

# THE BRIDGE MUSTAFA PASHA IN SVILENGRAD (BULGARIA)

(*Cisr-i Mustafa Paşa*)

*A Summary*

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According to an article in a Bulgarian periodic, *Narodna Kulture*, (July 19, 1963) signed by R. Radzeff, it is intended, after pulling down the historical Bridge of Mustafa Pasha on the River Maritza near the Turkish border, to construct a new and modern one in its place. R. Radzeff, examining this suggestion which was rejected by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and the Academy of Sciences, after judging the value of this bridge from artistic and historical points of view, mentions that it is not right to pull down the bridge. We are not in possession of the exact plan of the bridge and also we do not know if there is any scientific study made on it in Bulgaria. So, although some information in hand is incomplete we hope these collected notes will be of great use to make this valuable work of art known to those who are interested in history of architecture.

## I. *The plan for pulling down the bridge:*

In order to regulate the currents of the Maritza, to prevent the overflow of water that results from the arch openings being clogged by ice during the winter months and also to avoid traffic problems, it was decided to pull down the bridge. However, specialists have added that there could be found another solution to it. R. Radzeff indicating that information had been given so far by many travellers, among whom Evliya Çelebi was the leading one, gives a short information about Mustafa Pasha, the founder of the bridge, and adds that it is a collective work, but not Sinan's.

## II. *Mustafa Pasha, the founder of the bridge:*

In the beginning of the sixteenth century in the Ottoman Empire there are many historical persons called Mustafa Pasha. For that reason it becomes difficult to distinguish between their activities and works. According to various sources and documents the builder of

the bridge is Veziir Gazi or Lala Mustafa Pasha, known in history as the *Çoban* (Herdsman, shepherd). He died in 1529 (Hegira, 18 Şaban 935) and was buried in his mausoleum in Gebze. He, being the second vezier of Kanunî Süleyman (Soleiman the Magnificent), built this bridge just before his death. With the greatest probability it was finished after his death. From the documents, the income of the land around Edirne-Karaağaç was given for the maintenance of the bridge. The *Koca* (—old) Mustafa Pasha died in 1512 and the other one, who has a mosque and a mausoleum in Üsküp (Skopje), *Kuzgunsuz* or *Gemalmaz* Mustafa Pasha are two different persons. Also in these years there is the *Pılak* (*Polak*) or *Yılak* Mustafa Pasha who died in 1533. Çoban or Lala Mustafa Pasha was the Governor of Egypt for six months during 1522-23. While he was there he had prepared some of the materials of the great mosque in Gebze and brought them back with him to this locality. Besides this mosque and the surrounding complex, the date of which is according to its arabic inscription 1523 (Hegira, 930), he was the founder of the other works in the Empire. The most important of these is the *Kurşunlu Mosque* in Eskişehir dating 1515 (Hegira, 921), as is indicated in its Arabic inscription. The same Mustafa Pasha built in Edirne near the *Eski Mosque* a very great caravanserai, known as the *Two-gated* (*İki kapılı han*), and probably the *Tahmis hammam* were destroyed in the last few years. Besides these it is known from various documents that Mustafa Pasha had schools built at Rumelihisar, Seyyitgazi and in Eskişehir, baths in Silistre and Pravadi, and tenement houses in Filibe, Ahıska, Selânik, Pravadi, Gebze, Edirne, Yenişehir. This bridge which is the last work of Mustafa Pasha, is the result of the growth of a little town around it. This town, known as Cisri Mustafa Pasha during the Ottoman Empire, is today called Svilengrad.

### III. *The Bridge and Sinan, the Architect:*

Evliya Çelebi, who had passed over the bridge in 1653, indicates it as the work of Sinan. In a former source, the bridge division of the list of the Sinan's works *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye*, there is the name of the Mustafa Pasha bridge over the Maritza River. From the document dating 1573 (Hegira, 981), Sinan was later charged to pull down the mill which was dangerous for the bridge. We see Sinan as the chief architect from 1539 on. Although this and a few others are his earlier

works, we meet them in the lists of Sinan's works. This is at the moment a very difficult problem to solve. However, it is certain that, he did not begin right after being the chief architect but had built many before. We also know he attracted the attentions of the authorities by building bridges. During the invasion of Rhodes in 1522 he was about 30-32 years old, just the right age to build such a work as the Bridge of Mustafa Pasha which was built in 1528-29. Unless we have a different and reliable document proving the contrary, we have to accept it as Sinan's work for we meet the name in the *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye*. In short, this is one of the first works of the great architect done before his masterpieces. Therefore it deserves a special value.

#### IV. *The inscription of the Bridge:*

Although Evliya Çelebi mentions a piece of verse in Turkish for the date of the bridge, this has nothing to do with the words of the inscription. There is an Arabic writing on marble in the inscription pavillion of the bridge. This, being in arabic like the inscriptions of other works done for Mustafa Pasha is very interesting. It is written in the inscription that the bridge was constructed during the reign of Sultan Süleyman the son of Sultan Selim. The last word *hasanatan abadiya* (*—the eternal goodness*), according to the calculation by numerical alphabet, gives 935 which date is the date of the bridge and the death of the Pasha. We can not find out the calligrapher of this inscription so wonderfully placed with great skill. But no doubt it is the work of one of the masters of that period. Evliya Çelebi writes that the inscription of the mosque built near the bridge was made by Karahisârî Hasan Çelebi. It is most likely that the inscription of the bridge is also his or his adopted father's, Karahisarî Ahmed, who died in 1556 (H. 936). The calligrapher of the Süleymaniye mosque, Hasan Çelebi died in 1594 (H. 1002).

#### V. *A poem concerning the bridge:*

We can draw the conclusion that the incomplete couplets of the poem given by Evliya Çelebi belong to a longer poem. Mehmed Efendi from Bursa (1466-1535), nicknamed Deli Birader, who is known as the poet Gazalî, built a *masjid*, *hammam* and *zâviye* at Beşiktaş with the help of the authorities when he settled down in Istanbul after a long and adventurous life, but in 1531 he, being offended with the rumours

about him, went to Mecca and died there in 1534. Gazalî had usually presented eulogies for the ones who supported him financially for the masjid. He was also ordered by Mustafa Pasha to write a poem for the bridge, but just at that time Mustafa Pasha was dead, and so he presented it to his wife and was rewarded. We have four couplets of his poem in the *Tezkiretü's-Suarâ* of Kınalızâde Hasan Çelebi (1546-1697) and taken from that one in the *Hadikatü'l-cevâmi* and in the *Mirat-ı İstanbul*. As the whole of the *Divan-ı Gazalî* is not known we unfortunately do not possess the complete poem which thus has placed the bridge in Turkish Literature.

#### VI. *The Bridge as a work of art :*

The bridge has four arched openings in the middle and eight on both sides, in all twenty. There is in the middle a high inscription pavillon. This bridge is one of the noteworthy works of art in the European part of the Empire. So it has a certain place among the Uzunköprü, Büyükçekmece, Silivri bridges. It is more modest than the *Sinanlı Bridge* in Alpulu, a masterpiece of Sinan's. Therefore the Bridge of Mustafa Pasha is valuable as being one of the early trial works. It does not only provide a means of crossing the river but also a factor in the broadening of the local civilization. It has played an important role not only as a passage way of the army but in the growth of the surrounding lands, for the development of the settlement at its one end, and for the passing of the tradesmen and villagers with their goods and produce. Thus the bridge is like others of its kind a part of the history of the civilization.

It is impossible not to remember the International Law suggested by the Unesco a few years ago for the purpose of preserving the historical works of civilization.