

PREFACE

SOURCES, THEMES, AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF SINAN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

The autobiographical memoirs of the Ottoman chief architect Sinan (d. 1588), narrated shortly before his death to the poet-painter Mustafa Sa'i Çelebi (d. 1595–96), have come down to us in five versions. Preserved in the Topkapı Palace archives, three of them are incomplete drafts whose crossed-out lines and insertions testify to an extensive editing process in which Sinan collaborated with his biographer: a text without a title, traditionally known as *Adsız Risale* (henceforth abbreviated AR, Untitled Treatise), the *Risāletü'l-Mi'māriyye* (RM, Treatise on Architecture), and the *Tuhfetü'l-Mi'mārin* (TM, Choice Gift of the Architects). Unlike these sketchy drafts that never reached the public eye, the two subsequently edited versions of Sinan's autobiography are highly polished texts that circulated widely, judging by their numerous surviving copies: an abridged edition titled *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye* (TE, Record of Buildings) and a longer version called *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyān* (TB, Record of Construction).

Written in the second half of the 1580s, these five texts on Sinan's life and works are unique sources without any equivalent in the history of Islamic architecture. Each of them includes a brief biographical section, outlining Sinan's recruitment as a Christian boy from a village of Kayseri under Sultan Selim I (r. 1512–20) and his initial training in carpentry as a novice in Istanbul, followed by his promotion through the ranks of the Janissaries during the reign of Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520–66), whom he arduously accompanies to "many a ghaza" (war on behalf of Islam) as a foot soldier, building several bridges and war ships along the way. The texts then narrate Sinan's achievements as chief architect under three sultans (Süleyman I, Selim II, and Murad III) and group the monuments created during his tenure (1539–88) according to various building types.

The need for a critical edition of these five texts, accompanied by reliable English translations, became apparent to me as I was writing a book on Sinan that includes an analysis of his autobiographical narratives and their implications for Ottoman architectural culture.¹ At that time I collected the microfilms of some manuscripts with the hope of overseeing the publication of a scholarly volume in the series Supplements to Muqarnas, which I would edit. Howard Crane, who published two primary sources on Ottoman architecture in the same series, was an ideal candidate for such a collaborative enterprise.² I am grateful that he agreed to undertake this timely project, for which he assiduously assembled the remaining manuscripts recorded in library catalogues, in addition to locating others through persistent detective work.³ This volume, jointly prepared by him and Esra Akin, brings together for the first time all five autobiographical texts, providing critical editions, translations, and the facsimiles of selected manuscript copies. Since the authors discuss in their introduction the content, structure, interrelationship, authorship, and likely dates of each text, I will consider here the sources, themes, and broader cultural implications.

Sinan's autobiographical memoirs reflect his desire to leave a personal mark on history and collective memory through self-fashioning. This ambition is elucidated in the preface of TB, which praises the reigning monarch, Murad III (r. 1574–95), the heir apparent Prince Mehmed, and the grand vizier Siyavuş Pasha (g. v. 1582–84, 1586–89, 1592–93):

The reason for the composition of the agreeable book and fair ornament [that is like] a black-veiled beauty is this: One day, the chief of the fortunate padishah's architects, Sinan son of 'Abdülmennan, having become a weak old man and wishing his name and reputation to endure on the pages of time, asked this brokenhearted servant without protector, the humble Sa'i, to record his conversation in verse and prose so that he be remembered with prayers and blessings. I recorded and made clear [his

account] to the best of my worthless ability and arrived into his joy-meriting presence with an imperfect gift. And I gave the title *Record of Construction* (*Tezkiretü'l-Bünyān*) to this lofty treatise. It is hoped and requested of those friends who read this epic that insofar as possible they veil its defects with forgiveness ...⁴

Sa'i, then, presented the “epic” (*dastān*) entitled *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyān* as a humble gift to Sinan during his patron’s lifetime. Likewise, the shorter text of *Tezkiretü'l-Ebniye* refers to Sinan as still alive, touchingly announcing the grand master’s continuing artistic creativity under Murad III, despite the decrepitude of old age: according to the epitaph Sa'i composed for Sinan’s tomb,⁵ he died at over a hundred years of age (over ninety-seven in the solar calendar). The absence of such phrases as “the late” or “may God grant him mercy” with reference to Sinan in these texts also shows that he was living at the time they were written.

TB, which ends abruptly with a poem eulogizing the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, hints at the sudden interruption of sultanic patronage with the death of Selim II (r. 1565–74), after which no imperial mosque of the same caliber was commissioned by his successor Murad III. With a poem entitled “Complaint Against the Age” Sa'i’s preface laments the present devaluation of talent: “The ignorant and uneducated are greatly valued. / The possessors of talent are trampled underfoot. // None respect the masters of the soul. / In truth, skill has now become a fault.”⁶ Although the poet’s complaint primarily refers to his own field, one wonders whether it also insinuates Sinan’s disappointment with diminished architectural patronage that he hoped to bring to the attention of the reigning sultan and grand vizier invoked in the preface. If so, TB can be considered a hitherto unnoted example of the “decline discourse” that emerged in Ottoman historiography during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. This conjecture finds support in the epic structure of TB, which incorporates an abridged chronicle of the “Golden Age” of Sultan Süleyman, ending with a description of his death in the Szigetvár campaign followed by the accession dates of his two less glorious successors.⁷ It is not surprising, then, that five of the six architectural projects singled out in TB as the milestones of Sinan’s career were commissioned by his greatest royal patron, Sultan Süleyman, who is idealized as the “Solomon of the age” for whom the “jinns” and “demons” erect grandiose monuments. Sinan proudly mentions his personal interaction with

the sultans who honored him with private conversations, but he foregrounds his special relationship with his beloved yet capricious patron, Sultan Süleyman, which is likened in TB to the ardent love of Ferhad for Shirin. Like the legendary Persian sculptor-architect Ferhad, Sinan, for the love of the Shirin-like sovereign, carves water channels “from Mount Bisutun” and the mountain-like dome of the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul.

The chief architect commissioned Sa'i to elevate to a higher literary level of prose and verse conversations they held about his vita, his artistic aspirations, and episodes concerning the construction of select imperial monuments he considered the landmarks of his career. Accompanied by lists of numerous monuments, Sinan’s autobiographies narrate his life and extraordinary deeds from an assertive, first-person point of view, testifying to his acute sense of individualism. It was the growing esteem for architecture in Ottoman court culture that nourished this proud sense of individualism and new self-consciousness, generally associated with the Renaissance idea of the artist. Although the two final editions of the *Tezkires* were embellished by the poet’s refinements to a larger degree than the drafts that preceded them, Sinan’s personal voice is still recognizable, particularly in TB’s descriptions of engineering feats that use specialized technical vocabulary (such as the removal and transport of the Maiden’s Column in Istanbul for use in the Süleymaniye Mosque, and the construction techniques of the Kırkçeşme Aqueducts and the Büyükçekmece Bridge). Sa'i’s own voice, on the other hand, is significant because of his visual sensitivity as a painter-decorator who composed foundation inscriptions for several monuments built by Sinan. The epitaph he prepared for his deceased patron’s tomb implies that their relationship was not merely confined to a few conversations but most likely involved a personal intimacy developed over the years. The poetic images and associations embodied in Sa'i’s architectural descriptions cannot be lightly dismissed as generic literary topoi, for he belonged to Sinan’s circle and mirrored contemporary mentalities that colored the production and reception of the chief architect’s works.

The sources compiled in this volume have been endlessly mined as repositories of “facts” concerning the biography and corpus of Sinan, but they also provide invaluable insights into the practice and conceptualization of architecture during his tenure as chief architect for nearly half a century. Sinan did

not attempt to articulate the theoretical and practical bases of his architectural canon for fellow architects, since the transmission of professional knowledge in the workshop training of the corps of royal architects that he headed was largely confined to the domain of verbal communication, drawings, and technical manuals. Nor did he attempt to expound the principles of architectural design to an audience of elite patrons, since the theory and praxis of architecture remained outside the realm of learned Ottoman literary discourse.

The second-century BC Roman architect Vitruvius's *De Architectura*, which inspired the writing of theoretical treatises in Renaissance Italy, was known in the Ottoman court: a Latin manuscript copy sent by the Duke of Milan to the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus in the late fifteenth century had entered Sultan Süleyman's imperial library at the Topkapi Palace after the conquest of Hungary in 1526.⁸ Sinan likely had access to printed and illustrated editions of this work and to other architectural treatises published in Europe: he was, after all, the chief architect of a multiethnic and multilingual empire whose territories extended to the gates of Vienna and included Chios and Cyprus, islands recently conquered from Italian powers. Nevertheless, the resonance of Vitruvius's treatise and its early modern counterparts remained relatively limited beyond the orbit of European humanist culture. Ottoman "humanism" was not steeped in homage to the Graeco-Roman tradition of literature, even though philosophical and scientific classics inherited through medieval Islamic translations were regularly updated with commentaries. In the realm of literature, the preferred models were Turco-Persian and Arabic "classics."

Sinan must have had access to major works on the mathematical sciences, judging by the fact that the imam and muezzin of the masjid he endowed in Istanbul had in their possession an important collection of manuscripts on "the sciences of astronomy and geometry" once owned by the scholar Molla Lutfi (d. 1495); an imperial decree of 1578 orders that this collection be transferred to the royal observatory in Galata.⁹ The absence of Vitruvian treatises in the Ottoman context does not justify the prevalent presumption that Sinan's architecture lacked a theoretical basis and was entirely rooted in an empirical approach to design.¹⁰ Such a conclusion ignores the importance of orality in Ottoman architectural culture and the elevated estimation of architecture as a "sci-

ence" in contemporary texts, including Sinan's own autobiographical narratives, which recount his training in geometry during his apprenticeship in the craft of carpentry. The autobiographies provide glimpses of an unarticulated theory of proportions, guided by the "science of geometry" that also governs structural solidity. Sinan's concern for integrating beautiful form with solid structure in arcuate constructions that skillfully balance domical superstructures with varied support systems is concisely delineated in the TM preface quoted below. This concern was complemented by a concept of decorum, which informed the design of functionally appropriate building types befitting the relative social status of patrons and the graduated rank of construction sites within imperial geography.

The concept of decorum is inherent in the hierarchical ordering of lists of monuments in the autobiographies according to the rank of patrons (moving from sultans and the royal family to the viziers and lesser grandees) or location (starting with Istanbul to stress the primacy of the capital over the provinces).¹¹ The classification of these lists in terms of building types, on the other hand, reveals the overt privileging of Friday mosques, which are always enumerated first. The descriptions of mosques combine an emphasis on difficult engineering feats, innovative aesthetic forms, and distinctive decorative programs (comprising calligraphy and ornamentation in multiple media). Sinan's preoccupation with structural solidity and formal refinement also extends to other building types, which he creatively transforms with new combinations of functions. For instance, the Mağlova Aqueduct, hailed as a masterpiece of monumental stone sculpture, uniquely combines the functions of aqueduct and bridge: each of its three tiers features "a road like a bridge, [and] one can cross it on horseback."¹²

The literary genre of autobiography was a rarity in the late-sixteenth-century Ottoman world, and there is no precedent in the Islamic lands for an architect's biography. Sa'i drew upon the existing genres of the biographical memoir (*tezkire*) and the treatise (*risâle*). Although Sinan's autobiographies, so unusual in their use of the first-person point of view, differ from the short entries found in the biographical compendia of poets, calligraphers, and painters, they rely in their conception of architectural monuments as mementos of divinely bestowed creative power on previously formulated artistic authorship paradigms.¹³

In addition, their narratives particularly recall books of deeds (*menâqibnâmes*) recounting the miraculous

exploits of Sufi saints and ghazis (fighters for Islam), some of which are also written in the first person.¹⁴ It is therefore not a coincidence that the autobiographical memoirs of Sinan enumerate the many campaigns he participated in as a ghazi during the reign of Süleyman, the quintessential sultan of the ghazis. Moreover, TB recounts the construction of the Selimiye Mosque as an architectural ghaza, through which Sinan scores a personal victory over the architects of the “infidels” who challenge the ability of Muslim builders to equal in size the dome of Hagia Sophia. Besides representing him as a ghazi, the autobiographies liken the elderly Sinan to a Sufi saint, often referring to him as a “saintly old man,” the “spiritual master (*pīr*) of the dervish convent of the world,” and the “patron saint” of architects, and comparing him to the sage Lokman with his God-given wisdom and to the saint Hızır (Khidr) in his working of miracles. Sinan’s uncanny ability to detect hidden sources of water under the ground is a leitmotif in the *menāqibnāməs* of some Sufi saints renowned for discovering holy springs. The comparison with the immortal Hızır—alleged to have discovered the water of life and revealed the plan of Hagia Sophia to the emperor Justinian’s legendary architect Ignatius (Agnados or Ignadyus)—underscores Sinan’s skill as a hydraulic engineer who miraculously discovers “life-giving” springs for the Kırkçeşme Aqueducts and the waterwheel of a royal garden.¹⁵ The comparison also underlines Sinan’s superiority to the architect of Hagia Sophia, a masterpiece “without equal in the world” with which he competes throughout his career. Unlike Ignatius, Sinan, who is acknowledged by “all the world” for building his works “with saintliness” (*velâiyette*), does not need the assistance of Hızır in designing the Selimiye Mosque, thanks to his own miracle-working powers: “They say that Hızır Hagia Sophia designed. / Do not think this Hızır-like man a mere mason to be.”¹⁶

The writer Cafer Efendi explains that he penned his *Risâle-i Mi‘mâriyye* (Treatise on Architecture), a biography of Sinan’s student Mimar Mehmed Ağa, because it had become customary to compose *menāqibnāməs* for some chief architects.¹⁷ In addition to the autobiographies of Sinan, he must have been thinking of semimythical texts on the construction of Hagia Sophia, modified Turkish and Persian translations of the ninth- or tenth-century *Diegesis peri tes Hagias Sofias* (Narrative concerning Hagia Sophia). These popular late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century texts, which

relate stories about Justinian’s architect, Ignatius, and Sinan’s predecessor and namesake Atik Sinan (the architect of Sultan Mehmed II’s mosque complex in Istanbul [1463–70]), left a deep imprint on Ottoman architectural culture.¹⁸ They were clearly among the sources of Sinan’s autobiographies, which allude to them several times. For instance, the preface of TM quoted below mentions the embarrassing collapse of the dome of Hagia Sophia, which Ignatius built with much difficulty in fourteen years, and TB refers to the execution of Atik Sinan, who shortened the colossal columns supporting the dome of Mehmet II’s mosque without asking for the sultan’s permission.¹⁹ When rivals gossip about Sinan’s fear of removing the wooden centering of the dome of the delayed Süleymaniye Mosque, the impatient Sultan Süleyman threateningly reminds the architect of the tragic fate of his namesake—yet another allusion to mythical texts that attribute the collapse of the Hagia Sophia dome to the untimely removal of its centering because of Justinian’s impatience.²⁰ Sinan is careful to indicate in TB that only with the sultan’s permission was one of the four colossal columns supporting the Süleymaniye dome cut down to match the others.²¹ This indirect reference to the unauthorized shortening of comparable columns in the failed mosque of the ungrateful ruler Mehmed II draws attention to the display in the Süleymaniye of Sinan’s artistic superiority over his namesake. It also highlights Süleyman’s greater justice as a patron who gratefully honors his chief architect by having him open the gate of the Süleymaniye during its inauguration ceremony.

Intertextual cross-references to former books of deeds not only accentuate the difficulties inherent in the architect’s profession but also acclaim Sinan’s ingenious ability to overcome professional obstacles in the construction of monuments that eclipse the masterpieces of his Byzantine and early Ottoman predecessors. His boastful sense of pride in his unprecedented accomplishments is advertised in TB by the claim that he created in the Selimiye Mosque a dome both larger and more artistically refined than that of Hagia Sophia, along with minarets higher and more elegant than the celebrated triple-galleried minaret of the Üç Şerefeli Mosque in Edirne. In similar fashion, TM confidently asserts that the Mosque of Şehzade Mehmed in Istanbul (the chief architect’s first royal commission from Sultan Süleyman) surpasses in artistic refinement early Ottoman sultanic mosques awkwardly constructed in the “style of Hagia Sophia” and

thereby constitutes a preliminary “experiment” further elaborated in the Süleymaniye.

Even though TB and TE culminate with the Selimiye as the apogee of the chief architect’s artistic ingenuity, there is no suggestion in these sources to lend support to Sinan’s having uttered a saying reported by the seventeenth-century traveler Evliya Çelebi, which he allegedly heard from his father: “The Şehzade is my apprenticeship work, the Süleymaniye my work as a journeyman, and the Selimiye my work as a master.”²² Instead, both of the *Tezkires* refer to the Süleymaniye as a masterpiece in its own right, which “brought to completion” and “sealed” Sinan’s skill in architecture. TM’s omission of any reference to the Selimiye is striking. This hitherto unnoted peculiarity suggests that TM may have been conceived as a short tract emphasizing the evolutionary progress of sultanic mosque architecture in the capital, Istanbul—a progress brought to perfection with the Süleymaniye. Dedicated to Sultan Murad III, its preface eulogizes Sinan as a wise and pious architect who, with the Süleymaniye Mosque, has fully realized his mastery in the “science of architecture,” while the epilogue describes “the artistic accomplishments of this servant” and deals exclusively with innovations introduced by Sinan in the mosque. That the preface invites Murad III to commission great works in Istanbul hints at the primary reason for the focus of TM on the Süleymaniye, the capital’s most impressive mosque complex: the sedentary sultan had never laid eyes on the Selimiye in Edirne. It was probably for the same reason that the corps of royal architects paraded with a model of the Süleymaniye Mosque, rather than of the Selimiye, during the 1582 circumcision festival of Prince Mehmed at the Hippodrome (At Meydani) of Istanbul.²³

The preface of TM on the principles of architecture and its epilogue on the innovations of the Süleymaniye were eliminated in the final redaction of TE and TB, whose titles emphasize buildings (*bünyān, ebniye*), just as their contents focus on selected imperial works from Sinan’s corpus. By contrast, TM and its preliminary draft (RM) bear titles concentrating on architects and on the profession of architecture (*mi‘mārīn, mi‘māriyye*). Sinan’s view of architectural history as a mirror of civilizational progress is summarized in the TM preface, which exalts the difficulty and honor of his profession, briefly outlining the rules of construction along with the necessity of laying strong foundations:

It is obvious and proven to men of intelligence and wisdom and persons of understanding and vision that building with water and clay being an auspicious art, the Children of Adam felt an aversion to mountains and caves and from the beginning were inclined to build cities and villages. And because of the civilized nature of human beings, many types of buildings were invented day-by-day, and refinement increased. Not a moment was lost by those striving to leave a memorial and, in fact, a building such as Hagia Sophia, which is without equal in the world, was built in fourteen years through the effort of an architect named Agnados [Ignatius]. But a few years after its completion, the flat dome collapsed. And, in histories, it is set forth that it was rebuilt by the abovementioned architect-engineer (*mi‘mār mūhendis*) with various apologies. In like manner, your slave, Sinan of Kayseri, has also suffered many troubles during the completion of each building. No doubt, with the help of God, all of these [buildings] came into existence due to the auspicious government and lofty patronage of the kingdom-conquering Ottoman dynasty and the bountiful sincerity of our own heart. In short, there is no art more difficult than architecture, and whosoever is engaged in this estimable calling must, to begin with, be righteous and pious. He should not begin to lay the foundations if the building site is not firm, and when he sets out to lay the foundations he should take great care that his work be free from defect and he reaches the firm ground. And, in proportion to the abundance or paucity of piers, columns, and buttresses, he should close up the domes and half domes that are on top of them, and bind the arches together in an agreeable manner, without carelessness. And he should not hurry in important matters but should endure in accord with the import of the saying “Patience brings one victory!” in order that, with God’s help, he may find divine guidance for the immortality of his work. And in this there is no doubt!²⁴

The reference in this remarkable passage to primitive architecture built of mud recalls Pliny’s account (repeated in Alberti’s mid-fifteenth-century architectural treatise) that humans first lived in caves before inventing mud huts. The notion of historical progress recalls Vitruvius’s definition of architecture as a transition from a primitive mode of life to “civilization and refinement” through the emergence of differentiated building types (TM includes a catalogue of twelve building types fulfilling different functions).²⁵ Along the same lines, a letter by Alberti and the writings of other humanists associated Filippo Brunelleschi’s monumental dome crowning Florence Cathedral with the concept of historical progress, measured by the

architect's capacity for invention through the divine power of *ingenio*, a mysterious creative force akin to genius.²⁶ Yet Alberti's architectural treatise argues that invention must not be *ex novo*, because admired exemplars from the past lend distinguished pedigree to new proposals: "Inspired by their example, we should strive to produce our own inventions, to rival, or, if possible, to surpass the glory of theirs."²⁷

Sinan's autobiographies participate in the Renaissance discourse on the history of artistic progress by eulogizing his own inventions that, thanks to his creative genius nourished by piety, surpass admired monuments built in the past. From the primitive hut to Hagia Sophia, the evolution of architecture toward increasingly variegated building types and greater aesthetic refinement eventually culminates in his own superior works, which feature stabler domes built in a shorter time and simultaneously reflect the triumph of Islam, the grandeur of the Ottoman dynasty, and his God-given talent. Expressions of humility, which characterize Sinan as the "humble and lowly servant" or the "meek ant," counterbalance his bold self-representation as the divine agent on whom depends the architectural glorification of God and of the sultan, who is God's shadow on earth.

The skilled architect must be pious in order to overcome the challenges of his honorable profession. The cultural value attached to piety also becomes apparent in Cafer Efendi's early-seventeenth-century treatise, which stresses the devoutness of "Koca Mimar Sinan Ağa," who spent most of his life "on ghazas and jihads and on buildings and edifices for the sake of God."²⁸ Sinan's autobiographies attribute his ability to surmount professional difficulties to unceasing prayers and the help of God, the divine source of his talent. The exalted self-image projected in these texts echoes the *Lives* of Italian artists and architects, with their notion of the artwork as a material trace of its maker's mental powers of invention. The Italian genre of the vita condensed an artist's career to a series of key episodes: a recurrent theme is the *topos* of the misunderstood genius-protagonist, who is constantly undermined by the slanders of envious rivals but ultimately vindicated by his own expertise. The narrative structure of TB is propelled by similar episodes displaying the chief architect's cunning ability to overcome hurdles that cast doubt on his professional competence.

Sinan may well have been familiar with and inspired by the biographies of his Italian colleagues, given the

preoccupation with global artistic fame that lured him to accept the lifelong post of chief architect: "I wished to become an architect, / That with my perfect skill I should leave works of art in the world."²⁹ His concern for international recognition becomes apparent in TB, which attributes the competitive program of the Selimiye Mosque to the challenge posed by his professional rivals in Europe, "those who passed for architects among the sinning unbelievers," who presumed his inability to build a dome equaling in size that of Hagia Sophia. The Selimiye dome not only refutes this presumption but also proves Sinan's capacity for artistic invention, setting up a new standard of its own as an "inimitable" paragon of world architecture. The Selimiye, dominating the skyline of Edirne along the ceremonial highway to Europe, is declared "[matchless] in the world" and "worthy of the admiration of humankind."³⁰ These expressions capture Sinan's ambition to address a universal audience, which likely induced him to keep abreast of contemporary developments in the European architectural scene.

The sources of the chief architect's autobiographies may have included Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550, 1568), or the vitae of Brunelleschi (d. 1446) and Michelangelo (d. 1564), penned by their associates Antonio di Tuccio Manetti (1480s) and Ascanio Condivi (1553), respectively. Condivi's biography of his teacher Michelangelo has in certain respects been considered an autobiography, and much like Condivi, who drew information "from the oracle of his [master's] speech," Sa'i based TB on Sinan's "blessed" words reflecting "the wisdom of [the sage] Lokman."³¹ Condivi writes that his aim is "to contribute as best as I can to the fame of my master," and to prove to the world "how great are his powers of invention and how many beautiful ideas spring from that divine spirit."³² The equivalent of the term *divino* (divine) used for Brunelleschi and Michelangelo is applied to Sinan by his biographer, who is intent on advertising the chief architect's God-given genius: the "divine/blessed maestro" ('azîz-i kârdân), the "divine/blessed chief architect" (*mî'mâr-i mübârek-i muqaddem*).³³ Both Condivi and Sa'i record those attributes by which their subjects most want to be remembered, particularly their creative faculty that wins the reverence of powerful rulers and the envy of rivals.

Sinan's autobiographies have long shaped the inordinate focus of scholarship on his person, and by extension on his style, at the expense of such factors

as patronage and context. These self-centered texts suppress the contributions of numerous royal architects who executed the chief architect's designs and focus exclusively on the grandest sultanic projects in or near the capital cities of Istanbul and Edirne. TB eulogizes the skills Sinan displayed in creating three major imperial mosque complexes (Şehzade Mehmed, Süleymaniye, and Selimiye), the Kırkçeşme Aqueducts, the waterwheel of a royal garden in Istanbul, and the Büyükçekmece Bridge on the highway between Istanbul and Edirne. Each of these six projects involves Sinan's implicit contest with the architectural heritage of "infidel" times; in the Ottoman milieu the Romano-Byzantine building tradition is associated with a non-Muslim past and lacks the cultural connotations it held in the European humanist context, with its cult of antique revival. Nevertheless, much like his Italian colleagues who intently study the ancient ruins of Rome, Sinan eagerly examines and sets out to improve upon the classical antiquities he encounters in and near Constantinople.

Sinan's three grand imperial mosques engage with the past by means of a structural and aesthetic criticism of Hagia Sophia and early Ottoman mosques. His competitive dialogue with the past is not unlike that of his Italian Renaissance colleagues who were employed in the protracted construction of the new St. Peter's in Rome; they, too, aspired to reinterpret such unsurpassed antique models as the Pantheon and Hagia Sophia and more recent landmarks including Florence Cathedral.³⁴ The collection of rare columns and marbles from antique ruins (such as Cyzicus, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Baalbek) emphasized in the TB description of the Süleymaniye echoes accounts in the *Diegesis* and its Ottoman translations of Justinian's appropriation of spolia from pagan temples all over his empire for Hagia Sophia. The comparable transportation of precious stones for Süleyman's own mosque—itself a reinterpretation of Hagia Sophia, with which Justinian claimed in the *Diegesis* to have surpassed Solomon's Temple—represents a deliberate reenactment of building practices from antiquity. Alberti's treatise acknowledges that valuable columns and marbles increase the impressiveness of a monument, "especially if the stone comes from abroad and has been conveyed along a difficult route."³⁵ This statement testifies to the shared architectural culture of the eastern Mediterranean basin during the early modern period, despite its veiling by the differing dis-

courses on architecture that prevailed in Europe and the Ottoman Empire.

Engineering projects also bring Sinan face-to-face with the classical heritage. For the Büyükçekmece Bridge, Süleyman asks his chief architect to prepare a report about how the collapsed Roman bridge on that site was constructed in "the time of the unbelievers," and why it fell into ruin. After some archaeological fieldwork, Sinan presents a written report criticizing the old bridge: it collapsed, he reports, because "they positioned the bridge away from the sea and placed [it] in a marshy area by the shore"; for this reason the new bridge should be built in the sea, where "the water is shallow and [the ground is] firm."³⁶ Süleyman promptly gives his royal approval for the proposed plan (*resm*), which corrects the mistakes of the old bridge. The construction technique described by Sinan comes close to the Roman method outlined in Vitruvius's treatise, where the use of watertight wooden boxes (*batardo*) is recommended for the creation of bridge foundations. Another Roman technique employed in this project consists of joining large stones "together as a single piece" by iron clamps and molten lead.

Renovating the Kırkçeşme Aqueducts in Istanbul once again requires Sinan to study Roman ruins. After ordering grandees to investigate the history of the ancient waterworks of the capital, Süleyman holds a "consultation" with his chief architect to discuss their rehabilitation. TB describes how Sinan then proceeds to survey the ruins, using an astrolabe-like surveying instrument, an "aerial balance," to measure "the heights and depths of the valleys" and constructing a dam "in accord with the science of engineering (*hendese*, i.e., geometry)." He not only rehabilitates the ancient waterworks by uncovering "reservoirs and marble conduits built by the infidels" but finds additional water sources with which he considerably increases the city's water supply through new aqueducts.³⁷ In addition, during the construction of a waterwheel in a royal garden of Sultan Süleyman (once belonging to İskender Çelebi), the chief architect also discovers an underground water source and the remains of an ancient well from "the time of the unbelievers." His saintly power (*velâyet*) in the science of hydraulics is acknowledged in the sultan's presence by the chief of the privy chamber, and Süleyman himself praises the miraculous skill of his chief architect, recognizing his status as a "perfect man" (*kâmil insân*), the

highest spiritual station attainable by saints in Sufi parlance.³⁸

Sinan's autobiographies claim his authorship of an overwhelming number of projects, as if to compensate for the absence of his signature on monuments he considered his own. Prior to the establishment of the corps of royal architects at around the middle of the fifteenth century, Ottoman buildings often included inscriptions specifying the names of their architects and decorators.³⁹ The lack (with a few exceptions) of architects' signatures on late-fifteenth- and sixteenth-century monuments not only underscores the primacy of the patrons named in foundation inscriptions, but also implies a collaborative notion of authorship for buildings created under the supervision of chief architects—hence the assertion in TM that all buildings erected in the course of Sinan's tenure in that post came into being under his "supervision" (*mübāṣeret*).⁴⁰ His personal contribution to these monuments varied according to the relative importance of their patrons and their proximity to Istanbul, which he only occasionally left after he became chief architect. By claiming authorship of essentially collaborative works, realized with the mediation of royal architects, Sinan stresses his role in conceptualizing their design.

This is comparable to the Renaissance notion of *disegno* as a cerebral pursuit rooted in the power of judgment and transcending the execution of a building: a mental abstraction relatively separate from its material manifestation. The extensive reliance on drawings confirms the authority of the chief architect and the conception of architecture as an intellectual discipline based on the mathematical sciences, particularly geometry. TB announces Sinan's role in drawing the plans (*resm*) of a large number of projects commissioned by distinguished patrons, whose public image becomes increasingly bound up with prestige monuments built in the new style he has codified:

In short, this servant of the ruler of the age and of the viziers and grandees designed (*resm eyleyüp*) and built noble Friday mosques in eighty places, as well as more than four hundred exalted masjids. And madrasas in sixty places, and thirty-two palaces, and nineteen tombs, and seven Qur'an schools, and seventeen hospices (*'imāret*), and three hospitals, and bridges were built in seven places, and aqueducts in fifteen places, and six warehouses, and nineteen khans, and thirty-three bathhouses were built.⁴¹

The epitaph that Sa'i composed for Sinan's tomb also

mentions eighty Friday mosques and more than four hundred masjids, numbers that vary in differing lists appended to TM and to various copies of the *Tezkires* compiled in this volume.

Sinan's autobiographies are replete with allusions to the possessors of skill, perception, understanding, and vision who were among his intended readers.⁴² These readers no doubt included fellow architects and connoisseurs capable of recognizing the chief architect's innovations with their special mental powers of discrimination. Several passages explicitly invite experts to appreciate the rarity of his accomplishments, such as the "swiftness" of construction and the "charm" he displayed in the Süleymaniye. TM even declares that "doorways were opened from the minarets around the noble dome, and several small, upper domes were provided for the connoisseurs of works (*erbāb-i te'līf*)," an artistry that "had not previously been accomplished by any master."⁴³ Indeed, the composition of the vast Süleymaniye complex and its elaborate domical superstructure can be contemplated by experts from its roof terrace, which is surrounded by unprecedented stone balustrades. Sinan provided access to this "viewing terrace" from the lowermost doorways of the southern pair of minarets and from the doors of the unique "small, upper domes" that crown the lateral stepped buttresses as windowed belvedere chambers.⁴⁴

Seventeenth-century texts such as Cafer Efendi's architectural treatise and Evliya Çelebi's travelogue, which is filled with attributions to Sinan of buildings he encountered throughout the Ottoman Empire, confirm that enthusiasts of architecture did read the autobiographies. One of the surviving TE manuscripts bears a seal of ownership by the late-seventeenth-century chief royal architect Hafiz Ibrahim, and several TE and TB copies are preserved in Cairo, the center of a major office of Ottoman provincial architects. One of the Cairo manuscripts, which includes both TE and TB, belonged to Hafiz Hüseyin Ayvansarayi (d. 1786–87), who wrote a description of mosques in Istanbul entitled *Hadiqatū'l-Cevāmi'*. We also know that Dayezade Mustafa Efendi, the author of an eighteenth-century panegyrical essay on the Selimiye Mosque, consulted a copy of TB in the Revan Kiosk Library of the Topkapı Palace.⁴⁵

The prefaces of Sinan's autobiographies reflect a "humanist" ethos in their exaltation of humankind as a mirror of God's perfection. They describe the creation by the Divine Architect, without the aid of masons or drafting instruments, of the multitiered heavens and

earth, along with the “palace of man’s body” fashioned from water and clay and raised above all other creatures in terms of nobility of heart and soul. The preface of Sinan’s *waqfiyya* (endowment deed) similarly casts Adam as an embodiment of the Divine Artist’s wisdom, which raises some men above others by endowing them with special talents.⁴⁶ Sinan is clearly one of these favored men whom Sa‘i elevates to saintly status, thereby affirming the esteem of artistic creativity as a form of divine blessing.

The parallelism between the Divine Architect and His human counterpart, the blessed Sinan, is manifested in Sa‘i’s descriptions of imperial mosques as microcosmic representations of the universe, much like Byzantine *ekphrases* (literary descriptions) of domed churches.⁴⁷ The “mimetic” architectural descriptions of Sa‘i are packed with imagery from nature: columns and minarets like cypresses, marbles with wavy patterns like oceans, arches with alternating voussoirs soaring to the heavens in the manner of rainbows, bubble-like domes on the sea of elegance, great domes like mountains carved out from the earth, cupolas suspended in the manner of heavenly spheres, interior spaces and fountain courtyards like paradisiacal gardens. That these poetic images (repeated in Cafer Efendi’s treatise) find parallels in panegyrical descriptions of architecture by Ottoman poets, historians, travelers, and *waqfiyya* writers testifies to a widely shared aesthetic discourse.

The autobiographical texts penned by Sa‘i merged the literary genres of the biography and the book of deeds with panegyrical poems on selected sultanic monuments constituting joint memorials to the fame of their patrons and of Sinan. The collective nature of the chief architect’s works, created with the mediation of the corps of royal architects, came to be almost completely overshadowed by his assertive self-image, through which he successfully controlled the shaping of memory over the generations. The cult of Sinan was thus nurtured by his self-mythologizing autobiographies, written in his own words to leave an enduring imprint of his name and reputation on the “pages of time.”

Gülrü Necipoglu
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA

NOTES

1. *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London and Princeton, NJ, 2005); see chap. 4, on which this preface is largely based. For my preliminary thoughts on Sinan’s autobiographies, see “Challenging the Past: Sinan and the Competitive Discourse of Early Modern Islamic Architecture,” *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 169–80. I used my own translations of the autobiographies in my book, which was completed before I had access to the translations by Howard Crane and Esra Akin published in this volume. For former editions of Sinan’s autobiographies and their problematic translations into English, see introduction, this volume.
2. The texts edited and translated by Crane are: *Risâle-i Mi‘mâriyye: An Early Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Treatise on Architecture* (Leiden, 1987), and *The Garden of the Mosques: Hafız Hüseyin al-Ayvansarayı’s Guide to the Muslim Monuments of Ottoman Istanbul* (Leiden, 2000).
3. Crane’s research assistant, Febe Armanios, obtained TE and TB manuscripts preserved in Cairo with support from the Aga Khan Program at Harvard. I thank Aydin Yüksel for generously providing the copy of one of the TE manuscripts (once belonging to Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi and now kept in Kubbelîti Akademisi Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, no. VI/1), whose whereabouts were located by Howard Crane.
4. TB, trans., 114.
5. The epitaph is cited in the introduction of this volume. TE and TB comprise sections in verse that are repeated almost verbatim; the verses are interpolated with much longer prose narratives in TB.
6. TB, trans., 114.
7. The “decline discourse” is discussed in Cemal Kafadar, “The Myth of the Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post-Süleymanic Era,” in *Süleyman the Second and His Time*, ed. H. İnalcık and C. Kafadar (Istanbul, 1993), 37–48; idem, “The Question of Ottoman Decline,” *Harvard Middle East and Islamic Review* 5 (1998–99): 30–75; and Cornell Fleischer, *Bureucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Princeton, 1986).
8. This manuscript was returned to Hungary in 1877 by Sultan Abdülhamid II as a diplomatic present: see Gábor Hajnócz, “Vitruvius, *De Architectura* (MS Lat. 32) in the University Library, Budapest, and the Milanese Court of Humanists,” *Arte Lombarda* 97–98 (1991): 97–104.
9. The decree that orders the manuscript collection to be given to the Galata Observatory is published in Cevat İzgi, *Osmâni Medreselerinde İlim*, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1997), vol. 1, 126–27.
10. For this view, see Doğan Kuban, *Sinan’s Art and Selimiye* (Istanbul, 1997), 235–38, and Henry Matthews, “Concepts of Ideal Form in Istanbul and Rome: The Sacred Architecture of Sinan and His Italian Contemporaries,” in *Myth to Modernity*, ed. Nezih Başgelen and Brian Johnson (Istanbul, 2002), 59–70.
11. The concept of decorum is discussed in my book, *Age of Sinan*.
12. TB, trans., 121.
13. For example, the late-sixteenth-century Ottoman biographical compendium of calligraphers and painters by Mustafa Ali Gelibolulu, *Menâqib-i Hünerverân* (Istanbul, 1926); Persian examples of this literary genre are analyzed in David

- Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden, and Boston, 2001). For aesthetic theory and the conceptualization of artistic creativity in medieval Islamic texts, see my *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Santa Monica, 1995), 185–217.
14. A rare example of an Ottoman autobiography, dating from the 1540s and likewise “coauthored,” is that of the grand admiral Barbarossa (Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha, d. 1545), a seafaring ghazi who is elevated to saintly status because of his legendary exploits: see Aldo Galotta, ed., *Il “Gazavāt-i Hayreddin Pasa” di Seyyid Murād* (Naples, 1983).
 15. Sixteenth-century Ottoman Sufi saints who miraculously discovered holy springs include Demir Baba and Merkez Efendi: see Demir Baba, *Demir Baba Vilâyetnamesi*, ed. Bedri Noyan (Istanbul, 1976), 38, 127–29, and Merkez Efendi’s biography in Mahmud Cemaleddin el-Hulvi, *Lemezât-i Hulviyye*, ed. M. S. Tayşı (Istanbul, 1993), 467. For Sinan’s discovery of underground water sources, see TB, trans., 118.
 16. TB, trans., 132. The tradition that Hagia Sophia had been designed with the help of Hızır goes back to Persian and Turkish versions of the *Diegesis*; for this Greek text and its translations, see Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: Études sur le recueil des Patria* (Paris, 1984), 200, and Stéphane Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques* (Paris, 1990). The Greek original attributes the divinely inspired plan of Hagia Sophia to an angel; in some translations Hızır is substituted for the angel.
 17. Crane, ed., *Risâle-i Mi'mâriyye*, 23. Unlike Sinan’s autobiographies, this biography (ca. 1614–15) was written in the third person and undertaken by the author himself, without a commission from the chief architect (in this case, Mehmed Ağa).
 18. For the *Diegesis* and its translations, see n. 16, above. Another *menâqibnâme* briefly refers to the architect of the Üç Şerefeli Mosque, who also built a palace for Mehmed II along the Tunca River in Edirne: see Beşir Çelebi, “Târih-i Edirne, Hikâyet-i Beşir Çelebi,” in *Türk Edebiyatı Örnekleri*, vol. 3, ed. İ. H. Ertaylan (Istanbul, 1946).
 19. For the execution of Mehmed II’s architect, see Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 33–34.
 20. TB, trans., 125. Reasons given in Greek texts for the collapse of the Hagia Sophia dome are discussed in Cyril Mango, “Byzantine Writers on the Fabric of Hagia Sophia,” in *Hagia Sophia: From the Age of Justinian to the Present*, ed. A. Çakmak and R. Mark (Cambridge, 1992), 48.
 21. TB, trans., 123.
 22. Evliya Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme*, 10 vols. (Istanbul, 1896–1930), vol. 3, 443–44.
 23. For an illustrated manuscript depicting this circumcision festival, see Nurhan Atasoy, *1582 Surname-i Hümayun: Düğün Kitabı* (Istanbul, 1997).
 24. TM, trans., 65–66.
 25. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, ed. J. Rykwert, N. Leach, and R. Tavenor (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1989), 39.
 26. Christine Smith, “Originality and Cultural Progress in the Quattrocento: Brunelleschi’s Dome and a Letter by Alberti,” *Rinascimento* 28 (1989): 291–318.
 27. Alberti, *Art of Building*, 24.
 28. Crane ed., *Risâle-i Mi'mâriyye*, 107.
 29. TB, trans., 116.
 30. TB, trans., 130.
 31. Ascanio Condivi, *The Life of Michel-Angelo*, trans. Alice Sedwick Wohl, ed. Hellmut Wohl (University Park, PA, 1999), xiii, p. 4; TB, trans., 114.
 32. Condivi, *Life of Michel-Angelo*, 4, 109.
 33. From the epitaph for Sinan’s tomb: see n. 5, above, and TB, trans., 126.
 34. See my *Age of Sinan* and “Challenging the Past.”
 35. Alberti, *Art of Building*, 25, 163.
 36. TB, trans., 128.
 37. TB, trans., 121.
 38. TB, trans., 127–28.
 39. Inscriptions with signatures of architects and decorators are catalogued in Zeki Sönmez, *Başlangıcından 16. Yüzyıla Kadar Anadolu Türk-İslam Mimarisiinde Sanatçılar* (Ankara, 1989).
 40. TM, trans., 65.
 41. TB, trans., 117.
 42. “Ehl-i hüner,” “ma'rifet ehli,” “erbâb-ı nazâr,” “erbâb-ı hîkmet,” “erbâb-ı te'lîf.”
 43. TM, trans., 74.
 44. These domical belvederes are illustrated in İ. Aydin Yüksel, *Ottoman Mimarısında Kânûnî Sultan Süleyman Devri (926–974/1520–1566)* (Istanbul, 2004), 587, figs. 141.43–141.44.
 45. For a description of TE and TB manuscripts, see introduction, this volume. The text of Dayezade is published in Zeki Sönmez, *Mimar Sinan ile Ilgili Tarihi Yazmalar-Belgeler* (Istanbul, 1988), 101–2.
 46. İbrahim Ateş, *Mimar Sinan Vakfi* (Istanbul, 1990), 63.
 47. Some examples of Byzantine ekphrases are translated in Cyril Mango, *Sources and Documents: The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London, 1986).