

Sinan — A Presence in Time Eternal

A culture, its arts and artists cannot be studied in isolation from its belief systems and value structures. Through the life of Sinan, **Gulzar Haider** suggests a way of looking at Muslim history and its personalities.

EXISTENCE is perpetual movement; and God, the only constant. History is the flow of men and ideas in a God-directed continuum of time. Mankind is forever clarifying and realising its station vis-a-viz its Creator. In the chronology of events we cannot deny the seeming cycles of faith and doubt, knowledge and ignorance, brilliance and darkness but history is not locked in a helpless repetitive pattern. The 'local' variations when put together in a sequence and seen in a self-referential manner, do create an impression of a cyclical pattern and an innate periodicity in history. Examined in the light of the Qur'an, however, it appears that man's destiny is characterized by freedoms and free will within a smaller matrix of time but governed by strict laws of moral causality and social justice in the matrix of historical scale. It is superficial and even unfair to treat the fall of Rome, Baghdad and Istanbul as inevitable repetitions of history. The axioms and premises of any Islamic view of history have to emerge from its ethical and spiritual constancy and nor the territorial imperatives of man against nature or the politico-economic belligerence among classes and nations. Beyond the non-relativistic meta-values of Islam that establish the matrices of God-man, man-nature and man-man (*Inquiry*, August '85), all is change and dynamism. Ibn-Maskawaih, Al-Bairuni, Ibn Khaldun and Mohammed Iqbal have all, in their characteristic manners, seen the eternity and permanence of the Divine, and movement and evolution of nature and society.

Qur'an puts forth Islam as eternal movement and suggests the creative evolution in collective human consciousness by rejecting the eternal condemnation of "original sin" and blessing man with successively more comprehensive Revelation and Guidance through time. Man, as a historic

phenomenon, through belief, Shariah, knowledge, justice and perseverant struggle in His Way, has the potentiality to rise to his station of *Ashraf-al-Makhlooqat* (the most honoured of the creations) and be worthy of the covenant of God's vicegerency on earth. The same man is also under the continuous threat of the deviationary temptations of the God-defying *Iblis*. One such visage of *Iblis* is the subtle reoccupation of the monotheistic Kaaba of Islamic thought with the unseen but powerful idols of ancestry, nationalism, race, language and sectarianism. The chronicles have been disfigured by the glitter of the court, thunder of the guns and sophistry of the crowned scholars. The history of Muslims has suffered from the curses of incomplete truths, prejudicial characterisations and in some cases outright mythography. And what price have we paid for it? We are ignorant, grievously misinformed and victims of prejudices that have become essential to maintain our little mental empires. To the nationalist Arab, the Ottoman Turk is a despicable imperial tyrant. To the nationalist Persian, the Arab is a marauder of his fine Khosroic Civilization. To the Sunnis, both Arabs and Turks, the Persians have been the incorrigible heretics of history. To the Shia, the Ummayyads, one and all were usurpers. Muslim 'greats', philosophers as well as fighters, are territorialized as racial heroes, as histories are published under official patronage. Victimized by such synthetic history the Muslim mind is confused if not outright schizophrenic. Erratically it salutes the ruthlessness of a Hajjaj ibn Yousef and reveres the piety of an Umar ibn Abdul Aziz. The criteria for assessment of the past are blurred and history cannot play the creative role in helping the present to direct its future. The Qur'anic framework and its concordant metho-



dology to assess society and individuals are our only hope.

We turn to Sinan, a humble man who earned a place of special significance in the history of Islam, in the hope that we can learn something from him for the benefit of future time. He was a centre-stage figure in the Ottoman play on the stage of time. A brilliant chapter in the annals of world architecture, he remains a legend in engineering heroics and technical virtuosity. We cannot do justice to him without outlining the concept of creative personality in Islam, without identifying the relationship between architecture, society and civilization and, finally, without a careful look at some of his work. Our interest is beyond biography and enumeration of his architectural achievements. From Sinan we aim to extract timeless values of architecture and practical lessons for the role of the architect in contemporary Muslim society. And this, perhaps, may eventually help us to develop a purposeful approach to the study of 'historic' personality, free of blind hero worship.

About the year 1489 A.D., in a village named Aghirnas in central Anatolia, Yousef was born into a Christian family. Like every newborn, as Prophet Muhammed said, he had the innate potentiality of Islam. His grandfather, Dogan Yousef Aga was a respected, builder and his father a carpenter and stone mason. He studied through his eyes, learned through his hands and grew up to be intelli-

gent, skillful, strong and sober in character. At the age of 23 he was inducted into the *Janissary* cadet system and taken to Istanbul. He became a Muslim and was named Sinan Abdul-Mennan (Spearhead, Slave of God the All-Giving). It will be inaccurate to assert that he changed his faith after a free-thinking comparison between Greek Orthodox Christianity and Islam. What can be said with confidence is that, once a Muslim, he never exhibited any doubt or ambivalence. His personal life, his two pious foundation charters, his 'peak performance' as he came to mosque designs, his deep desire to surpass the dome of Hagia Sophia in the name of his faith, and his vigorous participation in the Muslim thrust into Europe, especially the campaigns of 1522, 1526 and 1529, are all a testimony to Sinan's vitalistic belief in Islam. He worked within the imperial system and its hierarchies, he addressed the *sultans* and *viziers* as the conventions of the court demanded, but there is no evidence that he ever sold his soul or tried to purchase someone else's. He did not plot or participate in the assassination of rivals. On the contrary, as his genius emerged and expressed itself in full bloom through his work, he was sought after by the notables of the vast empire to build them mosques, tombs and pious foundations in addition to his duties as the Royal Chief Architect. Well into his mature years (1567), he built Buvukrhakme bridge, one of his engineering masterpieces, and on one pier he carved his name as Yousef Abdullah. He must have recognized the honoured station of Prophet Yousef in the Qur'an and chosen this opportunity to remember the name his parents gave him or perhaps he had this urge to recall his builder grandfather's name. It could be that he had risen to the level of recognizing the spirit of Abrahamic monotheism and felt that it was most appropriate to reassert his Yousef as long as he was Abdullah, the Slave of God, the Protector of both the Prophets Yousef and Muhammed. At the age of 94, he performed Hajj in all the hardships of his time.

Sinan was disciplined, unafraid and perseverant in the pursuit of his goals. Though an indulgent family man, he carried on his shoulders simultaneous responsibilities or numerous projects. He managed almost an army of assistants and apprentices. When the *Kulliyya* of Suleymanieh was under construction (1550-1557) the entire area between the site, the third hill of

Istanbul and the Shehzadeh mosque was a beehive of craftsmen and Sinan participated in even the minutest details of the project. He carved the mihrab marble panel with the skills of a patriarchal master. Unlike the remote, dilettante, penthouse architectural 'greats' of our time, he never instructed what he could not demonstrate with his own hands.

Sinan thrived on challenges and characteristically experimented all through his life. From mobile wooden bridges, hoisting rigs, catapults, amphibious structures, flood control projects and civil works including the great aquaducts that brought fresh water to Istanbul, his genius drove him incessantly. Self-reliant and creative, Sinan was a problem-solver par excellence. His arena of action was clear to him. His life and work is enough to convince us that he did not aspire to anything other than to carry his 'stone-cutting' skills to the sublime. To architecture he always returned with the passion of a lover for his beloved. Whether it was the memorial mosque of Shehzadeh Mehmet (1448), public bath houses for Quewen Haseki Hurrem (1556), *Kulliyye* of Suleymanieh (1557), the mosque for Princess Mihremah Sultan (1565) on the highest hill of Istanbul, or one for grand vizier Sokullu Mehmet Pasha (1571) or Rustum Pasha (1561) on tight difficult sites, he was disciplined but innovative at conceptual, formal and technical levels. Every one of these architectural benchmarks is a signature of Sinan in

that they solve difficult problems ingeniously. To improve upon his previous work and maintain a continuous pursuit of an 'ideal' were the significant constants in his long career. It is a small wonder that this phenomenon climaxed in the awe-inspiring Selimiyyeh (Edirne, 1574) when he was eighty-six. His apprentices like Davut Aga, Dalgic Ahmet and Mehmet Aga later produced masterpieces like Yeni Jami, mausoleum of Murad II and Sultan Ahmet (Blue) mosque. Jafer Efendi, on the instructions of Mehmet Aga, produced *Risalei-Mimariye*, a compendium of methods and techniques refined through Sinan's "studios and workshops". His architectural legacy lasted well into the 17th century and he became a legend as the time passed. In war and in peace, Sinan was a *mujahid* and his weapons were his knowledge, skills and wisdom that he considered God's gifts. Just through his mosques, which are 'alive' centuries after him, his *Sadiqa-i-Jariah* (act of perpetual altruism) continues.

He signed himself as "*El-Faqir Sinan, Ser-i-Mimaran-i-Hassa*" which has been literally translated as "Sinan, the poor, chief of architects, the special" or "... chief of special architects". On his signet he carved in the middle "*El-Faqir El-Haqir Sinan*" which literally translated means: "Sinan, the poor and the despised". The border of the signet carried a verse couplet:

*Mihr-i-mimaran hemise mustmend
Bende-i-miskin kemine derdmend*

Sinan as a statue outside Ankara University (opposite); and his greatest challenge, the Church of St. Sophia which he converted to a Mosque





SINAN



The Selimiye Mosque in Edirne built in 1569-75 (left); the Shehzade Mosque complex in Istanbul built in 1544-48 (above); and the wire model used by the author to study the complex intricacies of the Shehzade Mosque

which can be paraphrased as:
 "Sun among the architects but always
 in need
 Destitute slave, the lowly, the
 anguished"

Sinan was not unsure of his station as an architect but he was the modest genius who would describe Shehzadeh as the work of an apprentice and Suleymanieh as that of a journeyman. His humility must not be mistaken as neurotic self-dislike. Neither are these the poetic lamentations of a mystic, nor the empty mannerisms of a seasoned servant of the imperial court.

From diverse accounts of Sinan's life one can construct his temperament as loyal and courtly to his patrons, exemplary and exacting towards his staff, indulgent towards his family and humble before his God. From his royal patrons, his noblemen friends and his students, he earned titles like "the Eyes of the Engineers; the Capital on the Column of Builders; the Master of the Masters of his Epoch; the Foremost of the most dextrous Artisans of his Era; the Euclid of Time and the Ages; the Royal Chief Architect, the Royal

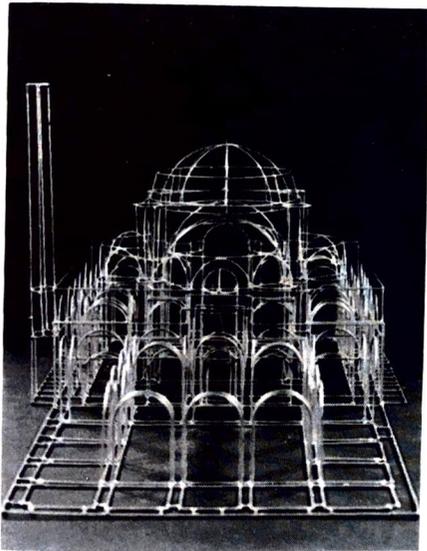
Teacher, Sinan Agha".

Sinan was not hesitant to borrow from those who had passed before him. Nor was he afraid of losing his secrets. He carried the memories of Hellenistic, Roman, Seljuk and early Ottoman architecture of Bursa. He studied the Byzantine remains of his time and unhesitatingly sought his inspirations as he repaired Haghia Sophia. He worked closely with craftsmen from various parts of the empire, especially the tile makers of Iznik, whose roots were in Persia. His observation of others only helped to crystalize his own creativity. All the grand viziers he served were themselves converts to Islam. In his vast army of 'builders' and apprentices there must have been many from other faiths. To this Yousef who became Abdul-Mennan, this Anatolian carpenter, stone-cutter who rose to be the *Mimarbashi* of Suleyman, the source and destination of all knowledge was God. He sought without prejudice and gave without malice.

A firm believer, Law-abider, honest in his contracts, honourable in his conduct, struggler in the rightful causes, humble before his God, tire-

less learner, open hearted, pursuer of beauty, perfection and higher meaning in his architecture, Sinan will remain a model Muslim artist of history. His strokes are purposeful and life-enhancing. He serves the spirit of his art but is not shackled by it. Through his work he does not merely express his times but shapes the civilization. And there is a higher purpose to it all, that is, to lend energy to the creative movement of man towards the cognizance of God.

In order to understand Sinan beyond his personality and as a phenomenon or architectural history, we have to pause and look at the dynamics of architecture, history and civilization. Architecture and civilization are ultimately inseparable. Civilization has an innate motivation to express itself. Through its literature and poetry, its music and ceremony, its clothing and craft and its art and architecture come across its most cherished values and its ultimate aspirations. Through its relationships between the ruler and the ruled, the law and the citizen, through its systems of social justice, its conventions of trade and commerce and its codes of conduct we understand its view of existence and the concept of man.



Architecture does not tell us lies though its manners may be subtle, indirect and implicit. We consider that the formative forces of architecture in any culture can be identified as desire to dwell, pursuit of paradise, urge to transcend time, thirst for knowing and telling and finally to uphold and creatively interpret the patterns of socio-economic transactions.

Ottomans sculpted, out of the raw materials of history, a culture and civilization that had all the formative forces for creating great architecture. From the modest beginnings of Osman Bey in the Sacaria region in the late 13th century, his fiercely dedicated

sons had built a great empire by the early 16th century. The seventh generation son of Osman, Mehmet II succeeded in his campaign against Constantinople in 1453 and was later known as Fatih (the Conquerer). His son Bayazid II, known as the Pious was deposed by his son Selim I Yavuz who is remembered as a tireless and severe fighter. He was the father of the famous Suleyman I *Kanuni* (the Law-maker) who had a long and illustrious reign from 1520-1566. Selim II and his son Murad III ruled until 1595. The Ottoman phenomenon had peaked with Suleyman I and after him a slow decline had begun.

The House of Osman was driven by a monolithic global vision of Islam. They saw themselves as inheritors of the tradition of the Prophet and mantle of the *Khulafa-i-Rashidin* (the Rightly Guided Caliphs). Their campaigns were against Christian Europe, Mamluk Egypt and what they termed as the heretical, deviated Islam of the Safavids in Persia. At the risk of being simplistic, one could propose that the secrets of Ottoman success and unprecedented longevity in Muslim history, were their systems and institutions. There was a balance between the sovereign family of Osman, institution of the Janissary army, sharing of wealth through commerce, military campaigns and royal gifts, a socially and environmentally enlightened law that extended the intentions of Shariah, visible public endowments that kept the population well-served and perhaps the complexity of intrigue and swift retribution, to the extent of accession. The affairs of the State were in the hands of a council of ministers, headed by the 'Grand Vizier' who was directly accountable to the Sultan. Many viziers had married into the family of Osman. Though appointed by the Sultan, the 'Grand Mufti' and his council of *ulema*, with representatives from diverse parts of the empire, wielded a braking power on the court. It was the supremacy of the system and institutions based on a vitalistic and progressive view of Islam that carried the achievements of Selim II and Suleyman II well into the late 18th century.

When the flow of history reaches its peaks of energy it starts taking the attributes of a civilization. Almost miraculously, men and ideas that are mutually supportive, even synergetic, appear on the stage of time. Sinan's career as a blossoming janissary engineer coincided with the most important military campaigns of Persia,

Egypt, Rhodes, Hungary, Vienna, Tabriz and Baghdad. Ibrahim Pasha, Rustum Pasha and Sokullu Mehmet Pasha, men of incredible capability, foresight and ambition, rose to the rank of grand viziers during the same period as Sinan, who outlived all of them. A lady of 'Russian origin' became one of the most powerful and influential, though invisible, personalities of that period as Queen Haseki Hurrem, wife and confidante of Sultan Suleyman. She liked Sinan and so did her daughter Princess Mihrmah Sultan, the wife of Rustum Pasha. All these patrons and benefactors were deeply committed to arts. Suleyman himself was head of the goldsmiths' guild and Rustum a prolific collector of manuscripts, carpets and even tiles. But perhaps the alchemy of that period is best represented by the coming to age of the tradition of *Waqf* and *Kulliye*.

Waqf in its original Arabic meaning is to pause, to arrest, to render something inalienably attached. In this sense a *waqf* is a duly chartered endowment towards the building of a pious foundation. Commercial facilities provide earnings for the maintenance of the religious, educational and various social programmes. *Kulliye*, the complex of public service buildings, has the same etymology as the Arabic word *Kull* (the whole) as opposed to the word *Juz* (the part). In Arabic *Kulliah* is also used for a university faculty composed of colleges and departments. In this sense the Turkish *Kulliye* represents an architectural whole composed of harmonious and essential parts.

For Sultan Suleyman I and Selim II, for grand viziers Ibrahim, Rustum, Kara Ahmet and Sokullu Mehmet Pasha, for Queen Haseki Hurrem, for Princess Mihrmah Sultan, and for himself, Sinan built pious foundations and *Kulliyes*. The resolve to endow them with the intention of the good of the people in this life, the continuity, almost perpetuity, of these ethico-social organizations, the physically and phenomenologically focal place of these 'micro-cities' within the larger city, the sympathetic and engaging relationship of these complexes to the surrounding environment, all combined to express the culture. A modest *waqf* with a small mosque and a courtyard *medressah* or a grand *kulliye* with soaring minarets, a symphony of perfectly balanced domes, *turbes*, gardens, schools for *muezzins*, colleges for scholars, teaching hospitals, asylums, public kitchens, baths and even wrestling grounds, all of which spoke

equally eloquently of the unity-directed spirit of Islamic environment. *Kulliye* expressed the microcosm of social dwelling and carried the 'genetic code' for the "City of Islam". The university city of Suleymanieh, the most magnificent *Kulliye* of Ottoman times, crowns and cascades beside the third hill of Istanbul. It remains the embodiment of an architectural ethic, that of, 'Environmental Sensibility' in the way it responds to the site and context, 'Morphological Integrity', in the way its form and space, its structure and envelope, and its profile and plan are all unified, to enhance its purpose, and finally the 'Symbolic Clarity', in the way every element ties, not literally but metaphorically and ever so quietly, into a rich narrative of the Islamic view of social existence. The directed march of history provides the energy, an inspired leader declares his vision, society lends the collective will and confidence, and time identifies a creative genius to give shape to it all. To Sinan belongs that honoured station for his epoch.

It is not easy to fathom Sinan's technical capability and architectural virtuosity. No one quite knows the precise numerical and geographic extent of his work. He has been credited with seventy-five large and forty-nine small mosques, forty-nine *medressahs* and seven institutes for the study of Qur'an, seventeen public kitchens, three hospitals, seven viaducts, seven

bridges, twenty-seven palaces, eighteen *caravanserais*, five treasure houses, thirty-one baths and eighteen tombs. To get a minimal grasp of his approaches to architecture we present our observations on one of his earliest major works: Shehzadeh Mehmet Mosque in Istanbul.

A detailed study has been done by the author and his student-colleague Hatice Yazar on this building in Istanbul. The method used has three aspects to it: firstly the building was 'experienced' and the perceptual, technical and emotional observations were discussed at great length. Secondly, a wire model, picking up the principal points and lines, was built at Carleton University. This model attempted at superimposition of the spatial and formal characteristics of Shehzadeh in a 'simultaneous' visual experience. Of course the very process of making this model, revealed relationships between the expressed form and the enclosed space, as well as many subtleties in the ordering of walls that were not otherwise apparent. Thirdly, during subsequent visits to the site, extensive photography of the calligraphic inscriptions was done which brought forth the hitherto unobserved value of both the content and location of the 'word' in Sinan's buildings. We may summarize our findings as follows:

1. There is a formal purity of shape that is pervasive in Sinan's work. In

Shehzadeh the simultaneity of a cube-sphere unit is central and unmistakable. The building footprints come from the square, its symmetries and subdivisions. The third dimension is the realm of the sphere, its subdivisions and the traces of its circular intersections with imaginary perceptual vertical planes created by the corresponding aspects of the four columns. Thus come into existence the arched cuts in planes, both vertical and horizontal. The edges of the arches in turn, become a strong definer of perceptual, vertical and horizontal planes. The sensation of a system of central cubic space, surrounded by prismatic spaces rising into the interpenetrating order of spheres, is completely unavoidable. There is stillness and unity in space which suggests that it is the process of subdivision of primal forms rather than mere addition of spaces and elements. The wire model shows the distinct perception of edges against a backdrop of forms that could be either the externally visible building envelope or the internally 'solidified' space.

2. Shehzadeh is one of those buildings of Sinan where the load transfer and constructional order is succinct to the point of perhaps being overly obvious. The cruciform plan here carries the genetic imprint of the structural strategy. From the crown dome downwards there are three load transferring



ideas

systems that operate simultaneously, each interlocking and supportive of the other. The constructional and load transferring strategy of the Shehzadeh is as clear from the outside as it is from the inside. It is this particular order that convinces the searching eye that Sinan, here, was acutely concerned with the techniques of creating a well-composed, balanced and unified space-enclosure over a magnificent sacred place.

3. From the building footprints, be they mosques, tombs or baths, one cannot help noticing that there must be a belief in the significance of pure shapes, value of the geometric order and the promise of harmony and beauty through proportion. There is ample historical evidence for the prevalence of such attitudes in Islamic thought. From the classical philosopher Al-Kindi to Ibne Khaldun, from Ikhwan-us-Safa to contemporary writers like Burkhardt, Nasr, Ardalan and Bakhtiar, El-Said and Parman, one can find reiteration of the belief that order is a simultaneous attribute of divinity and beauty. Notable Turkish researchers like Kuran, Arpat, Erdem and Tukul-Yavuz have documented the legacy of romance between geometry and Turko-Islamic

architecture.

It is important to note that Ibne Khaldun has said: "It requires either a general or specialized knowledge of proportion and measurement in order to bring forms (of things) from potentiality into actuality in the proper manner, and for the knowledge of proportions one must have recourse to the geometrician".

In approaching Shehzadeh in this attitudinal framework we have discovered four patterns: (a) A regular grid division, (b) A 1:root 2 proportion of diminishing squares, (c) A three-dimensional division extending the 1:root 2 proportion, and (d) A 2/3, 3/5, 5/8 proportion that is generated, based on a 24.5m block within the overall figure.

The different geometric systems that juxtapose, while none completely describing the entire building, show that Sinan, while unmistakably basing his work on purity and consistency of mathematical relationships, was not helplessly chained by his own rules.

4. What is unique about the organization of the parts of the *Kulliyye* of Shehzadeh Mehmet, and the same is true for Sulemaniyeh and Selimiye, is the sequential placement of the courtyard, the domed mosque and the

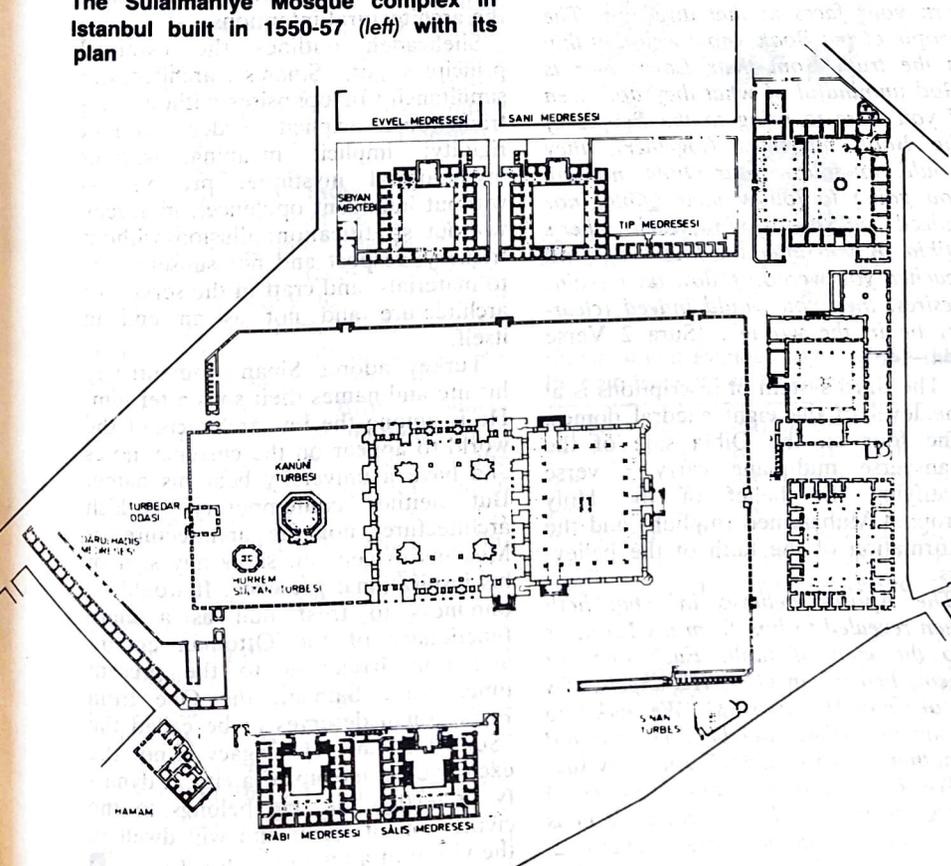
tomb on the axis to Makkah. The courtyard is the place of transition and purification from the life governed by the rights of society towards a state of prayer and supplication represented by the mosque. As the man reaffirms his faith, seeks forgiveness and begs for knowledge and guidance in every prayer, beyond him is the *Turbeh* (the earthly remains) of a sultan, a prince or a queen in the garden of graves – a reminder of the hereafter, the judgement and the eternity beyond. The spine of the Kulliye is the architectural allegory of the journey from the life-giving and purifying fountain in the courtyard to the still city of the dead with the mosque in between. And this mosque throbs with the five times daily rhythm of forgetful humanity reminding itself of its station before God.

It is significant that unlike some other Muslim cultures, the Ottoman tomb is deliberately humbled in the presence of the mosque. The memory of the patron lives in the foreverness of the services that the Kulliye offers and not in the grandness of the tombs. The powerful magnificence is reserved for the mosque that knows no death.

5. The relationship between the courtyard and the mosque is that of the earthly garden and the primordial heavenly *Musalla* (Prayer Mat). The limitless space of the heavens converges inward from the top down to the 5x5 square ring of domes, down to the 3x3 open courtyard and then to the centre abluion kiosk. Stillness and balance is retained by the location of central entrances on the Makkah axis. A certain dynamism and movement and Qibla bias is achieved by moving the lateral entrances by one module towards the mosque.

The mosque is the ultimate Islamic 'place'. The floor, the ritually clean horizontal plane defines the earth, spread out, bounded and sanctified as the place of gathering and prayer of man before his God. The floor rises into an earthly cube that culminates into the 'canopy of eternity'. The *axis mundi* is defined by the centre of the floor and the apex of the dome. The Qibla axis is defined by the centre of the courtyard and the *mihrab* and is accentuated by the axial entrances. The transverse axis is defined by the bodies, minds and hearts that line up, shoulder to shoulder, for prayer with their faces towards the Qibla. The three axes intersect at the centre that encapsulates the spirit of the 'prayer mat' sanctified by the symmetrically placed four columns and ascending

The Sulaimaniye Mosque complex in Istanbul built in 1550-57 (left) with its plan



canopy of domes. The mihrab, the mimbar, the ephemeral planeness and the pattern of light of the Qibla wall, as opposed to the comparative opaqueness and solidity of the narxex wall, all combine to confirm the significant direction. This orientation towards the House of God and the Sacred Mosque (Bayt-Allah and Masjid Alharam) is a spiritual and emotional connectedness that globally binds all the believers on earth as they offer their prayers.

The ultimate symbolic gesture of the courtyard is that the water that has restored the purity of man aims towards the centre of the earth. And in the mosque, at the centre of the primordial prayer mat, as man's body reaches the ultimate state of prostration and his forehead becomes one with the earth (*Sajud*), and he exclaims the highest praises for his Creator, and "his Lord is pleased with him", his spirit then has established a connection with the Throne of the Divine in the Heavens.

6. The Qur'an is Guidance from God to man. Being the pure word of the Creator it is the ultimate focus of sacredness. It is simultaneously the message with a content as well as the word with a form. The meaning unfolds at ascending levels of enlightenment on the Way of Piety. Qur'an is the law, the guidance, the light, the wisdom and ultimately the logos in the sense that it permeates through and engulfs the entire Islamic consciousness.

Islamic architecture has approached the Qur'an with four simultaneous objectives: firstly, the verses are used to express the intentions and purpose of the building; secondly, to impart sacredness by the very placement of the word; thirdly, as a medium to achieve and express beauty and finally, as the magnet and anchor of contemplative reflection that leads man to the cognizance of deeper Truth and the higher Meaning of existence.

The interior of Shehzadeh and the other great mosques of Sinan are like a spiritual journey through an ecstatic world of Qur'anic beauty. The eye, as it looks around and above in the abject emotion of supplication, is locked into a constellation of calligraphy. These are neither epic records nor commemorative inscriptions. Instead they are stations for pious thought that knows no bounds in the search of its Beloved.

Shehzadeh has five distinct systems of calligraphic inscriptions. At the apex of the central dome is the most

unusual composition of two concentric circular bands of calligraphy that unmistakably suggest the prayer to be the believers' ascension (Isra or Mi'raj). The outer and thus the lower band reads:

Glory to (God) who did take his servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless, - in order that We might show him some of Our signs: for he is the one who Heareth and Seeth (all things). He gave Moses the book, and made it a guide to the Children of Israel, - (Commanding): "Take not other than He as disposer of (your) affairs". (Sura 17, Verse 1, 2)

The inner and upper band that sets the final convergence to the Heavenly Axis contains Al-Fatiha, the seven verse Sura which is accepted as the Kernel of the Qur'an.

The second system is at crowns of the four half domes where we find the verses that once again are surprisingly succinct in relating the architecture of the mosque to the act of prayer. Starting with the crown of the Qibla directed half dome, the inscriptions continue to the other three:

"We see the turning of your face (for guidance) to the heavens: now shall We turn you to a Qibla that shall please you. Turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque: wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction. The people of the Book know well that that is the truth from their Lord. Nor is God unmindful of what they do. Even if you were to bring to the People of the Book all signs (together), they would not follow your Qibla; nor are you going to follow their Qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qibla. If you after the knowledge has reached you were to follow their (vain) desires, then you would indeed (clearly) be in the wrong". (Sura 2 Verse 144-145)

The third system of inscriptions is at the level of the eight exedral domes. The four on the Qibla side of the transverse mid-plane carry a verse testifying the belief of the Holy Prophet Muhammed (mpbuh) and the affirmation of the faith of the believers:

"The Apostle believes in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believes in God, His angels, His books and His apostles. "We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His apostles". And they say: "We hear, and we obey: (We seek) forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the end of all journeys". (Sura 2,

Verse 285)

The four exedral domes on the backside, that is the ones on the path of exit after the prayer, contain the reassurance of God's kindness in not burdening a soul beyond its capacities and the prescription of a most beautiful prayer:

On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns. (Pray:) "Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error. Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which you did lay on those before us. Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our Protector; help us against those who stand against faith". (Sura 2, Verse 286)

The fourth system of inscriptions is made up of the sacred adjectival names of God and appear in eight directional calligraphic medallions on the four major pendentives. And finally the system of inscriptions on the top of the entrances to the mosque contain the verses extolling the obligatory nature of prayer.

There is little doubt that in the mosques of Sinan, as exemplified by Shehzadeh, the 'Word of God' is used, as perhaps the most powerful yet non-obvious instrument, to reinforce the architectural intentions.

Shehzadeh outlines the essential principles of Sinan's architecture: simultaneity of opposites without contradictions; explicit order without rigidity; implicit meaning without mythological mystique; preciousness without indulgent opulence', hierarchy without stratification; illusion without trickery; respect and not subservience to materials; and craft in the service of architecture and not as an end in itself.

Turkey adores Sinan, romanticizes his life and names their sons after him. He is among the few architects of the world to appear on the currency notes and have a university bear his name. But neither contemporary Turkish architecture, nor the architecture of Muslims in general, show any sign of his inspirational presence. It would be blindness to treat him as a mere functionary of the Ottoman empire and thus irrelevant to the present times. Like Salman, the One from Faris, Sinan deserves to be called the "Son of Islam". His legacy is not the exclusive ownership of a city, a dynasty or a republic. He belongs to the civilization of Islam and will dwell in the vision of all who aim for it. ■