

A MONUMENT OF EARLY OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURE IN BULGARIA

THE BEKTAŞI TEKKE OF KIDEMLİ BABA SULTAN
AT KALUGEREVO — NOVA ZAGORA

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Until a few years ago the architecture of the Turkish derwish orders of the classical period of Ottoman architecture was unknown.

In 1967 the profound and richly illustrated study by Prof. Semavi Eyice¹ of the Tekke of Akyazılı Sultan in North-East Bulgaria appeared, whereby the importance of this long-known but never understood monument was convincingly demonstrated and its place located in classical Ottoman architecture.

Of great importance is its reconstruction and an explanation of the function of the monumental edifice next to the Turbe of the Saint, i.e. the Asitane, the spacious hall in which the derwishes held their meetings. This hall of which the walls have remained up to the adjoint piece of the truss, is a rare type of Ottoman architecture of which it was the only known specimen.

The architectural heritage of the Osmanlı in the Balkans is for the most part little known, if at all. Thus, Bulgaria, Greece and also the Yugoslavian state of Makedonia still hold unknown treasures in the field of architecture.

Only the Bosnian Moslems and the Hungarians have performed meritorious work on a large scale, thanks to which we are better informed about these areas.

While making a journey of 16000 km through the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire in Europe in the summer of 1969²

¹ Prof. Dr. Semavi Eyice, Varna ile Balçık arasında Akyazılı Sultan Tekkesi, in : Belleten T. T. K. No 124, Ekim 1967, pp. 551-600.

² This journey was made possible by a scholarship from the Netherlands Organisation for the Advancement of Pure Research, Z. W. O.

I was afforded the opportunity of visiting and describing several monuments unknown to science. One of these objects is the second example of a heptagonal *Âsitane* belonging to the classical period of Ottoman architecture.

The following may therefore be regarded as a brief addition to Prof. Eyice's study. This relates to the remains of the Tekke of Kıdemli Baba Sultan above the village of Kalugerovo in S. E. Bulgaria, about 15 km from Nova Zagora.

The region in which the Tekke is situated, North Thrace, is an area with a very agitated history as a perpetual borderland. After the emergence of Bulgaria as an independent state, in the 7th century, the undulating planes of of Thrace were the scene of a never-ending struggle between the early Bulgarian Empire and Byzantium. An inscription by Khan Krum of this region, on a boundary post, has remained preserved³. At the time of the Second Bulgarian Empire, in the 13th and 14th century, this region, now the south-west corner of Bulgaria, was a desolate and depopulated no man's land. Between the line Plovdiv (Filibe), Jambol and Edirne there was a strip of 150 km where hardly anyone lived. The fortresses at the border, Diampolis, Stenimachos, and Philipopol repeatedly changed hands. The terrible civil wars of the 14th century, which ravaged Byzantium under Andronikos II and III and the struggle for the throne of Kantakusinos and Paleologos, were largely responsible for this desolate state of affairs⁴.

Only after the definite occupation by the Ottomans did the

³ The inscription of Hambarlı near Yenice Kızılağaç (Elhovo). Published by V. Besevliev - Die Proto Bulgarischen Inschriften. Berlin 1963. '...and his brother did not forsake him and set out on a military expedition, and God gave him the following fortresses to conquer: Serdica Debeltos, Kostantia, Bersinikia, Adrianopol. These powerful fortresses were taken by him. And God instilled fear into the other fortresses and they (the Byzantines) left them and fled. Nor did he forget the Underland (the region to the south, the present Turkish Thrace), from the environs of which the old Emperor himself, the Bald One. Had undertaken the expedition with his entire army and burnt our villages and devastated everything and had forgotten the oath, and the ruler Kroum rose up to wage war...and went forth... to destroy...' p. 126. An illustrative example of the history of this region, border warfare, invasions and expeditions of vengeance.

⁴ Constantin Jiricek, Das Fürstentum Bulgarien. Prag-Wien-Leipzig, 1891 pp. 48-52.

harrassed country come to rest⁵. This conquest is said to have occurred somewhere about 1361 and closely associated with the conquest of Edirne and Plovdiv. After the battle of Çirmen in 1371 the Turkish rule in Thrace was permanently established. They embarked almost immediately upon the large-scale repopulation of the vacant country, which had to be cultivated afresh. We find confirmation of this not only by various indications among Byzantine and Turkish historians but also in the Ottoman Archives, from which impressive material has been published⁶. It is also very characteristic that in this region practically all the names of villages, hills, meadows and water courses are Turkish, which proves that they did not find any previous population there that had passed on the existing names⁷.

An important role in founding new villages and cultivating the land was played by members of the religious brotherhoods.

The tendency of these orders, permeated as they were with the remnants of ancient national religion and shamanism, to link up with the ancient heathen or Christian cult centers is sufficiently known⁸. The wooded hill of Ada Tepe above Kalugerovo (the ancient

⁵ Idem. The Turkish conquest brought lasting peace to these countries and at the end of the 14th century the Ottoman colonization.

⁶ O. L. Barkan, Les deportations comme méthode de peuplement et de colonisation dans l'Empire Ottoman, in: *Revue de la Faculté des Sciences Economiques, Université d'Istanbul*, 11e année No. 1-4. Münir Aktepe in *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, X, 1951, pp. 299-312; XIV ve XV Asırlarda Türkler Tarafından İskânına Dair. O. L. Barkan, *Kolonizatör Dervişleri . . .*. In : *Vakıflar Dergisi* II Ankara 1942.

⁷ In Makedonia and Serbia and West Bulgaria, Turkish colonists settled among and next to existing population groups and took over the old toponomy from them. In these areas a considerable population was still existent, which fact can clearly be seen on Barkan's map in his 'Deportation comme methode. . .' etc. The Bulgarian Government is making great efforts to replace the ancient Turkish place-names by Slavonic names, sometimes by translating the Turkish name. Sometimes by association with the great past prior to the year 1000 or by a name of a prominent figure from recent history. Offensive alterations such as Vasil Levski for Karlovo (a township founded by Karlozade Ali Bey, tutor of Princes under Bayazid II), Poljanovgrad for Karnobad (Karnınovası) or Kolarovgrad for Şumen, have fortunately been cancelled.

⁸ For greater detail on this see : F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, Oxford 1929 and J. K. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Derwishes*, London 1937.

Characteristic is the finding of the foundations of a large Byzantine Monastery

Tekke Mahalle) is an ideal site for a sanctuary of one of the nature gods. The isolated hill towers up visibly from afar high above the surrounding plain. Only on the south side does it continue in a series of lower hills, now called the hills of Sveti Ilija. The Tekke of Kıdemli Baba lies in a deserted region far removed from the main thoroughfares in an area which until recently could be reached with a farmer's waggon. This is no doubt the reason why the Tekke has so far remained practically unknown⁹. Only the indefatigable Evliya Çelebi gives a few valuable particulars in his Seyahatname.

According to him Kıdemli Baba obtained permission from Hoca Ahmad Yesevi to leave for Rumili. It was Hacı Bektaş who clothed him with the mantle. He chose the lonely height as his abode¹⁰ and, at the time of his death, had gathered around him a large number of disciples¹¹.

When Çelebi Sultan Mehmed¹² heard of his death he at once

dating from the period between 500 and 700 A. D. under the spot where the Kara-ağaç Tekke stood (near Varna) in the previous century. The monastery must have been destroyed before the year 1000, but the spot continued to be a place of reverence, in which the Bektaşî joined. See for these excavations: M. Mircev, Fouilles du Karac Tekke près de la ville Varna in: *Izvestija Bălg. Arkeol. Institut* 17, Sofia 1950, pp. 284-289.

In his study 'Zum islamischen Heiligenwesen auf dem Balkan, vorab im Thrakischen Raume', in: *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie*, I, Wiesbaden 1962. PP. 46-59 H. J. Kissling mentions the Turbe of Kıdemli Baba founding himself on Evliya's notes. He underlined the possible survival of remains of the cult of Dionysos-Orpheus in this place. (P. 58-59) His supposition that Ada Tepe must be a Tumulus can not be right as the hill is only a natural continuing of the chain of Sv. Ilija. Remains of older buildings under the present ones would be highly probable.

⁹ Peter Detev wrote a meritorious essay on this in the Bulgarian language, to which, however, no attention has been paid. P. Detev, *Starinite v rida Sv. Ilije*, in: *Izvestija Naroden Muzej Burgas*, I, 1950, pp. 92-95.

¹⁰ The Tekke of Sarı Saltık Dede in Kruja, Albania, also lies on a high mountain-top.

¹¹ In spite of the highly legendary character of Evliya's story, we have here again a clear indication of one of the Saints from Horasan who overran Anatolia in the 14th century.

About the historical Kıdemli Baba see: Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatında ilk mütesavvıflar*, Istanbul 1923 P. 54. Which work unfortunately could not be used for this article.

¹² Kissling mentions in his translation Mehmed the Second as founder; Kissling, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis im 17. Jahrh.*, in: *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes XXXII*, Wiesbaden 1956. P. 27

sent constructors to the place to build a Turbe. The same Sultan also attended to the erection of a separate Tekke, kiler and mescid and provided in addition a large area with seven villages as Vakf.

If Evliya's statement is correct, then we have here one of the oldest Turkish monuments of the Balkans¹³ and the third preserved foundation of this Sultan, in Europe after the Bedesten of Edirne and the Great Mosque of Dimitoka (Didymotichon) in Greek Thrace. The characteristics of the architecture would seem to confirm this.

The Turbe, on the barren flat top of the hill, with a grand view in all directions, is the only part of the Tekke which has remained in good condition. The walls of the Âsitane remained preserved on the south side to a height of 5 metres. Of the other sides of this building the foundations are still standing. Of the remaining buildings, too, only vague traces can still be discerned. Wall remnants at the lower end of the hill-top suggest that the whole complex had formerly been surrounded by a wall. The correct course of this wall and the shape of the other buildings can only be ascertained in the course of excavations.

The Turbe is a brilliant work of faultlessly cut and polished blocks of white marble placed upon each other in a manner which we find many other early Ottoman works (Firuz Bey Cami, Milas 1394; Iliyas Bey Cami in Milet, 1404; Yeşil Cami Bursa, 1415 etc.). It is heptagonal in shape, this being characteristic of the Bektaşî numerical symbolism, surmounted by a dome, and has a lower, square entrance-hall which is likewise surmounted by a dome. It has massive and extremely sober proportions and a severe and princely aspect. The only part having a richer adornment is the portal with its arched door lintel of alternately pink and white marble and is faultlessly worked.

The entire outer covering is executed with an astonishing mastery which can only be found in the building sheds of the capital. Native

For various reasons it was not possible to control from this place the translation of Kissling on this critical point, it is almost sure however that it must be Mehmed I as the Bulgarian translation of Gadzanov also mentions his name, the other details given by Evliya point to him as does the style of architecture of the Turbe.

¹³ Not far from Kıdemli Baba are the old towns of Stara Zagora and Jambol with their very ancient mosques, also dating from the earliest periode of Turkish rule over Thrace.

architects or workers have never been able to perform such work. Bulgarian architecture of the middle ages is distinguished precisely by the rough material that was used and the inaccurate way of building with numerous deviations¹⁴. As we have seen above, this region was uninhabited before the advent of the Turks, so that for this reason alone there can be no question of local masters. There is no doubt that these came from one of the ancient centres of Turkish architecture in Bursa or Central Anatolia, such as Hacı Alaedin of Konya, the architect of the Eski Cami of Edirne, or Hacı İvaz Paşa of Tokat, builder of the Yeşil Cami of Bursa and the Great Mosque of Dimetoka, of the years 1420-21. One is tempted, perhaps with good reason, to regard him as the architect of the magnificent Turbe of Kıdemli Baba.

An element that reminds one strongly of the buildings at Bursa, Milet, Milas etc. is the execution of the tambour of the dome. The marble covering of the Turbe is finished at a height of 5.30 m by a cornice. The tambour (1.70 m in height) recedes somewhat and is also terminated by a cornice, above which the tiled roof the dome only slightly protrudes. The tambour is not of the magnificent paleozoic marble but of a greenish broken stone and brick which is white-plastered. We find the same mode of working on the above mentioned buildings in Milas and Milet and also on the Green Mosque of Bursa, apart from the tiling.

The high tambour is a characteristic of Early Ottoman architecture as is also the mode of wall workmanship. A late example of a Turbe showing a distinct difference between the upper and lower part of the Turbe is that of İshak Paşa in Skopje in Yugoslavia dating from the year 1445. Here, the upper part is not of an inferior kind of stone and plastered, but is covered with geometrical tiling, for the rest the idea is the same.

After about the middle of the 15th century the high tambour disappears and the cornice between tambour and mainbody is used exclusively to impart a livelier character to the whole and no longer for the parting of separate constructional components.

¹⁴ For instance the Court Church on the Tsarevets Hill in Trnovo, built by czar Ivan Alexander.

In all probability we are here confronted with a Turbe which is a splendid example of Early-Ottoman architecture from the 1413-1420 period. The Turbe's of two other big Bektaşî Tekke's, Akyazılı Baba and Osman Baba near Haskovo are of altogether different structure and date from the end of the 15th century^{14a}.

The establishing of the above-mentioned dating has to be sought in archive documents or, better still, in the Vakıfname as there are no inscriptions of any kind on the building itself. In view of the early date, this is very unlikely.

Until quite recently the Turbe was in excellent condition¹⁵, but sustained considerable damage in the first half of 1969 as a result of undermining and digging by fanatical treasure-hunters¹⁶. These treasure-hunters broke the door open, thereby smashing the marble door-post. They hacked the flagstone floor open and struck a hole in the sarcophagus, in course of which they disturbed the remains of the Saint. It is worthy of mention that the skull was brachycephalic (short-skulled) and had a very thick parietal bone. It clearly showed the traces of a skull trepanation, which had for long been ossified. This is a possible indication of the secret practices of the derwishes, who in this way sought to attain a state of ecstasy.

Unfortunately the Âsitane of the Tekke of Kıdemli Baba is a heap of stone without much shape. It therefore did not occur to Detev¹⁷ what shape it had or what its function was. The heptagonal base is still clearly ascertainable, with a niche in the middle of each side and three niches on one side. No traces of a large 'ocak' have

^{14a} Eyice dated Akyazılı somewhere about 1500. Osman Baba was built, according to Evliya Çelebi, by Sultan Bayazid II. During a visit to this Tekke I found it impossible to read or photograph the high-positioned inscription. Evliya further reports that another part of the Tekke was built by Yahya Paşaoğlu Mehmed Bey. The broken and incomplete inscription bearing his name has remained preserved in Osman Baba, on aside building. Evliya mention of Bayazid as builder may therefore very well be correct, so that both Turbe's date from about 1500.

¹⁵ It was provided with a new ceramic roof and the tambour newly plastered by the Institut for the preservation of Ancient Monuments of the District of Burgas.

¹⁶ These treasure-hunters (in Bulgarian *Malcı*) are a veritable plague to this country. Their devastating imagination resulted also in the ruin of the most extraordinary 14th century frescos of the grotto church Gligore in the lonely Iskar canyon near Gara Karlukovo.

¹⁷ Peter Detev. In his work cited in note 9.

been found. The edifice is situated about 35 metres away from the Turbe on a lower part of the hill-top.

As the building lies on a very steep slope, a terrace first had to be formed, and on that side the masonry is still 5 metres high. Slightly further away the crumbling edifice is still nearly 2 metres above ground level. The walls are built of far more simple material than the Turbe, namely of "cloisonnée".

The floor level, covered with debris and overgrown, could no longer be established, nor could the original height of the walls. Nevertheless, we can ascertain with certainty that we are here confronted with a second example, possibly an older one, of the type figuring in religious architecture of the great derwish orders belonging to the period of classical Ottoman architecture. As such, the crumbling walls of Kudemli Baba are important and are deserving better care.