

THE PROTECTION OF THE MULTICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS OF THE OTTOMAN PERIOD IN THE BALKANS.

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After the total conquest of the whole of Balkan & Asia Minor by the Ottomans during the 16th century, slowly but steadily there was created an almost uniform architectural style in the Empire. This «Ottoman» style was a fusion of all the old local building traditions and was determined by the multinational character of the Empire 's population, with influences from the Renaissance of the Arts in West Europe.

In the cities, the different national Communities lived in separate quarters' with their own social life, concentrated around their religious buildings, that were, at the same time, their cultural and social centers.

The traditional structure of these multinational Settlements was maintained until the end of the 19th century.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Balcan wars lead to the decomposition of the Ottoman Empire. The new National States that were created in this territory, aimed at their national homogeneity.

So, a period of massive and often violent deportations of old local populations begun. Large land areas and Minorities' quarters in big cities, were abandoned, destroyed or altered.

The destruction usually begun by the demolition of the religious buildings of the opponent minorities. Mosques and Minarets were being massively destroyed in the Balkans and a lot of churches disappeared at that period in Asia Minor.

After the two World Wars, the industrial development and the need of new wider roads for cars, lead to the decomposition of the traditional structure of the old settlements.

In the balkan countries, the state usually ignores cultural differentiations or local peculiarities and applies a general plan of monument protection for large areas. It often imposes morphological elements that are considered as belonging to the «genuine» national tradition, and it allows the alteration, or even the destruction, of other local elements, that are not considered as significant.

All this is obvious in all our countries in this part of the world. It seems that the hard confrontations of the last two centuries among the Balkan countries, that aimed at an

outopic «national purity», are being now continued anachronistically, in the field of culture.

I believe that the main element to be protected, in the settlements of the Ottoman period in the Balkans – irregardless of the methods to be followed – is their **multicultural character**.

In my opinion, all the remaining traditional settlements and buildings in the Balkans and Asia Minor, are common cultural heritage of all the peoples in our area. They don 't belong to a single nation. They belong to all of us. And they need a **common policy for their protection and valorisation**.

The specialists in conservation of cultural goods in Greece, Turkey and in the other balkan Countries, have now the duty to work together for the protection of our common Heritage.

As a first step, I suggest that the two ICOMOS, of Greece and of Turkey, should take the initiative to organize, in the near future, a Congress, with the participation of all balkan ICOMOS, having as a special topic **the common Action for the Protection of the traditional multicultural Settlements of the Ottoman period** in our area.

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