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Since ancient times, Kosovo has been a crossroads of the Balkans, where the great religious and cultural currents of the Mediterranean world have met and interacted with each other and with rich indigenous traditions. These cultural interactions have given Kosovo a remarkable legacy, including a still thriving, 600-year-old European Islamic tradition, a part of its heritage that deserves to be better known. The oldest Islamic sites in Kosovo are linked to the memory of Sari Saltuk Baba (d. 1298), a legendary Sufi master from Anatolia, who, accompanied by a group of his dervishes, traveled and preached Islam in the region a century before the arrival of the Ottomans. However, the first major monuments of Islamic religious architecture in Kosovo are connected with the establishment of Ottoman rule in Kosovo in the 1400s.

The Ottoman sultans and their local officials—many among the latter being natives of the region—established pious endowments (*vakuf*, from Arabic *waqf*) for the building of mosques, medresas (theological schools), mektebs (schools for Qur'an-readers), Islamic libraries, charity soup kitchens, bridges, hamams (bath houses), tekkes (dervish lodges of the Sufi lay brotherhoods), and bazaar shops, whose rents supported these charitable and religious institutions.

Notable Islamic monuments from the early Ottoman period in Kosovo include the Mosque of Sultan Murad (built 1389-1440), in Prishtina, the Mosque and hamam of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (1461), in Prishtina, and the Market Mosque (1471), in Peja/Peć—all of them endowed by Ottoman emperors. The Ghazi Ali Beg Mosque (1410) in Vushtrria/Vučitrn, and the mosque and hamam of Hajji Hasan Beg (1462-85), in Peja/Peć, were founded by early Ottoman governors. The Llap Mosque (1470), in Prishtina, was endowed by a pious local Muslim resident.



Prishtina. Mosque of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (1461).



Prizren. The hamam (baths) of Gazi Mehmed Pasha, 1563-1574.

Mosques and other Islamic monuments continued to be built in Kosovo throughout the period of Ottoman rule. Much of this construction took place during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by which time the majority of Kosovo's population, including most Kosovo Albanians but also many Slavs, had become Muslims. Many of them rose to join the Ottoman elite as soldiers, statesmen, Islamic jurists and scholars. Some attained the highest posts. Between 1453 and 1912, close to 40 of the individuals who held the office of grand vizier, the chief minister who ruled the Ottoman Empire in the name of the sultan, were ethnic Albanians.

From the sixteenth century on, the great majority of the patrons who endowed mosques and other Islamic institutions in Kosovo were local people, as were the builders and craftsmen who built them. The styles and methods of construction of Islamic monuments in Kosovo reflected local tastes and building techniques, as well as broader trends in Balkan and Ottoman architecture.

In Kosovo's mountainous west and on the Dukagjin plateau, mosques were often built in the same manner and of the same materials as the kullas, the traditional Albanian stone tower-houses of the region—the house of God taking on the form of the houses of the faithful. Notable examples of this regional style are the Çok Mosque (1580), near Junik, and the Mosque of Deçan (1813). In many mosques and tekkes (dervish lodges) in Kosovo, local craft techniques were employed to good effect in elaborately carved wooden ceilings and other interior decorations, as seen in the Defterdar Mosque (1570) and the Kurshumli Mosque (1577) in Peja/Peć and in the tekke of Sheh Islam Efendi (1881) in Gjilan/Gnjilane.



Dečan. Mosque, built like a kulla; the mosque was burned in the 1999 war.

Islamic religious architecture of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Kosovo was distinguished by the exuberant use of colour and by the murals depicting landscapes, architecture and floral motifs that covered the interior walls of mosques. This painted decoration was a characteristic feature of mosques built during this period, among them the Red Mosque in Peja/Peć (1744) and the splendid Jashar Pasha Mosque in Prishtina (1834). Lavish mural paintings were also used to decorate older mosques that were renovated at this time, such as the Hadum Mosque in Gjakova/Đakovica (built 1592-95, renovated in 1842), the Sinan Pasha Mosque in Prizren (built 1615, renovated in the early 19th century), and the Bazaar Mosque in Peja (built 1471, renovated by Haxhi Zeka in the late 19th century).



Prizren: Bird's-eye view of the Sinan Pasha Mosque (1615).



Prizren: Mural paintings in the Sinan Pasha Mosque.

The first Balkan War (1912) brought an end to the long centuries of Ottoman rule in Kosovo, which was partitioned between Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro. Following the end of the First World War, the two kingdoms merged to form a new state, which in 1929 was renamed Yugoslavia. During the 70 years that followed, not very many mosques were built in Kosovo and some were destroyed or seized by the authorities.

At the end of Ottoman rule in 1912, Prishtina had 18 mosques. At the end of World War II in 1945, there were still 16 mosques left. The new communist Yugoslav regime that took power after the war closed all but five of the city's mosques, converting them into warehouses and other secular uses. As part of a socialist urban redesign of the centre of Prishtina in the 1950s, three historic mosques were ordered razed by the authorities, among them the Llokaç Mosque (built 1551). Some of the city's closed mosques were allowed to reopen for worship during the era of political liberalization in the 1970s and early 1980s,

but no new mosques were built in Prishtina between 1912 and the end of the twentieth century.



Prizren. The minaret of the torn-down Arasta Mosque.

Mosques and other Islamic heritage sites elsewhere in Kosovo did not fare significantly better during the communist period. In the centre of Prizren, the historic Arasta Mosque (built 1594) was torn down in 1963 to make way for a new post office and market stalls; only its minaret was left standing, as a 'civic monument'. In Peja/Peć, the sixteenth-century Kurshumli Mosque was closed after the end of the Second World War and turned into an arms depot for the Yugoslav army. It was returned to worship after a lapse of twenty years in 1965. In the post-war years, the regime also suppressed Islamic religious education and seized the property of the pious endowments that had sustained the mosques and their activities.

However, some mosques continued to be built in villages, remote from the centres of power. About two dozen of the mosques documented in this volume were built between 1945 and 1989. Although the 1990s in Kosovo were years of severe repression in most respects, communist-era restrictions on the building and repair of mosques were eased somewhat during this final decade of Belgrade's rule, at least outside of the major cities. Close to 20 of the mosques listed in this volume were built or reconstructed in the 1990s. In some cases, unfortunately, this new building activity also involved damage or destruction of Islamic heritage.

More than two-thirds of the 560 active mosques in Kosovo on the eve of the 1998-1999 war were buildings dating from the Ottoman era. Many of these were monuments of historical and architectural significance. However, this part of

Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage received relatively little attention from the state authorities charged with the protection of monuments.

Between 1947 and 1990, a total of 425 monuments and sites in Kosovo were officially designated for state protection. These included 96 archaeological sites, 16 cemeteries, 116 secular buildings and monuments, and 174 religious sites. Of the last category, 139 were Orthodox churches or monasteries, while only 32 Islamic religious monuments had been listed for protection. Since listed sites received priority in attention and in conservation funding from state agencies, this meant that by the 1990s much of Kosovo's Islamic built heritage was in a dilapidated state, after decades of neglect. In practice, the authorities not only failed to provide the funds and expertise needed for the preservation of these historic houses of worship, they allowed even listed Islamic monuments to be altered or demolished without intervening.

The years of peacetime neglect were followed by the massive wartime destruction of Kosovo's Islamic religious heritage in 1998-1999. As has been documented in this book, roughly 40 percent of Kosovo's 560 mosques were damaged or destroyed during the war.



Retia/Retimlje. Village mosque blown up by Serbian forces, March 1999.

The damage in most cases was clearly the result of deliberate attacks directed against the mosques. There is evidence of explosives planted in the mosque or inside the minaret, of artillery projectiles aimed at the minaret, and of mosques set ablaze. In some places, the mosque was the only building in the vicinity that had been singled out for attack. More often, the destruction of a mosque was accompanied by the burning of the surrounding homes of the local Albanian residents. The devastation of Islamic sacral sites was widespread and systematic, with few areas of Kosovo left untouched.



Peja/Peć. The Market Mosque (1471), torched by Serbian policemen, June 1999.

Among the worst hit was the northwestern region of Peja/Peć, where every one of 49 Islamic sites was attacked in 1998 and 1999. Among the sites targeted were the region's 36 mosques (half of them dating from the 15th-18th centuries), the offices, archives and library of the Islamic Community Council of Peja, a historic medresa, a 15th-century hamam (Turkish baths), 9 schools for Qur'an readers (mekteb), a dervish lodge (tekke), and several mosque libraries.



Peja/Peć. Red Mosque (1755), burned by Serbian troops and police March 1999

In some places, those responsible for these attacks had left behind their “signatures”— in the form of anti-Albanian and anti-Islamic graffiti in Serbian scrawled on mosque walls, or in the deliberate desecration of Islamic sacred scriptures, torn apart by hand, defiled and burned. Examples of this sort could be seen in the Gjylfatyn Mosque in Peja, the Mosque of Carraleva/Crnoljevo, the Mosque of Livoç i Poshtëm/Donji Livoč, and the Mosque of Stanofc i Poshtëm, and in a number of other mosques.



Carraleva/Crnoljevo. Torn-up and desecrated Qur’ans in the village mosque.

Of the 218 mosques and 11 tekkes in Kosovo that were destroyed or damaged during the war, 22 mosques and 8 tekkes were in the most severe damage categories. Among these, 13 mosques and 5 tekkes were completely razed, the ruins levelled by bulldozer; 9 mosques and 3 tekkes were reduced to rubble, but the ruins were not bulldozed. Among examples of completely levelled Islamic houses of worship are the Bazaar Mosque (built 1761-62; renewed 1878) in Vushtrria/Vučitrn, the Ibër Mosque (built 1878) in Mitrovica, the Mosque of Halil Efendi in Dobërçan/Dobrčane (1526), the Mosque of Loxha (1900), and the historic Bektashi tekke in Gjakova/Đakovica (1790).



Vushtrria. Gazi Ali Beg Mosque (1410), its minaret blown away by a tank cannon



Mushtisht/Mušutište. Mosque of Hasan Pasha (1702). Blown up in April 1999.

An additional 95 mosques suffered lesser degrees of damage, ranging from shell holes in the walls, through the roof or in the shaft of the minaret, to vandalism, including fires set inside the mosque, smashed-up interior furnishings, and the desecration of sacred scriptures.

A total of 31 mosques and 2 tekkes (dervish lodges) were attacked by Serb forces during the first year of the war, in the spring and summer of 1998. Two-thirds of these religious buildings were burned down, blown up or otherwise destroyed or seriously damaged. Ten of the mosques that were damaged during 1998 were subjected to repeat attacks and further damage during the spring of 1999. During the second year of the war in 1999, a total of 197 mosques and 9 tekkes in Kosovo were damaged or destroyed by Serb forces. One mosque, in the village of Jabllanica (Prizren region), had its roof partly destroyed by a NATO air strike in the spring of 1999. Otherwise, the destruction of mosques and of other Islamic heritage in Kosovo during the war was entirely attributable to attacks from the ground, carried out by Serbian troops, police and paramilitaries, and in some cases by Serb civilians.



Mitrovica. Tekke (dervish lodge) of Sheh Fejzullah. Destroyed in spring 1999.

The destruction also encompassed the written record of Islamic religious and cultural life in Kosovo. The Central Historical Archives of the Islamic Community of Kosovo were burned by Serbian police in June 1999, hours before the arrival of the first NATO troops in Prishtina. Six of the regional archives of the Islamic Community were also attacked and wholly or partially destroyed, among them the archives of the Islamic Community Councils in Peja/Peć, Gjakova/Đakovica, Glogoc/Glogovac, Lipjan, Peja/Peć, Skenderaj/Srbica, and Suhareka.

Kosovo's Islamic religious libraries were also singled out for destruction. Notable losses include the manuscripts and old books of the library of Hadum Syleiman Efendi in Gjakova/Đakovica, founded in 1595 and burned in 1999, as well as the libraries of dervish lodges in Gjakova/Đakovica, Mitrovica and Peja/Peć, also destroyed in 1999. However, the losses go far beyond this. Many old mosques in Kosovo had been endowed with collections of Qur'an manuscripts and Islamic religious books that were destroyed or damaged in 1998-1999.



Prishtina. Historical Archive of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), torched by Serbian police on 13 June 1999.

Among the historic centers of Islamic culture in Kosovo, only the city of Prizren escaped largely unscathed. The only Islamic monument destroyed in Prizren was a small building, part of the Medresa of Ghazi Mehmed Pasha, in which the League of Prizren, a group of Albanian civic leaders campaigning for autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, met in 1878. The building, which housed a memorial museum of the nineteenth-century Albanian national revival, was destroyed by Serbian police in March 1999.

Remarkably, not a single Serb Orthodox church or monastery in Kosovo was damaged or destroyed by Albanians during the 1998-1999 conflict.

Unfortunately that changed after the end of the war, as thousands of Albanian refugees who had been forced out of Kosovo during the war returned to their burned-out home towns and villages. Following the end of hostilities in June 1999, dozens of Serb Orthodox churches and monasteries were damaged in revenge attacks. Some 40 Serb Orthodox sites were vandalized, while another 40 suffered serious structural damage or were destroyed completely. Many of these buildings were village churches, some of them built during the previous decade. But about 15 to 20 of the destroyed churches dated from the medieval period.



Mushtisht/Mušutište. Church of the Holy Virgin Odigitria (1315), before and after it was destroyed by returning Kosovo Albanians in July 1999.

By the end of the summer of 1999, as a result of the efforts of KFOR and the UN administration to restore order, and in response to public appeals by Kosovo Albanian political and religious leaders, attacks on Serb Orthodox religious sites largely ceased.

This book is an attempt to document, to the extent possible, the Islamic sacral heritage of Kosovo that was lost during the 1998-1999 war. As Kosovo and its people come to terms with the painful memories of the recent past and work towards a common future it is well to recall that, for most of Kosovo's long history, houses of worship were protected by all communities and had traditionally been held immune from personal and communal vendettas. The rich cultural heritage that remains in Kosovo, despite the ravages of time and the destruction of war, is the common patrimony of all of Kosovo's people. It is up to them, as it was up to their forefathers, to jointly value and preserve it for future generations.

András Riedlmayer directs the Documentation Centre for Islamic Architecture of the Aga Khan Program at Harvard University. In 1999-2001, Riedlmayer and his colleague Andrew Herscher, an architect and architectural historian, conducted a

post-war field survey of cultural heritage in Kosovo. The results of the field survey were submitted to the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and to the UN war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). He has since testified about these findings as an expert witness at the war crimes trial of former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević and in several other cases before the ICTY.