

# In search of an ‘Ottoman Landscape’: Sinan’s works in Thrace as expression of tangible heritage

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the paper is to describe the ‘Ottoman Landscape’ designed by architect Sinan in the 16th Century, through examples of architectural artifacts like mosques, staging posts, caravanserais, complexes, bath and bridges inside the Turkish border of the Thrace region. The land routes connected the capital of the Ottoman Empire Istanbul to the rest of Europe were important routes crossing the Western lands under the control of the Ottomans, to reach other countries and lands. Thanks to descriptions left by many travelers, we can today have an idea of the cities, the urban spaces, the landscape and the territories of Thrace during the Ottoman time, in a period covering approximately the last five centuries.

A description of Sinan’s works in the territory of Thrace is given and analyzed, focusing on interesting aspects related to the choice of the site, the urban planning approach and the architectural features. Nowadays Sinan’s works are still visible in the territory and in the minor centers of Thrace, or outside big cities like Istanbul and Edirne.

Throughout these investigations and studies we can re-construct and re-shape the enormous heritage left by him as part of an ‘Ottoman Landscape’, not only considers in terms of specific and unique monuments that need to be protected, but also as part of a cultural ‘milieu’ that belongs to our contemporary world. This landscape needs to be revitalized, to preserve the memory of its historical values and for its future persistence in the territory.

## **Keywords**

Heritage, Landscape, Ottoman Architecture, Sinan, Thrace.

This paper will introduce the concept of an 'Ottoman landscape' enriched by a considerable number of works designed by architect Sinan through the years during the apogee of Ottoman Empire in the second half of the Sixteenth Century. The borderlands between Turkey and Europe, the Balkans, being quite rich in terms of architectural artifacts, still carry the traces of the Ottoman hegemony in these territories. For this purpose, the paper will consider sections of this geography, located in Thrace, where the works of architect Sinan are a noteworthy experience of cultural signals. The building layout, the urban scene and the territorial transformation of those lands, seen as a whole, testify a great Ottoman cultural heritage currently belonging to Turkey and shared with its neighbors. As a starting point, this cultural heritage distributed among Turkey and other Eastern European countries today, can be read as an approach for a better integration and substantial continuum - hopefully in the near future - between the Republic of Turkey and the European Union.

The research on Sinan's works and the 'Ottoman landscape' in Thrace is based on the PhD dissertation thesis, (Orlandi, 2005) which was discussed at the Polytechnic of Turin in May 2005. It was developed inside the PhD program undertaken and named: "History and Critic of the Architectural and Environmental Heritage". It can be considered as an interdisciplinary field research inherent to specific areas such architecture, city planning, landscape architecture, restoration, conservation, regeneration planning and sustainability. The dissertation thesis investigates and involves different fields and subjects not only related to History of Architecture or Urban History neither it should be merely intended as another monographic study on Sinan. Part of this PhD dissertation results was presented some years ago to an international audience, during a symposium <sup>1</sup>, (1) and later developed as a publication (Orlandi, 2009).

The lands belonging to the Balkan Peninsula are marked by the presence of strong multi-ethnic components and followers of several religions like

Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox Christians. The traces and influences left by the Turks and the Ottomans in almost six hundred years of domination and sovereignty are spread out everywhere, still having a remarkable presence in the territory. The province of *Rumelia* extending from western Turkey to the border of the Austrian and Slovenian territories at the time reached almost Vienna, included countries like Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro. The Turkish word *Rumelia* (or *Rumeli*) can be translated as the Land of the Rum, as the Turkish populations intended the territories belongs once to the Greeks or the Byzantines or more generally the Romans and passed later under their control. This western province of the Empire comprise of a striking number of Ottoman works of architecture and engineering masterpieces, precisely illustrating the aforementioned 'Ottoman landscape', strictly linked to the Ottoman Civilization.

The works built by Sinan, mosques, staging posts, caravanserais, complexes as the basic example of architectural works as well as the roads, bridges and aqueducts being the main examples of engineering projects define the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman landscape through small towns and along the caravan routes of Thrace. In this paper it will be examined the system routes and tracks for the caravans and the station posts locations, called *menzilhane*, and the bridges or other infrastructures left in the territory related to the great architect Sinan as well as their current conditions.

The choice of the Thrace region as a case-study is also due to the fact that this area can be regarded as the true heart of the Ottoman State, centered around two of the three capitals of the big empire, the first being Edirne and Istanbul the second. So, the choice of the region is not solely connected to its relation to the great and unique architecture of Sinan (Figure 1).

The ancient Greeks and Romans once called the region *Thracia* or *Tracia*, which current translation in English language is Thrace; today portion of it - known as Trakya by the Turkish

<sup>1</sup> The 'Sinan'ın kentleri – kentlerde Sinan imgesi' symposium was organized by the Chamber of the Architects of Kayseri, between 6th and 9th of April 2009.



**Figure 1.** *The Selimiye mosque in Edirne (Photo @ Luca Orlandi).*

- is the only part of Turkey geographically inside the border of the European continent and it is divided into four main administrative sub-regions today: Istanbul, Edirne, Kırklareli and Çanakkale. The paper is centered on some specific spots and places where Sinan designed some of his masterpieces and it doesn't intend to cover all the architectural production left by the Ottomans in this region, before and after Sinan. Through several examples of socio-religious or multi-purpose roadside complexes built by Sinan in those territories during his long career, the impact of his architectural production is still visible, in terms of urban and rural landscape and it is possible to recognize main changes and modifications in the territory itself.

In the Ottoman Empire in fact, the land routes connecting Istanbul to the rest of Europe – in other words, linking the East to the West and *vice versa* – were an important network of roads used by travelers, traders, armies, ambassadors, pilgrims and others for centuries. The land routes, which crossed the Western lands, were entirely under the control of the Ottomans; they reach other countries, connecting many important cities, and were in many cases tracing the ancient Roman and Byzantine tracks. In fact these routes, which had already existed in the past, were not only used by the Ottomans as they were, but were even improved, reno-

vated and re-designed by them. This was essential for the maintenance of their big empire with all its necessary relations and, of course for strategic purposes as well.<sup>2</sup>

During their rise in the middle of the Sixteenth Century, the Ottomans were able to establish and develop new cities and villages, commercial centers or simply multi-functional complexes along those roads. Therefore, they built infrastructures like bridges to cross lands and aqueducts to bring water to the towns; designed new roads to increase relationships, trades and commerce between people and countries, as well as to move armies, to control or to enlarge the empire's borders, following a policy of territorial expansion, and they transformed the landscape, both in architectural and urban scale, by designing several functional elements, urban features and setting landmarks on it. This practice of the Ottoman civilization both in the conquered lands and in their own territories has been well analyzed by Gülru Necipoğlu in her studies; while introducing Sinan and his patronage in relation to the territory and the policy, she states that: "The colonization of space through settlement [...] played a central role in Ottoman architectural culture" (Necipoğlu, 2005, p. 71).

Leaving aside the present condition of the routes or the architectural remains, for an appreciation of an 'Ottoman landscape' in Thrace, it should also be considered the travel literature as a primary source in investigation of this kind; in fact, descriptions and sketches left by many travelers, sometimes in the form of travelogue or in the form of sketch-books, give very detailed information which is not always available in the contemporary environment, often compromised by a 'careless' modernization process. Today it is possible to have a sufficient idea of cities, towns, urban spaces, transformed landscape and territories of Thrace during the Ottoman time, in a period covering approximately the last five-six centuries. In this sense, one of the goals of this paper is to understand architect Sinan, his patronage and his architectural and engineering production in Thrace.

Mostly of Sinan's works are still vis-

<sup>2</sup> For general information about the Ottoman administration of those territories see: Pitcher, (1972; Beldiceanu, (1980); Bombaci – Shaw, (1981); İnalçık, (1993); (1997a); (1997b); Mantran, (1999); Imber, (2002); İnalçık – Renda, (2002).



ible in the territory and in the minor centers of Thrace, outside and in the surrounding of Edirne, along the roads and in small urban areas; apart from the travelers, these lands were often used by the sultans and their courts during their seasonal permanence far from the big city of Istanbul. Centers like Svilengrad (today inside the Bulgarian border), Havsa, Babaeski, Lüleburgaz, Çorlu, Çatalca, Büyük Karıştiran, Ipsala, Tekirdağ, Marmara Ereğlisi, Silivri, Büyükçekmece and Küçükçekmece, were important caravan halts on the main land routes arriving from Western countries towards Istanbul<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately, a modern highway – reducing travel time between Edirne and Istanbul to three hours - cuts off those minor centers and the traffic runs on a gentle and comfortable road in the middle of the beautiful countryside of Thrace, but in the past those almost forgotten minor centers were very important staging posts for the politics and the economy of the Empire.

All the still existing complexes in Thrace, including the ones that are in ruins, like Sokollu Mehmet Pasha or Sokollu Kasım Beg in Havsa; Semiz Ali Pasha in Babaeski; Sokollu Mehmet Pasha in Lüleburgaz; Rüstem Pasha in Tekirdağ; Suleiman and Selim the Second bridge (under the supervision of Sokollu Mehmet Pasha) in Büyükçekmece are listed below.

The most important building type among others is the mosque. Examples are: Selimiye and Defterdar Mustafa Pasha in Edirne; Sokollu Kasım Beg in Havsa; Semiz (Cedid) Ali Pasha in Babaeski; Sokollu Mehmet Pasha in Lüleburgaz; Rüstem Pasha in Tekirdağ; Semiz Ali Pasha in Marmaraereğlisi; Davud Ferrah Pasha in Çatalca; Suleiman Han in Büyükçekmece (Figure 2, 3, 4 and 5).

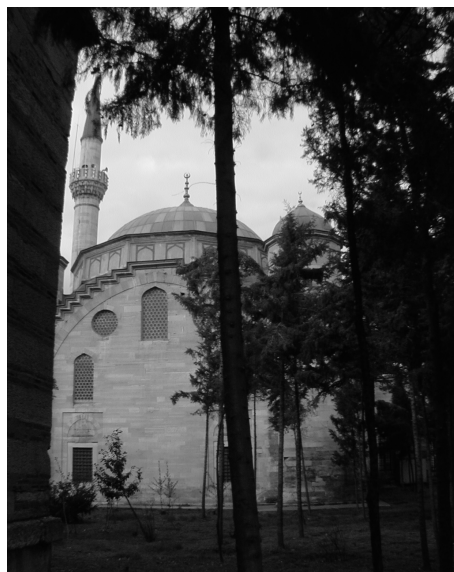
What's more, there are caravanserais, like: Rüstem Pasha in Edirne; Sokollu Kasım Beg in Havsa; Sokollu Mehmet Pasha in Lüleburgaz; Suleiman Han in Büyükçekmece; markets or *arasta*: Semiz Ali Pasha, Selimiye in Edirne; Sokollu Kasım Beg in Havsa; Sokollu Mehmet Pasha in Lüleburgaz; public baths: Sokollu Mehmet Pasha in Edirne; Sokollu Kasım Beg in Havsa; Sokollu Mehmet Pasha in Lüleburgaz;



**Figure 2.** The maksure of Sokollu Kasım Beg in Havsa (Photo @ Luca Orlandi).



**Figure 3.** Semiz (Cedid) Ali Pasha mosque in Babaeski (Photo @ Luca Orlandi).



**Figure 4.** Sokollu Mehmet Pasha mosque in Lüleburgaz (Photo @ Luca Orlandi).



**Figure 5.** Rüstem Pasha mosque in Tekirdağ (Photo @ Luca Orlandi).

<sup>3</sup> For further information about the land routes system in Thrace see: Jireček, (1877); Heywood, (1976-1977); Heywood, (1980); Cezar, (1983); Mandel, (1988); Cerasi, (1998); Yerasimos, (1991); Zachariadou, (1996); Zachariadou, (2002); Klusáková, (2002). An interesting study on the Ottoman cities and town into the Levant can be seen in: Eldem – Goffman – Masters, (1999).

gaz; bridges: Çoban Mustafa Pasha in Svilengrad; Sultan Suleiman in Edirne; Sokollu Mehmet Pasha in Lüleburgaz; Sokollu Mehmet Pasha (or Sinanlı) in Alpullu; Sokollu Mehmet Pasha (?) in Marmaracık (Çorlu); Suleiman Han in Silivri; Suleiman Han/ Selim the Second in Büyükçekmece; Odabaşı (?) in Halkalı; Kapağası (?) in Haramidere. (Figure 6, 7 and 8).

Of course, there will not only be considered the artifacts left in the territory,



**Figure 6.** Sinan bridge in Alpullu (Photo@Luca Orlandi).



**Figure 7.** Sokollu Mehmet Pasha bridge in Lüleburgaz (Photo@Luca Orlandi).



**Figure 8.** Suleiman Han bridge in Büyükçekmece (Photo@Luca Orlandi).

beside the buildings or complexes that are partially in ruins or lost forever, due to a lack of proper preservation or simply by negligence, but also it should be overviewed the literature related to the visual representations of these lands, in order to give a more precise idea of what it can be revealed today as an 'Ottoman landscape'. Throughout investigations and studies in these centers as well as in the documents and drawings left by many travelers, it is possible to re-construct and re-shape the enormous heritage left by Sinan, not only in terms of specific and unique monuments but also in a wide range. A heritage that needs to be preserved and maintained under protection – where it is still possible – and to be included in a cultural 'milieu' that belongs to our contemporary world. It seems even superfluous to argue that this 'Ottoman landscape' should be revitalized for the memory of its historical values and for its future, inside a program of sustainable cultural landscape.

The road scheme visualized in Figure 9 synthesizes the route network in the Ottoman times departing from Istanbul towards the West, showing the main urban centers and the places in which Sinan designed his works; three main branches are visible in this route system: the left road, (or *Sol kol*) connecting to Greece and Italy, the ancient *Via Egnatia*; the Imperial Road, connecting Istanbul and Edirne to the Balkans and the center of the European states and the right road, towards Crimea, Russia and the Black Sea regions.

Sinan was appointed by Sultan Suleiman as Chief of the Imperial Architects, and during his long life served other sultans, like Selim the Second and Murat the Third or other important dignitaries of the court, like viziers, sultan's wives or mothers, princes and princesses and several others. For many of them he designed buildings in these lands, including complexes, baths, fountains and bridges. In these maps the sites in which Sinan, under the patronage of those mentioned rulers, worked, both as architect / engineer and as responsible in chief for the public works, are showing the re-designed territories of Thrace, a new





**Figure 9.** The road network of Thrace with the main three branches and the Sinan's works sites (marked as white spot).

landscape, in which Sinan's quality to understand the place can be appreciated. It seems that a 'site planner', in the case of Sinan, is a more suitable definition for him than city planner, a term indubitably too modern for those days. Prof. Zeynep Ahunbay first set the idea of Sinan's role in this manner, to define precisely his contribution at urban and territorial scale.

Following the traces of Sinan's artifacts 'on paper' left in travelogues, some travelers who came across Sinan's buildings in the landscape of Thrace have been selected, starting from the year 1550: Venetian ambassadors, like Jacopo Soranzo or Marcantonio Barbaro, have left descriptions of centers like Lüleburgaz and Havsa, with detailed indications of the caravanserais and other accommodation facilities; French travelers like Guillaume Grelot or Nicholas De Nicolay, the Dutch Ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq and the English traveler Peter Mundy visited Büyükçekmece area and Silivri, commenting the bridges existing in those areas and the well maintained roads approaching the capital; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Helmut von Moltke stayed at Edirne, admiring the impressive mosque of Selim the Second.<sup>4</sup>

Some visual material, such as the anonymous Leiden sketches represent the minor centers from Belgrad to Istanbul; in the presented sketches the complex of Sokollu Mehmet Pasha and the bridge designed by Sinan, (Figure 10) connecting the town of Lüleburgaz to the other centers or staging posts on the Imperial Road are very well depicted as well as the skyline defined by the



**Figure 10.** Sokollu Mehmet Pasha and the bridge in and the bridge in the townscape of Lüleburgaz (Klusáková, 2002, 72-73).



**Figure 11.** The Semiz Ali Pasha complex in the townscape of Babaeski (Klusáková, 2002, 70-71).

Semiz Ali Pasha complex in Babaeski (Figure 11). These original sketches, preserved inside the Leiden library in Netherland, were 'unearthed' by Professor Lud'a Klusáková, who analyzed them in a very stimulating study on the Western/Christian view of the Ottoman townscape (Klusáková, 2002).

All these sort of information, both in shape of description or visual narratives, give a precise idea of how articulate and complex the urban or territorial transformations in Thrace were; moreover how the western travelers perceived the urban spaces and were mesmerized by the architecture designed by Sinan, as a 'real' Ottoman landscape, emphasized by landmarks as minarets and domes to celebrate and confirm the power and the hegemony of the Crescent in those lands.

More than the historical analysis of these complexes and buildings studied in recent years by many scholars, the aim of this paper is to seek for the changes, which have succeeded in these areas, highlighting the landscape and the urban spaces in which it is possible to integrate these complexes today. This is an important issue that still needs to be evaluated well, because it must be considered not only the masterpieces left by Sinan in the territory of Thrace, but also the territory itself, the surrounding environment in which those buildings have existed in the past and how the same buildings are seen

<sup>4</sup> In general, it is possible to find many sources on travel literature in the Ottoman Empire in the following texts: Yerasimos, (1991); Klusáková, (2002); and more recent, specifically for Sinan's works, see: Necipoğlu, (2005); Orlandi, (2009).

today, admired or even used, in order to survive.

The 'Ottoman landscape' that can be described in this context, cannot be thought within the scope of an old fashioned romantic vision any longer; a passionate and intense view of a beautiful nature or a city, a village, reminiscent of old postcards. Today the landscape is seen and perceived (or it should be seen and perceived) as a reflection of the human activities across time, in a particular and defined area, and under certain conditions; this concept includes the civilization, its history and its architectural culture as well. Because the landscape is not simply a territory, it is a continuum of overlapping physical vicissitudes and artificial modification occurring inside a specific territory, through the course of time. Following the signs of Sinan can be useful in understanding the importance of urban and rural areas in Thrace, through the construction of complexes, roads, bridges and all other the infrastructures connected to them. An urban/rural landscape - in this analysis - is a combination, or rather a continuous layer of a natural environment together with the development of human occupation, daily life, agriculture, farming, etc. and also a peculiar place transformed with the contribution and the 'artifacts' designed by architects and town planners. In this sense, the works of Sinan in Thrace, under the patronage of Süleiman the Magnificent or Selim the Second, and other important clients like the Gran Vizier Sokollu Mehmet Pasha or Rüstem Pasha, are incredibly surprising and impressing; they give a clue to understand not only the specific architecture of that time, but all the development program in these areas during the middle Sixteenth Century, in other words, the entire physical-political system - the agenda - in which they were built.

In a way, this work is created not to interest the study of specific buildings or individual works made by Sinan, and many scholars did it in an excellent way before, but it moves to the effects, the sum of these architectural experiences in a wider context. There is not a specific interest for the 'monuments',

the aesthetic appreciation for a complex or a single masterpiece, but instead, insisting in the urban and regional scale, the interest goes to the impact of those buildings and sites designed by Sinan in relation to the environment, in a large sense; therefore it can be taken under consideration the territorial policy of Sinan's patrons and how the architect was able to satisfy their needs, find the proper solution according to each specific site; or how the impressions of the visitors and travelers, the consideration that those buildings were representing for them, have been seen as a fundamental architectural and environmental heritage. From a critical point of interest, all the descriptions of this kind should be viewed as a whole. As explicit example, the recent works carried on by the Çekül Foundation goes in this perspective and in particular the map prepared by them on Sinan's works in Thrace (Çekül Vakfı, 2007). Moreover, their project called "*Sinan'a Saygı*" (Respect to Sinan), is an important step to enlarge the debate on Sinan's heritage and to increase the awareness of it towards a more vast public.

By considering the works of Sinan in Thrace in a larger scale, added as part of an Ottoman heritage in a wide region of Turkey, they can provide some links between several concepts; for example, it is possible to point out the connections between land, landscape and 'cultural heritage' through other concepts such as identity and memory. What it can define as a 'cultural landscape' depends on the values, both cultural and historical, and on the identity that is reflected in the territory itself. These values should be recognized by the local people, the real 'user' and acquired by the local municipalities and administrative authorities in order to define this heritage as a benefit for the collectivity and not only seen as a profit opportunity, as well as an important asset for themselves and for the maintenance and sustainability of the environment.

What is defined as a 'genius loci', the pure spirit of the place, in a particular site is somehow transformed by the architects, (in our case Sinan) who first recognizes and interprets the signs and the traces of the specific territory,

and consciously utilized all this information in his projects, turning and changing it, to obtain the result of a new space, architectural or urban, according to his intents. Today, all these beautiful and magnificent expressions of architecture can be seen and analyzed by collocating them in a sort of 'belonging' to a cultural landscape. It can commonly refer to this place, or space as a 'milieu', a site enriched by history, culture and other values, diametrically opposed to the concept of 'atopy', where every place is equal to another, indistinctly, without any specific characteristic. Of course, the entire process cannot be ascribed to the work of a single man – even if he was a genius in his practice, as Sinan surely was – but to a system in which the man occupies an important role in society, integrated and under the direction of wise patrons and where he has the possibility to make important changes and modifications, as the analyzed cases in Thrace have clearly shown.

Even if it is not an easy subject, what it is possible to emphasize is that the traces of the past and their presence, still visible in the present time, should consciously pass through conservation and restoration, not to create 'new' but already 'dead' monuments, or to make out of them urban space as 'monumental areas'. With awareness of the present situation and under very limited conditions, the restoration should bring the architectural works of the past to life again, integrating and innovating them in the contemporary society and in a more sophisticated concept of cultural heritage. In brief, many of the ideas presented here related to a definition of what can be considered worth in terms of 'Ottoman landscape', should not concretized only in a sort of open air museum on Sinan's works in Thrace, even if desirable, but should instead drive an awareness on the real wealth given by a heritage so extensive and unique, as the one we can find in that region.

With this specific intention, Sinan's architectural experience in Thrace can be helpful for the understanding of a large portion of Ottoman belongings disseminated in a very extensive region that can include all countries that are

part of the Balkans. The Ottoman architecture marks indelibly the territory, the local historical memories, their presence and the common matrix of cultural identity: crossing cities like Sarajevo, Thessalonica, Skopje, or countries like Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina or Kosovo or Macedonia, it is still possible to observe artifacts, along the provincial roads or in the minor urban areas, testifying the Ottoman achievement and preserving the memory and the history of a place.

In those lands, characterized by increasingly strong multiethnic and components from multiple faiths, the traces left by the Ottoman presence in almost six hundred years of domination, in form of towns, infrastructure, or architectural structures as mosques or *mescits*, public baths, caravanserais, covered bazaars, bridges and fortifications stratified in time, are unequivocally a bond, strong and direct, with both the general European history and the important role played by the Ottoman and Turkish civilizations in those border countries, not so disjoint or as far away as it is usually tend to think. Considering Sinan's examples summarily presented in the previous pages – a true testament in stone of a marvelous age – the hope is that such landscape can inspire and convey new energy to the people, stimulating a new interest in history and common rooted identities.

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