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A traditional trace in the urban fabric: Architectural analysis of the Maltepe Mosque

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Abstract

This study aims to present an evaluation of contemporary mosque architecture by addressing the Maltepe Mosque in Ankara, which was built with a traditional approach. In Turkey, modern mosque architecture often adopts design approaches that aim to maintain the traces of the past and remain loyal to the local cultural identity. However, this sometimes causes traditional elements to become an obstacle to innovative architectural approaches. In the study, the architectural features of the Maltepe Mosque, the traditional elements used and the relationship of these elements with modern architecture will be analyzed. In particular, how key architectural elements such as the dome, minaret, mihrab and minbar, which are fundamental to Ottoman and Seljuk architecture, were used in this building and how they were integrated with modern construction techniques will be examined through the plan and structural elements of the mosque. The Maltepe Mosque was selected as a case study in order to question the place of traditional mosque architecture within modern urban life and architectural understanding, to discuss issues of aesthetics, functionality, and originality through architectural elements, and to provide a critical perspective on the future of mosque architecture in Turkey. Whether the design of the Maltepe Mosque, enriched with traditional elements, contributes to the creation of a contemporary structure, its integration with the urban fabric and the degree to which it meets the needs of the users are among the focal points of this study. The limitations imposed by traditionalist approaches in the mosque architecture in the context of modern architecture will be evaluated in terms of aesthetics, functionality and originality. The relationship of the building with its surroundings and the sustainability of traditional mosque forms in a modern city will also be addressed within this framework. Finally, the study aims to offer a unique perspective on the harmony of traditional architecture with modern architecture in Turkey, specifically in the Maltepe Mosque. While the repetition of traditional patterns in mosque architecture can be seen as a factor that limits creativity, it can also be considered as a meaningful step towards preserving collective memory. Therefore, the aim of this study is to critically evaluate this balance between the traditional and the modern and to offer ideas on how mosque architecture in Turkey may evolve in the future.

Keywords: Ankara, architectural criticism, Maltepe Mosque, traditional mosque architecture

1. Introduction

Although studies on contemporary mosque architecture are limited, existing mosques are generally analyzed in two main groups: "*Traditional Approach*" and "*Modern Approach*" (Serageldin, 1996). The "*Traditional Approach*" refers to buildings that are designed to be close to the plans of historical mosques or as a copy of them but have encountered various problems in practice. While this approach repeats the classical elements of the Ottoman and Seljuk periods, it has a structure that limits its adaptation to today's user needs and contemporary architectural expectations (Soy, 2023).

On the other hand, the "*Modern Approach*" refers to mosques that move away from traditional patterns and are built with modern materials and techniques in their own style and aesthetics. This

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approach tries to create a unique architectural language outside the classical mosque forms by developing innovative solutions in an effort to be different. The modern approach considers the mosque not only as a place of worship, but also as a social space rich in aesthetics and functionality (Gürsoy, 2013).

This distinction between traditional and modern approaches constitutes an important area of discussion for the future of mosque architecture. Structures that balance the deep-rooted symbols of traditional architecture with the functional and aesthetic innovations of modern architecture can enable mosque architecture to evolve in line with the needs of contemporary society.

Eyüpgiller questions the symbolic significance of the dome and minaret in places of worship considered sacred from a sociocultural perspective, arguing that the earliest mosques were not domed structures and claiming that the functional necessity of the dome ended with the invention of steel and reinforced concrete (Eyüpgiller, 2006). Altınöz, emphasizes that in such approaches, facades are merely replicated and new mosque constructions are reduced to decorative surfaces, thereby diminishing architecture to a superficial façade practice (Bilgin Altınöz, 2010). In imitative mosque architecture, constructing forms specific to older styles and periods using contemporary building technologies does nothing more than applying a historical façade onto a modern structure (Kazmaoğlu & Tanyeli, 1986). Despite all the opposing views in the literature, contemporary mosques continue to be designed in the likeness of historical ones, featuring domes, arched windows, courtyards, and minarets, yet built with reinforced concrete frames (Kaymaz & Şenkal Sezer, 2017).

Modern mosque architecture in Turkey sometimes limits the opportunity to develop original and innovative approaches by frequently resorting to traditional elements in an effort to maintain traces of the past. The overemphasis on traditional forms and decorative elements can prevent the development of innovative architectural solutions in many mosques. This creates an environment, especially in public projects, where the concern for adhering to local identity makes it difficult to develop buildings that are aesthetically and functionally compatible with contemporary norms.

The Maltepe Mosque in Ankara can be considered as an example of this type of building. Although it was built with reference to traditional Ottoman-Turkish architecture, the design of the mosque is a repetition of past architectural elements rather than an original approach. This overshadows the creative potential of modern architecture instead of increasing the aesthetic value of the mosque. While innovative solutions suitable for user needs are expected, the fact that these buildings remain solely dependent on traditional forms creates a controversial area in terms of the architectural evolution of Turkey, which needs more functional buildings that are more compatible with today's urban fabric.

This study adopts a qualitative architectural analysis method to examine the Maltepe Mosque within the context of traditional mosque architecture and its relationship with contemporary architectural approaches. The analysis is structured under key architectural components including site layout, plan organization, section, structural system, mass and façade composition, material usage, and ornamental details. Each of these elements is critically evaluated in terms of their aesthetic, functional, and symbolic roles. The study also compares the architectural language of the mosque with both classical Ottoman-Seljuk examples and selected contemporary mosque designs in Turkey. Visual and spatial analyses are supported by architectural drawings, archival materials, and on-site observations, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the building's architectural identity.

Within the scope of the study, the architectural features of the Maltepe Mosque, the traditional elements used in its design and their relationship with modern architecture will be discussed. Firstly, the elements that refer to traditional Ottoman Mosque architecture will be analyzed through the plan and structural elements of the mosque. The connection of basic structural and decorative elements such as the dome, minaret, mihrab and minbar with traditional architectural

patterns and how these elements are combined with contemporary construction techniques will be evaluated.

Furthermore, the functionality of these traditional elements in meeting the needs of the mosque users will be analyzed under critical headings such as the harmony of the building with the environment and the urban fabric. This analysis will aim to shed light on the extent to which traditional forms make sense in today's urban environment and the limitations that such architectural approaches impose on contemporary architecture. Finally, how the architectural design of the Maltepe Mosque affects the originality and creativity of mosque architecture in modern Turkey will be discussed and the positive and negative aspects of the traditionalist approach of the building will be emphasized.

2. The Maltepe Mosque

The Maltepe Mosque is located on Şehit Gönenç Street in the Maltepe district of Çankaya, Ankara, on Block 5553 and parcel number 20, No: 3. The construction of the mosque began on May 16, 1954, and was completed and opened for worship on August 3, 1959. Designed by architect Recai Akçay, the building was constructed entirely using cut stone[1]. In the interior, sections up to 5 meters high were decorated with tile coverings, and marble material was preferred for the mihrab and minbar, preserving the traditional lines. These structural features of the mosque reflect both the architectural approaches of the period and the aesthetic understanding that remains loyal to the traditional Ottoman style.

Map 1 Aerial view of the Maltepe Mosque

In 1950, the “Association for the Construction of a Mosque in Ankara Maltepe” was founded under the chairmanship of Hasan Balbudak with the participation of the public in order to build a mosque in Ankara Maltepe (Association Archive). This association, whose name was later changed to “Association for the Construction and Preservation of Ankara Maltepe Mosque”, continues its activities under this new name today. The area initially considered for the mosque and allocated by the municipality to the association was the land opposite the current location of the mosque in Maltepe, where the units of Çankaya Municipality are located today. However, a 7019 m² plot of land on block 5553 and parcel 20 in its current location (Map 1), which was deemed more suitable in terms of usage area and the city's layout plan, was allocated to the association by the municipality for 99 years for the construction of the mosque (Association Archive) (Figure 1).

[1] Architect Recai Akçay (1909–1967) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul and worked in the studio of Ernst Egli until 1933. In addition to numerous significant projects, he also participated in the Anıtkabir design competition alongside Hamit Kemali Söylemezoğlu and Kemal Ahmet Arû, receiving an honorable mention (Menderes, 1968; Savaş Okumuş & Kıvılcım Çorakbaş, 2023).

Figure 1 Image of Maltepe Mosque taken in 1965 (Koç University, Vekam Dijital Library)

The square-planned harim (prayer hall) section of the building is covered with a main dome with a diameter of 20 meters and a height of 30 meters. Corner walls at the four corners support the square baldachin structure of the building (Drawing 1). The dome covering the entire space rests on large back arches connecting these corner walls, and the transition to the dome is provided by pendants. The plan structure is based on the central square baldachin structure as in the Classical Ottoman plan type. The harim floor rises gradually with curtain walls, symbolic weight towers and a central dome, and the copper finial at the top of the main dome has a crescent motif (Figure 2).

Figure 2 General view of Maltepe Mosque north facade

There are two minarets with a height of 50 meters in the northern corner of the mosque's harim. The minarets have a polygonal prism-based structure sitting on rectangular bases and attract attention with their cylindrical forms (Figure 3). Each minaret has a balcony, the bottom of twhich is decorated with three rows of muqarnas (Figure 4). The railings made with cage technique using marble material give the balconies an aesthetic appearance. The access to the balconies is provided only by stairs, and there are tile plates in the semicircular niches under the cone sections of the minarets. In addition, the cones are completed with lead coating.

Figure 3 General view of Maltepe Mosque minaret

Figure 4 A detail from the Maltepe Mosque minaret

The mosque is surrounded by a large courtyard which does not have any portico arrangement (Figure 5). The courtyard, which is slightly higher than the road level, is designed at the same level with the surrounding landscaping. The fountain or pool, which is often seen in the middle of the courtyard in the traditional style, is not included here (Figure 6).

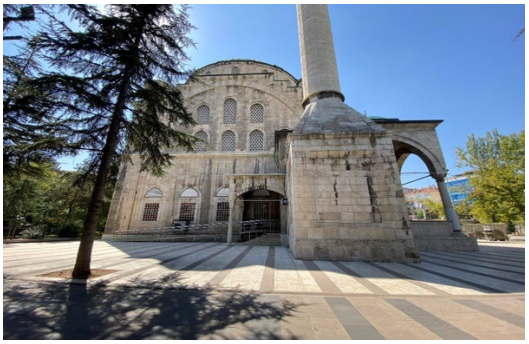


Figure 5 General view of the Maltepe Mosque east facade

Figure 6 General view of the Maltepe Mosque West facade

The last congregation area of the building is reached by five steps (Figure 7). Designed in five sections, each section of this area is covered with a dome. In the porticoes in the last congregation place, cylindrical columns are connected to each other with pointed arches, and the columns have two rows of muqarnas capitals and flat bases. Both sides of this section are designed to be open.

There are four large rectangular windows on the wall of the mahfil (gathering-place) on both sides of the door. These windows, with pointed arched pediments, have iron cages on the lower floor. The smaller upper windows are placed symmetrically to the windows below and also have pointed arches. In the center of the lower floor windows, there are mihrabiyas with muqarnas arches and these mihrabiyas and windows are connected to the harim (Figure 9). The inner surfaces of all the domes in the last congregation mahfil have hand-drawn decorations in the center and a single row of muqarnas decorations at the bottom (Figure 8).

Figure 7 Last congregation place of the Maltepe Mosque

Figure 8 Decoration of the dome of the last congregation place

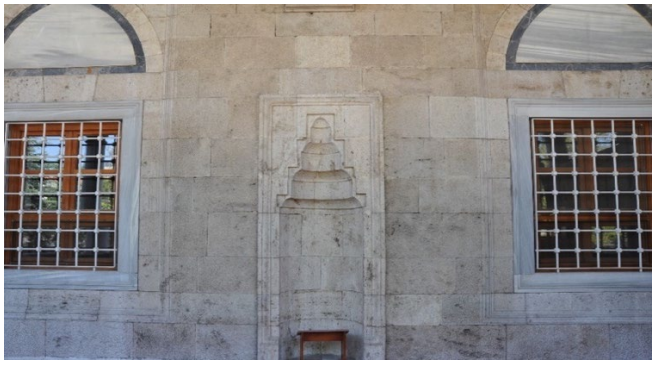
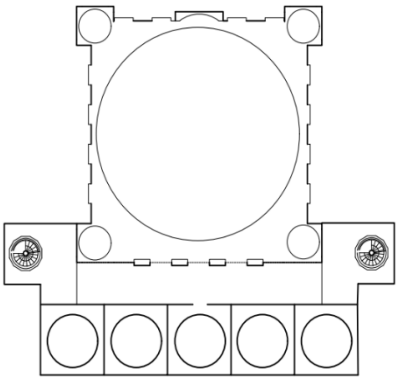


Figure 9 Mihrabiya of the last congregation place

The entrance to the harim is provided by a marble crown door from the last congregation place. An additional wooden porch-style entrance door was later built in front of this crown door. The door, which is in a large pointed arched niche, opens to both sides with concave and convex moldings (Figure 10). The flat arch of the door was formed using two colored stones interlaced with each other. At the top of the arch, there is an inscription written in celi sülüs calligraphy on marble.

Figure 10 Crown gate of the Maltepe Mosque

The wooden door wings are divided into three panels with similar decorations. The top panel of the door wings, made using the hammered kundekari technique, is smaller than the others and has a composition consisting of a five-armed star motif around a circle in the center. The large rectangular panel in the middle and the smaller rectangular panels below have an eight-armed star form in the center, surrounded by five-armed star motifs.



Drawing 1 The plan of the Maltepe Mosque (N. B. Soy, 19.11.2023)

To the north of the harim is the upper floor mahfil, which is protruding in the form of a balcony. At the level of the mahfil, there is a narrow balcony surrounding the building from three sides (Figure 11). The railings of the mahfil are made of marble and formed with cage technique. The rectangular columns are also made of marble and support the mahfil.

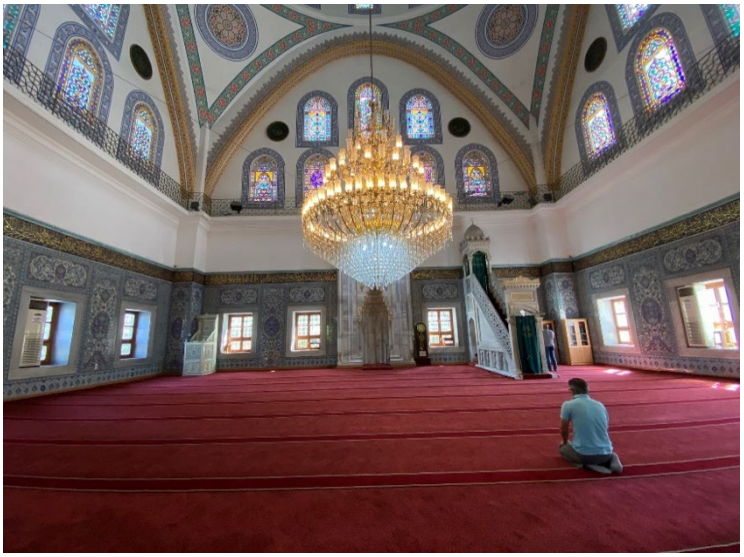


Figure 11 General view of the Maltepe Mosque harim

The mihrab located on the south wall of the mosque in the qibla direction is on the same axis with the qibla wall (Figure 12). The mihrab made of marble is bordered by large cylindrical columns on both sides. The capitals of the columns are hourglass shaped. The niche of the mihrab, which has six rows of muqarnas kavsara, is polygonal and is surrounded by columns on both sides. The corners of the arch are decorated with small layered rosettes covered with gilding (Figure 13). The 149th verse of the Surah Al-Baqara, “Fevelli vecheke shetral masjidil haram” (فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ) is written on the kavsara. The upper part is decorated with a spiral rumi and palmette array, and all the decorative protrusions of the mihrab are covered with gold leaf.

Figure 12 General view of the Maltepe Mosque mihrab

Figure 13 Detail from the mihrab of the Maltepe Mosque

The minbar of the building is made of marble. On both sides of the pointed arched entrance, there are two columns with rectangular bodies, the capitals of which have muqarnas (Figure 14). There is a rosette on each side of the arch pediment, and there is an inscription on the pointed arch. The entrance begins with a single row of muqarnas and ends with a crown. The crown is decorated with plant ornaments consisting of spiral rumi and palmette motifs. The perimeter of the side transoms of the minbar is surrounded by a flat molding. The triangular section is left empty. Under the transoms, there are four niches with segmented arches within rectangular panels. The passage section is plain. The square panel above the passage is decorated with geometric ornaments.

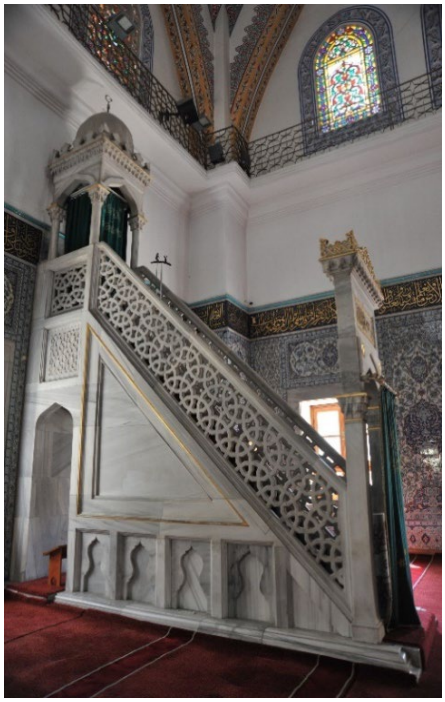


Figure 14 General view of the Maltepe Mosque minbar

The railing is decorated with geometric patterns using the pierced-work technique. In the center is a six-armed star and around this star is a composition formed by the intersection of twelve-armed star forms. The pavilion section is built on four columns with flat bodies and muqarnas capitals, connected to each other by pointed arches and covered with a flat ceiling. The bottom of the palmette-shaped top of the pavilion is decorated with a single row of muqarnas (Figure 15). The cone part is in the shape of an onion and there is a copper finial with a crescent motif on the top.

Figure 15 Front view of the Maltepe Mosque minbar

The sermon platform is made of wood, and its lower part consists of segmented arched niches arranged as two panels on each side (Figure 16). The upper part consists of panels decorated entirely with geometric compositions. There is a ten-armed star motif in the center, and the surroundings of this star are enriched with five-armed star motifs. The railing of the platform is

made of MDF, and it has a geometric composition derived from a six-armed star in the center. The top is in the form of a palmette and the bottom is decorated with a single row of muqarnas.

Figure 16 Sermon platform of the Maltepe Mosque

The mosque has many windows around the curtain wall and the dome (Figure 17). The windows at the foot of the dome are small in size and have pointed arches. On the curtain wall, there are five pointed arched windows on the same axis as the lower mahfil floor. The windows on the same level with the upper floor mahfil have also pointed arches. The middle one of these windows is larger than the others, and there are three in total. The windows are made in two layers, interior and exterior, and the cage technique is applied on their exterior surfaces. Colored stained glass is used in the interior parts, giving the mosque a very bright appearance. The windows on the lower floor are in rectangular form and are complemented with pointed arched pediments.

The lighting in the mosque is provided by a pendant chandelier put under the large dome.

Figure 17 Interior decorations of the Maltepe Mosque dome

The most prominent decorations in the Maltepe Mosque include calligraphy, hand-drawn works and tile decorations. The most striking example of calligraphy is the Surah Fatiha written in gold leaf on a black background in the center of the large dome. On the upper part of the tile panels in the harim, the Surah Tegâbün, written in celi sülüs calligraphy in gold leaf on a black background with the ground carving technique on marble, surrounds the harim walls from three sides. In addition, on both sides of the upper floor windows, there are panels with the names of Allah, Muhammad and the four caliphs. These panels are also carved in celi sülüs calligraphy in gold leaf on a black background.

One of the most magnificent elements of the building is the richness of the hand-drawn decoration. The main dome, pendants and window frames attract attention with hand-drawn ornaments applied on plaster. In the center of the dome, there are sun motifs dominated by yellow

and green colors on a claret red background. Inside these sun motifs are flowers, leaves and rumi motifs in hatayi style. At the ends of the sun motifs, palmette motifs decorated with yellow and white on a green background stand out. In the middle, there is a full sun motif dominated by navy blue, white and claret red on a turquoise background. At the foot of the dome, the sun motifs decorated with palmette motifs at their ends are dominated by green (Figure 18).

Figure 18 Hand-drawn decorations in the Dome Center

The edges of the pendants are surrounded by a border dominated by claret red, navy blue and white on a green background (Figure 19). This border is decorated with palmettes, spiral rumi and hatayi motifs. In the middle of the pendants is a large medallion decorated with palmettes, hatayi leaves and spiral rumi motifs in navy blue, white and claret red on a white background. The outer frame is decorated with penç, hatayi and spiral rumi motifs adorned with white, claret red and navy blue on a turquoise background. The borders that determine the borders of the back arches contain compositions consisting of spiral rumi, hatayi leaves and carnation motifs dominated by claret red and white on a yellow background. The upper floor window edges are also decorated with penç, hatayi and spiral rumi motifs dominated by white, claret red and navy blue on a turquoise background.

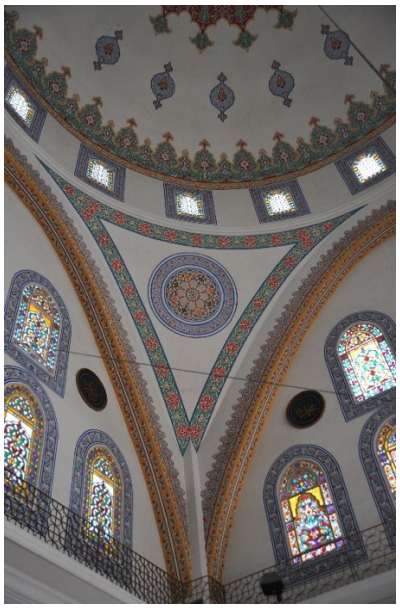


Figure 19 Hand-drawn decorations on Pendants

The harim section of the mosque is covered with tiles up to 5 meters high, and these tile decorations were arranged by Mahmut Akok. The tile panels on the right and left walls of the mihrab niche of the mosque are surrounded by a border consisting of leaves curled in the form of

dagger and penç applied in white on a turquoise background (Figure 20). The corners are decorated with spiral rumi motifs in white on a cobalt blue background. In the center of the panel, there is a sun motif bordered in white, and decorated with spiral rumi motifs on a navy-blue background. Below the motif is a vase motif, also decorated with spiral rumi motifs. The lower sections are decorated with flowers such as tulips, carnations, hyacinths and large curved leaves. The rest of the panel is elaborately filled with large dagger-shaped curved leaves, elegant penç, pomegranate flowers, hatayi motifs and peonies, all in a saz style using blue and green colors on a white background, leaving no empty spaces.

Figure 20 Detail of tile panel

One of the vertical rectangular tile panels on the side walls is surrounded by a border consisting of white penç and dagger-shaped leaves on a turquoise background. The interior is decorated with a turquoise-colored sliced arch form on the upper section, and the composition of spiral rumi motifs dominated by green and blue on a white background is on the corners of the arches. Inside the panel, there are three sun motifs created with white and turquoise colors on a navy blue background. These forms include large curved dagger-shaped leaves, penç, rumi and hatayi motifs. The panel is generally filled with large green curved leaves, penç and hatayi motifs on a white background. Another tile panel on the north wall of the harim has navy blue sun and hatayi motifs inside curved branches. Spring branches, carnations and penç motifs are placed between the motifs as ornaments (Figure 21).

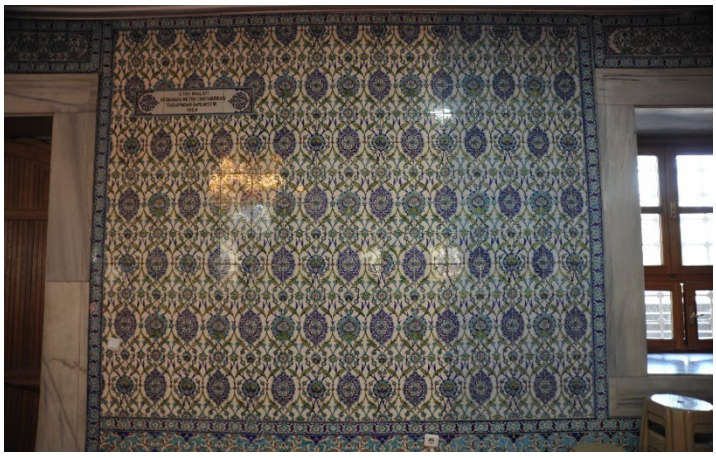


Figure 21 Tile panel detail from harim north wall

On the upper part of the lower floor windows, there are transversely rectangular tile panels. In the center of these panels is a sun motif on a dark blue background. The sun is surrounded by large leaves, penç and hatayi motifs dominated by green and dark blue on a white background. In the corners of the panel, there are penç motifs in white and claret red on a navy blue background.

3. Evaluation

Maltepe Mosque stands out as a building that bears the traces of Classical Ottoman Mosque architecture with its general architectural design. The mosque reflects the symmetry and centrality of Ottoman mosques with its central dome and square-planned harim. Designed in the square baldachin style, the plan of the building offers a balanced spatial composition with a large main dome and corner walls supporting the dome. The height and diameter of the dome increase the spaciousness of the interior and the splendor of the prayer hall, thus transforming the building from being a mere place of worship to an architectural work that offers an aesthetic experience to its visitors.

Today, Turkey's major cities are experiencing a significant increase in the number of mosques in line with the growing population. These buildings often adopt a style based on the classical Ottoman period, particularly 16th century architecture. In the construction of new mosques, there is a preference for adhering to or establishing a connection with the traditional style rather than original and modern designs. This is due to the effort to preserve the architectural identity of mosques and the society's respect for the past. However, sometimes these preferences lead to the exact copying of the traditional form and limit the development of original designs that will meet contemporary needs.

Classical Ottoman architecture is known for elements such as central planning, domed structures, and fine craftsmanship in ornamentation, and these features are frequently reproduced in contemporary mosques. Elements such as minarets, large domes, interior decorations and arches are reinterpreted by referencing classical period architecture. In this context, although original designs are limited in modern mosque architecture, there are also examples where traditional details are blended with modern building techniques and materials.

However, the tendency to adopt architectural formulas of the past instead of introducing new interpretations through contemporary architecture also reflects the aim of creating a socially and culturally familiar atmosphere. While this approach reinforces the function of mosques as spiritual and cultural centers in society, it also limits the search for original and innovative designs.

Maltepe Mosque has adopted the central square baldachin plan type seen in Classical Ottoman Mosque architecture. This plan structure is supported by the corner walls at the four corners of the building, and the dome covering the entire space is placed on large back arches connecting the corner walls. This structural arrangement is similar to a dome composition that Mimar Sinan frequently used and experimented with in his mosques. Sinan's dome designs have been evaluated as a basic structural and aesthetic element that shapes space and mass, beyond being just a covering element (Necipoğlu, 2005).

The spatial arrangement preferred by Mimar Sinan in mosque architecture and built on a four-legged square baldachin constitutes an important example of the classical Ottoman Mosque typology (Erarslan, 2020). Examples of this arrangement include works such as Edirnekapı Mihrimah Sultan, Eyüp Zal Mahmut Pasha, Lüleburgaz Sokullu Mehmet Pasha and Manisa Muradiye Mosques (Kuban, 2007; Necipoğlu, 2005; Goodwin, 2012). Maltepe Mosque follows this traditional plan scheme, preserving the essence of Ottoman architecture and reinterpreting the spatial aesthetics of the classical period.

Today’s construction technology has reached a level where the functional importance of the dome in spanning large spaces has been largely eliminated. Thanks to modern construction materials and engineering techniques, spanning large spaces can now be achieved with more diverse and flexible solutions. However, the dome has a deep historical and social meaning in mosque architecture; therefore, social acceptances cause the dome to maintain this function at a perceptual level (Dural, 2017). Even today, architects prefer the dome as an indispensable element in mosque designs as it continues to play both an aesthetic and spiritual role as the focal point of space in mosque architecture.

There are many factors that shape the design of a mosque. Among these, the identity and specific demands of the person commissioning the mosque, the location and dimensions of the land, the relationship between the building and its surroundings, and the orientation of the land are the key elements. These factors determine the plan scheme and dimensions of the mosque, and different designs emerge in mosques in line with these limitations. For example, the location of the land provides important clues as to whether the mosque should be in harmony with its surroundings, as well as the orientation of the mosque. The special demands of the person or institution financing the building can also have a direct impact on the architectural style and ornamentation of the mosque. Thus, each mosque acquires its own characteristic features.

One of the most prominent features of contemporary mosque design is the positioning of the building on a large area of land. Traditional arcaded courtyards are generally not used in such buildings. While it is common to surround the space with elements that draw a clear boundary in traditional mosque courtyards, such boundary-defining elements are not present in contemporary designs. The courtyard in the building under study is slightly elevated from the road level and is located on the same plane with the surrounding landscaping, creating an organic integrity with the building's surroundings. This allows the mosque to establish a more fluid relationship with its surroundings, blurring the boundaries of the space and offering a more open and inviting space for users.

In mosques designed in recent years, open courtyard arrangements that are not surrounded by sharp boundaries have become increasingly common. The Sancaklar Mosque (2013), one of the most modern examples of this approach, is located on a large land and is completely underground and integrated with nature (Akbulut & Erarslan, 2017). Similarly, the Yeşil Vadi Mosque (2010) rises on a white marble platform surrounded by a shallow pool of water on the south side, and the courtyard is accessed by stairs (Öney, 2019). The Marmara University Faculty of Theology Mosque (2015) is located above the street level and uses natural elevations instead of a wall defining its boundaries (Taşdemir & Erarslan, 2018). In addition, the TBMM Mosque (1989) offers a more fluid courtyard arrangement that is not surrounded by sharp boundaries by taking advantage of the slope of the land like the Sancaklar Mosque. The modern courtyard designs in these mosques make the mosque architecture more organic and in harmony with its surroundings, redefining the mosque as a social meeting point beyond a place of worship.

The Maltepe Mosque does not have a fountain or pool, which are common in traditional mosque courtyards. This deficiency shows that the mosque has adopted a different approach in the courtyard arrangement. While the absence of a fountain makes the overall design of the mosque simpler, it has allowed this area to be planned in an integrated manner with the landscape.

The last congregation place also stands out as an important element in the architecture of the mosque. This area, which has five sections and each section is covered with a dome, adds depth to the front face of the mosque. The muqarnas decorations on the columns and arches and the low arched doors keep the Ottoman aesthetics alive in the details.

The use of an odd number of units in the arcades of the last congregation place and the elevation of one or three units in the middle with wider arches or by keeping the centers above the springing line level is a traditional practice that emphasizes the entrance axis in classical architecture (Özyalvaç, 2020). This design approach gives the building symmetry and balance, emphasizing the direction of entrance for visitors and creating a visual focal point at the same time.

While the minaret of the Maltepe Mosque adheres closely to traditional Ottoman architecture, it does not adequately reflect the search for an original and contemporary design. The cylindrical form and polygonal prismatic base used in the minaret repeats the aesthetic understanding of the classical period, while remaining far from the innovative structural techniques of today's architecture. Although the height of the minaret and the single balcony structure provide a visually conventional symmetry, they do not offer an element that is in harmony with its surroundings or differentiates the user experience.

Mosques such as Çamlıca Mosque, Ataşehir Mimar Sinan Mosque and Arnavutköy Taşoluk Yeşil Mosque are among the buildings that repeat the cylindrical form and balcony minaret designs of the classical Ottoman scheme. In particular, the six-minaret structure of the Çamlıca Mosque carries the aesthetic elements of the Ottoman period to the present day, but instead of presenting an innovative architectural understanding, it is limited to an approach based on reproducing the past (Koçak & Özdemir, 2021). In such buildings, the tendency to reuse the symbols of the classical period makes it difficult for mosques to gain a unique architectural identity.

A similar situation is observed in the Ataşehir Mimar Sinan Mosque. The cylindrical minarets with three balconies on the four corners appear as an exact repetition of traditional forms rather than a contemporary interpretation. This design preference distances the mosque from being an original structure and causes it to remain as a reproduction of a symmetrical form taken from the past.

Although the Yeşil Vadi Mosque is a building designed with a modern architecture, a structure close to the traditional Ottoman form was preferred for the minaret (Akbulut & Erarslan, 2017). The cylindrical form, small windows and balcony design made of stainless steel pipes do not fully comply with the modern character of the mosque. This shows how necessary it is to deal with minarets in an original and innovative way in modern architecture. Adhering to traditional forms is an obstacle to the development of a more innovative and contemporary language in mosque architecture.

Although the harim of the Maltepe Mosque is designed with elements that repeat the classical Ottoman mosque scheme, it does not adequately respond to modern needs and today's aesthetic understanding. While the square-plan baldachin structure covered with a central dome makes the space symmetrical and balanced, it has difficulty in providing a contemporary usage experience.

The load-bearing elements of the building are supported by a central dome resting on large arches at the four corners. This dome system is a frequently preferred form in classical mosque architecture and was able to meet the structural requirements of the period. However, in today's architecture, lighter, more durable and flexible building materials and techniques can be used in order span large spaces and provide spaciousness in the space. In this respect, the dome of the Maltepe Mosque remains a traditional design rather than an innovative upper covering system.

In mosques built with a traditional approach, liturgical elements such as mihrab, minbar, muezzin's mahfil and sermon platform are of great importance. The mihrab, which stands out as a guiding building element in mosque architecture, is at the forefront of these elements. The mihrab schemes of classical Ottoman architecture, which developed under the leadership of Chief Architect Koca Sinan in the 16th century, formed the characteristic examples of monumental Ottoman mihrabs in terms of crown and frame designs. In these mihrabs, a unity of style is noticeable in terms of material selection, decorative features and technical use, which is a distinctive feature of classical practices that continued until the 18th century (Bozkurt, 2007).

Today, however, the repetition of these traditional mihrab designs may prevent the development of an innovative and original architectural language. While more functional and contemporary forms can be created with modern building techniques and materials, the strict repetition of traditional schemes can make the architectural identity of the building become ordinary. The reconstruction of liturgical elements in traditional patterns limits the potential of the space to adapt to modern user experiences, making it difficult for the mosque to gain a unique structural expression.

As a place where Friday and Eid sermons are read and where the state is represented in the mosque, the minbar is considered one of the most important elements of mosque architecture (Apa, 2007). However, the traditional approach to the minbar in Maltepe Mosque could not take the opportunity to give the building a unique character. Although the placement of the minbar to

the west of the mihrab is in accordance with Ottoman architecture, a more contemporary interpretation could have been offered with different placement and design alternatives.

Innovative designs that contribute to the aesthetic and spatial experience of the space while preserving the functionality of the minbar may be preferred in modern mosque architecture. Here, however, the construction of the minbar by adhering to classical forms has led to the limitation of the space to traditional patterns and has been insufficient to adapt the building to modern user needs. Although this traditional approach preserves the role of the minbar within the mosque, it is restrictive in terms of giving the mosque a unique character.

The sermon platform in the Maltepe Mosque is made of wood and decorated with classical hatayi and rumi motifs but fails to offer a modern interpretation or innovative design. The panels decorated with traditional ornaments and geometric patterns contribute to the aesthetic details of the mosque, but while the sermon platform in the mosque's architecture could have been reinterpreted in a more contemporary and functional manner, this opportunity has been overlooked.

During the Ottoman period, doors showed a tendency towards simplicity and a decrease in ornamentation. These doors were usually decorated with simple mouldings and muqarnas arches and were bordered by columns with hourglass-shaped capitals at the top and bottom. Two-colored marble was often used in the door arches and these elements added a characteristic elegance to classical Ottoman architecture (Karademir, 2014). However, these traditional door designs can become a limiting factor in the unique identity of mosques.

The last congregation place and courtyard arrangements with porticoes and fountains, which were also applied by Sinan in the Ottoman classical period, created a significant change in the northern facades of mosques. One of the areas where these changes are most visible is the crown gates. However, replicating the traditional crown door design in contemporary buildings may prevent the development of an innovative architectural language. While the functional and aesthetic reinterpretation of crown gates today offers opportunities to create more original solutions in mosque design, the repetition of classical forms and ornaments may limit the integration of the building with modern architecture and block the way for more innovative and bold designs.

Windows play an important role in ensuring the balance of openness and closedness of the structures by removing the walls of the mosque from being merely closed surfaces (Yetkin, 1959). These elements, which are both technically and aesthetically functional, allow the space to receive light and strengthen the interior-exterior relationship. However, in traditional mosque architecture, windows are often used with standardized forms and limited ornamentation, which adds a certain aesthetic to the building but limits originality.

Today, in mosque architecture, a more original and innovative approach to window design can give the space a more dynamic character. Diversifying the use of windows with different sizes, modern stained-glass techniques and variable forms can increase the aesthetic value of the building and give the space a more contemporary atmosphere.

The structural design of traditional mosque architecture is shaped by main load-bearing elements such as continuous load-bearing walls, piers and columns, while it is supported by auxiliary elements such as buttresses, mihrab front or maksure dome, squinch, pendant and Turkish triangle. As covering elements, arches, vaults and domes provide both aesthetic and functional richness to the building. The methods adopted by the designers in order to make the mosque different, permanent, monumental and expressive have revealed an original style in the use of materials and technology, nourished by religious philosophy (Arpacıoğlu, 2013).

Classical materials such as cut stone, marble and wood were preferred in the construction of the Maltepe Mosque, and these choices show that they remained loyal to the Ottoman mosque architecture. For example, the marble mihrab and minbar are similar to those of the classical period

in terms of both material selection and detailing. However, these traditional materials do not benefit sufficiently from modern techniques supported by today's lightweight, durable and sustainable building materials.

Technically, the building remains loyal to traditional construction methods. While this maintains the aesthetic and structural values of classical architecture, it limits the building's ability to be a contemporary building. While modern construction techniques have the potential to create spacious and open spaces with wider openings and less material use, Maltepe Mosque ignores these innovations and repeats the traditional construction.

The decorations in the Maltepe Mosque were designed in strict accordance with the traditional Ottoman mosque aesthetics. Calligraphy, hand-drawn works and tile decorations are among the prominent decorative elements and repeat the motifs common in classical Ottoman mosques. In particular, the gold-leaf calligraphy of Surah Fatiha in the center of the dome and Surah Tegâbün surrounding the walls are indicators of adherence to the traditional decorative language. However, the repetition of such classical calligraphy applications has a limited effect in terms of adding originality to the space.

Hexagonal and six-armed star motifs are among the most popular geometric compositions used on the marble minbar railings of the Maltepe Mosque. This motif is a frequently preferred pattern in the Ottoman period and is also seen in important historical buildings such as Bursa Yeşil Mosque, Divriği Ulu Mosque, Edirne Selimiye Mosque and Üç Şerefeli Mosque (Demiriz, 2004). The octagonal and eight-armed star motifs used on the double-leaf door wings of the Maltepe Mosque carry deep symbolic meanings in traditional Islamic art. The eight-armed star is one of the complex geometric compositions formed by the intersection of lines at a certain center and was symbolized as the “heaven tamga” or “heaven gate” by pre-Islamic Turks (Aslan & Duran, 2021; Şaman Doğan, 2002). This motif was called the “Seljuk Star” during the Seljuk period and was frequently used in historical buildings such as Konya Kubadabad Palace, Aksaray Ulu Mosque, Bursa Yeşil Mosque and Bursa Yeşil Tomb (Demiriz, 2004).

Although the tile decorations are enriched with traditional motifs used around the mihrab and on the walls of the harim, they do not include an innovative perspective. Classical plant patterns such as dagger leaves, rumi and hatayi motifs in the saz style increase the general aesthetic value of the mosque, but do not give the building an original character. However, in modern architectural decorations, it is possible to see more creative, dynamic and unique designs with contemporary interpretations of traditional motifs.

Although the reuse of traditional motifs in hand-drawn decorations preserves a certain level of artistic value of the building, it has deprived the architectural character of the mosque of an innovative approach. While the hand-drawn decorations on the dome, pendants and window frames reflect the elements of the classical period, they do not offer a contemporary expression. The excessive repetition of traditional motifs makes the building artistically ordinary and limits the potential of modern users to have a different experience.

From this point of view, the decorations of the Maltepe Mosque, while respecting the classical Ottoman decorative tradition, are far from offering an innovative aesthetics we expect to see in contemporary architecture. This prevents the mosque from gaining artistic originality and condemns the building to a historical repetition.

4. Conclusion

In Turkey, mosque construction is carried out by various institutions and organizations, but the architectural form and style of mosques has become an increasing topic of discussion in recent years. The constant repetition of traditional architectural approaches distances the buildings from responding to contemporary needs, and this situation reveals the necessity of innovative solutions

in mosque designs. Functional, aesthetic and environmentally compatible designs should be developed in mosque architecture, taking into account the changing social structure and needs.

In mosque projects, geographical and regional conditions should be blended with technological possibilities, and buildings should be transformed into spaces with strong environmental aesthetics, intertwined with the city. Considering the land size and congregation capacity, importance should be given to the solutions of small-scale structures, especially neighborhood masjids. This will allow small and functional masjids to take part in urban life instead of only large and monumental buildings. In addition, considering the costs, high-quality but modest structures that will meet the needs should be designed.

The characteristics of the environment should be taken into account in the exterior space arrangements of mosques, and the dimensions and proportions of the buildings should be adjusted to be compatible with the urban texture. Avoiding the constant repetition of traditional architectural elements, new and original styles should be developed. In this way, a balanced combination of traditional and modern elements in mosque architecture can be achieved, and sustainable, functional and socially compatible buildings can be created in the future. The functionality and functional elements of mosques should be re-evaluated according to today's technology and user needs so that worship areas can be functional and aesthetic.

As a result, the Maltepe Mosque exhibits its commitment to traditional mosque architecture by repeating the decorative and structural elements of classical Ottoman and Seljuk architecture. Although the elements used in the structure such as the minaret, dome, crown gate, mihrab and minbar are decorated with symbols dating back to the Ottoman period, these elements have missed the opportunity to evaluate the innovative design opportunities offered by contemporary architecture. The geometric motifs such as the eight-armed star, hexagon and six- armed star on the door wings have also caused the intensive use of traditional motifs and the aesthetic language of the building to remain closely tied to the past.

The construction of the Maltepe Mosque with this traditional approach condemns the building to a historical repetition by distancing it from being an original work of art and architecture. While it is possible today to interpret traditional motifs in a different way and develop original solutions in terms of functionality and aesthetics with modern building materials, advanced techniques and innovative design approaches, the mosque's preference for classical patterns has made the building ordinary.

As a result, Maltepe Mosque is a building that respects traditional mosque architecture but missed the opportunity to develop a contemporary architectural language. Addressing mosque architecture in the future in a way that is more original, creative and responsive to the aesthetic values of the time will be an important step for the architectural development of this field.

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Note

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Resume

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