

AN ATTEMPT TO TRANSFORM POPULAR RELIGIOUS IMAGES INTO CONTEMPORARY MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE: AHMET HAMDİ AKSEKİ MOSQUE

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Since the military intervention of 1980, Turkey has experienced a period of increasing political and societal conservatism. Consequently, mosque architecture has attracted the attention of professionals and the public. Ahmet Hamdi Akseki (AHA) Mosque is one of the latest examples that attempts to transform the popularized formal approach (a centrally organized prayer hall covered by a domical system that includes one, two, or four minarets) to contemporary mosque architecture. However, because architects in Turkey do not often oversee the construction process, as with the building of AHA Mosque, the built version of these mosques is usually different from the original design. To determine how this occurs, this paper outlines the social and official context of mosque architecture in Turkey; provides examples from small, experimental mosques; and presents AHA Mosque as a case study using interviews with the architect, chief civil engineer of the construction site, head of the construction department of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and project coordinator of the directorate's foundation, the organization that built the mosque. The article includes a critical evaluation of the mosque from historical and architectural points of view, reviewing the site selection, structural system, construction technology, use of a central scheme, transparency and lightness effects, and overall process from the design to the final building.

INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIAL AND OFFICIAL CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE IN TURKEY

Mosque architecture has not been a primary public building typology in the professional field in Turkey since the founding of the republic in 1923, which marked the transition of Turkey from a Muslim state to a secular one. In 1924, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA, also commonly called Diyanet) was founded as a state organization to organize religious matters. It is located in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. According to Turkish law, construction of both congregational and small mosques (*mescit*) falls under the responsibility of civil society organizations such as religious foundations, mosque construction associations, and/or individuals or benefactors. These associations and benefactors are advised by the DRA's construction department to submit architectural designs for each project. Nevertheless, they tend to cut back on architectural services (DRA, 2013, 2014a).

Until 2013, projects designed for foundations or mosque construction organizations, both professional and amateur, had to be submitted to the DRA for certification or validation by its construction department. Municipalities determine or approve the location and number of mosques in their community. The main problem in contemporary mosque design is the repetition of the same or similar mosque projects, enlarged or shrunk to adapt to the site. Most of these are replicas of one of the classic Ottoman sultan (*selâtin*)¹ mosques and do not take the context of the proposed mosque (e.g., site, climate, construction technology, congregation size) into account.

The tradition of today's popularized formal approach — a centrally organized prayer hall covered by a domical system that includes one, two, or four minarets based on the site size, congregation size, and/or whether the mosque is being built to honor someone (e.g., a significant historical person or the mosque's financier) — is based on classic Ottoman architecture, when mosque construction was under the control of the palace construction department, and the chief architect was selected based on strict criteria (Erzen, 1996; Kuban, 2007; Necipoglu, 2005). Symbolically, the dome represents the universe, and the crescent represents the power of and faith in Islamic states and establishments, symbolizing the spirit of the martyr. However, since quality control in contemporary mosque architecture is not overseen by a specialized professional council or board, the classic mosque image became a "decorated box" across Turkey long before the postmodern movement began in the 1970s.

The degeneration of imitations began during a period of demographic change in Turkey. Mass migration from rural to urban Turkey² beginning in the 1950s created residential areas with new mosques in the center, many of which have physically degenerated. The dome and minaret — signifiers of the classic Ottoman *selâtin* mosques — were fetishized. Mosque construction is indirectly encouraged in Turkey: the site and building are exempt from yearly taxes, and mosques are not charged for water or electricity. This benefit encourages financiers to build a mosque and then incorporate other buildings, such as an underground mall, into the site. Construction costs can be considered a donation to the religious organization and thus subtracted from the builder's or developer's taxes. Additionally, sometimes it is easier for a builder or developer to acquire bank financing if it is done through a mosque construction organization. If the organization is assertive, a large amount of money can be collected in a short period of time.³

Since the military intervention of 1980, Turkey has experienced a period of increasing political and societal conservatism. Consequently, mosque architecture has attracted the attention of professionals as well as the public. Media discussions around this topic began in the early 2000s and have recently increased,⁴ as secularly symbolic areas (e.g., squares, parks, green areas) have been opened to mosque construction after a partial change in development plans. Çamlica and Atasehir Ulu Cami Mosques in Istanbul were built in this way. This is the result of a political desire to reclaim secular public spaces for religious purposes.

By definition, a congregational mosque, which originally meant that more than 40 people could gather in its prayer area, is where Friday *khutbah* (a talk or sermon delivered in mosques before the Friday prayer) is delivered. However, with the help of sound-system technology, this definition changed long ago; through speakers, *khutbah* can be heard without the limitations of interior space. In addition, by law, the DRA must assign an imam to a *mescit* if there is a request for one, and any *mescit* with an imam assigned by the DRA ceases to be called a *mescit*.

There are no official numbers for mosques currently under construction in Turkey. A mosque is generally only added to the official list if an official request for an imam is made to the DRA after the mosque is completed. If no request is made (*i.e.*, an imam is chosen locally by the foundation or benefactor), then the mosque might not be officially registered. Thus, the official number of mosques in Turkey likely does not reflect the true number (Mete, 2014). Even so, there are more registered mosques in Turkey than there are schools.⁵ In 2002, Turkey had 75,941 registered mosques. Between 2002 and the end of 2011, that number increased by almost 1,000 mosques per year, but in 2012, the number of constructed mosques experienced a twofold increase, with 2,000 new mosques being built in that year alone (DRA, 2014b). Given these numbers, and considering that there are still many mosques under construction or not on record, examining contemporary mosque architecture in Turkey deserves a critical approach.

The DRA also takes a critical approach to contemporary mosque architecture. It organized conferences in 2004, 2005, and 2006 to discuss the subject and published the proceedings. However, “contemporary” does not mean the same thing to everyone. The DRA’s Foundation of Religious and Social Services (DSHV in the Turkish acronym) built the Ahmet Hamdi Akseki (AHA) congregational mosque, which is the case study for this paper, near the DRA’s new offices on the western edge of Ankara between 2008 and 2013. The new mosque is on a road between Ankara and the suburbs, where development has been occurring rapidly. AHA Mosque, named after the third DRA director, is popularly known as Diyanet Camii (Diyanet Mosque) and was chosen for this study because of its contextual and formal approach to transforming popular religious images (using architectural elements as signifiers of the classic Ottoman mosque typology) into contemporary mosque architecture.

As part of the field research, which took place between December 2013 and February 2014, the author conducted face-to-face, in-depth interviews with several individuals involved in AHA Mosque’s construction, including Salim Alp, the mosque architect; Mahmut Mete, the head of the DRA’s construction department; Salih Vural, the chief civil engineer of the construction site; and Merih Sengül, the DSHV’s project coordinator. The interviews were semi-structured, and the questions were open-ended. The order of questions changed according to the course of the interviews. The DRA has more than one foundation for constructing mosques; the DSHV spearheaded the AHA Mosque construction process, but no one from the foundation agreed to an interview with the author.⁶

CLASSIFICATION AND EXAMPLES OF CONTEMPORARY MOSQUE INVENTORY IN TURKEY

With the increasing interest in contemporary mosque architecture in Turkey, researchers have begun classifying mosque types. For example, some national studies have compiled an inventory of contemporary mosques. These studies either discuss mosques built by architects who competed for and were awarded the project (*e.g.*, Ankara’s Kocatepe, Armed Forces, and Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosques; Bangladesh’s Islamic Center for Technical and Vocational Training and Research Mosque), or they criticize the chaotic approach in mosque design. These classifications generally use form and structure as the basic criteria for classification — that is, mosques with curvilinear superstructures, mosques with broken-plate/pyramidal superstructures, and mosques that experiment with form and mass (Eyüpgiller, 2006). Eyüpgiller (2012) updated his study on

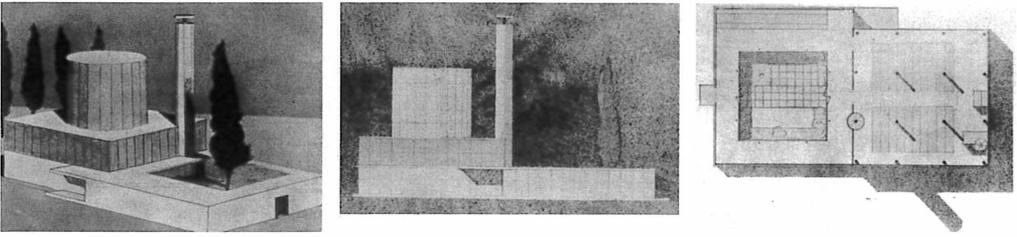


FIGURE 1. Axonometric projection, elevation, and plan of Burhan Arif's mosque project, 1931. (Source: Arif, 1931. Used with permission.)

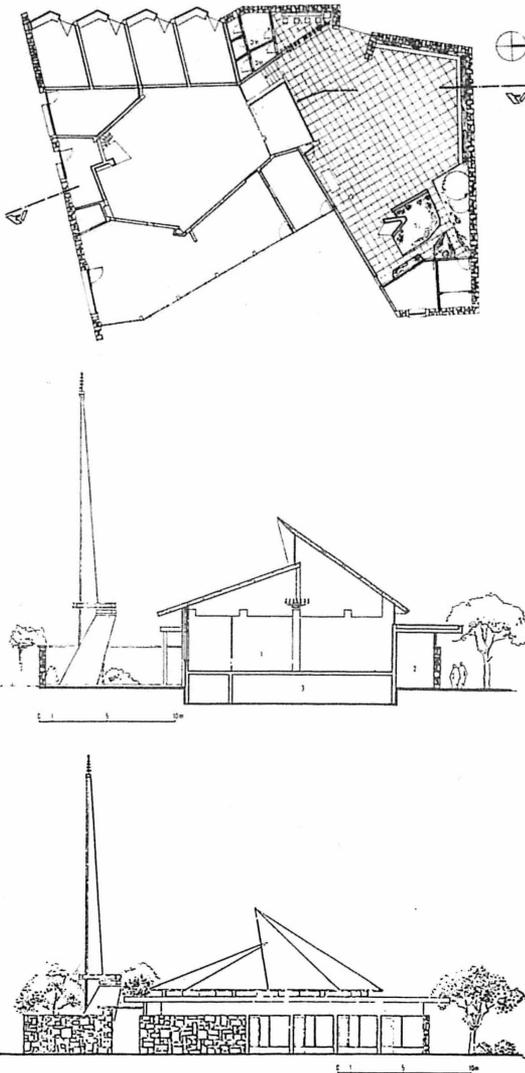


FIGURE 2A. Plan, section, and elevation of Kinaliada Mosque, 1956. (Source: Eyüpçiller, 2012. Used with permission.)

contemporary mosques by adding “Latest Applications” under the category of mosques that experiment with form and mass; his last example was AHA Mosque.

In the course of discussing AHA Mosque, this paper also refers to three other award-winning mosques: Ankara's Kocatepe Mosque by Vedat Dalokay and Nejat Tekelioglu; Islamabad's King Faisal Mosque, also by Dalokay; and Ankara's Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosque by Behruz Çinici and Can Çinici. For Ankara's Kocatepe Mosque, the DSHV opened a two-stage national architectural competition in 1957, which Dalokay and Tekelioglu won. Construction began in 1962, and the building foundations were completed in 1964, but after the first phase of construction, the DRA became convinced that the project's shell structure was not technologically possible, and the partly finished mosque was demolished. A second design competition for the mosque was held in 1967, and a neo-Ottoman design by Hüsrev Tayla and Fatih Uluengin won. Construction began the same year and was completed in 1987. An international architectural competition for King Faisal Mosque was held in 1969, and Dalokay's proposal, which shared many of the features of his Kocatepe design, was selected. The Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosque, which was completed in 1989, won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1995.

In addition to the newly built, large (minimum capacity: 4,000) mosques in secular public places, which are also politically symbolic, there are many small yet monumental examples, dating back as far as the 1930s, of interesting, experimental mosque projects

and applications. One such example is Burhan Arif's mosque project (1931), which is composed of a tall, cylindrical mass on top of a prismatic prayer hall with a square base and a slender cylinder

minaret, all based on a grid pattern (Figure 1). The building has a high level of abstraction in the dome and minaret while also including the essential architectural elements of a mosque (*mihrab*, *minbar*, ablution places), as well as secondary ones (courtyard, *revak*). It reflects the period's purist and cubist approach to architecture.⁷

Kinaliada Mosque by Turhan Uyaroglu and Basar Acarli (1956) is located on one of the Prince Islands in the Marmara Sea, close to Istanbul. The architects replaced the dome with a broken-plate upper structure defining the main prayer hall. Its minaret is detached from the main mass of the building, rising in its courtyard like an obelisk (Figure 2A). It is human scale and modest, holding 100 people. "It was intended to serve as a community center. The auxiliary spaces [library, lounge, meeting room, health center, shops, and a room for the mosque association] are exposed to the quay and to the surrounding street, while the prayer hall is internalized" (Erzen and Balamir, 1996b: 113) (Figure 2B).



FIGURE 2B. View toward the quay at Kinaliada Mosque. (Source: Bilkent University. Used with permission.)

Ankara's Armed Forces Mosque (Zirhli Birlikler Camii) by Cengiz Bektas (1965) consists of a prayer hall, which holds 300 people, and auxiliary spaces. "The plan of the mosque is an irregular hexagon. The walls do not enclose an elementary prismatic volume but have a plastic configuration allowing projections and recesses from the main body" (Erzen and Balamir, 1996a:115). The detached stair tower acts as a minaret and dominates the whole mass. A flat roof completes the architectural composition and defines the prayer hall (Figure 3).

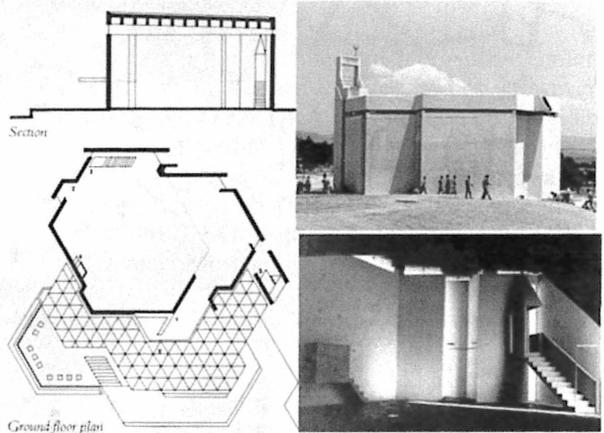


FIGURE 3. Section, plan, and images of Zirhli Birlikler Mosque, 1965. (Source: Bilkent University. Used with permission.)

In the 1969 King Faisal Mosque competition won by Dalokay, third place was awarded to Nihat Bindal, whose design was another project in which the dome was replaced by a broken-plate/pyramidal upper structure in harmony with and inspired by the Margalla Mountains, which form the background silhouette of the site ("Uluslararası," 1969) (Figure 4). Bursa's Buttım Mosque by Yücel Sertkaya (1997) holds 300 people and is part of a commercial complex (Figure 5). The architect's design referenced the upper structure of the award-winning Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosque (Figure 6). The minaret of Buttım Mosque is a symbolic, freestanding structure that does not include access to the top (Ürey, 2013) (Figure 5).

The most recent application is Istanbul's Sancaklar Mosque by EAA-Emre Arolat Architecture, which opened for prayer in 2014. It has a capacity of 650 people and has won multiple international

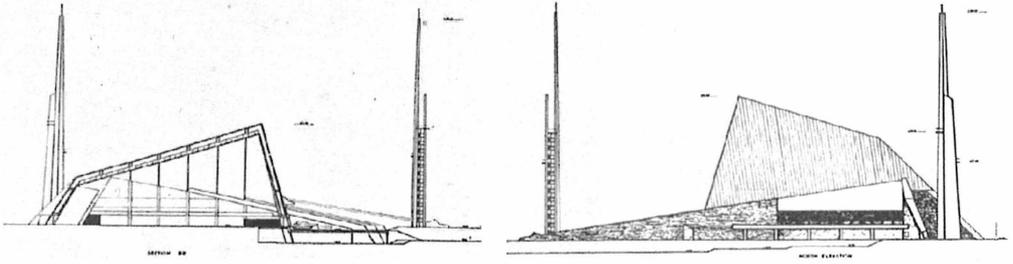


FIGURE 4. Section and elevation of Bindal's design for King Faisal Mosque, 1969. (Source: "Uluslararası," 1969. Used with permission.)

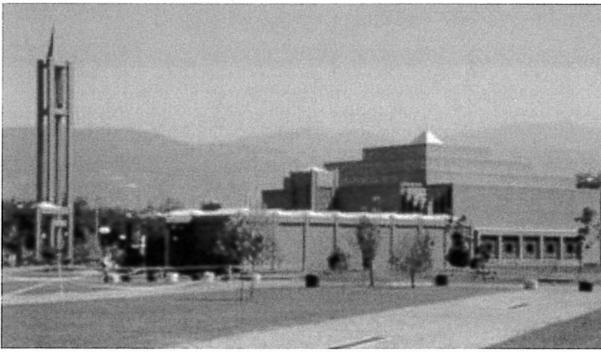


FIGURE 5. Buttım Mosque, Bursa, 1997. (Source: Eyüpgiller, 2006. Used with permission.)



FIGURE 6. General view of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosque, 1989. (Source: Can Çinici. Used with permission.)

awards in best religious building categories.⁸ Its design merges with the topography of the site; when approached from the street side, the mosque is not recognizable, as opposed to current symbolic designs that dominate the existing landscape or urban environment. From the hidden entrance facade, it looks like a cave (Pearson, 2014).⁹ Its design reconceptualizes the basic architectural elements of a mosque (Figures 7A-C). Anyone, Muslim or not, who "worships [or meditates] here experiences an existence within a timeless space devoid of worldly references" (Tanyeli, 2014).¹⁰ These examples indicate that small, experimental mosques provide more variety in contemporary mosque architecture; however, the independent financiers of these small mosques have a much more liberal attitude toward a new design language than does the DRA.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION PROCESS OF AHA MOSQUE

AHA Mosque sits on a corner lot at the busy intersection of Eskişehir Road and Bilkent University Boulevard on land adjoining the DRA's offices (Figure 8). The head of the DRA's construction department confirmed the mosque's site-selection process for the author (Metem, 2014). The site was originally the property of the Ministry of Environment and Urban Development, but it had been abandoned and passed on to the state treasury. At the DRA's request, the state gave the land to the DRA for mosque construction. Because of the traffic, the mosque was placed toward the back of the site. After construction started, the DRA allotted part of its land to enlarge the site.

The design competition for AHA Mosque was announced in spring 2006, and eight firms were invited to submit design proposals for the mosque.¹¹ The selection committee wanted the mosque to be a contemporary design, not a copy of well-known historic mosques. The DRA director at the time wanted a “neoclassical” mosque. While the head of the construction department informed the author that specifications were posted in June 2006 (Metz, 2014), the author was informed by the DSHV that the DRA did not develop written specifications because it is against the law for the ministry to organize a competition; rather, the committee merely spoke with the invited architects and interior designers (DRA, 2013, 2014a).¹² The DRA wanted a mosque with a capacity of 5,000-6,000 people. The DSHV paid for the five best projects of the ones submitted, and ultimately chose the one by architect Salim Alp. However, in Turkey, an architect has little control over the finished product in most mosque/religious-building projects. After a proposal is accepted by the employer, the first step is to decide on changes, either before construction or during the construction process. Depending on the location and size of the mosque, imams, administrators, and/or financiers can all make decisions about changing the project. This lack of professional control opens the field to non-architects, especially to the employer or the person most in control of the project; the architect is essentially excluded after the initial design has been accepted.

Alp’s project was selected by the jury members and DRA personnel. Alp had worked at Dalokay’s office during the design and construction of King Faisal Mosque, and the project for the DRA was Alp’s salute to that master architect.¹³ The architect oversaw the construction of AHA Mosque for the first year, but then control was ceded to the DSHV’s construction firm. The

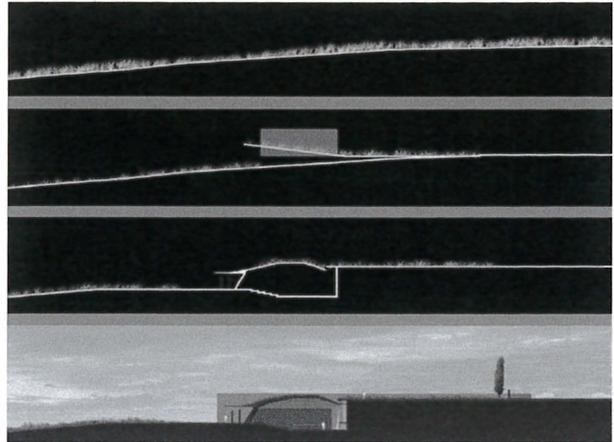


FIGURE 7A. Conceptual sections of Sancaklar Mosque, Istanbul. (Source: EAA-Emre Arolat Architecture. Used with permission.)

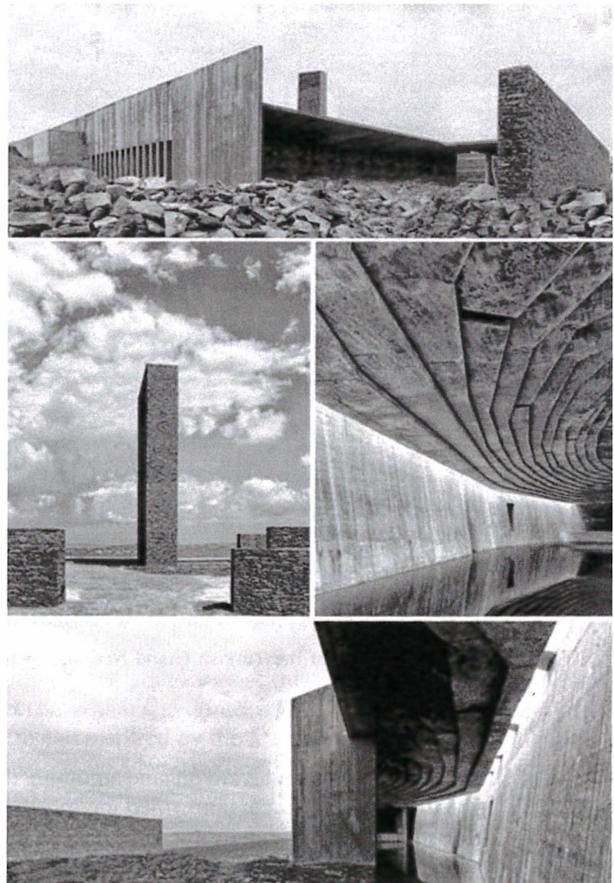


FIGURE 7B. Inside and outside views of Sancaklar Mosque. (Source: EAA-Emre Arolat Architecture and Cemal Emden. Used with permission.)



FIGURE 7C. Northeast view of Sancaklar Mosque. (Source: EAA-Emre Arolat Architecture and Cemal Emden. Used with permission.)



FIGURE 8. Satellite image of the DRA site and AHA Mosque. (Source: Google map data, Google Imagery, and CNES/Astrium, Digital Globe. Used with permission.)

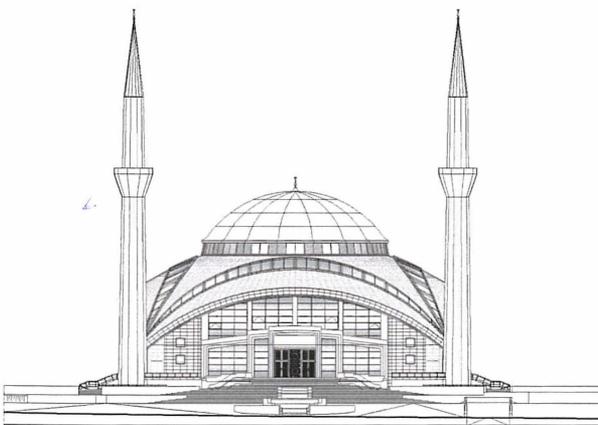


FIGURE 9. Main entrance facade in the original design of AHA Mosque. (Source: Salim Alp. Used with permission.)

original design intention was for the mosque to reflect the spirit of its age, to create a prayer hall where the idea of *tevhit* (affirming the unity of God) or reaching *tevhit* is felt by the believer, and where the symbolic elements (such as the dome and minarets) would be reinterpreted architecturally (Alp, 2014).

The structure is a skeleton system applied with conventional reinforced concrete, with four pillars supporting an upper structure composed of two superposed domes, one central and one peripheral. The original drawings show a building with transparent facades and a main dome, but they were changed by the DRA administration after the first year. The peripheral dome is cut by transparent crescents running parallel to arched beams (Figure 9). In Alp's original version, the solid parts of the transparent main dome would have been hidden, but this design was rejected by the DRA administration because it thought this might result in a feeling of insecurity during prayer. The facades remain translucent, but a visual interior/exterior relationship at the ground level was not established because of the traffic density. The mezzanine level (*mahfil*, a place for women) is 20 ft. (6 m) high and spacious, with plenty of room for mechanical systems.

A 33-66-99¹⁴ proportional relationship was used for the mosque: the height and diameter of the central dome are 108 ft. (33 m), the minarets are 217 ft. (66 m) tall, and the diameter of the peripheral dome is 325 ft. (99 m). The four minarets are integrated into the composition to complete a virtual cube in which the mass/volume of the mosque is placed (Figure 10).

As Figures 11-12 show, underground parking covers 861,113 ft.² (80,000 m²) across three basement levels. There are ablution places on every level so people can park their cars, perform their ablutions, and go directly into

the mosque. The Turkish Chamber of Architects and the Chamber of City Planners felt that having underground parking would result in increased traffic in the area, but the architect did not agree; he felt that the existing subway line to the area would decrease traffic by between 8,000 and 10,000 cars. More than one-third of the construction budget went to building the underground parking facilities.

The design specifications only required a design for the mosque. A cultural center, which was not in the original architectural program, was added on the first underground level during construction; the DRA archives were moved there after completion (Metev, 2014). These changes were made without consulting the architect.

The reinforced concrete structural system, dome, and arched beams work to compress the building, as if it were made of stone or brick. During construction, the circular beam of the drum tended to stretch outward and had to be stabilized by cables tied diametrically at certain points (Figure 13). The static project was developed simultaneously with the production/construction process. Construction of the peripheral dome, which consists of four almost semi-spherical elements, was difficult because of problems concerning its statics. The construction team was in continual contact with the architect, who proposed setbacks in the facade to compensate for the problem (Alp, 2014),¹⁵ but this solution was rejected in favor of one that did not require changing the facade. The domes were changed from the original totally transparent design to semitransparent to address the problem (Vural, 2014).

The tower crane was not high enough for the entire minaret construction, so the crew finished the minarets manually using scaffolding. In the architect's proposal, the *qibla* wall (which orients the congregation toward the Kaaba) was transparent, but this was changed during construction because it faced the courtyard.

During the application process, the project coordinator was working for one of the DSHV firms. When she took control of the project after the first year, she redesigned the facade and the floor of the cultural center on the first underground level; she also planned the interior design, including novelties such as ventilated shoe cupboards. Some of the interior walls in the *mahfil* hold head scarves and long skirts for women who arrive at the mosque in outfits that are not appropriate for prayer. The lighting is artificial and indirect. Decorations on the walls and ceilings consist mostly of

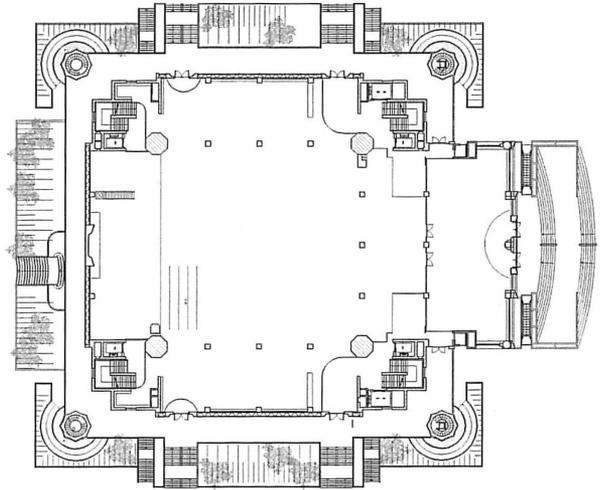


FIGURE 10. Ground floor plan of AHA Mosque.
(Source: Salim Alp. Used with permission.)

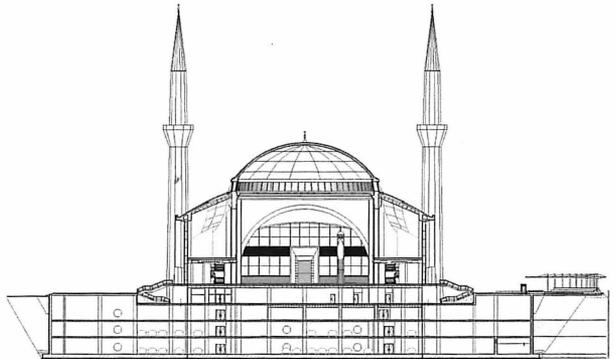


FIGURE 11. Section AA of AHA Mosque, facing toward the *qibla* wall.
(Source: Salim Alp. Used with permission.)

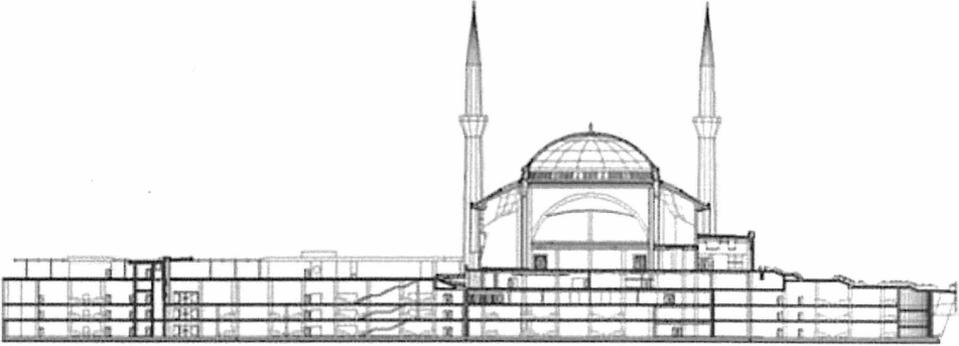


FIGURE 12. Section BB (longitudinal section) of AHA Mosque. (Source: Salim Alp. Used with permission.)



FIGURE 13. The drum of AHA Mosque under construction.

Seljuk motifs, while the dome is adorned with a wheel of fortune (*çarkifelek*) on which there are religious verses. The project coordinator aimed for a luminous interior space, but it had to be subdued, as she wanted the believer to feel serene so that he or she would want to stay in the mosque longer (Sengül, 2013). Turquoise, which represents water, sky, and earth colors, was selected as the dominant color. She wanted the mosque to be integrated with a social and cultural space, not a commercial one, so bookshops and a seating area were placed on top of a glass floor, under which is a pool with a “tree of life” design. A moving water feature was also incorporated to muffle the

sound of the traffic outside. The project coordinator’s main criticism of the mosque’s composition was that the depressed arches of the peripheral dome flatten the mass, and the minarets should have been higher to offset this (*ibid.*).

Several other changes were made to the winning design during construction, after the architect’s contract for supervising the construction process was canceled by the DSHV. For instance, the transparent silicone curtain facades were replaced with translucent and opaque strips. The only unimpeded light from outside enters through the crescent windows on the peripheral dome and the drum. The main entrance, facing Eskisehir Road, was also changed. In both versions of the original proposal, the entrance is more integrated into the facade by means of an eave. In the first version, the eave ran parallel to the ground from where the peripheral dome starts (Figure 14A); in the second version, the eave became a formal reflection of the dome’s curve (Figure 14B). The final constructed form, which was decided on by the DRA administration, turned out to be more solid and looks like a last-minute addition that was not integrated into the facade of the building (Figure 14C).

Preliminary construction of the mosque was completed in 13 months, and the entire building was completed in five and a half years. On April 19, 2013, AHA Mosque officially opened for prayer. It is the largest mosque in Ankara.

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF AHA MOSQUE

Wanting to avoid traffic congestion was not the main reason for the site choice of AHA Mosque; the DRA needed a mosque at its new headquarters. People call the mosque a “VIP mosque,” a phrase that DRA administrators intensely oppose because, ontologically, one’s social status does not matter in a mosque: every believer is equal. While originally and ordinarily, people could and can pray anywhere, historically and practically, monumental mosques are almost always symbols of political power. Therefore, *selâtin* mosques,¹⁶ King Faisal Mosque,¹⁷ and AHA Mosque are all symbolically linked with power.

Historically and traditionally, mosques have been built in central locations (e.g., in the heart of residential areas or near marketplaces)¹⁸ that could be reached easily and quickly during prayer times, especially on Fridays. The selection of the location for AHA Mosque did not follow this tradition. It is on an intercity road, not at the center of any settlement. Moreover, its proximity to the DRA offices visually relates it to the institution (Figure 8). As a state institution, by law, the DRA building should not be associated with any particular mosque or building of any Muslim sect or any other religion in the country. However, its proximity to the new mosque makes it appear as if the DRA is a state organization of Sunni Muslims only. In addition, there are two big university campuses between AHA Mosque and central Ankara, each with its own *mescit* and mosque. A new hospital center that will have its own prayer area is also under construction in the vicinity of AHA Mosque. Moreover, the new government buildings, shopping centers, and state institutions on Eskisehir Road also have their own *mescits* or mos-



FIGURE 14A. Entrance of AHA Mosque in the first version of the original proposal. (Source: Salim Alp. Used with permission.)



FIGURE 14B. Entrance of AHA Mosque in the second version of the original proposal. (Source: Salim Alp. Used with permission.)

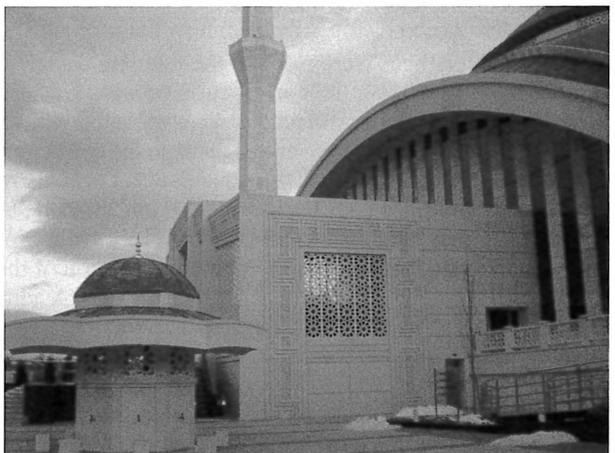


FIGURE 14C. Entrance of AHA Mosque as built.

ques, and there are many other mosques in the area as well. Still, AHA Mosque is accessible by commuters from two directions, and its monumental structure cannot be overlooked. Its high-capacity covered parking may also encourage people to stop and pray, especially on Fridays. In fact, after the mosque officially opened, a DRA banner stretched along the length of a nearby highway overpass, inviting people to the mosque with the tagline: "Let's go to the mosque with our families." There is a subway station adjacent to the mosque entrance, making the mosque accessible by both private and public transportation. One could speculate that the DRA wanted to build a religious icon on a road where, otherwise, two universities and state institutions would have been a person's first view of Ankara when approaching from the west. With the mosque, the whole landscape has changed.

In summer 2006, the DRA held a two-day consultation on contemporary mosque projects and invited many influential and well-known architects. Participants' comments focused mainly on three points: (1) lacking, inadequate, or deficient regulations for mosque construction; (2) the lack of supervision during the construction process; and (3) kitschy imitations of the classical Ottoman mosque image. Almost every invited architect and all DRA authorities united around the idea that current mosque architecture should be contemporary (Uzunoglu, 2007). This consultation might have been a preliminary step in building AHA Mosque; however, the DRA holds consultations about every two years, and each seems to be a repeat of the previous meeting because no major revisions to the regulations for mosque projects seem to occur.

Since the author could not obtain the architectural program for the mosque from either the DRA's construction department or the DSHV, we must be content with studying the program on the construction firm's website (Ender Insaat, 2014), which characterizes the mosque as "neoclassical." The same word was used by the head of the DRA's construction department during his interview with the author (Metz, 2014), and it raises the question of how the phrase "contemporary mosque" is understood, especially after the numerous consultation meetings on contemporary mosque architecture.

Discussions on contemporary mosque architecture have arisen in the academic literature as well. For instance, Yousef (2012:32) claimed, "The political and economic situation of Muslim societies caused a decline in innovative evolutionary movements. This led to a continuous process of copying, whether temporally from the past or geographically from the West, regardless of both regional and cultural identities." And while Çetin (2011:65) thought, "Contemporary mosque architecture could be unleashed from the tight shackles of stereotypical stylization of ancient formal typologies," Jahic (2008) noted that historicist principles are still common in mosque architecture. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last few decades of the 20th century, most of the mosques were

modelled on the Ottoman dome mosque and a slender, pencil-like minaret covered with a pointed conical roof. Semi-spherical concrete domes were used more for reasons of recognisability than for justified artistic or structural purposes. Minarets are usually disproportionately more slender than their Ottoman models, which disturbs the logical relationship between their proportions and those of the mosque.

(*ibid.*:11)

There are also celebrations in the literature of modern reinterpretations, such as the aforementioned King Faisal and Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosques (Jahic, 2008:17).

Although AHA Mosque has two domes and four minarets, as in many recently constructed congregational mosques, it also has distinctive architectural characteristics. Perhaps whether a mosque with a dome is traditional or not is the wrong question to ask; perhaps the correct question is one that Jahic (2008:19) posed: "How is it [the mosque] presented?" In Alp's original drawings and digital models, AHA Mosque looks like a domed crystal with transparent facades. The mass of the building is dematerialized, with the only solid aspects appearing to be its structurally support-

ing elements. From the exterior and in terms of visual balance, the peripheral dome seems to be visually primary to the central dome; the central dome seems weak, breaking up the integrity of the peripheral dome. Borrowing Louis Kahn's famous phrase (Tyng, 1984:29), the building "wants" the peripheral dome, as its upper structural element, to be in one piece. However, in the interior space, the visual balance changes to the advantage of the central dome. Because of the central plan type and U-shaped mezzanine, which reflects the peripheral dome as the upper structure, the central dome seems more dominant, and the interior design elements, such as the wheel of fortune motif, enhance that dominance.

Proportionally, the numerical relationship 33-66-99, which was applied to the architectural drawings of the exterior, did not play a role in the creation of the interior space. There is no spatial relationship between the exterior elements and the interior space. For example, the ground floor level is raised to 10 ft. (3 m) to reflect the dome height of 108 ft. (33 m); therefore, what one perceives in the interior space is not the whole measure of the height of the dome (Figure 11).

Structurally, the building is a tension-based skeleton system, but it appears to be a compression-based load-bearing system. With its semitransparent facades and crescent windows on the peripheral dome, the mosque gives an impression of a thin, light building from both the exterior and the interior. The neutral color scheme of the facade, ornamentation, rugs, and hardscape (from light grayish-blue to white with turquoise) enhances this effect. A common problem in the architectural expression of contemporary mosques that are revivalist or historicist is the reflection of the *idea* of an architectonic mass or architecture that is not the case in reality. This design approach and its applications have been critically evaluated in Turkey since the 1950s, long before the "decorated box" became popular in the 1980s.¹⁹

In the classical Ottoman mosque scheme, a centrally organized, baldachin structure is used to enlarge the main prayer area. Therefore, the peripheral domes are directed toward the main or central dome and attached to it by arches. AHA Mosque's four semi-peripheral domes serve the same purpose (to extend or enlarge the interior space by covering the women's *mahfil* floor), but the formal and structural logic of AHA Mosque's peripheral dome is not the same as in the classical scheme; instead, it is extraverted, and the arched beams are in a tangential relationship with the central dome. This structural and formal attempt is a reinterpretation of the traditional and integral use of semi-domes with a baldachin structure.

AHA MOSQUE AND REFERENCES TO THE RECENT PAST

The original conception of AHA Mosque shows some references to the recent competitions and award-winning mosque projects, which is a positive aspect in terms of continuing mosque architecture in Turkey in a modern/contemporary vein. Notably, the mosque's peripheral dome reminds one of Dalokay's unbuilt Kocatepe Mosque project (Figure 15). The original transparent facades, especially the transparent *qibla* wall, also formally reference the Kocatepe project, as well as Dalokay's King Faisal Mosque and the Çinicis' Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosque. Although informal references appear in the site placements of the previous three mosques — Kocatepe Mosque is on a hill in the middle of a green area within the urban fabric; King Faisal Mosque takes its references from the surrounding mountains (Senyapili, 1969); and the Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosque, with an Emevi Mosque scheme, is hidden behind a hill from the *qibla* wall side and sits on the lowest level of the National Assembly's campus area, where it welcomes people to its entrance facade — AHA Mosque does not make informal references to its contextual/topographical site.

Although the term "neoclassical" was used to define contemporary mosque architecture during the author's interviews, AHA Mosque is not actually neoclassical. One of its architectural features is

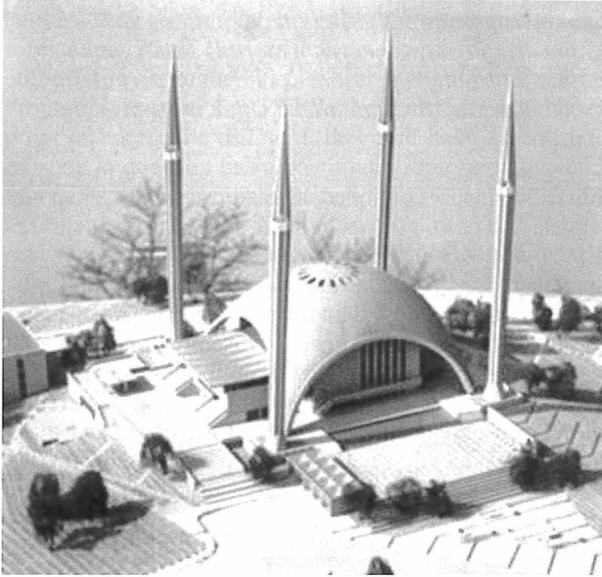


FIGURE 15. Dalokay's unbuilt Kocatepe Mosque design.
(Source: Güzer, 2009. Used with permission.)

transparency, which has been transforming the meaning of civic, public, and religious buildings since modernism emerged in architecture. In the postindustrial era, transparency, along with “functionality, rationality, [and] efficiency ... seem pushed to a new level, and altered in the process, as if they [have] become emblematic values in their own right” (Foster, 2011:48). Obtaining emblematic value might have been one of Alp's goals in proposing that the facades and dome be transparent; however, in this author's opinion, AHA Mosque's transparency is more a reference to the Kocatepe, King Faisal, and Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosques, as noted above (*ibid.*).²⁰

In general, the amount of daylight has been discussed in mosque design more than transparency, with two exceptions. In the Turkish Grand

National Assembly Mosque, the transparent *qibla* facade faces a pool with a miniature waterfall that descends from the highest level of the topography; from this direction, the mosque is hidden. In the unbuilt Kocatepe Mosque, Dalokay played with light in a sophisticated way by means of variously designed transparent facades, taking into consideration the changing condition of sunlight throughout the day and the interior/exterior relationship (As, 2006:54-56). The interiors of Istanbul's *selâtin* mosques from the classical period receive abundant daylight, and the interior/exterior relationship achieved through windows that start from the floor of the prayer area allows the believer or visitor to contemplate the mosques' interior green courts. In these examples, architectural approaches are related to the topographical conditions and site contexts as well as to spiritual ambiance.

In Islam, there has never been a prescribed form of mosque; mosque architecture has developed and changed parallel to a society's cultural and environmental conditions and context. God is, as a concept, everywhere, unrelated to space. Dalokay interprets this concept as a magnetic field. In historical examples, such as the Selimiye and Süleymaniye mosques, space is equally powerful, energetic, and dynamic throughout the main prayer halls. There are no strong architectural elements to give direction to space; even the place where the imam stands against the *qibla* wall to provide direction to the congregation is designed in a restrained manner. In these spaces, the believer is more aware of the main space under the main dome (Senyapili, 1969:30). Mosques are generally designed to be luminous, spacious places with no spatial/architectural direction. In AHA Mosque, the translucent facades hide the reality of the busy traffic environment from the praying individual or congregation in the interior space. Additionally, the night view of the mosque strikingly expresses the idea of the main and peripheral domes as the upper structure through the light and dark contrast created by the transparent and translucent surfaces.

In Alp's original design, a feeling of lightness was significant. In the built version, this feeling remains (though is somewhat subdued) through the translucent facades and the light color scheme. “Light modernity,” as one of the characteristic issues in contemporary global architecture, encourages innovative civil engineers to work with

structures and skins supported by their own tension. ... [L]ightness confirms the drive, already strong in modern architecture, toward the refinement of materials and techniques, but now this refinement seems pledged less to healthy, open spaces and ... modern design, than to decorous touches and atmospheric effects — to an aesthetic value in its own right. (Foster, 2011:55, 62)

Quoting the Italian author Italo Calvino, Foster (2011:62) continued, “I look to science ... to nourish my visions in which all heaviness disappears.” For Foster (*ibid.*), “The attraction of ... disembodiment is clear enough, but, viewed suspiciously, it is little more than the technological fantasy of dematerialization retooled for a cyberspatial era Viewed even more suspiciously, this lightness is bound up not only with the fantasy of human disembodiment but also with the fact of social derealization.” Thus, there are “two notions of lightness — the dream of disembodiment and the nightmare of derealization” (*ibid.*). Certainly, this discussion does not apply only to religious buildings, but historically, dematerialization in monotheist religious buildings, such as Gothic cathedrals, is not a new concept. The atmosphere created by the light effect of stained glass windows and its expansion aided by an almost skeletal structural system was established as having architectural value centuries ago. In AHA Mosque, Alp’s original design of a silicone curtain facade pushed the concept of transparency to another level.

Formally, Alp’s proposal to dematerialize the mosque’s mass through a transparent facade and dome was an original approach because it would have lessened the mosque’s effect on the believer as a symbolically powerful building. Had it been realized, the design would have expressed the idea of a light structure that gently sheltered the congregation. The mosque could have been designed to be smaller, could have been placed within a greener landscape, and/or could have retained some interior/exterior visual lines so that people could view a more pleasing outdoor space. The changed design only allows users to see the outside/sky through the crescents on the peripheral dome. The peripheral dome reflects Dalokay’s original shell design for Kocatepe Mosque, where it appeared that the dome touched the ground, but in AHA Mosque, it is actually attached to the bottom of the minarets.

The built version of AHA Mosque also gives a nod to contemporary and historical mosque examples, but these references generally make the building neither contemporary nor historical, but simply eclectic. The entrance looks like a separate part of the building, which breaks its formal integrity. The opaque and translucent strips of the facade reference King Faisal Mosque, but in that mosque, the elevations were treated in different ways according to sunlight and the interior/exterior relationship (as in the unbuilt Kocatepe Mosque). In AHA Mosque, the three facades are all treated in the same manner. The Seljuk motifs and decorations serve as historical references.

The differences between the architect’s original conception and the built mosque do not promote the transformation of popular religious images into contemporary mosque images. Further, the problem of the architect not controlling the building process remains, leaving open discussions in the field regarding fees, compensation, and the architect’s right to make later decisions about his or her original work.

CONCLUSION

As this paper shows, although “contemporary mosque image” and “contemporary mosque architecture” are two different concepts, they are perceived as the same by religious authorities in Turkey. The DRA’s critical approach to contemporary mosque architecture and its conferences to discuss the subject may be well intentioned, but the problem is many sided and includes not only architecture but also its social and official context. The head of the DRA’s construction department noted that the most original proposals he had seen would take about 50 years to be accepted and internalized by believers (as in the case of Dalokay and Tekelioglu’s Kocatepe Mosque project)

because they go completely against the traditional practices and customs of mosque architectural form (Mete, 2014). Such criticism is a topic for a future paper. On the one hand, DRA personnel are enthusiastic about novelties in architectural form, but on the other hand, they hold back when a proposal is too different. While they certify or validate small, experimental mosques, even if the proposals are quite different, they still have a controversial, even contradictory, attitude if the mosque in question has a potentially representative, emblematic value in the urban scale. AHA Mosque's apparent representative value as an icon on the road to Ankara surpasses its architectural value in the eyes of religious authorities and its meaning as merely a space for believers to pray. Consequently, the design intention of the project is deemed less important than other factors.

NOTES

1. *Selâtin* is the plural of sultan.
2. In 1923, 80% of the Turkish population lived in rural areas, and 20% lived in urban areas; in 2013, those percentages were reversed. Ankara's population in 1980 was 2,423,789; by 2013, it was 5,045,083 (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2014).
3. In Senyapılı (1969), Vedat Dalokay, the architect of the Kocatepe and King Faisal Mosques, explained how the system works in Turkey. A businessman who is in need of bank credit generally decides to build a mosque. The first step is to start a mosque construction association. Then, funds are collected (for Ankara's Kocatepe Mosque, seven million Turkish lira — approximately US\$777,778 at the time — were gathered in two years), and the money is deposited into several banks, preferably ones with which the builder has connections. The fourth step is to increase the builder's credit limit to get a bank loan for the rest of the funds.
4. See, for example, the papers presented at the First National Symposium on Mosque Architecture jointly organized by the DRA and Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi (2012) and Eyüpgiller (2006), as well as the television programs that aired on CNN Türk (October 16, 2013) and 5N1K (December 31, 2013), the 2011 issue (no. 352) of *Yapı* (a monthly architecture journal), and the 1994 issue (no. 11) of *Arredamento*.
5. According to DRA (2014b) statistics, there were 85,412 recorded mosques in Turkey in 2013. The number of schools, as of the 2012-2013 academic year, was 75,324 (Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, 2013).
6. The head of the DRA changed in 2010, which might have been the reason for the unwillingness to provide information or documents about the mosque for this research.
7. After his graduation in 1928 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul, Burhan Arif went to France on a scholarship, attended courses at Institut d'urbanisme, and worked in Le Corbusier's and Auguste Perret's ateliers. He returned to Turkey in 1931 (Mimarlık Müzesi, 2015).
8. For instance, the mosque won the "Complete Buildings – Religion" category at the 2013 World Architecture Festival and was chosen for Design Museum London's Designs of the Year Exhibition in 2015 (EAA-Emre Arolat Architecture, 2017).
9. The design refers to the Mount Hira cave where Muhammad had his first divine revelation in 610 (Pearson, 2014).
10. The construction of Sancaklar Mosque restarted the debate over why the historic approach should be abandoned, but its outcomes have yet to be seen.
11. In his interview, the head of the DRA's construction department listed some of the other architects who had been invited to submit proposals, including Necip Dinç, Hüsrev Tayla, Abdi Güzer, Danyal Çiper, and Oguz Ceylan (Mete, 2014).
12. Other contradictions between Mete's information and what others had told the author included a dispute about whether there was, in fact, a competition. In the author's opinion, these discrepancies may have been because — although the competition was supposedly organized and the specifications supposedly given out by the DSHV — the DSHV claimed it does not have any documents pertaining to the mosque's construction (e.g., information on the other four projects paid for by the DSHV, the specifications given to the invited architects).
13. For instance, Alp (2014) remembered Turgut Cansever's (2007) criticism that Kocatepe Mosque's dome sits on the ground, which is against the general symbolic meaning of a dome, so he lifted AHA Mosque's dome off the ground, supporting it with the minarets.

14. Prayer beads can be 33, 66, or 99 beads in length. The number 99 also refers to the names of Allah.
15. The facade of Selimiye Mosque (designed by Mimar Sinan, 1568-1575) in Edirne has setbacks, which define the main prayer hall under one main dome in the interior space, but that mosque was built with stone, and the structural system was designed mainly to work with compression (Kuban, 1997).
16. Because there are no longer sultans in Turkey, such mosques are now considered *ulu cami* (meaning “great mosque,” a term also used in sultan times), and the number of minarets is determined by the size of the congregation, which itself is related to the size of the main prayer hall. In the Ottoman Empire, only the mosques that were financed by sultans had four minarets, but today, the symbolic meaning has changed (e.g., after the congregation reaches 2,500 people, a second minaret is added) (DRA, 2009).
17. Commenting on King Faisal Mosque, Dalokay claimed that “mosques are symbols of power. People can worship anywhere they find appropriate. But the rulers want to symbolize their power. ... They don’t want [King Faisal] mosque to be a cultural center. They want a structure that can hold large ceremonies and serve 150,000-200,000 people” (Senyapili, 1969:30; translated from original).
18. There were two main reasons for locating mosques in central locations: originally, during the movement of nomadic Turkish tribes into Anatolia before the Ottoman state became the Ottoman Empire, the placement of a *zaviye* complex was one of the first decisions that was made when choosing a new settlement site (Barkan, 1942). The settlement then developed around the *zaviye*, making its location central. The second reason was for practicality; a central location made it easier for people to get to the site.
19. Dalokay, commenting on Tayla’s historicist design for the Kocatepe Mosque project, which replaced Dalokay’s design, stated that it “imitated the masonry construction technique with reinforced concrete. ... [Its] main hypocrisy is the application of contemporary building technology to a masonry construction system” (İltus and Topçuoğlu, 1976:69; translated from original).
20. A much smaller mosque, Dogramacizade Ali Pasa Camii, located at the end of Bilkent Boulevard, was built in 2008 and dedicated to the founder of Bilkent University. Designed by architect Erkut Sahinbas, it is a multireligious mosque and references the Seljuk period. It won both the 2007-2008 Architectural Award of the Turkish Independent Architects Association and the 2012 Mimar Sinan Grand Prix, awarded by the Turkish Chamber of Architects. It also has a transparent dome (although it does not totally define the main prayer area) and opaque facades, but Alp did not mention this mosque as a similarity; he likely would have if he wanted to achieve emblematic value by using transparency in his AHA Mosque design.

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