

Julia Krajcarz

Jagiellonian University, Krakow
Jagiellonian Library, Krakow
Polish Institute of World Art Studiesy

ORIENTALISM IN THE ORIENT – ELEMENTS OF THE MOORISH STYLE IN THE SACRED MUSLIM BUILDINGS OF ISTANBUL

The sacred Muslim architecture of Istanbul represents an exceptional phenomenon on a world scale. Istanbul, because of its location on two continents, belongs simultaneously to two cultures: Europe and Asia (in the Middle Eastern version). This city could be regarded as a bridge connecting two different lands and cultures, as a melting pot where a new product is created from various components, and also as being on the outskirts of both Europe and Asia. Istanbul belongs completely to neither Europe, nor Asia.

This uniqueness of the former Ottoman capital, caused by its location on two continents, can also be observed in the architecture of the metropolis. What makes Istanbul unique and exceptional, is the fact that there is nowhere in the Islamic world, other than Istanbul, where all European artistic, architectural and decorative styles, starting from Baroque, have been used in the sacred places of Islam. Of course, the use of European styles in mosques can also be observed in different buildings in other territories with a strong Muslim tradition (for example, the *Aziziye Camisi* mosque in Konya, Turkey, which was completed in its present form in 1874, with its Neo-baroque influences; the *Tombul Dzamija* mosque in Shumen, Bulgaria, completed in 1744, which has French Baroque characteristics). But it is only in Istanbul where the full gamut of European artistic styles can be found.

Sacred Muslim architecture is characterized by different elements and decoration, which are specific to the countries or lands in which they are located. Therefore, the characteristic arrangements of the specific parts of Muslim sacred buildings can be classified by the place of its origin. These elements could be simply analysed by the example of their minarets. Tunisian

minarets are tall and usually have a squared plane. Minarets from the territory of present-day Iraq are conical, spiral and twisted. Ottoman minarets are tall and narrow with a few balconies called *şerefe*. Persian minarets are usually doubled, conical or cylindrical, and sometimes covered with ceramic tiles. Chinese minarets are often made of wood and are pagoda-shaped.¹⁾

As has already been mentioned, Ottoman sacred Muslim buildings also had their own specific, characteristic forms, differentiating them from those in various Muslim territories. But during the history and development of Ottoman art, European influences also began to appear. These strong influences caused a unique phenomenon: sacred Muslim structures built in the latest and most recent European styles. A full review of these styles can be observed in the mosques of Istanbul.

Structures built with the aim of gathering worshippers together for individual or collective prayers are included in the sacred buildings of Muslims, which are known as *cami* in Turkish speaking territories. A *minbar* is the pulpit used for Friday sermons. A *mescit* is a small, free-standing building or prayer hall. A *namazgah* is a non-covered area, orientated towards Mecca, with a symbolical niche known as a *mihrab*. Sepulchral objects, such as mausoleums, especially in the form of *türbe*, may also be found. Hydraulic constructions, such as a *şadırvan*, serve to allow ritual ablutions to be made, and are located next to the main door of the mosque. A *sebil* is a fountain, built with the aim of distributing specially prepared, sweetened water during religious festivals. Water fountains in the form of *çeşme* do not have any special religious character, but in many cases have been constructed as part of a mosque complex. Examples of structures described in this paper, include a number of mosques and one mausoleum.

European influences were both strong and visible in Ottoman Muslim sacred architecture in Istanbul in the 18th century. This was caused by a number of factors: the growing fascination and interest of the Ottoman elites in European culture, the despatching of envoys or different agents for longer periods to Europe, the arrival from Europe and presence in the Ottoman lands of newcomers, especially artists. This led to the arch-Catholic, Baroque style, which originally derived from the counter-reformation, and promoted the triumph of the Catholic Church, appearing in the architecture of the Istanbul mosques around the middle of the 18th century (for example, the *Nuruos-*

¹⁾ Öz (1997: 13, I).

maniye Camisi mosque).²⁾ Rococo was the next European style to appear in the decoration and construction of Muslim sacred buildings in Istanbul (the *sebil* known as *Mihrimah Valide Sultan Sebili*),³⁾ Classicism (the *Tevfikiye Camisi* mosque),⁴⁾ Empire (the *Abdi Çelebi Çeşmesi* water fountain),⁵⁾ Eclecticism and historical styles: Neo-Baroque (the *Küçük Mecidiye Camisi* mosque),⁶⁾ neo-Gothic (the *Yıldız Camisi* mosque),⁷⁾ Moorish style, Art Nouveau (the *Şeyh Zafir Türbesi* mausoleum).⁸⁾ At the beginning of the 20th century, similar currents in European art and architecture also appeared in Ottoman art, and there was a tendency to find (or create) a so-called national artistic style and to return to the traditional Ottoman architectural forms from the times before European influence appeared in Ottoman art (the *Hobyar Camisi* mosque)⁹⁾. From that perspective, the display of interest in the Moorish style used in the sacred Muslim buildings of Istanbul have special meaning.

This style was invented in the first decades of the 19th century following a romantic wave of European fascination towards its interpretation of 'the Orient'. In structures built in that style, elements 'taken' from the Arab buildings of Spanish Andalusia were used, for example, from the palace of *Alhambra*. Further structures were inspired by Persian, Indian or Seljuk architecture. The repertoire of such 'Oriental' forms included: domes, liwans, 'Tudor' arches, the arrangement of frames of windows and doors, the decoration of liwans or panels, broad, painted, arabesque-style wall decoration, dark and bright slabs put alternately on the outer walls and geometrical or floral decoration.¹⁰⁾

In Istanbul, there are five sacred Muslim buildings, which were erected, refurbished or renovated in the second half of the 19th century, containing elements of the Orientally inspired Moorish style, popular at that time, not only in Europe, but also in the New World. The use of elements of Moorish style in Istanbul should be regarded as a 'surprising' phenomenon. 'Surpris-

²⁾ Göncüoğlu (2006: 202).

³⁾ Goodwin (2003: 410).

⁴⁾ Hürel (2010: 782).

⁵⁾ <http://www.suvakfi.org.tr/detay.asp?id=459&menu=%E7e%FEmeler> (08.02.2015).

⁶⁾ Hürel (2010: 769).

⁷⁾ Kafesoğlu (2012: 93).

⁸⁾ Krajcarz, Siemieniec-Golaś (2014: 148).

⁹⁾ Hürel (2010: 96).

¹⁰⁾ Bergman (2004: 17).

ing' because a region, which from a Eurocentric point of view was located just within 'the Orient', and was regarded as being, at the same time, both European and non-European, Asian and non-Asian, and was both influenced by and fascinated with its imitation of European art, a new European tendency had been adopted – the imitation of Oriental art. This resulted in the 'Europeanised Orient' striving to imitate the newest and the most fashionable European tendencies, by adopting the Oriental, so-called Moorish style.

One of the first Istanbul Muslim sacred Muslim buildings in Istanbul to have been 'dressed up' in a Oriental, Moorish 'costume', was a mosque known as *Şehsuvarbey Camisi*, located in the district of Beyoğlu, next to Galata tower, by the junction of Büyük Hendeki and Lakerdacı streets (Fig. 1). The accurate date of the Moorish architectural and decorative arrangement of that mosque is still unknown, but it is thought that its founder was Sultan Abdul-Aziz, who ruled from 1861 to 1876.¹¹⁾ The first genuine mosque on this site was built in the times of Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror, after the siege of Constantinople in 1453, and its founder was the sailor, Şehsuvar Bey. In the following centuries, the structure gradually fell into a state of disrepair. Then, in the second half of 19th century, it was totally renovated in the fashionable, Moorish style. The buildings had the same stylish character as the adjacent Sephardi synagogue, know as *Neve Sinagogu*, located on the same street. That building had also been erected earlier, but was refurbished in the Moorish style at around the same time.¹²⁾

The mosque of *Şehsuvarbey* is a two storey building. The frames of the windows on the first floor have a lanceolate form, while the window frames on the second floor are semi-circular, apart from one which is trefoil. The walls of the second floor have a decorative, fine, laced trim. The mosque has one small minaret. The outer part of the East wall on the second floor was donated by the little avant-corps, marking the *mihrab* and the direction of Mecca. Generally speaking, the frames of the window frames were made in the characteristic Oriental style. The designer of the Moorish design of the building is also still unknown. In addition, it could be stated that in the first years after the creation of the Citizens' Republic of Turkey, the mosque once again fell into a state of disrepair, but it was rebuilt by worshippers in the fifties and has luckily preserved its unique, stylish character.¹³⁾

¹¹⁾ Ekicigil (1982: 88).

¹²⁾ Hürel (2010: 635).

¹³⁾ Öz (1997: 62, II).

The other sacred Muslim Moorish-style building in Istanbul, is the sepulchral complex, located by the mosque of Fuad Ahmed Keçecizade. The founder was a Grand Vizier during the reign of Sultan Abdul-Aziz, and died in France in 1868. His corpse was brought to Turkey, and buried in the mausoleum built next to Peykhane Street, in the Fatih district.¹⁴ The mosque of that complex does not have an Oriental-style character, although the Moorish style was used on a great scale in the design of the mausoleum, called *Fuad Ahmed Keçecizade Türbesi*. This small-sized building has an octagonal plane (Fig. 2). A richly decorated, Arabesque-styled grate covers the semi-circular-framed windows and their forms were probably modelled on the frames of windows and doors of the Palace of Medina Azhara, near Cordoba, in Andalusia, Spain.¹⁵ The outer wall of the mausoleum is covered by dense, geometrical, openwork and decorative stonework, similar to, and based on, original Moorish structures in Andalusia, particularly the *Alhambra* palace.¹⁶ The identity of the designer of that project is not precisely known, but was probably a member of the Balyan clan, an Armenian family of artists and architects, active during the second half of 19th century in Istanbul, carrying out the orders of the Sultan's family.

The next Muslim sacred building in Istanbul, with a Moorish character to its architecture, is the *Hidayet Camisi mosque*, located at Yalı Köşkü Street, in the Eminönü district (Fig. 3). Sultan Mahmut II erected the first mosque there in 1813. The sultan had been shocked after visiting that site, which was then full of brothels and gambling dens, which he ordered to be cleaned up and renovated. A new prayer house, the mosque, was built and called *Hidayet*, which means 'Orthopraxis'. The then fashionable Moorish style was assigned to the mosque in 1887, through the initiative of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, and was the project of the French architect, Alexandre Vallaury.¹⁷ The building, erected on a rectangular plane, has one minaret, and its central, main part, dedicated to the practice of collective prayers, is covered by a dome. Light comes into the prayer hall through Tudor-arch framed windows. The windows in the porch of the mosque are semi-circular framed. The outer wall is decorated by semi-circular framed panels and blanked window. In the early years of the creation of Citizens' Republic of Turkey, the mosque

¹⁴ Hürel (2010: 224).

¹⁵ Chwastek (2011: 197).

¹⁶ Grabar (1990: 45).

¹⁷ Hürel (2010: 81).

temporarily lost its religious functions and was used for other purposes, for example, a factory and leather warehouse was placed there.¹⁸⁾ In the eighties, the building was renovated, and its original, religious function was re-established. Fortunately, in spite of all these changes, the mosque has preserved its Moorish-style appearance.

The other Oriental-style mosque in Istanbul is called *Pertevniyal Valide Sultan Camisi*, located by the junction of Atatürk Avenue and Turgut Özal Avenue, in the district of Aksaray (Fig. 4). The founder of that mosque was the *Valide*, Pertevniyal Sultan, the mother of Abdul-Aziz. This building was completed in record time, after 29 months construction work, in 1871. The designer of that project was either the Italian architect, Pierre Montani, or Sarkis Balyan, from the famous family of artists.¹⁹⁾ The most correct description of the architectural and decorative values of that building should include both the word 'eclecticism' and 'a predominantly Moorish style'. In both are found: longitudinal, *lanceolate* framed windows, a round arcading frieze and tympanums filled with dense, Arabesque decoration. Neo-Gothic styled traceries appear in the mosque window, slightly compromising the Moorish appearance of the building, but not destroying its exotic character. The Neo-Gothic appearance of the mosque is further intensified by its longitudinal, vertical silhouette, reminiscent of the neo-Gothic churches, that had been built in great numbers, not only in Europe, but also across the whole world. The mosque is covered by a dome situated on tholobate, which has been provided with lanceolate framed windows, also decorated with traceries. The building may be regarded as an amalgam of neo-Gothic and Oriental character, typical for the architecture of the Indian Peninsula.

One more Muslim sacred building in Istanbul, decorated in the Eclectic style, with neo-Gothic and Moorish elements, is the *Yıldız Camisi* or *Hamidiye Camisi*, mosque, founded by Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1885. The building is located by Yıldız Street, in the district of Beşiktaş, next to the Sultan's palace, *Yıldız Sarayı* (Fig. 5). The single dome, situated on a tall tholobate, rises above the solid, squat mosque. The windows of the buildings are lanceolate-framed and have neo-Gothic traceries. The Moorish look of the mosque is guaranteed by a few cones, filled with dense, geometrical decoration. Cornices are used, both in the main part of the mosque, and the tholobate. But the most 'Oriental' decorative element in the external appearance of the mosque, is

¹⁸⁾ Krajcarz, Siemieniec-Gołaś (2014: 93).

¹⁹⁾ Bayraktar (1980: 89).

the projection on the front wall of the main part of the mosque, which is decorated in a manner typical for the architecture from the Indian Peninsula. There is one minaret decorated with long fluting. The designer of this project was the French architect, Alexandre Vallaury.²⁰⁾ The inner, eclectic arrangement of the mosque also has neo-Baroque characteristics, but the external appearance of the building could be described as being a mix of Moorish, Indian and neo-Gothic decorative elements.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in both civic and religious Ottoman architecture, a trend appeared, as in Europe, stressing the necessity to return to those traditional architectural and decorative motifs and forms preserved in historic monuments and folk architecture.²¹⁾ Those movements to discover or work out a 'national style' in Ottoman architecture have been described as: *birinci ulusal mimarlık akımı* (first national style), or *neoclassic Türk üslubu* (neo-classical Turkish style) and *milli mimarı rönesansı* (renaissance of national architecture).²²⁾ The structures built according to these movements were an expression of the search for native architectural and decorative forms, from the European, and also the Oriental, point of view.

Istanbul's sacred Muslim structures, built in a style known in European art history as 'Moorish', are those which either imitate, or have been inspired by, Oriental architecture: mainly Arab structures from Andalusia in Spain or Indian architecture. There are five such buildings in Istanbul, which were erected over a period of two decades, between the eighteen-sixties and eighteen-eighties. They consist of four mosques and one mausoleum. Two of them were completely new structures and the other three were older buildings, which were renovated according to the fashionable, new tendencies of the Moorish inspiration. It is worth noticing that the founders of all these buildings were from the noblest elite: Sultans – Abdul-Aziz and Abdul Hamid II, *Valide* – the mother of sultan – Pertevniyal Valide Sultan, and the grand vizier – Fuad Ahmed Keçecizade. The designer of one project is still unknown, but the architects of the other projects have all been identified. They were also responsible for the construction of other important buildings in Istanbul: the Italian – Montani, the Frenchman – Vallaury and the Armenian – Balyan.

²⁰⁾ Hürel (2010: 765).

²¹⁾ Omilanowska (1998: 146).

²²⁾ http://www.mimarlikmuzesi.org/Gallery/Photo_6_1_kimlik-arayisi-iulusal-mimarlik-akimi.html (08.02.2015)

These buildings represent one stage of the history of Ottoman art, but because of their strong connections and influences, they also form part of the history of European art. Istanbul, which from a Eurocentric point of view is an Oriental city, is, at the same time, a European city. Europeanised Ottoman art at one time went through a period of fascination with the Orient. Istanbul's mosques built in the Moorish style are only a part of a whole group of Muslim sacred buildings erected in a European artistic style.

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Fig. 1. Mosque *Şehsuvarbey Camisi*



Fig. 2. Mausoleum *Fuad Ahmed Keçeci-zade Türbesi*.



Fig. 3. Mosque *Hidayet Camisi*



Fig. 4. Mosque *Pertevniyal Valide Sultan Camisi*



Fig. 5. Mosque *Yıldız Camisi/ Hamidiye Camisi*