

# An Unusual *Turbe*

One of the most intriguing cultural and tourist spots in Ohrid is the hillside just below the remnants of the upper part of Samuil's fortress. The site is called Plaosnik and it has been the location of several important archaeological findings. The first one is the late roman Christian mosaic showing swastika and other symbols unusual for Macedonian early Christianity. Another finding is the church modelled on the foundations of the church of St. Clement, disciple and hagiographer of St. Cyril and Methodius and one of the educators of the local population. The church was converted into a mosque with the arrival of the Ottomans, serving also as an *imaret*, the place where poor people were fed at public expense. After Macedonian independence, it was turned into a church again, catering to religious needs and at the same time satisfying the curiosity

of numerous visitors. The Macedonian Government is still developing the project that would restore to this location all the functions it originally served, being a university, library and the seat of the Holy Synod of the Church.

And near these large monuments there stands a sole object that is hard to integrate into the surroundings. Its foundation is L-shaped, and it is an open-plan building supported by two square columns at each end. The left part is smaller than the right one. It is the *turbe* of Sinan Yusuf Celebi that marks his burial site. Sinan was a mighty Pasa (general) in the Ottoman army, and his family is one of the oldest, i.e. the first to settle in Ohrid after the conquest of the town. In fact, after the settling in Ohrid, his family has been known in the Empire as Ohridzade. To this day, the family honours its roots and connection with Ohrid. Only recently they donated to the Ohrid Museum what





is known as the oldest manuscript written in Arabic in Macedonia. It was written in 1490 by Sinan Pasa, their ancestor. The document is a *vakufname*, the legal proof of ownership, stating that his family was in charge of the *caravansaray* and the *imaret*. It also records the construction of a mosque and gives some information about the shops in the neighbourhood.

*Turbes* are characteristic of the Turkish architecture throughout the Ottoman Empire as burial chambers in which distinguished Ottomans were buried. Particularly fine architectural examples of this type of building include the *turbes* of Mustafa Pasa in the Isaac Bey Mosque in Skopje, the open Kral K'zi *turbe*, and the eight meter domed *turbe* in Gazi Baba, Skopje. The design of Sinan Celebi's *turbe* is unusual because it has to accommodate two graves. The grave of Sinan Pasa is in the larger elongated space. It holds an inscribed funeral slab. The inscription is in Arabic and it is decorated with a leaf. It states that Sinan Celebi died on 19 April 1493. This slab is nowadays kept at the Museum of Ohrid, and a replica

has been placed in the *turbe*. After a recent renovation with a donation from the Turkish government, the unique architectural features of this monument can be fully appreciated by visitors. The smaller left side is the burial place of Hassan Baba. There are also other persons buried in the family grave. One of them is supposed to be the son or the brother of Sinan Celebi. Some legends say that the child of Ana Tasula, a Christian wife of Dzeladin Bey, the last ruler of the Fortress in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is also buried in this grave. The mighty bey was notorious for the cruel treatment of the people he forced to work on the restoration of the walls. But he is also remembered for a romantic relationship with the beautiful woman from another faith. There were rumours that she strangled her child instead of marrying the bey or entering his harem, which would have obliged her to convert to Islam. This unusual *turbe* is a cult site for the Muslims who come to visit in large numbers especially on 6 May, the Hederlezi or St. George's Day.