The emergence and subsequent development of the Ottoman architectural style in Bursa founded a new tradition. In addition to the mosque, the Sultan donated to the people a madrasa and a number of other public buildings. While the combination or close proximity of mosque and madrasa was an old tradition, combining the mosque, madrasa and public buildings such as hospitals, soup kitchens for the poor and baths in a complex or unified district, an autonomous “town” within the town, was a new architectural concept which originated, in the area of Islamic culture, with the Ottomans. In the külliye, all these buildings were grouped around the mosque to form an orderly unit in the midst of a multitude of houses and irregularly patterned streets and alleys.

A town is the work of man; a small, independent world of its own. Their founders could justly be proud of them. Towns in antiquity, and particularly Roman towns, were more than settlements, they were also monuments attesting to the fame of their founders. Exactly this attitude of the Ancient world is designated a danger, a source of temptation, in the Koran. The faithful are repeatedly warned not to become proud of their towns or worldly dwellings.

There are various passages in the Koran where the destruction of cities by natural catastrophes is interpreted as the consequence of divine anger. The destruction is described as a herald or harbinger of the Last Judgment, a sign meant to awaken man from a life in which he has forgotten God. The town, its flourishing life and its development and growth, including building monuments, is given a negative interpretation: once founded, its very existence seduces its citizens to adopt an attitude of heightened ambition. It offers an opportunity for the accumulation of property in the hands of the individual or of a certain group. “Competing for more worldly gain diverts you...” (102:2).

These thoughts and reflections help us to understand the concept of the külliye. More and more külliye were established as the Ottoman Empire grew and flourished. Not only the Sultan and the members of his family, but also statesmen and wealthy citizens vied with each other in donating mosques and külliye to the public. By founding and donating such külliye, the rich and the mighty justified their wealth before God and their fellow men. To be sure, such patrons provide for themselves a “monument” by their gift, but one in which they merely continue to be remembered as a benefactor. This schism between ambition and humility has found an exemplary expression in the idea of the külliye.

The construction of monumental madrasa was a Seljuk-Turkish tradition which was discontinued when the Ottoman Empire was established with Bursa as capital. In the new concept of the külliye, the madrasa loses its traditional architectural significance. The former monumental structure, whose shape and dimensions were on a par with the mosque, now becomes a plain functional building which is meant to fit harmoniously into the complex of public buildings.

The first külliye complexes were built in Bursa towards the end of the 14th century. The loose arrangement employed in their layout is characteristic of these early examples. The location of the individual buildings was in most cases determined by the form of the ground. The mosque was the only building which was directed towards Mecca, whereas the other structures are adapted to the features and shape of the land on which they are built.

After the conquest of Istanbul, great importance was assigned to the külliye. The mosque now becomes the absolutely dominating element in the arrangement of the complex. The surrounding buildings become increasingly plain and unadorned, enhancing the dominance of the mosque by their simplicity. In the field of the külliye, as in other areas, Sinan followed a tradition which was already far developed. The Fatih Külliye in Istanbul and the Bayazid Külliye in Edirne are two outstanding examples of the pre-Sinan era. In the work of Sinan, the hierarchical arrangement of mosque and surrounding buildings became even more decisive. While the design of the functional and utilitarian buildings is excellent as far as their interior organization and structure are concerned, they appear completely unassuming in architectural terms next to the mosque. The more monumental in character are his mosques, the more unpretentious are the exteriors of his madrasa and hospitals. The architectural achievement of Sinan’s külliye complexes lies in the disposition of the whole, that is, in the arrangement and grouping of the various structures. In subordinating the madrasa to the spirit of the unit as a whole, Sinan goes so far in some cases as to grouping the madrasa cells around the court of the mosque, thereby restructuring or converting the madrasa into a kind of front section of the mosque (as in the cases of Sokollu, Mihrimah and Kara Külliye).
After being appointed court architect, Sinan was commissioned by Haseki Hürrem Sultan to build a külîye. In addition to a small mosque, it was to contain a soup kitchen for the poor and a hospital for women. Work on the complex had already been started by Sinan’s predecessor, Acem Isa, who had most likely also decided on the layout and design of the entire project.

In the case of the Haseki Hürrem Külliye it was, by way of exception, not the mosque but the public buildings, beneficial to the entire community which formed the central and most important element. The space division of the soup kitchen is cleverly and functionally thought out. Sinan designed the space arrangement of the soup kitchen along entirely free lines. While it is true that here too the court provides access to surrounding rooms, it is much smaller in its dimensions and its arcades are much lower than those of the wide, high-vaulted kitchens and eating rooms. The hospital has an octagonal court, and it may well be that the ventilation and lighting problems of the rooms forced Sinan to adopt this unusual solution.

In the madrasa Sinan repeats the customary layout: the cells of the students are grouped around a court with arcades. In the center of the north side, opposite the entrance, he placed a square, domed auditorium.

The corner stone for the külîye of Süleyman was laid in 1550. Plans called for several madrasa, a hospital, a soup kitchen, a public bath and a caravansaray to be grouped around the mosque. The building site which was placed at Sinan’s disposal for the construction work was the plain on the third hill above the Golden Horn, one of the most exposed heights of the town. The mosque rises as a free-standing building in the center of a garden encircled by low walls. A broad street surrounds the mosque on three sides. Madrasa and the other structures are placed on the other side of the road. Although the functions of the various building differ widely, their ground plans differ hardly at all.

It is interesting in this context to note the location of the two madrasa on the east side, where the site slopes towards the Golden Horn. Sinan adapted the layout to this situation and built the lateral cells in the form of a sequence of separated, cubic units. Sinan’s idea to adjust the layout to the inclination of
THE MOSQUE OF SULTAN SELIM II AT EDIRNE
the land can perhaps be explained by the fact that he wished to preserve an unobstructed view of the mosque from the Golden Horn. Had these cells been built on an artificially elevated terrace, the madrasa would have disturbed the silhouette view of the mosque from the sea.

At the northwest corner of the külliye, the most easterly madrasa, the hospital and soup kitchen together form a closed street element, whereas the northeastern corner and other side of the street located to the north remained free of buildings. Owing to the south east axis prescribed by the location of Mecca, the main entrance of the mosque had to be situated on the northwest side. The harbour, the centre of the town and the serai of the Sultan thus remain located at the southeastern side of the mosque. This means that those entering the külliye from the centre of the town could reach the main entrance only via a detour. And it is precisely this detour, from the south entrance of the külliye to the main entrance of the mosque, which Sinan has lined with buildings. By using this arrangement, he created a street complex leading towards the mosque. Looking at it in a ground plan, we can see that the mosque is located on the centre line of the complex, while the other buildings are grouped around it in a right-angled arrangement. Anyone entering the külliye coming from the town is not, however, aware of the mosque’s axial position. Its three-dimensional form is made fully visible only when the western side street has been walked through. But the roads that lead to the main entrance door of the mosque are laid out in such a way that we see the full frontal view of the mosque only after the bend in the road.

A straight path leading to a building which provided a frontal view already from a large distance has, in the history of architecture, always been used as an instrument to heighten the monumental impression. This was true in Old Egypt, in Rome and, later on, primarily in Baroque architecture. Sinan’s külliye complexes show that he in principle avoids employing a similar solution. He seeks to enhance the monumental effect of the building not through axial layout but by a differing of context. The horizontally positioned outlines and bodies of the surrounding structures form a kind of “base” for the mosque, whose pyramid-like shape towers above this pedestal.

A closer inspection of Sinan’s various külliye complexes demonstrates clearly that he deliberately prevents spatial encounter with the axis — already evident in his first work, the Husrey Pasha in Aleppo. Here the subsidiary structures surround the mosque in a U-shape. The Aleppo külliye is entered from the south through two entrances which are located directly at the sides of the qibla wall. One then proceeds to the court of the mosque by traversing two smaller, irregularly shaped courts. The entrances to the court on the two sides differ from one another as are the perspectives which open up to the visitor entering the court. Upon entering the court one discerns the flight of arcades in the porch of the mosque. Only when we stand in the centre of the court and we have a frontal view of the mosque can we notice that the mosque and the madrasa opposite it are arranged along an axis of symmetry.

The two other külliye complexes designed by Sinan follow the same arrangement: the Tekkiye in Damascus, which he built for Sultan Süleyman around 1554, and the Sokollu Külliye in Lüleburgaz (1549). Both exhibit an exact axis-symmetrical design. At Tekkiye, for example, he has not provided for any entrances directed along a symmetrical axis. The entrances are located on the sides and the principal road runs vertically to the axis of the mosque and the soup kitchen on the opposite side. But this axis cannot be perceived until we stand in the middle of the principal road and look either ahead or backwards.

At Lüleburgaz an open bazaar street connects the symmetrically structured caravansary with the equally symmetrically constructed court of the mosque. In the middle of this road a domed passage connects the main entrance of the mosque with the entrance to the caravansary. The dome forms a central element for the axis-symmetrical layout of the complex. But the perspectives visible from here do not allow the intersecting symmetrical axes to be recognized as such.

The clash between the axes and the perspective views intentionally created by Sinan reaches its apex in the Selim Mosque. The mosque rises on a summit and is surrounded by a broad platform. A covered bazaar adjoins it to the southeast. The floor level of this narrow structure, which is about 160 m long, is significantly lower than that of the mosque. With its smooth, windowless walls, this building forms a kind of base or pedestal for the mosque. The actual entrance, the one most frequently used, is the bazaar entrance. Since the bazaar is situated much lower than the platform of the mosque, the platform is
reached via the stairs. A double stairway enclosed in a narrow room leads up to the mosque entrance. The dimensions of the stairs and the stairwell conform to the dimensions of the bazaar. At the end of the stairway a small door opens up to the platform and the massive structure of the mosque appears at a distance of 15 m. The path leading from the door of the stairs to the mosque in a vertical direction ends at the southwestern side entrance to the court of the mosque. The symmetrical pattern of the court and mosque entrances, which we can see in the ground plan, is again not visible here. The main entrance along the axis of the Selim mosque was rarely used. Sultan Selim did not reside in Edirne, and Selimiye never became a Friday mosque in the real sense of the word. The bazaar entrance was the shortest access road from the town and that was the reason why it was preferred to the other entrance. A surprise encounter with the mosque was one of Sinan’s favourite ideas. Narrow stairways, narrow passages and small gates leading to the court of the mosque were architectural designs which had already been tried in Rüstem Pasha, in Mihrimah and in Sokollu. In each of these designs the sudden appearance of the mosque in front of the visitor comes as an element of surprise. Walking through Sinan’s külliye makes us aware of the symmetrical order on which these complexes are based. We perceive this phenomenon spatially, but cannot experience it visually.

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