



# Influence of Early Ottoman Urban Pattern in Bursa on the Balkan Cities: Skopje Case

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## Abstract

Bursa, as the first capital of Ottoman State, is a peculiar Anatolian city representing unique urban development of Early Ottoman Era. Various studies have depicted that there was an established Ottoman model for the development of new towns and agreed that the Early Ottoman urban pattern beginning with Bursa influenced the development of Balkan cities that were conquered during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This study focuses on the effects of urban development idea of Early Ottoman State on Bursa and Skopje. Skopje is one of the Balkan cities conquered by Ottomans following Bursa. The city of Skopje, displayed similar characteristics with Bursa in terms of its topography and urban pattern. Although their development differed after the Ottoman sovereignty ended, their early development displayed some similarities. The settlement pattern, during Early Ottoman Era, can be characterized with an existing citadel, a bazaar and neighborhoods called 'mahalle'. These neighborhoods were developed around a nucleus composed of religious, commercial, social and cultural buildings called 'kulliyeh'. Within the scope of this study, the similar urban pattern of Bursa as the first Ottoman capital and Skopje, as one of the earliest Balkan cities conquered by Ottomans is analyzed. There are various studies focusing on Early Ottoman urban pattern in Bursa and Skopje separately. However, the similarities of the development of these two cities are rarely studied. Therefore, this study aims to depict these similarities and the effect of Early Ottoman urban pattern on these two cities.

## Key words

Ottoman Era, Urban Pattern, Bursa, Skopje

## 1. URBAN PATTERN IN EARLY OTTOMAN ERA

There was an established Ottoman model for the development of new towns. So cities in Ottoman Empire had idiosyncratic social and physical organizations. The buildings and streets were not placed randomly. The city organization in Ottomans comprised of layered structure whose components were religious center, commercial center and housing zone.

The religious center and the commercial center which located out of the fortress, on slope of fortress hill made up Ottoman's city center [1]. The commercial center consisted of bazaar and closed bazaar called 'bedesten'. It was clear that a common settlement plan was applied in Ottoman's bazaar. The producer or seller of the same goods took close places to each other in the bazaar. The members of every profession (blacksmiths, shoemakers etc.) located different parts of bazaar. The commercial and religious center was focus point of Ottoman cities. Besides bazaar, the inns were also a commercial component which strengthened Ottoman economy. In Ottoman cities the main commercial axis which called long bazaar, began from 'bedesten'. The long bazaar was a place which all kinds of goods and services were sold.

Neighborhoods (Mahalle) which located around a religious building or a small bazaar were the basic housing settlement of the Ottoman city [2]. 'Mahalle' was a social, cultural and physical unit which consisted of people who were responsible of each other's behaviors and social, cultural solidarity [3]. People who had same profession lived in neighborhoods (Mahalle) which identified with their profession again. (For example neighborhood of blacksmiths or shoemakers)

However there were non-Muslim neighborhoods where non-Muslim people lived. The coexistence of people belonging to the same ethnic group didn't break their relationship with other people in the city. So the neighborhoods had never been autistic units.

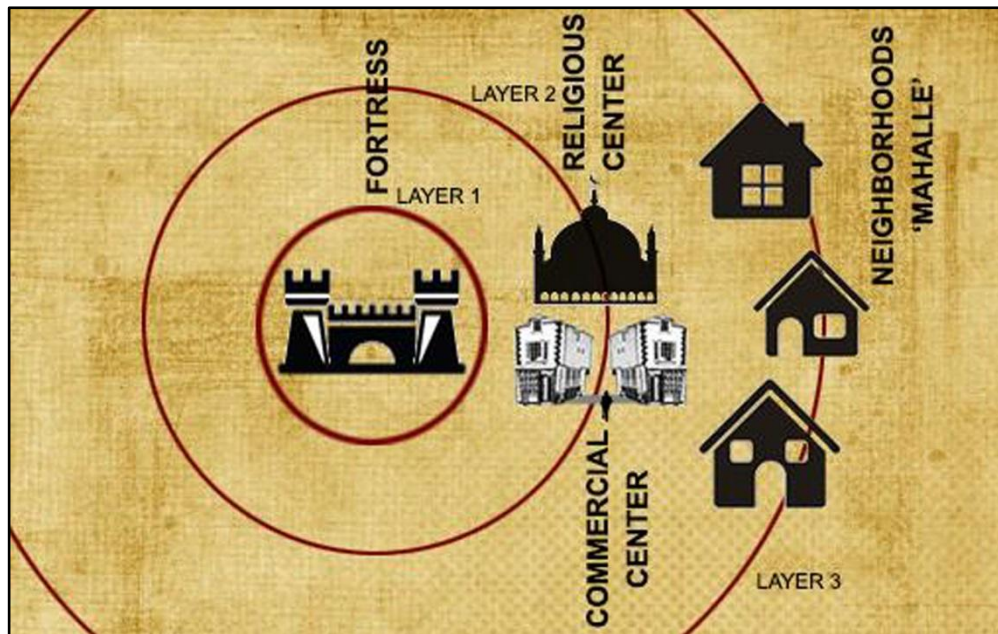


Figure 1. Urban Layers of Early Ottoman City

The residential part of the Ottoman towns separated from commercial areas. The quite modest form of the houses was the result of functional action. The houses in same character generated narrow and uneven roads. In Islamic cities, dead end streets were special roads which reached from main lines to houses [4]. There was no planned square in Ottoman cities. Mosques, bake houses, fountains were places where people meet.

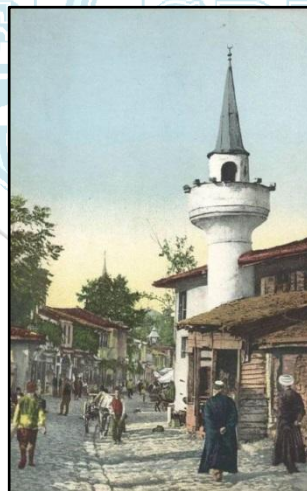


Figure 2. A View from Early Ottoman City [5]

## 2. BURSA CITY STRUCTURE IN EARLY ERA OF OTTOMAN EMPIRE

### 2.1. Bursa in Ancient Times

Bursa's history depends on to Romans, Byzantines. Bursa was conquered by Orhan Gazi (the second monarch of Ottomans.) in 1326. The city of Bursa located in a limited area in the fortress before the Ottoman Conquest. There were a library, stadium, bath, hippodrome, and colonnaded area (just like all big Roman cities) in Bursa in Roman era [6]. The most important development in Byzantium era was building an inner fortress next to the palace. The palace was used in Ottoman era as long as Bursa was the capital of Ottomans.

### 2.2. Bursa during Early Ottoman Era

After Orhan Gazi had conquered Bursa city, it was decided that the inner part of the fortress was remained and new settlements for providing house to new Turkish tribes in Anatolia were established out of the fortress. On the other hand inns, baths and almshouses, mosques were built from Çakırhamam to Setbaşı in Orhan Gazi era. The buildings which were

made by Orhan Gazi determined the main axis and center of Bursa city. The city center was a strategic focus which was the end of trade routes.

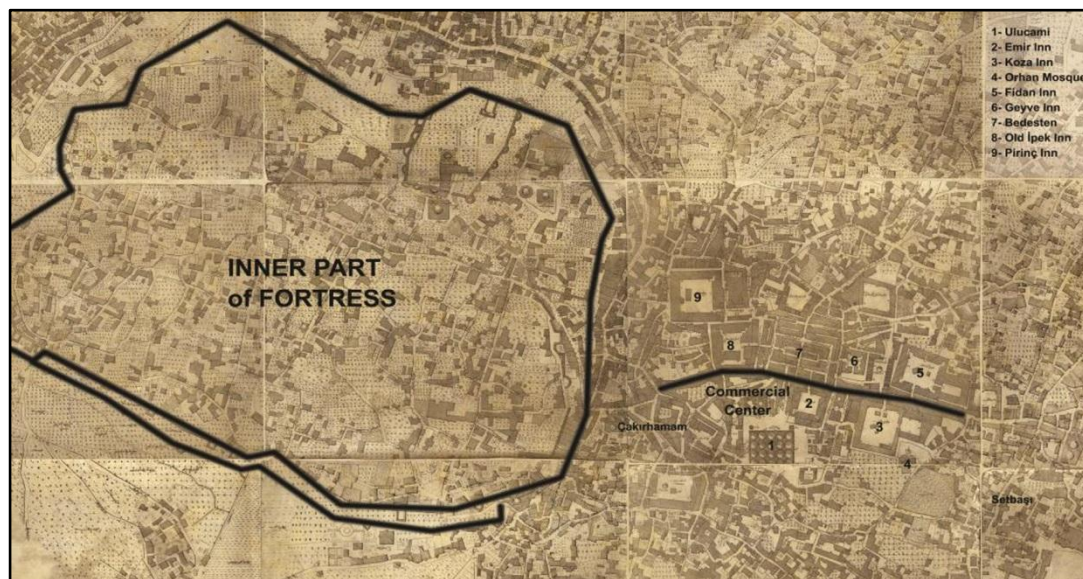


Figure 3. The Buildings which were constructed after Orhan Gazi period in Suphi Bey Map-1862 [7]

Monarchs (Sultans) who ruled the Ottomans after Orhan Gazi; continued to construct "Kulliye" in different part of Bursa city. This kind of buildings contributed to developing of the city. So and so, residential areas began to exist around "Kulliye" and city pattern of Bursa shaped. On the other hand Monarchs (Sultans) who ruled the Ottoman after Orhan Gazi constructed new buildings such as inns, bedesten (closed bazaar), and shops on the trade line to develop and strengthen the trade center.

The main dwelling units were neighborhoods in Early Ottoman era Bursa. The neighborhood was generally established around a bazaar or religious building. Neighborhoods in Ottomans were a whole unit with its activities and spiritual properties.

People in same neighborhood were interdependence with same religious belief, having same profession and other features which separate them other neighborhoods. But there were no wide squares for people's meeting just like European cities. Thus churches, mosques and bazaars were common places for inhabitants of the neighborhoods. These places were used for different aims if it was necessary [8].



Figure 4. A residential area in Bursa which remained from Ottomans [9]

The narrow and irregular streets went towards to mosque, bazaar or church in neighborhood. There was only one main road one neighborhood to another neighborhood. This case was the proof of separated neighborhoods.

As well as 'Kulliye', the places where were settled by dervishes were established as neighborhood too. The travelling dervishes played a major role in Ottoman's conquest policy. Travelling dervishes had visited the places to conquer and prepared mentally to local people for conquest. These Ottoman's conquest policy provided to emerge new kind of mosque which shaped as 'Reverse T' plan type.



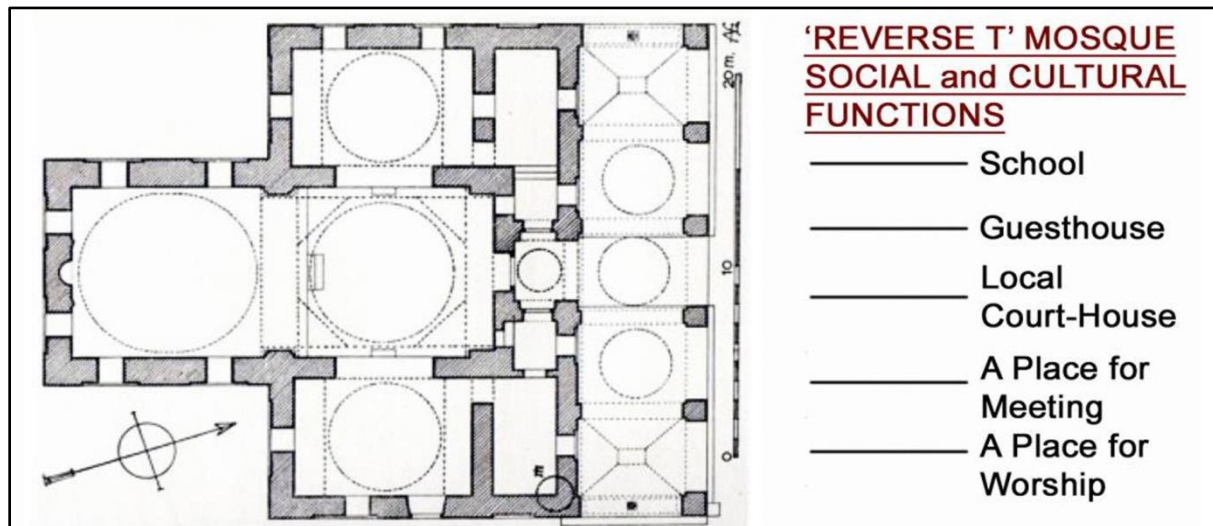


Figure 5. A Reverse T Mosque Example [10]

### 3. SKOPJE URBAN PATTERN IN EARLY OTTOMAN ERA

#### 3.1. Skopje City and Geographical Features

Skopje is the capital of Macedonia and located the north part of the country. Geographical features of the city have influenced the city character. First of all the city of Skopje located in a valley which consisted of surrounding mountains and cross rivers. Vodno Mountain on south, Suva Gora Mountain on southwest and Skopska Crna Gora Mountain on north encircled the city of Skopje.

The ground of Skopje occurred with alluvium which deposited by rivers such as Treska, Lepenec, Sereva and Vardar. Thus the district of Skopje has had fertile lands and has been a suitable place to settle since ancient times. The humid Subtropical Climate is effective in the region. So it is hot, humid in summer and usually mild to cool in winter. Dominant wind direction is from north to east just like flow direction of Vardar River.



Figure 6. Location of Skopje City [11]

#### 3.2. Road Networks of Skopje

The Valley of Skopje has been used as living space since ancient times. The Via Egnatia was a road which connected Roma to Istanbul. The road crossed the Roman provinces such as Macedonia. In this context, the Skopje Valley which located around Via Egnatia Road had a strategic position.



Figure 7. Position of Egnatia Road [12]

In 1928 Map, we can observe that local transit highways crossed via Skopje. So the city of Skopje located another important trade route from Middle-East Europe to Salonika (Aegean). On the other hand, the main highways on Skopje Valley followed Northwest-Southeast direction (Flow direction of River Vardar).

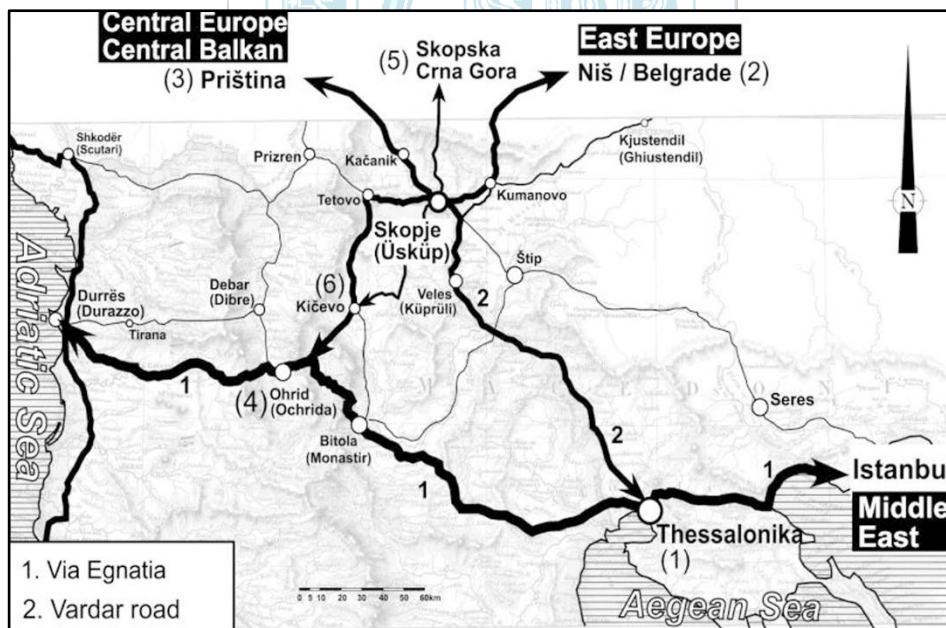


Figure 8. Road Network of Skopje in 1928 Map [13]

### 3.1. Urban Fabric of Skopje in Early Ottoman Era

According to Stern, the fabric of Islamic cities is different from the cities in Europe because of lack of square and municipality [14]. Thus lack of square surrounded with public buildings caused a different urban structure in Ottoman cities.

Before Ottoman Empire, the city of Skopje was under the rule of Byzantium, Bulgarian and Serbia. In spite of having limited knowledge concerning this period, it was thought that the city of Skopje was composed of four urban zones.



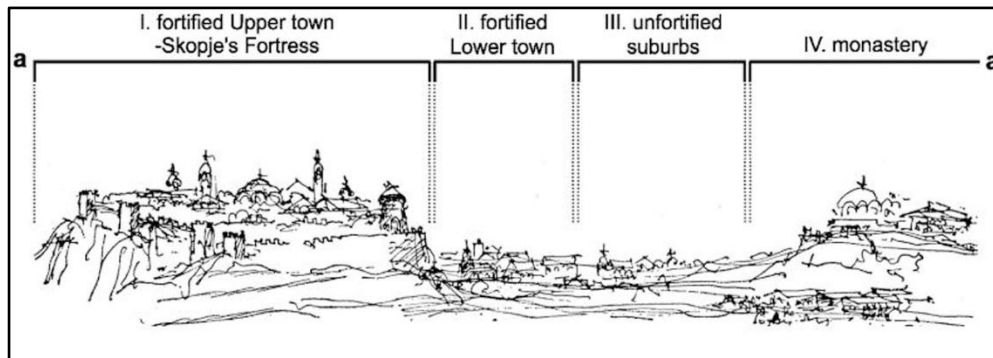


Figure 9. Urban Zones of Skopje before Ottomans [15]

After the city of Skopje had been conquered by Ottomans in 1392, the city developed according to Ottoman's urban principle and character. According to these principles the city of Skopje consisted of three urban layers:

- The fortress which was built on fortress hill
- The main mosque and the bazaar (consisted of inns, bedesten and shops) which was built on east slope of fortress hill
- Neighborhoods (Mahalle) which surrounding the city center

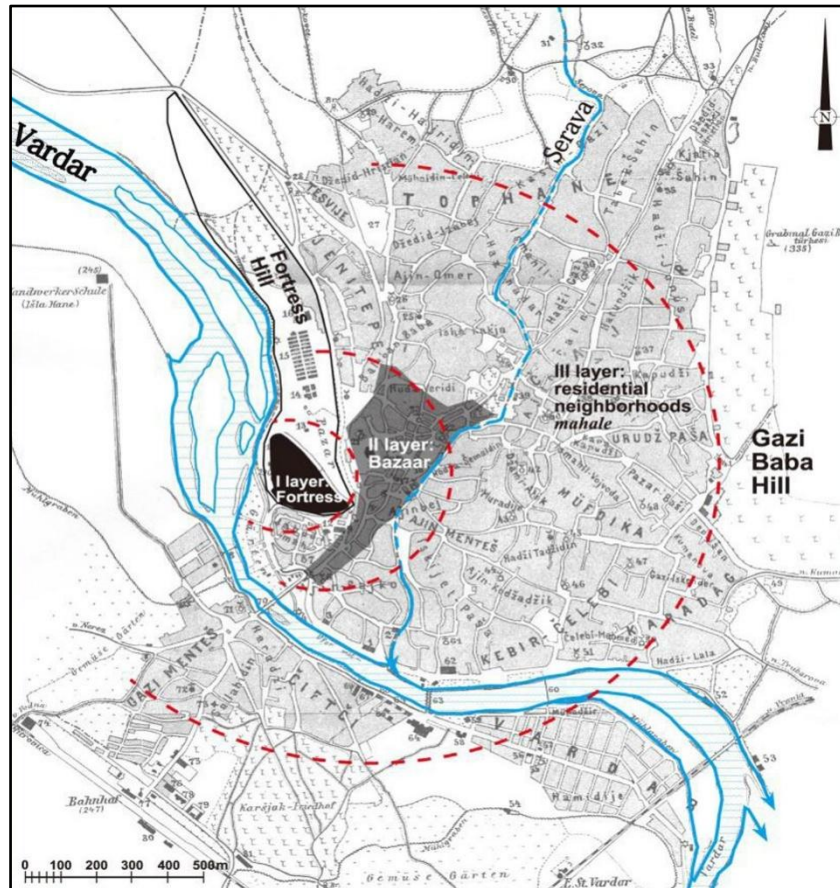


Figure 10. Urban Zones of Skopje in Early Ottoman Era [15]

The city of Skopje in Early Ottoman Era was located between Fortress Hill on West and Gazi Baba Hill on East. Sereva River flowed parallelly to main axis of city (long bazaar) between these hills and disembogued to River Vardar. The geographic features of fortress hill made here a perfect defense point.

Ottoman Bazaar played a major role in development of Skopje. The buildings such as inns, mosques, baths, Bedesten which were built out of the fortress formatted the religious and commercial focus of the city.

Also neighborhoods were situated encircling the religious and commercial center. The neighborhoods where houses located on were living spaces for people who had same cultural, ethnic specialty. The neighborhoods had a small center which consisted of a mosque, a bake house or a church.

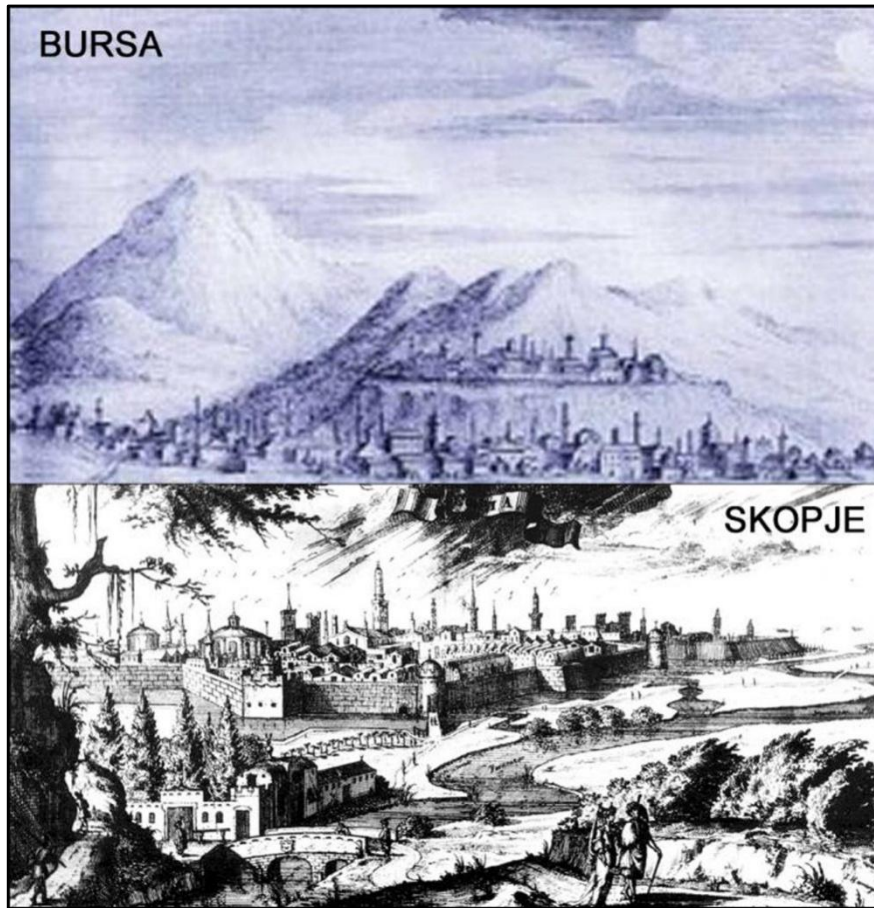


Figure 11. Comparison of Bursa and Skopje [16a and 16b]

#### 4. RESULTS

The Ottoman urban strategy which can be observed in Bursa urban fabric in Early Ottoman Era such as developed an urban zone (consisted of bazaar and main Friday Mosque) in the city center and residential neighborhoods around community centers (mosques, churches, school etc.) in the outskirts of the city also constituted the main character of Skopje City. Moreover facilities such as Bedesten (special buildings for trade), inns, baths, and mosques are common components of bazaar of Bursa and Skopje. In addition to all of these, the construction of special commercial building Bedesten in Skopje bazaar in 1438 following Bursa (1400) was supporting fact that Bursa urban pattern influenced Skopje city structure in early Ottoman Era.

One of the prominent buildings of Early Ottoman Era was 'T Shaped Mosques' which were used multipurposely for worship, meeting, education, judgment or hospitality. This type of buildings were found in firstly Bursa and around. Besides Bursa, 'T Shaped Mosques' could also observed the cities which ruled by Ottomans such as Edirne, Filibe, Skopje.

Finally it can be said that Bursa urban fabric set an example for Skopje city center in the Early Ottoman Era. So there is a strong influence of Bursa city creations on Skopje city center. It is possible to see the effect in the historical city centers even today.

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