



The Handanija Mosque



Restoration/conservation of wooden boards



Introduction

At the session held from 15 to 21 March 2005, the Commission to Preserve National Monuments adopted a decision whereby the architectural ensemble of Handanija Mosque (Handan-Bey, Hajdar Cehaja or Caršija Mosque) in Prusac was designated a National Monument of Bosnia-Herzegovina¹.

The Handanija Mosque restoration works were still ongoing at the time of designation. The works were completed in October 2005, when the Mosque was re-inaugurated.

In accordance with the fourth article of the Commission's decision, which states that "the painted decoration in the interior of the mosque shall be recorded, restored and conserved", the foundation Cultural Heritage without Borders assumed responsibility for completing this part of the restoration of the interior of the Mosque.

Through an invitation for applications, Mr Nihad Cengic, a Conservator of Works of Art, was chosen to implement the works.

The works lasted from May to October 2006.

¹Part of the text was taken from the decision on designation. The text is taken from the Commission to Preserve National Monuments web page, www.aneks8komisija.com.ba

History of the Handanija Mosque

The mosque is located in the centre of the village, not far from the medieval fortress on the nearby hill. This is the starting point for the annual pilgrimage known as Ajvatovica. Throughout its history the mosque has been a centre of cultural and religious life in the city of Prusac.

The Handanija Mosque represents an important example of Bosnia-Herzegovinian islamic heritage due to the numerous original 17th century features inside and to its long cultural and religious history.

The mosque has a rectangular floor plan, measuring 16.30 m x 12.70 m, with the minaret partially built into the southeast wall. The interior space is a single room with a wooden dome covered by a hipped roof. The building is built of stone, using four types of limestone. The walls are plastered and whitewashed (with the exception of the window architraves).

The bases of the columns are large with subtly decorated rounded corners. The capital, shaft and base of the columns are carved from one piece of stone. The strong, low proportions of the porch lack the slender elegance found in some other contemporary mosques. This is an expression of regional classical mosque architecture, and can be





The Handanija Mosque after the destruction 1992–1995.

found in other mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina, such as Travnik or Stolac, though the proportions of the Handanija arcade are probably the least slender.

The ceiling is decorated with edge boards with carved wooden lily decorations, while semicircular mouldings nailed onto

the ceiling boards form an orthogonal pattern covering the entire ceiling. It is painted in two colours: brick red and spruce green.

The ceilings above and below the mahvil (gallery) are flat, decorated in the same way as the dome with wooden boards, with an orthogonal pattern of mouldings, but



The Handanija Mosque after the restoration, 2005.



The entrance porch to the Mosque.

with additional mouldings that form a star pattern on the ceiling above the entrance. Inside, the minbar (pulpit) and the mihrab (niche) dominate the space. The structure of the mihrab is considered to be one of the most beautiful in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with its muqarnas (carved stone decoration) in

seven layers of stone. The Handanija Mosque was damaged during the war in 1993. Due to several direct hits, its walls, roof and minaret suffered severe damage. The roof construction was completely destroyed, while the rest of the structure was partially damaged.

Restoration/conservation of the decorated wooden edge boards on the ceiling of Handanija Mosque Gallery

Description of the decoration

The decoration belongs to the period of high Ottoman classicism, the peak of artistic expression in the 16th and the first half of the 17th century in the Ottoman Empire. They are the original and authentic interior of the mosque. Without any doubt, the artistic expression on the boards of the Handanija Mosque belongs to an artist who was a professional in his field.

This can be concluded from the complex scale of colours that the artist used in his work. After the first cleaning, it was possible to distinguish nine colours in the range, made from five pigments: based black, white, red minio and terra d'ombra (fine earth) in its natural form and as refined burnt umber.

The master who created this was an educated calligraphist. When looking at the boards from the distance (the original position of the boards where a human being

looks at them from the floor upwards are at a height of 3 m) the details cannot be seen when the board is on the ceiling, which indicates that the master was not skilled for “monumental” drawings.

It is also interesting to note that very similar decoration was found on the destroyed Aladža Mosque in Foca, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

It might seem surprising to find this decoration in such a distant province of the Ottoman Empire, but looking into chronicles and archives it is obvious that Prusac was a very important centre of cultural and religious life in 17th and 18th century Bosnia².

Conservation/restoration work on the boards

The decoration was created on wooden boards, which were hand made, and varies in thickness between 12 mm and 15 mm.

² Please see the “Restoration of Handanija Mosque” brochure published by CHwB.



The original board with the several layers of intervention.



The drawing of the decoration.



On the reverse side of some of the boards, there are traces of burning, while the decorated surface was treated several times with different chromatics as a part of the regular maintenance of the interior. One of the pigments found while cleaning was a bright yellow on the flowers, while heavy alkyd red paint was found filling the background of the drawing. Beside this, the edges were painted carelessly with layers of green paint which was used in previous restoration works in the interior of the mosque.

The boards were suffering from cracks, and some of the wood-knots had fallen

from their original positions. The treatment of wood-knots was originally done using a piece of paper, that was glued on from the top of the knot in order to get a smooth and even equal paint surface (as knots are darker than the wood itself), With a combined chemical and mechanical cleaning technique the green paint from the edges was removed, while the surface dirt was removed with light ammonia solution. Some of the boards were damaged in a way that the pieces of wood were attached to the old boards.

Although the wooden base had become



The new and authentic paint, a detail.



The restored authentic boards (left). Authentic boards before restoration (right).



The iron nails from 17th century used when mantling the boards.



The final outcome.

weak, it had not lost its structural flexibility, and therefore inserting wooden pieces and filling the cracks proved to be a suitable way of structural repair. The use of synthetic micro consolidation was avoided entirely.

Structurally and conservation-wise, the boards are stable. However in the future they should not be exposed to extreme hydro or thermal shocks. This is guaranteed by the present position of the boards in the interior of the building.

The colour range of tempera for recon-

struction is identical to the authentic colour range.

While working on the drawings, the ambition has been to do so in the same manner as the old master, with composed improvised and spontaneous moves, where elements of the drawing fill the space.

With the works completed, the aesthetic function of the ceiling of the mahvil (gallery) in Handanija Mosque has been achieved once again.

Cultural Heritage without Borders

Cultural Heritage without Borders was founded in 1995 as an independent Swedish non-governmental organisation to work in the spirit of the 1954 Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, natural catastrophes, neglect, poverty or political and social conflicts.

Rebuilding and protection of cultural symbols is one of the conditions for people to feel at home and secure, especially after a war or conflict waged on ethnic grounds. Working with cultural heritage helps victimised groups strengthen

and regain their sense of pride. The aim has been to integrate restoration of cultural property into the regular emergency relief work and development co-operation and thereby to improve the conditions for reconciliation and poverty reduction.

Most of the work carried out by Cultural Heritage without Borders has been in the former Yugoslavia with building restoration, museum developments and work exchanges.

Financial support comes mainly from Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency).

Board and secretariat

Board

Chairman:
Andreas Ådahl,
Ambassador

Vice-chairman:
Andreas Heymowski,
Professor, architect

Treasurer:
Sven-Erik Köhlin,
Civil engineer

Secretary:
Per Kåks,
Special expert

Board members:
Birgitta Hoberg,
Senior officer (RAÅ)
Christian Laine,
Architect
Ing-Marie Munktell,
Museum Director
Johan Mårtelius,
Professor architect,
Hans Sandström,
Architect, senior officer (RAÅ)

Co-opted members:
Margareta Biörnstad,
former Head of the
National Heritage Board (RAÅ)
Bengt O. H. Johansson,
Professor, former chairman
Jan-Krister Boman,
Architect

Secretariat

Cultural Heritage without
Borders
Box 6204,
102 34 Stockholm
Tel: +46 8 32 20 71
E-mail: info@chwb.org
Website: www.chwb.org

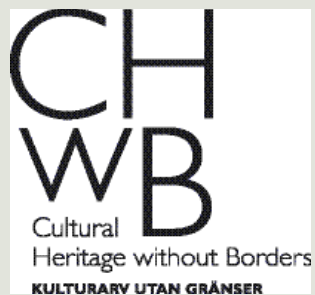
Office in Bosnia-Herzegovina
www.chwb.org/bih/

Office in Kosovo
www.chwb.org/kosovo/

Secretary General:
Per Arne Ströberg

“Damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world.”

Hague Convention, 1954



Address Box 6204, 102 34 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel +46 8 32 20 71 **E-mail** info@chwb.org **Internet** www.chwb.org