

Old Bridge Area of the Old City of Mostar

Stari Most (English translation: "The Old Bridge") is a 16th century bridge in the city of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina that crosses the river Neretva and connects two parts of the city.

The bridge spans the Neretva river in the old town of Mostar, the city to which it gave the name. The city is the fourth-largest in the country, it is the center of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton of the Federation, and the unofficial capital of Herzegovina.

The existing bridge was commissioned by Suleiman the Magnificent in 1557 to replace an older wooden suspension bridge of dubious stability. Construction began in 1557 and took nine years: according to the inscription the bridge was completed in 974 AH, corresponding to the period between July 19, 1566 and July 7, 1567. Little is known of the building of the bridge and all that has been preserved in writing are memories and legends and the name of the builder, Mimar Hayruddin (student of the Old/Great Sinan (Mimar Sinan / Koca Sinan), the Ottoman architect). Charged under pain of death to construct a bridge of such unprecedented dimensions, the architect reportedly prepared for his own funeral on the day the scaffolding was finally removed from the completed structure. Certain associated technical issues remain a mystery: how the scaffolding was erected, how the stone, egg and flour was transported from one bank to the other, how the scaffolding remained sound during the long building period. The Stari Most is believed to have been the largest single span arch bridge in the world at the time it was built. As a result, this bridge can be classed among the greatest architectural works of its time.

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995), Croatian secessionist forces turned against Bosnian government forces, and destroyed the bridge on November 9, 1993. Croat nationalists saw the bridge and old historic area around it as part of the Bosniak, Turkish, and Islamic culture, and it was often targeted during their bombardments.

In 1992 the parapet of the Old Bridge was pierced by an artillery projectile at one point very close to the approach on the right bank of the Neretva on the downstream side. On 9 November 1993 the bridge was completely destroyed, falling into the Neretva, following sustained artillery attacks from Cerk and other surrounding hills. The Croat forces deliberately targeted it citing military reasons, since the bridge was the only link between Bosniak-held left bank of the Neretva river and small pocket of territory under their control on the right bank.

After the end of the war, plans were raised to reconstruct the bridge as a symbol of peace and ethnic harmony, literally bridging the two sides of the conflict. For the campaigners, it was important to use as much of the original material as possible. Salvage operations funded by the international community raised the stones and the remains of the bridge from the river. Missing elements or parts that were not usable anymore were recut from the same quarry where the original stones came from.

Now listed as a World Heritage Site, the bridge was rebuilt again by Turks, this time by a Turkish company, under the aegis of UNESCO. Its 1,088 stones were shaped according to the original techniques, and the reconstruction cost about 12 million €. It reopened on July 23, 2004, and its reopening ceremonies were based on the idea of reconciling the Bosnian communities, even though bad blood and suspicion remain evident.

Source:-- Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]