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THE MOSQUE AND HOSPITAL AT DIVRIGI
AND THE ORIGIN OF ANATOLIAN-TURKISH ARCHITECTURE

THE MOSQUE AND HOSPITAL AT DIVRIĞI AND THE ORIGIN OF ANATOLIAN-TURKISH ARCHITECTURE *

The imposition of categories in the study of cultural phenomena is a necessary limitation. But a limitation which hinders the investigation of the relationship of an object of study with other conceivable objects and areas falsifies its understanding. This actually happens in the study of the so-called Islamic Art. In this paper I will try to show the handicaps involved in the prevalent interpretation of Islamic Art, through a general discussion of the nature of factors which contributed to the evolution of architecture during the Turkish period in Anatolia. I believe that the artistic stratigraphy through which we see the Islamic and related developments prevents us seeing a much broader process, namely the development of artistic forms in the Near and Middle East.

I do not intend here to add some minor remarks to the "Unity and Variety in Islamic Culture" thema. The variety is too great to enter into the bag of unity and we should probably invent a new conceptual frame, far broader in spirit to contain all known variations.

The origin and development of Turkish architecture in Turkey is a case in point. Between the end of the 11th century to the 15th century, in a period of great pragmatism, tolerance and eclecticism, all formal, technical and symbolical ideas then circulating in the Near East participated in the formulation of new patterns. And when we look at them, without a priori categories blurring our view, the radical change of behavior is obvious.

From this period of gestation I chose the complex of Divriği, not as a most characteristic monument of its time, but as an illustration of a phenomenal atmosphere where every conscious and unconscious tendency of the era was represented.

The mosque and hospital at Divriği were built by a lesser Mengüçük Prince, Ahmed Şah and his wife, and completed by the end of the third decade of the 13th century. By every standard it constitutes an exceptional building. I will only discuss the plan of the mosque and two of its portals.

Anatolian mosque architecture began with the memories of columnar or pillared halls, the so-called Arabic mosque, and Iranian and Centralasian courtyard with iwans. In Divriği we have a totally different approach at the outset: the Arabic mosque is a laterally developed and loosely defined building with an immense courtyard. The Iranian mosque with its four iwans and courtyard is an exteriorized building. Divriği is a mosque where the main emphasis is on the

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interior space; there is no courtyard; it is a longitudinal and carefully defined building (Fig. 1). For a superficial look it is a five aisled basilica. But more careful examination shows that it is not a simple building. Over the mihrab area there is a dome greatly emphasized by its decoration. This is a familiar feature in a Muslim and Seljuk mosque. As I tried to demonstrate elsewhere ¹, the dome over the mihrab is the reminiscence of earlier triple domed kiosque motif which has strong formal and probably functional connotations with Irano-Centralasian examples, such as the large musallas. In the center of the twenty-five units of the plan there is an opening which was rightly accepted as a reduced courtyard motif. As a matter of fact, there are many 12th and 13th century mosques in Anatolia where the memory of four iwans was represented by the disposition of the vaults around this center ².

So, in this seemingly basilical building, these two elements emphasized by their placement in the organism of the plan have features shared by other Anatolian mosques. And if one surrounds these central elements by an ambulatory one obtains the plan of Divriği. Certainly the memory of a basilical church should also be included. Thus we might present our mosque as a mixture of columnar hall, reduced Iranian courtyard, maybe Centralasian kiosque motif and five aisled basilica. That is the outcome of a totally syncretic approach.

We find this character more in the decoration of Divriği which constitutes its exciting contribution to the art of the 13th century.

The North portal of the mosque has the general shape of a Seljuk portal (Fig. 2). However the inner niche is double, its shape has nothing to do with an arch form and it does not have the common mukarnas niche. The general concept of this niche with its lack of an arcuated form is in strong contrast with the architectural traditions of the surrounding countries and of the period. This eventually might indicate, even if it is not easily proven, more primitive approaches to the art of corbelling, similar to Northern Indian examples.

The main decorative elements of this decoration are the large palmets and leaves (Fig. 3). As far as the individual features are concerned, the general tracery and the surface treatment of the palmets has numerous connections with the tradition of a stucco decoration which is apparently continued in all countries of the Near and Middle East, from Afghanistan to Egypt. There are parallels with the 12th century stucco work of Western Iran and Adherbaijan. However it seems here that every single motif of a riche decoratif vocabulary, expressed in different materials, was picked up individually, magnified under a microscope and recast into a new vocabulary of stone. There is an accentuated three dimensionality which makes this treatment unique (Fig. 4).

¹ Kuban, D., *Anadolu-Türk Mimarisinin Kaynak ve sorunları*, Istanbul, 1965, p. 119f.

² *Ibid.*, p. 120, p. 136.

Some of the motifs are obviously derived from wood carving such as those found in the interior faces of the door niche (Fig. 5). Parallels exist in Adherbaijan and in the Caucasus. Some motifs like eight pointed stars are very common shapes found everywhere, from Christian miniatures to Kashan tiles, and early Centralasian terracotta decoration.

Some forms like the dihedral arch of the niche interior are the outcome of a building tradition which goes back to Dura Europos and which is distributed from Egypt to Armenia.

The parallels of large discs are easily traced back to the decorative discs of the monuments of the Ghaznevides (Fig. 6). However some similar examples of 12th century from Adherbaijan is also known.

In every motif a long history of a material and formal background is to be expected. Apart this wealth of decorative vocabulary there is another aspect of this portal which puzzles and adds more to its importance: Within the general symmetry of the portal there is an absolute asymmetry in the details. This asymmetry is so obvious and so consciously executed that we are forced to attribute symbolic significance to this particular approach. This underlying duality is also stressed in some details of the interior, in the mihrab, in the iwan and on the portal of the Şifahane.

This possible symbolism led us to investigate more closely the main portal. And from the Grottoes of Taq-i Bustan to the tomb stones of the Timuride Period it was possible to individualize similarities of concept and similarity of treatment and form. The idea of a tree of life, connected with symbolical numbers, such as seven and nine, here represented by the arrangement of palmets, and the connection of a sun disc with a tree of life which has many examples in the Early Near Eastern art, also the idea of a door of paradise with a tuba tree and similar concepts have proved to be of extreme interest in dealing with this North portal of Divriği.

The portal of the hospital has the same peculiar aspect in its general design (Fig. 7). I believe that it is a liberal interpretation of some Medieval portal of the Holy Land. In this portal design everything has an aspect of improvisation. It looks as if a huge pilaster or pier, devised as a gigantic molding springing from its base, shapes the whole portal. There is no wall, no vault, no mukarnas decoration. This incredible sculptural unity is one of the characteristic aspects of Divriği art and its master (Fig. 8). This sculptural approach is further emphasized by the technique of stone carving which is executed mostly in situ, as to be seen, from still unfinished details.

The background wall is also unique: over the doorway there is the window of the second storey with a most unusual, atectonic column in the middle (fig. 9). A window over a doorway is not an unknown feature in Medieval architecture. But to put it in a portal and present it in a such a decorative way is unique. Here

the formal memory of the stonemason is at work in a fascinating manner.

Other decorative elements, like large unfinished palmets, huge corbelling mukarnas capitals without apparent function, the geometrical polygons translated from wood have the same spirit as those on the north portal.

A singular feature of the portal of the hospital is the portraits of a man and woman depicted on either sides of the doorway, over the large palmets, and now badly mutilated (Fig. 10). We know from the inscription of the hospital that the hospital was founded by Turan Melik, probably the wife of the founder of the mosque and the daughter of the Malik of Erzincan, Fahreddin Bahramşah to whom Nizami of Gence dedicated his *Mahzan al-asrar*. We may assume that the portraits were representing the founders. And even, if these sculptures do not represent anything, which is quite unlikely, still the use of human figures on a facade of hospital is not a common practice. Furthermore, as far as my knowledge goes, this was not a common practice in Christian architecture in this part of the world. The only example is the king presenting the church to Christ. Another more distant example is the Buddhist tradition in Central Asia where the donors are depicted on the walls of their foundation. The discussion of this problem might take a long time, and might lead nowhere. However it is worth while considering more attentively³.

In both these portals, the extraordinary wealth of motifs of which we detect formal relations to quite distant climates and times, and this overall approach to the design of a portal are the result of a peculiar environment where the most contrasting traditions existed side by side and where the formative and restricting influence of an established style never existed. The existence of an unrestrained decorative urge of diverse origins brought the representatives of different techniques together. This indicates a common climate of understanding among these artists who carved these portals, and this understanding was only possible in a cultural atmosphere where nothing was clearly defined.

In this brief outline I cannot give more details about the decoration of the mihrab or vaulting which again show strong family relationship with the Caucasus area (Fig. 11, 12). For the time being, we see Divriği vaulting as a culmination of the regional decorative stone vaulting tradition which seems to be developed under the influence of Iranian brick vaulting of the Seljuk Period.

We have at Divriği a mosque which is Islamic only by its program. But if Islamic is to be understood as a culture which stamps its production with a definite mark, it is not Islamic. And its most peculiar feature, its decoration, embraces, timewise and culturwise more than the Islamic environment provides. Divriği, however unique in concept, still it embodies a process which took place

³ On the both sides of the main iwan of the hospital of Keykavus at Sivas, built in 1217/8, there are two possibly human figures.

in Anatolia, after the Turkish conquest, and which is not unique. During the Turkish conquest the same spirit of experiment prevailed. In every instance the contributing factors were amazingly varied, but still bound with the older traditions preserved in the Near East. With the Ottomans again we witness the same process.

Two sets of architecture, one from Divriği, another from the Ottoman period illustrate this point and reveal the range of change which occurred in the same cultural environment (or so we assume):

- a. The interior of Divriği and the interior of an Ottoman mosque of the 16th century (Fig. 13, 14).

What is really relevant in the later phase of Anatolian-Turkish architecture is the emphasis put on the rational development of a structural system based on the dome. Three aspects of this new evolution place it outside the accepted standards of an Islamic style:

1. The dome used as a structural modul of a whole system;
2. The idea of centralisation of the building which relates it to the Classical spirit;
3. Space creation as the main occupation of architecture: again originally a post-classical idea.

- b. West entrance of Divriği and the west entrance of the Şehzade mosque in Istanbul (Fig. 15, 16).

In comparing the facades of the buildings in the Seljuk and the Ottoman periods we recognize again that for the Ottoman architect the simple emphasis of a portal was not enough and an overall composition of a façade has to be sought. The new approach to architectural design was not confined to the mosques, and is to be found in every building type. For example, Sinan, the celebrated architects of Kanuni's tomb does not take a Seljuk tomb tower as his example. He was living in an environment in which Diocletian's tomb at Spalato still found a symphatetic response, in a totally different spiritual atmosphere (Fig. 17).

It was not coincidence nor a result of simple imitation that Ottoman architecture developed classical Mediterranean themes. The dome was a familiar motif in the East as well as in the West, and in a centralized context it has been known since Iranian fire temples and Roman buildings. It continued to be an important architectural motif in the subsequent periods in Near Eastern architecture. But its potentiality as a core of an architectural style was not fully exploited. Ottoman architecture started with the memories of early centuries but took a new turn because of the prevailing environmental factors charged with domical ideas, mostly Mediterranean and post-classical in spirit. After the conquest of

Constantinople this spirit was consciously promoted by Fatih Sultan Mehmet. I believe that the development of this architecture as a supreme expression of a domical structure was due, in great part, to geographical factors. The center of gravity of the political relations of the Ottoman Empire was now Central Europe and the Mediterranean countries. New Ottoman society which believed in its mission and its superior culture was open to the experiences of former civilisations, as long as they were not in contradiction with the religious precepts. This was not possible in every field. But it was possible in the field of functional art. This ended with an architectural expression encompassing the Islamic and the Classical Mediterranean worlds. This is why the Turkish tradition was the only architectural style in Islam, which reevocates the Antique background, similar in spirit to Western Renaissance, not as a result of a *Zeitgeist* common with the West, but more as a result of a *Raumgeist*, shared with it.

The mosque at Divriği and the later Ottoman mosque differ with respect to the basic principles of architectural composition, and therefore, are formally distant from each other. They share however the common features of a process which structurally belongs to the Near East. These similarities could be summarized as follows:

1. Formal elements and structural systems are related to the older strata of the Near Eastern History.
2. In both cases there is a great power of innovation and syncretization which transcends the limits of a single culture.
3. In both cases the formerly reached and accepted standards are easily forgotten.
4. In both cases, the elements of composition can be traced back to the most distant traditions, but geographical factors decide the density of the re-current elements and the physiognomy of the new style.

If we try to understand Divriği and Selimiye merely in the context of a homogeneous Islamic culture there will be no conclusion. But if one explains them in the context of a Near Eastern development, as defined in the conclusive remarks of this paper, then they are the products of the same domain. There is no other possibility to explain the change from Divriği to Selimiye. All this vigor and creative energy cannot be seen as the result of a culture which sometimes accepted to come to a standstill already in the 10th century. This change was the outcome of newly defined ecological relations of which the components were differently arranged in every new synthesis.

From the foregoing discussion two important conclusions can be deducted: one concerns the history of Turkish Art, the other the history of Islamic Art.

First conclusion: This particular development was peculiar to Anatolia. It had no parallel outside the Turkish area, in any Islamic country, except some sporadic

exportations. In the beginning there were many connecting links between the Turkish dominated world, from Central Asia to Egypt. Especially for the decorative motifs, the most portable of all, there was a common jargon. But as time went on, the whole configuration of the new architecture was permeated with an Anatolian, Mediterranean and, as a result, what I call a Near Eastern spirit. In this history the relationship of Central Asian and Anatolian arts and architectures can be demonstrated. But this was not stronger than that existing between Anatolian and other peripheral artistic traditions. There are the arts of Turcic peoples. But there was not a single Turkish Art. Just there is a difference between the history of the Turks and the history of Turkey, so there is an important distinction to bear in mind, between Anatolian-Turkish art on the one hand and the art of Turkish peoples on the other. An the most distinctive Turkish Art was that of Anatolia.

Second conclusion: It is unrewarding to see the history of art and architecture in terms of limited distinct vistas, the so-called styles and civilisations which follow one another rising over the dead bodies of the former ones. This may lead to an interesting historical surgery where the historians dissect these dead bodies and find in them nothing but dead things. But fortunately the spatio-temporal change in the life of artifacts is more dynamic. The components of once defined Islamic Art enter into new combinations in the context of measurable changes, and then the old definitions do not hold.

The concept of the Near East, at least in our field of vision, must be redefined and reevaluated. We need to see the Near East as a storico-geographical phenomenon by itself where the interplay of change and stability are inherent characteristics.

In dealing with the architectural and other artistic forms of the Islamic period we should separate the cultural content from the artistic forms created within this culture. As Kroeber pointed out, in all cultural comparisons three aspects of phenomena are involved: cultural content, form of culture, their evaluation. What is and could be shared by Islamic peoples was a loosely similar cultural content. But the shapes of this culture varied regionally and temporarily. And if we consider that the Islamic Art was not born in a vacuum, we may be more apt to see it as a continuation of the Near Eastern tradition; a Near East where every period of its history was a mixture; the Near East which is the land of eclecticism by geographical necessity.

It seems that at a certain point in its history, this center of the old world found again the material expression of its geopolitical inner necessities in the history of Islam. Through Islam this inherent potentiality exteriorized into a political and cultural unity in the early history of Islam. The constituent factors of this unity were aboriginal. But in this land, eternally open to peripheral pressures,

this unity could not last. And again, it decentralized into regional entities in the formation of which latent Pre-Islamic factors reshaped the Islamic ones.

The clue to the understanding of changes that I presented in this paper lies here. Islamic is a vague term for these new regional syntheses. In the Anatolian-Turkish realm we are in a domain where this broad Near Eastern element, this element of change and duration, in its eclectic sense, in its underlying structural sense, dominates the Islamic element.

Istanbul

DOGAN KUBAN

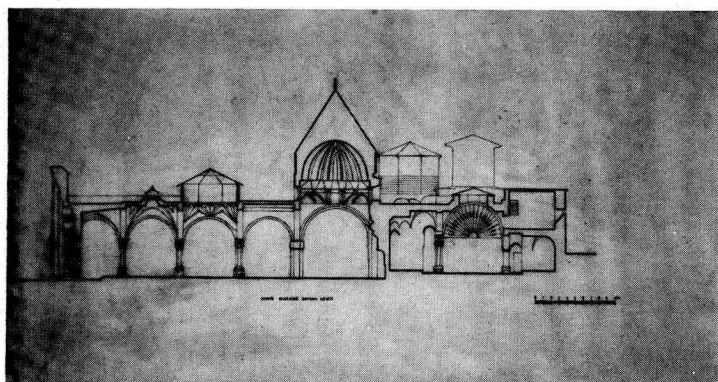
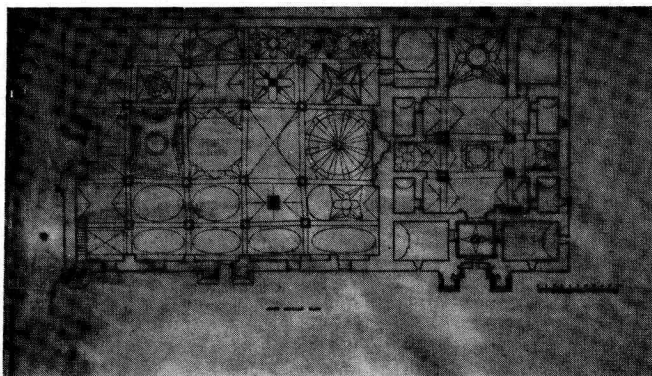


Fig. 1. Divriği - Plan and section of the complex



Fig. 2. Divriği - North portal of the mosque

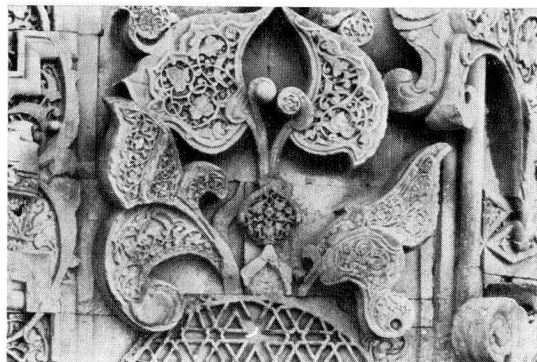


Fig. 3a. Divriği - Detail for the North portal



Fig. 3b. Divriği - Detail from the North portal



Fig. 4. Divriği - Detail from the North portal

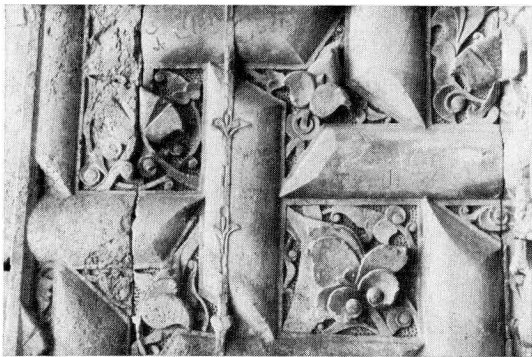


Fig. 5. Divriği - Detail from the North portal: interior of the niche

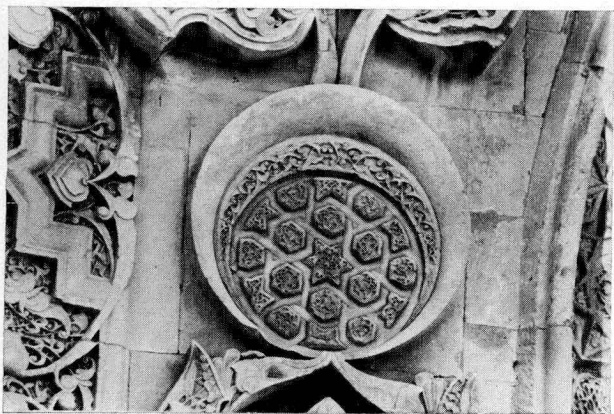


Fig. 6. Divriği - Detail from the North portal

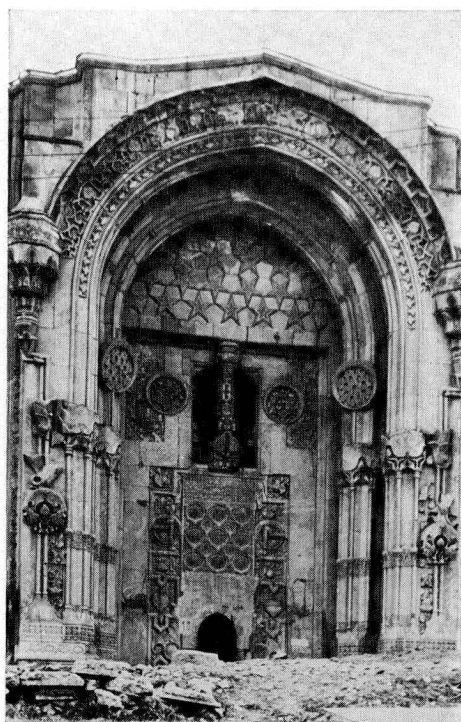


Fig. 7. Divriği - Portal of the hospital

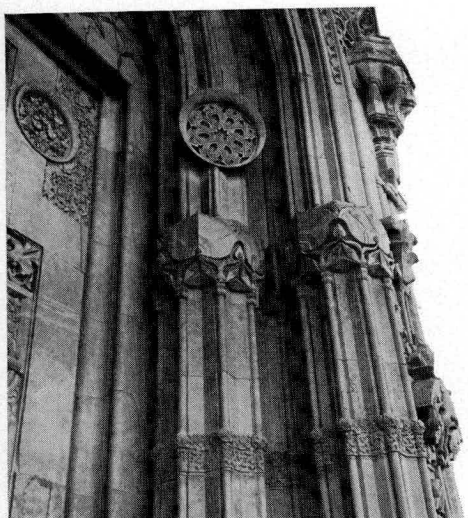


Fig. 8. Divriği - Detail from the portal of the hospital

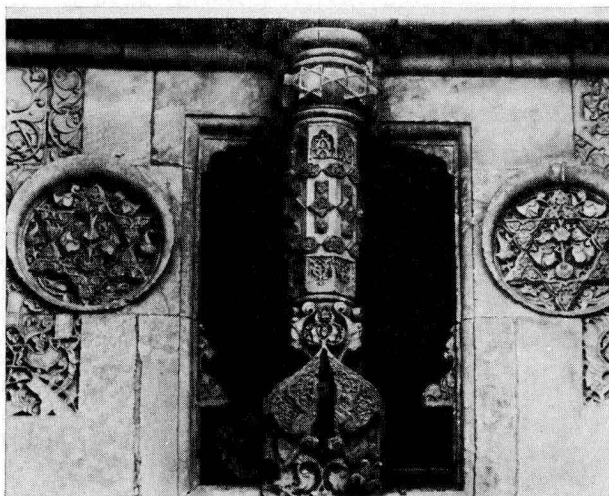


Fig. 9. Divriği - Portal of the hospital; decorative column

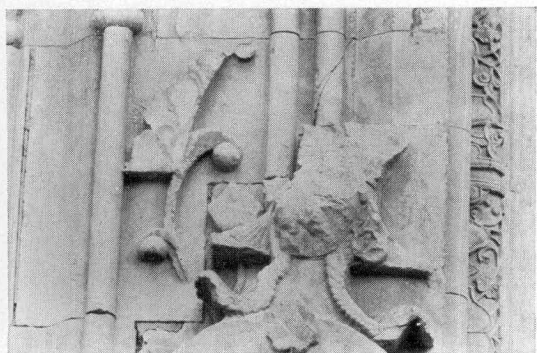


Fig. 10. Divriği - Detail from the portal of the hospital: mutilated head of a woman

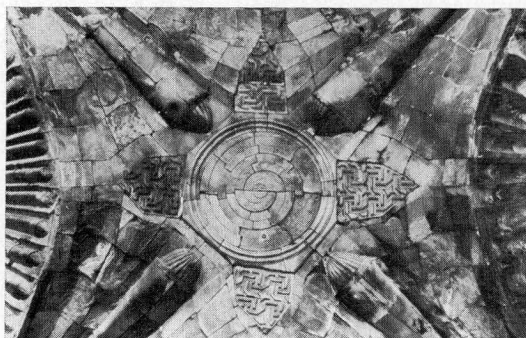


Fig. 11. Divriği - Interior of the hospital: decorative vaulting of the main iwan

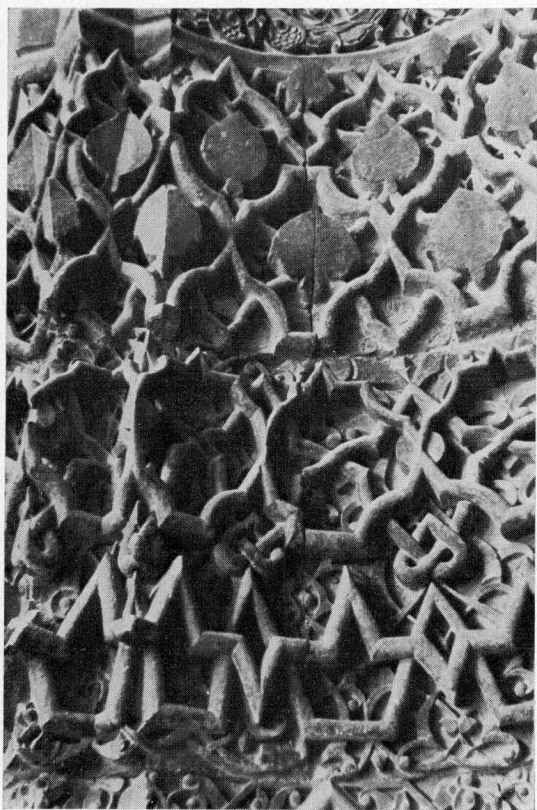


Fig. 12. Divriği - Interior of the mosque: detail of the mihrab decoration

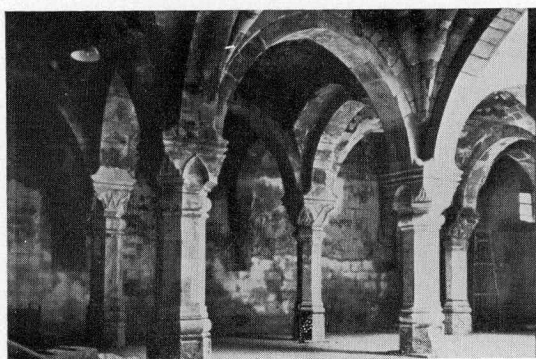


Fig. 13. Divriği - Interior of the mosque

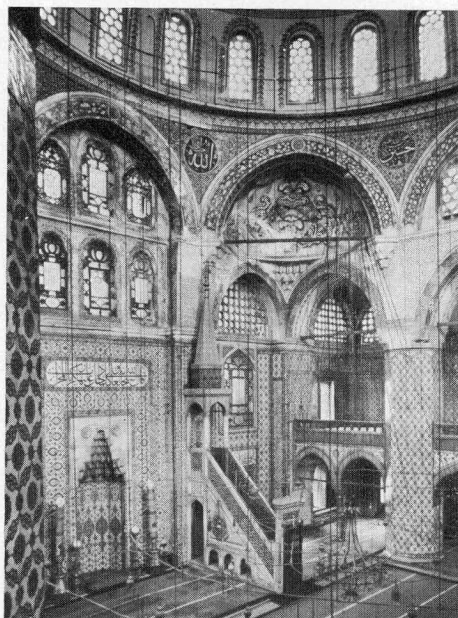


Fig. 14. Istanbul - Interior of the mosque of Rüstem Paşa



Fig. 15. Divriği - West portal of the mosque

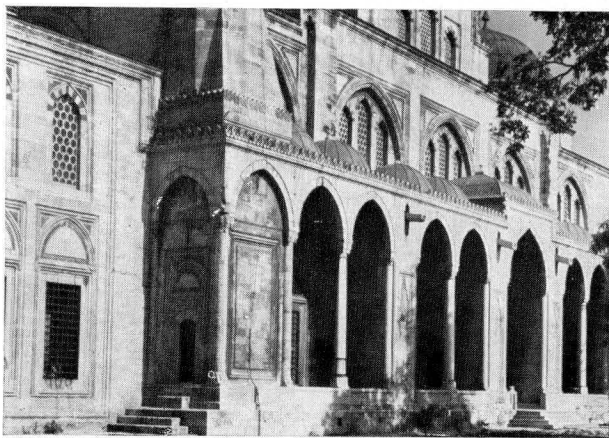


Fig. 16. Istanbul - Part of the West facade of the mosque of Şehzade



Fig. 17. Istanbul - Mausoleum of Kanunî Sultan Süleyman