



## ARCHITECTURAL STUDY OF KOCA SINAN PASHA MOSQUE AT KAÇANIK, KOSOVA

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### ABSTRACT

Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque is one of the oldest classical mosques built in Kosovo during the reign of the Ottoman Empire (1389-1912). The mosque bore the name of its donor and was completed in 1594/95. It is located in a small town in the southern part of the country, in Kaçanik. Regarding its compositional scheme, the monument belongs to the examples of Ottoman-style mosques in the Balkans with local elements. Its compositional scheme comprises a prayer hall, portico, and a minaret. The paper focuses on a brief history of the Koca Sinan Pasha, the history of the mosque, architecture, pictorial and sculptural decorations, current condition, and the monument's surroundings. By doing so, the paper helps identify the challenges that the mosque faced during its existence, as well as changes in the structure of the building and its decorations that occurred with time. The study relies on the existing monument as the primary source of information. However, the documentation of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Kosovo and the relevant literature that directly or indirectly deals with the issue in question has also been used. The study is accompanied by architectural visualization and photographs of the mosque's exterior and interior. The Paper aims to help study, promote and display the mosque's value to a wider audience.

### KEYWORDS:

Koca Sinan Pasha; Kaçanik; Ottoman; mosque; cultural heritage

### INTRODUCTION

The conquest and rule of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans for about five centuries, specifically in present-day Kosovo (1389 / 1462-1912), left behind many objects of architectural and cultural heritage. These constructions of religious, public, and residential character, which were realized in Ottoman style and intertwined with local elements, enriched the mosaic of artistic and creative expression of the local inhabitants.

Unfortunately, much of this material culture did not survive the time. Although years and climatic conditions played their part, it should be noted that the greatest damage was caused by humans themselves [1]. Moreover, this creativity with great historical, cultural, artistic, religious, and environmental values never received the treatment and attributed it deserved from the state institutions. Especially during the XX century, institutions responsible for protecting cultural heritage sites always and intentionally neglected them.

Meanwhile, publications related to Ottoman art in Kosovo were general. Monuments such as the Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque were generally treated as part of more extensive studies. Without delving into the details. Occasionally, only the history of the mosque

was addressed but not the architecture of the mosque. Works by authors: Ayverdi [2], Ibrahimgil and Konuk [3], and Drançolli [4] are worth mentioning. Although the Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque, in these publications, was covered as a part of a broader study, the scholars mentioned above are the only authors who, to this date, have dealt with the religious building.

Ekrem Hakki Ayverdi published the book "Avrupa'da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri Yugoslavya" in 1981. His work includes the majority of the architectural buildings of the Ottoman period and style in the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. A study of Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque is also part of this voluminous work. The mosque is presented in two pages. On the first page, in three paragraphs, the author provides historical and architectural information about the mosque; on the second page, the architectural visualization of the monument is presented. It should be noted that when this study was carried out, the mosque's portico had one floor. Hence, Ayverdi, in his architectural visualization, made the restoration project of the portico, which is presented with three domes standing in the arcades [2]. This architectural visualization is the first and the only one published regarding the mosque in question to day.

Another important Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque study is "Kosova'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri". Mehmet Z. Ibrahimgil and Neval Konuk carried out the study that was published in 2006, in two volumes. The authors did the re-inventorying of the cultural heritage belonging to the Ottoman period in Kosova. The study presents the documentation and condition of Kosova's postwar (1998/99) architectural heritage. In the re-inventorying of the Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque, the authors are based on the architectural visualization of Ekrem Hakki Ayverdi. At the same time, the work is illustrated with 10 photographs that reflect the state of the mosque before the restoration in 2012.

The last publication where Koca Sinan Pasha mosque is a part of a study is "Trashëgimia Monumentale në Kosovë - Monumental Heritage in Kosova" by Fejaz Drançolli. The book was published in 2011. The mosque is presented as part of the broader study regarding cultural heritage in Kosova from prehistoric times until 1912. The author briefly presents the mosques' historical, architectural and decorative values and accompanies the work with a photo of the exterior before the restoration.

Considering those works, the paper aims to present a more detailed study beyond previous publications. Even though very important, they are limited to brief explanations rather than in-depth analysis. We aim to achieve a more detailed, thorough, and genuine scientific work through on-site observations, study, analysis, and description of architectural, sculptural, and pictorial elements.

Furthermore, the goal is to raise awareness about the importance, preservation, and promotion of the mosque and Ottoman-style historical cultural and religious heritage in Kosova. Regrettably, we can say that it has remained in the shadows and is unknown to the world. Hence, the paper aims to display this monument to a wider audience.

## METHODS

This paper uses the monument as a study object and a primary source of information. The aim is to analyze and study the building to conclude the typology, layout, structure and construction technique, and condition. To compare with other mosques in Kosova, we will also mention other constructions built by the donor in Kaçanik and assess what is left of those buildings. In addition to the monument as an object of study, the literature directly or indirectly deals with the issue in question will be examined.

## RESULT

### KOCA SINAN PASHA

The Ottomans' first movements in the Balkans' territories, respectively Kosova, date back to the XIV century. At first, as a mercenary army engaged by the Byzantine Empire, and later with military expeditions for their interests [5][6][7]. The unstable political

situation created in the Balkans during the middle of the XIV century enabled the Ottomans to conquer the region faster [7][8][9]. By the end of the XIV century, respectively in 1389, the Ottoman army led by Sultan Murad faced the Balkan Alliance in the Field of Kosova [9][10][11][12]. This battle marks the first contact of the Ottomans with the territory of today's Kosova. However, the full conquest of Kosova was realized during the rule of Sultan Mehmed II, the Conqueror, in 1455-1462 [8][13].

The establishment and consolidation of Ottoman rule in the Albanian territories, specifically in the today's Republic of Kosova, began the practice of the Empire's policies for the subjugated populations of different faiths, namely the Christian faith. One of them was the taxation [7] and the *devşirme* system [14]. Christian children of early age were sent to the sultan's court, where in addition to Islamic religious teachings, they also received military training. Depending on the individual's skill, they were also educated in different professional fields. It happened to many prominent personalities of Albanian origin who served in the Ottoman Empire. It should be noted that, occasionally, a number of Albanian nobility joined the Ottoman hierarchy through the *timar system first as Christians and afterwards converted to the Islamic religion* [14].

One of these personalities was Koca Sinan Pasha [15]. He was born in Topojan village in Luma, Albania [15][16][17][18]. As a young man, during the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent, The Lawgiver, he was sent to the *devşirme* system, where for a short period, thanks to his skills and abilities, managed to reach the heights of the ottoman hierarchy [18][19]. In his carrier, during the reign of Sultans Syleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566), Selim II (1566-1574), and Murat III (1574-1595), served twice as governor of Egypt (1567-1568, 1571-1573) from where he conquered Yemen in 1569 [15][20]. He also governed Damascus from 1586-1587 and 1588 [18]. He commanded the navy of the Mediterranean Sea (1574), was commander in chief of Iran (1580), and also served five times in the position of grand vizier (I. 1580-1582; II. 1589-1591; III. 1583-1596; IV. 1595-1595; V. 1595-1596). Koca Sinan Pasha died in Istanbul in 1596 [8][21]. His monumental tomb is in Istanbul in the Koca Sinan Pasha Complex [18][15]. In addition to his military and political career, Sinan Pasha, besides the complex mentioned above, is known as a commissioner of several constructions of religious public and individual character all over the Ottoman Empire [22][23]. The most renowned is the mosque at the port of Bulaq in Cairo (1571-72) [19] and Sinan Pasha Mosque Damascus (1590) [24]. One of the lesser-known mosques he built is the Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque in Kaçanik, a town in Kosova.

### KAÇANIK

Kaçanik is a small town located in the southern part of Kosova, 35km from Skopje, the capital of Northern Macedonia. On the left side of the Lepenc River, in the former center of the Old Bazaar in Kaçanik is the Islamic religious building known as the Mosque

of Koca Sinan Pasha. (Figure. 1) We emphasize the former Old Bazaar because from this craft and trade complex, dating from the 10th decade of the XVI century, nothing remains from the initial state of construction. It is interesting to note that in front of the mosque, on the right side of the river Lepenc are the ruins of the ancient castle of Kaçanik.



Figure 1: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque

#### KOCA SINAN PASHA MOSQUE COMPLEX

The mosque, as a work of historical, cultural, artistic, and religious value, was built in 1594/95 [25] [26]. It was erected as a charitable, religious building after the conquest of Yemen [25][17]. Besides the mosque, Koca Sinan Pasha also reconstructed the ancient castle and constructed a *hamam* (public bath), *mekteb* (elementary school), *imaret* (public kitchen), and a *han* (inn) [26][17][27]. It is also confirmed in the inscription above the mosque's portal [3]. While according to the diaries of archeological reconnaissance survey and inventorying [28] conducted in the municipality of Kaçanik by the Provincial Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Kosovo, based on the traces left, it can be concluded that Koca Sinan Pasha in the Hill of Vranjak, Tophane, on the location called Perforated Stone had built the fortification, the castle. Inside the castle, he had also built his inn. Today, only ruins remain of this fortified settlement. It should be noted that in the archaeological site, during the inventorying were found remnants of the ancient Roman, medieval and Ottoman periods [29][26].

Unfortunately, as in many archaeological sites, religious, public, and individual buildings in the territory of Kosovo, the buildings of Koca Sinan Pasha have been destroyed. Destructions are a consequence of various reasons. It includes time, atmospheric conditions, and the human factor. Today, only the mosque remains from the constructions of the donor in question. We can say that this sacred building largely preserves the originality of the initial state. However, this mosque has undergone some interventions [28]. The last restoration was carried out in 2012 [29].

#### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS OF KOCA SINAN PASHA MOSQUE

Like every work of classical mosque type in Kosovo, Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque, in terms of composition, is identical to other objects of the same character and Ottoman architectural style with local elements in the Balkans [30]. In the compositional scheme, the mosque contains the prayer hall, the portico, and the minaret. (Figure 2)

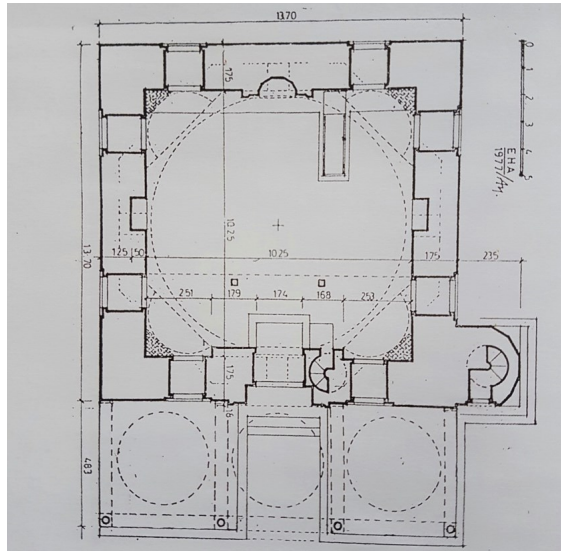


Figure 2: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Ground plan [2].

#### PRAYER HALL

A dome covers the prayer hall. The transition from the square to the circular shape of the dome is realized through squinches. (Figure 3) The mosque in its originally had walls with stone structures bound with lime mortar [4]. The walls in time were plastered. After the restoration, the plaster was removed, and the original masonry structure can be seen. The corners of the walls are made of regular rectangular stones. At the same time, other parts from natural stones are slightly chiseled. The masonry technique is rustic. (Figure 4)

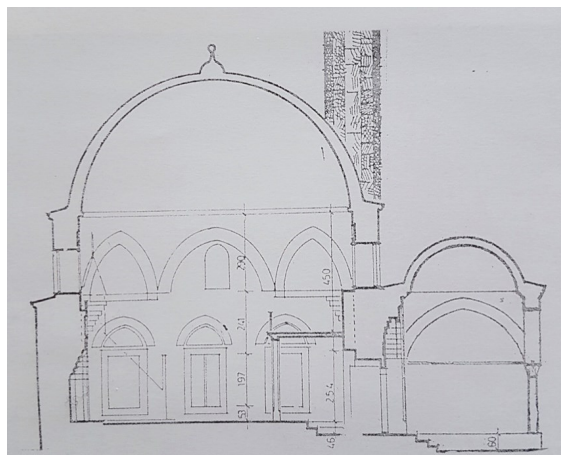


Figure 3: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Vertical cut [2].





Figure 4: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Northern facade.

The volume and space of the prayer hall are illuminated and ventilated by a total of 12 windows. In each view of the facade, we have two windows covered with architraves and a tympanum. Windows have moldings, whereas the blind tympana stand out with its modest decorations with bricks. They are secured with knotted grills. (Figure. 5) Four other windows are constructed on the drum. The drum is octagonal shaped. On every second page of the drum, there is a window. This form represents a single and unique variant in mosque construction in Kosova's territory. The cornice of the prayer hall and the drum are also unique. The cornice is constructed of many stone pieces in convex shapes. (Figure. 6) As constructive and functional elements of the interior of the prayer hall are *mihrab*, *minbar*, and *mahfil* (gallery).



Figure 5: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Window detail.



Figure 6: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Cornices.

#### PORTAL

The portal stands out with its historical and artistic importance and values. Above the entry door, are the mosque's inscriptions. This decoration is realized in middle relief sculpture. It is unique and represents an innovation on the portals of classical mosques in Kosova and the region as well. The gate of the portal is made of wood and decorated with geometric motifs. (Figure. 7)



Figure 7: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Portal.



Apparently, the portal can be a free expression of the master who built it. Or, it might be the influence of the craftsman who may have done work in any of the areas that Sinan Pasha served and built. Nevertheless, this is only an assumption; to date, we have not encountered any evidence to substantiate this assumption. However, it is known that during Ottoman rule, craftsmen from these areas took part in construction activities in regions and other centers of the Empire [30]. The portal in the region's mosques and many other mosques on the outskirts of the Empire was among the main parts where the direct communication of the building with its users and visitors took place [20]. Therefore, considering the construction's size and modesty, the portal as a constructive-architectural element plays an important part and gives a unique look to the building.

#### MIHRAB

*Mihrab*, as a constructive and functional element of the prayer hall, is made of marble. It serves to orient believers in the direction of Mecca. The opening of the *mihrab* has six angles and the upper part ends in a five-step pyramid shape. The upper part is decorated with stalactites. The *mihrab* is set in a rectangular frame. The frame is decorated with moldings that slightly project into the mosque's interior, Quran inscriptions, and seven tulip decorations. (Figure. 8)



Figure 8: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Mihrab.

#### MINBAR

*Minbar* is situated on the right side of the *mihrab*. It serves the imam to preach in Friday prayers and special religious holidays. It is made of marble, and, as usual, it takes the form of a staircase. It comprises a doorway and eleven steps leading to the top platform covered with polygonal *kūlah* (hood). The architrave of the doorway is adorned with sculptural reliefs on the upper part, while two sides of the *minbar* are embellished with moldings and geometric elements. In

the lower part, there are three openings. Two are smaller with stylized arches, whereas next to the wall is a bigger opening with a pointed arch. Above the pointed arch, below the top platform, is another opening resembling the lower ones. (Figure. 9)

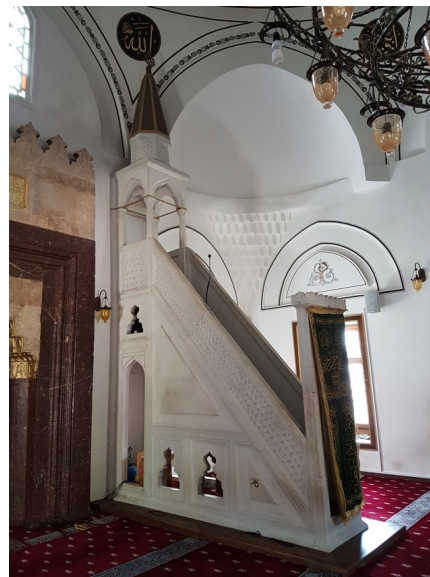


Figure 9: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Minbar.

#### MAHFIL

The *mahfil*, as a constructive and functional element, serves and is used by the female gender. It is made of wood and supported by two wooden pillars and three sidewalls. (Figure. 10) Communication with the *mahfil* is possible with the help of the doorway located on the western wall. *Mahfil* is protected with wooden handrails.



Figure 10: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Mahfil (gallery).

#### PORTICO

According to the photo documentation, the portico (narthex) of the mosque in its previous condition was open and made of wood [23][29]. It had a mono-pitched roof covered in the lead. Later, a closed narthex was added above the roof. This closed space was connected with the mosque through *mahfil* [3]. (Figure 11)



Figure 11: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Old portico.

With this unprofessional intervention without any restoration criteria, the mosque was degraded. Now the portico has been reconstructed according to Ayverdi's architectural visualization. This type of portico is typical for the classical mosques in Kosovo. It is all made of regular rectangular stone. The portico has four pillars and arcades. The pillars have no base. They are circular. The capitals are decorated with geometric figures. The portico is covered with three smaller domes. (Figure. 11)



Figure 11: Kocan Sinan Pasha Mosque. Portico.

#### MINARET

The minaret is a compositional part of the mosque. It is situated on the right side of the praying hall. A constructive and functional element is polygonal and fully constructed from stone. Its footing is square, while other parts like the pulpit, transitional segment, and shaft, are polygonal. The base, pulpit, and shaft are regular rectangular stones. It has one balcony with five cornices decorated with stalactites. Unfortunately, stalactites are in bad condition. The tracery of the balcony is realized with stone slabs. The spire has a wooden construction and is wrapped in lead. The minaret, as in other mosques, has small openings for ventilation and lighting. The openings start from the base and continue to the top of the minaret roof.

(Figure. 12)



Figure 12: Koca Sinan pasha Mosque. Minaret.

#### DECORATIONS

The interior of the mosque features paintings, medallions, and arabesque decorations. During the restoration works, it was intervened in the original mural painting. Apart from having new elements not of the initial time, the mural painting has also lost its originality [3]. The painting in the tempera technique is realized in dry plaster (*al secco*). The motifs, as in other works of Islamic religious character, are from the plant world, geometric figures, and quotations from the Qur'an. From the decoration, a medallion on the dome stands out. It is painted on the upper part, respectively, on the center of the dome. In the center, it has *thuluth* calligraphy and palmette motifs surrounding it. (Figure. 13) Apart from the dome, paintings mainly take place on the windows, squinches, and drums. (Figure. 14) The two-dimensional painting has a white background. The predominant colors are blue, purple, ochre, black and gray.



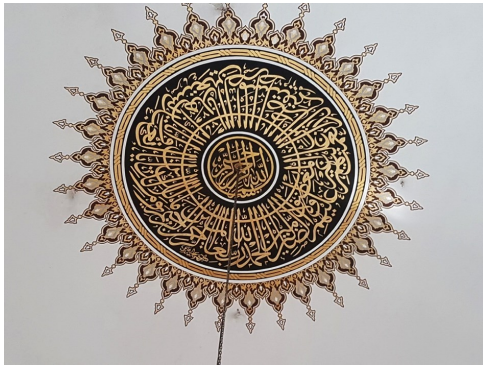


Figure 13: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Decoration.



Figure 14: Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque. Decorations

Besides paintings, the religious building is also characterized by a low-relief sculpture. Decorative elements are mainly realized in stone, plaster, and wood. Sculptural decorations are found in the portal, mihrab, minbar, and squinches.

Motifs are of geometric and stylized floral elements. Squinches are decorated with *muqarnas* in cubic form, realized with plaster. (Figure 9) Woodwork it is applied on the wooden doors and the bases of *mahfil* columns.

#### CURRENT CONDITION

First, it should be noted that the surroundings of the mosque have been lost since the initial state of construction. The cemetery with gravestones in rich calligraphic inscriptions within the mosque's courtyard is nonexistent. On the northwestern side of the mosque, in the courtyard, the Islamic Community of Kosova has built a new building for their administrative purposes. This object, which is close to the mosque, is not in harmony with the architecture and environment. The courtyard of the mosque was encircled with stonewall. Only a part on the western and

southwestern sides remains from this wall. Stonewall is covered with a stone roof. On the western part of the wall, there is a portal covered in the arch. The portal retains its original condition. Four tap fountains attached to the western wall on the right side of the portico are removed. However, after the last restoration, a fountain was built on the southwestern side of the mosque. On the western side of the mosque, a large residential building was constructed across the road, about 7 meters distance. This structure was built without any criteria regarding the protection of monuments, dominates the area, and undermines and diminishes the mosque's importance as a work of art.

#### DISCUSSION

From studying the building, we can conclude that although several changes have occurred, the mosque still retains its originality. The mosque has preserved the compositional elements, the quadrangular base, the dome, and the minaret. After the restoration in 2012, the original condition of the portico has returned and now it is covered with three small domes. The plaster in the facades of the wall has been removed as well. It gives the mosque an authentic look and allows the rustic structure and masonry technique to be seen. Constructive elements in the mosque's interior are well preserved too, except for the railings of the *mahfil*, which have been changed.

It should be noted that not every intervention in the building or its surroundings was done correctly and professionally. It can be witnessed in the interior decorations and the monument's external environment. After the restoration in 2012, the old paintings with floral motifs were removed. Floral motifs decorated parts above windows above the portal and on the drum. The dominating colors were light blue in windows, doors, squinches, and domes, whereas the mihrab frame was painted light green. Even though they were quite modest, decorations with light colors on a white background were typical for classical domed mosques in Kosova. Today, the white color still dominates the entire mosque. However, the decoration on the dome is totally new in a dark color and does not correspond with previous mosque painting traditions in Kosova.

Furthermore, the constructions surrounding the building are not in harmony and do not correspond with the mosque's architecture. Unfortunately, state institutions of the Republic of Kosova were negligent during the realization of restoration works and urban development of the town.

The mosque in Kaçanik is quite simple compared to other religious buildings in Cairo and Damascus, founded by the same donor, Koca Sinan Pasha. Considering the place where it was built, a small town on the periphery of the Ottoman Empire, it is

understandable. However, the work retains the main features of the compositional scheme of classical Ottoman-style mosques in the Western Balkans. Nevertheless, local elements are also present in the construction. The rustic masonry technique stands out: the portal, the four openings in the octagonal drum of the dome, the cornices of the prayer hall and the drum, and the shallow dome. These elements give value and distinguish the mosque from other buildings in Kosovo [30].

## CONCLUSION

The mosque of Koca Sinan Pasha is the only monument in the town of Kaçanik that still survives. The Ottoman-style mosque, although, in a compositional aspect, it is a typical building for the Western Balkan, stands out for the design of its portal. Furthermore, it is the nucleus of the town's development during the Ottoman period. Therefore, the study of this building with scientific methodology was necessary for completing the historiography related to the city's urban development and Ottoman-style architecture with local elements in Kosovo and the region. In addition, this study, analysis, and narrative of the architectural concept, constructive architectural, and decorative elements go beyond the previous limited and general works. Likewise, it allowed us to face unpleasant facts about Kosovo's treatment of cultural heritage.

Although the mosque never lost its religious function, it underwent several changes with time. They were both positive and, in some cases, negative as well. It was a result of negligence. Challenges like this, where there are numerous in the absence of proper studies, analysis and professionalism, the objects of architectural heritage and their environments undergo drastic changes. In the case in question, we hope the study will aid in documenting, preserving, promoting, and raising awareness of the Koca Sinan Pasha Mosque and its environment.

It is necessary for the relevant institutions and the competent bodies for the city's urban development to be careful and considerate while preparing and designing urban and spatial plans, not to allow the environment around the mosque to be further degraded. In addition, in case of future interventions in the mosque, prior studies by cultural heritage experts must be carried out. Thus preventing further changes from occurring and preserving the initial state of the building as well as regional elements and traditions. Moreover, a proper scientific study should help raise awareness of future generations in cultivating and preserving cultural heritage. It should also serve as an inspiration for architectural creations with positive elements of tradition in the future.

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