

Sinan's Sculptural Architecture in Istanbul

by Muzaffer Özgüleş

November 22nd, 2008

Karlsruhe, Germany

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1. Introduction

It is a bizarre dream to imagine a series of sculptures placed between two minarets of Selimiye, on top of its portico; just like the front façade of Saint Peter's Basilica.¹ [Figure 1]

Doğan Kuban writes so in his book "Ottoman Architecture" for Architect Sinan's masterpiece Selimiye Mosque, while discussing Ottoman Art in the context of Islamic Architecture and Renaissance. This dream *would be* very strange indeed, if we remember that the Ottoman Empire was following the strict rules of Islam, which were banning sculpturing in order to prevent creating icons of God, especially at that time. Not before late 19th century did the city of Constantine have the chance of hosting new sculptures on the façades of buildings with a western style² [Figure 2]. One should also note that the previous ones -if there had been any remaining- had been removed after the fall of the last piece of Eastern Roman Empire into the hands of Turks in 1453.

However, in the golden age of Ottoman Empire during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, Sinan was the artist to surmount this ban. He was the chief architect of the Empire for half a century (between 1538 and 1588) and maybe, he was the most powerful architect of all ages. [Figure 3] He was not only responsible for all the building activities and city planning of the capital, but also for training his successors and sending them to several places within the Empire to implement his own plans. The result of this power was incomparable: Sinan was accounted to have approximately 400 buildings³, most of which are located in Istanbul. This achievement, as compared to other Islamic architects or, indeed, to his contemporaries in Renaissance Europe, was extraordinary.⁴ Nonetheless, Sinan's power was not due to quantity of his works: the quality of them was at such a level that one may call them sculptures within the city due to their monumentality.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to reveal the intersections of art and science in his works, which are bedecking this city just like sculptures. Architecture was the language Sinan used to express, not only the religious believes, but also his artistic creativity; and this paper will focus on the transformation of a simple building into a monument within his hands.

¹ Doğan Kuban, *Osmanlı Mimarisi*, İstanbul: YEM Yayın, 2007, p. 465

² Afife Batur, "Frej Apartmanı", in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: 1994, p.338

³ Aptullah Kuran, *Mimar Sinan*, İstanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1986, pp. 22-23.

⁴ J. M. Rogers, *Sinan*, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies: I. B. Tauris, 2006, p. 36

In order to fulfill the aim of this paper, the essence of Sinan's achievements will be discussed within three headings: His sculptures, i.e. the monumentality and aesthetic perfection of his works; his use of space, i.e. introducing innovative relations between site and the building; and his city planning, i.e. placing his works in the city in order to establish a dialog between them.

The focus of this paper will be on the buildings constructed in and around Istanbul, since this was the city where Sinan gave 75 % of his total number of works⁵, and since this was the capital where the *spectacle* was taking place. It should be noted that the exterior articulation and the overall view of the buildings will be discussed rather than the interiors. But beforehand, one should also pay attention to historical context in order to place art of Sinan with respect to Ottoman architecture and Renaissance. Therefore, we will briefly give a sketch of Sinan's position between east and west so as to shed some light to the meaning of his works within this context.

2. Sinan's Art in the context of Ottoman Architecture and Renaissance

Architect Sinan was a "devshirmeh" from a Christian village of Anatolia⁶. He lived throughout the 16th century and started his career as a soldier in the Ottoman army, where he became responsible for several engineering works, such as building bridges on the marching way or even constructing ships to cross a lake⁷. When he was appointed as the chief architect of the Empire in 1538, the fourth Ottoman emperor in Istanbul, namely Suleiman the Magnificent, was maintaining his reign and Europe was experiencing Renaissance for more than a century.

In order to consider the first context, one should review the previous works of the Ottomans, even some significant public buildings of Seljuks, the former Turkish dynasty which had dominated especially eastern Anatolia. Among several Seljukid works spread in today's Turkey, one becomes quite distinguishable: Divriği Great Mosque. [Figure 4] This work follows the most common mosque typology of its era, therefore does not have

⁵ Sevgi Aktüre, "Mimarbaşı Sinan and the Building Policies of the Ottoman State", in *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre*, 1987, p. 98.

⁶ Reha Günay, *Sinan'ın İstanbulu*, İstanbul: YEM Yayın, 2006, p. 23

⁷ Godfrey Goodwin, *Sinan: Ottoman Architecture and its Values Today*, London: Saqi Books, 1993, p. 17

something new to say in structural or functional means. But its great main portal makes it an aesthetic peak of Seljuk period and its symbolism puts it in a special place in the history of art, as it has long attracted the attention and interest of scholars.⁸ [Figure 5, 6]

Other Seljukid works and the first works of Ottomans in Bursa and Edirne were plainer in façade articulation with respect to Divriği Great Mosque. The most important novelty introduced in the first Ottoman mosques in Bursa was the tendency to a central dome, which is observed as a reversed T-shaped plan with double domed interiors, and it was a slight derivation from classical multi-domed and multi-columned predecessors [Figure 7]. However, one had to wait until 1447 to see the final step in Edirne, namely Üç Şerefeli Mosque, which partly fulfills the famous “uninterrupted and unified space” requirement of mosque construction [Figure 8]. This work constitutes the prototype of sultanate mosques of Istanbul, however, Fatih and Bayezit Mosques [Figure 9], two important predecessors of Sinan’s works obtain their inspiration from Hagia Sophia (built between 532 and 537)⁹ by means of using semi domes for enlarging the covered space. [Figure 10]

However, all of those works given by Ottomans either in Bursa, Edirne or Istanbul up to Sinan’s era were maintaining some structural problems which were to be solved by the grand master. He was an innovator architect and a deeper analysis on the structure, form and plan of his works would give evidences of his genius. But, here in this paper, since the aesthetics of his works is being inspected, we will reconsider this aspect of his predecessors. Nevertheless, one should also keep in mind that structural form is connected to the aesthetic idea, and each effort to strengthen the structure becomes a feature of the aesthetic form of Sinan’s works.¹⁰ All the works given during Ottoman era were as plain as possible, resembling each other in the use of elements in creating a composition and offering little novelties in that manner. In fact, Ottoman architecture concentrates on function primarily and pragmatism becomes more important than symbolism. Therefore, bedecking the portal façade like the one of Divriği Great Mosque becomes useless; the Ottoman façade simply has the gate to go through and has the windows to illuminate interiors [Figure 11].

In the following sections, we will see how Sinan’s works differ from those earlier works although the priority of functionalism is still valid. But beforehand, we should also

⁸ Ömür Bakırcı, he Story of Three Graffiti, in *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre*, 1999, p. 42.

⁹ Rowland Mainstone, *Structure in Architecture: History, Design and Innovation*, Norfolk: Ashgate Publishing 1999, p. 209.

¹⁰ Jale Nejdet Erzen, *Sinan Ottoman Architect: An Aesthetic Analysis*, Ankara: METU, 2004, p.82.

briefly cover the Renaissance architecture and Sinan's contemporaries. Two significant works from the 16th century Italy would be satisfactory in our context for comprehending the aim and value of western architecture.

Santa Maria della Consolazione in Todi (built by Cola da Caprarola in 1508) [Figure 12] was a representative of classical Renaissance which seems to be related to Bramante's St. Peter's, begun two years before, and also recalls Leonardo's 'ideal' church designs.¹¹ This work is also very important for our concern since it uses the same covering scheme with Şehzade Mosque of Sinan [Figure 13]. Four semidomes support the central dome in both buildings. However, the result observed in the interiors is different since Caprarola's aim was to highlight the central dome and to make a cross shaped plan while Sinan's aim was to create a unified and uninterrupted space. [Figure 14]

While Sinan was working on several complexes in Istanbul, Michelangelo was designing the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, which had a larger span and greater height than all works of Sinan. This huge building in Vatican [Figure 15] was firstly under supervision of Bramante, and Bernini also worked on the embellishment of the basilica almost a century later¹². The result of these three great artists' –and other contributors'- work is literally the symbol of Catholic Church of Christendom today. The dimensions and the decoration of both interiors and exteriors are clearly representing the technical and artistic success of Renaissance contemporaries of Sinan.

On the other hand, the masterpiece of Sinan in Edirne reaches the span of Hagia Sophia but remains modest when compared to St. Peter's Basilica. Selimiye also lacks the sculptures which bedeck the symbolic building in Rome [Figure 16], just like other Christian architectural works. Therefore, one should note that the motivations of a Renaissance architect and Sinan were quite different and the end products of those artists should be evaluated by considering this phenomenon. Accordingly, assessment of Sinan's works requires great attention to structural, functional and formal aspects; and the aesthetic of those works should be investigated in its totality as well as in details. Because he had developed a dynamic arrangement for the façades and achieved plasticity, not by the shape of the individual elements, but by the totality of the building.¹³

¹¹ Sir Banister Fletcher. *A History of Architecture*, Oxford: Architectural Press, 1996, p.872

¹² Günay, 2006: 19

¹³ Doğan Kuban "The Style of Sinan's Domed Structures", in *Muqarnas: An Annual of Islamic Art and Architecture*, Vol.4, ed. Oleg Grabar, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987, p.79.

3. Sinan's Sculptures

The artistic success of Sinan's works is being appreciated by several architectural historians, of course by the ones who pay some attention to Ottoman architecture. His novel designs, which integrate with the city in a creative way, are constantly being emphasized and the sculpture like buildings that he constructed in and around the city are being highlighted. Therefore, I would rather call those buildings *sculptures* and will give examples together with their reasoning for the use of this pretentious term.

The buildings of Sinan, especially the sultanate mosques were the representations of the power and the hegemony of the Ottoman sultans, who were maintaining their most magnificent years. The empire was in its most powerful era and the buildings to be built were subject to show off. Fortunately, Sinan, most probably the best -and definitely the most known- of all Ottoman artists, was charged to realize this showing off. Therefore, one should note that the success behind the art of Sinan is not only due to his talents, but also due to opportunities: He had very rich patrons who desire to have sculpture like monuments just like their contemporaries in Europe, who were literally financing sculptures in their cities. Besides, the habitation in Istanbul was not fully complete, i.e. there were still empty spaces to build monumental edifices.

Şehzade Mosque

The first important complex that Sinan built for Suleiman the magnificent was the Şehzade complex, which was intended to be for Suleiman himself at first, but dedicated to his son Mehmet after his unexpected death. Besides its innovative structure¹⁴, this monument was a leap in façade composition. [Figure 17] No other building constructed up to that time was using lines, curves and colors as successful as Şehzade. It was more decorated externally than any other Sinan mosque and its monumentality was a measure of sultan's grief.¹⁵ Moreover, the cresting of the domes and portals and the decoration on the minarets introduced a decorative profusion.

The centripetality of the mosque was also due to its pure symmetry, where the courtyard had the same floor area and becomes one of the most balanced arcaded spaces.

¹⁴ For the structural innovations of Architect Sinan, please refer to "Fundamental Developments of 16th Century Ottoman Architecture: Innovations in the Art of Architect Sinan" (METU, 2008), which is available at <http://www.stps.metu.edu.tr/stpswp/series08/0803.pdf>

¹⁵ Goodwin, 1993: 117.

However, an innovative idea used for the first time in Ottoman architecture was the use of side galleries. [Figure 18] Those were appearing along the sides of the mosque in the form of large arcades and being perceived as dynamic elements, giving a more vivid form to the façades. Goodwin also states that those elements, the splendid façades of the Western Renaissance and before, had been lacking in earlier Ottoman architecture.¹⁶

Süleymaniye Mosque

Süleymaniye's unique pyramidal view from far away, which gives an impression of a sculpture carved on the hill top, is due to the rhythm of the domes, half domes, and exedras on the covering of the monument. Those elements, in total, give an effect of a waterfall of domes. [Figure 19] According to Goodwin, the contrast of convexity and concavity is the architect's response to a nature made up of hill and dale, foreground and background, the swelling and sinking of the landscape.¹⁷ The minarets were skillfully placed at the four corners of the courtyard, two tall ones next to the mosque, and shorter two at the far corners of the courtyard. [Figure 20] This balanced placement also amplifies the rise of the monument organically from the hill as the result of those minarets together with the main volume implies the silhouette of a triangle.

Edirnekapı Mihrimah Sultan Mosque

Edirnekapı Mihrimah Sultan's unmatched façade composition, which is regarded as the most feminine mosque of all by some architectural historians¹⁸, might be the peak of Sinan's creation of plasticity within three dimensional spaces. Legends says that the beauty of the mosque is the representation of Sinan's love for Mihrimah.¹⁹ As this building becomes a daring one²⁰ due its single dome resting only on four arches and four piers, the side walls have the opportunity to contain as much window as possible. They insert light into the building at its peak and form a unique composition in a balanced fashion. [Figure 21]

¹⁶ ibid. p.35.

¹⁷ İbid. p.38

¹⁸ Erhan Karaesmen, *Sinan Teması Üzerine Çeşitlemeler*, Ankara: İnşaat Mühendisleri Odası Yayınları, 2008, p.40

¹⁹ Murat Belge, *İstanbul Gezi Rehberi*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007. p.76

²⁰ Goodwin states that "other Islamic masonry buildings matched but could not excel this achievement which would only be surpassed in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries." Goodwin, 1993: 50.

The southern façade of this distinguished work of Sinan also draws attention due to its volutes on each side of the turrets, which have a unique polygonal shape. [Figure 22] This kind of structural elements appear in this fashion for the first time, where they will be present in the early baroque churches of Europe, such as Il Gesu in Rome.²¹ [Figure 23] In fact, this kind of novelties was almost a principal in Sinan's art, while the overall improvement of his elevations throughout his career also becomes a hint of his artistic success.²²

Zal Mahmud Paşa Mosque

One of the late mosques of Sinan, where he was still searching for novelties, was quite different from his previous works both in plan and façade composition: Zal Mahmud Paşa mosque was consisting of red brick and white stone layers with uniform windows on the walls. [Figure 24] The unusual façade of this building is said to resemble to palace façades, as it is also described by Cerasi as follows:

Uniformity of openings both horizontally and vertically had been established in Renaissance Europe with the palace architecture of Tuscany. That regularity was a consequence of the application of the Classical orders or, even when it was not accompanied by the halfcolumns and modanature of the orders, was assumed to be a paradigm of order, rationality, and majesty. In the later works of Sinan and his school, as, for example, in the Zal Mahmut Paşa and Ivaz Efendi mosques, this scheme often replaced the complex compositions of earlier mosques.²³

Mağlova Aqueduct and Büyükçekmece Bridge

The water structures Sinan built around Istanbul deserves great attention due to their technological aspects. However, they also become noteworthy as they were great civilian works which also have monumental effect, although they were meant to be functional only. For instance, Mağlova Aqueduct, which was connecting two hills with a sculpture like impression [Figure 25] is as valuable as Sinan's great mosques with their design quality.²⁴ It

²¹ E. H. Gombrich, *Sanatın Öyküsü*, İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, p. 389

²² Jale Nejdet Erzen, *Mosque Elevations of Architect Sinan's Era*, Ankara: ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları, 2007.

²³ Maurice Cerasi, "The Commerce of Forms and Types Between the West and the Ottoman East from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century", in *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre*, 1987, p.126.

²⁴ Kuban, 2007: 258.

rests in a valley and connects two hills organically and its plasticity embellishes this place of unmanned earth. The composition of the arches and the prisms and triangles within the mass are no different than the ones of a sculpture, while the other aqueducts built so far were repeating same order of forms. [Figure 26]

Another utilitarian work of Sinan, which is a bridge over the Büyükçekmece Lake, [Figure 27] is an impressive building where structural and aesthetic purposes integrate to create both rhythm and solidity.²⁵ It was built with stone foundation situating on wooden piles by taking the advantage of small islands, extents 635 meters, and its design combines creative artistic work with skillful engineering.²⁶ It rises and falls for four times, but irregularly, and not only connects two banks of the lake, but also becomes the only building that contains the signature of the artist.

Selimiye Mosque

Although the focus of this paper is on Istanbul, the masterpiece of Sinan in Edirne, namely Selimiye Mosque, deserves a favored place. It becomes the magnum opus of the architect due its monumentality together with the large span of the main dome which is stressed by four minarets. [Figure 28] Moreover, the façade composition, which surpasses the one of Şehzade mosque, enriches the building's palace-like articulation. Necipoğlu says that “with a novel sculptural dynamism and plasticity, Selimiye's lofty lateral façades that counterbalance layered horizontal tiers by vertical continuities inaugurate a new chapter in Sinan's mosque design, characterized by transgressions of the classical code.”²⁷ [Figure 29]

Another novelty introduced at Selimiye, which is seen for the first time in Ottoman mosque design, is the irregular use of columns in the arcades. Sinan introduced a half-sized arch each side of the central arch before the great door so as to create an interval which he filled with two monumental marble inscriptive discs to achieve movement and grandeur at the same time.²⁸ Hence, the monumentality of the building observed from the entrance façade owes much to this rejection of modular use of columns. [Figure 30]

²⁵ Erzen, 2004: 171.

²⁶ Kuban, 2007: 346.

²⁷ Gülru Necipoğlu Kafadar, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005, p.103.

²⁸ Goodwin, 1993: 94.

4. Sinan's City Planning

One should also mention Sinan's city planning if we are investigating his sculptural architecture in Istanbul. Because, he was responsible for every detail of city administration including the sewers, fire regulations and the repair of all public monuments, as well as drawing or supervising the plans of important buildings in the city and all over the empire.²⁹ With this chance and responsibility, he placed his monuments intentionally to create an overall composition within the city. Architectural historians use titles like "Sinan's Construction of the Urban Panorama"³⁰ or even "Sinan's Istanbul"³¹ for their works investigating this special subject. [Figure 31] For instance, Tayla says that "Sinan has chosen the places of his mosques so as to contribute and give way to the development of a city"³² and Erzen describes how he used this power:

In the Ottoman period, it is Sinan who, overseeing all the architectural activity of the empire, gave it its imperial form and meaning. He contributed to it a mechanism of connections that made it work as a whole. He activated the already existing foundation to function appropriate to an imperial Ottoman capital, by providing the necessary links and aesthetic significances, through his architecture.³³

Symbolism within the City

Sinan was restricted by the topography of Istanbul and by the law. He had the possibility of purchasing more land for his complexes, but he could not enlarge a highway or a precinct in the manner of 21st century administration. In fact, he did not prefer to do so. He used the present form of the city, which is consisting of seven hills and valleys between them, as it is. One may even claim that he did not plan the city, but the city planed him.³⁴ Because, according to the paradigm of the people of that age, all the artistic creation and narration

²⁹ Godfrey Goodwin, *A History of Ottoman Architecture*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971, p. 197.

³⁰ Enrico Guidoni, "Sinan's Construction of the Urban Panorama", in *Environmental Design Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre*, 1987, pp. 20-41

³¹ Günay uses this title for his book (Günay, 2006), while Erzen uses this heading in her book (Erzen, 2004)

³² Hüsrev Tayla, "Sinan Minarelerinin Mimaride ve Şehircilikteki Yeri", in *Uluslararası Mimar Sinan Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996, p. 70.

³³ Erzen, 2004: 179.

³⁴ Godfrey Goodwin, "Sinan and City Planning", in *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre*, 1987, p.13

could only be a small contribution to the already beautiful and well arranged environment; the most important responsibility of an artist was to obey this present order of things. The artist had to adapt his creation to an already ordered stage of creatures and introduce relations with them, because God also watches him as well as the sultan.³⁵ [Figure 32]

Accordingly, Sinan constructed his big complexes, where the Ottoman ceremonies exhibited in the city scale, by adjusting the monumental impression just like a stage, which will form a background for this kind of exhibition. [Figure 33] He introduces transparencies, diversions, nuances and contrasts, so as to make the heavenly buildings more familiar to the mortal people. Sinan develops a novel method of combining inhabitants with the city by means of offering aesthetic relations with his sculptural works.³⁶

On the other hand, the symbolic meaning of the mosque and its dependencies, which were situated around the religious core at the center with respect to their spiritual importance, represents a model for the eternal life. Therefore these religious complexes become even more important as they symbolize the values and themes to be followed. Mosque itself plays a transitory role between life and death: The north courtyard represents the vivid, dynamic life; the mosque signifies the power of God and Sultan with its huge dome and holy character; and the south courtyard with cemetery is the garden of the dead.³⁷

From mosque to mosque

Süleymaniye complex, Sinan's masterpiece in Istanbul, carries all these symbolism successfully and becomes the capital's spiritual and intellectual center, and the expression of power with its location and visibility. The monumental perception of it from several points of the city is unique since it establishes relations with other works of Sinan -as an observer in Süleymaniye can see other buildings of him distributed in the city-, with its environment in all four dimensions, and with the inhabitants of the city. A radial spreading of its dependencies out from the core gradually integrates the complex and its environment.³⁸ [Figure 34] "Before the twentieth century, the mosque was a focal point from all over the city" writes Goodwin,

³⁵ Jale Nejdert Erzen, "Aesthetics and Aisthesis in Ottoman Art and Architecture" in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Oxford, 1991, p. 6

³⁶ *ibid.* p. 16.

³⁷ *ibid.* p. 17.

³⁸ Erzen, 2004: 184.

“the drama of the view from Galata is as good an example of Sinan’s mind in action as can be found.”³⁹

Moreover, the number of other mosques of Sinan seen from Süleymaniye is more than 20 and even the mosques on the other shores of the Bosphorus are also visible; and in turn, Süleymaniye is seen even from miles away. [Figure 35] Another important monument seen from Süleymaniye is the gorgeous monument of Justinian, namely Hagia Sophia, which challenged Sinan and his patron when building this complex. According to Necipoğlu, the reference to Hagia Sophia might have been meant to imply a connection even between Süleyman’s mosque and Solomon’s temple.⁴⁰ In other words, the buildings of Sinan scattered around the city, were talking with each other and making allusions together with their symbolic meaning.

On the other hand, the number of major mosques seen from Edirnekapı Mihrimah is more than 10. [Figure 36] For this case, Sinan was faced with an awkward site on the crown of a hill. However, he raised it high on a platform set on vaults and gave it a tall and slender minaret so that it could be seen from afar both from within the walls and by the traveler from Edirne, like the Gothic spires of churches in Western Europe.⁴¹ [Figure 37]

Moreover, the smaller mosques of Sinan, which are ingeniously and intentionally placed at the shores of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, such as Zal Mahmut Paşa, Azapkapı Sokollu, Rüstem Paşa, Kılıç Ali Paşa, Sinan Paşa, Üsküdar Mihrimah Sultan and Şemsi Ahmet Paşa, form the overall scenery of the city, together with the dominating Şehzade, Edirnekapı Mihrimah Sultan and Süleymaniye Mosques.

5. Sinan’s Site Organization

Sinan’s establishment of novel building-site relations gave Ottoman architecture a new understanding of viewing buildings. He either manipulated the topography of the city or introduced creative plans in order to upgrade the city silhouette with the buildings having an impression of sculpture. Erzen says that besides the interior courts, intermediary spaces between buildings or between buildings and garden walls, which are either treated as alleys or

³⁹ Goodwin, 1993: 99.

⁴⁰ Gülru Necipoglu-Kafadar, “The Süleymaniye Complex in İstanbul: An Interpretation” in *Muqarnas: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*, Leiden: E.J. Brill. 1985 p. 103.

⁴¹ Goodwin, 1971: 252.

left natural, create spatial envelopes around buildings and link them to each other in picturesque ways.⁴²

Sinan's late complexes, which were built after 1570's, gain a more dynamic form by making use of diagonal axes. For instance, Şemsi Paşa Mosque in Üsküdar had a 45 degree shift of angle with a portico in two sides [Figure 38]. Or, Zal Mahmut Paşa Mosque in Eyüp was offering a diagonal plan with an L-shape medrese [Figure 39]. Both of them were introducing varying view of points and they were being perceived as monuments situated in the city in a creative fashion. This kind of diagonal placements in mosque plans would not be seen until the 18th century, where baroque and rococo forms would be assimilated by Ottoman architecture.

Süleymaniye Complex

If we are to give one and only one example of site organization among Sinan's works, it should be Süleymaniye, the reply of Sinan for the sultan's desire of a remarkable foundation. Sinan spent a year for creating Süleymaniye's podium, where at least 2 million cubic meters of earth was shifted. [Figure 40] The level stage that was achieved was the setting for a *primadonna among mosques*⁴³, which dominates and was meant to dominate both its complex and the city:

With the vision of genius, he did not raise the whole complex on a platform but let the colleges on the Golden Horn side of the mosque and the royal sepulchres descend the steep slope step by step and so not obscure the monumental view, which still survives from Galata and elsewhere down the shores of the Horn.⁴⁴

Although the view of Süleymaniye from the banks of Golden Horn is magnificent, one can not easily see the monument from its surrounding area. Although you circle around the streets and approach the mosque slowly, you cannot see it in totally unless you reach the outer wall enclosures. The narrow streets hide Süleymaniye until you reach up the platform of the mosque [Figure 41], and, all of a sudden, you surprisingly see the whole building. Erzen gives below explanation for this situation:

⁴² Erzen, 2004: 162

⁴³ Goodwin, 1993: 36.

⁴⁴ Goodwin, 1987: 10.

The view of the mosque unfolds sequentially at every turn; a complete view is possible only at close distances and only with imperial mosques which are treated almost as sculpture and are intended to be seen as a whole. In small mosques, the walls separating the courts and cemeteries obstruct such a total view of the building. In any case, the idea of perceiving the building as a sculptural mass from a distance is not predominant in this period of Ottoman architecture, as it would become later in the 18th century, with Westernizing influences.⁴⁵

Kadırga Sokollu Complex

Sinan uses level differences of the topography in order to create unexpected perspectives and approaches. The uneven physical features of the city transform into an advantage in his hands and he introduces three dimensional arrangements, not two. The innovative complex that he built on an inclined area in Kadırga, namely Sokollu mosque [Figure 42], becomes the most distinguished structure within this context:

Constructing the magnificent portico arcades and courtyard of Kadırga Sokollu Mosque on such an inclined area required a buttressing wall. (...) Situating the building complex on this area, where there is an elevation difference of 5 meters between the main gate and the courtyard, and 4 meters between this courtyard and the dervish lodge behind, shows Sinan's proficiency in establishing building-site relation, which we also witness at Süleymaniye, Zal Mahmud Paşa and Üsküdar Mihrimah Sultan Mosques.⁴⁶

The relation between the elements of these complexes also represents a vivid form, which may be called organic, rather than geometric. This dynamism, which can be seen as the result of the architect's genius, derives from the fact that the uneven topography is left as it is and is used to create a three dimensional relation amongst the varying buildings and spaces of the complex.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Sinan's success in establishing building-site relation can also be observed when the special case of the building requires an elevation difference, such as the one in Azapkapı Sokollu Mosque [Figure 43] and Rüstem Paşa Mosque. [Figure 44] Those buildings rest on a platform due to the functional needs of supplying space for commercial use beneath the mosque or to prevent moisture. In any case, they were raised high enough to be

⁴⁵ Erzen, 2004: 160.

⁴⁶ Kuban, 2007: 320.

⁴⁷ Erzen, 2004: 157.

seen within the crowd of the city, and their plasticity again gives them an impression of a sculpture, placed on a podium.

Minarets

While placing the minaret, the tower where the people are called to gather at the mosque for the prayer ritual, was a problem in Islamic architecture, Sinan used these elements in his works with a stunning effect as a vital part of his design. Kuban writes “Ottoman experience has got rid off the tradition of the minaret’s behavior like a separate tower with Sinan by means of inserting it to total composition of the mosque”⁴⁸ Moreover, he designed his minarets both comprehending their architecture and their role in the silhouette of the mosque⁴⁹

In Şehzade, as the massive side walls of the Ottoman architecture is replaced by galleries for the first time, the minaret-mosque relation is also established with the help of the side arcades [Figure 45]. The contribution of minarets to the monumentality of Süleymaniye and Selimiye had already been mentioned. However, smaller works of Sinan also find clever solutions for the placement of the minaret and it enriches the composition. For instance, the minaret is placed in the middle of the entrance in Piyale Paşa Mosque [Figure 46] while it is linked with the mosque with an exuberant arched structure to resolve this old problem⁵⁰ in Azapkapı Sokollu Mosque. [Figure 47]

6. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, the primary aim was to give a brief overview of the aesthetics of the 16th century Ottoman architect, Sinan. The monumentality of his works, even the most utilitarian ones, was the evidence of his skills in transforming a simple building into a sculpture. However, he did not –in fact could not- make use of any internal or external decoration elements like statues or paintings; his works were rather plain and the plasticity of them were due to the total composition. Moreover, his placement of the works in Istanbul and the establishment of novel building-site relations by benefiting the difficulties of the topography, contributed to their monumentality. With the symbolism of his religious

⁴⁸ Kuban, 2007: 457.

⁴⁹ Tayla, 1996: 62.

⁵⁰ Hans G. Egli, *Sinan: An Interpretation*, İstanbul: Ege Yayınları, 1997, p.138.

buildings, Sinan also expressed faith and belief, as well as power and hegemony, in an artistic manner.

Sinan's enquiring intellect was regarded as a Renaissance mind which experimented and explored, and had nothing to do with neither any fortuitous coincidence of forms with the works of Leonardo daVinci nor any other Western architect.⁵¹ His big prestige even made the sum of his works almost equal to history of Ottoman architecture in the discourse of Ottoman art history.⁵²

In conclusion, Sinan became a name of consensus while discussing the architecture in the East, just like Michelangelo of the West. Talking on the details of his works gives the pleasure equal to talking on the details of the paintings of Rembrandt or Da Vinci. His works also fascinated travelers to Istanbul; they were statues scattered around to embellish the city in the absence of real sculptures. Sinan was definitely able to surmount the ban of sculpturing in Islam, in a romantic and innovative way. So, let's conclude with Goodwin, who summarizes the change of the impact of Süleymaniye in the mentality of the West, which unfortunately triggers a change in their perception of *the art*:

Photographs of the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul constantly appear on posters and travel brochures. This monumental building on the skyline of the Golden Horn is the stage set for that Islamic world which Europeans regarded as romantic until the resurgence of fundamentalism made it frightening, a cunning foe, the enemy of the questioning individual mind – just such a mind by which the Süleymaniye itself was conceived.⁵³ [Figure 48]

⁵¹ Goodwin, 1987: 10.

⁵² Kuban, 2007: 451.

⁵³ Goodwin, 1993: 15.

7. References

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