

Art in Seljuk Period Architecture within the case study Karatay Madrasah, Konya

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Geliş Tarihi (Received) : 20.03.2014 - Kabul Tarihi (Accepted) : 18.08.2015

Abstract

This article discusses the artistic approach of Anatolian Seljuk (12th century) to architecture on a case study building "Karatay madrasah, Konya". Anatolian Seljuk art approach carries out symbolic meanings on figures. This abstract approach on architecture is observed on portals and also on the ceramic tiles inside the building. Karatay madrasah, Konya is a well preserved case with its ceramic tiles till today. In this research study, the meanings of the figures observed at Karatay madrasah will be discussed in terms of meaning and symbols. The study examines also the placement of the meanings in architecture and the architectural organization of symbols. Beyond figurative elements; geometric ornamentation and its symbolic meanings will be discussed. As research methodology; comparison and from general to peculiar approach is internalized. Literature survey, site survey and photographic documentation is done for the article.

Key Words: Turkish art and architecture, Seljuk art, Seljuk period madrasah, Anatolian medieval structures.

Konya Karatay Medresesi örneği üzerinden Selçuklu Dönemi Mimarisinde Sanat

Öz

Bu makale Anadolu Selçuklunun (12inci yüzyıl) mimariye sanatsal yaklaşımını Karatay medresesi, Konya örneği üzerinden tartışmaktadır. Anadolu Selçuklu sanat yaklaşımı figürler üzerinden sembolik anlamlar taşımaktadır. Bu mimarideki soyutlama yaklaşım, taçkapılarda ve yapı içi seramik süslemelerde gözlemlenir. Konya Karatay Medresesi seramikleri ile günümüze kadar iyi korunmuş bir örnektir. Bu araştırma çalışmasında, Karatay Medresesinde gözlemlenen figüratif anlamlar tartışılır. Çalışma ayrıca figürlerin mimari organizasyonunu ve yerleşim yerlerini de inceler. Figüratif elemanların da yanı sıra, çalışmada geometrik süslemeler de anlamsal ve sembolik açılardan incelenmiştir. Araştırma yöntemi olarak; karşılaştırma ve genelden özele gitmek benimsenmiştir. Yazılı kaynak araştırması, yapı incelemesi ve fotoğraf dokümanları çıkarılması işlemleri yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk sanatı ve mimarisi, Selçuklu dönemi sanatı, Selçuklu dönemi medresesi, Anadolu orta çağ dönemi yapıları.

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ISSN : 2147-6683

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A BRIEF ART AND ARCHITECTURE HISTORY OF ANATOLIAN SELJUK PERIOD

Primarily actors who influence arts, crafts and architecture will be introduced; and then the development of the body will be introduced.

Historical Actors

In Anatolia, settled way of life is strengthened during the reign of Kılıçarslan the second. Building activities are embarked to provide a characteristic identification of Anatolian Seljuk with arts and architecture. This movement is accelerated in 13th century with the Seljuk sultans and viziers are becoming the patrons of Islamic world and gaining more power in Anatolia. The stability in characteristics and arts is attained in the Golden Age period of Anatolian Seljuk state during the reign of Ala' al-Din Kaykubad I. Mongolian invasion followed this age with the inevitable fall of Seljuk. Obviously they had a strong effect on art in Anatolia; and the tradition of creating art couldn't be dismissed.¹

There are several sources that shaped the art of Anatolian Seljuk. A strong effect came from Islamic Sufism. The Seljuk Art inspired by the thought and spirituality of this fashion as long as they are interpreting their own influence. According to S. Ogel, it is most visible on architectural stone carvings on portals.

In Anatolian Seljuk period, monumental architectural construction was in the hand of various members of the ruling class such as sultan and his family, emirs and viziers.

In Seljuk period, they documented their buildings and it is stated that there were 1100 buildings and only 55% is alive nowadays. There were 115 mosques, 122 masjid, 135 tombs, 167 madrasah, 70 baths, 48 palaces, 49 bridges in the documents.²

Although they have settled lifestyle; nomadic Turkmen population made a great contribution to art and craft. Turkmen population was contributed to the art of woodwork with their shaman belief and symbolism.

Seljuk Sultans have the power to build public buildings. They were having miri system³ and most of the buildings were erected by the sultan himself or his high officials. The Seljuk sultans show less attention to prestigious buildings such as castles and châteaux as we observe in Europe in medieval age. They much more interested in public buildings such as caravanserais and hospitals. In spite of prestigious buildings, they repaired existing Roman and Byzantine Castles. Caravanserais were the symbol of strength and power of the sultan since they were erected on the trade routes and they show the implementation of a state to commercial activities. It is much related in economic policy. On the other hand, it is interesting that Sultans were erected remarkable few schools. They were erected usually by Viziers. Madrasah concept is going as far to Dar'ul Hikmet foundations (Cairo, 1005); it is most popular with Seljuk Vizier Nizam ul-Mulk. They opened madrasah and established education in order to fight ignorance and domestic fights in the state.

The art in Anatolian Seljuk is also influenced by old Myths and they were stylized by the customs of Turks. Although they were affected by Christian influences, they were eager to emphasize their devotion to Islam.

After 1243, Seljuk dynasty played no further role and Emirs take the place and gain power. The architectural activities in cities were supported by emirs. The years 1243-1308 may be

¹ Ogel, Semra. Seljuk face of Anatolia; aspects of the social and intellectual history of Seljuk Architecture. Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation, Manchester. 2008

² Zafer Bayburtluoğlu-Emre Madran, "Anadolu'da 1308M. Yılına Kadar Gerçekleştirilmiş Türklslam Yapıları Üzerine Sayısal Sınamalar", VIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi Bildirileri Özetleri, c.2, Ankara 1981, s. 940.

³ miri system: Sultan owns the whole land, and he has the right to allocate any piece of land to whomever he chose (ikta). S. Ogel

described as the period of the emirs concerning both history and architecture. The years 1262-1277 are generally known as the period of Muinuddin Pervane, while Sahip Ata Fahreddin Ali and Celaleddin Karatay are the most important of all emirs who engaged in building activity.

In 13th century, there were many building activities such that even foreigner craftsmen were brought. Unfortunately there is no picture illustrating the way of building activities; nor the records.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDINGS AND PRODUCTION OF ART

In the period of Seljuk, the responsibility for the form and style belongs to architect. We see patron-artisan relationship is relatively free, since we observe Sahip Ata dwells in Sivas (Gok Madrasah), Konya (Ince Minareli Madrasah) have different artistic embodiment. So, we can say that artist have amount of freedom. Although there are various workers on the same building, the building is in style and the architect was responsible of this. The workers in construction site can be stated as; those responsible for the financial side of the operation; the architect responsible for the plan of the building and the draughtsmen responsible for drawing the plans (these draughtsman were young apprentice architects that trained by the side of the architect); the laborers who carried out the rough work on the site as well as skilled workers; stone masons; brick-layers and tile workers; those who prepared the plans and those who realized them, possibly the architects themselves or others in close cooperation with the architects and, finally, the experts in calligraphy.⁴

SYMBOLIC CONCEPTS

The appearance of compositions displaying a wealth of widely used and widely known forms from Asia, Iran, Mesopotamia and the Caucasus, Georgia and Armenia, dating both Islamic and pre-Islamic times is the result of a close cooperation between the architects and the stonemasons. A host of craftsmen employing motifs with which they were familiar and designs in which they were already skilled, and that these, once approved, were applied to the work. The really essential point was that these should be in conformity with intent and purpose of the composition. It was of vital importance either that the craftsmen arriving from abroad should succeed in establishing certain sympathy with the Anatolian artistic environment or that only those who had succeeded in setting up such a relationship should participate in the work. The motifs encountered in Seljuk designs and compositions are often striking and unusual, but they are never "alien", they are never at variance with the forms to which they are applied.

On the other hand if we think of architectural style and artwork relationship; Sociologists of art find the history of style inadequate and divorced from the environment. Art historians need an analysis of form. In view of criticisms that the history of style is insufficient for the interpretation of a work of art, keep in mind that in the environment in which the work of art is created there is a common creative power that displays itself as a motive force in every field. Our basis is the spiritual climate and a life force that has absorbed centuries of imagery.

The cosmic images that found in mysticism a fertile ground for their continued existence are not confined to religious buildings. As a matter of fact, their wide-spread use will provide common ground on which to base our interpretation. The architecture of Seljuk period was carried out from the cosmos image, which influences schools, tombs and even khans (esp. Evdir khan). Cosmos should be from the tents of nomadic Turks as the symbol of universe. The tents of people are the little universes inside of a greater universe. Four Iwan, central courtyard and symmetrical-whole balanced plan scheme is the image of cosmos. This scheme is usually observed in open courtyard or domed schools. Also dome is another type of cosmos which represents the sky. One rarely encounters even an approximate equality between the Iwan-s of a madrasah. The Iwan directly opposite the entrance is the principal Iwan and establishes one of

⁴ Ogel, Semra. Seljuk face of Anatolia; aspects of the social and intellectual history of Seljuk Architecture. Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation, Manchester. 2008

the axes. The side "Ivan"s provide the balance in the four-Ivan scheme. In the Gök Madrasah, the cosmic symbol is repeated in the pool and its canals, the whole forming a central point with axes intersecting at right angles. This arrangement, in addition to the emphasis laid on the center, also introduces the element of water. The pool placed under the dome in domed schools has this symbolic significance above its practical use.

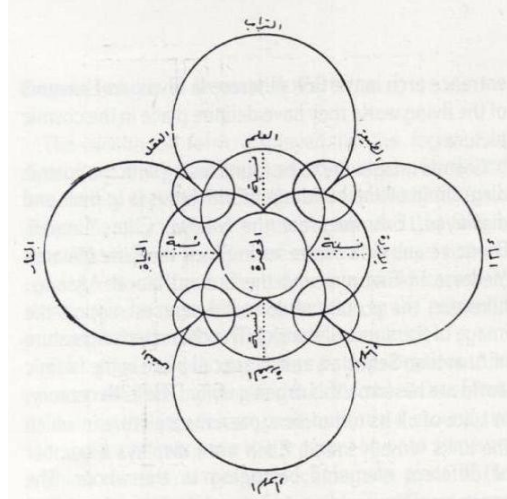


Figure 1. Extracted form the *Futuhat* by Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi. Source: Semra Ogel, *Anadolu'nun Selçuklu Çehresi*, İstanbul: Akbank Yayınları, 1994, p. 126.

Meanwhile portals have highly significant place in symbolism. Seljuk art main concentration is stone carving and it is seen on portals for some expressions. The door, which provides a link between the microcosm of the building and the external environment, as well as the façade composition formed around the threshold, communicate to the passer-by or to someone wishing to enter, a message defining the place of the building, in the universe. The highly significant stone carving on the facades, composed of calligraphy geometric and vegetal motifs and animal figures, has something to say to all. The geometric motifs, being themselves of the nature of cosmic symbols, are the closest in meaning to the cosmic diagrams represented in the architectural plans. The figured relieves do this quite explicitly. All the geometric systems, even those with the appearance of what we call "open systems" that give no due to a closed form, are, of course, based on the closed geometric figures such as circles, triangles, hexagons and octagons of which they are actually composed. These basic figures possess an accumulation of meaning acquired over the centuries, and if we go back far enough we shall find ourselves confronted with the basic geometrical figures of Plato. Starting out from the numerical cosmic laws of Pythagoras, Plato accepts the numbers given by these geometrical forms as cosmic numbers on the basis that cosmic phenomenon can be measured and expressed in mathematical terms. Thus, mathematics is the source of the laws of the universe and divine wisdom.

The star systems are founded on the circle and the intersection of the basic geometrical forms traced within it. It is linear movement in a state of perpetual transition from one star to another. None of the "arms" or "rays" of the stars are closed. All of them leap from one star to another in an infinite pattern. This produces an appearance based on a perpetual interlacing. It is this perpetual movement that achieves the desired appearance of 'unity within multiplicity'. This arrangement constitutes a cosmic order. The 'star' motifs to be found in these geometric compositions may also be referred to as "vegetal motifs". In that case, the compositions are described in terms such as 'the flow of one flower to another' or 'the opening of the flowers'.

PORTRAIT CUSTOMS

In Anatolian Seljuk, we come across with striking results. In Islamic environment, portrait issue is a problematic issue; but instances show us the taboo is not internalized all align. We see sculptures at Umayyad palaces, Kasr-ul Hayr el Garbi, or Hirbet-ul Mefcer; frescoes at Kuseyr Amra. In Seljuk period, portrait concept and art was not only for inside walls or gated community; but also for public and outside walls of palaces. Also in Seljuk period, we observe Muhamad portraits, which are usually forbidden in Islamic cultures (Ayyuki. Varka ile Gulsah). It is thought to be a custom from shaman culture since in shamanism, there should be portraits of holy creatures or gods.

THE CASE STUDY OF KARATAY MADRASAH, KONYA

The artistic components in Karatay Madrasah, Konya and its narrative, symbolic meanings will be introduced and discussed.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Konya Karatay Madrasah is built during the reign of Izzeddin Keykavus II by the emir Celaledin Karatay in 1251. The architect is unknown. The madrasa which is used also in Ottoman period is deserted in 19th century. Madrasah is built of Sille⁵ stone for the purpose of education of “tasfir⁶” and “hadith⁷”. The entry of the single storied building is from the east by the door made out of white marble. The portal is a masterpiece of Seljuk period stone craft embellished with “hat⁸” and figures.

To the madrasah entrance, there is a courtyard which had been closed by a dome. After the gate, there is the inner court closed by dome which is foliated by ceramic art. On west part of the building, there’s an Iwan with barrel vault. On the border of the vault, there is calligraphy; “ayat-ul kursi” and “basmala”.

In 1995, the building is started to service as “museum of glazed tiles”. The building is interesting with its without courtyard plan. The function is obviously a religious function rather than education.

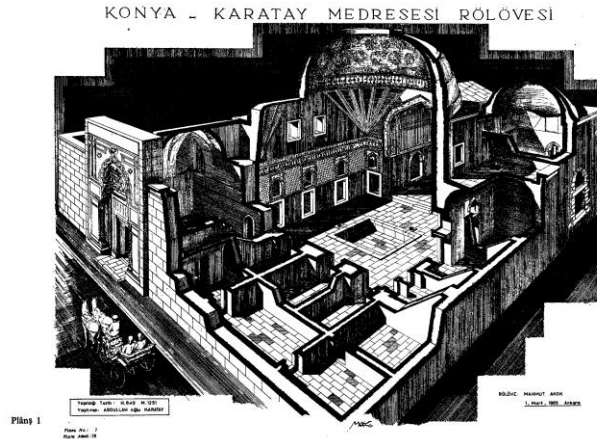


Figure 2. http://www.kulturvarliklari.gov.tr/sempozyum_pdf/turk_arkeoloji/18_2.turk.arkeoloji.pdf

⁵ “Sille” is a place in Konya

⁶ “Tasfir” is the art of commentary of qur-an and islamic rules. (seslisozluk.com)

⁷ “hadith” is collection of writings that document the sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad, one of the main sources of Islamic law (seslisozluk.com)

⁸ “hat” is the art of calligraphy

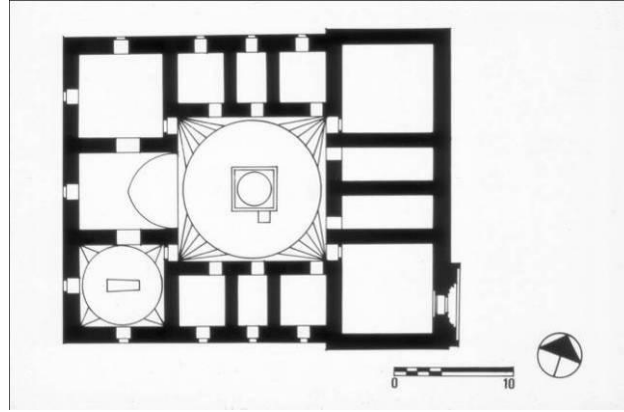


Figure 3. Karatay Madrasah, plan

http://dome.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.3/50309/142173_tm.jpg?sequence=3

PORTAL

In Anatolian Seljuk architecture, portals are the most ornamented; even many times the only ornamented part from outside. Arts and crafts are applied on that part the most. It is the only element in façade organization in the first half of the 13th century. The identification of portals is classified according to their depths.⁹ With deeper compositions, portals and its niches gain more spatial characteristics.

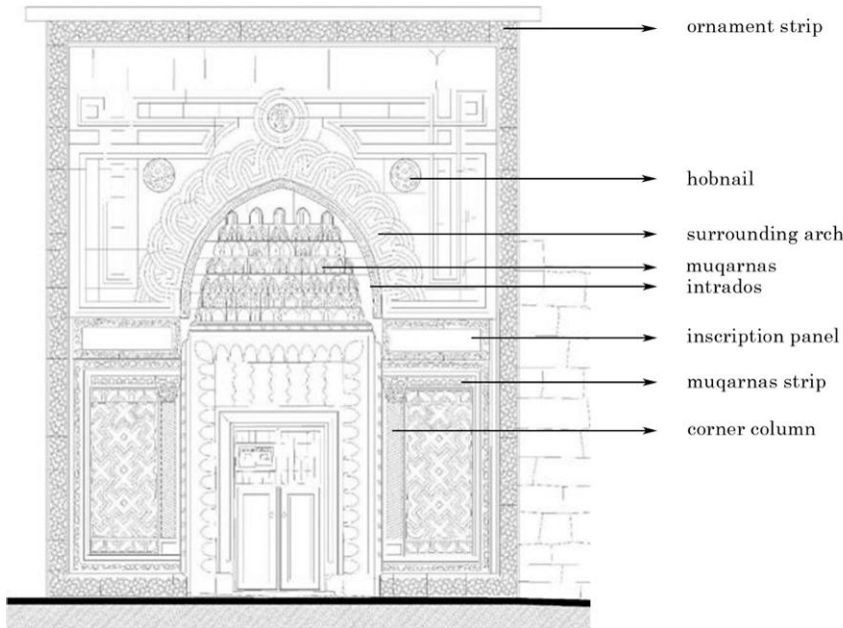


Figure 4. Table prepared by Kemal Korkmaz with the measured drawing of Karatay Madrasah portal on the paper "digital techniques in cultural heritage documentation".

The portal in Seljuk period is composed of ornamentation border, "gülbezek"¹⁰, "kabara"¹¹, multiple surrounding belts into each other, "kavsara"¹² with muqarnas, inscription panel, arch, corner column capital-shaft-base, "mihrahiye"¹³ niche, "mihrahiye kavsara" with muqarnas.

⁹ Ünal, Rahmi Hüseyin. Osmanlı Öncesi Anadolu-Türk Mimarisinde Taçkapılar. Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, İzmir, 1982

¹⁰ "Gülbezek" refers to "rosa". Tanyeli, Ugur and Sozen, Metin. Art (concepts and terms) Dictionary

¹¹ "kabara" refers to "hobnail". Tanyeli, Ugur and Sozen, Metin. Art (concepts and terms) Dictionary

¹² "kavsara" refers to "intrados". Tanyeli, Ugur and Sozen, Metin. Art (concepts and terms) Dictionary

¹³ "mihrahiye" refers to small niche on the portal sides.

In Karatay madrasah portal, main niche is relatively too much large and according to Rahmi Huseyin Unal¹⁴ kavsara order is disturbed. The muqarnas kavsara which is built to enclose this large niche is suddenly cut on the top with five muqarnas tooth in spite of single muqarnas tooth.

Profile of the portal is very significant and the profile is usually given separately from the general layout. According to R. H. Unal's comparison of profiles (figure 5), there is no rule and it is much more related with the artist/craftsman's pleasure. He grouped the portal of Karatay Madrasah as organized as plain moulding which makes 45 degree angle with the surface of portal.



Figure 5. Survey drawing (Ünal, Rahmi Hüseyin. *Osmanlı Öncesi Anadolu-Türk Mimarisinde Taçkapılar*. Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, İzmir, 1982.)

In the portal of Karatay Madrasah, we observe “ovolo moulding¹⁵”. The side niches in portals are not thought to be embellishment part. Usually they are left with plain moulding. On the other hand arches are thought as embellishment stripes.

Intrados part is with muqarnas but here the muqarnas organization is different than others and much interesting. The muqarnas intrados is suddenly cut on the top with five muqarnas tooth in spite of single muqarnas tooth. After the muqarnas intrados, surrounding arch comes. Surrounding arch is composed of interlaced arches series. This kind of surrounding arch system is originated in Syria.¹⁶ This knowledge can go through the notion of Syrian craftsmen and artists. As we know from the brief history part, the artists and craftsmen are brought to Turkey with the intense architectural facilities and the craftsmen can emphasize their styles on their production. The arch is designed and built by nailing technique as we also observe the same period and same region architecture: Alaaddin Mosque (Konya). Also the corners of surrounding arches are embellished with hobnails¹⁷. The hobnails are composed of geometric figure which is composed of radial lines of star which usually symbolizes eternity and also with sphere form, the symbol is much more emphasized. According to S. Ogel, the hobnails are symbolism of cosmos since they are sections of lotus flowers. This hobnail and rosa arts are also seen in Asia Minor Arts. Above hobnails, Cufic writings take place with an advanced geometric calligraphy.

¹⁴ Ünal, Rahmi Hüseyin. *Osmanlı Öncesi Anadolu-Türk Mimarisinde Taçkapılar*. Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, İzmir, 1982.

¹⁵ Look up “kavla slime” in Turkish.

¹⁶ Ünal, Rahmi Hüseyin. *Osmanlı Öncesi Anadolu-Türk Mimarisinde Taçkapılar*. Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, İzmir, 1982.

¹⁷ R.H. Unal sometimes uses rosa (“gulbezek”) term in spite of hobnail (“kabara”) for Karatay madrasah portal.



Figure 6. The portal photo of Karatay Madrasah, Konya taken by Kemal Korkmaz

The doorjamb is embellished (Figure 7) in Karatay Madrasah with the writing which tells two prays: “basmala” and “ayat-ul kursi”. The portal has two “mihrabiye”¹⁸ on two sides and their intrados are with muqarnas, too.

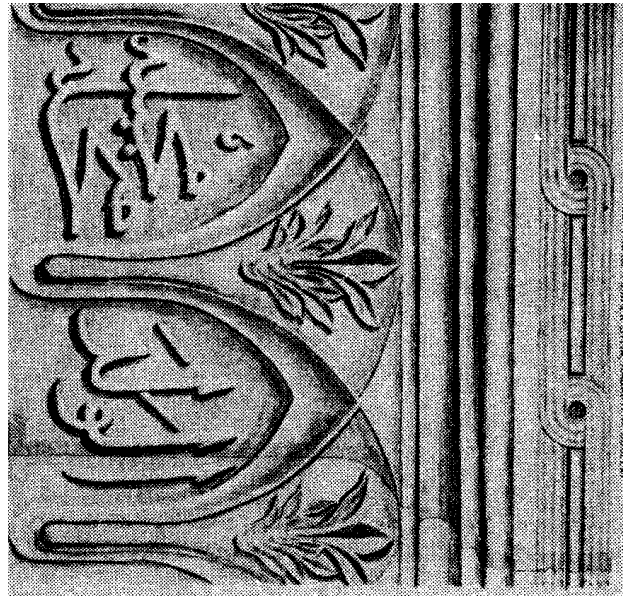


Figure 7. The doorjamb. Survey of M. Akok

On the other hand, Alaeddin mosque portal (figure 8) and Karatay madrasah portal surrounding moulding styles are very similar. There can be the same artists and craftsmen.

¹⁸ “mihrabiye”, also smaller mihrab; is a side niche in portal.



Figure 8. Alaaddin mosque portal, Konya

The portals of both Ince Minareli Madrasah and Karatay Madrasah are thought to be consciously influenced by Alaaddin Mosque according to Giovanni Curatola. It carries Assyrian style.



Figure 9. Motives and patterns found on portal

INTERIOR EMBELLISHMENT AND CERAMIC ARTS

Karatay Madrasah interior part is kept deliberately simple. The dominant element in the interior part is turquoise, china blue and black ceramic tiles. The rectangular form of the space is dominated by a strip above with cufic writings. The writing has advanced graphical quality. Turkish triangles are divided into five with geometric meander pattern as we also observe on the same time metal censer samples.

The dome is covered with graceful ceramic art. Involved eternal nodes and flower motives are composing a graceful pattern. On the two stripes, there are cufic writings. The medallions symbolize 24 rayed¹⁹ Sun. The “sun” is symbolizes the eternity of the state with involved endless nodes. The dome symbolizes the sky with the blue color and sun figures. The half suns and the involved nodes are symbolizing the time loop with the sunrise and sunset. It has the narrative of holiness in both state of Islam and in the background and power of state.

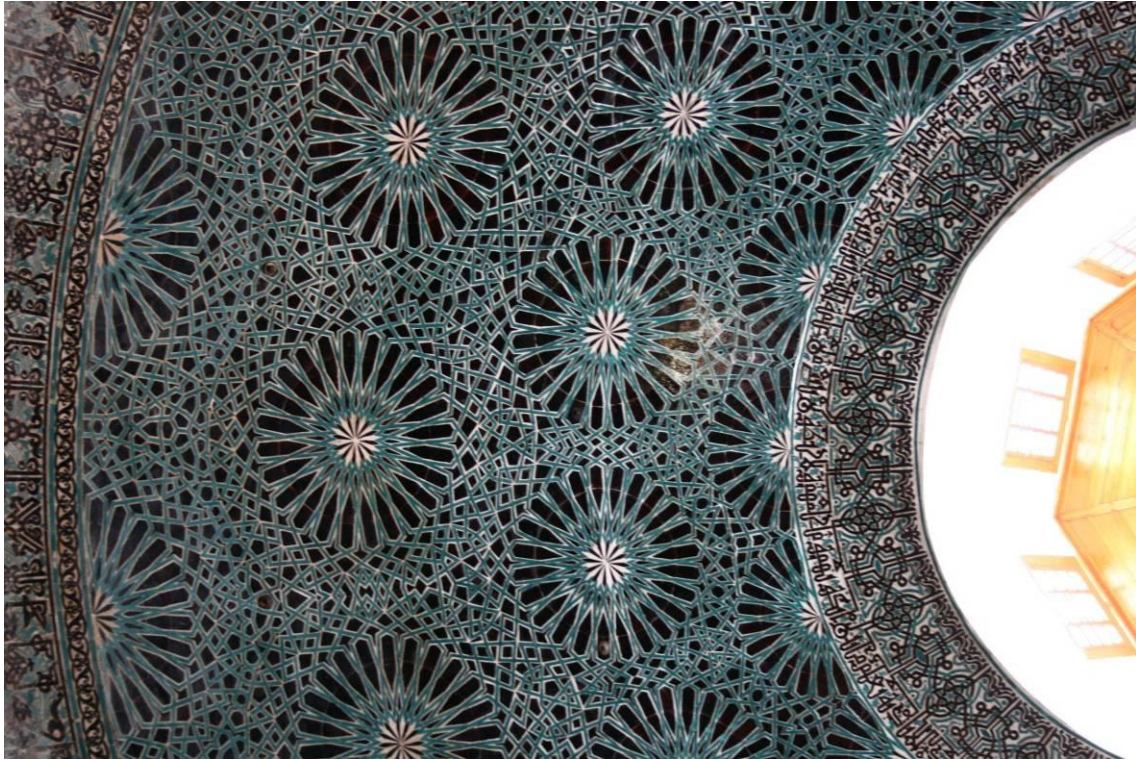


Figure 10. dome of central court of Karatay madrasah. The photo is taken by Kemal Korkmaz.

Also Turkish triangles have cufic writings on it (figure 10). It is thought that, prophet names are written on them. This carries the meaning of Islamic state and/ or religious building. For four corners, there are the big prophets of great four religions.

¹⁹ The Seljuk State was come from 24 Oghuz clans.

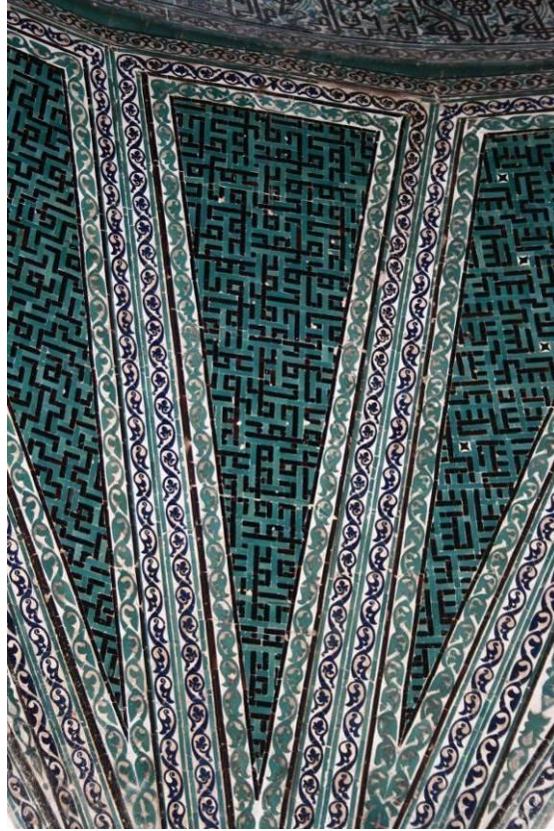


Figure 11. Turkish triangles and cufic writings taken by Kemal Korkmaz.

In the center of the court, there is a pool. According to S. Ogel, water symbolizes the spring of life. There are holes adjacent to pool in order to getting rid of too much water and they have again sun symbol and water wave symbol.



Figure 12. The central pool in the court taken by Kemal Korkmaz.



Figure 13. Water spout with the figure of sun taken by Kemal Korkmaz.

CONCLUSION

In the history of art, there are narrative thoughts and symbols which are conducted by the artist to the artwork. This is very crucial for an artwork. In the start of Turkish art, Seljuk period carried out many symbols in their arts and the artworks are involved by architecture. Seljuk art has a great narrative background from the shamanism, nomadic culture to Islam culture and the region they live in. They are also influenced by the surrounding culture such as Umayyad, Assyrian, and Byzantine cultures. We can only understand the art by knowing and analyzing the art and history. Seljuk art opens up the doors of spirituality with mystery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to assist. Prof. Dr. Mine Hamamcioğlu Turan for all influence, guidance and advising.

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