

Harmonious Simplicity

Macedonia was among the first countries in the Balkans which were taken over by the Ottoman Empire. After the conquest, churches gave way to mosques as centres of religious life. There were many other novelties, too. As small unstable feudal states were replaced by a huge empire, walled medieval cities were no longer needed. This change ushered in new architecture that adapted to the requirements of Ottoman urban life. The new focal points of the urban landscape were the inn, the *hamam* (Turkish bath), the *bedesten* (covered marketplace), and the mosque. Located close to each other these public buildings became a typical characteristic of the Ottoman urban planning and the centres of public life.

Immediately after the conquest the most symbolic churches, such as St. Sophia Cathedral and the Church of St. Clement in Ohrid, and the Church of St. George in



Skopje, were converted into mosques. Yet, the Ottomans built many new magnificent buildings. The main mosques with their educational and religious buildings were supported by endowments of the highest imperial officials. The famous chronicle writer Evliya Celebi records a total of 120 places of worship in Skopje, 45 of which were large mosques. In Bitola, or Manastir, monumental mosques were evenly spread through the city, especially on the left side of the River Dragor in the main administrative and commercial area. Celebi lists 70 mosques in Bitola. In the sixteenth century Bitola was enriched by the Isak Mosque built in 1509; the Yeni Mosque built in 1559; and the Mosque of Gazi Haydar Kadi built in 1561. The judge Haydar Efendi chose Kara Oglan quarter as the site for his endowment. It was a bit far from the river, but in a busy city district opposite the Sheep, the Wood and the Wheat Markets, close to Deboy Cifte Hamam and the largest cemetery (Kabristan) situated on its eastern side. In fact the mosque became the main edifice within the large *vakif* of the wealthy donor. Like the other large mosques in Bitola from this period, this mosque has a single dome and an open porch (*tivan*) dating from the same time.



This porch is the only original construction of this kind in Macedonia that survives to this day. The mosque is built with a combination of chiselled rectangular stone blocks (plastered on the outside) and bricks arranged only in horizontal rows; hydraulic mortar was used as binding material. This is considered to be a unique local variant of the Byzantine influenced style of the classical Ottoman masonry. Besides the porch, the decorative marble portal and the polygonal niches on the outer northwest wall of the mosque, the polychromatic effect achieved by the masonry, especially in the arches above the windows, is the only decoration of the exterior of the mosque.



The prayer hall has a square floor plan, while the 19 meters high dome is supported by a twelve-sided tambour. The open porch is partitioned into three bays with four marble slabs, connected with pointed arches supported by low octagonal tambours on small blind domes (also visible from the outside) with which each bay is vaulted. The porch floor in lateral bays is raised in comparison to the floor level of the central bay. This is the most widespread period floor plan for mosques.

The two bases for minarets, which rose on either side of the Haydar Kadi Cami prayer hall, however, were unusual.

The *mihrab*, a polygonal niche decorated at the top with stalactites, is the only surviving construction in the spacious and monumental interior of the mosque. In terms of painted decorations, there are some faded traces in the upper tier, while in the lower areas the painting has been damaged or completely destroyed. The stylized painted geometric ornamentation can also be seen around the windows, arches and squinches. The *mihrab* and squinches are also decorated with sculptured stone elements, while low relief can be seen mostly on the portal, the capitals and the *minber*. The wooden door is carved in bas-relief and decorated with prominent stylized depiction of the Arabic letter "alif".

Although this mosque is somewhat smaller in dimensions than the other domed mosques in Bitola, ideal proportions make this mosque one of the most resplendent examples of mature classical style of Ottoman sacred architecture. When Evliya Celebi visited it, he expressed his excitement: "Gazi Haydar is an artistically splendid edifice for worship." The absolute perfection of the proportions and the monumental simplicity of the space are the features of this mosque which have led numerous scholars to believe that it is one of many buildings designed by Kodza Mimar Sinan, the greatest Ottoman architect of the classical period. But there is no evidence to support such a claim. The mosque was an active place of worship until 1912 when it was deserted. During the Battle for Manastir in the First World War a minaret was hit by the artillery and collapsed. After 1945 it was protected as a Cultural Monument, and its restoration with conservation was completed in 1960 and 1961. After restoration it has remained in the shade of more centrally located mosques of Bitola.