

# **The Late Works of Mimar Sinan Symbolism and Cultural Significance with the Case Studies of the Sokollu Mehmed Pasa Mosque and Medresse in Kadirga, Istanbul and the Selimiye Mosque Complex in Edirne.**

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## Abstract

Mimar Sinan was the court architect of the Sultans and Grand Viziers of Ottoman Turkey during the height of the Ottoman Empire. During a career that spanned over fifty years he was responsible for almost 500 building projects and designed some of the most important buildings of his era. However, though the quality, inventiveness and breadth of his work were commensurate with his Renaissance contemporaries, it is still little known in the West and has not benefited from the substantial scholarship afforded his Renaissance peers. In particular, the symbolism of his külliye (mosque complexes) has not been adequately addressed in relationship to worship, Islamic beliefs, and cultural settings. This paper intends to begin to rectify this significant gap in scholarship.

The paper will argue that in his late works Sinan coalesced and incorporated many of his early motifs, ideas and strategies into a unified whole. Of these, site, form, structure, spatial composition, geometry and ornament found their most potent expression. It will focus on two of his last works, The Sokollu Mehmed Pasa Mosque and Medresse in Kadirga, Istanbul and the Selimiye Mosque Complex in Edirne. It will also reference important earlier works such as the Sehzade, Suleymaniye, Kara Ahmed Pasa, Rustem Pasa, Edirnekapi Mihrinah Sultan, Eski Valide and Azakapi Sokollu Mosques, also in Istanbul. The paper includes the scholarship of Turkish architectural historian Dogan Kuban, Robert Hillenbrand's research on Islamic architecture, Gunkut Akin's research on the Selimiye Mosque, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's scholarship on the symbolism of Islamic art and architecture.

The conclusion argues that even though Sinan worked within a highly circumscribed conservative political, religious, and artistic setting, his works are consistently distinguished by their inventiveness. Furthermore, one can trace a lineage of rational, sequential experiments throughout his oeuvre. In particular, his late works were a culmination of his previous experimentation, which achieved a maturity of formal, structural, symbolic and religious expression that both reflected and transcended their cultural setting.