

**THE CHURCH OF SAINT  
SOPHIA IN OHRID**

**Architecture, History, and Urban  
Context**



## **The Church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid: Architecture, History, and Urban Context**

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Ekaterina Namicheva Todorovska





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# FOREWORD

As the Series Editor of the Architecture and Design book series, I am honored to introduce this book titled “The Church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid: Architecture, History, and Urban Context” by Ekaterina Namicheva Todorovska. This work is a great example of the mission of our series – to examine innovative perspectives between architecture, history, and cultural heritage.

The Church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid is one of the most significant monuments in our country, reflecting centuries of religious, cultural, architectural, and urban evolution. In this book, the author Namicheva Todorovska is not focused only on the architectural development and changes of the church, from the Roman and early Christian periods to the Byzantine and Ottoman Eras, but also analyzes its position within the broader urban fabric of Ohrid, a city that is recognized for its historical and cultural legacy as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition, this book provides a detailed analysis of the church’s structure, proportions, architectural elements, and features, offering readers details of religious, political, and artistic intentions embedded in its architecture.

Both reviewers of this book give special importance to the scholarly value of this book. Jasna Grujoska-Kuneska highlights the book’s comprehensive content, deep research, and special attention to both architectural and urban contexts, noting its significance for the representatives from conservation and similar professions. Marko Icev underscores the book’s contribution to filling a notable gap in the literature on St. Sophia, praising its integration of historical research, architectural analysis, and comparative study within the Balkans and beyond. Combined together, these reviews are confirming the book’s excellence as a research resource,

and its relevance not just for the students and academics, but also for anyone interested in the Balkan architectural heritage.

Furthermore, this book is aligned with the aims of the Architecture and Design series, which is focused on promoting interdisciplinary approaches to architecture and design, including the study and preservation of historical and cultural heritage. By connecting theoretical analyses, historical research, and detailed architectural and urban investigation, Namicheva Todorvska's book showcases a work that elevates our understanding of the architectural legacy while inspiring meaningful reflections on contemporary practice.

I firmly believe that readers will find this book both intellectually enriching and deeply engaging. It serves not only as a valuable reference for experts in architecture, history, and conservation, but also as an invitation to appreciate the cultural significance of one of Macedonia's architectural treasures.

Marija Miloshevska Janakieska  
Series Editor, *Architecture & Design*  
Associate Professor, Department of Architecture,  
International Balkan University  
Skopje, September 2025



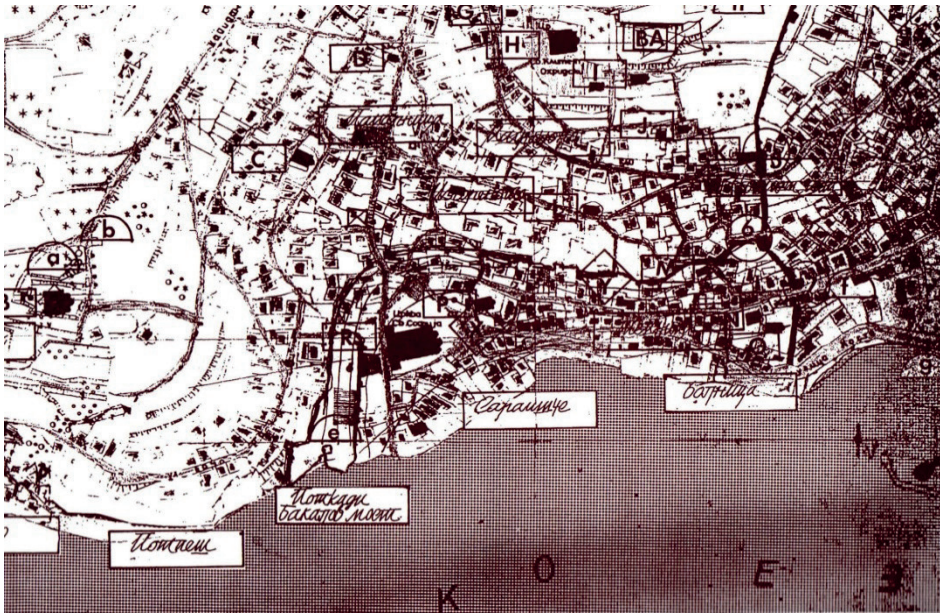
## CHAPTER 1

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# Location and Geographic Context of the Church of Saint Sophia

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the interest of the international scientific community in the city of Ohrid and Macedonia began to grow. There was a rediscovery of Ohrid as a rich region in cultural heritage from the prehistoric, ancient, and early Christian periods and the Middle Ages. The church of Saint Sophia is one of the most important monuments from the Byzantine period in Macedonia.

The old city of Ohrid, Lychnidos, is mentioned in the 3rd century BC as the capital of the area, Desaret. Well protected from the surrounding mountains, on the shore of Lake Ohrid, the city has the perfect conditions to develop as a military and economic center, while also being a political and cultural center. Ohrid had the most important role from the end of the 9th century till the beginning of the 11th century, when it was the center of Slavic cultural activities, the center where Cyril and Methodius and their associates were setting the grounds for South Slavic literature. During the reign of Samuel, Ohrid became the political center of his Empire. The role of Ohrid was important during the whole Middle Ages and the Ottoman Empire (Ljubenkovic, 1955, p. 24).



**Figure 1:** Master plan of the city of Ohrid and the position of the church (Chipan, 1996)

Saint Sophia is located in the lower part of the historic center of Ohrid-Lychnidos. From the coastline of Lake Ohrid, its position is 40-50m away in a straight line. The terrain on which the church is spread today is inclined towards the lake, and during its construction, it had to be leveled in order to be built on a flat terrain. The difference between the level of the church and the level of the lake is 5.50m. Saint Sophia is one of the most representative and important buildings of the Middle Ages in Macedonia. It's not known when the church was built; the archeological excavations have shown that the church was built on an ancient cult site. Under the church today, there are foundations of older buildings.