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## The Historical Jajce City in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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### Abstract

Jajce is a city (with about 7172 inhabitants), located in central Bosnia, at the confluence of the Pliva and Vrbas rivers (Geographical coordinates: 44°20'27.33"N, 17°16'09.77"E, elevation: 426). Under this name, Jajce appeared relatively late, at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, at the time when Hrvoje Vukcic Hrvatinic (1350 - 1416) began to bear (1396) the title „conte di Jajce“. This is also the reason why historiography accepted the opinion that the city was built by the mentioned lord. In this paper, the author deals with the topic of 'sustainability'. In this sense, he visited the entire area of Bosnia and Herzegovina and collected rich material, which he incorporated for the most part into his books and scientific works. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an extremely complex area in terms of the natural and social environment and its population. The three most numerous ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) live here, and thanks to its rich history, numerous people of different origins: Jews, Germans, Poles, Czechs, Italians, Hungarians... The composition of the population changed over time, but remained material and spiritual traces of their life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The complexity of Bosnia and Herzegovina is also visible in its architecture. Hence, for elaborating on the theme of sustainability (in this work using the example of the historical Jajce city), the most suitable scientific methodology was the one covered in his book: Hadrovic, A. (2007). Defining Architectural Space on the Model of the Oriental Style CityHouse in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia, Booksurge, LLC, North Charleston, SC, USA.

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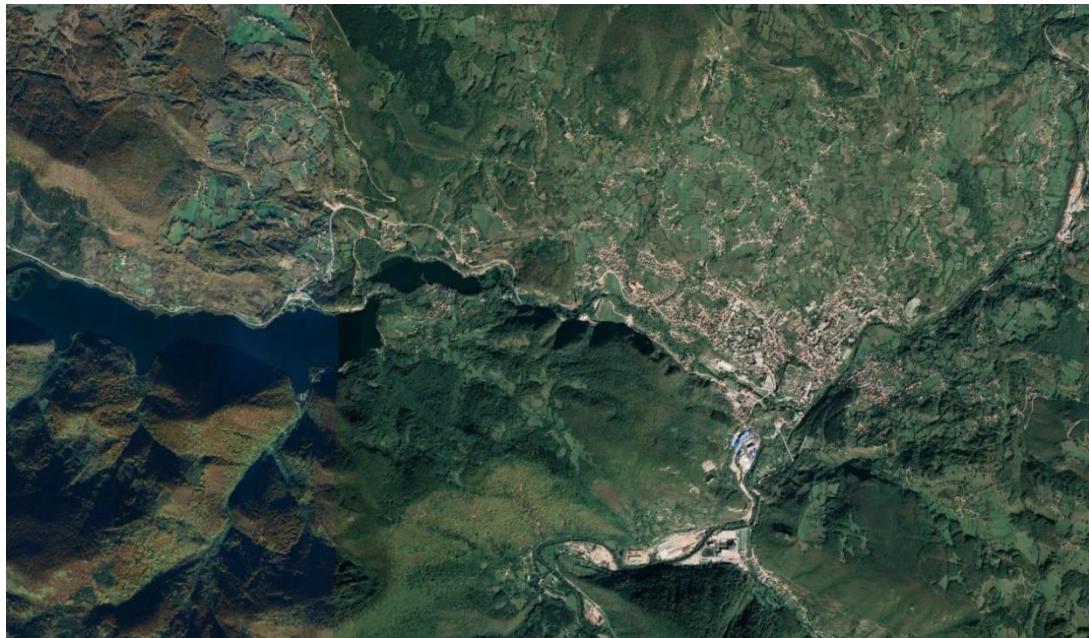
### 1. Introduction

Jajce is a city (with about 7172 inhabitants) <sup>[1]</sup>, located in central Bosnia, at the confluence of the Pliva river and the Vrbas river (Geographical coordinates: 44°20'27.33"N, 17°16'09.77"E, elevation: 426), (Figure 1).

In this paper, the author deals with the topic of 'sustainability'. In this sense, he visited the entire area of Bosnia and Herzegovina and collected rich materials, which he incorporated for the most part into his books and scientific works <sup>[2-16]</sup>. In this sense, he visited the entire area of Bosnia and Herzegovina and collected rich material, which he incorporated for the most part into his books and scientific works. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an extremely complex area in terms of the natural and social environment and its population. The three most numerous ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) live here, and thanks to its rich history, numerous people of different origins: Jews, Germans, Poles, Czechs, Italians, Hungarians... The composition of the population changed over time, but remained material and spiritual traces of their life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The complexity of Bosnia and Herzegovina is also visible in its architecture. Hence, for elaborating on the theme of sustainability (in this paper using the example of the historical Jajce city), the most suitable scientific methodology <sup>[17]</sup> was used, which is covered in his book: Hadrovic, A. (2007).

Defining Architectural Space on the Model of the Oriental Style CityHouse in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia,

Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia, Booksurge, LLC, North Charleston, SC, USA.



**Fig 1:** The historical Jajce city. Location Google Earth: Accessed: December 8, 2025.

## 2. Environment

By 'environment' we mean every possibility in the space in which man can realize his existence [17].

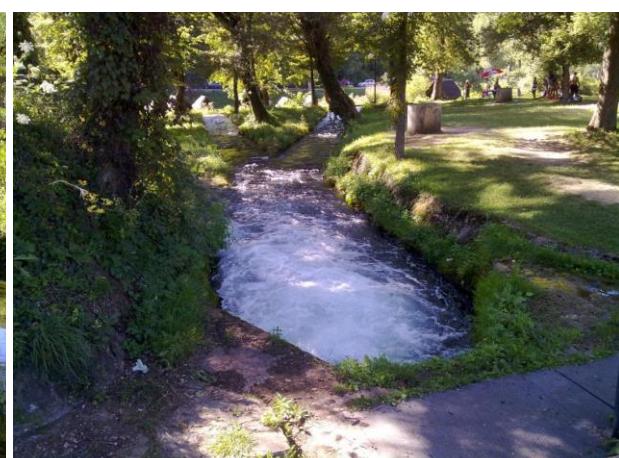
### 2.1. Natural environment

By 'natural environment' we mean all those features that nature gave, and on which man (mostly) did not exert his influence: geographical location, geomorphology, watercourses and reservoirs, plant and animal life, available soil, climate [17] ... The biggest natural resources of the Jajce city are its waters: the Pliva river, the Vrbas river, the Plivska Jezera (Pliva Lakes, Big and Small Lakes), the waterfalls of the Pliva river at its confluence with the Vrbas river.

The natural environment - a high stone hill at the foot of which two rivers flow - was ideal for the construction of a fortress city. The city fortified in this way received its supplies from the vast fields along the Pliva and Vrbas rivers, and from the meadows and pastures that extend at higher altitudes. Today, these natural resources are an attraction for many tourists and other visitors to the city, which more or

less directly contribute to the city's income (Figure 2).

Cultural landscape - Pliva lakes with a complex of mills on Pliva near Jajce is located about 6 km northwest of the center of Jajce. The complex of water mills forms a natural environment (a travertine dam where the water dissolves into many tributaries flowing from Veliko to Malo Plivsko jezero) with the construction of mills, of which today there are a total of twenty. It seems that there is nothing more striking in human consciousness, thought, practical action and experience than the symbiosis of two sources of life, water and bread. On the example of water mills on swimming lakes in Jajce, this impression is supported in such a convincing way that it borders on a miracle. The abundance of water that offers man many possibilities (fishing, construction of watermills, recreation in a wide variety of ways), the greenery of trees and lawns, the proximity of a city with an exceptional history and the presence of the famous waterfall Pliva in Vrbas are such values that can rarely be found in the world at all [18] (Figures 2, 3, 4).





**Source:** Author (August 12, 2011.)

**Fig 2:** Cultural landscape - Pliva Lakes with a complex of mills on the Pliva river near Jajce



**Source:** Author (July 21, 2016)

**Fig 3:** The Pliva river flows through Jajce



**Source:** Author (July 21, 2016)

**Fig 4:** The waterfall on the Pliva river at its descent into the Vrbas river

## 2.2. Social environment

By 'social environment' we mean everything that man has created and that separates him from the world of other living beings [17]. It includes both physical structures (various material, more or less ordered products of their activity) and

the immaterial world that we know with the intellect (science, philosophy, religion, law, morality) through an ordered system of abstract symbols (letters, signs) [17]. Under the name 'Jajce', this town appears relatively late, at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, at the time when Hrvoje Vukcic

Hrvatinic (c. 1350-1416) began to bear (1396) the title of 'conte di Jajce'. This is also the reason why historiography accepted the opinion that the city was built by the mentioned lord. Djoko Mazalic [19] is of the opinion that Hrvoje Vukcic built only the citadel, and that before that there was a so-called Bear-tower. It is reliably known that Hrvoje Vukcic was the lord of Jajce, that he issued charters there, built a family tomb, and in accordance with the general military and political circumstances gave the city's architecture features of fortification. Later, Jajce became the capital ('table place') of the Bosnian kings, Stjepan Toma Ostojic (1444-1461) and Stjepan Tomasevic (1461-1463), as we learn from their charters. The Greek historian Halkokondil, in his description of the fall of the Bosnian state under the Ottomans, states that Jajce is the capital, while the court itself is explicitly mentioned in 1457 [20]. Jajce was also a favorite residence of Bosnian kings, Stjepan Tvrkta II (1412-1443), for example, as we learn from the letters of the representatives of Dubrovnik. In the period from 1439 to 1462, there were a total of 20 Dubrovnik residents here, which is evident from the appointment of judicial commissions for resolving disputes. This does not mean that they had their own permanent colony like in Visoko, Fojnica, Srebrenica or Zvornik at that time, which means that Jajce did not have the attraction and level of development that the mentioned cities had. The military-strategic position of Jajce on the border of the central and western, as well as the northern and southern parts of Bosnia, will ensure its constant importance, both during the time of the Ottoman invasion and later, until today. The Ottomans occupied Jajce in June 1463, which made Bosnia part of the Ottoman Empire [21]. In December of the same year, Croatian-Hungarian forces took over Jajce, apparently appreciating that the stabilization of the Ottomans in this place would represent a direct threat to the Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom. Jajce is additionally fortified and becomes the center of the newly founded Jajačka banovina, successfully resisting the constant pressure of the Ottomans until December 1527. As it was assumed, the fall of Jajce will mark the time of the unstoppable penetration of the Ottomans to the west and north. And the new masters of Jajce realize its strategic importance, so they build it with new fortifications and locate considerable military forces there. The first known description of Jajce was given by Antonio Bonfini at the end of the 15th century.

### 3. Man

Space acquires meaning only if it stands in some relation to man. This relationship ranges from the relations of the already known dimensions of space, through those that can be sensed, to those that are currently beyond the reach of human imagination. In other words, man is a being on the way, a being who continuously learns, a being of open possibilities. The term 'man' is a huge question, the essence of which he himself tries to decipher within his own limits,

within the limits of the Earth and the limits of the Universe [17]. Together with the rest of the living world, it participates in the process of circulation of matter and energy in nature, sharing the same fate with it, being born and dying against its will. Endowed with reason, will and feelings, he is the only one in the living world who can discover the given laws of the organization of nature.

The Jajce city is a typical city for Bosnia and Herzegovina in that its history was written by many nations (both from the West and from the East) who left traces of their material and spiritual culture there. Here are the remains of a metreus, a sanctuary typical of the culture of ancient Persia, which was brought here by the veterans of ancient Rome (3rd century). In Jajce there are remains of an early Christian church (12th century) and many monuments of Islamic culture. All this, along with exceptional natural resources (water, especially), gives this city an extremely wide range of values that are rarely found in the world [22].

### 4. Boundaries: architecture as a framework of life

Boundaries are those places in the environment where the situations encountered are controlled according to very specific human needs. Conditions are all those discovered and undiscovered phenomena in space that have a stimulating or degrading effect on humans. Borders, therefore, have the task of enabling the selection of influences. In an architectural sense, they enclose, but also include a person in the conditions of a certain environment [17].

Architectural cultural and historical heritage. Jajce is a city where man and nature achieved a rarely seen symbiosis. Traces of human presence from prehistoric times to the present have been preserved here. The remains of the culture of ancient Rome are followed by structures from the Middle Ages (when Jajce was the seat of the Bosnian kings), traces from the era of the Ottoman Empire, from the era of the Austro-Hungarian administration, the Kingdom of SHS/Kingdom of Yugoslavia and FPRY/SFRY. It is precisely the rich cultural and historical heritage integrated into an extremely picturesque natural environment, where the waterfall of the Pliva river in Vrbas and the Plitvice Lakes with mills stand out, that made the town of Jajce and its surroundings one of the most significant urban and natural entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Figures 5- 17). The Mithraeum in Jajce dates from the 3rd century. Mitrej is located in the locality of Bare, about 200 m southwest of the Old Jajce City, on the left bank of the Pliva river. The cult of Mithras (the invincible sun god) was spread by people from the Orient (India) who passed through these regions for various reasons, but also by Roman soldiers who came into contact with this cult through the Roman conquests in the east (Iran, Syria, Iraq). As the cult advocated more social justice and the afterlife, it attracted the lower social classes [23] (Figure 5).



Source: <http://24sata.info/vijesti/bosna-ihercegovina/125331-foto-otvoren-hram-bogamitre-u-jajcu.html>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

Source: <http://visitjajce.com/index.php/bs/znamenitosti/hram-boga-mitre>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

**Fig 5:** Mithraeum in Jajce

The fortress in Jajce was built on top of a stone hill (at 470 m above sea level) as part of a unique complex of a medieval fortified town. This complex is located on the southern slope of a stone hill, which is bordered from the southwest by the bed of the Pliva river, and from the east and southeast by the bed of the Vrbas river<sup>[24]</sup>. The perimeter of the medieval town of Jajce is about 1300 m, and its area is 112000 m<sup>2</sup>. The medieval town of Jajce consisted of a citadel at the very top of a stone hill. The defensive wall of this fort follows the configuration of the terrain: the buildings within the citadel have not been preserved to this day. At the southeastern corner of the citadel, you can see the remains of the Ottoman tabi, erected on the site of the original towers. From the citadel, the thick walls that defined the town descend towards Vrbas. In the wall that descends from the northeast corner of the citadel towards Vrbas, there is a Banjaluka gate through which the road from Jajce to Banjaluka passed. A defensive wall was built along the shore of Vrbas, of which only its remains testify today. In the wall that runs from the southwest corner of the citadel and follows the course of the Pliva to its waterfall, there are two towers: the one near the waterfall (Travnik's tower) has a gate, and the one below the citadel itself has been converted into a tabia. Varos (subdistrict) below the citadel, defined by walls, was connected to the important road via Jajce that bridged the valley of Vrbas, on the one hand, and the valleys of Lasva and Bosna, on the other. The fortified part of the town was the center of trade and commerce. Pliva provided ideal conditions to build mills and steps for rolling cloth and making rawhide. The travel writer Atanasije Georgice (1590-1640) in his work Relacije (written in 1626) records about a hundred 'wheels' on Pliva. It is more than certain that some of these 'wheels' existed for Bosnian kings as well. The same travel writer (who stayed in Jajce in 1626) records that at that time there were 300 Muslim

and 15 Christian houses in Jajce, and two churches, one of which was converted into a mosque and the other into a spa. The mosque in question was located at the very entrance to the fortified city according to its floor plan and according to what we learn from other sources, it was probably built on the site of the church of St. Luke. Namely, after the collapse of the Serbian despotism in 1459, the bones of St. Luka the Evangelists were moved from Smederevo first to the Catholic church in Teocak, and from here to Jajce<sup>[25]</sup>. When it comes to the hammam, given its specific technology and architecture, it could not have been created by rebuilding the church. The Jajce clock tower is a specific object of its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina, since it was built as a capitol tower. It was built in the 17th century, and lost its function as a public clock after the Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878. The production and trading part of the egg bazaar expanded beyond its walls: in front of the Travni gate, the tradition of leather processing, cloth rolling and millinery continued, while blacksmithing developed in front of the Banjaluka gate. In the picture of Jajce, the residential buildings scattered on the stone hill below the walls of the medieval town leave a particularly striking impression. Their simple high gabled roofs, which cover the white floor with many small windows, have become one of the symbols of Jajce. As we can see, apart from the old fortress, there are no buildings in Jajce that, viewed in isolation, represent large monuments. Considering its military-strategic position, this could not even have been expected. That is why Jajce will remain a city built by nature. As such, he will always tie the hands of prudent architects and ask them for particular subtlety. Others, on the other hand, can desecrate it, to his detriment and to the detriment of all those people who will visit it (Figure 6).



Source: Author (July 21, 2016)

**Fig 6:** Fortress in Jajce. Left: Banjaluka gate in Jajce. Right: North-eastern walls of the Old Jajce City

Church of St. Mary with the Belfry of St. Luka was remodeled (1528) into Fethiye Mosque (Sultan Sulejman's Mosque). In the 12th century, a Romanesque church stood on this site, which was then remodeled in the Gothic style. In the 15th century, the church received a belfry-tower of St. Luke. Jelena Brankovic (1447-1500), daughter of the Serbian despot Lazar Brankovic (c. 1421-1458), after her marriage to the Bosnian heir to the throne Stjepan Tomasevic (1438 –

1463), brought (April 1, 1459) as a dowry to the relics of St. Luka the Evangelist, which (1453) was bought by the despot Djuradj Brankovic (c. 1377-1456) from the Ottoman sultan. The coronation of the last Bosnian king, Stjepan Tomasevic, took place in this church (1461). The building suffered fires and destruction on several occasions, and after the fire in 1892, the building was not in operation. This building was already declared a cultural monument by the Austro-Hungarian administration (1892) <sup>[26]</sup> (Figure 7).



Source: <https://www.svetlorjeci.ba/crkva-svete-marije-i-zvonik-sv-luke-u-jajcu/>, Accessed: June 19, 2025.

**Fig 7:** Church of St. Mary with the Belfry of St. Luka

The catacombs in Jajce are located in the living rock within the city walls, under the plateau located between the Bear Tower and the Church of St. Maria. It is assumed that (1416) Hrvoje Vukcic had catacombs carved out of the rocks, such

as his tomb and the tomb of the duke Hrvatinić family, while there is no explicit written historical information about the catacombs themselves <sup>[27]</sup> (Figure 8).



**Source:** <https://dev.furaj.ba/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2-2.jpg>, Accessed: June 19, 2025.

**Source:** <https://www.agencija-jajce.ba/1240-1008-o-katakombama-u-jajcu/>, Accessed: June 19, 2025.

**Fig 8 :** The catacombs in Jajce

Omerbey's house was built in the second half of the 17th century, and is located right next to the Travnicka gate in the Jajce city. This is a typical oriental-type townhouse with the specifics of the town of Jajce. The Omerbegovic family bought the house (1952) from Dana Salom, who owned the house since 1924. The municipality (in 1965) took over this

house, and assigned another to the Omerbegovic family, only to (in 1967) give it to the Belgrade company "Putnik" for use. The building was fundamentally reconstructed and turned into a restaurant that was in operation until the 1992-1995 war<sup>[28]</sup> (Figure 9).



**Source:** Author (July 21, 2016)

**Fig 9:** Omerbey's house in Jajce

The Sinan-bey (Okica) mosque is located in Gornja Mahala, just below the walls of the Old Jajce City. The mosque was built (1689) as his endowment by Sinan-bey Dzabic. The

mosque got its name Okic mosque after the Okic family, which provided imams of this mosque for fourteen generations<sup>[29]</sup> (Figure 10).



**Source:** <http://www.agencijajajce.ba/spomenici/kulturnaba%C5%A1tina/nematerijalna-kulturnaba%C5%A1tina/uglednijajcani/106-hafizmehmed-tevfik-ef-okic>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

**Fig 10:** Sinan-bey's (Okic) mosque in Jajce

The old (Hafizadica) fountain is located right next to Omerbey's house, near the Travnik's gate. The fountain was built (1845/1846) by Hadzi Serif Merjem-hanum, wife of Seid Ahmed-bey Hafizadic, daughter of the Bosnian teftedar

Ahmet-bey Vilic from Travnik. The fountain has been in its current location since 1948, when it was moved from its original location, about thirty meters away on the opposite side of the street (Figure 11).



Source: Author (July 21, 2016)

**Fig 11:** The old (Hafizadic's) fountain in Jajce

Kršlaka's house 01 is located directly next to the northeastern stone walls of the medieval fortress of the Jajce city. The facility is accessed via a rather steep cobbled street, with the possibility of vehicle access. Although there is no reliable information about the time of construction of the building, according to its physiognomy and known disposition, it can be said with confidence that the building was built at the end of the 18th century and that it belonged to an oriental-type town hall with the specifics of the city of Jajce. When it comes to the specifics of this house, the first thing that comes to mind here is its high, voluminous roof with a wooden structure and a covering of wooden planks-shingles. In

addition, the specificity of the egg house is the rather massive stone wall in its basement and ground floor, and a light floor with doxats, constructed in wooden bondruk and filled with adobe and wattle with rammed earth. During the 1992-1995 war, the building was almost completely destroyed. It was restored in 2006 with the support of the UK Headley Trust Fund, and as part of the British Council's Cultural Heritage "Royal Trail" Project, as evidenced by the commemorative notice board at the entrance to the building. The building was renovated and adapted into the proctor of the City Gallery<sup>[30]</sup> (Figure 12).



Source: Author (July 21, 2016)

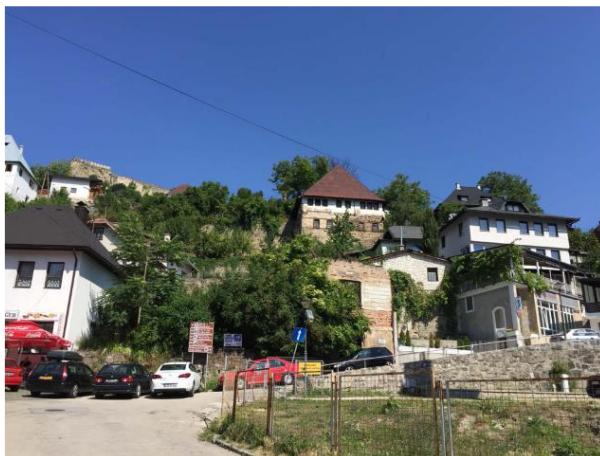
**Fig 12:** Kršlak's house 01 in Jajce

Kršlak's house 02, also known as Kapetanovic's house, is located about ninety meters (as the crow flies) southwest of Kršlak's house 01. Kršlak's (Kapetanovic's) house 02 (whose external floor dimensions are 12.50 x 11.00 m) is developed

through a basement, ground floor and first floor. Due to the extremely steep terrain on which it is situated, Kršlak's house 02 has a basement only under one part of the contour of the ground floor. The ground floor is also buried so that the

ground level on the southwest wall of the building is at floor level, and on the northwest wall is almost at the height of the roof cornice. As the house has been declared a national

monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>[31]</sup>, it is expected that it will be restored and saved as an exceptional architectural and general cultural asset (Figure 13).



Source: Author (August 24, 2016)



**Fig 13:** Krslak's house 02 (Captain's house) in Jajce

The Carsija (Esme Sultanije) mosque in Jajce was built in 1749/1750. According to the inscription (date) above the entrance portal, the mosque was founded by Emir Mustafa,

Cehaja of Caus<sup>[32]</sup>. It was completely destroyed during the war (1992-1995), but was rebuilt (2008), (Figure 14).



Source: Author (August 24, 2016)

**Fig 14:** Carsija (Esme Sultanije) mosque in Jajce

Dizdar's (Women's) Mosque is located in Gornja Mahala of the Jajce city, right next to the citadel walls. The mosque was built (1812/1813) by Sulejman-beg Kulenovic, which is recorded in history above the entrance portal<sup>[33]</sup>. The mosque

belongs to the type of central one-room mosques without sofas and minarets, with a brick dome that is hidden from the outside by a hipped roof covered with shingles. The building was completely renovated in 2002 (Figure 15).



Source: <https://akos.ba/zenska-dzamija-u-jajcu/>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

Source: <http://ba.n1info.com/a100818/Vijesti/Vijesti/>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

**Fig 15:** Dizdar's (Women's) Mosque in Jajce

The Sarac house, the Finance building (Lower Vocational School) and the Old Elementary School (Lower Music School) were built in a row, one next to the other, during the Austro-Hungarian administration in Jajce. They are located

near the Bell Tower of St. Luka. The Old Elementary School building was built in 1880, the Finance Building in 1882, and the Sarac House (known as Sarenica) was built in 1899 (Figure 16).



Source: <http://www.jajce.ba/atrakcije/saraceva-kucazgrada-finansija-i-stara-osnovna-skola/>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

Source: <http://sa-c.net/events/itemlist/tag/jajce.html>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

**Fig 16:** Sarac house, Finance building (Lower Vocational School) and Old Elementary School (Lower Music School)

The home of AVNOJ in Jajce was built (1932-1934) during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, according to the project of the Belgrade architect Momir Korunovic (1883-1969), for the needs of the Sokol Society in Jajce. Funding for the construction was collected from charitable contributions and a donation from the company Elektrobosna. During the construction of the building, there were significant deviations from the original project. Until 1941, the building served its

intended purpose (gymnasium, Sokol social rooms, cinema shows). In this facility (29 and 30 November 1943) the II session of AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council of People's Liberation of Yugoslavia) was held with the participation of 142 delegates, representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia, where the future federal state was founded (Figure 17).



Source: <http://www.androidvodic.com/lokacija--muzej-avnoj-a>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

Source: <http://spomeniki.blogspot.ba/2014/01/jajcemuzej-2-zasedanja-avnoj-1.html>, Accessed: November 27, 2024.

**Fig 17:** Home of AVNOJ in Jajce

## 5. Conclusion (Perspectives)

By the term 'Perspectives' in the framework of the theory of architecturally defined space (ADS), we mean "that dynamic relationship that connects now - future, existing - possible, achieved - desired" [17]. The emergence of a settlement (hamlet, village) or architectural-engineering structure is never accidental, but rather the result of a synergy between the natural and social environment-man [17]. The town of Jajce is a typical town for Bosnia and Herzegovina in that its history was written by many peoples (both from the West and from the East) who left traces of their material and spiritual culture there. Here are the remains of a metreus, a sanctuary typical of the culture of ancient Persia, which was brought here by the veterans of ancient Rome (3rd century). In Jajce there are remains of an early Christian church (12th century) and many monuments of Islamic culture. All this, along with exceptional natural resources (water, especially), gives this city an extremely wide range of values that are rarely found in the world.

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