



## Oriental style city house in bosnia and herzegovina: The seranic family house in Banjaluka

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### Abstract

The Seranic family house is located in the Gornji Seher district of Banjaluka (Geographic coordinates: 44°44'54.98"N, 17°09'30.93"E, Elevation: 165 m). The Seranic family was a well-known bey family in the city of Banjaluka. In 1580, this family started building the first house on this site. The house, in accordance with the economic status of the family, was built as a rich town house of the oriental type in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It had a garden, a richly decorated house yard ('avlija'), a spacious spatial organization with a public zone ('selamluk') and a private zone ('haremluk'). The premises were richly decorated, both in the treatment of surfaces (floors, walls and ceilings) and in the equipment in them. Considering the location (springs of toppe water), the house also had a specially arranged building, a house spa ('hauz'), located in the avlika. Apart from the owner of the house, the spa ('hauz') was also used by the neighbors. The house of the Seranic family, which is located next to the Vrbas river itself, is the most representative example of an oriental-type town house in Banjaluka. At the beginning of the 20th century, the house was divided between two families (descendants of the 'basic' family) when, due to its adaptation to new needs, it lost much of its authenticity.

**Keywords:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Banjaluka, Seranic family House

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### 1. Introduction

Banjaluka is a city (with about 227,000 inhabitants) located on the river Vrbas, in the northwest of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Archaeological findings confirm the presence of people in this area since prehistoric times. The Illyrians organized in the state of Illyria lived here, and after the Illyrian Wars (229-168 BC), the ancient Romans (at the beginning of the new era), where the area was included in their province of Illyricum. Today's fortress Kastel (Latin: Castra) originates from the time of the Attic Romans. According to ancient Roman documents, the Romans called the settlement on the site of today's Banjaluka Ad Ladios. The Slavs came to the area of today's Banjaluka in the 6th century. Several settlements will be formed in the vicinity of Banjaluka over time: Vrbas (1224), Zemljanik (1287), Kotor Varos (1323), Zvečaj (1404) and Bocac (1446) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Like most towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Banjaluka was built near a medieval town - a fortress. The first, known to us, mention of this town on the river Vrbas is that of February 6, 1494 <sup>[2]</sup>. Evlija Celebija in his Travelogue <sup>[3]</sup> reports that „the old part of the fortress from the time of the Romans was mentioned for the first time in 1295 (and) it was the property of a certain Ban Radoslav“. The town-fortress on the left bank of Vrbas (in today's Gornji Seher <sup>[1]</sup> with its suburbs and one Catholic monastery is the largest fortress on Vrbas downstream from Jajce, which the Ottomans conquered only in 1527/1528. years. From then on, for the next three and a half centuries, Banjaluka grew and evolved in the full sense of urbanization, and according to the principle of organization of an oriental city of Islamic civilization. The growth of Banjaluka flowed from the town under the fortress in the direction downstream with Vrbas, both on its left and right banks. Gornji Seher first arose and grew (Figures 1,2,3), where the Tsar's mosque (built in honor of Sultan Sulejman the Magnificent, 1494 – 1566) represented the backbone of both the bazaar and the entire settlement.

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<sup>1</sup> During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995), Gornji Seher was renamed Srpske Toplice.

The mosque was soon named the Carsijska mosque, and when the second mosque was built, the Carsijska mosque was named Stara (Atik), and after it the mahal that stretched to the mouth of the Suturlija river and the Vrbas river. From the mouth of this river, further down the Vrbas, the Tabaci village arose (it got its name from the artisans who made rawhide). It is not known exactly when the Tabačka Mosque (Debagija) was built, but it was demolished in 1919 [4].

In 1553, the Bosnian Sandzak Beg Sofi Mehmed Pasha (the fourth Bosnian governor, in the period 1590 - 1591) transferred the seat of the Bosnian Sandzak from Sarajevo to Banjaluka, which will represent an extraordinary stimulus to the overall development of this city. In 1554, this Sandzakbeg built a mosque on the right bank of Vrbas, opposite the Emperor's Mosque, and a bridge. To support these endowments, he built 69 shops, a large inn, a hammam, four mills and added a lot of arable land to them. (In the list of buildings of the architect Kodza Mimar Sinan, the Sofi Mehmed Pasha mosque is also mentioned. Unfortunately, this building has not been preserved in its original form). The trust fund ('vakufnama') of Sofi Mehmed Pasha dated December 26, 1554 is the oldest surviving document from the Ottoman era that refers to Banjaluka. At this time, Kubad-vojevodina mahala (around the mosque of the same name) was also created in Gornji Seher, on the left bank of Vrbas.

In 1563, Osman Shah, Bosnian Sandzakbeg, built his mosque. The area around the source of sulphurous water, on the right bank of Vrbas, was called Ilidza as early as 1554 [4].

According to the first Austro-Hungarian population census in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1879, 9560 inhabitants lived in 1741 houses in Banjaluka, of which 6474 were Muslims, 1893 Orthodox, 1006 Catholics and 187 Jews. While staying in Banjaluka in 1659, Evlija Celebija mentions churches, but does not give us detailed information about them [3]. Until 1737, there was a Catholic parish in Banjaluka, when it was closed (which is connected to the burglary of Hildburghansen and the Catholics' fear of eventual retaliation by the Ottomans). The parish of Banjaluka was rebuilt in 1859, when the public school was opened; in 1872, the Sisters of Mercy arrived in this city and opened their own school; a small church (Bethaus als Kirche) was built next to the parish office. Shortly before 1850, a Serbian elementary school was built in Banjaluka, and in 1867, an Orthodox seminary organized by Vaso Pelagic (1838 - 1899). The Orthodox church was probably built a little earlier.

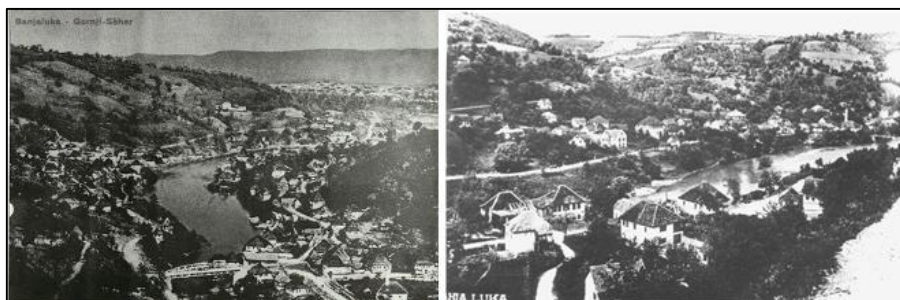
Jews in Banjaluka arrive from Sarajevo after the fire that engulfed this city in 1852; merchants and sarafis (money changers) arrived first, and later sahadis, tinsmiths and other artisans.

With the entry of Austro-Hungarian troops into Banjaluka (July 31, 1878) led by Field Marshal Wilhelm Herzog, there will be an era in which the forces of different cultures and worldviews gained new intensities and as such were reflected in the totality of the life of this city, which can be clearly traced through the urban planning - architectural picture of Banjaluka [3].



Source: Google Earth. Accessed: May 26, 2023

Fig 1: Seranić family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Location



Source: [8] Imsirija M. (2012). Defining Genius Loci on the example of Gornji Seher in Banjaluka (Doctoral dissertation), Faculty of Architecture, University of Sarajevo, Sarajevo

Fig 2: Left: Gornji Seher (end of the 19th century). Right: Gornji Seher, part of Ilidza hamlet (1930)



Source: Author (August 1, 2011)

Fig 3: Gornji Seher, part of Iidza hamlet (2011)

On the territory of today's local community Gornji Seher, along the river Vrbas, there are eight sources of thermal-mineral water with a temperature of 32 °C. These sources

were the basis for the construction of ancient-Roman baths (termi). During the Ottoman Empire, a spa (Iidža) with several pools with warm water was arranged here (Figure 4).



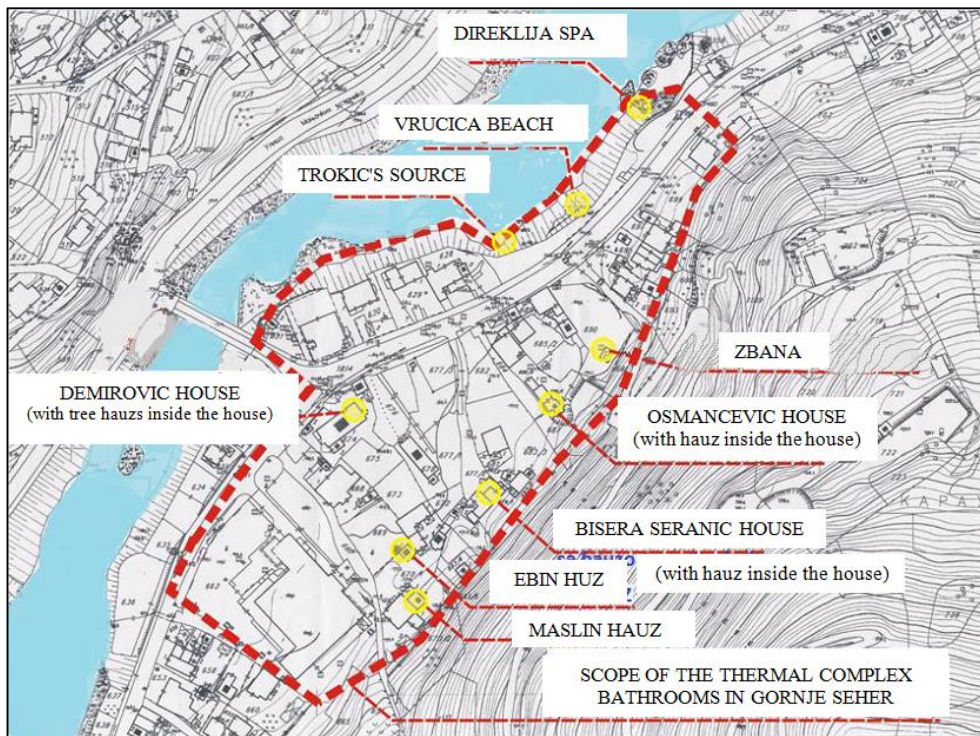
Source: Prof. Ph.D. Ahmet Hadrovic (August 1, 2011) Prof. Ph.D. Ahmet Hadrovic (August 1, 2011)

Fig 4: Thermal water springs in the former Iidza hamlet in Gornji Seher

Iidza hamlet, a part of the Gornji Seher settlement, got its name from the warm, medicinal springs between which a stream of warm water flowed, descending into Vrbas (Figure 5). Even today, the people of Banjaluka gather here, known as Vrucica, to cool off on warm days. The name of this village is derived from the Turkish word 'Iladz', which means 'medicine', that which gives a person health. The word 'iladz' marked and defined this locality of water, air and air. This part of the city is unique for its architectural and urban specifics, cultural heritage and artistic handicrafts. Hot water

serves all residents of Gornji Seher, it was not only used in public spas, but on the contrary, every wealthier family introduced thermal water to their house or yard, which makes the mahala Iidza retain to this day. The distinguishing feature of this hamlet were large, beautiful gardens with orchards. The stream of thermal water passed through this entire area, and the source started from the Maslina house (today the house of Gusic), then it passed under the wooden bridge on the main road to the Iidza hamlet, all the way to the Vrbas river [5,6,7,8].





**Source:** Imsirija M. (2012). Defining Genius Loci on the example of Gornji Seher in Banjaluka (Doctoral dissertation), Faculty of Architecture, University of Sarajevo, Sarajevo

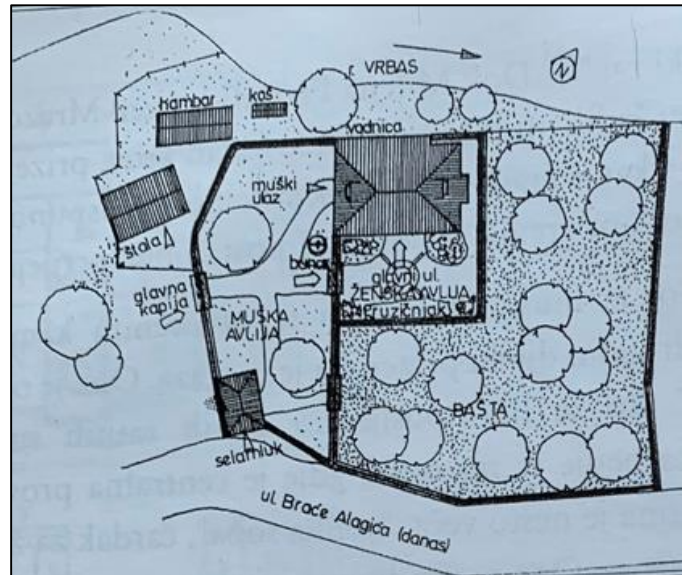
**Fig 5:** Situational plan of Ilidza hamlet (with indicated buildings and houses under protection)

## 2. Spatial-form characteristics of the house

The Seranic family house was built at the end of the 18th century. The Seranic family were rich landowners and the largest family in Gornji Seher. It is known that this house was the first to be covered with pepper-tiles at the beginning of the Austro-Hungarian occupation, since the dilapidated shingles were removed. According to the stories of family members, the tiles were brought from Trieste [5,6,7,8]. At the beginning of the 20th century, the house was divided between two families, a new entrance was added to the public part of the house ('selamluk'), the divanhana was divided and another internal staircase was built.

The Seranić family house belongs to the type of developed oriental-type city house in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a differentiated public zone ('selamluk') and an intimate zone ('haremluk'). In the vertical plan, it is developed through the ground floor and first floor (Figures 6,7,8,9,10,11). The ground floor measures 8.95 m x 11.59 m, and the first floor measures 9.25 m x 12.65 m. It used to be in the garden, separated from the street by a high wall and a gate, which was on the north side, on the site of today's motel. A stone for easier mounting of horses stood next to the entrance gate. Through the gate, one entered the public part of the inner yard ('avlija selamluka'), which everyone had access to and where there were stables for cows and horses, barns for grain and other auxiliary facilities. From the public part of the inner courtyard, through a small gate, one could access its intimate

part, which was enriched with an orchard and a flower garden, and a spa ('ilidza'). From the public part of the inner courtyard, you entered the rooms for male visitors, which were completely separated from the other rooms on the ground floor. In the public part of the house ('selamluk') there are two rooms, one for servants and the other, a 'men's room' ('halvat') with windows 'on the mihrab'. This room had a built-in three-part wardrobe ('musandra') on one wall (toward the pantry), through which it was possible to receive food from another part of the house. In that room there is also a hearth for storing coffee ('kahveodzak'), and the construction of the authentic chimney still exists. The 'men's room' with its sekija, musandra and coffee pot is a peculiarity of these houses. In this part of the ground floor, another staircase was built at the beginning of the 20th century, when the building was divided into two co-owners. The main wooden entrance door is from the intimate part of the inner courtyard facing the street, and is of simple design. From the hajat, paved with stone slabs, you enter a large storage room ('magaza'), which was used to store tools and firewood. In the warehouse, on one wall, there are two small openings in the form of loopholes that were used for defense in the event of an attack. Next to the storeroom is a smaller pantry ('hudzera'), where on one wall there is an opening through which serving was done. Shoes were left in the hajat and slippers ('papucluk') were put on, and one-legged wooden stairs ('basamaci') led to the terrace ('dihvanhana'), (Figure 8).



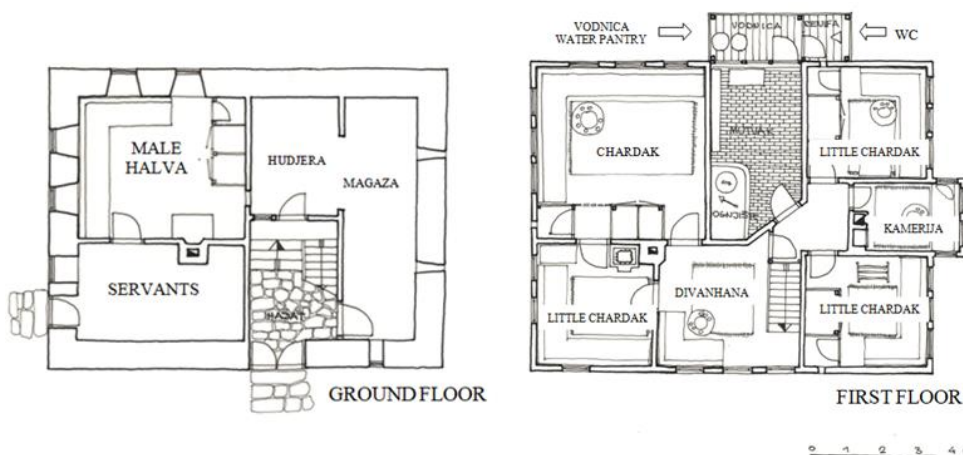
Source: [5] Husedzinovic, S. (2005). Documents of survival: (values, significance, demolition and restoration of cultural heritage), Zenica City Museum, WORKS XV, Zenica, pp. 167-170 (in Bosnian)

Fig 6: House of the Seranic family in Ilidza hamlet, Gornji Seher, Banjaluka



Source: Author (August 1, 2011)

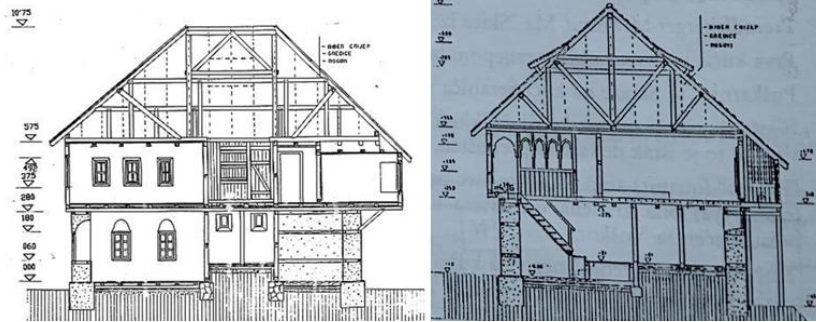
Fig 7: House of the Seranic family in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. An example of a rich town house of oriental type in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Source: drawing by A. Hadrovic (1985) according to the archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Banjaluka

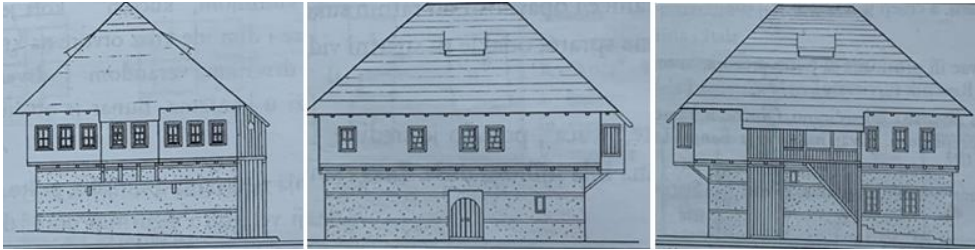
Fig 8: Seranic family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. The basis of the ground floor and the first floor





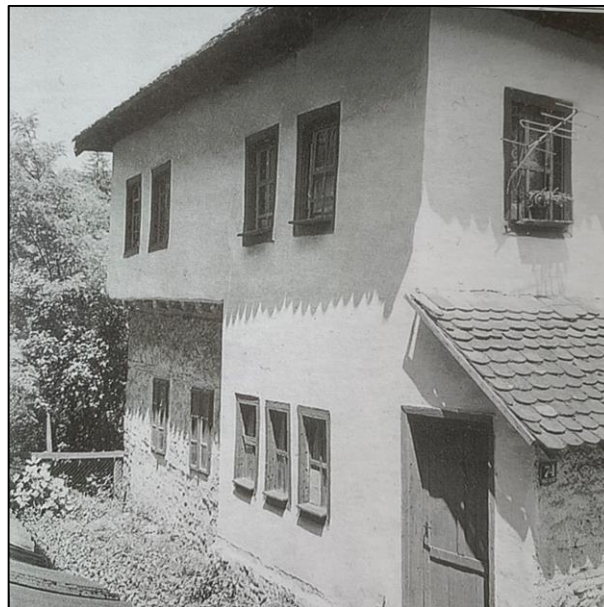
**Source:** [5] Husedzinovic, S. (2005). Documents of survival: (values, significance, demolition and restoration of cultural heritage), Zenica City Museum, WORKS XV, Zenica, pp. 167-170 (in Bosnian)

**Fig 9:** Seranic family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Original sections



**Source:** [5] Husedzinovic, S. (2005). Documents of survival: (values, significance, demolition and restoration of cultural heritage), Zenica City Museum, WORKS XV, Zenica, pp. 167-170 (in Bosnian)

**Fig 10:** Seranic family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Facades, from left to right: Northeast facade (toward the garden), Southeast facade (toward the street), Northwest facade (toward the Vrbas river)



**Source:** [5] Husedzinovic, S. (2005). Documents of survival: (values, significance, demolition and restoration of cultural heritage), Zenica City Museum, WORKS XV, Zenica, pp. 167-170 (in Bosnian)

**Fig 11:** Seranic family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Appearance of the house after its functional division into two residential units (beginning of the 20th century)

### 3. Construction and materialization

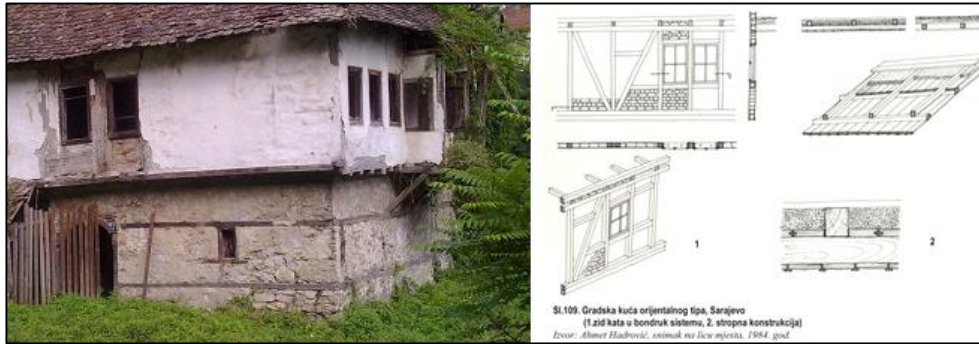
The ground floor has massive outer walls (about 85 cm thick), which are reinforced with wooden beams ('hatule'), and the filling was made of crushed stone and pebbles (Figure 12). The walls of the floor are made of a wooden skeleton ('bondruk') with adobe filling. The four-pipe roof is constructed as a 'triple chair' made of wooden beams (Figure 13). It was originally covered with shingles, and later the

shingles were replaced with 'pepper tiles'. It was the first house in this area that had a 'new material' cover, brought all the way from Trieste.

The structure ground floor-first floor is made of wooden beams, with a board covering on the upper side (the floor of the house), while on the lower side (ceiling of the ground floor) they were visible with an infill composed of boards that make up 'shishes'. On the first floor of the house there was a

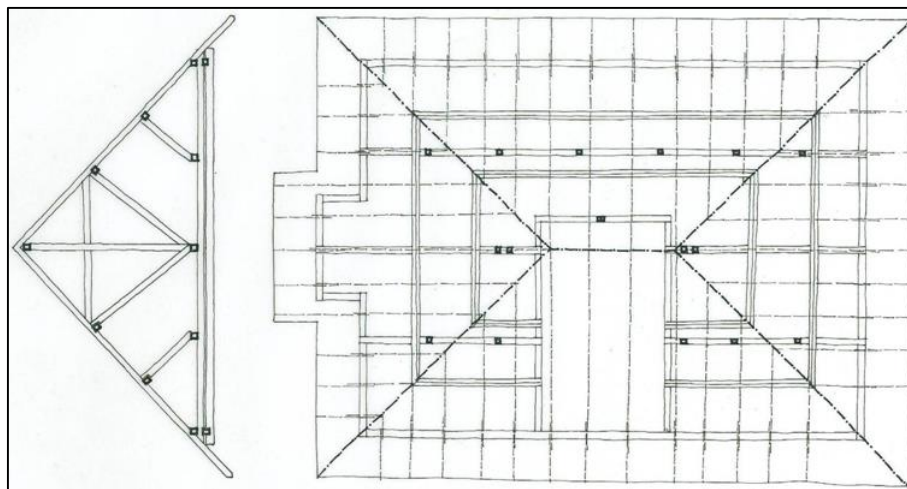
fireplace, or kitchen ('kuca'). This space had an opening ('badza') in the roof, where the smoke went. The hearth was

demolished, although its place still exists <sup>[9,10]</sup> (Figure 8).



Source: Left: Author (Photography, August 1, 2011). Right: Author (Drawing, 1984)

Fig 12: Town house of oriental type in Bosnia and Herzegovina: construction and materialization of external walls and mezzanine construction



Source: drawing by A. Hadrovic (1985) according to the archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Banja Luka

Fig 13: Seranic family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. The roof

**4. Doors and windows**

All the doors in the Seranic family house in Gornji Seher are made of wood. The entrance door from the street to the inner courtyard is double-winged and massive. In the design of the

interior doors, the obvious effort of the masters to make them 'beautiful' is visible, where they are decorated with wood carvings with geometric motifs (Figure 14).



Source: drawing by A. Hadrovic (1984) according to the archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Banjaluka

Fig 14: Seranic family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Left: entrance door to the hayat. In the middle and on the right: the door to the chardaks

The windows have a rectangular profile, double-hung, single-hung made of wood. Due to the great thickness of the walls, the window perforations in the wall, seen from the inside of the walls, are made with an arched lintel ('na mihrab').

### 5. Specific elements of home equipment

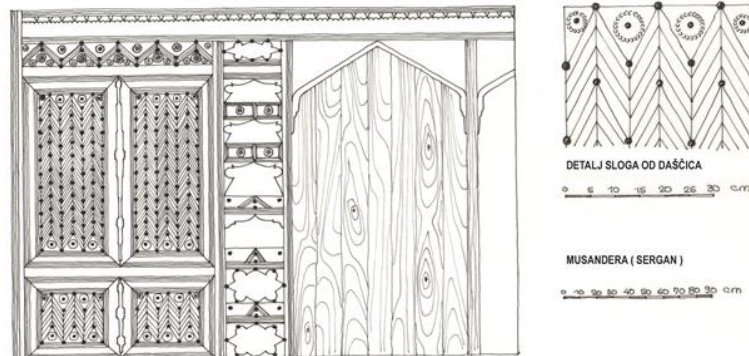
Similar to other houses of the oriental type with developed solutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Mostar, Foca) and in the house of the Šeranić family in Gornji Seher,

in Banjaluka, we encounter characteristic elements of interior design equipment: seating sets ('minderluk'), built-in three-part wardrobes ('musandera') with compartments for storing bed linen ('dusekluk'), a spa ('hamamdzik') and heating water for the spa ('furuna'), a hearth for preparing food, a fireplace for preparing coffee ('kahve-odzak') and a table with a vessel containing a brazier ('mangala') for serving coffee (Figures 15,16,17,18).



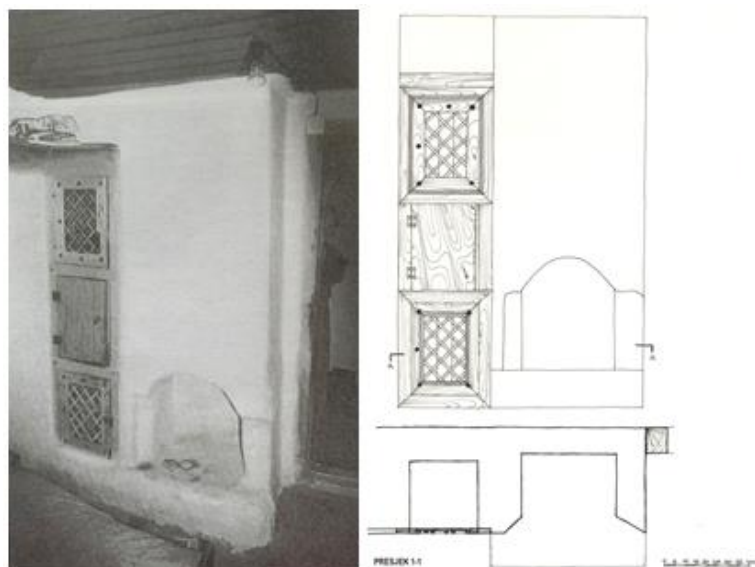
**Source:** Imsirija M. (2012). Defining Genius Loci on the example of Gornji Seher in Banjaluka (Doctoral dissertation), Faculty of Architecture, University of Sarajevo, Sarajevo

**Fig 15:** Seranic family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Details of interior surface treatment (2008)



**Source:** drawing by A. Hadrovic (1985) according to the archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Banjaluka

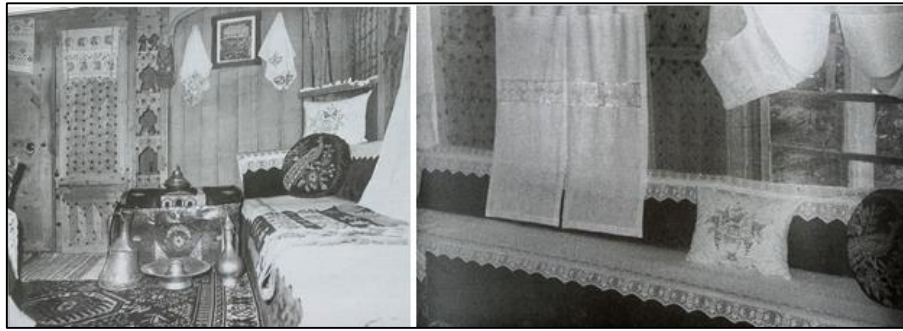
**Fig 16:** Seranić family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Musander



**Source,** left: [5] Husedzinovic, S. (2005). Documents of survival: (values, significance, demolition and restoration of cultural heritage), Zenica City Museum, RADOVI XV, Zenica, pp. 167-170. Source right: drawing by A. Hadrovic (1984) according to the archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Banjaluka

Figure 17. Seranic family in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Coffee-chimney with built-in wardrobe ('dulaf')





Source: [5] Husedzinovic, S. (2005). Documents of survival: (values, significance, demolition and restoration of cultural heritage), Zenica City Museum, RADOVI XV, Zenica, pp. 167-170

**Fig 18:** Seranic family House in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka. Authentic interior of the house

## 6. Conclusion

In 1553, the Bosnian Sandzakbeg Sofi Mehmed Pasha transferred the seat of the Bosnian Sandzak from Sarajevo to Banjaluka, which will represent an extraordinary stimulus to the overall development of this city. In 1554, this Sandzakbeg built a mosque on the right bank of Vrbas, opposite the Emperor's Mosque, and a bridge. To support these endowments, he built 69 shops, a large inn, a hammam, four mills and added a lot of arable land to them. (In the list of buildings of the genius architect Kodza Mimar Sinan, the Sofi Mehmed Pasha mosque is also mentioned. Unfortunately, this building has not been preserved in its original form). Vakufnama (foundation) of Sofi Mehmed Pasha from 26.12.1554. is the oldest preserved document from the Ottoman era that refers to Banjaluka. At this time, Kubad-vojevoda's mahala (around the mosque of the same name) was also created in Gornji Seher, on the left bank of Vrbas. In 1563, Osman Shah, Bosnian Sandzakbeg, built his mosque. The area around the source of sulphurous water, on the right bank of Vrbas, was called Ilidža as early as 1554. By the 80s of the 16th century, four more mahals were created in the area of Gornji Seher: Dzefer-aga, Hadzibeg-zadin, Kalenderija and Sitarija. Until the arrival of Ferhad-bey Sokolovic as Sandzakbeg of Bosnia (in 1574), Banjaluka had nine mahals (the same number of mosques) with 223 houses. Ferhad-beg Sokolovic, later Ferhad-pasha, the last Bosnian sandzakbeg (1574 - 1580) and the first Bosnian beglerbeg (1550 - 1588), gave the development of Banjaluka a rarely seen momentum. He builds Donji Seher, the second Banjaluka bazaar and settlement. (Several Christian graves on Laus and the name of the stream Crkvine point to the possibility of the existence of an earlier smaller settlement. We do not know any other information).

The specificity of Mahala Ilidža in the Gornji Seher in Banjaluka is the springs of thermal mineral water. This natural resource generated the construction of hot spas on the ground floor or near residential buildings. There are covered swimming pools ('hauzi' next to the Gusic family and the Seranic family houses), as well as independent buildings (Ebin or Hadzi Isakovic's). These buildings of stone, massive walls with perforated domes are one-room structures. The swimming pool, lined with wooden benches, with a gravel bottom, is the only room in the facility. Other areas around the pool were added later. This type of facility cannot be compared to a hammam in the classical sense of the word, because it differs from it in terms of layout and technology. Water heating is not necessary, since there is a hot spring, there is no halvat (room where you bathe with cuttings-stages and kurnas-stone troughs into which water is poured).

Bathing is done in the pool, with the fact that the 'houses' probably also had some kind of lobby with changing cabins. A smaller pool, also of this shape with a dome, but with openings on the side, was next to Zejra Seranic's house, but today there are only the remains of stone walls with a richer locality of *Adiantum capillus veneris*. Further there are the swimming pools, but much smaller 'Hakerin hauz' next to the Serenic Bisera's house, then the Osmanovic's spa and the Demirovic's spa, which are in the building itself, and the remains of the Direklija and Sugavica spas within the Pecine locality, and especially the remains of the Zbana military bath [8].

The Seranic family house in Gornji Seher, Banjaluka, is today in a rather dilapidated state. The Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments issued Decision No. 02-6-913/03 of May 6, 2003, which declared the Historical Building - Seranić House in the Ilidža Mahala in Gornji Seher in Banjaluka a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina [11]. Due to the construction of the motel, which is located in the immediate vicinity of this house, part of the auxiliary buildings (which were part of the public courtyard of the house) were demolished (barns, stables, fence, main gate). The construction of the motel had a negative impact on the entire environment. The possibility of viewing this exceptional object in its entirety in its authentic setting has been lost.

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