CHAPTER 3

The Topographic Reconstruction of Ottoman Dimetoka: Issues of Periodization and Morphological Development

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Introduction

In his seminal work, Veinstein put forward the theory that the existence of the typical Ottoman town lies in the morphology of the North-western Anatolian and Balkan cities. He encapsulated the common characteristics of the group in: a) easily identifiable continuous great axes, b) straighter and longer dead-end streets and c) less densely settled habitat. More importantly, he concluded that “there existed an original urban type, halfway between the Arabic and the Western towns; and if this analysis is confirmed from future studies, then the term—Ottoman town—will be legitimately used to refer to this type”.¹

In this paper it will be argued how the first substantial urban conquest of the Ottomans in the Balkans complies with this normative paradigm. At the same time, an elucidation of the factors which influenced the adaptation of such a morphological solution will also be attempted. Towards this objective, we would need to devise a more refined tool of periodization for Ottoman urbanism, which will reflect the state of the inferred changes, as viewed at the time of their conception. Our study proposes the following periodization: the proto-Ottoman phase (reigns of Murad I to Mehmed I), the classical phase (reigns of Murad II to Bayezid II) and the consolidation phases (reigns of Selim I and Süleyman I).

In order to make the stages of urban development intelligible, we need to provide answers to questions related to urban patronage: what were the quarters of Ottoman Dimetoka,² when were the pious foundations [vakfs] of the


2 A cross-referencing table of the archival material on the Dimetoka quarters is provided in Appendix II.
town established and how was the lay-out of the town affected by their arrangement? The urban vakfs of Dimetoka in terms of their financial potential and power are all classified within the same category of medium-sized vakfs with cash above 2,000 akçes and less than 100,000 following the classification suggested by Gerber in his work on the vakfs of neighbouring Edirne.\(^3\) Even the two sultanic vakfs set up by Bayezid I and Mehmed I did not share the magnitude of the genuine economic enterprises as described by İnalcık.\(^4\) These vakfs constituted the nuclei of urban development, around which the diverse quarters emerged.\(^5\) The systemic balance attained between the Ottoman fringe belt and the pre-existent Byzantine kernel suggests that the exclusively peripheral concentration of the zaviye sites—and in this sense of the vakfs—pre-determined the trajectories which defined the future development of the town.

The reconstruction of the proto-Ottoman morphological phase will help us understand the town-planning solution devised under the first sultans in the period prior to the interregnum (1402–1413). The classical phase of the town-plan should be seen as the culminating stage of an evolutionary process that unfolds over the course of a century and a half, subdivided under the reigns of six sultans. We should, though, bear in mind that this evolution cannot be considered as the product of a state orchestrated initiative, but rather a local and instinctive response to functional and pragmatic changes.

This conclusion seems to be suggested by the fact that the ‘corps of royal architects’ was officially organised not earlier from the time of Bayezid II (1481–1512). Before then, its kernel should have been formed during the building activity exerted after the conquest but architects were submitted under the miscellaneous group of ‘distinguished royal servants’ [müteferrika]. By the time of Suleiman I (1520–1566), the corps has been bureaucratically consolidated as an administrative branch of the centralised state that coordinated construction enterprises throughout the empire either through the dispatch of royal architects or the stationing of city architects.\(^6\)

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