

The Fethija mosque

Country or territory:
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Name of organisation
compiling the information:
Commission to Preserve National
Monuments

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<u>Name and address of bulding(s) or site:</u>	THE FETHIJA MOSQUE, Bihać
<u>Inventory reference number(s):</u>	08.2-6-795/03-8
<u>Ensemble type(s):</u>	Monumental, architectural ensemble consisting of a mosque, harem (courtyard/burial ground) and nine gravestones.
<u>Building type(s):</u>	Sacral building
<u>Main date(s):</u>	13 th or late 14 th century
<u>Current use(s):</u>	Mosque from 1592 to the present day Church from the 13 th or late 14 th century to 1592

Significance:

In the middle ages the town developed as a free royal borough with a fortress and two monasteries, one Dominican and one Franciscan, several churches, a large number of commercial and residential buildings, and several defense towers. In the sixteenth century, Bihać and its surrounding fortresses became part of the so-called Military Frontier consisting of a defensive zone fortified against the increasingly frequent incursions by Ottoman troops. The Ottoman Army, led by the Bey of the Segedin Sanjak, Hasan Pasha Predojević, occupied the town in June 1592.

The Gothic Church of St Anthony has survived to this day. After the conquest of Bihać, it was turned into a mosque and given the name Fethija (from *fath*, victory), as were mosques in Jajce (St Mary's Church) and Soko near Gračanica.

There is no reliable document providing the exact date of construction. Stylistically, it appears to date from the late fourteenth century. Marko Vego notes that it was built in 1266 and that it served as the borough church under Dominican administration. In Mujezinović's view, the building probably dated from the fourteenth century, since a plaque close to the apse bore the date 1400. He also notes that there was a Dominican monastery alongside the church, to which there is reference in the thirteenth century.

The Gothic bell tower of the building served as a minaret until 1863, when it was so dilapidated that it was pulled down and a new minaret was erected.

After Bosnia and Herzegovina was occupied by the Austro-Hungarians, the Franciscans built a new church, since they were unable to agree with the authorities on the restitution of the building to the Catholic Church.

During World War II the mosque was damaged – the roof and all the wooden elements in the interior were burned down, and there was damage to the minaret. After World War II conservation works on building were carried out.

General information

The building has a rectangular ground plan, with a length of 22 and a width of 11.5 m. The building was largely constructed of precisely square-cut blocks of bihacite laid in even rows. The thickness of the walls at the base ranges from 1.1 to 1.2 m.

The north side of the building is partly plastered, with layers of hardcore visible beneath the plaster. There was an apse on the east wall, which was removed when the church was turned into a mosque, and two new rectangular windows were added. There is also a small rosette window on the same wall, dating from the same period. The place where the apse formerly stood is visible from the exterior.

On the south side, which is entirely built of finely dressed cut stone blocks, there are two large Gothic windows at approximately the same distance from the corners of the buildings, of rectangular shape and terminating in broken arches. The window frames are of diagonally cut stone with very restrained moulding on the inner side. The Ottomans partly walled up these windows, leaving only a small aperture. During the Austro-Hungarian period the windows were restored to their original condition. At the end of the south wall, by the eastern corner of the building, there is a smaller window, which probably belonged to the presbytery of the church. The walls of the building terminate in a cornice extending the full length of the building except at the point where the minaret breaks it. The front facade of the building is entirely in the Gothic style, visible both in its proportions and the proportions and treatment of the portal and rosette.

There are four round columns on either side in the portal, with a flattened column between each. The frieze is 25 cm wide and 90 cm long. There are eight carved flowers on either side. The door is 1.7 m. wide and 3.12 m high, terminating in a profiled round arch and a Gothic arch.

There is a rosette above the portal, made of diagonally cut pieces of stone that were then smoothed. The outer edge of the window is rounded and moulded. The eight arms of the rosette are also of moulded stone and take the form of stylized petals.

There are also two short stone brackets on the same wall, the first 2 m from the north corner of the building and the second below the rosette and above the door. These brackets are 4 m apart and there was no doubt formerly a third, removed when the minaret was built. They were probably intended to hold small sculptures of saints (Jusić, p. 173). The ends of the south and north walls of the building project 20 cm from the surface of the east wall giving them the appearance of pilasters.

The interior of the building measures 20.8 m long x 9.13 m wide, and is plastered so that the stone of the walls is not visible. When the church was turned into a mosque, the interior was adapted, with a *mihrab* built and the floor raised at an angle in front of it to adjust the orientation towards the south-east. A *minber* and *ćurs* were also added.

By the entrance to the building a *mahvil*, 6.00 m. deep and two storeys high was made, taking advantage of the considerable height of the building. The *mahvil* is made of wood and rests on six wooden pillars with corbels in three transverse rows and on two storeys.

The entrance to the minaret of the Fethija mosque is situated on the second storey of the *mahvil*.

The minaret of the Fethija mosque is built of the same stone as the building, and stands where the Gothic steeple stood until its demolition. Its proportions and the way the stone blocks are dressed indicate that it is the work of an outstanding stonemason.

All the cornices, like the *šeref*e (balcony) of the minaret, are richly decorated with rope-twist and globular projections. The *šeref*e railing is also in stone, but has been left plain except for a single band of 10 cm at the top. The top of the barrel of the minaret is decorated with blind broken arches and a shallow stone cornice.

The mosque was originally roofed with wooden shingles, later replaced by plain tiles.

Stonemasons' marks:

On the outer surfaces of the walls, almost every stone block bears a stonemason's mark. There are 22 different marks in all, if one counts those facing different directions. There appears to be no rule as to where the marks were placed, which leads to the conclusion that they were not intended to indicate the order in which the blocks were to be laid, but rather to designate the stonemason who had cut them so as to ensure that each craftsman was paid for the work he completed. In addition to the stonemasons' marks on the west wall, there are some graffiti around the portal, which have not been deciphered.

Inscriptions:

There are two inscriptions on the Fethija mosque. The more recent is above the entrance to the mosque, and records the restoration of the mosque in 1312 AH (1894 CE), while the older is on the base of the minaret, carved into a stone plaque measuring 1.6 x 0.9 m, with a smaller plaque with the date below it. The inscription reads: This minaret was erected, which is without peer, and this venerable mosque was restored, for the noble rule of the head of the illustrious Ottoman family, protector of the faith, sustainer of cities, our lord Sultan Abdul-Azizhan. The smaller plaque, measuring 90 x 60 cm, bears an inscription reading: 1280 (1863). Written by the humble Hilmi, kajmekam [district head] of Bihać, on the Eternal, the Sustainer.

The small plaque above the entrance to the mosque bears this inscription: Ya Fattah! This venerable mosque was in great need of repair and with the financial help of the state and the help of the population the roof was repaired and the entire interior painted and decorated. The renovation was happily completed in 1312 (1894).

Harem:

There is a harem by the Fethija mosque, with several *nišan* tombstones of which two are dated and bear epitaphs.

Gravestones:

Before World War I, nine gravestones were taken from the Fethija mosque in Bihać to the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo (inventory nos. 5780-5788 of the Museum's Mediaeval Collection). The slabs had been built into the floor of the entrance to the building in such a way that their reverse sides were uppermost, which meant that they were very well preserved. Before the church was turned into a mosque some were probably built into the right-hand wall of the church, and others into the left-hand and more noticeable side (Vego, 1954, 269).

The slabs date from 1519 to 1565, and most of them were from the graves of members of the Croatian nobility serving in and around Bihać. They were made of the local stone, bihacite, which is easily worked. From the treatment of the slabs it is clear that some of them were made by the same master craftsman or came from the same school. All the epitaphs are in Latin, in both Humanistic and Gothic script. There are errors in the language, particularly in the recording of the years.

Research and Conservation and Restoration Works:

- thirteenth century – building erected
- early nineteenth century – part of windows walled up
- 1863 – Gothic tower pulled down and minaret built
- 1894 – repairs to the building, when the gravestones were found set into the floor
- late 19th/early 20th century – windows restored to original condition
- 1946 – *šerefef* of the minaret repaired
- 1954 – minaret repaired, paid for by voluntary contributions
- 1966 – repair works to the ceiling and roof structure
- parts of stone cornice made
- 1968 – works to the interior of the building: windows, repairs to *mahvil*, reconstruction of the *minber*, plastering interior walls
- during these works, discovery of niches in north wall
- 2000 – repair works to the roof structure
- 2000 – archaeological investigations:
 - test dig I, 2.00 x 2.00 metres, alongside north wall
 - test dig II, 2.00 x 2.00 metres, alongside north-west corner of the building

The purpose of the archaeological investigations was to determine how deep the foundations of the main building were and whether it stood on its own foundations or walls from an earlier period or whether it was built on living rock. The dig was conducted by a team from the Pounje Regional Museum in Bihać headed by Mulabdić Enver, graduate archaeologist. In test dig I, the first layer to be removed consisted of turf (grass and soil), and the next two of rubble largely consisting of soil and stone. The living rock appeared at a depth of 10 cm to the north of the cut and 30 cm to the south of the cut in test dig I. The north wall of the main building stood on a wall built to level the terrain. The stone was split and bonded set on a base of lime mortar. This leveling wall was about 30 cm high. Once a level base had been achieved, the bihacite masonry began.

In test dig II, the living rock appeared at a depth of about 40 cm. There were no archaeological finds in either dig. The north west corner of the building was partly dug into the rock, probably for stability and as a result of leveling the ground.

The findings of test dig 1 did not fully answer the question whether there had been another building – the Dominican monastery, or another construction – alongside the north wall of the building. The use of two different types of stone in the eastern half of the north wall suggests this, as do four stones found in the centre of the dig, bonded to the living rock with lime mortar. This is not enough to reach firm conclusions, however.

Categories of significance:

Of outstanding national importance

Categories of ownership or interest:

Of national interest.

Documentation and bibliographic references:

Documentation:

The following documentation is in possession of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments

- Documentation on the location and current owner and user of the property (copy of cadastral plan and copy of land registry entry)

- Data on the previous and current condition and use of the property, including a description and photographs, data of war damage if any, data on restoration or other works on the property if any, etc.
- Historical, architectural and other documentary material on the property, as set out in the bibliography.

Bibliography

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4. Jusić, Enisa, *Srednjevjekovna crkva sv. Antuna – sadašnja džamija Fethija u Bihaću* (The mediaeval church of St Anthony – now the Fethija mosque in Bihać), collected papers of the regional museum VII, pp. 169-177
5. Lopašić, Radoslav, *Bihać i Bihaćka krajina* (Bihać and the Bihać frontier region) Zagreb 1890.
6. Mujezinović, Mehmed, *Islamska epigrafika Bosne i Hercegovine* (Islamic epigraphics of BiH), Vol. 3, 3rd ed., Cultural heritage series, Sarajevo Publishing, 1998, pp. 61-65
7. *Report on archaeological dig Fethija 2000*, Pounja Museum Bihać, 2000
8. Truhelka, Ćiro, *Sredovječni spomenici Bosanske Hrvatske* (Mediaeval monuments of the Bosnian Croats), Hrvatsko kolo XXIII, Zagreb, 1942.
9. Vego, Marko, *Crkva sv. Ante (Fetija džamija)* (St Anthony's Church – Fetija mosque), Naše starine, pp. 255-268, 1954.

Condition:

Very bad

In 2000, the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina inspected the condition of the building, and found that the minaret of the Fethija mosque was cracking alarmingly along the joints, both horizontally and vertically, along the barrel of the minaret up to the top, which is threatening the stability of the minaret. The cracks are visible although the whole of the body of the minaret which is covered with a strong mixture of cement and terrazzo, having an aggressive effect on the stone. Local inhabitants are contributing, by their works on the interior, to the very bad condition of the building.

Amount of war or associated damage:

No damage

Risk:

The building is at direct risk from works to the interior being carried out by a group of local inhabitants without approval from the relevant Ministry for Regional Planning and the Environment or under supervision from the heritage protection authority. The following is ascertained:

1. the wooden *mahfil* and its access staircase have been pulled down
2. the floor slabs have been pierced and eight reinforced concrete free-standing bases measuring 2.20 x 2.20 x 0.60 metres have been concreted in
3. on each of the reinforced concrete bases an octagonal reinforced concrete pillar has been set with cross-section dimensions of 40 x 40 cm and a height of 3.10 m
4. shuttering for horizontal tie beams has been laid across the pillars with part of the shuttering for a reinforced concrete floor slab.

The gravestones are in the Mediaeval Archaeological Section of the National Museum in Sarajevo and are in good condition.

Condition risk:

Immediate risk of further deterioration or loss of fabric, solution agreed but not implemented.

Technical assessment and costing:

Project for urgent protection measures from further deterioration needs to be done, as well as projects for next phases of protection – project of sanitation, conservation and restoration.

For the purpose of ensuring the permanent preservation of the monument, the following measure shall be applied on the National Monument:

- all works on the monuments of the architectural ensemble are prohibited other than conservation and restoration works carried out to a design project approved by the Federal Ministry of Regional Planning and under the expert supervision of the heritage protection authority of FBiH,
- works of any kind to the infrastructure are prohibited unless with the approval and under the expert supervision of the heritage protection authority of the Federation of BiH,
- the dumping of all kinds of waste on the site of the National Monument is prohibited,
- the display and other forms of presentation of the gravestones in Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be carried out on the conditions determined by the Federal Ministry responsible for culture.

The Government of the Federation shall be responsible in particular for drawing up a project for conservation and restoration works that shall include the following procedures and measures:

- a technical survey of the monument,
- research works including a study of the stability and structure of the walls of the building and the minaret, and proposed repairs,
- research works to reveal the interior original painted layers (around the *mihrab* and on the *mihrab* wall),
- research works on the *mahfil* of the mosque followed by a project to repair the *mahfil* using original parts,
- repair of damage to the entrance area of the building – steps and landing – and repair of the damage to the wall surrounding the complex,
- conservation of the tombstones from the mosque harem.

All executive and area development planning acts not in accordance with the provisions of this Decision are to be revoked.

Costing proposals for projects and above listed works have not been done.

Ownership:

Islamic Community of BiH

Occupation:

Regularly occupied

Management:

The provisions relating to protection and rehabilitation measures set forth by the Law on the Implementation of the Decisions of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments, established pursuant to Annex 8 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of the Federation of BiH nos. 2/02 and 27/02) shall apply to the National Monument.

The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be responsible for ensuring the legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary to protect, conserve, display and rehabilitate the National Monument.

The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be responsible for providing the resources for drawing up and implementing the necessary technical documentation for the rehabilitation of the National Monument.

Summary:

After the completion of the conservation works on the building, after World War II, the Fethija mosque was regarded as the most significant and monumental building in Bosanska Krajina. Some of its architectural features influenced the form taken by mosques, including a somewhat more elongated prayer space and the use of elongated windows. From the nineteenth century onwards, the facades of many of the mosques in the Krajina were altered in appearance. The old fashion of two rows of windows disappeared, to be replaced by tall, rectangular windows like those of the Fethija, which were to remain a general feature of mosques in the Krajina and also in other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Regional Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina to 2000 registered the Fethija mosque in Bihać as a category I building - of national importance.

Applying the Criteria for the adoption of a decision on proclaiming an item of property a national monument, this national monument reaches the following criteria of significance:

- A. Time frame
- B. Historical value
- C. Artistic and aesthetic value
 - C. i. quality of workmanship
 - C.ii. quality of materials
 - C.iii. proportions
 - C.iv. composition
 - C. v. value of details
 - C.vi. value of construction
- D. Clarity (documentary, scientific and educational value)
 - D.i. material evidence of a lesser known historical era
 - D.ii. evidence of historical change
 - D. iv. evidence of a particular type, style or regional manner
 - D. v. evidence of a typical way of life at a specific period
- E. Symbolic value
 - E.ii. religious value
 - E.iii. traditional value
 - E.v. significance for the identity of a group of people
- F. Townscape/ Landscape value
 - F.i. Relation to other elements of the site
 - F.ii. meaning in the townscape
 - F.iii. the building or group of buildings is part of a group or site
- G. Authenticity
 - G.i. form and design
 - G.ii. material and content
 - G.iii. use and function
 - G.iv. traditions and techniques
 - G.v. location and setting
 - G.vi. spirit and feeling
 - G.vii. other internal and external factors
- H. Uniqueness/rarity
 - H.i. unique or rare example of a certain type or style
 - H.ii. outstanding work of art or architecture
- I. Completeness
 - I.i. physical coherence
 - I.ii. homogeneity

The priority level for intervention is *high*.

NOTE:

Condition

Very bad:

Condition risk

Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric, solution agreed but not implemented.

Criteria employed for the Priority Intervention List:

- The monuments are designated as national monuments,
- They represent rare or unique examples of the typology or chronological - stylistic corpus,
- They were damaged/destroyed during the 1992-1995 war in BiH or they were endangered by the post war conditions (illegal constructions, lack of funding for restoration and maintenance, inexpert reconstruction,) and are subject to further deterioration,
- Their restoration will encourage the return process in BiH,
- Their restoration will support development of the region.

Sign. and date:

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10.03.2004.