



FIG. 1—Konya: Selimiye. North Front View



FIG. 2—Konya: Selimiye. East View (neg. 29.324)

# SELIMIYEH IN KONYA

*A Replica of the Old Mosque of Fatih in Constantinople*

BY RUDOLF M. RIEFSTAHL

**O**F the mosques of Turkey, that which is perhaps the richest in associations and still remains a center of old tradition is the mosque of Mohammed the Conqueror in Constantinople, or, as it is called by the surname of the conqueror, "Fatih." It ranks in prestige with the Selimiye of Adrianople or the Ulu Djami of Brussa.

The original mosque, erected on the site of the famous Church of the Apostles, was begun in 1462/3 (867 A. H.) and finished in 1470/1 (875 A. H.). Of this structure little remains. Only parts of the courtyard—the north wall, certainly, and the east and west walls, perhaps—belong to the original construction. At least some of the columns supporting the domes of the courtyard are new. The present mosque itself is entirely new, replacing the old Fatih, which was destroyed by an earthquake on the eleventh of May in the year 1765 (1179 A. H.).

On account of the associations connected with the mosque, reconstruction was undertaken almost immediately. The corner stone of the present structure was laid on the fourth of Rabi I, 1181 A. H. (1767), and the building was finished on the fifteenth of Nisan, 1185 A. H. (1771). The new mosque was built on a plan entirely different from that of the original Fatih, but thanks to an admirable bit of research done by Dr. Mehmet Aga-Oglu, we have a sufficient amount of information concerning the nature of the old mosque. The evidence discovered by Dr. Aga-Oglu enables him to give a clear picture of the mosque and to publish a tentative plan (Fig. 3).<sup>1</sup>

The evidence used by Dr. Aga-Oglu is of two kinds: first, descriptions by Turkish authors who saw the original mosque; second, European drawings and engravings which show the mosque before the earthquake. The most important description, that given by Ewliya Chelebi, may be translated as follows: "One reaches the interior of the mosque by stone-built stairs which are placed on the right and left sides. The height of the mosque is, according to structural measurements, eighty-seven ells from floor to roof, and from the soil to the floor of the interior, four ells. The large dome is divided by fifteen ribs<sup>2</sup> and rests on four supports. On the side of the mihrab is a semidome. To the right and left side [of the interior] are two beautiful columns of porphyry."<sup>3</sup>

The *Garden of the Mosque (Hadiqat ul-Djewami)* published in 1768 (1182 A. H.) by Hafis Husseyn gives a description of the new mosque of Fatih and says: "Instead of the former two 'elephant feet' and the two porphyry columns, the dome was erected over four piers and the two porphyry columns were buried outside the mosque. The interior of the mosque was considerably enlarged [by this transformation]."

1. Mehmet Aga-Oglu, *Die Gestalt der aller Mohammedije in Konstantinopel und ihr Baumeister*, in *Belvedere*, no. 46, pp. 83-94.

2. This is probably an error: the logic of structure would call for sixteen ribs.

3. Translated from Dr. Aga-Oglu's German text, after Ewliya<sup>2</sup> Chelebi, I, p. 138.

The European representations of the old Mosque of the Conqueror shown by Dr. Aga-Oglu are three in number, but only the drawing by Melchior Lorichs, dated 1559, is of importance;<sup>4</sup> for the other two illustrations are evidently derived from this drawing, which was made on the spot.<sup>5</sup> This drawing shows a central dome on a polygonal base, with at least four buttresses riding on a square block. On the south side of the square block the semidome mentioned by Ewliya Chelebi is visible, though not distinctly. The east wall, facing the spectator, has four minor domes; the northernmost, separated by the minaret from the other three, is evidently one of the domes of the porch; and the three remaining must be domes covering the side aisle.

The perfect concordance between the drawing and the descriptions leaves no doubt that the schematic plan drawn up by Dr. Aga-Oglu is correct in all main features. Further corroboration is furnished by the plans of two other Istanbul mosques, Atik-Ali Pasha (Fig. 4), built in 1497, and Sultan Beyazid (Fig. 5), built in 1501-1507, which are brought in by Dr. Aga-Oglu as supplementary evidence.<sup>6</sup> The plan of Atik-Ali Pasha shows, instead of three smaller domes covering each side aisle, only two: the two ground-plan squares right and left of the "apsidal" semidome are omitted. This has the great advantage of eliminating the conflict between the pendentives supporting the semidome and the arches leading into the compartments right and left of the semidome. The main dome of Atik-Ali Pasha rests directly on the north wall, which is not recessed. The plan of Sultan Beyazid shows on each side four lateral compartments covered by four domes: the two compartments corresponding to the main dome, the compartment corresponding to the "apsidal" semidome on the south, and a compartment corresponding to the northern semidome of the middle aisle. This northern addition was no doubt inspired by Hagia Sophia. It opens through a wide passage into the east and west wings, which are a distinguishing feature of Sultan Beyazid. Furthermore, inner buttresses create a number of recesses along the north wall. Such recesses on the north wall are a typical feature of almost all larger mosques; the *khojas* are wont to stay in them. Though the relatively small mosque of Atik-Ali Pasha, which perhaps had few *khojas*, lacks these recesses, the larger mosque of Sultan Beyazid provides them, and we might anticipate that such a very important mosque as Fatih was not without them. This is, however, a minor detail, which would not appear on Lorichs' drawing and which does not affect the accuracy of Dr. Aga-Oglu's reconstruction of the plan. The existence of such recesses possibly explains, however, an apparent, though not real, contradiction between the statements of Ewliya Chelebi and the *Hadiqat ül-Djewami*. According to Ewliya the mosque rested on four supports, two of which would be the engaged piers of the north wall, while the two others would be free-standing piers. In the description of the *Hadiqat ül-Djewami* only the free-standing

4. Editor's note: Since Dr. Ricstahl's article was written Dr. Mehmet Aga-Oglu has published an article, *The Fatih Mosque at Constantinople*, in *The Art Bulletin*, XII, 2, pp. 179-195, in which, besides treating more in detail the position of the old mosques in the development of Ottoman-Turkish architecture, he has given two fresh pictorial confirmations of the correctness of his reconstruction of the old Fatih mosque. They are (1) a drawing of the old mosque from a plan of the water conduits of Constantinople, dated 1673 (1083 A. H.), and (2) a less exact

drawing of the mosque in a general view of the city in the famous *Hülner-Name* of Shahnamechi Logman Effendi, an illustrated book written in 1578.

5. E. Oberhammer, *Konstantinopel unter Sulciman d. Gr.*, Munich, 1902, pl. 13. This and other illustrations here discussed are reproduced also in the article by Dr. Aga-Oglu cited in note 4.

6. An exterior view of the mosque of Sultan Beyazid is given by Dr. Aga-Oglu in fig. 20 of the article cited in note 4.

piers are mentioned, as the "elephant feet," while nothing is said about the engaged piers. The porphyry columns mentioned in both descriptions are, of course, the columns which carry the minor arches supporting the minor domes to right and left and the twin arches enclosed by the shield arches to right and left below the central dome.

Important buildings have always served as models for others. Generally, the replicas and imitations are of minor interest, but in the case of a great monument which has disappeared a later replica may be of the utmost importance, since it may give a much clearer picture of the lost original than literary quotations or other evidence can afford. During my research in Konya in 1929 I had the good fortune to find such a replica of Old Fatih. The mosque of Sultan Selim in Konya (Figs. 1, 2, 6-11<sup>7</sup>) must be an exact copy of the mosque of Fatih destroyed in 1765. All its features coincide with Dr. Aga-Oglu's reconstruction of Old Fatih. This identity cannot be accidental: Selimiyeh in Konya must be a conscious replica of the famous mosque in Constantinople, just as the mosque of Selim in Constantinople is a replica of the mosque of Sultan Beyazid II in Adrianople. Selimiyeh of Konya thus assumes great importance in the study of the evolution of the Ottoman mosque, and a description and analysis of the structure permit us to supplement Dr. Aga-Oglu's reconstruction in a few minor points.

I have, unfortunately, no information as to the exact date of construction of Selimiyeh. There is no inscription on the building, and the records of the Evkav (Pious Foundations), which probably give not only the exact year of the construction, but also the name of the architect, were not accessible to me. Fatih was constructed by the older Sinan, who died in 1475 (875 A. H.).<sup>8</sup> Selimiyeh, which must have been built between 1512 and 1520 (918-926 A. H.), cannot, of course, be the work of the same architect.

Selimiyeh has no formal courtyard, as has the mosque of Fatih. There is a large open space in front of the mosque, which is bordered on the east by the Tekke of the Mevlevi; but the porch of the mosque shows no traces which might permit the conclusion that this space was once inclosed by arcades. Opposite the mosque, on the north side of the open space, there are to-day remnants of rather flimsy buildings. On the west side of the space more or less casual constructions are still standing. I suppose that formerly the open space in front of the mosque was surrounded by light structures—medresses and other buildings—such as were required for the purposes of a civic center, not laid out according to a regular plan, but forming a loose and picturesque *ensemble*, which served at the same time as a transition to the Tekke of the Mevlevi. The extant walls may be remnants of these haphazard buildings, but we can only make vague suppositions. While a formal courtyard is to be expected in connection with a great sultan's mosque of the period of Selim I, it is not always found. It is missing, for instance, in the mosque of Sultan Beyazid II in Amasia and in the Chatuniyeh in Tokat, also built by Sultan Beyazid II.

The porch of Selimiyeh has seven domes, the middle one slightly higher than the others (Fig. 1). Dr. Aga-Oglu assumes five domes for the porch of the old Fatih. The drawings do not give any evidence on this point, and since as a rule seven domes seem to have been preferred in a mosque of relatively wide lateral measure, I should be inclined to assume seven domes for the porch of Old Fatih.

7. The plan of Selimiyeh and the photographs provided with inventory numbers in the captions are part of my archives of Mediaeval Near Eastern Art. Photostats of plans, contact prints and enlargements of the photographs

can be obtained through the Research Institute, College Art Association, 20 West 58th St., New York City, upon payment of costs.

8. See Aga-Oglu's article in *Belvedere*, *loc. cit.*, p. 93.

To right and left of the façade are the two minarets, tall, cylindrical, each with one balcony only. The sixteenth century drawing by Lorichs shows the same type of minaret for the mosque of Fatih.

The *ensemble* of Selimiyeh is dominated by the huge cubic block supporting the central dome. This block appears relatively low in Lorichs' drawing of Fatih, and Lorichs shows no windows save those in the base of the dome (probably sixteen in number), which are so large as to give the impression of a rather tall drum. In Selimiyeh the building up of the cubic block seems more logical: a slightly recessed semicircle on the outside walls of the east, west, and north sides expresses the gable arches of the interior structure and at the same time incloses three arched windows with two circular windows above. The relation between the main block of the building, the windows in the lower part of the dome, and the top of the calotte seems to be much better in Selimiyeh than in Lorichs' drawing, which may be slightly incorrect. Above each corner of the square central block of Selimiyeh two flying buttresses are visible, covered, as is usual in Ottoman architecture, with lead. They carry part of the thrust of the dome into the masonry of the corners of the square block. Identical buttresses (two at each corner) appear clearly in Lorichs' drawing of the mosque of Fatih. As in the rendering of the windows of the dome, Lorichs has not been entirely clear in the rendering of the semidome above the mihrab. In Selimiyeh the semidome is higher than the lateral domes.

A strange defect of the design of Selimiyeh is that the central dome, seen from east or west (as in Fig. 2), does not ride on the center of the square block; the north end of the block projects beyond the circumference of the dome in a flat surface (see below). In Lorichs' drawing the dome rides on the center of the square block. The three smaller domes covering the side aisle are very clearly indicated by Lorichs. Their aspect in my photograph of Selimiyeh (see Fig. 4) is slightly interfered with by two domes of tombs belonging to the adjoining Tekke of the Mevlevi. Nevertheless, they are clearly recognizable.

The essential features of the ground plans of the two buildings (Figs. 3 and 6)—central dome, buttressing semidome on the south, three lateral domes on each side—tally exactly. But a few slight variations may be noted. The two "elephant feet" carrying the dome are indicated as round in Dr. Aga-Oglu's plan: they may have been round; they may have been square; they may have been octagonal with projecting pilasters on all four sides, as in Selimiyeh. Dr. Aga-Oglu makes the semidome of Fatih rest on spherical pendentives; Selimiyeh has the more primitive form of squinches, corbelled by stalactites. I am inclined to think that these squinches give us a hint as to a feature of Old Fatih about which the sources are silent. Huge porphyry columns were not available in Konya; we find in their stead two rather elegant bundle columns composed of eight units around the core, with a bold, well designed prismatic capital (see Fig. 8).

But the greatest discrepancy between the two plans is in the treatment of the north wall. In Dr. Aga-Oglu's plan the dome rests on the north wall, and two slightly projecting pilasters correspond to the two "elephant feet" under the south part of the dome. In Selimiyeh we observe huge piers, 3.60 meters in depth, which form three bays of the same depth. In front of these piers are—just as in Dr. Aga-Oglu's plan of Fatih—slightly projecting pilasters which seem to carry the arches that connect with the bundle columns. The middle recess is a deepened, very slightly pointed, almost semicircular gable arch

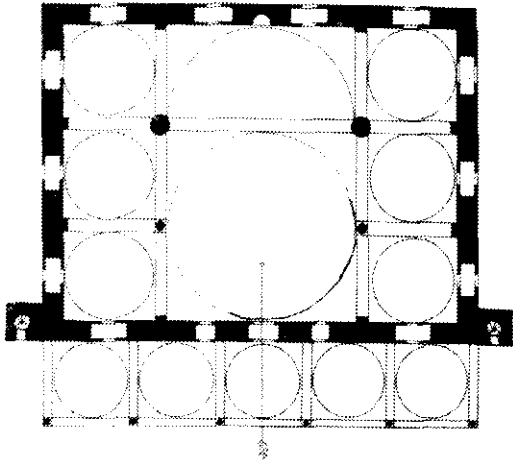


FIG. 3—Constantinople: Old Fatih  
Ground Plan (After Aga-Oglu)

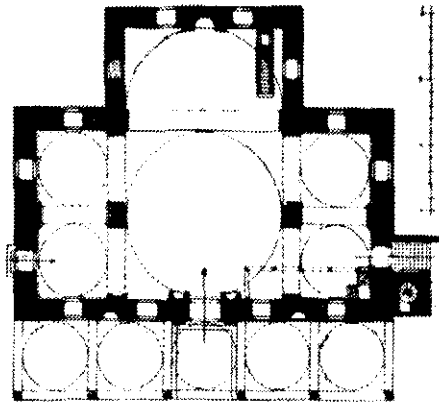


FIG. 4—Constantinople: Atik-Ali Pasha  
Ground Plan

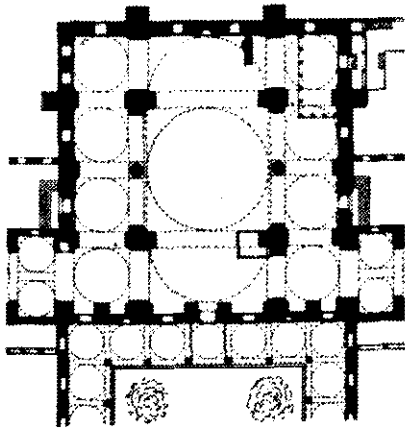


FIG. 5—Constantinople: Sultan Beyazid  
Ground Plan

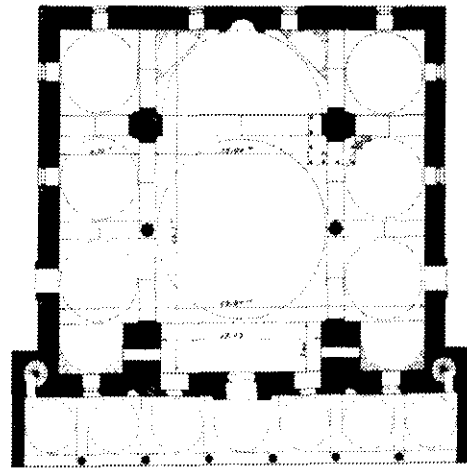


FIG. 6—Konya: Selimiye. Ground Plan  
(Drawn by Martin A. Charles)



FIG. 7—Konya: Selimiye. Detail of Carving on Minbar (neg. 29.337)

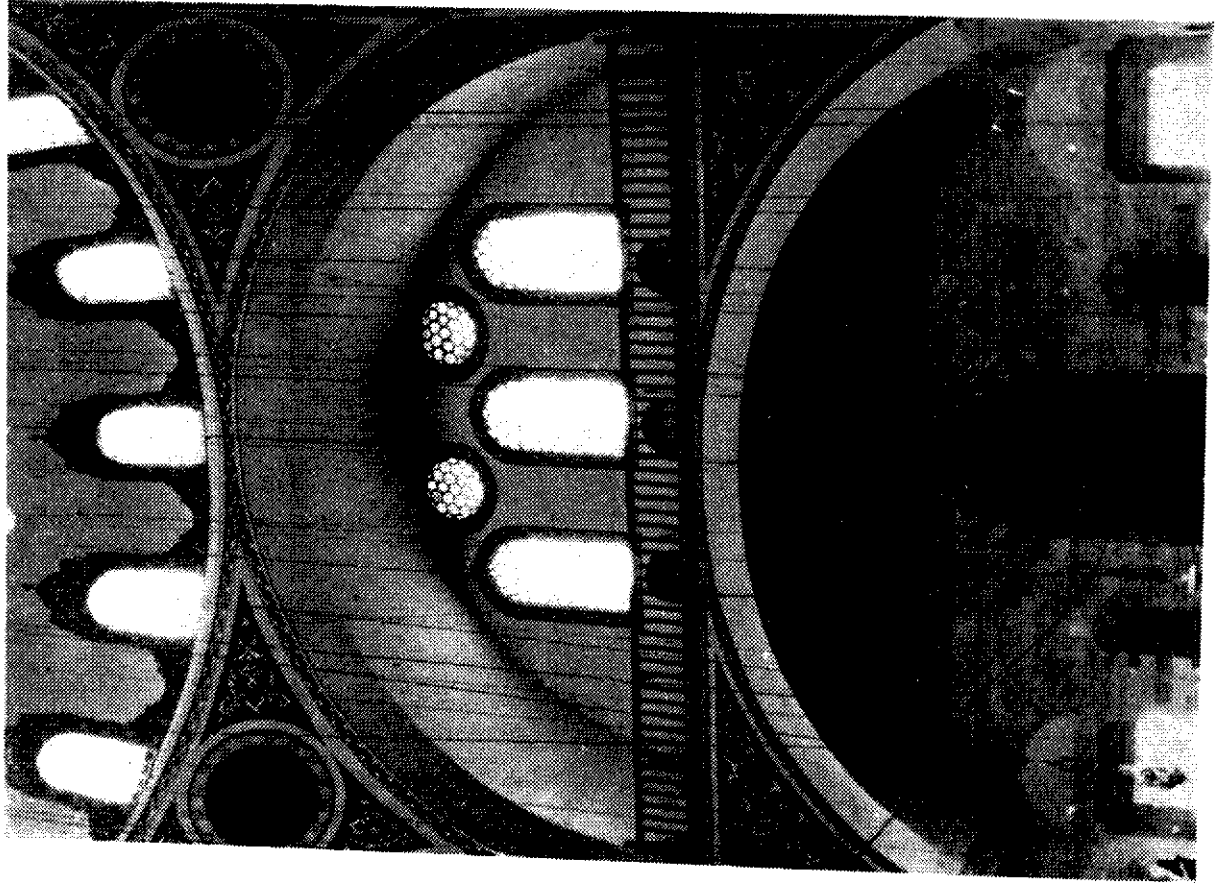


FIG. 9—Konya: Selimiyeh, Interior Detail of North Wall  
(neg. 29.334)

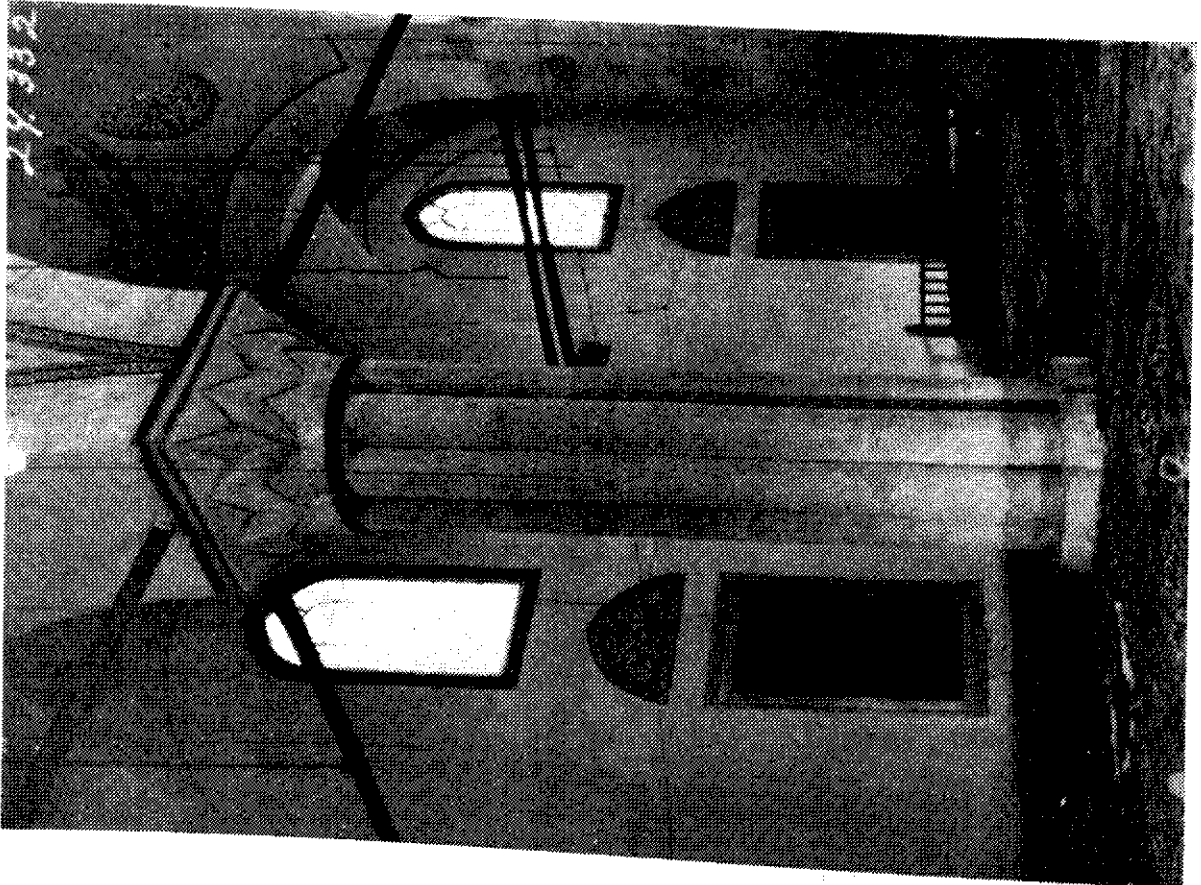


FIG. 8—Konya: Selimiyeh, Detail of Interior Showing Bundle  
Column with Prismatic Capital (neg. 29.332)

inclosing the only tribune of the mosque (Fig. 9). This tribune is supported by a segmental arch which swings rhythmically with the main arch and spans the entire width of the recess (13.07 meters). This is a bold but harmonious solution. The lateral recesses are ceiled by a short semicircular barrel vault ending in a semidome. The transition from the semidome to the rectangular base is effected by stalactite corbelling (see Fig. 11). The piers are pierced by narrow passageways in, I am almost tempted to say, the Byzantine manner. These recesses in the north wall leave, as already noted, a distance of 3.60 meters between the north wall and the face of the gable arch supporting the dome. This width appears on the roof as the flat surface on the north side of the square block which gives the asymmetrical placing of the center dome when viewed from east or west, and in the north view makes the dome appear lower than it should. But this defective feature was admitted because of the necessity of creating lounging space for the khojas along the north wall. Furthermore, these north recesses give in the interior, like the lateral domes on the exterior, scale to the central dome.

It is true that Lorichs' drawing has not the slightest indication of the asymmetry of the central block. Although I cannot prove it and although Lorichs' evidence speaks against it, I am nevertheless inclined to think that Lorichs overlooked this detail in a sketch which is after all rather summary, and that Old Fatih also had this feature. While in the relatively small mosque of Atik-Ali Pasha such lounging space could be dispensed with, it would seem to be of elementary necessity for a large and important mosque such as Old Fatih. The new mosque of Fatih has such recesses, which, often as I have been in the mosque, have always been occupied by khojas teaching, talking, or enjoying themselves in quiet meditation.

Our information about the side aisles of Old Fatih is very scanty. Lorichs' drawing shows that each side aisle consisted of three compartments covered by three domes. Dr. Aga-Oglu bases his reconstruction on the similar plans of Atik-Ali Pasha and Sultan Beyazid in Constantinople. Selimiyeh runs true to type. The domes of the side aisles are on plain spherical pendentives. The domed compartments of each side aisle are held together as a unit by the wide pointed arches supporting the domes. And these lateral space units are not confused with the central space: they are screened off from the center and yet suggest to the imagination even further reaches of space than they inclose. In the east and west walls beneath the central dome a subtle effect of screening is attained through a simple design. A large semicircular gable arch incloses an upper wall panel pierced by windows. The base of this panel, accented by a string course, rests on two pointed arches that are carried by the corner piers and a bundle column. Through the openings of these arches the eye wanders from below the big dome into the side aisles (Fig. 10).

Selimiyeh gives us a better conception than do Atik-Ali Pasha or Sultan Beyazid of the spatial harmony of Old Fatih. The *ensemble* is generous, simple, and not overloaded with detail. There is, of course, too much light in the mosque. Since the double-shell system of fenestration has been destroyed, leaving only the inner shell, about three times as much light as was originally intended floods the interior. Fenestration is always one of the weak points of Turkish architecture. It seems that a prosaic, practical sense has demanded much light where from the architect's standpoint the effect would be better with less. Such compromises are of all ages. The result is regrettable in this case, not because it



interferes with mystic, romantic feeling (mystery might be expected in a church, but has nothing to do with an Islamic meeting house), but because it interferes with architectural harmony. The bull's-eye windows in the gable arches to right and left are superfluous from the standpoint of design. The upper windows right and left of the mihrab seem also to have been imposed upon the architect: the way they have been squeezed within the stalactite corbellings of the squinches is most unfortunate.

The only real weakness of the design is in the squinches of the "apse" on stalactite corbelling which conflicts with the arches leading into the side aisles. Here the architect has paid the penalty which has to be paid by any one who adopts the Hagia Sophia *motif* of a semidome supported by squinches and pressed into a rectangular plan. This is the weakest feature of Hagia Sophia and is perhaps one of the reasons why its plan remained a *hapax legomenon* in Byzantine architecture.

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A few words should be said about the furnishings of Selimiyeh. There are no tiles. The carpets are mediocre. The mihrab is constructed of marble which is exceedingly well carved but of somewhat dry design. The decoration of the domes and other vaulting features is executed *al secco* and is modern. It shows an attempt to go back to earlier decorations of a similar style which have practically everywhere disappeared beneath the brush of the whitewasher or decorator. The only really fine piece in the mosque is the marble minbar (see Fig. 11). The hood of the minbar imitates in shape the pointed dome of the Tekke of the Mevlevi and is still painted blue, thus recalling that the dome of the Tekke was originally covered with beautiful turquoise blue tiles, fragments of which may still be seen in the surrounding cemetery. But in the latter days of Abdul Hami this delicate revetment was somewhat damaged and so deemed unworthy of one of the greatest centers of Islam in Turkey. The late sultan accordingly had manufactured in Kutahia the ugly green tiles with which the dome is covered to-day, but the hood of the minbar of Selimiyeh still bears witness to the old color of the dome of the Mevlevi. The finest part of the carving of the minbar is the very beautiful undulated vine with attached arabesque leaves that surrounds a triangular center field of geometric interlacing (Figs. 7 and 11). This elaborate vine design is somewhat surprising for the early sixteenth century, and I therefore leave open the question as to whether the minbar is contemporaneous with the construction of the mosque or later.

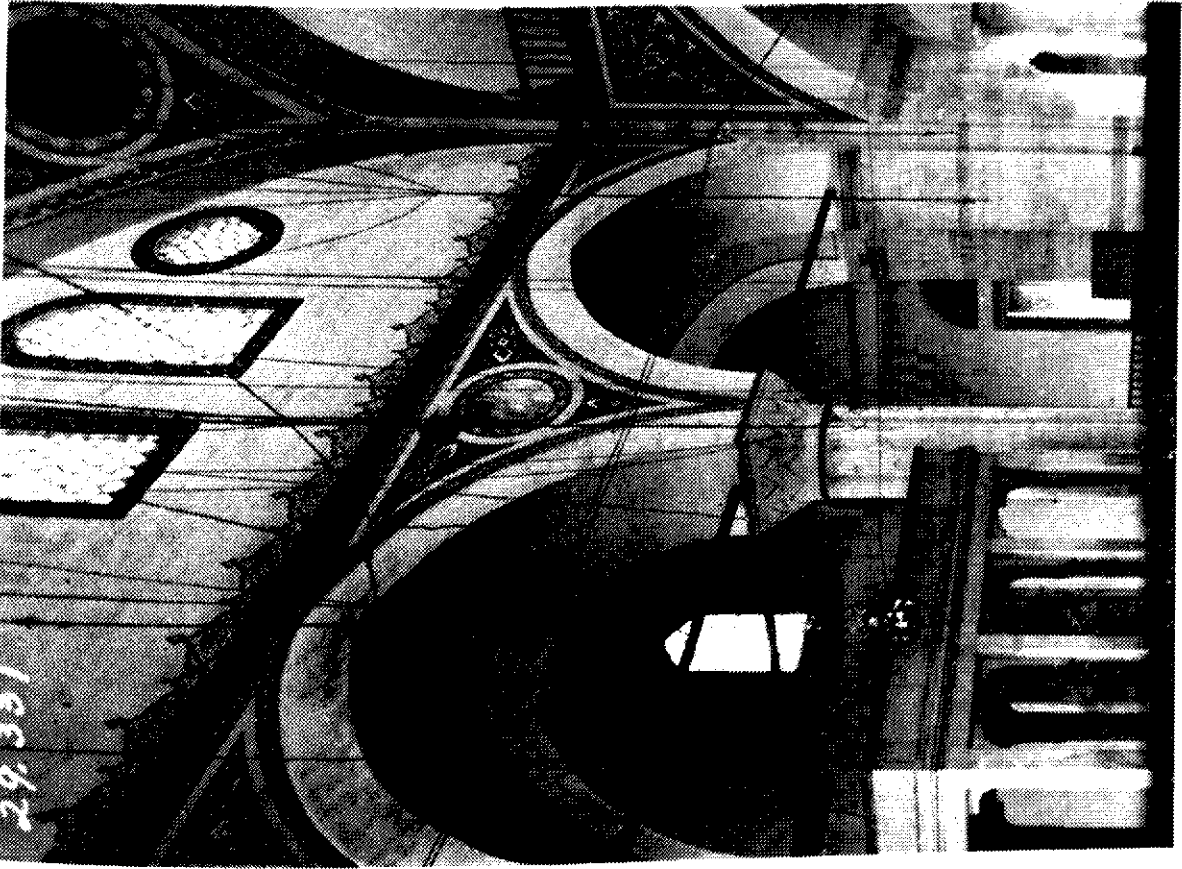


FIG. 10—Konya: Selimiye. Interior Looking toward Southeast  
(neg. 29-331)

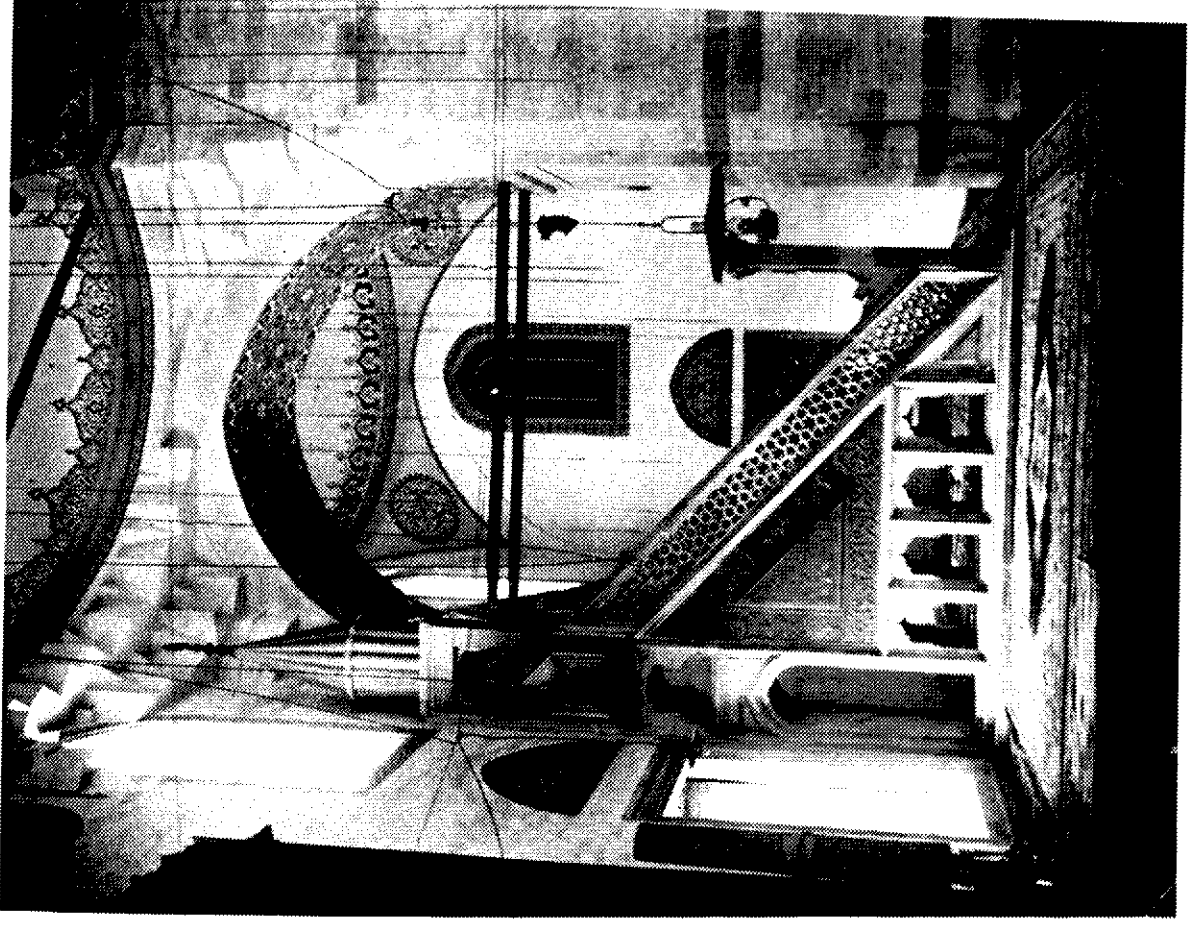


FIG. 11—Konya: Selimiye. Detail of Interior Showing Minbar