An evaluation of Sinan’s 16th-century Istanbul must go beyond the investigation of plans and geometries. To reconstruct a mental image of the urban experience of that particular time, an aesthetic and theoretical framework based on phenomenological concepts can be proposed, somewhat akin to the approaches of Aldo Rossi and Norberg-Schulz. To use the phrase “Sinan’s Istanbul” is not an exaggeration, considering his period of activity spanned the reign of three sultans. Yet, it is primarily Sultan Süleyman’s policies and aspirations towards the centralization of his expanded empire that provided the impulse for Sinan’s imagination to create an imperial capital from the ancient city. Viewed within an urban context, the general character and the particular features of Sinan’s architecture reveal certain cultural values that must have geared his approach to design.

Foremost must have been the intentions of Süleyman when he employed Sinan as Chief Royal Architect in 1538. Throughout his reign three issues seem to have preoccupied the Sultan: the expansion and establishment of Ottoman power in the West, the unification of his rule under orthodox Sunni practice, and the establishment of definitive legislation on land ownership. We can therefore assess that the vast architectural programme undertaken by Sinan during and after Süleyman’s reign was intended to symbolize the Empire’s world dominating status and had to provide for the functions of a centralized religious institution.

Furthermore, the extensive building of religious complexes, with special land and maintenance endowments, secured state control over buildings and land for communal use. Süleyman’s imperial policy found its environmental and physical realization in the creative genius of Sinan who personifies to us the building establishment of his day.

Sinan was above all an imperial architect. It is with this awareness that by the end of the 16th-century he was able to give physical reality to the values cultivated by the formation of the Ottoman State.

Istanbul had attained its basic form long before Sinan. It had served Byzantium for eleven centuries and the Ottomans for a century as capital. Yet, it is Sinan who, serving as chief architect for 50 years, and overseeing all the architectural activity of the empire, really gave it its imperial form and meaning. He contributed to it a mechanism of connections that made it work as a totality. He activated its already existing foundation to function according to an urban consciousness appropriate to an imperial capital, by providing the necessary links and aesthetic sublimation through his architecture.

Therefore, we cannot treat of his urbanism only in terms of individual building activities, no matter how vast a programme they comprised. This is not to claim that Sinan started with a preconceived layout for the whole. But it is not far fetched to think that he had a vision of the whole urban mechanism that went beyond individual topographic considerations, even when he was building for individual programmes. Such an assumption can be validated by two facts. One, that he built for all conceivable kinds of programmes — religious, charitable, educational, residential, as well as for urban services: water supply, restorations, overseeing fire prevention. Two, he built simultaneously on many different sites of the city. Consciously or unconsciously, he must have had a sense of how the city worked.

As a spatial structure, the city is the stage where human events take place and where humanizing historical continuity acquires physical form. In Islam the urban scene is staged on quite different principles than those in the West. The order of the Islamic city is not immediately recognizable. What constitutes its order is neither the vertical or horizontal geometries, nor the circulation patterns, but other perceivable qualities. In Sinan’s Istanbul we can talk about an order created through connections and reciprocity of the built form to the environment, and about certain experiences that add up to construct a meaningful image of the city.

To what degree a phenomenological and aesthetic analysis can be systematized is a question. Nevertheless, meanings or urban life can be methodically deduced from the general character of architectural composition. However, when talking about the life of a predominantly Islamic city, one danger is to ascribe to it Western meanings. A public consciousness such as was determining in the European city of the Renaissance, based on principles of Antiquity and Humanism, cannot be true for the Islamic context. In Islam, the unity of State and religion and the absolute autocracy of the ruler meant absolute centralization of power, which left no space for public institutions. Yet, an enriched urban environment could only be formed by accommodating this centralized system with complementary values of human life at
various levels. This is where Sinan's urban vision played a role in imperializing the old city of Istanbul. Yet, one fact is distinctly clear: Istanbul is just as different from a typical Islamic city as it is from a Western one. It is this special Ottoman character that combines both Western and Islamic qualities in its architectural form, which makes it possible to talk about an overall, related urban mechanism. In my estimation, it is the hierarchic order of the distribution of elements, plus the extremely important transitional features between contrasting qualities or zones that determine the individuality of the Ottoman city and especially of 16th-century Istanbul.

Thus in trying to systematize an analysis of Istanbul in this era we can talk about a) complementary, contrasting values reflected in architectural and urban form; b) transitional features; c) a referential system which works on different levels and scales: such as 1) the individual building; 2) the religious complex; 3) overall urban space.

The concepts of urban experience that we can deduce from Sinan's Istanbul can be analyzed as certain complementary values:

Communal (buildings and spaces for public use)

Individual (residential)

Monumental, sacred (religious, historical, ceremonial)

Intimate, private (residential, details of human scale)

Constant, orderly (religious complexes and buildings, communal zones)

Temporary, random (residential, commercial)

Historical (old sites, buildings, religious buildings)

Quotidian (residential, commercial neighbourhoods)

Artifact (monument, built form)

Nature (gardens, cemeteries, courts left green, unoccupied land)

Living (communal spaces, residential spaces, commercial spaces)

Dead (mausolea, cemeteries)

Corpus Mundi (the total order of the city)
Locus Solus (individual, unique place)

First we perceive how urban space is differentiated into zones of varying social importance. In contrast to free, or random, tight and introverted patterns of residential areas, the order of communal life was emphasized primarily in the religious center. The most important of these were the religious complexes, or the Friday mosques with domes and courts, usually commissioned by sultans, viziers, admirals, princesses and bureaucrats. They were built at significant nodal points of the city.

Sinan's architectural system was conceived to create the ideal communal space. This system can be traced as meaning or symbol in a single building, in a group of buildings, or in the totality of the city. The Süleymaniye can serve as a perfect example of this concept. In the mosque the unity of the community is reflected in the organization of interior space, and this unity is assured under the sacred protection of the dome. The Sultan's role in the conservation of this whole, in this world, is stated in the caligraphic decorations and other symbolic elements of the mosque. The Süleymaniye complex reflects the rational order of the unity of state and religion in contrast to the random pattern of settlements in the city. With its colleges, medical school, mosque and orderly courts, mausolea, its dead and living, the monumentality of ceremonies, the rhythm of daily life, the patterns of circulation, Süleymaniye reflects the concept of an ideal social life. These meanings were made apparent in an order that was perceived through various media; in the sounds from minarets, as well as visually in pictorial perspectives; in a referential system that united a topography that is divided by hills and water, or that relates the monumental to intimate detail.

Sinan's large complexes, designed to symbolize the ideal city, were worldly models of the Medina'l Fazila, the city of virtue. In the complexes of Süleyman's time, as in the prototype Süleymaniye, the values of the political order were stressed alongside those of religion, Şeriat. They were localities where an ideal balance was reached between the worldly and the otherworldly. The religious complex was the core of the communal realm. The mosque and its dome being the spiritual centre had to be visually accessible. In the Süleymaniye, the layout was planned not according to an apriori concept, but taking into consideration viewing conditions from different angles and distances.

The mosque and its court, elevated from the surrounding larger court, are the highest and most imposing structures. They form one pyramidal mass in their monolithic form,
THE OUTER WALL OF THE COURT OF SEHZADE MOSQUE TODAY

THE ENTRANCE PORTAL TO THE COURT OF THE SÜLEYMANİYE MOSQUE
SIDE VIEW OF AZAPKAPI SOKOLLU MEHMET PASHA MOSQUE
perhaps also creating a symbolic association to the primeval mountain. The dependencies are situated at lower levels, forming a transitional belt between the profane and the secular.

Monument and site interaction played just as important a role in the formation of the complex as that of function. In this relation, elements such as domes, walls, entrances, arcades and facade articulation, or more properly stated, elevations, were significant in creating correspondences between the monument and the environment.

In distinguishing the monumental Saladin mosque or mosques of smaller size within the generally random looking urban arrangement, the role of the minaret was to indicate the place, while the dome defined the communal space. Therefore, cover structures manifested significant differences according to the mass and scale of the building and according to the conditions of the site. Situated on large terrains visible from distances, Sehzade and Süleymaniye formed monolithic pyramidal wholes due to the hierarchic arrangement of their cover elements. Their masses flowed downward to the earth. Mosques which were built on smaller and more congested sites made their presence apparent by their single dome rising above the skyline. In all these mosques, such as Sokollu at Kadırka, Mihrimah at Edirnekapi or Rüstem Pasha, the cover is not a system of varying domed elements, but the central dome stands single out.

The first contact with the complex or its monument are the walls around the outer court, often articulated to human scale with fountains placed on it, or windows giving a view into the court. There are usually several entrances to the outer and inner courts, not a single approach. Thus access to the site is conceived as a smooth transition from the surrounding random pattern. The sequence of entries augments in importance as one approaches the purely religious realm. The doors on the outer walls are most modest, the court portal, as in the Sehzade and the Süleymaniye most monumental and point to the mihrap axis, and the mosque portal sculptural and carved-in as a receding and receiving form.

Süleymaniye is related to its environment in all four directions. The approach from the harbour faced its east elevation. The approach from the west between the colleges was aligned with the mosque’s side entry. The southern limits were defined by the cemetery walls. A radial spreading of its dependencies out from the core gradually integrates the complex and its environment. The multiple small domes of the dependencies and of the court form a visual pattern in themselves and are a symbol of unity in multitude, and echo the symbolism of the central dome. The repetition of elements, typical of Islamic aesthetics, is employed here on an urban scale by the repetition of entries, paths and domes.

Arcaded galleries are an other element of monument and site interaction, and of integration between interior and exterior spaces. As the open court is introverted, having a concentric form, the masses of large buildings such as Sehzade and Süleymaniye have been made eccentric by the use of galleries on their side facades. In the Selimiye mosque at Edirne, the building is in a way turned outward in all four directions, also containing galleries on the qibla wall. These galleries have no other function than directing the mass to the environment. This monument/site interaction is carried to its utmost in the Selimiye; the lower part of the building receding inwards, the higher level thrust outward. Furthermore, approach to the site considers, for the first time, a path toward the qibla from between the cemetery. The position of the cemetery within the complex and its relation to the mosque, as well as the constant encounter with it within the urban and architectural order creates an emphasized reference to the community of the dead. The cemetery with its mausolea or mausoleum is placed in the qibla direction of the mosque, referring to the spiritual and super natural realm. On the north of the mosque is the court, the space for the living community, placed at the point which symbolizes activity. With its strict geometry defined by arcades, or in the case of Süleymaniye, with a pavement that may have indicated ceremonial positions, communal space for the living stressed a certain discipline in design. Its opposite, the cemetery usually lacked imposed order. In between, the mosque stood as the connection between both worlds.

When we consider the more congested sites and the closer distances of mosques to the surrounding urban environment in later designs, we realize Sinan’s efforts to create proper viewing conditions and elevations. In later mosques such as Azapkıpı Sokollu, Kılıç Ali Pasha, and Zal Mahmud Pasha, the elevations no longer reflect the inner composition and structure, but act as walls of urban space. Thus the elevation of later mos-
ques become more vertical and planar and contain a grouping of elements which can be repetitive or linear, as in the case of Zal Mahmud Pasha and Azapkapi Sokollu. We see the great difference between their articulation and that of Mihrimah at Edirnekapi. The religious complex was the model of the ideal city in miniature form. It was the social core of its neighborhood or, in the case of the Saladin mosque such as Suleymaniye, the spiritual and intellectual centre of the whole city. Situated on the third hill, Suleymaniye dominated the city, symbolically radiating light "to strengthen the mechanisms of worldly sovereignty and to reach happiness in the afterworld." Suleymaniye's position on the silhouette of the city related it to all other complexes in a visual manner. It is also this quality of viewing the monuments that constituted one of the most essential aspects of the urban order. Many mosques are related to the centre. Rustem Pasha mosque whose dome is elevated above the congested commercial area on the harbour is situated on the skirts of the Suleymaniye and seems to be under its protection. When viewed from the west, Sehzade is also seen as dominated by the Imperial mosque. Across from the Bosphorous at Uskudar, both Mihrimah and Semsi Pasha mosques have a direct view of the Suleymaniye and of each other. From the Piyale Pasha mosque, the city centre with the Suleymaniye and Sehzade mosques is seen as a reference for orientation. From the Kasimpasa harbour, just a few steps from the Piyale Pasha mosque, one faces the monumental portal of Suleymaniye's court. A similar view again binds the Azapkapi mosque with the Suleymaniye. The limits of the city were also often defined by the presence of a complex or a mosque. The Mihrimah Sultan at Edirnekapi, the Hadim Ibrahim Pasha mosque at Silivri Kapi or the Atik Valide on the hills of Uskudar are such examples. Suleymaniye, as the perfect monument, also points to a historical continuum. Its site once belonged to the Old Palace which was built by Fatih on the Byzantine Forum Tauri, the civic centre of Constantinople. It dominated the ceremonial axis which stretched from the Topkapi Palace to the Beyazit mosque. Thus, its monumentality was reinforced in a theatrical manner by the Imperial proces-
sions every Friday and holiday, and gave the urban experience a dramatic sense of time. The conservation of and emphasis on the old Byzantine centre in the Ottoman city also points to the belief that the Ottoman State had in historical legitimation. The urban order thus emphasized the consciousness of man’s continuity beyond quotidian life. Sinan’s claim about the structural solidity of his mosque not only expressed an engineering feat; when he mentioned that Süleymaniye would outlive Dooms day, he was also stating an awareness of historical significance. It must have been partly this awareness that made Sinan search for new design alternatives in older mosque plans and arrive at new solutions such as the Piyale Pasha and Sinan Pasha mosques.

Sinan’s building activity was not limited to the monument. Only in and around Istanbul about 35 small mosques and masjid are attributed to Sinan.12 These often had a simple tile roof and were single-unit modest buildings. Even if Sinan did not personally supervise them, it is certain that he concerned himself with the whole layout of the city, including the residential and the intimate neighbourhood. Since we know from records that he also built palaces, the assumption that he was busy with a repertoire that afforded the experience of different urban scales not is far fetched.

The general character of the city showed a variety that on the one hand extended to the private and intimate and on the other to the monumental, public and historic. A neighbourhood corner with its fountain, or an inscription, a grilled window, or a carved fountain on the exterior wall of a religious complex provided intimacy and human scale. Another type of variety and contrast manifested itself in the assimilation of nature and artifact. The integration of nature as garden, cemetery or unoccupied terrain was not only the outcome of Istanbul’s topography and climate, but often evidence of conscious planning. Each mosque had a cemetery garden, where trees bearing various symbolic meanings were planted. Mosque courts surrounded by arcades or colleges were sometimes left green and planted. In contrast to the monument’s powerful solid mass these pieces of nature emphasized Nature’s time and rules. Istanbul was often experienced as a garden city. The need for a natural aesthetic must have been important, for even in a case like Rüstem Pasha mosque’s portico which could not contain real plants, tiles with motifs of flowers and paradise trees decorated the portico wall. In fact, Rüstem Pasha mosque as a whole, with its profuse floral tile revestments symbolized a holy garden within the busy congested commercial neighbourhood.

The completion of the capital’s imperialization through Sinan’s architecture was not the outcome of an order imposed on the city by a preconceived plan. The civilized urban quality was assimilated into the experiential dimension through careful handling of details. The urban order rarely manifested itself in horizontal geometries, but as an articulation between earth and skyline. The structural totality of the city has to be understood as a two-level mechanism: the fact that built-forms functioning as a whole, in the total city, by references to each other in both functional and aesthetic terms and that architecture attained its definite final form through interaction with the life, the natural patterns, and the topography of the city.

For each scale, typology and locale, the final conditioning factor was site/monument interaction. This concerned the individuality of the site, with its historic, spiritual and physical implications. The size, height and form of the monument, the order and composition of elements, no doubt also referenced to meanings related to its function, its patronage, etc. Thus, we see great differences in style and positioning on site, such as reflected in the Piyale Pasha, in the Rüstem Pasha, or in the Semsi Pasha mosques and complexes.

Piyale Pasha mosque built for the admiral is a six-domed unit which has the appearance of a medieval fortress; it is massive and imposing, and is well assimilated with the more rural and hilly surrounding. Its double entry and its minaret placed on an arch are a far cry from the refinement of the classical style. The Semsi Pasha with its mausoleum attached and open to the mosque, may reflect the individuality of its patron.14 Its positioning on the site is a tribute to the unique position of the sea. Rüstem Pasha mosque is well known for its unique design. Placed in the middle of a commercial district, it accommodated spaces for shops and storage. Such special design solutions seem to exist for each separate site and building. The supporting walls of the elevated court of Mihrimah Sultan at Edirnekapi incline according to the street, at the same time accommodating shops and providing the necessary transition between the two different worlds. The Sokollu mosque at Kadırga, placed at the
limit of the city centre, on a sloping terrain, shows a special attention to relations with the environment. At different levels and directions, entries have different characters. Its layout appropriates itself smoothly to the site and the neighbourhood; but in its court is a world unto itself. Obviously, as Sinan erected his monuments, at the same time as he expressed the power and status of his patrons, he nevertheless crystallized the values of the Locus Solus in the physical details.

In urban experience scale is one of the most expressive qualities. As pointed out before, it manifest itself in the intimate and the monumental and the communal. By the time Sinan’s active life came to an end, the Imperial city had become a structure that permitted a civilized life according to Islamic and Ottoman ideology. The ruling hierarchy under the protection of the Sultan and of religion, the unity of the community, social and cultural life found its physical expression in monuments, while nature and the individual were reflected in the global urban context, in freer patterns. With the symbols of historic continuity, its various cultural heritages, its different social and ethnic groups, its civil, commercial and religious buildings, its monuments and its intimate detail, Istanbul was the model of an undivided and entire world. It was the corpus mundi. The achievement of such an urban structure must not be understood as the outcome of a static, a priori approach to design and building. The political and economic atmosphere changed during Sinan’s half-century long career. As can be detected in many aspects of Sinan’s designs, such as the forms of cover structures, the articulation of elevations or the site arrangements, Sinan’s architecture was transformed radically within this half century, no doubt partly reflecting changes in the social atmosphere. But, this must have been also the result of the impetus provided by the potential of his architectural concepts. This proves that architecture and urbanism were living entities for Sinan, a fact which enabled him to view them from multiple angles.

Jale Erzen

2 Kafadar, G.N., Süleymaniye Complex in Istanbul, Muqarnas, Vol. 3, 1985. This is the first extensive study on the problem of meaning and symbolism in Sinan’s architecture.
3 Ortaylı, I., İstanbul’un Mekansal Yapisının Tarihsel Eleştirel Bir Bakış, Amme İdaresi Dergisi.
4 Kafadar, op. cit.
5 Kafadar, op. cit.
6 This issue was discussed by this author at the International Congress of Turkish Art in Cairo, in September 1987, in a paper entitled “Cover Structures of Sinan’s Mosques”.
8 This point has been elaborated in the following literature: Erzen, J., The Mosque Facades of Architect Sinan, Dimensions, Ankara, 1983, and Erzen, J., Mimar Sinan Dönemi Cami Cepheleri, OTTU, Ankara, 1981.
11 Kürkçeoglu, K.E., Süleymaniye Vakıfyesi, Resimli Posta Matbaası, Ankara, 1962. (Translation from Kafadar (1985)).
12 It is Evliya Çelebi who mentions Sinan’s claim.
14 Reference to Semsi Pasha’s character are to be found in Fleischer, C.H., Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire, Princeton, New Jersey, 1996.
15 For the stylistic evolution in Sinan, see Erzen (1981).