THE URBAN ARRANGEMENT OF THE SELIMIYE MOSQUE IN EDIRNE

In Edirne monuments are centrally concentrated. Twenty-nine monumental structures are located within a circle 5 km in diameter: mosques, tombs, inns (han), baths (hamam), theological schools (medrese), shopping streets (arasta) etc. This area is virtually an open museum unmatched in the world.

The relationship of Eski Cami (1444), Uc Serefeli (1448) and Selimiye (1575) can be likened to that of San Marco, San Giorgio and La Salute trinity in Venice.

The city of Hadrianopolis was founded in A.D. 125 by the emperor Hadrian. It was incorporated into the territories of the Byzantine Empire in 395 and later, between the 9th and 11th centuries, was substantially damaged by the wars between Byzantium and the Bulgarian armies.

In 1361 the city was captured by the Ottoman army marching to Thrace under the command of Sultan Murat I; while in 1368 the capital of the Ottoman Empire was moved from Bursa to Hadrianopolis. However Sultan Murat II emerges as the real founder of Edirne.

Sultan Mahmet II (Conquerer), Cem Sultan and Beyazit II were all born in Edirne, and Süleyman the Magnificent wrote some of his most significant laws here.

After the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 the capital was moved once again. However, Edirne remained important as the seat of the Sultans' summer palaces and hunting pavilions. It also served as a strategic outpost for the military campaigns into European territory. Armies camped there, war plans were plotted there, and foreign ambassadors received there. As the second largest city of the Empire, it retained its significance well into the 1820's.

After the Balkan War 1912-13, Edirne returned to Turkey. Very little survives of ancient Hadrianopolis: some remains of the city walls along the shopping street formerly called the Burg or Citadel, which was the earliest centre of Edirne.

The second urban focus developed in front of: the Eski Cami, while the third is the Uc Serefeli Cami or Tashan Square. The first is a commercial centre while others are the social/cultural centre (the Sehristan of Turkish and Islamic cities).

Sultan Selim II's admiration of the Tunca Palace in Edirne and his passion for hunting in the area account for his choice of this city rather than Istanbul as the site of his imperial mosque.

Many stories and legends have been fabricated by travellers and historians of romantic inclination connecting the selection of the site for the Selimiye mosque to some prophecy or dream of the Sultan. That Sinan personally conducted lengthy investigations in Edirne is never mentioned by these stories. Another hill called Kiyak or Bucuk Tepe, 1.5 km southeast of the mosque's site is higher and more spectacular. But Sinan was far more familiar with soil conditions of the site where 50 years before he built a water reservoir.

Thus he knew that the bedrock was 20 meters below the surface and that Edirne was located in an earthquake zone.

The site he chose, the Sari Tepe, occupies a most dominant position on the plain. Its superb relation to earlier monuments reveals what Sinan called its "crowning the city". Furthermore, the yellow soil, easy to dig and shift yet quick to harden, lends itself very well to the construction of a major monument. A group of barracks to the north were demolished upon Sinan's instruction in order to clear the site for construction.

Two mosques built about 130-140 years before Selimiye are highly significant for Sinan's scheme: the Eski Cami by Alaaddin and more specifically, the Uc Serefeli Cami attributed to Haci Ivaz or to Müşlihidin which marks a turning point in Ottoman architecture.

In Uc Serefeli Cami, the inverted-T-plan of early Bursa mosques is transformed into rectangular, reflecting the desire to gather the faithful within a single, unified space. The minarets, 67 meters high (the tallest of their time), contained three separate stairways giving access to the balconies, an ingenious system skillfully implemented by Sinan.

Ottoman culture nurtured many master architects and builders before Sinan — including such names as Old Sinan (the architect of the first Fatih Mosque), Kemalettin, Hayrettin, Alaaddin, Rüstem Aga, Haci Ivaz, Acem Ali and Muslihidin Mimar. Sinan carefully studied and learned from these masters.

In this study it has been suggested that Sinan has situated Selimiye in close proximity to Eski Cami and Uc Serefeli in a spatial dialogue reminiscent of the location of La Salute in Venice. It is very likely that this dialogue prompted Sinan not to use a Süleymaniye type of complex here. Eski Cami, the caravansaray of Rüstem Pasha nearby, the Bedesten, the Uc Serefeli Cami and next to it, the medrese of Murat II as well as the Peykler medrese — all constitute an important city centre bigger in scale than
the traditional kölliye complexes. The correspondance of Sinan with Sultan Selim is itself of great historical/documentary interest. Asking the Sultan what to do about the residual empty spaces around the mosque, he receives an order to build a kapan (commercial center) to the south and to border the northern side with ten stone houses.

Following Sinan's sketches, these were built after his death by his chief assistant Davut Aga.

Regrettfully the kapan, which gave scale to the mosque and the square, was torn down about 40 years ago. Today in its place are some remains of the walls, the hamam of Mezit Bey (1443), a fountain and a han which struggle for survival. Only fragments of the stone houses remain.

Having lost its original scale, the square has become a meaningless open space assailed by chaotic traffic, while the shops built across the Eski Cami are more than embarrassing.

The present project-plan is intended to explore the possibilities of a new spatial articulation for these three monuments. Structures built after Selimiye in the later phases of the Empire are retained as a historical testimony.

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I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to:
Prof. Dr. Bülent Özer and my friends in Edirne
Journalist author Oral Onur
Gângor Mazlum, former mayor
Painter Tayyip Yilmaz
Architect Özcan Topsyel.
I have extensively used the following sources:
The rich library of Oral Onur and private discussions with him
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