

THE TEKKE OF AKYAZILI SULTAN
BETWEEN VARNA AND BALCHIK (BULGARIA)
(SUMMARY)

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In the travels of Evliya Çelebi while he is telling one of his journeys in 1652, he mentioned the tekke of Akyazılı Sultan which is in the north of Varna. This tekke being considered as one of the important works of Turkish art and history of the Ottoman empire. I was glad to have the opportunity of going there in the summer of 1966. This survey about the tekke of Akyazılı Sultan is being presented with the purpose of bringing out its historical and architectural identity.

As Evliya Çelebi relates, this Turkish mystic named Akyazılı was one of the disciples of *Hoca Ahmed Yesevi* who was an important head of the Turks in Central Asia. Akyazılı came to Bursa with Hacı Bektaş and later, during the conquest of *Rumeli*, he settled there. Evliya Çelebi also tells two stories about his *vita* and miracles. The first story deals with his planting of a horse chestnut tree which was believed to contain the special quality of being curative. The second story is more historical in character. It was supposed that Akyazılı had lived from the reign of Orhan Gazi until the reign of Murat II. He was the moral support of *Gazi Mihaloğlu Arslan Bey* who was the leader of the great raids in *Rumeli*. When he died, Arslan Bey built a unique tekke and a tomb for him near this chestnut tree. After describing the architecture of the tomb, Evliya Çelebi also mentions that this place is known for curing sick people. Even, he himself got over his malaria here and for that reason he wrote a couplet on the wall.

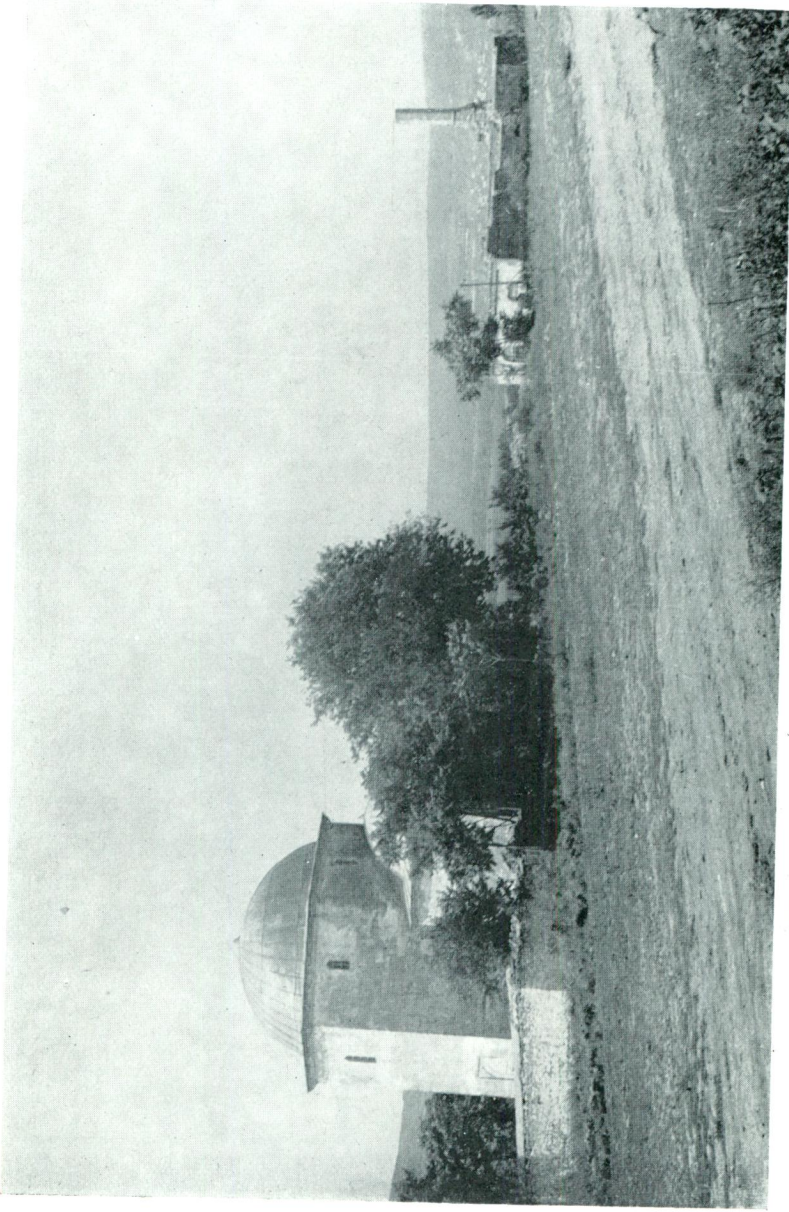
His most important observation is about the *tekke*. The *tekke* which is a polygon of seven sides and which has a pointed cap like that of *Galata Tower* is situated near the woods. The outside of the cap is lead and its inside is wooden and it has a crest at the top. From inside it is decorated like a dome and it is not supported with any pouts. A chandelier with three hundred oil - lamps hangs down from the center of the ceiling. The inside is covered with marble and there is a

fountain for ablutions (*şadırvan*) in the center. Around the main pole, supporting the cap, there is a great number of girders carrying the wooden framework of the roof. Besides, the *tekke* is rich in its estates. The *Bektashi Dervishes*, here, were interested in handcrafts and when a guest came, they entertained him for three days and three nights.

The important deeds of the Saints of *Horasan*, during the foundation of the Ottoman Empire and also during the conquests of *Anadolu* and *Rumeli*, have been known for a long time. It is thought that Akyazılı, whose original name is unknown, was one of them. There is the possibility that this saint was not a member of an order, but that he was just a saint of Horasan, or a *Ghazi* or even that he might be an *Akhi*. May be, later, this basis that had been built for him was adopted by the *Bektashis*. This might be just a guess. However, in any case, the *tekke* of Akyazılı is known in history as the *tekke* of the *Bektashis* or even as an *âsitane* (head monastery). Like the *tekke*, the tomb was built with seven sides following the principle of the holy number of *Bektashis* which shows their power over their thoughts. It is also known that the *Bektashis* had brought with them some of the beliefs of the *Shamanists* of Central Asia. It is for this reason, that in the 16 th century, during the combat between the *Shiis* and the *Sunnis*, it was possible for *Kızılbaş* and *Alevi* to merge with the *Bektashi*. The great number of the *Bektashi* *tekkes* in *Rumeli* shows the importance of this order among the Turks of that area. It is certain, that *Evliya Çelebi*, while writing about this *tekke* made use of a *vita* concerning Akyazılı.

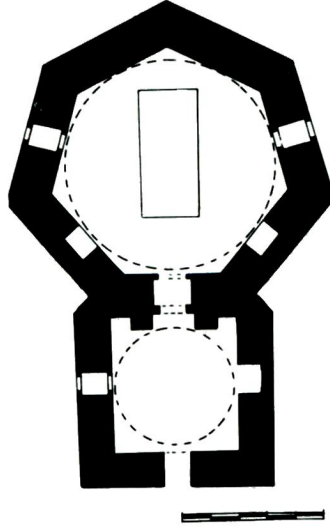
In previous years some poems about Akyazılı were found. *Yemini*, the writer of the "*Fazilet-nâme*" mentions that Akyazılı Sultan became the head of the order (*Pîr*) during the years of 1495-96. If he, and the saint of this *tekke* are the same person, then he might have lived during the late 15 th and early 16 th century and thus he was alive when the "*Fazilet-nâme*" was written in 1519. On the other hand, it is known that during the 15 th and the 16 th centuries the *Mihaloğlu* family, gave importance to other *Bektashi* centers. So, the *tekke* of *Seyyid Ghazi* near *Eskişehir* was enlarged and new sections were built by this family. One can read about their deeds in the inscriptions.

In some of the *Bektashi* poems the name of Akyazılı Sultan appears in the first line. (*Hacı Bektash*, *Balım Sultan*, *Sarı İsmail Sultan*,

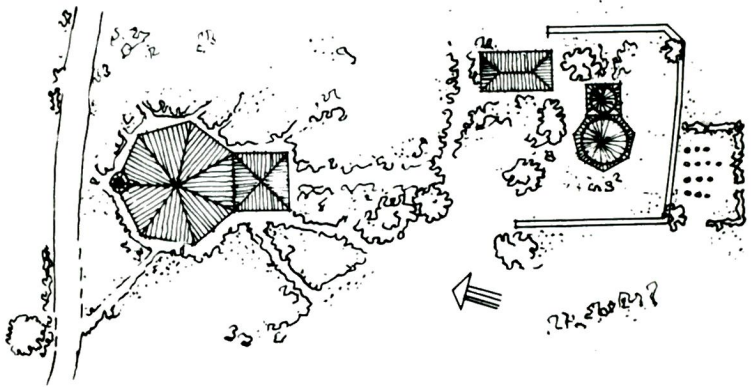


Res. 1 — Akyazlı Türbe ve şitanesinin genel görünüşü.

S. Eyice



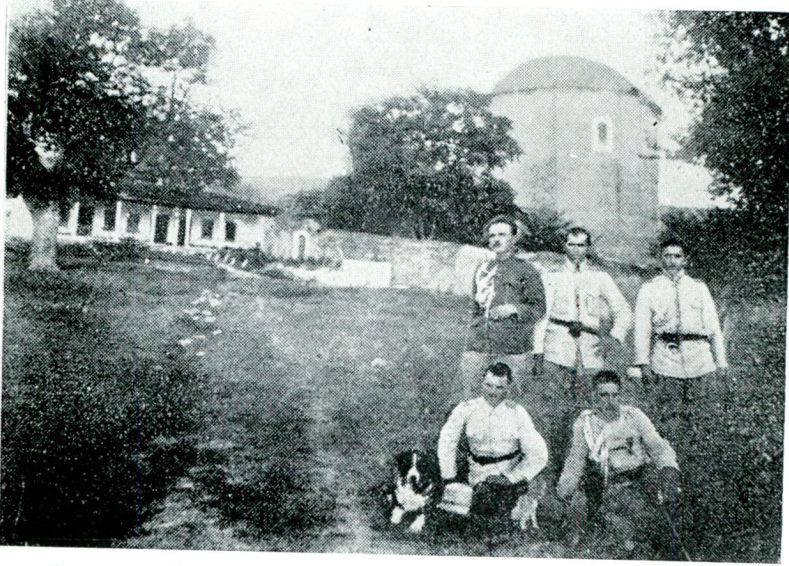
Res. 2 — Akyazılı Türbesinin plânı.



Res. 3 — Türbe ve tekkenin vaziyet kroki
(Bulgar mimarisi tarihi'ndeki plândan).

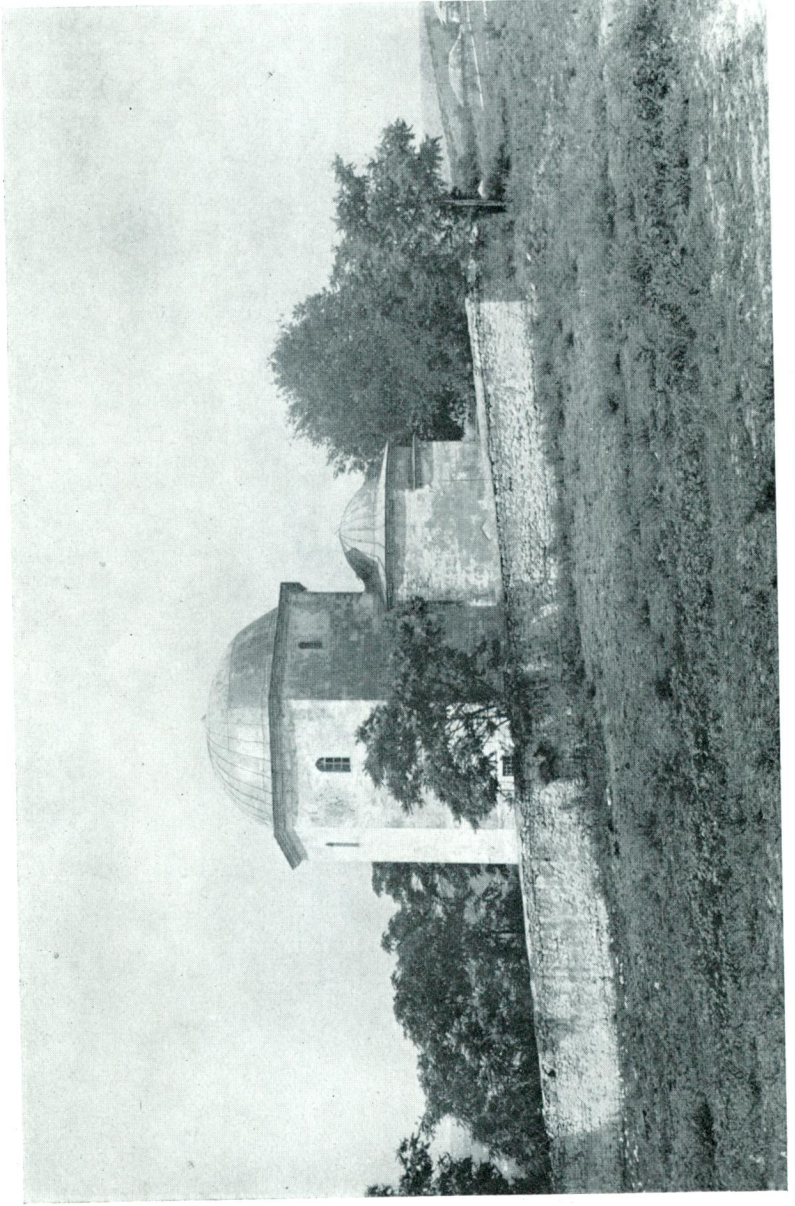


Res. 4 — Akyazılı Türbesinin eski bir fotosu (Hielscher'den).



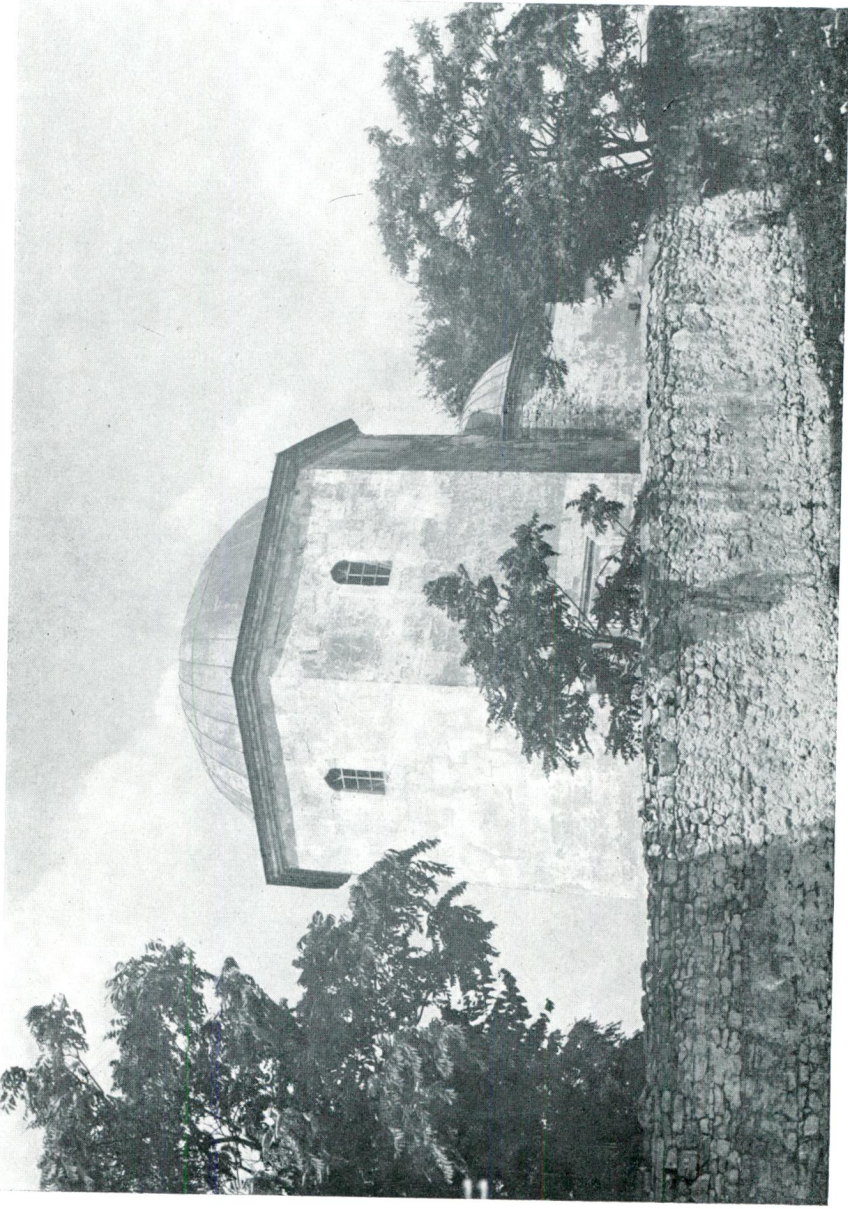
Res. 5 — Akyazılı Türbesinin 1920 deki durumu (Tafralı'den).

S. Eyice



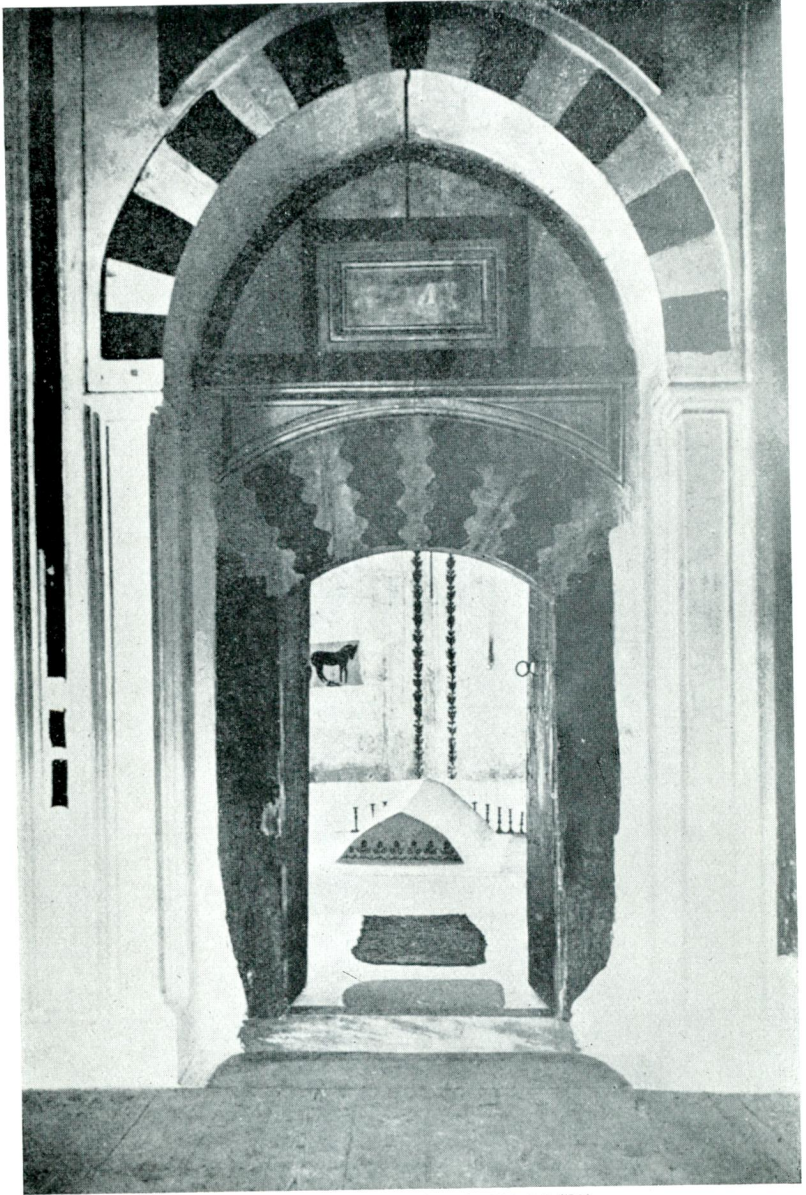
Res. 6 — Akyazlı Türbesinin bugünkü durumu.

S. Eyice



Res. 7 — Akyazlı Türbesi.

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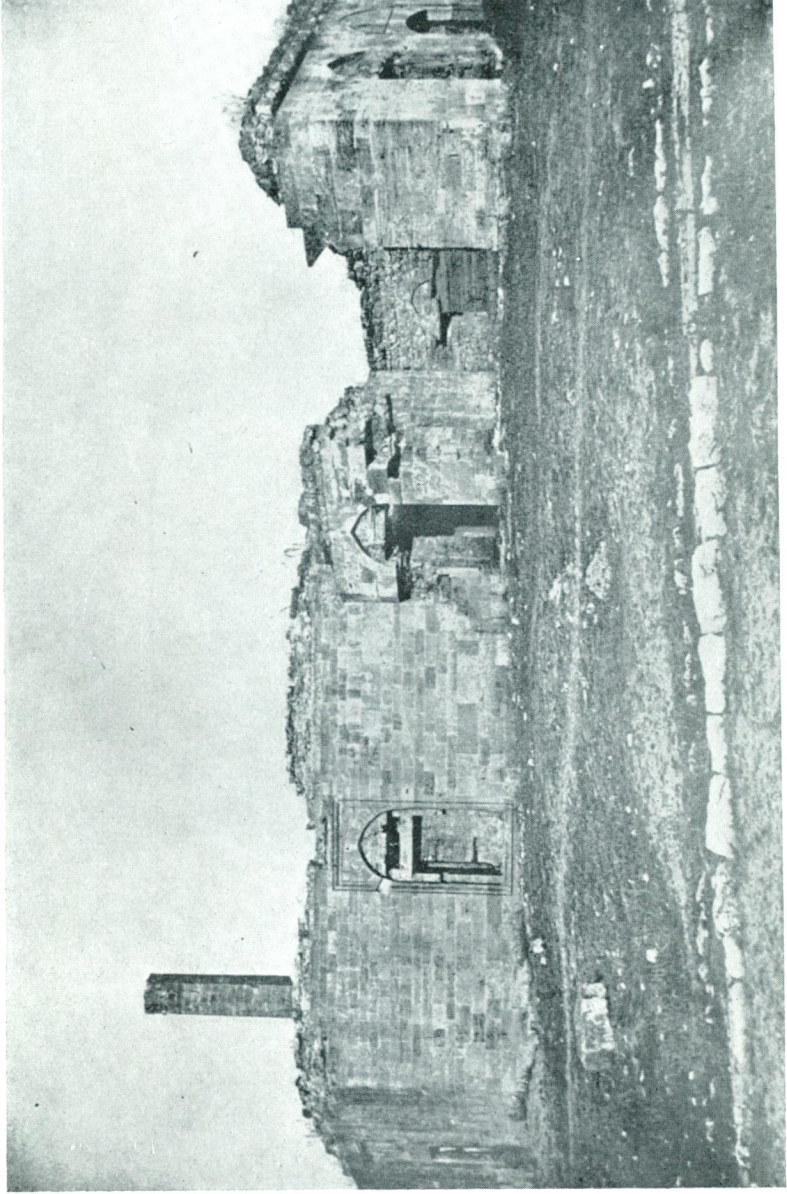


Res. 8 — Akyazılı Türbesinin iç kapısı ile iç görünüşü
1930 - 33 yıllarında (Iorga'dan).

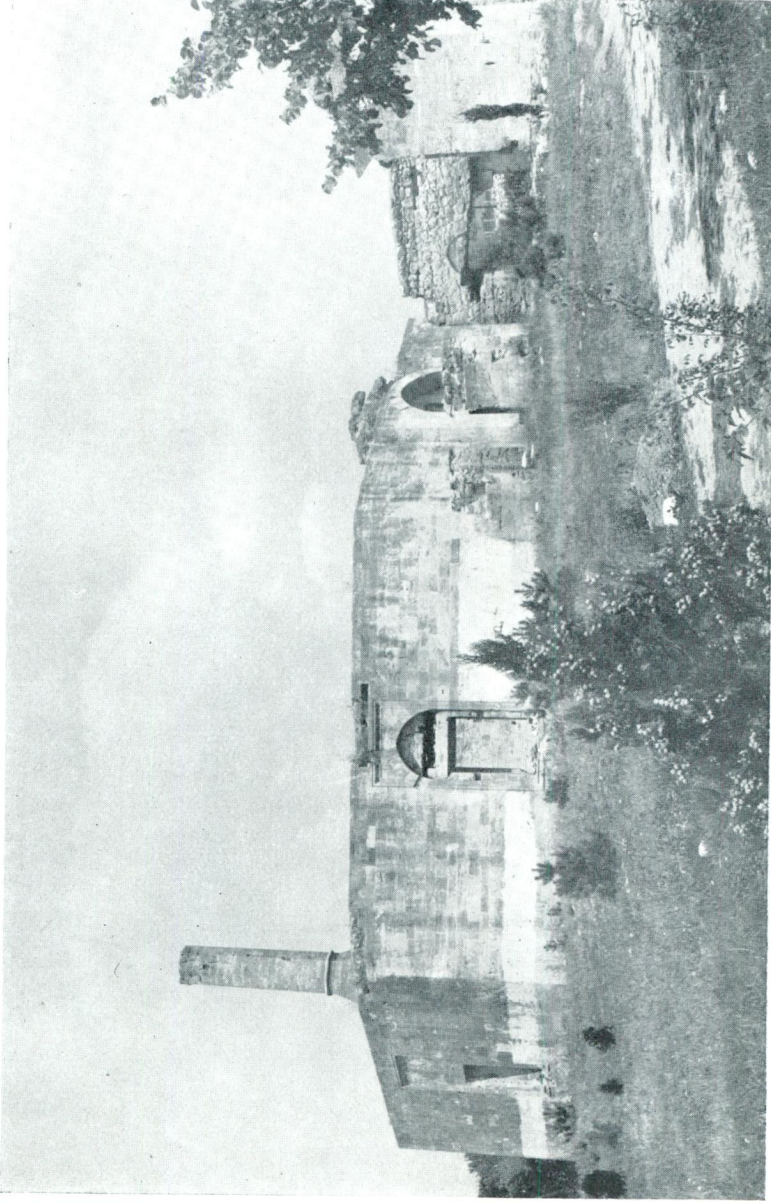


Res. 9 — Akyazılı Türbesi, medhal kısmının dış kapısının şimdiki görünüşü.

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Res. 10 — Akyazılı Āsitanesinin eski bir fotosu. Duvarların üst kısımları ile medhal holünün pencereci duvarı henüz durmaktadır.

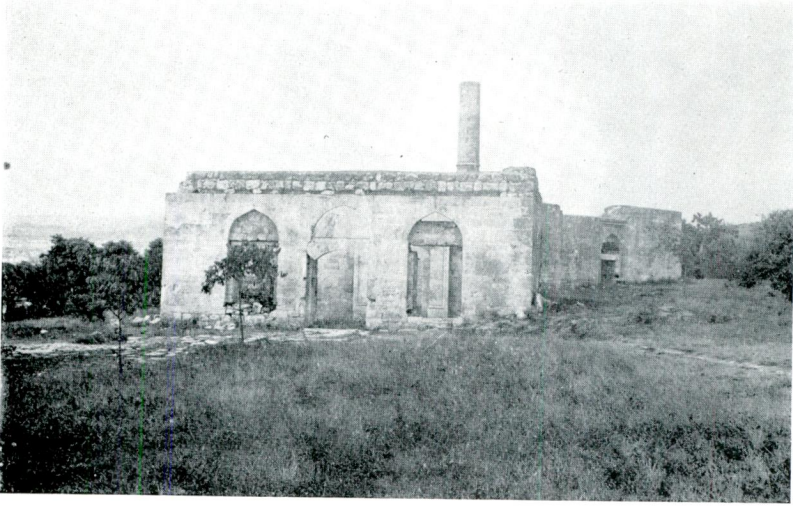


Res. 11 — Akyazılı asitanesi aynı noktadan şimdiki görünüşü.
Bazı kısımların ortadan kalktukları farkedilmektedir.

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Res. 12 — Akyazılı âsitanesinin medhal holünden
meydanevine geçişi sağlayan kapısı.

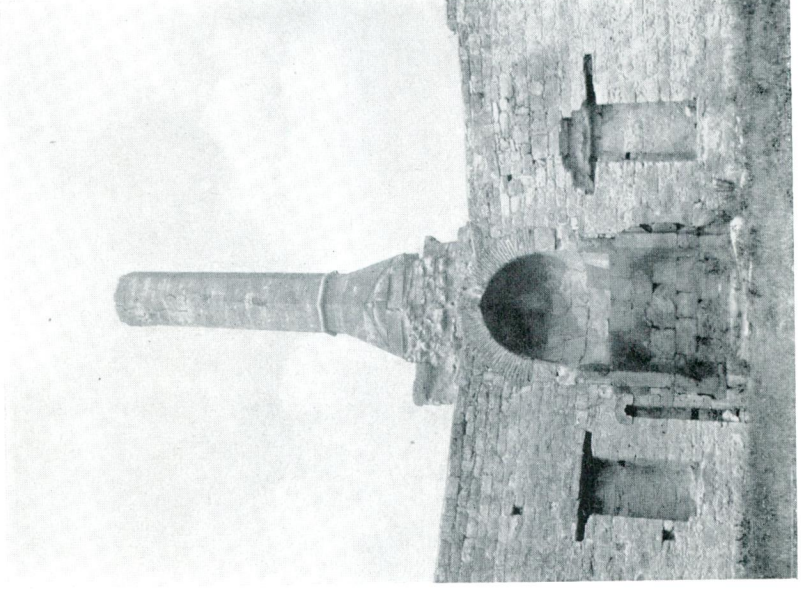


Res. 13 — Akyazılı âsitanesinin giriş cephesi.

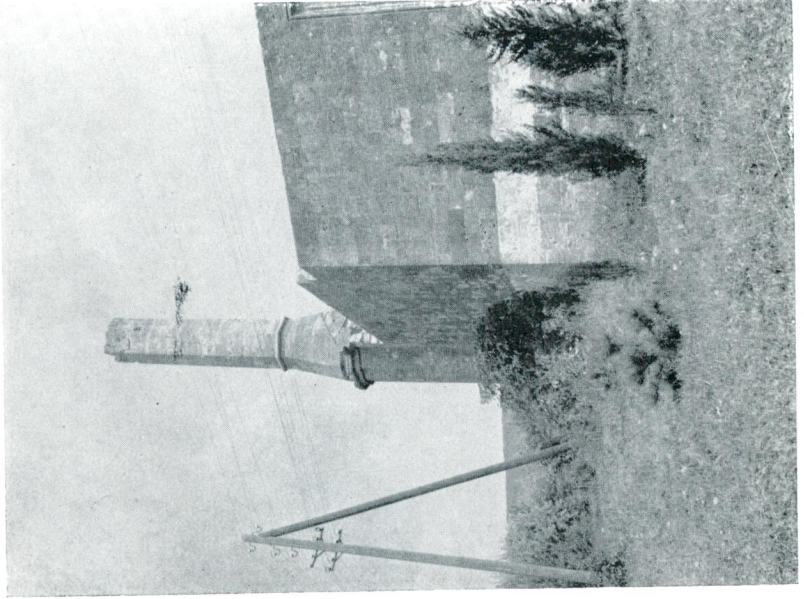


Res. 14 — Akyazılı âsitanesinin meydanevi ocağı,
solda çırağ-ı Ali'nin özel yeri görülmür.

S. Eyice



Res. 15 — Āsitanenin ocađı ve bacası.



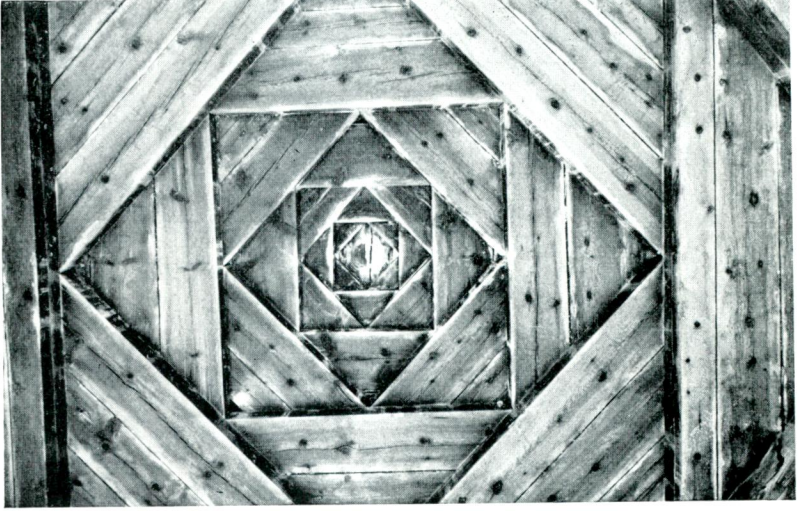
Res. 16 — Āsitanenin bacası.

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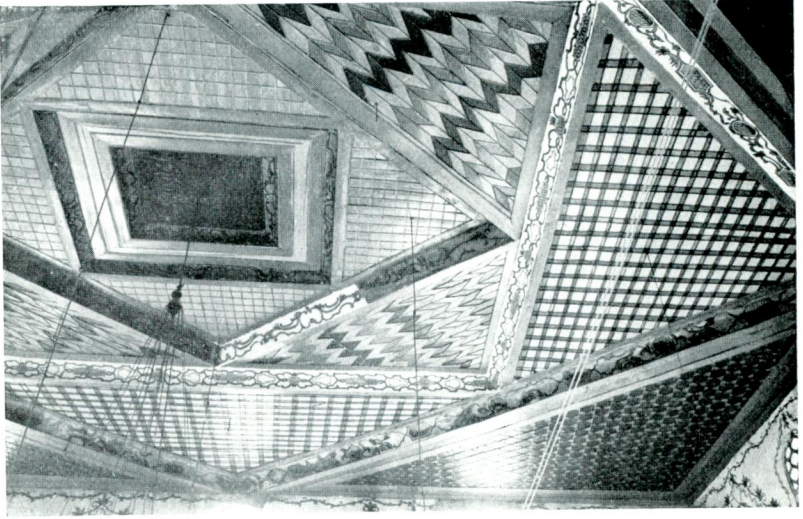


Res. 17 — Akyazılı âsitanesinin meydanevi'nin plân - krokisi.

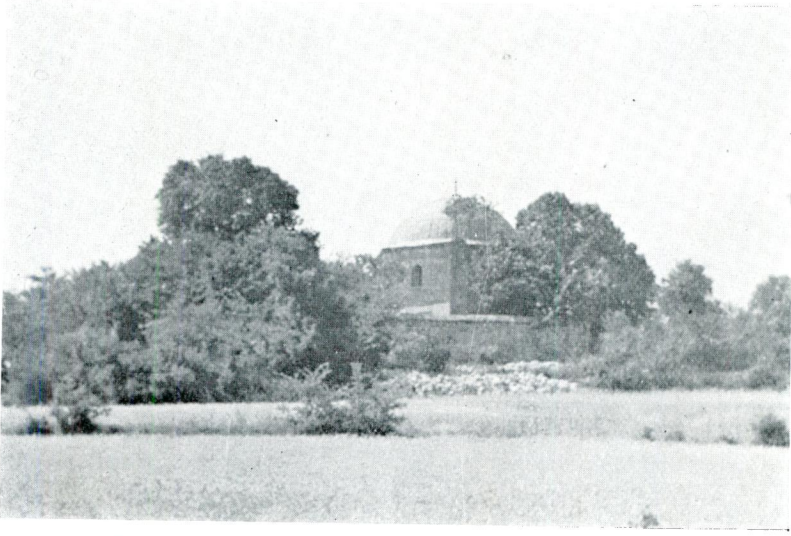
S. Eyice



Res. 18 — Hacı Bektaş tekkesinin ahşap tavanı (1965 - foto: Y. Demiriz).



Res. 19 — Lefke - Osmaneli'nde Rüstem Paşa camii'nin tavanı
(1967 - foto: Y. Demiriz).

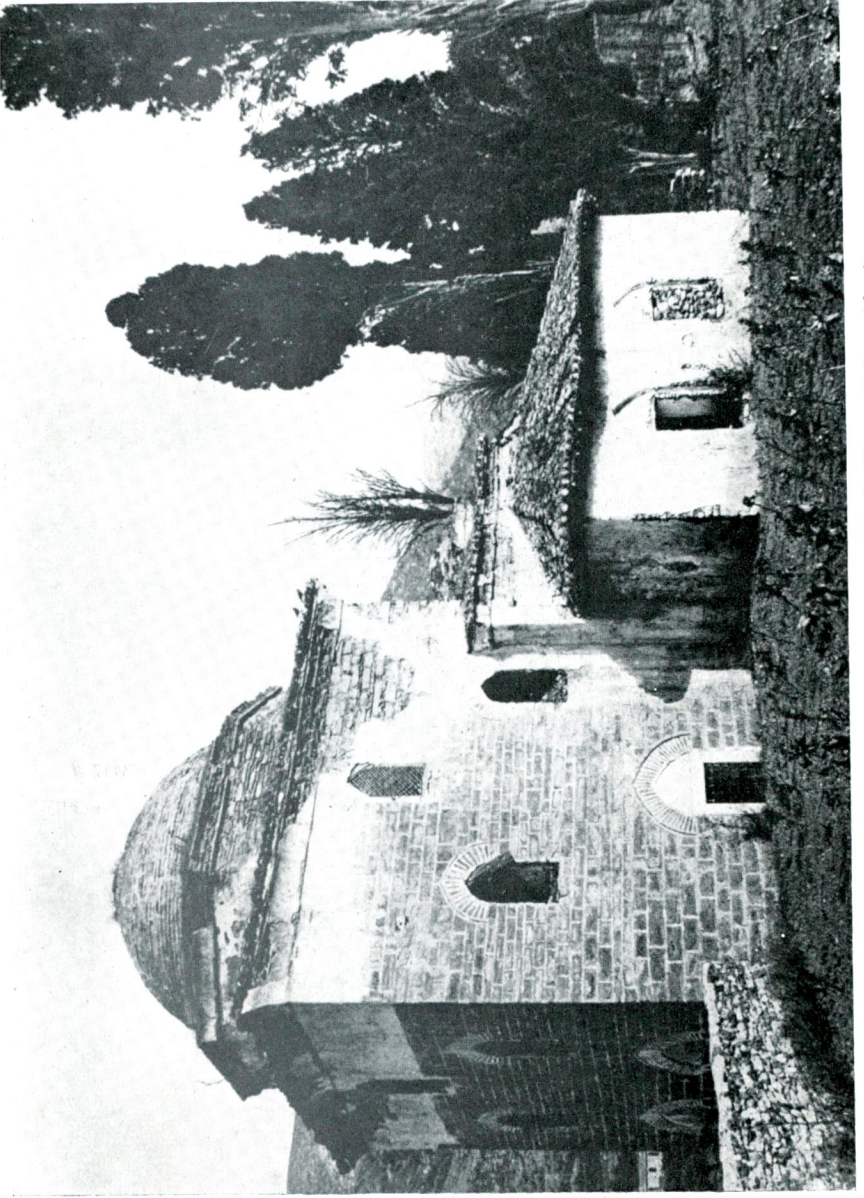


Res. 20 — Haskova (Hasköy) yakınında Otman Baba tekkesinin türbesi.



Res. 21 — Pınarhisar yakınında Ahmed Baba türbesi (1961 - foto: I. Hattatoğlu).

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Res. 22 — Tempe vâdisinde Baba köyünde Hasan Baba tekkesi.

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Res. 23 — Hasan Baba tekkesi (Reisinger'den).

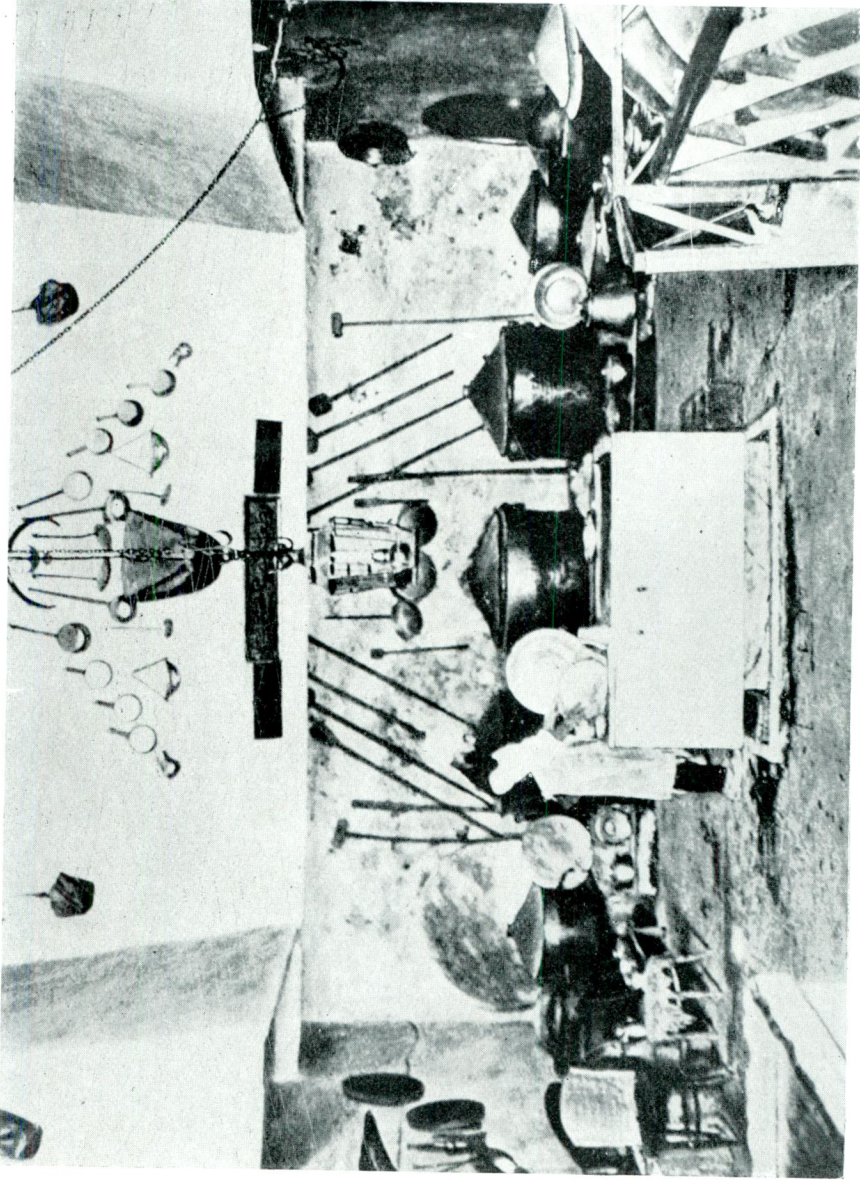


Res. 24 — İstanbul Merdivenköyü'nde tekkenin orta direği
kâidesinde oniki çırağ (foto: Y. Demiriz).

S. Eyice



Res. 25 — İstanbul - Merdivenköyü tekkesinin oniki dilimli kubbesi (foto: Y. Demiriz).

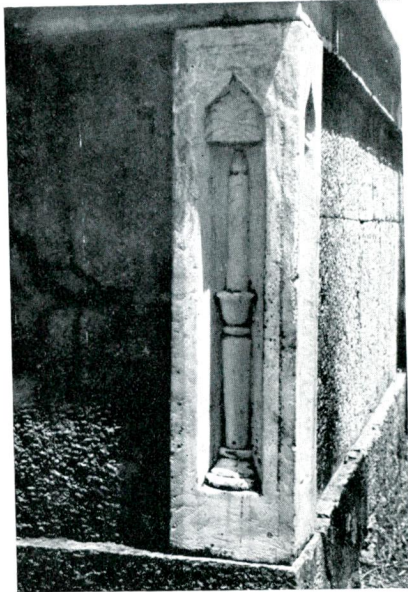


Res. 26 — Mısır'da bir Bektâşî tekkesinin mutfağı ve ocakları.

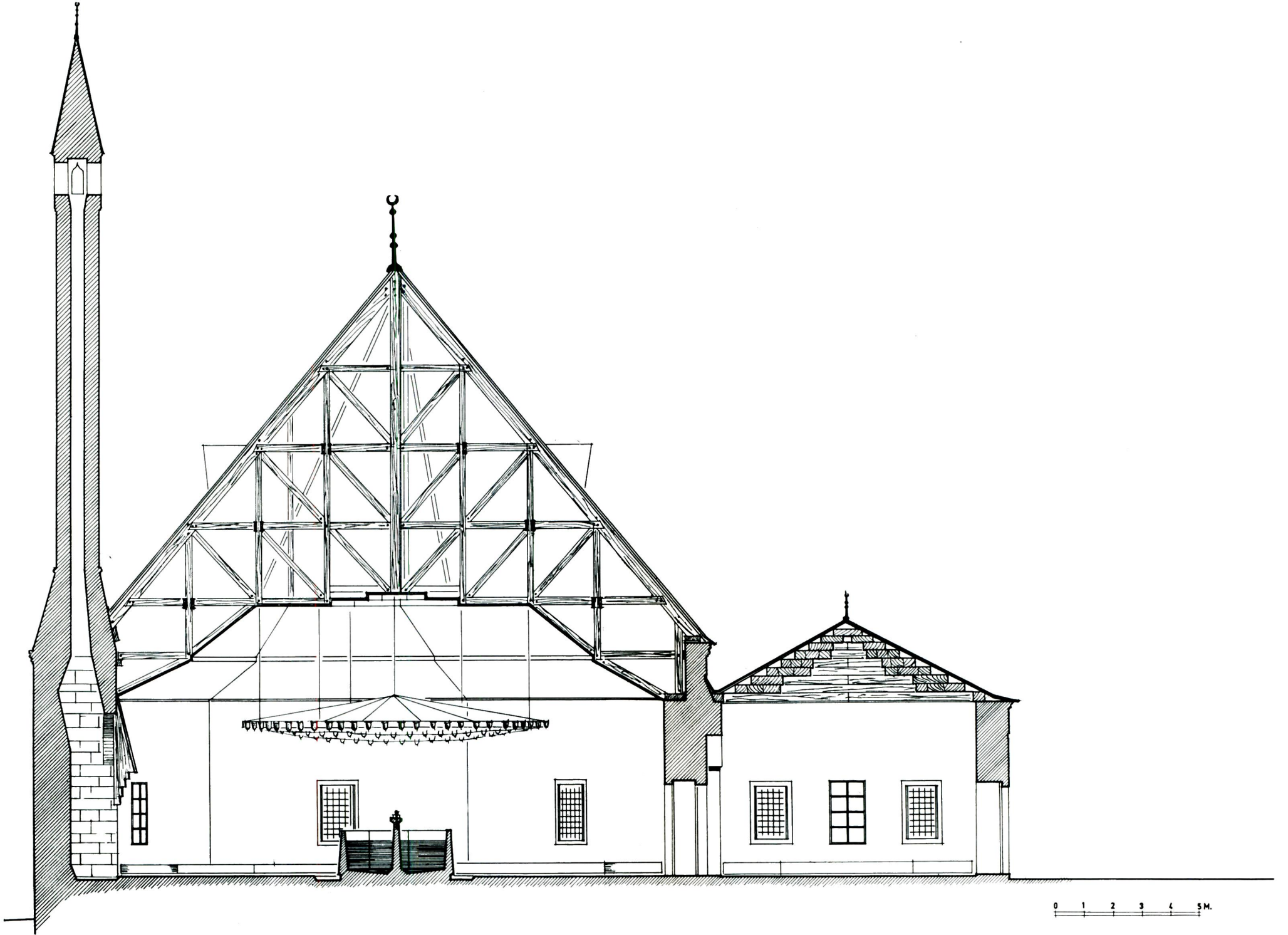
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Res. 27 — Romanya'da Babadağı'nda Sarı Saltuk türbesinin girişi (1966 da).

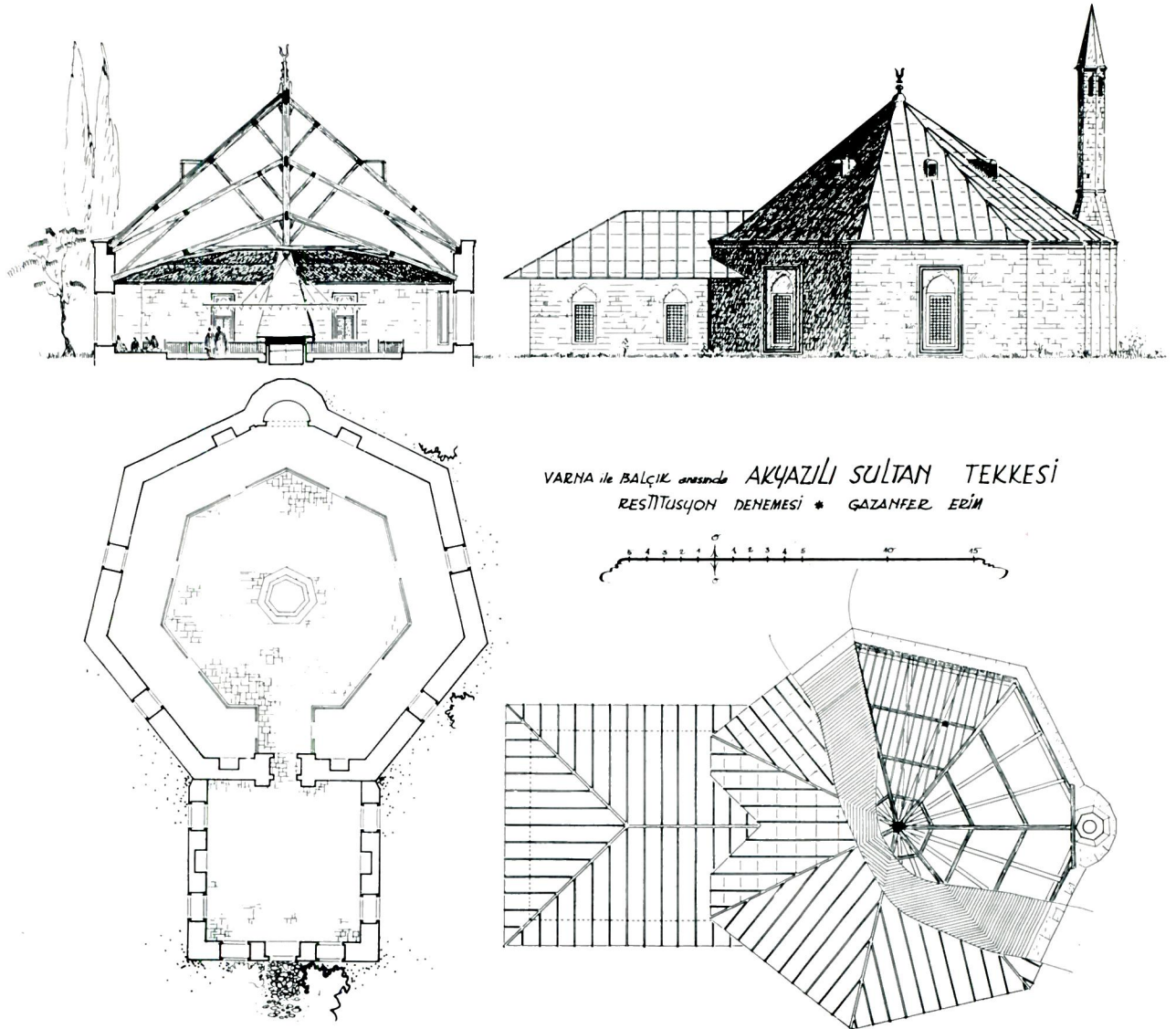


Res. 28 — İstanbul'da Göztepe'de Gözcü Baba haziresinde çırağ-ı Ali.



Lev. I. — Akyazılı Āsitanesinin restitüsyon kesiti denemesi (Yük. Mimār Ali Muslubāş tarafından çizilmiştir).

S. Eyice



Lev. II. — Akyazlı âsitanesinin diğeri bir restitüsyon denemesi
(Yük. Mimar Gazanfer Erim tarafından çizilmiştir).

Cemaleddin Sultan, Hacım Sultan, Abdal Musa Sultan, Seyid Ali Sultan, Akyazılı Sultan, Sarı Saltuk Sultan, Kaygusuz Sultan). We know quite a number of *ghazi* Saints concerned in some way with the conquests of the Early Ottoman Empire : Around their tombs, tekkes and also Bektashi tekkes were established. *Geyikli Baba* around Bursa and many others in *Rumeli* are the examples of this. Evliya Çelebi writes about the “*zaviye*” of Kılğara Sultan in Kaliagra near Varna. Another tekke of *Sarı Saltuk* is in Babadağ, Rumania. Only the tomb remains today. Evliya Çelebi also tells us about the magnificent tekke of the Bektashi which was built for janissary *Piri Efendi* in Pravadi (now Provadija), west of Varna. Further west, between Hezargrad (now Razgrad) and Tutrokan in the picturesque valley stands the tomb and the tekke of *Demir Baba* (or Timur Baba?). In the south, in Uzuncaova between Hasköy (today Haskovo) and Harmanlı there is another Bektashi tekke named the tekke of *Otman Baba* which still remains with its classical style. In the Turkish section of Rumeli, between *Pınarhisar* and *Kırklareli*, in the village *Tekke*, we can see the magnificent tomb of *Binbiroklı Ahmed Baba* but, unfortunately its *tekke* does not remain. The names of many other historical tekkes in Albania and Yugoslavia are also known. Such foundations in Ishtip (Ştip), Üsküp (Skopje), Kalkandelen and Prizren were destroyed during and after the Balkan war. In order to defend the dangerous gorges, to help travellers and to give them food and shelter without taking their religions into consideration, to revive the old and ruined buildings and to do other social services *tekkes* were being built in various places. We can also see tekkes of this kind in several parts of Greece. Here we may mention the tomb and the tekke of *Hasan Baba*, in the valley of Tempe which had been built to defend such an important gorge. For the farthest away examples we may mention the tekke of *Gül Baba* in Budin (Budapest) and the tekke of *İdris Baba* in Pecuy (Pecz), Hungary. We also know of the existence of such foundations in Egypt. Even though this is a typical sign of the spreading of Turks, a complete geographical study of these foundations has not yet been done. The head Monastery of Akyazılı is the largest one of these and from the architectural point of view, it is one of the most interesting tekkes among its kind. The cult of the holy tree which was widely spread among the Central Asian Turks, can also be seen here.

According to Evliya Çelebi the tekke of Akyazılı was built by *Arslan Bey*, a member of the *Ghazi Mihal oğulları* family. However, this family doesn't seem to have any relative by this name. It is also known that, during the conquests of *Rumeli*, *Mihal oğulları* who were known as the raiders of *Mihal* have attacked Plevne, Niğbolu, Sofia and Semendre. It has been discovered that this family developed and grew in Plevne, Tirnovo and Ihtiman and they also had relatives and members under the same name in Anatolia in Bursa, and Amasya. The close relationship and connection of *Mihal oğulları* with Bektashis is certain. The tekke of *Battal Ghazi* near Eskişehir was reconstructed with new additions by *Mihal oğlu Ali Bey*, *Hızır Bey*, and *Ahmed Bey* between 1493-4 and 1511. The inscriptions which still exist today verifies this reconstruction. Therefore, it is possible that what Evliya Çelebi stated can be placed upon a reliable basis. If one day any trust or deed can be found, then we will have exact knowledge about the reconstruction and will also learn which member of the *Mihaloğlu* family gave today's appearance to the *tekke*. However, both the characteristics of style and some later documents give us the early XVI th century (Period of Selim I. ?) as a foundation date.

Unfortunately the place of the inscription above the door of the *tekke* is empty today. The inscription which previously filled its place and which could have solved all the problems was taken out at an unknown date and for an unknown reason. If one day this inscription is found, then the history of this building may come to light.

A few documents connected with this foundation were found in the Istanbul archives. If a wider study were to be done then more documents could be found. A record about the foundations and the dervishes of the *tekke* of Akyazılı was found in a register in the Archive of the Prime Ministry (Defteri Hakanî - the Register Book, Silistre, No. 542, row 53). Since the rights that were given to this *tekke* are written in this record, it is obvious that this *tekke* was completed before the reign of Selim I (1512-1520) and in some respects it belonged to his religious foundations.

During the reign of Kanunî Süleyman (1520-1566) the *Kızılbash abdals* from Iran merged with the tekke of *Seyyid Ghazi* and many others. In order to prevent this, the Sultan took stern measures and later between the years of 1555/6 - 1557/8 he scattered the members of this tekke and even kept some of them in the prisons of Kütahya.

From this date on *Seyyid Ghazi* was made a *medrese* (religious school). At the same time (1559) the *cadi* (judge) of Varna was instructed to control the tekkes of *Sarı Saltuk* and Akyazılı and he was also instructed to prevent the manufacture of drinks being made at such places. After passing through this crisis, the tekke became a rich and well cared for foundation of the Bektashis in XVII th century, in the days of Evliya Çelebi. Çelebi had seen this place in a perfect state in 1652.

The document, with the date of 1711, which was found in the Archive of Prime Ministry (No. 20176, the Book of Estates), tells us only of the appointment of the *tekke* as being a Sheikhdome. However, another document found in Topkapı Sarayı, and dated 1765, tells us of the great crisis that this magnificent *tekke* has undergone in the late XVIII. th century. This rich foundation and its land were seized by various people. This document also gives us the names of the people who controlled the *tekke* of Akyazılı from 1741 on. During this time *Derwish Kalender* got control of the tekke in a very strange way. Even though he benefited from the income he didn't spend anything for it, he sold the pets and animals of the *tekke*. The ones that he couldn't sell, he let go. He tore down the lead parts of the *Tekke* and sold the lead and left the place in ruins.

From the late XVIII th century on, this area was in a state of constant crisis. Russian armies threatened this place in 1773 and between XVIII-XIX centuries, the struggles in Rumeli had probably some effects on the area too. When the Janisseries were abolished and when the Bektashis were being persecuted during the reign of Mahmud II, it is probable that the tekke of Akyazılı was also in disorder.

During the XIX th century the Russian armies passed through this region several times. It is said that during the battle of 1828 the tekke of Akyazılı was burned. After this event, although the Head Monastery was not built again, the simple one story tekke that had been built near the tomb, after 1829, continued to survive. About 180 immigrants from the Crimea settled around this *tekke* in the middle of the XIX th century. Kanitz, an Austrian, visited the *sheikh* in 1872. The *sheikh* told him that he was a *Kadiri*. This shows that, after this date the *tekke* was not in the hands of the Bektashies, but it was in the hands of the *Kadiriés*. At this time there were 26 dervishes, 18 of whom were permanent and 8 of whom were temporary.

After the war of 1877, the *tekke* of Akyazılı was not in the hands of the Ottoman Empire. When Jireçek came here in 1883, he could only see one *derwish*. It is at this date, that the rumor was spread around about Akyazılı being Saint Athnasion. That is why later the Christians were interested in this place. Today, oil - lamps, candlesticks and Kurans still remain in the tomb but in the fire - place of the Head - Monastery there are the nests of owls. In a guide book written in 1894 by a Greek named Nikolaos, it is said that the place had originally been a church and later it was occupied (!) by the *derwishes*. However, Hasluck, although he had not seen the place, proved that this rumor was not true.

During the First World War (1914-1918), this region which was within the boundaries of Romania remained as a place to be visited, O. Tafralı had a survey about the same place and he published some of its photographs in 1920. Later, in Iorga, Hielscher's publication's there are some short notes and some pictures.

During the Second World War (1939-1945) Akyazılı and its surroundings passed into the hands of Bulgarians. Today the Head-Monastery and the tomb are preserved as ancient monuments. The ground plan and the pictures of this monuments are to be found in a Bulgarian history of art book and this shows the importance of the building. Short summaries of this building can be found in some of the Turkish publications and an article with a picture was also published in a periodical.

The building around the Head Monastery and the *türbe* (mausoleum) that could be seen in the old pictures, and the graveyard of the *tekke* do not remain today. There are only some tombstones in the hall of the *türbe*.

The *türbe* is build with evenly cut stones. With its classical style the building has a stately appearance. It has a square hall with a low dome. The main section of the tomb is seven sided. Only the base of the Saint's coffin is in its place, its main part is missing. One can enter the tomb through the doors that were placed inside the pointed arches. The arches belong to the art of the classical period of the Ottoman Empire. Even though the architecture of the mausoleum is very simple, its doors are very rich and elaborate. The Head Monastery also covered with evenly cut stone slabs and has a square hall in front of it. Like the tomb it is seven sided too. The dominant sections

of this Monastery is the fire place. The prominent part of the fire place and also the part that goes over the main building are also seven sided. Thus, in this building we see the importance of the holy number seven. When we compare the *türbe* with the Head Monastery, we can see that their plans are similar but the Head Monastery is larger than the mausoleum. There are no physical connections between the hall and the main part of the Head Monastery. This shows that the hall was added later. The main and the largest room of the monastery is 20 m. in diameter (this room is called "*Meydan*" by the Bektashis). The pointed arch surrounding the door of this room is in classical style like that of the tomb's. The place of the inscription above the door is empty. Since, some rows of stones have been taken down, the proportions of the exterior are spoiled and some of the elements which show the characteristics of the roof system are lost.

Food, a copper kettle and a fire place were among the symbols of Bektashis. A fire place, the most important symbol, is seen in this Head Monastery. On the left side, there is a long narrow niche with a graceful arch. This could have been the place where the big candle, called *Çerağ-ı Ali* stood. There are no signs of the marble floor, the pedestal and the *şadırvan* that Evliya Çelebi mentioned. The window of both *meydanevi* and of the hall were built with pointed arches on the outside and to give an animated appearance they were framed with mouldings. From the signs below the chimney we realise that a sharp profiled cornice surrounded the walls from the top.

We think that the top of this large place was covered with a wooden roof which was resting on the walls. It was supposedly in the shape of a pointed cap. Thinking of this, an architect, Ali Muslubaş, has drawn us the possible shape of the roof. Since, wood is not a problem in this region it is easy to find long and sturdy timber to build such a roof.

In a building where symbols take such an important place, the wooden and decorated ceilings of the *meydanevi* and hall were possibly built in the technique of the lantern roof which was widely used in Turkish architecture. As a matter of fact, the ceiling of two rooms of the tekke of Hacı Bektaş in Anadolu are in the same technique. This type of ceiling was widely used in Central Asia and it was carried to Anadolu by the Turks, and continued to live to the present day. This technique can be seen in the ceilings of the magnificent buildings

as well as in that of the simple village houses. Its parallels are seen on the Mediterraneanian coasts during III rd. century A. D.

Except the tekke of Hacı Bektaş, the tombs of the Bektashi Centers of Anadolu are not as monumental as the Head Monastery of Akyazılı, and most of them belong to a later date. In the very large foundation of *Seyyid Ghazi* even though many large rooms are placed one after another there is not a separate *meydanevi* by itself. Although the Merdivenköy Head Monastery of Istanbul seems to be made at a quite a later date, it is interesting to see the symbolic numbers in this building. Here, the *meydanevi* is twelve sided, it represents the twelve *imams*. The twelve sections of the dome are connected with a single column at the center. At the marble base of this column there are twelve candles in high relief.

The architecture of the religious orders of the Turkish art of the Ottoman Empire has not been known since we saw the *tekke* of Akyazılı. It is a very valuable example of this architecture. Even though there are many *tekkes* in various places, they are not important for us since they belong to a later period. However, the *tekke* of Akyazılı near Varna, being an example of the classical Period *tekke* architecture, has an important place and value amongst its kind.