

TRADITIONAL GATES IN THE PIROT AREA VILLAGES (RELATIONSHIP TO THE ARCHITECTONIC HERITAGE)

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Abstract. *Gates represent the first architectonic element visually encountered in a rural household, and that, to a great extent, defines perception of a rural environment. Most often they are simply made, with or without decorative elements, made from the locally available materials, serving the elementary needs of a rural household. However, their position provides them with a multidimensional character, not only physical, but also symbolical. In this way, they become an important segment of architectonic heritage whose existence testifies the diversity of vernacular tradition and characteristics of an area.*

This paper analyses the appearance, function, materialization and structural design of old traditional gates in the Pirot area villages, in an attempt to emphasize the need to preserve them as testaments of cultural-historical identity of this area.

Key words: *gates, structure and materials, functionality, preservation, tradition.*

1. INTRODUCTION

„The man leaves his mark on every object he touches.“ Ivan Cankar

Architectonic space, as an ambient wherein people live, work and create is a result of human visions, wishes, understanding and time in which they live [1]. Gates, as architectonic forms, represent a recognizable element of heritage of an area. They are a product of local builders who, using the available materials and simple techniques, created works which nowadays illustrate the diversity of our vernacular tradition. Their multiple character reflects not only the functional requirements, but also esthetic needs of their creators and users.

With limited resources, with locally available building material, without aspirations of monumentality and unnecessary artsy appearance [2], structures subjected to satisfying basic human needs were made. This precisely is a recognizable criterion governing the people

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constructing their housing in rural areas, adapting them to their needs, terrain contours and climate conditions. According to Slobodan Maldini, the concept of vernacular architecture as: „*The term for architecture created on the foundations of a separate tradition inside a region which is separate in geographical or cultural-civilizational terms. Vernacular architecture is traditional architecture, but also architecture of a specific style which is characteristic for a certain area. Vernacular architecture is not pretentious, it is simple, homely, innate, those are traditional structures made of local materials constructed following the well-known forms and types.*“ [3].

The subject of the paper is an analysis of characteristics of old traditional gates in the Pirot area villages and emphasizing the need for their preservation. Even though they differ in terms of size, form, used materials, structure and way of construction, and time of construction, the gates should meet the basic requirements, primarily functional and esthetic. Time, insufficient durability of materials, negligence, disinterestedness, inexpert interventions and adaptations, and eventually physical demolition resulted in numerous examples of their devastation which destroyed or diminished their historical value and authenticity.

Pirot is specific for its location, because nearness of the roads connecting Europe and Asia determined its development. For that reason, vernacular architecture represented a resulting sum of numerous cultures, Old Slavic, Illyrian, Thracian, Roman, Byzantine and almost five centuries of Ottoman cultures. Also there are differences between the town which was on the very high road and remote villages where the impact (of oriental building style) was less intense in comparison to the original, indigenous one (e.g. the village of Gostuša).

The goals of research:

- Identify, describe and analyse appearance, function and structural designs of traditional gates from the Pirot area;
- Draw attention to the gates in the rural area of southeast Serbia, as a part of architectonic heritage which was not paid due attention until now;
- Indicate a need to preserve them and affirm them as an important segment of rural and architectonic heritage.

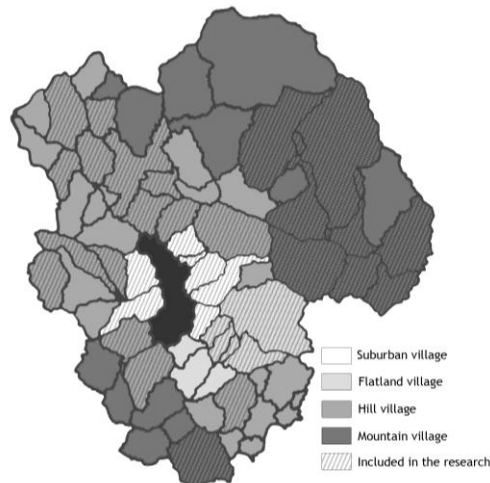


Fig. 1 Villages included in the research (Pirot, map of the area)

For the purposes of this research, a field data acquisition was performed, and on the occasion 36 villages in the Pirot are were visited (51% of the total number) and 151 gate was documented. The processed representative sample included the villages belonging to different categories, which facilitated making relevant conclusions after the performed analysis of the collected material (Fig. 1). Four types of settlements are classified on the basis of the land configuration and proximity to the town, so care was taken to balance their share in the sample. The research included 100% of suburban, 62.5% of flatland and 43% of hill and mountain villages, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1 Specifics of gates according to the settlement type (in terms of land configuration)

Settlement type	Suburban	Flatland	Hill	Mountain
Settlements included in the research / total number	7/7	5/8	15/35	9/21
Expressed in %	100	62.5	43	43
Share of old gates	Very small	very small	small	Largest (in comparison to other settlements)
Material of gates and fences	wood, adobe	Wood, adobe	wood, adobe, stone	Wood, stone
Canopy cover	S-tile, roof tile	S-tile, roof tile	S-tile, roof tile	Stone slates, roof tile

2. ABOUT GATES AS AN ARCHITECTONIC FORM IN TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

2.1. Historical context of emergence of gates and their conceptual definition

As early as when the first shelters, shrines and other significant structures were constructed, a need to protect and enclose them arose [4]. The people closed the openings in their first habitats using branches, stones, skin and bones of animals, which provided only an elementary protection from the weather and wild animals. Formation of indoor spaces and more permanent dwellings also led to construction of sturdier and more durable barriers at their entrances, serving as protection [4]. For instance, huts made of twigs, as one of the first dwellings, had a door made of interwoven branches in a wooden frame. At a later date, the openings are shut using crudely hewn boards or planks, connected with wooden crosspieces [5].

The first door, although primitive in architectonic and formal senses, already had completely defined practical and symbolical function of a gate and entrance [4]. Later on the gate stands out as a separate element, when the enclosed curtilage started to form around the house. The basic function of the first enclosure was to mark the boundaries of a property, protect the household, and prevent the livestock going out or in. Initially, it was a *plot*, a fence made of stakes interwoven with twigs, mostly willow twigs for their natural flexibility. Later, there are fences made of more durable materials, such as *taraba* (picket fence). In some areas, depending on the availability of the material, the courtyards were enclosed with stone. Gates were built in agreement with the material of the fence, by interweaving of willow twigs or by nailing the upright pieces connected by a horizontal or diagonal wooden railing. The protective function was particularly prominent in the period of the Turkish rule. The remaining traces of that urban matrix and architectonic form can be found in some locations, especially on the Constantinople road, which were exposed to the passing armies.

The concepts of the door and gate have closely related meaning and in some places they are employed synonymously. In etymological terms, the word for a gate – *kapija* derives from

Turkish *kapi*, and it can be defined as a type of door or entrance into an enclosure as defined by D. Milovanović [4]. M. Mladenović talks about the gate as a showpiece of a house, and in his mind, the form of a gate contains an „inverted presentation of the house volume” intimating existence and characteristics of internal space [6].

In Serbian, the words *vratnice*, *dveri*, *portal* and *porta* are used, which also define the architectonic concept of an opening for passage which full determine its basic function [4]. The words *kapija* or *vrata* also define the geographical concepts meaning passage through some natural barrier or boundaries between various areas (Gvozdena vrata (Iron gate) in Đerdap, Demir kapija...). Gate as an engineering and architectonic form represents a boundary between the interior and exterior, a contact with the outside world, and simultaneously it is “a symbol of secure life and latent fear of dangers outside... a safe sanctuary or an illusion of one’s own power” [6], it bars entrance and provides communication with the environment. In time, two forms have been established: doors and gates for wagon passage as separate elements, and doors as parts of gates.

A door as an architectonic concept determines those openings which provide communication between various spaces, i.e. block this communication between them. Miloš Matic mentions that their basic function is closing of entry openings in buildings or individual rooms [7]. In the traditional architecture, in addition to this definition, the concept of a door includes the threshold and lintel, door jamb, armature (hinges) used to mount the door panels, locks and handles. Depending on the structure of the building, certain parts can be omitted, or may have multiple roles. For instance, door jamb can be a column, i.e. a part of the roof structure. Vertical and horizontal posts forming frame of the door, create a strong bond between the gate wings and massive walls of the house, whereby the wings are the movable element closing and opening the space, establishing or interrupting connection with the exterior.

2.2. Traditional architecture and symbolical meaning of a gate

A. Deroko, speaking of rural architecture, claimed that every spontaneously developed architecture is influenced by three factors: way of life and needs of population, available building material and climate of the specific area. Vernacular architecture is a subtle fusion of spatial harmony, building inventiveness and artistic inspiration of an unknown builder [8]. Abundance of physical-geographical elements, particularly relief, water, foliage, landscape and ambient values, natural environment, development and way of life of people, lends a specific cultural matrix to any area [1]. Building heritage represents a collective interpretation of an intricate complex of social beliefs of a population which are expressed through the physical form of dwellings [9]. It can be said that the choice of gate form in one environment has the same genetic code. They can be very simple, but also decorated with fine plastics, so in their appearance, form and details one may observe the esthetic experience of a population in an area. Sometimes, they are devoid of any visual articulation, but the character, wealth and power are expressed by the size and primary form, coarse plastics or sculptural approach to construction of the gate itself.

The multidimensional perception of a physical partition, serving to compartmentalize space, create openings on the buildings or provide security within a property also has a symbolic importance in ritual practice. The fence around a curtilage represents a boundary between the external or public area and the courtyard which is an interior or private world of a family. Courtyard doors – gates represent a symbolical gateway between one world into another [9], and

the threshold is identified with an altar for communication with the ancestral spirits, for taking communion and sacrificing [6], [10]. A balanced relationship of symbolic values and material causes is an important factor in the creation of any, and so of this architectonic form. In all the cultures, irrespective of when they were created, the symbolism of the gate is expressed in a similar way. The symbolism of elementary forms, symbols, motifs, numbers, structural designs and used material testifies about their universal character. The specifics in the combinations of the mentioned elements express autochthonic culture, identity and originality of every individual expression of style [4].

3. AREA OF RESEARCH

3.1. Old gates as a part of architectonic heritage in the rural areas of the Pirot municipality nowadays

The aspect of affirmation of culture in vernacular heritage is in the document “Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage” by ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), is specially emphasized: „*The built vernacular heritage occupies a central place in the affection and pride of all peoples... It would be unworthy of the heritage of man if care were not taken to conserve these traditional harmonies which constitute the core of man's own existence*”, stressing that “*the built vernacular heritage is the fundamental expression of the culture of a community, of its relationship with its territory and, at the same time, the expression of the world's cultural diversity*” [11].

Very small number of old traditional gates has been preserved in the rural area of the Pirot municipality in its original, authentic form. Most of old gates and fences were demolished by the owners themselves, to replace them with new ones, or they dilapidated and fell to ruins, due to neglect, time or material fatigue. It is interesting that the majority of gates preserved in their original form are found in the houses and curtilages which are deserted now, or which only occasionally have occupants. The oldest gates, as witnessed by the owners or neighbours are more than 100 years old, and they mostly date back to the first half of 20th century. They are mostly dilapidated and in poor condition, but even as such they represent an important document of architectonic heritage in the Pirot area villages. There are examples of successful restoration of old gates, but the number of those where the attempt to preserve their original form has been unsuccessful is higher by far.

3.2. Position of the houses and courtyard organization – precondition for positioning of the gates

Gates are positioned depending on the orientation of the house to the street. A large number of housing buildings in the villages is laid along the roads – streets, and not only those built in the recent decades, but also those from the end of 19th and beginning of 20th century. Such an orientation of the houses was characteristic for Pirot after the liberation from the Turks at the end of 19th century, when a considerable number of houses was built along the street and closer to it [12], [13]. One can also observe, a certain number of cases where the granary is located in front of the houses, near the road. The reason is both in the lack of space in the densely built villages (almost all the villages in the Pirot area), and in the fact that it is easier to transport crops to the storage in this way.

In some courtyards, the house is set back into the property, so as to provide intimacy and protection, which was especially characteristic for the construction in the period of the Turkish rule. A number of outbuildings is near the house in the courtyard (*dvor*, *avlija*), and a part in other areas of the household. The courtyard most often contains granary, maize storage, hay barn (*plevnja*), buildings for livestock and poultry, firewood shed (*drvnik*), bread baking ovens (*vurnja*)... There is no uniform arrangement of buildings, it is individual for each household [14].

3.3. Classification of fences and gates

There are no considerable differences in the appearance of gates and fences in the villages on the periphery of the Pirot valley and mountain villages, safe for the fact that those in the mountain villages are smaller in size. A traditional gate consists of two sections: first, larger used for letting wagons through and which is called the great gate (in the Pirot area, it is called „*golema kapija*”) and the section for passage of people, so called the small gate. By their character, the entrances to the courtyards are to a great extent adapted to wagons, and there is only a small number of those with a separate gate for pedestrians – all pass through the great gate. The fences are made of wood or stone or adobe, with a gate having a canopy, otherwise, the buildings are placed on the alignment line, bordering the street, so there are no fences. Most of the entrances are in a housing building or an outbuilding in a form of a passage - “*sajvan*” (Turkish word, meaning tent, umbrella, used in the Pirot area as a canopy above an outbuilding).



Fig. 2 Classification of gates based on the position of the house in respect to the access communication (photo I. Đorđević)

Based on the data obtained by the field research, the following classification has been developed, based on position of the house in respect to the access communication (Fig. 2):

- Gates of the houses placed next to the street line, whose courtyard has an entrance next to the residential building or an outbuilding (Fig. 2A, Visočka Ržana);
- Gates of the houses placed next to the street line, whose courtyard is located behind the house, and which has a passageway through the house itself (Fig. 2B, Visočka Ržana);
- Gates of the houses set back in the courtyard, while an outbuilding with an entrance on it is placed next to the street line (Fig. 2C, Visočka Ržana);
- Gates of the houses set back into the courtyard (Fig. 2D, Pakleštica).

There is a certain number of houses where there are no gates, because the courtyards were not fenced at all, as is the case in the mountain villages, remote households, inaccessible terrain on steep gradient where there was no need for fencing. By analysing the structure and form, two types can be identified: covered and uncovered gates, which do not differ considerably in terms of form and used materials (Table 2).

Table 2 Classification of gates by structure and form

TYPES OF GATES					
Covered gates					Uncovered
With a roof		Passageway <i>sajvan</i>			
	Gable	Hipped	Inside a residential house	Inside an outbuilding	/
Roof cover	Stone slates, S-tile, tile	Stone slates, S-tile, tile	/	/	/
Entrances	With separate wagon and pedestrian entrances, without separated pedestrian section				
Gate wings	Wooden planks or combination of planks and laths (nonstandard dimensions)				
Posts	Wooden posts: Driven into the ground, Resting on a stone footing				
Hinges	Metal bolts: L shaped hinges, eye bolt hinges				
Handles	Wooden or metal				
bolts	Wooden or metal				
Size	Non-standardized				

3.4. Gates

3.4.1. Functional and formal design

In spatial and physical terms, the house is defined by the walls and the roof, which outline the house volume, while the fence in the same way defines a courtyard or curtilage [6].

A traditional gate has two entrances: for wagons and for pedestrians (Fig. 3A, Crnoklište), although there is a much greater proportion of those lacking the separate pedestrian section, so pedestrians also use the great gate (Fig. 3B, Slavinja). In the houses whose courtyard is not next to the street but behind the house, which is next to the street, there is a passageway with a gate. Its dimensions differ depending whether it is a wagon or pedestrian gate.

Left and right from the great gate (and of the small one, if it exists) are wooden posts driven into the ground or resting on stone footings. The posts are often stiffened by transverse beam and some with crosspieces, which can be set both on the interior and the exterior side. There are examples that a small gate is cut in one of the wings of the great gate, where small interventions on the structure provide a more practical door for pedestrians (Fig. 4, Temska). In the village of Gostuša there are entrance without a gate, more precise there is a passageway through the building – passageway *sajvan*, which leads to a house and it has side doors for a basement (*zevnik*, *zemnik*) (Fig. 5, Gostuša). In two cases, there is a frame of wooden beams on the entrance, in the third case there is none.



Fig. 3 Gates with a different number of entrances (photo I. Đorđević)



Fig. 4 Pedestrian entrance obtained by cutting in the great gate wing (photo I. Đorđević)

Fig. 5 Passageway *sajvan* (photo I. Đorđević)

3.4.2. Materials of fences and gates

In the Pirot area villages the most readily accessible material is stone and wood. The simplest fences are made of roughly hewn wooden uprights and woven whips. When they are made of woven whips, they often do not have a gate – but only a passageway leading to the courtyard of the residential zone.

Picket fences, *tarabe*, can be encountered both in the villages near to the town and in the remote mountain villages. Since they were not coated by any protection, exposed to weathering, they rapidly rotted and dilapidated. Even though one may encounter examples several tens of years old, they are mainly in a very bad condition. Most frequently the upright boards are 2 to 3 cm thick, 10 to 15cm wide, 90 to 120cm high (Fig. 6A, Rsovci). The boards are rightly cut, pointed at the top, almost never of uniform dimensions. They are installed on the stakes driven into the ground, at a distance of around 3m, and they are connected by nailing them to two railings, which testifies that they are recent. Gates in such fences are made of the same elements, and for the purpose of stability and strength, the railings are additionally stiffened by one or two diagonal crosspieces.

Stone was used for construction of fences in mountain villages, where it was easily available. The fences made of stone can be seen more often, which is certainly due to the durability this material. Stone was broken or dressed and laid in an irregular course, without using any binder, resulting in the fences of very varied individual dimensions (Fig. 6B, Dojkinci). The stone fences covered on top by S-tile are rare (Fig. 6C, Vlasi). With such fences, different types of wooden gates can be observed (made of laths or boards, with or without canopy).

The third type of traditional fence is the made of adobe (bricks made of soil and baked in the sun) covered with S-tiles, and later with roof tiles (Fig. 6D, Prisjan). Such walls-fences are 1.5 to 2 blocks wide. Such fences are characteristic for the villages located on the periphery of the Pirot valley, while there are none in the mountain villages. The gates are the same, both in terms of material and form, as in the stone fences.



Fig. 6 Types of fences (photo I. Đorđević)

Irrespective of the fence material, wood used for construction of gates was the variety available in the vicinity of villages themselves. It could be beech, ash, bitter oak, oak or hornbeam, but most often it was softwood, for its durability.

3.4.3. Structure of the fence and gate

In construction, one can particularly recognize the materialization principle (material availability principle), and mimicry-mimesis principle (relationship to the surroundings principle – “spirit of place”) [15].

A number of traditional gates were covered with a canopy, which extended their service life and they were preserved in their original form. Most often they are covered with gable canopies

(lean to and hipped roofs are extremely rare), of wooden structure. Two or four wooden posts support the roof structure made of purlins, rafters and wall plates.

The cover is S-tile, and the mountain areas for this purpose are used stone slates of various sizes and thickness, roughly dressed. Unfortunately, most of the roof covers are replaced by the tiles nowadays, because of which they lost their authenticity. Dimensions of these roofs are in accordance with the size of the gates.



Fig. 7 Extended roofs near the gates with a storage space (photo I. Đorđević)



Fig. 8 Timber post resting on a stone footing (photo I. Đorđević)

The roofs can be extended as canopies which are used also for storage of tools, material or some other purpose (Fig. 7, Gostuša, Visočka Ržana). It is not rare that the roof extends to outbuildings of the village household. Such a construction (Fig. 8A, Sukovo) represents an evolution of the previous canopy. Gates are often simple structures without decorative details. The boards are either sawn or hewn, of various widths and nailed with nails to two transversal lathes. The posts are timber beams, driven into the ground or resting on a stone footing, on which the gate wings are mounted. (Fig. 8B, Brlog).

Due to the passage of time, and regarding that they have no protective coating, exposed to weather and insects, the structures quickly deteriorated, the boards warped and broke so numerous subsequent repairs on them are noticeable. In most cases those meant replacing rotted boards, reinforcing hinges, repairing or replacing the locking mechanism and handles, and subsequent paint coating or lacquering, so their authenticity is more or less compromised. There are also samples where no subsequent interventions are observable.

Gates are mainly mounted using “L” shaped iron bolts, with one pointed end driven into the post. The eye attached to the gate wing is then mounted onto the bolt (Fig. 9A, Krupac). There

are examples where the eye is fixed to the post, while the bolt is on the wing (Fig. 9B, Slavinja). Alternative method of mounting is with interlocked eyes, with long ends so as to be driven into the wing and post. The ends are bent, which provides additional strength (Fig. 9C, Visočka Ržana). The number of hinges depends on the mass of the wings, but the most common number is two. Older gates have wooden hinges, but there is few of them because they were replaced with metal, more durable ones.

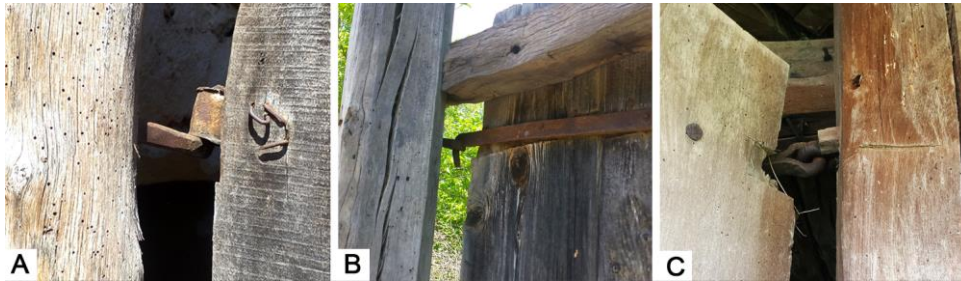


Fig. 9 Gate wing mounting (photo I. Đorđević)

Considering the condition of gates themselves, a small number of them have other elements preserved, such as the locking mechanism. For locking the gates, locks and latches were used, mostly the metal ones, which became widely present in the second half of 19th century. They are simple, without any decorations. In a small number of gates, one may find wooden latches used to close the gate from the inside. The consist of two parts – one attached to the wing, with an opening along the middle, and the other, movable, which by sliding left and right goes in or out of the opening, blocking or freeing the other wing on the gate, that is, locking it and unlocking it (Fig. 10, Gostuša, Gostuša, Nišor).



Fig. 10 Door locking mechanisms (photo I. Đorđević)

Instead of a handle, for the purpose of easier opening and closing, there are knockers, having a double function. They are small, simple and without decorations. The original wooden handles are very rare because considering their dimensions they were easier to brake and they fell off the gates. In the mountain villages they have simple forms (Fig.11, Dojkinci, Crnoklište, Pakleštica).



Fig. 11 Gate handles (photo I. Đorđević)

3.4.4. Decorative elements on the gates

The artistic expression of the gates can be discussed only after the imperative of their functionality has been satisfied [6]. It is noticeable that they do not differ much mutually in form and size. Very often, some details contribute to the difference in their style can be observed. It is evident that functionality is in focus, while fine decorations are not present. The material status of their owners was expressed through the gate size.

There is only a few gates which have a sort of a decoration or attempts and stylization of details. Some of them have a number of thin laths in their upper sections, which are cut in different way on their tops, for esthetic purposes (Fig. 12, Slavinja, Crnoklište, Sukovo). Such examples are the most numerous in the villages nearby Pirot, so it can be assumed that the need for esthetic details was learnt from the urban environment, by copying the town gates of the time.

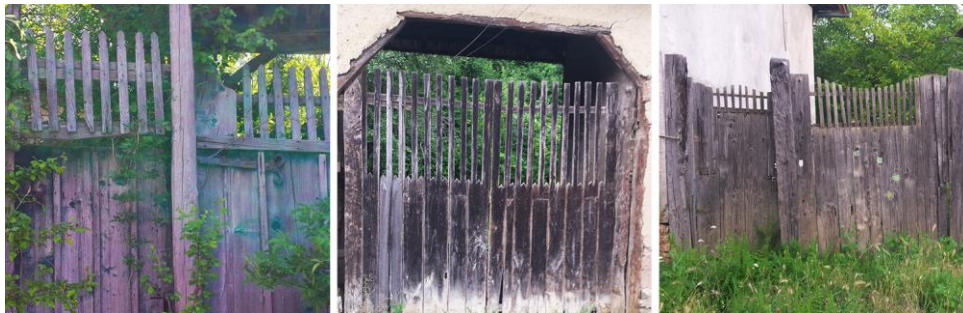


Fig. 12 Gate decorations in the form of thin laths in their upper parts (photo I. Đorđević)

In the mountain villages, there are almost no decorations but the gates of neighbouring villages of Rsovci, Visočka Ržana, and Slavinja, there is an almost identical way of decoration obtained by placing wooden panels cut in a form of an arch at the top of the gates, or vertical inserts made of lathes. This similarity in door decoration shows that, most likely, it is a work of one and the same craftsman, or a copy (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13 Similar way of decoration of gate wings (photo I. Đorđević)

Another form of decoration was observed, on the posts next to the gates, where horizontal grooves are made at the top and the bottom (Fig. 14A, Dojkinci), and only in Temska village, they are shaped in a different way. Namely, their builder retained the original dimensions of the post at the bottom and the top, while the middle section was rounded and thinned. The same principle was used for braces (Fig. 14B, Temska), except for rounding their middle section. In the same village, at several locations, an identical or similar way of post or braces decoration was implemented (Fig. 14C, Temska).



Fig. 14 Decoration of the posts and braces (photo I. Đorđević)

Impressive dimensions of gates and decorations are the result of the owners intention to demonstrate their status and financial standing, while the less well-off people only observed their function. But, considering that only wealthier households could provide covered gates, only such gates survived to this day, implying that the analysed examples are exactly those of the wealthy households.

3.4.5. Gates - keepers of privacy

Gates in the villages of the Pirot area, apart from their basic function, with their size keep the privacy of their owners by screening the property from the curious eyes of onlookers. Some are over three meters high. Next to them are stone or adobe walls and outbuildings. Counting as well those houses whose courtyards are accessed through the tunnels inside the housing buildings, a large number of households is protected in isolated so there is no visual contact with the inner yard. The fact that most of the gates dates back to the end of 19th and 20 century, suggests that the need to protect the property and family is the result of the long Turkish occupation.

3.5. New gates

In the villages of the Pirot area, the authentic wooden gates were replaced by more durable metal gates. It can be conclude that new generations, just as their ancestors, are not interested in the esthetics, but functionality, so the materials chose are those which will ensure durability. Of course, one can ignore those examples of gates and fences serving to advertise the status of the owner and unsuccessful attempts to imitate the traditional gates. The reason for that is in the economy and low standard of the population. The policy which caused desertion of villages and lack of understanding of importance of preservation of authentic architectonic values, also meant neglecting the heritage and tradition. A positive and the increasing trend, seen in a number of Stara Planina villages is the tendency to restore the old gates or build the new ones, in the traditional style. This is in part a result of development of rural tourism (gaining increasing popularity) or restoration of family houses used by the owners for leisure (Fig. 15, Gostuša, Pakleštica).



Fig. 15 New gates built after the traditional model (photo I. Đorđević)

4. CONCLUSION

Vernacular architecture is a materialized reflection of human spirit on the cultural distinction of a certain area. Being a product of a specific area under social and historical conditions, its preservation is invaluable, as it is a testament of cultural historical identity of a region.

Gates, as part of architectonic heritage in the Pirot area are a product of local craftsmen, and they are characterized by simplicity and functionality. Presence of decorative elements is negligible. They were built of locally available material, mostly coniferous wood, and they provided peace of mind and security to rural population. Their dimensions were varied but sufficient to let through the wagons and pedestrians. Owing to the canopies, a certain number is preserved in their authentic form. Uniformity of their form, materialization and construction are recognizable characteristics. Their shape and hermetical character, because they completely hide the inner yards, makes them similar to fortress gates, which is a logical consequence of almost five centuries of Turkish rule.

The primary issue is how to preserve all the gates from oblivion, because when they disappear the entire ambient value of architectonic matrix of the rural space is reduced, and a part of history is erased. A multidisciplinary approach of analysis of rural areas would allow preservation of this traditional architectonic element. The need to preserve the remaining facilities is imposed, as the answer to the basic question. The local community and individuals, the region and state institutions should take part in that process, simultaneously cooperating with the neighboring regions. Collaboration involves a wide range of joint activities and projects, as well as the use of others' experiences. Vernacular architecture, as important issue for the preservation of identity, is present in the area of Eastern Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria, and it is to a large extent matched. The approach should be systematic and systemic, through recording and listing all remaining architectural structures of this type, through their evaluation and classification, protection, researching and finding the role and places in the development of the cultural values of this and neighboring regions. An important role is played by education of the population, affirmative relations in the media and activation of higher education institutions, through adequate scientific and research programs and projects, in order to permanently develop awareness of the importance of tradition and cultural heritage and the need for its preservation. Thanks to the development of rural tourism, ethno villages and households, the awareness of the value and importance of preservation of traditional values is becoming more affirmed, so in the recent years a return to traditional architecture is noticed, where new gates can be observed next to the housing buildings, which take after the authentic ones both in the way they look and their materialization.

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TRADICIONALNE KAPIJE U SELIMA PIROTSKOG KRAJA (ODNOS PREMA ARHITEKTONSKOM NASLEĐU)

Kapije, predstavljaju prvi arhitektonski element sa kojim vizuelno dolazimo u kontakt sa seoskim domaćinstvom, i u velikoj meri definišu percepciju konkretne ruralne sredine. Najčešće jednostavne izrade, sa ili bez dekorativnih elemenata, sačinjene od dostupnog materijala služe zadovoljenju elementarnih potreba seoskog domaćinstva. Međutim, njihov položaj im daje višedimenzionalni karakter, ne samo fizički i funkcionalni, već i simbolički. Na taj način postaju bitan segment graditeljskog nasleđa koje svojim postojanjem dokumentuje bogatstvo narodne tradicije i osobenost nekog područja.

U ovom radu se analizira izgled, funkcija, materijalizacija i konstruktivno rešenje starih tradicionalnih kapija u selima pirotskog kraja, sa ciljem isticanja potrebe za njihovim očuvanjem kao svedočanstva kulturno-istorijskog identiteta ovog prostora.

Ključne reči: *kapije, konstrukcija i materijali, funkcionalnost, očuvanje, tradicija*