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THE NINETEEN-CENTURY OTTOMAN RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE OF BITOLA/MANASTIR

At the end of the eighteenth-century, the Ottoman central government had little control over the Balkans, as virtually independent warlords ruled over peninsula. The region of Western Macedonia, Malisor and Epirus was thrown into a state of anarchy and corruption. This caused an influx of Christians into Bitola/Manastir from the surrounding areas, a trend which intensified from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. A large number of these people came from the Vlach population of Moschopoli, Gramos and Hlerin/Filurina. They rapidly increased the percentage of the Christian population in the city of Manastir. Thus the city witnessed profound transformations in the religious, social, and economic life and in its urban fabric. The city reflected the changes in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century. Muslims were the largest religious group in Manastir, but they were not a majority, with the city’s environs mainly settled by Christians. The city had a very fluid population, composed of people employed by the state, military men, merchants, students, day workers and craftsmen. Starting from 1830 the city was densely populated. In its streets a variety of languages was to be heard. The sleepy eighteenth century small mediaeval town was transformed into a modern city, impressive in appearance.

The Ottoman intellectual Sami Bey Frashery described the city of Bitola/Manastir at the end of the nineteenth centuries as follows:

...the central town of a vilayet, with a population of 31,347. There are twenty-four mosques, five churches, nine Turkish theological schools, a primary school and a military school, a Turkish junior high school for girls and for boys, and a school for Bulgarians, the Greeks and Wallachians, junior high schools for Catholic and Protestants missionaries, two large barracks, a military hospital, 2482 shops and markets, fourteen inns, seven baths, one clock tower. The kaza of Manastir has a population of 161, 863. ¹

But, the Golden age of sixteenth-century monumental mosque buildings had long passed. There was no significantly monumental mosque, of the eighteenth-century. Instead the city looked towards European architectural fashion. The urban and religious architecture was influenced by architectural pluralism and pragmatism, which radiated from the imperial city on the Bosphorus and from Salonica. High-ranking Ottoman officials from the provinces were patrons of the building activities: it seems that the officials sponsored the construction of mosques on the Balkans, partly because the Ottoman ruling elite originated from the Balkan provinces. A number of these patrons were military or administrative officials, and wealthy people. The mosques belonging to the Sultan’s officials were frequently built in the various parts of Rumeli. The difference was that those in the provinces were generally smaller and more modest than the Imperial ones in Istanbul. Some political power-holders created pious foundations or renovated the main mosques to consolidate their reputation among the town people. Their edifices were to show off their local status or their religious beliefs.² During the nineteenth-century a number of the main places of Islamic worship in Toli Manastir were renovated such were:

- The Isa Fakih mosque of 1505 was renovated in 1259 AH/1843, as recorded in the marble inscription on the minaret.


Fig. 1. A photo of Bitola/Manastir from Tumbeki

- The Kadi Ishak Chelebi mosque was remodeled after lightning damaged the minaret and portico. The portico was enlarged with domes and the cemetery around the mosque was extended. Rumeli Mushir Reshad Pasha was buried there in 1846.

- The Hadji Mahmud Bey mosque (1521-1522) was renovated in 1293 AH/1875, April 19, according the marble plaque above the entrance.

- The Yeni Cami or Kadi Mahmud efendi mosque was renewed and a portico was added in 1308AH/1890.

- The Uch Sheihler or Hamza Bey mosque was renovated in 1857-58 and a marble plaque was set above the main gate.

- The Hasan Baba mosque of 1628-1640 was renovated by Fazli Pasha, a Commander of the Third Ottoman army in 1883.

During the eighteen-nineteen centuries, instead of a dome on top of the building, the local mosques were covered by a hip-roof structure. It was the dominant type of mosque in this period. Usually these buildings were of modest dimensions. Most of them were built according to local architectural traditions, though influenced by the mosques in the capital city. Thus, stalactite decorations and Ottoman style windows mingled with western architectural forms. Such eclectic styles can be seen in all the mosques and even in the architecture of some synagogues and churches. There were a few provincial mosques erected in Bitola/Manastir during the eighteen and nineteen centuries: Emir Bey mosque was built by the governor of Rumeli, Yegen Ali Pasa in 1205 AH/1790; Silhedar Mehmed Pasha mosque in 1180AH/1767; and Huseyn Pasa mosque, built by the order of Rumeli Valisi Huseyn Pasha in 1816. Some of the mosque patrons were locally well-known merchants, heads of the guilds or Muslim clergy, or members of the rich Ottoman Muslim aristocracy: Egrikash or Ayshe Hanum mosque was renovated during the eighteen century by Madame Ayse Hanum; Sarachane Bashi Meschid was erected in 1203AH/1788, by the head of the horse equipment guild; and the Meschid of Misirli Hodja Ahmed was erected by Misir Hodja Ahmed Efendi in the nineteenth century.

In the eighteen-nineteen centuries, mosques and mesdjids in Manastir were designed by architects familiar with Ottoman religious architecture in Istanbul, but most of the buildings were constructed by the local masters-builders. It may be that the plans, drawings or designs for major buildings were prepared in


U. Bates, “Facades in Ottoman Cairo”, The Ottoman City and its parts, urban structure and social order, (ed. J. Elizovik) Beograd 1933

Ayverdi, op. cit., 96.
local or sometimes in imperial offices. The training of the masters-builders seems to have been carried out locally, as was the case with Ustabashi Mateya Grdanov from Krushevo, George Novakov – Djon-djar from the village of Papradishte, or Maystor Gine from Smilevo village. 7 In addition, the final composition of the façade was affected by the building materials or architectural style, which was fashionable at the imperial architectural offices. In general the Classical Ottoman architectural plans, horizontal forms and vertical elevations have survived in their original format, but with some slight variations:

Plastic low-relief decoration was used in the fashioning of the capitals, portals, the mihrab (a niche indicating the direction to Mecca) and the minbar (pulpit), which were ornamented with geometrical motives of an oriental origin and hanging decoration which gave the appearance of stalactites.... The motives of the painted decorations were of vegetal or geometric origin. 8

On the one hand the most prevalent, Classical decorative style was transformed by a puritan reduction and the rejection of unnecessary decorative details. On the other, the interiors and Mihrab wall had moderately ornate painted decoration. The painted floral ornaments and landscapes represented in Islamic iconography had their roots in the Koran and Islamic Eschatological texts regarding heavenly landscapes.9

According to the Turkish historian of Ottoman Architecture, H.E. Ayverdi,10 it is possible to follow the number of new or renovated mosques and mescids in the city of Toli Manastir, from preserved Ottoman Cadastral archival documents. For some of them there is only modest information or an alternative name, since a number of mosques and mescids were ruined by the wars, natural disasters and time. Still, the following list can be compiled for the eighteen and nineteen centuries,

- The Ali Pasha Cami of 1153 AH / 1740. Ali Pasa was a clerk (Defterdar) at the Imperial palace,
- The Emir Bey Cami was erected in the same city quarter Emi Bey, on the left side of the river Dragor. The patron was Yegen Ali Pasha, Governor of Rumelia. He built a medresa and library in the mosque’s court. Yegen Ali Pasha was appointed as governor in 1164/1750 and stayed one and a half years in this position,
- The Silahdar Mehmed Pasha Cami, built by the Governor of Rumeli, Silahdar Mehmed Pasha, in the quarter known as Yakub Bey, around 1180AH/1767.

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- The Azeb Bey Cami built in 1203 AH/1788.
- The Husrev Kethuda Cami, of around 1203 AH/1788.
- The Sarachane Bashi mesdjid, built in 1203 AD/1788.
- The Hadji Hasan Cami, in the quarter of Sinan Bey, of 1269 AH/1852.
- The Hadji Nuri Efendi mesdjid in the quarter Sinan Bey, near the cemetery.
- The Huseyn Pasha Cami was built by the Governor of Rumeli, Huseyn Pasha after 1816, in the vicinity of the Grand Palace (Saray).
- The Misirli Hodja Ahmed Cami, of the nineteen century.
- The Faik Pasha Cami, was in the Upper city, in Muhadjir mahalla, and the Hadji Dogan mesdjid on Ilindenska street.

One of the surviving nineteenth-century mosques is Sherif Bey Cami. The building is located on the right bank of the river Dragor, behind of the Musical school building, “… in the middle of the city” as Mehmed Tewfik commented in his book.12

According to a preserved marble plaque, the mosque and medresa were erected by Mehmed Zade Sherif Ahmed Bey from Ohrid in 1244 AH/1828.13 For the maintenance of his pious Vakif he left a large endowment. The marble plaque, with dimensions of 82 x 51 cm, contains a text in Ottoman Turkish, written with arabic letters, referring to the medresa: “The benefactor of this welfare centre (Hayrat) is the Pasha of Ohrid, Mahmud Zade Sherif Ahmed Bey.”14

The building is partly preserved. It is a simple rectangular base covered by a hipped roof and terracotta tiles. On the southern side the base of the minaret still exists. The corners of the building were built of stone blocks. The façade was decorated with Neo classical stucco decoration characteristic of large rectangular buildings of nineteen century European architecture. These days the buildings of the mosque and its medresa are used as a dwelling. In one of the rooms the stucco decoration indicating the Mihrab is still visible.

Another mosque from 1903 is preserved in the Upper parts of the town and is called “Hatuniye”(Lady’s) mosque. It is possible that the modest mosque building was the last representative place of worship built before the Balkan Wars (1912). A wall enclosed the building with a minaret and a small cemetery. It was situated in the old Muslim quarter known as Bali Voyvoda. It has an unusual name--Hatuniye means that the founder was a distinguished lady. The mosque may be connected with the cult of Rabiya Hatun (Rabi’a al Adawiyya al Qaysiya, who lived between 714 and 801 in Basra), a famous Muslim saint.15 Her cult was spread in the Balkans by Bektashi dervishes and there is a tekke in Albania dedicated to her cult. According to Mehmed Tewfik there was a sacred...
well known as “Bogday bunar” (Wheat well) in the vicinity of Hatuniye mosque. In 1269AH/1848-49, miraculously, wheat grains were found in the crystal waters of the well. Alternatively, ‘Hatuniye’ may be connected with the title, which was given to the Sultan’s legal wives in the early dynastic period.

The Hatuniye mosque is a modest rectangular building 13.5 m. x 8.55 m. with a portico on the west. Modern terracotta tiles cover the pitched roof. The minaret on the right side is short and whitewashed, with a simple decoration on the Sherefet balcony. Above the entrance a marble plaque in Arabic letters contains the following inscription in Ottoman Turkish:

This Kible is the most important spot on this place.
They say when you enter this place, you should have the highest respect.
In this place, worshipping is a reverence.
Without any doubt this is a house of Salvation (Dar-ul Salam).
With the highest love, we should repeat, the name of Allah.
In this house you should ask, anything you need from God.
Jamad Al Uhra 1323/1903 (September)

During the nineteen-century a number of the city’s traditional places of worship were renovated, and their interiors were refurbished, or repainted, as recorded in commemorative marble plaques. This was the case, for example, of Uch Sheihler or Hamza Bey in 1857 - 58; Hadji Bey in 1875; Hasan Baba in 1883; Yeni cami in 1890 and Ishakkiye, which was specially adapted for the Sultan Reshad V’s visit in 1908. An Imperial loggia (Hunkar mahfili) for the Sultan and his family was erected on the northwestern side of the prayer hall. The wall paintings, inscriptions from the Koran and heavenly landscapes were repainted by an unknown artist, around 1910-1912.

In contrast to the Orthodox churches and the synagogues lost between the town houses and districts, the mosque’s minarets stood out. When Edward Lear visited Manastir in 1848, he created a small collection of panoramas and views of the city dominated by the minarets of Ishakkiye, Yeni, Haydar Kadi, Sungur Chaus, the Clock tower and the mausoleum called Kizlar Bey Turbe. Either looking up or down the river, the intermixture of minarets and mosques with cypress and willow foliage, forms subjects of the most admirable beauty.

The Sufi Brotherhoods in Bitola/Manastir and their lodges played an important role in Ottoman social and spiritual life. Many of the Sufis’ tekkes were located in the predominantly Muslim quarters.

Fig. 4. The marble plaque of Sherif Bey mosque.

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16 Tefik, op. cit., 223-224.
17 Translated into Macedonian by Nedjbeddin Hodja, to whom I am grateful. The English version is my own translation.
18 Томовски, op., cit., 1957/58, 44, n. 65; П. Момидиќ, ‘Џамијата Исхак Челеби во Битола’, Зборник на трудови на заводот за заштита на спомениците на културат, музеј и галерија, 1, (1979), 66.
20 Edward Lear’s Journals, a selection,(ed.H.V. Thal), London 1952, 27.
Beside the mosques with their prayers, rituals and holy days, the Sufi orders (tarikats) provided crucial relations between religious people and their social functions. The teachings of each dervish brotherhood had its own variants, but all tarikats had in common their mysticism towards God and their search for personal enlightenment. The most popular were those of Nakshbendis, Rifais, Bektashis, and Halveti. They were politically powerful and belonged to different social classes. The Brotherhood of Bektashis, which drew on the lower classes including the Janissaries, was suppressed by the reforms of Mahmud II in 1826. One of the Bektashi leaders from Manastir, Esad Baba was taken to Constantinople where he was publicly executed for his beliefs.

Among the most popular tarikats in the city of Manastir were the Rifai with two tekkes, and the Nakshbendi, Bektashi and Halveti with one tekke each. Most of these lodges were visited and described by Hasluck, an English traveler throughout Ottoman Empire. He described the tekkes, graves of the saints, holy places and mausoleums in Manastir, as a “Provincial Pantheon”:

Figure 5, Hatuniye mosque marble plaque

The following description of the pilgrimages and holy places of the large provincial town of Manastir, all of simple type, little, if at all, affected by the learned classes, may be deemed not without interest for Turkish mythology.

There are four tekkes, all small, belonging respectively to the Rifai (two), Nakshbandi, and Bektashi orders. Of these that of the Nakshbandi alone seems to be of importance for popular religion.

The first Rifai tekke stands off the main street of the town. Its precincts have been much curtailed by the widening of the street. It contains the tomb of Mahmud Dede, the founder, who is supposed to have lived at the time of conquest. The second, which stands on the outskirts of the town, was founded by Sheikh Nazmi Efendi in 1276 (1895-60), who is there buried with other saints, including Sheikh Mehmed of Allepo.

The Bektashi tekke, also on the outskirts of the town, has outwardly the appearance of a well-to-do Turkish house and is discreetly walled. It contains the tomb of the martyr Husain Baba in an octogonal turbe built in 1289 (1872-3).


22 F.W. Hasluck, Christianity and Islam under the Sultans, Oxford 1929.

23 The tekke was in the central area between the main street, the Catholic church and the Worker’s University. It was described by Tewfik Mehemd as Rifai tekke “Lokanta”. It was established by Mahmoud Baba during the reign of Selim II (1566-1574), see: Тевфик, оп. цит., 224.

24 The tekke was on the western outskirts of the town, near the river Dragor and the place Hanlar–I-onu, where once a large Turkish cemetery exist. Тевфик, оп. цит., 224.

25 The tekke still exists today. See Hasluck, op. cit.,
Fig. 6, A mosque after the WW1 bombardment of Bitola

The Nakshbandi tekke, in the same quarter, is more important from our point of view as containing the tomb of Hasan Baba, which is famous for his miracles. The saint is said to have fallen under the displeasure of a sultan, who sent men to hang him. Fleeing from them, the saint had turbes built at many places through which he passed, in order to deceive the sultan into believing him dead. Consequently, cenotaphs of Hasan Baba exist in various parts, as at Kossovo, Uskub, Adrianople, Constantinople (in Divan Yolu), Anatolia, and Egypt. Beside each turbe is a mosque. Monastir naturally claims the authentic tomb. The humble turbe containing the grave of the saint is specially frequented by women who cannot bring forth and children who cannot walk. The former find relief by contact with the beads of the saint, and the latter by being supported three times round the grave and leaving behind them the wooden pattens with which the circumambulation is performed. Kurban is erected for that purpose outside the turbe; by a miraculous coincidence the saint receives every year exactly three hundred and sixty-six such offerings, one for each day. Many rags are affixed to the turbe windows.

Among the most prominent members of the Nakshbendi Brotherhood in Bitola were Hadji Said Efendi, around 1785; Numan Baba, Efghani Sheykh Mehmed Efendi c.1887, and Kitapchi Mustapha c.1887.

Another brotherhood of Halveti dervishes had its early beginnings at Bitola/Manastir in the last decades of the eighteen century. It was begun by the Sufi leader Sheykh Mehmed Hayati from Ohrid, who founded the Halveti tekkes in Manastir, Kesrye/Kastoria, Hlerin/Filurina and to-day Albania. In Bitola his followers were Ibrahim, Abdul Kerim and Ahmed, known as Three Sheykhhs (Uch Seihler). They were buried in a turbe opposite the mosque Uch Seihler or Hamza bey. The tekke and turbe were ruined in 1911 and suffered heavy damage during the First World War.

Hasluck observes in his notes that he went on pilgrimage to all the tombs of the local Sufi saints and holy places. In such a provincial pantheon Hasluck found some relics from the past connected with the early Islamisation of the area, as well as some pre-Christian customs and old Balkan beliefs. Visiting the tombs of the local holy men was widely practised and visitors prayed at the tombs for the saints’ intercession, lighting candles, placing offerings or even sleeping near the graves. The supplicants offered a present in the form of clothing, a prayer rug, a sacrificial lamb, a coin or ribbon in order to obtain the miraculous blessing from the saint. A number of such holy places were connected with pre-Christian sites with holy water (Agiazmo) and holy places. In this way the Muslims and Christians often venerated the same place, tomb or holy spring, only using different names. Mehmed Tewfik described some of the Muslim sanctuaries in Manastir in his book published in 1911. Hasluck and Tewfik are the most valuable

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26 Hasluck, op. cit., 356.
27 Kurb–a sacrifice or sacrificial victim. It is applied to the Muslim ritual to sacrifice an animal. In Turkish speaking countries this is known as Kurban-Bayram.
28 Hasluck, op. cit., 356-357.
29 Тефик op. cit., 224-226.
30 Тефик, op. cit., 234.
32 Hasluck, op. cit., 356-360.
sources for understanding the Islamic spirituality in the area of Bitola/Manastir, influenced by ancient Balkan beliefs and superstitions. In his personal pilgrimages through the Bitola area Hasluck visited the main places, such as: Bunar Baba, a sacred well traditionally patronized by the Muslims and also by Christians; the tower of Kuleli Mahmud Khirka Dede or Zandan Kule; the graves of Chetim Tess Baba, Jigher Baba, Merhum Baba or Tez Veren near the Yeni Hammam; the Kizlar Bey turbe; and the grave of Khalil Baba dating from 1183 (1769-1770) at the graveyard of Yeni mosque. A number of holy places were mentioned by Tewfik, including the local oral legends noted by Marko Tsepenkov in his “Legends”, such as Krkardaš or Forty friends (martyrs) and the Crooked mill-Kriva vodenica (Egri Degirmen) on the northern outskirts of the town.

During the second half of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Muslims and Christians came under Western educational influences. All parts of the Ottoman Empire were affected, the Balkan areas in some ways more profoundly from the rest. The great advantage of these schools was to teach French, which opened up a new world of ideas and western scientific concepts. The traditional primary (Sibyan) and higher medresa schools were changed from their traditional character into state schools: Mekteb I-Rushdiye, İdadiyeh, military and medical colleges, which included female education. The town of Bitola/Manastir played an important role as a center of learning, education and literature for Muslims, Christians and Jews turning towards Western models. According to the Imperial

35 Тефик, op. cit., 216-225; М. Цепенков, Преданија, 7, Скопје, 1972, 206; А. Стерјовски, ‘Топонимот Крк –кардаш во Битола’, ‘Јазични појави во Битола и балканското денешно и во минатото’, Скопје 1988, 311-321; People of Turkey: twenty years residence among Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians, Turks and Armenians, by a consul’s daughter and wife, (ed. L. Poole) London 1878, 236-237; Zhelyazkova, op. cit., 257, “…the Forty martyrs venerated by Christians found their place in esoteric Islamic teachings, where they could be identified with the holy figures known as the kirklar."
36 R.H. Davison, Essays in the Ottoman and Turkish history 1774-1923, the impact of the West, Austin 1990,167; Quataert, op. cit., 2000, 167-168.
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Оваа студија ја обработува османската религиозна архитектура на Битола во деветнаесеттиот век, потоа суфиските редови и нивните установи во градот, како и прегледот и развитокот на модерните османски училишни установи под влијанието на демократските реформи.

Во 19-тиот век градот Битола прерасна во модерен центар на административната и воената управа на Румелискиот вилајет, добивајќи космополитски карактер. Но, за жал, ’Златниот период’ на џамиската архитектура од 16-17 век одамна беше одмината, така да повеќе се обновуваат постојаните религиозни објекти или се градеа по скромни објекти, ука треба да се спомени дека религиозните објекти во градот

Џамијата на Шериф Беј беше изградена од Мехмед Заде Шериф Ахмед беј по потекло од Охрид во 1828. Од оваа зграда се сочувани делови од минаретот како една мермерна плоча со арапски-османски натпис: ’Добродетелот на оваа благодетна установа (Хајрат) е е пашата од Охрид, Мехмед Заде Шериф беј’. Едвард Леар го сретна овој човек во Охрид при својата посета во 1848.

Џамијата Хатуније од 1903 се наоѓа во некогашното маало Бали војвода. Можеби самото име е поврзано со култот на средновековната све-

tителка од Багдад, Рабије Хатун популярен кај дервивските редови, како и бунарот во близината ’Будај бунар’.

Во прегледот на суфиските и дервивските редови во 19 век во Битола. Најпознати биле Накшбенди, Руфаи, Халвети и Бекташи. Според англискиот патеписец Хаслук во својата студија ’Провинциски пантеон’ тој набројува 4 текенија: две Руфаи, едно Накшбенди и едно Бекташи. Но имало и уште едно Халвети кај џамијата Уч Шеихлер. Исто така тој набројува и свети места и гробови низ градот: Џигер Баба, Тез верен Баба, Хасан Баба, Хирка Баба и К'злар Турбе.

Во прегледот на модерните државни и воени школи направени под влијание на западноевропските примери и отворени со модерните султански реформи, како што биле: Карадибак, Хаџи Доан, Бујук Шадрван, Уч Шеихлер, Нумуне како е ден број на воени школи и сродни институции во градот.