

YILLIK

Annual of Istanbul Studies

2021

3



İSTANBUL
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies

3 (2021)

YILLIK is a peer-reviewed annual journal, published simultaneously in print and online (via Dergipark).

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Title history

2012–2018 | İstanbul Araştırmaları Yıllığı / Annual of Istanbul Studies, 1–7

2019– | YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies

Mode of publication: Worldwide periodical, published annually every December

Note to contributors: *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies* accepts submissions in English and Turkish. Articles should conform to the usage of The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), 17th edition, and to the style guides published on the journal's website. Articles in Turkish conform to a customized CMOS style available at the website. Research articles are subject to review by two anonymous reviewers and the editorial board. All other submissions are reviewed by the editorial board.

Istanbul Research Institute Publications 47

Periodicals 10

Istanbul, December 2021

ISSN: 2687-5012

Publisher: On behalf of the Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation, Necmettin Tosun

Graphic Design: Volkan Şenozan

Editorial Assistant: Miray Eroğlu

Copyediting: Emily Aaruz, Miray Eroğlu, Y. Güneş Yücel, Özge Ertem

Assistants: Osman Kocabal, Ryan Mitchell

Contact: istanbulstudies@iae.org.tr

Color Separation and Print: Onikinci Matbaa Basın Yayın San. ve Tic. Ltd. Şti. (Certificate no: 46618)

İbrahim Karaoğlanoğlu Cad. no: 35 Kat: 1 Kağıthane/Istanbul

Tel: 0212 281 25 80

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Meşrutiyet Caddesi no. 47, 34430, Tepebaşı - Beyoğlu/Istanbul

www.iae.org.tr

Certificate no: 12482

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Mid-Century Sinan: Vasfi Egeli and the Turkish Republic's First Mosque

Gavin Moulton

Abstract

With its revival of classical Ottoman forms, Şişli Mosque (1945–1949) has often been overlooked as an anachronistic reaction to the Turkish Republic's secular modernist architecture of the 1930s and 40s. However, its eclectic design by restorer-architect Vasfi Egeli and attentive craftsmanship executed by the last Ottoman-trained masters distinguish the Şişli Mosque from the mass-produced followers it inspired. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the first decades of the newly established republic, formal permission was not granted for any major religious construction projects until 1945 when ground broke on Şişli Mosque. This study examines architect Vasfi Egeli's nationalization of classical Ottoman mosque architecture during the İnönü era, citations in the mosque's decorative program, and the influence of restoration activities. As the first monumental mosque in the Turkish Republic, Şişli Mosque set an influential precedent in its reconciliation of classical Ottoman architecture with a nationalized Turkish Islamic identity and rearticulation of the mosque within the context of republican era religious reforms.

Keywords: architecture, early republican era, restoration, Şişli, İslam

Yüzyıl Ortası Sinan'ı: Vasfi Egeli ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin İlk Camisi

Özet

Klasik Osmanlı formlarını yeniden canlandıran Şişli Camii (1945–1949), Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin laik modern mimarisine anakronistik bir tepki olarak algılanmış ve genellikle araştırmacılar tarafından göz ardı edilmiştir. Ancak, restoratör-mimar Vasfi Egeli'nin eklektik mimari tasarımı ve eğitimini Osmanlı döneminin son zamanlarında almış ve ustaların yapmış olması, Şişli Camii'ni daha sonra topluca üretilen taklitçilerden ayırıyor. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun çöküşünden sonra, yeni kurulan cumhuriyetin ilk döneminde, 1945 yılına kadar büyük camilerin yapılmasına resmi izin verilmedi. Bu çalışma, caminin iç süsleme programındaki tarihi mimari unsurları, Egeli'nin mimari referanslarını ve restorasyon faaliyetlerinde Egeli'nin Osmanlı geleneğini yorumlama yöntemlerini incelemektedir. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin ilk anıtsal camisi olan Şişli Camii, klasik Osmanlı geleneğini millileştirilmiş bir Türk-İslam kimliğiyle uzlaştırmada ve caminin cumhuriyet döneminin dini reformlar bağlamında yeniden yorumlanmasında etkili bir örnek oluşturdu.

Anahtar kelimeler: mimarlık, erken cumhuriyet dönemi, restorasyon, Şişli, İslam

Supporters of the project to build Şişli Mosque—Istanbul's first monumental mosque since the fall of the Ottoman Empire—possessed grand aspirations (figs. 1–3). In the Islamic journal *Ehli Sünnet*, historian İbrahim Hakkı Konyalı (d. 1984) praised the mosque's reconciliation of modern construction methods with the classical Ottoman style, referring to the chief architect of the classical Ottoman period from 1539–1588: “In combining the art of the age of Sinan with twentieth-century techniques, the [Şişli] mosque has an edge over the works of Sinan.”¹ And, the project's architect and chief organizer, Vasfi Egeli (d. 1962), envisioned an architectural tes-

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Manuscript received:

June 15, 2021

Manuscript accepted:

September 24, 2021

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This article is indebted to the guidance of Professor Gülru Necipoğlu and Dr. Himmet Taşkömür who supervised my undergraduate honors thesis from which this article is adapted. Research and fieldwork in Turkey were generously supported by an Abramson Travel Fellowship from the Department of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University. I would like to express my gratitude to Hüseyin Ereğ, Director of the Şişli Mosque Foundation; Anne Joyce; Özge Yıldız; and Dr. Perin Gürel for their support. Many thanks to the anonymous reviewers of the article, as well as the editors and copyeditors of *YILLIK*.

¹ İbrahim Hakkı Konyalı, “Şişli Camii,” *Ehli Sünnet* 2, no. 29 (February 1948): 11–12.



Figure 1: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, 1945–1949, interior view towards mihrab. Photograph: Gavin Moulton, 2018.

tament comparable to the masterworks of the Byzantine and Ottoman traditions, declaring: “We want this work [Şişli Mosque], like the Süleymaniye or like the Hagia Sophia, to have a long life ... may it stand for thousands and thousands of years.”² With a single pencil minaret and lead-roofed dome, the unapologetically Ottoman revival mosque broke the architectural traditions of twenty-two years of the secularizing and westernizing one-party rule that had consciously avoided overt reference to the Ottoman past. Located physically on what was then the periphery of Istanbul in 1945, the aesthetic and political decisions entangled in the Şişli Mosque’s construction during the politically pivotal years of 1945–1949 remain unsettled in Turkish religious, architectural, and partisan debates.

As the Turkish Republic’s first major religious building, Şişli Mosque occupies a transformational yet overlooked role in twentieth-century Turkish architectural history. Scholarship

2 M. Salâhaddin, “İstanbul ve Memleket Camilerini ve Din Âbidelerini Ziyaret: Şişli Camii Şerifi,” *Selâmet* 1, no. 21 (October 1947): 4–5; 11.



Figure 2: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, ca. 1948, exterior view. Pious Foundations Monuments and Structural Works Archive.

Figure 3: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, 1945–1949, exterior view of *müsenna* calligraphy of *Sûrat at-Taubah* 9:18 by Hamid Aytaç. Photograph: Gavin Moulton, 2018.

“He only shall tend Allah’s sanctuaries who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor—due and feareth none save Allah! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk.”



on contemporary neo-Ottoman architecture often begins with the third competition for Ankara’s Kocatepe Mosque in 1967 that followed the outcry over the previous selection of a modernist plan by Vedat Dalokay and Nejat Tekelioğlu, resulting in its replacement with a massive neo-Ottoman mosque. However, extending the history of Ottoman revivalism to the republican era reveals the extent to which Şişli Mosque and its immediate replicators from Izmir to Rize synonymized modern mosque construction with classical Ottoman revival architecture before 1960. The work of Gülru Necipoğlu and Sibel Bozdoğan on Ottoman architectural culture in the early republican era provides a foundation for my articulation of how Vasfi Egele contributed to and extrapolated from the nationalization of Sinan. An emerging historiography of republican era mosque preservation efforts and the Istanbul Research Institute’s 2016 exhibition catalog of photographs from Şişli Mosque’s unusually well-documented construction further benefits this study.³

³ Essays presented in the special edition of *Muqarnas* edited by Gülru Necipoğlu and Sibel Bozdoğan, “History and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the ‘Lands of Rum,’” *Muqarnas* 24 (2007), critically interrogated nationalized

42 This article is informed by archival research in Istanbul, Ankara, and London, close analysis of Vasfi Egeli's restoration activities and design of Şişli Mosque, and debates over the mosque's construction in Islamic journals, newspapers, and architectural publications. Through identification of archival, architectural, and textual references in the mosque's decorative program—such as photographs in the Pious Foundations' Monuments and Structural Works Archive, motifs from the 1873 *Usûl-i Mi'mârî-i Osmânî* (Foundations of Ottoman Architecture), and especially Egeli's own restoration activities—I demonstrate a primary dialogue with sixteenth-century classical Ottoman mosques and elucidate substantial deviations that reference the *longue durée* of Ottoman mosque building. I argue that the nationalization of Sinan's architecture in the 1930s enabled its lead architect and organizer, Vasfi Egeli to reclaim Ottoman revivalism as consonant with republican religious reforms and modern Turkish identity. Although the Şişli Mosque's plan and style were widely replicated, its detailed craftsmanship and careful dialogue with Ottoman architectural culture were not. Contextualizing the mosque within broader architectural discourses of the republican era, I highlight Egeli's contributions to the modernization and nationalization of Ottoman architecture and Şişli Mosque's pioneering role in the revival of Ottoman-style mosques across Turkey in the 1950s during the rule of the Democrat Party.

Restorer-Architects and Ottoman Revivalism

Şişli Mosque stands prominently in a triangular plot at the intersection of Abide-i Hürriyet and Halaskargazi Streets in Şişli, a district of Istanbul historically home to a large Christian population that developed rapidly in the republican era. A staid stone exterior in sixteenth-century style belies an innovative reinforced concrete dome and the interior decorative program's wide array of historical references. This curious and unique revivalism was the product of Egeli's vast knowledge of Ottoman architecture, acquired as a restorer-architect with the General Directorate of Pious Foundations (henceforth Pious Foundations) and education at the *Sanâyi-i Nefîse Mektebi* (Istanbul Fine Arts Academy) under the tutelage of leading architects of the revivalist First National Style. Contacts from the Pious Foundations, such as architect Vahan Kantarcı(yan), renowned calligraphers Hamid Aytaç, Macid Ayral, and Halim Özyazıcı, and master craftsmen trained under the Ottoman system, provided the expertise necessary to realize Egeli's revivalist project. Initial funding came from the merchant brothers Şükrü and Yusuf Gürün, but Egeli's ambitious plans required a controversial, years-long fundraising campaign that secured support from the Pious Foundations, business organizations, private citizens, and philanthropists, such as lottery magnate Nimet Abla (Özden), and raised over 1.2 million TL (fig. 4).⁴

Egeli's historical consciousness was shaped by his tenure as chief architect of the Istanbul Pious Foundations, a role he was appointed to after the retirement of Nihad Nigisberk. At the Pious Foundations, he oversaw restorations of Murat Paşa, Mihrimah Sultan, Hırka-i Şerif, and Fethiye Mosques before resigning to lead the Şişli Mosque project.⁵ Though Egeli was well aware of the strict rules governing classical Ottoman architecture, he selectively respected and transgressed them in restoration projects and in the design of Şişli Mosque. Serving as chief architect of the Istanbul Pious Foundations endowed Egeli with a singular power to preserve and formulate narratives of Ottoman mosque architecture during an era lacking significant new religious construction and to assemble a network of artisans invested in preserving and modernizing the remnants of Ottoman artistic and religious heritage. Although sympathetic to mosque construction, the Pious Foundations was an apparatus of the secular government that constrained Egeli's mosque-building ambitions. Retiring in 1948 to lead the grassroots

historiographies of Ottoman architecture, especially in the early Turkish Republic. Ahmet Ersoy's work on the *Usûl-i Mi'mârî-i Osmânî* challenges the vision of Ottoman decline embraced by Egeli and provides a useful theoretical approach to revivalism, see Ersoy, *Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary: Reconfiguring the Architectural Past in a Modernizing Empire* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015). The Istanbul Research Institute's 2016 exhibition and catalog of the Foto Sabah photographs of the mosque bring to light Egeli's transformative vision for mosque architecture. See Baha Tanman, *Şişli Camii / The Şişli Mosque* (Istanbul: İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2016).

⁴ Nimet Abla donated 50,000 TL to the mosque's construction effort and later constructed the Hacı Nimet Özden Mosque, designed by İsteban Aratan and located in Esentepe. İsmail Habib Sevük, "Klâsikliği Asrileştiren Yepyeni Âbide: 500üncü Fetih Yılı'nı Tek Mesud Eseri," *Cumhuriyet*, April 16, 1951. My estimate of the project's total cost is based on donations recorded in newspaper articles and donor plaques in the mosque courtyard, however the location of the mosque waqf's early financial records is needed for further precision.

⁵ Erdem Yücel, "Vakıf Eserlerini Restore Eden Mimarlardan Vasfi Egeli," *Restorasyon* 11 (2015): 75.



Figure 4: Supporters of the Şişli Mosque ca. 1950. Note Nimet Abla and Vasfi Egeli (first row left and second left). Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation (SVIKV), IAE, FKA 6395.

Şişli Mosque project granted Egeli increased freedom to independently apply his ideas on Ottoman architecture in the construction of a modern Turkish mosque.⁶

To address why Egeli made the radical decision to design a neoclassical Ottoman mosque in 1945, I will first clarify the respective meanings of modernist and Ottoman mosque architecture in the context of Turkish republican thought. Given the modernization and religious reformation programs in the early years of the republic, it may seem counterintuitive that the first monumental mosque built since the establishment of modern Turkey looked not to the future but to the Ottoman past. Through an analysis of the proposed mosques in the *Yeni Mimari* (New Architecture) style—a nationalist take on International Style modernism influenced by local construction, financial, and materials limitations—that did not gain traction in the 1920s and 1930s, I aim to show that such a mosque was simply incompatible with the staunch secularism that defined Kemalist urban life. This is exemplified by the development of the new capital, Ankara, and in religious reforms that sought to create a nationalized version of Sunni Islam. In the 1920s and 1930s, Turkish Islam had a nationalizing “Lutheran moment”: the recitation of the call to prayer in Arabic was banned, a Turkish translation of the Qur’an commissioned, and broader religious reforms called for the removal of “superstitions and innovations.”⁷ A state religious bureaucracy, *Diyanet İşleri Reisliği* (Directorate of Religious Affairs), centralized and moderated the practice of religion. However, no corresponding monument championed this vision of state-run Sunni Islam, leaving Ankara a capital without a new mosque and Istanbul a city of old Ottoman mosques. The government’s suppression of religious construction projects created an architectural

⁶ Egeli was not just an architect in the Şişli Mosque project, he was an important organizer who strongly believed in the mission of mosque construction. For an announcement of Egeli’s retirement, see “Vakıflar İstanbul Başmimarı Vasfi Egeli Emekliye Ayrıldı,” *Arkitekt* 199–200 (August 1948): 183.

⁷ Doğan Gürpınar, *Ottoman/Turkish Visions of the Nation, 1860–1950* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 73–75.

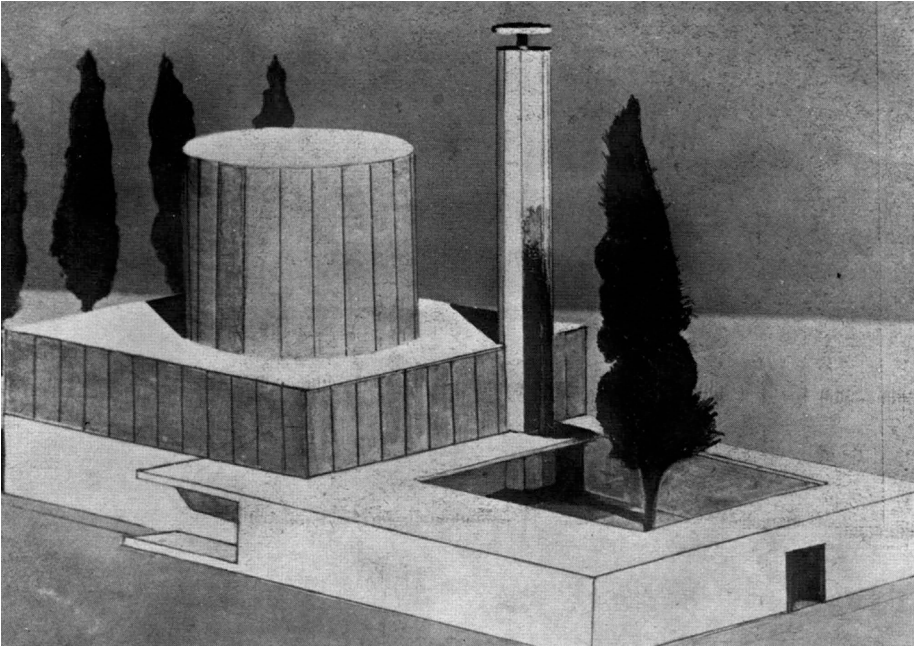


Figure 5: Mosque project, Burhan Arif Ongun, 1931 ("Cami Projesi," *Mimar* 10 [1931]).

vacuum that remained unaddressed until Vasfi Egeli and the Şişli Mosque Construction and Support Waqf designed, fundraised, and secured governmental permission for the republic's first monumental mosque.

Though numerous plans existed for modern mosques before and after the Şişli project, few were realized. In 1931, architect Burhan Arif Ongun (d. 1980) published one such design in *Arkitekt* (fig. 5).⁸ Having recently returned to Turkey after working in the atelier of the leading modernist Le Corbusier in Paris, his proposed mosque obscured references to the Ottoman past by introducing undecorated surfaces focusing on elegant geometric combinations.⁹ Breaking with Ottoman mosque building conventions, Arif surmounted the prayer hall with a cylindrical tower instead of a dome, reflecting the aversion of Turkish modernists to the overtly Ottoman connotations of domed mosques.¹⁰ Cantilevered porches, unabashed use of concrete, and an elegant minaret capped with a floating flat cover signaled a definitive departure from earlier National Style mosques by Kemalettin and Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi that aimed to reclaim and clarify a national Turkish tradition based on Ottoman motifs. The First National Style refers to "the prolific Ottoman revivalism that dominated building production from 1908 until [its] final demise around 1930," and was led by "Kemalettin Bey, Vedat Bey, and the Levantine Italian architect Giulio Mongeri."¹¹ In the republican era, several quaint national style mosques were constructed, including Mihrişah Sultan Mosque (1927) and Heybeliada Mosque (1933–1935). Each built on the site of an existing mosque or replaced a demolished structure; they are characterized by squat proportions, ogival windows, and hipped roofs, contrasting sharply with Yeni Mimari designs.

Modernist Sedad Hakkı Eldem had also proposed a prototype modernist mosque in 1929, like Ongun featuring a circle on square design, but with a dome in place of a cylinder. However, this was yet another attempt to create a Turkish mosque that ultimately was not realized.¹² The secularization policies of the state, lack of construction on behalf of the religious bureaucracy, and inability of modernist architects to secure public and governmental support for a

8 Burhan Arif Ongun, "Cami Projesi," *Mimar* 10 (1931): 329–330.

9 Sibel Bozdoğan and Esra Avcı, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 66.

10 Sibel Bozdoğan, "Reading Ottoman Architecture Through Modernist Lenses: Nationalist Historiography and the 'New Architecture' in the Early Republic," *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 217.

11 Sibel Bozdoğan, "Art and Architecture in Modern Turkey: The Republican Period," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey Volume 4: Turkey in the Modern World*, ed. Reşat Kasaba (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 423–424.

12 Sedad Hakkı Eldem, "Cami Perspektifi ve Cami Vaziyet Planı," drawing, 1929. SALT Research, Ceyda Eldem Koleksiyonu, AEXSHE0010552.

new mosque, ensured that no monumental religious structures were built during this period, by default transforming the Pious Foundations into the leading center for the rearticulation and preservation of mosque architecture in response to the changing religious and political scene. Although the Pious Foundations architects were comparatively more open to Ottoman revival, they were not immune to the nationalist historical theories of the early republic.

The neo-Ottomanism of Şişli that superseded a decade of unbuilt modernist mosque designs is better understood within the terms of the campaign to nationalize the legacy of Sinan that occurred in the late 1930s,¹³ its architects' and calligraphers' experience with restoring Ottoman mosques, and a desire to save traditional Ottoman craftsmanship. Although Egeli's mosque was a radical statement in the 1940s, it was rooted in earlier efforts that incrementally centralized classical Ottoman architecture in narratives of modern Turkish nationhood, epitomized by the classicizing mosque-preservation efforts of the Pious Foundations and the Turkish Historical Society's recasting of Sinan as a "national genius."

Vasfi Egeli followed a well-established tradition of restorer-architects designing Ottoman revival religious buildings. The relationship between preservation and neo-classical religious construction in the late Ottoman and early republican periods was not coincidental as preservation activities connected architects to craftsmen and contributed to a deep understanding of Ottoman architectural history. As industrialization, modernization, and political turmoil threatened traditional artisanal production and funding, restoration was a rare source of employment for Ottoman-trained calligraphers, stonemasons, and carpenters who were navigating changing systems of patronage. For architects, historic preservation promoted an uncommon familiarity with the Ottoman architectural tradition that inspired and informed—through motifs, patterns, and plans—the works of Léon Parvillée (d. 1885), Kemalettin Bey (d. 1927), Vedat Bey (d. 1942), Ali Saim Ülgen (d. 1963), and Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi (d. 1984).¹⁴ In the late Ottoman era, such restoration activities were commissioned by waqfs and government officials. Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, waqfs were nationalized in 1924 and the mandate for the maintenance of historic mosques was formally entrusted to a consolidated General Directorate of Pious Foundations in 1931.¹⁵ This confirmed the Pious Foundations as the preeminent center for discourses on mosque architecture. Articles by restorer-architects and scholars associated with the Pious Foundations in the first two editions of the voluminous *Vakıflar Dergisi* (*Pious Foundations Journal*) in 1938 and 1942 demonstrate careful study of waqf endowment deeds in the original Ottoman and a high degree of interest in mosque architecture.¹⁶

In addition to Egeli's experiential understanding of mosque design as a restoration specialist, his formal training as a student at the academy informed his understanding of Ottoman architecture. Egeli studied with Vedat Bey and designed a mosque model for his graduation project.¹⁷ After receiving a degree in 1913, he began working for Kemalettin at the Pious Foundations. A 1918 assignment to Palestine with Kemalettin and Nihad Nigisberk, by the Ottoman Evkaf İdaresi (Waqf Administration) testifies to Egeli's incubation in the National Style that provided a foundational understanding for his future works.¹⁸ Having witnessed Kemalettin's reuse of earlier Ottoman designs, in particular tiles and stonework, for nationalist architecture, Egeli saw

13 Gülrü Necipoğlu, "Creation of a National Genius: Sinan and the Historiography of 'Classical' Ottoman Architecture," *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 141–183.

14 For more on restorer-architects, see Erdem Yücel, "Mimar Kemalettin ve Mimar Vedat Beylerin Üslûbunu Sürdüren Restoratör Mimarlar," in *Birinci Millî Türkoloji Kongresi: 6–9 Şubat 1978, İstanbul: Tebliğler* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Türkiyat Enstitüsü, 1980).

15 "Seriye ve Evkaf ve Erkânı Harbiye Umumiye Vekâletlerinin İlmasına Dair Kanun," Pub. L. no. 429 (1923), https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmco02/kanuntbmmco02/kanuntbmmco0200429.pdf; Ahmet Onay, "Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Camilerin Finansmanı," *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 7, no. 18 (December 2009): 53. In conjunction with religious reforms, the nationalization of waqfs led to the expropriation and closure of the religious use of many important sites such as Sufi lodges and madrasas. See Kristin Fabbe, *Disciples of the State? Religion and State-Building in the the Former Ottoman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 119–120. Public outrage was expressed in newspapers with allegations of historic mosques being used for stables; see "Bu Ne İnfasızlık: Seferihisarda Tarihi Bir Cami Ahır Yapılmış!," *Cumhuriyet*, April 20, 1936; "Cami Ahır Olur Mu Hiç?," *Cumhuriyet*, May 23, 1948.

16 *Vakıflar Dergisi* 1 (1938): 395; *Vakıflar Dergisi* 2 (1942): 793.

17 The mosque model is mentioned in a newspaper article by İsmail Habib Sevük. I was not able to locate photographs or drawings of the model. Sevük, "Klâsikliği Asrileştiren Yepyeni Âbide."

18 See Ali Cengizkan, "Mehmet Nihat Nigisberk'in Katkıları: Evkaf İdaresi ve Mimar Kemalettin," in *Mimar Kemalettin ve Çağı: Mimarlık, Toplumsal Yaşam ve Politika*, ed. Ali Cengizkan (İstanbul: TMMOB Mimarlar Odası; Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, 2009), 182; Ahmed Ağın, *Şişli İlçesi: Anıtlarımız* (İstanbul: İstanbul Halk Basımevi, 1965), 38.

46 no conflict between modern Turkish identity and Ottoman techniques. For example, major commissions in the new capital of Ankara, such as Vedat Tek's and Kemalettin's Ankara Palace Hotel (1924–1928) and Giulio Mongeri's Agricultural Bank (1926–1929), prominently featured Ottoman motifs while expressing nationalist sentiments.¹⁹ As a result of this appropriation, Kemalettin “was instrumental to imbuing Ottoman religious monuments with national significance beyond their obvious religious connotations.”²⁰ Egeli's revivalism however, embraced a religiously inflected Turkish national identity fundamentally connected to Islamic practice and had no qualms defining Turkish architecture via reclamation of Ottoman imperial mosques. Yet, contemporary critics and Egeli's self-definition recognized a distinct break from the First National Style in the Şişli Mosque. This can be seen in fellow restorer-architect Kemal Altan's description of the relationship between the National Style and Egeli's Şişli Mosque in 1948:

During the Second Constitutional Period, the Pious Foundations' architects, the late [Ali] Talat with Kemalettin and the late architect Vedat [Tek], engaged in a great effort to revive Turkish architecture. Many long years after the First World War and the Second World War, the first classical monumental work will be the Şişli Mosque, presently being built.²¹

While emphasizing continuity in the quest to revive Turkish architecture, understandably placing Kemalettin and Egeli within the same tradition of Pious Foundations restorer-architects, Altan distinguishes Egeli's mosque from earlier historicisms by defining it as “classical” and “monumental.” An additional incentive for establishing distance from Kemalettin was that by 1931, First National Style aesthetics had fallen out of favor and were replaced by the New Architecture.²² Although Egeli was not a modernist, he defined himself as an architect of the “Modern School of Turkish Architecture” and the Şişli Mosque design received public support from prominent modernist, and close associate of Mustafa Kemal, Seyfi Arkan (d. 1966) who described it as “beautiful and harmoniously proportioned.”²³ While Arkan's support is not to be mistaken for a general endorsement by modernist architects, it exposes the inherent limitations in a modernist versus historicist paradigm.

Considering its construction in 1945, the immediate architectural context of the Şişli Mosque was, what has been since been deemed, the Second National Style. To counter the International Style modernism of the Yeni Mimari, Sedat Hakkı Eldem proposed a Yerli Mimari (local architecture) in an eponymous 1940 article.²⁴ Eldem lamented that a “local architectural style has not yet come into existence,” and called for architectural autarky, praising the fascist architecture of Germany and Italy.²⁵ While Egeli's rhetoric displays similarities with Eldem, particularly concerning the negative impact of European architects on the Ottoman tradition, nationalism, and a desire for localized architecture, it would be misguided to conflate Şişli Mosque with the politics and aesthetics of the Second National Style.²⁶ Whereas Eldem and others looked to the ancient Anatolian past and Ottoman vernacular house for inspiration, Egeli's architecture was defined by Ottoman mosques.²⁷ The swift rejection of József Vágó's proposal for the Turkish Grand National Assembly competition in 1937—the only proposal featuring an Ottoman-inspired dome and minarets—exemplifies that the politics of the

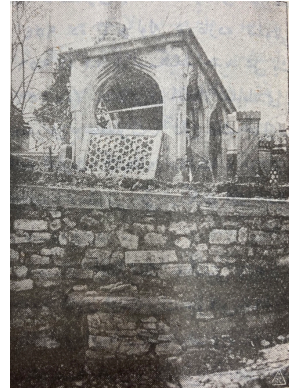


Figure 6: Sinan's Tomb before restoration, Istanbul, 1927 (“Mimar Sinan Türbesi,” *Millî Mecmua* 5, no. 83 [April 1, 1927]).

19 Metin Sözen, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Mimarlığı 1923–1983* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1984), 35–36; 39.

20 Nur Altınyıldız, “The Architectural Heritage of Istanbul and the Ideology of Preservation,” *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 287. 21 Kemal Altan, “Şişli Camii,” *Mimarlık* 5, no. 1 (1948): 9–11. For more information on Ali Talat Bey (1869–1922), see Aras Nefçi, “Ali Talat Bey - 1,” *Restorasyon*, no. 6 (2013): 152–154 and Nefçi, “Ali Talat Bey - 2,” *Restorasyon*, no. 11 (2015): 80–86.

22 Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture In the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 47–48.

23 Vasfi Egeli, *Explanatory Report of the Mausoleum and the Mosque to Be Erected in the Commemoration of the Saviour of Pakistan Quaid-i-Azam: Mohamammad Ali Jinnah* (Istanbul: Becid Basımevi, 1953), 9:27. For Arkan's articles, see Seyfi Arkan, “Şişlide Yapılan Cami Güzel Bir Eser Oluyor,” *Cumhuriyet*, November 4, 1946; Arkan, “Şişli Camii Süratle Yapılıyor: Vatandaşlar, Camiin Tamamlanması İçin Büyük Yardımlarda Bulunuyor,” *Cumhuriyet*, November 10, 1947.

24 Üstün Alsaç, “The Second Period of National Architecture,” in *Modern Turkish Architecture*, ed. Renata Holod and Ahmet Evin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 94–104. Here, Alsaç places Egeli in a list of Second National Style architects.

25 Sedat Hakkı Eldem, “Yerli Mimariye Doğru,” *Arkitekt* 111–112 (1940): 69.

26 *Ibid.*, 72.

27 Üstün Alsaç, “Türkiye'deki Mimarlık Düşüncesinin Cumhuriyet Dönemindeki Evrimi” (PhD diss., Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi, 1975), 36.

Figure 7: Egeli with workers after the restoration of Sinan's Tomb, c. 1934. Pious Foundations Monuments and Structural Works Archive.



Second National Style were incompatible with Ottoman imperial aesthetics.²⁸

As Egeli did not opine in architecture journals or produce competition entries before the Şişli Mosque project, close analysis of his restoration activities is essential to understand his individual approach and engagement with broader historical ideologies. Egeli's high-profile restoration of Sinan's Tomb in 1933–1934 demonstrates the articulation of a historicist vision before the Şişli Mosque and the influence of the Turkish Historical Society's campaign to cast Sinan as a “national genius.” At the time of Egeli's intervention and for decades before, Sinan's Tomb was in a nearly destroyed condition. In 1932, the state allocated 7,700 liras for its repair and the demolition of a nearby building (fig. 6).²⁹ Conceptually, restoration required attention to historical sensibilities and creativity in deciding how to resurrect a dilapidated space in accordance with an imagined original style. Egeli's restoration of Sinan's Tomb reveals a fluid understanding of classical Ottoman architecture, aesthetically linked to the past but not completely bound by its conventions.

In the precarious condition Egeli found the tomb, the architect Sinan's grave lay under a small arched structure with an exposed stone wall below it, protruding into a street intersection. According to Konyalı, “Sinan's tomb, courtyard, and fountain ... were repaired under the skilled architect Vasfi Egeli's constant control and supervision in a thorough manner.”³⁰ The restoration was “thorough” indeed; Egeli utilized the opportunity to accentuate the site's monumentality and rationality. While the “lower part of the original walls was made of rough and uncut stone,” Egeli covered them in white marble.³¹ Where the old carved marble screens

28 Sibel Bozdoğan, “Reading Ottoman Architecture through Modernist Lenses: Nationalist Historiography and the ‘New Architecture’ in the Early Republic,” *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 217–218; Esra Akcan, “Translation Theory and the Intertwined Histories of Building for Self-Governance,” in *Terms of Appropriation: Modern Architecture and Global Exchange*, ed. Amanda Reeser Lawrence and Ana Miljački (New York: Routledge, 2018), 116–138.

29 Sümeyra Öztürk, “Mimar Vasfi Egeli: Hayatı ve Çalışmaları” (PhD diss., Marmara Üniversitesi, 2015); “Mimar Sinan Türbesi,” *Milli Mecmua* 5, no. 83 (April 1, 1927): 134; Ebru Karakaya, “Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi'nin Yeri ve Restorasyon Alanına Katkıları (1883–1960)” (PhD diss., Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 2006): 95–96; “Vakıflar İstanbul Başmimarı Vasfi Egeli Emekliye Ayrıldı,” *Arkitekt* 199–200 (August 1948): 183; “Mimar Sinan Türbesi'nin Tamir Ettirilmesi,” *Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri, Cumhuriyet Arşivi* (BCA), 30-18-1-2 / 31-62-9 (September 18, 1932).

30 İbrahim Hakkı Konyalı, *Mimar Koca Sinan* (İstanbul: Nihat Topçubaşı, 1948), 123. The “fountain” or water dispenser was indeed not part of Sinan's Tomb but constructed by a separate waqf in a clever orchestration by Sinan, see Gülrü Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*, 2nd ed (London: Reaktion, 2011): 151.

31 Konyalı, *Mimar Koca Sinan*, 119.

48 were composed of various geometric designs, Egeli standardized and increased their number.³² In comparison to its previous derelict state, the restoration echoed the clean lines and uniformity prized by Yeni Mimari architects (fig. 7). Although Egeli's restoration was likely informed by reading Sinan's waqf documents in the original Ottoman, his interventions should not be considered exclusively as a way to return the site to its former glory. The complex politics surrounding Sinan and his reinvention as a "national genius" imbued new meaning into the small details of Egeli's intervention. The renewal of Sinan's tomb transformed it into a secular shrine exemplifying the architectural and nationalist policies of the new state.

Accordingly, Sinan's newly restored tomb served as the symbol of the effort to Turkify his works inaugurated in 1935 by the Turkish Historical Society. It featured as the sole image on the cover of a French-Turkish pamphlet about the life of Sinan published by the society in 1937 (fig. 8).³³ Focusing on the architect's tomb was not merely symbolic of his architectural achievements—understood as a precursor to modernism due to their "principled rationality"—it emphasized the physical presence of his skull, excavated in 1935 and measured by the society after the tomb's restoration.³⁴ Through phrenological analysis of Sinan's skull, the Turkish Historical Society attempted to scientifically prove his Turkishness and negate historical evidence that Sinan was a Christian *devşirme* (child levy), and therefore most likely of Greek or Armenian origin.³⁵ Though such pseudo-scientific pursuits were not limited to Turkey, the underlying racial science was integral to the Kemalist narrative of history, and a particular interest of Mustafa Kemal's adopted daughter, Afet İnan. In fact, she wrote her dissertation on the topic (measuring 64,000 bodies) and later authored a book applying these theories to Sinan in 1968, testifying to the long-lasting Kemalist investment in the narrative of Sinan as a "national genius."³⁶ The Turkish Historical Society's use of Sinan's tomb as a definitive architectural image recast his legacy, emphasizing individuality, conveniently avoiding overt religious and imperial references, and embodying the government's racial and architectural policies.

Dialogue with Ottoman Architectural Tradition

The construction of Şişli Mosque brought newfound attention to Egeli and empowered him to claim a central role in the revival of Turkish architecture. In a journal article published several years after the mosque's official opening in 1953, Egeli presents himself as the progenitor of a new Ottomanism:

For some reason after the construction of Yeni Mosque (Valde Sultanlar [sic.] Mosque)³⁷ in Eminönü in year 1074 of the hijra (1637–1638), classical Turkish architecture was abandoned. In the span of some 300 years since, both in Istanbul and in the provinces, a good deal of mosques have been built, but none can be considered a successful example of the Turkish classical tradition.³⁸

By asserting that, "in the span of some 300 years [not a single mosque] can be considered

32 Ibid., 121; Erdem Yücel, "Mimar Sinan'ın Türbesi," *Arkitekt* 352 (1973): 189–190.

33 Fuad Köprülü and Albert Gabriel, *Sinan: Hayatı, Eseri* (Istanbul: İstanbul Devlet Basımevi, 1937).

34 Selçuk Mülayim, "Mimar Sinan'ın Mezarında Teşhis-i Meyyit," *BELLETTEN* 82, no. 294 (2018): 511–529; 513–514. Sinan was valued for "principled rationality" by the authors of the *Uşul* and European architectural historians such as Cornelius Gurlitt, who praised Sinan's "conception of space." in the *Die Baukunst Konstantinopels* (1907). These ideas were continued by theorists such as Celal Esad Arseven who understood Sinan as a proto-modernist and nationalist, see Gülrü Necipoğlu, "Creation of a National Genius: Sinan and the Historiography of 'Classical' Ottoman Architecture," *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 182.

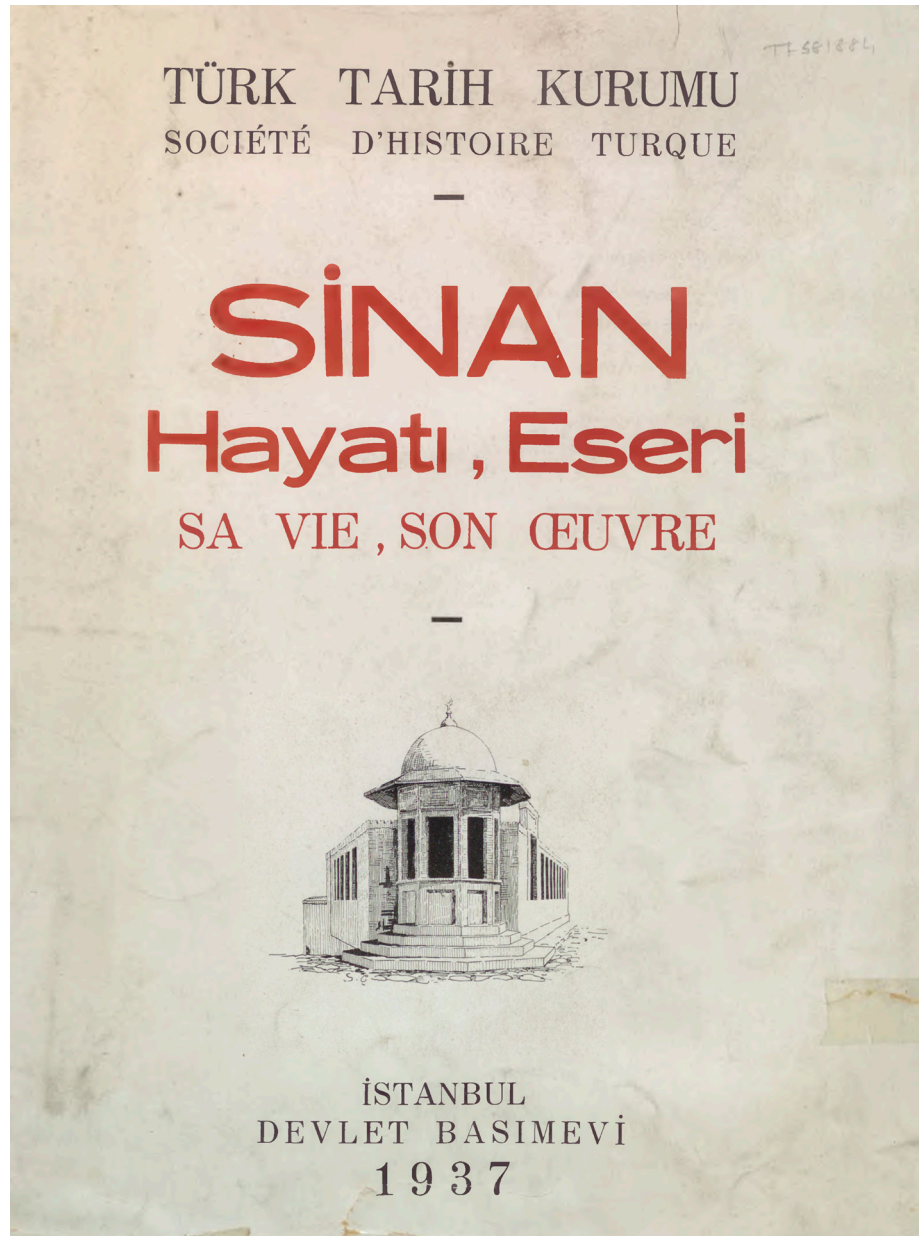
35 Necipoğlu, "Creation of a National Genius," 141–183; 167. Sinan's skull was not found during this excavation according to Konyalı, *Mimar Koca Sinan*, 125. The practice of excavating skulls for racial science, additionally enabling the production of "authentic" statues of politically expedient historic figures, was not limited to Turkey alone. The Soviet Union employed scientist Mikhail Gerasimov (d. 1970) to excavate the grave of Timur and erect a statue promoting him as a national hero in their Central Asian satellites. Charles Shaw, "The Gur-i Amir Mausoleum and the Soviet Politics of Preservation," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 8, no. 1 (2011): 54–57. For the section of Gerasimov's autobiography on the Timurids, see Mikhail Gerasimov, *The Face Finder*, trans. Alan Houghton Brodrick (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1971): 129–191.

36 Afet İnan, *L'Anatolie, le pays de la "race" Turque: Recherches sur les caractères anthropologiques des populations de la Turquie (enquête sur 64.000 individus)* (Geneva: Librairie de l'Université de Genève, 1941), and İnan, *Mimar Koca Sinan* (Ankara: Türkiye Emlâk Kredisine Neşriyatı, 1968).

37 Today known as Yeni Camii (New Mosque) or Valide Sultan Camii (Valide Sultan Mosque).

38 Vasfi Egeli, "Şişli Mosque Şerifi," *İstanbul Enstitüsü Dergisi* 2 (1956): 19.

Figure 8: Cover of the Turkish Historical Society's book on Sinan with image of his newly restored tomb (Köprülü, and Gabriel, *Sinan: Hayatı, Eseri*, 1937).



a successful example of the Turkish classical tradition,” Egeli reinforced a key nationalist argument about the architectural past. In the tradition of the 1873 *Usûl-i Mi'mârî-i Osmânî*, early republican architectural historians such as Celâl Esad Arseven (d. 1971) and Abdullah Ziya Kozanoğlu (d. 1966) lamented the “corruption” of a supposed Turkish architectural purity due to Westernization at the hands of Armenian and Greek families who were prominently involved in imperial architecture projects after the seventeenth-century.³⁹ By harking back to a period that benefitted from a centralized architectural corps, historians conveniently managed to scapegoat minorities and eliminate an immediate connection between the Turkish state and the Ottoman Empire. This essentializing view is summarized by Albert Gabriel (d. 1972), who links the corruption thesis of Ottoman architecture to the decline thesis of Ottoman history:

39 Aptullah Ziya, “Sanatta Nasyonalizm,” in *Tereddüd ve Tekerrür: Mimarlık ve Kent Üzerine Metinler: 1873–1960*, ed. Bülent Tanju (Istanbul: Akın Nalça, 2007), 204–209.

In the eighteenth century, the introduction of foreign methods combined more or less skillfully with Turkish methods deeply modified that character of [Ottoman] buildings... What had been constructed in the nineteenth century was hybrid, often strange, like the empire itself that was in decline.⁴⁰

Widespread acceptance of the corruption thesis of Ottoman architecture belied disagreement on when the degeneration began, a polemic echoed in discourses about Şişli Mosque. Egeli placed the beginning of the decline after the completion of the Yeni Valide Mosque in 1665. While Mehmet Kideys placed the start of deterioration in 1703 (perhaps correlated with the Janissary Revolt) in his essay about the mosque in a British Muslim publication, *The Islamic Review*, where he posited that “Turkish architectural design in mosque building has been revived after 246 years by the architect Vasfi Egeli who is an acknowledged authority in this field.”⁴¹ The aforementioned modernist architect Seyfi Arkan assigned the slightly later date of 1747, arguing Şişli Mosque was the first “classical and successful” mosque built in Turkey in “200 years.”⁴²

Discussion of Şişli Mosque’s style and specific architectural inspiration reflected a parallel uncertainty. Despite broad consensus on classical inspiration, writers likened it to mosques constructed between 1497 and 1700. One of the first newspaper articles announcing the construction of Şişli Mosque in March 1944, specified that it “will be constructed on the model of the Şemsi Pasha Mosque in Üsküdar.”⁴³ In 1946, Seyfi Arkan described Şişli Mosque as “in the type of Sultan Bayezid Mosque,” according to the “plan, size, and effectiveness of the prayer hall.”⁴⁴ The first article on the mosque to appear in the prominent architecture journal, *Arkitekt*, and presumably written by Egeli in third person, describes it only as a “classical type.”⁴⁵ This contrasts with Islamic journals, which almost always labeled the mosque as an example of “Turkish and Islamic” architecture.⁴⁶ The center-left newspaper *Cumhuriyet* later deemed it as “prepared according to our sixteenth-century architectural style.”⁴⁷ In 1948, architect Kemal Altan wrote that Şişli Mosque “resembles the essence of the Atik Ali Pasha Mosque.”⁴⁸ The restoration specialist and architectural historian (and later the director of the Hagia Sophia Museum) Erdem Yücel pronounced it in 1967 as “entirely in the Turkish style of the seventeenth century.”⁴⁹ The three mosques expressly referenced in these accounts were built over an almost century-long timespan: Atik Ali Pasha Mosque in 1497, Bayezid Mosque slightly later from 1501–1506, and Şemsi Pasha Mosque in 1580. These competing answers demonstrate the convoluted reception of Şişli Mosque’s eclectic architecture and reveal that Egeli’s design decisions were not always readily comprehensible under a singular stylistic framework to discerning supporters who publicly endorsed the project.

The lack of consensus on the mosque’s precise stylistic origins by contemporary reviewers is understandable as Egeli assembled a complex decorative program that belied the unassuming exterior. Beyond the well-noted fact that Şişli Mosque’s plan resembles a classical Ottoman mosque, its constant mimetic dialogue with the Ottoman aesthetic tradition has been overlooked in scholarship. However, Egeli was adamant about the centrality of mimicry in the mosque’s design and its symbolic value in the renewal of Turkish architecture. In a 1947 interview, Egeli declared, “in the interior decoration, we intend to have various Turkish and Islamic motifs, not just from one or two of our mosques, but separately from all of them.”⁵⁰ This interior collage of Ottoman sources is a technique borrowed from Kemalettin, who extensively cited Ottoman designs in his buildings. Yet, Egeli clarifies that his use of mimicry is a tool of resurrection rather than revival: “We do not intend to make any innovation in the mosque’s style or decoration. Everything you will see here will consist of renewed examples of various historical works. We insist on staying local, loyal to our native motifs.”⁵¹ Whereas Kemalettin

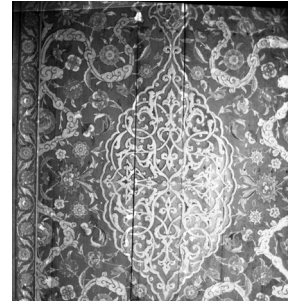


Figure 9: Kara Ahmed Pasha Mosque, Istanbul, 1572. Detail of the porch ceiling decoration Pious Foundations Monuments and Structural Works Archive.

40 Albert Gabriel, *La Turquie: Terre d'histoire et d'art* (Istanbul: Doğan Kardeş Yayınları, 1954), 86–87.

41 Mehmet Kideys, “A New Mosque at Şişli, Istanbul, Turkey,” *The Islamic Review* (April 1949): 32.

42 Seyfi Arkan, “Şişli Camii Süratle Yapılıyor.”

43 “Şişli’de Yapılacak Camii,” *Cumhuriyet*, March 14, 1944.

44 Arkan, “Şişli’de Yapılan Camii.”

45 “Şişli Camisinin İnşası İlerliyor,” *Arkitekt* 179–180 (December 1946): 268–270.

46 H. İ., “Şişli Camii,” *İslâm Dünyası* 1, no. 19 (August 8, 1947): 4–5.

47 “Şişli Camii Tamamlanıyor,” *Cumhuriyet*, March 14, 1949.

48 Altan, “Şişli Camii,” 10.

49 Erdem Yücel, “Vasfi Egeli,” in *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Koçu Yayınları, 1968), 9:4955–4956.

50 Salâhaddin, “Şişli Camii Şerifi,” 4–5; 11.

51 Quoted in *ibid.*, 5.

Figure 10: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, 1945–1949, detail of the porch ceiling. Photograph: Gavin Moulton, 2019.



intentionally created a new style of architecture in accordance with a shifting national identity, Egeli's goal was to selectively reclaim and manipulate an existing historic style. His citations place Şişli Mosque in a liminal space between restoration and new construction, bestowing the mosque with a historic feel despite its reinforced concrete dome and interior anachronisms.

Citations from Ottoman mosques were controversial at the time of Şişli Mosque's formal opening in 1953.⁵² A journal article celebrating the mosque's construction (again likely written by Egeli in third person) defended against claims that Egeli "benefitted from the Pious Foundations' archives and copied some designs."⁵³ In turn, Egeli argued that to create a sense of place in a classical building, inspiration from both archives and extant structures is necessary, retorting that his overall success in the mosque construction was the more important matter. Despite Egeli's attempts to downplay claims of archival plagiarism and criticism of leveraging his privileged position at the Pious Foundations to benefit the mosque's design, it is certain that both were fundamental, as motifs directly copied from Ottoman sources are present in every part of the mosque. What was not fully appreciated in newspapers, however, was the extent of Egeli's mimicry and the diversity of his inspirations. My consultation of the Pious Foundations Monuments and Structural Works archive and close analysis of the mosque reveal that Egeli indeed cited most frequently from Sinan's classical-period mosques, but also referenced his own previous restorations, *Usûl-i Mi'mârî-i Osmânî*, and early Ottoman dynastic monuments.

Kara Ahmed Pasha Mosque (1572)

The best example of Egeli's archival "plagiarism" is the *mahfil tezyinatı* (porch ceiling decoration). The design is wholly replicated from Sinan's Kara Ahmed Pasha Mosque in Topkapı and slightly modified to fit the space (fig. 9–10). Mirroring the original, there are two identical

⁵² The mosque opened in 1953 to coincide with the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul, the first time the occasion was celebrated in the republican era. Vasfi Egeli was also a member of the anniversary planning committee. See "500üncü Fetih Yılı İçin Hazırlıklar," *Cumhuriyet*, February 14, 1950.

⁵³ Vasfi Egeli, "Şişli Camii," *Arkitekt* 263–266 (1953): 177. Sedat Çetintaş further alleged that the mosque's design was taken from restorer-architect Ali Talat Bey. See Sedat Çetintaş, "Şişli Camii'nin Mimarı Kim?," *Son Saat Gazetesi*, September 13, 1953.

porch ceilings, though at Şişli they are oriented towards the qibla. In spite of minor variances, such as the background color, curvaceousness of the *hitâyi* (chinoiserie motifs of Cathay) cloud motifs, and type and placement of flowers, it would have been immediately recognized as a copy to those familiar with the Kara Ahmed Pasha Mosque.

Although Egeli himself did not oversee the Kara Ahmed Mosque's restoration in the 1930s, he may have been involved. It is likely that other historically cognizant figures collaborating at Şişli, such as the head of Pious Foundations, Fahri Kiper, would have been aware of the citation's origin—leading to my speculation of a potential relationship between the citations and specific donor's preferences.⁵⁴ In any case, photographs of the Kara Ahmed Pasha Mosque's restoration, including the porch ceiling decoration, were available to Egeli in the Pious Foundations archives and it appears that he referenced them and others attentively.

Sinan's Tomb (ca. 1587)

The influence of Egeli's restorations is demonstrated in his repeated use of the tripartite dodecagonal motif throughout the entire mosque and outer buildings. This seems to have been first used by Egeli in his reconstruction of the walls of Sinan's tomb when he increased the number of carved marble screens, all featuring the design. At Şişli Mosque, the tripartite dodecagonal motif is present in the *şadırvan* (ablutions fountain), porch railings, marble inlay on the windowsill pavements, and minaret balconies. Although this motif is common in Sinan's architecture, it is notably employed in a similar manner in the aforementioned Kara Ahmed Mosque porch railing. Egeli continued to use this motif throughout the rest of his career, previously employing it during restoration of the Süleymaniye Mosque and later in his restoration of a cemetery near the Eyüp Sultan Mosque in the late 1950s.

Selimiye Mosque (1568–1575)

In a rare public recognition of a particular detail's inspiration, one journalist branded Şişli Mosque's *şadırvan* the "little brother" of the one at Sinan's Selimiye Mosque in Edirne (fig. 11–12).⁵⁵ The fountain's design is attributed to Nazimî Yaver Yenal (d. 1987) who considered it one of his masterpieces and placed an image of it on his desk.⁵⁶ In comparison to Selimiye and other classical era Ottoman examples, Yenal's *şadırvan* is extremely elaborate and colorful. Baha Tanman attributes this ostentation to Yenal's training in the Beaux-Arts style with architects such as Giulio Mongeri at the Istanbul Fine Arts Academy, where he later became a teacher.⁵⁷ Though Yenal designed hundreds of buildings on paper, the *şadırvan* is one of his few realized projects.

Just as at Selimiye, the *şadırvan* is dodecagonal. Each of the twelve sides has a central spout surrounded by a marble panel with an inset ogival arch. Whereas Selimiye's *şadırvan* is exclusively composed of white marble and sober geometric decorations, Şişli's is a polychromatic explosion embellished with variegated pavement in the shape of a twelve-pointed star. Between each panel, a slab of purple stone progresses outward to a diamond-shaped green stone piece, culminating in points of pink stone. These colors are echoed within the panels; the area above each arch is inlaid with alternating green and pink stone. Twelve small stools with wooden seats also made Şişli's fountain more comfortable for use in ablutions, especially during winter due to the cold temperature of marble.

The extravagant decorative program left no surface untouched. As opposed to a uniform decorative ribbon circling the structure, there is a trefoil above each screen, the backs of which are covered in calligraphic medallions. In the center of the fountain, a mini-version

54 For the Kara Ahmed Pasha Mosque's place in republican historiography, see Serra Akboy-İlk, "Building the Architectural Narrative of the Topkapı Kara Ahmed Pasha Mosque Complex in Early Republican Turkey," *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies* 2 (2020): 81–102.

55 Sevük, "Klâsikliği Asrileştiren Yepyeni Âbide."

56 Baha Tanman, *Şişli Camii*, 22.

57 Ibid, 22. See also Büke Uras and M. Baha Tanman, eds., *Nazimî Yaver Yenal: Bir Kağıt Mimarının Hayali Dünyası* (Istanbul: İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2017), 12–13; 41–42.

Figure 11: Selimiye Mosque, Edirne, 1569–1575, ablutions fountain. Pious Foundations Structural Works and Monuments Archive, ca. 1930.



Figure 12: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, 1945–1949, ablutions fountain. Photograph: Gavin Moulton, 2019.



of the entire *şadirvan* features the same trefoil design atop a dodecagonal structure, each side featuring a mini-spout. This miniaturized version is crowned by a dome composed of tulips, vaguely recalling the Dome of the Rock, and can be viewed as a potential reference to the location of the first qibla at that site.⁵⁸

Bayezid Mosque (1501–1505)

Decorative stone bands on the minaret are derived from the Bayezid Mosque. The minaret decorations on the Bayezid Mosque were described by architectural historian Semavi Eyice as “important and almost without parallel,” which is perhaps why Egeli was attracted to them as well.⁵⁹ The terracotta-color stone inset in the Bayezid Mosque minarets are repeated with the exclusion of the elaborate lower pattern and white stone circles of the palmettes. According to newspaper accounts, there were plans for a second minaret had sufficient funds been raised.⁶⁰

Yeni Mosque Sultan Pavilion (Hünkâr Kasrı)

In 1949, the Sultan’s Pavilion at the seventeenth-century Yeni Mosque Complex in Eminönü was restored by Egeli and his colleague Süreyya Yücel.⁶¹ Egeli repeatedly extolled the Yeni Mosque, and it is likely that the Sultan’s Pavilion forms the basis for the outbuilding at Şişli. Curiously, early plans appear to be derived from the outer galleries at the Süleymaniye complex.⁶² However, as the outbuilding was the final addition to Şişli Mosque, Egeli had several years to make alterations. This may have occurred during the Yeni Mosque restoration project, which the library, with its alternating stone and brick bands and lower level covered in marble, more closely resembles.

Laleli Mosque (1760–1764)

Deviating from interior references to Sinan, and even from the sixteenth-century architecture that he claimed to reproduce, the designs on the central and three-side domes came from the baroque Laleli Mosque, a similarity noted by Ahmed Ağın in his very thorough guidebook to the monuments of Şişli.⁶³ Yet, the design on the dome is neither baroque nor original to the Laleli Mosque. Like many other Istanbul mosque domes, it was redecorated in a classicizing style by the Pious Foundations during architectural historian and restoration specialist Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi’s 1937 restoration.⁶⁴ As head of architectural works at the Pious Foundations, Egeli would have known of the project and likely visited it. Yet, there are distinct differences between the classicizing design at Laleli and Egeli’s reinterpretation of it at Şişli. The design outside of the central calligraphic medallion is significantly larger than the original and is elongated into a sunburst shape that dominates the dome. Three decorative bands between the calligraphy and exterior sunburst are also not present at Laleli. The powder blue, gold-enrod, crimson, and white color scheme mirrors Laleli, although discrepancy in the size of the interior dome decoration and embellishment of the side domes with lunette calligraphies and a unifying cobalt blue background mark Şişli as distinct.

Usûl-i Mi‘mârî-i Osmânî (1873)

Beyond Egeli’s archival photographic research and firsthand knowledge of Ottoman architectural history, a textual source, the *Usûl-i Mi‘mârî-i Osmânî* (henceforth referred to as the

⁵⁸ A straight line can be drawn from the fountain to the mihrab. It is clear that the location of the fountain is intentional as photographs show a wooden mockup that was created before the construction of the stone version.

⁵⁹ Semavi Eyice, “Beyazıt II Camii ve Külliyesi,” in *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1992), 6:48.

⁶⁰ Arkan, “Şişlide Yapılan Cami.”

⁶¹ Erdem Yücel, “Yeni Camii Hünkâr Kasrı,” *Arkitekt* 320 (1965): 115.

⁶² For Egeli’s presumed original drawings of the building see, “Şişli Camii Vaziyet Planı,” Atatürk Library (AK), Hrt_012932 (ca. 1945).

⁶³ Ağın, *Şişli İlçesi*, 40. He also harshly criticizes Egeli for never finishing projects.

⁶⁴ The restoration of the Laleli Mosque was approved in July 1936 and 15,660.35 TL was allocated for the project. “İstanbul’da 6 Camiin Tamirinin Emaneten Yaptırılması,” *BCA*, (July 16, 1936), 30-18-1-2 / 67-61-6; Ağâh Oktay Güner, “Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi’nin Ardından: Hayâtı, Şahsiyeti, Fikirleri,” *Kübbealtı Mecmuası* 13, no. 3 (July 1984), <http://openaccess.marmara.edu.tr/bitstream/handle/11424/176078/001521285006.pdf?sequence=3>. This date is also confirmed in a photograph album, see “Evkaf Heyet-i Fenniyesi,” 1938-1945. Album 17. Koç Üniversitesi Mehmed Nihad Nigizberk Mimari Fotoğraflar ve Çizimler Koleksiyonu. Many thanks to Dr. Dila Gümüş for this information.

Figure 13: Yeşil Mosque in *Usûl* (*Usûl-i mi'mârî-i Osmânî*, 1873, plate XXXVIII, fig. 2).

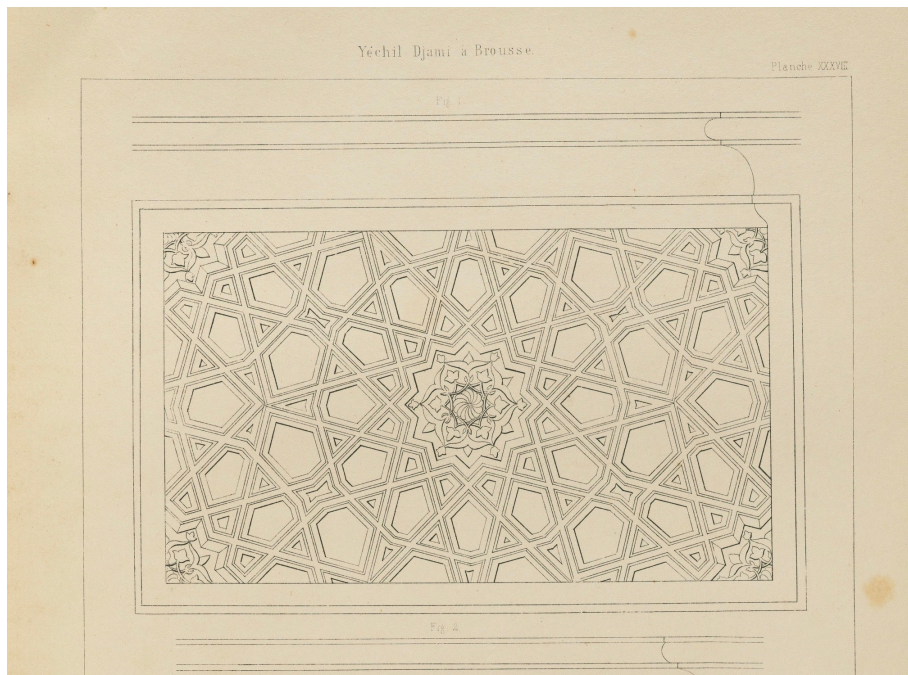


Figure 14: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, 1945–1949, detail of dome decoration.
Photograph: Gavin Moulton, 2019.



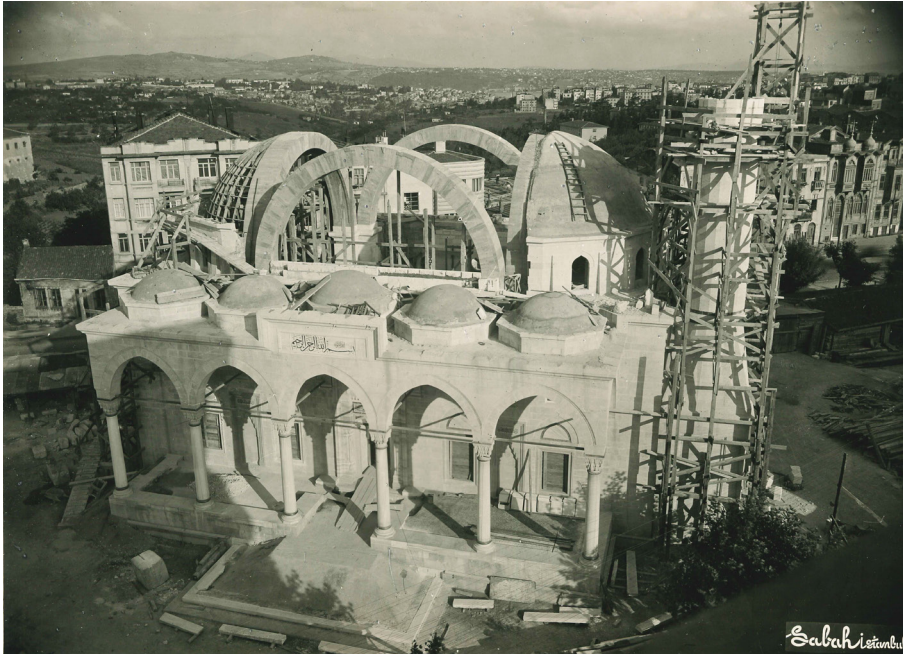


Figure 15: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, 1945–1949, construction of reinforced concrete dome. SVIKV, IAE, FKA 6369.

Usûl), was clearly consulted. The *Usûl*, published in 1873, was the first major work produced on Ottoman architecture and functioned as a textbook and manifesto. It collected designs from Ottoman mosques around the country, heavily emphasizing the early dynastic Yeşil Mosque and Tomb in Bursa and Sinan's classical era mosques. Late Ottoman architecture, such as the Pertevniyal Valide Mosque and Cirağan Palace, was praised and deemed as a manifestation of "Ottoman renaissance."⁶⁵ Ahmet Ersoy has argued that the Ottoman renaissance style created an imperial identity for the multi-ethnic state based upon a shared dynastic identity, making Egeli's subtle citation of designs from the *Usûl* an ambiguous feature of the Şişli Mosque. Though Egeli dismissed the late Ottoman architecture associated with the *Usûl*, its reference may hark back to an encounter at the academy where it had previously been employed as a textbook.⁶⁶

It is clear that several designs from the *Usûl* are present at Şişli Mosque. The numerous patterns contained within the *Usûl* make it difficult to ascertain whether Egeli and Yenal referenced it specifically, or independently cited a detail from an Ottoman source illustrated in the text. In any case, the center of the dome is undoubtedly a three-dimensional version of a Yeşil Mosque pattern contained in the *Usûl* (figs. 13-14).⁶⁷ The design is infilled with gold and encased with two interlocking Y-chains, also sourced from the *Usûl*.⁶⁸ Painted decoration on the minbar ceiling, with its central interlocking lines, closely resembles an *Usûl* pattern.⁶⁹ Cumulatively, citations from the *Usûl* seem to be most correlated with the decorative contributions of Nazimî Yaver Yenal. He is known to have collaborated on the mosque's interior design, but his specific role is uncertain.

Although Egeli claimed that they did "not intend to make any innovation in the mosque's style or decoration," there are noticeable incongruities between the decorative program at Şişli and that of the sixteenth-century Ottoman architecture.⁷⁰ Egeli's vision of the mosque

65 Ersoy, *Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary*, 5–7.

66 Necipoğlu, "Creation of a National Genius," 161.

67 Marie de Launay, Montani Pietro et al., *L'architecture ottomane / Usûl-i Mi'mârî-i Osmânî / Ottomanische Baukunst*, (Constantinople: Imprimerie et lithographie centrales, 1873). Planche XXXVIII, fig. 2. This design is also repeated by Egeli for the Levent Mosque dome.

68 *Ibid.*, 186, pl. IV, fig. 3. This design is also featured around the dome calligraphy by Halim at the Sultan Ahmed Mosque entrance portico.

69 *Ibid.*, pl. XXV, fig. 2.

70 Salâhaddin, "Şişli Camii Şerifi," 21.

Figure 16: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, 1945–1949, view of Turkish triangles. Photograph: Gavin Moulton, 2019.



as “consist[ing] of renewed examples of various historical works ... staying local, loyal to our native motifs,” left ample room to reimagine and reshape tradition.⁷¹ The mosque’s austere exterior—hiding a reinforced concrete dome under a traditional lead roof—masks the extent to which Egeli “renewed” tradition in the use of modern materials and elaborate interior decoration (fig. 15). On the inside, surfaces that were routinely left undecorated in Ottoman mosques are intricately adorned. The window box ceilings are painted with geometric and floral motifs, the window box floors are inlaid with colorful stone designs, and the ceilings of the entrance gates are painted, as is the back-exit lodge behind the minaret. This brazen embellishment is atypical of classical Ottoman decoration. Furthermore, forms most often found in Ottoman architecture before Sinan, including the prominent Turkish triangles on the lateral sides of the dome (fig. 16) and *selsebil* (interior cooling fountain) in the center of the prayer hall, signal the mosque’s departure from a coherent program of classical decoration.⁷² Egeli offered no explanation for the inclusion of archaic elements while claiming to create a classical-style mosque. To better understand why Egeli’s eclecticism is limited to the mosque’s interior, we should consider that the exterior would have been more subject to public scrutiny and the traditional aesthetic was considered to be less conspicuous. The

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Tanman, *Şişli Camii*, 18.

58 playful and heterogeneous interior, hidden from everyday view, freely explores the entirety of the Ottoman tradition, with references to its dynastic beginnings in the classical era and concluding with the *Usûl*.

Preservation, Craft, and Spolia

In addition to criticizing Şişli Mosque's originality, several newspaper articles contended that it was constructed with material appropriated from historic structures. Vasfi Egeli's unique access to the immense power of the Pious Foundations and its control of historic buildings helped to fuel these repeated accusations. In 1945, an unnamed writer of a piece entitled "A Dirge," claimed their "friend" Muhiddin Hattatoğlu informed them that the Pious Foundations was demolishing the ruins of the historic Tulumcu Hüsam Mosque to take its stones for Şişli Mosque. Incensed, they stated, "If this destruction does not stop, the mosques, minarets, fountains, and ruined balustrades of Istanbul will be cleaned up until Şişli Mosque is finished."⁷³ The article asserts that such demolitions were widespread, alleging stones from the Hacı Mustafa Fountain in Küçük Hamam were also taken for Şişli. A 1946 news article confirms the project's ravenous need for material, asserting that additional stones were removed from a half standing mosque in Maçka, the site of which was subsequently made a park.⁷⁴ Although these claims are difficult to legitimate without further evidence, they attest to the scrutinized public relationship between the mosque and the Pious Foundations.

In addition to the aforementioned stones, two objects likely acquired from historic sites were not mentioned in the newspapers, the *selsebil* and the ablutions jar in the courtyard.⁷⁵ Local tradition holds that the *selsebil* originated from the Çırağan Palace, an Ottoman imperial palace constructed in the 1860s in the "Ottoman Renaissance" style later celebrated by the *Usûl*.⁷⁶ Although the *selsebil* is not shown in the few existing photographs of the sprawling complex, the Çırağan Palace was replete with internal fountains. Consultation of archival drawings offers support for tradition and suggests the fountain is likely by Ottoman-Armenian craftsman Sopon Bezirdjian (d. 1915), who worked extensively on the Çırağan Palace and other late Ottoman projects.⁷⁷ Bezirdjian's elaborate drawings match the style of the *selsebil*, which is markedly incongruous with the rest of the mosque. Considering the recognition given to craftsmen throughout the Şişli project, it would be out of character for Egeli to not acknowledge the sculptor of a newly made piece. However, the potential controversy of leveraging his government position at the Pious Foundations to acquire a historic object for an ostensibly private religious project could explain a purposeful lack of clarity. The origin of the ablutions jar is decidedly less clear. However, it was modified with calligraphy by Hamid Aytaç (d. 1982) when it was brought to Şişli, evincing Egeli's at times revisionist approach to Ottoman art history.⁷⁸

There was a strong precedent in Egeli's work with the Pious Foundations for removing historic objects from monuments slated for demolition. Indeed, during those years, "transplanting works that have been left abandoned," was an official goal of the Pious Foundations.⁷⁹ Relocations could occur in various forms: objects could enter the collections of the Turkish and Islamic Museum, operated by the Pious Foundations, or be reused in restoration work.⁸⁰ In fact, Egeli was involved in two such efforts while renovating the Ağa Mosque in 1936. The *şadırvan* from Yemen Fatihî Sinan Pasha Mosque was removed and reconstructed in Beyoğlu, presumably under Egeli's direction. This episode is recounted in a report prepared by the Pious Foundations about their activities for the 1937 Turkish Historical Congress:

73 "Bir Mersiye," *Akşam*, November 4, 1945, Ankara Üniversitesi Gazeteler Veritabanı.

74 "Şişli Camii," *Cumhuriyet*, March 10, 1946.

75 Tanman, *Şişli Camii*, 17–18.

76 Ahmet Tüccar, *Şişli Camileri* (Istanbul: Şişli Müftülüğü, 2015), 197. In my conversations with the Hüseyin Erek, director of the Şişli Mosque Waqf, he also mentioned the palace as the sebil's origin.

77 Alyson Wharton-Durgaryan, "The Unknown Craftsman Made Real: Sopon Bezirdjian, Armenian-ness and Crafting the Late Ottoman Palaces," *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 6 (2015): 71–109. Many thanks to Professor Wharton-Durgaryan for her support and bringing this drawing of a similar fountain to my attention, see Sopon Bezirdjian, "Étoile Casino/Plan," Victoria & Albert Museum Archive, ME.15-2013 (ca. 1850–1900).

78 Tanman, *Şişli Camii*, 17.

79 "Metruk vaziyette kalan eserlerin nakli," *Cumhuriyetten Önce ve Sonra Vakıflar: Tarih Kongresi ve Sergisi Münasebetile Türk Tarih Kurumuna Takdim Olunan Rapor* (Istanbul: Vakıflar Umum Müdürlüğü Neşriyatı, 1937), 42.

80 Ibid, 42–43.

The abandoned *şadırvan* of the demolished [Yemen Fatihi Sinan Pasha] mosque, found in the courtyard, had suffered much damage. Skillful hands broke the marble apart to remove some lead and had no trouble separating the stones. In order so that this precious work was not left abandoned in a far-out place, it was planned to move it to the Ağa Mosque located on İstiklal Street in Beyoğlu. This past year during restoration work on the mosque, it was carefully transported and reconstructed in the side garden.⁸¹

According to historian and encyclopedist Reşad Ekrem Koçu (d. 1975), a marble pool at the Ağa Mosque was also relocated, originating from the Oluklubayır Sufi Lodge in Eyüp. Reuse of other historic material in the mosque's restoration is recorded in a 1947 Islamic journal article.⁸² Given the desire to save and repurpose historic works, and especially the precedent within Egeli's own restoration activity at the Ağa Mosque, it is plausible that the objects found in Şişli Mosque were acquired through the Pious Foundations. In addition to these possible material donations, the Pious Foundations was a financial supporter of Şişli Mosque, contributing over 125,000 liras.⁸³

With Şişli Mosque's close connections to preservation activities and historic mosques, it is not surprising that Egeli promoted the mosque as a reclamation of lost Turkish arts. This had been a longstanding goal, as traditional Turkish crafts suffered from lack of patrons in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire. New materials and a preference for modernism in the 1930s reduced opportunities for calligraphers, tilemakers, stone masons, and other select craftsmen in new construction projects. In Istanbul, the lack of major religious commissions and focus on domestic architecture further impacted the livelihoods of Ottoman-trained artisans. Owing to his work with the Pious Foundations, Egeli was deeply invested in the training and commission of artisans, and the construction of Şişli Mosque was an ideal showcase for their work.

Perhaps no one was more elated about this prospect than architectural historian Albert Gabriel, a French intellectual domiciled in Turkey since 1926, when he was invited to teach at Istanbul University.⁸⁴ In 1938, before the planning of Şişli Mosque, Gabriel expressed his desire to create a "sort of practical school for restorers" in the first edition of *Pious Foundations Journal*.⁸⁵ This school was to be led by an "architect from among alumni of the Istanbul Fine Arts Academy" and managed, "from the beginning ... exclusively by Turks."⁸⁶ Though Gabriel imagined this national restoration corps at a major Seljuk site, Şişli Mosque was a near perfect substitute. It was led by Vasfi Egeli, a 1913 academy graduate, provided paid work for craftsmen, and created opportunities for training. Gabriel hailed the mosque as a new start for historic preservation in Turkey:

Vasfi Egeli and the workers under his command have a big role in this effort as they will of course take part in the future works on historic buildings. These workers will not function just as workers, but will be true master craftsmen, capable of training apprentices.

For that reason, new schools and establishments are needed, that in conjunction with the works at Şişli Mosque, can train and support the formation of a cadre of skilled craftsmen. Certainly, the work of Vasfi Egeli and his friends at Şişli Mosque gives us evidence of their art and professional capabilities and can be mentioned as [a] vivid example of the continuation of this country's most sound traditions.⁸⁷

In this way, Şişli Mosque's construction functioned in the same manner as a restoration, applying the high-quality techniques of Pious Foundations experts to a new construction

81 Ibid, 43.

82 Reşad Ekrem Koçu, "Ağa Camii," in *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Koçu Yayınları, 1971), 1:232; M. Salâhaddin, "İstanbul ve Memleket Camilerini ve Din Âbidelerini Ziyaret: Ağa Camii," *Selâmet* 1, no. 21 (October 1947): 6-7.

83 "Merkezi İstanbul'da bulunan Şişli'de bir Cami Yapıtırma ve Yaşatma Derneği'nin kamu yararına derneklerden sayılması," *BCA*, 30-18-1-2 / 112-97-9 (October 23, 1946).

84 Korkut Erdur, *Albert Gabriel (1883-1972): Mimar, Arkeolog, Ressam, Gezgin* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2006), 27, 36. His most notable work is Albert Gabriel, *Monuments Turcs d'Anatolie*, 2 vols. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1931).

85 Albert Gabriel, "La restauration des monuments historiques Turcs," *Vakıflar Dergisi* 1 (July 1938): 18.

86 Ibid, 16-17.

87 Albert Gabriel, "Yeni Şişli Camii ve Ananevî Türk Mimarisi," *Cumhuriyet*, July 24, 1949.



(fig. 17). Similarities are so striking that photographs of marble carvers working on capitals from restorations of the Süleymaniye and Selimiye Mosques in the 1930s and 1940s and the Şişli atelier appear almost identical.

For Egeli, historic preservation constituted an important source of information on the Ottoman tradition. Many of the works cited at Şişli, such as the Kara Ahmed Pasha Mosque, Süleymaniye Mosque, Selimiye Mosque, Laleli Mosque, and Yeni Mosque Sultan's Pavilion were restored in the two decades prior to Şişli's construction when Egeli was employed by the Pious Foundations. However, as opposed to restorations where craftsmen were generally unnamed in public reports, Egeli credits the most famous craftsmen at Şişli Mosque individually. His 1953 *Arkitekt* article celebrating the mosque's official opening reveals that Tevfik Özkürşün designed the gypsum stained glass windows, İzzet Orni sculpted the woodwork, Avni Uyar painted the *kalem işleri* (painted decorations) on the dome ceiling, and İbrahim Tokluoğlu oversaw the mosque's stone masonry.⁸⁸ Further supporting the crafts revival, the original prayer rugs of Şişli Mosque were woven with "special care and attention" at the Hereke Factory near İzmit in 1949.⁸⁹ As a historic center of late Ottoman carpet production, the acquisition of Hereke factory products is a testimony to the no-expenses-spared attitude of Egeli when it came to the mosque's interior decoration.⁹⁰

Egeli was discerning in employing craftsmen of the highest quality. Within the vision of reviving artisanal crafts, tile-making is strikingly missing. Egeli elucidates a possible

Figure 17: Şişli Mosque, Istanbul, 1945–1949, workers sculpting capitals. Pious Foundations Structural Works and Monuments Archive.

⁸⁸ "Şişli Camii'nin Yazı ve Tezyinatı," *Arkitekt* 263–266 (December 1953): 178–180.

⁸⁹ "Şişli İçin Seccade Dokunuyor," *Cumhuriyet*, March 18, 1949.

⁹⁰ The Hereke Factory was established in 1843 and produced carpets for late Ottoman palaces; it was taken over by Sümerbank in 1933 when it was modernized. See Önder Küçükerman, *The Rugs and Textiles of Hereke: A Documentary Account of the History of Hereke Court Workshop to Model Factory*, trans. M.E. Quigley-Pınar (Ankara: Sümerbank Genel Müdürlüğü, 1987), 50, 58.

reason for this in his later report to the Muhammad Ali Jinnah Tomb and Mausoleum Committee:

The wonderful tiles of Süleymaniye, New Mosque, Rüstem Pasha Mosque, and those of Sultan Süleyman's Mausoleum, in particular, have been attracting the admiration of all visitors, both from the East and the West. But the passing away of all the old masters, as time went on, has made it impossible to reproduce these masterpieces of art, and thus they have become a thing of the past.⁹¹

Claiming that “all the old masters” had passed away was not entirely accurate, but the Küta-hya tile industry had been devastated by the loss of Armenian craftsmen and changing stylistic preferences. The master tile-workers who collaborated with Kemalettin were David Ohannessian (d. 1953) and Mehmed Emin Usta (d. 1922). Although Mehmed Emin had passed, Ohannessian, an Armenian from Küta-hya, was alive during the construction of Şişli Mosque. In 1915, he was imprisoned, but miraculously released and, after surviving a death march by the Ottoman authorities, escaped to Jerusalem before later fleeing to Beirut.⁹² In Jerusalem, he founded a new tile workshop, returning to his native Küta-hya to recruit surviving Armenian colleagues for his workshop in Palestine.⁹³ The persecution of Armenians and enlistment of Mehmed Emin in World War I, emaciated the Küta-hya tile industry.⁹⁴ The industry was so devastated that in 1927, the Turkish government invited the son of Ohannessian to return to Küta-hya and oversee the languishing industry's revival.⁹⁵ Though he declined, Mehmet Emin's son did eventually help to resurrect the industry.⁹⁶ Egeli had encountered the quality of contemporary Küta-hya tiles in his restoration of the Ağa Mosque in Beyoğlu (1938–1939) and chose not to use them in the Feneryolu Mosque (1944–1945), Şişli Mosque, or the Levent Mosque (1954).⁹⁷ This distinguishes the work of Egeli from imitating mosques in the 1950s and 1960s that have tiled interiors, such as the Maltepe Mosque in Ankara and Söğütluçeşme Mosque in Kadıköy.

While Egeli and Gabriel made bold claims about the mosque's potential for the revival of artisanal crafts, their historicist vision did not have an exclusive claim over the Ottoman applied arts tradition. For example, in his autobiography, American hotelier Conrad Hilton (d. 1979) claims partial responsibility for reviving the Turkish tile industry, during the construction of the Istanbul Bosphorus Hilton (1952–1955). The hotel, located two kilometers from Şişli Mosque on the opposite end of the Halaskargazi–Cumhuriyet streets axis towards Taksim, was a collaboration by the prominent American firm Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (S.O.M.) and leading Turkish modernist Sedat Hakkı Eldem:

For instance, generations ago the Turks had been famous tile-makers but the art had largely died out. Evidence of their handiwork however, abounded in the old Sultan's Palace. When we decided we wanted to use similar tiles, a local architect searched out a few old men who could teach the younger ones and today, long after the completion of the hotel, tile-making is again quite a thriving business.⁹⁸

Hilton's bold claim of instigating the tile revival demonstrates the blurring between modernism, historicism, and national tradition that characterizes the architecture of the Bosphorus Hilton and Şişli Mosque. Both were immensely influential visions for mid-century Turkish architecture that defined themselves as modern, Turkish, and (to varied degrees) cognizant of the Ottoman past. Immense growth from private enterprise in the 1950s enabled mass-

91 Egeli, *Explanatory Report*, 19–20.

92 Hakan Arlı, “Kütahyalı Mehmed Emin Usta ve Eserlerinin Üslubu” (master's thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1989); Sato Moughalian, *Feast of Ashes: The Life and Art of David Ohannessian* (Paolo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019), On the deportation see pages 123–127, on time in Jerusalem and Beirut see pages 149–227.

93 Moughalian, *Feast of Ashes*, 285.

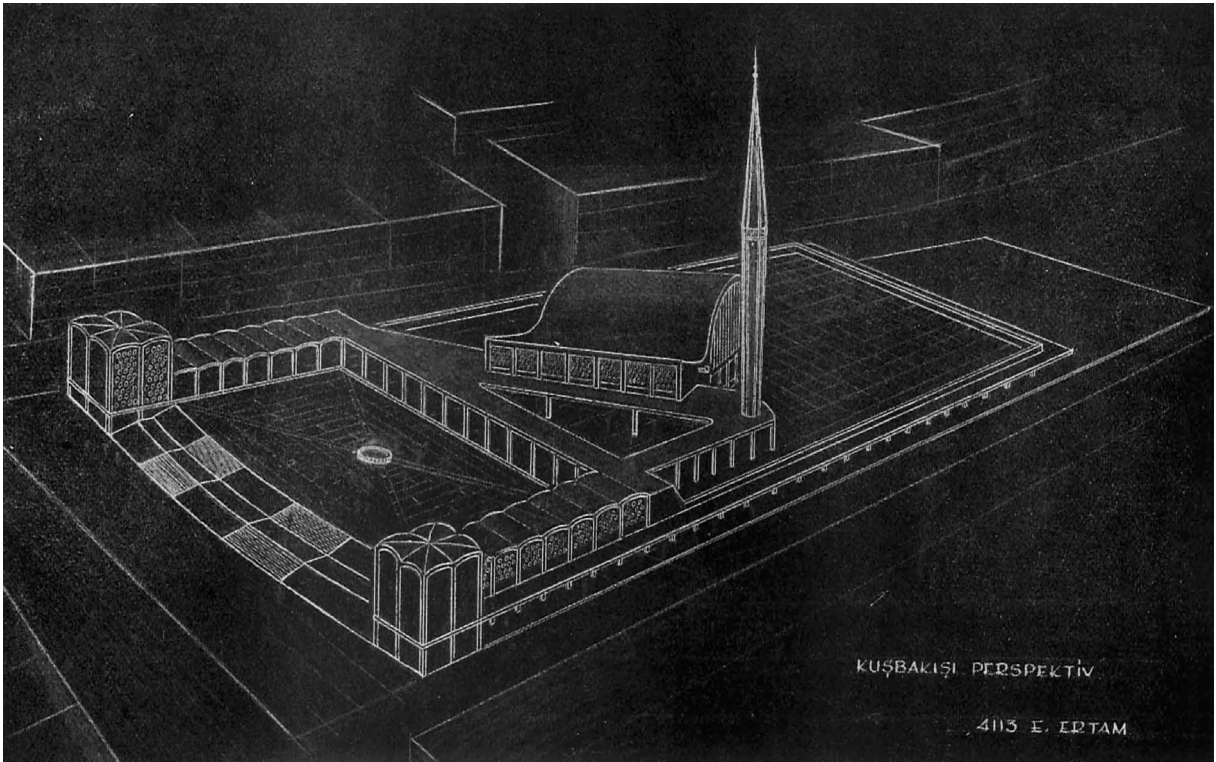
94 Ibid, 169–171.

95 Ibid, 284–285.

96 Gürbüz Taşkıran et al., “Kütahya Çiniciliğinde Değişen ve Yok Olan Üretim Yöntemleri,” *Restorasyon Konservasyon Çalışmaları* 1, no. 20 (2017): 34–36.

97 Koçu, “Ağa Camii,” 230. See also Salâhaddin, “Ağa Camii,” 6–7.

98 Conrad Hilton, *Be My Guest* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994 [1957]), 254. For more on the construction of the Hilton Hotel in Taksim, see Begüm Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (Paolo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018), chap. 5.



produced replication of the two typologies both inspired: the Ottoman revival mosque and International Style commercial development.⁹⁹

Toward a State Religious Architecture

The strangeness of constructing an Ottoman mosque in the mid-twentieth century was not lost on the editors of *Arkitekt* who immediately after their coverage of the opening of Şişli Mosque, included another article on a proposed mosque in the Şişli district designed by students in a modernist style (fig. 18). The difference between these two neighboring mosques could not be more striking. Egeli's Ottoman revival structure, with its emphasis on traditional forms, stands in stark contrast to the modernist design, with a wave-shaped concrete roof and pinnacle minaret.¹⁰⁰ This editorial reaction is just one piece of evidence that not everyone was entirely satisfied with Egeli's creation. Restoration specialist and architectural historian Erdem Yücel seconds this in 1967, writing, "If colleagues criticized some points after the construction of Şişli Mosque, the total loss of identity in the mosques built afterwards demonstrates the value of Egeli's work."¹⁰¹ His comment points toward the crucial difference between Egeli's work and later imitators, but also raises the question of how discontent with Egeli's design did not hinder adoption of neo-Ottomanism as a quasi-official style for mosque architecture in following years.

Why then, did Şişli Mosque achieve such widespread replication of the neo-Ottoman style? Let us consider that at the time of its construction, the call to prayer was chanted from Şişli Mosque's minarets in Turkish, not Arabic. The mandate to have the call to prayer in the

Figure 18: "Project for a Mosque in Şişli." Fourth semester students in Prof. M. Ali Handan's class, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University (Erdem Ertam, *Arkitekt*, 1953, 9–21).

99 Esra Akcan, "Americanization and Anxiety: Istanbul Hilton Hotel by SOM and Elden," in *2001 ACSA International Conference (Orientalism-Occidentalism: Geography, Identity, Space)* (Istanbul: Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, 2001), 40.

100 "Bir Cami Projesi," *Arkitekt* 263–266 (December 1953): 181–182.

101 Yücel further elucidates some critiques of the mosque (presumably from the architectural community): "From the harmony of the minaret, painted decorations were used everywhere excessively they said, the height of the prayer space, they prated about the fountain inside. In short, everything you can think of was said by people who knew nothing." Yücel, "Vasfi Egeli," 4956.



Figure 19: Maltepe Mosque, Ankara, 1954–1959, exterior view. Photograph: Gavin Moulton, 2019.



Figure 20: Hocazade (Alsancak) Mosque, Izmir, 1948–1950, exterior view. Photograph: Gavin Moulton, 2019.

vernacular was deeply unpopular and was one of the chief ways in which the wide sweeping reform programs of the new Turkish government were not always well-received by the majority. Indeed, an election promise of the Democrat Party was to remove the ban on the call to prayer in Arabic, a pledge they fulfilled immediately upon receiving control of the legislature in 1950.¹⁰²

The immediate influence of Şişli Mosque is demonstrated through four mosques built right after the completion of the Şişli Mosque in major cities across the country that closely copy the most important tenets of its exterior form and carry some essence of its spirit: the Hocazade Mosque in Izmir (1948–1950), Egeli's Levent Mosque (1954), the Maltepe Mosque (1954–1959) in Ankara, and the Şeyh Mosque in Rize (1959) (fig. 19–20). These four mosques are well proportioned, benefit from traditional craftsmanship, and contain high-quality calligraphic works. Exterior uniformity makes them visually similar to the point of reproduction, though they are easily distinguishable from Egeli's work at Şişli Mosque by the quality of the materials and overall aesthetic harmony.

Praise from the international media and high-profile visitors to Şişli Mosque helped to establish Egeli's reputation as a mosque architect and make Ottoman forms synonymous with the modern Turkish mosque.¹⁰³ A 1948 article recounts that congratulations came “from Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and even the newly established government of Pakistan.”¹⁰⁴ In 1951, King Abdullah I of Jordan visited the mosque, just a month before his assassination, and donated 1,500 liras.¹⁰⁵ The Pakistani Ambassador to Turkey was so enthused that he invited Egeli to visit Pakistan and enter the design competition for the Mausoleum and Mosque of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the country's founder.¹⁰⁶

The pivotal moment cementing Şişli Mosque's promotion of a national style of Turkish mosque architecture was the construction of an Ottoman-style mosque in Ankara. As previously mentioned, no major mosques had been built in Ankara since 1923, despite the explosive population growth in newly planned neighborhoods. The first attempt to build a large mosque in the city was the Foundation to Build a Mosque in Ankara–Yenişehir, approved by the government in 1947. Previously, in 1945, the foundation hosted a competition for a mosque to be built at the present site of the Çankaya Municipality building.¹⁰⁷ It seems clear that the mosque was intended to be in a historicist style as the competition rules stated that, “projects must have Turkish architectural character in the style of mosques built by craftsmen.”¹⁰⁸ The precise definition of “Turkish character” was elaborated in a 1946 letter from the foundation: “Architects can choose any of the Hayrettin, Sinan, baroque, or imperial styles for the projects provided that they do not neglect Turkish character.”¹⁰⁹ From the requirements alone, the project is almost identical to Şişli Mosque, with its high budget near 2 million liras, and expressed emphasis on craftsmanship and traditional Turkish character.¹¹⁰ Though initially unsuccessful, the project was later reincarnated as Kocatepe Mosque (1967–1987).

102 Umüt Azak, “Secularism in Turkey as a Nationalist Search for Vernacular Islam. The Ban on the Call to Prayer in Arabic (1932–1950),” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 124 (2008): 161–179.

103 Kideys, “A New Mosque at Şişli.” See also the praise of Pakistani Minister of Education, Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, in: Egeli, *Explanatory Report*, 19–20.

104 “İlgiler o kadar büyük ki Cumhuriyet devrimizin yarattığı bu milli eserden dolayı Ürdünden, İraktan, İrandan hattâ yeni kurulan Pâkistan hükümetinden tebrikler almaktayız.” Altan, “Şişli Camii,” 10.

105 Esat Sezai Sünbünlük, “Ürdün Meliki Hazretlerinin Şişli Camii Şerifini Ziyaretleri,” *Hakka Doğru* 6, no. 10 (June 4, 1951).

106 “Pakistan Hükümeti Üstad Mimar Vasfi Egeli'yi Davet Etti,” *Arkitekt* 239–240 (1951): 254. For news coverage of the Pakistani government's invitation, see “Cinnah'ın Türbesini Bir Türk Mimarı Yapacak: Yüksek Mimar Vasfi Egeli Pakistana Davet Edildi,” *Cumhuriyet*, February 16, 1952. It appears that for the mausoleum project Egeli was competing with his fellow restorer-architect, Ali Saim Ülgen, who sent his designs for the Zonguldak Ulu Mosque and the unbuilt Ankara Yenişehir Mosque to the Pakistani Ambassador. See “Pakistan Konsolosluğu, Vehbi Koç ve Ali Saim Ülgen Arasındaki Yazışmalar - Correspondences between the Embassy of Pakistan, Vehbi Koç and Ali Saim Ülgen,” SALT, Ali Saim Ülgen Arşivi, TASUDOC0068 (September 24, 1951).

107 The site is located between Sakarya, İnkılap, Selanik, and Ziya Gökalp streets in Kızılay. See “Ziya Kocainan'a Ait Mimari, Teknik Belgeler: Ankara Yenişehir Camii-Proje Müsabakası Şartnamesi,” 4. SALT, Said Bey, Kocainan Arşivi, AFMSBKDOC045 (1945).

108 Ibid.

109 “Mimar projelerinde Hayrettin, Sinan, Barok, ve Ampir tarzlarından her hangi birini Türk karakterini ihmal etmemek şartıyla seçmekte serbesttir.” “Ankara Yenişehir'de Yapılacak Cami İle İlgili Dokümanlar - Documents Concerning the Mosque to Be Built in Ankara Yenişehir,” 18. SALT, Ali Saim Ülgen Arşivi, TASUDOC0376 (May 2, 1946).

110 SALT, AFMSBKDOC045.

64 Of the competition submissions for the Yenişehir Mosque published in *Arkitekt*, it is telling that all are in a neo-Ottoman style, not neo-Seljuk or another neo-Turkish style. Curiously, when the committee revealed results in 1947, they opted not to give out a first-place award on the grounds that “no project was deemed worthy.”¹¹¹ The second-place project however was designed by Ali Saim Ülgen and Orhan Alnar.¹¹² Similar to Egeli, Ülgen was a restorer-architect; he authored the seminal text on historic preservation in Turkey and worked extensively with the Pious Foundations.¹¹³ In this regard, Ülgen is not exclusively an imitator of Egeli, but a contemporary whose professional background and worldview led him to the same conclusions. Even though his design did not win first place, Ülgen continued to pursue the project, writing to Vehbi Koç (d. 1996), one of the most important industrialists and businessmen in Turkey, to convince the committee to take action on the mosque’s construction in 1953.¹¹⁴ By 1955, the President of Diyanet, Eyüp Sabri Hayırlıoğlu, became head of the project, indicating a shift in religious construction toward the state-run religious bureaucracy, as opposed to grassroots community foundations.¹¹⁵ Ultimately, Ülgen’s was unable to materialize the project and a second competition was held in 1957 after the intervention of Democrat Party leader and prime minister, Adnan Menderes (d. 1961).¹¹⁶

Due to these failures, the Maltepe Mosque (1954–1959) became Ankara’s first monumental mosque in the republican era. Compared to Ülgen’s design, which represented a creative interpretation of the Ottoman tradition with its imaginative octagonal courtyard, the Maltepe Mosque more closely imitates Şişli Mosque, with a five-dome entrance portico, stepped façade, and sixteen windows under the dome. There are no side domes, but other features demonstrate the extent to which Maltepe directly took inspiration from Şişli. The dodecagonal marble screens on the minaret, Turkish triangles between the domes of the portico and the arches, and colored marble borders in the decorative arches recessed in the portico are extremely similar to those at Şişli Mosque. A distinguishing factor, however, is the jarring color scheme of the painted decoration and inferior quality of materials at Maltepe, with a prayer hall covered in green and purple tiles designed by Mahmut Akok (d. 1993).

Conclusion

The lack of religious construction in the first decades of the republic and lingering challenge of generating the political will and financial resources to build a monumental mosque left the form of the modern Turkish mosque undetermined until the construction of Şişli Mosque in 1945. Extensive community organizing, generous donors, and the changing political scene enabled Vasfi Egeli to supplant modernist visions of a Turkish mosque that reinterpreted Ottoman spatial planning without revival of classical forms. Instead, Egeli balanced a revival of classical Ottoman architecture, rooted in preservation and artisanal techniques, with practical constraints.¹¹⁷ Rather than arguing that technical progress had eliminated the need for the dome, as did many of his colleagues in the early republican era, Egeli embraced the application of reinforced concrete for dome construction. The Democrat Party’s coming to power in 1950, loosening of regulation of mosque construction, and continued urbanization led to a building boom marked by the influence of Egeli’s neo-Ottoman example. Thus, by

111 “Haberler,” *Arkitekt* 181–182 (February 1947): 54. For projects see “Ankara’da Yapılacak Cami Projesi Müsabakası,” *Arkitekt* 183–184 (April 1947).

112 For the plans of the project, see Ali Saim Ülgen, “Zonguldak’ta Yapılacak Cami Projesi - Mosque Project in Zonguldak,” SALT, Ali Saim Ülgen Arşivi, TASUPA0533011 and other documents in the same folder (ca. 1945).

113 For Ülgen’s text on historic preservation see Ali Saim Ülgen, *Anıtların Korunması ve Onarılması* (Ankara: Maarif Matbaası, 1943).

114 SALT, TASUDOC0068. Supposedly, Vehbi Koç had a history of supporting mosque building, having commissioned the Merkez Mosque in Keçiören, see “Vehbi Koç’un Yaptığı Merkez Cami Yeniden İnşa Edilecek,” *Emlakkulisi.com*, November 4, 2009, accessed November 20, 2021, <https://emlakkulisi.com/vehbi-kocun-yaptirdigi-merkez-cami-yeniden-insa-edilecek/25506>.

115 SALT, TASUDOC0376, 15.

116 Although I disagree with Meeker’s interpretation of Ülgen’s project for the Ankara Mosque, the Kocatepe section of this article contains useful information about early perceptions and goals of the mosque’s construction. Michael Meeker, “Once There Was, Once There Wasn’t: National Monuments and Interpersonal Exchange,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 177. For more on Vehbi Koç’s potential involvement, see Abdullah Manaz, *Kocatepe Camii Tarihi*, n.d., 29. 117 Emre Demirel, “The Renewable Tradition: Le Corbusier and the East,” *Architectural Research Quarterly* 13, no. 3–4 (December 2009): 241–250.

the time that Vedat Dalokay introduced a modernist design for the Kocatepe Mosque in 1957, its abstraction was controversial, partially as Egeli's aesthetic idea of the mosque had been so widely imitated as to become synonymous with the modern Turkish mosque. Even Burhan Arif Ongun, who had enthusiastically contributed a modernist mosque plan to *Arkitekt* in 1931, turned to a neo-Ottoman style for his 1953 Burgazada Mosque.¹¹⁸

Yet, Vasfi Egeli's preferred identification of Şişli Mosque's historical inspiration as "classical Turkish architecture" is a far cry from the complex and innovative decorative program that he assembled.¹¹⁹ Viewed from the outside, the myth of the sixteenth-century style, linking the mosque with the nationalized architecture of Sinan, appears plausible. Stone walls and a lead roof inconspicuously fold Şişli Mosque into the urban fabric of Istanbul and mask the reinforced concrete dome and interior historical collage. Harmonious proportions, first-rate craftsmanship, and allegiance to the most important outward-facing tenets of Ottoman mosque building reinforce this historic feel. However, analysis of the mosque's interior—with Turkish triangles, citations from the *Usûl*, and a spoliated nineteenth-century *selsebil*—reveals a fascinating historical consciousness that unifies diverse elements of the Ottoman mosque building tradition. Stylistically, in period writing, Şişli Mosque was almost always referred to simply as "Turkish" or in more religious sources as "Turkish-Islamic."¹²⁰ Arkan's account, Egeli's self-definition as a modern architect, and the stylistic designation of the mosque as "Turkish" reveal that modernism, nationalism, and historicism were not mutually exclusive for supporters of the mosque.

The immediate imitation of Şişli Mosque in urban centers stretching from Izmir to Zonguldak confirms the unparalleled creation of a visual identity for modern Turkish-Islamic religious expression and an outsized aesthetic impact on mosque design. Compared to the explosion of neo-Ottoman mosque construction in recent decades, Şişli Mosque is a fundamentally distinct forebearer. On the one hand, it is an unattainable aesthetic ideal, too expensive, artisanal, and eclectic to be reproduced easily. On the other, its nationalization and reclamation of classical Ottoman mosque architecture became so pervasive as to provide a nominal model for almost all successive mosque construction in Turkey. In spite of this, imitators, especially those built after 1960, repeatedly failed to engage meaningfully with the Ottoman tradition in the ways Egeli had at Şişli, through high quality craftsmanship and a historically informed design. Instead, their grandiose proportions, unabashed usage of concrete, and incorporation of mass-produced tiles alienated them from the tradition of classical Ottoman mosque building that Egeli hoped to revive and modernize. But while these factors leave the mosque with a legacy that is not easily interpreted, it is clear that Şişli Mosque promoted a resonant style of mosque architecture, breaking with the humble character of early republican National Style mosques and ushering in a new era of neo-Ottoman construction enabled by the rise of the Democrat Party.

118 Like the Şişli Mosque, the Burgazada Mosque was intended to be completed in time for the quincennial anniversary of the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul. See Koçu, "Burgazada Camii," in *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Koçu Yayınları, 1963), 6:3140.

119 Vasfi Egeli, "Şişli Camii," *Arkitekt* 263–266 (1953): 172.

120 "Şişli Camii: Yeniden yapılacak caminin temeli dün merasimle atıldı," *Vatan Gazetesi*, June 23, 1945.

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