

Restoration complete of Skopje Stone Bridge

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The famous Skopje Stone Bridge has been renovated, the guard tower that broke off last year (several large stones ended up in the Vardar river) were retrieved by divers and restored back again.

This was the final piece of the restoration that lasted 14 years.

Chronology of the Skopje Stone Bridge:

Unfortunately, there are no precise historic sources and records, on the dating of the Bridge.

Scholars say the bridge had been built by the Romans, on a place of an old bridge that was destroyed after the disastrous 518 earthquake, when also the Classical town of Skupi was devastated.

The earliest mention of the Bridge in the historic records is contained in the vakafnamata (records) of Isa - Beg's Aladza (Motley) Mosque, in 874 according to Hijra.

The original shape of the Bridge consisted of 13 vaults with a total length of 329 local feet or 213.85 metres (one foot = 0.65m). The total width of the Bridge was 6.33 m. That was the Bridge as seen and described by the Venetian Giacoppo Soronze who, on his journey to Constantinople (1575), stayed in Skopje.

The Bridge was built of masterly and precisely aligned travertine blocks, jointed by iron rods, and strengthened by cast lead, chiseled stone and mortar applied inside the pillars. Some of them, for example the central pillar, which in the upper section ends with a decorative niche (a sentry box) similar to mihrab - in the interior have large rooms with double function, primarily to minimize the overloading of the pillar, and then to serve as a loophole. During its designing, also the decoration of the facades was taken into account, by using the renown ornamental elements (stalactites).

Over time the Bridge suffered a number of impairments, which required particular reconstruction activities. There are records for some of them. Thus, it is known for certain that the Bridge was damaged in the disastrous 1555 earthquake. Then four pillars were either ruined or severely damaged. Turkish travels-writer Evlija Celebija, who stayed in the city in 1660/61, is quoting the inscription placed on the bridge on the occasion of its reconstruction: "When people saw this unrivaled bridge restored, they praised it by saying: "It is much more beautiful than it used to be." It was reconstructed in 987 according to Heira, i.e., 1579 A.D. The reconstructed Bridge survived the frequent overflowing of the river. However, in 1817/18, during Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839), a new reconstruction was carried out. The records say it was paid 28,816 "grosa" and 2 "aspri" (former currency). There were also subsequent reconstruction activities. Thus, before 1885 the arks and vault on the north-east side were repaired, using the bricks for the vaults and stone blocks for the lower sections of the pillars. Throughout its life, until 1909, the Bridge had a fence made up of stone slabs.

In 1895, as a number of times before, the Bridge was again endangered by the flooding waters of the rivers Treska, Lepenec, and Vardar. Therefore, in the following years (1896 and 1897) protective walls were built on the quay, as one of the measures for regulating the river flow in that area.

One, today lost stone slob, which was on the Bridge until 1963 and whose inscribed wording was copied and thus preserved, reveal that Sultan Mehmed II Resat in 1909 instructed the expansion of the Bridge by metal consoles that supported the sidewalk along its two sides.

Thus the roadway was widened from 6.33 to 9.80 m.

In 1944 the invading German and Bulgarian nazi army mined the Bridge. However, on the liberation of the city by the Macedonian partisans, the activation of the dynamite was prevented. Thus the Bridge was saved from a disastrous breakdown.

In 1992-93 a new reconstruction activity was undertaken, aimed at restoring its original shape. Thus, the sidewalks above the iron consoles were removed, and the original width of the bridge was restored. The original fence made up of stone slabs was also restored.

