

THE PATRONAGE OF SULTAN SÜLEYMAN — THE SÜLEYMANIYE COMPLEX IN ISTANBUL

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Ottoman architecture reached its classical and most prolific period during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent. In this paper I shall discuss a number of major architectural monuments sponsored by Süleyman I. However, I will be looking not so much at the buildings themselves, as at the fact that they were put up at particular times and places. The construction of these buildings can be discussed in terms of political process. I will view their patronage, monumental quality and the use of architectural elements as acts of statescret — acts which are as fundamentally political as is the levying of taxes, the drafting of soldiers or the waging of war.

That monumental architecture is politically significant is fairly obvious when we consider the vast amounts of labor, wealth and material required to erect a great mosque and its dependencies. Simply the construction job alone is significant in how it draws on the tax revenues of distant provinces, the time and skills of thousands of artisans and administrators. But this is probably not the major function of monumental architecture within the fabric of an empire like that of the Ottomans. Great architecture is likely a fundamental way in which information about political realities is conveyed. Architectural monuments use recognizable and conventionalized symbols and iconography to communicate

the power and political objectives of the patron. Moreover, it can be the primary means by which the political structure of the state is publically described. The enshrining of particular historic events and the commemoration of specific religious ideologies or sects can serve to announce the state's domestic and foreign policy.

The period of Sultan Süleyman which lasted for 46 years between 1520 and 1566 is distinguished by the expansion of the Empire. The period is also marked by internal social unrest, in particular the beginning of the uprisings in Anatolia, known in Ottoman history as the Celali İsyamları (1). A serious external threat was posed by Safavid Iran along the eastern frontiers of Ottoman Empire. Also, Shah Tahmasp directly and indirectly aided the rebels in Anatolia in an attempt to further Iranian territorial expansion at the expense of the Ottomans. Architecturally, the period is one of intense activity, despite the fact that the economic climate displayed signs of decline (2). Indeed, after Süleyman there is an obvious deterioration in wealth and political management.

Fortunately for us the reign of Sultan Süleyman is rich in literary and historical works. Various activities of social life at court and political events are documented by historians and chroniclers, some contemporary to the Sultan. Some aspects of the great architectural enterprises are also described. Ottoman historians raise few, if any, interpretive questions concerning the nature of events. We lack any critical record of the motivations behind patronage in architecture. Instead, we are provided with meticulous statistics concerning dates, expenditures, inventories and some correspondence that occurred during the course of building (3). However, this together with what is known about the monuments themselves, and about their patron enable us to place them in a political context.

As we might expect, Sultan Süleyman was the foremost patron of architecture during his reign. Most of the work he supported was dedicated to religious, charitable or educational institutions.

(1) M. Akdağ, *Türk Halkının Dirlik ve Düzenlik Davası; Celali İsyamları*, Ankara: Bilgi Yayınları, 1975; in passim.

(2) M. Akdağ, *Türkiye'nin İktisadi ve İctimai Tarihi*, Cilt II, İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi (Kültür Dizisi), 1974, pp. 424-28.

(3) Ö. L. Barkan, *Süleymaniye Camii ve İmareti İnşaatı (1550-57)*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınlarından, VI. Seri, sa. 10, 1972; p. 1ff.

In looking at these there is little reason to question either his personal piety or interest in the well-being of his subjects. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the political implications of the work he undertook. In particular, the Süleymaniye complex is an interesting and informative case in point. The mosque and its dependencies clearly symbolize the power and wealth of the Ottoman Empire centralized in the person of Sultan Süleyman, and announce the paramount importance of the city of Istanbul. Süleyman was the representative of the caliphate, Padishah of Islam to his subjects and the head of a far-flung centralized bureaucracy which governed numerous nations and thousands of ethnic groups. He was also a statesman who was directly involved in the affairs of the world. The *külliyeye* of Sultan Süleyman is a translation of this autocratic power into architectural terms. The Külliye with its magnificent mosque in the center, is of grandiose dimensions and of an orderly layout. The Süleymaniye is commented upon by almost every Ottoman historian of the 16th or 17th centuries. Western travellers to Istanbul admired its magnificent architectural design, and favorably compared it with Aya Sofya in the same city, or with buildings in Europe (4). The mosque of Sultan Süleyman, more than any other mosque of the Ottomans, advertised not only the power of the sultan through architectural symbols of power, rank and unity but also the fact that this power was legitimate.

On June 13, 1550 (27 cemaziye evvel 965) the foundation stone of the mihrab (5) was put in by Shaykh al-Islam Ebu Su'ud Efendi, one of the most influential Ottoman ulema of all times. Clearly, Sultan Süleyman by appointing Ebu Su'ud Efendi as the inaugurator of his own building allowed him to share in the glory of establishing the Külliye, and in the sanctification of the mosque.

This respect and deference shown to the Shaykh al-Islam of the period is an overt sign of the growing importance and strength of the ulema and of the orthodox of sunni Islam in general. At the

(4) For example, John Sanderson, who was in Istanbul between 1578 and 1580 praised the Süleymaniye in these words: «A wourke which meriteth to be matched with the seven ounders of the wourld», The Hakluyt Society, *The Travels of John Sanderson*, Second Series, no LXVII, London: 1930; p. 71.

(5) Barkan, *Süleymaniye Cami*, p. 48.

same time, one might suppose the emphasis laid upon the ulema signaled to the rest of the Islamic world, particularly to the followers of heretical orders in Antolia, that the seat of Islamic learning is thereby situated in Istanbul with Shaykh al-Islam pe rsiding over it.

For Süleyman the Magnificent, Sinan, the greatest Ottoman architect of all times, designed and built the royal mosque together with its dependencies on one of the hills of Istanbul that commands a view of the Golden Horn, and of the harbor. The four hundred domes covering the various spaces within the eighteen buildings of the külliye cascade from the peak of the mosque down almost to the edge of the water. Yet, the dependencies are organized very tightly around the mass of the mosque while being contained at their perimeters by the city itself. Besides the mosque, an imaret, a tabhane, a hospital, a school of medicine, a bathhouse, dar'ul-kurra, a school for young children, four medreses, a cemetery which contains the mausoleums of the Sultan Süleyman and his wife Hürrem, a house for caretakers, the humble mausoleum of the architect himself, and various shops (6) make up the extensive külliye.

Records concerning the building of the Süleymaniye were meticulously kept (7). The cost of construction and the embellishment of the mosque amounted to 380 sacks of akçe (aspers), or more than 700,000 gold ducats, together with the income from the silk trade (8). This was a forbidding amount of expense to be spent on one building. The 1550's were hard times for the state treasury of the Ottomans, following long years of wars, especially those carried out against Shah Tahmasp of Iran. As modern historians agree (9), the decline of the Ottoman Empire, at least in monetary economic matters, started about this time. The emer-

(6) An excellent discussion of the Süleymaniye Complex is by G. Goodwin, in *A History of Ottoman Architecture*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971; pp. 215-239.

(7) Ö. L. Barkan has made available to the art historian documents on the building of the Süleymaniye. See Barkan, *op. cit.* and «Türk Yapı ve Yapı Malzemesi için Kaynaklar», *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 1960, XVII; 3-26.

(8) H. İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire, The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, New York & Washington, D.C.: Praeger Publishers, 1973, p. 125.

(9) Akdağ, *İktisadi ve İçtimai Tarih*, II, pp. 395 ff.

gence of powerful and united Iran in competition with Ottomans as a market place and manufacturer of similar goods such as textiles and carpets cost the government of Istanbul dearly. The supply of raw silk for the mills of Bursa, which until then came from Iran was interrupted or declined because of monetary inflation and particularly of the wars between the two countries (10). Higher taxes were being levied on the subjects, and in addition an oppressive policy was being directed to the Alevi or Kızılbaş population in central and eastern Anatolia. Dissatisfaction with mounting taxes, the problem of inflation and internal unrest led by the Kalender, put the Ottoman state in a precarious situation. The campaigns carried out against Iran by Sultan Süleyman in 1534-35, and 1548-49, and again in 1552 that lasted until 1555 were partially to display the strength of the population of Ottomans to Anatolia, and to prevent aid from Iran reaching the Kızılbaş rebels, as well as to establish a peaceful frontier in the East along the Persian border. The question that inevitably comes to mind is why so much effort was committed to architecture. In addition to the immense Külliye of the Ruler, about the same time Sinan had undertaken the building of various structures for the members of the Ottoman house, and the administration. Almost the total sum of the money for the expenses for the Süleymaniye was paid from the personal treasury of Sultan Süleyman (11).

A possible answer can be suggested: the power of the state, and more importantly, he who rules it, depends on the ability to collect taxes and maintain both internal order and territorial integrity. The building of the enormous Süleymaniye complex may have served these functions in a direct way. It may have enhanced, or have hoped to enhance the authority of the patron. The authority of the ruler, like that of an institution, is as important as real power when it comes to collecting taxes and administering. Very often a display of power and commitment, if credible, is more important than the actual ability to coerce by the use of force. Potential rivals for power, for example such as the army or regional and foreign interests, may be influenced by public display.

(10) M. Çizakça, «Reflection of the European Price Revolution in the 16th Century Ottoman Silk Industry», paper read at the Middle East Studies Association Meetings, Los Angeles, November, 1976.

(11) Barkan, *Süleymaniye Camii*, p. 14.

If we review the descriptions of the official «opening day» of the mosque complex and catch the details of the «gala», the reasons for the monumental undertaking, and for the often-expressed impatience of Sultan Süleyman can be better understood. The mosque was opened on 20 Zilhicce 964 (10 October 1557) when the Sultan was handed the golden key (12) to unlock the door of the Mosque, who in turn graciously handed the key to the architect, to the creator of the architectural marvel. The audience who witnessed this memorable event contained the ulema, civil servants of the Otoman state as well as foreigners. The opening of Süleymaniye was meant to be a magnificent display; a symbol of the pre-eminence of the orthodox Islam, and an occasion to gather the representatives of Islamic lands in Istanbul. Even Iran could not afford to ignore the fact. An ambassador sent by Shah Tahmasp arrived in the Otoman capital bearing gifts to the mosque of Süleyman. All Ottoman provinces dispatched their important men to the capital to witness the occasion. It mattered little that some of the details were still unfinished (13). We can picture the pomp and processions that must have taken place on that day in Istanbul. The gifts presented by the Persian ambassador must have counted more than their intrinsic value: rare copies of the Koran to Sultan Süleyman from Shah Tahmasp, and expensive articles from the Shahzade of Iran to the Grand Vezir (14), from the sister of the Shah Māhin Bānū, to the wife of Sultan Süleyman, Hurrem Sultan. In an accompanying letter the princess of Iran wrote to Hurrem Sultan that she would like to be remembered in the prayers of the people worshipping in the magnificent mosque, therefore she desired to adorn the mosque with carpets and asked the dimensions of the building (15).

We see the impact of the Süleymaniye Küliye reflected in the historical works. The history of the Kurdish Şeref Han, whose father once had sided with Shah Tahmasp against Sultan Süleyman praised the beauty of the mosque (16). The history of the

(12) *Ibid.*, p. 59.

(13) *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 92.

(14) M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, «Süleyman I.» in: *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: 1970.

(15) I am grateful to His Excellency Hossein Davoudi who informed me of the contents of this letter.

(16) Şeref Han, *Şerefname, Osmanlı - İran Tarihi*, vol. II, translated from

Ottomans written in the 17th century by Voiwode Demetrius Cantemir compares the Süleymaniye with the structures of the Christian world, and recounts the merits of the mosque (17). Sultan Süleyman had succeeded in expressing his might and proclaiming the city of Istanbul as the political capital of the Islamic world. He had received recognition from all, and renewed tokens of reconciliation from Shah Tahmasp. It took at least one more year to complete the Külliye, but then, the work could proceed at a normal speed once one of its functions had been fulfilled.

Sultan Süleyman took his title, «The Caliph on Earth quite seriously» (18). He sought to cripple the Safavid Iran, and to punish the Kızılbaş communities in Anatolia. His patronage in architectural activities paralleled his policy against the Alevi and the Shi'ites. The buildings he sponsored in important Sunni centers attest to his desire to create testimonials to his status as the Caliph. Following his successful campaign over the Safavids and taking of Baghdad in 1535 Sultan Süleyman visited Kerbela. He immediately ordered the construction of a *kubbah* or a mausoleum over the tomb of Imam-i Azam Abu Hanifa, and a mosque and an Dar al-Ziyaf in the same precinct. For this undertaking honoring the Imam of the Sunnis, 11,450,000 akces were spent (19).

For the renovation and decoration of Mecca he carefully obtained a *fetva* from the Shaykh al-Islam. The Ka'aba was painstakingly repaired, and medreses were built for the ulema of the hanefi, shafi'i, malikite and hanbeli schools in the holy city (20). A *kubbah* was constructed over the tomb of Hadija. Expenses of all institutions, and salaries of all connected staff were increased with the enriched waqfs (21).

Sultan Süleyman repaired the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, donated the tile panelling to the building. By the time this news

Arabic into Turkish by M.E. Bozarslan, İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1971; pp. 229-30.

(17) D. Cantemir, *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire ,part I: 1300-1683*, trans. N. Tindal, London: 1734; pp. 214-15n.

(18) İnalçik, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

(19) «Süleyman I», *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*.

(20) İbrahim Peçevi, *Peçevi Tarihi*, trans. Murat Uraz, İstanbul: Neşriyat Yurdu, 1968; p. 227.

(21) *Idem*.

reached Bitlis, it had gained considerable embellishment, and was recorded by Seref Han in his *History of the Ottomans and the Iranians*, «and Sultan Süleyman erected a magnificent *qubbah* over the Holy Rock in al-Kudus...» (22). This type of distortion of an event would have pleased Sultan Süleyman.

Probably in order to secure the continuing loyalty of important and mostly urban orders of Islam, Sultan Süleyman used his patronage to establish structures acknowledging the legitimacy of such orders in the Otoman Empire, orders which had influential followers among the military organizations, ulema, and the urban populations. For the Qadiri order, the Sultan donated the money necessary to rebuild the tomb of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ghilāni in Baghdad. Adjoining the tomb of Mevlana Jalāl-al-Dīn Rūmi in Konya, a mosque, an imaret, a *semahane* and cells for the dervishes were built under the royal patronage. The Bektashis, whose followers included the powerful *Yeniçeri* corps, were granted a large *tekke*, mosque, medrese and an imaret near the mausoleum of Sayyid Battal Ghazi in central Anatolia (23). At a period of sectarian struggles in the Islamic world, Sultan Suleyman asserted and confirmed his position by architectural patronage to favored religious orders.

The ruler did not hesitate to reinstate the abolished custom of building zaviyes for shaykhs and dervishes when the necessity for doing so arose. In the early years of the Ottoman state, many zaviyes formed the nucleus for future Muslim towns especially in western Anatolia. Naturally, in these towns power centered around the zaviye whose members were nearly always of the heterodox *tariqats*, presumably to the displeasure of the ulema. Once the administration of the Ottoman Empire became centered in Istanbul, the ulema and the so-called high Islam were used as the unifying force. Accordingly, the right to found a zaviye was suspended. However, during the reigns of Sultans Selim I and Süleyman, the oppression of the Kızılbaş, and the wars with the Safavids had caused some cities and villages to be abandoned by their inhabitants who emigrated to Iran. Towns, particularly those to the east of Erzurum had become desolate areas. Süleyman

(22) *Şerefname*, II, pp. 204-05.

(23) *Peçevi Tarihi*, p. 227.

issued an edict for that region reinstating the building of zaviyes, and most probably he personally provided the necessary funds (24).

Here we have briefly reviewed architecture of the period of Süleyman within its political context. Several points emerge from this simplified overview of the architectural patronage of Sultan Süleyman. Sponsoring monumental architecture has an important impact of the redistribution of resources in a pre-industrial society. Architecture comes about as a result of drawing on the communications with near and distant provinces of the Ottoman Empire (25), and thereby it influences large-scale patterns of political integration. The creating of waqf in order to provide revenues for the maintenance of a building, bringing together and the employing of large groups and laborers all can contribute to strengthening the political integration of the society. Also, once the building is erected, it may be the locus for regular visitations from various regions of that country or neighbors and thus be politically important. All this is obvious and necessary part of any social understanding of architecture. However, it is possible to go beyond this.

The monumental architecture undertaken by Sultan Süleyman when viewed as imperial patronage in the 16th century tells us much about the period at several levels. The Süleymaniye Külliye, for example, can be seen both as a symbol and as an advertisement of the great centralization and concentration of power in single locus. A külliye of similar dimensions would never be attempted in the provinces (26). The pyramidal mass of the mosque and the horizontal and nonobtrusive dependencies of the Süleymaniye clearly express the relationship between the sultan and his subjects in architectural lines.

The extensive medrese structures in the Süleymaniye complex are public announcements of the increased political role of the ulema hierarchy. The dominance of this group is pointed to and centralized in the person of the Shaykh al-Islam. The cooperation of the ulema, and their indirect or symbolic participation in state affairs were essential during this period when Sunni Ottoman Empire was engaged in a political and economic struggle against

(24) İnalçik, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

(25) Barkan gives the provinces of workers whenever so listed in the defters, in: *Süleymaniye Camii*, passim.

(26) The exception is the Selimiye Complex at Edirne built by Selim II (1566-1574).

the Shi'ite Safavid Empire. Conversely, the power of the heterodox tariqats was severely curbed as limitations put on zaviye building indicate. Urban-based, highly widespread orders which had followers among the military or administrative class, found protection from Sultan Süleyman. He became patron of numerous structures on sites venerable to these orders.

Monumental architecture also served as a means of advertising the wealth and power of the Ottoman Empire to foreign heads of state, as well as to the elite of provinces and non-Turkish Muslim subjects. The ceremonies involving the inauguration of the Süleymaniye mosque, the ostentatious maintenance of buildings at sites holy to Islam can be seen as a response to severe competition in political, religious and economic sphere with Iran.