

## BONTA'S INTERPRETATION OF AN ARCHITECTURAL MYTH

Kujtim Elezi<sup>1\*</sup>, Nuran Saliu<sup>1</sup>, Enis Jakupi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Architecture, Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Tetova, RNM

\*Corresponding author e-mail: kujtim.elezi@unite.edu.mk

---

### Abstract

The paper aims to throw some light on the so called 'connection' between Le Corbusier and Macedonia, the way it was described through years and by different authors, a connection that indeed it didn't exist in the reality. The research shows that most of the authors that spoke about the 'Macedonian connection' were wrong, and Le Corbusier's visit to Macedonia in 1927 was indeed a myth created by them, not a reality. The present study charts the growth of an error and its gradual transformation into an accepted fact—albeit in a local context. The further research aims to interpret the architectural myth, created in decades by authors in Macedonia, taking Juan Pablo Bonta's 'way of interpretations in architecture' simply because the myth about Le Corbusier visiting Macedonia in 1927 makes a perfect example in Bonta's architectural interpretation. The myth of Le Corbusier's visit to Macedonia is not a historical work but a theoretical one, indebted to the influential studies by Juan Pablo Bonta's well-known essay. The obtained results of the myth interpretation, gives a clear approach to all stages of Bonta's view in architectural interpretation. The architectural myth created in Macedonia, can be totally explained, even one can presume what might happen in the upcoming time and how the myth will permutate in the future time. Based on this investigation, it can be concluded that Le Corbusier never visited Macedonia, there is impossible to exist a Macedonian influence in his work.

**Keywords:** Architectural myth, architectural identity, architectural interpretation, Macedonia, Le Corbusier.

---

### 1. Introduction

In April 2003, an IAESTE (International Association of the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience) seminar was held in Shkup, Macedonia, where the participants received an interesting anecdote about Le Corbusier's visit to the country: "*The great architect of this millennium, Le Corbusier, derived some of his architectural principles from the typical Macedonian house...Le Corbusier came to Macedonia's highest town Kruševo and was overwhelmed by the style and charm of this (then) prosperous town. He drew and photographed all of the old houses in this town and his sketches could now be found in the museums in Macedonia and abroad*" ([www.iaeste.org.mk/sid/aboutmacedonia.htm](http://www.iaeste.org.mk/sid/aboutmacedonia.htm)). Another author, Mihailo Popovski gives more details about Le Corbusier's visit into the town of Kruševo: "*When in 1927 the Frenchman Charles Edouard Jeanneret-Gris visited Kruševo, he could not get over his astonishment... But none of them [the older people], neither then, nor later when they were telling me this story, knew that this had been the famous architect Le Corbusier...*" (Popovski, 2003, p.32).

One of Popovski's sources may have been Mishel and Jovan Pavlovski's *Macedonia, Yesterday and Today*, published in 1998. Pavlovski also states: "*In 1927, Le Corbusier visited Kruševo and was delighted by the nineteenth century architecture unique to this small town. The densely-packed houses are characterized by magnificent architectural arrangements. Together they create a harmonious whole of various architectural elements and vivid colors, mostly light blue or light yellow...*" (Pavlovski, 1998, p.99).

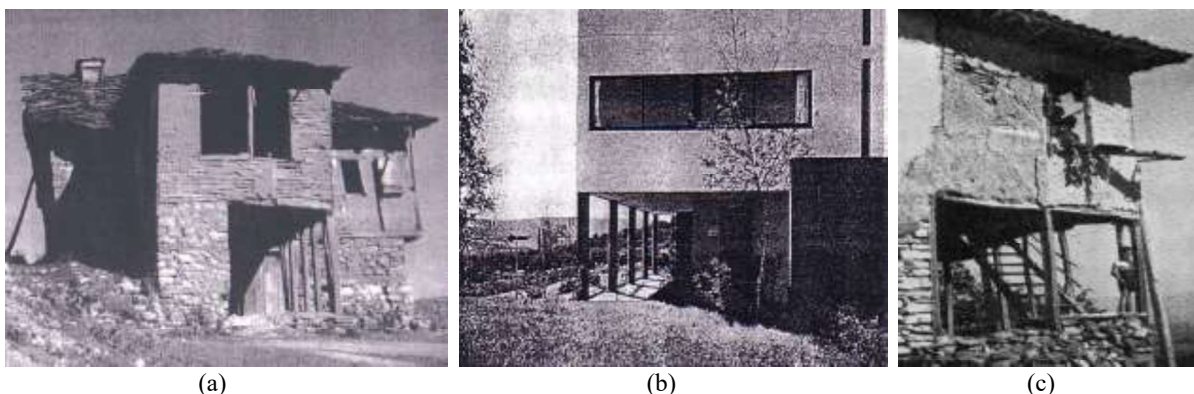
An earlier text, Sotir Tomoski's *Makedonska narodna arhitektura* of 1960 specifies the book in question as Le Corbusier's *Oeuvre Complete 1910-1929*, which came out as early as 1929, (Le Corbusier&Jeanneret, P. (1929), p.17-21). Tomoski claims that Le Corbusier publishes his sketches of Macedonian houses here

(Tomoski, 1960, p.8). And here begins my problem. In the *Oeuvre Complete 1910-1929*, there is in actual fact neither a discussion of Macedonia, nor any sketches of Macedonian houses. The closest things are Le Corbusier's drawings of houses in Bulgaria and Turkey, made during his *Voyage to the Orient* in 1911.

Also, the standard biographies of Le Corbusier fail to mention the Macedonian connection at all. Ivan Žaknić, (Žaknić, 1987, p.32-66), for instance gives descriptions of places Le Corbusier visited in 1911 however he names no entry or stay in any town in Macedonia. Giuliano Gresleri in his *Le Corbusier: Reise nach dem Orient*, (Gresleri, 1991, p.108-120) documents places Le Corbusier went during his *Voyage* with Le Corbusier's own sketches and photographs, but there is no evidence that would prove Le Corbusier to have made a sketch or a photograph of houses in Macedonia. H. Allen Brooks in his *Le Corbusier's Formative years*, (Brooks, 1997, p.225-303) and Geoffrey Baker in his *The Creativity Search*, (Baker, 1996, p. 138-169), also have studied Le Corbusier's early trips, but evidence that would prove Tomoski's statement is missing. This silence on the part of Le Corbusier himself as well as most historians is astonishing if it is true what the IAESTE conference information was claiming: that Le Corbusier learned his geometric language, his use of light and his way of dealing with the landscape from his Macedonian study trip. However, the idea that Macedonian house had influenced Le Corbusier as an architect is not new or unusual in Macedonia.

Seen from other perspective, historians have identified several influences on Le Corbusier even though he himself may not have wanted to call attention to them. Many of these alleged cases of influence, however, are controversial, for example that of Dutch theosophist and architect J.L.M. Lauweriks, (Lauweriks, J.L. 1987, p.75). In 1967, Dutch historian Nic Tummers created a sensation by claiming that Le Corbusier evolved his modular system directly under the influence of Lauweriks's theory of mystical proportion. Tummers claims that not only the Modulor, but the ideas of golden section and regulating lines in the *Vers une architecture* of 1921 were directly inspired by Lauweriks. The question about the influence of Lauweriks on the Modulor is only one of several contested issues relating to Le Corbusier but it suffices to demonstrate that the art historical judgment on Le Corbusier may still be revised. Given this fact, it seemed possible to me that Macedonian house may have played a role in Le Corbusier's development. However, as we started to investigate the matter, it became more and more obvious that the Macedonian connection was a myth.

The origin of this error can be traced back to the book *Makedonska kuća*, (Grabrijan, 1955, p.38-62), published in Lublana where Grabrijan presents a number of analogies between Le Corbusier's houses built in the 1920s and 1930s and vernacular examples from the Macedonian towns of Struga and Ohri, Figure 1 (a), (b), (c). Grabrijan does not think that these analogies are random or unconscious parallelisms; instead he believes they prove that Le Corbusier must have been to Macedonia and consciously borrowed some of his basic ideas from there, without ever acknowledging his great debt, (Elezi, 2010, p.64-72), Figure 2 (a), (b).



**Figure 1.** The trem in Macedonia, Le Corbusier in Stuttgart (1927) and again in Macedonia



(a)



(b)

**Figure 2.** Pilotis, Le Corbusier in Stuttgart (1927) and the master builders in Ohri - Macedonia

A little later, Boris Čipani expressed a very similar view in his *Starata gradska arhitektura vo Ohrid*, (Čipani, 1955), Figure 3 (a), (b), (c) and figure 4 (a), (b), (c). In 1960, Sotir Tomoski in his *Makedonska narodna arhitektura*, again claims that the houses in Macedonia have contributed through the creation of modern architecture through Le Corbusier's borrowings.



(a)



(b)



(c)

**Figure 3.** Ohri's house, example of a free façade

As concrete evidence, Tomoski states that Le Corbusier's *Oeuvre Complete 1910-1929* contains some of his sketches of Macedonian houses. By this time, in Macedonia, the myth about Le Corbusier's visit to the country and his being influenced by Macedonian houses had achieved its canonical form, to use Juan Pablo Bonta's term (Bonta, 1979, p.145). Over the next four decades [1960-1998], no further details were added to the story about Le Corbusier's visit to Macedonia, until in 1998 Mishel and Jovan Pavlovski attempted to demonstrate that the visit took place in the year of 1927, and that Le Corbusier was seen in the town of Kruševo. Finally, Mihailo Popovski filled in some colorful detail in his 2003 publication. In order to show once and for all that this story is just a myth, I delved into the extensive literature on Le Corbusier and consulted his personal library, contacted archives, and interviewed scholars, such as Giuliano Gresleri, Ivan Žaknić, H. Allen Brooks and Geoffrey Baker, as well as Macedonian officials. (The Office for The Maintenance of the Cultural Monuments: in Skopje, Marula Nikoloska and Viktorija Apostolova, in Ohrid Lenče Koćkoska, in Kruševo Nikola Jovanovski.) The conclusion is inescapable: Le Corbusier was definitely not influenced by Macedonian house, partly because he was never there.



Figure 4. The chardak leading to Le Corbusier's les terraces - Villa Stein (1927)

However, one does not need to conduct much study to realize that there is something wrong in the claim that Le Corbusier received his main ideas from a study trip to Macedonia in 1927: the idea collapses of its own chronological incoherence. Then why study such an obvious mistake? My attempt below is not limited to correcting the error. Instead, I want to study the myth of Le Corbusier's visit to Macedonia in order to see how such an error could arise, be disseminated, and finally be accepted as the truth, and also speculate on this basis about the general character of art historical interpretations, in particular the role of precedent and the concepts of influence and resemblance (Elezi, 2010, p.75-81).

## 2. Bonta's interpretation of an architectural myth

In his book *Architecture and Its Interpretation* (1979) Juan Pablo Bonta argues that many interpretations of works of art and architecture— if not all of them— “display a certain internal consistency within their own frames of reference”, (Bonta, 1979, p.131.) Bonta thinks that there is also a certain logic or order in the ways in which the various interpretations of a single work follow each other. He argues that time is an important factor in the process of interpretation, and that by arranging the interpretations, according to their chronological sequence, certain patterns may emerge which had not been considered previously and deserve closer inspection. (Bonta, 1979, p.131-132.) By following the various interpretations regarding Le Corbusier, and his (supposed) relation to Macedonia in a chronological manner, from the very first writings about him in 1955 and until the year 2003, it can easily be concluded that the Macedonian interpretations contain all the stages of Bonta's “filter” of interpretation: blindness, pre-canonical, canonical interpretation, dissemination, silence, oblivion and reinterpretation.

### 2.1. Blindness, pre-canonical responses and canonical interpretation

According to Bonta blindness is the first step in the process of architectural interpretations. It presents a time period during which a certain architectural work, for some reason or other, has passed unnoticed (Bonta, 1979, p.134-138). As regards nineteenth century houses in Macedonia, as an architectural phenomenon, the blindness of critics lasted until the 1955. In explaining the way in which things were interpreted and the role of the critics in the process of interpretation, Bonta argues that when a work departs from culturally established patterns, it always requires a collective effort of clarification, and that architecture becomes incorporated into culture as a result of the work of critics, no less than that of designers. It seems that in Macedonia, the work of critics until 1955 was hardly recognized, and that is why architecture was badly incorporated into the culture. Incorporating architecture into the culture, according to Bonta, requires meanings to be verbalized and new canons to be established. The 1950s presents a shift in judging the nineteenth-century architecture in Macedonia. For example, in 1955 Grabrijan in his book *The Macedonian House* argued that the architecture of the previous century in Macedonia should be treated as a heritage important enough to be used as the basis for the creation of modern architecture, not only in Macedonia, but also in Yugoslavia. Grabrijan presented a few suggestions to break the blindness about nineteenth-century architecture. It is necessary to return to the letter sent to Grabrijan in 1952 by his colleague Marjan Šorli: “In New York” wrote Šorli “I bought Peter Blake's book about Marcel Breuer.



Peter Blake begins with a conversation between Breuer and Le Corbusier ... Close by was a picture from some place in Macedonia.” (Grabrijan, 1955, p.108). On the same page Grabrijan reproduces the photograph Šorli was talking about, which indeed shows the city of Kratova. By reproducing it, Grabrijan started the process of interpretations about Le Corbusier and Macedonia. Elsewhere in his book, Grabrijan writes that “Le Corbusier in his writings and in the conversation with our [Yugoslavian] architects has mentioned that he has visited Macedonia, or as he calls it ‘South Serbia’,” and further elaborates that “Le Corbusier speaks a lot about the Oriental house, but when it comes to the Macedonian house he seems to be reserved.” (Grabrijan, 1955, p.120). Moreover, Grabrijan explains: “In his work we see a Macedonian influence in his first phase and that when modern architecture needed advice, architects who knew the Balkans, would take the Macedonian house as a model in creating the modern one.” (Grabrijan, 1955, p.120). In publishing his statements, Grabrijan was the first to draw attention to the importance of Macedonian architecture, and the role it had in helping one of the most important architects of the century, Le Corbusier, from the very beginning in his career. Grabrijan’s suppositions, published in 1955, are indeed matter of continuous judgments and illuminated guesses, but without statements supported by facts or at least backed up by the consensus of the academic community. Grabrijan’s scholarship was to be regarded as tentative, presenting individual interpretations, but as we have seen, these later became subject to further controversy with other individuals adding to the scholarship from where began the process of further interpretations of the story about Le Corbusier and Macedonia. In accordance with Bonta’s theory, Grabrijan’s guesses presented in the early 1950s can be taken as pre-canonical responses and, furthermore, he can be considered as the single initiator and author of the pre-canonical responses (Bonta, 1979, p.38).

However, Grabrijan was not the only architect and author interested in the nineteenth century houses in Macedonia. Jovan Krunić, another architect who became active in scholarly research in Macedonia, traveled from Serbia to Macedonia in 1950, only one year after Grabrijan. Krunić published his first views about the value of the nineteenth century houses from Macedonia in 1951-52, (Krunić, 1951) and went on to write a number of articles about it. But, Krunić never mentioned in his writings that Le Corbusier had some connection with Macedonia, that he had visited ‘South Serbia’ or been impressed by its architecture. This is particularly telling since Krunić had actually worked for Le Corbusier between 1938 and 1940. Although, Krunić’s articles are important for breaking the blindness about the nineteenth century houses in Macedonia, they can’t be taken as pre-canonical responses, because he does not give the basis for the later discussion of Le Corbusier and Macedonia, as we see happens with Grabrijan.

Another author that might have been given the same attention as Grabrijan and in some way breaks the blindness is Boris Čipan, who in his book *Old City Architecture in Ohrid* writes: “*The creative capability of the master builders, with which he solves his problems, has as a result an architecture all humanized, setting the master from Ohrid close to the protagonists of modern architecture*”, and that “it would be the first generation of the modern movement– Le Corbusier, Aalto [sic] *that will know how to use the values of such architecture, in realizing their own goals*” (Čipan, 1955, p.31-32) Finally Čipan will raise the controversy of Le Corbusier failing to acknowledge his sources: “*The elements of modern architecture which we use today in our projects, indeed are the same elements that modernists [Le Corbusier] copied from the anonymous architecture in Macedonia, but without speaking about their source of inspiration*” (Čipan, 1955, p.32). Čipan’s statement that Le Corbusier took the Macedonian house as model in creating the modern house can be also classified as a precanonical responses. If we are looking to limit the year of the precanonical responses in this case, then that would be 1955, the year when Grabrijan and Čipan published their suppositions, and the interpretation regarding Le Corbusier and Macedonia during the stage of the precanonical responses achieved the following form: *Le Corbusier was in Macedonia in his youth in order to be inspired by its architecture and we today can see the Macedonian influence in his work. Le Corbusier took the Macedonian house as a model to create the modern house.*

However, by the end of the 1950, there was a new viewpoint in the interpretation of Le Corbusier in Macedonia. By then it had changed sufficiently that instead suppositions by one or two authors there were now mature and important statements by leading authors in Macedonia. Grabrijan’s and Čipan’s writings about Le Corbusier and the importance of Macedonia in his work had opened the way for further

interpretations by other authors. In 1960 Sotir Tomoski received public attention in Macedonia when he published his book *Macedonian National Architecture*. Tomoski gives an example from a house in Dibra, where four windows were built so close to each other that it somehow reminds him of Le Corbusier's *fenetre en longueur*: "It is obvious that when the master builder built these four windows so close to each other, he didn't realize that actually he had marked the beginning of modern architecture. At the end of the nineteenth century and begin of the twentieth century we see the temptation to build windows of the house very close to each other, the chardak-verandas will be closed in with windows, making in this way a wall covered completely by glass. These houses are the predecessors of modern architecture. Even the pioneer of modern architecture, Le Corbusier itself, was inspired by them" (Tomoski, 1960, p.16.). Tomoski then concludes: "Our architecture contributed to the modern architecture through the name of Le Corbusier. In his *Oeuvre Complete 1910-1929*, we see sketches, chardak-verandas and interiors of our houses. Our old house, naked, rich with sun, air and green surfaces, with large glazed surfaces and with the wooden skeleton, couldn't keep away the feelings of an artistic soul like Le Corbusier, who then demands that modern architecture fulfill the same" (Tomoski, 1960, p.16). Tomoski concludes: "These [Macedonian] houses are the ancestors of modern architecture, and from which was inspired even the pioneer of the modern architecture, Le Corbusier" (Tomoski, 1960, p.16).

Grabrijan's and Čipan's tentative suggestions and Tomoski's more definitive statements suggest that many previous responses were distributed by the repetition of the essential facts. It has to be said that at this point the interpretation does not recognize one single author—initially Grabrijan—but rather is shared by an entire community, or at least by an identifiable section of it, namely the academic and professional subcultures: Boris Čipan, Sotir Tomoski, and Krum Tomovski. Bonta calls such a development in the process of interpretation as the canonical interpretation (Bonta, 1979, p.138-145). In short, after Tomoski's conclusion that Le Corbusier in his *Oeuvre Complete 1910-1929* shows sketches of Macedonian houses no one will doubt that Le Corbusier had visited Macedonia, had been inspired by the Macedonian houses of the nineteenth century and that had used Macedonian elements in his later career, without mentioning from where those elements were coming. By the 1960s, using Grabrijan's suggestions and his analogy between the houses in Macedonia and Le Corbusier's villas, Čipan's conclusions and Tomoski's statements, the interpretation regarding Le Corbusier and Macedonia will have achieved its final form: *Le Corbusier was in Macedonia to seek inspiration, and what he saw inspired his later work. He visited the towns of Struga, Ohri, and Kratova. We recognize in his house's elements of our nineteenth century Macedonian house. We Macedonians have contributed to modern architecture through Le Corbusier, who took our house as a model in creating the modern house. Yet he was never willing to say a word about the originality of his work, and did not discuss the sources of his inspiration*

This general interpretation about Le Corbusier and Macedonia became the culminating interpretation at the end of the 1960s. Once the canonical interpretation was fixed in Macedonia, there began the phase of its consolidation. From this perspective, what needs to be explained is not how some precanonical responses became included in the canonical interpretation, but rather how it is that some of them were abandoned. One of the forces that govern the process of filtering is the necessity of reconciling contradictory aspects among diverse initial speculations. At the stage of precanonical responses a variety of conflicting views can coexist, where the canonical interpretation emerges as a number of unrelated responses, which gradually settle into a consistent pattern. After the reconciliation of all contradictory aspects – e.g. the acceptance of Struga, Ohri and Kratova as towns visited by Le Corbusier, not giving a date when Le Corbusier was in Macedonia, naming only that which was called 'South Serbia'—after the 1960s we have the generalized version of the canonical interpretation as follows: *Le Corbusier was in Macedonia, he was inspired by what he saw there and he uses the elements of the nineteenth Century Macedonian houses in his later works.*

Another factor that has an effect on the process of canon formation is the means graphic and photographic used to record all that has been claimed before. Beginning with Grabrijan and Tomoski, we see both authors trying to give a pictorial record of what they were suggesting and supported their conclusions with drawings and photographs. For instance, Grabrijan's analogy, is supported by comparative sketches and photographs

between Struga and Villa Carthage and and between Ohrid and Pessac, and there is also the analogy *Bondruk* and *Dom-Ino* (Grabrijan, 1955, p.111). In Tomoski's writings there is the comparison between the house in Dibra and houses Le Corbusier published in his *Oeuvre Complete 1910-1929* (Tomoski, 1960, p.16). The third factor that leads from pre-canonical responses to the canonical interpretation is the presentation of the issues considered worthy of concern. The 1960s were the years in Macedonia when Macedonian architects tried to base their modern architecture on the elements of the nineteenth-century architecture. This was an issue worthy of concern and that is the reason why the myth of Le Corbusier and Macedonia had to be promoted in the canonical form (Elezi, 2010, p.76-81).

## 2.2. The period of dissemination

With the publication of Tomoski's *Macedonian National Architecture* in 1960, people became convinced about Le Corbusier having Macedonia as a source of inspiration and it became that which Bonta calls the canonical interpretation and the 1960s was a point in the process of interpretation in which the canonical interpretation reached a wider public, what Bonta terms the period of dissemination (Bonta, 1979, p.175). In the period between 1960 and 1998 the interpretation about Le Corbusier used Macedonia as a source of inspiration was further consolidated in Macedonia by different interpreters and then sold to the general public in a simplified form.

The process of consolidating the view has to do with the generalization of the whole interpretation. During the period of dissemination, interpreters in Macedonia did not occupy themselves with details, such as for instance the precise dates or even the year when Le Corbusier would have visited Macedonia (or 'South Serbia') or the precise places he visited, other than Struga, Ohri and Kratova. Even Grabrijan's analogy between nineteenth-century Macedonian houses and Le Corbusier's work was discussed only in a general way, and without using specific details. Architects, authors and different institutions would all occupy themselves in "selling" the story. Accordingly, the interpretation that Le Corbusier visited Macedonia would be simplified to a level acceptable to the general public. And, of course, moreover, there was no reason to doubt that this interpretation would be anything but true. So, the final version of the interpretation in the late 1970s was as follows: *Le Corbusier had been in Macedonia to seek inspiration for his future work. An analogy exists between the Macedonian house and the work of Le Corbusier. We see how our Macedonian elements were used by Le Corbusier in his villas, but he himself never realized that Macedonia was the source of his inspiration.*

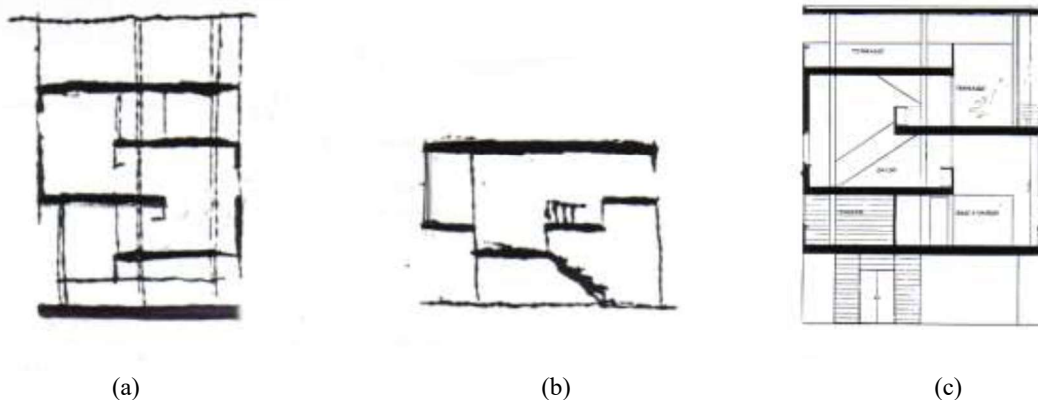
However, during the long period of dissemination of the idea that *Le Corbusier had visited Macedonia*, there are some interesting points to be recorded. First, interpreters tend to base their version of the "story" not on written texts (very rarely in this case) but on verbal statements. This explains the fact that in Macedonia, everyone who was dealing with art and architecture knew "from somewhere" the story about Le Corbusier and Macedonia. Second, interpreters were capable of basing their statements not only on facts such as Šorli's letter and the photograph of Kratova "owned by Le Corbusier," referred to in Grabrijan's book, but also on verbal statements, as made for instance by Tomoski, who claimed that sketches in Le Corbusier's *Oeuvre Complete 1910-1929* are of Macedonia, when in fact they are from Bulgaria and Turkey. In doing so, they all help to perpetuate the myth (Bonta, 1979, p.134-138).

Then, during the phase of dissemination, according to Bonta's theory, in interpreting architectural phenomena it might happen that the initial relationship between a particular phenomenon [between Le Corbusier and Macedonia in the present case] and any texts may be completely lost due to the successive deformation of the "primary" text. In this case, such an example of verbiage running wild happens with the infamous letter sent to Grabrijan in 1952 by his friend Šorli concerning a passage in a book by Peter Blake. Up until the beginning of the period of dissemination, we have been dealing only with successive deformations of the primary text. As analyzed in detail above, Šorli distorts the topic of the conversation between Le Corbusier and Marcel Breuer, changes "South-Eastern Europe and its architecture" to "Yugoslavian folklore architecture" and "Southern Hungary" to "close to the Yugoslavian border" (Blake, 1949). The second deformation of the text appeared in 1955, this time in the Macedonian edition of

Grabrijan's book, translated by Branko Juvan who somehow forgets to translate "close to the Yugoslavian border," leaving only "Le Corbusier at once began to talk about Yugoslavian folklore architecture" (Grabrijan, 1955, p.108).

Nevertheless, as Bonta claims, the most interesting point in the stage of dissemination is not the changing of facts or losing the relationship between the phenomenon and the text, as the examples in Macedonia show, but the abandonment of the first important facts, the basis from which the interpretation was started (Bonta, 1979, p.175-186). In the present case, the interpretation about Le Corbusier and Macedonia began with Šorli's letter and the picture showing the city of Kratova, interpreted as: *Le Corbusier had been in Macedonia, he was explaining to Breuer his source of inspiration, and he had a picture from Kratova.*

But, when the story reached the public or canonical interpretation, the facts were abandoned. In the second Macedonian edition of *The Macedonian House*, from 1986, as the book was enlarged in terms of the number of pages and sketches, the famous letter from Šorli and the photograph of Kratova were absent, though in the first Macedonian and Serbo-Croatian edition of 1955, the letter and the photograph from Kratova were the main documents proving the connection between the Le Corbusier and Macedonia, Figure 5. For Macedonian interpreters it seems that at that time it was important that the story to be sold in a generalized form and also to be accepted as such– which it indeed was. That is why the translator of the second edition, Dolja Spirova-Stefanija "doesn't know how such an important fact for Macedonia and Macedonians [publishing Šorli's letter] was left unpublished in 1986." (Conversations with the translator of the 1976 edition Dolja Spirova-Stefanija, November 2004-April 2005).



**Figure 5.** Cross-section of the villa Carthago, published in *The Macedonian House* (1955), (a) published upside down but compared to a gipsy house in Struga (b). The real cross-section of the villa Carthage (1923) (c)

Another example of this kind is the involvement of the Minister Dejan who, according to Grabrijan, was interested in solving two problems: first, to find out what is specifically Macedonian in the nineteenth century architecture in Macedonia, and second, to find an analogy between Le Corbusier and the Macedonian architecture (Grabrijan, 1955, p.2). In his book Grabrijan does not give us the real name of the minister referred to in 1949. It might be that it was not usual to give too many details about such a very highly placed person in the government. While the Slovenian (1976) and Serbo-Croatian (1955) editions of Grabrijan's book contain only references to "Minister Dejan," the Macedonian versions of the same book from 1955 and 1986 has a note explaining who indeed was the Minister Dejan– an architect, Kiro Georgievski. (Grabrijan, 1955, p.22&Grabrijan, 1986, p.27). A deformation of a different kind occurs with the sectional sketch of the Villa Carthage (1923), used to show the analogy between the houses from Struga and the Villa Carthago – which in all editions of *The Macedonian House* was reproduced upside down (Figure 5 (a)). No one has ever noticed this mistake. (Grabrijan,1955, p.22&Grabrijan,1986, p.27).



### 2.3. Silence, oblivion and reinterpretation

According to Bonta, interpretations eventually go through states of silence, oblivion and reinterpretation (Bonta, 1979, p.182-200). This seems to happen in the present case, as well. After 1986, the year when the Macedonian edition of Grabrijan's *Macedonian House* was published for the second time, the process of interpretation in Macedonia appeared to dry up. Since the canonical interpretation had been established, it was difficult to think of the "story" in any other way, and over years it became tedious to keep repeating the same points, to hail the same version. Under these circumstances, the story of Le Corbusier visiting Macedonia was likely to be mentioned less frequently, simply because there was an indication of things being taken for granted. No other comments or new interpretations about Le Corbusier and Macedonia seem to have been recorded after 1998, or at least not until recently.

The silence in the process of interpretation in the present case can be explained first of all as "absence" of the main actors: Grabrijan died in 1952, leaving his book completed but unpublished, Le Corbusier in 1965, Sotir Tomoski in 1985. After the interpretation had achieved the stage of canonical interpretation, other authors that have written about Le Corbusier and Macedonia, such as Vangel Božinovski, Boris Čipan, Petar Muličkovski, and Krum Tomovski, have based their comments on the earlier texts, mostly on Grabrijan's and Tomoski's writings or misreadings of Le Corbusier. This is a reason why the silence became self-perpetuating and led to a state of what Bonta terms oblivion (Bonta, 1979, p.182-200) that is to a state where the story becomes meaningless, where interpretations are liable to wear out.

But as Bonta argues, oblivion does not necessarily mean that the story about Le Corbusier and Macedonia was already old and totally forgotten. Oblivion will not imply the conclusion of the interpretative process of the work, and it can't be declared as the end stage of the interpretation even in the present case. Indeed, the canonical interpretation will be further presented to the public, but in a "reduced" form. Thus, in 1998 there appeared in Macedonia new information about Le Corbusier and Macedonia, which was enthusiastically accepted by the public. In their book *Macedonia, Yesterday and Today* (1998), Jovan and Mishel Pavlovski write: "*In 1927, Le Corbusier visited Kruševo and was delighted by the nineteenth century architecture unique to this small town...*" (Pavlovski, 1998, p.99). A few years later architects, students of architecture, and the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje would also be involved in distributing the same new information. Perhaps in order to make an impression on the visiting guests, during the Seminar on IAESTE Development, held in Skopje between 24th and 27th April 2003, this same information was presented: "*The great architect of this millennium, Le Corbusier, by the name of Charles- Eduard Jeanneret, was an international Swiss architect and city planner who established some of his architectural basics and principles according to the typical Macedonian house... Le Corbusier came to Macedonia's highest town Kruševo and was overwhelmed by the style and charm of this (then) prosperous town...*" (IAESTE, [www.iaeste.org.mk/sid/aboutmacedonia.htm](http://www.iaeste.org.mk/sid/aboutmacedonia.htm)). But it seems that Mihailo Popovski in his book *Monographs about Kruševo* (2003), is even more specific about Le Corbusier having visited Macedonia. Claiming to be the first person to discover the year (1927) and place (Kruševo) Le Corbusier was staying during his trip to Macedonia, he writes: "*When in 1927 the Frenchman Charles Edouard Jeanneret-Gris visited Kruševo, he could not recover from astonishment. While his companion, a man from the French Embassy in Belgrade, was acquainting him with some historical events since the beginnings of the town and specially those referring to the Ilinden Uprising, the guest, obviously excited, took notes and sketches in his big sketching pad, very fast...*" (Popovski, 2003, p.32).

So, the year 1998 records new information about the already old story of *Le Corbusier and Macedonia*; namely that Le Corbusier had visited Macedonia in 1927, and that the city of Kruševo had been his point of interest. This kind of new and indeed important fact was good enough for the process of interpretation not to be over. Instead of oblivion, a new stage of interpretation was about to begin after 1998 that of reinterpretation or, as Bonta suggests in reference to Thomas S. Kuhn's study of the accumulation of scientific knowledge, of revolution, in which everything is re-examined (Bonta, 1979, p.202). According to Bonta, an obvious way to begin a reinterpretation is when there are aspects of the facts that were overlooked at the stage of the canonical interpretation— something which is inescapable in any

interpretation— and as time passes and the attention of the architectural community focuses on new topics, more and more issues will be found to have been omitted in an old canonical interpretation (Bonta, 1979, p.182). The above examples in Macedonia show that now we have to deal with new, overlooked facts; that is, the year when Le Corbusier visited Macedonia, 1927, a new city he visited, Kruševo, and a record of his behavior (the way he was sketching, taking notes in his pad and photographing, and the way he was dressed). These new facts, published in 1998 and in 2003, by the Pavlovskis and Popovski respectively, build the basis for the stage of reinterpretation of the already old story about Le Corbusier and Macedonia.

The first step in the process of reinterpretation in Macedonia was the destruction of the mystique associated with the old canonical interpretation. If we cast an eye over the above presented texts, we see that from the old version of the interpretation – the canonical stage of the interpretation— only the main *idea* has been taken: that Le Corbusier had visited Macedonia and was inspired by Macedonian architecture, and not the old facts that he was in Struga, Ohrid, or Kratova. The canonical interpretation was thus destroyed by presenting new facts: the year 1927, Kruševo as a city visited by Le Corbusier. Taking the canonical interpretation for granted, then ignoring it, and then challenging it, are the first steps in the process leading to reinterpretation. But for reinterpretation to occur, it is necessary for there to be a change in focus, a switch to a new area of interest. And in Macedonia this time we have the switch, the new area of interest, the date, the city, and the “complete” description of Le Corbusier’s action.

It is too early to judge how long it will take for such a reinterpretation to crystallize or whether it will crystallize at all. It can be predicted, however, that should a canonical reinterpretation emerge, it will be constructed from the point of view of the current interests of society. Its prime components, as Bonta concludes, could be semiotic, philosophical or religious, but there are also several other centers of interest, which could provide the basic insight (Bonta, 1979, p. 217). In the case of Macedonia, the prime component in the emergence of a reinterpretation is less likely to be philosophical or religious, but rather historical; that is a component that will help to create an identity for the Macedonian nation, or in fact to rebuilt the identity for the second time after 1945, keeping in mind the political circumstances in the former Yugoslavia after the 1990s, when Macedonia became independent and the rebuilding of the nation’s identity once again came in question (Elezi, 2010).

### 3. Results

As regards authors discussing issues close to the matter concerning Le Corbusier visiting Macedonia brought no solution to solving the dilemma. There is no indication in the correspondence that Le Corbusier had anything to do with Macedonia, there is nothing about Macedonia or Le Corbusier’s visit in 1927 to Macedonia or ‘South Serbia’. Gresleri’s suggestion, when contacted to discuss Popovski’s and Pavlovski’s claim about Le Corbusier’s visit in 1927 to Macedonia was very clear: “ignore both of the books you are writing me about, and also ignore all other sources, saying anything about Le Corbusier having travelled in Macedonia in 1927, a year when the “Maestro” was travelling in Frankfurt, Germany and in Barcelona, Spain”. Given the implausibility of this particulate date, 1927, one wonders why Popovski chose it, instead of claiming, for example, that Le Corbusier had visited Macedonia during the Voyage to the East, or shortly thereafter. Grabrijan’s remark about South Serbia would allow any year between 1913 and 1941; is it just a coincidence that Popovski’s preferred date is exactly in the middle? Le Corbusier’s alleged visit to Macedonia can be seen as an example of what Daniel J. Boorstin has called a “pseudo-event” (Boorstin, 1967). According to Boorstin, a pseudo-event is “not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.” (Boorstin, 1967, p.11). Same what has been written about LC and Macedonia. In short, Kiro Georgievski had planted a pseudo-event for the purpose of being reported and reproduced, making Macedonians believe in the importance of the Macedonian house in Le Corbusier’s career.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

What we can conclude from Grabrijan's mistaken attribution of Macedonian influence on Le Corbusier it is that the myth was wrong, and in particular the year 1927 for the supposed trip of Le Corbusier to Macedonia could not possibly explain his white style, as it was about to end at that time and because the basic elements of the style had been determined as early as 1915 when Le Corbusier patented the Dom-Ino system.

If the method of similarity is difficult to apply as regards buildings and their visual characteristics, it is no less problematic when dealing with texts. Especially when we enter the domain of architectural theory, it becomes very difficult to identify precursors or influences. Original ideas are extremely rare, especially when compared with science or with the rapidity of formal development in the various arts.

Our investigation of the Macedonian thesis has broader implications. To claim that Le Corbusier was influenced by Macedonian architecture is not the only mistake; a more damaging, even if common, mistake is to infer that one work of architecture has influenced another if there is a certain amount of similarity and if a historically possible connection can be established. It is known that art historians have a terrible idea of what they call affinity. They operate with resemblances: you can find a precursor only in the sense of finding things that resemble and hence have an affinity with. Le Corbusier and his connection to Macedonia is what we call an external genealogy, because there is no causal relationship.

#### References

- [1]. Popovski, M. (2003). *Monografija Kruševo*. Skopje: Narodna i Univerzitetska Biblioteka.
- [2]. Pavlovski, M.&Pavlovski, J. (1998). *Macedonia yesterday and today*. Skopje: MI-An Publishing Agency.
- [3]. Tomoski, S. (1960). *Makedonska narodna arhitektura*. Skopje: Makedonska Kniga.
- [4]. Žaknić, I. (1987). *Journey to the East*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- [5]. Gresleri, G. (1991). *Le Corbusier, Reise nach dem Orient*. Zürich: Spur Verlag.
- [6]. Brooks, H.A. (1997). *The Formative Years of Le Corbusier*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- [7]. Baker, G. (1996). *Le Corbusier- The Creative Search*. London: E&FN Spon.
- [8]. Grabrijan, D. (1955). *Makedonska kuća, ili prelaz stare Orientalne u savremenu Evropsku kuću*. Ljubljana: Državna Založba Slovenije, 1955.
- [9]. Elezi, K. (2010). *Le Corbusier in Macedonia, the history of a myth*. VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.
- [10]. Čipan, B. (1955). *Starata gradska arhitektura vo Ohrid*. Skopje: Makedonska Kniga.
- [11]. Bonta, J.P. (1979). *Architecture and its Interpretation, A Study of Expressive Systems in Architecture*. London: Lund Humphries.
- [12]. Krunić, J. (1957). Smeštaj, razvoj i osnove Bitoljske kuće pri koncu turske vladavine. *Zbornik Arhitektonskog fakulteta u Beogradu*, Beograd, III (1956-1957), 5.
- [13]. Krunić, J. (1951). Neke naše stare konstrukcije i njihove forme (Primeri narodne arhitekture starih majstora Makedonije). *Arhitektura*, Zagreb, 9-12.
- [14]. Blake, P. (1949). *Marcel Breuer; Architect and Designer*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.
- [15]. Boorstin, D. (1967). *The Image, A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Atheneum.
- [16]. Lauweriks, J.L., "Ein Beitrag zum Entwerfen auf Systematischer Grundlage in der Architektur", in *Ring*, Heft 4, April 1909. Tummers, H.M., *J.L. Mathieu Lauweriks*, Hilversum 1968. Sebastian Müller, "Die Moderne in der Architektur und J.L.M. Lauweriks" in *Maßsystem und Raumkunst. Das Werk des Architekten, Pädagogen und Raumgestalters J.L.M.Lauweriks*. Ausstellungskatalog. Hagen, Krefeld, Rotterdam 1987.
- [17]. Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret, *Oeuvre Complète 1910-1929*, Zürich, 1929.