THE COMMERCIAL CENTER OF THESSALONIKI, GREECE: ARCHITECTURAL FORMS AND SIGNIFICATIONS 1875-1930

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Various interpretive accounts of the nineteenth and early-twentieth-century history of eastern Mediterranean cities have viewed their spatial development as manifesting the prevalence of the overwhelming intellectual and political power of Western Europe over a politically and economically weakened East. This view would seem to be supported by the involvement of European experts in the conception and implementation of urban and architectural projects in the area as well as the employment of purely Western principles and design language. The case of Thessaloniki’s commercial center, however, offers a representative example of two essentially different processes of Westernization: one that was imposed, and proceeded by disregarding local cultural and architectural traditions; and another that was indigenously developed, and proceeded by including aspects of tradition within the requirements of modernization. Guided by the underlying principle that architecture constitutes the material representation of the cultural and social context that produces it, this paper examines the spatial patterns and architectural character of the old and new sections of Thessaloniki’s financial/commercial center as expressions of the aforementioned types of Westernization.

As historians of the economy of the Ottoman Empire have noted, the empire’s traditional “social formation” was characterized by the production of independent peasant households and an elaborate bureaucracy which assured the control and appropriation of surplus production for the central authority. The entire process of production, then, including that of urban crafts, was completely regulated and controlled by the state, which attempted to enforce similar rules over trade. Yet, with
the introduction of the empire into a world-market economy and the subsequent commercialization of its agriculture in the late sixteenth century, the above system underwent a process of disintegration, which was intensified by the peripheral development of the Ottoman economy in relation to Western economies in the nineteenth century.¹

A more comprehensive discussion of the specific character and causes of these transformations within the Ottoman economy exceeds the scope of this paper. However, due to their significance for Thessaloniki, two consequences of the empire's integration into the larger European economy should be mentioned here. The first consequence of economic integration was, as Sumar has pointed out, that "the western regions of the Empire in general and the coastal cities in particular prospered."² The second was that a particularly influential class of merchants, consisting primarily of subdued people, emerged. As Islamoglou and Keyder have noted, "trade was organized by foreign trading companies and merchants stationed in a few cities (Selek-Tsaldoniki-, Istanbul, Izmir, Beirut, Alexandria). Merchant capital of foreign origin entered into a division of labour with native capital, in this case with ethnic minorities. It was the Jews, the Greeks and the Armenians who acted as intermediaries between British, French, Italian and German merchants and the actual producers."³ The intense activity of merchants belonging to ethnic minorities was regulated so that it would serve European interests.⁴ But the activity also had significant consequences for both the state and local societies. For example, by being involved in trade activities which largely defied state control, the members of merchant classes contributed to the economic problems of the empire.⁵ And by accumulating considerable wealth, the merchant classes brought the earlier dominance of Ottoman landholders into question.

As a significant seaport in the eastern Mediterranean, Thessaloniki provides a good site in which to observe the above developments. Between 1839 and 1864 the total transit of goods through the city (imports and exports combined) tripled,⁶ and similar increases continued throughout the nineteenth century. During this period the economy of the city came to be characterized by a proliferation of commercial houses of Jewish and Greek ownership which served English, Swiss, French, Tuscan and Sardinian interests.⁷ Banking houses also emerged which functioned mainly with foreign capital, and which were almost exclusively controlled by members of the local Jewish community. The primary activity of these financial houses was the immensely profitable threefold activity of money lending, mortgage, and real estate development, which led to "the legend of the Jewish tycoons of Thessaloniki" which was to last until 1911.⁸ Finally, with the establishment of such industrial installations as the Saia spinning mill in 1873 and the Allatini brick factory in 1880,⁹ the first capitalist relations were introduced into Thessaloniki.

FUNCTIONAL AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER OF THE MARKET AREA BEFORE 1917

While the economic functioning of the city was radically transformed in the second half of the nineteenth century, when it came to conform to Western prototypes, the spatial organization and architectural character of Thessaloniki's market area exhibited a remarkable reluctance to change (FIG. 1). Located in the center of the walled city, the market of Thessaloniki originally was formed according to administratively controlled guilds," spatially arranged according to the noxiousness of their work. This spatial order was preserved throughout the Ottoman reign (1430-1912), and the location of some guilds (such as the market of the coppersmiths and the Bezesteni) can be observed to this day.¹⁰ Thus, the markets of chest-makers, with thirty-one shops; grape-sellers, with eight stores; shoe-makers and silk-sellers, with twenty-five shops; wheat-sellers and non-Muslim shoe-makers, with forty seven stores; and so forth were referred to in 1837.¹¹ But by then the homogeneity of craft work and the trading goods housed in each market had begun to disintegrate (FIG. 2). As the last Ottoman survey indicates, in 1906 the commercial

FIGURE 1. Map of the commercial center of Thessaloniki before 1917, showing:
(1) the group of buildings on Eades Street; (2) the Ottoman Imperial Bank, 1903;
(3) the Bank of Thessaloniki, 1906, and (4) the Bank of the East, 1906, and the
center of Thessaloniki was characterized by an arbitrary functional arrangement of shops and stores, many of which were still housed in preexisting khanes. The traditional organization and location of the guilds at this time survived primarily in the names of various streets: e.g., Mesciller — street of sleepers-makers; Papuscilar — street of the shoe-makers; Eski Balik Pazari — street of the old fish market; and so forth.15

Although essentially deprived of its Ottoman organizational structure, at the beginning of the twentieth century the commercial center of Thessaloniki nevertheless retained significant elements of the local Macedonian architectural tradition. The majority of the narrow, tortuous streets were lined by small-scale, unpretentious, wood and brick buildings with tiled roofs and projecting enclosed balconies (sahnisi). Constituting an almost uncomfortable adaptation of the introverted Macedonian house to the requirements of commerce, these buildings (together with smaller ad hoc wooden structures) formed the architectural physiognomy of the market area (FIG. 3). It is interesting to mention here that, although they were referred to as unmistakably Turkish by Western visitors, the particular elements of this physiognomy were never explicitly described. For instance, the nineteenth-century traveler W.M. Leake implied that it was impossible to provide an accurate account.

A similar view seems to be expressed by an officer of the English army who visited Thessaloniki during World War I.

One element which did attract the attention of Western visitors was the structure which covered Venizelos street and some adjacent roads, beginning at Egnatia in the north and reaching as far south as Tsimiskes street. At the beginning of the twentieth century an informal board cover over this section of the city was replaced by a wood and glass roof whose architectural character did not exhibit inherently Eastern origins (FIG. 4). Yet, due to the manner in which it was employed, to Western viewers this structure constituted an
Oriental phenomenon. "From an open roadway," according to Mann’s description, Venizelos street “became the main promenade of a tortuous and elaborately covered-in bazaar, which enticed the visitor to wander in search of curios. On all sides British officers and men were greeted by...the local variant of the old time pedlar’s cry.”93 Being more sympathetic to the picturesqueness of this space, Day wrote: "This typical Eastern phenomenon, with its rich display of furs, carpets, gold and silver curios and glittering jewelry, provided a particularly attractive and picturesque sight. Here native commercial methods could be studied to advantage."

Such descriptions suggest an openness and immediacy to the commercial activities in Thessaloniki. The writing of a French officer, J. Frappa, is indicative of this aspect:

Since dawn, lemonade sellers filled these streets with their loud calls and clinked their enormous pitchers like children...; the shops of Odos Heraklion and Odos Egyptia displayed [frogs]... at their windows. Coffee shop owners attracted the passer-by with enormous carafes full of a clear, yellow liquid... One should hurry to the market in the morning; the streets abounded with people and reverberated with noise.

The abundance of street vendors and peddlers and their contribution to the picturesque character of the old market has also been discussed by the local writer G. Stamboles, who notes that several different languages were employed in the market areas (Turkish, Hebrew-Spanish, Greek) in order to better serve the local multi-ethnic community.94

Along with its lively and disorderly nature as the focal point of small-scale trade, the market area also constituted a commercial center for local businessmen and bankers. Referring to the period of great mercantile activity and prosperity, 1840–1880, the local Jewish historian Nehama wrote:

It was in the French quarter, in the vicinity of the present position of the Bank of Thessaloniki where all the commercial activity was concentrated. At all times during the day... there was a compact and busy crowd in this plaza. News from all places were effluent. Letters, telegrams and messages were read and commented upon there. Travelers from Constantinople, Egypt, Tunis or Marselles were eager to go there and present their information and predictions on political events, the course of trading or the rates of exchange... Merchants were notified of the news while their clerks went back and forth between the plaza and stores situated in the adjacent roads.95

This area, then, concentrated every aspect of the city’s commercial life — from small stores and artisans’ shops, to cafés and great financial houses. Its function was characterized by honesty and propriety. Thus, according to Nehama: “From top to bottom of the commercial and artisanal ladder, integrity was absolute.”94 In terms of image, the area’s traditional architectural character was preserved until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the transformation of the local economy, caused by the penetration of Western capital, began to be reflected in stylistic and typological changes to various structures. An exhaustive account of these architectural transformations is not possible because the great fire of 1917 destroyed a major part of Thessaloniki’s commercial center, but the few remaining historic buildings in this area are suggestive of the process.

The best example of architectural transformation in the old commercial center consists of a group of historic buildings located on Edessa street (REFER TO FIG. 1). The architecture of these structures is representative of transitions in both the local economy and local society as attempts were made to accommodate both a familiar past and a fascinating but foreign future. Thus, the old building type of the khane, combining stores and shops on the ground floor with a hotel on the second floor, was preserved in the Kyrtsi Khane (before 1910)96 — but only as clad in a neoclassical facade of repetitive pilasters, with a disproportionate pediment emphasizing the central portion of its south elevation. More moderate in scale and style, the building south of Kyrtsi Khane presented a Macedonian enclosed balcony on the first floor, also in the neoclassical idiom.

According to Trakasopoulou, “[probably] the most representative example of the eclecticism which was adopted as the prevalent style of architecture toward the end of the nineteenth century was the Emniet Khane or Nantsina Building (1896).”96 Compared to the Kyrtsi Khane and its neighbor, the architecture of this building presented more direct influences from the West. Its exterior composition was based on the alternating motifs of balcony doors and niches, expressed in low relief with an elaborate program of decoration. Perhaps the building’s most outstanding element was the dominating projection of its southeast corner. Due to the scale and proportion of this projection in relation to the rest of the building, it was more than a purely decorative treatment, relating more to the local balcony form, the tahnisi (FIG. 5).

Other buildings in the area also expressed the melding of traditional form and modern expression. For example, the ground floor sto–passage of the Passage Kyrtsi (1890–1900)97 constituted a Western rendition of the traditional khane. The expressive quality of this structure relied on a grid consisting of an elaborate scheme of pilasters (whose form and scale were transformed on the upper floors) and a series of pronounced horizontal moldings separating the three stories. Finally, the
two structures at 4 and 6 Edessa street provide examples of buildings whose planar facades incorporated an excessive but uncritical use of ornamentation (FIG. 6). Their architecture was characterized by an opening of their ground floor toward the street and a framing of their door and window openings with formal decorative schemes.

In general, it could be argued that a limited understanding of the requirements of the developing modern economy in Thessaloniki led to an architecture that attempted to retain traditional typologies and spatial elements, but which expressed them in a yet-unmastered stylistic language through exaggerated use of attached ornament. This uncertainty, however, which characterized the architectural expression of the less significant structures, did not seem to be present in the primary institution representing the new order: the bank. The Ottoman Imperial Bank is the first building that should be referred to here (FIG. 7). Indicative of Western involvement in the local economy, Moskof has written, “this organization was created in 1856 with French and English capital and from 1884 managed the public income of the Empire. It, therefore, constituted a ministry of economic affairs functioning under the direct control of the two foreign powers.”

The bank building, constructed soon after 1903, was designed by the Turkish architects Barouch and Amar. Representative of the incorporation of Western techniques and building materials, the central atrium with its glass roof constituted the dominant element of the layout, and created an opulent and impressive interior. Expressed in the Neo-Baroque style, the exterior, on the other hand, was characterized by the highly ornamental and projecting central portion of the south facade. Compared to other Western-influenced structures (as well as traditional ones) within the market area, the Ottoman Imperial Bank constituted the most impressive and powerful pictorial statement of the new economic order. Demetriades' reference to this section of the city makes apparent both the stylistic and functional novelty of this building:

Along Tophane Avenue (Fragui Street) there was the Su'iaz khane with twenty-two... shops, and a courtyard that included three shops and a stable. On the same avenue there was also the Rogote Khane with twenty-two shops, the Catholic church with a pharmacy and a hospital for the Catholics, and the Ottoman Bank. The khane of someone called Deres Aga with two hotels, two coffee shops and twenty-one shops, stores and rooms, a two-storied house with thirty shops... and another one with nineteen shops... were located on the other side of the road...

It could be argued, then, that its status as a pretentious and dignified structure became one of the first material representations of the obscure and mysterious function of the new...
economic order. This was described by a Thessalonikan au­
thor as "a familiar, suspicious and silent atmosphere reign­ing behind the dark glass . . . of these halls that create so much piety in the deprived souls of many."

Creating the backdrop of Bank street and located in the vi­
cinity of Fragoi street, the Bank of Thessaloniki constituted
probably the most unmistakable sign of the Jewish presence
in local economic life (FIG. 8). This bank was established in
1880 by the Allatini family to facilitate their commercial and
industrial companies. According to Moskof, however, "it
constituted the means by which the transfer of Austrian
capital, especially that of Vienna's Lander Bank was coordi­
nated."

The building was designed by the Italian architect
V. Poselli and was completed in 1906. "Its orthogonal plan
was organized around a central space that comprised the whole
height of the building and was covered by a glass roof . . . .
The articulation of the main facade, including elements of the
architecture of Bramante, Vignola and Palladio, made appar­
ent its designer's influence from the Italian Renaissance."

The Bank of the East and the Bank of Athens provide two
further representations of the economic functioning of Thes­
saloniki at the beginning of the twentieth century (FIG.
9).

Built in 1909 and before 1906, respectively, the two build­
ings were organized as commercial stoas, a function reflected
in the repetitive use of highly ornamental bays on their ex­
terior. The significance of these structures, however, did not
depend simply on their innovative architectural character,
but also on their function within the local community. As
Hekimoglou has noted, "the block of St. Menas and espe­
cially its southern side was one of the most significant points
of the city. It constituted the heart of the Greek community
during the last phase of Turkish reign, it forged the economic
emancipation of the Greek element from the . . . money
lenders of Fragoi Street."

It could be argued, then, that alongside their status as signi­
fications of Western involvement in the local economy, the
new architectural types and styles which began to appear in
the commercial center at the beginning of the twentieth
century also incorporated nationalist connotations for the
ethnic communities of the city (especially its Greeks). But
the particular architectural expression of various Neoclassical
structures does not reveal any particular correspondence
between ethnic groups and the iconographic qualities of
specific styles. Rather, this phenomenon should probably be
viewed as a representation of the transitional and unsettled
nature of the period.

However, a comparison of the solemn appearance and digni­
ified composition of such buildings as the Ottoman Bank and
the Bank of Thessaloniki with the undetermined style of the
other structures is suggestive of an operative hierarchy. Most
dominant in the modern economic development of the city,
the West was represented by an unprecedented building type
expressed in the didactic neo-Baroque style. The Jewish
financial houses derived their iconographic models from the
late Renaissance. Meanwhile, the emerging Greek financial
institutions attempted to establish their presence through an
exaggerated use of ornamentation on the facades of otherwise
modest buildings. It is important to note, however, that
despite their stylistic novelty, the majority of the new
buildings in the city's commercial center reproduced several
essential traditional elements of the place through one or
more of the following: (1) their moderate size; (2) the pre­
servation of the high density and complexity of the urban
space; (3) the retention of preexisting functional types; and
(4) their almost innocent use of decorative motifs, which
failed to transform the structure of the place, but rather re­
mained pretentious dress.
THE EVOLUTION OF THE URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER OF THE COMMERCIAL CENTER AFTER 1917

Following the fire which destroyed a major portion of central Thessaloniki in August 1917, the Greek state decided to reconstruct the city according to the requirements of "modern" Western urbanism. The design and implementation of the new plan was entrusted to the French architect and planner E. Hébrard, who was at the time stationed in the city as an officer of the French army. According to the first proposal by Hébrard in 1918, the area under consideration was to retain its commercial function but be spatially and morphologically transformed (FIG. 10). As Hébrard noted: "the quarter of commerce with luxury stores, large hotels and other shops will be located between Alexander the Great and St. Sofia Streets. Venizelos Street will remain the main commercial artery but will be significantly enlarged." Thus, the commercial center in the southwestern section of the city was to be preserved, but also rationalized by assigning distinct areas to different types of commerce. Following the process of transferring goods from production to consumption, this area was to be arranged sequentially: industrial installations and wholesale markets were to be placed to the west outside the old city walls; the financial district was to be organized around a formal square in front of the Bank of Thessaloniki; and the commercial center was to be located to the east. Probably the most distinguished element of the 1918 scheme was the new monumental axis (today's Aristotele avenue and square), which ran perpendicular to the sea front, and which included a large square at its southern end, "in which grand cafés and luxurious hotels were to be erected." Positioned at the meeting point of this axis and Egnatia Avenue, were the Bazaars, which constituted "a place especially reserved for the local forms of commerce and represented an attempt to respect the habits of the population and care for the picturesque [character of the town]."

As indicated by its functional arrangement and formal composition, a primary objective of the new plan was its attempt to provide the appropriate spatial context for the consolidation of a modern economy. The proposed organization of the commercial center is a good example of this objective. Based on an orthogonal grid that deviated only to accommodate two historically significant monuments — the church of St. Menas and the Turkish Baths — the new plan proposed that the area west of Venizelos street be rationalized so as to erase its traditional spatial complexity (and, with it, its lively and disorderly function) (FIG. 11). Picturquesness, one of Hébrard's major concerns, did not seem to be relevant here. Such a quality was only desirable in distinct sections of the new city that had been subjected to an overall Western vision of order and rationality. Thus, the small-scale trade which had previously permeated the entire market area was now to be limited within the confines of the neo-Byzantine Bazaars.

The November election in 1920 and the subsequent change of the Greek government brought a sudden pause in the process of implementing the new plan, and the plan was subsequently...
revised. The new plan, officially approved September 24, 1921, preserved the eastern section of the commercial center as envisaged in the 1918 plan, including the monumental axis of Aristotle and the Bazaars; but due to the reduction of the area of the burned zone, Hébrard's 1918 proposals for the area of the city west of Venizelos street were considerably modified. Thus, the new I. Dragoumes street and the parallel Venizelos street (which was enlarged through the shift of its eastern side) became the two major elements of Hébrard's plan in the western area of the commercial zone. This allowed the arrangement of the rest of the old financial and commercial center to accommodate aspects of the urban fabric predating the fire of 1917 while still providing adequate connections with the newly designed area to the east (FIG. 12). Thus, the basic characteristics of the southwestern region of the city emerged as follows: an irregular network of narrow streets reflecting the local urban tradition; the creation of small, geometrically irregular and informal open public spaces; blocks which followed the urban forms that had begun to emerge since the nineteenth century; and the preservation of various structures which had survived the fire. In addition, major axes of central Thessaloniki before 1917 — like Fragoi (King Herakleos) street and the impor-tant St. Menas street, as well as the smaller perpendicular roads like V. Hugo and Katounes streets — were preserved, although they assumed a secondary role due to the importance of newly opened tree-lined boulevards (FIG. 13). Related archives and literature do not include references to specific areas, but contain only general criticism of such changes from the initial plan to the 1921 plan. As the contemporary urban historian Yerolympos has noted, the 1921 modifications did not betray the primary principles and objectives of the original plan. Nevertheless, after December 1920 various articles and commentaries in the local press did begin to express fears about the future of Thessaloniki and to object to extensive changes of the initial plan. Permission to erect temporary structures with a commercial function in limited areas (such as Venizelos street) was similarly interpreted as an unconditional return to the city's Turkish past. This negative response to the modifications of 1921 has been eloquently described by the local author G. Vafopoulos:

The needs of the settlement of one and a half million souls [from Asia-Minor], and the economic difficulties of the state did no longer permit the luxury of grandiose urban plans. The great mistake was that in front of the inability to implement Hébrard's initial plan, they did not work out a new scheme smaller in scale but analogous to the new conditions. Basic changes and modifications of the original plan were implemented in the manner by which a large well-tailored suit is altered to fit a child. As a result, with the intervention of politics and personal interests, the plan for Thessaloniki underwent sequential transformations, shrinkages and mutilations which eventually led to its present form. The opportunity to create the most beautiful city of Greece and perhaps the entire south-eastern Europe across from mount Olympus was forever lost.
It must be noted here that the reasons to which Vafopoulos attributes the changes of the plan do not correspond to the actual development of events between 1917 and 1921 (the analysis and interpretation of which would exceed the scope of this paper). Yet Vafopoulos’s short account does represent views and feelings that developed locally, and it becomes more interesting later.

Despite these changes, the rebuilding of Thessaloniki began [from 1923] in a swift pace and relatively systematic fashion. . . . Meanwhile the commercial and social life of the city proceeded with leaps. Its old character was completely transformed. Through the settlement of thousands of [Greek] refugees . . . and the parallel departure of its Muslim inhabitants the city acquired a new physiognomy. These uprooted Greeks brought with them the spirit of a new civilization and the conception of a new social life . . . and, with time, the blending of the new elements with the old ones crystallized a new type of Thessalonikians, presenting all the organic signs of a biological inter-breeding. The Jewish inhabitants—also adopted their lives to the new conditions and began to show a tendency for social assimilation. Soon, a forceful and pure Greek character emerged in Thessaloniki.49

Thus, according to Vafopoulos, after 1922 Thessaloniki acquired an essentially Greek identity as a result of its changed demographic composition. The establishment of the uprooted Greeks of Asia Minor in a politically and economically distressed state was neither easy nor immediately accepted.10 And, in this respect, Vafopoulos’s comments could be viewed as a misrepresentation of the actual state of affairs. His comments do, however, describe a significant development within the Thessalonikan community—a development which had fundamental repercussions for the city. The city’s existing population, as well as the refugees from Western Thrace and Asia Minor, were emerging from five centuries of Turkish rule, and their Greek national consciousness, though preserved in their language and religion, had absorbed considerable elements of Eastern cultures.51 Their consciousness, therefore, did not coincide with the cultural tradition of ancient Hellas, which had provided the ideological foundation of the modern Greek state ever since its inception in the early nineteenth century. And yet a politically motivated problem seemed to resolve this apparent conflict: this was that modern Greek national identity should include both the rational antique tradition and the spiritual outlook of the East—particularly that of Byzantium.52 The internal consistency of this paradigm does not constitute an issue to be addressed in this paper. However, it is important to note that the views it promoted, associated with the “great idea,”53 were embraced by the masses who, throughout the nineteenth century,14 recognized the East as, at minimum, a partial source of their cultural tradition.

It would probably be too daring to assert a direct correlation between this view concerning modern Greek identity and the material representation of Eastern spatial arrangements in cities. Besides, the severe criticism regarding the possibility of canceling the implementation of the new plan and preserving Thessaloniki’s Turkish past that appeared in the local press between 1918 and 1921 provides overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The active resistance of the Jewish, instead of the Greek, community to the process of executing the new plan also points to the inaccuracy of such a view. Yet the development of the city after the fire—resulting both from Hébrard’s planning decisions and, even more importantly, from the political circumstances of the time—did seem to incorporate what Vafopoulos has called “the organic signs of a biological inter-breeding.” For years after 1921 significant portions of the urban space, which by choice or necessity were excluded from the area of the new plan, continued to function as meaningful contexts for local social life. And, eventually, the city as a whole became a representation of that conflict between Eastern spirituality and Western rationalism which has characterized modern Greek identity.

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT AFTER 1921

The functional and architectural development of the commercial center of Thessaloniki is representative of the above dilemmas. After 1921 lands in central Thessaloniki began to be returned to the local community, and the market area, which during the years since the fire had held only temporary structures and hovels, acquired new life. Representing an old and familiar order, the section west of Venizelos street was revived first, while the axis of Aristotle, with its state-imposed composition and expression, followed at a slower pace, and was still being developed in the fifties.54 The preservation of the old ownership system in the western section55 provides a ready explanation for this sequence of redevelopment. However, it could also be argued that the long history of this section of the city as a center of commercial and financial activities continued to influence local merchants, who recognized it as the proper area for their businesses. The state also seemed to accept this logic. In the discussions of the Parliament on July 2, 1921, concerning the distribution of new lots, Venizelos street (rather than the newly designed Aristotle avenue) was the only place which was referred to as desirable for both local owners and public or semi-private financial institutions.52

Thus the western section of the commercial center began to revive first through the erection of a multitude of new structures.56 Although the typological and expressive prototypes of these buildings were similar to those predating the fire, a
process of evolution in their architectural character can also be discerned. The development of St. Menas street constitutes an good example of trends characterizing the architectural production of the time. According to Trakasopoulou:

In all structures we encounter a variety of architectural and morphological elements, rich decoration with significant influences from the Art Nouveau, highly ornate sidewalk covers and elaborate iron works. Particularly characteristic were the facades of buildings located at street intersections, the corner composition of which projected in a variety of forms. . . . It must be emphasized that these forms do not appear in these new structures for the first time. They seemed to have existed since the end of the nineteenth century, but after the fire their usage evolved and was generalized. 59

Located across from the Bank of Athens and facing three major streets (St. Menas, Venizelos, and Tsimiskes), the Gatenio Florentin Building (1925) 60 is typical of the above architectural character (FIG. 14). Designed by the engineer and member of the designing committee for the new plan of Thessaloniki, J. Pleyber, it contained stores on the ground floor and offices around a central hall on its upper stories. Its influence by French models was clear in its exterior, which was characterized by a proportionate horizontal articulation of base, main body, and crowning; and by an emphasis on the vertical, provided by corner towers with Mansard roofs. On the other hand, the comprehensive composition of its facades and their decorative program (which seems to be expressive of an internal structural system) differentiated it from structures that predated the fire. The articulation of these was characterized by a monotonous repetition of singular modules, and their expressive quality often depended on attached ornamentation.

The stylistic expression of the Gatenio Florentin Building constitutes a unique example within Thessaloniki's commercial center. But its typology, consisting of offices positioned around a central space rising the building's entire height and covered by a skylight, was employed in numerous structures of the area. The proliferation of this building type and the simultaneous disappearance of the traditional khanes may be viewed as an architectural expression of changes in local economic life. 64 The extensive office space required by the new economic reality of Thessaloniki also led to a transformation of the expressive quality of the new structures. As indicated by three stylistically different buildings erected along St. Menas street in 1925 (Nahmia Building, Tattes Arcade, and Naar Building), 65 the pragmatic requirements of office use were expressed in a compositional clarity of facades, as well as in an exterior transparency resulting from an increase in window area and a relative decrease of ornamentation (FIG. 15).

The above examples could be viewed as representative of an attempt to renew the architectural character of the commercial center by abandoning the eclecticism of the nineteenth century and adopting contemporaneous compositional principles and stylistic models. An additional indication of this effort was the gradual emergence of the Art Deco style after 1921 in various sections of the new city, and particularly in the area of Venizelos street. According to Kolonas:

This desire to conform to the newest Western architectural prototypes becomes apparent in a series of articles by Divrios in the local newspaper Nea Apeleia (which also included an examination of the aesthetic quality of various newly erected structures in Thessaloniki): "Buildings comprising massive pilasters spanned through elliptical arches and supported by thin metal posts, an evident structural decay possibly attempting to create a charming impression of ruins, excessive use of plant and other sculptural motifs and facades directly copied from European Books 64 created an architecturally horrible urban image, according to Divrios. The solution to the eclectic employment of styles and ornamentation, he concluded, could only result from architects' exploration "of ideal and pragmatic truth as the highest characteristic of their work and their taking into consideration of the axiom that nothing is beautiful but that which is truthful." 66

The above architectural development constituted an unconditional and possibly uncritical acceptance of forms and models originating in a foreign cultural context, and could certainly be viewed as subconsciously imposed Westernization. With respect to the western section of the commercial center, however, particular characteristics of the place differentiated the nature of this process. On the one hand, the limited number of "modern" structures certainly reduced their significative forcefulness. On the other, this area had already begun, since the nineteenth century, to experience the effects of an analogous process of Westernization — a process which in the past had distinguished and even emancipated (as was the case for the Greek community) the local minorities from the Turkish ruling class. Finally, the new structures were placed within a familiar urban fabric, whose communal function was not disturbed by their introduction.
At the same time, however, the preservation of commercial arcades predating the fire, and the erection of new ones, constituted a means contributing to the increase of the complexity of the somewhat rationalized and simplified urban fabric and the retention of the traditional function of the place. For example, Zarkada notes that the Site Saoul "in the form it acquired after the fire of 1917 is an interesting architectural complex and a historical document of the flourishing of the Modiano financial house,"66 and of the development of Thessaloniki's commercial center as a whole. The arcade was established approximately between 1867 and 1881 by Saoul Modiano, the founder of the commercial house with the same name who became legendary for his wealth (FIG. 16).67 In 1906 the arcade contained ninety-six stores, a coffee shop, offices and storage rooms, and belonged to the children of Modiano.46 A major part of the building was burned in the 1917 fire, while the implementation of the new plan reduced its area. In 1929, however, a new portion designed by Ch. Modiano was added to that which survived the fire (FIG. 17). The resulting structure, which is preserved to this day, includes two intersecting pedestrian corridors connecting the surrounding streets with a multitude of stores, shops and offices on its two stories. Expressively, the complex was characterized by the plasticity of its facades and a harmonious coexistence between the neo-Renaissance old portion and the Art Deco new one.69

The urban and architectural development of the area around the Bank of Thessaloniki constitutes probably the most representative example of the essentially indigenous process by which newly introduced Western stylistic and technological models not only complemented and coexisted with older forms but were put to the service of old functions and local habits (FIG. 18). In her article "The Allatini Mansion in the French Quarter: The Evolution of Urban Space and Architectural Type," Trakasopoulou has provided a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the place, which does not require repetition here.70 It should be noted, however, that highly ornate old as well as newly erected buildings, together with more simplified ones pierced by a multitude of internal stoas, created a complex character for the area in contrast to the rationality of the new plan. The insistence of the old order of the place becomes most apparent in the case of Bursa street, which was enclosed within a new urban block. As Trakasopoulou has shown, aside from the addition to the Davidello Stoa along Sygros street, the remaining area of Bursa street was simply covered with a glass roof, and the earlier facades were preserved.71 As a result, the preexisting public way acquired the form of an internal passage with apparent signs of the new technology, but retained the essential elements of its earlier morphology and function.

Up to this point the analysis of the commercial center west of Venizelos street may seem inadequate in its description of the internal structure and essence of the place. Yet this inability to describe the development of the urban space as an orderly...
layering reflects a primary characteristic of a city which can be experienced but not rationalized. As Pentzikes has noted in a text referring to the market area:

In Thessaloniki nearly nothing of what one sees can be isolated. A dense co-existence of objects is created, leading to gradual spiritual and intellectual exaltations. It is exactly this that from an aesthetic point of view could be called color [character] as opposed to architectural line [style]. . . . One could not argue that one has in Thessaloniki separate objects which if observed from an appropriate point of view can be stripped off their material existence and reach the height of the idea. The best position and time to observe an object is that which allows the atmospheric conditions to transform it into a point of color and a quality of emotion.

The juxtaposition of disparate building types, functions and styles, especially in the western section of the commercial center, then, can be viewed as representative both of the city’s receptivity to change and evolution and of its attachment to a traditional order.

Yet the relation of the process of development in the above area after 1917 with that which characterized it in the late nineteenth century becomes even more apparent when compared with the newly designed eastern section — and particularly the monumental axis of Aristotle (FIG. 19). Constituting the focal point of the new monocentric city, Aristotle avenue, with the square at its southern end, became the material representation of foreign urban principles and prototypes. Its arrangement is characterized by a number of features: geometric clarity; a functional rationality that organizes the position of small-scale trade in the Bazaars to the north; luxury stores in the middle section, and entertainment in the square to the south; and a monumentality that results mainly from the immense scale of the complex. These urban features are in direct contrast to those of the western section of the city: its irregular street network, the coexistence of disparate functions, and the intimate size of public spaces.

The composition of the axis of Aristotle attempted to deal with issues which were not part of the city’s past life and function. For example, continuous stoas lined the two sides of the complex, providing a comfortable and protected space for pedestrians and distinguishing pedestrian movement from vehicular traffic. Although such an arrangement was a necessity in an urban metropolis, into which Thessaloniki was to develop, it destroyed the traditional function of the street as a center of communal life. The uniform and extensive stoas, though functionally and organizationally similar to the arcades of the western section of the commercial center, also created an entirely different physical impression. As their stylistic expression and their imposing scale indicate, their origins must be searched for in early Byzantine urbanism. The city’s Byzantine history, as represented in the early twentieth century by its significant and numerous churches, also provided the iconographic prototypes for the complex. It should be noted, however, that the compulsory neo-Byzantine facades lining the essentially Western urban space remained a pictorial statement by the architect Hébrard, who proposed it, and possibly the Greek state, which imposed it. This was a statement which, despite its apparent Greek connotations, continued to lack a cultural content.
A CLOSING REMARK

Various accounts regarding the history of the areas of the eastern Mediterranean have viewed its development in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a prevalence of a culturally and economically powerful West over a politically and economically weakened East. Through an analysis of the urban and architectural evolution of Thessaloniki's commercial center, this paper has attempted to examine two distinct expressions of this prevalence. Although the result of Western involvement, the development of the local economy in the second half of the nineteenth century led to the emergence of new, financially powerful social groups on the local level who were receptive to Western progress and civilization. This internal dynamic found its expression in new building types (e.g., banks) and styles (e.g., Neoclassicism) which were gradually introduced into the city's commercial center. As has been shown, despite its contrast to local architectural forms, this *indigenously developed Westernization* proceeded at a slow pace, and was incorporated within the old urban fabric, allowing the preservation of its essential nature and structure.

By contrast, the implementation of the new plan for Thessaloniki introduced an entirely different process of Westernization. Characterized by a determination to disregard the preexisting order and character of the place, the involved architectural and official authorities devised a plan which was based on principles and models of Western urbanism. As has been shown, the eastern section of the commercial center, in which the new plan was implemented, became a material representation of *imposed Westernization*, while the western portion continued to follow the process of evolution which had begun in the late nineteenth century.
REFERENCE NOTES

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1. H. Islamoglou and C. Keyder, “Agenda for Ottoman History,” in H. Islamoglou-Inan, ed., *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.47. Note the composition of the involved units into an interdependent network whose crucial attribute was the ability to reproduce itself.

2. For a comprehensive analysis of these developments, see I. Sumar, “State and Economy in the Ottoman Empire,” in Islamoglou-Inan, ed., *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy*, pp.65-87; and Islamoglou and Keyder, “Agenda for Ottoman History,” pp.42-62.


6. Note that the Ottoman administration did not remain inactive. The Tanzimat reforms were designed to strengthen central authority, to promote a secular universalist polity designed to strengthen central authority. Such universalism, it was thought, could benefit all and harm none: it would serve the preservation of the Ottoman state by opposing nationalist movements, it would integrate the local powers into a state apparatus . . . and it would promote uniformity and rationalization through the codification of laws, the establishment of formal equality for all citizens, and the recognition of private property. The crucial question of revenue crisis would be solved as well.


8. Ibid., pp.49-50.

9. A few of these banking houses had been established from the beginning of the nineteenth century.


15. Ibid., pp.185-209.


24. Ibid., p.576.


26. Ibid., pp.46-47.

27. Ibid., p.48.


30. Note that another Neoclassical residential building preexisted in the same location. It is possible then that significations similar to those discussed in this paper in relation to the new
building were associated with the old one as well. On the other hand, the presence of other stylistically and typologically Western structures like the Hotel Colombo and the commercial Stoa Lombardo in the surrounding area since the late nineteenth century could be viewed as reinforcing the above significant function of the Ottoman Imperial Bank.

31. G. Ioannou, *To Diko mou Aima [Our Own Blood]* (Athens: Kedros, 1980), p.96. Ioannou's text was written long after the construction of the Ottoman Bank. However, this reference is a representation of the significant function of the bank as a building type in general.

32. Minkol, *Thessaloniki*, p.94

33. Zarkada-Pistiole, *Nestor Mnemeia*, p.55. As we have already seen the Bank of Thessaloniki constituted the focal point of Thessaloniki's commercial center. However, it was a residential building, the mansion of the Jewish family of Altarini which was built in 1874 and became the core for the later development of the area.


37. For a complete account on the rebuilding of Thessaloniki, see A. Karademos-Yerolympos, *E Anexhadotheu tou Thessalonikis mete to Pyrgos tou 1917* [The Rebuilding of Thessaloniki after the Fire of 1917] (Thessaloniki: Publications of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, 1983).

38. Ernest M. Hebrard (1875-1933) was a graduate of the École des Beaux Arts and a recipient of the Grand Prix de Rome in 1904. His architectural training was classical, yet, as Hauzeau noted, "he understood that architecture is not the result of set formulas but is determined by natural, economic, social and historic conditions." This approach can also be observed in his urban proposals for Thessaloniki. M.L. Hauzech, "Ernest M. Hebrard," in *Urbanite (Paris: May 1953)*, p.142.


41. R. Dreyfus (E. Hebrard), "Le Nouveau Plan de Salonique," *L'Architecte* 1923, p.3. The composition of this complex, which included an additional square in its northern section, constitutes probably one of the most important and interesting aspects of the new plan, but its examination goes beyond the scope of this paper, and has therefore not been included here.


43. Archive of the Building Department, Thessaloniki, no classification.


45. In her comprehensive analysis of the new plan for Thessaloniki, Yerolympos has argued that "the retreat did not go far with regards to the plan. Hebrard undertook to amend his scheme and succeeded in securing the retention of its basic ideas." Yerolympos, *Amvoukhdemou*, p.126.


47. Ibid., 17-11-1921.


49. Ibid., p.58.

50. A detailed examination of this issue exceeds the scope of this paper and has therefore not been included here.

51. Those elements composed an indigenous identity which directed major aspects of everyday life and was in direct opposition to a Western one.

52. Prominent intellectual figures of modern Greece were involved in the development of this paradigm. Among them, I. Dragoumes attempted to describe a pure but forgotten Hellenicity by recognizing the Eastern roots of modern Greek identity. I. Dragoumes, *Martyrra Kai Heron Aima* [The Blood of Martyrs and Heroes] (Thessaloniki: Maliareas-Paidera, 1992, first printing 1907), p.viii.

53. The political aspiration of the modern Greek state for territorial expansion so that it would include Constantinople.


55. This process of developing Aristotelian square continued even after the 1950s. The western semicircular building of the square (Elektro Hotel), for instance, was not built until the end of the 1960s, while empty lots were remaining even later. Yerolympos, *Amvoukhdemou*, p.171.

56. In order to implement the new plan, after the fire, the Greek government decided to ignore the preexisting ownership system. To this end, they proceeded to expropriate the entire burnt section which was to be returned to the local owners through a bidding process. The exclusion of the area west of Venizelos street from the new plan, then, meant the preservation of the old properties with minimal changes.

57. *Ephimairia Symvouli tou Voulou* [Newspaper of Parliamentary Discussions], 2-7-1921, p.870.

58. The erection of a group of Greek banks with explicit stylistic references to classical antiquity resulted since 1924 in the emergence of a new financial center at the intersection of Tsimiskes and I. Dragoumes streets functioning alongside that of Fragi street. Due its position outside the boundaries of the area under consideration, a detailed examination of this development has not been included in this paper.


60. Ibid., pp.86-87.

61. See the first section of the paper.


64. Ch. Divrias, *Nea Athina*, 5-6-1932.

65. Ibid., 15-6-1932.


67. The Modiano commercial house was considered the richest one in the Ottoman Empire after that of Kamontz in Constantinople. Zarkada-Pistiole, *Nestor Mnemeia*, p.51.

68. Demetrias, *Topographia tou Thessalonikis*, p.188.


71. Ibid., p.167.


73. The creation of a monocentric city constitutes the most characteristic element of the new plan, indicating at the same time the desire to replace the old polycentric urban fabric.