

**THE ROLE OF EKREM HAKKI AYVERDİ IN CONSERVATION OF THE  
OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN THE BALKANS**

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**Abstract**

*Historic conservation and enhancement of the architectural heritage requires constant struggle against time, since various effects work against the preservation of historic buildings. Therefore, identification and documentation of these architectural works when they are still present is of paramount importance. In this sense, the research regarding the Ottoman architectural heritage in the Balkans which was conducted by Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi and his team 40 years ago, has priceless value.*

*Considering the direct effects of the process in the Balkans for the last 20 years on the Ottoman architectural heritage, the importance of the documentation done by Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi can better be understood.*

*Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, has made extensive field research and archival work with a team of colleagues, I. Aydın Yüksel, Gürbüz Ertürk and Ibrahim Numan between 1975-1983. The four volume book “Ottoman Architecture in Europe” which was written as a result of this study gives documentation about 15 669 architectural work. The book which provides survey drawings and photos of many buildings in the region is an important document of Ottoman architectural heritage in the Balkans. Today, many of the buildings which have been listed in Ayverdi’s book are totally damaged or forgotten, undergone change because of the renovations, or in struggle to stand.*

*This paper searches the role and importance of the research and publications by Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, on the conservation and enhancement of the Ottoman architectural heritage in the Balkans.*

**Keywords:** Ottoman Architecture, Balkans, Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi.

Anybody interested in Turkish culture, especially in Turkish architecture, knows Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi to a certain extent<sup>1</sup>. But when the cultural heritage of Ottoman architecture in the Balkans is mentioned, this man of culture has a distinct place and importance. Therefore, in a congress concerning the Balkans, I would like to speak of Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi's great service to the Ottoman architecture in the Balkans by his devoted works and thus, pay a debt of loyalty and remember him with gratefulness.

Ottoman Empire gave great importance to Balkans and established a great civilisation in this region by the last quarter of the 14th century. Today, thousands of architectural works we encounter in the Balkan soil stand as most concrete examples of this fact. If we should note with a common statement, The Ottoman Empire conducted a policy based entirely on tolerance in the finding of such a civilisation. As a result of this policy, communities living in the Balkans could live their religions easily, could speak their mother tongues and thus could find a facility to practice their culture and beliefs freely. Currently, the churches, synagogues and mosques which are found together in many areas in the Balkans explain this situation in the best way. Thus, protection of the Ottoman architectural heritage in this region is important since these architectural artefacts are concrete documents of living together in tolerance and of such a ruling system.

However protection and cherish of an architectural heritage has always been a struggle against time. Because many inner and outer factors act against preserving. Thus documentation in the right time plays an important role in the protection of historical architectural monuments. Sometimes even just one frame of photography or an appropriately made architectural plan may help a ruined architectural work revive according to its original qualities. In this context, researches and publications made by Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi and his team nearly 40 years ago concerning the Ottoman architecture works in the Balkans are priceless today.

Some nation states gained independence after the Ottoman rule, especially during the 20th century. Considering the particular policies and attitudes pursued by these

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<sup>1</sup> For extensive research about Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi's life and studies see: İ. A. Yüksel, *Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi*, Ankara, 1993; İ. A. Yüksel, "Ayverdi, Ekrem Hakkı", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, C.4, İstanbul, 1991, p. 295; İ. A. Yüksel, "Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi Biyografisi", *Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi Hâtıra Kitabı*, İstanbul, 1995, pp.11-24; İ. A. Yüksel, "Türk Mimari tarihi Araştırmacılığı ve Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi", *Vakıflar Dergisi*, XX, Ankara, 1988, p. 484; S. Ayverdi, *Hâtıralarla Başbaşa*, İstanbul, 1977, pp. 253-255; *Kubbealtı Akademi Mecmuası, Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi Özel Sayısı*, XIII/3, İstanbul, 1984.

states, one could not expect that they would preserve or document this heritage<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is known that both the conditions of the region and the ideological approaches in that period did not let the Ottoman architectural works in the Balkans to be observed scientifically and documented properly. In fact, even up to the recent times, the Ottoman architectural heritage in the Balkans could not be observed widely by scientific institutions<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, first studies made by Turkish scientists had started in 1950s which were lead by Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi. His 1956 article “Turkish Memorials and Foundations in Yugoslavia”<sup>3</sup> has been a fore study and has lasted as the only Turkish reference source<sup>4</sup> for many years. Apart from being Turkish, this study is also important since it was based on the archive documents.

He has found a visit opportunity to examine the Ottoman architectural works in situ in 1975 and 1976 with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Turkish Republic of that time. First of these visits was done with a team consisting of İ. Aydın Yüksel, Gürbüz Ertürk and İbrahim Numan lead by Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi. Due to health conditions Ayverdi could not attend to the second visit and the research was done by other team members mentioned above<sup>5</sup>. As a result of these two visits, extensive archival work and resource studies, a complete work of four volumes named “Ottoman Architecture in Europe” was published.

The first volume prepared and written by E. H. Ayverdi with the contribution of İ. A. Yüksel, G. Öztürk ve İ. Numan includes the architectural works in Romania and Hungary. There are 234 architectural works included with information in the Romania section and 726 works in the Hungary section of the specific volume. All the information about the buildings has been supported with nearly 380 drawings and photographs.

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<sup>1</sup> For extensive information on the current situation of the architectural Works in the Balkans see: M. Zeki İbrahimgil, “Balkanlarda Türk Eserlerinin Bugünkü Durumu ve Köprü Mimarisinden Örnekler”, *Köprüler Kurduk Balkanlara, Uluslararası Sempozyum*, İstanbul, 2008, pp.207-228.

<sup>2</sup> Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Zeki İbrahimgil has made extensive researches on the Ottoman architectural works in the Balkans in the scope of “Locating the Turkish Works Abroad Project” conducted by the Chairmanship of The Turkish Historical Society and also supported by *The state Planning Organization of Republic of Turkey* in the last years. But this project has come to a standstill in 2008 due to the change of the chairman of The Turkish Historical Society with various reasons. Although İbrahimgil continues his researches with the support of other institutions. I sincerely thank him for the opportunity he gave for benefiting his studies and data he collected through these researches.

<sup>3</sup> E. H. Ayverdi, “Yugoslavya’da Türk Abideleri ve Vakıfları”, *Vakıflar Dergisi*, III, Ankara, 1956, pp.151-223.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Ahunbay, “Mostar’daki Osmanlı Kültür Mirası (1463-1878) ve Korunması”, *Osmanlı Mimarlığının 7 Yüzyılı “Uluslararası Bir Miras”*, YEM Yayınları, p.337.

<sup>5</sup> İ. A. Yüksel, “Türk Mimari Tarihi Araştırmacılığı ve Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi”, *Vakıflar Dergisi*, XX, Ankara, 1988, s. 486; İ. A. Yüksel, “Ayverdi, Ekrem Hakkı”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, C. 4, İstanbul, 1991, p.295.

2nd and 3rd volumes were prepared by the same team, and contained information about 6941 buildings in Yugoslavia (Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Vojvodina). There are many photographs and drawings related to the works in the subjected volumes.

The fourth volume which is written by E. Hakkı Ayverdi himself covers the Ottoman architectural works in Bulgaria, Greece and Albania. The first chapter of the book is reserved for the Ottoman architectural heritage in Bulgaria and holds information on 3339 architectural works. The second chapter is about the Ottoman architectural heritage in Greece and covers records for 3771 architectural works. The last chapter is dedicated to the the Ottoman architectural works in Albania, and 1015 buildings have been reviewed. In chapter ends and diverse parts of the book, there are many drawings and photographs. Besides, at the end of the fourth volume, an enumerated index of all the volumes is presented. In this index, a list of 15 699 architectural buildings is found<sup>1</sup>.

Of course such a study was not an easy task under the conditions of those days. Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi speaks of the conditions the studies were performed in the introduction sections of the mentioned books and emphasizes that the studies could not reach the desired aim due to various reasons. In this context, due to lack of permission, research team could not go to some countries and make field resarch, instead, information related to the architecture of those countries were taken from archives and Evliya Çelebi's chronicles. Although, this situation can not devaluate these studies. It is a great achievement for today's researchers that those archive resources were observed by an authority like Ayverdi.

The late Ayverdi who was very aware of the significance of his responsibility in identification and documentation of the architectural heritage in the Balkans, had expressed this in the introduction of the second volume as such: "Every moment of this study, we see that we are taking on a burdensome task. If the writer of these sentences would not take this duty willingly, if, instead, he would be called for service, would receive an offer and if there would be a payment for copyright and preparation, he would give up all pecuniary benefits, copyrights and survey rights

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<sup>1</sup> For the detailed review of the contents of these books see: İ. A. Yüksel, *Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi*, Ankara, 1993, pp.15-19; A. Çakırtaş, "Balkanlar'daki Osmanlı Sanatı'na Dair Bibliyografik Bir İnceleme". *Kültür. Rumeli Özel*, Sayı 14, 2009, s.150-153; E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri*, Cild IV, İstanbul, 1982, p.421vd.

by asserting the possibility of incompleteness of the documents and get free. The task is that heavy and burdensome"<sup>1</sup>.

The late Ayverdi also emphasizes the importance of the task besides its difficulties<sup>2</sup>: “Even though it is precarious, it is heavy, we continue this duty by sacrificing ourselves and caring less what to be said. Whatever is told this study bears a great importance by itself even in this level.”

In reality, these volumes which contain plans, restitution and photographs of an important amount of the architectural works have become a document for the Ottoman architecture in the Balkans. Particularly when it is considered that Ottoman architectural works have been directly effected by the course Balkan geography passed through the last 20 years, importance of the observation and documentaion Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi and his team had done is understood better. Moreover Ayverdi’s studies are an indispensable source of reference to revive hundreds of architectural works currently being damaged, entirely demolished or lost its originality due to cursory renovations.

In present, we have reached a new phase to revive the Ottoman architectural heritage in the Balkans. In this geography, after the great losses that the Ottoman architectural heritage faced, we have to truly understand the value and utilize in the best possible way the studies/publications which Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi and his team documented and conveyed devotedly.

For today some of the Ottoman architectural works in the Balkans whose existence can be found in the archive records vanished away and forgotten, some have been changed more or less due to the renovations and the remaining ones are struggling to stand still. When the architectural works in the archives are compared to the existing ones based on the studies through the last years, there occurs such a table.

	Number of the buildings collected from archives.	Number of the current buildings Located	Remaining Percentage
Bulgaria	3339	518	%14

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa’da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri*, II. Cild, İstanbul, 1981, p.XI.

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Ayverdi, *ay.yer.*

Croatia	241	52	%22
Kosovo	576	222	%39
Hungary	644	41	%6
Macedonia	1413	484	%34
Serbia	909	162	%18

The archive records indicate that other Balkan countries outside this list also have architectural works built in the Ottoman period: 1015 in Albania, 3541 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 222 in Montenegro, 3771 Greece and 291 in Romania<sup>1</sup>. Studies concerning how many of them are standing still are kept going.

When the data are examined it is understood that there is a substantial amount of Ottoman architectural heritage in the Balkans. When compared to Anatolia, it can be suggested that some central areas have been protected even better in terms of historical texture. Yet there are two most important subjects: First is to preserve the present and the second is to revive the losses as close as to their original qualities. To be able to preserve the present, it is a must to keep these buildings standing and transfer to future generations according to internationally accepted preserving and restoration principles<sup>2</sup>. In this context, many buildings in the Balkans have been restored by TİKA from Türkiye in the past years. An important number of these are successful projects and can be an example or model for the ones to be executed. A protection-recovery / reconstruction strategy, again within the international principles, is needed for the buildings that are mostly demolished, completely lost or partly lost their originality mostly due to improper renovations. For this, the original qualities of the buildings to be revived should be determined by the experts in their fields under the control of scientific committees within the facilities given.

<sup>1</sup> All the data here belongs to M. Z. İbrahimgil also for the list classified according to the types of the list of books and extensive information see. M. Zeki İbrahimgil, "Balkanlarda Türk Eserlerinin Bugünkü Durumu ve Köprü Mimarisinden Örnekler", *Köprüler Kurduk Balkanlara, Uluslararası Sempozyum*, İstanbul, 2008, pp.207-228.

<sup>2</sup> In an article, Ayverdi says that he is against to restore our works according to the international thought within the framework of *The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*: "You cannot touch a Turkish monument with an international approach" (E. H. Ayverdi, *Makaleler*, İstanbul, 1985, p.105). Ayverdi is right in this opinion; because, irreparable mistakes are done in the restoration projects of our architectural heritage (both domestic and abroad) due to many reasons. Thus many architectural entities loses its originality and character. However there are no another internationally accepted principle for the restoration of Turkish architectural works. In this step, not to face more losses there is no remedy but to take internationally accepted current principles as a reference.

Meanwhile archive resources and publications should be utilized very well, the data should be supported by the archeological excavation in the fields, restoration projects should be conducted by competent architects in restoration field under the light of these scientific data and with Ayverdi's own words "with an undoubted fidelity to its origin"<sup>1</sup>. Through all these processes, Ayverdi's study of four volumes and other individual publications related to the subject will help enlighten the dark points for many architectural works.

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<sup>1</sup> İ. A. Yüksel, "Türk Mimari tarihi Araştırmacılığı ve Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi", *Vakıflar Dergisi*, XX, Ankara, 1988, p. 484.