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## Mosque on Kuslat in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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### Abstract

The Kuslat Mosque is a unique building built in the early Ottoman period in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 15th century, between 1460 and 1480. This mosque has always had a special spiritual value among the people. In the past, 'rain prayers (dova)' were regularly taught at the mosque: during dry years, the religious teacher ('muallim') would lead the mektep children to the mosque, accompanied by believers from this and neighboring congregations, where the 'rain prayer' would be performed. The mosque was also visited by many people in need, believing that in this blessed place they would find a cure for their illnesses or the illnesses of their loved ones, so they sacrificed 'qurbani' at the mosque and left gifts of money and various things. The Kuslat Mosque was a gathering place for religious scholars ('ulema') from various parts of the Ottoman Empire, where discussions on various theological topics were held. This long-standing practice left a deep mark on the population of the surrounding villages, where a culture and a need for religious education and its consistent application were developed. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), the mosque was demolished on March 14, 1993. The mosque was rebuilt after the return of Bosniaks to the surrounding villages and administrative preparations carried out by the Islamic Community in 2009. The mosque was rebuilt on the same site, in its original form and with authentic building materials. It was officially opened on September 1, 2012. On the last Friday in August, Friday prayers are traditionally performed in the Kuslat Mosque, with a large number of believers present.

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### Introduction

Kuslat or Kuclat is a medieval fortress-town located on an almost vertical cliff, a hundred-meter high cliff above the confluence of the Jadar river and the Drinjaca river (geographic coordinates: 44°16'36.11"N, 19°06'37.04"E, altitude: 244 m). It was first mentioned in 1345, and its suburb Podkuclat in 1396, as a square well known with the Dubrovnik colony <sup>[1-5]</sup>. The fortress belonged to the royal domain in the Trebotic parish. Thanks to mining activities in the wider Podrinje region, the suburb Podkuclat developed (1346). In economic terms, this was a period of growth that ended at the end of the 14th century, and it was still an important crossroads, a transit station for Dubrovnik merchants heading north towards Zvornik, south towards Srebrenica and across the Drina to Serbia. From 1404, Kuslat was in the hands of Hrvoje Vukcic Hrvatinic (1350-1416), and from 1410, by agreement, in the hands of the Hungarian ruler Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368-1437). It came under Ottoman rule after the fall of the Serbian Despotate in 1459. The tradition of its transfer to Ottoman rule is narrated by Evlija Çelebi, who states that this city was built by the Serbian prince Radovan and that Sultan El Fatih (1432-1481) could not conquer it, but forced it to surrender through a siege. In the Ottoman era, Kuslat was a nahija belonging to the Zvornik sandzak. The city had a military function under Ottoman rule. The anonymous description says that the town is small, with few weak cannons, and a crew of up to 15 guards. In 1804, there were 12 mustahfiz timarli and 15 jebedji in Kuslat. Due to reforms, it was abandoned before 1833.

The Kuslat mosque was built inside the old fort. It was intended for the needs of the crew of the Ottoman army. The famous travel writer Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682) writes that it is Ebul Feth, which means that it was built in the 15th century, during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II El-Fatih, when the Ottomans conquered Bosnia. The Kuslat Mosque is considered the oldest military mosque in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The town was abandoned shortly before 1833. In his "Travelogues" ("Seyahatnâme", "Book of Travel"), the famous Ottoman travel writer Evliya Celebija presents his observations about Kuslat. "Kushlat was built by the Serbian ban Radovan (Radoban). It is mentioned since 1345, and its suburb Podkuslat since 1349. His majesty Fatih personally laid siege to the city of Zvornik and conquered it. According to Abu'l Feth's cadastral list ('tahrir'), Kuslat lies in the territory of the Zvornik sandjak. It is a round stone town on the banks of the Jadar river, on a cliff that rises to It is a small city that has hard bastions and a small gate facing the southeast. The rock itself is pointed like an egg. The city has a small mosque, a muezzin's house, and a gatehouse shahicannons, city commander (dizdar) and twenty-eight soldiers of the garrison present. There are no other buildings. From the city directly down to the Jadar river, the breakneck rocks were cut with Ferhat's hammers. This surpasses human strength. From there, they descend five hundred stone steps down to the river and get water. And now there is a jebhana and four full caskets of copper sinija and several copper and tin sahans, carpets, dishes and similar things of its masters and from the time of enemy rule. The inhabitants of that region keep all their valuables and treasures in that city for fear of Serbian robbers. Outside the city there is a cistern that can be approached only by one road. Since it is very steep, such a strong fence ('korkaluk') was erected on the right and left sides of that road as if it had been built by Sheddad (a

famous Islamic scholar). Many horses and people have stumbled on that road into the abyss. One does not even dare to look down into the valley where the flowing river roars like thunder. From that city, it is difficult to descend to the town, and it is also difficult to climb up. The town has only one hundred and twenty houses with gardens. There is a small mosque there, but there is no mosque or primary school. There are many vineyards and gardens. There has been a town there since ancient times, which seems to have been very large. Even now there are traces of its buildings that were destroyed during the siege. Below this town, on the Jadar river, Jahshi Alajbeg built a stone bridge with one shaft ('goz'). It is as strong as the one built by Sheddad. It is a great endowment. Near this bridge, the Jadar flows into the Drinjaca river. Rocks have been carved along the banks of the Drinjaca river, a road has been opened, and a fence ('korkaluk') has been built on both sides" [6].

By the way, building monasteries (built in Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism and Orthodoxy), as well as mosques, on high rocks and in hard-to-reach locations was a common practice. They were once built with the explanation that the monks-monks wanted to withdraw into isolation, and once were on Wednesdays for security reasons. Some famous such monasteries are presented below.

Sümela Monastery (Greek: Μονή Παναγίας Σουμελά = Moní Panagías Soumelá, Turkish: Sümela Manastırı) was built in 386 (geographic coordinates: 40°41'23.55"N, 39°39'29.76"E, altitude: 1357 m). It is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It was built on Mount Melá (Sou Melá = Black Plan), or Karadağ (which is a direct Turkish translation of the Greek name of the mountain), on a steep rock cliff (at about 1200 m above sea level), about 50 km south of Trabzon. Today, the monastery is located within the Altındere National Park [7] (Figure 1).



Source: Author (July 6, 2012)

**Fig 1:** Sümela Monastery (Greek: Μονή Παναγίας Σουμελά = Moní Panagías Soumelá, Turkish: Sümela Manastırı)

The church of Saint Michel d'Aiguilhe, built in 969 on top of an 88-meter-high volcanic rock (geographic coordinates: 45°02'59.89"N, 3°52'57.09"E, altitude: 624 m). It was built by the local bishop Godescalc, who wanted to celebrate his return from a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James in Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Some of the architecture of the chapel is reminiscent of sacred buildings from Spain,

especially the stonework of the cathedral in Cordoba. Today, the chapel serves as a starting point for the same pilgrimage, and many visitors bless their walking sticks at the shrine on the clifftop before starting their walk. The peak of the cliff has a diameter of only 59 meters - hence the name 'Aiguilhe', meaning 'needle' - and can only be reached by a side staircase of 268 steps [9] (Figure 2).





Source: [https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipMeeBj3H3F57wMJw\\_oMyIiKUcZNvZ207Je\\_hZq7=w459-h306-k-no](https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipMeeBj3H3F57wMJw_oMyIiKUcZNvZ207Je_hZq7=w459-h306-k-no)

Accessed: May 12, 2025.

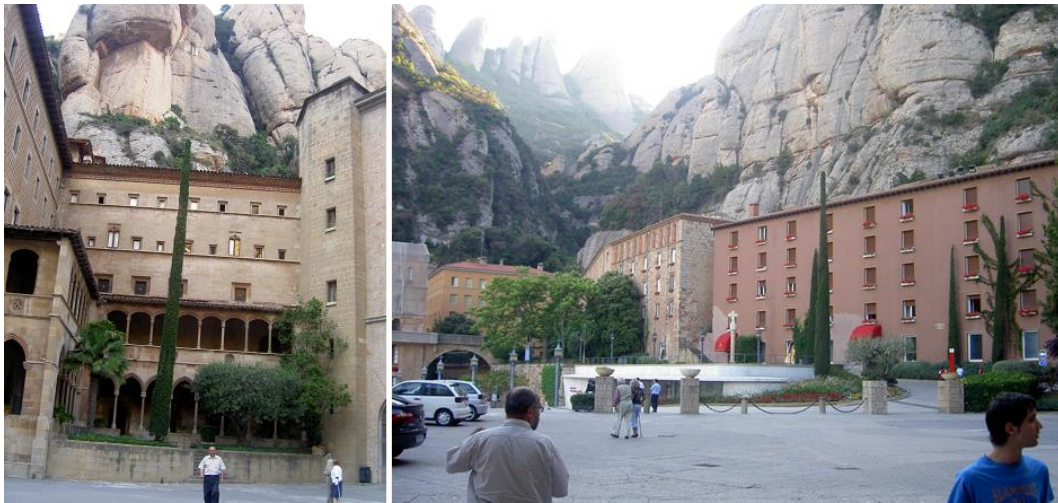
Source: [https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/gps-cs-s/AC9h4noiD-fmQItEOfb0fcGhMR5ks8Z\\_Ps4t0aIPAO1VwZVYRssjdoqELAv-UkGSEUhBNl5wmC5sVDgh4DbotaY0eU8Hj9SZLnTiXGMFEZt3vZfNSqwCujrInE4rNnG4jyegX8ztjwT=h720](https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/gps-cs-s/AC9h4noiD-fmQItEOfb0fcGhMR5ks8Z_Ps4t0aIPAO1VwZVYRssjdoqELAv-UkGSEUhBNl5wmC5sVDgh4DbotaY0eU8Hj9SZLnTiXGMFEZt3vZfNSqwCujrInE4rNnG4jyegX8ztjwT=h720)

Accessed: May 12, 2025.

**Fig 2:** Saint Michel d'Aiguilhe (France)

Santa Maria de Montserrat is an abbey of the Order of Saint Benedict located on the Montserrat mountain in Monistrol de Montserrat, Catalonia, Spain (geographic coordinates: 41°35'35.14"N, 1°50'11.71"E, elevation: 720 m). It is notable for housing an image of the Virgin of Montserrat. The monastery was founded in 1025 and was renovated between the 19th and 20th centuries. With a community of around 70 monks, the abbey is still in use today. Montserrat, whose name means 'jagged mountain', plays an important role in the

cultural and spiritual life of Catalonia. It is the most important religious sanctuary in Catalonia, and groups of young people from Barcelona and throughout Catalonia often hike overnight to watch the sunrise from the heights of Montserrat. The Virgin of Montserrat is the patron saint of Catalonia and is located in the sanctuary of Mare de Déu de Montserrat, next to the Benedictine monastery located in the towers and cliffs of the mountain <sup>[10]</sup> (Figure 3).



Source: Haris Bradic (June 2006)

**Fig 3:** The Author in the Santa Maria de Montserrat monastery near Barcelona

The Taung Kalat Buddhist monastery and temple complex is located in central Myanmar, on Mount Popa (geographic coordinates: 20°54'47.33"N, 95°12'33.73"E, altitude: 664 m). It is built on a 225-meter-high volcanic plug and is one of several prominent natural spiritual sites in Myanmar. It was built in the 12th century during the Bagan Kingdom under

King Narapatisithu. It can be seen for miles on a clear day. A total of 777 steps lead to the top of the outcrop where 37 Nats (semi-divine spirits) are believed to reside. The site is a popular pilgrimage destination and is considered a source of natural spiritual energy <sup>[11]</sup> (Figure 4).



Source: <https://www.insightguides.com/inspire-me/blog/visual/taungkalat-monastery-mount-popa-bagan-myanmar>, Accessed: May 13, 2025.

Source: <https://compassandcamera.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/popa12.jpg>, Accessed: May 13, 2025

**Fig 4:** Popa Taungkalat Monastery in Myanmar

In a region of almost inaccessible sandstone peaks, monks settled on these 'pillars of the sky' from the 11th century onwards (geographic coordinates: 39°43'17.83"N, 21°37'55.38"E, altitude: 454 m). Twenty-four such monasteries were built, despite incredible difficulties, during the great revival of the hermitic ideal in the 15th century. Their 16th-century frescoes mark a key phase in the development of post-Byzantine painting. Meteora (Greek: Μετέωρα) are rock formations in the Trikala regional unit, in Thessaly, in northwestern Greece, which house one of the most prominent complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries, locally considered second in importance only to Mount Athos. Twenty-four monasteries were founded on top of the giant natural pillars and rounded, hill-like rocks that dominate

the local area, mostly from the second half of the 14th century under the local ruler Simeon Uros. Six of them are still active and open to visitors: the monasteries of Great Meteoron (founded 1356), Varlaam, Saint Nicholas Anapausas, Rousanou, Holy Trinity and Saint Stephen. The latter became a community of nuns in 1961, while the first five are still run by monks. Meteora is located between the town of Kalabaka and the Kastraki village on the northwestern edge of the Thessaly Plain near the Pineios river and the Pindus Mountains. The Meteora complex was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1988 for its outstanding architecture and beauty, combined with its religious and cultural significance<sup>[12]</sup> (Figure 5).



Source: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/455>, Accessed: May 11, 2025.

Source: [https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/gps-cs-s/AC9h4nrzCFuE8te733W0K9oCGpgLJNGMJGjNlrsxn-v1Bc1\\_qKHB7U](https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/gps-cs-s/AC9h4nrzCFuE8te733W0K9oCGpgLJNGMJGjNlrsxn-v1Bc1_qKHB7U)

2gYAXrENpLAKOqg045FpPUHTCZ0V\_BpJPoQjkiiZizlmz8pHuM4mpM6yYZBCq6\_YkNqc0mnSyFYGeSmsXuBs5V8Q=w408-h544-k-no, Accessed: May 11, 2025

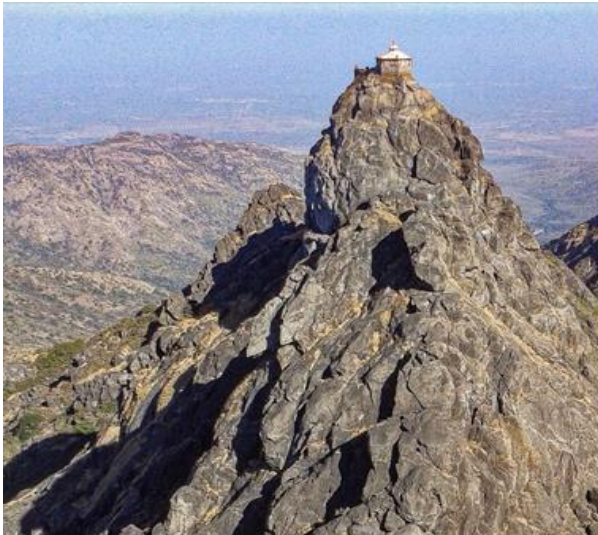
**Fig 5:** Monasteries of Meteora (Greece)

Girnar dattatreya temple in Gujarat, a state in western India, is home to numerous temples that hold immense religious and cultural significance. Among these revered places of worship is the Girnar Dattatreya Temple, situated on the sacred Girnar

mountain range in Junagadh district (geographic coordinates: 21°31'41.16"N, 70°32'00.91"E, altitude: 1036 m). This temple is dedicated to Lord Dattatreya, a revered deity in Hinduism who is considered an incarnation of the holy trinity of



Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva <sup>[13]</sup>. The Girnar Dattatreya Temple attracts devotees from far and wide who seek spiritual solace and divine blessings. Located on the top of the Girnar Mountain in Junagadh in Gujarat, Dattatreya Temple is revered Hindu temple dedicated to the holy trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva collectively known as Dattatreya or Datta. Temple was built around the 15th century. While some sources suggest a more precise date of 1427, others mention a general period between 1200 and 1500 (Figure 6).



Source:  
<https://x.com/InfoGujarat/status/1187606056093929473/photo/1>,  
 Accessed: May 30, 2025.

**Fig 6:** Dattatreya Temple on the top of the Girnar Mountain in Junagadh in Gujarat (India)

Kırklar Camii which translates into “Mosque of the Forty” in Turkish was built at 3144 meters high (geographic coordinates: 40°31'20.93"N, 40°20'04.59"E, altitude: 3144 m). Although it is not known when the mosque was constructed, the name is believed to be an attribution to forty hermits who once lived on top of that mountain. Located at the highest altitude of Kırklar Mountain among hazy clouds, the mosque offers a beautiful landscape with lots of fresh air to breathe <sup>[14]</sup>. That is to say, it is a perfect hermitage place to pray, contemplate, and turn to Allah (Figure 7).

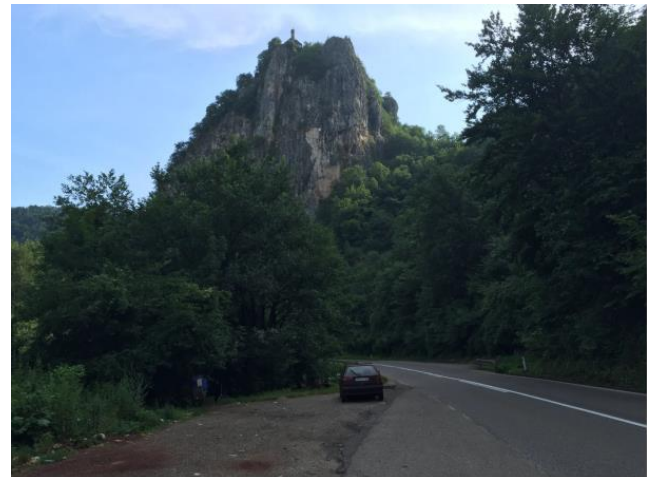


Source: <https://imamsonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Screen-Shot-2018-07-31-at-09.49.33.png>, Accessed: May 31, 2025.

**Fig 7:** Kırklar Camii (Türkiye)

### Mosque on Kuslat

The author of this work has intensively researched the cultural-historical architectural heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Balkans, the Mediterranean and parts of Asia, and presented the results of the research in his books and published scientific papers in international scientific journals <sup>[15-82]</sup>. The first military mosque with a wooden minaret in Bosnia was built on Kuslat (Figure 8). The city and the mosque were built in such a place that was almost completely safe from external conquest (geographic coordinates: 44°16'36.14"N, 19°06'37.04"E, altitude: 244 m),



Source: Author (August 24, 2017)

**Fig 8:** Mosque on Kuslat

A more dynamic process of acceptance of Islam by the resident population in these areas was probably correlated with the early construction of the Mosque on Kuslat and the missionary activity of the imam and other members of the crew of the fortified town. The famous French diplomat Michael Kikle, who passed through these parts in 1657, also mentions the mosque on Kuslat. Since this mosque has remained in the immediate vicinity of a very important road until today, it was often visited by researchers of various professions and interests. At the small mosque on Kuslat fortress (8.15 x 7.84, external dimensions) the mahfil with a depth of 3.1 m covers almost half the length of the building in order to increase the space for its crew to pray (Figures 9-14).

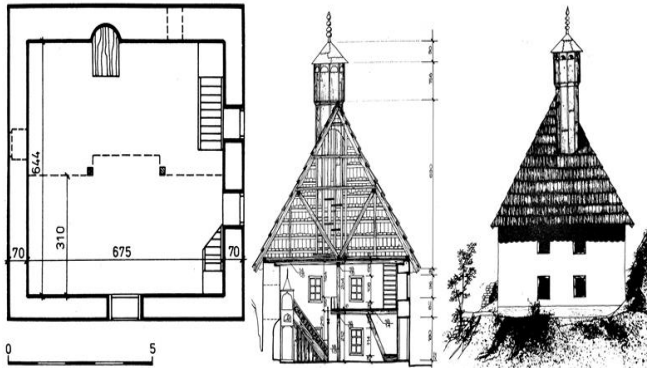


Source: <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/balkan/molitva-na-stijeni-oku%C5%A1lat-d%C5%BEamiji-su-pisali-evlija-%C4%8Delebiya-ivo-andri%C4%87-/1489421>, Accessed: May 11, 2025.

**Fig 9:** Mosque on Kuslat



“The rectangular openings have wooden frames. The high roof dominates the volume and structure of the wooden roof, and the wooden minaret rises above it only by the height of the gallery, which has small semicircular openings. Apart from the minaret, the design of the mosque does not differ from that of a residential house”<sup>[83]</sup>. In aesthetic and architectural terms, the mosque fully corresponded to the ambience of the old city, which is not surprising, since Ottoman urbanity fully respected coexistence with the natural and social environment (Figure 9).



Source: Becirbegovic M. (1999). Mosques with a wooden minaret in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo-Publishing, Sarajevo

**Fig 10:** Plans of the Mosque on Kuslat



Source: <https://www.bosnianexperience.com/07-tekst-br09>, Accessed: May 11, 2025.

**Fig 11:** Mosque on Kuslat. Reconstruction of the mosque after it was destroyed in the 1992-1995 war



View of the 'Qibla wall' - mihrab and member



View from the mihrab towards the entrance of the mosque



Mosque Gallery (mahfil)



View through the window on the ground floor of the mosque towards the Jadar river canyon

Source: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/dzamiya-kuslat-izgradjena-na-stijeni-vijekovima-prvisi-svakom-izazovu/140309017>

Accessed: May 11, 2025.

Source: <https://muftijstvotz.ba/kuslat-dzamiya-na-stijeni/>, Accessed: May 11, 2025.

**Fig 12:** Mosque on Kuslat. Details of the mosque after its renovation (2012)

As a sultan's mosque, built with state funds for the needs of the Ottoman army, the Mosque on Kuslat did not have its own endowment ('vaqf'). Her maintenance was provided from the state treasury. After the military crews left this town in 1883, the local Muslim population of Pahljevic, Drinjaca, Konjevic-Polje and other surrounding villages took over the care of the mosque. In a symbolic sense, like other mosques in our region, the origin of which is linked to the days of Feth



(Sultan Mehmed El-Fatih), this mosque also had an emphasized religious value. When the mosques in Drinjaca and Konjevic-Polje were built, the mosque lost its primacy and was opened occasionally only for Juma, Eid prayers and other special needs. Despite this, the imam's service in this mosque, as far as is known, was not interrupted until April 1992.



Source: <https://mizbijeljina.ba/vijesti/u-zvorniku-otvorena-dzamiya-kuslat/>, Accessed: May 11, 2025

**Fig 13:** Mosque on Kuslat. The reopening ceremony of the renovated mosque (September 1, 2012)



Source: <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/balkan/d%C5%BEamija-naku%C5%A1latu-simbol-nade-obnove-i-zajedni%C5%A1tava/3310801>

Accessed: 11.5.2025.  
Source: <https://stav.ba/vijest/dzamiya-izmedu-zemlje-i-neba/24823>, Accessed: May 11, 2025

**Fig 14:** Mosque on Kuslat. Many visitors visit the mosque and pray

## Conclusion

The Mosque on Kuslat has always had a special spiritual value among the people. In the past, 'rain prayers (dova)' were regularly taught at the mosque. Namely, during dry years, the religious teacher ('muallim') would lead the mektep children to the mosque, accompanied by believers from this and neighboring congregations, where the 'rain prayer' would be performed. Many people in need also visited the mosque, believing that they would find a cure for their illnesses or the illnesses of their loved ones at this blessed place, so they

would sacrifice 'qurbani' and leave gifts of money and things at the mosque. The Mosque on Kuslat was a gathering place for Islamic scholars ('ulema') from various parts of the Ottoman Empire, where discussions were held on various theological topics. This long-standing practice left a deep mark on the population of the surrounding villages, where culture and the need for religious education and its consistent application were developed. During the 1992-1995 war, the Mosque on Kuslat was set on fire (on March 14, 1993). The mosque was rebuilt after the return of Bosniaks to the surrounding villages and administrative preparations carried out by the Islamic Community in 2009. The mosque was rebuilt on the same site, in its original form and with authentic building materials. It was officially opened on September 1, 2012. On the last Friday in August, Friday prayers are traditionally held in the mosque on Kuslat, with a large number of believers present.

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