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SINAN AS ANTI-CLASSICIST*

All sixteenth-century Ottoman architecture is commonly called "classical," but the term is applied with particular emphasis to the half-century from around 1537 to 1585 when Sinan was chief architect of state under the sultans Süleyman I, Selim II, and Murat III. In those years he produced all kinds of structures, both religious and civic; about 450 are attributed to him, and most of those attributions are undoubted.

For Sinan the mosque proved to be the built form most suited to realizing his theories about structure and volume, façade and interior, and for working out his attitudes toward them and toward the relationship between a building and its environment. The functional necessity of providing a large and uninterrupted space in which a congregation could worship already posed particular structural problems which the demands for symbolic expression by religion and by the amalgamation of state power only made more acute. For that reason the mosques from this time lend themselves best to an analysis of style in sixteenth-century Ottoman architecture generally and Sinan's work in particular.

Every mosque Sinan built in his fifty-year career testifies to his passion for creating original form. The particularity of each of his mosques is undoubtedly one of the reasons why his architecture is treated in terms of discrete buildings rather than as an oeuvre representing architectural language in the process of being formed. In spite of the variety in the formal expression found in every Sinan mosque, however, a coherent line of development can be discerned through the concerns that all of his mosques have in common. Organizing Sinan's production into chronological phases reveals relationships among buildings of similar date and a uniform process of stylistic change.

The baldachin, the basic structure upon which Sinan developed his mosques, makes all the structural and formal aspects of the building closely interdependent. Change in any aspect of the building requires changes in all the rest. How the building's cover is arranged is clearly reflected in the articulation of the volumes, the façades, and the interior orders and ambience. This interdependence and hierarchic relationship make the stylistic evolution of Sinan's mosques particularly clear.

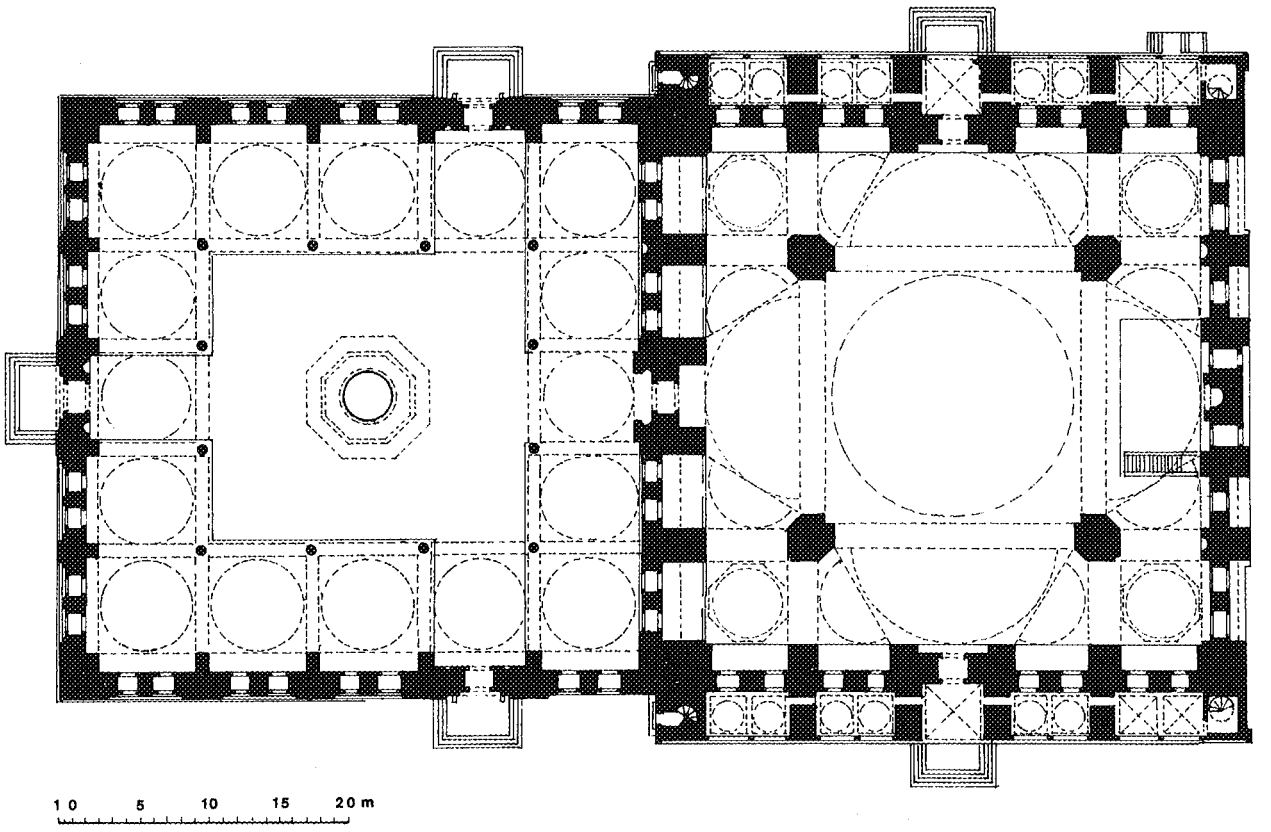
Like most geniuses blessed with long life, Sinan first took the tradition handed down to him and developed it to its fullest realization in monumental ways and then set off in a new direction. In his first phase, he searched systematically for a classic order that found its culmination in the Süleymaniye mosque; in the second, he experimented in obviously new ways with both structure and form. By the time he approached the end of his life in 1585, he had not only changed the typical form of the mosque but had given new formal meaning to its placement in the city.

Sinan's mosques can, for purposes of study, be divided into three quite distinct phases, which here will be labeled pre-classical (1540-55), classical (1555-70), and anti-classical (1570-85). The first two reflect the architect's aspirations to attain perfect harmony and order within the language of classicism. The third, produced half a century later, reflected the tension and anxiety that ended the golden age of the Ottoman empire. In the seventeenth century there was an effort to revive its grandeur in its most traditional form, as evidenced by the Yeni Cami and the Sultan Ahmet executed by the conservative Mehmet Ağa. But the impetus Sinan gave Ottoman architecture had no successors and his late experiments were never carried to their conclusion. Perhaps, like Mannerism, they offered no possibilities for further growth. Whatever the reason, as examples they were forgotten and as buildings they were generally ignored.

Sinan's classical period has been widely and frequently commented on in the literature; here we shall touch upon it only briefly and insofar as it contains some of the elements he was later to develop, and then turn to his later work and try to elucidate the development of his much neglected post- or anti-classical style.

PRE-CLASSICAL BUILDINGS

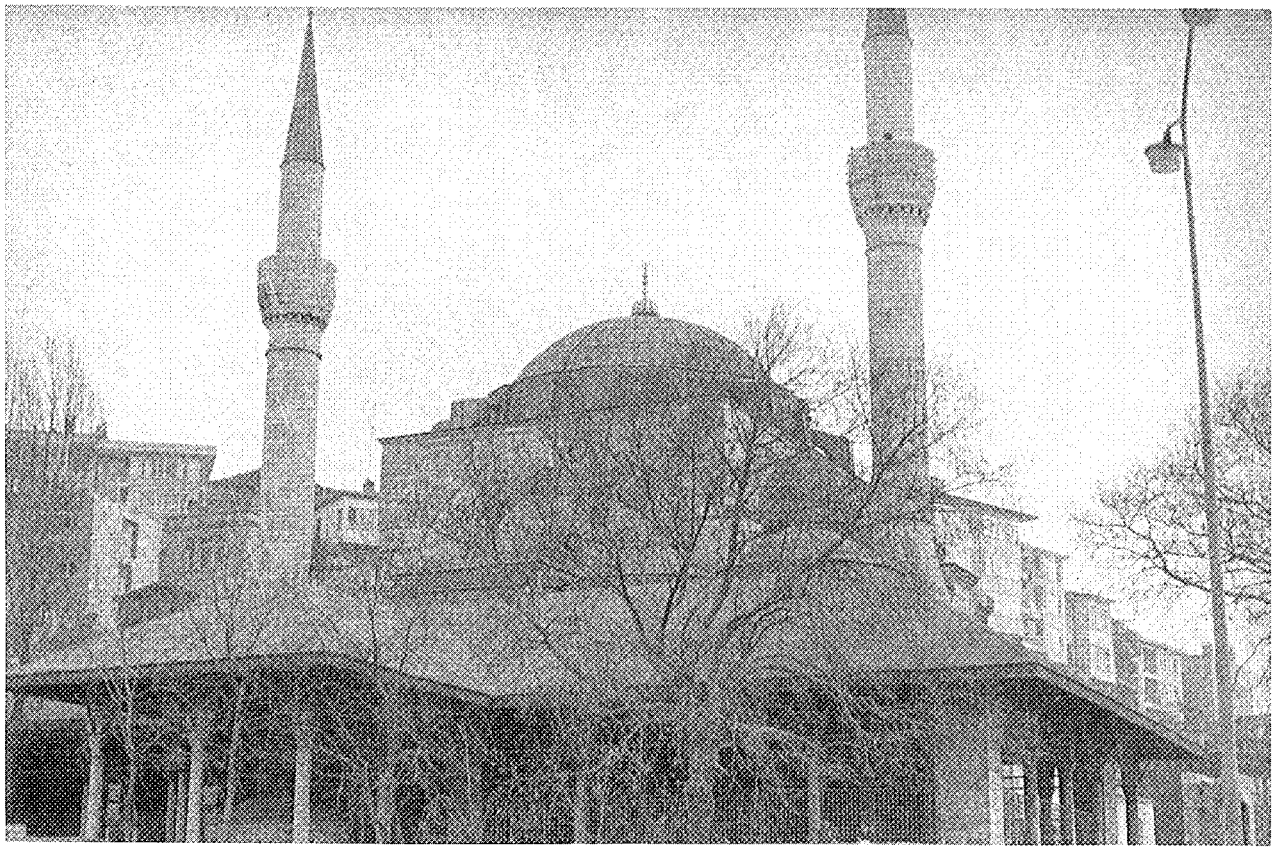
Sinan's first great achievement, his own version of a hierarchic order in the cover system, is found in the



1. Plan of Şehzade mosque. From Godfrey Goodwin, *A History of Ottoman Architecture* (London, 1971).

Şehzade mosque (1543-48). The plan expands from a central dome equally in all four directions through the addition of half domes (fig. 1). In the mosque of Mihrimah Sultan in Üsküdar (1540-48), begun earlier and completed in the same year, this effort to produce symmetrical space expansion is already evident. There half-domes are used on the south, east, and west extensions, and the abrupt entry to the mosque is compensated on the north by a double portico and roof extension in the center above the ablution fountain. In the Şehzade the same effort is more completely achieved. The interior is a homogeneous, perfectly symmetrical, centralized space; its four piers cause minimal interruption as their directional thrusts are neutralized by the equally long perspectival views on all four sides. In the Edirnekapı Mihrimah mosque which dates to the 1540's,[1] the primacy of the central space under the dome is accented by the light let through the windows on the tympana just below the dome.[2] The side extensions on the east and west are covered by three small domes and are clearly secondary in the hierarchic order of space.

These three early mosques present a clear definition of Sinan's intentions in structure and form-making which find their fully developed expression in the Süleymaniye mosque. Those intentions can be defined as (1) balancing all the parts, (2) making those parts subservient to the hierarchic order, and (3) making that hierarchic order in turn fully dependent on the arrangement of the cover system. The boundaries of space starting with the dome make a continuous shell; the space flows downward and outward as it expands toward the base; it is a continuous, uniform whole. Outside, the structure is reflected in the pyramidal silhouette with curvelinear surfaces giving place to planes only on the lower levels (fig. 2). The transition between cover and body is smooth; surfaces are continuous (fig. 3). Façade elements such as windows,



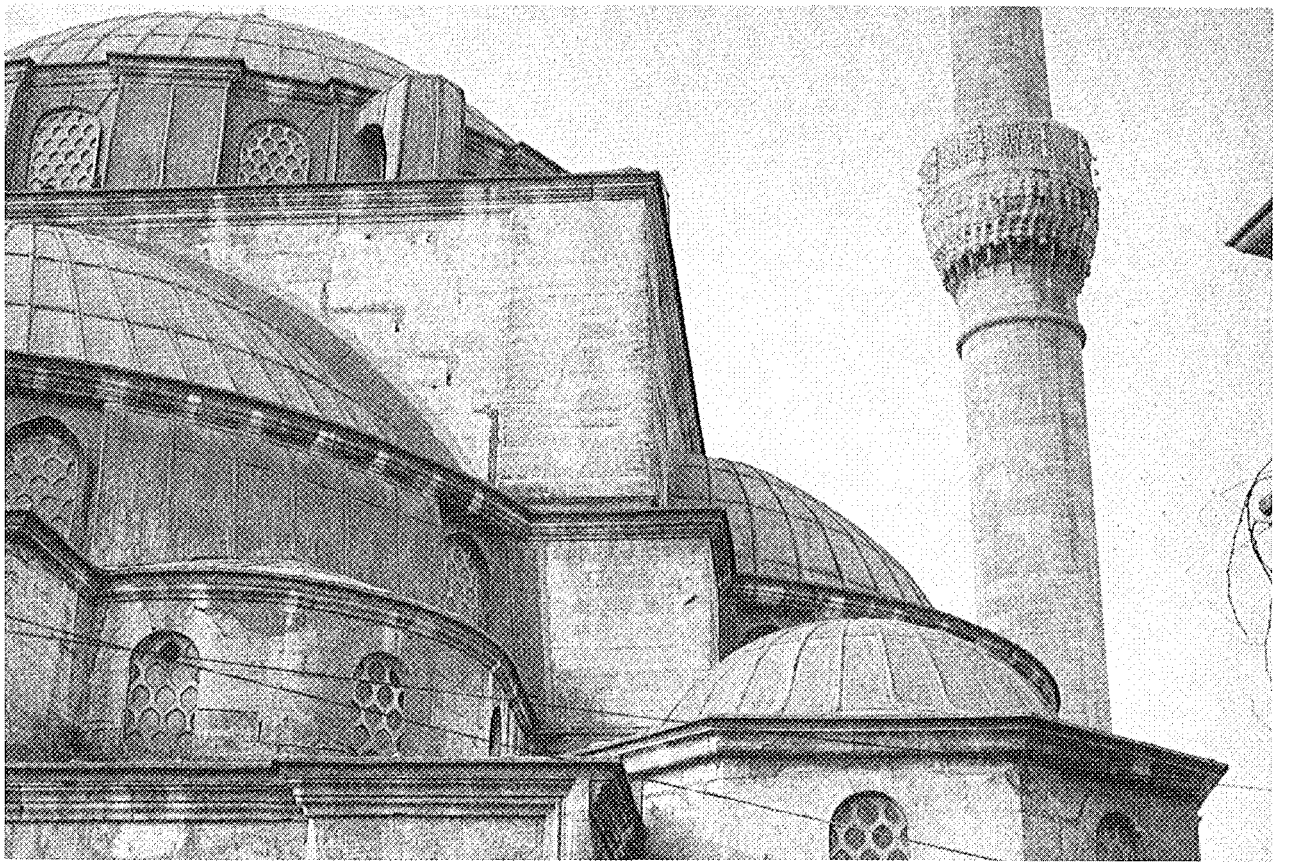
2. Looking toward the portico and north façade of the Üsküdar Mihrimah Sultan mosque. (This and all subsequent photos are by the author.)

doors, niches, and all planar surfaces are composed and arranged according to the possibilities of the load-bearing system. Their grouping always results in patterns that indicate arches and support elements. Their hierarchic order descending from the primacy of the dome often results in odd-numbered groups such as three or five. A pair is usually combined with a single central accent of some sort, for example, a single window opening on a higher level (fig. 4).

All three of these early mosques—Şehzade, Üsküdar Mihrimah, and Edirnekapı Mihrimah—although they represent an effort at achieving the perfectly balanced classical order, remain heavy in volume and structure and simple in the articulation of their façades. In the arrangement of Şehzade's façades (fig. 5), the gravitational forces are visible in the dominant horizontal lines. To compensate, Sinan devised some lacelike stone work and added arcading on the east and west to diminish the weight of the heavy support elements. In both the Üsküdar and Edirnekapı Mihrimah the square bases rise as simple volumes above the first level of the body. In spite of the windows that open into the four tympana of the Edirnekapı Mihrimah mosque, the façade articulation is again simple, with a few similar elements. In the Üsküdar Mihrimah mosque, the volumetric effect of the walls is particularly weighty because of the very few openings (fig. 6). Although the intention to balance the forms, planes and curves, and vertical and horizontal forces of the structure is evident, the lightness and harmony reached in the Süleymaniye is not yet apparent.

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

An evolution in structure and design is apparent in the symmetry of the Süleymaniye. On the east and west

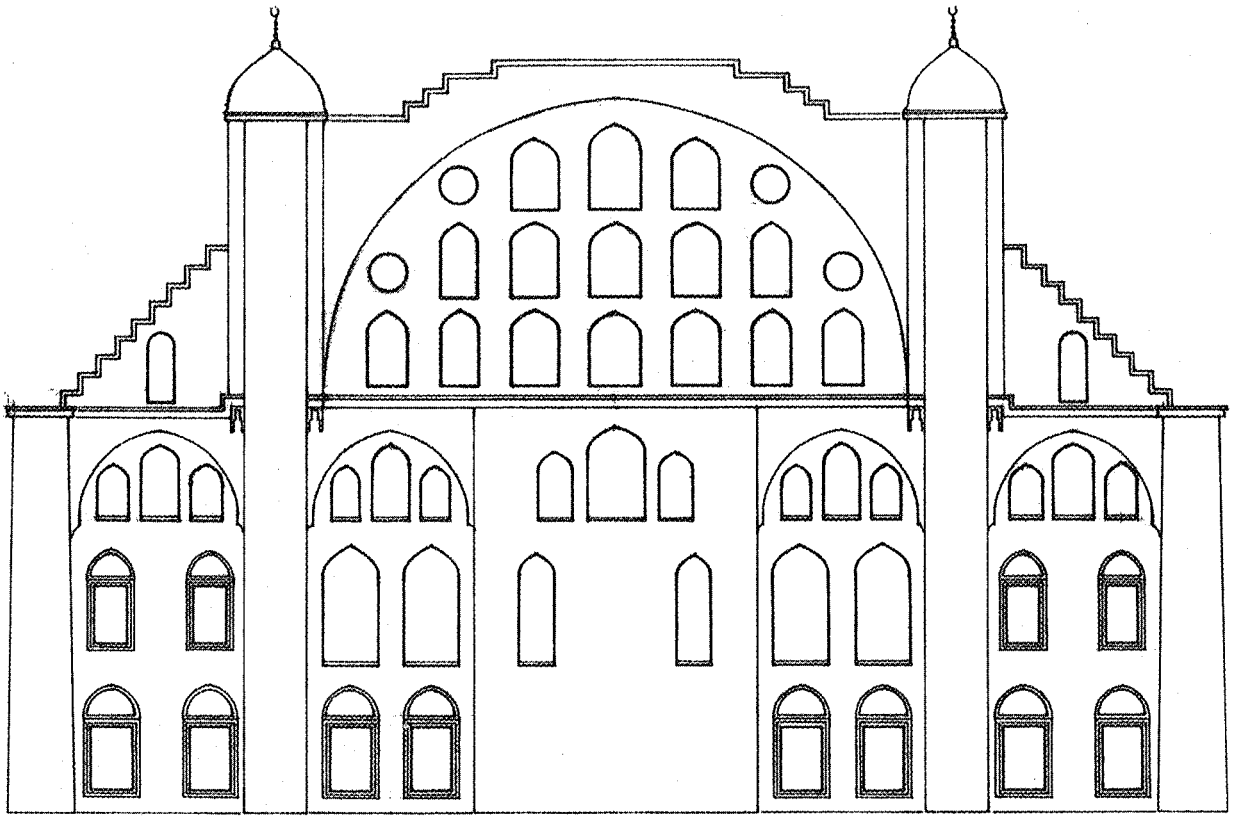


3. Cover structure of the Üsküdar Mihrimah Sultan mosque.

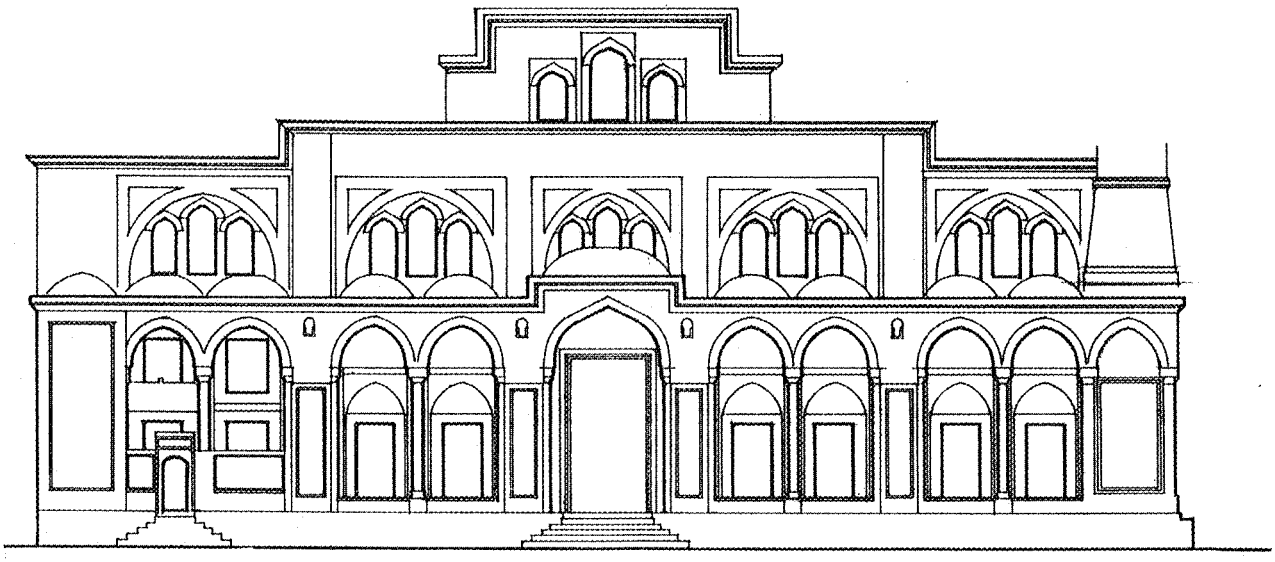
extensions, the half domes of the Şehzade have been replaced in the Süleymaniye by three smaller domes, the center one slightly larger than its two neighbors. These cover a space similar to that covered by a half-dome, but they introduce a rhythm that lightens the structure and enriches the façade articulations. This is particularly obvious on the east and west façades, where an intricate play of varying arch forms and groups show a concern for façade organization never before encountered in Ottoman architecture.

Although the relationships between the two-dimensional shapes are complex, the organization is based on the interplay of volumes. Beginning with the curved surfaces of the cover elements, volumetric contrasts are brought into play; each spherical form is complemented by the flat shape of an arch and its tympanum; each projecting volume contrasted with a deep opening. As the eye goes down, sizes approach human scale and elements are more readily perceived in their totality. At the base, the ablution fountains with their moldings that repeat an elegant rectangle constitute the link between man and the monument.

The same variety is seen inside, without, however, destroying the peace and balance provided by the expanse and homogeneity of the space (fig. 7). The directional thrust produced by the half-domes on the south and north axis is balanced on the east and west by the variety of arches which provide a sufficient degree of transparency for the eye to reach the boundaries. In Sinan's mosques of the classical period, although visual variety can exist at the lower levels, the meaning of space is not rendered through visual movement, but as one direct total encounter. Movement is experienced before one enters the building, in the

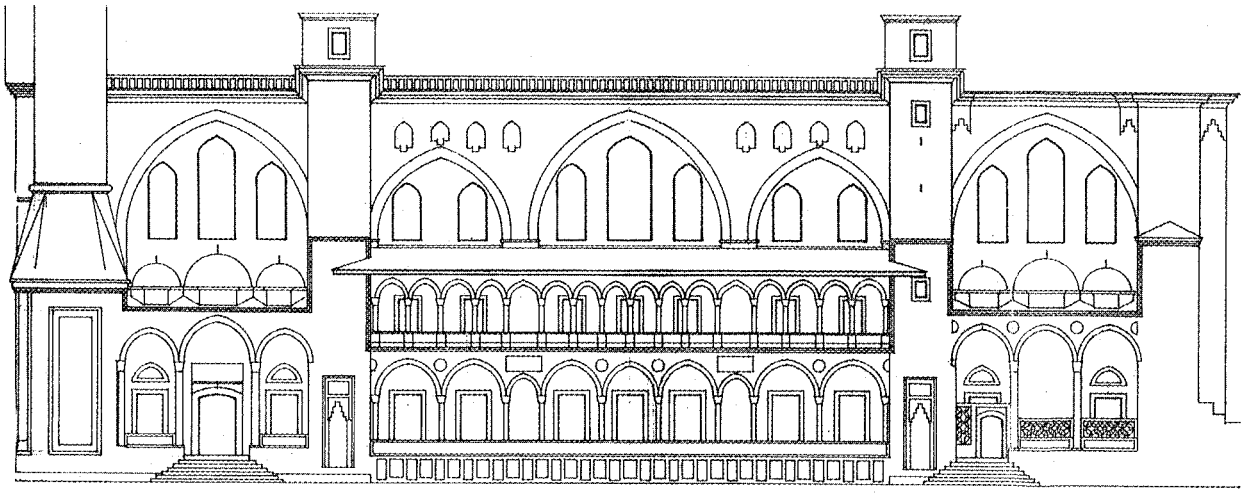


4. Qibla wall of Edirnekapı Mihrimah Sultan mosque. (This and all subsequent drawings are by the author and Fatih Tayşı).

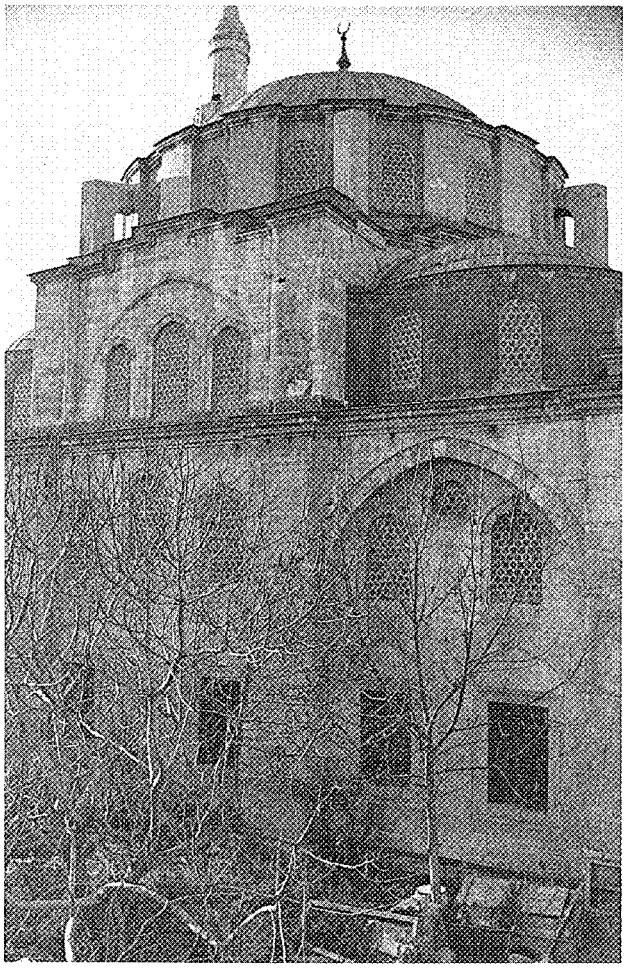


5. Side façade of Şehzade mosque up to the cover.

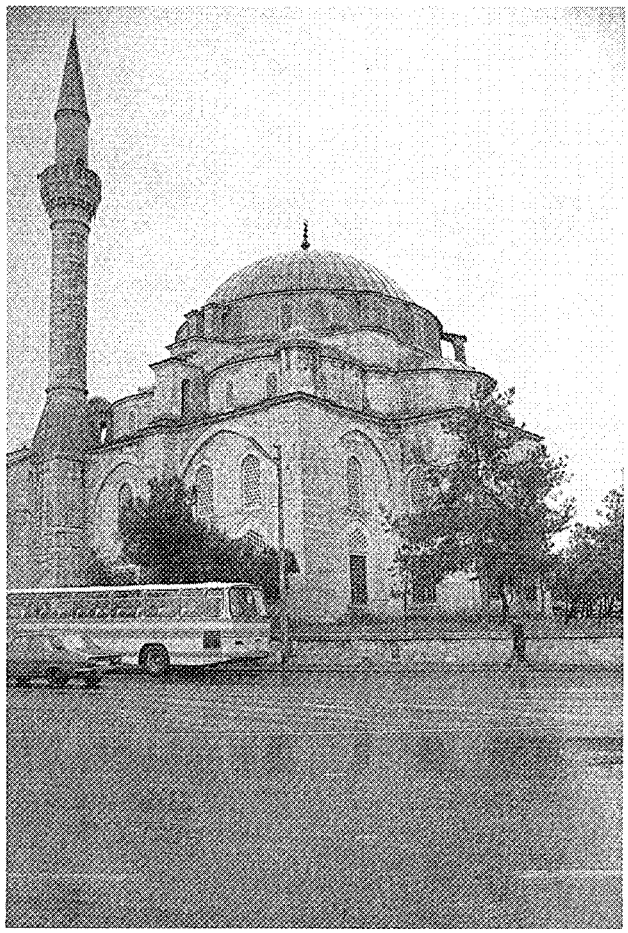
6. Exterior view of the Üsküdar Mihrimah Sultan mosque from the east.



7. Side façade of the Süleymaniye mosque.



8. View showing the cover system of the Kara Ahmet Paşa mosque.



9. Exterior of the Semiz Ali Paşa mosque with the mihrab apse on the right.

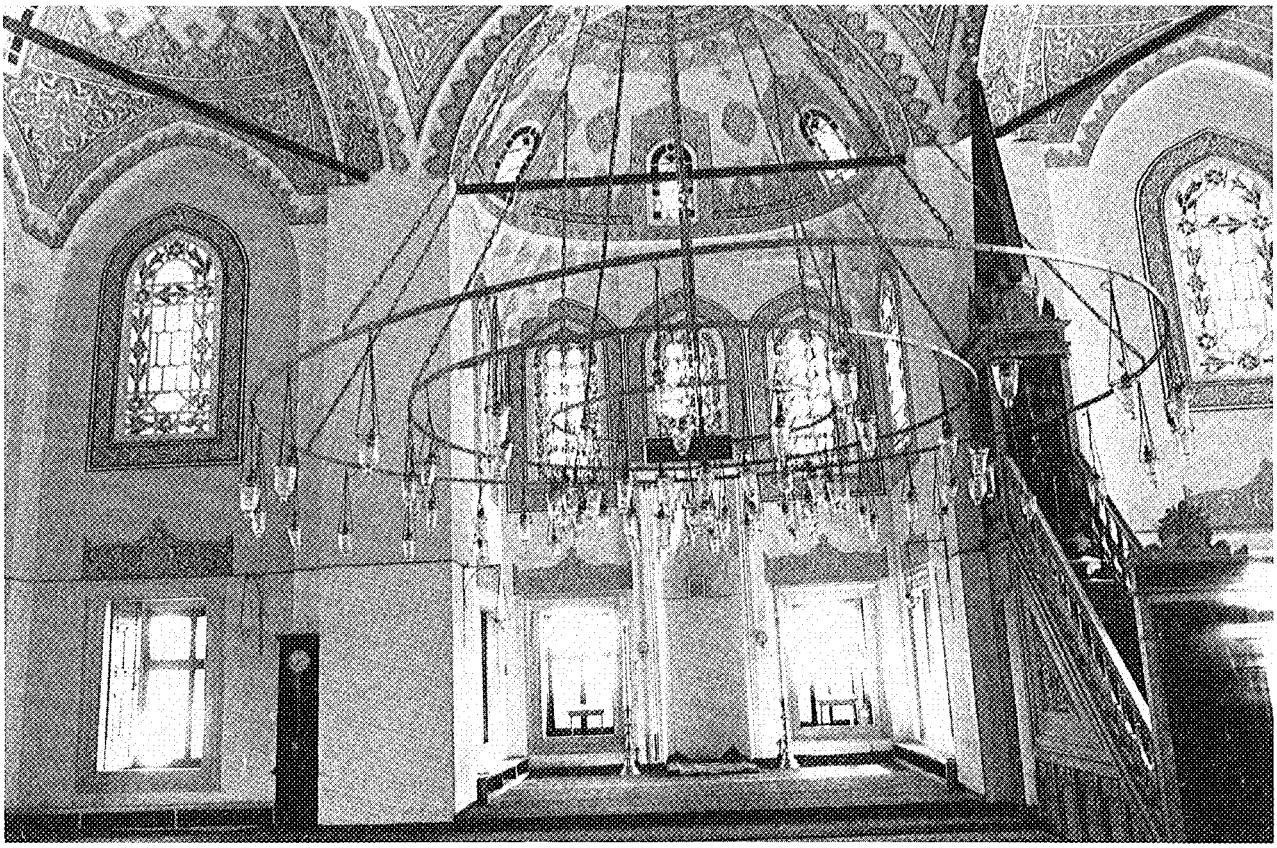
court, and in the portico with its arcading. Movement inside is restricted to the flow over the concavity of the continuous domes on the upper levels.

With the Süleymaniye, Ottoman architecture attained a sophistication and maturity that represent the culmination of an effort to achieve a balanced composition of structure and form. Such perfectly balanced orders have no further possibilities for expression, and therefore do not last long, because any deviation by definition introduces a departure from the impeccable order that has been attained. When the Süleymaniye was finished Sinan perforce had to look elsewhere and find a new language.

THE PERIOD OF EXPERIMENTATION

In 1555, while he was still working on the Süleymaniye, Sinan built the Sinan Paşa mosque in Beşiktaş, Istanbul, using an old plan. It represented the first in a series of experiments with hexagonal structures bearing a dome, based on the Üç Şerefeli mosque at Edirne (1438-47), whose plan it follows very closely.

A hexagonal base is obviously going to end in something very different from a structure formed on a square and will break up the uniformity and homogeneity of the interior space. In addition the extension east and west through the two additional

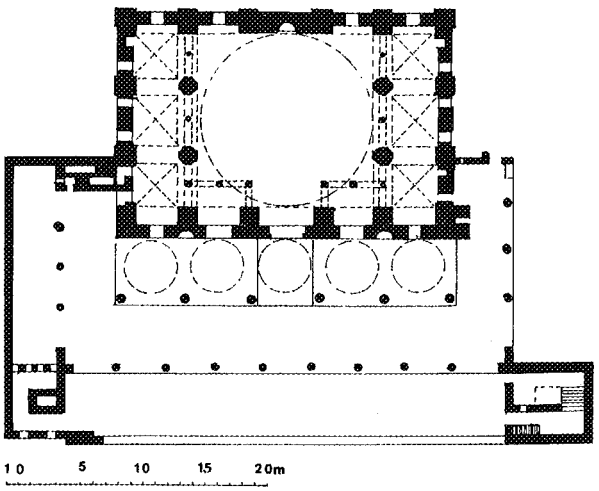


10. Interior of the Molla Çelebi mosque looking toward the mihrab apse.

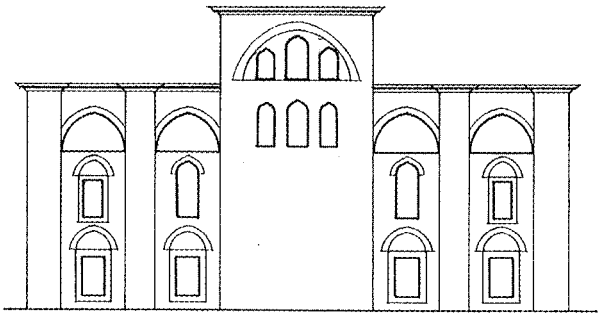
domes on either side of the central dome competes with the central space and reduces its significance. The two smaller domes on each side with their lower arches adjacent to those of the hexagon break up the continuity of the interior. In his later hexagonal structures, such as the Molla Çelebi mosque in Istanbul,[3] the Semiz Ali Paşa mosque at Basaeski (1561-65), the Kara Ahmet Paşa mosque at Istanbul (1555-58), and the Sokollu Mehmet Paşa mosque, Kadırga, Istanbul (1570-71), the extensions on the sides are covered by semi-domes. Obviously the use of half-domes in place of small domes provides greater continuity for both the cover system and the interior than is found at the Sinan Paşa mosque.

Sinan's use of galleries in these relatively small interiors—only the Molla Çelebi mosque lacks them—each executed with varying arrangements of supporting columns, represents an innovation in Sinan's interior organization. Compared with the earlier square-based mosque of Edirnekapı Mihrimah Sultan, which also has interior galleries on the east and west, in these three hexagonally structured mosques the auxiliary space extensions compete with the central space. They attract the eye with their variety of vertical support elements and the light that makes them as bright as the central area. The continuity of space is also reduced by the contrast in height between the side extension and the central space under the dome. In the Kara Ahmet Paşa and Sokullu Mehmet Paşa mosques the sharp contrast between the east-west axiality and the verticality of the central space provides a tension that is not present in the arrangement of the earlier buildings.

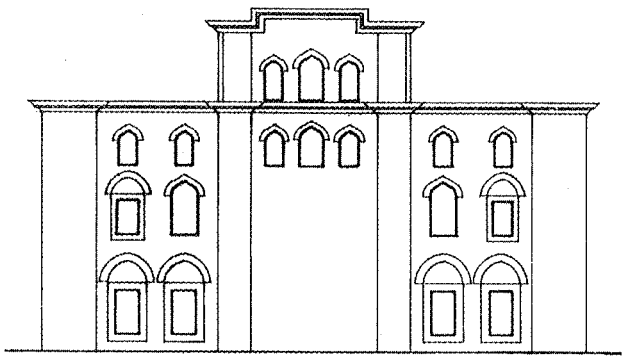
Obviously Sinan's ideas about space and volume are changing in these hexagonal buildings. Similar changes can also be detected in the configuration of the volumes on the exteriors. The smooth transition from cover to body that created the pyramidal silhouette and the continuous shell-like boundaries of the classical organiza-



11. Plan of the Rüstem Paşa mosque. From Godfrey Goodwin, *A History of Ottoman Architecture* (London, 1971).



12. Qibla wall of the Rüstem Paşa mosque.



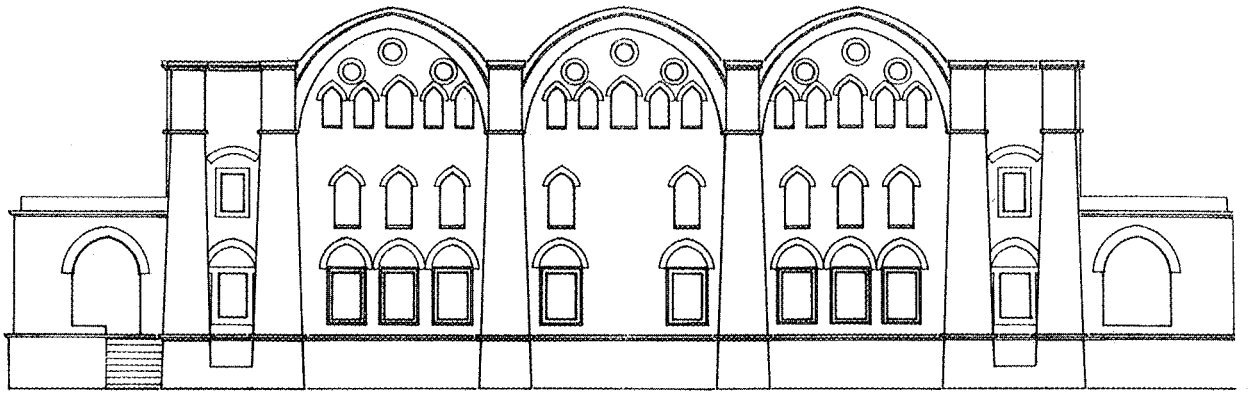
13. Qibla wall of the Sokollu Mehmet Paşa mosque at Kadırga.

tions have here begun to disappear. The walls start to form smoother planes, the body to read as one block distinct from the cover (fig. 8), and inversely the cover becomes separated from the walls. Recessing it from the wall plane accentuates that difference. Because the half-domes of the hexagon are small in proportion to the central dome, the form of the dome is much more accentuated than it is in the cube-based system. In the Semiz Ali Paşa (fig. 9) and Molla Çelebi (fig. 10) mosques, the mihrab is for the first time realized as an apse projecting from the middle portion of the qibla wall. Inside, this spatial configuration compensates for the lack of depth on the north-south axis.

The development of the mihrab apse also reflects a new interest in treating the volume of the building in the round. The best example of this is the qibla wall of the Selimiye mosque in Edirne, which represents a final step in the development of façade articulation in Turkish religious architecture. That development began with attention exclusively paid to the portal on the north, then went on to a consideration of the entire north façade, then—with the Şehzade—to the east and west façades, and finally in the Selimiye, to design in the round.

The attention to façades was of course related to the site on which the building was placed. In the great sultan mosques, such as the Şehzade, Süleymaniye, and Selimiye, the open expanse around the buildings and the need to achieve monumentality inspired façade design. Smaller mosques tucked into already crowded neighborhoods had to attract attention in other ways. But apart from and in spite of these practical considerations, a change in the building's exterior articulation over time is clearly visible. In the hexagonal structures, the outside walls become planar surfaces and grow taller. Although the basic baldachin system is still visible on the façades through the articulation of arches and the groups of windows that reflect the silhouettes of the arches, the sections become repetitious.

In the hexagonal structures the exterior walls already begin to become planar surfaces that attain great verticality. Although the structure of the basic baldachin system is visible on the façades through the articulation of arches and of groups of windows that reflect the silhouettes of arches, the treatment of sections becomes repetitious. This is especially evident on the east and west façades where the two arches of the hexagon are



14. Qibla wall of the Piyale Paşa mosque.

reflected on the walls as two wall divisions. But later, even in the octagonal structures where three arches are reflected as three wall divisions, each division is treated in the same fashion. This is an obvious change from a design like that of the Süleymaniye, which completely adheres to a classical concept of form making. Without doubt these changes concern all the aspects of the structure and are also an outcome of the handling of cover systems and the load-bearing walls. On the other hand, buildings that are fit into congested areas grow vertically, and the dome's visibility becomes more important. Its relation to the body and the downward flow of forms is no longer a necessary visual quality.

In the Rüstem Paşa mosque (1561[4]) where Sinan tried the octagonal structure for the first time, all these considerations lead to the emergence of a totally new concept of mosque design which dominates Sinan's late phase (fig. 11). The Rüstem Paşa mosque is raised above a base, and its double portico is reached by a staircase. The interior is enlarged on the east and west, which have galleries supported by slender columns placed between four of the eight piers carrying the dome. The great contrast of height between the east and west portions and the space under the dome is distinctive. The visual variety offered by the unequal distribution of light, the lavish tile decoration, and the support elements is new. Rüstem Paşa's tile decoration makes it Sinan's most ornate building. Although the patron's wishes must be taken into account, this abundance of surface decoration also suggests an interest in planar elements.

In this building for the first time Sinan uses vaulting above the extensions on both sides of the dome; the body of the building assumes a prismatic character heightened by the use of a base; the dome is raised so far above the body that it is perceived as a single element. A new type of semicircular window, or tympanum, on the upper parts of walls also makes new compositional factors on the façades (figs. 12-13).

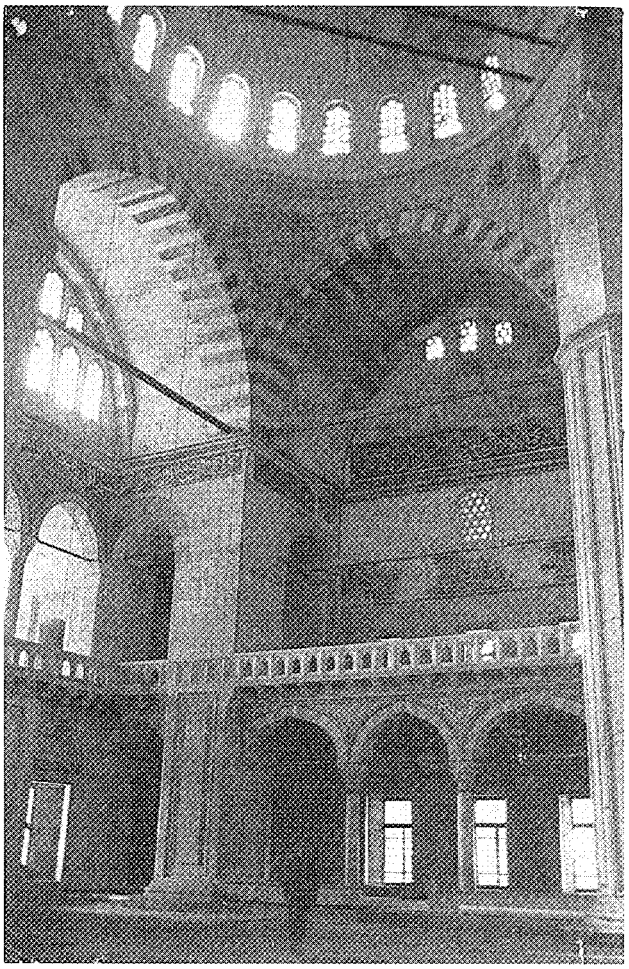
POST-CLASSICAL BUILDINGS

The new design elements that begin to appear in the hexagonal structures and are clearly defined in the Rüstem Paşa mosque dominate the buildings Sinan constructed after 1570. Although the patron no doubt played some part in the unusual form of the Piyale Paşa mosque (1573; fig. 14), it nevertheless expresses Sinan's determination to experiment and the new spirit that characterizes his late buildings. The cover is a six-domed system and refers back to the early Ottoman mosque scheme. The rectangular space broken by two columns in the middle is further extended on the east and west, and vaulting covers the portions that are separated from the rest of the interior by the columns carrying the domes and the side galleries. On the exterior, the building is flanked by heavy arcading, the portico on the north is a totally new conception with two entries on the sides. The repetitious rows of arches on the façades, the linear arrangement of supportive elements on the sides, and the minaret projecting from the roof on the north side of the building give it a remarkable appearance that represents a decisive move away from classicism.

Sinan's next building, the Selimiye mosque in Edirne (1575), develops the octagonal structure. Its integration of the spherical cover with the prismatic body using a baldachin creates the most awe-inspiring and balanced homogeneous expanse of uninterrupted space in all Ottoman architecture. In this respect the Selimiye continues the spatial intentions of the Şehzade and the Süleymaniye. The use of galleries both inside and outside the mosque gives the boundaries a sculptured effect and provides articulation and movement (fig. 15). The impression is that of a space hollowed out of a single block. The central dome is unified in its visual effect, with no competition from other spherical elements. All spatial volumes extending beyond the limits of the dome and of the base are covered with flat roofing. The body of the building up to the level of the tympana is a continuous two-dimensional plane, articulated by variety of arches and windows. Although polychrome arches are a unifying element, the variety of shapes and sizes on the façades of the Selimiye is anything but classical (fig. 16). The wall articulations and the colorful treatment of the court and the portico on the north, especially its complementary blues and oranges, is also striking in rich and rhythmic effects and a great change from the formal atmosphere of Süleymaniye's court (fig. 17).

The southern façade of the Selimiye treats the qibla wall in a new way. Its arcading and rich articulation are obviously intended to be seen as the view approaches the mosque between its two adjacent madrasas (fig. 18). It represents Sinan's final development of the façade; he here gives all the façades equal attention. It also represents a new way of orienting a building in the city. The mosque provides its environment with symbolic meaning and visual order. In most of the mosques built in the last decade or so of Sinan's productive life, façades are treated as boundaries of exterior spaces within congested environments.

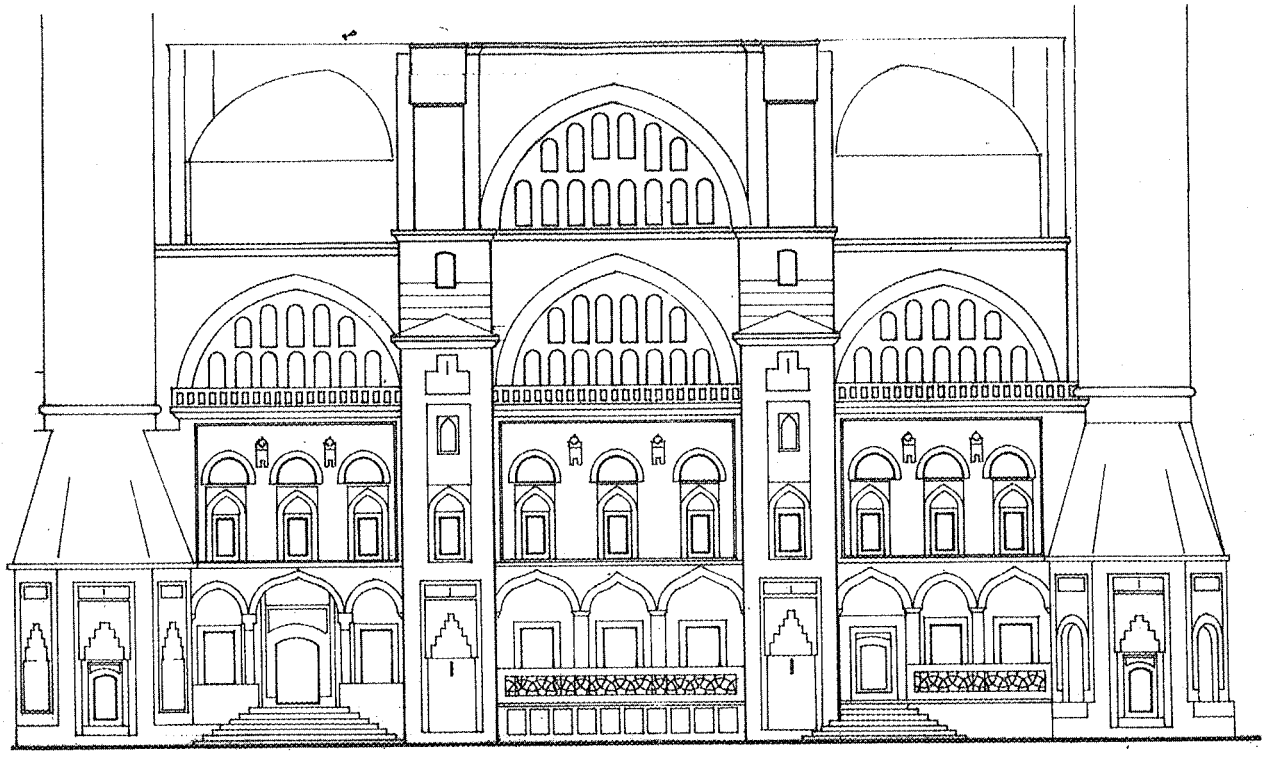
Except for the Muradiye in Manisa, Sinan's last six mosques are all situated in Istanbul. They too reveal significant stylistic characteristics that can be summed up as representing a totally new direction for Ottoman religious buildings. They are a far cry from what one thinks of as typical Sinan or typical sixteenth-century Ottoman architecture. The term "mannerist" seems applicable to their generally overcrowded feeling, variety of shapes with no single, dominant theme, great contrasts in proportions, and absence of centrality. The buildings are definitely prismatic in form; space is layered by the use of galleries over side extensions and



15. Interior of the Selimiye mosque.

reflected on the façades with molding indicating two stories; vaulting and flat roofing, in most cases, are used exclusively over side extensions; and a sharp separation is made between the body of the building and its cover. Most of these buildings are raised on a high base that accentuates the height of the façades. The façades no longer reflect the structural or interior arrangement. The cover system appears as a separate conglomeration of volumes above the prismatic form of the body, and the dome has lost its hierarchic relationship to the rest of the elements on the roof. The spaces around the buildings generally offer little width in proportion to the vertical rise of the façades.

Although the exact dates of some of these mosques[5] are still subject to controversy, as is their attribution to



16. Side façade view of the Selimiye mosque.

Sinan, they are all listed in the documents of the time as being Sinan's, and we shall treat them as his. Of these late mosques, the Sokollu Mehmet Paşa at Azapkapı (1578) is a striking example of the post-classical phase (fig. 19). The building is elevated upon a base, the traditional portico is covered and is reached from two entrances on the north façade. Without the usual arcading, the building's prismatic character is even more accentuated. The dome is on an octagonal base, the columns of which surround the central part of the interior. In the south the mihrab is treated as an apse, and the space is otherwise enlarged in the three other directions and covered with a vaulting system and flat roofing, except for the excedras and the small corner domes. The dome rises high above the level of the body as a singular element flanked by turrets. The façades are two-dimensional, with groups of rectangular windows. The verticality of the façades contrasts strikingly with the very narrow space around the building.

A similar treatment of prismatic volume and two-dimensional façade is found in the Zal Mahmut Paşa mosque at Eyüp (fig. 20). This is a cubic-based structure; the central area under the dome is surrounded by columns and the extensions on the north, east, and west are covered by vaults with flat roofing accentuating the single dome. The Kılıç Ali Paşa mosque at Tophane (1580) revives the use of the cubic-based dome with half domes on the south and north (fig. 21). The east and west extensions are again vaulted, however, and the interior, crowded with piers and patterns of window shapes, is totally different in character from the earlier cubic-based mosques. The exterior is somber and appears congested; the court in front of the double portico offers little relief to this crowded effect.

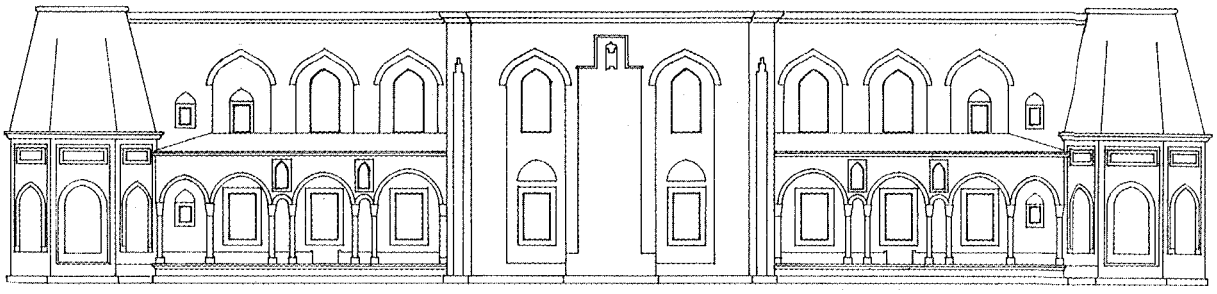
The small mosque of Kadıasker Hacı İvaz Efendi (1585) is again a typical example of this period, with its flat façades, groups of rectangular windows in even numbers on the north, and double entrance (fig. 22). The Mesih Mehmet Paşa mosque, which is an

17. Side view of the Selimiye mosque.

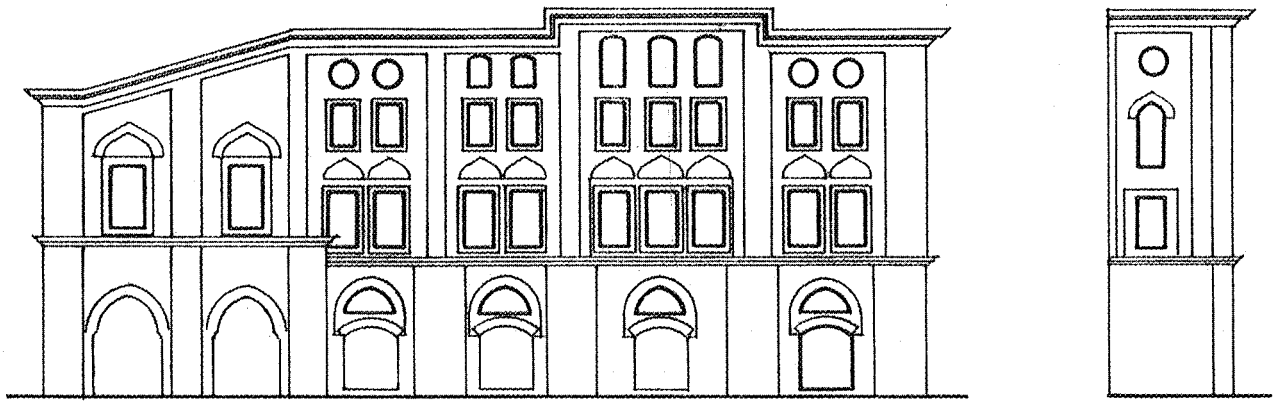
octagonal structure, is again typical—body and court elevated on a high base, variety of window shapes, and molding indicating two stories in the interior (fig. 23), and an interior crowded with supporting elements that divide the central and side spaces (fig. 24).

Although the execution of the Muradiye mosque in Manisa is known to have been carried out by Mahmut and Mehmet Ağa, the design is Sinan's. It was built in 1583-85 for Murat III, and its façade resembles that of the Selimiye mosque, though on a much smaller scale. The polychrome ogival arches give it a colorful and light appearance (figs. 25-26). The interior is enlarged beyond the central dome on the south, east, and west, and is covered by vaults which accentuate the verticality of the façades with their high, diagonally ribbed vault covers. The whole effect of the façade arrangement is to create a vertical movement crowned by the small, high-drummed dome, with turrets at the corners. Both the interior and the exterior offer an experience of movement, variety, and lightness, with special care accorded to details. As one of Sinan's last experiments in mosque design, it is more baroque than the other late mosques and a happy change from the somber Kılıç Ali Paşa.

Each of Sinan's buildings has been designed as an individual composition in structure, plan, and exterior. This characteristic is probably what has led scholars to treat Sinan's works as individual examples within the general framework of the classical style. A systematic chronological survey scrutinizing stylistic relationships, developments, and changes is essential in treating such a vast production spread over so many years. This survey demonstrates that Sinan, master of Ottoman classicism though he was, was by no means content with repeating the perfect language he had developed. Instead he changed the course of Ottoman architecture. The typical examples of classic order in his production are in fact relatively few. After the Süleymaniye,



18. Qibla wall of the Selimiye mosque.



19. Side façade of the Sokollu Mehmet Paşa mosque, Azapkapı.

Sinan's experimentation was consistently in an anti-classical direction. Sinan can be called an anti-classicist, as well as the creator of the perfect classical idiom.

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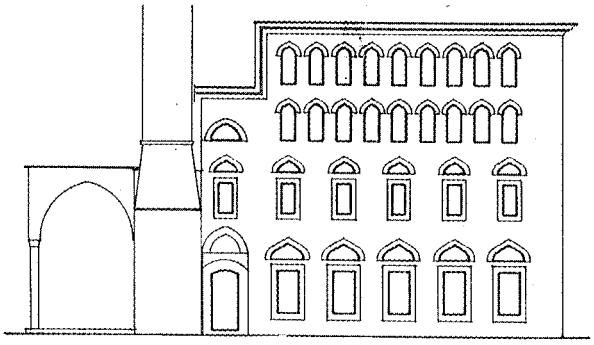
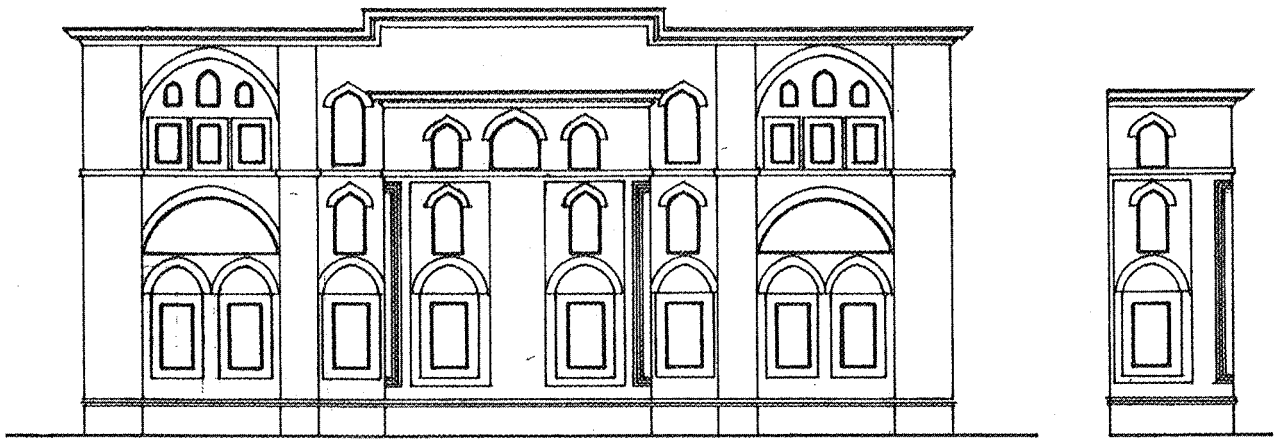
NOTES

* I would like to thank Professor Haluk Pamir for reading the manuscript and for his valuable suggestions.

1. The two dates usually assigned to this mosque are 1562-65, offered by Semavi Eyice, *Istanbul: Petit Guide à travers des monuments bizantins et turcs*, p. 70, Sect. 100 (Istanbul: 1960-66), and 1540-50. The later date seems more consistent with its style.
2. This has already been remarked by Professor Kuban; Doğan Kuban, *Osmanlı Dini Mimarisinde İç Mekan Teşekkülü*, İstanbul,



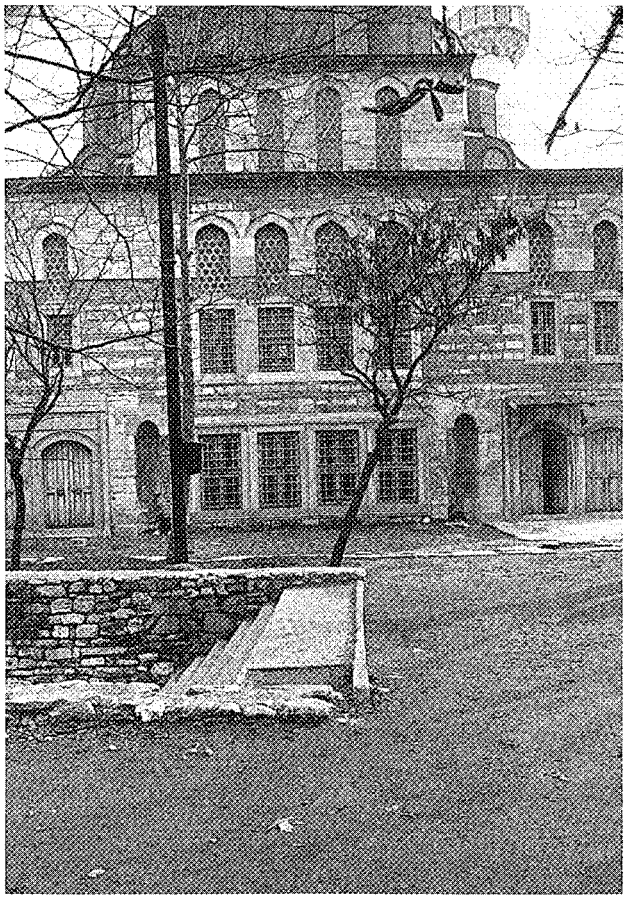
20. Side façade of the Zal Mahmut Paşa mosque, Eyüp.



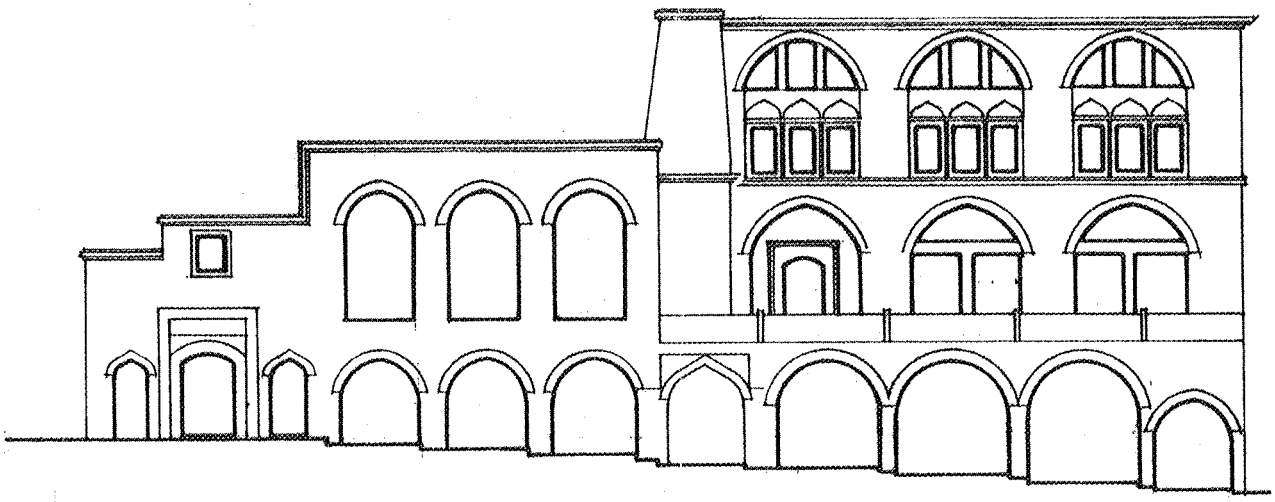
21. Qibla wall of the Kılıç Ali Paşa mosque, Tophane.

İ.T.Ü. Mimarlık Fakültesi Güven Basım (Istanbul, 1958), p. 45.

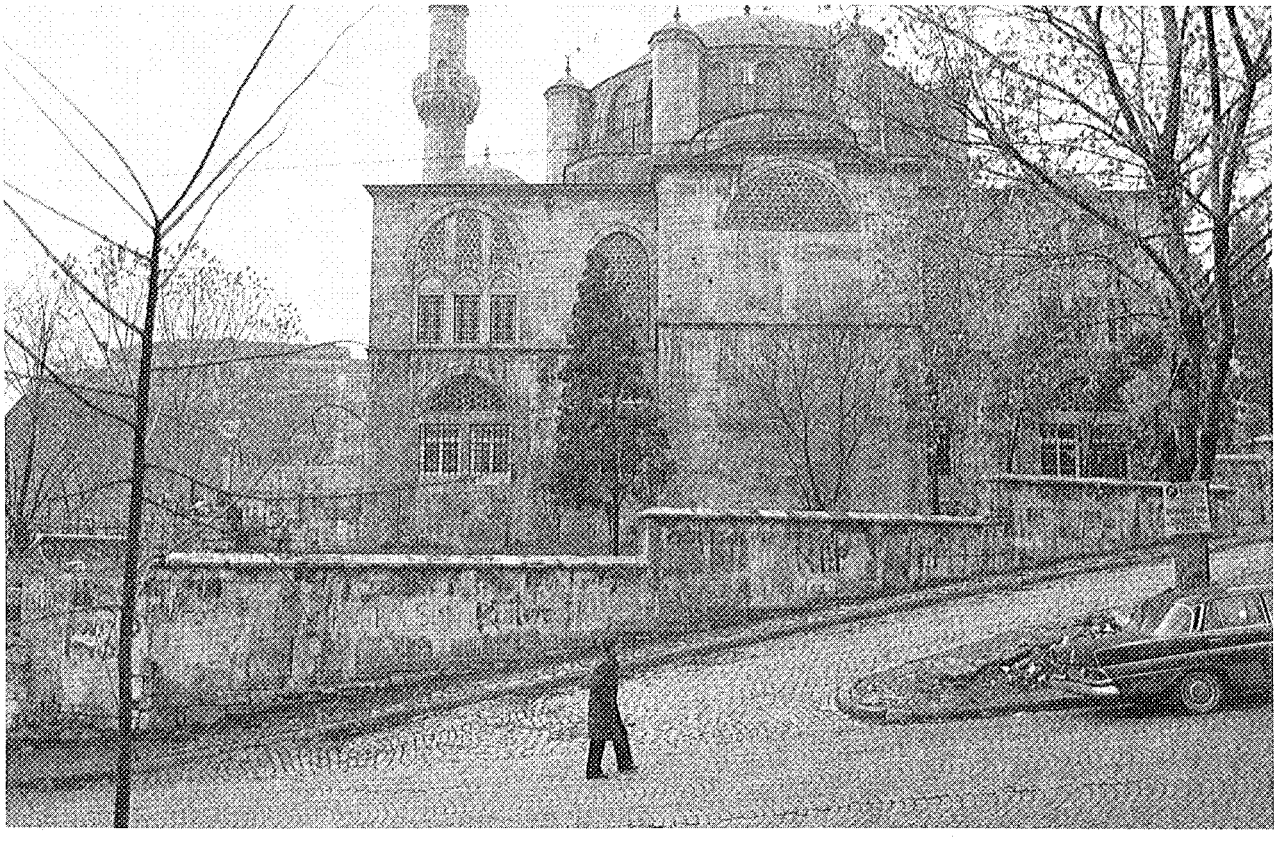
3. An inscription on its bath, since destroyed, gave its date as 1561. Because of its similarity to other hexagonal-based mosques, most of which date from the 1560's, it is probably correct.
4. Although the exact date of this mosque is not known, the foundation deed mentions it as being the year of Rüstem Paşa's death (1561).
5. The architect of the Mesih Paşa mosque is not known, but it is certainly similar to Sinan's mosques of the period. The dates of the Zal Mahmut Paşa mosque are given as 1551 by Gabriel and 1560-66 by Semavi Eyice. Some sources say it was the year of Zal Mahmut Paşa's death, which is 1580, and because it accords well with the style of the building there is no reason to doubt them.



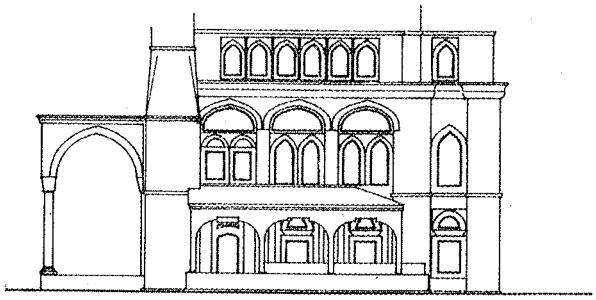
22. North view of the Kadıasker Hacı İvaz Efendi mosque.



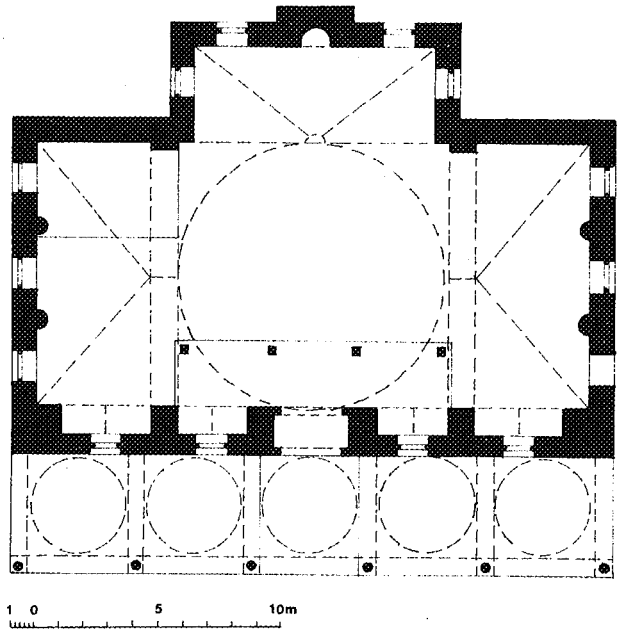
23. Side façade of the Mesih Paşa mosque.



24. Qibla view of the Mesih Paşa mosque.



25. Side façade of the Muradiye mosque, Manisa.



26. Plan of the Muradiye mosque, Manisa. From Godfrey Goodwin, *A History of Ottoman Architecture* (London, 1971).