

# MONUMENTS OF ISLAMIC CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION IN SHTIP

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper makes reference to the Islamic cultural and civilization heritage on the territory of the city Shtip.*

*Here, we primarily refer to the Bezisten, the city's clock tower and Husa Medin-Pasha mosque, which among the Christian population is known as the Church of St. Ilija. The author of the paper will take into consideration the historical data related to these culturally valuable monuments, the socio-economic and other conditions regarding their creation, their specifics and what separates them from other structures from this period, their current condition, their preservation and restoration i.e. projects and activities undertaken for that purpose.*

*These buildings are a unique monument of Islamic culture and civilization on the Balkan, but at the same time they are a monument of coexistence in this region. They are testimonies of multicultural coexistence in this region, and in that context we would point out the Husa Medin-Pasha mosque, which Christians still respect and attend on the holiday St. Ilija. Particularly strong is the faith of Macedonian women eager to give birth in the power of this ancient monument.*

*Key words: heritage, Islam, culture, civilization, monuments.*

## ÖZET

*Bu çalışma İştup yöresinde İslam kültürü ve medeniyetinden miras kalan eserler üzeredir. Burada öncelikle kapalı çarşı (Bezistan) olmak üzere, Şehrin saat kulesi ve Hüsameddin Paşa Camii, Hristiyanlar halkı arasında Aya Ilija Kilisesi olarak bilinmektedir. Makalemizde, bu eserlerin tahrisel özelliklerini ve dönemin diğer binaların mevcut durumu, koruma ve restorasyonu, bu değerli kültür eserlerin yaşatılabilmesi için sosyo-ekonomik ve diğer koşullara bağlı tarihsel verileri ele alacak veya projeler ve faaliyetler yapılması üstlenilmesi hedeflenmektedir.*

*Bu tür binalar Balkanlar'da İslam kültürü ve medeniyetinin has bir özelliğidir, aynı zamanda bu eserler bölgede çok kültürlü bir birlikteliğin yaşama ifadesidir. Dolayısıyla bu bölgede ki birlikteliğin kanıtı yine Hüsameddin Paşa Camii ki hala Hristiyanlar bu camii Aya Ilija Kilisesi olarak ziyaret edip, özellikle de Makedon kadınların doğum vermek için oraya gidip kendi inandıkları ahşap yapı bir antik anıt üzerine dualarını yapıyorlar.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler: miras, İslam, kültür, medeniyet, anıtlar.*

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## Introduction

"With the arrival of the Turks, the process of urbanization was developing very fast. Already in the fifteenth, and particularly in the sixteenth century administrative and political, religious and educational centers have already been formed and developed, which thanks to the overall convenient situation in the growing Kingdom, grew into bigger trade and financial centers, craft and shopping centers and centers of various Islamic institutions."<sup>3</sup> "The cities gain more and more oriental urban characteristics. Special groups of structures with social purposes were created, functionally grouped into special centers that occupy important positions in the urban core of the city."<sup>4</sup> In fact, "the impact of Islamic culture on Macedonian soil has a great stake in shaping the physiognomy of the cities. In all Islamic countries, even in the Ottoman Empire the architecture was most developed branch of art. Builders of monumental buildings (...) were generally Ottoman architects, who made the blueprints and probably were involved in their construction. Most of the builders remained anonymous which makes the research for the involvement of individuals more difficult even when it comes to professionals of the highest value."<sup>5</sup> However, "from the very beginning of Ottoman rule, in the emerging opportunities, in the enforcement of a nation, various secular and sacrilegious objects that were used for the needs of the conquerors were built."<sup>6</sup>

### Islamic monuments in Shtip, Macedonia

This paper makes reference to the Islamic civilization and cultural heritage on the territory of Shtip. "Shtip represented an important religious, economic and administrative center in northeastern Macedonia, on the relation between Vardar, Kyustendil and Gorna Dzumaja, i.e. it was the main meridian thoroughfare connecting Thessaloniki and Serres with Belgrade, Sarajevo and Kostajnica, i.e. Central Europe. Also, Shtip was the transverse road, which, from Western Macedonia through Gradsko and Shtip, led to

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<sup>3</sup> *Islamske institucije i šerijatsko sudstvo u Štipu*, Rejhan Mandak, diplomski trud, odbranet na Fakultetot za islamski nauki-Saraevo, 2003 god, str.14.

<sup>4</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Islamska arhitektura*, vo kn. Umetnichkoto bogatstvo, Skopje, Makedonska kniga, 1984, str.238

<sup>5</sup> Risto Petkov, *Islamska arhitektura*, Husa Medin – Pasha djamija, Delo 74, Shtip, str. 546.

<sup>6</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Islamska arhitektura*, vo kn. Umetnichkoto bogatstvo, Skopje, Makedonska kniga, 1984, str.238

Sophia, i.e. it connected with the Constantinople road."<sup>7</sup> "There are four hundred and fifty guild and craft shops. "<sup>8</sup> "This location offered Shtip favorable conditions for the development and establishment of seats of numerous religious and other institutions with a number of religious officials from the Ottoman state."<sup>9</sup>

Here, we mainly refer to the Bezisten, the city's clock tower, as well as the Husa Medin-Pasha mosque, which among the Christian population is known as the Church of St. Ilija.

"The census books from 1570 give a complete image of the wakufs in Shtip in which nearly 80 wakufs are registered. They were sacred public and private facilities (shops, warehouses, lots, watermills, vineyards) and other real estate."<sup>10</sup> The founders of the wakufs were the numerous wealthy merchants and craftsmen. They also were the most prestigious people in the city. "They were trying to ensure their maintenance and normal functioning, and for that the most suitable were the craft and retail stores that were part of some establishment."<sup>11</sup> Apart from these, the municipality of Shtip also had family wakufs. The most known founders of such establishments were the keeper of the Shtip fortress – Ibrahim-aga and Mehrum Hadji Behadir. The center of the overall economic activity was the city's bazaar, where a number of trade and craft facilities, inns, shops, taverns and the like were situated.

In fact, in proportion to the establishment and spread of the wakufs, the number of the trade facilities in the city simultaneously increased. Thus, while in 1519 there were only 45 wakuf shops in Shtip, in 1530 their number increased to 70, only in 1570 to become around 140. Such a great number of wakufs established by numerous benefactors, and which served to maintain the mosques, madrassas, tekkes, inns, etc., clearly show that Shtip became an important trade and religious center at that time. Thus, Shtip developed in an Islamic and Oriental spirit which had a major role on the Turkish colonization and Islamisation of the native people. For these reasons, it was a period of

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<sup>7</sup> Ilija Petrushevski, *Geografski razgledi*, Skopje, 1975, str.139.

<sup>8</sup> Risto Petkov, *Islamska arhitektura*, Husa Medin – Pasha djamija, Delo 74, Shtip, str.547.

<sup>9</sup> *Islamske institucije i šerijatsko sudstvo u Štipu*, Rejhan Mandak, diplomski trud, odbranet na Fakultetot za islamski nauki-Saraevo, 2003 god, str.14.

<sup>10</sup> The same, p.14.

<sup>11</sup> The same, p.15.

intensive construction and growth of mosques, which were the most important buildings of that era as a symbol of the faith of the Ottoman conquerors towards which all Muslims turned.

According to documented data, "the mosques were built by the most prestigious Turkish conquerors - pashas and beys and occupied the most important locations, often dominant ones, in the neighborhoods ... In the beginning, the Turks converted the existing Christian churches into mosques, as it is the case with the church St. Sofia in Ohrid, and then they even started to build new ones."<sup>12</sup>

The mosques were built by the same rules of construction that have been accepted in all Islamic countries. In Shtip, the most accepted and enforced was the single room sub-dome mosque with porch that was aslant with three domes, with square or rectangular base. The census books clearly show that almost every neighborhood had its own mosque according which it was given its name. The famous Turkish travel books writer Evlija Chelebija, during his stay in Shtip in 1662, in his *Sejahet - nami* wrote that the city Shtip has 24 mosques, and then in detail he stated their names by the neighborhood in which they were built, as well as a brief description of some of them. Moreover, he mentions: Fethija mosque which was located under the fortress Isar and was originally a church, but Ali-bey turned it into a mosque. However, it functioned as a mosque until 1915, and today it is under the authority of the MOC, as a church of St. Arhangel Mihail.

Then, Isak Chelebi also mentions and the Middle mosque (Orta mosque), known as the Kurshumli mosque, which was tear down in 1980, then Husa Medin-Pasha mosque and describes it: "It is an artistically built mosque with a minaret build from stone. It is covered with lead and lies on the top of a hill. "This mosque exists till this day. It is protected as a cultural monument. At the same time, precisely in 1994, with a resolution it was put under the protection of the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments of Shtip, but with a resolution in the Official Gazette no.55 from May, 3 2006, it was

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<sup>12</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Islamska arhitektura*, vo kn.Umetnichkoto bogatstvo na Makedonija, Skopje, Makedonska kniga, 1984, str.240

awarded to the Muslim religious community. However, among the population in Shtip there is a legend which tells that on the site of Husan Medin-Pasha mosque a church existed dedicated to St. Ilija, although till this day no source data were found that would confirm this legend. If it did exist, this church was built during the XIII-XIV century, but it was torn down in the first decades after the occupation of the country. Perhaps the main reason for this attitude towards the existence of the church, according to the statements of Prof. Kosta Balabanov, PhD, was her location that dominated over the city. However, this mosque is built on a dominant hillside in the central part of the city, on the left side of the river Otinja. This mosque is a unique monument of Islamic culture and civilization on the Balkan, but at the same time it is a monument of the coexistence in this region. It is a testament of the multicultural coexistence in this region because this building is still visited by Christians on the holiday St. Ilija. Especially strong is the faith of Macedonian women eager to give birth in the powers of this ancient monument (Fig.1).

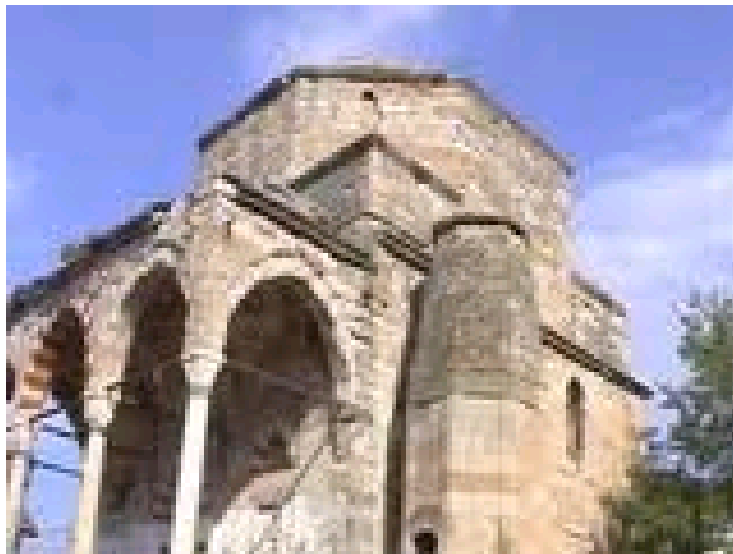


Fig.1 Husa Medin-Pasha mosque

“The name of Husa Medin-Pasha is bound to the construction of an hamam in the city, whose walls are preserved till this day.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dimitar Kjornakov, *Bezistenot vo Shtip*, vo kn. *Spomenici na kulturata na Makedonija*, Mislra, Skopje, 1980, str.126.

Another mosque which still exists in the area of Shtip is the **Kadin Ana mosque**, located in the city center, near the National Theatre. It is of recent date and is thought to have been built in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then it has often been restored, so it has lost its original shape. This mosque still has not lost its function. It has its own hamam and is visited by the Muslim population of the city and the surrounding area (Fig. 2).



Fig.2 Kadin Ana mosque

**Other mosques** existed on the territory of Shtip, such as: Shadrvan mosque, which was located where the town square is today and was destroyed during World War II, Sultan Murad mosque, Kajalar mosque, Tabag-han mosque and Ashaj Tekje mosque. Today on the site of the mosque Ashaj tekje exists only the fountain that was an integral part of that mosque. It is still functional among the population living in that part of the city. According to written data, between the World War I and II seven mosques existed of which today remain only two – Husa Medin-Pasha mosque and Kadin Ana mosque.

**The Bezisten** is another impressive work that still exists in Shtip, despite the numerous inns, madrasas and maktabas, about which data also exists. "The Bezistens served as shops for precious goods and were well protected. Beside them, usually in wood and mud construction, shops were built where trade developed."<sup>14</sup> "The bezistens

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<sup>14</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Islamska arhitektura*, vo kn. Umetnichkoto bogatstvo, Skopje, Makedonska kniga, 1984, str.242.

can be divided into two types by their spatial construction: with a single internal space, as for example the Bezisten in Stip, or with a system of multiple internal communications around which shops are arranged (The Bezisten in Bitola). These facilities were well protected."<sup>15</sup>

"In Turkish times the Bezisten served as the main bazaar where various types of cloths were sold, hence his name arises."<sup>16</sup>

This is how Evlija Chelebija describes the Bezisten and its immediate surrounding: "Between the beautiful bazaar and the Kjachuk Emir-sultan's inn is a large paved area and in its middle a pool is located, where the water constantly changes, so that from its fountain and faucets, which look like a dragon, flows clear water that runs into that pool. It is a clean and artistically constructed pool area 10x10 m ... (...) ...Near this place is a bezisten with three domes covered with lead. At both ends of the bezisten there are iron doors."<sup>17</sup>

The Bezisten is a stone building with harmonious proportions, located in the city center, built in 1662 and served as the main bazaar for selling luxury and precious goods. The Bezisten was built with processed stone on the inside and from the outside with this kind of stone were built just the corners, arches and partis around the entrances. The wall canvases are made from half-chiseled and crushed stone. According to the external dimensions, it is a single space divided into three rectangular areas, separated from each other by columns that have two broken arches. Because of the great historical significance as well as the opportunity the space offers in 1962 it was turned into a permanent art gallery of Macedonian Contemporary Art. The Bezisten is poorly lit. Poorly lit are the corner spaces while the central part is lighted by six windows installed in the dome itself (Fig. 3).

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<sup>15</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Arhitektonskoto tvoreshtvo vo Makedonija za vreme na tursko-osmanliskoto vladeenje*, vo kn. Makedonskata akademija na naukite i umetnostite, Skopje, 2000, str.169.

<sup>16</sup> Dimitar Kjornakov, *Bezistenot vo Shtip*, vo kn.Spomenici na kulturata na Makedonija, Misla, Skopje, 1980, str.124.

<sup>17</sup> Risto Petkov, *Islamska arhitektura*, Husa Medin-pasha djamija, Delo 74, Shtip, str.547.



The Turks also built clock towers "as significant vertical accents located in the heart of the neighborhoods or at a dominant location".<sup>18</sup> The clock tower is also located in the central part of the city, adjacent to the part which the citizens of Stip call "Gorno maalo (Upper neighborhood)." It has a square base measuring 6.7 X 6.7 m<sup>2</sup>. This facility was built of carved and crushed stone with an original purpose as a building for living and defense, i.e. it was a Turkish feudal bey tower. It is believed to have been built in the second half of the 16th century, precisely in 1650, and in the 19th century it was transformed into a clock tower with an added room for the mechanism of the clock and a bell tower. The reconstruction is planned to return the authentic look of the tower. Three clocks will be set. Returning it to the original form would mean an upgrade of the Clock Tower for 11.80 meters, it will reach its original height of 29.65 meters (Fig. 4). Part of the house was demolished in 1934 by the government at the time. History says that the tower was built by a Turkish bey who lived in Shtip but his name was not recorded. He built the tower to protect his family in times of crisis. Regarding this bey and the Tower, a legend exists among the population in Shtip, which the recently passed away citizen from Shtip who took care of maintaining the clock, known as Risto the teacher among the citizens of Shtip, with his handwriting wrote it on an old stone tower wall. It says: "The tower dates back from 1650. Some Turkish bey fell in love with the beautiful Anka from Shtip. He wanted to Islamize her and was very persistent in it. She, in order to make him

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<sup>18</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Arhitektonskoto tvoreshtvo vo Makedonija za vreme na tursko-osmanliskoto vladeenje*, vo kn. *Arhitekturata na pochvata na Makedonija*, Makedonskata akademija na naukite i umetnostite, Skopje, 2000, str.169.



give up, once said that she will do it, but he in return will give the city, as a token, for example, a tower that will be the city's clock. Anka thought that the bey will give up on her love. However, the Turk, being head over hills in love with the beautiful Anka, in quite a short time built the tower and took the young citizen of Shtip away", says the legend about the Clock Tower in Shtip. The object had an embrasure and a balcony. The Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments and the museum of Shtip, point out that in one month the conservation, restoration and reconstruction of the clock tower will begin, a monument of the culture from the 17th century, which is under state protection. The rare monument in the city center will get its authentic look. The tower is planned to have three large clocks which citizens can use to tell the time. The construction works will be performed thanks to the donation of a private businessman from Shtip.



Fig.4 The Clock Tower

"During the Ottoman Empire in Macedonia, the construction of bridges was also developed which were significant factors on the roads for smooth and safe movement of the caravans. And in the construction of the bridges the Turks used foreign traditions and sometimes restored the old ones".<sup>19</sup> One such an impressive monument and a rare example of Islamic architecture in Shtip is the Kjachuk Emir Sultan bridge, built before 1672 by the sultan Emir Kjachuk (Fig.5) and is one of the few examples of Turkish architecture of these types of constructions in Macedonia. It connects the two banks of the river Bregalnitsa, through the main road which leads into the city. Originally the bridge was paved with Turkish cobblestones, but it was damaged several times, thus it

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<sup>19</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Islamska arhitektura*, vo kn. Umetnichkoto bogatstvo na Makedonija, Skopje, Makedonska kniga, 1984, str. 242.

was several times renovated. It's 30 to 40 meters long and 6 to 8 meters wide. Enclosed with a metal fence, but unfortunately it has never been adequately lit or protected which would regained its lost splendor and value it has now, and even in the past. It is certain that it was thoroughfare during the Turkish occupation, in conquering the other nations by the Ottomans, and through it a number of famous historical figures had passed. The importance is reflected in the fact that Bregalnitsa was considered a large river and needed bridging in this section. This bridge was the first one with such an architectural form and the uniqueness is evident in the fact that in the eastern part of the state no such similar bridge exists. During the First Balkan War, through this bridge went the demarcation line, which divided the city into a Serbian and Bulgarian part. The settlements on the left side of the river Bregalnitsa were under Bulgarian rule, while those on the right came under Serbian occupation. Bridging the river is done through eight shafts, shaped with carved stone blocks with appropriate architectural proportions of which today are visible only six (Fig.6).



Fig.5 Emir Kjachuk Sultan Bridge in 1919.



Fig.5 Emir Kjachuk Sultan Bridge (today)

"Many drinking fountains and basins supplied the neighborhoods with water in Macedonia",<sup>20</sup> even in Shtip. These fountains which served to "supply the population with drinking water, typically located in neighborhood centers, were built by skilled workmen called fountain makers, then the basins - mostly built in the courtyards of mosques associated with performing the religious ritual - abdest".<sup>21</sup> In the past, there were several drinking fountains in Shtip, located in different neighborhoods ...although small in dimensions, they were very vividly integrated in the space and were present in every neighborhood - neighborhood drinking fountains.

### Conclusion

There is no doubt the impact all these structures had in the city's development as a center of Eastern Macedonia. They remain there till this day and silently, yet very loquaciously testify for a past time, but also for a peaceful coexistence for centuries of the population in this region.

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<sup>20</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Islamska arhitektura*, vo kn. Umetnichkoto bogatstvo na Makedonija, Skopje, Makedonska kniga, 1984, str. 242.

<sup>21</sup> Krum Tomovski, *Arhitektonskoto tvoreshtvo vo Makedonija za vreme na tursko-osmanliskoto vladeenje*, vo kn. Arhitekturata na pochvata na Makedonija, Makedonskata akademija na naukite i umetnostite, Skopje, 2000, str.169.

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