THE OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURAL PATRIMONY OF BULGARIA REVISITED: INFRASTRUCTURE, INTENTIONALITY, AND THE GENESIS AND SURVIVAL OF MONUMENTS

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In honor of Prof. Machiel Kiel’s five decades of uncovering and reassembling the history of the Ottoman Balkans, I have prefaced this contribution with an anecdote. In 1993, I visited Bulgaria to write and photograph on Muslim life in the shadow of the war in Bosnia. To lend historical background to my work, I set out to identify architectural monuments through which I could conjure up the half-millennium during which the land now called Bulgaria had been Ottoman. As a first step, I interviewed researchers at the Oriental Division of the Saints Cyril and Methodius National Library and the University of St. Clement of Ohrid, both in Sofia. Each of the specialists I spoke with answered my questions with a simple question of their own, to wit: “Do you know Machiel Kiel?” I did not, but I did manage to find on the shelves of the National Library a lone, unread copy of Kiel’s *Studies on the Ottoman architecture of the Balkans*. When I opened the book, its spine made a cracking sound characteristic of a pristine new volume. On the frontispiece of the book was a handwritten inscription by the author which read something to the effect of: “I dedicate this book to the first person who reads it.” And so, I read the book and, like many of the contributors to and readers of the present publication, accepted Kiel’s challenge to take to the archives or, as in my own case, to the field, whether to expand our knowledge and understanding of the Ottoman past in the Balkans in general, and in Bulgaria in particular, or to help ensure the preservation of its architectural legacy and even, in the present age of exclusionary nation states, the vestiges of its traditions of pluralism.

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Over the last half-century, the lion’s share of Machiel Kiel’s several hundred published articles and numerous books has focused on the architecture, settlements, and demography of the territory that, since the late-19th century, has comprised what is now the independent state of Bulgaria. In recent years, to point to but a single example, Kiel has undertaken to write a history of Ottoman Bulgaria in the form of scores of new entries on Bulgarian cities, towns, and selected rural settlements for the *Turkiye Diyanet Vakfi Islam Ansiklopedisi*. His major book-

3 For the individual entries, see the bibliography at the end of this volume.
length work, *Art and society in Bulgaria during the Turkish period*, analyzed and cogently deflated what had long been, and sadly still remains, the backbone of Bulgarian (not to mention Western) historiography and popular opinion, and the very misconception upon which modern Bulgarian national identity arose and continues to be based, i.e. that the half-millennium of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria was a dark, nightmarish time in which freedom was curtailed, imagined national identity quashed, and social, cultural, and economic development kept at a stand-still.

That Kiel came to write so extensively on Bulgaria is no accident. The territory that is now Bulgaria was among the first in the Balkans into which Ottoman rule and institutions expanded, and among the last from which they withdrew. From the late-14th century until the formation of the Kingdom of Bulgaria as a result of the Russo-Turkish war of the 1870s and the absorption of the semi-autonomous principality of East Rumelia in 1885 – for a full 500 years, thus – what is now Bulgaria had been an integral part of the Ottoman Empire. As such, it was dotted with new settlements, peoples with waves of new arrivals, and spanned with new webs of infrastructure and the components thereof, i.e. the architectural monuments and civil works that comprised the framework and settings for Ottoman economic, administrative, and religious life and military defense.

Even in the aftermath of the succession of regional and world wars, political upheavals, internecine conflicts, and economic changes that characterized the one hundred years between the end of Ottoman rule and Kiel’s first extensive rounds of field work in Bulgaria during the 1970s, a broad range and large number of greater and lesser Ottoman architectural civil works representing diverse styles and levels of quality remained extent for documentation and study in Bulgaria. These monuments had survived despite the recurring and invariably heavy-handed efforts of Bulgarian political authorities and scholars alike to make ethnically, religiously, and linguistically homogeneous the geopolitical entity that Bulgarians consider to be exclusively theirs and theirs alone, this by wiping out or explaining away any and all vestiges of Ottoman times, from individual monuments and the names of locales to the very presence and identities of the country’s Turkish, Roma, and linguistically-Bulgarian Muslim populations.

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For the next coming generation of Ottoman historians, a number of whom are represented in this volume, Professor Kiel’s output and approach provide the impetus and method for continuing to recover and write chapters of the history of the Ottoman Balkans. From the perspectives of other disciplines, however, Kiel’s findings provide a basis for placing Ottoman history and the Ottoman architectural patrimony of Bulgaria (not to mention those of neighboring countries) into larger historical and functional contexts that explain and clarify, not only the rise and endurance of monuments throughout the Ottoman centuries, but also their partial destruction over the time since, their present situations, and the prospects and means for their future preservation. In a broader context, such an examination also lends insight into questions of public good, roles of government, and the origins and nature of economic and social infrastructure.

Monuments, intentionality, and infrastructure

Architectural monuments are conceived, built, and function in contexts broader than those of their individual histories, typologies, or styles. Individual structures, no matter how imposing or unique, owe their genesis and survival, their abandonment and/or eventual conservation or regeneration, to their roles within larger infrastructural contexts and the intentions of those build, fund, and use them.  

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the history of architecture was often subsumed as a subset of art history. Architectural works were presented and analyzed in terms of styles, thus positioning architecture as a large-scale, outdoor, and utilitarian form of sculpture, with adorned exteriors and decorated interiors. Invariably, building techniques, engineering challenges, and choices of materials were neglected in such presentations, as were the geneses and roles of monuments in larger economic, political, functional contexts. Such an approach characterized one of the earliest modern presentations of the architecture of the Ottoman Empire, a volume on Ottoman architecture prepared and presented for the Vienna World Fair of 1873 at the behest of Sultan Abdülaziz. In it, the development of Ottoman architecture was presented as an organic progression and in a teleological manner that charted the emergence and evolution of a distinctly Ottoman style and traced its evolution toward realization, self-consciously presenting and justifying it in terms of the architecture of the West.

In more recent times, leading authorities on Muslim and Ottoman architecture took a variety of approaches to characterizing, analyzing, and establishing relationships between monuments. Robert Hillenbrand, for example, presented and analyzed Islamic architecture in terms of the types and functions of buildings, Godfrey Goodwin presented the corpus of Ottoman architecture in terms of historical periods, and, the pioneering surveyor of the remains of Ottoman architecture in the lands that once comprised the Empire, Ekrem Hakki Ayverdi, grouped Ottoman monuments in the Balkans geographically according to the boundaries of the geopolitical entities within which they stood at the time of his research. In his work for the Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, as in most of his published articles, Professor Kiel orders monuments by individual cities, towns, and villages.

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7 As a classic example, see Pevsner, Nikolaus. An outline of European architecture, London: Murray, 1948.


In the first decade of the 21st century, new perspectives have emerged, grounded in understanding of infrastructural roles, political and economic processes, and the intentionality from which monuments emerged. In *The Age of Sinan* for example, Gülru Necipoğlu reevaluates the works of the architect Sinan as expressions of the positions, prerogatives, and identities of their patrons. In his recent book *The shaping of the Ottoman Balkans* and in his contribution to the present volume, Heath Lowry looks at the first wave of Ottoman monuments constructed in the early-15th century in what is now northern Greece as part and parcel of a pattern of infrastructural investment deliberately implemented to ensure security, facilitate economic activity (and thus streams of taxation revenues), and express permanence of rule and hegemony through a minimal and well-targeted level of expenditure and a minimal displacement and disruption in the lives of indigenous inhabitants.

A similar approach is advanced in a recent analysis of the conception, construction, roles, and subsequent fates of the major architectural monuments in Istanbul. Nur Altınyıldız posits that the great hill-top mosque complexes that gave Ottoman Istanbul its characteristic appearance, one that endures in large measure even until today, are best understood as imarets, this in the sense of the Arabic root *‘umrān*, “bringing or returning to a state of prosperity,” i.e. as sources of value, thus. Such complexes augmented the value invested in them by their patrons and builders by creating additional value through their roles as the cores and anchors of urban agglomerations and of the economic, social, religious and cultural functions that comprise and sustain cities and generate the goods and taxation revenues that support empires. The great mosque complexes were, at the same time, elements of the larger infrastructures of temporal rule and the religious organization of society while also serving as the underpinnings of urban economic and residential life. To mix metaphors, the great monuments were the massive stone anchors of the wooden residential and economic agglomerations that grew and accrued around them not unlike pearls around grains of sand. As the centuries passed and as economies and the distribution of economic activities within urban contexts changed and as new urban trajectories and routes and modes of transportation emerged and social and religious concepts evolved, monuments that were once the lynch-pins of urban infrastructure were deprived of their original roles and marginalized. Their functions narrowed and they came to be valued first for the specific narrowly-defined purposes of their spaces or, later, within modern secular contexts, for their aesthetic, symbolic, or antiquarian worth as stand-alone “monuments” or elements of collectively or juridically defined “cultural heritage.”

*Envisioning Ottoman Bulgaria: the infrastructures of hegemony, religion, and daily life*

The Ottoman architectural patrimony of Bulgaria can be ordered as a series of successive, overlapping layers of infrastructure that served as the foundations of successive waves of secular and religious hegemony and permutations of day-to-day economic and social life. In broad strokes, these include:

1. The infrastructure of early Ottoman expansion: *zaviyes/imarets*, some built by *akıncı* families who led the Ottoman advance. Examples include the present-day mosque of Şihabuddin Paşa at Plovdiv and the now-ruined mosque at Ihtiman, both discussed at further length below.

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II. The infrastructure of heterodox religion and the mausolea and tekke complexes later built and maintained by descendents of the akıncı to honor saints of the heterodox traditions that were the spiritual arm of their advance and to maintain the loyalties of rural populations adhering to dervish and abdal traditions. Examples include the monumental, classically Ottoman, 16th- and 17th-century mausolea of Otman Baba, Ak Yazılı Baba, Demir Baba, and Kidemli Baba near present-day Haskovo, Balčik, Isparih, and Nova Zagora, respectively.15

III. The infrastructure of the consolidation of Ottoman power and, later, of Sunni Islam: Mosques, including two examples of multi-domed hypostyle sanctuaries in the architectural tradition of the Great Mosque (1400) at Bursa and the Eski Camii (1414) at Edirne, i.e. the early-15th-century Muradiye Camii in Plovdiv and the late-15th-century Büyük Camii in Sofia (the latter, since the early-20th century, the home of Bulgaria's National Archaeological Museum); early single-domed structures such as the now derelict and minaret-less Eski Camii (Mosque of Hamza Bey) in Stara Zagora (dating to 1408/9 and significant for the broad span of its dome and the robust nature of its stonework); as well as later works including the mid-18th-century külliye of Şerif Halil Paşa at Şumen, the only complete mosque complex still standing in all of Bulgaria. Also of interest in the present context is the İbrahim Paşa Camii at Razgrad, a town built by the Ottomans as a bulwark of sultanic rule in the midst of the Deli Orman region, traditionally a potentially rebellious stronghold of heterodox belief; the fortress-like appearance of the mosque is, albeit coincidentally, symbolic of its role.

IV. The infrastructure of decentralized rule and local lords (“ayans”), including the mosque and library of Pasvantoğlu Osman Paşa at Vidin.

V. The infrastructure of rural belief and custom including local genres such as the wooden mosques of eastern and southern Bulgaria.16

VI. The infrastructure of trade and urban life, including bridges, baths, fountains, bedestens, clock towers, official residences, and administrative structures of various periods. Prime examples include the bridges at present-day Svilengrad, Harmali, and Nevestino; the “Leaden Fountain” at Şumen and “Big Fountain” at Samokov; the solitary lone standing wall of the caravansary at Novi Han, the last stop prior to Sofia on the road from Istanbul to Belgrade and northward; and the nineteenth-century governor’s palace at Sofia, later the palace of post-independence Bulgarian kings and, beginning in the communist period, the home of Bulgaria’s national museums of art and of ethnography.

VII. The infrastructure of fortification and defense: Including fortifications extant at present-day Belogradčik, Ruse, and Silistra.

The Ottoman architectural patrimony of Bulgaria: relics bereft of contexts

The present-day status of the Ottoman architectural patrimony of Bulgaria provides a case study in the fates of monuments long divorced from their original contexts, bereft of new contexts to sustain them, and lost, as it were, in the midst of more recent infrastructural contexts and patterns of intentionality. Indeed, in Bulgaria, such shifts caused monuments that once were

15 Classical, that is, in all but the seven-sided shapes of their main chambers, an anomaly found only in what is now southern and eastern Bulgaria. For photographs of all such mausolea, and a striking exception thereto, see Lewis, Stephen. “A seven- and eight-sided problem: the heterodox Muslim türbes of eastern Bulgaria”, http://www.bubkes.org/2006/01/30#a83.

anchors of urban agglomerations and economic, civic, and religious life to become isolated relics fated to be ignored, destroyed, appropriated, or, at best, conserved or restored – and this not always in manners faithful to their origins, purposes, or histories, nor the cultures from which they emerged.\footnote{For reports on the status and use, as of 2006, of forty-five mosque structures and heterodox Muslim shrines in Bulgaria dating to Ottoman times, see field reports appended to Stephen Lewis, \textit{A Survey of architectural monuments}, op.cit.}

The remaining infrastructure of the Ottoman Empire in Bulgaria was marginalized by the general trends of technological innovation, urbanization, and secularization that characterized the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries and continue into the 21\textsuperscript{st}, as well as by radical changes engendered by waves of Russian military incursions from the late-18\textsuperscript{th} century to the late-19\textsuperscript{th} and by Bulgaria’s subsequent independence from Ottoman rule.

In the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War of the 1870s Bulgaria emerged as a nation state in the standard European model of the time, i.e. a country built around the hegemony and rule of a single ethnus, united by a contrived and mutually agreed-upon history and teleology, speaking one language and practicing one common state-sanctioned religion, with pretenses to exclusive control within its borders and to the right of expansion beyond, and having, at best, a magnanimous and easily-withdrawn “tolerance” for other peoples or religious or linguistic groups in its midst, as well as by occasional outbreaks of vengeance toward those cast as fifth-columnists of present enemies or as vestigial reminders of past occupiers or real or imagined oppressors.\footnote{For an erudite refutation of central myths of Bulgarian national history and identity, and a cogent contention that the second Bulgarian kingdom was one of Cumans rather than Bulgarians, see Vásáry, István. \textit{Cumans and Tatars: oriental military in the pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185-1365}. Cambridge: University Press, 2005.}

Indeed, as Bulgarians from all walks of life have repeated time and again to this writer during his researches over the last two decades: “You do not understand, what makes us Bulgarians is our fight against the Turks.” Ottoman rule in Bulgaria ended almost a century and half ago but inwardly Bulgarians still wage one-sided warfare.

The realization of a newly-found national identity by those who defined themselves as Bulgarian led to active creation of their own monuments and urban vocabulary, utilitarian and symbolic, as well as to a concomitant erasing of vestiges of the Ottoman past that went beyond appropriation, destruction, and explaining away of monuments to include a government-mandated \textit{en masse} change of the names of hundreds of cities, towns, and villages from Turkish to Bulgarian during the mid-1930s, and even to compulsory name changes of individual Turks and Muslims a half-century later. It also led to several waves of voluntary and forced mass emigration of Muslims from Bulgaria.\footnote{See McCarthy, Justin. \textit{Death and exile: the ethnic cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922}. Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995; Turan, Ömer. \textit{The Turkish minority in Bulgaria (1878-1908)}. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basmevi, 1998; and Vaksberg, Tatiana. \textit{Technology of evil} (a documentary film report on the administrative processes and implementation of Bulgaria’s repression and expulsion of Muslim and Turkish-speaking citizens during the 1980s), Sofia, 2001.} Whatever the exact numbers, out-migration contributed heavily to depriving what remained of Ottoman and Muslim infrastructure in Bulgaria of much of the constituency required to sustain it.

\textit{From Filibe to Plovdiv: urban change and the fates of marginalized monuments}

The fate and status of Ottoman monuments in the city of Plovdiv illustrates the effects of the convergence of cultural, demographic, and infrastructural change. Not far from the banks of the Meriç River (Marica in Bulgarian, Evros in Greek) at the edge of what was Ottoman Filibe, is an elegant Italian restaurant. Most diners are unaware that the interior of the restaurant bears an uncanny resemblance to that of a mosque; elegantly set tables fill a mahfil-like balcony, a mural decorates a domed ceiling, and what at first glance appears to be a hearth, on second glance...
uncannily resembles a mihrab. In fact, the restaurant is a mosque, the 16th-century Orta Mezar (Central Cemetery) Mosque. The mosque was closed and its eponymous surrounding cemetery cleared away early in the 1980s. The building was reopened as a restaurant a decade later.

Over the near century-and-a-half since Bulgaria achieved independence, more than a score of Plovdiv’s former Ottoman religious monuments have vanished, depriving the city of its one-time minaret-studded skyline. The causes were diverse. A portion of Plovdiv’s Ottoman religious monuments were abandoned and rendered superfluous by the cold realities of demographics as the city changed from largely Turkish and Muslim into almost exclusively Bulgarian and Christian. Other monuments fell victim to the transition of Plovdiv, as of other of Bulgaria’s urban locales, from characteristically Ottoman cities of multiple ethnic- or confessional-based mahalle to self-consciously “European” cities of newly straight-cut streets streets in a so-called “American” style or of broad boulevards à la Hausmann’s restructuring of Paris. Simultaneously, with the rise of passenger and freight rail transportation, the epicenters of such cities moved towards their former peripheries as their growths shifted longitudinally on axes between their traditional commercial and administrative centers and agglomerations that formed around newly-built railway stations thus displacing concentric groupings once centered around mosques, baths, and bans. Within such radically changed urban contexts, Ottoman ensembles became superfluous and expendable, and were treated as such. This process continued well into the 1960s, when an immense ban structure that still dominated part of the old center of Plovdiv was demolished.

Today, only three mosques remain in Plovdiv, each representing a distinct Ottoman style and each with a distinct fate. The early-15th-century Muradiye Camii or Friday Mosque – set alongside Plovdiv’s main thoroughfare since Ottoman times and at the foot of a hill the heights of which comprised the city’s fortified pre-Ottoman settlement – is an immense, multi-domed, heavy-piered structure built by Murad II during the reestablishment of control following the interregnum. Indeed, the monumentality of the Muradiye and its central defining location played a role in its survival in post-Ottoman times. The mid-15th-century İmaret Camii or Mosque of Gazi Şihabuddin Paşa, the Ottoman beylerbeyi of Rumeli, whose mausoleum stands adjacent to the structure, is T-shaped, having originally been built as a zaviye or imaret, with characteristic vestibule, longitudinal meeting space, and lateral refectory and hospice chambers, and is located at what at the time was the far periphery of Plovdiv. The İmaret Camii was retrofitted with a minaret and converted to use as a mosque during the solidification of Sunni Islam and sultanic rule during 16th-century. The 16th-century Orta Mezar Camii mentioned above is an Ottoman dome-on-cube at its simplest, an elegant structure despite its rough-hewn stonework.

The present-day roles of these three mosques are as diverse as their styles. The Muradiye Camii remains Plovdiv’s main mosque. It had been severely destabilized by earthquakes in the 19th and 20th centuries and by archeological excavations of classical Philippopolis several decades ago (an archetypal example of attempting to emphasize the classical heritage of Bulgaria at the

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21 Possibly the most striking examples of a grid street plan in Bulgaria is found in Stara Zagora, which was rebuilt on such a plan following its destruction by fire during the Russo-Turkish War. The above-mentioned Mosque of Hamza Bey now stands within this context, as bereft of the surroundings to which it gave meaning as it is of the worshipers on which its own meaning had once in part depended. The transformation of Plovdiv combined grid-layouts in its new districts with preservation of parts of the traditional layout of its center. Sofia opted for a Haussman-inspired plan supplemented by grid-based elements and imposed on a “tabula rasa” created by the destruction of the houses of departing Turks. Only major boulevards cut in late-Ottoman times and the radial moat around the city were retained. The transformation of the center of Sofia also involved an “ethnic cleansing” of its new commercial downtown. Jews, who comprised almost one-third of the population of Sofia immediately after Bulgarian independence, were pressured to move en masse from their traditional quarter to a new quarter (Üç Bunar) to the west of the center. Roma were also expelled from the center and subsequently settled in a quarter just west of that of the Jews. See *ibid.*, pp. 45-49.
expense of its Ottoman heritage). The Muradiye has been restored by a joint Turkish-Bulgarian team financed by the municipality of Istanbul under a bilateral Bulgarian-Turkish treaty providing for the conservation of mosques in Bulgaria and Bulgarian churches in Turkey – an important step in reestablishing Ottoman period monuments in their original transnational contexts. The restored mosque re-opened this year. The Imaret Mosque underwent a major restoration in the 1970s under the direction of the late Nikola Mušanov, a Bulgarian architect who worked hard to ensure the preservation of his country’s Ottoman heritage. The mosque remains in good condition and is open for midday prayers only.

From mosques to churches: demographic change and the appropriation of religious structures and their histories

The demographic changes occasioned by the forced and voluntary out-migration of large numbers of Muslims following the founding of an independent Bulgarian state led to the abandonment of many urban mosques that had once formed the cores of the settlements in which they were located. Urban mosques stand vacant and in various stages of collapse and disrepair at several locations in southwest Bulgaria, an area with almost no remaining Muslims. Examples include the Fatih Sultan Mehmed Mosque in Kustendil, the Mosque of Ahmed Bey in Dupnica, and the Mosque of Karaca Paşa in Goce Delčev (Nevroko), all dating from between the mid-15th and early-16th centuries. In Razgrad in northeast Bulgaria, the above-mentioned Mosque of İbrahim Paşa, built as a symbol of Sunni Islam and sultanic control, now stands empty.23 Over the last century, the regional control function of Razgrad was appropriated by Christian Bulgaria and the city was transformed into a predominantly ethnically Bulgarian and religiously Orthodox Christian bastion in the midst of what is still a mostly Turkish-speaking and largely heterodox region,24 a secular version of the processes of appropriation described by F. W. Hasluck in his classic Christianity and Islam under the Sultans.25 In other cities and towns, mosques maintained their functions, but their centrality was displaced by the construction, either adjacent to them or at newly carved-out town centers, of large Bulgarian Orthodox churches.26

In other locales, forms of appropriation have been in one sense more extreme but in another far more appropriate. The late-16th-century former Mosque of Koca Sinan Paşa in the now near-desolate village of Uzundžovo in Bulgarian Thrace was converted into a church in 1906 and re-named after Sveta Bogorodica (“the holy mother of God”). During Ottoman times, Uzundžovo stood at the crossroads of the main military and trade route towards Sofia, Belgrade, and Vienna and the road northwards towards Lemberg (present-day Lviv) and Russia beyond. Thus, Uzundžovo was for centuries a way-station in the lucrative silk-for-fur trade and the site of one of the most important Ottoman commercial fairs in the Balkans.


23 Not only empty but partially looted. The portico of the mosques was razed by invading Russian armies and its marble columns taken to Russia as spoils of war. The scars created on over the entrance way to mosque by the demolition of the portico are still visible.

24 When Professor Kiel visited Razgrad in the 1970s, the town’s historic hamam was still standing. One decade thereafter, it was razed. Its former site is marked by a towering, phoenix-like sculpture honoring the resurrection of Bulgarian national identity.


26 Examples abound throughout Bulgaria. Most well known is that of Sofia, where the church of Sveti Kral was built at the historic main crossroad of the city not far from the Banya Baş (Molla Efendi) Camii (1570), presently the only functioning mosque in Sofia. The original church was blown up during in the early 1920s in an attempted assassination of the king of Bulgaria and the general staff of the country’s armed forces. Sveti Kral was replaced by the present structure, the church of Sveta Nedelja. In the folkways and political propaganda of Bulgaria, the proximity of the church to the mosque and to the nearby early-twentieth Central Synagogue is touted as a symbol of “traditional Bulgarian tolerance.” In actuality it was a visible symbol of the usurpation of political power and religious hegemony.
The transformation of the mosque at Uzundžovo into a church, however, enabled the continued use of the structure as a place of worship and ensured the survival of an immense and beautiful monument absurdly stranded in a small, no longer important, locale suddenly without a Muslim population. Architecturally, the transformation entailed only minimal interventions. The original dome of the structure was surmounted with a smaller onion-shaped dome topped by a cross. A cruciform roof was created by adding four barrel-vaulted elements each radiating from alternate facets of the octagonal transitional drum on which the original dome rests. Finally, an opening into the qibla wall made way for the addition of an apse. The result is a surprisingly graceful Jugendstil-influenced remodeling that obscures neither the form nor function of the original, and that preserves many of the building’s characteristically Ottoman decorative elements.

The mid-16th century Mosque of Sofi Mehmed Paşa at Sofia – colloquially the Black Mosque, this after its long-ago dismantled minaret of black basalt – is said to have been based on a design by Mimar Sinan. The mosque was remodeled into a church early in the early-20th century and renamed the Church of the Sedmočislenici after the Saints Cyril and Methodius, the so-called fathers of Slavic literacy, and their disciples. Following the sudden drop in the population of Sofia in the aftermath of the severe earthquakes that wracked the city in the mid-nineteenth century, the mosque and its precincts had been used as a barracks, munitions dump, and jail. The mosque remained empty after the flight of Sofia's Muslim population following Bulgaria's independence.

Unlike the conversion of the mosque at Uzundžovo, the remodeling of Sofi Mehmed Paşa was heavy-handed. Its exterior was encrusted with neo-Byzantine decorative elements, changing its appearance radically. A vaulted entrance way flanked by two bell-towers was built onto the front of the sanctuary in place of its origin multi-domed portico. It spacious interior, unobstructed by columns or piers, however, still betrays its Ottoman origins. The building’s domed ceiling – 23 meters in diameter – spans the full length and width of its sanctuary. Still, the church lacks the brightness and fenestration associated with Sinan and school. Indeed, the remodeling closed off a number of the former light sources, creating a self-conscious atmosphere of stereotypical “mystery” associated with Eastern Orthodox places of prayer.

In the case of both former mosques, attempts were made to justify their conversion by staking claim to their histories as well. An incised stone marker at Uzundžovo reads: “Here at the site of an old Bulgarian church, in approximately 1593, a Turkish mosque was built that in 1906 was transformed into a Christian shrine.” The presence and identity of any such past church at the site, however, remains to be verified, and, if a church did exist at the site, it may have been equally likely to have been Byzantine.

A plaque mounted in the interior of the entrance way to the Sedmočislenici in Sofia takes a different tack. It attempts to usurp legitimacy by appropriating the builder rather than the building, i.e. by claiming that the architect was ... a Bulgarian! According to the plaque, the Black Mosque was the work of “Hodža Sinan, a Bulgarian janissary from Široka Lăka”, a town in the central Rhodope mountains once renowned for its builders. Whatever ambiguities surround Sinan’s origins, he was certainly neither Bulgarian nor from Bulgaria.

Conclusion: a monument bereft of past, present, and future

By way of a conclusion, one of the oldest Ottoman structures in the Balkans – the imaret/zaviye at Ihtiman, a one-time caravan stop between Plovdiv and Sofia – provides a case study of a monument totally divorced from infrastructural and intentional contexts, past, present, and future, and currently derelict and threatened with disappearance as a result.

The founding of this building is associated with Mahmud Bey son of Mihaloğlu Ilyas Bey
of the Mihaloğlu family of akıncıs, thus placing it solidly in the context the infrastructure of early Ottoman advance and the social infrastructure of solidification of power, propagation of belief, and facilitation of trade that engendered and was served by the combined functions of meeting place, hospice, and refectory such buildings served. Architecturally, the Ihtiman structure combines a T-shaped form with robust and fantasy-rich brick and stone work, a fusing, as it were, of early-Ottoman and late-Byzantine styles and techniques of construction. Photos of the site taken a century ago indicate that the ground level around the structure to have risen by well over a meter since, giving the remains of the structure a squat appearance that obscures it original gracefulness. Kiel dated the building to the last quarter of the 14th century based on archival evidence. In 1999, the present writer, with the permission of Bulgaria’s Ministry of Culture, extracted a number of brick samples from the structure which Kiel forwarded to the University of Durham in England for dating. The results of the analysis were congruent with Kiel’s archival findings.

With the consolidation of sultanic power and Sunni Islam in the 16th century, the Ihtiman imaret was transformed into a mosque, a function it maintained until early in the 20th, by which time most of the Muslims who it had served had departed from Ihtiman, leaving the town to be repopulated by Bulgarians and Roma from the surroundings. Some years prior to the end of the communist period, a plan was prepared for the restoration of the structure but was never implemented, possibly due to the officially promoted and popularly accepted anti-Muslim, anti-Turkish hysteria in Bulgaria at the time.

The imaret at Ihtiman has been derelict and unguarded for decades. At least as late as 2007 it served as a garbage dump, children’s playground, drug users’ refuge, and improvised public toilet despite its location in the yard of an elementary school. Its prospects for conservation or restoration were comprised in concert by its past identity as a mosque, by potentially competing claims to its ownership between local and regional authorities and the office of the Mufti of Bulgaria, and by its setting at the edge of Ihtiman’s Roma quarter, a location not granted top priority by local authorities. By contrast, the Ottoman hamam at Ihtiman was restored more than 20 years ago and since then has served as a café and discotheque and more recently as an arts and crafts gallery patronized by Sofiotes and expatriate foreign visitors to Ihtiman’s new golf courses.

The recent fate of Ihtiman itself also influenced the fate of the monument. Construction of a new highway from Sofia to Plovdiv in the 1970s bypassed and marginalized Ihtiman, as did the collapse of the town’s industrial base at the end of the communist period. Until quite recently, Ihtiman, due to renewed interest in its location between Sofia and Plovdiv, was expected to reemerge as an “exurb” – a distant bedroom community and commercial and service suburb – to the expanding capital city of Sofia. Prices of land, including that on which the crumbling Imaret stands, were expected to rise and the center of the town to be redeveloped to fit Ihtiman’s foreseen new roles. Whether such developments would have saved or threatened the Imaret remained to be seen. As the present contribution goes to press, the picture is even less clear. The international banking crisis and credit-crunch coupled with rising oil prices are leveraging other shifts in infrastructure; loans and capital for building is scarce and the days of cheap automobile transportation and automobile-based exurbia are numbered, if not past.

Also, despite Bulgaria’s entry into the multi-national, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious European Union, the country’s self-definition and ethos appear to remain stuck in the mind-set of the artificially contrived and exclusionary mono-ethnic, mono-religious 19th-century nation state. Until Bulgaria sees its Ottoman past as part of its own heritage, and the heritage of its

28 The plan, complete with drawings, artists’ impressions, and cost calculations, can be found in the archives of the National Monuments Commission, Republic of Bulgaria, Sofia.
Turkish, Roma, and Slavic Muslim citizens as equally inherent to the identity of the nation and its place in Europe as its self-defined Slavic Christian narrative is, the future of the Ihtiman *imaret* remains bleak. Only a broadening of consciousness and concepts of responsibility beyond national borders can save monuments that sprang from infrastructural contexts that predated and transcended such boundaries.

Ill. 2. Orta Mezar Camii, Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Interior as converted to a restaurant, 1997.
Ill. 3. Uzundžovo, the late-16th-century Mosque of Koca Sinan Pasha, converted into a church in 1908 and re-named after Sveta Bogorodica ("the holy mother of God"), 2004.

Ill. 4. The mid-16th century Mosque of Sofi Mehmed Pasha at Sofia – colloquially the Black Mosque, this after its long-ago dismantled minaret of black basalt – was remodeled and converted into a church early in the 20th century and redubbed the Church of the Sedmočislenici, after Saints Cyril and Methodius and their disciples, traditionally described as fathers of Slavic literacy, 2009.
Ill. 5. The late-14th-century Imaret at Ihtiman, frontal view, 1999.

Ill. 6. Ihtiman Imaret, diagonal view from left rear, 1997.

Ill. 9. Late-14th-century Imaret at Ihtiman, view of chimney passage above the vaulted entrance from the central vestibule to the left lateral chamber, 1998. The presence of such chimney passages indicates that the left and right lateral chambers of the structure originally had been separated from the central vestibule by closed walls, and that the lateral chambers had been fitted with and heated by *ocaks*, indicating their probable use as refectory and/or hospice respectively. Arched passageways connecting the vestibule to the lateral chambers were likely to have been created after the conversion of the structure to a mosque, this probably in the 16th century as per the case of the *imaret/mosque* of Gazi Şihabuddin Paşa in nearby Plovdiv.