

# The Bulgarian St. Stefan church in Istanbul: an architectural project from 1890s and its multifunctional application in Bulgaria

Blagovesta Ivanova<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** The paper analyses and compares some architectural projects connected with the construction of Bulgarian St. Stefan church in Istanbul. It views the theoretical and practical possibilities for their implementation in Bulgaria after the Liberation. It examines the architectural project of Fossati brothers, the unknown project of Antoin Perpignani and the first architectural project of the Istanbul architect with Armenian origin Hovsep Aznavur, with which he won the competition for a Bulgarian church in Istanbul in 1888.

After a decision for a constructive change in the conception of the building, the projects were proposed to be implemented in Bulgaria, thanks to Bulgarian diplomats. During the same year, the projects were proposed to be used for a construction of a church at the place where the temple St. Alexander Nevsky was to be built. Another idea was the projects to be used as plans for construction of other temples in Bulgaria. The facts and the conditions for the implementation of the projects were analyzed and the possible churches for which the project was used as a prototype were looked for in the architectural works on Aleksi Nachev. The reviewed and examined documents lead to the conclusion that the projects by Fossati, Perpignani, Aznavur and Nachev are linked and they were important for the construction of temples in Bulgaria after the Liberation.

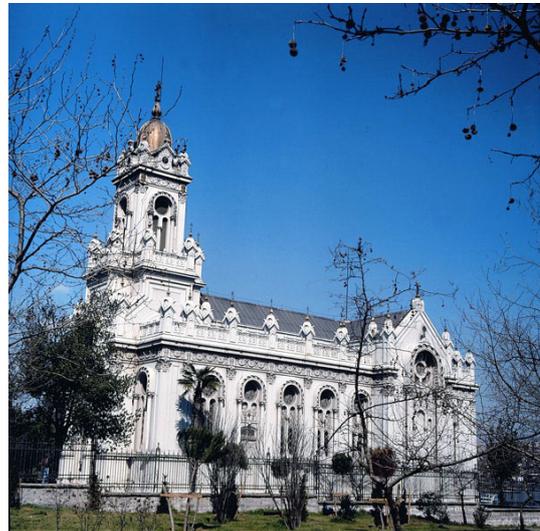
**Keywords** – Bulgarian church St. Stefan in Istanbul, architectural projects by Gaspare and Giuseppe Fossati, Antoine Perpignani, Hovsep Aznavur.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The orthodox church of St. Stefan in Istanbul is situated near the Golden Horn in the historical part of the peninsula between the Fener and Balat districts. Now it is a monument of national importance in the Republic of Turkey, and is under the supervision of the Bulgarian Churches Foundation in Istanbul. In the first part of 19 c. when the Ottoman Sultan recognized the rights of Christian population in the Empire, Bulgarians who lived in the city decided to build their own temple.

<sup>1</sup>Blagovesta Ivanova – Assoc. Prof. PhD Department of Urbanism Theory and History of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture at the Higher School of Civil Engineering, Sofia.

In 1849 they asked Stefan Bogoridi – a high-ranking Bulgarian in the administration of the Ottoman Empire to help them with the creation of an architectural project for the temple. At that time the wooden structure was reconstructed for a church.



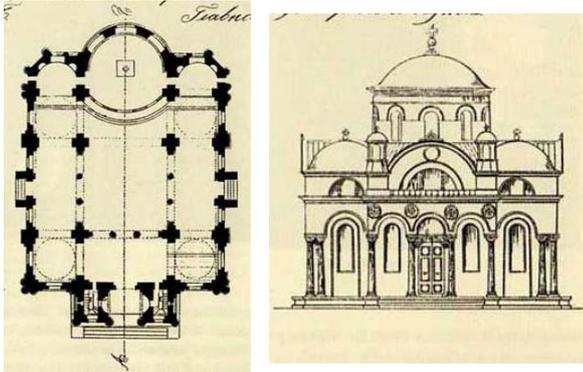
Picture 1. The steel church of St. Stefan in Istanbul, 1898

## II. THE ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT BY GASPARE AND GIUSEPE FOSSATI

In 1850 the Bulgarians decided to construct a new church. Its designers are the brothers Gaspare and Giuseppe Fossati who are from swiss-italian origin. The architectural scheme of projected in 1857-1858 stone temple is Byzantine. It is three apse central domed basilica with four callottes (blind domes) placed in the east and the west parts of the naos. The location of the domes shows the evolution of the architectural plan from the Greek cross. The dimensions of the temple are: length of 28,5 x width of 20,9 and the height of the dome is 21,85 archines.[1] As it is known, one construction archin is 0,758 m, therefore, the dimension of the church is 21,60 x 15,84 x 16,56 m. The temple was not constructed.

### III. THE ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT BY ANTOINE PERPIGNANI

In 1882 the Istanbul architect Antoine Perpignani investigated the fundament of the future temple and in the same year he created the new architectural project. In February 1883 Perpignani's project was sent to Sofia to the Ministry of building and was approved with the added proposal to work out the details about the section of the central dome.[2] This project has not been preserved in archives.



Picture 2-4. Fossati brothers temple.

### IV. THE COMPETITION FOR THE PROJECT IN 1888.

The competition for the project for the Bulgarian church in Istanbul started in 1888. The members of the commission are unknown and according to the newspapers the competition is held in Rome. Therefore none of the bulgarian architects has been assigned with this task. It is well-known that the architects Aznavur and Dilitdica participated in the competition. The second architect handed in the project later. Meanwhile in Sofia, Aznavur's project gets an approval, according to other sources. The task of the project for the competition is unknown, therefore Dilitdica's conception is unknown, because his project was not preserved.[3]

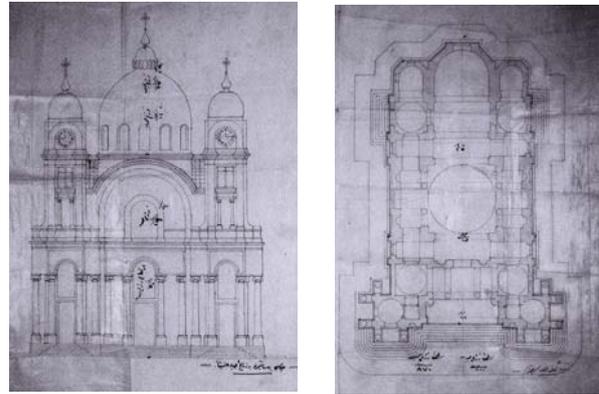
In February 1888, one month before the competition was going to be held "in Rome", Perpignani's project was returned from Sofia to Istanbul and the architect was asked to make corrections on it. Probably, they were not realized or they were unsatisfying even after the competition had started. It is possible that Perpignani took part in it, because in one of his letters after the competition he wrote that he is looking for his payment for the corrections and says that his project is available.

In 1890 the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religions Dimitar Grekov required the Diplomatic Agent in Istanbul

to send Perpignani's project and its applications to Sofia. The idea was the project to be used for building new churches in the Principality of Bulgaria.[4]

Our purpose is to know more about the realization of this architectural project.

Meanwhile, in 1890, Hovsep Aznavur destroys Fossati's temple foundations and organizes the analysis of the terrain. His prized project is now preserved in the Ottoman archive in Istanbul.[5]



Picture 5-6. The first Aznavur project/The project from the "Roma competition".

The first architectural project of Aznavur is a revision of Fossati brothers structure. The arch vaults of the temple are semicylindrical, the dome is placed on the place of its intersection. The dome has not got apronounced tambur. It has the skylight turret which is crowned with a cross. The dimention of this building are: *length 23, 46 x width 10 x height of the vault arches 20 x height of the dome 33,60 m.*

In 1888 the diplomatic agent Georgi Valkovich makes a suggestion to the minister of Foreign Affairs and Religions Georgi Stranski for the first project of Aznavur to be built in some big Bulgarian towns or even in the place where later the St. Alexandar Nevski Catherdral is built, because it has been paid for by the Government. Valkovich said that it could be enlarged to one quarter of its dimensions before being build. According to the Diplomatic agent this temple will be one of the most beautiful churches in the Balkan peninsula.[6]

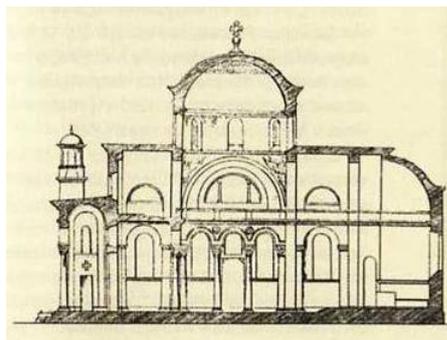
Why is the project expected to be realized on the place where the Cathedral St. Alexander Nevski has to be built?

The architectural project about the Cathedral church represents an enlarged project for the competition for building a memorial temple for the Russian Emperor Alexander II after his death. It is revised in for a Bulgarian cathedral 1885 but in 1886 its designer- Russian architect Ivan Bogolubov died. The projects for the temple are approved from the technical commission but the financial resourses for its construction were not enough.[7]

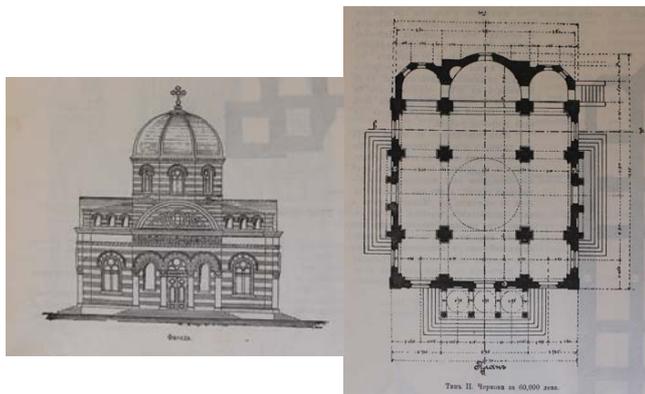
The examined facts show that the projects from Istanbul which can be realized in Bulgaria are two – they are Perpignani's project, and Aznavur's project. Aznavur's project is a revision of Fossati's project.

V. ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS FOR STANDARD CURCHES BY ALEKSI NACHEV.

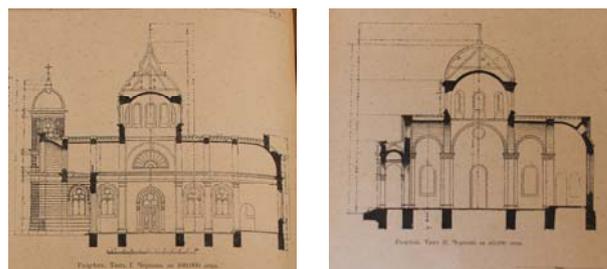
A similar project to Aznavur's we can find among the projects for standard churches by architect Aleksi Nachev. The examples show that Nachev's projects are created after Fossati's and Aznavur's architectural compositions. Their development is assigned to architect Nachev in 1892 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and religions as standard projects for the building of temples in the Bulgarian principality. He estimated the price of the finished building according to their complexity and their size to 100 000, 60 000 and 10 000 levs.[8]



Picture 11. Longitudinal section of Fossati's temple.



Picture 7-8. Project of Aleksi Nachev for standrd building of middle sized church for 60 000 levs.

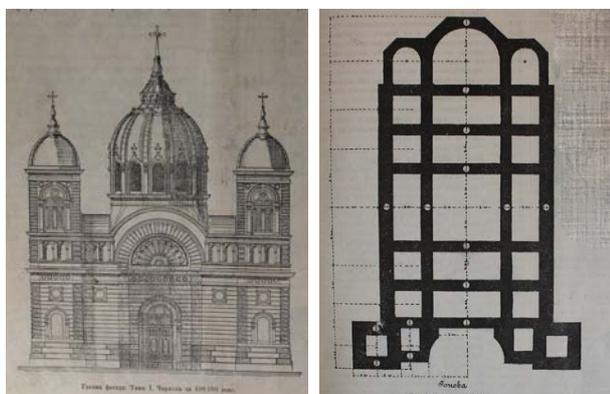


Picture 12-13. Longitudinal sections of Nachev's middle and large temples.

The comparison of the longitudinal sections of the projects by Fossati and Nachev shows their common peculiarities.

Architect Aleksi Nachev is one of the first Bulgarian architects after the Liberation. He graduated in Zurich in 1888. From 1892 (the year, when the creation of standard projects was assigned to him) he is one of the specialists in the Department of public buildings who carry out the control regarding to the documentation for the realization of St. Stefan steel temple in Istanbul.

The described facts show that in the period of 1883 and 1888 there are particular examples of demonstration of the desire and intention from high officials to use standard architectural projects in Bulgaria. Such is the case with the reception of the projects by Perpignani and Aznavur from Istanbul and Bogolubov's from St. Petersburg.



Picture 9-10. Project of Aleksi Nachev for standard building of large sized church for 100 000 levs.

If we examine the succession of the suggested projects, we can see not only the chronology, but the common characteristics which are submitted to the schemes of the architectural plan, the morphology and the façade compositions.

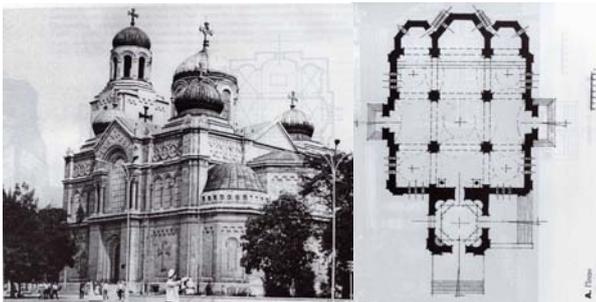


Picture 14. St. Ivan Rilski church in the town of Pernik 1920.

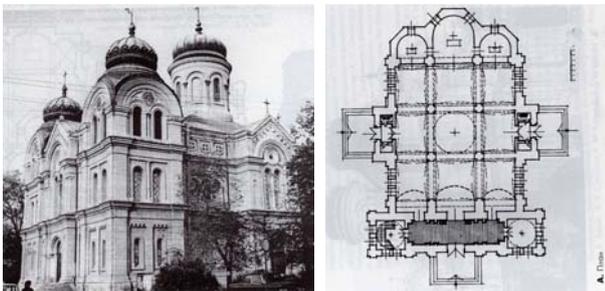
The last example of St. Ivan Rilski church in the town of Pernik shows the position of the domes which are configured according Nachev's standard scheme for a middle type of a church. The other peculiarity of this position is the connection with the old Byzantine

compositional scheme.

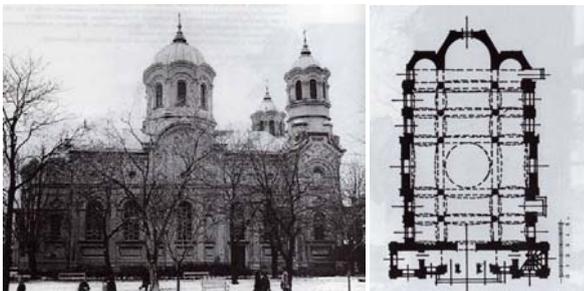
Lets mark another special feature. Similar plans, founded on the base of the transcription of Athos typology plans, have some churches such as: The Assumption in Varna, 1883-1885 from architect Gencho Kanev, according to idea project of architect Maas from Odessa. Similar is the church St. Dimitar in the town of Vidin (the project dated from 1885), which some authors define as a copy of the Varna Cathedral and others relate it to the works of Italian architect L. Bahnani; the churches St. Nikolai Mirlikiyski in Stara Zagora (1896–1909), St. Georgi in Sofia, (1896), and St. Nikolai Chudotvorets in Yambol follow this type and they are the standard projects about the big type of church projected by Aleksi Nachev.



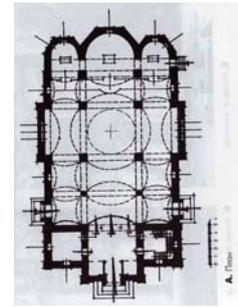
Picture 15. The church Assumption in Varna, 1883-1885.



Picture 16. The church St. Dimitar in the town of Vidin, the project dated from 1885.

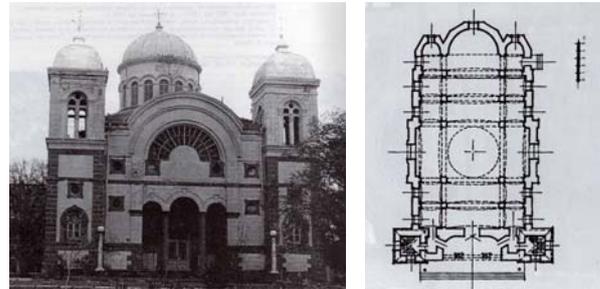


Picture 17. The church St. Nikolai Mirlikiyski in Stara Zagora, 1896 – 1909.



Picture 18. The church St. Georgi in Sofia, 1896.

Following this sequence does not allow us to add the church St. Nikolai Chudotvorec in Yambol. Peter Yokimov dates it to 1882 or 1885 based on different sources.[9] This means that this church is built earlier than the others.



Picture 19. St. Nikolai Chudotvorec in town of Yambol, 1882 or 1885.

Here I would like to note that the time of its building coincided with the year when Perpignani's project came to Bulgaria.

If we compare its plan and the façade composition we can see the similarity between the projects of Fossati and St. Nikolai Chudotvorec.

This entire means that the church in Yambol is not only an example for an accomplished project of Perpignani. The similarity between the projects of Perpignani and Fossati means that the idea of Swiss architects has been accomplished in Bulgaria.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion the analysis shows that the examination of Fossati's project of 1856 for the construction of Bulgarian church in Istanbul became the basis for the next interpretation of some architects such as Perpignani, Aznavur and Nachev. On this basis Aleksi Nachev became the author of the idea regarding the standard temple building after the Liberation.

## REFERENCE

- [1] CIAI (Church Historical and Archive Institute by Bulgarian Sinode), inv. 9103.
- [2] Central State Archive, f.166K, inv.1, a.u.120, pp.2–8, 14.01; 09-24.02.1883; CSA, f.321K, inv.1, a.u.615, p.23, 10.12.1889, (fr.lang.); CSA, f.321K, inv.1, a.u.615, p. 33, 07.02.1888 (fr.lang.); CSA, f.321K, inv.1, a.u. 615, p. 24, 24.03.1891, (fr.lang.).
- [3] CSA, f.246K, inv.1, a.u. 43, p.15A; CSA, f.246K, inv.1, a.u. 43, p.52-56.
- [4] CSA, f. 321K, inv. 1, a. u. 359, p. 1.
- [5] BOA 876, IB, lef 15.
- [6] CSA, f. 166K, inv.1, a.u.121, p.157–157b.
- [7] Радкова, Р. Храм-паметник Св. Александър Невски. С., 1999, с. 28. (Radkova, R. Temple-monument St. Alexander Nevski. S., 1999, p.28).
- [8] Начев, Ал. Три типа за черкови. – СпБИАД, 1894-1895, №4, с. 164-166; №6, с. 238. (Nachev, Al. Three types of churches. – ВИАД, 1894-1895, N4, 164-166; N6, 238).
- [9] Коева, М., П. Йокимов, Л. Стоилова, Православни храмове по българските земи. Архитектура, история, библиография. С., 2002, с. 424, 429-436. (Koeva, M., P. Yokimov, L. Stoilova, Orthodox temples on the Bulgarian lands, S., 2002, pp. 424, 429-436).