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Skopje In The Evlıya Çelebi's Book "Seyahatname" ("Travelogue")

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Abstract

This research paper examines the enduring influence of Ottoman architecture in Skopje, North Macedonia, through the lens of Evliya Çelebi, a prominent travel writer of the Ottoman Empire. Focusing on the 17th century, the study highlights the architectural heritage reflected in Skopje's urban fabric, exploring the thematic foundations, planning principles, and spatial organization of notable structures. By analyzing Çelebi's "Seyahatname," we uncover the cultural significance and imperial authority embedded in key landmarks, particularly the Kale Fortress and Yahya Pasha Mosque while comparing their historical and contemporary states. This interdisciplinary approach combines historical analysis, architectural critique, and urban studies to enrich our understanding of Skopje's built environment and its transformation over time. Ultimately, the research contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on cross-cultural architectural influences, revealing the complex interplay between historical forces and urban development.

Keywords: Ottoman architecture, Skopje, Evliya Çelebi

Introduction

Skopje, which was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1392 to 1912, is a reminder of a time when centuries of imperial influence could be seen in the architectural wonders of the past. This research paper explores the magnificent tapestry of Ottoman architecture from the 17th century that adorned the Macedonian landscape, all through the eyes of one of the most well-known travel writers of the Ottoman Empire, Evliya Chelebi. The Ottoman Empire had a lasting impression on Skopje's urban fabric. Hence, this research aims to understand the nuances of various projects by examining the thematic foundations of Ottoman architecture throughout this time, as well as planning principles and spatial organization.

Using Evliya Celebi's book, "Seyahatname" ("Travelogue"), we want to reveal the architectural heritage that marked Skopje, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between imperial authority, cultural expression, and the growth of urban settings. Our investigation goes beyond just documenting architecture; it seeks to highlight the nuances of design, construction, and cultural importance contained in the most prominent buildings of the era, analyzing the tales they tell and the roles they play in the larger socio-cultural context. Among the many cities documented by Çelebi, Skopje, the capital of present-day North Macedonia, occupies a significant place. This seminar delves into the rich tapestry of Evliya Çelebi's observations on Skopje, examining the vivid descriptions he provided in his travelogue. Beyond the biographical details of Çelebi's life, we will explore the lens through which he viewed Skopje, unraveling the layers of historical context and cultural nuances embedded in his writings. Moreover, this research extends beyond the literary realm to conduct case studies on two prominent landmarks - the Kale fortress and the Yahya Pasha Mosque - comparing their states in the 17th century to the present day. Through this interdisciplinary approach, we aim to bridge the temporal gap, offering insights into the dynamic evolution of Skopje's architectural and cultural heritage.

By combining historical analysis, architectural critique, and urban studies, we hope to provide a comprehensive understanding of Skopje's built environment under Ottoman influence.

In essence, this work adds to the greater scholarly discourse about cross-cultural architectural impacts by providing insights into the evolution of urban environments throughout lengthy periods of imperial authority. By identifying the continuing imprint of Ottoman architecture on Skopje's urban fabric, we hope to deepen

our collective awareness of the historical forces that molded the cityscape, eventually connecting the dots between the past, the present, and the architectural legacy that survives.

Evliya Chelebi

Evliya Çelebi, born in March 1611 in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey), emerged as one of the most celebrated Ottoman travelers of his time. His remarkable journey spanned over 40 years, traversing through the vast territories of the Ottoman Empire and neighboring lands. Çelebi's educational journey commenced in a madrasah in Istanbul, where his exceptional Quran recitation skills caught the attention of Sultan Murad IV. This recognition led to a unique opportunity for Çelebi to further his studies at the prestigious palace school of the Ottoman Empire. Here, he delved into various disciplines such as Arabic language, music, calligraphy, and more, honing a diverse skill set that would later enrich his travel narratives.

Empowered by a growing wealth of knowledge and a multifaceted education, Çelebi embarked on a series of extensive travels throughout the Ottoman Empire. From the bustling streets of Baghdad to the historic city of Belgrade and from the Crimean Peninsula to the enchanting landscapes of Cairo, Çelebi's journeys were not merely geographical explorations but immersive cultural experiences. These travels were not solely personal adventures but were funded and supported by the royal court, reflecting the empire's keen interest in cultural exploration and documentation.

The culmination of Çelebi's journeys and experiences manifested in his magnum opus, the "Seyahatname" ("Travelogue"). This comprehensive travelogue encapsulated Çelebi's observations, insights, and vivid descriptions of the cities he visited, offering a detailed glimpse into the diverse landscapes and cultural tapestries of the 17th-century Ottoman Empire. Çelebi's "Seyahatname" has since become a pivotal historical resource, providing invaluable insights into the urban, architectural, and social dynamics of cities under Ottoman rule.

In the context of this research paper, our focus lies on Çelebi's writings concerning 17th-century Macedonia, with a particular emphasis on Skopje. Skopje's urban landscapes and iconic landmarks, as depicted by Çelebi, serve as a gateway to understanding the intricate nuances of Macedonian architecture and the city's historical significance during that era. Through Çelebi's eyes and narratives, we aim to unravel the layers of Skopje's architectural heritage, shedding light on its cultural,

social, and historical dimensions, thereby enriching our understanding of Macedonian history and architecture.

Skopje in "Seyahatname"

Through Jajce, Uskoplje, Travnik, Sarajevo, Višegrad, Dobrun, they came to Priboj and from there, through the former Novopazar Sandžak, they passed through Kosovo and through the Kačanička Klisura they arrived in Skopje (Emin, 2007)

On the way from Priboj to Sofia, Evlija described all the stations, towns and cities through which they passed in great detail in his travelogues road. Without a doubt, it is the most extensive and best description of Skopje that we have from the 17th century (Çelebi,1896).

Reading and understanding Seyahatname is really important for us because it best way we can find out how Skopje looked like during 17th century and learn about architecture of that period.

Evliya Chelebi starts speaking about history of Skopje and its conquest and he says: "This city was conquered by the gazi Evrenos bey for the government of Yildirim Bayazit Khan. Later, Yildirim Bayazit Khan liked the climate of this pleasant place, so he sometimes spent the winter in Jedren, and sometimes in this town of Skopje. And from there he undertook numerous conquests in neighboring countries.

According to the policy carried out during the time of Suleiman Khan, Skopje is in the Rumeli vilayet and is the seat of a special Sanjak bey, but many times it was given to the administration and pashas with two regiments, which could also be valijas according to their rank.Skopje Sanjak bey manages 500 soldiers (Çelebi, 1896).

Skopje was Sanjak in Ottoman empire, which were military administrative units and it had its own Sanjak bey who managed 500 soldiers. We can conclude that Skopje was pretty important city in Macedonia in 17th century based on this information and with his descriptions of the city itself, its own architecture, urban districts it had during that period.

Chelebi describes Kale, or the Skopje Fortress, in his book as a strong and powerful fortress. It is a huge ornate fortress whose inhabitants are enlightened and in good standing. The gates and ramparts of the fortress seem to have been polished by someone who polishes metals or mirrors. The city was built of dressed stone. Such skills and mastery are not seen in other cities. A skilled architect carved and deepened, painted and decorated marble columns that seemed to be made of plaster

on that rampart. This is only found in the city of Athens at the school of the great Plato. The fortress lies above the town of Skopje. It is pentagonal in shape. It is a solidly built tall fortress, the walls of which are up to 50 arshins high on each side. It is decorated with 70 towers (Çelebi, 1896).

Then he starts describing the position of Skopje, the inhabited places in it, and the shape and location of the town. It says that the town lies on the right and left banks of the Vardar, on a spacious and flat land, overgrown with greenery and covered with gardens and that it is a large town. It describes the west of the river and where the fortress is, as decorated with thousands of wonderful buildings made of hard material. And mentions that there are a total of 70 mahalas (Çelebi, 1896).

According to Çelebi, Skopje had 120 mosques, 45 out of which are only used for Friday prayers, most famous mosques he mentions are Hatunjuk Mosque, Murat Pasha mosque, Jahja Pasha mosque, then he mentions madrasas Madrasah of Sultan Murat Khan, Madrasah of Yahya Pasha, Madrasah of Ishaq Pasha, Madrasa of Mustafa Pasha and Madrasa Karli Zadeh. There were 9 schools of Quran, 70 primary schools and 20 Tekkes (Sufi lodges), 120 drinking fountains, public baths, and 9 imarets (free public kitchens), indicating a diverse cultural and educational milieu. The city's defenses, which included twin walls of polished carved stone and strategically placed gates, demonstrated its defensive ability. The mention of well-built buildings with red roof tiles, particularly around the Sultan Murat Mosque, implies an affluent and visually appealing residential setting. Notable monuments like the Clock Tower contribute to the city's individuality and architectural character. Çelebi's depiction of Skopje's dynamic urban life is enhanced by the busy Old Bazar, which features a variety of stores, squares, and flower-adorned marketplaces. The emphasis on cleanliness, along with descriptions of notable inhabitants, poets, and people who enjoy pleasures and joys, provides a social and cultural dimension to the story. During the Ottoman era, Skopje's Old Bazar, "which included 2150 stores" (Kiel, 1990), several squares, and finely built markets ornamented with vaults and domes, formed a magnificent setting. The cobblestone-paved tiny alleys were immaculately clean, with stores covered with hyacinths, violets, roses, lilacs, and other flowers in vases and pots, creating a colorful and pleasant environment. Evliya Çelebi described the Old Bazar as a home for poets and philanthropists who help the less fortunate. The locals were well-known for their appreciation of joys and delights, with love and satisfaction pouring from their infatuated hearts. Çelebi emphasized the city's attractiveness despite limited language and writing abilities. According to Çelebi, the city's inhabitants consisted of merchants, clerks, and

craftsmen, all of whom contributed to its diversified and vibrant social structure. Çelebi's depiction of Skopje's cultural diversity was enhanced by his detailed descriptions of local attire and food. In the book, he describes every shop as decorated with pots and flower pots with hyacinths, violets, roses, winter roses, basil, and ergot. He says that there is a business world and a virtuous world. During the summer heat, the entire Skopje square looks like shady places in Baghdad, because its entire bazaar, like Bosnia (I guess he means Sarajevo) and Aleppo, is reinforced and raised on vaults.

Case Study 1 Kale

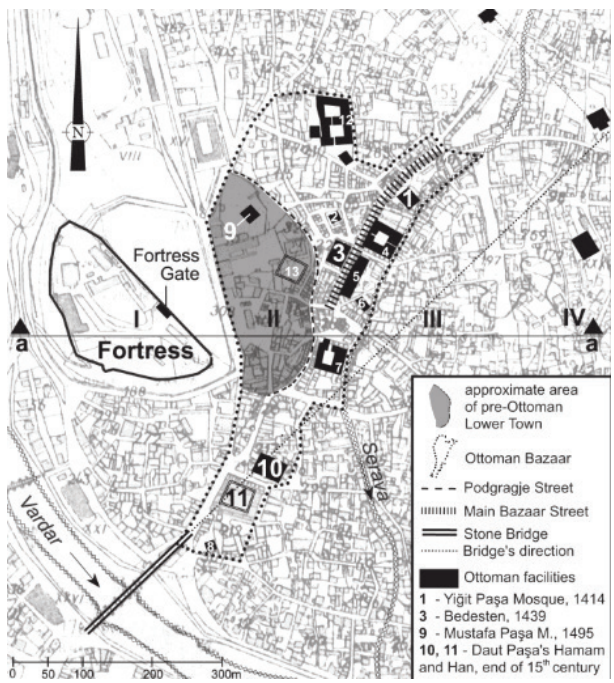
Evliya Celebi gives us a beautiful description of Kale in his book, where he says that it is a strong and powerful fortress whose inhabitants are enlightened and in good standing. He describes the gates and ramparts of the fortress saying that they seem to have been polished by someone who polishes metals or mirrors. The city was built of dressed stone. Such skills and mastery are not seen in other cities. A skilled architect carved and deepened, painted and decorated marble columns that seemed to be made of plaster on that rampart. This is only found in the city of Athens at the school of the great Plato. The fortress lies above the town of Skopje. It is pentagonal in shape. It is a solidly built tall fortress, the walls of which are up to 50 arshins high on each side. It is decorated with 70 towers. Otherwise, the city is a district and very neat with about 2000 of its own shops. There are 3 iron doors open to the qibla, at which there are numerous guards at the entrances. Again, the same doors are decorated with various weapons. The fortress has no obstacles to its maintenance and protection. It was built on extremely high rocks from where you can see the whole environment (Emin, 2007).

Over the ages, Skopje Kale's location hasn't moved all that much. Situated on a hill with a commanding view of Skopje, North Macedonia, the castle offers a tactical advantage. The site's elevation provides sweeping views of the surroundings, enabling those who occupy it to keep an eye out for and protect against possible attacks. In Skopje, the stronghold still has a prominent position above the town, retaining its historical significance and visibility despite new developments and changes to the urban environment. Skopje Kale may still retain a pentagonal overall design, but structural alterations have been made to the stronghold, especially since the terrible 1963 earthquake that devastated Skopje. The city, including the stronghold, sustained substantial damage as a result of the earthquake. After the

damage, restoration work was started. Although efforts were made to preserve the site's historical integrity, some reconstructions and adjustments were unavoidable. Because to the effects of time and natural calamities, several characteristics that were detailed in the 17th-century account—such as elaborate embellishments and particular architectural elements—may not be exact replicas.

Figure 1

Location and site plan of Kale



The biggest change to Skopje Kale is its function. The description from the 17th century highlights its strategic significance for defense by implying that it is used for military barracks and colonies. Skopje Kale has changed into a public archaeological site in modern times. Despite maintaining its military and historical value, the stronghold is now a well-liked tourist destination. Not only is it worth visiting for its historical and archaeological significance, but it also provides amazing views of the contemporary metropolis. Skopje Kale now serves as a cultural and historical landmark rather than just a military bastion, adding to the city's character and preserving a link to its colorful history.

In conclusion, Skopje Kale's position and overall structure have withstood the test of time, although certain changes have been brought about by the effects of the 1963 earthquake and subsequent restoration initiatives. Its conversion from a military stronghold to an archaeological site and popular tourist destination illustrates how historically significant places may change to fit the requirements of the times while retaining its cultural and historical significance.

Figure 2

Kale in 19th century

Figure 3

Kale today

Case Study 2 Yahya Pasha Mosque

In the lower town is the Yahya Pasha mosque. Its founder was the vizier and son-in-law of Sultan Bayazit. On the vault over the main entrance of the mosque, written in calligraphic gilded letters is this inscription about her becoming:

"O pasha who in battle is like a lion, his name is Yahya, build a mosque with happiness for those who worship and pray. When I heard that the mosque was finished, at that moment from happiness, I said, This mosque is for God." (Emin, 2007)

It has a high dome and an even higher minaret. The minaret looks like the minarets of St. Constantinople, Saint Sofia. The architect of the building really showed his skill. In the middle of the gate, in the shadow of maples and cypresses, was made by an artistic sabil, so needed. He placed it there for the admiring eye enchants with his mastery.

Yahya Pasha mosque is one of the most important mosques in Skopje. It was built in the 16th century, and it looked different than now. Evliya Chelebi says in his book that it resembled Aya Sophia in Istanbul with big dome and high minaret. The Yahya Pasha Mosque, which currently has a pitched roof, used to have the biggest

dome in the region. This dome was probably destroyed by a fire in 1689. Thereupon, a normal roof was added to the building in 1720 in pyramid form. (Pavlov, 2008,) The religious shrine, which has been heavily damaged by wars and natural causes to date, has often been restored. The length of the stone minaret of the mosque reaches 45 meters, and together with the cone, it reaches 55 meters. This situation makes this minaret the longest minaret built in Rumelia. One of the most magnificent gates in the Balkans, its portico adornment represents the artist's completely realized creative expression. The prayer area of the Gazi Isa Bey Mosque is made up of two square surfaces covered with identical-sized domes and has a total length of 20.5 meters. It is designed to be a big space or chamber.

Marble slabs surround the walls, and carefully sculpted stalactite embellishments adorn the mihrab and minbar, adding to the overall pleasing visual impression. Polished marble slabs decorate the gateway, while stalactite pendants are set symmetrically above the entryway. The entry door is expertly constructed from walnut wood. Two built-in minbars, used for summertime religious rites, are located on the left and right of the gateway. The enormous marble columns supporting the exquisite porch on the western side have pointed arches and capitals at the top, adding to the mosque's overall feeling of monumentality.

Figure 4

Aya Sofia Mosque

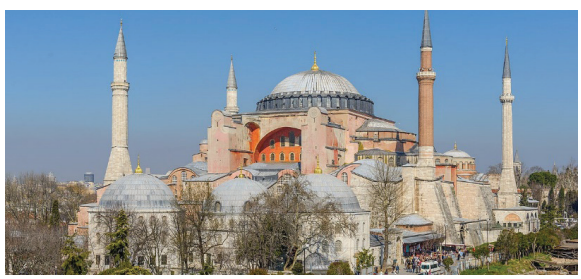
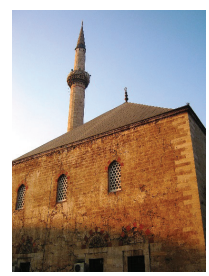


Figure 5

Yahya Pasha Mosque



The Yahya Pasha Mosque, originally featuring a dome, now showcases a sloped roof, highlighting the mosque's architectural evolution over time. Despite this divergence, the mosque's unique architectural elements and rich history evoke a sense of pride, celebrating the distinct cultural identity it brings to Skopje in comparison to the renowned Hagia Sophia

Conclusion

In conclusion, Evliya Çelebi's meticulous travelogue, "Seyahatname," serves as an invaluable resource for understanding the urban landscape and architectural heritage of Skopje in the 17th century. The rich descriptions of landmarks such as Skopje Fortress (Kale) and the Yahya Pasha Mosque provide a vivid snapshot of the city's historical tapestry. Çelebi's observations showcase Skopje's strategic importance as a military and cultural hub within the Ottoman Empire. The detailed accounts of architectural wonders, bustling bazaars, and diverse neighborhoods reveal the city's vibrant social fabric. The Old Bazar, adorned with markets, squares, and finely built structures, emerges as a testament to Skopje's dynamic urban life. Examining specific case studies, such as the Skopje Fortress, we witness how time and natural disasters, notably the 1963 earthquake, have influenced the architectural evolution of these landmarks. Skopje Kale's transformation from a military stronghold to a public archaeological site and tourist attraction reflects the adaptability of historical sites to contemporary needs while preserving their cultural significance. The Yahya Pasha Mosque, with its architectural prowess and historical significance, stands as a symbol of Skopje's cultural identity. The shift from a grand dome to a sloped roof, influenced by events like the 1689 fire, emphasizes the mosque's resilience and adaptive nature over the centuries. The mosque's current role as a cultural and historical landmark, open to tourists, highlights the dynamic interplay between preservation and modern utility. In essence, Evliya Çelebi's writings open a window to Skopje's past, providing a nuanced understanding of its architecture, social dynamics, and cultural richness. As Skopje continues to evolve, these historical insights serve as a foundation for appreciating the city's enduring legacy and its journey through time.

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