

Reading the Examples of Modern Mosques in Turkey Through Semiotics

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Abstract

In this study, three different mosques built after the modern period in Türkiye are analysed from an architectural point of view. The aim of the research is to make sense of the messages intended to be conveyed through worship structures and to read the messages conveyed through these structures within the framework of semiotic theory. Using the semiotic method, each building is analysed in terms of context and environment analysis, design principles and style, function, plan scheme, spatial analysis, structure, facade character and symbolic forms. In addition, the buildings are analysed in terms of Günther Fischer's value criteria (location, size-measure, material, form, arrangement) and Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics. The method will help us understand the multidimensional meanings of architectural structures, and the importance of the study is emphasised by the fact that it provides a better understanding of the place of these structures in the cultural and social context. This research makes an important contribution to the understanding of the approaches followed in modern mosque designs and shows how the messages conveyed through architectural structures can be interpreted using semiotic theory. By shedding light on the design processes of modern mosques, it reveals the decisive role of context in this process. As a result of the evaluation, it is concluded that context is the most influential factor in modern mosque design, while other elements are shaped based on context.

Introduction

Religion is seen by the majority of people as a rational explanation of the unknown and destiny [1]. Religion, which is an abstract concept, has been concretised by people over time in order to be put into practice and has become an indispensable part of life by placing it at an important point in the framework of life [2]. As a result, it has been influenced by a number of social, cultural and political elements and has become the owner of a defining form in the perception of the society to which it belongs through architecture. Religion, which has become a very strong source of motivation for people over time, has managed to preserve its value to this day by creating a sense of "oneness" among individuals through art forms such as architecture, painting, sculpture and music. Believers have built various spaces and structures in order to fulfil worship, which is one of the main elements of religion

on the way to becoming one, and even symbolised God through the worship structure while supporting spiritual experiences and strengthening social ties through rituals in order to strengthen their motivation [3].

Religious buildings and monuments are mostly iconic designs rich in artistic aspects because they do not have comprehensive functions [4]. These structures are architectural products that are given meaning and identity through many different symbols in order to keep the values of different faiths and societies alive and transmit them into the future. In many faiths, the symbolism of heaven within the worship structure is provided by the dome. As there can be such common interpretations in architectural design, the effect of faith and worship can be enhanced through the symbols of each religion with some arrangements in the plan level and interior space.

Symbolic and iconographic forms in religious architecture vary according to the faith to which the

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building belongs. Before the Classical period, this use could be seen in almost all religious buildings. Although the redesign of these buildings, which over time have developed an emotional bond with their users, through radical choices in the modern period was initially received negatively, the number of innovative designs is now increasing [5]. With the replacement of symbolic and iconographic forms by metaphorical forms and forms close to contemporary values (material, technology, politics, etc.), new meanings have begun to be produced.

It is possible to use semiotics as a tool to make sense of the messages conveyed by architectural products, which have a language of their own, contain implicit messages and are in constant communication with the environment. In order to reveal the meanings produced and to be able to produce new meanings over time, meaning can be inferred by analysing structures through the criteria of location, scale, material, form and arrangement, as proposed by Fischer.

In the existing literature, there are limited studies on the symbolism of modern mosque buildings. Previous studies, such as by Widodo and Artiningrum [6] and Ürey [7], have either focused on formal elements or have been limited to typological studies such as by Ghouchani et al. [8], Alajami and Al-Haroun [9], and Kahmis and Tantawy [10]. This study focuses on modern mosque architecture and its symbolic layers, which are often ignored in the existing literature, and explores in depth how religious buildings are semiotically signified. In contrast to previous studies that focus mainly on morphological and typological features, this research integrates Fischer's theory of architectural language and Saussure's theory of signs through Barthes' semiotic theory to illuminate the role of architectural symbols and formations in religious and social contexts. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of modern mosque designs on social perceptions and cultural identities, thus filling the knowledge gap in the field and offering new perspectives. Thus, analysing modern mosque designs from a semiotic perspective aims to fill the knowledge gap in this field and to better understand religious architectural symbolism.

In the study, firstly, the place of mosques in Islamic architecture and in Türkiye is mentioned and the features and symbolic aspects of these buildings are discussed. Then, the concepts and criteria for reading and evaluating architectural spaces are explained, and the focus is on the semiotic analysis of modern mosque designs. The research includes the adoption of modern mosque designs in Türkiye and their differences with traditional religious architecture, the role these structures play in social and cultural identities and their semiotic meaning. The main problem of this study is to examine what kind of effects modern mosque designs have on social perceptions and how they are affected by these perceptions. In this

respect, taking into account Barthes' [11] semiotic theory (Denotation and Connotation), the study analyses how architectural elements are interpreted and the social effects of these meanings through Saussure's semiotics and Fischer's value criteria.

Within the scope of the study, three mosques in Türkiye, which have modern lines outside the traditional typology and are located in very different locations in terms of context (political – parliament, otherworldly; religious – cemetery and religious education; housing area – high welfare level detached housing area), have been analysed based on the criteria determined within the scope of semiotic reading (context and environment analysis, design principles and style, function, plan scheme, spatial analysis, structure, facade character, symbolic forms). In addition to this, each building was analysed based on Fischer's five criteria, pointing to the value of the architectural product and Saussure's semiotic expansion. Finally, the structures analysed within the scope of these criteria were compared by considering the data obtained.

I. Conceptual Framework

The mosque (*jami'*), whose root word is *cem'* and means gathering [12], is a place of refuge for Muslim communities where people gather, chat and pray, work, learn about Islam and receive other services [13]. When they were first built, all places of worship belonging to Islam were called mosques without any typological distinction. In the following period, those with a minbar and where Friday prayers were performed were called *jami'*, while those without a minbar and where smaller groups prayed on a daily basis were called *masjids*. Mosques are considered to be the most important structures in Islamic architecture because they can have multiple functions. In fact, over time, they were built at the triangulation points of cities, and their political and symbolic identities were emphasised in addition to their worship function.

After the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottoman Empire, a mosque typology with the character of the great cathedral of Hagia Sophia was formed. With the adoption of this approach, mosques of similar typology were built throughout the territory of Türkiye for centuries, idealising a certain period and style. Özçakı [14] defines the reasons for this approach as the continuation of the traditional and unquestioning system in the Ottoman Empire, the repetition in the intellectual and design fields, and the reaction to the global. In the field of religion, the silhouette of the mosque, with its colonnades, domes and minarets, which we associate with the Ottoman Empire, was followed by modern mosque designs. These could be adapted to the architectural understanding of the time and the context of the environment. However, it was not easy to accept and get used to these contemporary forms. Evren [4] explains

the reason for this as the belief of Islamic thinkers that changes/reforms cannot be made in Islam.

According to Allahham [15], with the contemporary understanding, the traditional perception of the mosque as a place of worship, sacred connotation and the house of God has been replaced by a signalling tool to express the power of the patron or the government, to promote an identity to support and legitimise their rule. Allahham argues that this situation creates a confusion of meaning for society towards mosques. In Türkiye, similar debates have taken place about the mosques built on Çamlıca Hill and Taksim. Especially since the beginning of the 2000s, there has been a significant increase in the construction of religious buildings in Türkiye. The introduction of modern, eclectic and traditional designs in this construction period [16] has stimulated society's visual memory and paved the way for innovative approaches, but it has also generated some debates. In this process, many architects have produced different projects for different user groups and designed mosques outside the cultural codes. For example, while traditional minarets usually have elements such as lecterns, pendants, bodies, balconies, naves, honeycombs, cones and ornaments, contemporary minarets usually lack some or most of these features.

Although there are no religious restrictions, during the Republican period there was no search for a new design for mosque architecture in Türkiye. In this process, the traditional mosque form of the Ottoman period was maintained and innovative approaches could be seen only after the 1960s [17].

A. Semiotics in Architecture

According to Erkman-Akerson [18], a sign bridges the gap between a form and a concept. It is defined as a symbol or sign that makes it possible to express a reality or concept beyond its original plane of reality [19]. Various symbolic wholes such as language, behaviour, architecture, fashion, and painting are used by people to communicate in social life, and they are created by combining multiple indicators [20]. Semiotics in architecture refers to the use of signs in architectural elements to express values, stories, philosophies, and meanings. Signs in architecture can take the form of shapes, spatial arrangements, building decorations, colours, patterns, or textures. The study of semiotics in architecture is closely linked to an architect's way of thinking, which is influenced by social interactions and observations of the environment [6]. The aim is to make sense of how the codes formed through architectural language and established communication affect the thoughts and behaviours of individuals [21]. Architectural products possess artistic value in addition to their physical attributes. Moreover, besides their primary functions of protection and accommodation, architectural products can also function as a qualified communication tool due

to their ability to convey many semantic expressions and implicit messages [22].

Architecture, as a discipline, relies on perception, observation, and experience to communicate primarily through visuals. Architecture evolves through perceptual accumulation, primarily visual, and creates new identities by generating new codes in accordance with these perceptions. In turn, it changes its own form and indirectly alters its environment [23]. Apart from analyzing form and space, examining the relationship between symbols and meanings is crucial to comprehending values relevant to human perceptions in the reuse of buildings. Forms and symbols can convey indirect messages and meanings unrelated to their direct interpretation. Interpreting the meaning of a symbol entails considering its multi-layered meanings, and the surrounding context is a crucial factor for proper interpretation [24].

Architectural artefacts with different forms and symbols communicate specific messages. These messages are interpreted by users or society according to codes that follow specific value criteria, including location, size-measure, material, form and arrangement [25]. Technical terms such as codes and value criteria should be explained when first used. These criteria allow us to understand the worth of a building in its context and its social, cultural and economic significance and effectiveness for its users. As each criterion acts as the code of communication between the building and its context, it determines their respective identities. Messages derived from signs, which are inherently connected to the units that constitute them, should not be viewed as static or finalized entities but rather as dynamic concepts that can change or evolve based on context and time. Instead, they are concepts that can emerge, vanish or evolve over time, as noted by Erkman-Akerson [18]. Consequently, the synthesis of symbolism, form, space, and human-centred values is necessary for the analysis and evaluation of architectural works. Semiotics supports this synthesis and aids in the interpretation of architectural works.

B. Worship Buildings

Places of worship have greatly influenced art across time and are significant structures that showcase a society's historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political background beyond serving as architectural products. Designed in response to environmental and climatic conditions and sometimes influenced by the form of government, such buildings become integral parts of a city's cultural heritage, reflecting the values of the people towards their faith.

Islamic worship structures, also known as mosques, have been constructed with similar typology over the years, and innovative or unconventional designs are uncommon. However, the Holy Qur'an emphasizes that places of

worship should be clean rather than focusing on their shape and form. Tuncer [26] highlights the significance of having an open plan for places of worship to facilitate a meditative environment that unobtrusively affects the senses of sight, sound, and heart. This is believed to enhance the acceptability of prayers led by an imam in mosques. As a result, simplicity in interior design has become a prominent feature of such structures. Additionally, Khamis and Tantawy [10] argue that incorporating symbolism in mosques can deepen the spiritual experience of users by reinforcing the values of faith and culture. This facilitates the acceptance of new designs by users.

According to Khan [27], mosques can be classified into four different categories, namely traditional, historicist, contemporary classical and modern. Throughout the historical process of developing mosque architecture within these four different approaches, various elements have been incorporated into mosques over time. Nonetheless, the dome, minaret, iwan, arches, courtyard, mihrab – Qibla-facing niche where prayer leader – imam – stands, minbar – a pulpit in a mosque from which sermons (khutbahs) are delivered during the Friday (Jumu'ah) congregational prayers, columns and ornaments have been the primary elements used in mosque architecture for centuries [27]. Over time, these elements have evolved and taken on diverse forms, materials, and interpretations, thereby shaping human perception.

Within modern architecture, attempts to surpass typical design conventions have led to the distinction of symbolic forms and changes in mass and space. This situation has also transformed views on the relationship between form and meaning. Allahham [15] notes that although this process parallels the growing hunt for meaning after the modern era, it has also altered views regarding the holiness of religious edifices that blend with their surroundings. Hence, users of religious structures have raised concerns about potential harm to the worship structure and associated faith. Nevertheless, this unconventional architectural language, which disrupts the memorization process, has shown that religious buildings have not forfeited their sanctity. On the contrary, thanks to advancements in technology and opportunities, the concept of sanctity has acquired a new significance on a distinct level of understanding. One can discern this change by interpreting the signs.

C. Using Semiotics and Architecture as a Method

The semiotic method is a theory and method of analysis that studies the meaning and communication of signs and symbols. Semiotics seeks to understand the meaning of signs and symbols used in various forms of communication, such as language, visual images, gestures and objects. The main purpose of this method is to understand how signs and symbols carry meaning, how these meanings

are constructed, and how they are communicated and perceived.

In the context of semiotics and semiology, according to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory, the concepts of sign, signifier and signified play a central role [28]. Saussure's distinction allows us to understand how language and other symbolic systems work. Each sign functions as a combination of signifier and signified, and this interaction forms the basis of communication and meaning. This theory forms the basis of semiotic studies and can be applied in many fields, such as language, literature, visual arts and cultural studies. While Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce established the basic theoretical structures in the field, Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes enriched these theories and made them applicable to architectural practice. According to Eco [29], architectural artefacts present different layers of meaning to their users and viewers through the symbols and signs they contain, while according to Barthes [30], every architectural structure is like a text, and these structures evoke certain reactions and interpretations in society by conveying various messages through visual signs and symbols. These approaches emphasise that buildings are not only physical entities but also dynamic spaces that carry social, cultural and aesthetic meanings. The use of the semiotic method in architecture involves analysing not only the physical characteristics of buildings and spaces but also the meanings, symbols and cultural references that these structures carry. Semiotic analysis in architecture aims to understand the meanings behind the design, shapes, materials and spatial arrangements of a building and how these meanings are perceived.

Architecture, where communication is primarily visual, is a discipline based on perception, observation and experience. Architecture, which progresses on the basis of perceptual accumulation, especially visual, constantly changes itself and indirectly its environment by creating new codes in line with these perceptions. Different perspectives and approaches are exhibited in the evaluation of these codes.

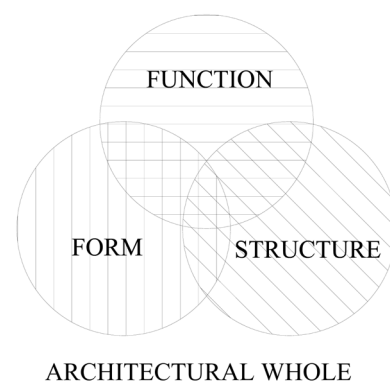


Fig. 1. Components of architecture [schematised from Erkman, 1973].

Zevi argues that only the space is not enough to define architecture, it should be considered as a whole. In order to perceive, interpret and make sense of architecture as a whole, it is first necessary to determine the basic factors that make it up [31]. Vitruvius characterised the elements that make up an architectural whole as function, structure and form. These elements are considered social, psychological, economic, technical, aesthetic and functional factors when interpreting an architectural product (Fig. 1) [32].

The field of architecture often treats form as an object of passion rather than reason. In architecture, the design of buildings incorporates elements of culture, belief, and emotions, with form and context interacting in terms of production, reference, and signification. In terms of production, architectural products are required to be integrated into their own context (e.g., environmental, economic, ideological) as part of the city and its texture. Thus, a form can be interpreted as an expression of context. Culture-specific forms can be used to reference the context and add more meaning through indicators that reference the environment [33]. According to Fischer, these signs can take on expressive forms that reflect stylistic or cultural values, such as texture, material, and fiction, while also possessing the qualities of language.

In addition to icons and symbols, architectural elements can also convey meaning. The conveyed meanings depend on the context in which the architectural element is utilized. Fischer [25] outlines certain value criteria to explain how architectural meaning is produced. These criteria include location, size/measure, form, arrangement, and material. Value criteria can be considered semantic references or signs. These criteria provide full values that can be attributed to the building. This makes it possible to analyse and interpret the aesthetic, historical, cultural, and socio-economic values of architectural structures. The criteria can also be useful in determining the hierarchical order of groups of buildings of similar typology or defining certain values at the scale of a single building. Using Fischer's value criteria, it is possible to gather data on the context of the buildings and interpret the values of the whole building based on this data.

In this study, the meanings in the whole design are analysed semiotically through the criteria determined as the scope for reading mosques. In the examination, the relationship of the buildings with the environment, mass and spatial analyses and interpretation of their symbolic values were made. Afterwards, the values brought to the context by Fischer's value criteria were interpreted with the concepts of sign, signifier and signified put forward by Saussure.

II. Case Study

Modern architecture is commonly employed in the mosque constructions of semi-autonomous or autonomous

organizations. Architectural design in such buildings often emphasizes the individuality of the architect as an artist [16]. This section of the study examines and assesses the design approaches used in three distinct modern mosques.

In the analysis process of the study, firstly semiotic analysis was made. The architectural features of each mosque, its symbolic elements and their relations with social, religious and environmental contexts were analysed within the framework of semiotic theory. Each structural element (dome, minaret, etc.) was identified as a sign, and their meanings were analysed. Then, from a coding and code-breaking perspective, the symbolic codes used by architects in the design process were identified, and how these codes were associated with cultural and environmental references was analysed. Finally, through semiotic analysis to reveal the layers of meaning, it was revealed that architectural structures have more than one layer of meaning and how these layers interact with each other.

D. TBMM Mosque

TAG	
Architect:	Behruz Çinici/Can Çinici
Location:	Çankaya/Ankara
Year of construction:	1989
Land area:	2500 m ²
Design area:	750 m ²
Capacity:	500 people
Awards:	Ağa Han Architecture Award

The Mosque of the TBMM is one of Türkiye's most significant examples of modernist architecture, designed as a portion of the Turkish parliament complex situated in Ankara, where public buildings pertaining to the administration of the country are situated [34]. The design was initially intended to be a masjid but was subsequently built as a mosque in compliance with the decisions made. As the mosque was created for the benefit of the users of the complex and could not be publicly owned, it was built in 1989. It demonstrated its importance in modern Islamic architecture by winning the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1995. The mosque in the TBMM complex was designed with reference to the parliamentary complex and the public relations building. Behruz Çinici designed the architectural plan of the latter [35] (Fig. 2). We can see that the design has adapted to the existing topography by predominantly using common materials. Its style has been developed accordingly.

The mosque's design concept has effectively incorporated its political, architectural, and natural surroundings. Approaching the mosque from the parliament building, one's attention is immediately drawn to the pyramidal ziggurat-like structure with an upper cover (Fig. 5). The mosque's design does not clearly feature

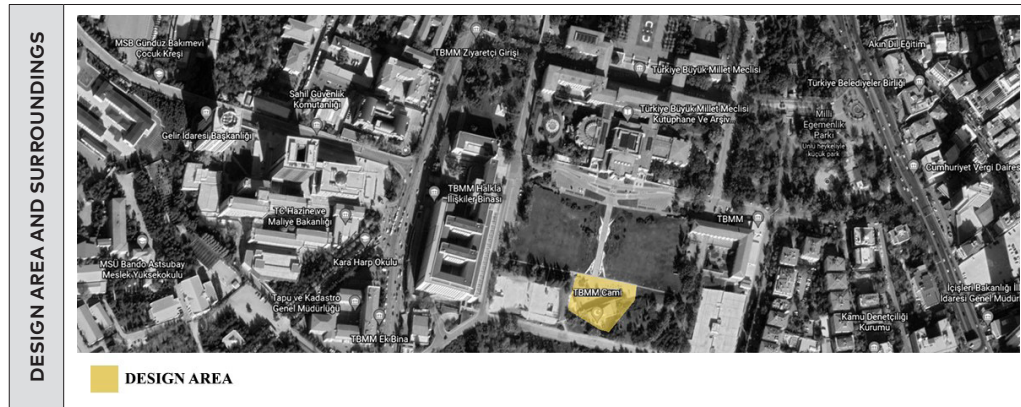


Fig. 2. Location of the TBMM Mosque [schematised from Google].

two essential elements, such as the minaret and the dome, which symbolise and define the identity of an Islamic worship structure.

The mosque is shaped in reference to the surrounding buildings, and the exterior space features an intensive use of gross material. The courtyard has a rigid form and hard texture, which add to the integrity of the design (Fig. 4). Water elements are used in the courtyard to

establish a relationship between the building and the natural environment. This also softens the hardness of the design based on form and material (Fig. 4). In the design where the landscape is of great importance, the borders of the pool in the direction of the qibla were formed by taking reference from the zig-zag movement in the silhouette of the mosque (Fig. 5). This strengthens the sense of integrity that is intended to be achieved with the

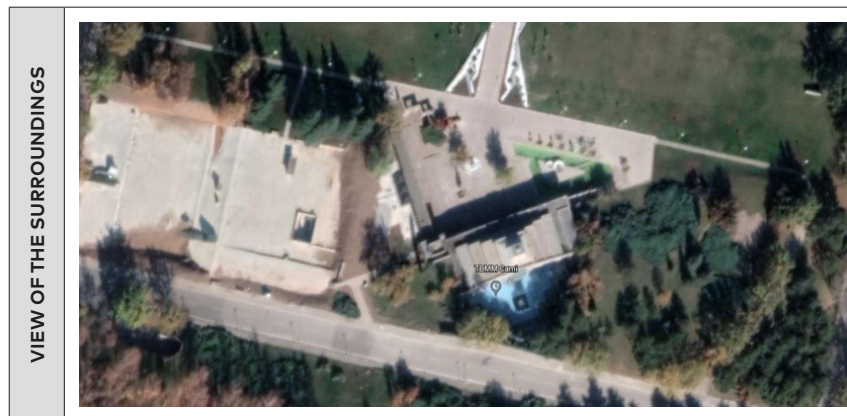


Fig. 3. The layout of the TBMM Mosque [schematised from Google].



Fig. 4. TBMM Mosque [34].



Fig. 5. View of the TBMM Mosque from the courtyard [36].



Fig. 6. Facades of the TBMM Mosque [37].



Fig. 7. Plan of the TBMM Mosque [34] (schematised from Arkiv).



Fig. 8. TBMM Mosque [34].

environment in terms of form. Additionally, it reinforces the sense of belonging of the building in the contextual natural environment.

The TBMM Mosque features a rectangular plan scheme that includes an imam's office in the east and an ablution centre in the west (Fig. 7). The mosque, which also features a women's cloister, adopts a modular design approach. Moreover, the linear and angular forms utilized in the mosque convey a dynamic approach to the design, from the courtyard to the plan and from the facade character to the interior decorations (Fig. 10). The upper cover on the mosque and library facades facing the courtyard were extended towards the courtyard. The area under the eaves was utilized to create the last congregation space. Column bases were located in the projection of the upper cover (Fig. 6), thereby creating a perception similar to the last congregation area with portico use in the classical mosque typology in the background accumulation of the mind.

The zig-zag design seen on the dome in the exterior space is also replicated in the interior space, as shown in Figs. 4 and 5. By preserving the integrity of the Baroque style in both exterior and interior spaces, it is believed that the interplay of light and shadow reinforces the impression of the dynamic structure in visual perception in both environments. The dome image, with its steps-like design, creates an impression that inspires users to reach for the sky (Fig. 9). The natural light that enters the interior through the slits on the dome is further enhanced by the transparent surfaces of the qibla wall and mihrab. The choice to use completely transparent material in the mihrab, along with the garden and pool design towards the qibla direction, aims to encourage the worshippers to turn towards the paradise garden and find tranquillity. An analysis of the formal preferences and the points where natural light enters the interior shows that the attention of the believers is directed towards the qibla and the dome.



Fig. 9. The TBMM Mosque interior [36].

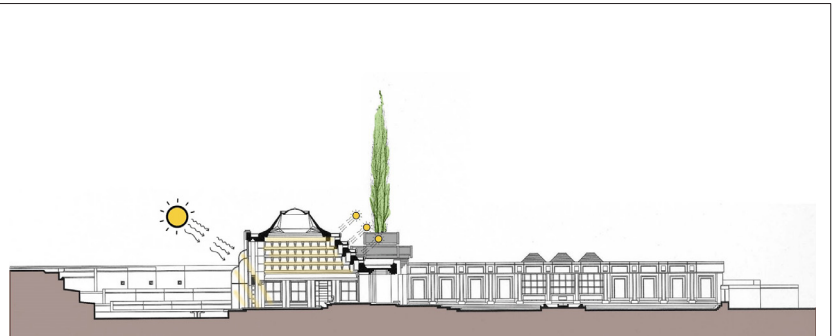


Fig. 10. Section of the TBMM Mosque [34] (schematised from Arkiv).



Fig. 11. Location of Sancaklar Mosque (schematised from Google).

The TBMM Mosque does not have a minaret. The balcony at the intersection of the mosque and the library resembles a minaret. In order for the balcony to be perceived as a minaret from the courtyard, a cypress tree was planted behind the representative minaret (Fig. 10).

E. Assessment

The design of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye Mosque (TBMM) differs from traditional Islamic architecture, particularly Ottoman Mosque architecture, by taking a different approach. It has a simple and modern design that mostly avoids the traditional symbols and ornamentation commonly found in mosques. Instead, the emphasis is on the building's form and function, with part of the mosque being underground and without the dome and minaret applications that are typically included in mosque designs and embedded in visual codes. Therefore, some people believe that the mosque is not intended to resemble a worship structure. The approach and purpose in the design indicate that religion does not play a role in the administration or that religion will not be in competition with the administration based on the values of the complex where the mosque is situated.

In addition to its modest design concept, which is integrated with nature due to its location, the Grand National Assembly Mosque has taken on a mass character in line with the political context in which it is located. In the interior space, which has a rectangular plan and is a little far from the central plan concept, light is given great importance, especially from the mihrab point overlooking the garden area with a pool, and natural light is provided to enter the space through the layers of the dome. The most original approach in the design is the depiction of the minaret, which is regarded as an important symbolic structure in Islamic architecture that symbolises religious unification and spiritual ascension, rising to the sky, with a tree in this building.

F. Sancaklar Mosque

TAG	
Architect:	Emre Arolat
Location:	Büyükdere/İstanbul
Year of construction:	2013
Land area:	7400 m ²
Design area:	1050 m ²
Capacity:	650 people
Awards:	(2011) Project of the Future Award, World Architecture Festival, Barcelona, (2013) First prize in the religious buildings category in the World Architecture Festival, Singapore- (2014) Chamber of Architects Building Award (2016) Best Religious Building of the Year Award of the World Architecture Association (2018) International Excellence Award of Royal Institute of British Architects

Sancaklar Mosque was designed by Emre Arolat based on the essence of Islam on a sloping land in the Büyükdere district of Istanbul, in an area with a high density of detached houses, far from the city centre [38]. The mosque, which proved to be one of the most important representatives of modern Islamic architecture with the awards it received, started to serve in 2013. The design of Sancaklar Mosque is contemporary and innovative, breaking away from the stereotypical architectural style associated with Islamic places of worship in terms of both its exterior features and interior qualities. The building blends in with the surrounding architecture and draws users away from their regular worship experiences through thoughtful design. Emre Arolat explicitly states in the text, which he prepared to be displayed at the entrance of the mosque [39], that he designed the building taking into account the existing context, the needs of the users, and the philosophy of Islamic faith [40].



Fig. 12. Sancaklar Mosque layout [schematised from Google].



Fig. 13. Road facades of Sancaklar Mosque [39].

The Sancaklar Mosque, depicted in Fig. 11, is situated on a corner plot (Fig. 12), separated from a dense residential area by a motorway. Its high walls surrounding the parcel boundary isolate the building from the external environment, establishing a clear separation from the mundane. The building's location on a corner plot, as noted by Fischer (2015), as the first criterion for architectural value, highlights its significance and emphasizes the importance given to its design. This is because the focal point of the surroundings in terms of value is allocated to the building.

Approaching the design area of Sancaklar Mosque, the rectangular solid mass, covered with a natural stone-like material and rising towards the sky (Fig. 13), is the first element that draws attention. The parcel is surrounded by bounding walls (Fig. 12). Even for someone who knows that this building is a mosque, it would be difficult to identify the solid mass as a minaret. It is impossible for someone

who has no knowledge about the design to make such a characterization. This is because the minaret is coded differently in people's visual memory. Nevertheless, the Arabic inscription "Allah" placed by the designer on the top of the rectangular solid mass to eliminate this obscurity could be regarded as the first and most conspicuous indication that a structure related to worship might exist in this location.

The primary structure of Sancaklar Mosque, which leaves an uncommon impression on visitors, features a dark and minimalistic design without any ornaments and is partially submerged beneath the surface, which goes against typical architectural norms [41]. The edifice, which does not intend to manifest its scale, portrays modesty whilst showing respect to its environs; it is a place of worship that conceals itself. This structure not only segregates itself from the outside world with perimeter walls but also balances its presence with emptiness by



Fig. 14. Sancaklar Mosque [44].



Fig. 15. Sancaklar Mosque visuals [44].

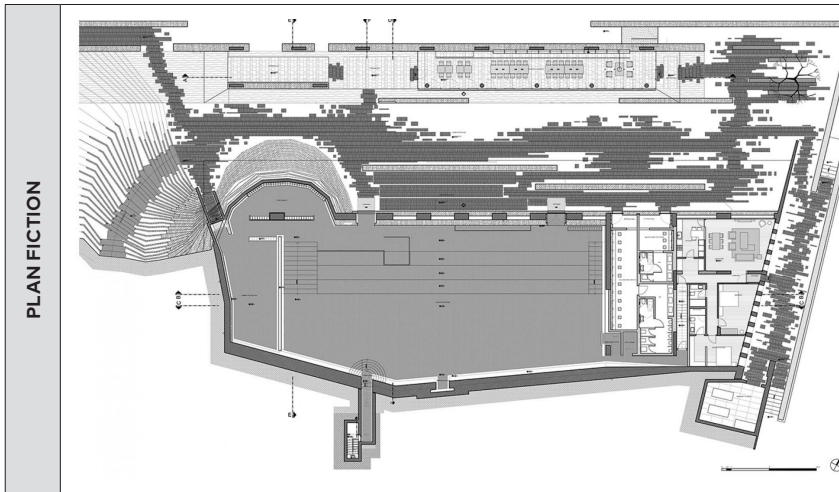


Fig. 16. Plan of the Sancaklar Mosque [44] (schematised from the Arkitektüel).



Fig. 17. Sancaklar Mosque visuals [38].

utilizing the opportunities that the sloping terrain offers. In this manner, the mosque has become integrated into the courtyards and surroundings it has formed, both by remaining concealed under the earth and by taking cues from the natural environment.

As they descend the stairs, users are greeted by an olive tree. The stairs are perceived to be a part of the topography, and they offer a direct view of the natural surroundings, leading the users from the upper courtyard to the lower courtyard (Fig. 14). The olive tree [42] is considered a symbolic representation of peace, splendour and immortality in many faiths. The water feature on the lower level has a meditative aspect, and when combined with the olive tree, it creates a sense of awe for worshipers (Fig. 15). The design's ability to stimulate the user's perception using not only sight and touch but also sound is noteworthy as it is a common approach in structures built for worship. The design's varying stimuli provide users with a sanctuary to fulfil their spiritual needs and cut themselves off from the outside world to a considerable extent.

The walls on both the upper and lower courtyard levels are covered with natural materials. Circulating around the water element and evoking a labyrinth effect, these walls on both courtyard levels limit the visual perception of users (Fig. 19). Furthermore, according to Attali [43], labyrinths symbolise journey, test, purification, and resurrection, and thus direct people towards their inner worlds. As a result, an ordinary wall application has gained significant meaning within the design, reinforcing the embrace of nature, faith, and the individual, which forms the context with the otherworldly.

Upon analysis of the Sancaklar Mosque, it is evident that the place of worship follows a rectangular plan scheme (Fig. 16). The mosque features a courtyard with two separate main entrances and has designated prayer rooms for both men and women. Contrary to other mosques, the women's prayer room in Sancaklar Mosque is not at the back of the men's prayer room but situated on the side. However, it is separated by a divider. This idea, which is not easily acceptable to users due to traditional ideas

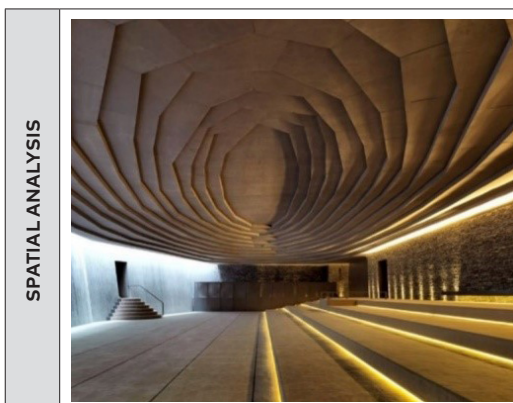


Fig. 18. Interior of Sancaklar Mosque [38].

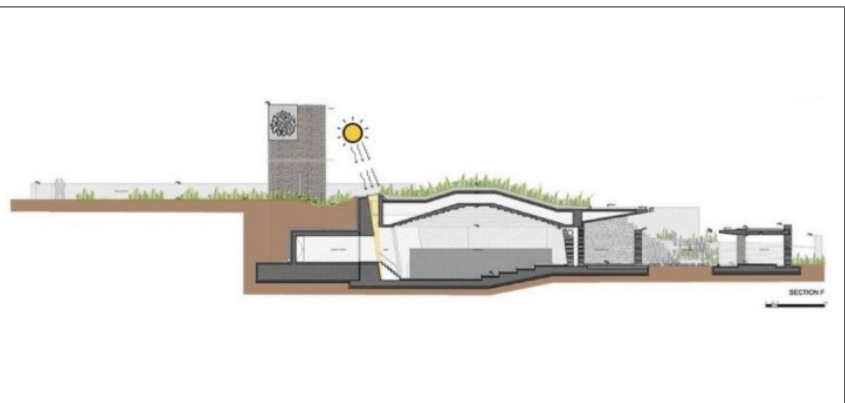


Fig. 19. Section of Sancaklar Mosque [44] (schematised from Arkitektüel).

and ongoing religious practices, has been criticised for being one of the poor design choices. The ablution rooms and the imam's house are other areas accessible from the courtyard. Figure 17 shows the final gathering space in the courtyard. It was designed by extending the eaves of the upper cover on the facade. Apart from these, the courtyard also has a social area and a library. These two spaces reinforce the precept of "reading", which is integral to religion, and strengthen the unity of Islam.

The interior design maintains naturalness and simplicity, akin to the exterior. This is achieved through the incorporation of elements that convey serenity, awe and a sense of connection with God. The grey and earth tones dominate the interior design (Fig. 18), creating an ambience that refrains from invoking worldly emotions in the place of worship. Instead, focus is directed at the bond between the creator and the believer. This notion is echoed by the only natural light source illuminating the altar wall in the ambient dimness, emphasising the believer's sense of motivation. The upper cover is present in the interior but manifests itself differently from the usual dome form and cannot be perceived from the exterior. The dome is formed by many overlapping plates with sharp lines, evoking various metaphorical elements such as fingerprints, cavern entrance and spiderwebs.

Another feature is the use of a level difference on the floor inside the main space, which is different from many other places of worship. This method aims to ensure that the worshippers' attention is directed towards the qibla wall. However, it may negatively affect the worshippers' acts of worship. The use of light and colours to manage perception is also supported by formal factors.

The design's most impressive aspect is the opening slit in the upper cover along the qibla wall. This ensures that natural light enters the interior space in the same direction as worship (Fig. 19). It creates God's manifestation for

believers on the qibla wall, which is designed simply in the direction of prayer. Traditional mosque architecture takes God's symbol, which is light, from the dome, while in Sancaklar Mosque, it enters the interior space from the intersection of the mihrab wall and the dome. On the qibla wall designed in exposed concrete (Fig. 20), the mihrab point is harmoniously designed with simplicity and integrity through the creation of volumetric depth. Because of the wider opening of the slit on the mihrab, the light hitting the qibla wall highlights the mihrab (Fig. 21).

G. Assessment

Sancaklar Mosque, built with a distinctive design approach, blends tangible and intangible aspects of faith in its plan, interior setup, exterior features, and design philosophy. Based on Islamic philosophy and blended with its surroundings, the Sancaklar Mosque stands out as a pioneering building due to its innovative design, non-repetitive approach, and unique perspectives. Emphasising Islamic values such as modesty and humility with its massing and placement on the site, this building has an interior design that reflects the aesthetic understanding of Islam that focuses on simplicity and essence. The interior of the mosque, where dim light is used, is designed in earth tones to create a meditative and peaceful atmosphere, which is in line with the importance that Islam attaches to inner thought and spiritual depth. The differentiated formal uses (dome, minaret), the juxtaposition of the men's and women's mahfils on the plan plane and the use of elevation break the conventional mosque plan fiction.

The Sancaklar Mosque stands apart from traditional mosque typology and has been criticised for its simplicity and innovative interior setup that divides the users' opinions. Unlike the exterior, the interior of the mosque has no symbolic elements and Islamic values are represented

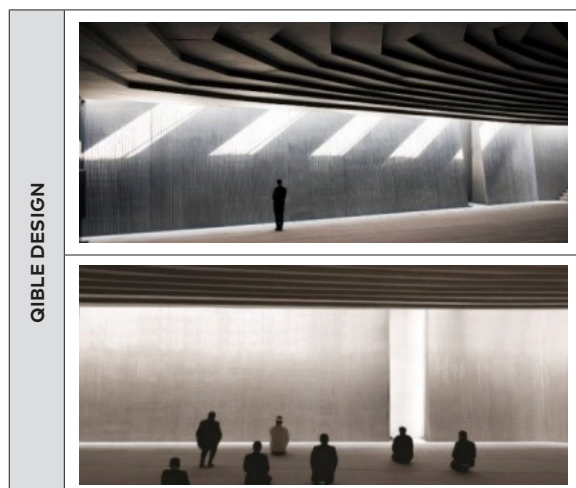


Fig. 20. Sancaklar Mosque's qibla wall and mihrab [38].



Fig. 21. Sancaklar Mosque's qibla wall section [44] (schematised from Arkitektüel).

through abstract approaches. In addition, some users found the interior lighting insufficient and compared the building to a church. They had trouble identifying the architectural elements they were familiar with and creating a mosque-like worship experience during their first visit.

H. Marmara İlahiyat Mosque

TAG	
Architect:	Hilmi Şenalp
Location:	Üsküdar/İstanbul
Year of construction:	2015
Land area:	30 000 m ²
Design area:	8500 m ²
Capacity:	4500 people
Awards:	-

The Marmara İlahiyat Mosque is located next to the Marmara Theology Faculty in the Üsküdar district of Istanbul [45]. Designed by Hilmi Şenalp, the mosque reinterprets the classical architectural tradition with a modern approach. The building was designed to function

as a complex with spaces such as an art gallery, classrooms, instructor rooms, conference hall, library and canteen. The Marmara İlahiyat Mosque began to serve in 2015. It was built with a steel construction on reinforced concrete infrastructure. The Marmara İlahiyat Mosque, built on an area of 30 000 m², is located in a densely populated area on the university campus. The mosque's parcel is situated between two wide main streets, with a cemetery directly opposite, which can be accessed by non-faculty residents.

The Marmara İlahiyat Mosque was constructed 17 steps higher than the level of the road and was elevated and positioned as a goal to aim for. Not having a surrounding wall around the mosque courtyard has created an attractive effect, making it visible and noticeable to the local population. However, as the building is designed above the ground level, users can only gain access via the staircase located on the main road facade (Fig. 26). Furthermore, the decision to build the structure at a raised level is deemed a design strategy that improves the functionality of the complex by letting natural light into the basement's social and educational areas (Fig. 22).

By examining the exterior of the mosque, you can notice that it has a dome and minaret, which are known as the

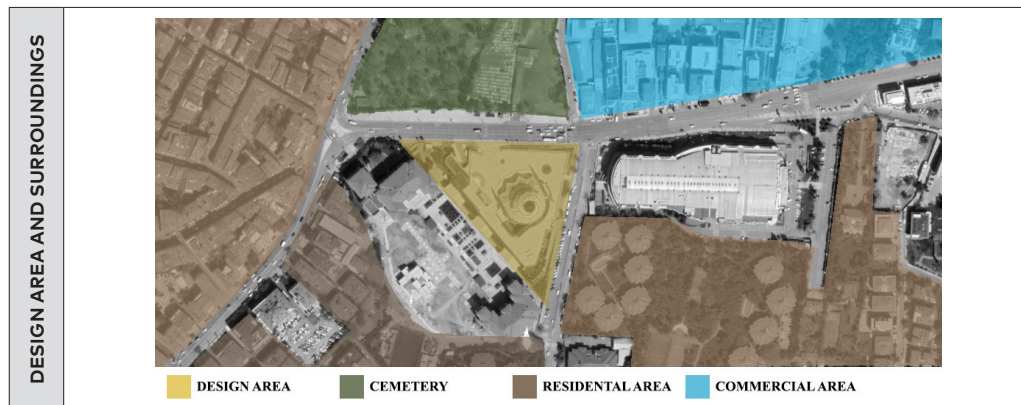


Fig. 22. Location of Marmara İlahiyat Mosque [schematised from Google].

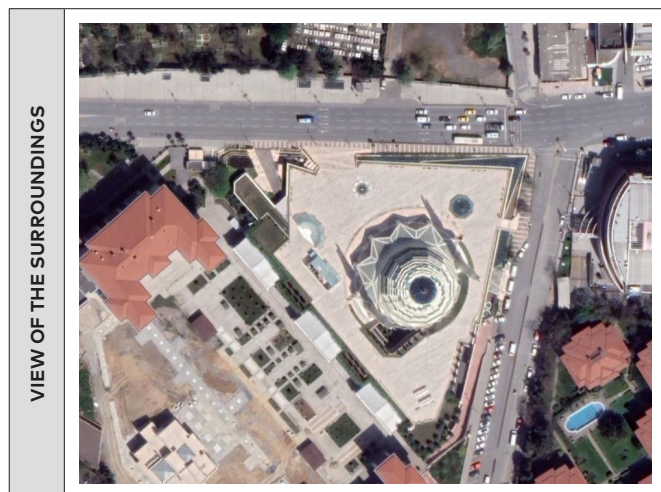


Fig. 23. The Marmara İlahiyat Mosque's layout [schematised from Google].



Fig. 24. Road facades of the Marmara İlahiyat Mosque [48].



Fig. 25. Marmara Ilahiyat Mosque [45].



characteristic features of the prayer space in traditional mosques (Figs. 24 and 25). Besides the turquoise dome, the mosque is notable for being mostly white, which symbolises purity, and makes it stand out from its surroundings (Figs. 23 and 24). In contrast to the other two mosques analysed in this study, this mosque stands out due to its more evident and noticeable design, taking inspiration from its location's setting. It remains loyal to the fundamental shapes and values of traditional mosque architecture while also incorporating new, innovative approaches. This mosque's architecture follows traditional principals, incorporating elements like domes and minarets, although it also incorporates modern techniques and materials, deviating from the usual standards (Fig. 25). The mosque's dome was designed based on the rotational

movement of the entire universe [45]. The design aimed to achieve an architectural style by combining motifs inspired by traditional arts. The calligraphy in the interior space is not merely an ornament but also reinforces the architectural effect.

The mosque has 12 sides and a central area, it has two floors. The parts of the building at each corner of the plan use steel on the ground floor and reinforced concrete in the basement. The building is not just a place of worship. It also serves the faculty, functions as a complex, and helps meet the social needs of its users (Fig. 27).

Traditional forms are used in both the interior and exterior of the mosque for design identity purposes (Fig. 30). The modernised and abstracted forms allow the mosque to respect the past and its ties without sacrificing



Fig. 27. Plan of the Marmara Ilahiyat Mosque [45].



Fig. 28. Interior visuals of the Marmara Ilahiyat Mosque [45].

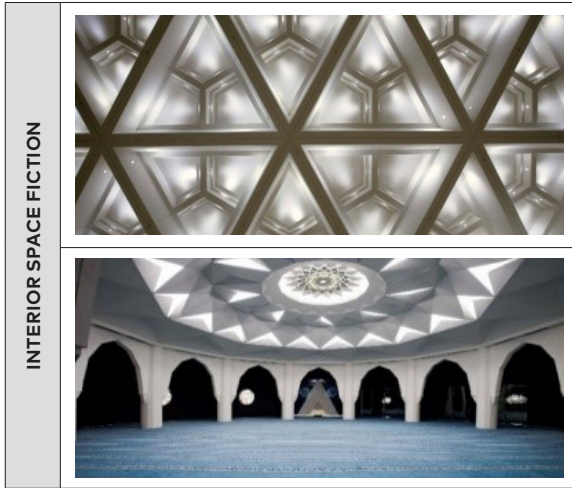


Fig. 29. Interior decorations of the Marmara Ilahiyat Mosque [45].

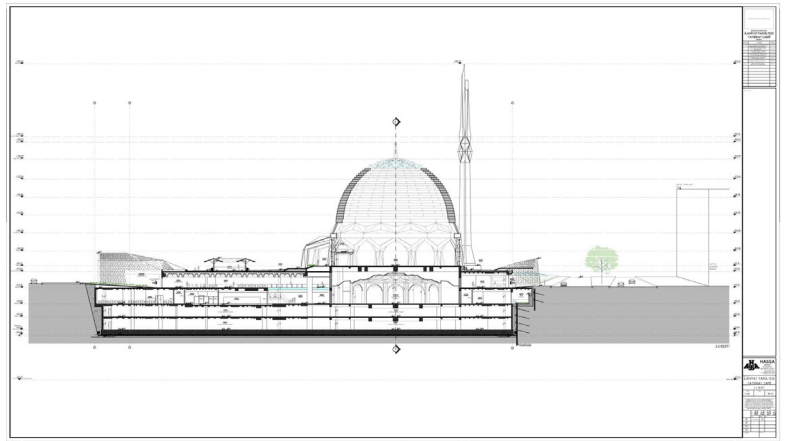


Fig. 30. Section of the Marmara Ilahiyat Mosque [45].

its worship structure. The location of the mosque within the Faculty of Theology's complex is considered the most significant factor in adhering to this approach. The worship areas on the ground and basement levels share similar design elements. The upper covering and arches defining the areas relate to each other in terms of form and decor. To illuminate the worship space on the ground floor, broken arched windows on the facade and tears in the dome were used (Figs. 28 and 29). In the basement worship space, lighting elements have been installed within the dome-like ceiling design (Fig. 29). Despite sharing many features, the two places of worship on different floors differ due to their distinct mihrab applications. While the mihrab located on the ground floor showcases the traditional forms and ornaments (Fig. 31), the mihrab in

the basement (Fig. 29) is more avant-garde in its form, with a pyramidal arrangement, yet still richly decorated with Islamic ornaments.

I. Assessment

Unlike the other two mosques investigated, it is apparent that the Marmara Ilahiyat Mosque features Islamic motifs in both its formal elements and interior decoration while avoiding excessive abstraction. One could speculate that this approach is influenced by the mosque's location within the Faculty of Theology and its primary users, such as the faculty's administrators, educators, and students. Furthermore, the mosque's connection to the cemetery across the street bolsters the current approach. Nevertheless, this method is also viewed as a response to how tradition is perceived in a world undergoing modernisation. The detachment from core values due to Westernisation reflected in the structures of worship creates concern about the disappearance of the architectural culture tied to Islamic values. This serves as motivation for the design.

The Marmara Ilahiyat Mosque, which combines elements of traditional Islamic architecture with a contemporary design, is raised above the ground in the area where it is located, and the values of faith are made important on the basis of the building. The building, which has a luminous dome in a central plan, is designed to meet the functional needs in a balanced way. The courtyard, which has an important place in traditional Islamic architecture, plays a central role in this mosque. However, unlike traditional courtyards, this courtyard is handled with a more contemporary interpretation. With the use of a fountain, both Islamic rituals are performed (ablution), and socio-cultural communication between

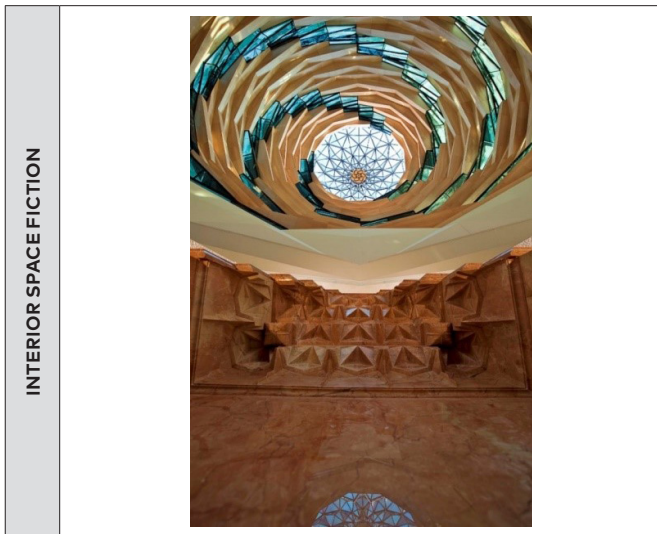


Fig. 31. The Marmara Ilahiyat Mosque's mihrab and dome [45].

users is established. With all these features, the Marmara İlahiyat Mosque is not only a place of worship but also offers spaces for education and social interaction. This reflects the multifunctional role of mosques in Islamic society.

III. Discussion

This section of the investigation comparatively assesses mosques with a contemporary design approach according to context, environment, structure-material, function, style, facade character, design principles, plan schemes, and symbolic forms (Table I).

Context and environment analysis shows that the design is significantly influenced by context, concept, and environment. Ideologies, belief data, natural texture, and religious thoughts directly impact the design. Mosques built in modern style are shaped according to their context in different environments. The design takes into account various elements from the environment, which give shape to the worship structure and make it meaningful formally and philosophically.

Design principles and style: All mosques studied were constructed in a modern style, influenced by different approaches that suit their contexts. While worship structures that emulate traditional style can be easily identified as “mosques”, it is challenging to do so for those in modern style.

Function: All mosques have a complex logic with spaces for worship, education, and culture. Unlike the other two mosques examined, the Marmara İlahiyat Mosque includes social spaces. This is due to its diverse functions, catering to a larger number of users and their varying needs. In contrast, the TBMM Mosque and the Sancaklar Mosque are only visited at specific times throughout the day.

Plan schemes: When analysing the plan schemes of three different contemporary mosques, it is evident that square, rectangular, and circular (dodecagonal) plan schemes are employed. The circular plan scheme, which emphasises the dome, was favoured in the design. The interior space is dominated by symmetry in this plan scheme, and a symmetrical appearance is also prominent on the exterior facade. The centralist approach in the plan scheme was also reflected in the upper cover. In the instances created with a more conceptual and original methodology, the rectangular floor plan scheme is implemented. These designs, which are better incorporated into the topography, adhere to a spatial analysis of belonging to the location and context instead of a centralized approach.

Spatial analysis indicates that the TBMM Mosque and the Sancaklar Mosque do not conform to the usual identity of a conventional Islamic worship structure. However, while the TMBB Mosque is designed to be in harmony with the architectural and political context of its environment, the Sancaklar Mosque is unique with its innovative character,

which reflects the simple and modest aspect of Islamic philosophy. It features novel designs in terms of form and colours and stands apart from traditional patterns. Unlike the other two mosques, the Marmara İlahiyat Mosque incorporates Islamic forms and motifs that are rooted in tradition and distinct from abstraction.

Structure and Material: The mosques examined in this study share similar structures due to their close design periods. However, the TBMM Mosque and the Sancaklar Mosque distinguish themselves from the Marmara İlahiyat Mosque by incorporating the relationship between material and context into their design. This is likely due to the strong contextual elements present in these mosques. The acceptance of these elements as references in the mosque design led to both being awarded.

Examining the facade character of each of the designs reveals two noteworthy elements. The initial component in creating a mosque design is the interpretation of its forms. Upon analysis of several examples, varying approaches were observed in shaping the dome and minaret elements. The interpretation process and the significance attributed to it are intertwined with the second component, the context. Whilst some mosques may not be directly linked to the approach followed by other mosques, each individual mosque has been designed to function as a place of worship through the incorporation of additional symbolic features. Consequently, the TBMM and Sancaklar Mosques can be considered as unique, pioneering and forward-looking examples of architecture.

Symbolic forms, which are primarily utilised to identify, define or integrate a building within its surroundings, are widely incorporated. Since the buildings under analysis are mosques, they incorporate symbolic forms such as the dome and minaret that provide information about the Islamic faith. While abstract approaches were followed for the dome and minaret applications in the exterior space of the TBMM and Sancaklar Mosques, the design of the Marmara İlahiyat Mosque adheres more closely to the forms in visual codes, making it easily recognisable.

In previous studies in the field, while discussing the formal differences and the meanings of these differences, they were interpreted without establishing an in-depth relationship with the context in which the buildings are located. Although it has been addressed how socio-cultural values can affect architectural design in terms of meeting human needs, the evaluation criteria in space readings have not been determined in a variety that will make sense of the spirit of the place (Table II). We think that this perspective will be incomplete in revealing the thoughts and intentions regarding some semantic and design inputs in architectural readings.

The findings presented in this paper reveal how modern mosque architecture is shaped by environmental and cultural factors (the influence of ideology, beliefs and the role of the local environment) rather than simply

TABLE I

Defining the Semantic Values of Mosques [by authors]

			
	TBM MOSQUE	SANCAKLAR MOSQUE	MARMARA İLAHİYAT MOSQUE
CONTEXT	The mosque is located in a space where management and ideology are represented	The mosque is located in a residential area with a high socio-economic level and natural environment	The mosque is located in a residential area, within the boundaries of the university faculty
DESIGN PRINCIPLES	It is built in a modern style with baroque influences and recalls the ziggurats, symbols of the faith	Designed in modern style with Islamic philosophy	It is built in modern style by emulating the traditional and in a way to strengthen the state of communication with the social environment
FUNCTION	Built as a small complex, it is used as a mosque and library	Built as a small complex, it is used as a mosque and library	Built as a large complex, it is used for mosque, educational, social and library functions
PLAN SCHEME			
	RECTANGULAR DIAGRAM	RECTANGULAR DIAGRAM	DODECAGONAL DIAGRAM
SPATIAL ANALYSIS	The mosque, which is designed away from the identity of a conventional Islamic worship structure, is designed in a way that does not contradict the architectural and political context in which it is located	The worship structure has an innovative character, reflecting the simplicity and modesty of the Islamic philosophy, with a unique design in terms of form and colours and an innovative character outside the usual patterns	Throughout the design, the use of Islamic forms and motifs, which are far from abstraction and close to tradition, has been tried to preserve the values of faith.
STRUCTURE MATERIAL	Structure: Reinforced concrete Material: Exposed concrete and marble	Structure: Reinforced concrete Material: Natural stone veneer	Structure: Reinforced concrete and steel Material: Aluminium composite
FACADE CHARACTER	The design has an innovative approach, far from the traditional but also refers to designs that have a place in the history of architecture (ziggurat)	The design has an innovative approach, far from the traditional. The materials and forms used in the design symbolise concepts such as harmony with nature and humility, which have an important place in Islamic philosophy	The design contains lines from the traditional. Although these lines are traditional, they have come to life with innovative materials and application techniques
SYMBOLIC FORMS	Exterior space - Dome Interior - Qibla - Minbar - Mihrab	Exterior space - Minaret Interior - Qibla - Minbar - Mihrab	Exterior space - Dome and minaret Interior - Qibla - Minbar - Mihrab

being a religious building. This study makes an important contribution to the literature by showing how mosque designs are integrated with local belief systems, natural environment and socio-cultural elements. In particular, minimalism and environmental integration in the design

of buildings such as the Sancaklar Mosque bring a new perspective to the understanding of Islamic architecture and challenge architectural theories, as well as paving the way for many debates by creating an alternative to traditional mosque designs. This approach opens new

TABLE II

Value Readings of Mosques Using Fischer's Criteria [by authors]

	 TBMM MOSQUE	 SANCAKLAR MOSQUE	 MARMARA İLAHİYAT MOSQUE
LOCATION	Sign: Mosque location, Mosque area Signifier: Step effective facade Signified: A sense of orientation towards a place, direction (sky)	Sign: Mosque location, Mosque area Signifier: Structure integrated into the hill's slope Signified: The desire for isolation, the otherworldly sphere separated from the earthly	Sign: Mosque location, Mosque area Signifier: Mosque on the deck raised above the ground Signified: The unity of faith and social life
SCALE	Sign: Mosque building Signifier: Solid mass integrated with topography Signified: Integrated with life, covering itself	Sign: Mosque building Signifier: Structure under the soil Signified: Reflection of the philosophy of Islamic faith	Sign: Mosque building Signifier: White mass with voids Signified: Purity
MATERIAL	Sign: Exposed concrete Signifier: Concrete surfaces Signified: Harmony with context and simplicity	Sign: Natural stone Signifier: Stone cladding Signified: Harmony with the context, return to the essence of man and nature	Sign: Composite material Signifier: Composite cladding Signified: Harmonisation of old forms and new material
FORM	Sign: 1 – Dome 2 – Minaret 3 – Revak 4 – Water Signifier: 1 – Ziggurat-like zig-zags 2 – Balcony and cypress tree 3 – Column base 4 – Pool Signified: 1 – The existence of the divine, the heaven 2 – Sign of the existence of the mosque, ascending to the sky, symbol of religious unification and spiritual ascension 3 – Invitation to the assembly area 4 – Awe and purification	Sign: 1 – Minaret 2 – Staircase 3 – Olive tree 4 – Water 5 – Labyrinth 6 – Mihrab and light Signifier: 1 – Prism mass 2 – Steps poured from nature 3 – Tree 4 – Pool 5 – Walls 6 – Brute qibla wall and daylight Signified: 1 – Sign of the existence of the mosque, ascending to the sky, symbol of religious unification and spiritual ascension 2 – Reaching what is hidden, abandonment of worldliness by creating a sense of turning towards the cave. 3 – Peace and tranquility 4 – Awe and purification 5 – Journey to the inner world, self-discovery 6 – The manifestation of God and peace	Sign: 1 – Dome 2 – Minaret 3 – Arch Signifier: 1 – Spiral ziggurat form 2 – Two white pillars rising to the sky 3 – Arches with sharp lines Signified: 1 – The manifestation of heaven 2 – Sign of the existence of the mosque, ascending to the sky, symbol of religious unification and spiritual ascension 3 – Being open to renewal with the integrity of old forms and new applications
ARRANGEMENT	Sign: Plan diagram Signifier: Interior plan solution Signified: Connection between belief and human	Sign: Plan diagram Signifier: Interior plan solution Signified: Emulation of the past as well as equality between men and women	Sign: Plan diagram Signifier: Interior plan solution Signified: Centredness and orientation towards the sky

doors for future research to examine mosque architecture in broader cultural and environmental contexts.

The limited number and geographical distribution of the studied examples, focusing on only three modern mosques, limits the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the data of the study was obtained from the existing literature and architectural projects, focusing on semiotic readings in order to reveal the meanings contained in the buildings. Therefore, no direct data was collected on the user experiences and long-term effects of the designs. Future research should be conducted on a larger number of mosque examples in different geographical regions and should be supported by user feedback. In this way, the adaptation of mosque architecture to socio-cultural and environmental factors can be evaluated more comprehensively.

Conclusions

In this study, the architectural characteristics of three modern mosques in Türkiye are analysed using semiotic approaches. The findings of the research, which has evaluation criteria in various dimensions such as context and environment, structure-material, functionality, style, plan scheme and facade character, reveal that contemporary architectural design understanding plays an important role in the shaping and meaning of worship structures.

The analyses have shown that modern mosque designs are distinctly different from the traditional worship building form. These buildings were shaped according to the local environment and cultural context, which increased the diversity and richness of the designs. In particular, the richness of the social space of the Marmara İlahiyat Mosque and the original and innovative design approaches of the TBMM and Sancaklar Mosques attracted attention.

As a result, the architectural designs of modern mosques redefine their religious and cultural identities through symbolic forms and materials used. This study has shown how mosque architecture can produce new meanings in social and cultural contexts by blending traditional and modern elements. The research also demonstrated that architectural semiotic analysis can be a powerful tool for analysing the layers of meaning in religious buildings such as mosques. These findings offer new perspectives for future studies in the field of architectural design and planning.

Mosques can be regarded as structures that bolster spirituality, aside from reflecting Islamic philosophy and containing socio-cultural information about the society [32]. Developing human needs and technological innovations have facilitated the update and adaptation of mosques – one of the most crucial structures in Islamic architecture – to modern life, thereby acquiring new shapes and meanings.

Although contemporary mosque design in Türkiye exceeds the traditional lines of the past, it is arguable that many designs merely imitate old styles and lack innovation. Despite limited examples, this study evaluates and interprets worship buildings that enhance Islamic architecture and the mosque identity in Türkiye with their pursuit of new forms and styles based on diverse criteria.

Upon evaluation of all criteria in the analysed designs, it becomes apparent that the context holds the greatest influence on the architects. The significance and worth of the context, informed by environmental analysis and socio-cultural data, is manifested in both the facade and interior of the place of worship, reflecting its essence. The symbolic forms that are integral to the essence of the mosque and faith have been either destroyed or abstracted and made invisible within the context. Nevertheless, these approaches have contributed towards comprehending the mosque design within Türkiye in terms of architectural and cultural accumulation, whereby classical forms have been disrupted and transformed in the minds of the users.

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