

Ottoman use of the existing public buildings in former Greece as case study:Byzantine towns

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Abstract

The Ottoman building activities in former Byzantine towns with a special reference to Greece is the main focus of this paper. During the early centuries of Islam, Muslims evidently preferred to build their own new cities after conquering regions within Persian or Byzantine lands, and their new urban centres were planned according to the concept of the Islamic city.¹ These cities were generally located outside the previous urban areas' walls or boundaries. In the case of the Ottomans, as compared with other parts of their empire the foundation of new towns in Greece, however, was rather limited. The main reason for this is partly the fact that the Greek territories in southeastern Europe were far more urbanized than other regions in the area: the degree of urbanization in a region like Bulgaria, for instance, was visibly lower than that seen in the Greek provinces, while Serbia, Bosnia-Hercegovina and the interior of Montenegro were studded with the castles of feudal lords and imposing monasteries, but had almost no towns until the early 15th century.

Towns were either founded by the Ottomans as part of their urbanization policy, or else sprang up by themselves, helped by a certain amount of building activity on the part of the lower echelons. The Ottoman cadastral registers (tahrir defterleri) from the 15th and 16th centuries held in the archives in Istanbul and Ankara show that only small numbers of Turkish colonists settled in the urban centres of Greece.

Moreover, this paper will discuss the activities of the Ottomans in this domain in Greece, which can be divided into two main categories: 1) Reuse of an existing building with (or without) limited alterations or additions. 2) Reuse of the site of a ruined building.