

UNESCO World Cultural Heritage of Edirne: Selimiye Mosque Complex

Edirne'nin UNESCO Dünya Kültür Mirası: Selimiye Camii Külliyesi

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Edirne, located in basin fed by the Tunca, Meriç, Arda and Ergene Rivers in the east of Europe, is a city of history, culture and tourism, connecting Asia and Turkey to Europe through the Balkans.

“The Selimiye Mosque Complex”, built upon the order of Sultan Selim II between the years 1568-1575 (976-982 AH), is a masterpiece of world architecture as well as Turkish-Islamic architecture.

The Selimiye Mosque was built by Sinan the Architect at the age of 80 and was called “My Masterpiece” by Sinan. The structure consists of nine base units as follows: the Selimiye Mosque, Dar’ul Kurra Madrasa, Dar’ul Hadis Madrasa, Sıbyan (Primary) School, Arasta, the Clock House (Muvakkithane), the Library, the courtyard with shadirvan and the outer courtyard. In this context, Arasta Bazaar was built by Davut Aga the Architect during the reign of Murat III in order to yield income for the mosque.



Figure 1: Selimiye Mosque.



Figure 2: Selimiye Mosque at the View of Edirne City.

The Mosque crowning Edirne was built on Kavak Square (also called Sarıbayır), where the first Ottoman Palace of Edirne was located. This location is the most visible area of the city and the Selimiye Mosque can therefore be seen all over the city. The selection of the location shows that Sinan was a very important city planner as well as an Architect.

The famous traveller Evliya Çelebi indicates in his travelogue that 27.760 rum pouches of money, that is, 550.000.000 coins were spent for the construction of the mosque (Çelebi, 2006). Selim II's life did not last long enough for him to see the mosque and he died before he saw the mosque completed.

Sinan the Architect elevated the covered central structure scheme with a single large dome in the Ottoman and World Architecture to its highest level in the Selimiye Mosque Complex. Inside the Selimiye Mosque, the weight of the enormous dome that is 42.30 m high from the ground up to the keystone and has a diameter of around 31.50 m is distributed on eight pillars and buttresses of a large arch. Four semi domes at the corners and a semi dome on the mihrab support the central dome. The mosque is illuminated through hundreds of windows lined up on the dome frame and facades.

The contribution of the minarets covering the dome from afar and strengthening the sense of verticality in the mass composition plays a great role in making the structure



Figure 3: A View from the Worship Area (Harim).

legendary. The minarets 85.67 m height above ground including the finial and 3.80 meters in diameter have three sherefes (minaret balconies) with muqarnas. The minarets on either side of the main door have independent three-ways with different staircases reaching the sherefes. The minarets on the madrasas section have single staircases. The minarets faced four directions of the main dome in this structure for the first time and therefore provided an impressive facade appearance. Placing the independent three-ways with different staircases reaching the sherefes in minarets on the connection points of the main mass and the courtyard



Figure 4: A View Inside the Dome.



Figure 5: A View Inside the Dome.



Figure 6: One of the Selimiye Mosque Tiles.

created a legend that evokes nearly the whole structure and even Edirne. The Sultan's Mahfel is decorated with dazzling tiles. This structure constitutes the culmination of aesthetics with its minbar that is a unique example of marble work, the decoration tiles used in the interior, kalemisi (hand ornamentation) and marble fountain (shadirvan) in the middle of the courtyard surrounded by porticos. (Turan: 2013)

Inside the mosque there is the Muezzin Mahfel in the middle, the Sultan's Mahfel on the left of the mihrab, and the Library on the right. The collection of the library was formed by the donation of approximately 270 books that belonged to Sultan Selim II and the state. Today, manuscripts of Selimiye Manuscripts Library are kept here.

There are Primary School, Dar'ul Hadis and Dar'ul Kurra Madrasas in the large outdoor courtyard surrounded by stone walls of Selimiye Mosque Complex. Today, Dar'ul Hadis Madrasa serves as the Turkish and Islamic Art Museum and Dar'ul Kurra Madrasa serves as the Selimiye Foundation Museum.

The Selimiye Mosque Complex is a cultural symbol that links the East and West in Ottoman Classical Culture and is a signature of the city. The complex was included in the World Heritage List by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee on June 29, 2011 through collaborative efforts of the Municipality of Edirne and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

SINAN THE ARCHITECT

The world-famous Turkish Architect Sinan lived between 1490 and 1588 (890-996 AH) and witnessed the reigns of four sultans. Sinan was admitted to the Guild of Janissaries after being recruited as a devshirmeh from Ağırnas village in Kayseri during the reign of Yavuz Sultan Selim and joined expeditions to the East and the West organized by the state during this period and had the opportunity to see various cities and architectural works.

Sinan the Architect had won the approval of Vizier Lutfi Pasha with the bridge he built across Prut River during Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent's Karaboğdan (Moldavia) Expedition, and became chief architect on the recommendation of Lutfi Pasha upon his predecessor's death.



Figure 7: Sinan the Architect.

According to the collection of biographies by Sai Chelebi, which quote Sinan The Architect, he built 81 mosques, 50 masjids, 55 madrasahs, 7 dar'ul kurras, 19 mausoleums, 14 imarets, 6 water ways – arches, 8 bridges, 16 caravanserais, 33 palaces and 37 Turkish Baths as the chief architect.

The Other works of Sinan the Architect in Edirne are the Rustem Pasha Caravanserai, Semiz Ali Pasha Bazaar, Sokullu Bath, Saray (Kanuni) Bridge, Adalet Kasrı (Justice Hall) and Defterdar Mustafa Pasha Mosque. (Municipality of Edirne, 2014)

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