

Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi'nin hâtırasına

OSMANLI MİMARLIK KÜLTÜRÜ

hazırlayanlar

Hatice Aynur

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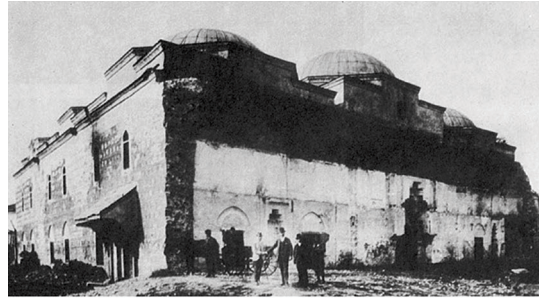
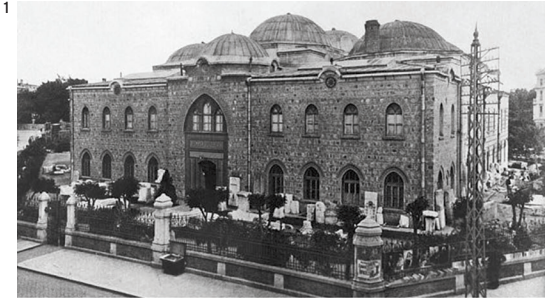
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**ARCHITECTURE, CHANGE,
AND DISCONTENT IN THE EMPIRE OF
MEHMED II: THE GREAT MOSQUE
OF SOFIA, ITS DATE AND IMPORTANCE
RECONSIDERED**

My paper focuses on an Ottoman historical monument in the centre of the Bulgarian capital that has thus far not received the attention it deserves: the mosque built by the Grand Vizier Mahmud Pasha during the reign of Mehmed II (ills. 1-5). Unfortunately, its exact date of construction during its patron's long career is not recorded in a known inscription, endowment deed, or a comparable historical source. This deficit has clearly deterred scholars from attempting to critically contextualize this mosque's remarkable architecture. Its nine-domed plan is unusual in regard to place, patron, and the believed date of construction. While dates ranging between the 1440s and 1490s (!) are encountered in the secondary literature, the year 1474 is most commonly cited as the mosque's completion date. As this claim does not appear to be backed by any historical source, it remains open to debate.¹

* University of Vienna. Research project (FWF) "Centre and periphery? Islamic architecture in Ottoman Macedonia, 1383-1520."

¹ Some discussion is found in Machiel Kiel's review of *Sofija prez vekove* (in: *Südost-Forschungen* 50 [1991]: 505-06); Robert Anhegger, "Beiträge zur frühosmanischen Baugeschichte [I-III]," in *Zeki Velidi Togan'a Armağan* (Istanbul: TTK, 1955), 308-09; Ljubomir Mikov, "Osmanski pаметnici v Sofija (sgradi i promenena i zapazena funkcija)," in *Izsledvanija v čest na Stefan Bojadžiev*, ed. Stanislav Stanev et al. (Sofia: Nacionalen Arheologičeski Institut i Muzej, 2011), 236-43; Ekrem



1-3. Sofia, Mahmud Pasha Mosque in old photographs. The second photo shows remains of a five-bayed portico prior to the construction of the present historicizing entrance structure shown on the first photo. The third photo shows the exterior of the *mihrab* wall, now enveloped by a modern building. The accentuation of the longitudinal axis through an elevation of its three domed bays is visible on all three photos.

My paper proposes an earlier date for this mosque's construction. The argument is based on inductive logical reasoning rather than newly discovered sources. It seeks to reconcile this building's remarkable form with a historical function it assumed at a specific point in time, for a specific patron, in a specific place, and in a specific socio-political context. Consequently, I intend to challenge the mostly unquestioned (and typically implicit) conception that "the Ottomans" simply built mosques because they were Muslims and bearers of civilization, and contend instead that each building project was launched not by default, but in

response to real or perceived wants, challenges, and ambitions. The social-historical reconstruction of a building's original "function," that is, of the context that invested its formal characteristics with meaning, allows us to explain that building's form without resorting to reductionist or romantic patterns of explanation critical questions are nowadays often eluded by portraying monuments as "displays of power" or, yet more problematic, as "expressions of piety."

Hakkı Ayverdi, *Osmanlı Mi'mârisinde Fâtih Devri: 855-886 (1451-1481)*, vol. 4 (Istanbul: Bahâ Matbaası, 1974), 854-57. The lack of an inscription is not all that untypical in cases of a patron's death before the completion of his buildings. This, however, is not the line of argument in the literature purporting the 1474 construction date, which is also the date of Mahmud Pasha's execution. For reasons detailed below, I do not think that the inscription is missing because the mosque was not completed by the time of the patron's death.

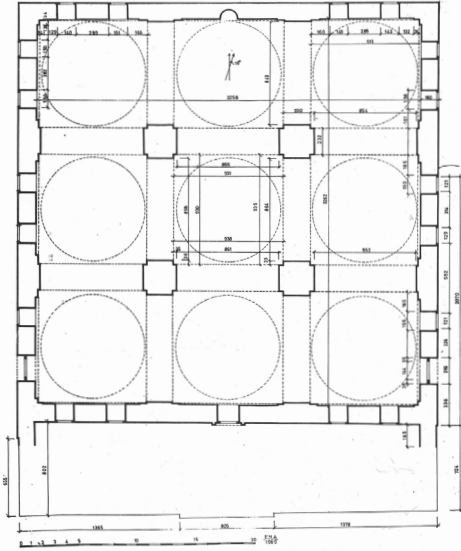
I seek to illustrate the nature of this critique through a case study of a building I will hereafter refer to as the Great Mosque of Sofia. This building must have been planned in response to specific challenges, and in response to conditions that made the project's completion both feasible and meaningful to contemporaries. The mosque's new dating will also contribute to integrating this monument in a more meaningful way into Ottoman architecture's general history since, as will be demonstrated, the mosque was constructed at an important junction. In fact, this mosque should be considered a key building in Ottoman architectural history, not just a provincial echo. Hence the necessity of establishing a construction date that is as dependable as possible.

The first part of my paper examines the Great Mosque's formal architectural characteristics in their cultural-historical context. The second part will turn to the patron's biography, and will focus in particular on his role in Mehmed II's regime in order to determine at which point in Mahmud Pasha's career such a building project would most likely have been undertaken. The third and final part will consider the factor of place, and explore the possible meanings of such a building project in Sofia in the age of Mehmed II.²

The architecture and its implications

Mahmud Pasha's mosque in Sofia is a square building with sides of approximately 36 metres; its structure is composed of nine domed bays of equal size, aligned in rows of three (ill. 4). The nine domes with diameters of almost ten metres are supported on twelve arches spanned between the walls and four masonry piers. The domed bays on the *mihrab* axis are slightly higher than the others. They are also supported on prismatic squinches, with an octagonal drum facilitating the transition from square to circle, while the lateral bays' domes rest on pendentives (ill. 5). This differentiation evidently served to accentuate the longitudinal axis. Traces of the mosque's original five-bayed portico can still be seen on photographs predating the late nineteenth century (ill. 2), when a

² This was greatly aided by a critical biography of Mahmud Pasha: Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović: 1453-1474* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). I am grateful to Rossitza Gradeva, Grigor Boykov, and Markus Ritter for their comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.



4. Sofia, Mahmud Pasha Mosque, third quarter of fifteenth century, ground plan drawn by Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi (see note 1).

curiously historicizing two-storeyed structure was built against the old building's front wall (ill. 1). In this paper, however, I shall focus on what remains of the mosque's fifteenth-century appearance, notably the "grand form" of the nine-domed plan (see ills. 4 and 9). This architecture facilitated the largest prayer hall in the Ottoman Balkans outside Edirne, approaching the dimensions of the (later, better-known) Şehzade Mosque in Istanbul.

Connoisseurs of Ottoman architecture will immediately identify the so-called Old Mosque of Edirne as the Sofia monument's probable model. Begun in 1402-03, the Edirne mosque, too, was composed of nine domed bays (ill. 6&7). Those with an interest in Islamic architectures more generally might also point to a history and tradition of the nine-bayed type outside Ottoman architecture (ill. 7a-d).³ In the discussion of the Sofia mosque's models this connection seems to be a dead end, however.

Formal similarities with roughly contemporary mosques in Southeast Asia are unlikely to be anything but a coincidence.⁴

Just as interesting is a look toward Moscow, where in 1474, the very year of Mahmud Pasha's execution in Istanbul, a momentous construction project was launched. The Muscovite grand duke Ivan III intended to build a new Kremlin cathedral. He soon discovered that local builders lacked the skills to translate his ambitions into architecture when an edifice begun in 1472 actually collapsed. Ivan eventually followed his wife, Sofia Palaiologa's, suggestion and invited an Italian architect in anticipation of a better performance.⁵ The resulting building (ill. 7e)

³ Andrew Petersen, "Nine-Domed Mosque," in *Dictionary of Islamic Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 209-11; Lisa Golombek, "Abbasid Mosque at Balkh," *Oriental Art* 15, no. 3 (1969): 173-89; Geoffrey R. D. King, "The Nine Domed Mosque in Islam," *Madrider Mitteilungen* 30 (1989): 332-90.

⁴ For examples and a typological discussion, see Perween Hasan, "Sultanate Mosques and Continuity in Bengal Architecture," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989): 58-74.

⁵ For this building, see William Craft Brumfield, *A History of Russian Architecture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 95-9.

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is not only of approximately the same size as the Great Mosque of Sofia and roughly contemporary with it; its *naos*, too, consists of nine equally-sized bays linking four piers through arches. This architecture could be described as a Renaissance regularization of the traditional Byzantine cross-in-square plan with a central dome. Was this breach with tradition due to the Italian architect's proclivity for a geometricaly-ordered aesthetic? Or did he think that this structure was better suited to perform a task at which he was not allowed to fail, namely to provide a secure covering for a building for which the dimensions may have been determined beforehand?

Therefore, if we consider that in Sofia the desired size of a building intended for congregational prayer may also have been determined before ways of covering the corresponding area were even debated, then the nine-domed plan must have seemed a logical and safe choice. Covering an area of approximately 1300 square meters with a single dome was out of the question. Only Sinan, a century later and at the peak of his career, managed to achieve this, but only once.⁶

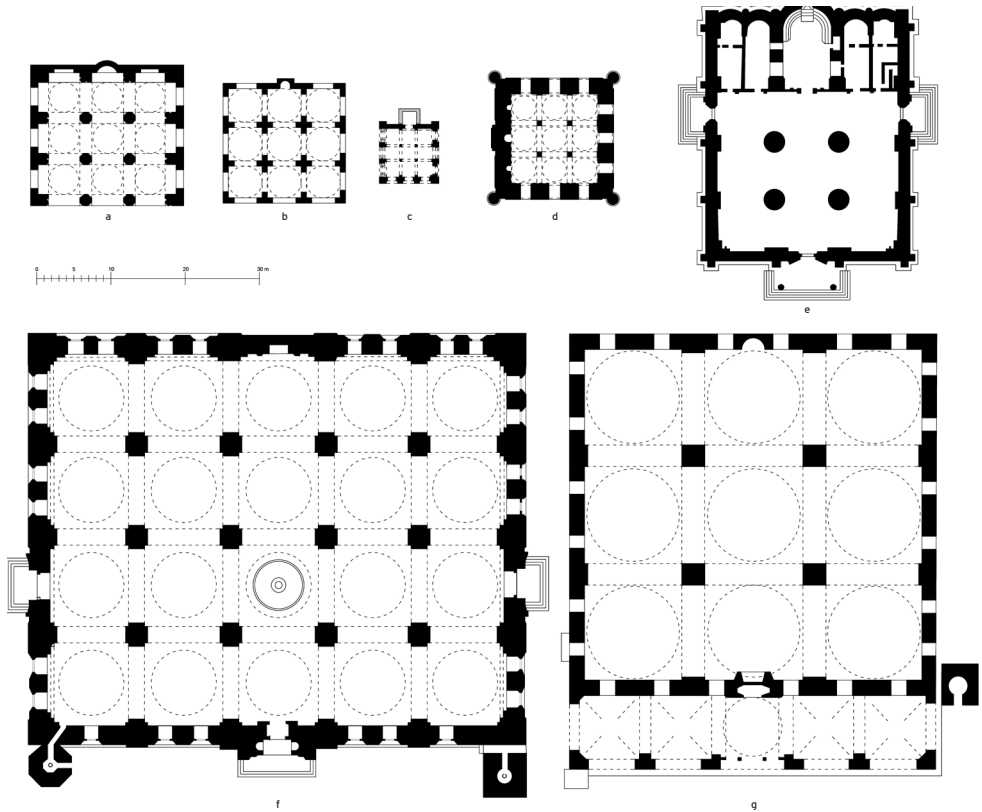
⁶ The diameter of the Selimiye's (1568-74) dome in Edirne measures 31.22m, the next largest in Sinan's oeuvre being the Süleymaniye's (1548-59) with 26.5m. For a list, see Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Reaktion, 2005), 558-61. Interestingly, the largest dome by Sinan outside Istanbul and Edirne was built in Sofia (Sofu

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5. Sofia, Mahmud Pasha Mosque, third quarter of fifteenth century, interior (panoramic photograph by Ann Wuits).

6. Edirne, Old Mosque (Eski Cami), 1402-14 (with interruptions). The original structure had only one minaret.



7. Schematic representations of ground plans of (upper row) various medieval nine-bayed buildings at Balkh (Friday mosque, a), Cairo (mosque-mausoleum of Sharif Tabataba, b), Toledo (Bib Mardum Mosque, c), Bagerhat ("Nine-Domed Mosque", d) and Moscow (Dormition Cathedral, e), for which see also notes 3-5. The lower row shows the Ottoman 'great mosques' of Bursa (f) and Edirne (g). Note in particular the very different dimensions of the Islamic buildings. This calls into question their supposed belonging to a single type, despite formal similarities. The Ottomans used the nine-dome-plan for large congregational mosques.

Thus it is likely that, at least in part, this multi-domed plan type was chosen with the aim of covering an area corresponding to the building's desired capacity, and with the plan type chosen accordingly.

This is not to say that the mosque's "grand form" was devoid of cultural associations within an Ottoman framework. It is, in fact, important to stress that

Mehmed Pasha Mosque, 1547-48. 18.3m).

the mosque stands in a tradition of a certain type previously sponsored exclusively by Ottoman rulers: single-spaced congregational mosques composed of several domed or vaulted bays with an accentuated *mihrab* axis.⁷ This type's best known representatives are the Bursa Ulu Cami and the Edirne Eski Cami, both of which were conceived on the turn from the fourteenth century to the fifteenth century.⁸ Though remaining rare, this type was not discarded after the Interregnum (1402-13): Mehmed II's father, Murad II, built two mosques on European soil that I consider variations of this type, namely at Plovdiv and, possibly, Skopje.⁹ Its connection to this architectural tradition makes the Sofia mosque historically remarkable because it marks the first time a Grand Vezir built a type of mosque previously reserved for sultans. Did the Grand Vezir choose that mosque type because it represented supreme power, as implied in the previous paragraph, or simply, as suggested earlier, because it represented a practical solution to the fundamental problem of covering a large space? In this case, both aspects are entangled. Until the Fatih period, the building of large and monumental congregational mosques was a pre-

⁷ Looking at the Bursa Ulu Cami's transverse axis, we actually note a stepping over three levels: the *mihrab* axis is the highest, followed by the second and fourth bays' level, with the first and fifth bays being on the lowest level. This structuring reveals a hierarchy not shown on floor plans; it appears to have played an important role in these mosques' design, however.

⁸ I would also include in this group three mosques whose plans were originally distinguished by only two domes on the *mihrab* axis, flanked by two vaulted bays on each side: the Şehadet Mosque at Bursa and the sultanic mosques at Didymoteichon and Skopje (for which, see also next footnote). All three have lost what appears have been their original layout. To this group I would furthermore like to add the rather well-preserved Cuma Cami of Plovdiv, which has three instead of two sets of domes and vaults. I find it justified to claim that these buildings represent one group despite the noticeable differences among them. What is important is that all were built as congregational mosques by Ottoman sultans and were intended for a large gathering, probably all of a city's Muslims, for Friday prayer in one building monumental enough to convey the sultan's power. Irrespective of the number of bays and vaults, the *mihrab* axis is always accentuated – either through elevation or by the use of domes contrasted with vaults.

⁹ The large mosque of Murad II in Skopje (1436-37) is presently covered by a pitched roof, which must date from the 1711-12 repair following the town's 1689 devastation by Habsburg forces in 1689. The mosque had seen an earlier repair in 1542, following a devastating fire in 1537-38. All these dates are related by epigraphy *in situ*, as are probably more superficial interventions from 1911, the year of Sultan Reşad's visit to Skopje. It is generally assumed that the building in its original fifteenth-century appearance must have been domed. A covering by a single dome can be ruled out, however, as that dome's diameter would have made it the largest Ottoman dome built at the time, which is unlikely. I have argued elsewhere ("Das spätmittelalterliche Skopje als Zentrum und Peripherie: Ein Beitrag zur Stellung des Balkans in der osmanischen und islamischen Kunstgeschichte," paper read at the 10th Ernst Herzfeld Colloquium, Hamburg, July 3-6, 2014) that a plan with two domes on the longitudinal axis, flanked by two vaults each, would appear to correspond to features that remain of the original structure.

rogative of sultans. Mahmud Pasha's Friday mosques in Istanbul and Sofia were a breach of this convention, but a breach that one is tempted to explain through this Grand Vizir's extraordinarily powerful position in relation to the Sultan's. Famous is the chronicler Neşri's remark that around 1460 it felt as if the sultanate had been entrusted to Mahmud Pasha.¹⁰ From that perspective, the choice of a sultanic form type should perhaps not surprise. However, we can also see that Mahmud Pasha's mosques in Sofia and Istanbul both recycled older, multi-domed plan types at a time when the Sultan had already begun to orient sultanic patronage towards the centrally-domed monument based on the image of Hagia Sophia, as illustrated by Mehmed II's grand complex completed in 1470. Whatever the specific reasons, the choice of this unusual plan type appears less mysterious if we find that it was taken in a period in which conventions and meanings were being renegotiated.

The patronage context

The second part of my paper aims to strengthen the evolving argument that the Sofia mosque must have been built around 1460, and not in 1474. While no inscription survives,¹¹ there is one previously overlooked historical source that makes the 1474 date further unlikely: the mosque is already mentioned in the grandees' architectural patronage record appended to Aşıkpaşazade's chronicle of Ottoman history, which terminates in 1472.¹² More importantly, I find that the circumstances of the time around 1460 provide a more compelling explanation for the choice to build such a mosque. For that historical context we shall examine the advance of the patron's career, the nature and consequence of the positions he held, as well as the general challenges of that age.

¹⁰ Neşri, *Kitâb-ı Cihan-nümâ*, ed. Faik Reşit Unat and Mehmed A. Köymen, vol. 2 (Ankara: TTK, 1957), 743, via Stavrides, *Sultan of Viziers*, 128.

¹¹ As no date or inscription is recorded or mentioned in 1653 by Evliya Çelebi upon his visit to Sofia (cf. *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi 3. Kitap: Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 305 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu-Dizini*, eds. Seyit Ali Kahraman and Yücel Dağlı [Istanbul: YKY, 1999], 223), I find it possible that it never existed or that somebody did away with it, possibly during the confiscation of the patron's *vakf* properties after his execution in 1474. For the inscriptions on the doors, which contain no date, see Mikov, "İzşledvanija," 242-43.

¹² Âşıkpaşaoğlu Ahmed Âşıkî, "Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osman," in *Osmanlı Tarihleri*, ed. N[ihal] Atsız [Çiftçiöğlü], vol. 1 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1949), 243.

The conquest of Constantinople, as is well known, triggered some important changes in Ottoman thinking. The challenge to repopulate and culturally appropriate a city as historically burdened as Constantinople was considerable.¹³ As Mehmed II soon appears to have realized, this project also required a greater commitment from the ruling elite. In 1459, as recorded by the chronicler Kritovoulos, he ordered the *grandees* to contribute to his project to rehabilitate and monumentalize the Ottoman capital by sponsoring the construction of noteworthy buildings of faith, trade, and residence.¹⁴ At that same time Mahmud Pasha was at the peak of his influence. He himself was the product of another Fatih-period innovation: a ruling elite dominated by converted slaves rather than born Muslims. The execution in 1453 of Çandarlı Halil Pasha, a Grand Vezir who hailed from a prominent family of *ulemâ* background that had served Ottoman rulers for decades, heralded a new age in this respect.¹⁵

Mahmud Pasha's fame had risen in the course of the Balkan campaigns in the second half of the 1450s, during which he was able to exploit his regional networks to the Sultan's advantage. His career peaked between 1459 and 1463, when he earned the distinction of holding two leading positions at the same time: as *beğlerbeği* of Rumelia he was the commander-in-chief of the empire's European half and controlled the *sancakbeğis* governing the province's districts; as Grand Vezir (*vezir-i azam*) he ranked above other *vezirs* and presided over the *dîvân* as the Sultan's absolute deputy in administrative functions. As such he was also authorized to use the Sultan's signature and seal – both symbolic of the Sultan's power.¹⁶ In 1463, after successful campaigns in Greece, in Bosnia, and on the Black Sea coast, his influence started to wane. He was only relieved of both offices, *vezir-i azam* and *beğlerbeği*, in 1468, however. After a brief comeback as Grand Vezir in 1472, power

¹³ For this process, see Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis-Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Kritovoulos, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, tr. Charles T. Riggs (Westport: Greenwood Press, [1954] 1970), 140.

¹⁵ Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 50.

¹⁶ On the development of the office of the Ottoman Grand Vezir, see Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 37-72 (and 127ff. for his career after 1459). It should be noted here that the office of Grand Vezir actually dated back no further than Fatih's father's reign, as for previous Ottoman emirs and sultans a single vizier had been sufficient. For our case, this may mean that the power position of this office-holder was then still relatively negotiable.

struggles resulted in his 1474 execution; his *vakf* properties were confiscated.¹⁷ The Sultan was apparently alarmed by the power still commanded by Mahmud Pasha, especially among the army. At the time of his execution, the atmosphere in the capital was said to be tense, verging on the outbreak of a revolt.¹⁸ At this point, if not much earlier, Mehmed II may have thought the experiment with a deputy slave liberally equipped with extensive powers to have failed.

That Mahmud Pasha should have embarked on a project of the Sofia mosque's scale at a time when his future was as uncertain as it was in the 1470s is difficult to imagine. In terms of his biography, everything points to the construction having taken place around 1460, at the peak of his career, instead. That this point in time also coincided with a phase of experimentation in Ottoman architecture was remarked upon earlier in this paper. In light of these two factors, it seems far more likely that the Sultan endorsed Mahmud Pasha's construction of a mosque in which formal architectural particulars pointed to sultan-like authority at a time of mutual trust reinforced by successes, that is, around 1460; 1474, a time at which their relationship was already troubled, not least owing to the rumours spread by Mahmud's numerous rivals, appears much less likely. In other words, by 1474 his extraordinary role as the Sultan's privileged deputy, which may have accounted for the choice and endorsement of an architecturally extraordinary project around 1460, was in the distant past.

The genius loci

In the third and last part of my paper I shall investigate why building a remarkably monumental congregational mosque in Sofia should have made sense for Mahmud Pasha. This requires some rumination about Sofia's role in the early Ottoman power system. Very little is known about Sofia's history

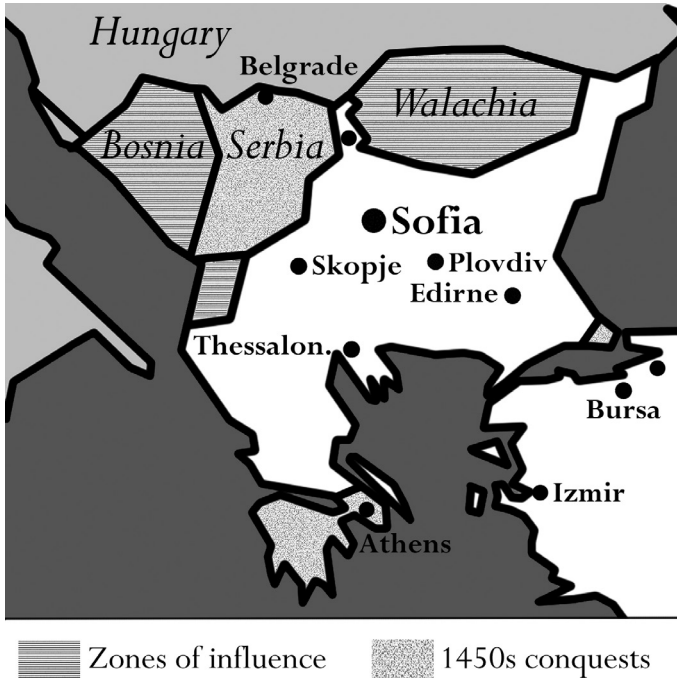
¹⁷ Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 174, 275, 379, 394. It may have been a result of this confiscation, later undone, that the inscription disappeared from the mosque. For his *vakf*, see also Süheyl Ünver, "Mahmud Paşa Vakıfları ve Ekleri," *Vakıflar Dergisi* 4 (1958): 65-76, and Suraiya Faroqhi, "A Great Foundation in Difficulties: or Some Evidence on Economic Contraction in the Ottoman Empire of the Mid-Seventeenth Century," *Mélanges Professeur Robert Mantran*, ed. Abdelgelil Temimi, vol. 3 (Zaghouan: CEROMDI, 1988), 109-21.

¹⁸ Even a cult of "veli" Mahmud Pasha developed after his death. See Stavrides, *Sultan of Vezirs*, 379, 382.

between its presumed conquest in the late fourteenth century and the Fatih period. In any case, Sofia appears not to have played a central role for the Ottomans at first. No monumental mosques were built in this town that continued to be dominated by a Christian populace living within city walls dating from the age of Justinian. It must also not be forgotten that Sofia slipped from Ottoman rule twice – in 1443 and 1454.¹⁹ Seen from Istanbul, this crumbling old city close to the frontier was a liability. Mehmed II thus decided to deport a part of Sofia's inhabitants to repopulate his half-abandoned new capital, and to send Muslim settlers to Sofia in their stead. What followed was the transformation of Sofia into a genuinely Ottoman and predominantly Muslim city. The earliest preserved tax register of Sofia, dating from the 1520s, indicates a sizeable agglomeration of maybe 6,000 inhabitants, already three-fourths of which were Muslims.²⁰

Travellers eventually labelled Sofia the “capital” of Ottoman Europe, which owed to its function as “the seat of the *beğlerbeği* of Rumeli.”²¹ What exactly this meant is unclear – as is the date that Sofia assumed such a role. I find it most likely that this status change occurred in the aftermath of Serbia's conquest in 1459, which completely changed Sofia's situation in the Ottoman state's geography. At mid-century still a dilapidated Christian town near the empire's confines, Fatih's Balkan conquests suddenly placed it at the centre of the Ottomans' possessions there (ill. 8). Sofia was also located on a strategically vital plateau along the main highway between the Bosphorus and Ottoman expansion grounds in Central Europe, making it ideally situated to gather and direct an army heading north. With-

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- ¹⁹ As with many takeovers in that tumultuous period, not even its date is fully established. For the 1443 events and the early history of Sofia, see Machiel Kiel, “Urban Development in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period: The Place of Turkish Architecture in the Process,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 4, no. 2 (1989): 116-21. On the 1454 events, reported in a little-known contemporary source, see Vasil Gjuzelev, “Der deutsche Humanist Nicolaus von Kues und die Ereignisse in Bulgarien im Jahre 1454,” *Mitteilungen des Bulgarischen Forschungsinstituts in Österreich* 7, no. 1 (1985): 117-25.
- ²⁰ Machiel Kiel (“Die Rolle des Kadı und der Ulema als Förderer der Baukunst in den Provinzzentren des Osmanischen Reiches,” in *Frauen, Bilder und Gelehrte: Studien zu Gesellschaft und Künsten im Osmanischen Reich*, eds. Sabine Präter and Christoph K. Neumann, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Simurg, 2002), 578) has extracted the following demographic data from the relevant tax registers: 848 Muslim and 280 households in 1525-26; 1166 Muslim, 168 Christian, and 88 Jewish households in 1544-45; 1276 Muslim, 323 Christian, and 208 Jewish households in 1570-71.
- ²¹ For this point, see Svetlana Ivanova, “Şofya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition*, vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 702-03.



8. This map shows the marginal location of Sofia prior to the conquests of Serbia and (later) Bosnia as well as the subjugation of Wallachia. The ensuing political-territorial developments placed Sofia at the centre of the Ottomans' possessions in Europe by the early 1460s.

in the peninsula Sofia also was centrally located enough to function as the place at which the *beğlerbeği* would gather the *sancakbeğis* from all corners of Rumelia. Thus, Sofia's promotion within the Ottoman system of rule seems more likely to have occurred in or soon after 1459. The Muslims Fatih had earlier deported to Sofia probably served as the nucleus for the development of a more thoroughly Ottomanized town, symbolically anchored at the new mosque built just outside the walled city's gate on the road toward Istanbul (ill. 9). The demographic data from the aforementioned tax register suggest that this change may have been rapid and abrupt.

Sofia's role as the nominal seat of the *Rumeli beğlerbeğisi*

and the fact that Mahmud Pasha also held that office around 1460 are the circumstances that provide his building project there validation. The Muslims of this rising metropolis, a satellite of the capital, could not be expected to congregate in minor edifices such as converted churches in a place that must have looked miserable overall. Sofia was a hub that anybody travelling between Vienna and Istanbul had to encounter. As Mahmud Pasha evidently resided in Istanbul and probably only rarely visited Sofia, his mosque may also have been thought of in terms of signifying his presence in the face of his absence. But whose presence exactly – Mahmud Pasha's as an individual, in his function as *Rumeli beğlerbeğisi*, or as Fatih's *kul* ("slave")? Given the lack of precedent and the striking result, it may well have been all three.

Conclusion

All circumstantial evidence strongly points to a construction date around 1460, when Sofia's position within the Ottoman system appears to have been upgraded: a crumbling, medieval, walled town filled with non-Muslims was designated for transformation into a sprawling, predominantly Muslim town in the centre of the Sultan's European possessions, located on the main expansion route to the north, and equipped with the perhaps more nominal mandate to act as the capital's provincial satellite. What Sofia lacked was an Ottoman-Islamic infrastructure that corresponded to its function and could broadcast the new role the ruler's faith was to assume in the city's public image. Mahmud Pasha, as *beğlerbeği* of Rumelia, was the highest representative of Sultanic authority specifically connected to Sofia as a place, however nominal that connection. Perhaps the emergent Muslim community had even approached him with the request to supply them with a mosque. I find it also not unlikely that Mahmud Pasha may



9. Sofia, Mahmud Pasha Mosque, third quarter of fifteenth century (Source: Google Maps satellite image). The Justinianic wall ran just west of the mosque, which faced the Istanbul Gate, located before the fork of the road.

have followed an order of Mehmed II to build a mosque there on his behalf, as his “slave.” Whomever it was to represent, this monumental mosque served as a potent reminder of Ottoman greatness and authority in a town where loyalty to the sultan had been only lukewarm. At the same time, in a town that bore so many reminders of a long Christian tradition, Mahmud Pasha’s mosque signalled to the emergent Muslim community that they were there not as colonists but as representatives of the new *hegemonic culture*. The choice of the nine-domed plan type was unusual in any case, but less so for the time around 1460, a period of typological reshuffling, than for 1474. The Sofia described above required a building both large enough to serve an increasing Muslim population whose advancement it symbolized, and sufficiently expressive of the Sultan’s imperial ambitions. The nine-domed plan type fulfilled both requirements. The product was what can be considered a key monument of the architecture and milieu of the early Fatih period.