Petar Strunje

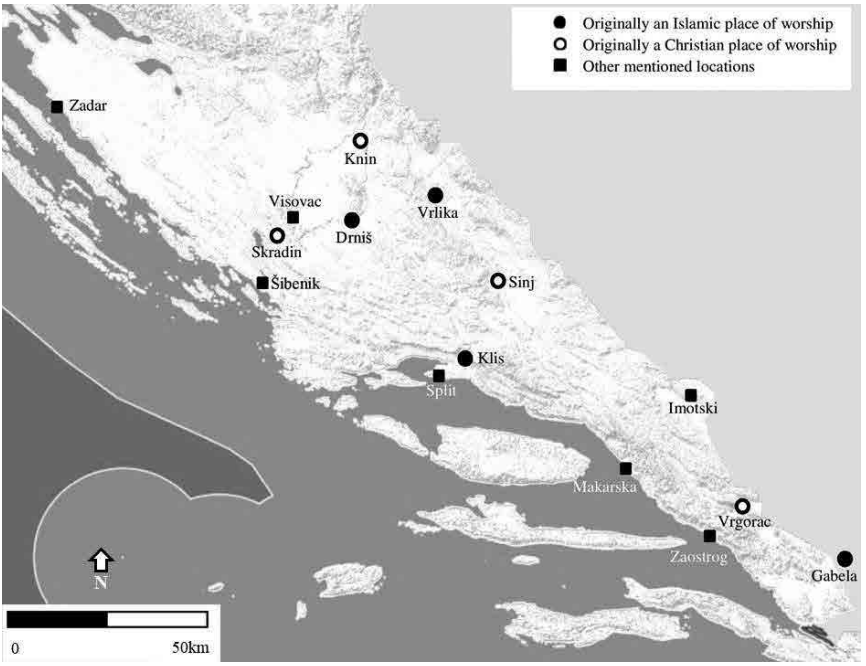
Whose monuments? Interpreting mosque-to-church conversion in Dalmatia

There were nine confirmed cases of mosque-to-church conversions in present-day Dalmatia following the Venetian conquests of the region from the mid-seventeenth to the early eighteenth century (Fig. 1).[1] The mosques of Drniš and Klis survive as churches to this day, while the third preserved monument is the minaret of the second Drniš mosque – the now-destroyed church of Saint Barbara *dei Bombardieri* (Fig. 2).[2] All examples demonstrate the cultural-religious interplays in the region and are valuable in analysing relations between architectural cultures, their iconographies, and Catholic and Islamic liturgical needs. Being nominally monuments of two cultures and two religions, they present problems to traditional art history. Thanks to Ljubo Karaman, these monuments are included in most monographs on Croatian built heritage, but almost exclusively as Ottoman monuments, notwithstanding that they have been churches for significantly longer than mosques.[3] To best illustrate these problems and propose a solution, two examples from Drniš will be used: the mentioned seventeenth-century mosque of Halil Hoca – now

1 Petar Strunje, "Christianisation of Mosques in Dalmatia: Recontextualisation of Sacral Architecture," *Turcica* 54 (2023).

2 While the minaret still largely stands, the church was destroyed in a storm in the second half of the eighteenth century. A shortened minaret also stood next to the parish church of Vrgorac until 1861, when it was demolished to make way for the new church transept.

3 Anđela Horvat, Radmila Matejčić, Kruno Prijatelj, ed., *Barok u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1982); Milan Pelc, *Renesansa* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2007); Zlatko Karač, "Tursko-islamska arhitektura i umjetnost," in *Hrvatska umjetnost: Povijest i spomenici*, ed. Milan Pelc (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, Školska knjiga, 2010). Recently, a monograph has been published on Islamic art and architecture: Zlatko Karač, Alen Žunić, *Islamska arhitektura i umjetnost u Hrvatskoj: Osmanska i suvremena baština – Islamic architecture and art in Croatia: Ottoman and contemporary heritage* (Zagreb: Arhitektonski fakultet, UPI-2M PLUS, 2018).



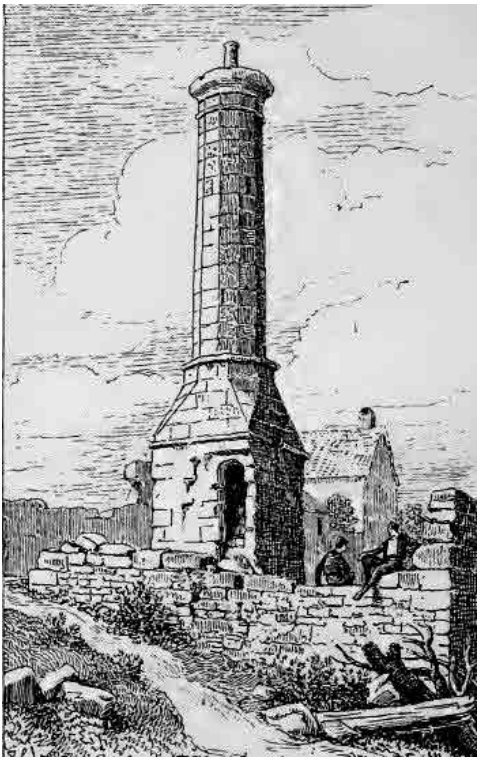


Fig. 1

Map of Dalmatia showing the Christianised mosques (source: Strunje, "Christianisation," Fig. 1)

Fig. 2

Minaret of Drniš (source: Jackson, Dalmatia, the Quarnero and Istria, vol. 2, Fig. 53)

the church of Saint Anthony, and the eighteenth-century church of the Assumption of Mary in the village of Gradac near Drniš.

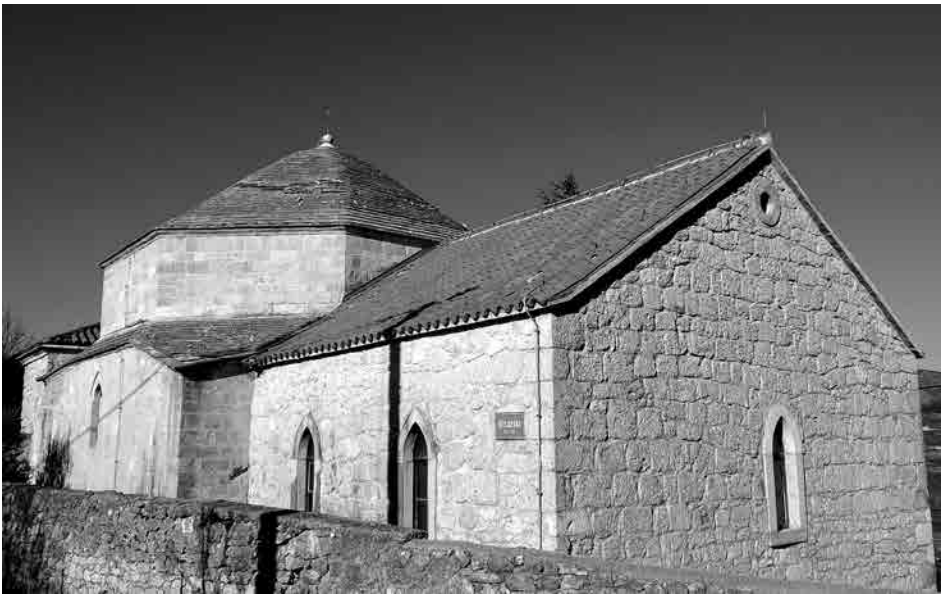
The mosque of Halil Hoca was constructed in the first quarter of the seventeenth century by serasker Halil Hoca, an Ottoman military dignitary, in the small but regionally significant town of Drniš (Fig. 3–7).[4] It is a typical single-domed mosque of the classical Ottoman period, comparable to other examples in the Balkans, especially the Dalmatian-Herzegovinian mosques entirely made of local stone (*muljika*). The Venetian administration definitely gifted the mosque to the Franciscans of the nearby Visovac monastery in 1689 when the Venetian army conquered the town during the Morean War (1684–1699).[5] Following conversion, the apparent symbols, spatial relations, lighting, and liturgical furniture were changed in light of the new religious, cultural, and chronological context.[6] That is, the building underwent Christianisation and baroquisation. However, all the structural and several decorative elements were not changed, and the building was easily recognisable by its dome, portico, ogee arches, and the muqarnas decoration. It could still be and repeatedly was read as a former *Turkish* mosque, as testified to in almost all canonical visitations. Moreover, the muqarnas from the squinches and the portico capitals survived and became a local model. British diplomat and travel writer Andrew Archibald Paton (1811–1874) noted that the "honeycomb and stalactite ornaments in the corners still remained; and […] they had struck the fancy of the last house painter that had decorated the church; for no doubt ignorant of the original character of the ornaments, he had carried an imitation of them all around the church."[7] This is not the only such reference. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the motif was repeated on the holy water (or baptismal) font and the capitals of the triumphal arch in the church of the Assumption of Mary in the nearby village of Gradac, where it is included in the local iterance of eighteenth-century

4 Krešimir Kužić, "Sudbina kršćanskih i islamskih bogomolja na prostoru Dalmatinske zagore od 1415. do 1717. godine," in *Zagora između stočarsko-ratarske tradicije te procesa litoralizacije i globalizacije*, ed. Mate Maras and Josip Faričić (Zadar, Split: Kulturni sabor Zagore, 2011), 363; Karlo Kosor, "Drniš pod Venecijom," in *Povijest Drniške krajine: Zbornik povijesnih studija 1494.–1940.*, ed. Ante Čavka (Split: Ante Čavka, 1995), 211–212, 396. On Ottoman Drniš see Seid Traljić, "Drniš šesnaestog i sedamnaestog stoljeća," *Radovi Instituta JAZU u Zadru* 19 (1972); Karlo Kosor, "Drniška krajina za turskog vladanja," *Kačić* 11 (1979); Karlo Kosor, "Drniška krajina za turskoga vladanja," in *Povijest Drniške krajine: Zbornik povijesnih studija: 1494.–1940.*, ed. Ante Čavka (Split: Ante Čavka, 1995); Kornelija Jurin Starčević, "Osmanska graditeljska baština srednjega jadranskoga zaleđa u povijesnoj perspektivi," in *Spomenica Josipa Adamčeka*, ed. Drago Roksandić and Damir Agičić (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 2009); Kornelija Jurin Starčević, "Osmanski Drniš: popisni defteri, narativna vrela i arheološki ostatci kao izvori za (re)interpretaciju osmanske historije u današnjoj Dalmaciji," *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* 64 (2015).

5 Kosor, "Drniš pod Venecijom," 211; Strunje, "Christianisation".

6 By 1709 three altars were present. The bell tower was built at the end of the eighteenth century; the nave was added to the west in the middle of the nineteenth century, while the choir in its present form was constructed at the beginning of the twentieth century. For a detailed chronology see Kosor, "Drniš pod Venecijom," 211–212, 396; Antonia Tomić, *Sakralna umjetnost drniškoga i skradinskoga područja u XVIII. stoljeću* (Drniš: Gradski muzej, 2017), 54–67.

7 Andrew Archibald Paton, *Highlands and Islands of the Adriatic: Including Dalmatia, Croatia, and the Southern Provinces of the Austrian Empire*, vol. II (London: Chapman and Hall, 1849), 31. He also remarked that the mihrab (a decorated niche indicating the *qibla* – the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca) was only partially obscured by the main altar.



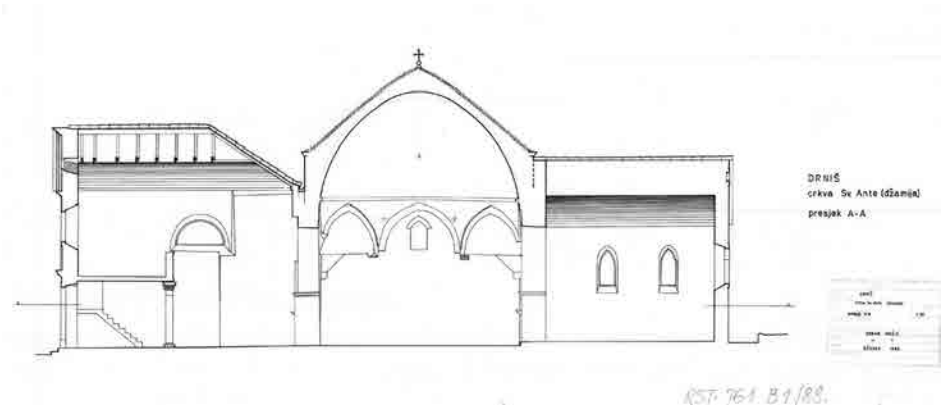


Fig. 3

Church of Saint Anthony in Drniš
(photo: P. Strunje)

Fig. 4

Goran Nikšić, Cross section of the
church of Saint Anthony (source:
Tomić, "Osmanska ostavština," Fig. 11)

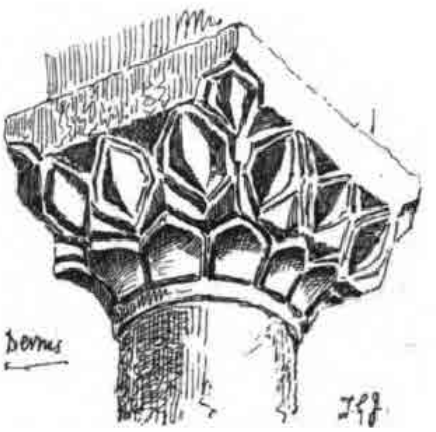


Fig. 5

Interior of the church of Saint Anthony (photo: P. Strunje)

Fig. 6

Muqarnas decoration on the squinces, the church of Saint Anthony in Drniš (photo: P. Strunje)

Fig. 7

Capital from the church of Saint Anthony in Drniš (source: Jackson, Dalmatia, the Quarnero and Istria, vol. 2)

forms (Fig. 8–10).[8] This confirms the repetition of what is considered an exclusively Islamic architectural motif in subsequent local Catholic architecture. Rather than claiming an external influence, it was suggested that the motif had come to signify the church of Saint Anthony as the parish church of Drniš, from where it entered the local architectural vocabulary.[9] This afterlife of Ottoman monuments or the coexistence of apparently opposing forms (especially contemporary ones) presents an interpretative problem.

Before Karaman, Dalmatian mosques were valued to a double standard. Foreign travel writers, such as John Gardner Wilkinson (1797–1875), Andrew Archibald Paton, Valentino Lago, and Thomas Graham Jackson (1835–1924) included them in their publications, while contemporary local scholars did not.[10] Therefore these monuments lived a double life, neglected in the regional and national narratives while existing in the international sphere. As an influential architect, Jackson was probably the greatest authority to direct a scholarly gaze towards these *Turkish* monuments. Ottoman monuments in Dalmatia were formally recognised by Alois Hauser (1841–1896), the Viennese architect in charge of monuments' conservation in Dalmatia, in his 1894 partial classification of monuments in the region. He classified the fortress of Klis with its mosque and the minaret in Drniš under the second category (of only two), assigning them regional and local artistic and historical significance and deeming them worthy of conservation.[11] Thus, based on contemporary postulates of the Vienna School of Art History, Hauser expanded his valorisation to include Islamic monuments. However, to both Jackson and Hauser these monuments were important mainly because they were rare and foreign (i.e. *Turkish*), not because of their intrinsic qualities.

The first attempt at consolidation within regional, and subsequently national, art history was made by Ljubo Karaman, then head of the Dalmatian monuments' protection office in Split. He dedicated a short chapter to Ottoman architecture in his 1933 monograph *Umjetnost u Dalmaciji XV i XVI*

8 A complete chronology is difficult to establish. The early medieval church of Saint Peter stood on the site. A rebuilding permit was issued in 1693 and the parish was re-established by 1709 when the church was testified to be in excellent condition. This building was burnt down by an Ottoman raiding party in 1715, and rebuilt as a modest structure by 1725. In its present form, the church is a product of the construction of 1752–1757, with a significant restoration dated 1771. In any case, the muqarnas elements can be dated to the period from 1752 to 1771. Stanko Bačić, "Uloga visovačkih franjevaca u Drniškoj krajini od XVI. stoljeća do 1830. godine," in *Povijest Drniške krajine*, ed. Ante Čavka (Split: Ante Čavka, 1995), 257–260; Tomić, *Sakralna arhitektura*, 78; Strunje, "Christianisation".

9 Strunje, "Christianisation".

10 See John Gardner Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro,* vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1848), 127; Paton, *Highlands and Islands*, 31; Valentino Lago, *Memorie sulla Dalmazia* (Venice: Grimaldo, 1869–1870), vol. 1, 402, vol. 2, 216; Thomas Graham Jackson, *Dalmatia, the Quarnero and Istria with Cettigne in Montenegro and Island of Grado,* vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887), 180–181, fig. 53–54. Jackson (p. 181) was particularly critical of the Christianisation of the Drniš mosque, stating that "[…] Moslem mosque turned into a Christian church, and much altered and spoiled in the process."

11 Hauser did not mention the Drniš mosque. Franko Ćorić, "Kategorizacija dalmatinskih spomenika Aloisa Hausera: Prilog povijesti umjetničke topografije u Hrvatskoj," in *Ivi Maroeviću baštinici u spomen,* ed. Žarka Vujić and Marko Špikić (Zagreb: Zavod za informacijske studije, 2009), 361.

vijeka (Art in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Dalmatia). While deeming it unquestionably worthy of representation within the corpus of Dalmatian art, Karaman still struggled to incorporate it, as evident from his introductory statement: "It is a weird occurrence […]."[12] The most significant contribution to valorising architectural heritage is undoubtedly Karaman's *O djelovanju domaće sredine u umjetnosti hrvatskih krajeva* (On the Impact of the Native Environment in Croatian Art), published in 1963. Following his (non-exclusive) classification of peripheral, provincial, and borderland art, Karaman categorises Ottoman architecture in Croatia as part of the last group. Borderland art is created on a political and cultural frontier where two (or more) artistic traditions overlap in a given chronological frame, creating something *interesting and new*.[13] In a true cultural borderland, monuments of different provenance coexist, while forms of diagonally different origin often meet on the same monument. Therefore, while Ottoman monuments as imported forms would strictly be classified as provincial art dependent on Bosnian Ottoman models, their geo-cultural position on the Ottoman-Venetian frontier makes them borderland art. While Karaman does not mention their re-use as Catholic churches, this conversion would position them even more strongly within borderland art, as only in this category do *forms of diagonally different origin* meet on a single monument, albeit in provincial forms.[14] Karaman's mention was a step forward in valorising Ottoman monuments but did not give any answers on their afterlife when old and new *rustic* (*provincial*) elements overlap, producing an "eclectic and sporadic mix of different forms on the same monument", instead of a "wide artistic synthesis even of different layers" of the *periphery*.[15] Karaman presents them as foreign (Islamic) monuments,[16] not hybrids. Several difficult questions arise first-hand. Even if certain forms applied on the original layer of the monument were *imported* in the seventeenth century, are they still foreign in the eighteenth? How to classify two layers on the same monument when they are separated by centuries but interconnected? How do the locals, as authors and consumers of a visual language, see the monument? The fluidity of Karaman's notions would allow for a plethora of readings depending on the political-geographical-cultural context, but the borderland monument

12 Ljubo Karaman, *Umjetnost u Dalmaciji XV i XVI vijeka* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1933), 137. The value of these monuments still lies in their rarity: "*Vrlo rijetki i već po tome vrlo zanimljivi* […]." Ottoman art is similarly valorized in his *Dalmacija kroz vjekove u historiji i umjetnosti* (Split: Jadranska straža, 1934), 122–123. Cvito Fisković (1908–1996), Karaman's assistant and later successor, wrote extremely positively about the mosque on Klis fortress, valuing its aesthetic qualities as the "most beautiful part of the fortress". *Doprinos upoznavanju kliške tvrđave* (Sarajevo: Napredak, 1939), 19.

13 Ljubo Karaman, *Problemi periferijske umjetnosti: O djelovanju domaće sredine u umjetnosti hrvatskih krajeva* (Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 2001), 13 [first edition: *O djelovanju domaće sredine u umjetnosti hrvatskih krajeva* (Zagreb: Društvo historičara umjetnosti N.R.H., 1963)].

14 Karaman proposed a similar reading for the Istrian interior, where "art is of the [Italian-German] border area, but in mostly provincial forms." *Problemi periferijske umjetnosti*, 15.

15 Karaman, *Problemi periferijske umjetnosti,* 16.

16 Karaman, *Problemi periferijske umjetnosti,* 85. "They are interesting relics from the era of Turkish occupation."

Fig. 8

Parish church of the Nativity of Mary
in Gradac (photo: P. Strunje)

Fig. 9

Triumphal arch of the parish church of Gradac (photo: P. Strunje)

Fig. 10

Holy water or baptismal font from the parish church of Gradac (photo: P. Strunje)

would always end up at the crossroads of somewhat elusive centres. Karaman might consider these monuments *interesting and new*, but their individual and collective creators and their intrinsic motivations are not as emancipated as those of peripheral art. Rather than forcing these monuments within Karaman's paradigm sixty years later, it would be more convenient to adopt a new approach, already anticipated in local historiography.

Trying to reconcile the new, imported, and inherited local solutions, as well as the urban and rural examples, Kruno Prijatelj, in the first monograph on the Baroque in Croatia, concluded that Dalmatian Baroque is an encompassing spirit evident in local variations and hybrid solutions between the old and the new, not just in ornaments and their composition but also in the architectural space.[17] This approach enables the valorisation of these monuments *as they are* and have been for more than 300 years. We no longer talk simply of the original mosque changed and disrupted by later additions, but of the church of Saint Anthony that inherited the former mosque.[18] While both the original and subsequent layers are thus emancipated, this approach does not tackle the precise and intricate mechanism of accommodating a seventeenth-century Ottoman mosque into an eighteenth-century Catholic church, marked not only by the introduction of new Baroque forms but by selective re-use, adaptation, and imitation of inherited Ottoman ones.

Hybridity is a relatively new term in art history that proposes no value system and instead concentrates on encounter. There are quite a few monuments in the European context in which two apparently opposite traditions overlap, and they are more often found in centres than on frontiers.[19] Venice is a good example, proverbially challenging to incorporate into the Western canon. Of all the categories, Karaman assigns to borderland art the most evident political-geographical frame. He does not use the vaguer (and somewhat pejorative) term borderline (*granična*) but "art of the borderland" (*umjetnost graničnih sredina*), fixing it in place. This place is then in a subordinate relation to two other places from which it receives artistic inputs. On the other hand, hybridity does not wield political or

17 Prijatelj also included the church of Saint Anthony in his study, as a baroquisation of the original Ottoman mosque. Kruno Prijatelj, "Barok u Dalmaciji," in *Barok u Hrvatskoj*, ed. Anđela Horvat, Radmila Matejčić, Kruno Prijatelj (Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1982), 709. In one of the rare art-historical studies on the region, Zoraida Demori Staničić turned her attention to *minor forms* in the post-medieval hinterland of Split, to chapels and small parish churches and their liturgical furniture, concluding that the Baroque in the region is not a purely stylistic category but rather a chronological frame. Zoraida Demori Staničić, "Spomenici 17. i 18. stoljeća u Splitskoj zagori," *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 28, 1 (1989).

18 Prijatelj, "Barok u Dalmaciji", 709. This approach was taken up by Tomić, *Sakralna arhitektura* in the recent monograph on eighteenth-century sacral architecture in the Drniš and Skradin areas.

19 When considering the geography of hibridity, Peter Burke adds the court and the city to the frontier as contact zones where hybrid art is made. Artistic production of the frontier is treated as an independent product of frontier cultures, not cultural frontiers. These frontiers are: "zones with their own distinctive culture or customs, distinguished by archaism and by unusually intense cultural exchange." *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 66–78; *Hybrid Renaissance: Culture, Language, Architecture* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2016), 43–52.

geographical determinants and takes into account only the cultural aspects, emancipating the zone as a *frontier culture* with its individual qualities on par with cities as hubs of *mixing*.

It would be wrong to treat the re-use of the Drniš muqarnas capitals, their imitation on the wall painting or the triumphal arch columns in Gradac as a foreign Ottoman influence. When imitated, the muqarnas was already appropriated and adapted within the local Catholic context. It became the primary signifier of the church of Saint Anthony, an element that separated it from all other churches. Thus, the muqarnas motif became codified within the local architectural tradition, forming an ecotype, a local style.[20] In linguistic terms, it is a loanword assimilated into a local language and incorporated into its syntax.

One could argue that any cultural artefact is hybrid to a degree, and this critique would be correct. However, specific examples like the above-mentioned ones stand out in a comparative perspective as something that does not neatly belong to a relatively homogenous landscape. The chronological frame is another problem. What stands out today did not necessarily stand out before. The question of the contemporaries' consumption of the architectural language is necessary to explain the survival of these structures and their subsequent re-use in relation to the Catholic and local worldviews. To this aim, canonical visitations, Franciscan reports, and secular administrative decrees were analysed, reconstructing the local narrative. Each source recognised the original buildings and their parts (dome, minaret, windows, capitals) as *Turkish*, sometimes signifying the former function within Islamic practice, such as the notion that the minaret is a *Turkish* bell tower from where their priest would call to prayer. However, while their provenance remained obvious, all of these elements could be Christianised, that is re-contextualised within a Catholic context precisely because they had functional and semantic equivalents from a Catholic point of view. The minaret was no longer a Turkish bell tower but simply a bell tower, while a mosque was no longer a Turkish church but simply a church, *our church*. Their outlook or provenance was signified as a way of building a style (*mos Turcarum*) that could be recomposed and re-used without any symbolic burden. All non-interchangeable elements pertaining to Islamic liturgy were negated along with other most apparent symbols,[21] while new ones were introduced.[22]

In essence, everything that could be re-used was kept while going through the process of cultural translation. What could be translated in function was kept (form notwithstanding), and what could not, was significantly

20 For several interesting ecotypes in the polycentric ambient of rural Dalmatia, see Vladimir Marković, *Crkve u Dalmaciji 17. i 18. stoljeća: Prošlost i promjene* (Zagreb: Gliptoteka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, 2018).

21 Elements such as balconies and endings of the minaret, or the *minbar* – pulpit.

22 These were most notably the consecrated altars, of which the main altar needed to be raised, followed by the baptistery, confessionals, bells, and similar. Because a church – unlike mosques – is also a place for the dead, it was deemed beneficial that a grave or two were introduced. Strunje, "Christianisation".

changed or destroyed. Through decades of use and re-use, the structure and its elements were re-contextualised within a Catholic narrative, becoming the main signifiers of the church of Saint Anthony as a distinct building in the region. The same process happened numerous times in the region with the appropriation of pagan antiquity, most notably with the mausoleum of Emperor Diocletian turned into the cathedral of Split and the Temple of Jupiter into its baptistery. Their structures and decorative language might reveal their provenance, but the emphasis was on new (Christian) semantic relations.

Finally, by reconstructing the narrative of local contemporaries, Prijatelj's original statement can be confirmed. An originally Ottoman mosque could be recomposed as a Baroque space and serve all church functions with minor changes.[23] To properly valorise these spaces, all layers need to be taken into account, as it is shown that all subsequent layers enter into an informed and active dialogue with the original Ottoman one, a dialogue that extends well beyond the structural elements and produces a hybrid monument in formalist terms, but with independent artistic qualities.

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23 Other noted examples from the period are the Mosque of Ibrahim pasha – All Saints' church in Đakovo (Croatia), the Mosque of Ali pasha – All Saints' church in Szigetvár (Hungary), and the best-known Mosque of Qasim pasha – Candlemass Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Pecs (Hungary), all of which are important in national historiography both in their original form and as eighteenth-century monuments. For Ottoman motifs used in new church construction in historical Hungary see Burke, *Hybrid Renaissance*, 87–88.

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