

# Open Spaces for Prayer (Musalla) in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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**Abstract**— *The tradition of mass prayer in an open space (on a more or less organized ground known as 'Musalla') in Bosnia and Herzegovina dates back to the time of the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia (1463). After conquering a territory, the Ottomans performed a collective prayer ('Dova') there and thus promoted a new religion - Islam. For this occasion, they chose special places, most often next to Bosnian medieval stecak necropolises, or on attractive mountain glades. At the same time, very often, they buried their soldiers-askar there and in that way 'marked' that place, and in the eyes and consciousness of the local population - as a 'holy place'. In some cases, a mausoleum (turbe) was erected over the graves of Ottoman soldiers. It is known that the medieval population of Bosnia followed their own view of the world and religion ('bogomilism') and that they called themselves 'true Christians', which is how they wanted to distinguish themselves and 'separate' from 'official Christianity' (Catholic Church and Orthodoxy). for which they were persecuted. There is a general opinion in science that medieval Bosnians like this gladly accepted Islam.*

**Keywords**— *Bosnia, Bogumils, Islam, Musalla.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of human existence, religion accompanies man as a more or less ordered system of belief and practical action with which he determines his place in the world (in space). In its multitude of forms, the common feature of all religions is man's belief that outside him, outside his powers, there is something stronger than him, something that regulates the segments of his life, the segments of his natural and social environment, and even the entire Universe<sup>[1,2]</sup>.

Although religion (belief) can be 'carried inside' in such a way that no one from the outside has an insight into it, various ways of its formal manifestation have been established over time, including the construction of special buildings for this purpose. Over time, these buildings (temples) became symbols of certain religions, larger or smaller social communities, and even entire cultural-artistic and historical eras<sup>[2]</sup>.

Some of them are today masterpieces of architecture (that is, of culture in general) that had a huge impact on the architecture of the temples of peoples and cultures that came later, as well as on the influence of architecture in general: the Kaaba in Mecca (Saudi Arabia), Stonehenge (England, ca. 2200 BC), Ziggurat in Ur-Namm (former Mesopotamia, ca. 2113-2096 BC), Karnak Temple (Egypt, 20th dynasty, 12th century BC), Temple of Queen Hatshepsut (Egypt, 18th dynasty, ca. 1500 BC), several temples on the Acropolis in Athens (second half of the 5th century BC), the Maya pyramid in Tikal (Guatemala, 4th century BC), the Pantheon in Rome (120-128), the Basilica of the Nativity of Jesus (The Church of

the Nativity) in Bethlehem (333), Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (532-537), Hripsime in Ejmiatsin (Armenia, 618), Bete Giyorgis (Church of St. George) in Lalibela (Ethiopia, 12-13th century), Dome of the Rock Mosque, Jerusalem (691), Borobudur Temple in Java (Indonesia, 780-850), Great Mosque of Cordoba (Spain, 785), Angkor Temple in Cambodia (802), Great Mosque of Samarra (Iraq, 85 2), Tyagaraja Temple in Tiruvarur (India, 11th century), Sobor Sviatoyi Sofiyi in Kiev (Ukraine, 1037), Sofia Council in Novgorod (Russia, 1045-1052), Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris (12th century), Stave Church in Borgund (Norway, 1150), Amiens Cathedral (France, 1220), Cologne Cathedral (Kölner Dom, Germany, 1322), St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow (1555-1560), Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome (1593-1626), Sultan Selim II Mosque in Edirne (Jedren, Turkey, 1568-1574).

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a consequence of its geopolitical position, was at the crossroads of human and socio-historical flows, where practically all great world cultures left their traces. Along with other traces of architecture, there are more or less preserved traces of temples from different historical eras. Roman veterans brought to these areas (from the 3rd century to 78 BC) the belief (respect) of Roman deities (Jupiter, Juno, Fortuna...) as well as respect for the Old Persian sun deity-Mitros. Remains of mithraeums, temples in honor of Mitros, were found in Potoci near Mostar, in Lisicici near Konjic and in Konjic itself.

The first traces of Christianity in Bosnia and Herzegovina date from the 4th century: oratories in Vidostak near Stolac and Boracci near Vitina, and early Christian churches in Mogorjelo, Zitomisljci, Tasovcici near Capljina, Varvara near Prozor and Lisicici near Konjic. We should also mention the visible remains of the late antique basilica at Crkvina (archaeological site) in Breza (6th century), the late antique basilica in Cim (archaeological site), Mostar (5-6th century), the late antique basilica in Oborci (archaeological site) near Donje Vakuf (5-6 centuries).

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476), the Eastern Goths (493) with Theodoric at the head, invaded Bosnia. They stay here until the year 535, until the invasion of Byzantium. During the twenty-year war between Byzantium and the Goths, the Slavs broke into Bosnia on two occasions (around 548 and 551-553). Around 598, the Avars invaded and practically ravaged Bosnia. Architectural buildings whose remains (as archaeological sites) have been preserved to this day can be dated to this period: the Late Antique Basilica at Crkvina in Breza (6th century), the Late Antique Basilica in

Cim, Mostar (5-6 centuries), the Late Antique Basilica in Obrinci near the Donji Vakuf (5-6 centuries)...

In the period from 1154 to 1163, Bosnia was ruled by the first known Ban Bosne-Boric. Since then, along with Christians, 'Bogomils' have been mentioned, whose religion, tradition and cultural heritage will distinguish Bosnia in particular and, we would say, trace its identity. Both the Eastern and Western Christian churches labeled the Bogomili as heretics, and as such were exposed to constant pressure and frequent physical persecutions and executions. Despite everything, they showed amazing vitality and persistence in their belief. Their mass, voluntary, acceptance of Islam with the arrival of the Ottoman administration in the area of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina is a phenomenon that should be taken into account as a key fact in the elucidation and understanding of the latter history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, up to the present day.

Popes: Gregory VII, Innocent III, Honorius III, Gregory IX and Innocent IV continuously waged wars against the Bogomils from the beginning of the 13th century. The arrival of the Franciscans in Bosnia in 1235 should also be viewed in this light: to ... „help the bishop of Tannosni to suppress the Patorene heresy“<sup>[3]</sup>.

The most famous religious buildings of medieval Bosnia include:

- Churches: Coronation and burial church of Bosnian kings (archaeological area of Mile), Arnautovići near Visoko (13-14th century), Church of Our Lady in Olovo (14th century), Church of St. Georgija in Sopotnica near Gorazde (15th century), Church of St. Ive in Podmilacje (before 1461), Church of St. Peter and Paul, with a cemetery, judges' chairs, a courtyard and a wall in Osanici (before 1505), the Old Church of Varas (a small church dedicated to St. Michael) in Varas (16th century),
- Monasteries ('Samostani'): Around 1385, 35 monasteries were built on the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, four of which were in Bosnia (Franciscan monasteries in Visoko, Lasva, Kraljeva Sutjeska and Olovo). In the part of Herzegovina, the most famous Franciscan monastery is Gorica, Livno (14th century),
- Monasteries (in Serbian: манастири): Mostanica Monastery, near Bosanska Dubica (1113), Dobricevo Monastery near Bileca (1232), Sase Monastery (1242), Tavna Monastery near Bijeljina (13th century), Zavala Monastery near Trebinje (13th century), Monastery Dobrun near Visegrad (1383), Gomionica Monastery (15th century), Rmanj Monastery in Martin Brod (1440), Zitomislici Monastery near Capljina (15th century).

By capturing the royal city of Jajce in 1463, the Ottomans became the new masters of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is not without significance to point out that the Ottomans found an almost completely Bogomil Bosnia, about which V. Klaić in the History of Bosnia writes: "After the death of King Stjepan Dabisa (1395), dark days arose in Bosnia for the Catholic Church. The struggles for the throne and the raids of the Turks made the Patorene faith unusually felt and almost prevailed in the entire state..."<sup>[3]</sup>.

In a relatively long period of time, the main feature of which is the continuity of one government, a rich cultural heritage was created in which architecture has a particularly important place. Among the multitude of architectural programs, many mosques stand out.

The tradition of mass prayer in an open space (on a more or less organized ground known as 'Musalla') in Bosnia and Herzegovina dates back to the time of the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia (1463). After conquering a territory, the Ottomans performed a collective prayer there and thus promoted a new religion - Islam<sup>[2,4,5,6,7]</sup>. For this occasion, they chose special places, most often next to Bosnian medieval stecak necropolises, or on attractive mountain glades<sup>[7]</sup>. At the same time, very often, they buried their soldiers-askar there and in that way 'marked' that place, and in the eyes and consciousness of the local population - as a 'holy place'. In some cases, a mausoleum (turbe) was erected over the graves of Ottoman soldiers. It is known that the medieval population of Bosnia followed their own view of the world and religion ('bogomilism') and that they called themselves 'true Christians', which is how they wanted to distinguish themselves and 'separate' from 'official Christianity' (Catholic Church and Orthodoxy). for which they were persecuted. There is a general opinion in science that medieval Bosnians like this gladly accepted Islam.

## II. EL FATIH'S MUSALLA (MUSALLA IN KAMENGRAD)

El Fatih's Musalla (Musalla in Kamengrad) is an open space where mass prayers are performed, most often Eid ('Bajram') prayers or those arranged as 'duas'. Fatih's Musalla is located in Donji Kamengrad, ten kilometers northwest of Sanski Most (Geographical coordinates: 44°47'08.05"N, 16°34'18.64"E, elevation: 209). Here, according to folk tradition, Sultan Mehmed II Fatih the Conqueror (1432-1481), during the occupation of Kamengrad (1463), prayed the first Juma prayer. After the war (1992-1995), the area of Fatih's Musalla was renovated, where Juma prayer is offered every year on the first Friday of July (Figures 1, 2). The Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared (in 2003) the 'Building complex-Musalla in Kamengrad, with a moat' as a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>[8]</sup>.



Figure 1. El Fatih's Musalla (Musalla in Kamengrad)  
Sources: Google Earth, Accessed: 9.1.2018.



Figure 2. El Fatih's Musalla (Musalla in Kamengrad)

Sources:

<https://lh5.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipPS4FxBEzbofTSDWAEcKZu2Ex86D8rFmEeU7q=h720>, Accessed: 9.1.2018.



Figure 3. Djevojacka pecina (The Maiden's Cave) in Brateljevici near Kladanj. Location

Sources: Google Earth, Accessed: 9.1.2018.

### III. MUSALLA NEAR DJEVOJACKA PECINA (MAIDEN CAVE) IN BRATELJEVICI NEAR KLADANJ

Djevojacka pecina (The Maiden's Cave) in Brateljevici near Kladanj is a natural cave. Next to the Maiden's Cave, there is a landscaped area (Musalla) where a traditional outdoor prayer ('dowa') is held every year, traditionally on the last Sunday in August (Geographical coordinates: 44°12'50.38"N, 18°38'39.04"E, elevation: 743 ), (Figures 3,4). In the case of Dova in Brateljevici (Prayer in Brateljevici), Genius Loci consists of the Djevojacka cave and a mountain glade with the Bukovica river (a tributary of the Drinjaca river), in the rich forest of the slopes of Konjuh. From the macadam road that leads from Brateljevici to the end of the cave, you can take the arranged stairs (about 30 meters) to the entrance to the cave. From the spacious entrance, the profile of a huge triangle, it first descends into the cave, then comes across a wide flat space (in which water sometimes accumulates), and then climbs through a wide amphitheater space to the end of the cave. with several 'terraces'. As the final point of the cave, the peak of the entire 'natural composition', there is a well that can be approached completely bent over, almost crawling. The cave is located at 760 meters above sea level. The temperature inside the cave (14 °C) is constant both in summer and winter. The axis of the girl's grave follows the direction of the Kaaba (Qible). The well is the reason for a legend that has lived in the people for more than four centuries, in which water and a girl are the main characters. This touching legend about a brave girl became the reason for the unprecedented popularity of the Maiden's Cave in Brateljevici near Kladanj. This became the motive for performing a mass annual prayer ('dowa') in the open air, and visiting 'people, women and children who suffer from some kind of trouble'. As this tradition continues today, new stories are constantly taking place, which will become part of the legend of the Maiden's Cave in Brateljevici from the real characters of today<sup>1</sup>.



Figure 4. Outdoor prayer: Djevojacka pecina (The Maiden's Cave) in Brateljevici near Kladanj (August 28, 2022)

Sources: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geSM20wz0WQ>, Accessed: 9.1.2018.

### IV. MUSALLA ON THE KURBAN-KAMEN NEAR OLOVO

The Musalla on the 'Sacrifice stone' ('Kurban-kamen') near Olovo is an endowment that has a tradition from the time when the Ottomans, led by Sultan Mehmed II El Fatih, conquered (1463) Bosnia (Geographical coordinates: 44°10'34.96"N, 18°31'34.46"E, elevation: 826). At this end, there is a granite rock-stone on which, according to tradition, Sultan El Fatih sacrificed a ram-sacrifice, after which a collective prayer was performed. The altar stone ('Kurban-kamen') is still used as a mihrab. There are three well-organized graves of El Fatih's soldiers-askers (Figures 5,6).

<sup>1</sup> The author stayed in Djevojacka pecina (The Maiden's Cave) in Brateljevici (August 3, 2011) accompanied by an official (Tufik Selimbasic, born 1965) who, in front of the municipality of Kladanj and the Tuzla Canton, is in charge of taking care of guests visiting the cave, including security electric lighting in the cave. Without this (or similar) lighting, it would not be possible to walk through most of the cave.

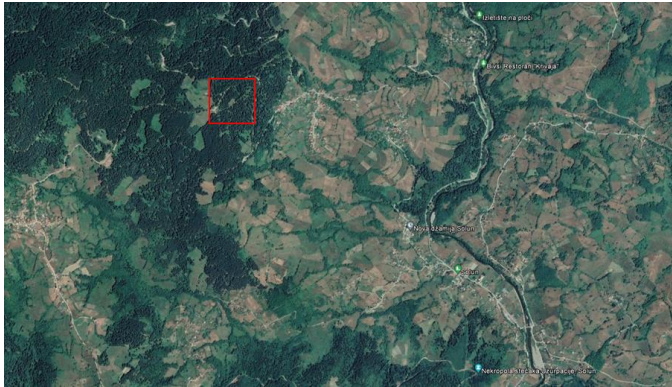


Figure 5. Doviste-Musalla 'Kurban Stone' ('Kurban-Kamen') near Olovo. Location

Source: Google Earth (September 1, 2022.)



Figure 6. Prayer in nature - 'Rain prayer' on the 'Kurban Stone' (for the villages of Glavisno, Hadre and Kovacici) near Olovo

Source: Author (June 2, 2013)

#### V. DOVISTE-MUSALLA TO THE CUNISTA VILLAGE NEAR OLOVO

The Cunista village also has its own open prayer space. The religious ceremony is performed at the Musalla, on a finely decorated amphitheater in the forest above the village (Geographical coordinates: 44°12'29.44"N, 18°29'51.09"E, elevation: 555). On the area of the musalla there is a finely decorated grave, and tradition says that it is the grave of one of the soldiers of Mehmed II El Fatih (1432-1481). On the terrace, people planted a linden tree, which is considered a noble tree and which blooms just in time for the annual outdoor prayer (Figures 7,8).

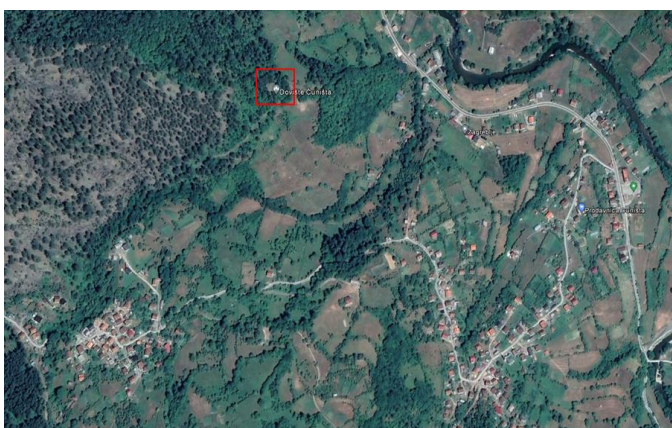


Figure 7. Doviste-Musalla in the Cunista village near Olovo. Location

Source: Google Earth (September 1, 2022.)



A forest path leading to the finish line and an arranged amphitheater for praying



The landscaped grave on the Doviste (possibly the grave of martyrs from the time of El Fatih's conquest of Bosnia in 1463) and a linden tree in the pine forest on the Doviste



The view from the peak in Cunista to the hamlet of Mahalu (in the very background of the picture is Bijeli vrh)

Figure 8. Musalla in the Cunista village near Olovo

Source: Author (May 19, 2020)

#### VI. MUSALLA NEAR TURBE IN THE VARDISTE VILLAGE NEAR BREZA

Every year on the first Sunday in the month of August, the mevlud and prayer are taught at this doviste, organized by the Vardiste congregation and the Majlis of the Breza Islamic Community (Geographical coordinates: 44°03'30.42"N, 18°16'32.62"E, elevation: 801). It is known for sure that the study of prayer has not been interrupted in any year since 1914 (since the beginning of the First World War), and it was learned even earlier because an Ottoman soldier - asker, was buried in this turbet, during the withdrawal of cannons towards Bobovac, the then capital of Bosnia, during the conquest of Bosnia by the Ottomans (1463) led by Sultan Memed II El Fatih (1432 -1481), (Figures 9, 10).



Figure 9. Musalla near Turbe in the Vardiste village near Breza  
Sources: Google Earth, Accessed: 9.1.2018.



Figure 10. Collective prayer ('Dova') at Musalla near Turbe in the Vardiste village near Breza

Sources:  
<https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/index.php/aktuelno-arhiva/20351-proucena-dova-na-dovistu-kod-turbeta-u-dzematu-vardiste-miz-e-breza>,  
Accessed: 9.1.2018.

### VII. DOVISTE-MUSALLA IN JASIK NEAR OLOVO

Near the necropolis with stecci "Mramorje", in a forest glade, there is Doviste in Jasik (Geographical coordinates: 44°08'15.26"N, 18°32'26.65"E, elevation: 704), an open space-Musalla where every year collective prayer ('Dova'). On the edge of the glade-doviste, there is an impressive necropolis with niches (Figures 11,12). It is believed that the martyrs of Sultan Mehmed II El Fthih's army from the time of his conquest of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1463) are buried there. The stećak necropolis, as well as the recitation of the prayer (Islamic ritual), on the one hand, testify that this area was also inhabited in the Middle Ages, and on the other hand, that the medieval Bogumili ('true Christians', as they called themselves) accepted Islam immediately after the conquest of this area by the Ottoman Empire, led by Sultan Mehmed II El Fatih (1432-1481).



Figure 12. Doviste-Musalla in the Boganovici village near Olovo  
Source: Author (May 14, 2020)

### VIII. DOVISTE-MUSALLA "DOBRE VODE" ("GOOD WATERS") NEAR FOSA

Doviste-Musalla „Dobre Vode“ (“Good Waters”) is located in the Foca municipality (Geographical coordinates: 43°35'12.91"N, 18°39'34.56"E, elevation: 1043). It is about 13 km from Foca, about 28 km from Gorazde, and about 40 km from Sarajevo (by air). The nearest villages to this locality are Zarudine, Kolun and Potkolun (Figures 13,14). On a narrow hilly area only a few hundred meters from each other in Zarudina, there are three important sights: the turbes of Sheikh Murat and Sheikh Salih and two healing springs: 'Dobre Vode' and 'Kasimovo vrelo' ('Kasim's Spring'), around which the Foca Muslims, Gorazde, Ustikoline and the surrounding regions gather every year and constantly return to them in



Figure 11. Doviste-Musalla in the Boganovici village near Olovo  
Source: Google Earth (September 1, 2022.)

search of God's blessing, health and progress in life. According to tradition, Zarudina is visited three times. On the Tuesday before St. George's Day, sick people, as well as healthy people who wanted to preserve their health, came to 'Good Tuesday' alone or with caregivers, on foot or on horseback.

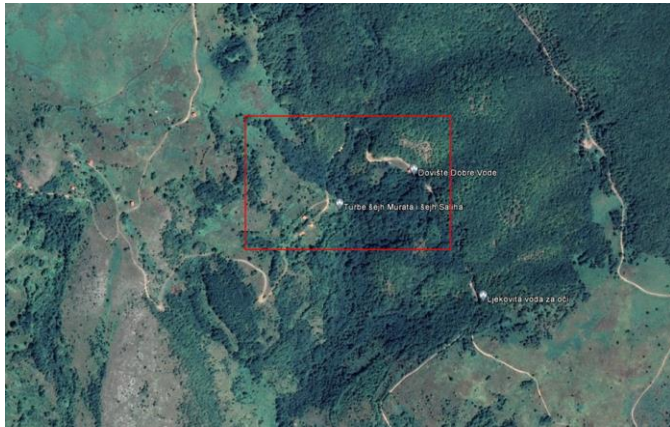


Figure 13. Locality "DOBRE VODE" ("GOOD WATERS")  
Source: Google Earth. Modified by the Author, Accessed: 9.1.2022.

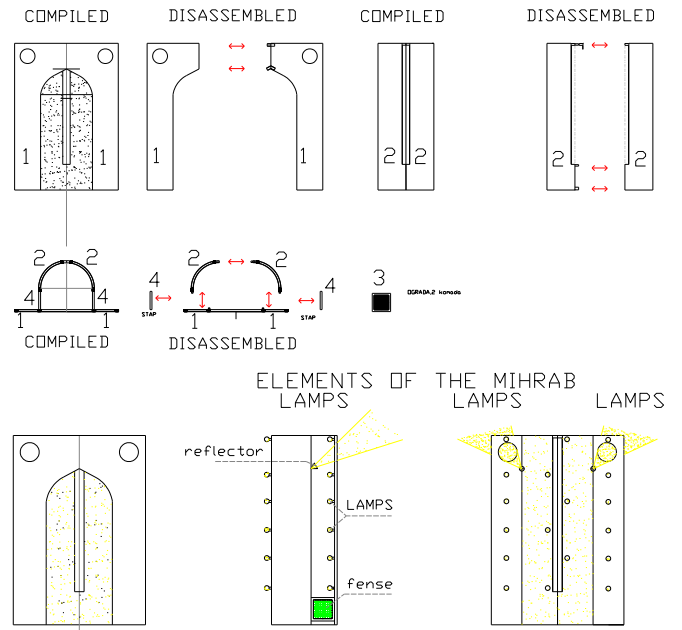


Figure 14. Musalla "Dobre Vode" (Contractor and foundation Fadil Budnjo, B.Sc. Eng. Geol.)

Source: Author (May 8, 2011)

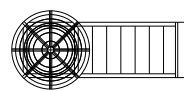
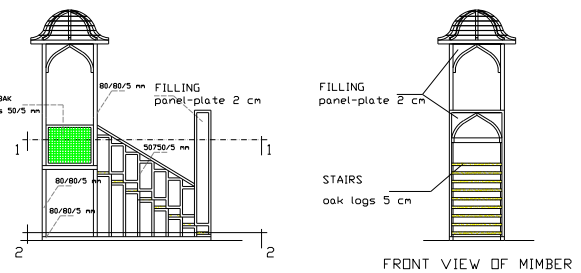
### IX. ASSEMBLY-DISASSEMBLY MIHRAB AND MIMBERA FOR MUSALLA ("MIRZA DELIBASIĆ" HALL, SKENDERIJA, 1997) BY ARCHITECT AHMET HADROVIC

The assembled-dismantled mihrab and mimbera were commissioned by the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in this case for the purposes of forming the Musalla in the "Mirza Delibašić" Hall, in the Skenderija Cultural and Sports Center in Sarajevo (Geographical coordinates: 43°51'15.24"N, 18°24'51.06"E, elevation: 541). Namely, Bajram prayer (held twice a year) is a big festival in Islam and on that occasion a large number of people gather for a short but very solemn prayer. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is a living custom that the Eid prayer is offered (except in mosques) and in an open space (musala). In some mosques there is a permanent qibla-wall with a mihrab, in some it is assembled and dismantled, while often it is not installed at all. For 25 years, the mihrab and mimber presented here have been used as purposeful furniture and symbols during Eid prayers in the sports hall of the Skenderija complex (Figures 15, 16).

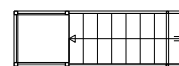


### LAMPS IN THE MIHRAB

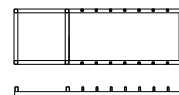
Mihrab



VIEW OF MIMBER FROM ABOVE



SECTION 1-1



SECTION 2-2

### ELEMENTS OF MIMBERA

Mimber

Figure 15. Assembled-dismantled mihrab and mimbera for musala ("Mirza Delibašić" Hall, Skenderija, 1997). Project (Architect: Ahmet Hadrovic)  
Source: Author (Project, 1997)

The base (base) and the central part of the mimbera are made of steel pipes 80/80/5 mm. The stairs and access portal are made of 50/50/5 mm pipes. The footings of the stairwells in the mimber are made of 5 cm thick oak planks. the mušebak on the fence of the central part of the mimbera is made of steel strips 50/5 mm. the filling above the arches of the central part and the access portal on the mimber is made of a 2 cm thick

panel. All steel elements are painted with green paint twice. The oak planks of the stair treads are varnished with colorless varnish.

The basic construction of the mihrab consists of steel pipes 50/50/5 mm and 80/80/5 mm. the pipes are placed along the contour of the flat and oval canvas and inside the field in order to ensure rigidity and install the lining (plywood). The cladding (plywood) is installed precisely. Connections are not visible. All visible surfaces, both metal and plywood, are painted with white varnish, in two coats. Sheets (الله) are made of plywood with a thickness of 6 mm and are painted with green varnish.

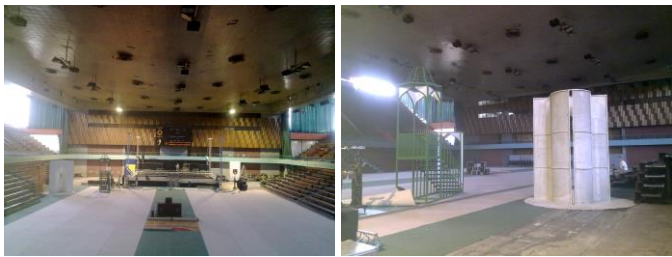


Figure 16. Assembled-dismantled mihrab and mimbera for musala ("Mirza Delibašić" Hall, Skenderija, 1997). Project (Architect: Ahmet Hadrovic) Source: Author (June 8, 2012)

## X. CONCLUSION

After designing and realizing several mosques, with a 'modern approach to the design of this architectural program', and thus gaining the general trust of the public, the author of this paper received an order (1997) from the departmental service of the Canton of Sarajevo to design a prefabricated-dismantled mihrab and mimbera for decorated Musalle in the "Mirza Delibašić" Hall in Sarajevo. Of course, these elements could be applied to any arranged space. Although through the design of mosques, the Author carefully studied this architectural program (that is, the architectural realization of mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina and around the world), arranging the Musalla was a completely new challenge for him. From the initial information he received from people who understand this topic (professors at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Sarajevo), the Author visited several Dovista-Musallas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thus, 'on the spot', became familiar with these contents. For him, it was a 'great refreshment' and a great learning about the 'being of a Bosnian-Herzegovinian man'. Although he carried this topic 'within himself' for a long time, the Author decided to share it with the whole world.

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