Oleg Grabar compared architecture in the formative period of Islam, with its novel synthesis of Byzantine and Sasanian elements, to “a sort of graft on other living entities.” “The Muslim world,” he wrote, “did not inherit exhausted traditions, but dynamic ones, in which fresh interpretations and new experiments coexisted with old ways and ancient styles.” In this study dedicated to him I would like to show that a similar process continued to inform the dynamics of later Islamic architecture whose history in the early-modern era was far from being a repetition of preestablished patterns constituting a monolithic tradition with fixed horizons. The “formation” of Islamic architecture(s) was a process that never stopped. Its parameters were continually redefined according to the shifting power centers and emergent identities of successive dynasties who formulated distinctive architectural idioms accompanied by recognizable decorative modes. Novel architectural syntheses that both remained rooted in a shared Islamic past and self-consciously departed from it created a perpetual tension between tradition and innovation, often articulated through pointed references to the past that endowed monuments with an intertextual dimension.

Though the semiotic charging of buildings with reference to specific architectural pasts had its roots in the formative period of Islam, it came to play a particularly important role in the intertextual architectural discourse of the early-modern era, extending roughly from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. This period representing the “adolescence of modernization” was characterized by its growing independence from traditional culture, but at the same time its reluctance to sever ties from the past. My essay will identify a shared early-modern preoccupation with challenging the past without rejecting its heritage, first by focusing on the programs of Sinan’s imperial mosques and then by situating their competitive discourse within a broader spectrum of examples chosen from the Uzbek, Safavid, and Mughal realms.

The competitiveness of Islamic architecture can be traced back to the imperial ambitions of the Umayyads. As Spiro Kostof noted, “The very first monument of the new faith, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, was a patently competitive enterprise” that constituted a conspicuous violation of the Prophet’s strictures against costly buildings. The Dome of the Rock and other Umayyad imperial projects not only challenged the modest architecture of the early caliphs stationed in Medina, but at the same time invited a contest with the Byzantine architectural heritage of Syria, the center of Umayyad power. A well-known passage by the tenth-century author Muqaddasi identifies the competition with Byzantine architecture, a living tradition associated with the greatest rival of the Umayyads, as the central motive behind the ambitious building programs of Abd al-Malik (685–705) and al Walid I (705–15). The Caliph al-Walid beheld Syria to be a country that had long been occupied by the Christians, and he noted there the beautiful churches still belonging to them, so enchanting fair, and so renowned for their splendor as are the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the churches of Lydda and Edessa. So he sought to build for the Muslims a mosque in Damascus that should be unique and a wonder to the world. And in the like manner, is it not evident that his father Abd al-Malik, seeing the greatness of the martyrdom of the Holy Sepulcher and its magnificence was moved lest it should dazzle the minds of the Muslims and hence erected above the rock the dome which is now seen there?

The Umayyads and the early Abbasids, who were the only caliphal dynasties to have unified nearly the whole world of Islam, effectively competed with the past in constructing their imperial architectural image. After their cultural hegemony had ended, the smaller states that emerged often sought to legitimize their dynastic claims by making allusions to the prestigious monuments of these two early caliphaties. For example, architectonic and decorative elements from the eighth-century Umayyad Great Mosque of Damascus were selectively quoted in the tenth-century Great Mosque of Cordoba built by the exiled Spanish Umayyads who wished to establish an iconographic link with their imperial ancestral past to support their own claims to the caliphate. A similar
claim was made through the Fatimid caliph al-Mansur’s tenth-century round city of Mansuriyya, with its obvious reference to the eighth-century round city of Baghdad, the ultimate symbol of caliphal authority built by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur.

The monumental south dome (1086–87) of the Great Mosque in Isfahan, which appears to have been inspired by that of the fire-damaged Umayyad Great Mosque in Damascus (rebuilt by a Seljuq vizier in 1082), can be read as yet another allusion to the royal authority of the Umayyads. Coupled with the palatial element of the iwan, Malikshah’s dome projected the prestige of his sultanate which provided support to the weakened caliphate of the Abbasids who no longer enjoyed royal power. The numerous domed maqsuras it engendered in Iran and in the smaller mosques of the splintered Seljuq successor states of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia reflected a resurgence of royal symbolism at a time when independent princely successor states, who perpetuated the Sunni revival of the Great Seljuqs, were establishing themselves in a Middle East no longer unified by colossal imperial caliphates.5

The reverence towards the past seen in these examples from the middle period of Islam differs fundamentally from the references found in early-modern monuments. They more frequently allude to the past in order to challenge it and to affirm the superiority of their own time. This competitive attitude first emerges in the post-Mongol era in the fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century architectural projects of the Ilkhanids, Timurids, and Mamluks, whose domineering monumentality stands out from the modest structures of their immediate predecessors, which had abandoned the ambitious scale of the early imperial caliphathe. It is embodied in such monuments as the colossal domed mausoleum of the Ilkhanid sultan Uljaytu at Sultaniiyya (d. 1316) whose sheer size, commented on by most contemporary historians, reflected an attempt to challenge earlier royal mausoleums such as that of the Seljuq ruler Sultan Sanjar in Merv. With its gigantic iwan the roughly contemporary Masjidi Jami at Tabriz, built by the Ilkhanid vizier Ali Shah (d. 1324), gave concrete expression to its patron’s stated intention to surpass the Sasanian Arch of Chosroes in Ctesiphon, the ultimate symbol of royal power. The monumental funerary madrasa of Sultan Hasan in Cairo (1356–61), which no doubt was a Mamluk response to the challenge posed by contemporary Ilkhanid projects, also boasted ivans larger than the arch at Ctesiphon; measurements were taken to prove the claim. Khalil al-Zahiri wrote in the mid fifteenth century:

As for the Madrasa of Sultan Hasan, this edifice has no equivalent in the whole world. It was reported that Sultan Hasan, when he ordered its construction, summoned all the architects (muhandisim) from all the countries and asked them: Which is the highest building in the world? He was told: Iwan Kisra Anusliyran. So he ordered that the iwan should be measured and revised (yuharrar) and that his madrasa should be 10 cubits higher than it, and it was constructed.... Iwan Kisra has but one iwan, this madrasa has four!8

Timurid architecture showed a similar preoccupation with height, monumental scale, and spectacular effects. The unprecedented scale of Timur’s Great Mosque in Samarqand (1398–1405) represented its patron’s ambition to build one of the most colossal mosques of the Muslim world in a capital he regarded as its microcosm. According to the historian Sharaf al-Din ʿAli Yazdi, with its soaring height “rubbing against the heavens,” Timur’s mosque proclaimed the verse frequently cited by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century historians: “Verily our monuments will tell about us, so look to our monuments after we are gone!”7 When the fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khalduin wrote that “the monuments of a given dynasty are proportionate to its original power,” he noted that those of the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Fatimids surpassed the ones built by the “less important dynasties” of his own time, among which he singled out the “Turks of Egypt” (Mamluks) and Timur (with whom he had several meetings) as the two most powerful rulers.8

The competitive streak that emerged in the architecture of these two late medieval dynasties was to culminate in the early-modern era with the ambitious imperial projects of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals. These empires shared the same self-conscious attitude toward the vast accumulated heritage of Islamic architecture that could endlessly be elaborated to define new identities. No longer faced with the problem of inventing ex novo building types or forms that had preoccupied earlier generations, architects could now concentrate on creating innovative reinterpretations of inherited models, with subtle quotations and intertextual allusions becoming the avenues for creative expression. They could draw on a multitude of codified Islamic building types, architectural idioms, and decorative modes awaiting to be revised, edited, and refined.

Such multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious frontier empires as the Ottomans, and the Mughals self-confidently synthesized Islamic and non-Islamic regional forms with their shared Timurid architectural heritage, which had unified the international Turco-Iranian cul-
ture of the fifteenth century. The Safavids and Uzbeks who occupied the long-Islamized central zones primarily asserted their identities through competitively juxtaposing their own monuments with those built by their predecessors that conspicuously marked their territories. They refined inherited forms and decorative vocabularies to create theatrical effects and grandiose ensembles of polychrome splendor which medievalists attuned to the more restrained aesthetic norms of earlier periods have tended to dismiss as unsubtle and unoriginal. The result was an architecture that brilliantly refined older schemes and an age of spectacular monuments that proclaimed imperial aspirations with an unabashed self-confidence rooted in the notion of the superiority of the “moderns” over the “ancients.”

Centuries after the Umayyads, the Ottomans faced a comparable problem when they inherited the magnificent Byzantine churches of Constantinople. Thus for a second time in the history of Islamic architecture an intense dialogue was taken up with the classical heritage of Byzantium. It was not the modest tradition of late-Byzantine architecture (the Ottomans had already selectively assimilated that in their early capitals), but the grand monuments of the golden age of Byzantium that caused them to redefine their concept of imperial architecture. In constructing their new imperial image the Ottomans appropriated from early Byzantine architectural elements that would simultaneously speak to their subjects, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and to their rivals, both in Europe and in the Islamic world. Umayyad architecture had challenged Byzantium by Islamicizing a current Mediterranean visual language carrying well-established imperial associations. Ottoman architecture alluded to the architectural glories of an empire that had ceased to exist at a time when the construction of monumental domed structures like the Hagia Sophia had become a thing of the past. The late-antique architectural tradition was no longer a living cultural force as it had been for the Umayyads. It had to be revived, and it was revived by the Ottomans at a time when the Italian Renaissance architects were involved in a similar enterprise.

The Ottoman fascination with Hagia Sophia, which had become the first and foremost Friday mosque of Istanbul, inspired a series of imperial mosques — starting with that of Mehmed II (1463–70) — that iconographically linked the new rulers of the city with the vanquished Byzantine past. The Greek historian Kritovoulos wrote of Mehmed II’s mosque, “The sultan himself selected the best site in the middle of the city and commanded them to erect a mosque which in height, beauty and size should compete with the largest and finest temples already existing there.” The late-fifteenth-century historian Tursun Beg provides more information about this competitive project, “And he [Mehmed II] built a great mosque based on the design of Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya karnamesi resminde), which not only encompassed all the arts of Hagia Sophia, but in addition incorporated modern features constituting a fresh new idiom (tasarruf-i muta‘alhîrin üsre nev-i sâve-i tâze) unequalled in beauty (hüsûn).” The passage suggests that Mehmed’s mosque was a modernized reinterpretation of Hagia Sophia whose selectively quoted features were synthesized with Ottoman-Islamic forms and such novelties as the symmetrical layout of the complex, inspired by Italian Renaissance theories of ideal planning. Tursun’s statement resembles Vasari’s description of Bramante (1444–1514) as an architect who translated the past into a modern idiom through new inventions: “While the Greeks invented architecture and the Romans imitated them, Bramante not only added new inventions, but greatly increased the beauty and difficulty of the art, to an extent we now perceive.”

Tursun had a sophisticated ability to distinguish architectural idioms; in another passage he differentiates the “Ottoman style MODE” (İasr-i Osmanî) from the Persian one. It was not, however, until Sinan’s tenure as chief court architect (1538–88) that the Ottoman idiom reached its mature expression. Sinan challenged not only Hagia Sophia, but also the Ottoman-Islamic architectural tradition he had inherited. The architect’s three great mosques — the Şehzade Mehmed (1543–48), Süleymaniye (1550–57), and Selimiye (1568–74) — which he himself identified as the milestones of his career, exemplify three different ways in which he responded to that challenge.

Sinan’s several autobiographical essays, the only examples of their kind in Islamic architectural history, give us a rare glimpse into the architect’s own assessment of his work. Although they have been used to reconstruct Sinan’s career and identify his vast corpus, their broader conceptual implications have not yet been considered. Composed at a time when great architectural personalities were emerging in Renaissance Italy, Sinan’s autobiographical essays reflect an acute individualism and pride in his triumph over the architectural masterpieces of the past. These texts, some of them unfinished drafts, are clearly the product of a collaborative effort. They were dictated by the aging architect to his poet-and-painter friend Mustafa Şânicî, who transformed Sinan’s oral ac-
count into prose and verse. In that respect they recall Manetti’s life of Brunelleschi and Condivii’s life of Michelangelo. Although Şin’s says that he conveyed the “blessed” words of Sinan, he no doubt added his own touches. Nevertheless, the various versions of Sinan’s autobiographical essays — some of which have marginal addenda and corrections in a hand that may well be his own autograph — testify to a process of editing in which the architect almost certainly participated.14

The laconic introduction of Tuğrât-ı Miṣrārın about “the canons of architecture, the foundations of buildings, and the strengthening of lands” provides a glimpse into Sinan’s competition with the past as well as his structural and aesthetic concerns. It begins with a discussion of the origins of architecture:

> It is clear and obvious to persons of intelligence and to possessors of comprehension that building with water and clay being an auspicious occupation, the Children of Adam came to hate mountains and caves and showed an inclination to found town and villages. Due to mankind’s civilized nature various types of buildings were invented day after day so that refinement (nezâket) increased and not one moment was lost by anyone in attempting to leave an [architectural] memorial. In fact, a building like Hagia Sophia, which is unequalled in the world, was built in fourteen years through the efforts of the architect (miṣrâr) named Agnados. But a few years after the completion of its design (târbî), the flat dome (yassu hubbe) collapsed. That the above mentioned architect-engineer (miṣrâr mutâhen-dinâ) rebuilt it with many difficulties is written in histories. Given this, your slave Sinan of Kayseri, too, has suffered great toil in the completion of each building. There is no doubt that all of them came into existence with the help of God, and through the auspicious sovereignty and lofty aspiration of the country-conquering Ottoman family, as well as the bountiful sincerity of our own heart. In short, there is no art/craft (san’â) more difficult than architecture (muṣârâh). Whoever is engaged in this honorable service must first of all be righteous and pious. He should not begin to lay down foundations if the construction site is not firm, and once he commences the foundations he should give full attention to their strength in order to save his work from defect. And according to the abundance or scarcity of elephant’s feet piers, columns, and buttresses, he should bind the domes and half-domes on top of them, and tie the arches in an agreeable manner without making an error. He should avoid hurrying up building requirements and bear his load according to the saying, “Patience brings victory to man,” in order to find divine guidance for the immortality of his work through the assistance of God: “There is no doubt in this.”15

This rather simple and prosaic commentary is nevertheless pregnant with meaning. It argues that, with the progress of civilization, increasingly refined building types were invented for patrons wishing to leave memorials of themselves behind. The difficulty of the architect’s task in satisfying his ambitious patrons makes his profession that much more important. From the primitive hut to Hagia Sophia the gradual development toward greater aesthetic refinement culminates in Sinan’s works, owing to the grandeur of the Ottoman state and Islam and the virtuous architect’s own God-given talent. By mentioning the collapse of “Agnados’s” notoriously unstable “flat dome,” Sinan sets up a competition between his monumental domed mosques and Hagia Sophia, a building he acknowledges to be “unequaled in the world.” By reminding his readers of the failure of Hagia Sophia’s dome, Sinan indirectly praises the sound construction of his own, with their lateral thrusts skillfully counterbalanced by a carefully proportioned system of supports. His preoccupation with structural stability, a result of his training as a military engineer, is, however, tempered by an aesthetic concern with agreeable solutions. Achieving structural elegance in a harmonious correspondence between the domical superstructure and its infrastructure of supports is singled out by the architect as one of his central concerns.

The reference to Justinian’s architect as “Agnados” comes from popular semi-mythical histories of Hagia Sophia in Persian and Turkish, which Sinan seems to have known.16 His autobiographical essays which contain frequent allusions to Hagia Sophia testify to its role as a vivid source of inspiration. In the epilogue of Tuğrât-ı Miṣrārın the architect compares his own imperial mosques with earlier Ottoman examples inspired by Hagia Sophia:

> It is clear and obvious to the engineers of the age and to the overseers of auspicious monuments that buildings constructed in the style/mode of Hagia Sophia (Ayasıyfa [arzinda]) did not carry refinement (nezâket) until this servant of yours completed the honorable mosque of Şehzade Sultan Mehmed — May God Enlighten His Tomb — which served as a model for the honorable complex of Sultan Süleyman Han — May His Grave be Pure. Thereafter, in the latter lofty complex numerous graceful works were created, each of which was designed with refinement (nezâket).17

The comment that imperial mosques lacked refinement until Sinan came along shows that he regarded himself as having created a more refined “neo-Hagia Sophia” Ottoman style. The architect’s way of defining his own style is not unlike that of contemporary Renaissance architects who used prestigious models from antiquity as their point of reference. Like his Italian contemporaries,
Sinan was, on the one hand, conscious that he was an innovator, yet, on the other, reluctant to create *ex novo*. He needed to measure his originality against architectural exemplars from the past. Though his fascination with Hagia Sophia lacked the humanistic antiquarianism that had inspired Renaissance architects to study the ancient monuments of Rome, it involved a comparable attitude. Sinan did not, however, make the architecture of Hagia Sophia his point of departure, but filtered its lessons through the accumulated heritage of Ottoman-Islamic architecture. Unlike Renaissance architects who rejected their immediate Gothic past, Sinan accepted Ottoman-Islamic architecture as potentially perfectable. He set out to reinterpret this well-established building tradition.

The problem Sinan faced, then, was not one of creating a new architectural language from scratch, but of critically revising, editing, distilling, and refining one whose main outlines had already been formulated by the late fifteenth century. Instead of enriching that language by introducing new elements, he chose to make it more uniform by reducing its serially repeatable vocabulary to a few standardized canonical forms remolded into harmonious proportions. “Talent is a favor of God,” said Sinan, and his artistic ingenuity was God’s will, to be carried out through his own hard work and the diligent study of historical monuments. However, although he made valuable observations during his travels in eastern Europe, the Balkans, Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, direct quotations from non-Ottoman monuments are hard to find in his architecture. His buildings remained strictly self-referential exercises within the confines of the canonical Ottoman imperial idiom which he codified.18

The Şehzade Mosque was, as Sinan himself said, an attempt to refine the Hagia Sophia–inspired style of earlier imperial mosques. According to the contemporary historian Celalzade, Sultan Süleyman selected its plan from a number of presentation drawings (*resmiler ve tablolar*) because he found its style to be the most agreeable and well proportioned (*mabru ve mevcud olan usta*) among the proposals. With its perfectly centralized quatrefoil structure, the Şehzade Mosque was the final stage in a sequence of imperial mosque plans that began with the Üç Şerefeli Mosque (1437–47) in Edirne, was extended in Mehmed II’s mosque (1463–70) with the addition of one half-dome, and in the mosque of Bayezid II (1500–5) with two half-domes.19 This logical progression shows that Sinan’s design was informed by the same conception of evolutionary architectural history seen in several of his buildings for other patrons, where he paraphrased the schemes of older monuments in a sixteenth-century idiom.20 In the Şehzade Mosque he came up with a revolutionary elevation, which featured a novel approach to fenestration and lateral façade ordering, and the harmonious stratification of the domical superstructure that resulted in a stepped pyramidal silhouette. The late-sixteenth-century geographer-traveler Mehmed Aşık acknowledged the mosque’s unprecedented refinement of construction (*nezâket-i binâ*), which set it apart from its predecessors.21

If the Şehzade Mosque commemorating a deceased crown prince was Sinan’s elegant response to earlier imperial mosques inspired by Hagia Sophia, the Süleymaniye was his direct answer to the challenge of Justinian’s masterpiece itself. Sinan chose to meet this challenge by using themes already developed in the Şehzade Mosque. His building program can be seen as a sixteenth-century revival of the competition Mehmed II’s mosque had opened up with Hagia Sophia, the ultimate imperial symbol worthy of being emulated in Süleyman’s own mosque. Mehmed’s architect, Atik Sinan, had been punished for his shortcomings. The description of a visit by Süleyman to the construction site of his mosque in the *Teşirâtül-Bünyân* shows that the sultan reminded Sinan of his predecessor’s tragic precedent in a threatening tone. The completion of the Süleymaniye according to the symbolically charged plan approved by the sultan thus marked Sinan’s superiority over his namesake and Ottoman architecture’s triumph under the glorious patronage of Süleyman.22

With its vast, rationally planned complex the Süleymaniye alludes to that of Mehmed II, until then the largest imperial establishment in Istanbul. Its four minarets of varied heights framing a marble-paved courtyard were drawn from the Üç Şerefeli, the largest imperial mosque in Edirne. These references to prestigious imperial mosques were complemented by an obvious quotation from Hagia Sophia, the central dome flanked by two half-domes which had already been used in the mosque of Bayezid II. Süleyman’s octagonal tomb with its double dome alluded to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem that had recently been restored by the sultan and built on what was believed to be the site of Solomon’s Temple. Through these multiple references the Süleymaniye enriched its imperial associations and its status as the most ambitious Ottoman mosque complex ever built. It was the new temple of Solomon commissioned by the Second Solomon (i.e., Süleyman) and the new Hagia Sophia, also built to emulate Solomon’s Temple — when
It was finished Justinian is said to have exclaimed, "Solomon I have surpassed thee!" Sinan's eclectic set of allusions was given unity by what has been aptly defined as a "structural criticism" and "rationalization" of Hagia Sophia's scheme, based upon a more centralized spatial definition. The Süleymaniye introduced a "classical" vocabulary of forms and a novel decorative idiom that came to be the stamp of Ottoman identity in later projects. In his autobiography Sinan praises the mosque as a work uniting the best of the decorative arts. "Its like (anın naźrî) has not been created until now," he boasts, "nor will it be in the future." The mosque's pyramidally massed exterior is very different from Hagia Sophia's heavily buttressed stark and heavy façades. Sinan's orchestration of various sized domes around a central baldachin is entirely absent in Hagia Sophia, and the architect declares this to be an ingenious invention never before attempted. A passage in the ʿUbdettî'lm.Mârîn suggests that he determined the placement of doors in the minarets so that they would provide vistas for connoisseurs (literati, ʿerbâb-i teʾfîf) of the domes, which he compares elsewhere to "bubbles on the surface of the sea" around a colossal heavenly dome whose girt finial glittered like the sun. This supports the argument of architectural historians that Sinan's starting point in designing his mosques was the domical superstructure and not the ground plan. He skillfully integrated innovative domical superstructures with the traditional rectilinear layout of the mosques without destroying the unity of inner space. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ottoman writers such as Mehmed Asîk and Evliya Çelebi often compare the domical configurations of various mosques, and this does suggest that they conceptualized space from above rather than from the ground plan.

Sinan's eloquently articulated domical superstructures rationally reflect the structure of inner space to the exterior. The seventeenth-century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi describes how ten European specialists in geometry and architecture who visited the Süleymaniye Mosque appreciated the unified design of its interior and exterior. The foreigners who allegedly kept biting their fingers in astonishment, exclaimed "Maria! Maria!" and removed their hats in admiration as they toured the building. When Evliya asks their translator to describe their reactions, he says:

Every creature and every building is beautiful (güzî) either within or without, but never do these two kinds of beauty exist together. However, both the interior and exterior of this mosque have been built in a gracious manner (sîrînkârî‘ûşûr). In the whole of Frangistan [Europe] we have never seen such an exemplary building so perfect in the science of geometry (şîlî-i hendese). Evliya then asks the European spokesman to compare the mosque with Hagia Sophia, which shows how often aesthetic judgments about architecture were made by comparing monuments. Evliya's travelogue is filled with such comparisons, a common habit that made the intertextuality of architectural references transparent to the ordinary observer. The foreigner answers:

True, it [Hagia Sophia] is an ancient work built larger than this [Süleymaniye] in brick. It is an immense building of that ancient age artistic in terms of solidity (metanet ʿûşûr). But in terms of pleasantness (letâfet), elegance (zrâfet), propriety (nezâfet), and graciousness (sîrînkârî‘û), this exemplary building [Süleymaniye] is more artistic. Regarding its costs, more money has been spent on this mosque than on Hagia Sophia.

The Süleymaniye is judged superior in its aesthetic refinement, and its stone masonry structure is more costly than brick. Despite its monumental magnificence, Hagia Sophia is perceived to represent the taste of an ancient age, admired, but different from the new Ottoman aesthetic. This perception foreshadows the assessment of the church by several eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century European travelers as "Gothick." Although Evliya's comparison almost certainly is his own, his story about the foreign visitors need not necessarily be dismissed as invention. The numerous European prints and drawings of the Süleymaniye testify that foreign visitors were common; among them the English traveler John Sanderson praised it in 1594 "as a work which meriteth to be matched with the seven wonderers of the world." Just as representations of the Süleymaniye were readily available in the West, so Sinan may have had access to the illustrated architectural treatises published in increasingly larger numbers in sixteenth-century Europe. Although there is no evidence he was acquainted with Palladio's or Michelangelo's work, it is likely he knew about their experiments with monumental domed spaces, given the close diplomatic and mercantile relations within the Mediterranean world at that time. He must at least have heard reports about recent architectural developments from Ottoman travelers, like those who visited the construction site of St. Peter's in Rome, where they are reported to have expressed their admiration for the
unfinished project to the Italian military architect Francesco de Marchi.  

According to the Tektiretül Bünüyan it was Christian (probably European) architects who challenged Sinan to outstrip Hagia Sophia’s dome in the Selimiye Mosque (which Le Corbusier was centuries later to liken to a “tiara of great splendor” crowning the cityscape of Edirne):

This humble servant drew up plans (reseb) for a monumental mosque in Edirne deserving to be admired by the people of the world. Its four minarets are placed on the four sides of the dome. And each has three galleries. Two of them feature three separate staircases with different paths. The minaret of the Üç Şerefeli, built in the olden days, is like a tower. It is excessively thick. However, it is apparent to the judicious that making the minarets of this [Selimiye] both refined (nasuh) and with three separate staircases is quite difficult. And one of the things that people all over the world used to say was impossible was “a big dome like that of Hagia Sophia [which] has not been built during the Muslim era”; on account of this the so-called architects of the infidels used to claim, “We have surpassed the Muslims.” The heart of this humble servant was troubled by their invalid presumption that “to support such a [big] dome is extremely difficult; if it were possible to match it (nasirin mânkin okut) they would have built one like it.” Working hard on the construction of this mosque, with the help of God “the King, the Conqueror,” and under the rule of Sultan Selim Han, I demonstrated my power by making the height (kaddim) of this dome 6 cubits [4.50m] and its circumference (devrin) 4 cubits [3.00m] larger [than that of Hagia Sophia].

This passage, recalling earlier attempts by Muslim architects to surpass the Arch of Ctesiphon, announces Sinan’s intention to challenge two ancient buildings, the Üç Şerefeli and Hagia Sophia which were the largest imperial mosques of Edirne and Istanbul respectively. The Süleymaniye had reformed Hagia Sophia’s overall scheme filtered through references to earlier imperial mosques, but the Selimiye set out specifically to challenge unsurpassed feats of construction, Aqgnoe’s large dome and the Üç Şerefeli’s tall minaret. With their elegant design Sinan’s virtuoso minarets eclipsed the Üç Şerefeli Mosque’s heavily built, unintegrated triple-galleried minaret featuring three separate staircases. The thinner and taller minarets of Selimiye, built so close to their rival, which until then had remained the highest one in the Ottoman world, proclaimed Sinan’s triumph over the past by combining an engineering feat with aesthetic refinement.

The rivalry with Hagia Sophia focused on the unsurpassed size of its monumental dome. Sinan boasted: “The world used to bet that no other dome/Like Hagia Sophia could ever be made/This soaring dome exceeds it/I know not the rest, for God alone knows the best.” The architect’s claim to have surpassed the dimensions of Hagia Sophia’s dome has puzzled architectural historians because the diameter of Selimiye’s dome (31.22m) approximates that of Hagia Sophia (ranging between 30.90m and 31.80m), and it is considerably lower. Sinan does not, however, say that he surpassed the diameter (commonly referred to as kütur or çap) of Hagia Sophia’s dome, but rather its circumference (devir). In addition, he apparently considered each dome independently as an autonomous shell, measuring its height (hadad) not from the ground, but from the level of its base. Computed in this way, Selimiye’s rounder dome with its higher apex is in fact higher than the flat profiled dome of Hagia Sophia. On these grounds Sinan could proclaim that he had not only succeeded in equaling Hagia Sophia’s dome, but also in surpassing it. Evliya Çelebi’s description of the Süleymaniye Mosque’s dome, which is also lower than that of Hagia Sophia, shows that he measured it in a similar fashion: “The elevated summit of this mosque’s dome (kuşbesini in sâve-i a’lâisi) is rounder (müdevver) than the dome of Hagia Sophia and seven cubits higher than it.” This peculiar method of computing a dome’s height from its base rather than from the ground level is in keeping with Sinan’s conceptualization of mosque architecture as an elegant counterbalancing of a curvilinear domical superstructure and a strictly rectilinear system of supports. The duality of these two distinct zones is always emphasized in his mosques.

Sinan’s autobiography suggests that the dome of the Selimiye, built to compete with its predecessor, constituted his starting point in designing the rest of the mosque as a centrally planned octagonal baldachin. The allusion to Hagia Sophia was further reinforced through a quotation of its protruding apse, a feature not present in Sinan’s earlier imperial mosques. Unlike the Süleymaniye project where he was encumbered by a literal reinterpretation of Justinian’s basilical church, Sinan could freely explore his own imagination and mature experience in designing the Selimiye which he regarded as his masterpiece. The synthesis he achieved was as novel as that of Renaissance architects inspired by the Pantheon.

The domination of the Selimiye’s great dome is emphasized by eliminating smaller domes, half-domes, and multiple-domed dependencies. The Tektiretül Bünüyan, which compared the cascading small domes of the Şehzade and Süleymaniye mosques to “bubbles on the sea of elegance,” therefore omitted this striking simile in its
Selimiye description. The colossal dome is surrounded by a belt of eight turrets framed by four identical minarets, not around the courtyard — as in the Üç Şerefeli and Suleymaniye mosques where their varied height accentuates a pyramidal silhouette — but around the domed baldachin. The closely integrated dome and four minarets (elements simultaneously signifying sultanic status and the power of Sunni Islam) thus focus attention on the competitive central theme of Sinan’s building program. The minarets alluding to Üç Şerefeli and the dome referring to Hagia Sophia are juxtaposed in an almost post-modern manner to announce the architectural triumph of Sinan’s superbly sited mosque, a triumph that simultaneously communicated the grandeur of the Ottoman state and Islam.

The building programs of Sinan’s three great mosques have to be read as responses to the specific challenges of the past rather than as part of a linear evolution of style driven by some mysterious impulse toward creating centralized schemes. Just as Ottoman intellectuals of the time were busily producing critical commentaries (şerih) on the classics, so Sinan busied himself with a structural and aesthetic criticism of earlier masterpieces. His three great mosques are the architectural counterparts of naziye, poems composed on the model of admired exemplars to improve upon them ingeniously through a novel twist. Emulating earlier poetry had always been practiced, but by the late fifteenth century it had come to dominate the Timurid literary scene, as “the style of the ancients” had ceased to be the criterion by which poetical production was judged. Since literary creativity involved the elaboration of set themes dictated by convention, “refinement of expression” became the prime focus of Timurid poets who sought to reshape admired exemplars in accordance with modern tastes. The composition of imitative poetry became the means by which many early-modern poets, including Ottoman ones, established themselves within an increasingly intertextual collective literary tradition which by the late fifteenth century had “become an intricate web of interrelationships and interdependencies between poets of different generations and distant localities.”

Just as contemporary poets aspired to emulate former poets who had been judged by critics as impossible to surpass, Sinan advertised his skill by challenging architectural exemplars that experts had declared to be inimitable. The Tekkevi’i-Bünyân even uses the term “naziye” when it refers to those non-Muslim architects who declared that it was unfeasible to build a dome equal to that of Hagia Sophia. The dome of Selimiye was intended to be a naziye, or competitive response, to that challenge. In the process of formulating his response Sinan went beyond mere emulation to remodel his model ingeniously into a fresh new idiom. Once completed the Selimiye dome itself became the new exemplar: “No dome like it has been built or can ever be built on earth/It is a non-pareil equaled only by the sky.”

The deliberate references in Sinan’s great mosques provide them with visual lineages and chains of allusion like those of the poets. His is an architecture conscious of its historicity, an architecture that bridges the past and the present through the rhetorical device of intertextuality. It not only reflects an acute historical consciousness, but also affirms the superiority of the more eloquent present. In his autobiographical essays Sinan deliberately advertises his derivations from older models, but he also distances himself from them in order to make his audiences notice both the allusions to the past and the departures from it to highlight his own originality. The result is a dialectical emulation of the past, which calls attention to, critically reflects on, and challenges comparison with admired exemplars. Sinan mingles his heterogeneous allusions with rhetorical skill to update past achievements; he corrects, criticizes, and refines his models to demonstrate his superiority.

Literary theories of imitation as the proper framework for creativity also played a central role in Renaissance Europe. In the sixteenth century a vigorous debate over the various modes of imitation and the proper role of tradition over artistic originality was carried on all over the Mediterranean world. Classical Ottoman architecture was a product of the same environment. Sinan’s great mosques proclaimed imperial power, the triumph of Islam, and the role of the divinely inspired architect in codifying the canons of a historically conscious architecture expressing a glorious epoch. Sinan, aware of his important role, recorded “his name and reputation in the annals of time in the hope that he might be remembered with well-intended prayers.” Eventually his exploits became folklore, his powers superhuman: like Daedalus he could fly from one construction site to the other.

Sinan’s assertions that his age was superior to the past were repeated throughout the early-modern Islamic world during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the Safavids and the Mughals followed the Ottomans in creating their own distinctive architectural and decorative idiom. Sinan’s successors also followed his example, even further refining the “classical” Ottoman idiom he had codified. The Sultan Ahmed Mosque (1609–
in Istanbul, often judged by modern architectural historians to be inferior to Sinan’s masterpieces, was regarded by seventeenth-century Ottoman critics as the “commander of the army of mosques” and the “most beautiful (güzel) of all the sultanic mosques in Istanbul.” Noting that its plan was the same as that of the Şehzade Mosque, Evliya praised the “graciouslyness of its architectural style/mode” (tarihi mimarinside olan şinikârî) unknown in the mosques of any other country. In fact, with its exaggerated elegance and elongated proportions the Sultan Ahmed Mosque exemplified the changing aesthetic sensibilities of a Baroque age through a theatricality missing in Sinan’s restrained classicism. It faced a public maidan just across from Hagia Sophia, once again inviting a competitive comparison between past and present.6 The Sultan Ahmed Mosque’s six minarets — alluding to those of the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca (whose six minarets were increased to seven to avoid criticism) — eclipsed the four used in Hagia Sophia. Its highly articulated ashlar masonry façades and cascading domical superstructure contrasted sharply with the bulky monumentality of Justinian’s ancient masterpiece with which it was intentionally paired.

The deliberate juxtaposition of new monuments with old ones around public maidans became a particularly common mode of architectural naźîrî in the early-modern era, especially in the grand urban schemes of the seventeenth century. Samarqand’s Registan Square is one of these maidans, with its competitive dialogue between Timurid monuments and Uzbek ones that replaced demolished Timurid structures. There the seventeenth-century façade of the Shirid Madrasa closely paraphrases that of Ulugh Beg’s fifteenth-century madrasa across from it, as if trying to outdo its model. This semiotically charged pairing of the old and the new presented the Uzbeks as worthy heirs to their Timurid predecessors.4

In 1585, the Ottoman historian Ta’Ъikizade describes a maqsûd built in the now destroyed maqṣûd of Tabriz by the Safavid Shah Tahmasp I (1522–76) as a “naźîrî” to an earlier Friday mosque on the opposite side by the Aqqoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan (1453–78).5 The old maqṣûd of Isfahan also had its mixture of Safavid and pre-Safavid monuments, but it was not until Shah 4Abbas I (1588–1629) created the new maqṣûd that the whole city became polarized by a naźîrî which invited a comparison between past and present. The outcome of this open match was obvious to contemporary observers; the early-seventeenth-century chronicler Junabadi declared that the new maqṣûd corrected the “narrowness, crookedness, and gloominess” of the old one with rational design principles, “so that now they call the former Isfahan (İsfahân-i sâhi) the ‘old city’ and these places and residences the ‘new city.’” Junabadi boasted, “Through the circumstance of these sublime buildings, the City of Rule, Isfahan, is one of the mothers of cities of the civilized world and its equal and like in the seven climes does not exist.” With its monuments embodying the distinctive Safavid idiom and its Friday mosque (1611–30) that represented a refinement of Timurid prototypes, the brilliant theatrical stage of the new Safavid maqṣûd eclipsed the old one whose antiquated Seljuk great mosque still carried Sunni memories despite its transformation by a decorative veneer of Safavid tiles carrying Shi‘î inscriptions. The court historian Islandar Munshi asserted that Shah Abbas’s new mosque was “without equal in Iran and possibly in the entire civilized world.”6

Shah Abbas once again challenged the past when he enlarged the shrine complex of Imam Riza in Mashhad (1612–13), juxtaposing new structures in the Safavid idiom next to its old Timurid core that became integrated into a rationally planned symmetrical scheme. Islandar Munshi writes:

After performing the pilgrimage ceremonies at the shrine of the Imam Riza, the Shah resolved... to restore the buildings and dwellings and to enlarge the main courtyard of the shrine, because he considered the existing one unimpressive. The Mir 4Alishir portico was the entrance to the shrine... but it was extremely badly located in the corner of the courtyard. The Shah’s plan was to demolish some older buildings lying east of the courtyard and already in ruins, and to incorporate the lands thus acquired within the courtyard in such a way that the Mir 4Alishir portico would then be located in the center of the southern wall. He also planned to construct a second portico in the north wall, facing south and opposite the Mir 4Alishir portico, and two other porticos in the east and west walls, respectively. An avenue would then be constructed from the west gate of the city running east to the shrine; on reaching the shrine, it would circle around it, passing by all four entrance porticoes.7

Around the same time the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (1628–57), who after regularizing parts of Agra found it to be beyond repair, decided to build the new city of Shahjahanabad at Delhi. Like Isfahan, this rationally planned city composed of monuments in the new Mughal imperial idiom provoked a competitive dialogue with older settlements established in Delhi by earlier Muslim dynasties in terms both of its architectural style and of its urban layout. The French traveler Bernier
(1656–68) writes, “Owing to their being so near at hand, the [material] ruins of old Dehli have served to build the new city, and in the Indies they scarce speak any more of Dehli, but only of Jehan-Abad.” The rational planning of Shahjahanabad with tree-lined axial avenues bisected by water canals (recalling Isfahan’s Chahar Bagh avenue) was unprecedented in earlier Mughal capitals. The new city may well have been intended as a nagin, a Mughal response to Isfahan. During an audience Shah Jahan even asked a Persian ambassador to compare the two.\(^{49}\)

We know that the emperor had access to drawings of Isfahan and Baghdad,\(^ {50}\) but he reinterpreted them in the distinctive Mughal architectural idiom codified during his reign when several old buildings in red sandstone, judged to be unimpressive, were demolished and replaced with those of Shah Jahan’s own design in white marble. The emperor considered among others his father’s red sandstone buildings in Lahore as “old fashioned and of bad design” (kudnagii wa bad tarhi); by contrast his own marble pavilions at Lake Ana Sagar in Ajmer were judged to be in a pleasing “fresh style.”\(^ {51}\) This new style revised well-established Mughal precedents, remolding them into a canonical language of harmonious forms stamped with a novel decorative skin. There remained little doubt in the minds of contemporaries that theirs was an architecture unsurpassed in its elegant refinement; the seventeenth-century court historian Lahori asserted that “in this tranquil reign, the art of building has reached such a point as astonishes both the widely traveled connoisseurs and the magic-working engineers of this incomparable craft.”\(^ {52}\)

As these random examples demonstrate, Sinan was not alone in asserting the architectural superiority of the present in an early-modern age so deeply preoccupied with challenging the past through self-consciously intertextual monuments and urban schemes. This confidence would last until the eighteenth century, before signs of self-doubt emerged all over the Muslim world, and it began to turn to European artistic models in its search for different visual idioms that would express newly constructed modern national identities.

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NOTES

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9. Beyond the Turco-Iranian cultural sphere, the predominantly Arab-speaking world of Syria, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain preserved its traditional identity, even after most of it had become incorporated in the sixteenth century into the Ottoman realm, by elaborating local architectural idioms drawn from an idealized medieval past.


13. He refers to the Persian style as “taavt-e khāsir” (the mode of \nPersian kings); see Tursun Beg, The History of Mehmed the Con-\nquering, text, fols., 59a–59b.

14. The several versions of Sinan’s autobiographical essays still \nawait a critical edition. Most of them have been compiled in \nRıfkı Meli Meriç, Mimar Sinan, Hayatı, Eseri I: Mimar Sinan’ın \nHayatına Eserlerine Dair Metinler (Ankara, 1965). Also see, Mus\nıfa Sa’î, Tekiret-zâr-Bünyan (Istanbul, 1313/1897), and the \nEnglish translation of a more reliable version of the same text \naccompanied by a facsimile in Metin Sözen and Suphi Saatçî, \nMimar Sinan ve Tekiret-zâr Bünyan (Istanbul, 1989) (hereafter \nT.B.). Unfortunately the English translation is not reliable, so I \nhave provided my own. Some archival documents and Sinan’s \nautobiographical essays have been adapted to modern Turkish \nin Zeki Sınmaç, Mimar Sinan ile ilgili Tarihi Yazaralem-Beğer \n(Istanbul, 1988). For the known autobiographical manuscripts \nin various library collections, see Sözen and Saatçî, T.B., pp. \n20–28. A version of Tekiret-zâr Bünyan preserved in the Topkapı \nPalace Library (R. 1456), in which the first editors are edited and interesting new details added, is \npublished in Suphi Saatçî, “Tekiret-zâr Bünyan’ın Topkapı \nSarayı Revan Kütüphândaki Yaşına Nûshâsi,” Topkapı Sarayı \nMüzesi Yıllık 4 (1990): 55–101.


16. For an analysis of these popular texts and further bibliogra-\nphy, see Necipoğlu, “The Life of an Imperial Monument,” pp. \n198–209. Sinan’s references to the architect of Hagia Sophia as \n“Agnados” and to the legendary founder of Constantinople as \nYanko bin Madyan confirm his familiarity with these texts, see \nMeriç, Mimar Sinan, p. 21; and T.B., fol. 56.


18. In his youth, Sinan had gone on military campaigns with \nScîlî I in western Iran (1514) and Egypt (1516–17), because \n“just as a compass draws an arc, so I desired to tour countries. \nFor a while in the service of the sultan I wandered the Arab \nand Persian lands, deriving my sustenance from the pinnacle of \neach iwan, and my lodging from the corner of each iwan,” \nT.B., fols. 2b, 3a.


20. For example, the Selimiye Mosque in Konya (ca. 1565) and \nthe Tatar Khan Mosque at Gözleve in the Crimea (1550’s) are \nbased on the layout of Mehmed II’s mosque in Istanbul, and \nthe Sinan Pasha Mosque in Beşiktaş (1550–55) reinterprets \nthe scheme of the Üç Şerefeli Mosque in Edirne. Towards the \nend of his life Sinan also paraphrased the scheme of Hagia \nSophia on a smaller scale at the Kilic Ali Pasha Mosque in \nIstanbul (1577–1587).

21. Mehmed Aşık, Memârâzî-ı Âsâlîm, National Library, Vienna, \nm.s. cod. mxt. 314, fol 264r. The seventeenth-century traveler \nEvliya recognized the Şehzade Mosque’s improvement on ear-\nlier models through an original synthesis: “It has been built by \nstealing a refinement (nesâhe) and a propriety (nesâfeh) from \neach royal mosque that preceded it.” See Evliya Celebi Seyhâ\nnameşesi, I. Kitap: İstanbul, ed. Sinasi Tekin and Gönül Tekin \n(Cambridge, Mass., 1989), fol 9a. The architect of Mehmed II’s \nmosque is reported to have been punished for shortening the two \ntall marble columns supporting the dome’s lateral arches, \nwhich had been transported at great expense. Sinan is therefore \ncareful to indicate in his autobiography that the Süleymaniye’s \nfour monumental marble columns brought from distant lands \nwere cut down to the same height with the sultan’s permission, \nib., fol. 9b.

22. T.B., fol. 10b. For Süleyman’s approval of his mosque’s plan \nand site which he discussed with Sinan in a meeting, see ibid., \nfol 9a. The architect of Mehmed II’s mosque is reported to \nhave been punished for shortening the two tall marble columns \nsupporting the dome’s lateral arches, which had been trans-\nported at great expense. Sinan is therefore careful to indicate \nhis autobiography that the Süleymaniye’s four monumental \nmarble columns brought from distant lands were cut down to the \nsame height with the sultan’s permission, ib., fol. 9b.


24. The “rationalization” of Hagia Sophia’s scheme is discussed \nin Kuban, “The Style of Sinan’s Domed Structures,” p. 84; T.B., \nfol. 10a.

25. For the minaret doors, see Meriç, Mimar Sinan, pp. 51–52. The \ncomparison to bubbles is in T.B., fol 10a.

26. For Sinan’s conceptualization of domed spaces from above, \nsee Kuban, “The Style of Sinan’s Domed Structures,” pp. 74, \n92–95; Kuran, Mimar Sinan, p. 13. Ottoman architectural \ndescriptions comparing mosques in terms of their domical \nconfigurations abound in Mehmed Aşık’s Menâşer and Evliya \nCelebi’s Seyhâname. Evliya, for example, observes that the \nŞehzade Mosque has four half-domes like the Sultan Ahmed \nMosque and differs from the double half-domed mosques of \nHagia Sophia and the Süleymaniye. He notes the common \nscheme of the Kilic Ali Pasha Mosque and Hagia Sophia, and \nalso points out the parallel between Rüstem Pasha’s octagonal \ndomed baldachin and that of the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, \nSeyhâname, 1: 125–26, 149–50, 163, 302–3, 441; 5: 433–45. Evli-\nya’s reference to the Ulu Cami in Bursa, as “the Ayasofya of \nBursa, being the city’s most monumental mosque,” shows that \ntemporary observers viewed mosques in a comparative per-\nspective, Seyhâname, I: 441, 2: 14.


30. I am indebted to Howard Burns for the reference to the visit of \nan Ottoman delegation to St. Peter’s in Rome: Romeo de Maio, \nMichelangelo e la Controriforma (Rome-Barth, 1978), pp. \n322, 342, n. 64. Francesco de Marchi’s passage cited by De \nMaio from Architettura militare, book 6, Florence, Bibl. Naz. \nMs. Magl. I.277, fol. 105r–v reads: “Il tempio di S. Pietro è il più \nmagnifico della cristianità, e quando sarà fatto secondo il dis-\negno e modello non se troverà uno semile in parte nessuna \n… e certe tutti gli luomini che sono sopra la terra dovrebbero \nconsiderarlo che detto tempio si dovesse finire e porgerli aiuto \ne favore; persino alli Turchi, nemici della vera fede, ho par-\nlato con alcuni di loro in Roma, li quali desideravano che detta \nChiesa si finisse, secondo il bello e meraviglioso principio.”

fols. 15a–15b. In the published edition of this text, instead of “circumference” (der) the term “depth” (derinlik) is used; see Šaši, Tektiratıbarsı, pp. 71–72. This appears to be a typographical error, given that the manuscript versions consistently use “der”; see, for example, the edition of the Reva ms. by Sattı in Topkapı Sarayı Müesı Yıllık, p. 96.

32. The triple-galleried minaret of Ùç Şerifeli is 67.65 m high, the minarets of Selimiye measure 70.90 m according to Aptaullah Kur'an, The Mosque in Early Ottoman Architecture (Chicago-London, 1968), p. 181.

33. T.B., fol. 15b. The height of Selimiye’s dome from the ground is 42.25 m, and that of Hagia Sophia is 55.60 m; Kur'an, Minver Sinan, p. 163. The Hagia Sophia was extensively remodeled when the Selimiye was almost finished in 1573–74; its deformed dome was protected with added buttresses, its two minarets were increased to four, and Selimi II’s domed mausoleum was built in its garden; see Necipoğlu, “The Life of an Imperial Monument,” pp. 205–10.

34. See Evliya, Seyhahıname, 1: 149–50; and the facsimile edition by Sinasi Tekin and Gönül Alpay Tekin, Eviyya Celebi, p. 90, fol. 43b.

35. For the comparison with bubbles, see T.B., fols. 4b, 10a.

36. Only mosques built for the sultan himself featured more than two minarets and large domes that clearly stood out from the smaller domed mosques of other patrons. Sinan’s autobiography compares the dome and four minarets in both the Selimiye and Süleymaniye mosques to the Prophet who is “the dome of Islam” surrounded by his companions, the first four Sunni caliphs; see ibid., fols. 10a, 11b.

37. The saying attributed to Sinan: “The Şehzade is my apprenticeship work (ơra��h), Süleymaniye is my work as a journeyman (hafiz), and Selimiye is my work as a master (ustab),” has unfortunately contributed to viewing the stylistic development of Sinan’s mosques as a linear progression towards the formulation of a perfectly centralized scheme culminating with the Selimiye. According to this view, Sinan’s departure from the rationality of Şehzade’s centralized plan in the Süleymaniye is a retrogression or anomaly, which Sinan corrects in the Selimiye; see Kuban, “The Style of Sinan’s Doned Structures,” pp. 84–89; idem, “Sinan,” in Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Architects (New York, 1982), 4: 66, 68. Evliya reports that while serving as muezzin at the Selimiye his father had allegedly heard from Sinan that the architect regarded the Şehzade Mosque as his journeyman’s work, the Süleymaniye as his master’s work, and the Selimiye as his masterpiece. Here the Selimiye is still singled out as Sinan’s most original creation, but the Süleymaniye is referred to as work of a master rather than that of a journeyman; see Evliya Celebi, Seyhahtıname, 10 vols. (Istanbul, 1896–1930), 3: 443–44. This more balanced assessment is also repeated in the Tektirin which says that with the Süleymaniye Sinan “brought to completion his skill in the field of architecture” and “sealed his artistic talent.” The Tektirin show no sign of dissatisfaction with the Süleymaniye, nor do they support an interpretation of Sinan’s career as a single-minded search for perfecting centralized schemes; see Meric, Minver Sinan, pp. 18, 30.


39. Ibid., p. 68. In his biographical dictionary of Ottoman poets presented to Sultan Süleyman I in 1546, Lâwifi refers to an anthology of Ottoman naivy compiled in 1524 by Nazm Mehmed Celebi; see Fatih Resad, ed., Tektirin-i Lâwifi (Istanbul, 1314/1896–97). Lâwifi’s frequent use of “refined” (naivy) with reference to poems parallels the use of the same term in Ottoman architectural description.

40. T.B., fols. 15a, 15b.


44. The Uzbek competition with Timurid monuments is noted by the late-seventeenth-century Samarkan anthologist Muhammid Badi: “Abd Allah ibn Iskandor ordered the razing of several major Timurid buildings in Samarkan including the great congregational mosque, because he wanted no memorial of Timurid splendor left there and wished instead to make Bukhara the cultural and architectural center of Mawaran-nahar,” cited in R. D. McChesney, “Economic and Social Aspects of the Public Architecture of Bukhara in the 1560’s and 1570’s,” Islamic Art 2 (1987): 228.

45. Ta’liikazade, Tebrizîye, Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi, R. 1299, fol. 30v.


48. Ibid., p. 1064.

49. François Bernier, Travels in the Mogul Empire (a.d. 1656–1668), trans. A. Constable (rept., New Delhi, 1983) pp. 241, 284–85. Bernier describes the questioning of the Persian ambassador: “The Mogol [Shah Jahan] inquiring what he thought of his new Dehi, then building, as compared to Isfahan; he answered aloud, and with an oath, ‘Bihîl/Bihîl/Isfahan cannot be compared to the dust of your Dehi,’” which reply the King took as a high encomium upon his favorite city, though the ambassador intended it in sportive decision, the dust being intolerable in Dehi,” ibid., pp. 152–53.


51. Cited from Lahori in Ebba Koch, Mughal Architecture (Munich, 1991), pp. 84, 103.