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Sancaklar Mosque: *Displacing* the Familiar

Abstract

Studying contemporary mosque architecture necessitates dealing concurrently with both the past and the present. Burdens of the past cause a crisis at a point when architects attempt to design prayer spaces that avoid historicist references while attending to the religion's liturgical requirements. This crisis indicates the moment at which architects are forced to become critical of what is preceding, and thus creates a challenging situation in the evolution of mosque architecture. This article takes the Sancaklar Mosque, designed by Emre Arolat Architecture (EAA), as its main object of research in order to assess this challenge. The Sancaklar Mosque presents a significant attempt to free mosque design from the prevailing formal practices observed in the majority of current mosques, by rejecting any clear reference to the historical mosque type and the use of any conventional mosque elements. However, I argue that while Sancaklar Mosque displays a clear break with the past, it is not ahistorical. The mosque suggests both a suspension of discussions on mosque architecture reduced to formal significations and historical prototypes, but also a different way of dealing with the past, which is, in this article, conceptualized as 'defamiliarization'. The Sancaklar Mosque provides a significant example for a project in which familiar codified formal elements are displaced as a particular response to the challenge that architects face when designing religious buildings.

Introduction

Scholars who seek to analyse contemporary mosques confront many challenges, some of which are underlined in the following questions raised by Oleg Grabar: 'What are the burdens of the past that seem to affect feelings

towards modern mosques? What are the expectations of the present that should somehow feature in today's mosques?'[1] Concerning these conditions, Grabar claims that 'a contemporary mosque is habitually subjected to an insistent search that looks for its connection with the past examples', and that 'to consider a modern mosque is to deal at once with the present and with the past'.[2] These conditions are particularly crucial when framing the problems faced by studies of Islamic prayer spaces. Renata Holod and Hasan-Uddin Khan assess that 'those architects who would normally have worked in a totally contemporary idiom, usually have to turn to historic models for inspiration or, just as importantly, for validation of their own designs on the basis of precedents'.[3] This tension between the contemporary and the historical also points to the undeniable significance of traditional models to both the creation and the study of emergent mosque architecture. Precedent might be approached either as something to be resisted, suggesting a clear and conscious rupture with the past, or as something to be appropriated and reused.

The past, then, receives far more consideration in studies of contemporary mosques than it does in relation to other categories of contemporary architecture. Mosques are usually classified and conceived in terms of their association and dissociation with historical precedents, and this burden can lead to a crisis when an attempt is made to design a prayer space that avoids all historicist nostalgia while simultaneously attending to the religion's liturgical requirements. Here, the term 'crisis' does not indicate a disaster, but rather the moment at which architects are forced to become critical of what is past and present. It provokes a move away from conventional norms, implies that we must reconsider known answers, invites architects to question the very essence of the act of prayer, and thus creates a challenging situation.

Liturgical requirements in Islam are very few. The essentials of the prayer space may be reduced to an area constituted by rows facing the *qibla* direction, indicating the direction of prayer towards the Ka'ba in Mecca. The typical liturgical elements are the *mihrab*, a *qibla*-facing niche where the imam stands to lead prayer; the *minbar*, a pulpit serving for the delivery of Friday orations; and the minaret, which enables the voice of the muezzin to be heard from a considerable distance during the call to prayer. The function of these elements has remained largely constant throughout history, and no obligatory forms are associated with any of them.[4] The holy book of Islam, the Qur'an, does not prescribe a visual form for these elements, nor does it set out what a mosque should look like; instead, it describes an open system of signs that should be materialized within the individual and collective experiences of the community. The formal expressions of mosques and their liturgical components are therefore mainly cultural, traditional and political rather than Islamic per se. Any continued attachment to these forms is likewise tied to the cultural or political meanings attributed to them throughout history by various Muslim communities.

This article explores the challenges of eschewing historicist models while meeting liturgical requirements in contemporary mosque architecture. My discussion will centre on the case of Istanbul's Sancaklar Mosque, completed in 2014 and designed by Emre Arolat Architecture (EAA) [Figure 1].[5] This mosque represents a bold attempt to move away from the prevailing formal practices observed in the majority of contemporary mosques, by rejecting any reference to historical mosque types and the use of any conventional mosque elements. Its resultant architecture raises a general architectural problem

Cemal Emden (Courtesy of Emre Arolat Architecture).

Figure 1: Sancaklar Mosque from the south.

concerning the relationship between contemporary architectural production and the various past traditions that collectively form its architectural heritage. In this respect, Sancaklar Mosque both advocates the suspension of prevailing understandings of contemporary mosque architecture, which are reduced to formal significations and historical prototypes, and suggests another means of engagement with the past, which is, in this article, conceptualized as 'defamiliarization'. To this end, the mosque will be scrutinized and discussed not in terms of its familiarity with codified formal elements, but in terms of its displacements of the familiar.

Sancaklar Mosque

Referring to the Sancaklar Mosque, Uğur Tanyeli asks: '[H]ow can this radical exemplar be constructed in a country where the majority of mosques embody political ideologies and historiographical nostalgias? And how can it convince a public that is highly suspicious of "alien" design elements?'[6] The so-called 'alien design elements' are actually the result of a defamiliarization process that displaces the familiar and makes it seem unfamiliar. This process is rendered operational by distancing the mosque from any specific historical model or conservative policies of political Islam in Turkey, so as to create a new context for practice. This context works as part of an open-ended process of interpretation of liturgical requirements, with the intention of deepening spiritual experiences in the prayer space.

In this article, I argue that while the Sancaklar Mosque displays a clear break from the past, it is not ahistorical. The displacements in the mosque reveal that its essential significance lies not in its familiarity with historical and customary formal elements, but in its attempt at defamiliarization. This endeavour to displace the familiar is not a consequence of neglecting or resisting the past, nor is it the result of a desire for architectural gratification; rather, it indicates a process of making the familiar unfamiliar by criticizing formal conventions and expressing them outside their usual contexts. This leads the familiar to become dissociated from its usual context and to reappear in a different form, although in the same relationship with the building. This critical and analytical approach to precedent and to the familiar suggests another way of dealing with the past, as well as a new approach to

the conceptualization and understanding of the prayer space. In the Sancaklar Mosque, the displacements are intentional, with the aim of increasing our awareness of the prayer space, and thus it mediates between intellectual order and the experiential quality of space, between the absence of fixed type(s) or signifiers and the essence of prayer. Its engagement with sensations and non-signifying elements rather than with customary elements, suggests the possibility of multiple engagements rather than a single articulation of function and form within mosque architecture.

Defamiliarization

I refer to 'defamiliarization' both as a concept for understanding how architects engage with the works of their predecessors and peers, and as an analytical device for discussing and situating the Sancaklar Mosque in the context of current practices, particularly in Turkey. Defamiliarization suggests a design process in which historical reference is used, but its traditional-cultural-political meaning is displaced. The architecture thus derives its significance from strategies that are historically atypical and applied to challenge the established formal codes within the traditions of mosque architecture. Examining these atypical strategies contributes to the discussion and mapping of critical attitudes in the larger context of architectural practice.

The concept of defamiliarization was first introduced by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky to explicate 'the purpose and the technique of the art'.[7] 'Making the familiar seem strange', the effect of defamiliarization is 'to look with a high level of awareness' via an open-ended process of interpretation and criticism.[8] Building on Shklovsky's suggestion that a work of art 'is defined in relation to other, already existing forms', architecture can be considered a critical engagement in which architects interpret disparate sources and historical types through design as a form of active criticism. Defamiliarization tries to distance a work from any prototypes, not by ignoring them, but by addressing them indirectly so as to resist any clichés. Such an approach results in an open-ended process that does not instrumentalize the past or read the work as an effect of linear causality, but rather reveals its specific conceptual standpoint. In this regard, Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization may be applied to steer architectural discussions of contemporary mosques away from unquestioningly accepted normative typologies and towards more creative and critical readings of traditional models. This shift suggests new understandings of the artefacts of the past as multivalent sources of knowledge rather than as problem-solving models or ideal solutions.

To better understand defamiliarization, two related terms need to be clarified: 'familiar' and 'displacement'. While 'familiar' refers to easily recognized and habitual ways of doing things, in the context of mosque architecture it indicates essential religio-symbolic elements and any predetermined formal norms that may be assigned to these elements as a matter of convention. In the majority of contemporary mosques, both in Turkey and elsewhere, an automatized formal practice can be identified that paves the way for the emergence of a 'global mosque' image, shaped mainly by the use of the dome and minaret. Even in mosques with a comparatively more 'modern' look, these two features accompany the design process. 'Displacement', by contrast, indicates a disengagement of a work from its usual and specific historical-political-social connections, and although these are not disregarded altogether, they are treated critically in new forms. This process, which entails situating oneself

inside the crisis by embracing a high level of awareness, provides the space for an informed critique of the tradition of mosque architecture.

Critical Attitudes: Organization or Experience of Prayer Space

In Turkey, mosque architecture is overburdened with political connotations. With the domination of a religious ideology in governments since the late 1990s, there has been a coincident boom in mosque construction, and the mosque, traditionally a place of prayer, has increasingly become an ideological and political space. Redefinitions of Islam have now emerged as a socio-political force that also seeks symbolic attributes within a newly defined religio-nationalist formation. This search for symbolism then turns popular reactions into material practices, so that the past is objectified and reasserted with strongly defined stereotyped and institutionalized images. As a result of a conscious political desire for an 'Islamic' image, the use of such identifiable elements as the dome and minaret is becoming ever more frequent in today's mosques. Revivalist projects embodying Ottomanist nostalgia are produced mainly as replicas of the sixteenth-century classical Ottoman mosques, particularly those of the architect Sinan. This is an intentional approach, as in these new modes of political Islam Sinan is constituted as a legendary figure signifying the relationship between political power and architecture, and his mosques represent the golden age of the Ottoman Empire. His works in this regard satisfy the historicist and nationalist nostalgia of present-day political Islam.[9] Holod and Khan label these replicas as 'Ottomanesque', 'as if one were seeing a sixteenth-century Ottoman mosque by Sinan in a distorting mirror'.[10]

The best-known example of this phenomenon is Kocatepe Mosque in Ankara [Figure 2], which is an adaptation of Sinan's Şehzade Mosque, and was built to replace Vedat Dalokay's competition-winning modernist project [Figure 3].[11] Neo-Ottoman revivalist mosques, especially those constructed in major cities like Ankara and Istanbul, emerge as part of the religio-nationalist discourse, and are presented as symbolic spaces that manifest the power of Islamic identity against the secular republican identity. It is in this sense that the state-sponsored mosques of Kocatepe, Mimar Sinan and Çamlıca, all of which imitate Sinan's masterpieces, cannot be referred to as 'historical': they are filled with contemporary ideological and political meaning [Figures 2 and 4].[12] Indeed, their link with the past is problematic, as the past to which they refer is not a real one, 'but a willfully manufactured myth'.[13] The political pressure to develop the 'Islamic image' has come to spoil the meaning of the term 'Islamic', and the result is 'an amalgam of a variety of sources and elements refashioned for current use'.[14] Today, these pressures are such that the current Islamist government has started to take control of architectural practices, pushing for a neo-Ottoman style for the architecture of not only mosques, but also other public buildings.[15] Like Dalokay's unbuilt Kocatepe Mosque, the foundations of which were dynamited (to be replaced by the present mosque), the construction of Nevzat Sayın's Mehmet Kavuk Mosque in Malatya was terminated since it was found to be 'too modern', and the absence of a central dome was criticized by the prime minister [Figure 5].[16] The extent to which something looks 'modern' is now seemingly defined in terms of its distance from Ottoman heritage, which is, unfortunately, reduced to a historicist model that includes a central dome and minaret. Dalokay and Sayın's mosque

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Figure 2: Kocatepe Mosque, Ankara (designed by architects Hüseyin Tayla and Fatih Uluengin, 1967–87).

designs were rejected since they did not satisfy the historicist taste that monumentalizes the government's current political ambitions.

In contrast to the evident classical Ottomanism of Kocatepe and similar mosques, there are also mosque practices in which the architect's engagement with historical precedent evolves as active design criticism. The mosque of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara, designed by Çinici Architecture, and the unbuilt Mehmet Kavuk Mosque, are examples that transcend simple mimesis, creating an evolutionary relationship with the historical mosque type. Their designs can be understood as the result of a critical attitude towards the tradition of mosque architecture focused mainly on the organization of prayer space.

The National Assembly Mosque in particular has become significant in terms of its challenge to, and stimulation of, debates on practices in contemporary mosque architecture. Displacements observed in the conceptualization and materialization of its religious space and elements have given rise to certain features that have inspired other buildings. Among these features are the mosque's integration with the surrounding landscape, which largely hides the building; the elimination of the traditional visual and physical
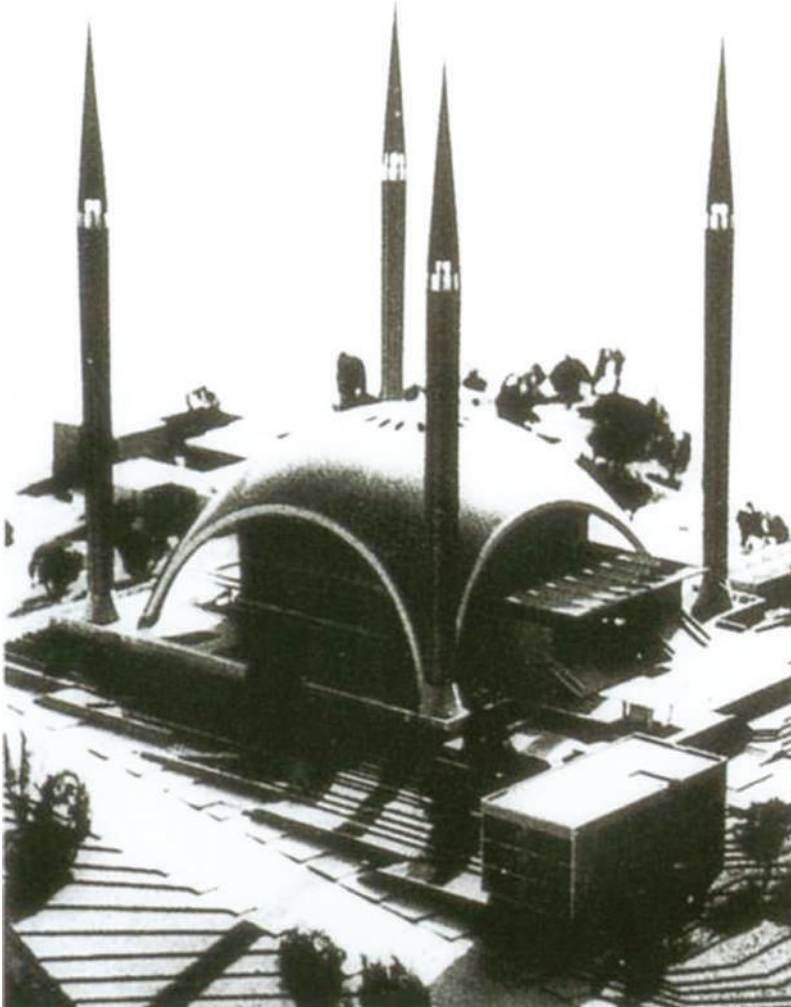
Vedat Dalokay Archive (Courtesy of the Dalokay Family).

Figure 3: Vedat Dalokay's proposal for Kocatepe Mosque (1957).

separation between the men's and women's areas; the expression of the *qibla* wall as a transparent surface; the transformation of the dome into a stepped pyramid; and the replacement of the minaret with a cypress tree [Figure 6].

Like the National Assembly Mosque, Sancaklar Mosque exemplifies a very different kind of engagement with the past and the familiar, an engagement that is tied neither to official political ideals nor to the sense of comfort that the perpetuation of tradition can provide. Emre Arolat Architecture has employed the device of displacement to bring a new perspective to bear on all familiar elements that identify the structure as a mosque. It is through this adaptation that the mosque resists being a fixed type, and so defies any reading attempting to identify a linear progression from a historical precedent. It uses certain historically atypical strategies to challenge historical, cultural,

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Figure 4: Mimar Sinan Mosque in Ataşehir, Istanbul (designed by architect Hilmi Şenalp, 2012).

traditional and political meanings attached to the familiar. Each of these strategies defines how the mosque's liturgical elements are displaced and how the prayer space is experienced.

Through the architects' approach to integrating the natural landscape into the mosque structure, Sancaklar Mosque rejects conventional forms and eliminates the separation between men's and women's areas. These departures from tradition may refer to the innovations of the National Assembly Mosque. Yet in terms of their attitudes to the past, these two mosques present different critical approaches. Although the National Assembly Mosque cannot be read as an effect of a linear causality with the past, its historical origin can be traced through a continuously developing design process. The mosque may not follow any historical type, but its relationship to earlier models is nonetheless connoted in the manner in which it distinguishes itself from them. As Mohammad Al-Asad asserts, 'in the National Assembly Mosque, the extensive analysis of the past seems more a prerequisite for breaking with that past

Nevzat Sayın.

Figure 5: Nevzat Sayın Architecture's proposal for Mehmet Kavuk Mosque, Malatya (2011, not built).

than an attempt aimed at establishing a relationship of continuity with it'.[17] The references to the past actually emphasize the mosque's distance from that past, which is all too evident, for example, in the removal of the minaret and the transformation of the idea of a central dome. Similarly, in the Mehmet Kavuk Mosque, the designer's reference to the hypostyle mosque type is apparent. Sayın states explicitly his preference for creating a limitless space of prayer through an infinite repetition of structural units, which he was able to create with the hypostyle model [Figure 5].[18] The Çinicis and Sayın both utilize historical precedents to initiate a design process that intends neither to justify the traditional type, nor to rework the type within the parameters of that typology. As a result of such a critical examination of the past, the precedent is no longer instrumentalized as an ideal model, but rather serves as a source of knowledge.

In Sancaklar Mosque, however, it is not possible to trace a single definite origin through a reverse mental process, and so one cannot identify a linear progression of a specific historical type. The fragmented nature of the architectural elements that make up the mosque, function more specifically as a trace of discontinuous development, having no single imaginable origin (but rather a series of origins), and this brings forth another way of conceptualizing and creating relations with precedents. In this regard, concerning their different ways of dealing with the past, each of these mosques requires different modes of examination, and these must be duly acknowledged in terms of the challenges they bring to the table.

Çinici Architecture Archive.

Figure 6: Turkish Grand National Assembly Mosque, Ankara (designed by Çinici Architecture, 1989).

With regard to the basic configuration of Islamic prayer spaces, Sayın asks a significant question: 'Could any place be a mosque?'[19] He answers his own question in the negative, explaining his critical belief that a mosque is 'inherently an iconic building situated in the world of signs and signification', and so its design process should be different from a factory or hospital.[20] Works similar to the mosques of the Çinicis and Sayın tend to prioritize the organization of the prayer area as total work, enhancing the spatial experience using recognizable forms. But there are other approaches that clearly avoid any reference to a specific historical type and architectural heritage. A complete rejection of the tradition of mosque architecture is extremely rare, although one courageous example is the design of Kamran Diba's Namez-Khaneh in the Carpet Museum in Tehran, where the prayer space is treated in a purely abstract form. Its structure is composed of two cubes, one located within the other, and both open to sky. The inner cube is aligned with the *qibla*, while the outer one is aligned with the axis of the museum [Figure 7]. Narrow full-height slits on both cubes indicate the *qibla* direction and act as a mediator between nature and man, enhancing man's spiritual integrity.

Such a design prioritizes the sensory experience of space, material and light, and so may be understood as the result not of a critical attitude towards the tradition of mosque architecture, but rather of an attitude that focuses on how space conveys and accommodates spirituality. Attaching greater importance to visual, spatial and tactile sensations, this approach brings to mind contemporary discussions of architectural programming that advocate a new
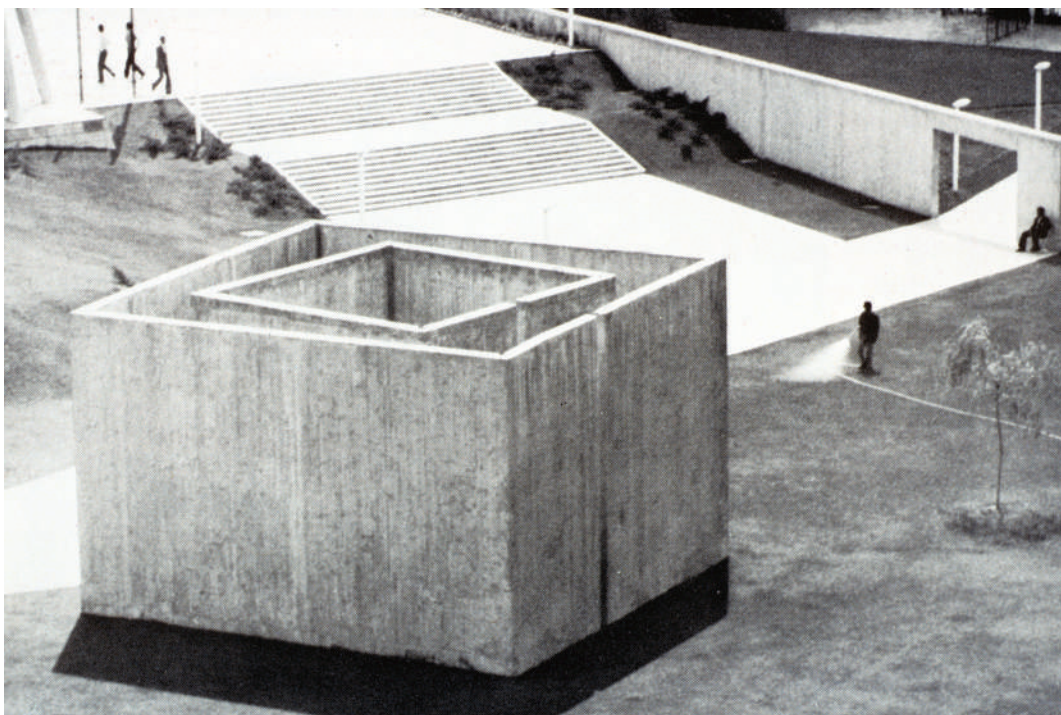
IAA6838 © Aga Khan Trust for Culture – Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Figure 7: Namez-Khaneh in the Carpet Museum, Tehran (designed by Kamran Diba, 1978).

relationship between space, movement, and event by introducing the experience of time as a fundamental issue of architecture. This shift to the experience of space in turn raises the question of how the programmatic interpretation and liturgical qualities of a mosque could be reconciled.

Sancaklar Mosque, in which the pursuit of extreme sensations manifests itself in the tactile and tectonic massiveness of the volumes and in the way natural light enters through from the roof, presents an architecture that oscillates between these two critical attitudes, depending on whether attention is focused on performance-based aspects of the prayer space or on the liturgical elements of the mosque tradition. While it evolves as a critical attitude to the performance of the religious space and presents a break from the historical type in terms of the abstract and pure forms of its spaces, it is not ahistorical. Considering the architects' confrontation with the past as an attempt to dwell in the present and, more importantly, to dwell in the essence of prayer, their approach to precedent is critical. The past is not ignored, but is rather looked upon with an awareness, and is referred to not 'by virtue of being an inheritance', in that it is 'intrinsically useful', but mentioned only indirectly. Accordingly, architectural innovation is sought not in the critical attitude to the specific historical type, but in the critical approach to the mosque's architectural programme and to the formal expressions of the liturgical elements through the device of displacement, which yields the fragmented structure of the architecture of Sancaklar Mosque.

Displacements

Grabar's claim that 'the true uniqueness of the Muslim visual symbolic system lies not in the forms it takes, but in the relationship it creates' implies a new paradigm in mosque architecture, in which the absence of obligatory forms for Islamic liturgical requirements challenges contemporary practices.[21] Emre Arolat Architecture takes up this challenge by bringing the programme and the qualities of the mosque to a space in which the familiar forms of the liturgical elements are displaced by the search for spiritual contemplation.

The main concern in Sancaklar Mosque is to create an architectural impression not at the conventional formal and stylistic levels, but at an emotional level, articulated through the considered use of materials, nature and light. The architects' confrontation with the established tradition of mosque architecture through displacement, situates the mosque in the present context by emphasizing the experiential qualities of religious space rather than its organizational aspects. Contemporaneity is examined in a special relationship with the past through a search for what is archaic, which does not indicate a chronological beginning, but rather a historical becoming that has been shaping the essence of the act of prayer. Explaining the architects' design concerns, Emre Arolat states that they 'tried to reach the "essence" of the ritual of prayer rather than searching for new and extravagant forms', because the 'essence can be eternal only when the form is ephemeral'.[22] This focus on 'essence' advocates 'modesty' in the formal expression of the mosque, where natural materials and light are used in their purest forms.

As defamiliarization requires looking at historical models with a high level of awareness that is not limited to the constraints of their origin, an architect's critical engagement with the past proceeds through the act of design. Such a critical engagement may be possible through the historically atypical strategies that control the design process, where the familiar is disengaged from its historical-political-social connections and reappears in a different form by sustaining the same relationships with the building. In the Sancaklar Mosque, this process of making the familiar unfamiliar is realized through such strategies as extending the mosque's field, multiplying and breaking the *qibla* wall, dissolving the relationship between the roof and plan, and flattening the dome in the form of a stepped ellipse. Through these strategies, the past is not rejected, but approached critically and referred to indirectly. As a result of the displacements in Sancaklar Mosque, the liturgical requirements are all present in the prayer space without being entrapped in historicist nostalgia: they are dissociated from their usual context and expressed as something unfamiliar.
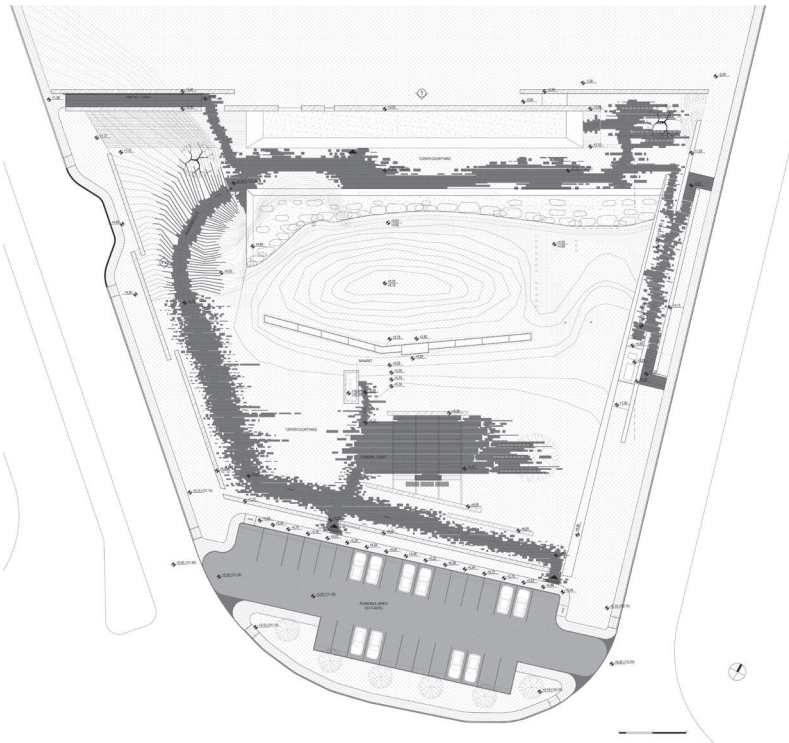
Extended Field of the Mosque

The Sancaklar Mosque is a modest structure that is set into the topography rather than onto it [Figure 8]. The structure and its landscape are integrated in such a way that neither dominates the other. This has two design consequences: first, the mosque is embraced on three sides, with only its north side and roof being visible; and second, the mosque becomes 'an extended field' that opens onto the view and expands into the natural landscape by adjusting itself to the slope. Although it is buried beneath the ground, the prayer area is not bound by the interior walls and instead expands towards the exterior. In this way, the entire site becomes a mosque; in other words, the mosque is a field merged with the landscape [Figure 9]. The mosque of the National
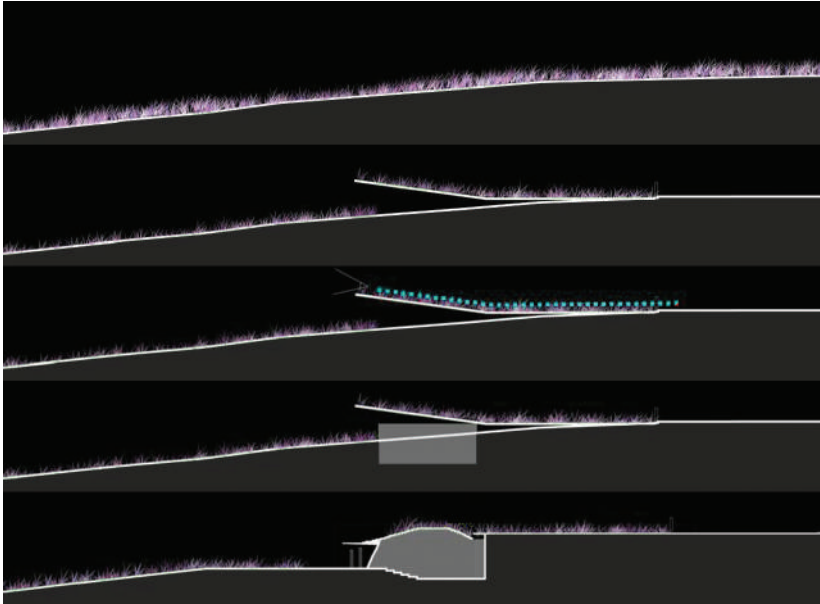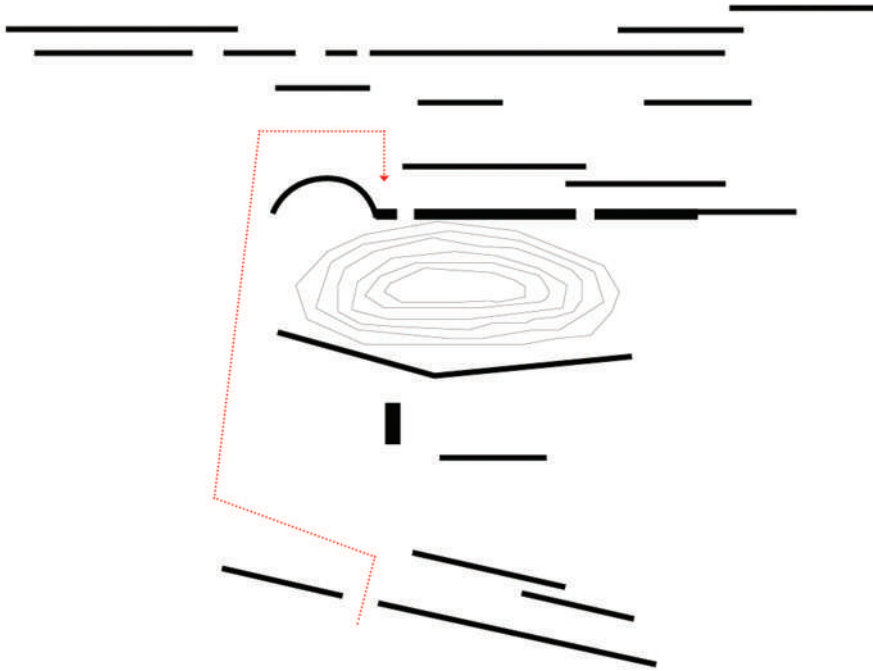
Emre Arolat Architecture Archive.

Figure 8: Placing the Mosque into the topography.

Emre Arolat Architecture Archive.

Figure 9: Site Plan.

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Figure 10a: Route in the extended field of Sancaklar Mosque, and parallel positioning of the walls to the qibla *wall.*

Cemal Emden (Courtesy of Emre Arolat Architecture).

Figure 10b: Succession of walls that constructs the extended field.

Cemal Emden (Courtesy of Emre Arolat Architecture).

Figure 11: Harmonious unity between the natural surface and the built surface; and the conic wall from the exterior.

Assembly, in contrast, although also hidden within the topography, continues to appear as an object growing out of the landscape.

In the extended field of the mosque, the entrance from the car park to the indoor prayer area is prolonged by sequences of different spatial experiences, so as to prevent an automatized perception of the landscape and to enhance spiritual contemplation. This route, which connects different experiences through a series of walls and a cascaded landscape [Figures 10a and 10b], seems to be freely paved with natural stone, giving the effect of an imperfect landscape. However, it is a calculated freedom, with the imperfection working in harmony with nature. The harmonious unity between the layers of topography and the entrance wall is achieved through a cascading and merging of layers together with the wall. The result is a tectonic manifestation of the construction through massive solid walls, and as the entrance itself is conical, nothing breaks this continuity of form [Figure 11]. This conical wall, the elliptical dome, the minaret and the cascaded landscape layers are fragments of the mosque, appearing as evidence of the ruptures in the design process with no single recognizable origin.

The *Qibla* Wall Displaced: Multiplication and Breakage

As Muslim worship is dictated by the direction to be faced, indicating the *qibla* is the key principle of the prayer area. Directionality is usually denoted by a wall, known as the *qibla* wall, which, when elongated longitudinally, guarantees a good length of rows for worshippers. The *qibla* wall, as the major spatial component in mosque architecture, works at different scales: it designates the mosque's direction within the physical context (city or district), demarcates the borders of the prayer area and serves as a point of visual focus during prayer.
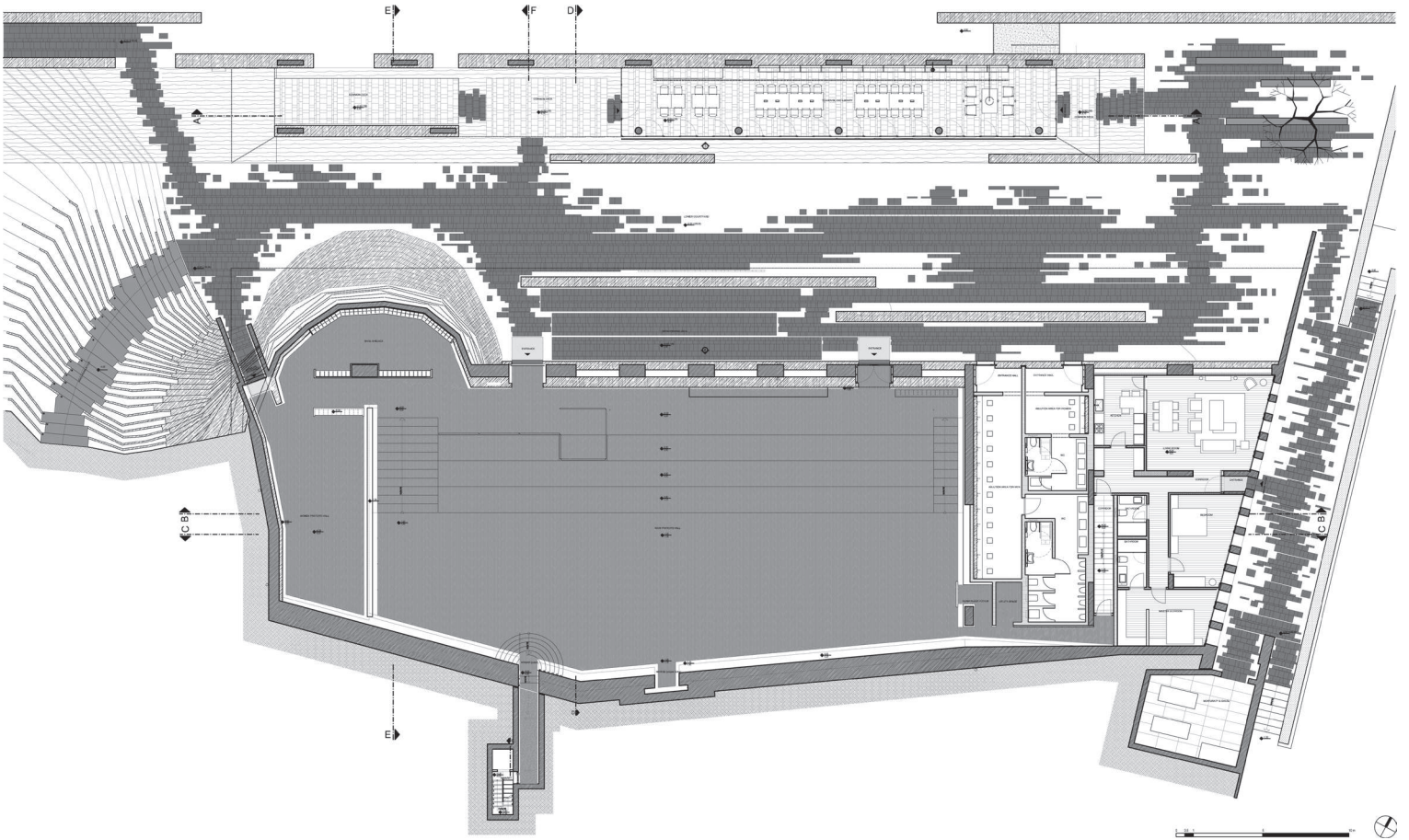
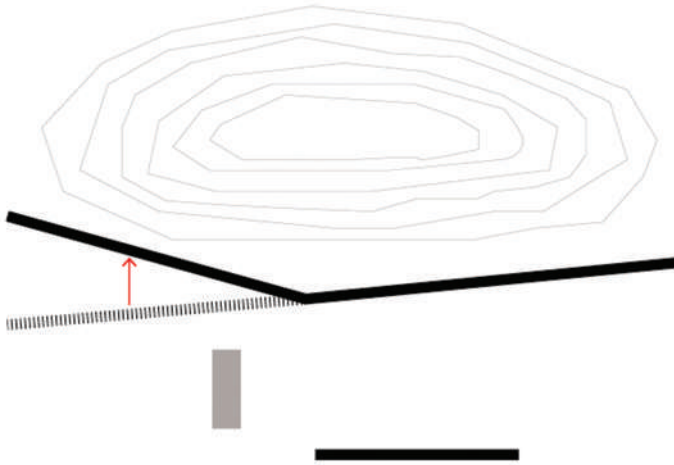Emre Arolat Architecture Archive.

Figure 12: Plan showing the qibla *wall, conic wall,* minbar, mihrab, *minaret, library and the imam's living quarters.*

Sancaklar Mosque's *qibla* wall is not a straight line, but slightly broken [Figures 12 and 13]. Through this atypical strategy, the wall seems to embrace the main prayer space. The break also has the potential to draw visual focus to the wall at the point where a change in direction is introduced. One would expect this focus to be emphasized with a *mihrab*, which is the usual focal point on the *qibla* wall, normally in the form of a niche. Here, the *mihrab* is a narrow vertical recess rising to the height of the wall, and a slight break – not easily observed – in the wall's angle occurs between the *mihrab* and the *minbar*. This optical illusion creates an ambiguity in one's perception and conceptualization of the *qibla* wall by displacing the balance between the *mihrab* and the *minbar* with the introduction of a subtle change in direction. This unusual design-act erases all of the commemorative and normative values attached to the *qibla* wall, so that its rigidity and absoluteness as the object of direction is broken. Although the wall continues to indicate the *qibla*, it acts predominantly as the main constructive spatial element, framing the liturgical elements (*minbar*, *mihrab* and minaret) and forming relationships between them. It denies the dominance of any one liturgical element over another by uniting them into one single element: the wall itself.

The placement of the mosque within the topography brings forth a challenging situation: as the slope rises towards the south, the *qibla* wall disappears within the landscape, becoming invisible from the exterior and thus preventing the direction of the Ka'ba from being understood from the outside. Yet the positioning of a series of walls parallel to the *qibla* wall as a means of constructing the mosque's extended field makes the *qibla* visible, and displaces any conventional meanings attached to the *qibla* wall by multiplying and spreading it into the outdoor area. In this regard, the *qibla* direction is no longer indicated by a single wall [Figures 10a and 10b], and this strategy of multiplication actually questions the wall's presence as only an object of direction, challenging its instrumentalization by repeating it so as to provide a sequence of spatial experiences that enhances perceptions within the prayer space.

The limits of directionality as a norm are also transcended in the National Assembly Mosque. The *qibla* wall here, in contrast to its evident massiveness and solidity at Sancaklar Mosque, is totally transparent, opening onto the sunken garden in front of it. While this creates a more intricate relationship between the worshippers and nature, it also challenges the traditional codes that signify the wall as the object of direction. The *mihrab* is similarly articulated as a transparent niche incorporated into the wall, and in this way the transparent *qibla* wall and *mihrab* niche increasingly become elements of interaction between the inside and outside that evoke an exceptionally strong impression through the absence of substance. The most radical aspect of the National Assembly Mosque can be considered the replacement of the minaret with a cypress tree, although it should be underlined that this substitution never conceals the notion of a minaret, but rather emphasizes the extent to which the mosque challenges the conventions of traditional mosque architecture.

The minaret at Sancaklar Mosque should be considered in the context of the building's extended field [Figures 9 and 12]. Constructed in the form of a tower, the minaret is more reminiscent of an observation tower than a conventional minaret. Its existence could be criticized for undermining the overall approach of rejecting the use of any conventional mosque element, yet it becomes justifiable when we consider the extent to which its

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Figure 13: Break on the qibla *wall, and the relation between the* qibla *wall and the minaret.*

Thomas Mayer (Courtesy of Emre Arolat Architecture).

Figure 14: The qibla *wall incorporated with the* mihrab *and the* minbar.

familiarity has been displaced. As the only prominently vertical element in the programme, the minaret can be seen from a distance and so functions as a landmark indicating a place, although not indicating specifically the presence of a mosque [Figure 1]. When entering the field, the minaret, with epigraphy on its wall, is the first indication of the presence of a mosque; but more important than its function as a sign is its function as a constituent of various spatial experiences in the field. Complementing a series of exterior walls, the minaret acts as a public element that welcomes and directs people into the prayer area. Although Sancaklar Mosque's modest structure seems to be hidden inside the natural landscape, the tower, presenting its individuality above the ground, belies this perception of the mosque, indicating the building's extended field and its embrace of the surrounding topography.

As mentioned, the other liturgical elements – the *mihrab* and the *minbar* – are formed not as decorative objects on the *qibla* wall, but as elements integrated with the wall to create one united element in the form of a continuous plain brutal wall that is disjointed from the roof and extent of the prayer area [Figure 14]. This condition of disjunction serves to announce the *qibla* wall's autonomy, which is further emphasized by the natural light coming onto it from the roof. Light, which affects the atmosphere and experiential attributes of the space, also becomes a disjunctive tool operating between the wall and the roof [Figure 15]. While the *mihrab* is a full-height slit in the *qibla* wall, the *minbar* – as a raised platform reached by several steps – projects from the wall [Figures 14, 16 and 17]. Although the size of the *mihrab* is commensurate to its presumed function as a focal point, it does not constitute a dominant transversal axis in the longitudinally formed prayer area, in that it is not on a direct axis with the entrance [Figure 12]. This is in contrast to the traditional alignment of *mihrabs* with doorways. At Sancaklar Mosque, then, the *mihrab* minimizes the hierarchical framing of the imam, instead simply indicating the place from where he leads the rows of worshippers in prayer, in accordance with the Islamic belief in the equality of all people.

Indoor Prayer Area

According to the Prophet Muhammad, 'the best place for prayer is the first row in the mosque', and for this reason, the walls parallel to the *qibla* are often longer than those perpendicular to it.[23] Nevertheless, centrally planned prayer spaces, which are no less axial in arrangement, have also been used throughout the history of Islamic architecture.

The idea of axiality as an essential characteristic of mosque interiors (particularly in classical Ottoman mosques with a centralized plan) is displaced in the Sancaklar Mosque. While ensuring linearity in the prayer area, the *qibla* wall does not allow for the dominance of any (transversal or longitudinal) direction or a hierarchy of any position [Figure 18]. Through this 'decentralization', the space and its elements are democratized, as discussed, in relation to the place of the imam. Thus the women's prayer area, which is habitually located at the back behind a screen or on a balcony, is here situated next to the men's area, with only an insignificant level difference and a low perforated separation between them.

In the architectural tradition of mosque, the dome has been a privileged and expected feature, and its popularity is further bolstered by the cultural and political interpretations that have become tied to it. In modern Turkey,

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Figure 15: Disjunction between the qibla *wall and the roof and slab of the prayer area.*

Thomas Mayer (Courtesy of Emre Arolat Architecture).

Figure 16: The mihrab.

Thomas Mayer (Courtesy of Emre Arolat Architecture).

Figure 17: The minbar.

the engagement with the dome has on the whole been shaped in parallel to the political project to reconstitute a religio-nationalist identity through the use of a neo-Ottoman style that mimics Sinan's centrally planned domed schemes.[24] The central dome is seen both as a 'symbolic' element, signifying the glorious imperial past, and as a tool for legitimizing the political ambitions and monumentalization of the power of the current Islamist government.

Emre Arolat Architecture employs the idea of a dome covering the prayer area, but frees itself from all of its political and historical attachments. In contrast to the traditional hemispherical dome, which delineates and caps the central space, the architects employ a stepped and flattened elliptical dome, a horizontal element that covers the mosque's linear rectangular area [Figure 19].[25] The simultaneous affirmation of the domical approach to vaulting and the denial of the indication of a central space through the use of an actual dome, displaces the concept of centrality and resists any historical or political meanings that may be attached to the dome. The reconcilement of the idea of a central dome and a linear plan displaces the familiar and reveals the dissolution of the relationship between the plan and the roof.

At the Çinicis' National Assembly Mosque, the central-dome idea is transformed into 'a stepped pyramid that further emphasizes the treatment of the mosque as an object growing out of the landscape'.[26] The dome is never removed, but is articulated in a more abstract manner by accentuating its verticality. This articulation gives the dome its strongest characteristic, which is visible from the exterior. The elliptical dome of Sancaklar Mosque, however,

Thomas Mayer (Courtesy of Emre Arolat Architecture).
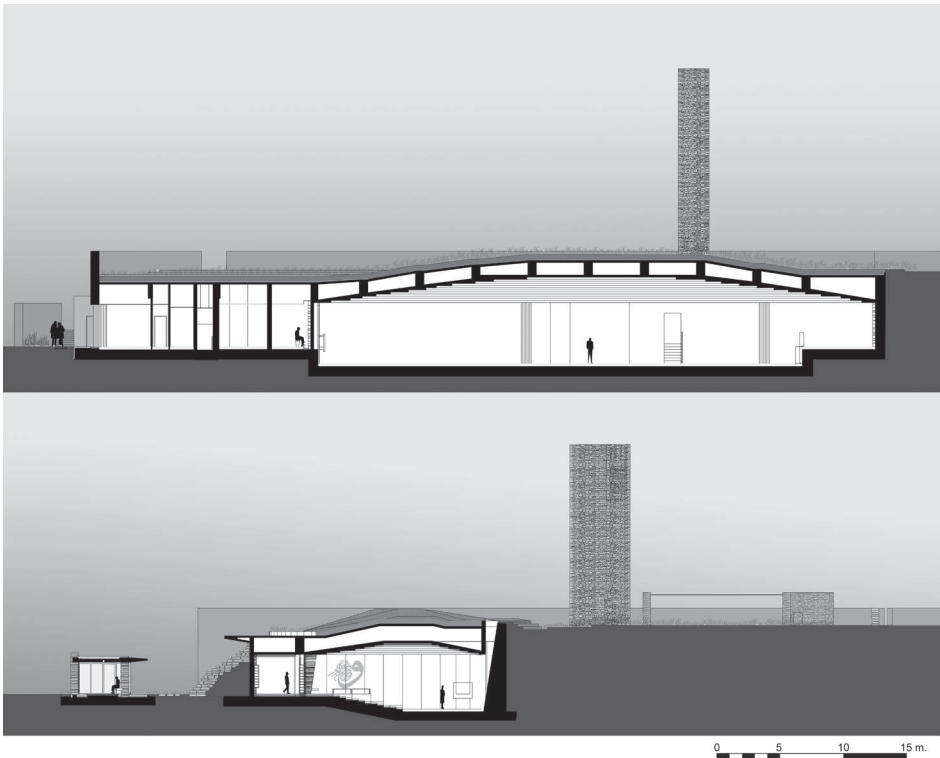
Figure 18: Indoor prayer area.

Cemal Emden (Courtesy of Emre Arolat Architecture).

Figure 19: The elliptical dome from the interior.

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Figure 20: The elliptical dome from the exterior.

Emre Arolat Architecture Archive.

Figure 21: The double skin of the elliptical dome.

is not strongly expressed from the exterior, where a continuous earth surface gives the mosque the appearance of having a flat roof [Figures 20 and 21].

Displacements through various historically atypical strategies thus reveal the fragmented structure of the Sancaklar Mosque's architecture. The fragments, including the elliptical dome, the conical wall, the *qibla* wall – with its *mihrab* and *minbar* –, the minaret and the landscape layers are all evidence of a discontinuous design process that cannot be traced back to any easily recognizable fixed origin or underlying structure. Nonetheless, these fragments manage to remain committed to the whole. As the architects do not dwell on an ideal past or future, but rather in the present, each fragment is articulated to enhance the experiential quality of the prayer space. For example, the familiar forms of the *mihrab*, the *minbar* and the *qibla* wall are displaced to provide the conditions for spiritual contemplation, such that the light coming from the roof onto the *qibla* wall is designed to give 'a sense of tranquillity and solitude'.[27]

Conclusion: Shifts in Religious Architecture

A complete rejection of tradition in religious architecture is very rare. Such radical examples as the Church of Light by Tadao Ando, Bruder Klaus Field Chapel by Peter Zumthor and Namez-Khaneh by Diba, represent cases where all stereotypical formations are lost and the essence of the act of prayer is sought. What is common to these buildings is both their responsiveness to the situation in which habitual answers and previous models are no longer adequate, and their willingness to inquire into whatever has been laid bare in the essence of prayer. Their approaches point to a crisis in religious architecture in which the repertoire of stereotypical conceptions of prayer space disappears, signalling a shift from the religious building as an entity to the experiential qualities of the prayer space.

The majority of mosques in Turkey today appear to be modifications of a limited number of historical models; yet, as can be observed in the mosques of the National Assembly, Mehmet Kavuk and Sancaklar, a search for architecture that avoids historicist nostalgia through the device of displacement frees architects from the heavy duty of producing buildings overburdened with (political and historical) 'meanings', and makes it possible for them to reconsider mosque architecture with no ready answers. This move away from the tendency to construct space according to familiar symbolic and stylistic codes that render the building recognizable, results in a search for what is specific to each particular case.

Sancaklar Mosque in particular proposes a suspension of discussions on contemporary mosque architecture reduced to historical prototypes. Issues brought forward by the mosque, such as the experience and performance of space, decentralization, fragmentation, discontinuity and dissociation from formal codes, suggest another mode of engagement with the past while also referring to contemporary architectural debates that approach event, space and movement as the main constituents of the experience of time. This approach questions the privileged spatial or formal strategies or codes that are considered to be tied to specific functions, and instead addresses non-hierarchical and nonlinear design processes, dynamic open spatiality and the architectural programme as a design objective. This in turn leads to the banishing of ideologies and conventions, and to the development of strategies that propagate potential interactions between activities and spaces. Recognizing these

issues, Emre Arolat Architecture seeks to situate its architecture in contemporary practice by subordinating formal concerns that are shaped by convention, creating a building with the capacity to deliver great expressiveness through very limited formal means.

This kind of radical reduction forms part of the architectural responsiveness that is created at the level of the visual, spatial and tactile sensations. At Sancaklar Mosque, the liturgical elements not only meet the religious requirements, but also, and more importantly, become programmatic elements that react with each other in a symbiosis that supports the condition of spiritual experience as a specific requirement in a prayer area. In this way, the prevailing concern is shifted from the creation of a mosque as a religious building, to the imparting of sensations of religious space as they are perceived and experienced, not as they are known.

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Endnotes

1. Oleg Grabar, 'The Mosque in the Islamic Society', in *The Mosque*, eds Martin Frishman and Hasan-Uddin Khan (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 242.

2. Ibid., 242.

3. Renata Holod and Hasan-Uddin Khan, 'The Mosque in Muslim Society: Past, Present, Future', in *The Mosque and the Modern World: Architects, Patrons and Designs since the 1950s,* eds Renata Holod and Hasan-Uddin Khan (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 13.

4. Grabar, 'The Mosque', 243. See also Grabar's book in which he discusses elements of mosque architecture and its development: Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). For the ontological roots of the liturgical elements, see Mehmet Kerem Özel, 'İslam Tapınma Yapısını Kuran Ögelerin Ardışık Zamanlı Ontolojik Analizi', in *Gelenekten Geleceğe Cami Mimarisinde Çağdaş Tasarım ve Teknolojileri*, eds H. Tokay, M. Kaptı, B. B. Cantimur and S. Coşkun (Ankara: Dinayet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2013), 226–30; Doğan Kuban, 'The Central Arab Lands', in *The Mosque*, eds Martin Frishman and Hasan-Uddin Khan (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 76–99; and Martin Frishman, 'Islam and the Form of the Mosque', in *The Mosque*, eds Martin Frishman and Hasan-Uddin Khan (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 16–41.

5. Besides Emre Arolat as the chief architect, Uygar Yüksel, Leyla Kori, Nil Aynalı, Fatih Tezman and Nurdan Gürlesin are the project team members. In addition to the prayer area and its accompanying activities (e.g. ablutions), the mosque contains also a library and living quarters for the imam.

6. Uğur Tanyeli, 'Profession of Faith: Mosque in Sancaklar, Turkey by Emre Arolat Architects', *The Architectural Review,* July 31, 2014, accessed August 6, 2014, http://www.architectural-review.com/8666472.article?WT.tsrc=email&WT.mc_id=Newsletter200. See also Özlem Erdoğdu Erkarslan, 'Sancaklar Camisi: İdrak ve Teslimiyet', *Mimarlık* 379 (2014): 18–22.

7. Among the seminal texts on 'defamiliarization' is Shklovsky's canonical essay, 'Art as Device/Technique' (1917). According to Shklovsky, the purpose of art is 'to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar [...]. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important*'. Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, eds Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12, original emphasis.

8. Ibid., 5.

9. For how Islamist thinking politicizes the past, see Berin F. Gür, 'Redefining Tradition for Multiple Geographies: Towards Juxtaposed Traditions and the Case of Islam in Istanbul-Turkey as a Discursive Act', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements*, Working Paper Series No. 136 (2000): 69–84. Gür argues: 'The present experiential world of Islamic thought in Turkey […] reconstitute[s] its past […] [and] transforms the religious memory into a literal and heroic imagery. […] [S]patial means of religious tradition are utilized for social, historical and the most importantly for *political legitimation*'. Gür, 'Redefining Tradition', 78, original emphasis. Similarly, Kishwar Rizvi addresses how Middle Eastern nations have turned to religious history as a source of legitimation, and discusses Turkey as a case study under the title of 'A Neo-Ottoman World Order: History as Ethno-imperialism'. She studies 'transnational mosques' as sources for understanding the role of architecture in disseminating religious and political ideology under the patronage of the government. Kishwar

Rizvi, *The Transnational Mosque: Architecture and Historical Memory in the Contemporary Middle East* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). Bülent Batuman also discusses the politics of mosque architecture in modern Turkey, focusing on the state sponsored mosques. He applies 'architectural mimicry' to reveal political instruments behind the state mosques. Bülent Batuman, 'Architectural Mimicry and Politics of Mosque Building: Negotiating Islam and Nation in Turkey', *Journal of Architecture* 21.3 (2016): 321–47, doi: 10.1080/13602365.2016.1179660. For popular and political perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in Republican Turkey, see Nicholas Danforth, 'Multi-Purpose Empire: Ottoman History in Republican Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies* 50.4 (2014): 655–78.

10. Holod and Khan, 'The Mosque', 13.

11. For details of Dalokay's unbuilt Kocatepe Mosque, see İmdat As, 'The Digital Mosque: A New Paradigm in Mosque Design', *Journal of Architectural Education* 60.1 (2006): 54–66; and Jale N. Erzen and Aydan Balamir, 'Contemporary Mosque Architecture in Turkey', in *Architecture of the Contemporary Mosque*, eds I. Serageldin and J. Steele (London: Academy Editions, 1996), 100–17.

12. The architects of Çamlıca Mosque defend their architecture against the criticisms of being a replica of Sinan's mosque with the following words: '[T]his is not a copy. This is a style', accessed January 21, 2016, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/camlica-ya-yapilacak-cami-taklit-mi-%20/gundem/gundemdetay/16.11.2012/1628040/default.htm. By announcing Çamlıca Mosque as the 'symbolic edifice of the governing religious party', the Ministry of Environment and City Planning registers the mosque's political power, accessed January 21, 2016, http://www.arkitera.com/haber/12243/erdoganin-camlicasi.

13. Holod and Khan, 'The Mosque', 13.

14. Ibid., 13.

15. Architectural practices reviving Ottoman heritage are not limited to religious buildings. Other than mosques, there are public buildings/projects (e.g. the Taksim Barracks project, state buildings, primary schools, courthouses) embodying Ottomanist nostalgia, provoked by the current Islamist government that imposes its own aesthetic taste, the neo-Ottoman style, as the style of 'new' Turkey. This historicist architecture, as an amalgam of a variety of sources, is controversial. A good example reflecting this controversy and the relationship between the political power and architecture is the new Presidential Complex in the Atatürk Forest Farm in Ankara, which was initially referred to as a palace, and then as a *külliye*, recalling building complexes of the Ottoman Empire. See the Special Issue of *Dosya* (published by the Chamber of Architects Ankara Branch), co-edited by the author: 'AOÇ | 39⁰55'51.4"N 32⁰47'57.3"E', *Dosya* 34.1 (2015).

16. Recep Tayyib Erdoğan's personal involvement in the termination of Mehmet Kavuk Mosque is a clear indication of the ideological content

embedded within the mosque, and the termination of the mosques by Dalokay and Sayın was a political decision taken by the governing power. The controversy over these mosques turned into a power struggle between secularists that supported modernizing the mosque, and the conservatives more closely associated with religion that supported a historicist approach. For an outline of neo-Ottoman Turkey, see Sibel Bozdoğan and Esra Akcan, *Turkey* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 197–99.

17. Mohammad Al-Asad, 'The Mosque of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara: Breaking with Tradition', *Muqarnas* 16 (1999): 165.

18. Nevzat Sayın, 'Bu Coğrafyanın Şifreleri', interview with Hülya Ertaş, December 2013/January 2014, accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.xoxo-themag.net/post/4820/nevzatsayın.

19. Nevzat Sayın, 'PANEL: ÇAĞDAŞ CAMİLER 2', in *Gelenekten Geleceğe Cami Mimarisinde Çağdaş Tasarım ve Teknolojileri*, eds H. Tokay, M. Kaptı, B. B. Cantimur and S. Coşkun (Ankara: Dinayet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2013), 286.

20. Sayın, 'PANEL', 286.

21. Quoted in Sibel Bozdoğan, 'The Aga Khan Award for Architecture: A Philosophy of Reconciliation', *Journal of Architectural Education* 45.3 (1992): 183.

22. From the author's interview with the project team on April 28, 2014. A poem, 'Essence' written by Emre Arolat (2013) is placed on the Mosque's wall: 'This is any place where you prostrate. It is clean. It has been built with the motto of humility. It neither boasts of its form nor does it swell with its own image. […] It rather seeks the hidden essence behind the form […]'. Emre Arolat, 'Öz/Essence', accessed May 19, 2014, http://www.arkitera.com/haber/18972.

23. Quoted in Özel, 'İslam Tapınma', 229.

24. Congregation under a huge central dome, inspired by the architecture of Hagia Sophia, was Sinan's main intention; spanning an area larger than Hagia Sophia, with a single structural dome, was his main motivation. For more on this subject, see Gülrü Necipoğlu, 'Challenging the Past: Sinan and the Competitive Discourse of Early Modern Islamic Architecture', *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), 169–80. From the time of its construction, Hagia Sophia has also 'been the rhetoric figure in a political sense, as to conquer it means to conquer the city of Istanbul. The building was converted from a church into a mosque by the Ottomans as a symbol of the victory of the Islamic world over the Christian world' (Gür, 'Redefining Tradition', 81).

25. The elliptical dome was seen in the Ottoman Baroque mosques. Küçük Efendi Mosque (Istanbul, early nineteenth century) is a prominent example of this, featuring an elliptical dome covering an elliptical plan. See Aptullah Kuran, 'Türk Barok Mimarisinde Batı Anlamında Bir Teşebbüs:

Küçük Efendi Manzumesi', in *Selçuklu'lardan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye'de Mimarlık*, eds Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, Lucienne Thys-Şenocak and Timur Kuran (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2012), 537–46.

26. Al-Asad, 'The Mosque', 161.

27. Tanyeli, 'Profession of Faith'.