

**RESHAPING ALIEN SILHOUETTE AND TRANSFORMING
ISLAMIC SKYLINE OF THE PREVIOUSLY OTTOMAN
SETTLEMENTS; THE CASE OF GREECE**

Yabancı Silüeti Yeniden Şekillendirmek ve Eski Osmanlı Yerleşmelerinin İslami
Silüetinin Dönüştürülmesi; Yunanistan Örneği

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Reshaping Alien Silhouette and Transforming Islamic Skyline of the Previously Ottoman Settlements; the Case of Greece

Abstract

Due to the fact that ethnic geography is often forgotten in studies on historical geography, the main factor in the differentiation of geographical environment is often attributed to a change that its subject is variable. However, the subject is immutable and human being. People transform their environment in various ways according to their economic, cultural, religious, and social needs. Cities that change hands with political movements change completely after a while, and in some, almost everything can be erased except relief. Changing recreational and cultural areas, cultural texture, and changing city culture of cities have revealed new cities known with their old names, and sometimes they have reappeared in the world geography as new cities where even their old names have been changed. In this case, the existence of a historical German town with a German name and a German texture in its architecture in a country like Azerbaijan and a minaret that could stay in the middle of Hungary gains even more meaning. While changing cities preserve the changing cultural and architectural environments within themselves, many buildings that need to be preserved are sometimes deliberately erased from the silhouette of the cities, sometimes within the context of the historical process, natural disasters, and needs. At this point, the settlements, with their different periods of transformation differing from their former inhabitants and cultures, create areas that history and geography should deal with together. In this study, the spatial transformation caused by the human being was evaluated together with the sample settlements, old and new photographs, and street views, and the reasons affecting this change and the differentiation it revealed were emphasized. In the study, the relevant literature was scanned and the necessary archival documents and the reports of the competent authorities were used, but more land surveys and interviews were made. The main ethnic element living in the place and the issues such as ignoring its own existence in the environment where it lives and paving the way for other places of worship, as well as the construction of Non-Community churches in Muslim villages, zoning law in the country and the tenders for its past, and the ethnocultural environment shaped as a result of these and the changed human geography have been revealed. The main difficulties encountered in the making of this study were the inadequacy of the relevant literature within the scope of the article, as well as the reluctance of official authorities (Greek institutions) to provide documents and their presupposition that there is no double standard against Muslim religious institutions. despite this, the obvious deformation of the silhouette on the field and the scraping of historical

artifacts from the city silhouettes, almost as if history were disregarded, were so obvious that no documents other than photographs were needed. Despite this, the part of the old mosques that were allowed to exist, especially in Western Thrace, should have been considered in a separate category. In this context, in the analyzed regions, practices such as destruction, hiding, concealment, or leaving them to be demolished have also been observed. Before this study, the antithesis of the thesis put forward in the article was also examined separately and the possibility of the coincidence of the issues mentioned in the study was also emphasized. In this context, the article has been written with skepticism, from a middle point, and an unbiased perspective. However, in almost all practices, it has been clearly seen that there was no protectionist tendency by Greek authorities towards Muslim religious structures and they do not leave them in their “actual form” as they should be on the city skyline, regarding them as “alien objects”. As a matter of fact, this view of the Greek authorities has been proved and revealed by the pictures from the field as well as the statutes and the documents based on the data obtained from the interviews conducted with concerned authorities through the instrumentality of ethnography, discourse analysis, and grounded theory.

Keywords: Geography, Historical Geography, Ethnocultural-Environment, Spatial Transformation, Architectural Environment, Islamic Skyline, Greece.

Yabancı Silüeti Yeniden Şekillendirmek ve Eski Osmanlı Yerleşmelerinin İslami Silüetinin Dönüştürülmesi; Yunanistan Örneği

Öz

Tarihi coğrafya üzerinde yapılan araştırmalarda etnik coğrafyanın çoğu zaman unutulmasından dolayı coğrafi ortamın farklılaşması üzerindeki ana faktör, çoğu zaman öznesi değişken bir değişime atfedilir. Ancak özne, değişmez ve insandır. İnsan, içerisinde bulunduğu ortamı ekonomik, kültürel, din ve sosyal ihtiyaçlarına göre çok çeşitli şekillerde farklılaştırır. Siyasi hareketler ile el değiştiren şehirler bir süre sonra tamamı ile değişmekte hatta kimilerinde rölyef dışında hemen her şey silinebilmektedir. Değişen rekreasyonel ve kültürel alanlar, kültürel doku ve şehirlerin değişen şehir kültürü ortaya eski isimleri ile bilinen yeni şehirleri çıkarmış, kimi zaman ise eski isimlerinin dahi değiştirildiği yeni şehirler olarak dünya coğrafyasında yeniden boy göstermiştir. İşte bu durumda, Azerbaycan gibi bir ülkede Almanca isimli ve mimarisine dek Alman dokusuna sahip tarihi bir Alman kasabasının varlığı ile Macaristan'ın ortasında kalabilmiş bir minare daha da anlam kazanmaktadır. Değişen şehirler, değişen kültür ve mimari ortamları kendi içlerinde tarihi dokuyu bir şekilde muhafaza ederlerken saklanması gereken birçok yapı, şehirlerin silüetinden kimi zaman tarihi süreç, doğal afetler ve ihtiyaçlar dâhilinde kimi zaman ise kasıtlı olarak silinmektedir. Yerleşmeler, işte tam bu noktada, eski sakinleri ve kültürlerinden farklılaşan apayrı dönüşüm dönemleri ile tarihin ve coğrafyanın birlikte ele alması gereken sahaları meydana getirmektedir. Bu çalışmada insanın meydana getirdiği mekânsal dönüşüm, ele alınan örnek yerleşmeler, eski ve yeni fotoğraflar ve sokak görünüşleri ile birlikte değerlendirilmiş, bu değişime etki eden sebepler ve ortaya koyduğu farklılaşma üzerinde durulmuştur. Çalışmada ilgili literatür taranmış ve gerekli arşiv belgeleri ile yetkili makamların raporları kullanılmış ancak daha çok arazi incelemesi ve yüzyüze görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Mekânda yaşayan ana etnik unsur ve onun yaşadığı ortamdaki öz varlığının yok sayılarak diğer ibadet yerlerinin önünü açması gibi konuların yanı sıra Müslüman köylerde Cemaat dışı kiliselerin inşası gibi meseleler ve ülkedeki imar kanunu ile bunun geçmişine yönelik ihaleler ve bunlar sonucunda şekillendirilen etno-kültürel ortamın ve değiştirilen beşeri coğrafyanın bundan ne derece etkilendiği ortaya konulmuştur. Bu çalışmanın yapım sürecinde karşılaşılan başlıca zorluk, ilgili literatürün makale kapsamına uygunsuzluğu yanında resmi kurumların (Yunan kurumları) belge vermekteki isteksizlikleri ve Müslüman dini kurumlara karşı ortada bir çifte standart olmadığı yönündeki önkabulleri idi. Buna rağmen sahadaki silüetin bariz derecedeki deformasyonu ve adeta tarihin hiçe sayılırcasına tarihi eserlerin şehir silüetlerinden kazınması, fotoğraflar dışında bir belgeye ihtiyaç duyulmayacak kadar barizdi. Buna rağmen varlığına müsaade edilen eski

camilerin özellikle Batı Trakya'daki kısmı ayrı bir kategoride ele alınmalıydı. Bu bağlamda analiz edilen bölgelerde her biri kendine özgü yok etme, gizleme, alçakta bırakma veya yıkılmaya terk etme gibi uygulamalar gözlemlenmiştir. Bu çalışma öncesinde makalede ortaya konulan tezin antitezi ayrıca irdelenmiş ve çalışmada değinilen hususların tesadüfiliği ihtimali üzerinde de durulmuştur. Makale bu bağlamda bir septizmle orta noktadan ve tarafsız şekilde bakılarak yazılmıştır. Ancak neredeyse hiçbir uygulamada Yunan otoritelerinin, Müslüman dini yapılarına karşı muhafazacı olmadığı ve onları şehir silüetinde olması gerektiği gibi "ilk hallerinde veya ilk görünümünde" bırakmadığı ve "öteki" yerine koyduğu açıkça görülmüştür. Nitekim Yunan makamlarının bu görüşü, sahadan elde edilen resimlerle olduğu kadar ilgili makamlarla yapılan görüşmelerden elde edilen verilere dayanan tüzük ve belgelerle de ispatlanmış, etnografi, söylem analizi ve kuram oluşturma yoluyla ispatlanmış ve ortaya konmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Coğrafya, Tarihi Coğrafya, Etnokültürel Ortam, Mekânsal Dönüşüm, Mimari Ortam, İslami Silüet, Yunanistan.

Introduction

Settlements have undergone various changes and transformations in the historical process. It is a necessity of the historical process that they undergo spatial changes, sometimes on a functional and sometimes on a dimensional basis. However, the changes in the characters of the settlements and their deep transformations are mostly due to the mass or partial migration of their inhabitants. At this point, political border changes are effective, which are the phenomena seen after wars and political unions. The traces left by a religion or a national group as a result of leaving a geography are often seen as a "foreign" and "malicious" trace by a nation that has fought a frontal war with it. A nation that has just gained its independence or gained control in its own field tends to liquidate the previous one. The place is subjected to a dynamic process that needs to be changed to emphasize the cultural transformation of the political presence on the ground. For this, different methods are used such as fires, forced transformations, leaving to rot, and curtaining. Some processes that can happen on their own over time are sometimes also created deliberately. This is as understandable as the owner of a new house wanting to change the previous colors, moving the furniture if any, or wanting to make serious and permanent changes in the whole house. However, this comprehensible situation ceases to be a simple, insignificant, and understandable phenomenon when considered within the framework of human rights. Because the land of countries is not a house that can be designed according to the taste of a single nation in today's world.

1. Removal of Islamic Religious Buildings from the Skyline in Greece

In the period when Greece became independent in 1829, its approach to Islamic religious structures and its reflex a hundred years from now forms variance. In the city of Nauplion (Anadolu), which was their first independent center, the mosque, which still stands today, was used as a school.¹ Cizderiye mosque in the city center of Athens was also used as the ballroom of the Greek King Otto, and then as a prison and warehouse. The same fate also happened against Fethiye Mosque when the mosque's minaret was torn down and was used as a school following the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence.² It is clear that, first of all, their minarets were destroyed, but the main structure was preserved. Similarly, in the Attica Peninsula, where Athens is located, and in the Peloponnese, the ancient artifacts were used in different ways instead of their destruction. This kind of saving, such as using instead of demolishing, was due to the "need for big buildings" in the conditions of the period. As a matter of fact, nationalism and the reflex of showing itself in the space in the regions captured later from Turkish people became documented with an advertisement published in the Macedonian Newspaper in 1925. In the picture below, the tender for the demolition of 26 minarets of the city of Thessaloniki is announced (Picture 1).

¹ Giocalas Thanasis – Kafetzaki Tonia, "Αθήνα: Ιχνηλατώντας την πόλη με οδηγό την ιστορία και τη λογοτεχνία [Athens: Tracing the city through history and literature]" (in Greek). Athens: Estia (2013), 109.

² Thanais and Kafetzaki, "Αθήνα: Ιχνηλατώντας την πόλη με οδηγό την ιστορία και τη λογοτεχνία" (2013), 75.



Picture 1: Newspaper “Macedonia” 13 August 1925, p.3 (Source: Newspaper Archive)

According to this announcement, mosques in the city will be demolished by an open reduction method and the city skyline will be cleared of minarets. The date in question is one year after the Turks left the city of Thessaloniki with the population exchange signed between Turkey and Greece which meant the uprooting and repatriating of around 1,5 million people. In this case, the savings of making use of the buildings are still valid, and the only unwanted image in the city is the minarets. The literal translation of the above advertisement is as follows:

“An auction was held in the municipality yesterday for the demolition of 26 minarets of the city. The start of the tender was determined as 101,500 drachmas. Contractor Spiridon I won the tender for 98,900 drachmas. ... As it is known, there is a right to benefit from the materials of the destroyed minarets. The only minaret that will not be

demolished (Thessaloniki Hortaca Mosque) is, St. George's Minaret.”

Such efforts and practices were met with nationalist voices and joy in the Greek media. On 22/3/1924 in the newspaper “Makedonika Nea”, which had the subtitle “morning newspaper, instrument of national interests”, in the column “Athenian impressions” is published an article that celebrates the demolition of some minarets (these are called two churches, Saint Demetrius and Ahiropteos, but it seems that other mosques are also meant).

“One after the other, the symbols of a religion of a barbaric people, falling to the ground. The forest of white minarets is thinning. The obelisks with the crescent, the ones that have been threatening the sweet Greek skies for centuries, are being eradicated as useless now. The crescent is eradicated in the last refuge, to follow, those who believe in it, to the youthful hearth. A naked pride collapses, in a volume of fanaticism it disappears, in totality of unsavoury chimneys of a faith ‘of Mohammedanism’ it falls sharply. It is done! The red fesses (Muslim hat) leave, the jasmines disappear. What else is left? Nothing. Nothing, after a month, reminds us, nor should it remind us, that the conqueror passed by here and, brutally, arrogantly raised the emblems of their religion, polluting the majestic temples of Orthodoxy!”³

In the end, the silhouette of a city has been completely changed and an artificial image has been brought to this city apart from the image of the city (Picture 2). This artificial image constitutes the “New Greek Identity” of the city, and this identity is an identity built on the destroyed “other” and the remains of many old buildings in the city are screened between high buildings (Picture 3). These high buildings can be measured at an altitude of 15, 20, and 25 meters, depending on the historical structures that need to be hidden among them.

³ Velogiannis Manthos, “Η διαχείριση των μουσουλμανικών και εβραϊκών ιερών μνημείων στη Θεσσαλονίκη» [The management of Muslim and Jewish shrines in Thessaloniki] (in Greek). Patras (2018), 29-30.



Picture 2: Transformation of Thessaloniki City Skyline in the Same Century

There are many examples as above. The same destruction is also on the table in the city of Kavala, and the minarets of the mosques (İbrahim Pasha, Halil Bey, and Imaret Mosque) that are still standing today and used as a church assembly center and hotel room are either completely destroyed or up to their bases. Even if the buildings in the restored mosques in the country are renewed with original materials and original architecture, the minaret is not added in any way. The Zincirli Mosque in Serez has been recently restored, but its minaret has not been rebuilt. The minaret of Osman Shah Mosque in Trikala is also half destroyed and the rest of the mosque is well preserved and restored. Madrasa Mosque in Veria formerly named Karaferiye has also

been restored recently, which is one of the few minarets that somehow survived in the area outside Western Thrace in Northern Greece. Likewise, in Edessa, formerly named Vodine, New Mosque and its minaret are still standing, despite the damage at the tip. There are also two minarets standing in Ioannina, which are seen as mosques symbolized by this city that bears the memory of Ali Pasha from Tepedelen. Also, due to Albanian Muslims living in the country until 1945, a periodical tolerance was shown to the minarets of the mosques in Western Greece. Hundreds of mosques in sixty-eight villages and towns were burned and looted between June 1944 and March 1945 due to the massacres that caused the Cham Albanians to flee the country.⁴ Despite this, there are still mosque minarets in villages in places like Konitsa formerly named Koniçe, which are about to be demolished. There are exceptional examples that have survived both in remote villages of Greece, in the villages of a provincial settlement such as Konitsa, or in the half minaret outside the town of Arnissa in the administrative unit of Pella.

In rural areas outside major cities such as Athens and Thessaloniki, this is a tolerable situation, but in cities, the tolerance is very limited. While there are still surviving minarets in Crete, especially in Rethymno Yerapetre and Heraklion, the minaret of the Janissaries Mosque in the harbor part of Chania was destroyed. Again, in the islands of Rhodes and Kos, which came under Greek domination after World War II, many mosque minarets are still standing (although some of them were left to be demolished and there are problems with restoration permits and appropriations). In addition, the minaret of the only mosque on the island of Meis is still standing, except for the balustrades of its balcony. In this case, not the hostility to the structure of another religion, but the impulse to “preserve the Greek appearance” of the city should be the main factor. In this regard, the jurisprudence and approaches of different municipalities and city administrators in different regions can be effective in protecting or destroying these structures. In spite of there are positive attempts and constructive statements of the previous mayor of Thessaloniki (Yiannis Boutaris), those efforts remain fruitless. These positive approaches for the places of worship and the desire to open them, are mostly inconclusive in the implementation phase. For instance, Ishak Pasha Mosque, also known as Alaca Imaret, is one of these places of worship.⁵ The situation of Alaca Imaret also is striking with a classical parcel shielding in Greece.

⁴ Hima Adi, “The Cham Issue: Past, Present and Solutions in the Light of European Integration of South East Europe”. *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2010), 1-118.

⁵ Anadolu Agency, “Greek Mayor Fights to Preserve Ottoman Heritage” (Date of access 17 May 2021).



Picture 3: Zoning Plan Tactic in Which Mosques are Lost Among High Buildings, Clockwise Thessaloniki Ishak Pasa,⁶ Drama Mehmed Ağa,⁷ Anabolu Martyr Ali Pasa,⁸ Thessaloniki Hamidiye Mosque⁹.

It should not be forgotten that in buildings to be deleted from the city skyline, the intent is to eliminate the long parts that enter the silhouette, and in Islamic structures, this is usually minarets. When the minaret of a building is destroyed or converted into a bell tower, the building can be used in any way. The standard brought by the Greek administrations in this regard also determines the size of a place of worship. As it is known, minarets are a part of Islamic temples and, beyond that, they are a symbol. The visibility of the minaret must be higher than the surrounding buildings for the prayer to be heard. However, seeing the minaret also means that the identity of the settlement is “less Greek”. Because Orthodoxy is an important part of identity in Greece.

⁶ Aktis, “Alak Imaret Mosque/Ishak Pasha Mosque, Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki Region, Central Macedonia, Greece” (Date of access: 10 May 2021).

⁷ Dramini, “The Restoration of the Arab Mosque in Drama was Raised with Other Issues in the Ministry of Culture” (Date of access: 10 May 2021).

⁸ Travel Orama, “City Tours” (Date of access: 10 May 2021).

⁹ Forum Anavatan Rumeli, “Main Page” (Date of access: 4 May 2021).

In addition, some of the structures that qualified to be Turkish temples or tombs were privatized and plundered. It is also meaningful that there are Greek and Byzantine flags in front of the tomb of Hıdır Baba in Komotini, which are also in front of many churches. The Church sees its mission in Greece, which is a secular state, as an institution that complements the nationalist and Greek spirit, and it also shows this exceedingly in front of buildings and places of worship, some of which were built by Muslims.



Picture 4: Hıdır Baba Tomb, Which was Converted into Aya Yorgi Church in Komotini, and Kavalalı Halil Bey Mosque, With its Inscription Covered With Paint, Left Among the Apartments in Kavala and Whose Minaret Was Destroyed¹⁰

As can be seen from the example above, if the main structure of the mosque is under Greek domination in the days when a city needed a building, this mosque is used for different purposes by demolishing its minaret. When there is no need for a building in the city, it is left to be demolished and burned by accident, or it is left to the process of an earthquake, rain, and various natural events. Although not in Western Thrace, there are mosques that somehow appear in the city skyline, but these are the two mosques close to the touristic Mehmed Ali Pasha Palace in Ioannina, Crete, which joined Greece later, and the Rhodes and Kos mosques, which are the last lands to join. In the city skyline in Greece, these structures are predominantly defined as

¹⁰ Mehmet Emin Yılmaz, *Kiliseye Çevrilen Türk Eserleri* (İstanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 2020), 411-432.

“post-Byzantine” structures. According to this view in Greece, the structures are either pre-Byzantine or post-Byzantine. The reflection of this understanding in place, which will not leave room for another culture and history, or which cannot accept the architectural and cultural traces of another culture in Greece, is quite dramatic. In many places, structures have been demolished, abandoned for demolition, or converted. Unsurprisingly this is not just an incident in Greece. It is possible to find similar ones in Anatolia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Serbia. However, the fact that Greece is generally accepted as a country connected to Democracy and European values is the main reason for the emphasis in this study.

2. Spatial Transformation in Settlements such as Western Thrace and 12 Islands

After the Turks living outside Western Thrace in Greece were sent to Turkey *en masse* in 1923, the religious rights in the country have come to cover only the Muslim Turkish community in Western Thrace. On the other hand, the situation of the Turks of the 12 Islands living in specifically to Rhodes and Kos in that was under the control of Greece with the Italian troops withdrawing after the Second World War, presented another society whose legal structure was even more uncertain. All ethnocultural rights of this society have been violated and their establishment and representation of associations and foundations under the Turkish name have been prevented. In addition, with the heavy taxes imposed on Muslim foundations, the Turks had to sell their foundation properties and even foundation works one by one. Diplomat Çelikkol, who also signed an important masterpiece with his research on this subject, was personally involved in these issues during his duty in Rhodes and he included important information in the book he wrote and revealed the Greek policies and systematics towards religious structures.

Accordingly, he summarized the Greek policy as “plan-based, sometimes in compliance with the legislation, but usually by using a third party to reach a result by using pressure.” Zeki Çelikkol also stated that it is a policy requirement to force the nation to spend more than its income by constantly making new expenses, and to sell its lands in order to meet these expenses. Çelikkol also pointed out to Evkaf that it is a policy requirement to force the people to spend more than their income by constantly making new expenses and getting them to sell their lands in order to meet these expenses. In 1977, Evkaf, whose tangible assets were estimated at 120 million and income of approximately 3 million drachmas, was accrued in total 2 million drachmas as income and wealth tax. In this way, he also mentions that 12 religious buildings as mosques and masjids were donated to the Rhodes Metropolitan

Municipality only in the 1972-76 period, with numerous documents and papers in his book.¹¹

On the other hand, the situation in Thrace, which is protected and stable with legal rights, presents legality on paper, and in operation, it often creates grievances against the Turks with the arbitrary practices of the Greek authorities.

3. Legal Situation Regarding the Size Limitation of Places of Worship in Greece

Places of worship in Greece were given the status of “houses of worship” for Muslims, and a standard was set for new mosques within the scope of this new limitation, and this caused a dispute between the Turkish minority in this country and the Greek authorities. Apart from this, there are also many foundation and authority problems, but the size limitations of places of worship are the main subject of this study, and what primarily determines the silhouette of the space is the limitation of this dimension.

Granting construction permits for Muslim prayer/worship places (mosques, masjids, lodges, and cemevis) is guaranteed in paragraphs 1, 2, and 4 of Article 13 of the Greek Constitution. In the international arena, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly resolution of 10.12.1948) and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which was transcribed into domestic law in the Greek Official Gazette (Volume I, Line 256), where the law no. 53/1974 was published. The Greek Official Gazette (Volume I, No. 238, 1923), in which the European Union Declaration of Fundamental Rights (2000/C 364/01) and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Treaty of Lausanne were ratified. Articles 37 and 45 of the 5th part of the Treaty of Lausanne on the Protection of Minorities guarantee the religious freedoms of the Western Thrace Turkish community, all rights to the protection and construction of places of assembly and worship.

Accordingly, the minaret and cone heights were limited. It has even been brought down. The limit of 16 meters has been reduced to 7.5 meters today. While the jurisprudence before 2008 on this issue was that a minaret was not higher than the bell tower of a church, later on, Muslim places of worship, namely mosques, were adverted as houses, and a 7.5-meter standard was introduced for them. According to the previous law 1369/1938, it was necessary to obtain a permit from the local metropolitan area for a “house of worship or minaret”. In the following years, church authorities limited this to a height of

¹¹ Zeki Çelikkol, *Rodos'taki Türk Eserleri ve Tarihçe 6* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1992), 2.

16 meters, not exceeding the bell tower. However, as a result of the events that started with the fact that the minaret of the Koyunköy (Kimmeria) mosque in Xanthi (İskeçe) was not allowed in 1999, this arrangement changed with the law enacted in 2006. Following the amendment of this regulation by Law No. 3467/2006,¹² the case law in practice also changed, and this authority was taken from the local dioceses and given to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.¹³

One of the practices of the Greek authorities to erase the minaret silhouettes in the cities is that the permit process for repair is very sinister and the repair and restoration initiated is sometimes spread over a period of time close to a person's birth, growth, and adulthood. This long restoration process gives both the impression that it is intended to break the resistance of the Muslim community and to tire them out, and also creates a suitable environment for the physical dissolution of the structure for it to collapse on its own during this period. For instance, Çelebi Mehmet Mosque, which was completely burned in 2017 in a fire that broke out twice in a row in Dimetoka and was closed before, is a convenient example. As with the restoration of the Sultan Çelebi Mehmet Mosque, it does not take kindly to the restoration of historical Ottoman artifacts in cooperation with the Turkish authorities.¹⁴ In the answer given by the Minister of Culture Lina Mendoni to the parliamentary question dated 411/28.8.2019 of the Rhodope Deputy İlhan Ahmet for the restoration of this mosque, which was burned or burned by someone else, it was stated that the administrative and judicial investigation regarding the fire is continuing, and the restoration of the mosque is foreseen to be completed in 2023. In its response, the Ministry stated that the restoration process was initiated with the approval of the "Dimetoka Mosque Monumental Area and Landscaping Project" prepared by the Meriç Antiquities Committee and submitted to the Byzantine and Antique Artifacts Directorate and the Post-Byzantine Artifacts Restoration Directorate with including in the East Macedonia Thrace 2014 - 2020 Activity Program. An appropriation with a budget of 3,428,876 drachmas was determined for the mosque and it was foreseen to be completed in 63 months and reach 2023.¹⁵ The name of the institution named "Post-Byzantine Artifacts Restoration Directorate" mentioned above is also an issue worth mentioning here. According to the Greek

¹² Greek Official Gazette, "FEK A' 128, Article 27", 21 June 2006.

¹³ Ali Hüseyinoğlu, "Islam and Religious Liberties in Western Thrace, Greece", *Islam in the Balkans Unexpired Hope* 4/19 (2016), 141-158.

¹⁴ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and the Turkish Community in the Dodecanese" (Date of access: 2 May 2021).

¹⁵ Trakya'nın Sesi, "Dimetoka Beyazıt Camii Restorasyonunun 2023'te Tamamlanması Öngörülüyor" (Date of access: 13 June 2021).

authorities in Greece, “Post-Byzantine Artifacts” are in question instead of Turkish and Ottoman works. Many historical buildings have the phrase “Post Byzantine Cultural Monument” or “Muslim Artifacts” on them, and in this post-Byzantine period (15th-20th centuries), Turkish and Ottoman heritage is not even wanted to be mentioned. In this way, Turkey’s intervention in these structures is also excluded by not saying “Turkish Artifact”. Such expressions of buildings other than their identity, and the effort to see and show them differently, undoubtedly show an attitude that includes “alienization” towards the buildings. Such a view, as a matter of course, makes goodwill questionable for the preservation of the future of these structures. It should also be noted that after the restoration, the Çelebi Mehmet Mosque was prevented from becoming a mosque with its original function. There have been many declarations of intention by the authorities that this place will now be put into operation as a museum.



Picture 5: Çelebi Mehmet Mosque in Dimetoka and Its Condition After the Fire¹⁶

This minaret, which dominates the city in a remote settlement far from the center of Greece like Dimetoka, had been the target of various attacks before it was damaged in the fire. The news that a Greek flag was hung above the minaret, whose cone part was liquidated, in 2015 was also reflected in the media.¹⁷ This is a reflection of a nationalist view of “Preserving the Greek Image

¹⁶ Trakya’nın Sesi, “Dimetoka Beyazıt Camii Restorasyonunun 2023’te Tamamlanması Öngörülmüyor” (Date of access: 13 June 2021).

¹⁷ Sözcü, “Dimetoka’daki Tarihi Caminin Minaresine Yunan Bayrağı Astılar”, (Date of access 20 May 2021)

of the City". This shows that the minaret and the culture it represents is a silhouette that still disturbs some people from the public, and this image was not ascribed to the Greek identity of the city and was made to compensate by hanging a Greek flag on it, perhaps "to make it more digestible and more national". It is highly possible that the building, which burned down after this action in 2015, was burned down intentionally.

Minaret in Greece is a chronic national issue. Even the mosque that was decided to be built in the city of Athens was built as a place without a minaret and the name of which is not a mosque. In this regard, the procedure for erecting a minaret or permitting it in the country is long and ominous. The order of operation to be applied is; in order to get the appropriate opinion, an application must be made to the Ministry of Culture and Sports Macedonia & Thrace New Monuments and Technical Projects Authority Local Monuments Regional Directorate and requires the approval of the Ministry of Education, Research & Religious Affairs. These relevant rules are,

According to the Law No. 4178/2013 published in the Official Gazette of Greece (Official Gazette No. 174 Vol. I) and the revised Law No. 4067/2012 (Official Gazette No. 79, Vol. I), paragraph 4 of the 27th paragraph, only the approval of the deviations in height in the construction of the minarets is considered exceptional with the approval of the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change after the positive opinion of the Architectural Central Board and the approval of the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs.

Also for any operation, including renovation:

a) For buildings and their surroundings, which are classified as monuments or which are under self-protection under the provisions of Law No. 3028/2002 or which are over 100 years old,

b) For any action to be taken on the land or building that is near the old or new monument, or within the archaeological site or historical place,

The approval of the Ministry of Culture and Sports is required.¹⁸

These "deviations" mean the violation of the rules, including the height of the minarets of the mosques.

The part that puts the issue in suspense and opened it to the intervention of the Greek Government is that these mosques were described as "houses of worship" and the minarets were rearranged within this new classification. Until 2008, the minaret height was given as 16 meters in the Rhodope

¹⁸ Yunan Cumhuriyeti Eğitim, Araştırma ve Din İşleri Bakanlığı Din İşleri Genel Sekreterliği Din İdaresi Daire Başkanlığı, "Farklı Dinler ve Mezhepler Şubesi Genelgesi, Sayı: 57071/TH1", 2017, 40.

province centered in Komotini (Gümülcine), but in 2008, referring to the general construction law in Greece, after evaluating minarets and mosques as houses and publishing that they could not exceed 7.5 meters, the construction office in the governorate also took this ministry document as a basis and decided to give 7.5 meters for this situation. Recently, the Greek State insists on the 16-meter demand for the minarets of Kalenderköy and Demirbeyli villages. In addition, in another circular issued for mosques in Greece in 2017, the circular about all religious structures, covering not only Muslims but also other religions, is another subject of discussion.

In the rules applied in this way until recently, relief is also taken into account and the opportunity to benefit from it is only given to Christian places of worship, which is that Yassıköy (Yasmos) is an example. It is not allowed to build a mosque on a dominant hill of the village or on a visible slope, but however, the church is erected at the most dominant point, where the desire to attribute the perception of dominance over the landscape to the religion of the dominant authority comes to the forefront again.

On the other hand, the reaction of the local people is either absent or weak in most places. Nowadays, the rate of the Turkish population in the Western Thrace cities in question has varied considerably. While there is a balance in half in Komotini, the Turkish population is less than half in Xanthi. In Alexandroupoli, on the other hand, the Turkish population did not remain outside of almost a few dozen families in the central part.

At this point, the dominant Orthodox Greek authority is developing counterfeit historical geography as an add-on to the demographic structure that cities are changing. As a matter of fact, an Orthodox chapel with a historical cut stone built in the village of Mustafçova (Miki) in Northern Greece, which does not have a Christian population, is an example (Picture 6).



Picture 6: Example of a Semi-Arbited Padlocked Church, Isolated from Local Culture and Religion Groups (Greece)¹⁹

It is difficult to say that the church was built for worship. Inasmuch as, although the church is kept closed almost all days of the week, the padlock on its door, which is worn by a Christian religious official who rarely comes in, and the semi-fortified iron and wire door that a person cannot easily climb are proof of this. When the people of Mustafçova are asked why the church is isolated from the local people with such arbitration, they find it meaningless. However, the arbitration in question must have been made against a possible reaction letter likely to be written on the church.

This and similar counterfeit historical constructions are seen in the majority of orthodox countries where the Muslim minority lives, which is abandoned or wanted to be intimidated.

What happened in Yanıkköy (Nimfea) settlement in Komotini is another example of this situation. The church, which was built on a Muslim foundation in Yanıkköy, whose population came to the point of disappearance due to immigration, at a point overlooking the village and its view, was built

¹⁹ 2014 tarihinde İskeçe'ye bağlı Mustafçova (Miki) Yerleşmesine yapılan ziyarette çekilmiş fotoğraftır.

without the need for any Christian community among the people of the region. Moreover, the land belongs to a Muslim foundation, which is clearly proven by the title deed, while the Greek government claims that the land is public land. In this case, it may be sufficient for a piece of land to be public land to plant a church in a region. The interesting thing is that the church is again being built in a view that will be considered historical and moreover, it is being built on a deeded foundation land arbitrarily and illegally without obtaining permission from the regional forest administration.

In the interviews with the residents of the region, they have questioned what the purpose of these churches was in the perception of ethnicity and they stated that they were clearly aware that this was not done for them. As well as there are those who say that this is a practice made in the region where they live so that people do not feel themselves in their homeland, and the who state that it is nothing but a provocation, another opinion also gives quite significant information. The common view of the villagers who have completed their education in Turkey and European countries is that these churches and chapels are not being built for a few gendarmerie officers since there is not a single Christian living in the places where they are built. However there are also those who say in the village that this is an effort to create a future-oriented history to say that “Greeks lived here” 100 years from now. The construction of the church with the aim of giving a historical appearance rather than being built according to any need can also be seen in the picture below.



Picture 7: Non-Community Church in Yanikköy, Komotini.²⁰

Although Western Thrace Turks were sometimes included in the “Forbidden Zone” in the past and had difficulties in obtaining permission from the military administrations for their simplest work, today there is no ban due to the relaxation of the bans in the area close to the Bulgarian border, which is described as this “Forbidden Zone”. However, the fact that the procedures require long and many signatures, that they are kept waiting for a very long

²⁰ Milliyet, “Bati Trakya’da resmi gasp”, (Date of access 28 May 2021)

time at the approval stage, and that there are many missing documents or arbitrary delays intimidate the minority representatives who apply for it,²¹ and in this process, the structures are either burned down or demolished on their own or they are being precluded. For example, 50 years after the first pier was built-in 1960 for the repair of the Recep Pasha Mosque, it was announced by the Greek authorities that 1 million euros were allocated for the repair of the mosque. However, this statement was made in response to Turkey's initiation of restoration work after the mosque's dome collapsed and a significant portion of it began to collapse.²²

Conclusion

Muslims living in Greece today are not only Turks. A large number of Albanians, Arabs, Pakistanis, and Muslims from many other nationalities, who came to the country after the 1990s, live by coming to this country. In general terms, it is difficult to mention about extremism and hate speech against the religion of Islam in Greece. However, the main Islamic institutions in the country are located in the areas where the Western Thrace Turks live, which is guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne, and acquired rights (despite many intimidation, and pressure) are largely preserved. Despite this, some Turks were deprived of citizenship, villages in some strategic areas were forcibly evacuated after 1974 (such as Celepliköy in the west of Xanthi), and their inhabitants were replaced with Greek populations and the leaders of Turkish society began to be intimidated. In addition, the fact that the muftis chosen by the Turks in no way were recognized by the Greek authorities and their signatory powers were taken away is another aspect of the issue. Turkish people are recognized in Greece as a Religious Community, not an Ethnic Community. Concerned that their recognition as an ethnic community will bring Ethnic and Political rights in the future, the Greek administration's ignoring and marginalizing their religious rights and their architectural presence in the space is one of the classical practices of Greece, which does not comply with European norms and international law. Furthermore, the failed efforts of the previous mayor, Yiannis Boutaris, who came to the fore with his attempts to not allow the existing under-apartment place of worship to Muslims in Thessaloniki, forcibly evacuate the existing place, and to restore the existing Ottoman structure place worship in the city to their original form, gives the impression that initiatives at the municipal level in Greece are also hindered by a "State Policy". This is a situation that is made by the ruling power in order to process people's psychology and give them the perception of the fact that they "live in a foreign country", where it first makes itself felt in the space, and in which it is revealed that this is an intentional situation with the examples in this study.

²¹ Halit Eren, "Batı Trakya Türkleri", İstanbul: Rebel Basım, (1997). 93.

²² Takvim, "Rodos Savaşı", (Date of access 23 May 2021)

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