

HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS AND PRIVATE MUSEUMS IN MITROVICA

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Abstract

Movable cultural heritage occupies a very important place in the history of a country or a nation regarding its past. A new practice in collecting and preserving movable heritage exhibits, is spread also in Mitrovica and its suburbs, as a result of the negligence of the state bodies for these exhibits to be stored in state museums.

Today in Mitrovica and its suburbs there are some private museums that preserve around 1000 movable exhibits of different time periods, from antiquity up to the more recent years, KLA's war in 1998-99.

This paper discusses three historic house museums and three private museums that are expanding day by day and are visited by many visitors. It is of special interest that these museums receive better conditions from municipal and state bodies to organize, inventory, preserve, present and publish these independent results of people dealing with this subject.

The tradition of collecting and storing museum exhibits in Mitrovica began around 1979 by Dr. Bajram Preteni, internist. That same passion for collecting and storing various exhibits shared also Mr. Sheshivar Begu from Vllahi, a village located about 9 km north of Trepça.

The private museum in the towers of Kroi i Vitakut has a different character from other museums. This museum preserves the paintings of its own owner, the well-known painter, Kadri Kadriu, killed by Serbian paramilitary forces on March 24, 1999. The works of art preserved in this museum are not all the works that the author made during his life, but are those that could be saved from war destruction.

There are about 70 works of art made by artist Kadriu known so far but according to the data it is believed to be a total of about 300 of them. The museum in question has other exhibits that do not belong to Kadri Kadriu and day by day it is enriched with exhibits donated by citizens themselves.

Keywords: *Heritage, History, Culture, Art, Exhibits.*

Historic House Museums and Private Museums in Mitrovica

Historic House Museum – Isa Boletini's Tower

The tower-type residence, except for residential genuine value, became a symbol of resistance and struggle for freedom during the Albanian National Movement. It was an expression of high national awareness for preserving and cultivating ethnic values of Albanian traditions in centuries.¹

Isa Boletini's Tower in Boletin of Bajgora was destroyed three times in 1830/32, 1892,² 1895 and twice during the first decade of the twentieth century, namely 1908 and 1912. The last two destructions were made by the Young Turks.³

¹ Fejaz Drançolli, Rrënimet e kullës shqiptare, Prishtina, 2004, p. 121.

² Tafil Boletini, Pran Isa Boletinit, Kujtimr 1, (1892 – 1916), Tetova, 1996, p. 23.

³ Fejaz Drançolli, Rrënimet, op cit. p. 122.

Many major events with national dimensions, especially Albanian Declaration of Independence, have had as epilogue brave fighters' uprisings of Mitrovica region, their prodigious resistance under the leadership of Isa Boletini.⁴ The Boletini Tower's room was a center of patriotic importance. It played a major role in the growth of national consciousness. Isa Boletini was born and raised in this family full of patriotic and fighting traditions, which possessed lands, forests and pastures, and which owned a mine and workshop of mill stones that were traded in Kosova, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and other Balkan countries.⁵ Beside the residential function of individual, family, and national defense, the tower had other functions and played the role of an institution with particular social - economic, legal, political, cultural, and educational importance.⁶ In the case of Isa Boletini's tower, except of performing the function of the house of guests, it also functioned as observation and resistance tower, not only to protect the neighborhood but also to protect the entire village. In this historic house museum (tower) is perpetuated Isa Boletini's legendary saga and his deeds.

Even though Isa Boletini's Tower was demolished several times, it has been raised again more magnificent and proud bearing on its beams all that glorious history. After the War of 1997 - 1999 ended, Isa Boletini's Tower was taken under the protection of Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments in Prishtina, which also made the renovation of the tower. After the renovation, Isa Boletini's Tower was converted into a museum where a number of documents, files, and other materials of the heroic life and work of national hero, Isa Boletini, are shown. The museum also hosts other exhibits that were part of Isa Boletini's life where a large number of them are found in other museums both within and outside the country. In the yard of the tower is prepared Isa Boletini's tomb expecting for his remains to rest comfortably on his land where he lived and was raised, and as well the remains of his comrades that were killed by his side. Burying the remains and building a statue of Isa Boletini in the yard of the museum would increase not only the museum's value but also the value of the village and the surrounding region in general.

Mustafë Sahiti's Historic House Museum, Lumbardh Neighborhood - Mitrovica

The idea to establish a museum in this house, which preserves in its memory and its past a very gruesome story, came at a meeting of February 12, 2008, between the Mayor of Mitrovica, Mr. Bajram Rexhepi, and his staff, and the residents of Lumbardhi (Bosnian neighborhood).

Neighborhood Representative Fevzi Beqiri asked Mayor Bajram Rexhepi to put this house under the jurisdiction of the municipality and to be announced a memorial museum dedicated to the murdered and massacred residents in this home. The mayor hesitated saying that the house was a private property and it is difficult to intervene, but the persistence of neighborhood representative and the support of the residents of this neighborhood has managed to find a compromise with the house owner, Mustafa Sahiti, who agreed to make his house a memorial museum dedicated to 23 victims executed in that house.

On April 15, 1999, chetnik paramilitary forces entered in the neighborhood "Lumbardhi", so-called Bosnian neighborhood, and forced the residents to leave their homes. During this displacement, Serbian paramilitaries mugged their valuable items, money and everything they had. From this mass of population, they detained over 100 people of different

⁴ Fazli Hajrizi, *Mitrovica dhe Shala e Bajgorës në fokusin e historisë*, Ngjarje, personalitete historike, arsimore dhe

kulturore, Prishtina, 2011, p. 78.

⁵ Fazli Hajrizi, *Mitrovica dhe Shala*, op cit. pp. 78, 79.

⁶ Fejaz Drançolli, *Trashigimia monumentale në Kosovë*, 2011, Prishtina, p. 178.

ages, in Mustafa Zahiti's house, along with his brother, son and a friend that was staying in this house.

Eye witnesses from the neighborhood said that there was violence, terror, massacre, rape on these 100 people and they were executed in front of their family members.⁷

11 out of 100 detained people were killed; all the bodies were removed to destroy the evidence. Later the bodies of seven people were found, four people are still considered missing. Beside the 11 people killed on the same day, from March 27, 1999 until June 10, 1999, were also killed twelve other people in the same house.

Once the home owner agreed, the first intervention took place with an initial project where they put a roof to the burned house to protect it from destruction of atmospheric precipitation.

On April 15, 2009 on the 10th anniversary of the biggest massacre in this house, the house was announced memorial museum dedicated to the victims killed there. With the opening of the historic house museum, a plaque with engraved names of twenty-three people killed was placed outside the museum where it still remains.

Nr	Emri (emir i babes) Mbiemri	Data e lindjes	Data e vrasjes
1	Besim (Mustafë) Sahiti	1. 11. 1976	15. 04. 1999
2	Osman (Isuf) Sahiti	14. 06. 1952	15. 04. 1999
3	Fadil (Ramadan) Boletini	18. 07. 1962	15. 04. 1999
4	Islam (Qerim) Hasani	19. 04. 1949	15. 04. 1999
5	Minir (Ragip) Azemi	7. 06. 1973	15. 04. 1999
6	Istref (Shahin) Avdiu	15. 01. 1957	15. 04. 1999
7	Fazile (Emin) Zeneli	15. 03. 1934	15. 04. 1999
8	Arsim (Isa) Sherifi	15. 12. 1978	15. 04. 1999
9	Sherif (Isa) Sherifi	25. 05. 1975	15. 04. 1999
10	Nysret (Hasan) Hoti	25. 11. 1966	15. 04. 1999
11	Remzi (Kadri) Kurteshi	21. 08. 1971	15. 04. 1999

In this table are shown the names of the people killed and massacred on April 15, 1999, and also the names of twelve other people from March 27 to June 10, 1999 also killed in this house.

Nr	Emri dhe mbiemri	Data e lindjes	Data e vrasjes
1	Zeqir (Januz) Januzi	18. 01. 1976	27. 03. 1999
2	Ajet Xhemajli	6. 04. 1933	28. 03. 1999
3	Nezir (Kamer) Tahiri	17. 08. 1940	30. 03. 1999
4	Sylejman (Kamer) Tahiri	27. 05. 1943	30. 03. 1999
5	Muhamet Gjushnica	20. 12. 1949	14. 04. 1999
6	Ramiz (Beqir) Beqiri	5. 07. 1965	14. 04. 1999
7	Ibrahim Fejzullahu	1. 01. 1917	11. 05. 1999
8	Vahide Fejzullahu	1. 01. 1927	11. 05. 1999
9	Sadije Fejzullahu	13. 05. 1952	11. 05. 1999
10	Halit Sylejmani	1. 04. 1956	8. 06. 1999
11	Mevlude Sylejmani	5. 07. 1962	8. 06. 1999
12	Xhelal (Ismet) Jakupi	1. 05. 1941	10. 06. 1999

⁷ Fevzi Beqiri, interviewed in 14. 5. 2013, përfaqësues dhe i ngarkuar për përkujdesjen e këtij muzeu në lagjen Lumbardhi - Mitrovicë, (born in 15. 09. 1957).

Construction Enterprise “Lin Projekt” with Fevzi Beqiri’s request will make the second phase of the project to adjust the historic house museum. This will be the final project and will adjust the interior spaces of the museum for photography exhibitions, clothes and shoes of the murdered ones, and the victims that were found, and everything that is connected with the last war.

The project also includes some offices for easier work for people that will be hired in the museum. It is proposed that non-governmental Association for Missing People based in Mitrovica to be placed in these offices and to be responsible for supplying the museum with various exhibits.

The second phase of the project cost about 20,000€ but it still has not found support from municipal authorities nor from Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports, although Fevzi Beqiri had a meeting on October 8, 2012.⁸ Hopefully soon the measures will be taken for the completion of the constructions of this museum which will reflect a part of our past: painful and glorious.

Rifat (Ali) Zeneli’s Historic House Museum

The historic house museum was built in 1976 having Rifat Zeneli as its first owner. This museum is located in Mazhiq village in Bajgora. In the yard of the museum there are three tombs: one of Rifat (Ali) Zeneli, the other of Rifat’s sister, Rabije (Ali) Zeneli, and the third is the tomb of Rifat’s son, Ali (Rifat) Zeneli, former KLA soldier.

Rifat was born on January 7, 1916, in Mazhiq village. He had no school-learning but his writing and reading were very good. For seven years he worked in Trepca Mine, during and after World War II. Later on Rifat worked only in farming and agriculture since the position of the village allowed him to do so. During the glorious KLA war and Serbian offensive of September 1998, Rifat did not leave his house even for just a moment. Rifat also had prepared the positions of defense and war against Serbian forces. His sister Rabija also stayed with him. According to a witness, a former member of the Serbian police at Trepca police station, with Bosnian nationality, (named Safet, surname unknown), says that for two hours straight Rifat fought Serbian police forces and it was impossible to break his resistance, then they asked for reinforcements to come and for two other hours he did not leave his positions until heavy artillery was used and he was killed on September 15, 1998.⁹ After the murder of Rifat, his sister Rabija was killed and her body was burnt together with the house while Rifat was buried in the cemetery in the north part of Mitrovica.

11 months later, Rifat’s body was exhumed and reburied in his own yard. During the exhumation his son Hysen stated that at the head of the grave there was a long pole with a camera attached to it which has continually photographed the tomb 24 hours, for 11 consecutive months, and also the grave was too deep. His other son, Ali, was killed on May 2, 1999 with seven other people in Rasha.

The house was announced a historic house museum on September 15, 2009 after the intervention of Mitrovica Municipality for the removal of atmospheric precipitation through a roof in the first part of the project. The second phase of the project continued in 2012, where on May 5, 2012 was completed the yard fence of the museum. Other phases are expected to continue in the future because there is still a lot of work to be done in this house of resistance.

There are also other exhibits in the museum belonging to war period, old exhibits belonging to random findings in the ruins of the medieval city of Trepca, and parts of household furnitures, but still unsystematized until the museum is well prepared for exposing museum items.

⁸ Fevzi Beqiri, from the interview.

⁹ Hysen (Rifat) Zeneli, interviewed in 12. 05. 2012, Rifat’s son (born in 20. 06. 1947).

The Museum in Kroj Vitaku's Towers in Mitrovica

The houses are built in 1989 and they were two-story houses, one owned by painter Kadri Kadriu and the other owned by his brother Ali Kadriu. They were greatly destroyed during the war. Housing reconstruction started in 2008 according to the project prepared by Kadri Kadriu himself, while he was still alive. Towers carry a large number of windows (turrets), a total of 80 of them. The number of windows matches with some important dates listed in different parts of the towers. From the windows of the towers we find the date of March 20, 1999, the day of Kadri Kadriu's murder, and other important dates like 24 March 1999, 17 February, 28 November 1912.¹⁰

The museum in Kroj i Vitakut's Towers was inaugurated on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Independence of Albania when the family was placed in the reconstructed houses. The museum is divided into two sectors; one sector belongs to Kadri Kadriu's atelier and consists of works of art made by him. This sector holds about 20 works of art that were saved from the war. There are about 70 works of art made by artist Kadriu known so far but it is estimated that he had left behind him a greater number of works about 300 of them.

The other sector of the museum holds about 20 different exhibits that are random findings and donated by several people, and some metal sculptures made by Ali Kadriu. In this group of exhibits there are some exhibits found in the medieval town of Trepca, some tools found in the same place, and there are also exposed some local press articles that address the issue of northern Mitrovica. The inside of the museum is out of any standard to be a museum due to the inability of the family to invest in this piece, although there is will to enrich the museum with other museum items.

Exhibits in the museum belong to different regions of Kosova. The museum is visited by many visitors ranging from the most senior state leaders and continuing with the municipal ones, KFOR, journalists, various non-governmental organizations, compatriots, students, as well as from the general population.

Dr. Bajram Preteni's Museum in Mitrovica

Apart from the city museum of Mitrovica, we have also private museums as is that of Dr. Bajram Preteni (internist). Dr. Bajram Preteni's museum is located downtown in Doctors' Neighborhood. Humanity and the passion about the past, prompted the doctor to collect and store a number of various exhibits. The museum building is located in the doctor's yard. It is a new building built and adjusted for preserving museum exhibits.

The museum has ethnographic character, where more than 312 different exhibits are preserved, ranging from agricultural tools, construction tools, wood carving tools, parts of tufting machines together with other parts for spinning and twisting thread, some wall clocks, table clocks, and watches, ancient swords, one of them has a stamp of 1840, the other according to the seller's data was found somewhere in the ruins of the city of Syrigana, a medieval town, and apparently should belong to that period. There are also two imitation pistols in this museum. Household furniture made of soil includes: pipkins, amphoras, jars, small plates, plates, çerep (bread-baking pans) of various sizes and shapes. Among them there is an ancient pipkin donated by Jusuf Haliti on December 29, 2007 which was found in Broboniq village not far from Roman necropolis Lushta in 2006 while digging the foundations of Sabit Xh. Hajra's house 2 meters deep using an excavator. Together with the pipkin emerged fossil bones and other ceramics.

¹⁰ Ali Kadriu, interviewed in 15. 05. 2013, (born in 21. 03. 1957).

Metal utensils include: cooking knife, chain of chimney where pots for water heating were hung, copper and iron caldrons, one of them was about 180 years old and served for several generations in the doctor's family, large pans which indicate a big family with many members, funi (served for cooking) which according to Dr. B. Preteni in 1918 belonged to a family from Melenica village of Bajgora which when immigrated in Turkey left it to the doctor's grandmother. There is a considerable number of kitchen vessels for carrying water, some of them have Ottoman inscription in Arabic letters. It is interesting the kitchen vessel used for food by the Turkish army which has a fork and a spoon aside and it is composed of three parts where the spoon and fork keep these parts together. This vessel belonged to Turkish army superiors or officers. In the museum's exhibits there are also some Semaver for transporting and boiling water for preparing tea, one of the semaver has a seal with the date of 1873 which means that it belonged to the nineteenth century, ancient tea kettles, eight coffee grinding mills, some serving trays, an iron for ironing of clothes using coal, etc.

It is also very interesting the collection of light bulbs where the oldest ones are carbide lamps used by Trepca miners continuing with more recent lamps, namely gas lamps and street lamps. Dr B. Preteni's museum is enriched even more with traditional Albanian clothing for both men and women, such as: plisi, shirt, xhamadan, tirq, socks, zavjaq, mahram and many other parts of clothing. Regarding the textile material, there are preserved also some carpets, prayer rugs, bed covers, bedding sheets, etc. Regarding agricultural products, this museum has a special glory due to pocërka (pot) and corn. There are also different kinds of animal bells.

The doctor started collecting these collections in the seventies of the twentieth century, more intensive in the eighties when he began to work as a doctor in the villages of Bajgora. During the war of 1997 – 1999 about 20% of the exhibits he had until then were destroyed. Dr. B. Preteni had exhibits from almost all Albanian regions: Kosova, northern Albania, mainly from Kukes, Bajram Curri, Kruja, and from Macedonia, but he did not have any exhibits from Montenegro. A special contribution was given by his uncle, Shefqet Preteni, doctor, who had helped collecting the exhibits. The exhibits in the doctor's museum are collected, donated, and purchased with large sums of money. In the museum's yard there are some exhibits but the most interesting one is the stone shell found in Zasella village,¹¹ which is identical with the stone shells found at Shkodra Castle Museum that served for the demolition of the castle walls during the war of 1479.¹² Such shells weighed from 360 to 390 kg. The four shells found in Zasella village are identical to the above-mentioned ones whereas three other shells are being preserved by the residents.

Sheshivar Begu's Museum – Vllahi village

Sheshivar Begu's private museum is located in Vllahi village in Bajgora, 9 km from Trepca. The great desire of Sheshivar Begu to remember his past and the generations before him, without adequate experience in the field of Museology just longing to preserve old items urged him to collect, buy, donate and preserve them, although in an inappropriate place. Sheshivar Begu has managed to gather more than 450 different exhibits. The villagers' contribution has been great over the centuries in preserving traditions. With all the consequences of wars by foreign invaders, they still could save enough items of museum values in baskets and hidden crates.

Sheshivar Begu's museum is divided by material type (wood, textile, soil, stone, metal and leather). Lacking professional training and experience, museum collection or better

¹¹ Dr. Bajram Preteni, Interview during a visit in the museum, 14. 11. 2011.

¹² Pajazit Hajzeri, Tezë Masteri, Shkodra prej shekullit të XI deri në shekullin XV, Prishtinë, 2010, p. 76

say the exhibits in Sheshivar Begu's museum are not classified and organized by type or age but are all clustered together.

The wooden exhibits collection consists of working tools, such as: the chariot, the winter sledge, the wedding chest (hope chest), the pantry, "kutlla" as a unit of weight for agricultural products, tufting machines with their associated equipments such as forks for spinning and different twist axes. The collection of brass instruments like pipe, flute, gaida or mezhnica made of wood and leather, çifteli, lahuta, lute etc are also made from wood.

Textile collection contains traditional Albanian clothing for both men and women, ranging from plisi, mahram, tirq, xamadan, shirts, socks, zavjaq, prayer rugs, carpets, bed covers, bedding sheets, etc.

The largest collection was that of metal where he preserved tools from Medieval tools found somewhere in the old city of Trepca such as hammer, hoe, nails, up to newer exhibits for working the land with plow, okë scales, other kilogram scales, hammer for carving mill stones, and bells for animals (bells for cattle, sheep bell, cow bell, etc.). There is a church bell in this museum with an inscription "HIS", while on the other side is inscribed "Jezu Krishti në Kryq" (Eng. "Jesus Christ on the Cross"). Household furniture exhibits consisted of copper and iron caldrons, pans, mills for grinding and roasting coffee, lighting lamps where the oldest ones were the wick, carbide lamps that were used by Trepca miners, and different containers for food and beverages. In respect to the metal material, there are also some remains of the last war: casings of tank shells, armored vehicles, military hats, and military radio equipments. Stone collection preserves: millstones, fireplace vaults from the towers ruined by time, a gravestone with a Latin inscription dedicated to Jupiter. Objects made of soil include: pipkins, amphoras, jars, small plates, plates, çerep (bread-baking pans), as well as an exhibit that I think is the oldest of the soil exhibits found in the ruins of the old Trepca with a size of a cup. In Sheshivar Begu's museum there are also preserved two registry books of Trepca Mine workers, where one book is a registry book of 1939, and the other starts from June 6, 1950.¹³ Sheshivar Begu worked in Trepca Mine; today he is unemployed.

¹³ Sheshivar Begu, Interview held in 19.11. 2011.