

SOME COSMIC MOTIFS AND ELEMENTS IN SELJUK AND OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURE

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In all communities religious architecture is shaped in conformity with the functions necessitated by the religious doctrine; and meanings and contents of beliefs necessitated by creeds. The form and order of a sanctuary is, also shaped in accordance with the religious principles and the ritual essentials of the religion. Some fundamentals which were brought about by the Holy Qur'ân, similarly gave rise to the form of the mosque which is the sanctuary of Islamic religion. Of these fundamentals, the most important one is "Arş", namely "the Throne".

The literal meaning of the Throne is altitude, high place, ceiling, cover, the tent and it is used in the Qur'ân and in the Hadiths (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammed) as "Divine Sovereignty, Dignity and the Throne" (Develliöglu 1970: Arş; Gölpınarlı 1977: Arş, 1989:101; Akay 1991: Arş; DIA:Arş; IA:Kürsü). The concept of "Kürsî" which occurred in Âyet el-Kürsî in the Qur'ân is synonymus with the Throne which is attributed to "Allah" symbolically.

As the metaphorical place from which Allah rules the world, the Throne is the highest point of the cosmos. In the Qur'ân, it is mentioned that the Throne is over the waters (Hud: 7), it is carried by four angels (Mü'min: 7), and eight angels will, in the Last Day, bear it (Hakka: 17). He who created the cosmos is firmly established on the Throne (Yûnus: 3), (Ra'd: 2), (A'raf: 54), (Ta-ha: 5), (Hadid: 4), (Furkan: 59), (Secde: 4). His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth (Bakara: 225). The Throne which has six directions and also, weight, shade, corner and columns, is an enormous and valuable object which stands over the heaven as a dome.

This concept has also been used in the Old Testament (1. Kings: 22/19; Revelation: 7/11-12). It will not be mentioned here, in order not to extend the subject; but, such a similar concept might have influenced Christian sanctuaries and other buildings.

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On the columns of the Throne is written the Kelime-i Tevhid (the declaration of Allah's Unity). According to the Hadiths collected by Bukharî, the Throne, being on the waters before the heavens and the earth are created, was also over the paradise which was on the seventh stratum of heavens. As for Allah, He is over the Throne. When commenting on the verse which says "the sun runs his course for a period determined (or in a certain orbit)" (Ya-sin: 38), the Prophet Muhammed said: "It's orbit is below the Throne". That the concept of the Throne has the meaning of frame with four corners it has a significance from our point of view.

When the Seljuks came to Anatolia they transmitted a kind of masque plan with them. This is the Cum'a Mosques in Isfahan, Ardistan and Zevvare which belong to the Iranian Seljuks and which have maintained their essentials up today. They have a dome in front of the mihrab and an iwan in front of it and side naves (sahn) constituting the sanctuary (harim). Without being isolated by a wall, the sanctuary opens itself to a courtyard. The other three sides of the courtyard are surrounded by a portico (revak), of these each has an iwan within and his connections with the sanctuary. And in the middle of the courtyard, in a point where axes intersect each other, there is a square basin.

However, in Anatolia this kind has underwent some variations. The part between the basin and the iwan are covered by a vault and thus the courtyard and basin are implied within the sanctuary. This time the basin was not left open to heaven but covered by a dome with lantern. Being the archetypes of (Ulu) Great Mosques in Anatolia, Niksar (about 1135), Kayseri (about 1140), Erzurum (1197), Niğde (1225), Divriği (1228) (Fig. 1) and other mosques like Hunad in Kayseri (1237), Sahib Ata in Konya (1258) and Eşrefoğlu in Beyşehir (1299) and the others not mentioned here are reproduced from the classical Anatolian Seljuk scheme that has no side iwans and their basin is covered by a dome with lantern (Gabrial 1934: 177-178, Fig. 112; Kuban 1965: 121-122; Karamağaralı 1976: 200-203). The most fundamental features of these Anatolian Seljuk mosques, like the height and wideness of the middle nave and its dome in front of the mihrab, iwan, basin and dome with lantern, all come from Iranian Seljuks. While the basin in the Iranian Seljuks exists in the intersecting points of axes of iwans, in the Anatolian Seljuks it exists in a point where the axes of doors and main iwan intersect.

The relationship we presume here is that the basins (which are usually square and sometimes octagon) represent the water which has taken place in the definition of the Throne and flows under the Throne; the dome

represents the heaven, the four pillars which carry the dome represent the four angels carrying the Throne; and the openness in the dome of the building refers to the concept of ascension to heaven (Eliade 1991: 158). This openness (lantern) represents the center of heaven (cosmos). It is in the middle of the dome and since it is on the vertical axis which is believed to bound the earth and heaven, it represents the axis which is believed to pass through the center of the world (axis mundi) (Ardalan-Bakhtiar 1978: 75, Eliade 1991: 23-28). The placement of the basin, being right beneath the dome carried by four pillars, on the intersection point of axes of South and North, East and West of the mosque, right under the key stone and the lantern, metaphorically represents that the basin is the center of the sanctuary which is considered as a cosmos reduced for human perception and that all cosmos takes place under and around the Throne, which is on the uttermost stratum of the heaven, and that Allah, the Absolute Sovereign, governs the cosmos from there.

As far as Islamic philosophy is concerned, the concept of the Throne, which is represented by the basin, the four pillars, the dome and the lantern on the dome in a mosque, may refer to the conceptions that Allah is eternal and pre-eternal, that he is over everything, all the cosmos and the strata as their only Sovereign and the Ruler, that all the cosmos is ruled from a single center. This can explain why this scheme appears in a place where one can reach Allah and why it is just in the center.

Alone with the concept of the Throne, it is necessary to mention the iconographical concept of "mandala" which is used in various ways in Turkish architecture and which I suppose to have a close relationship with the Throne.

Mandala means circle in Sanskrit, and is a symbolic drawing used in the rituals and during meditations in Hinduism and Buddhism. Another definition of mandala is circular diagram that one makes use of to obtain cosmic and physical energy (Rawson 1978: 211). Madala is a point in which universal powers are gathered and it represents the cosmos as a sacred area in which the gods dwell. Mandala is made to create a microcosm and to reign over its elements. The mandala diagram has been taken as an example for some architectural plans (Rawson 1982: 66) (Fig. 2).

The shape of the cosmogram called mandala in architecture and handcrafts, consists of a circle and a square, one within the other. While the circle represents the God, cosmos, mystical life, eternity, the world of eternity and esoteric concepts; the square represents the world, material life,

worldly life and all exoterical concepts. This was used in Central Asia very commonly in pre-Islamic life of Turks besides India and Far-East. However, we are not concerned here with the origin and the development of the mandala, but only with its parallelism with the concept of the Throne.

The totality of the meanings which the square and the circle of the mandala include, both separately and together, is in accordance with the philosophy of Islam. The plan with four iwans and a central courtyard, has been interpreted as an image of the cosmos. This plan has a very long past in history; it has been identified with the diagram of mandala, and has been extensively applied in architecture for centuries (Ögel 1986: 59-84; 1994: 63-115). The concept of mandala which takes place in pre-Islamic Turcic beliefs and traditions, has united and integrated with the concept of the Throne, which has played a significant role in the formation of religious architecture after Islam.

Besides the mosque plans, the same ordinances with respect to the Throne can be found in the medrese and zaviya plans. Some examples of these are Karatay Medrese and İnce Minareli Medrese in Konya; Sahib Ata Hanegah in Konya, Karabaş Veli Hanegah and İbrahim Bey İmaret in Karaman.

It is not by accident, that mandala has been used as a motif outside the mosques, medreses and zaviyes. Some instances of mandala motifs are; the west portal of Divriği Ulu Mosque (Fig. 3) and its door's wing, the window on the north portal of Niğde Sungur Bey Mosque, the bases of the minarets of Sivas Gök and Çifte Minareli Medreses and Erzurum Hatuniye Medrese (Fig. 4) which is very attentive with the inscription of Allah. These examples show how Turks were obliged to the Throne concept and gave an Islamic identity to the mandala simultaneously and united the two concepts.¹

¹ As far as I am informed by M.Kiel in his letter in 10.12.1995; Irene Beldiceanu, a specialist on pre-Ottoman and early Ottoman Turkish population of Anatolia and the Ottoman Tahrirs, had mentioned that the Turkish tribes in 14.-15. century in Anatolia had still adhered to Buddhism. Also, he considers that, there are some symbols to be evidences of Buddhist culture on some statues (gravestones) found in Afyon. Remembering that Eretnaogulları were of Uygur origin, as well as the fact that Sultan Bayezid II was said to have been one of the last to have studied the Uygur language which must have been spoken in Anatolia quite a long time; these should have been the bearers of elements of the Buddhist culture. It is understood that the Buddhist culture continued to exist in Anatolia during Seljuk and Ottoman periods. B. Karamağaralı, in her article (1993: 249-270) also points out many iconographical examples seen on Islamic buildings and handcrafts, indicating or having connections with Buddhist culture.

When we investigate the Ottoman architecture, especially the sultan buildings with this respect, we see the same mandala—the Throne relationship. The same approach exists in Bursa Yeşil Mosque and Medrese, Bursa Muradiye Medrese, and in the Darüşşifa in Edirne Beyazid Külliye. In Bursa Ulu Cami (Fig. 5), the square basin which exists in the intersection point of axes, is covered by a dome with lantern based on four pillars. Orbits and planets which exist in the eastern face of wooden minber of Ulu Cami of Bursa is a decorative indicator of the Throne's element.

Edirne Eski Cami, which is based on four pillars within a square plan, though its basin has been removed, is another example of mandala—the Throne composition having a dome with lantern where the axes passing through the doors intersect each other (Ardalan-Bakhtiar 1975: 31, 75, Fig. 49a). A square, made of nine equal squares is also a well known variation of mandala.

Selimiye Mosque, being the peak and the masterpiece of the Ottoman Architecture, has great importance by using cosmic motifs and elements like “mandala” and “the Throne” in perfect harmony with its architectural structure. There are two great circles on top of the gateway by which one can enter into the sanctuary through the courtyard of the mosque. Having borders in three sides, it represents a mandala. Besides, right in front of the door in the basement, there is a mandala with a circular green stone in its center (Fig. 6); and another mandala five meters towards the fountain with a purplish brown color. We see the same mandala on the entrance to Sultan Ahmet Mosque and Behram Paşa Mosque in Diyarbakır. These can be interpreted as the signs of holiness of the place that one enter to pray for Allah.

The square sanctuary and the projection of the dome within this square, looks like a mandala (Fig. 7). The fact that the dome is based on eight columns, has the implications of the Throne (Hakka: 17). But the most significant place where the Throne is manifestly showed, is the place of the müezzin's lodge (mahfil). Some colleagues have also perceived the importance of the place of the müezzin's mahfil and put forward various aspects (Akın 1988; Şenalp 1988: 9-10; Akın 1993: 8-9, 20). The mahfil is placed right in the center of the sanctuary and beneath the key stone of the dome, which is not seen in any other mosque. Undoubtly, there are meanings and reasons in addition to hearing “tekbir” from every point, in the preference of this place (Fig. 8). This place exists on the vertical axis of the keystone, which is the centre of the universe and the centre of the harim, which is the centre of the world. An octagonal basin bordered

by a square frame, stands just beneath the müezzin's mahfil. The basin refers to "Kevser" (the holy water of Paradise) which flows under the Throne. Not being contented with these, in order to express the concept of the Throne, Sinan has put a big central "çark-ı felek" representing the sun and the planets, on the bottom side of the mahfil in relief, so as to face the basin; the way the Prophet Muhammed said when he interpreted Yasin: 38. In other words, the orbit of the sun and the planets are under the Throne, but over Kevser.

Right at the centre of the dome, Surah of Ihlas is written. When the dome is considered together with this Surah, it absolutely denotes "The Unity" and confirms the philosophy of the Throne. As much as Selimiye Mosque is a masterpiece according to all architectural criteria; its iconographical motifs and elements, and its connecting those motifs and elements with its architectural concept, it occupies an exceptional place.

As a conclusion, we can say that there is a close relationship between "mandala" and "the Throne" concepts and Turks have used the form of mandala before Islam and continued to use it after. They accepted it in their scheme of religious architecture, and that mandala lived together with the Qur'anic concept of the Throne; and these two concepts and their connotations have extensively influenced all the branches of art especially the architecture.

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