

Publisher:
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For the publisher:
Amra Madžarević, Director of the Museum of Sarajevo

Author of the Exhibition and text:
Ljiljana Beljkašić-Hadžidedić, Museum councillor

Restoration and conservation works:
Esad Vesković, M.A. Conservator
Azra Hodžić, Dipl. Eng. Arch.
Azra Bečević – Šarenkapa, M.A. Conservator

Preparation works:
Taib Kešmer, senior preparer
Enisa Čaušević, senior preparer, specialist
Jasna Šišić-Saradžić, senior preparer, specialist
Aida Čaušević, preparer

Graphic design:
Art 7

Technical set-up of the Exhibition:
Taib Kešmer

Preparation works assistant:
Mirsada Dizdarević

The supervision of works:
**Institute for Protection of Monuments,
the Ministry of Culture and Sports
of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**
Azra Hadžić, Dipl. Eng. Arch.
Aida Sulejmanagić, Dipl. Eng. Arch.

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"Neimari"

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**Despić's
House**

Short guide

In the Despić's house that forms a part of the Museum of the City of Sarajevo the culture of living of the Serbian mid class from the end of the 18th till the beginning of 20th century is shown. The Despić's house got its name according to the famous trading family of Sarajevo Despić, that were its owners and inhabitants. Through the museum exposition the life of this family throughout generations has been shown.



The owners living abroad gave as a gift this house to the city of Sarajevo in 1969 conditioned by the provision that it should be for the purposes of the museum. The museum of the city of Sarajevo took over the care for the Despić's house and opened it for visitors. But because of the age of the object and lack of assets to adapt and renovate it the same had to be closed in 1971.

In the year 2000 the association "Cultural heritage without borders" from Sweden and the Government of the Canton Sarajevo financed the restoration of the object so that after some thirty years the conditions of the museum exposition have been fulfilled.

In the showing of the culture of living in the old Sarajevo in the named period it is necessary to say something about the socio-economic and cultural situation that ruled over that period as well as something more about the Despić family itself.


In the entire period of the Ottoman Empire ruling in our regions 1463-1878 the city of Sarajevo was a famous trading and handicraft center. The population of the city of Sarajevo was of mixed composition. There were Muslims, Christians and Jews. The center of the handicraft and trading was the "čaršija" (city center) while the housing blocks and units were placed mostly on the hill parts of the city. In the first time the Christians and Jews settled mostly around their religious objects. The orthodox Christians were mostly located in "na Varoši" near by the Old Orthodox Church, Jews near the synagogue (both from around 16th century) and Catholics in the special block near Čaršija, "Latinluk" where they have had their chapel.

Sarajevo has always been a bridge by its geographical position between the East and the West. The trading was mostly oriented towards the Istanbul. While the Muslims mainly traded with Istanbul the Christians and Jews traded with Istanbul as well but also with other central European cities.

During the several centuries Ottoman Empire the entire life of the city's population was under direct oriental influence. It found its reflection in the architecture, interior, culture of living, clothing, nutrition and so on, regardless of the confession.

The furniture in the houses was unified and modest. The floors were covered with carpets and in the baseline the main parts of it were sitting angles and built in closets as well as some other part of furniture. The differences in the interior design of the house depended mostly on the financial strength, whether it will be a thick carpet





or just a plain blanket on the floor, but the houses of the Christians and Muslims did not differ much (orthodox houses had icons and icon lamp). For instance, the houses of Muslims had on the sitting angles blankets and covers of colorful textiles while in orthodox used to have dark red ones.

The clothing of the city's population regardless of the religion was also under direct oriental influence. The clothing that was trendy was the clothing decorated with fur from within and big demand existed for the fur. A fur handicraft was very developed in Sarajevo, a handicraft mainly performed by the orthodox Christians. They used to travel to Istanbul with their products, but as well they used to trade with Vienna, Trieste, Leipzig and other central European cities. They used to at the same time bring along the goods that were not to be found in Sarajevo.

In such socio-economic conditions around the year 1760 from Herzegovina, surroundings of Gacko came Risto Slijepčević that learned the fur handicraft and married the Sarajevo girl Despa. Most probably he was successful in his handicraft because he bought a smaller house in 1780 in the Latinluk. The house consisted of basement, room in the ground floor and a room on the upper story. Few years later one more house has been bought in the immediate nearest location and both were put under the same roof. Nothing is known about their outer looks.

The sons of Risto Slijepčević under the existing custom used to bear the surname Ristići, but as sons of Despa they also call them Despići so that they use both surnames. Their followers took over the name Despić.

Some next generations of Despić successfully perform the fur handicraft and trading. They had several houses and basements (shops) and it was mentioned that they used to have even up to 20 workers in their shops. They enjoyed a great

reputation and through marital connections they were related to several influential orthodox families.

By the end of the 19th century some major changes occurred in the handicraft and trading. The fashion has changed and the demand for fur decreased and the fur handicraft began to fade away so that the Despić's cross over to more trading as well as other professions.

Among all Despićs the most intriguing personality was Makso Despić that was born and died in this house on Miljacka river. The interesting part was that he was born in the Ottoman Empire, lived in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and died in the Kingdom Yugoslavia in very late age. As trading person he used to travel to many countries, was two times on the pilgrimage in Jerusalem and wrote about it in his memoirs. As reputable and honest citizen in the period of Turkish administration even twice he was treasurer of the city which was never the case before. After the take over of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy he visited the czar Joseph as a member of the delegation.

In the time of the biggest prosperity of the family in the first years of the 19th century another part of the house was constructed and put under the same roof together with the other two. That new part consisted of a basement, big room in the ground floor and one more room in the upper story.

In the mid 19th century Makso Despić and his brother Mićo founded an amateur theater and performed shows in the "big room" in which they used to live. In the shows an actor also his brother Mićo used to perform. The repertoire consisted of "jokes and plays" of Jovan Sterija Popović and Kosta Trifković. The visitors were mainly family members and close friends. The adults used to sit on the couches and younger

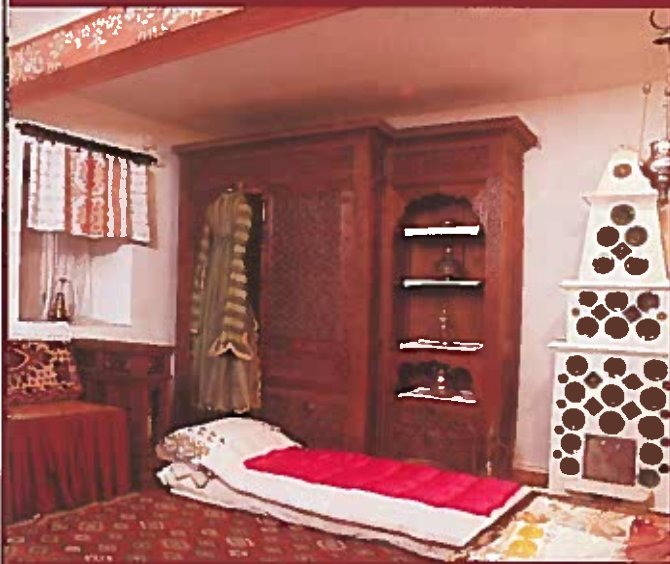


ones on the pillows on the floor. Except theater shows they used to organize parties.

Although amateur, this theater of brothers Despić was also the first theater in Sarajevo but also in Bosnia-Herzegovina as well.

Hajji Makso Despić remained in the memory of Sarajevo population by some odd behavior especially in those times. Although wealthy trading person when he was still alive he ordered the casket to be of plain unpainted wood, only to "be seen that in death all are equal and that none of us is taking anything over there". His will is also interesting, exposed in the doorway in the whole text.

Today's house in the architectonic sense represents a true jewel. The first part of the house was bought in 1780, the second one few years later and the third one was built by the end of the 19th century according to the western European standards.



The oldest parts of the house were preserved in the ground floor-mother's room (left), father's room (right) and "Kubelija" above in the middle.

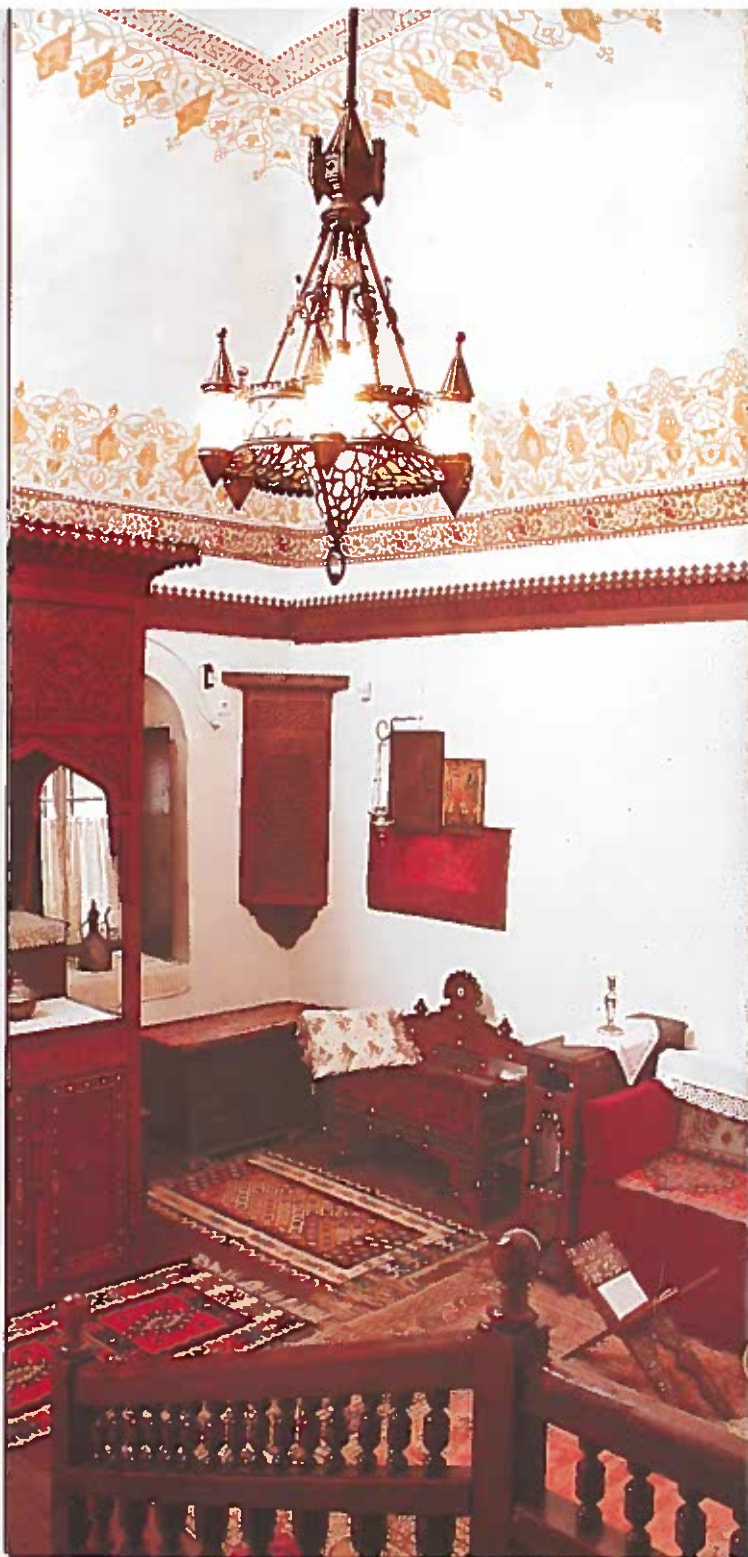
Mother's and father's room are both designed in accordance to the oriental form in the appropriate time period.

In "mother's room" there is a richly decorated closet, small wall closet, sitting angled couch ornamented with pillows from Brusa-Bursa, built chimney with pots, box for the clothes, old fashioned mirror. On the floor there was a bed for sleeping. They used to sleep on the floor and during the day the bed sheets were put in the big closet.



"Father's room" was fully furnished by the oriental fashion. There were couches with Bursa pillows, clothing box, chimney with pots, wash pot, water pot and floor table on which they used to eat.

Kubelija is the room above father's room. It is called because of the ceiling in the rounded form (KUBE). Stairs leading from father's room were hidden behind the closet. In this room two styles meet and intercept: oriental and central European.



Beside all this there is a saloon sitting set, a small one, venetian mirror, English clock and a commode most probably bought by Makso Despić from the French consul.



The "big room" is the part of the third constructed part of the house. Theater shows and parties were organized here. The entire wooden ceiling is painted. Beside couches and some parts of the furniture there is also a family tree of the family Despić as well as the portraits of some family members. In the wall closet there is material related to the parties and shows organized in it.



The entire upper story is redecorated and constructed in 1888 and furnished by central European standards. On the right side there is a sleeping room and saloon with usual furnishing from the beginning of the 20th century. Through the doorway on the left (with commodes and dishes) there is a dining room. Beside the usual dining room inventory there is a piano that tells of status and standards of the Despić family. Beside the dining room there are some exposed objects from the family legacy as well as photos. On the wall there is a sejjada made of 1160 knots of wool, made by brother of Makso's wife, Spiridon Rajković in 1851.



Some time ago there was also a garden next to the house leaned on river Miljacka. After the construction of the road and lifting of the level of the coast, only the small part of it remained next to the house.

The story of the culture of living of a reputable trading Serbian urban family starts in 1780 and ends between 20ies and 30ies of the 20th century.

