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Symbolism in the Mosques of Mimar Sinan: Inscriptions, Meanings, and Architectural Order*

MİMAR SİNAN'IN CAMİLERİNDE SEMBOLİZM: KİTABELER, ANLAMLAR VE MİMARİ DÜZEN

CEMİLE FEYZAN ŞİMŞEK**
ALİ UZAY PEKER***
SİNAN MERT ŞENER****

ABSTRACT

Architectural spaces not only consist of structural elements but also bear traces from the period in which they were built. These traces can be religion, culture, economy, power, technology, abstract concepts, or symbols. Worship places, in particular, contain diverse symbols and indicators due to their mission. Mosques specific to the Islamic religion also have various symbolic elements besides their original architectural features. It is seen in history that these elements are included in mosque architecture with abstract ornaments and calligraphy. In the mosques of Mimar Sinan's period, the inscriptions mainly consist of Qur'ān verses. These verses are placed on many architectural elements, starting from the dome. The study aims to systematically question and reveal the relationship between these verses and the architectural elements where they are placed using the semiotic method. Five mosques, the richest in terms of the epigraphy program, were selected as samples for the study. All the inscriptions in the mosques were identified on-site, and their accuracy was ensured by comparing them with sources related to the period. In this study, the symbolism of the inscriptions in Mimar Sinan's mosques, which has not been revealed before, is presented uniquely for each architectural element by reading them through the inscriptions and structural elements.

Keywords: Mimar Sinan, Mosque, Symbol, Architecture, Inscription, Meaning, Epigraphy.

ÖZ

Mimari mekânlar sadece yapısal unsurlardan oluşmazlar aynı zamanda yapıldığı dönemden izler de taşırlar. Bu izler din, kültür, ekonomi, iktidar, teknoloji, soyut kavramlar veya semboler olabilir. Özellikle ibadethaneler, misyonları gereği çeşitli semboller ve göstergeler barındırırlar. İslam dini ibadet mekânı olan camiler, özgün mimari tasarımlarının yanında çeşitli sembolik unsurları da barındırmaktadır. Tarihsel perspektifte bu unsurların soyut süslemeler ve yazıyla cami mimarisinde yer aldığı görülmektedir. Osmanlı döneminde cami mimarisini zirveye taşıyan ve bu çalışmanın konusu olan Mimar Sinan dönemi camilerinde kitabeler ağırlıklı olarak Kur'an ayetlerinden oluşmaktadır. Bu ayetler kubbeden başlayarak birçok mimari elemana yerleştirilmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı, bu ayetlerin yerleştirildiği mimari elemanlarla olan ilişkisini göstergebilimsel yöntemle sistematik olarak sorgulamak ve ortaya koymaktır. Çalışmada, Mimar Sinan döneminde inşa edilen epigrafi programı bakımından en zengin camiler olan Şehzade Mehmet, Süleymaniye, Selimiye, Kılıç Ali Paşa ve Sokullu-İsmihan Sultan camileri örneklem olarak seçilmiştir. Camilerde yer alan bütün yazılar yerinde tespit edilmiştir, ayrıca dönemle ilgili kaynaklardan da karşılaştırma yapılarak doğruluğu sağlanmıştır. Bu çalışmada, daha önce ortaya çıkartılmamış olan Mimar Sinan camilerindeki yazıların sembolizmi yazılar ve yapı elemanları üzerinden okunarak her mimari eleman için özgün olarak sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mimar Sinan, Cami, Sembol, Mimari, Yazı, Anlam, Yazıt.

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INTRODUCTION

Architecture incorporates signs similar to those found in language and writing, and the idea that architectural works are a means of communication has been widely accepted. Places of worship, in particular, are charged with symbolic meaning. Inscriptions (written with calligraphy) can be a direct means of communication, just like other symbols in mosque architectural design. In Islamic architecture, due to the established aniconism, lettering and abstracted decorative compositions come to the fore, which can be attributed to the utmost importance placed on the *Qur'ān* and the words of the Prophet Muhammad, the *hadith*.[1] The design features, materials, and structures of the mosques from the Mimar Sinan period have been widely studied. However, no research has touched on the symbolic dimension of the inscriptions in the mosques of the period and its reflections on mosque architecture elements. Therefore, this study examines the concept-symbol relationship in the calligraphic inscriptions found on the various elements of mosque structures and analyzes the meaning they generate.

1. Methodological Approach: Studying Signs and Symbols in Architecture Through Semiotics

Studying the theme of symbolism in architecture requires understanding the concept-symbol-system-semantic dimensions' structure. The sign analysis approach from the field of semiotics is helpful in its ability to reveal the interaction among them. Various tools have been developed to aid communication. The dissemination of these tools, as well as our encounters with various groups and cultures, require individuals to learn different communication systems to survive, and semiology analyses these systems.[2]

Linguistics and semiotics, founded in ancient times, have also been processed into architecture as a reflection of the worldview of societies from the past to the present. Many philosophers have produced ideas on the concept of signs from ancient times to the present and have examined signs in various fields, especially linguistic signs. The word *semiotics* comes from the Greek term *semeiotike*, and the word *semiology* comes from the Greek words *semeion* (sign) and *logia* (from *logos* meaning "theory"; "word"). The adventure of semiotics, which began with the Stoics in the 3rd century BC, continued with Plato, Modus, Locke, Leibniz, Diderot, Condillac, and Lambert in the 17th and 18th centuries, and continued with Hoene-Wronski, Bolzano, and Husserl. The foundations of general semiotics in the contemporary sense were laid by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) in the early 20th century.[3]

1 "Aniconism is a term that generally refers to the practice of avoiding or prohibiting the creation of images of living creatures. However, Islamic aniconism involves avoiding or prohibiting the depiction of living beings, such as humans and animals, in art and other visual forms. This form of aniconism is driven by the belief that the creation of animate forms is a privilege reserved for God alone and is therefore considered to be a religiously motivated practice." For detailed information about aniconism in Islam, see: Fariha Ali, "Aniconism in Islam", *Al-Salihat (Journal of Women, Society, and Religion)* 1/02 (2022), 13-27.

2 Mehmet Rifat, *XX. Yüzyılda Dilbilim ve Göstergebilim Kuramları 1 - Tarihçe ve Eleştirel Düşünceler* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2013), 113.

3 Rifat, *XX. Yüzyılda Dilbilim, 115-116.*

Pierce focused on the logical function of signs and tried to classify semiotic phenomena completely. The most striking triad is the icon, the index, and the symbol. An icon is a sign with a feature that makes it meaningful even if the object it represents does not exist (a pattern or a photograph). An index is a sign that will immediately lose the feature that makes it a sign when its object disappears but will not lose this feature if there is no interpreter (like a cloud being a sign of rain). A symbol is a sign that would lose the feature that makes it a sign if there was no interpreter (like a scale being a symbol of justice).[4]

F. de Saussure describes the indicators that are formed from signs or symbols as parts of a binary model, consisting of a signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*), and claims that the concept and sound-image together constitute the "sign" (Figure 1).[5] Signs produce meaning in language, individually, or in interaction within a system.

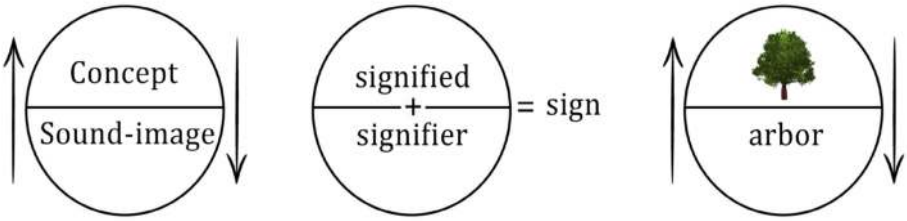

Figure 1: F. de Saussure's diagram of "sign"

Roland Barthes, a follower of Saussure, continues the understanding that all areas of culture, science, and society can be considered as various "languages" and that language can be a part of semiotics.[6] The fact that architecture is also seen as a language depends on this.

On the other hand, Umberto Eco followed Barthes's footsteps and became an architectural semiotics advocate. According to Eco, "If all cultural phenomena were systems of signs, any function must be related to communication. All architectural artifacts serve a communicative function by fundamentally communicating their function to be fulfilled before their actual use. Eco explains how society needs cultural codes generated step by step to communicate. Anything publicly emerging enters the realm of codes and entangles itself with connotations, tracing itself and its historical representation in collective memory. The architectural message becomes expected and comprehensible only by resting on these codes."[7]

Architecture itself represents something other than its material reality, explains something, and conveys the message of something. From this perspective, architectural production also refers to the aspect of representation, a language incorporating signs of communication in its means of representation. Hence, by nature, the space, structure, and even

4 Rifat, *XX. Yüzyılda Dilbilim*, 118.

5 Mehmet Rifat, *XX. Yüzyılda Dilbilim ve Göstergebilim Kuramları 2 - Temel Metinler (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008), 24.*

6 André Loeckx and Hilde Heynen, "Meaning and Effect: Revisiting Semiotics in Architecture", *Conditioning Architectural Theory, 1960s–1990s, ed.* Sebastiaan Loosen, et. al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 32.

7 Efe Duyan, "Rethinking Semiotics in Architecture: Architecture As A Perceived Sign", *Adam Arts 4 (2023), 32.*

the city might represent themselves and other things, whether they are society, culture, usage, needs, pleasure, or economy.

The conclusion we can draw from semiotics research in architecture is that architecture, as a means of communication and a set of signs (space, form, structural elements, and other components), carries a message and has its unique meaning. Semiotics allows us to consider space with all these parameters and examine the messages it conveys to the user.

The primary reason for considering and explaining semiotics in this study is to provide a basis for the study. Starting from this point, the meaning-design integrity in mosque architecture will be examined in the most basic way through the concept-symbol relationship put forward by Saussure. It will be investigated whether the verses written with Islamic calligraphy in the interior and exterior spaces of mosques are considered as "meaning/concept" and whether the architectural elements where the writings are located are symbols/icons in which this concept finds expression. As a result, the question of whether the concept-symbol integrity, that is, the signifier-signified relationship required to create the sign, can be explained with the writings and structural elements in the mosque will be sought an answer.

2. Content and Objective of the Research

In the sixteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire had reached the height of its power, expressions of grandeur could be seen everywhere and indeed played a role in the diversification of design. To understand how the epigraphic program and architectural design relation was created in architecture, the mosques constructed in the Mimar Sinan period, as the peak of architectural expression at the time, are opened to discussion, with the diversity of building scales, the richness of the epigraphical programs and the availability of written resources being influential in this choice. Information for the study is garnered from early and late five architectural works from the period to provide a rich source and holistic view of the issue. There are 25 mosques known to have been built by Mimar Sinan. The Şehzade Mehmed, Süleymaniye, Selimiye, Kılıç Ali Paşa, and Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan mosques selected for the study are the 5 mosques that have writings on almost all their architectural elements and are the richest in terms of writing programs.[8] Thus, the study was based on more data and diversity. Since these mosques were built by sultans and statesmen, they were large-sized mosques, and their epigraphic programs were more intense and diverse. Information for the study is garnered from early and late works of Sinan mosques from the period, to provide a rich and holistic view of the issue.

The present study examines and interprets the relationship between writing (meaning) and architectural design through a semiotic methodology, aiming to understand the symbolization and the production of meaning through the inscriptions made in mosque architecture. In other words, the study will carry out a meaning analysis based on examples of the art of calligraphy found in mosques' interior and exterior spaces within the concept-symbol relationship. The content of inscriptions within the mosque constitutes the "signified", while the architectural

8 When all of Sinan's mosques are examined, it is seen that there are repetitive verses in the architectural elements of the mosques. Since the study is in an article format, it is limited to these 5 mosques, which provide more content in terms of the writing program. For detailed information about the writing program in the other 25 mosques built by Sinan, see: Cemile Feyzan Şengün, *Mimar Sinan Dönemi Cami Mimarisinde Yazı ve Kozmolojik İçerik* (İstanbul: İstanbul Technical University, Graduate School of Science Engineering and Technology, Master's Thesis, 2015).

form on which the inscription is found constitutes the "signifier" of the writing. In other words, the architectural concept/text/form is integrated into a sign or a symbol. In short, revealing the integrity (signifier-signified relations) required to form the indicator through meaning, writing, and form is possible. In this relationship, just as concepts become signifiers of inscriptions, inscriptions also become the signifiers of forms. The signifier element in Saussure's signifier/signified relationship can become signified by forming new signifiers.[9] The wealth of this third dimension is the main reason for the rich connotations/meanings in art and architecture. When the concepts, forms, and inscriptions, each of which produces independent meaning, interact in architecture, it creates a tremendous space impact in the beholder's mind donated with the due knowledge of them. Another objective of this article is to provide this knowledge.

3. Inscription and Ottoman Architecture

The first dimension of being a direct interlocutor of Allah in Islam is reading *the Qur'ān* – as the main line of communication between Allah (God) and humankind. A Muslim attempts to comprehend/understand the world from the perspective of the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad and his teachings – the *hadiths*. The intense literary language of *the Holy Qur'ān*, and the way it deals with various themes has enabled society to adopt its guidelines as a way of life and to integrate it into all aspects of life. Muslims create aesthetic value based on the written evidence of the *Qur'ān* and the *hadiths* and reflect this value on their environment. Of course, forming such ideological foundations does not mean they are unaffected by external factors. Those engaged in Islamic art and architecture reflect these influences in their works through interpretation and assimilation, drawing upon the technical know-how of each period and thus influencing architectural differentiation.

In Islamic calligraphy, the *Jeli Thuluth* style has the most appropriate features for architectural works.[10] The *Jeli Thuluth* calligraphy style has a round and dynamic feature, and as it can be enlarged to the desired size, it is easily adapted to architecture. As the size increases, the calligraphy integrates with the architecture in harmony, leading writing to become an element that completes architecture, giving it both spirit and life. Accordingly, the inside and outside inscriptions are in harmony with the forms and convey several messages to those who visit the buildings and take a mediating position in explaining the words of Allah. Writing in architecture began in Anatolia during the Seljuk period, and the portal came to the fore as the most common spot for *Thuluth* and *Kufi* calligraphy.[11] The inscriptions containing verses from the *Qur'ān* gained the ability to convey/announce Islam. Whether in verse or not, we encounter Islamic calligraphy in many Seljuk works, and this tradition was later developed and enriched in the Ottoman period.

4. Publications on the Meaning of Inscriptions in Ottoman Architecture

There are several articles, books, and master's and doctoral theses analyzing the relationship between writing and architecture in Seljuk and the Ottoman Empire, many of which provide

9 Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning; A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1946).

10 Ali Alparslan, "Celî", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1993), 7/265-267.

11 Ahmet Sacit Açıkgözoğlu, "Türk Mimarisinde Hat Sanatı", *Hat ve Tezhip Sanatı, ed. Ali Rıza Özcan* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2009), 182.

examples of the art of Islamic calligraphy while detailing its history and different forms. Although classifications have been made of such writings and their locations in the works, no explanation has been made of the relationship between the meaning and location of the writings.

The unpublished doctoral dissertation of Zübeyde Cihan Özsayıner is significant in its systematic approach to such inscriptions.[12] In her study, Gülru Necipoğlu discusses writing programs while examining structures dating to the Mimar Sinan period. While she explains the verses in this work, no detailed interpretation is made of the relationship between writing and meaning in conjunction with architectural design.[13] Murat Sülün has no periodical focus in his study on inscriptions and makes no mention of the architectural meaning dimension, opting only to explain the *Qur'ānic* verses.[14]

In addition to the studies carried out in Turkey, there have also been studies into the symbolism of Islamic architecture made abroad, with Oleg Grabar, Robert Hillenbrand, Titus Burckhardt, and Thomas Barrie counted among the leading international researchers in this field.[15] None of them focuses explicitly on inscriptions in architecture. Dodd and Khairallah made a general conceptualization of the architectural environment by attempting to relate the content of the writings in Islamic works in the whole Islamic world to architecture and found that the image of paradise and the commandments and creativity of God are emphasized as a partnership in writing and architecture.[16] A book edited by George Michell provides a valuable understanding of the world of thought and its influence on the formation of Islamic architecture. However, it contains no specific content about writing.[17]

Some of the abovementioned studies contain information about the semantic content of Islamic art and architecture and so may occasionally serve as the basis for this study. However, there has been no systematic study of the relationship between the writings found in architectural works and their affiliation with meaning and design from the Mimar Sinan period, neither in Turkey nor abroad. This article tries to bridge this gap by synthesizing knowledge on the holistic design between the meaning of inscriptions and architectural form, referencing existing knowledge on writing and architecture while also using fresh information about the issue.

5. Classification of the Inscriptions

For the study, five mosques are selected for analysis Şehzade Mehmed, Süleymaniye, Selimiye, Kılıç Ali Paşa, and Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan in Kadirga (Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). The inscriptions in these selected mosques are classified according to the structural elements on which they are found, following an axial hierarchy starting from the dome and leading down through the

12 Zübeyde Cihan Özsayıner, *Mimar Sinan'ın İstanbul'daki Camii ve Türbelerindeki Yazı Düzeni ve Anlamı* (İstanbul: İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, Doctoral Dissertation, 1993).

13 Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

14 Murat Sülün, *Sanat Eserine Vurulan Kuran Mührü* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2013).

15 See: Oleg Grabar "Symbols and Signs in Islamic Architecture", *Architecture as Symbol and Self-Identity*, ed. J.G. Katz (Philadelphia: Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1980); Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 1994)*; Thomas Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture (Oxon: Routledge, 2010); Titus* Burckhardt, *Arts of Islam: Language and Meaning* (Indiana: World Wisdom Inc., 2009).

16 Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, *The Image of the Word, A Study of Qur'anic Verses in Islamic Architecture* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981), 53-57.

17 George Michelle (ed.), *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

semi-dome, pendentive, corner semi-dome, *yap*, window, and gate (Table 1). The verses found in different mosques but on the same architectural element are mentioned together. The verses are given in their sequence in the *Qur'ān*.[18]

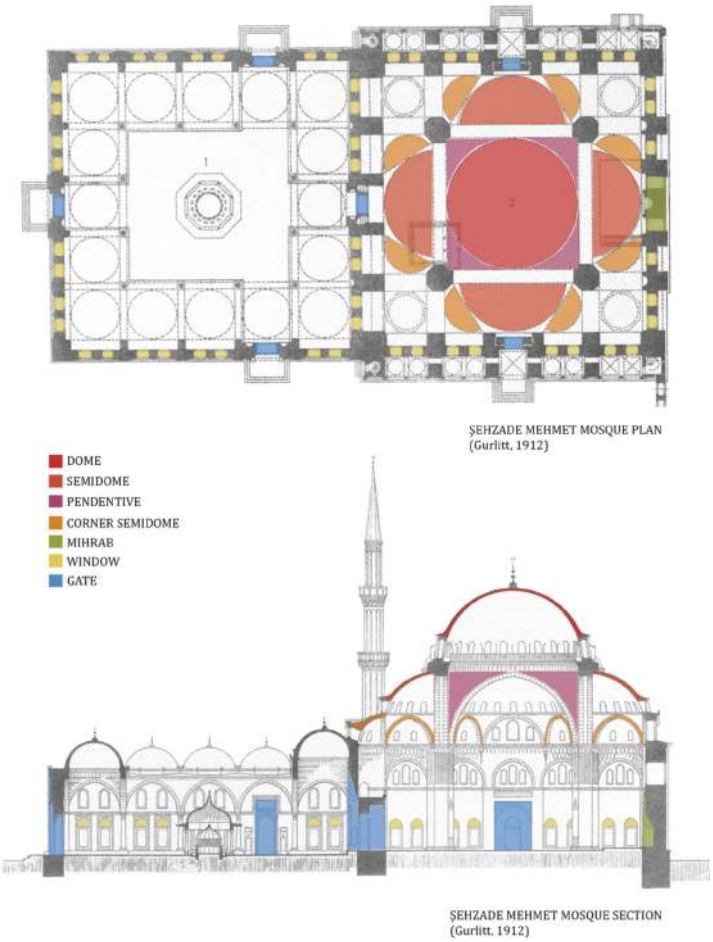

Figure 2: Şehzade Mehmed Mosque, Inscriptions located on structural elementsdepicted on the plan and section drawings[19]

18 The following work is used for the English translation of all the verses of Qur'ān mentioned in the article: A. B. Al-Mehri (ed.), *The Qur'ān: With Sūrah Introductions and Appendices: Saheeh International Translation* (Birmingham, UK: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2010).

19 The plan and section of the Şehzade Mehmed Mosque are taken from the book: Cornelius Gurlitt, *Die Baukunst Konstantinopels* (Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth, 1912).

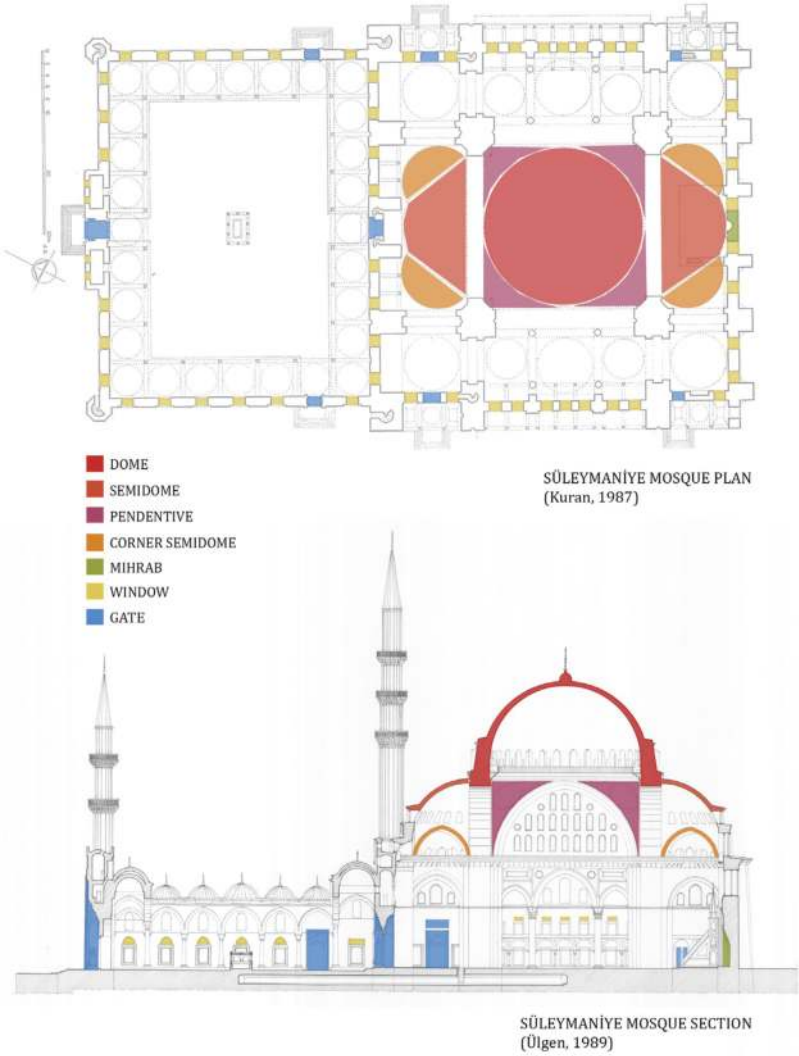

Figure 3: Süleymaniye Mosque, Inscriptions located on structural elements depicted on plan and section drawings[20]

20 The plan of the Süleymaniye Mosque is taken from the book: Aptullah Kuran, *Sinan: The Grand Old Master of Ottoman Architecture (Washington D.C.: Institute of Turkish Studies, 1987). The section of the Süleymaniye Mosque is taken from the book: Ali Saim Ülgen, Mimar Sinan Yapıları (Katalog)/The Buildings of Mimar Sinan (Catalogue), ed. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu and et. al. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989).*

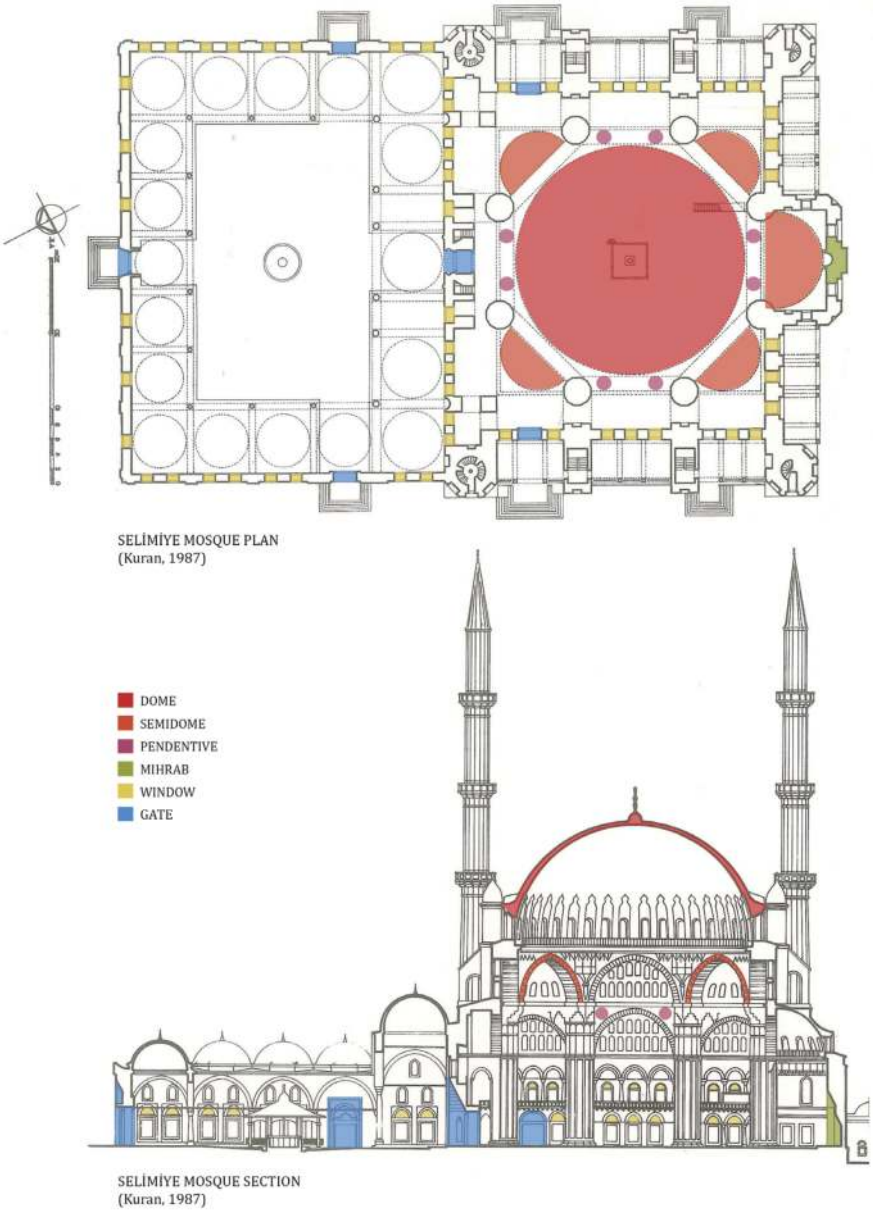

Figure 4: Selimiye Mosque, Inscriptions located on structural elements depicted on plan and section drawings[21]

21 The plan and section of the Selimiye Mosque are taken from the book: Kuran, *Sinan: The Grand Old Master*.

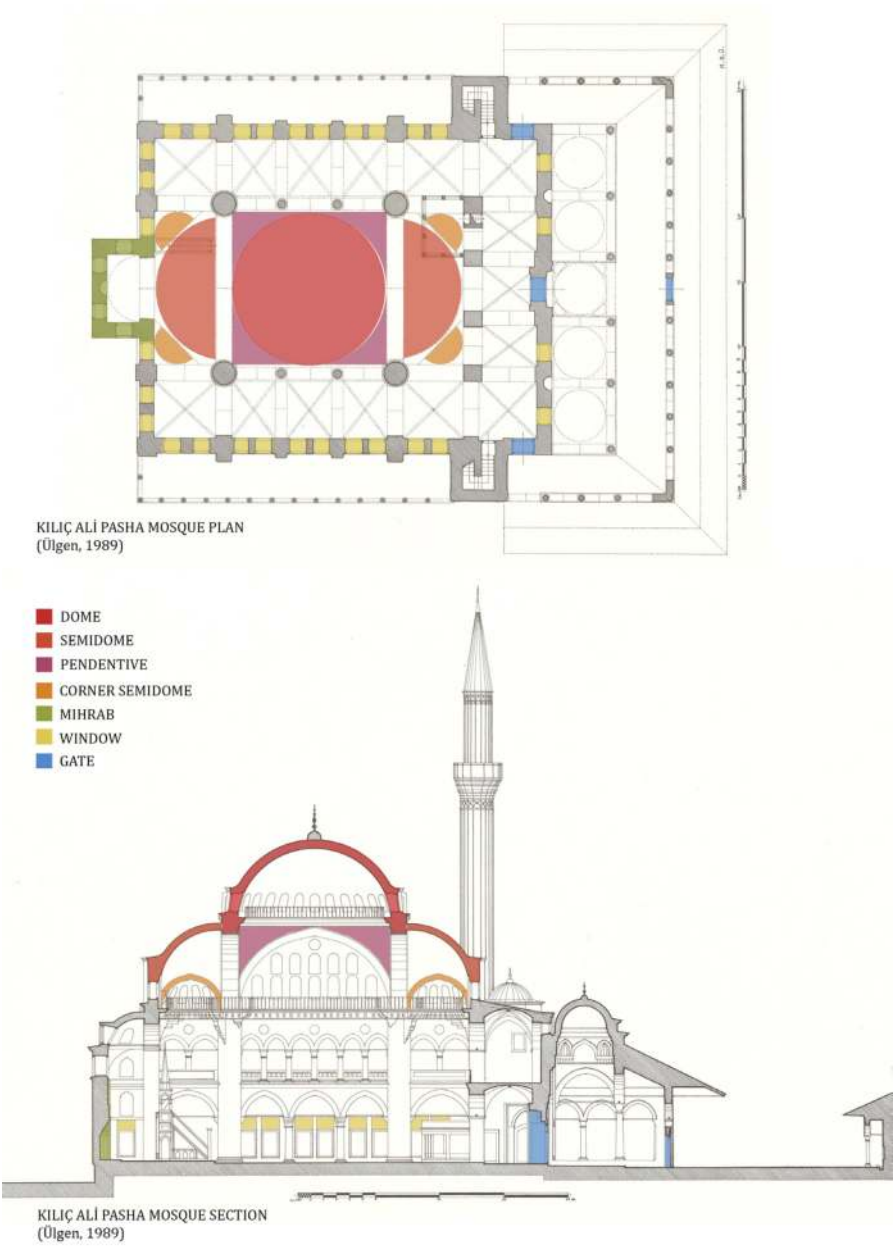

Figure 5: Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque, Inscriptions located on structural elements depicted on plan and section drawings[22]

22 The plan and section of the Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque are taken from the book: Ülgen, *Mimar Sinan Yapıları.*

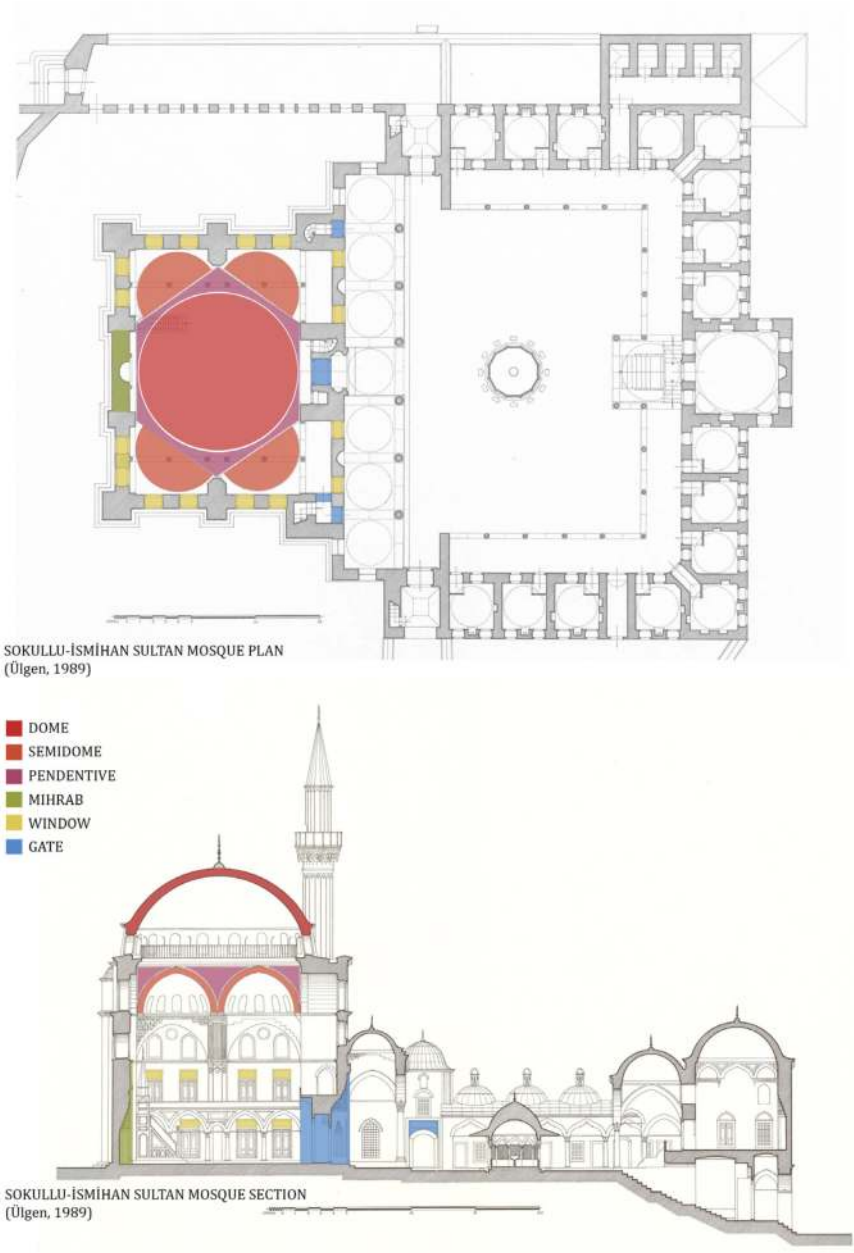

Figure 6: Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque, Inscriptions located on structural elements depicted on plan and section drawings[23]

23 The plan and section of the Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque are taken from the book: Ülgen, *Mimar Sinan Yapıları*.

Table 1: Architectural elements with their inscriptions in selected Sinan Mosques

MOSQUE NAME	DOME	SEMIDOME	PENDENTIVE
Istanbul Şehzade Mehmed Mosque (1548)	Surat al-Isra' 17:1-2; Surat al-Fatiha 1:1-7	Surat al-Baqara 2: 144-145	Ya Subhan, Ya Ghaffar, Ya Dayyan, Ya Fattah, Allah, Muhamad, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali
İstanbul Süleymaniye Mosque (1557)	Surat Fatir 35:41	**The south semidome:** Surat al-An'am, 6:79 **On the walls above the northeast and southwest arches:** Surat al-Tawba, 9:112 **The north semidome:** Surat al-hajj, 22:77	Northwest: Surat al-An'am , 6:102 Southeast: Surat Hud, 11:88 Northeast: Surat al-Ra'd, 13:16 Southwest: Surat al-Isra', 17:84 On the four great pillars: Abu Bakr Umar Uthman Ali Surat al-Fatiha (in medallions) On the pendentives of the *mihrab* semidomes: Allah and Muhammad On the pendentives of north semidomes: Hasan and Husayn
Edirne Selimiye Mosque (1574)	Surat al-Ikhlas 112:1-4	**The *mihrab* (south) semidome:** Surat al-Tawba, 9:18 **The four equal semidomes surrounding the main dome:** Surat al-Jumu'a, 62:9-10	**On the spandrels of the arches between pillars:** Allah, Muhammad, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Hasan, Husayn
İstanbul Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (1580)	Surat al-Ikhlas 112:1-4	Surat al-Tawba 9:18	**On the main dome pendentives:** Sūrat al-Jumu'a, 62:9-10 **On the side walls:** Allah, Muhammad, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali Hasan, Husayn
İstanbul Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque (1571)	Surat Fatir 35:41	**The four equal semidomes surrounding the main dome:** Surat al-Jumu'a, 62:9-10	Asma al-Husna (Beautiful names of Allah) **On the built-in pillars of the qibla wall:** Allah, Muhammad **On the north and the side walls:** Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Hasan, Husayn

MOSQUE NAME	CORNER SEMIDOME	MIHRAB
Istanbul Şehzade Mehmed Mosque (1548)	(amana ar-rasul) Surat al-Baqara, 2:285-286"	Surat al 'Imran 3:37
İstanbul Süleymaniye Mosque (1557)	**The southwest corner semidome:** Surat al-Baqara, 2:115 **The southeast corner semidome:** Surat al-A'raf, 7:29 **The north corner semidomes (in succession northeast-north-northwest):** Surat al-'Ankabut, 29:45"	**On the *mihrab* wall:** Surat al-Fatiha, 1:1-7 **On the muqarnas of the *mihrab*:** Surat al 'Imran, 3:37 **On the *mihrab* of the sultan mahfil:** Surat al 'Imran, 3:39
Edirne Selimiye Mosque (1574)	None	**On the *mihrab* wall:** Surat al-Fatiha, 1:1-7 ***Mihrab* pediment** Surat al 'Imran, 3:37 **On the *mihrab* of sultan mahfil:** Surat al-Shu'ara', 26:83, 85, 89
İstanbul Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (1580)	**The northwest and southwest corner semidomes:** Surat al-'Ankabut, 29:45 **The southeast corner semidome:** Surat al-Baqara, 2:115 **The northeast corner semidome:** Surat al-A'raf, 7:29 ***Mihrab* semidome:** Surat al-hajj, 22:77"	**On the *mihrab* wall:** Surat al-Fatiha, 1:1-7 ***Mihrab* Pediment:** Surat al 'Imran, 3:37"
İstanbul Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque(1571)	None	***Mihrab* pediment:** Surat al 'Imran, 3:37 **On the *mihrab* wall:** Surat al-Ikhlas, 112:1-4"

MOSQUE NAME	WINDOW	GATE
Istanbul Şehzade Mehmed Mosque (1548)	**On the window pediments of the qibla wall:**Surat al-Fath, 48:1-4 **On the Sultan Mahfil window pediment:** Ayatul Kursi, Surat al-Baqara, 2:255"	Surat al-Nisa'4:103
İstanbul Süleymaniye Mosque (1557)	**On the window pediments of the portico:** Ayatul Kursi, Surat al-Baqara, 2:255; Surat al-Fath, 48:29 **On the window pediments of the north wall:** Surat al-A'raf, 7:31; Surat al-Jinn, 72:18 **In the window above the *mihrab*:** Surat al-Nur, 24:35"	**East lateral gate:** Surat al-Ra'd, 13:24 **West lateral gate:** Surat al-An'am, 6:54 **On the pediment of the eastern gate leading to the inner court:** Surat al-Nahl, 16:32 **On the pediment of the western gate leading to the inner court:** Surat al-Zumar, 39:73 **On the pediment of the northern gate leading to the inner court:** Surat al-Nisa, 4:103 **On the pediment over the central arch of the portico:** Surat al-Baqara, 2:238 **On the pediment over the central arch of the northern arcade overlooking the inner court:** Surat al-Ma'arij, 70:34-35 **On the inner pediments of the east and west gates (in succession):** Surat al-Zumar, 39:53

MOSQUE NAME	WINDOW	GATE
Edirne Selimiye Mosque (1574)	**On the window pediments of the portico:** Ayatul Kursi, Surat al-Baqara, 2:255 Surat al-Fath, 48:29 **On the pediments of side windows of the *mihrab*:** Amanar Rasul, Surat al-Baqara, 2:285-286 **On the window pediments of qibla wall:** Surat al-Baqara, 2:101; Surat al-Baqara, 2:201; Surat al 'Imran, 3:8-9, 16 **On the window pediments of the Sultan Mahfil:** Surat al-hashr, 59:22-23"	None
İstanbul Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (1580)	**On the window pediments of the portico:** Surat al-hashr, 59:23 **On the window pediments of the prayer hall:** Surat al-Baqara, 2:255-59"	**The gate of the corner sebil (fountain):** Surat al-Anbiya 21:30 **The main gate:** Surat al-Zumar, 39:62 Surat al-hashr, 59:24 **On the gate pediment of the portico:** Surat al-Ma'arij, 70:34-35 Surat al-Baqara, 2:238"
İstanbul Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque (1571)	**The central arch of the Portico:** Surat al-Nisa, 4:103 **On the portico window pediments:** Surat al-Fatiha, 1:1-7 **On the window pediments of Qibla Walls:** Surat al-Baqara, 2:115; Surat al-Baqara, 2:201"	**The main gate:** Surat Ya Sīn, 36:58 **On the built-in pillars next to the Sultan Mahfil:** Surat al-Isra, 17:81"

5.1. Inscriptions on Architectural Elements

5.1.1. Dome Inscriptions

The Sūrat al-Fātiha 1-7 verses adorn the center of the central dome of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque (Figure 7). There is a *hadith* about Sūrat al-Fātiha. One day, the Prophet Muhammad told his Companions named Ebû Saîd b. Muallâ that he would declare the greatest sūrat in the *Qur'ān* before leaving the mosque. He explained that this sūrat was al-Fātiha.[24] As both the greatest sūrat and the first sūrat in the *Qur'ān,* Muslims give significant weight to Sūrat al-Fātiha. The sūrat, which begins with the name of Allah and continues with praise and blessings to Him, declares Allah as the sovereign. It expresses the uniqueness of Allah and ends with a prayer to Him. The sūrat, which extols the attributes of Allah, His relationship with His servants, and the afterlife, closes with a prayer for those who believe in Allah. The inclusiveness of the sūrat and its summary of the *Qur'ān* distinguishes it from other sūrats. Thus, it can be said that Sūrat al-Fātiha, the most crucial and first sūrat of the *Holy Qur'ān*, was chosen for the central dome, given its unique place in the architecture of the mosque and the point of primary attention.

Figure 7: The Sūrat al-Fātiha and 1st-2nd verses of the Sūrat al-Isrā in the dome of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque

The Sūrat al-Fātiha adorns the centre of the central dome of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque, encircled by the 1st and 2nd verses of the Sūrat al-Isrā (Figure 7). These verses associated with the ascension theme *"Miraj"* have been deemed appropriate for the dome in architecture. The

24 Ebû Abdillâh Muhammed b. İsmail el-Buhârî, *el-Câmiu's-Sahih* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), "Fedâ'ilü'l-Kur'ân" 9, 8/103.

verse tells the believer of the greatness of Allah, informing that he has heard and seen everything, but also gives a warning: "... You shall not take other than Me as a Disposer of affairs". This warning is undoubtedly written in the most impressive location of the place of worship, symbolizing that the effect of God is so high and that the glory of God can be felt. In addition, the Prophet Muhammad's (*Miraj*) ascension in stages from the earth to the heavens is put to the mosque's dome, incorporating the elements of these stages, rendering the mosque a symbol of the created universe in the microcosmic dimension.

The 41st verse of Sūrat Fātir adorns the center of the central dome of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 8) and Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque. The inclusion of this verse and its interpretations can be considered an attempt to liken the mosque to the universe and all of its celestial bodies. It can be said that the designer of the building, who interpreted the dome as similar to the universe, glorifies God from the same perspective. At the end of the verse, it is reiterated that Allah is the forgiver and the lenient. Thus, the adherent can expect to draw closer to God. The building stands with all its elements, just as God keeps the universe in place. In other words, the celestial dome and the dimension below it – the building itself – as a universe consists of elements that complement each other. The structure created by God that holds the universe is included in the structure of the building. As an architectural expression, God's firm hold on the universe is symbolized by the entirety of the mosque design. God's greatness and strength are shown in this way.

Figure 8: The 41st verse of the Sūrat Fātir in the dome of Süleymaniye Mosque

The Sūrat al-Ikhlās adorns the center of the central dome of the Selimiye and Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosques (Figure 9). Sūrat al-Ikhlās expresses the principle of Tawhid in Islam in a succinct way, and the importance given to it is great. The sūrat describes Allah's unity, uniqueness, greatness, eternity, and the fact that He neither begets nor is born. Commenting on the importance and virtue of this sūrat, the Prophet Muhammad said: "By Him in Whose

Hand my soul is, it is equivalent to one-third of the *Qur'ān*".[25] Accordingly, the sūrat effectively describes the unity of God as essential to Muslims. This sūrat may have been chosen for the dome to symbolize God's unity and uniqueness through the magnificence and greatness of the dome. Inscribing this sūrat on the central dome may be an attempt to reinforce this magnificence-glory and to suggest parallelism with the size and unity of the central dome.

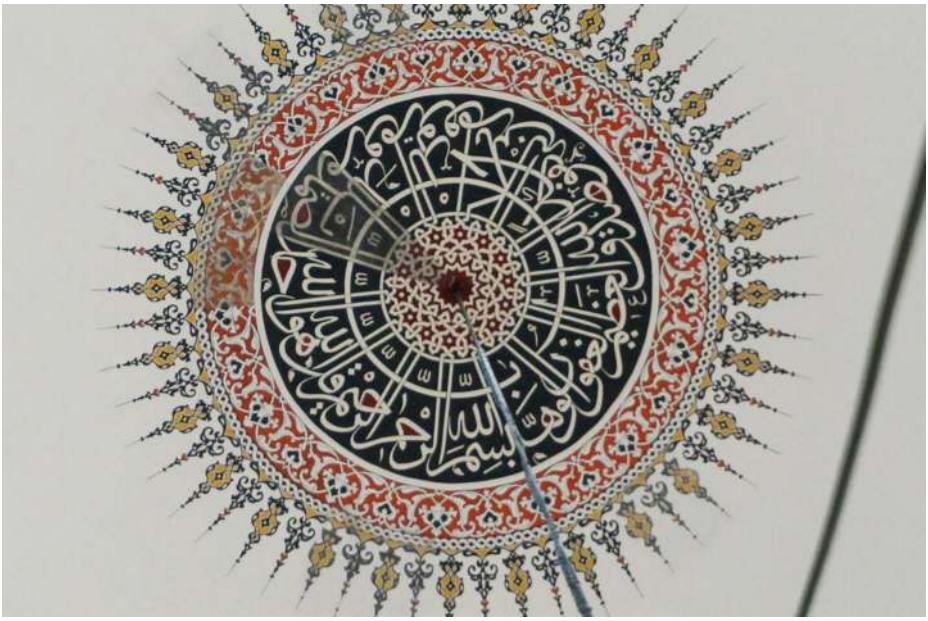

Figure 9: The Sūrat al-Ikhlās in the dome of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque

5.1.2. Semi-Dome Inscriptions

The 144th-145th verses of Sūrat al-Baqara adorn the center of four semi-domes of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque (starting in the direction of Qibla and continuing in the counterclockwise direction) (Figure 10). The verse mentions the direction of Qibla, providing information about the direction to be taken during prayer (*salaah)*. The *salaah* is frequently mentioned as the form of worship that comes after faith in Allah. There is no doubt that this verse, referring to *salaah* and the Qibla, was selected for the place of worship built for *salaah*, and thus, a desire to draw closer to God is demonstrated. Privately, it reminds the adherent that another Qibla has been designated for Muslims and that they should worship by turning to their own Qibla, separately from other religions. Having this theme about Qibla on the semi-domes across four cardinal directions is significant.

25 Buhârî, *el-Câmiu's-Sahih* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), "Fedâ'ilü'l-Kur'ân", 13, 8/105.

Figure 10: The first part of the 144th verse of the Sūrat al-Baqara in the *mihrab* semi-dome of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque

The 79th verse of Sūrat al-An'ām adorns the center of the southern semi-dome of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 11). This verse, which can be considered an expression of God's creative power, can also be read as an attempt to reinforce the power and glory of God as perceived in the interior space. The fact that this verse is located in the semi-dome parallels the idea that the semi-dome, which flanks the central dome on the east and the west, is convenient to associate with the act of facing the divine in the mosque.

Figure 11: The 79th verse of the Sūrat al-An'ām in the centre of the southern semi-dome of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 18th verse of Sūrat al-Tawba adorns the center of the *mihrab* (south) semi-dome of Selimiye Mosque (Figure 12), and the center of two semi-domes (starting from the south semidome continuing with the north) of the Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque. Having expressed the power of Allah in the dome in the closest part of the building to Him, the inscriptions now continue gradually informing about who built the masjids and the characteristics of those people, referring to the builders. After accepting the existence and oneness of Allah, the most important factor in Islam is worship, which is described as a set of *fardh,* such as belief in the afterlife (*Akhirah*-life after death), performing *salaah* and giving alms (*zakat*). Following the vertical order from top to bottom, these most important forms of worship are mentioned in the semi-domes after the dome.

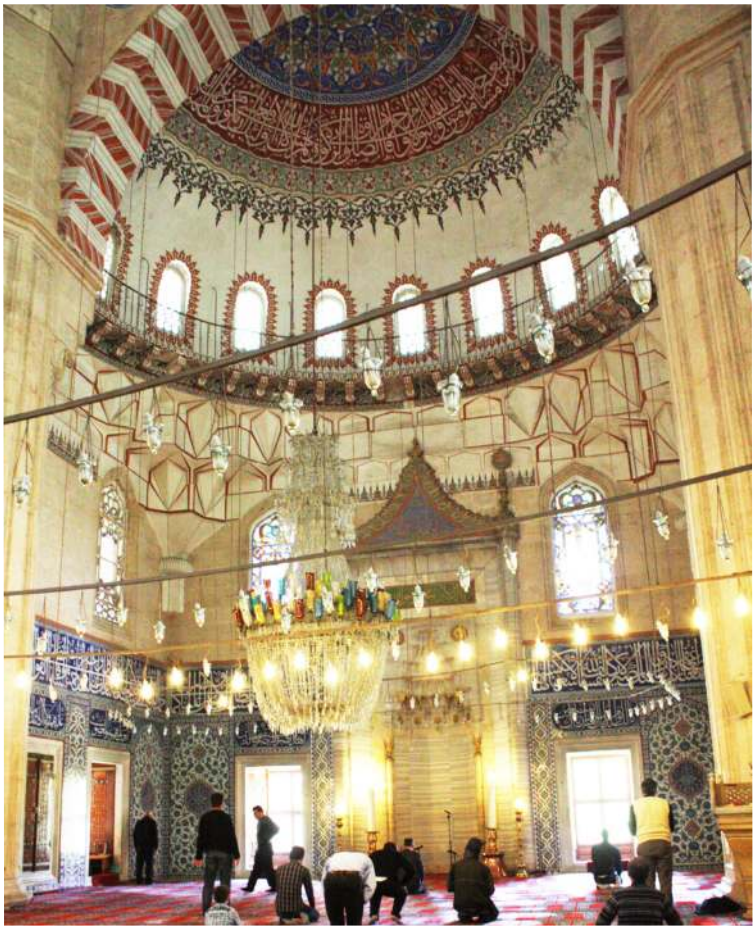

Figure 12: The 18th verse of Sūrat al-Tawba in the *mihrab* semi-dome of Selimiye Mosque

The 112th verse of Sūrat al-Tawba adorns the walls above the northeast and southwest arches of the arcades facing the central space of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 13). This verse, which gives good news to Muslims who engage in prayer and other obligatory forms of worship, reminds adherents to meet all their obligations besides their faith in Allah. It also praises the precious works of the believers who behave this way.

Figure 13: The beginning of the 112th verse of the Sūrat al-Tawba on the inner arcades of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 77th verse of the Sūrat al-hajj adorns the center of the northern semi-dome of Süleymaniye Mosque. This verse that adorns the semi-dome reminds adherents of the most essential form of worship after faith and brings to mind the reason behind the construction of the space.

The 9th–10th verses of Sūrat al-Jumu'a adorn the four equal semidomes surrounding the main dome of Selimiye Mosque (starting from the corner semi-dome to the right of the Qibla and continuing in the counterclockwise) and Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque (the same order as Selimiye) (Figure 14). The concept of Jumu'a refers to the "gathering and worshiping together" time in the verse. The two *hadiths* about Friday (*Jumu'a*) spoken by the Prophet Muhammad are as follows:

> "The best day on which the sun has risen is Friday; on it, Adam was created. on it he was made to enter Paradise, on it he was expelled from it. And the last hour will take place on no day other than Friday."[26] "There is an hour (opportune time) on Friday and if a Muslim gets it while praying and asks something from Allah, then Allah will definitely meet his demand."[27]

Friday is attributed particular importance to Muslims in *hadiths* and other narratives. The call to prayer and the promise of Allah to Muslims after prayer encourage Muslims to worship. The fact that this sūrat was chosen for the semi-domes after the dome, considered an appropriate place to express the greatness of Allah, shows that *salaah* is the most important form of worship for the Islamic religion. A hierarchy that leads down from dome to semi-dome, respectively, to comprehend the glory of God and then to tend to worship is emphasized.

Figure 14: The 9th–10th verses of Sūrat al-Jumu'a in the semi-domes of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque

26 Ebü'l-Hüseyn Müslim b. el-Haccâc Müslim, *el-Câmiu's-Sahih* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), "Cum'a", 5, 1/575 (No. 854); Sunnah.com, "7 The Book of Prayer – Friday" (Access 29 September 2024).

27 Buhârî, *el-Câmiu's-Sahih* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), "Cum'a", 37, 1/224; Sunnah.com, "11 Friday Prayer" (Access 29 September 2024).

5.1.3. Pendentive Inscriptions

The dome transfers its load to the semi-domes or corner semi-domes, and the "pendentive" acts as a mediating structural element. Inscriptions of verses on pendentives are seen in large-scale *sultan*, *vizier,* and *padishah* mosques. Still, they are very rare, with Süleymaniye Mosque and Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque being two such examples.

The 9th–11th verses of the Sūrat al-Jumu'a adorn the main dome pendentives of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (starting from the southeast and ending with the southwest) (Figure 15). The selection of a verse that mentions the call/incentive to *salaah* and promises for the pendentives is thoughtful. After expressing the existence/glory of Allah in the dome, Muslims are invited to worship Allah underneath it in the pendentives.

Figure 15: The 9th–11th verses of the Sūrat al-Jumu'a on the pendentives of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque

The 102nd verse of Sūrat al-An'ām (northwest), the 88th verse of Sūrat Hūd (southeast), the 16th verse of Sūrat al-Ra'd (northeast), and the 84th verse of Sūrat al-Isrā (southwest) adorn the pendentives of the Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 16). In Sūrat al-An'ām (6:102), believers are instructed to believe only in Allah and worship only Him. In Sūrat Hūd (11:88), it is emphasized that success comes only with the help of Allah and reinforces Allah's power and might. The 16th verse of Sūrat al-Ra'd describes the unity and essence of Allah, giving examples. The 84th verse of the Sūrat al-Isrā reminds us that Allah knows the works of the believers. The verses here provide theme parity with those mentioned in the previous "Semi-dome Inscriptions" section. Therefore, the verses that mention God and ask believers to worship Him reinforce the inscriptions on the dome, and the selection of these verses for the pendentives is meaningful.

Figure 16: The verses inscribed on the pendentives of Süleymaniye Mosque

We encounter that Allah and the Names of the Prophet, the Four Great caliphs, and *Esmâ-i Hüsnâ* (the beautiful names of God) are written on the pendentives of various mosques (Figures 18-21).

In the mosque structures that we have discussed from the period of Mimar Sinan, we generally encounter in the pendentives the names Allah, Muhammad together with Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, known as the Çehâr *Yâr-i Güzîn* (the four great caliphs) or Çâryâr, and sometimes also Hasan and Husayn.[28] In the mosques investigated in the present study, the names of Allah and Muhammad are directed toward Qibla.

The attributes of *Ya Subhan*, *Ya Ghaffar*, *Ya Dayyan*, and *Ya Fattah* from *Esmâ-i Hüsnâ* (the beautiful names of God) are inscribed on the pendentives of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque central dome (Figure 17), with the names of the Çâryâr found on circular plates underneath these pendentives. Plates bearing the names Allah and Muhammad are found underneath the southern semi-dome above the *mihrab*, and plates bearing the names Hasan and Husayn are found underneath the semi-dome in the north. Allah, Muhammad, and Çâryâr are inscribed on the pillars of the Şehzade Mehmed Mosque.

28 The term was derived from the "*Hulefâ-yi Râşidîn*", or caliphs on the right path, mentioned in a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. It is stated that it refers to the four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali) who came after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In the Sunni Islamic world, the term "Rashidun Caliphs" is limited to these four people by using the expressions "four caliphs" or "four distinguished friends" (çehar yâr, çehar yâr-i güzîn, çihar dost). It is not known when the term was first used. See: Mustafa Fayda, "Hulefâ-yi Râşidîn", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1998), 18/324-338. It is believed that the use of these names in mosques began in the early Islamic period, especially during the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 AD). It is said that this practice was mostly done by Sunnis to protect the caliphs after the Prophet Muhammad and to respect their memory, but there is no source on which this information is based.

Figure 17: Plates describing the attributes of Allah and Çâryâr located on the pendentives of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque

The Sūrat al-Fatiha were hung on medallion-shaped plaques together with the Çâryâr on the four pillars of Süleymaniye Mosque. In addition, the names of Allah and Muhammad are inscribed on the pendentives of the *mihrab* semi-dome, while Hasan and Husayn appear on the other, inscribed on plates.

In the architectural design of Selimiye Mosque, these names were placed on the spandrels of the arches between the pillars due to the lack of pendentives (Figure 18). Starting with Allah and Muhammad directed towards the *mihrab*, the names are inscribed on the spandrels of the four central side arches in respective order.

Figure 18: The names of Abu Bakr and Umar on the spandrels of Selimiye Mosque

In the design of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque, it was preferred to inscribe verses on the pendentives. Allah and Muhammad are inscribed on the *mihrab* wall, the Çâryâr are inscribed on the side walls, and Hasan and Husayn are on the wall above the entrance gate to the mosque (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Allah, Muhammad, and Çâryâr inscribed on plates hung on the side walls of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque

The names of *Esmâ-i Hüsnâ* are inscribed in the pendentives of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque. Besides, the names of Allah, Muhammed, the Çâryâr, and Hasan and Husayn are found on the side walls inscribed on tile plates in hierarchical order leading away from the *mihrab* wall (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Allah, Hasan, and Husayn inscribed tile plates on the side walls of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque

It is very meaningful to inscribe the pendentives, primarily with the names of Allah and Muhammad, followed respectively by the four great caliphs (Çâryâr) and Hasan and Husayn. The process that began with Allah's appearance to the Prophet Muhammad at the birth of Islam was strengthened by the subsequent caliphs, and the grandsons of Muhammad also contributed to the dissemination of Islam. Looking at the architectural design of the mosque, the verses referring to the unity of Allah and faith are inscribed within the dome – the highest point of the mosque – in line with one of the most important principles of Islam. The conditions of faith, especially *salaah*, are inscribed in the semi-domes, and names of the caliphs and the grandchildren are inscribed on the pendentives. The placement of the inscriptions of the names of these people on the pendentives is symbolic. Recognizing the intermediary role of the pendentives in carrying the load of the dome is similar to the roles played by the followers of the Prophet. Consequently, it can be said that the basics of Islam are presented in a descending hierarchical order downward from the celestial dome.

5.1.4. Corner Semi-Dome Inscriptions

"Corner semi-dome" refers to the semi-dome underneath the grand semi-dome that flanks the central dome in large-scale mosques.

The 115th verse of Sūrat al-Baqara adorns the southwest corner semi-dome of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 21) and the southeast corner semi-dome of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque. This verse, stating that the east and the west belong to Allah, implies that the entire earth belongs to Allah and that He can be worshiped from anywhere. Therefore, wherever you are and whichever way you turn, it is said that Allah's face is there. For Muslims who want to worship (those who wish to perform *salaah*), Allah defines the entire world as a mosque, thus easing their task. The mention of the direction of worship and the indication of the *salaah* as a form of worship are themes of practice found appropriate to the spots underneath the grand semi-domes.

Figure 21: The 115th verse of Sūrat al-Baqara inscribed within the southwest corner semi-dome of Süleymaniye Mosque

Verses 285–286 of Sūrat al-Baqara, known as *Āmana ar-rasūl*, adorn the corner semi-domes of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque in sequence (starting from the corner semi-dome to the right of the Qibla and continuing in the counterclockwise) (Figure 22). These verses describe the very essence of the Islamic faith and the concept of faith itself, a widely read prayer (*duah*) of such importance that it merits inscription in the corner semi-domes. The prayer at the end of the verse brings Muslims closer to Allah.

Figure 22: Verses 285–286 of Sūrat al-Baqara in the corner semi-domes of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque, inscribed in sequence (from right to left)

Part of the 29th verse of Sūrat al-Arāf adorns the southeast corner semi-dome of Süleymaniye Mosque and the northeast corner semi-dome of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (Figure 23). This verse, like other similar ones in the corner semi-domes, mentions the direction of worship and instructs how it should be done. With the verse's emphasis on justice and creation, believers are reminded of the importance of justice in Islam.

Figure 23: The part of the 29th verse of Sūrat al-Arāf in the northeast corner semi-dome of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque

The 45th verse of Sūrat al-Ankabūt adorns the semi-domes (in succession northeast-north-northwest) in the north corner of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 24) and the northwest and southwest corner semi-domes of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (in succession). The verse mentions the order of *salaah* and the incentive to *salaah*. In this way, the importance of prayer is repeated to the believers. After passing hierarchically down from the dome to the semi-dome, the inscription of this verse in the corner semi-dome, after describing faith and its conditions, indicates the priority given to *salaah*.

Figure 24: The first part of the 45th verse of Sūrat al-Ankabūt adorns the northeast semi-dome of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 77th verse of the Sūrat al-Hajj adorns the *mihrab* corner semi-dome of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque. This verse of Sūrat al-Hajj contains a call to worship (*salaah*) and servitude. It is reported that those who comply will eventually be led to salvation and will gain Allah's approval. Here again, we see the importance of worship.

5.1.5. Mihrab Inscriptions

In the present study, there were predominantly two verses found in the *mihrabs* of the mosques selected from the period of Mimar Sinan, located within the niche of the *mihrab* and written in a plain style without decoration. These verses are taken from the 37th and 39th verses of Sūrat Āl Imrān. Other verses are also inscribed on the *mihrab* wall.

Part of the 37th verse of Sūrat Āl Imrān, as the most common *mihrab* verse, adorns the *mihrab*s of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque, Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 25), Selimiye Mosque, Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque and Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque: "Every time Zechariah entered upon her (Mary) in the prayer chamber ..." (Āl Imrān, 3:37).

Figure 25: Part of the 37th verse of Sūrat Āl Imrān in the *mihrab* of Süleymaniye Mosque

In addition, part of the 39th verse of Sūrat Āl Imrān, as the second most common *mihrab* verse, adorns the sultan mahfil (private balcony for prayer) of Süleymaniye Mosque: "So the angels called him (Zechariah) while he was standing in prayer in the chamber (*mihrab*), " (Āl Imrān, 3:39).

The verses in the *Qur'ān* containing the term "*mihrab*" are as follows: The 37th and 39th verses of Sūrat Āl Imrān, the 11th verse of Sūrat Maryam, and the 21st verse of Sūrat Sād. The reason for the selection of Sūrat Āl Imrān is that the word *mihrab* (in English translation above "chamber") is used to refer to a particular area reserved for worship. In other verses,

the term "*mihrab*" is generally used to refer to a shrine. In other words, "*mihrab*" is not used in the *Qur'ān* to refer to the mosque's *mihrab*. There is a similar situation in the hadiths.[29]

When we look at the meaning of *mihrab*, it means a battlefield where the believer is purified from worldly feelings and fights against evil/devil. The first appearance of the *mihrab* in Islamic architecture as a niche was in the Masjid an-Nabawi to symbolize the sutra of the Prophet Muhammad, and its inclusion in Islamic architecture was through the *mihrab*s built in the Fustat Amr and Damascus Umayyad Mosques during the time of the Umayyad Caliph Walid ibn Abdul Malik. Although it is widely accepted that the *mihrab* was built in mosque architecture to indicate the direction of the qibla, it is also thought to symbolize the spiritual presence and leadership of the Prophet Muhammad.[30] The names of Allah and Muhammad on the *mihrab* walls of the mosques we examined may also indicate this.

Successful interpretations of the *mihrab* in terms of Turkish architectural history were presented by Mimar Sinan in the Şehzade Mehmed, Süleymaniye, and Selimiye mosques by raising the prostration ground one step in front of the *mihrab*. In Mimar Sinan's mosques with domes on polygonal bases, the *mihrab* front area, which is arranged with a rectangular recessed sofa/oriel extending out from the harem, has become a constant element.[31] Thus, the *mihrab* both shows the direction of the qibla and creates a niche space reserved for the imam. Therefore, we can say that the choice of the verse for the *mihrab* is appropriate.

The Sūrat al-Fātiha adorns the walls of the *mihrab* in Süleymaniye Mosque, Selimiye Mosque and Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (Figure 26). Sūrat al-Fātiha was chosen for the *mihrab* wall, being the first sūrat in the *Qur'ān,* and thus of great value for Muslims. The sūrat informs Muslims of the attributes of Allah, stating that only Allah will be worshipped and only Allah will be asked for help. Sūrat al-Fātiha ends with the believer's prayer (*duah*), bringing one closer to Allah, and its inscription on the *mihrab* wall reminds those who come to worship of this. On the other side, reading the sūrat in every *rakat* during the *salaah* may be one of the reasons why the sūrat is written on the Qibla wall, which faces the believers during prayer. The Sūrat al-Fātiha is written on the *mihrab* and windows in the main prayer hall, especially after the dome, based on the meanings and importance we explained above and in the dome section. The Sūrat is very comprehensive, and a summary of the *Qur'ān* also reveals its breadth of meaning and scope. Therefore, we think that the selection of the Sūrat for the dome is related to the unity of Allah and praising/exalting Him (this is also the main theme of the other dome verses); while its selection for the *mihrab* is to remind and encourage Muslims to worship Allah.

29 Tolga Bozkurt, "İslam Mimarisinde Mihrap Sembolizmi", *Sanat Tarihi Araştırmaları (Selçuk Mülayim Armağanı)*, ed. Aziz Doğanay (İstanbul: Lale Yayıncılık, 2014), 189-191.

30 Bozkurt, "İslam Mimarisinde Mihrap", 190-198.

31 Bozkurt, "İslam Mimarisinde Mihrap", 197-198.

Figure 26: The Sūrat al-Fātiha with a tile plate on the *mihrab* walls of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque

The 83rd, 85th, and 89th verses of Sūrat al-Shu'arā' adorn the *mihrab* of the sultan's mahfil of Selimiye Mosque (Figure 27). These verses begin with the prayer of the believer and with a prayer reminding the person who seeks Allah's consent that his heart must be purified.

Figure 27: The 83rd, 85th, and 89th verses of Sūrat al-Shu'arā' adorn the *mihrab* wall of the sultan's mahfil of Selimiye Mosque

Sūrat al-Ikhlās adorns the *mihrab* wall of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque (Figure 28). Sūrat al-Ikhlās is of great importance since it speaks of the principle of Tawhid, reflecting the essence of the Islamic religion.

Figure 28: Sūrat al-Ikhlās inscribed on medallion-shaped tile plates on the *mihrab* wall of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque (two pieces)

5.1.6. Window Inscriptions

Various verses from numerous sūrats adorn the mosques' internal and external windows from the period of Mimar Sinan. In this section, the verses on the window pediments will be presented with no distinction made in interior or exterior space.

The Sūrat al-Fātiha adorns the portico window pediments of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque (Figure 29). Before entering the place of worship, these lines on the back wall of the portico in front of the mosque are repeated to the Muslims. This verse appears for those late for the congregation (*jamaah*). The choice of this sūrat for the portico was based on the fact that only Allah is to be worshiped and asked for help. The sūrat has been described as a summary of the *Qur'ān*.

Figure 29: The Sūrat al-Fātiha on the portico window pediments of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque

The 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr adorns the window above the *mihrab* of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 30). The 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr in the window above the *mihrab* is very convenient. The mention of "Nur" (Light) is appropriate for the window as a provider of light, and the inscription of this verse on the Qibla wall serves to show the all-encompassing knowledge of Allah to Muslims and to ensure that adherents are illuminated while at prayer.

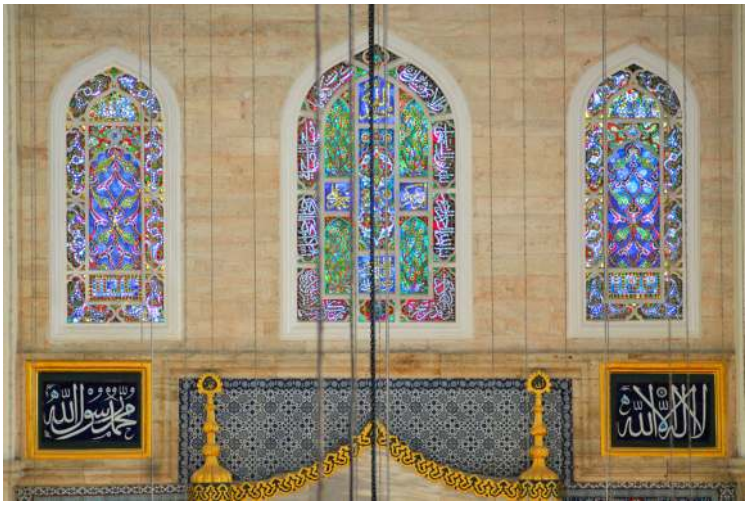

Figure 30: The 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr in the window above the *mihrab* of Süleymaniye Mosque (Source: Mustafa Cambaz)

The 101st verse of Sūrat al-Baqara adorns the window of the Qibla wall of Selimiye Mosque. The 115th verse of Sūrat al-Baqara adorns the Qibla wall of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque. This verse, which mentions the direction of worship, is inscribed at eye level in the place of worship to remind believers that Allah exists and knows everything, no matter where he is. In other words, every place is a mediator for worship and can bring one closer to Allah.

The 201st verse of Sūrat al-Baqara adorns the Qibla wall windows of Selimiye Mosque and Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque. This verse is a prayer (*duah*) inscribed at eye level in

the place of worship. Enes b. Malik states that the Prophet Muhammad mostly read and recommended reading this verse's "Rabbenâ atinâ ..." section when performing salaah.[32] The fact that the Prophet reads this prayer in every salaah increases the importance of the verse.

The 255th verse of Sūrat al-Baqara, known as *Ayatul Kursi*, adorns the sultan mahfil window pediment of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque and the portico windows of Süleymaniye Mosque and Selimiye Mosque (Figure 31). The *Ayatul Kursi* is chosen for the window pediments to remind those who come to worship of the knowledge of God. Questioning why are the same verses inscribed in the dome and other places in the mosque has a simple answer. Sometimes, the calligraphic inscriptions exceed human scale, and not everyone can read them, so they can also be written at eye level. Besides, depending on the meaning of the verses, it may be desirable to write them in another architectural element. However, as the epigraphic program of the mosques differed, it is seen that the verses inscribed in the domes and semi-domes in some mosques adorned the windows or *mihrab* in other mosques. For example, Sūrat al-Fātiha is inscribed in the dome of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque but can also be found on the *mihrab* wall in the Süleymaniye and Selimiye mosques. This shows that there are no strict rules governing the selection of the sūrats, but there is no irregularity in the selection and placement of the inscriptions either.

Figure 31: The 255th verse of Sūrat al-Baqara, which is known as *Ayatul Kursi*, on pediments of the portico windows of Selimiye Mosque

The 255th–259th verses of Sūrat al-Baqara, which includes the *Ayatul Kursi*, are inscribed on the window pediments inside Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (Figure 32). The *Ayatul Kursi*, which describes the attributes of Allah, gives examples to believers in the following verses of what Allah can do.

32 Buhârî, *el-Câmiu's-Sahih* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), "Deavât", 55, 7/163.

Figure 32: Part of the 258th verse of Sūrat al-Baqara adorns the windows of the Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque

The 285th–286th verses of Sūrat al-Baqara, which is known as *Āmana ar-rasūl*, adorn the side windows of the *mihrab* of Selimiye Mosque inside. The verse, which refers to faith and its principles, informs those Muslims who come to worship how to believe. It then provides a prayer (*duah*) as an example for believers, showing them how to come closer to Allah through worship.

The 8th, 9th, and 16th verses of Sūrat Āl Imrān adorn the window of the Qibla wall of Selimiye Mosque. The verses stating that believers come for worship to praise Allah and to ask for help from Him serve as an exemplary prayer for those entering the mosque.

The 103rd verse of Sūrat al-Nisā adorns the central arch of the portico of the Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque. The verse informs Muslims how to perform the *salaah*.

The 31st verse of Sūrat al-Arāf adorns the windows of the northern wall of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 33). In the verse, which informs them how to worship, Muslims are warned not to waste food.

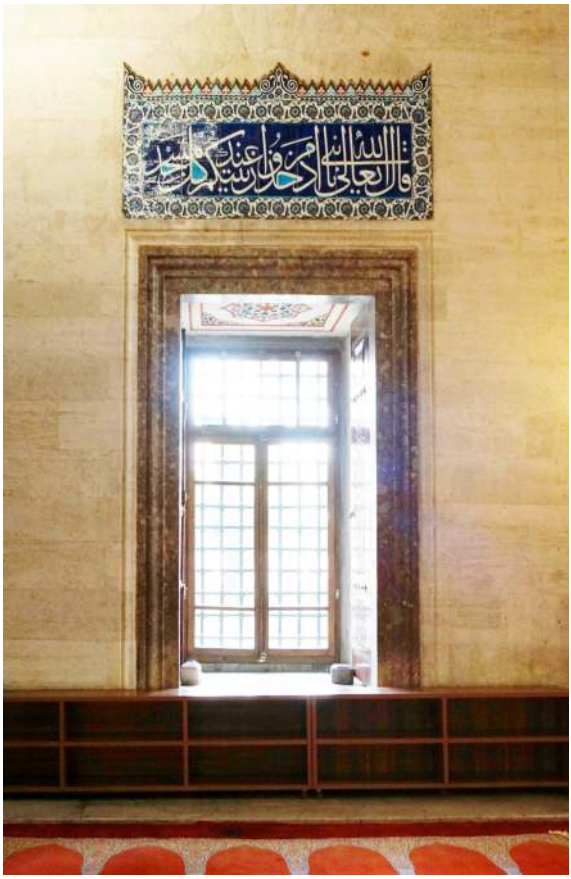

Figure 33: The initial part of the 31st verse of Sūrat al-Arāf, which adorns the windows of the northern wall of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 1st–4th verses of Sūrat al-Fath adorn the Qibla wall window of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque (Figure 34). The verse presents the good news of conquest and some other good news. Through examples, believers are reminded that everything comes from Allah, and the servant who sees the blessing of the Lord can be expected to come closer to Him and worship Him even more.

Figure 34: The 1st–4th verses of Sūrat al-Fath adorn the Qibla wall window of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque

The 29th verse of Sūrat al-Fath adorns the portico windows in the Süleymaniye and Selimiye mosques. This verse states that Allah is pleased with what believers do. The inscription of the verse in the place of the portico serves as an incentive for those who enter the mosque. It also enables Muslims to worship enthusiastically in the mosque or the portico.

The 22nd-23rd verses of Sūrat al-Hashr adorn the window pediments of the *Sultan Mahfil* of Selimiye Mosque, while the 23rd verse of Sūrat al-Hashr adorns the window pediments of the portico of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (Figure 35). The verse, which speaks of the attributes of Allah, follows the principle of *Tawhid,* explaining that Allah is both peerless and unique.

Figure 35: The 23rd verse of Sūrat al-Hashr on the window pediments of the portico of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque

The 18th verse of Sūrat al-Jinn adorns the window of the northern wall of Süleymaniye Mosque. The verse states that the masjids belong to Allah as places of worship and informs the Muslims who come to worship to serve only Allah.

5.1.7. Gate Inscriptions

While not every mosque carries inscriptions on its gate pediments, when present, they are usually on the upper side of the portal. The section will focus on some of the varied verses inscribed on these portals.

The 238th verse of Sūrat al-Baqara adorns the portico of Süleymaniye Mosque and Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (Figure 36). The verse contains advice for Muslims about continuing *salaah* and information on how *salaah* should be performed.

Figure 36: The 238th verse of Sūrat al-Baqara on the pediment over the central arch of the portico of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 103rd verse of Sūrat al-Nisā adorns the pediment of the northern gate leading to the inner court of Süleymaniye Mosque and the southern portal of Şehzade Mehmed Mosque. The verse states that *salaah* at certain times is obligatory for believers and cautions Muslims on this matter.

The 54th verse of Sūrat al-An'ām adorns the west lateral gate pediment of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 37). This verse extends greetings to Muslims and invites them to worship, implying forgiveness.

Figure 37: The 54th verse of Sūrat al-An'ām on the gate pediment of the west lateral gate of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 24th verse of Sūrat al-Ra'd adorns the east lateral gate pediment of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 38). The verse begins with the expression of a greeting and then offers Paradise (*Jannah*). This verse encourages those who enter the mosque by saluting them.

Figure 38: The 24th verse of Sūrat al-Rad on the gate pediment of the east lateral gate of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 32nd verse of Sūrat al-Nahl adorns the pediment of the eastern gate leading to the inner court of Süleymaniye Mosque. In this verse, believers who come to pray are greeted and are heralded with *Jannah* in exchange for their good deeds.

The 81st verse of Sūrat al-Isrā' adorns the built-in pillars next to the *Sultan Mahfil* of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque. This verse reveals Islam as the one true religion. Thus, it is inscribed on the pillars to emphasize the solidity of religion.

The 30th verse of Sūrat al-Anbiyā adorns the gate of the corner *sebil* (fountain) of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque. This partly inscribed verse about water, chosen for the gate to the public fountain, is very appropriate. The verse states that living things come to life with water.

The 58th verse of Sūrat Yā Sīn adorns the main gate of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque (Figure 39). Although Sūrat Yā Sīn is widely read and known by Muslims, verses from the sūrat are not often seen in mosques from the Sinan period. Of the mosques investigated in the present study, the verse appears only on the portal of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque. It speaks of Allah's mercy and His salutation to Muslims, having the characteristics of a welcome to those who come to the mosque.

Figure 39: The 58th verse of Sūrat Yā Sīn on the main gate pediment of Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan Mosque

The 53rd verse of Sūrat al-Zumar adorns in succession the inner pediments of the east and west gates of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 40). In this verse, when Allah refers to the servants who have transgressed against themselves, He is referring to those who have sinned. However, They are reminded that Allah is merciful, so they should be hopeful, not sad. So even those who believe themselves sinners can enter the mosque to worship and hope for God's mercy.

Figure 40: The beginning of the 53rd verse of Sūrat al-Zumar on the inner pediment of the east lateral gate of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 62nd verse of Sūrat al-Zumar adorns the main gate of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (Figure 41). The verse informs Muslims who come to worship the greatness of Allah.

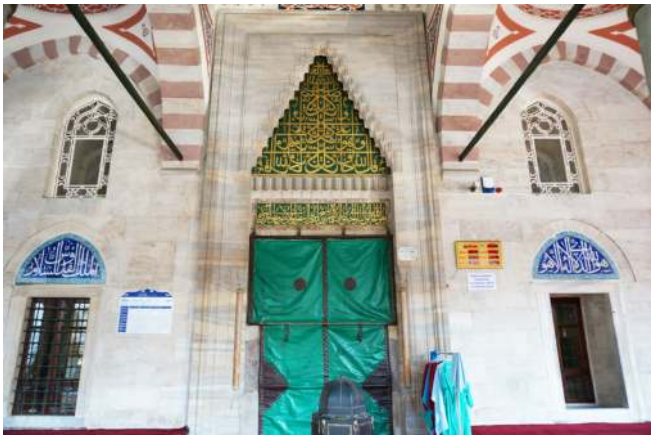

Figure 41: The 62nd verse of Sūrat al-Zumar above the main gate of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque (symmetrically)

The 73rd verse of Sūrat al-Zumar adorns the pediment of the western gate leading to the inner court of Süleymaniye Mosque. This verse serves as an incentive to those who enter the place of worship, reminding them that those who feared Allah would go to heaven. After entering the mosque via the main gate, Muslims are greeted with the verse as a form of welcome.

The 24th verse of Sūrat al-Hashr adorns the main gate of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque. In this verse, believers are shown the attributes and power of Allah.

Figure 42: The 34-35th verses Sūrat al-Ma'ārij on the pediment above the central arch of the northern arcade of the inner court of Süleymaniye Mosque

The 34th–35th verses Sūrat al-Ma'ārij adorn the pediment above the central arch of the northern arcade of the inner court of Süleymaniye Mosque (Figure 42) and the gate pediment of the portico of Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque. In this verse of Sūrat al-Ma'ārij, believers who are diligent in their performance of *salaah* are promised heaven. It can be understood from the sūrat that *salaah* is a vehicle to heaven, and the mosque is a vehicle for *salaah*.

5.2. Topics in the Inscriptions and the Architectural Program

In the present study, the inscriptions, their meanings, and the architectural forms on which they are inscribed within the selected Sinan mosques are defined, and comments are made on the associations between the writings and their forms. Beginning from the central dome, as the focal point of mosque architecture, the inscriptions on the dome, semi-dome, pendentives, corner semi-domes, *mihrabs*, windows, and gates are presented in a hierarchically descending order, and this order is also reflected in the hierarchy of the writing program. In the five Sinan mosques examined in the study, the hierarchical order of the architectural forms in relation to the writings is as follows:

Dome: This is the prayer area's highest, most central, and inclusive place. The inscribed verses mention about Allah's greatness, might, and glory.

Semi-dome: The inscriptions on the semi-domes deal with the principles of faith and worship that constitute *the five pillars of Islam*.

Pendentive: There are inscriptions pointing to the mediators who helped spread Islam. Aside from the caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, there are also names of his grandchildren, Hasan and Husayn. As the most important people in Islam after the Prophet Muhammad, their roles in Islam are important, and just as the pendentives act as an intermediary element in transferring the load of the dome and semi-dome to the ground, they serve as intermediaries in explaining Islam.

Corner semi-dome: These architectural elements include inscriptions about *salaah*, servitude, the direction of worship, and prayer to Allah. There are also explanations about the obligations under Islam and how they should be fulfilled.

Mihrab: These include inscriptions about the Tawhid, worshiping only Allah, and the attributes of Allah, good tidings, and prayer. The *mihrab*, indicating the direction of worship, contains such inscriptions directly related to the divine to show the true owner of the place of worship. They emphasize that worship is to be directed only at Allah.

Windows: These carry inscriptions directing Muslims how to perform their religious rites and encourage Muslims to worship. The windows attract significant attention, being at the eye level of those who come to worship. In this location, Muslims answering the call to prayer are reminded of their obligation to worship Allah. The fact that the windows come hierarchically after the corner semi-domes and the *mihrab* provides information about the subjects (*kul*) and includes reminders and incentives to fulfill their purpose in guiding worship.

Gates: The gates contain inscriptions relating to the promise of heaven and offering greetings and religious reminders to those who come to worship. They serve an intermediary purpose, connecting the interior place of worship to the outer space. Some verses herald those who come to worship, and encouraging verses that remind people that they will attain Allah's acquiescence, along with several other religious reminders.

CONCLUSION

Tools of communication, which consist of signs, have facilitated the creation and dissemination of our knowledge of the universe, and the most prolific of these tools have undoubtedly been speech and writing. Architecture can be considered another such tool in that architectural products serve as indicators containing symbols (*signifiers*) of such concepts. This study has sought to analyze the concept-symbol dimension of architectural indicators from the age of Mimar Sinan through the inscriptions left behind.

The content of the inscriptions in the mosques of Şehzade Mehmed, Süleymaniye, Selimiye, Kılıç Ali Paşa, and Sokullu-Ismihan Sultan and their associated architectural elements indicate that the epigraphy program in sixteenth century Sinan mosques was carried

out according to a program. The inscriptions on certain architectural elements within different structures contain similar contexts, and the verses were selected consciously to integrate architectural design and text. The domes are adorned with verses describing Allah's greatness, might, and magnificence, symbolically at the mosque structure's most central and highest point. Semi-domes, on the other hand, include verses describing the principles of faith and worship, integrated with the roles of the semi-domes in supporting the dome. Following their intermediary role in architectural design, the pendentives contain writings describing the unity of Allah and the principles of faith/worship, as well as the names of Allah, Muhammad, the four great caliphs, and the grandchildren of the Prophet. The corner semi-domes contain verses explaining how to worship. In line with specifying the direction of prayer, the *mihrab* is adorned with verses emphasizing Tawhid and calling on adherents to worship only Allah. The windows contain verses explaining and encouraging worship. There are also verses on the gates promising heaven, as well as greetings and religious reminders for those who come to worship.

Finally, it can be understood that several principles define the essence of Islam (like Allah, conditions of faith, and the acceptance of these conditions) included in the inscriptions that follow the infrastructural hierarchy of the transitional elements and the domes. The inscriptions follow the structural hierarchy of the building, following a certain narrative scheme that resembles the introduction, development, and conclusion of a scientific work. When evaluated in detail in accordance with the content framework described in this study linking the inscriptions and architecture, it can be said that the mosque structures, which were constructed hierarchically from the ground to the dome, became a "means" by which to worship Allah, and included the "created universe" as a realm in which the *Qur'ānic* belief principles and practices were represented.

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