on ground floor or with one floor were erected too. Traditional houses, which were characteristic for the old market (çarshi) complex and old city of Prishtina, were built as well. Amongst the oldest monuments of historical zone of Prishtina were classical Islamic religious objects covered with dome. Çarshi Mosque or Murad Mosque, Fatih Mosque and two double Baths. The Bath of Çarshi Mosque was destroyed and did not survive to this day. The traveler, Evliya Celebi, does not mention the bath during his visit in Prishtina in 1663⁸. Whereas the Old Bath or Fatih Bath still stands but it is not in the initial state. These buildings were donations of Sultan Mehmet II, The Conqueror. They are the first Islamic buildings of ottoman style in territory of medieval Prishtina. With these creations started the development of urban area of Albanian city⁹ during Imperial Ottoman period. This area with oriental impact, namely ottoman style represents the oldest part of Prishtina City. First mosques that were built were in service of ottoman military administration and garrisons¹⁰, but at the same time, they aimed at the islamization of the local people¹¹.

History

This paper is based mainly on the research that I carried out during the inventorying of the mosque. However, I consulted and utilized the literature of other authors who directly or indirectly dealt with the mosque in question¹². The Great Mosque or Imperial Mosque as a religious building is located in the core of historical zone

7 Drançolli, *age.*, s. 128.

8 Evlija Çelebi, *Putopis, Odlomci o Jugoslavenskim zemljama*, çev, Hazim Sabanovic, IRO “Veselin Maslesa”, Sarajevo, 1979, s. 278.

9 Emin Riza, “Vështrim mbi urbanistikën e qytetit shqiptar (Shek. XII- XX)”, *Monumentet 14*, Ministria e Arsimit dhe e Kulturës, Instituti i Monumenteve të Kulturës, Tiranë, 1977, s. 47.

10 Aleksandër Meksi-Gjergj Frashëri, “Arkitektura dhe restaurimi i Xhamisë së Haxhi Ethem Beut në Tiranë”, *Monumentet 14*, Ministria e Arsimit dhe Kulturës, Instituti i Monumenteve të Kulturës, Tiranë, 1977, s. 125.

11 Drançolli, *age.*, s. 100.

12 Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, Mehmet Z. Ibrahimgil, Fejaz Drançolli, Nimetullah Hafiz.

of Prishtina. The neighborhood took the name after its donor: “Neighborhood of Sultan Mehmet, Han Gazi”¹³ In a close distance from the mosque, the Old Hamam, the Hamam of Pasha, a clock tower, a tekke with mausoleum, the Jashar Pasha Mosque, the National Museum of Kosovo and the Çarshi Mosque are located. Today from conurbation remains only a segment of old market, some traditional houses and curvy roads that were characteristic for ottoman urbanism.

According to inscription above the portal, Fatih Mosque was erected in 1461¹⁴. Donator of this mosque as well as number of other mosques in Albanian territories¹⁵ was Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror. In its original state, besides the fountain, the mosque had a madrassa and graveyards. In the mosque’s courtyard were buried most eminent figures and personalities of Prishtina. Gravestones were rich with calligraphy and decorations. The courtyard of the complex is surrounded with stoned walls covered in double-pitched roof. The entrance to the complex is located in southwestern side. The portal constructed with a carved stone covered in arch.

Throughout the course of history, because of time and human factor, mosque sustained damages¹⁶. Damages were in architectural construction as well as in painting. As a result, needed interventions were done in order to protect the mosque. In XVIII-XIX measures in repairs, decorations, paintings in the praying hall and the portico of the object were taken¹⁷. Furthermore, in 1961/62, for rehabilitation, stability of the object it was intervened in the pillars of portico. Whilst in 1964/67, measures were taken for repairing, fixing the upper part of

13 Rizaj, age., s. 246.

14 Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, *Avrupa’da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri Yugoslavya*, III Cild, 3. Kitab, Bilmen Basımevi, İstanbul, 1981, s. 154

15 Meksi, Frashëri, age., s. 125.

16 Tefik Morina, “Monumentet e kulturës islame në Kosovë dhe mbrojtja e tyre gjatë periudhës 1945-1992”, *Feja, Kultura dhe Tradita Islame ndër Shqiptarët (simpozium ndërkombëtar)*, Kryesia e Bashkësisë Islame të Kosovës, Prishtinë, 1995, s. 519

17 Cumhuriyet Başbakanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), 20/1481 (21 Za. 1309/16.06.1892); BOA, *Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi (DH.MKT)*, 357/27 (1312 L.05/01.04.1895); BOA, *Yaveran ve Maiyyet-i Seniyye Erkan-Harbiye Dairesi (Y.PRK.MYD)*, 4/8 (1302 Ra. 04/22.12.1884); BOA, *Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Umum Vilayet (Y.PRK.UM)*, 23/79 (1309 C. 13/13.01.1892); Mehmet Z. İbrahimgil, *Fatih Sultan Mehmed Camii*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yurt Disindaki Türk Kultur Varlıkları Envanteri, Evnanter Numarasi: KVE, KS, PR, 03-10, 19 Temmuz 2001; Mehmet Z. İbrahimgil, Neval Konuk, *Kosova’da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri I*, I. Cilt, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 2006, s. 413.

the minaret, at a height of 17 meters¹⁸. The last restoration in architectonic aspect and painting as well was undertaken in 2009/2013.

Architecture

The Imperial Mosque is a central planed, single-spaced building covered in dome. It is composed of praying hall, portico and a minaret. It is the biggest mosque in Prishtina (24.35 x 20.05)¹⁹. Its compositional scheme has a rectangular base. The praying hall is covered with a large dome. Transition from squared plan to a twelve-angled drum is achieved through pendentives. The cupola is placed on top of the drum thus creating the dome. It is worth mentioning that cupola in Fatih Mosque, as well as in other classical mosques in Kosovo, is shallow and covered in lead. It has a mixed masonry material. It is constructed with fired bricks. In exterior is wrapped with regular rectangular stones.

The praying hall is illuminated by three rows of windows constructed in each side of the mosque. Regarding the structure of masonry and materials, they do not differ from one another. They are identical in ordering, realization technique and artistic values. However, there is an exception in the front wall of the mosque. In this side, there are only two rows of windows. Above each window of the front row, a rounded window is placed. They are symmetrical and constructed in the same height as the second-row windows. First row has quadratic windows with a tympanum above architrave. From the outer side, windows are secured with metallic bars in quadratic shape. Whilst in the inner side with wooden window shutters the second and third row windows are covered with pointed arch. However, the third-row windows are smaller than the second row windows. The mosque is illuminated by twelve windows with pointed arch constructed in drum as well. In total, the sacral building is comprised of thirty-seven windows.

The mosque has an open portico, which is covered with three smaller domes that stand on colonnade of four pillars. The smaller domes, serve as contrast to the bigger central dome affecting the esthetical aspects of the mosque. The portal represents the most monumental part of the building. It is covered with architrave. Above that is the inscription with the date and the name of the donor²⁰.

18 Morina, age., s. 519.

19 Gani Gashi, *Tash- Xhamia e Sulltan Mehmet Fatih II*, Instituti i Kosovës për Mbrojtjen e Monumenteve të Kulturës, Prishtinë, 2012/2013.

20 Nimetullah Hafiz, Mucahit Asim, "Pristine Kitabeleri", *Çevren Dergisi*, sayı 79/80, Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1990, s. 76.

In comparison with other mosques in territory of Kosovo, the portal of Imperial Mosques stands out for its rich constructive, architectonic and decorative elements.

Minaret, as a constructive- compositional element, is constructed on the right side of the praying hall. It is an undivided part with the compositional plan of the mosque. With its slim and polygonal shape, minaret accentuates, raises the value and beauty of the mosque. It is a typical ottoman style minaret, made up of footing, pulpit, transition segment, shaft, balcony, upper shaft and spire with an ornament on top of it.

In the entrance of the mosque, on the both sides of the portal, in slightly raised platform, a *muezzin mahfil* / gallery is constructed. Mahfil is divided by a wooden railings. Above it, standing in a six wooden pillars and supported by the wall of the mosque, a mahfil reserved for females is constructed as well. Two pillars on both ends are embedded to the wall. Pillars are composed of pedestal, shaft and capital. In the center part, above the portal, mahfil is higher than in lateral parts. The mahfil is protected by the same wooden railings as in muezzin mahfil.

Decorations

The interior of the Imperial Mosque is filled with decorations. Paintings realized in secco technique mainly dominate, but there are parts decorated in low relief sculpture as well. Obviously, as in every other mosque, mihrab stands out as the most decorated part of the interior. It is a form of niche and stands on the slightly raised platform. On the niche part is decorated with ottoman style muqarnas realized in stucco. Low relief sculpture is applied in the outer part of the niche, mainly in the frame of the mihrab but on top of niche as well.

On the right side of the mihrab, a minbar is constructed. A minbar is fully constructed from stone and, same as the mihrab and muezzin mahfil, it stands on a slightly raised platform. It has eleven steps and is covered with polygonal spire. It represents one of the elements that preserves the originality from the time of its realization. It is rich with decorations on low relief sculpture like rosette, muqarnas, and geometrical shapes. On the left corner of the mihrab wall rostrum (*kürsü*) is located. It has the shape of a flipped cone. In its lower and upper part of the cone is painted with stylized flowers and profiled with low relief sculpture, whereas, the upper part is decorated with wooden decorative grill.

Besides the historical, constructive-architectonic importance, Fatih Mosque is characterized with its decorative paintings realized in the secco technique.

Paintings are mainly concentrated in the interior of the praying hall, curved triangles of pendentives, around windows, drum, calotte of the central dome and three smaller domes and above the main entrance of the mosque. Colors that dominate the decorations are light blue, red, green, brown, ocher, etc. in the white background. Predominantly dominate floral motifs like stylized flowers, flowers in vase, rosette in the dome, geometrical figures and arabesques. However, there is a depiction of Fatih Mosque in the front wall of the mosque, above the portal. This architectural motif is painted with light blue on white background. Even though, these elements are repeated throughout the interior of the mosque, they are not monotonous. In addition, they enrich and beautify the walls of the mosque. Thus, raising the artistic and aesthetic values of the religious building. As we mentioned above, mosque is complemented with sculpture in low relief as well. Low relief in stone and wood is applied in portal, mihrab, minbar, kürsü, pedestals and capitals of the pillars, doors and minaret. Motifs are mostly of geometrical, floral world and muqarnas in mihrab, minbar and in the balcony of the minaret.

The Current Situation

In its initial state, the complex of the mosque had graves, a fountain and surrounding walls. Today that has changed. The surrounding walls have two doors and the fountain that is from initial state, but after the last restoration, it was covered with a dome that stands on pillars. Meanwhile the graves have been destroyed. Gravestones were rich with decorations and calligraphy. Unfortunately today we have no information regarding the fate of the gravestones. This happened after the Second World War, especially after 1947²¹. A *gasilhane* (a place where the deceased washed and prepared for burial) and two buildings for the needs of Islamic Community of Kosovo were built as well. The buildings were erected in a close distance to the mosque and do not fit with the classical monumental building. The Old Hamam, Inn and clock tower are among the buildings that do not affect the integrity of the Fatih Mosque. There are also other buildings, which do not fit in the environment, that are built within zone that is protected by law.

21 Christine Kohlert, "Zona historike urbane në kontekstin e menaxhimit urban", *Heritage of Prishtina – Remained Heritage of Prishtina*, Cultural Heritage Without Borders, Prishtina, 2008, s. 21; Eliza Hoxha, "Prish-ti-na", *Heritage of Prishtina – Remained Heritage of Prishtina*, Cultural Heritage Without Borders, Prishtina, 2008, s. 9.

Conclusion

In the end we can conclude that The Complex of Fatih Mosque, as the main part of the urban center of the Old Prishtina City of ottoman style, as a whole does not preserve the initial state from of the XV century. Since the time it was built, only the mosque and the restored fountain remain. The mosque, as an Islamic cult object, after the constructive- architectonic restoration measures retains its original forms. However, this does not apply to the eastern façade that has lost sight due to the rise of the road level. Hence, we must be careful for this and other monuments and complexes of the ottoman style and period. We must study, protect, restore, and conserve them with professional scientific criteria. This cultural heritage is not only local or regional. It is also part of the world's cultural- historical treasure, composition protected according to UNESCO international norms, etc.

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APPENDICES

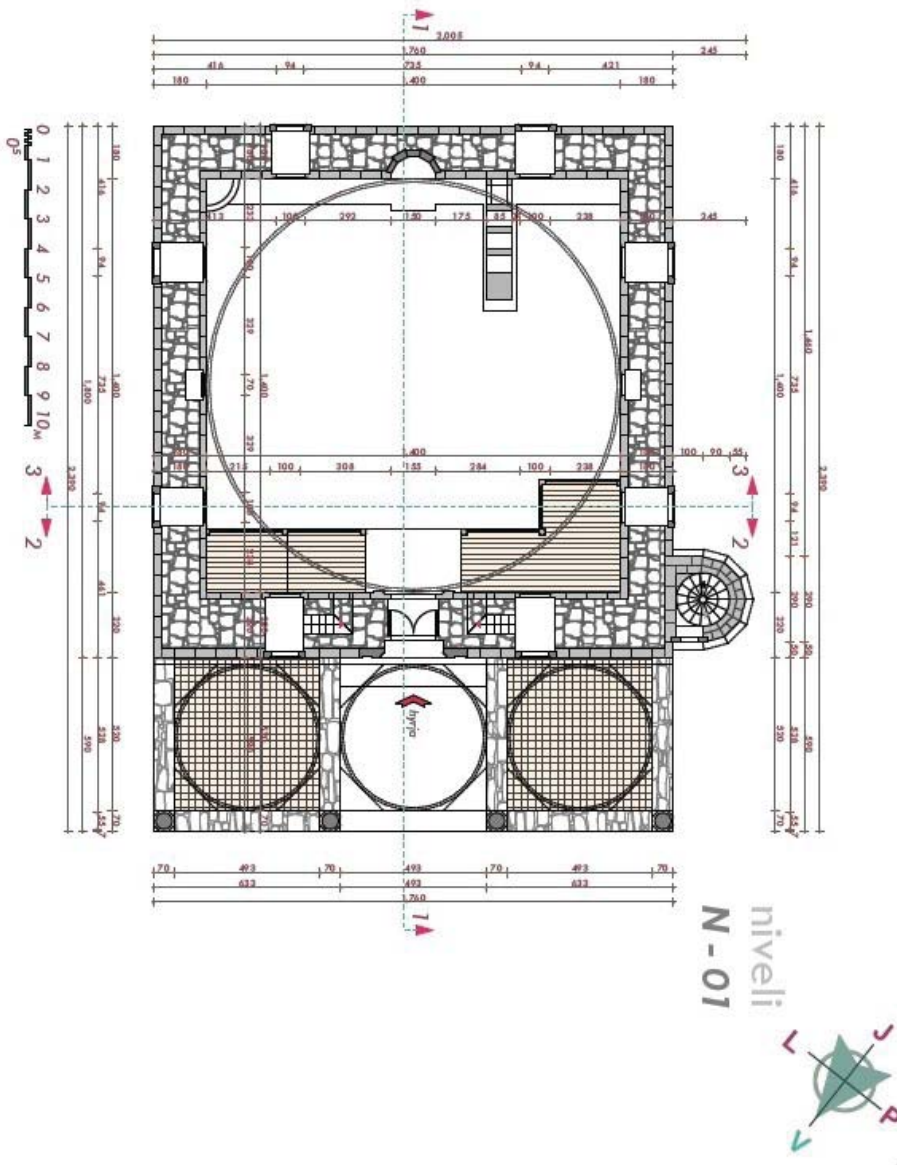


Fig. 1: Gani Gashi, ground plan of Fatih Mosque in Prishtina

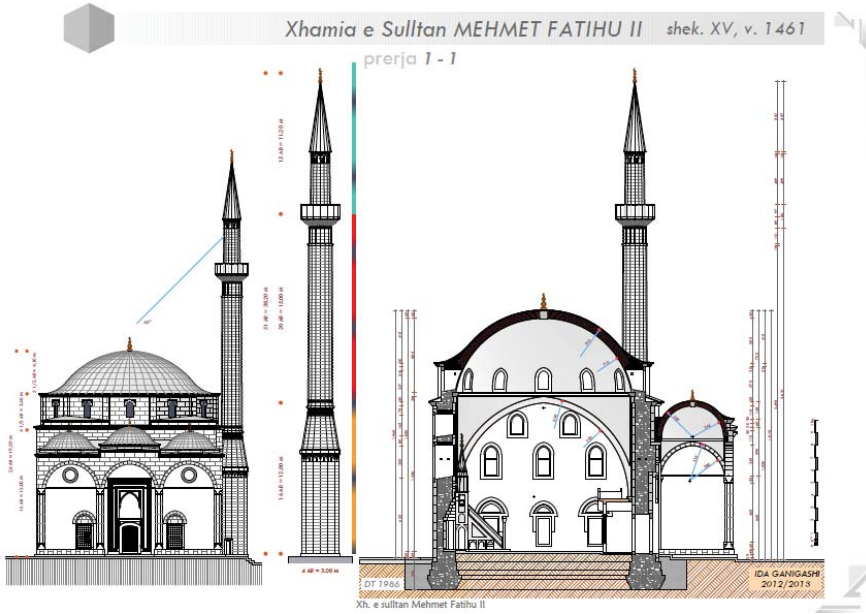


Fig. 2: Gani Gashi, elevation of the principal façade and a cross section of the Fatih Mosque in Prishtina



Fig. 3: Frontal view of the Fatih Mosque in Prishtina



Fig. 4: Southeastern view of the Fatih Mosque in Prishtina



Fig. 5: Portal of the Fatih Mosque in Prishtina



Fig. 6: Interior of the Fatih Mosque in Prishtina



Fig. 7: Mihrab and Minber of the Fatih Mosque in Prishtina



Fig. 8: Mahfil of the Fatih Mosque in Prishtina



Fig. 9: Rosette