

# HERMENEUTICS OF DOME SPACE IN OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURE

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## ABSTRACT

Needs and beliefs are the leading elements of architecture. A dome giving a building a stupendous appearance has a stronger effect on people compared to other covering systems when considered in terms of inner volume. Due to this strong impression, dome has frequently been preferred as the top cover of religious buildings throughout history. Examining the background of this preference based on religious tradition can reveal the purpose of building a dome and what it stands for in society. For this reason, primarily the symbolism of dome in the world will be discussed and the representation and hermeneutic understandings of dome in Ottoman culture will be addressed through architectural, literary and religious texts expressing ontological perception in the study.

The development of dome structure in Islamic architecture can be traced starting from the Great Seljuk constructions. The notion of a central dome gained prevalence in the early Ottoman period before the conquest of Istanbul. The dome of the Hagia Sophia was a goal to be accomplished for Mimar Sinan (Architect Sinan), who carried dome architecture to its zenith. While this goal is often perceived as the ideal of building the largest dome covering a large rectangular space, it has the idea of making a higher version of a symbolic volume behind it. In order to address this subject, it is necessary to evaluate the architectural texts describing the symbolism of dome and its hierarchy within the structure. Starting from the symbolic expressions and analogies in these texts, examining the religious ontological texts which will explain the subject in more detail will allow for a better hermeneutic understanding of the dome in Ottoman culture.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Architecture, Dome Space, Hermeneutics, Architectural Symbolism, Ontology

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In human history, domes appear as forms of cover that endow buildings with iconic superiority and beautify the space where they stand, in proportion to their

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size. While it can be the focal point in the silhouette of the structure from the outer façade, it constitutes a central, upward-directional volume that establishes continuity in the interior. As an architectural top cover element, the dome is a matter addressed in terms of different forms and construction techniques. There are also some remarkable studies on the symbolism of the dome. In this study, the dome will be examined through a reading of philosophical and literary texts that describe the symbolic meaning it adds to the structure. First, the question of “what is the hermeneutics of architecture?” will be answered. In this study, the dome hermeneutics of buildings belonging to different periods and beliefs in the historical process will be evaluated while discussing the hermeneutics of the dome in the Renaissance, one of whose contemporaries was the classical Ottoman culture. Finally, the hermeneutics of the Ottoman dome -- the main topic of this study -- will be in the limelight.

First of all, putting forward the common symbolism of the central dome form in the structures of different beliefs throughout history is a necessary step to be able to do a hermeneutic reading. When we look at the studies on the symbolism of dome, we<sup>1</sup> first encounter the comments made by the representatives of the traditionalist/perennialist school. The first was an article by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, one of the founding figures of this school. The author explains the symbolic meaning of the dome mainly through Hindu ontology, while also giving similar accounts of other beliefs. René Guenon published in 1962 a book titled *Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée* (Fundamental Symbols; The Universal Language of Sacred Science) and covered this topic in a chapter titled ‘Dome Symbolism’. Titus Burckhardt wrote on the same subject in *Sacred Art in East and West* (Coomaraswamy, 1938) (Burckhardt, 2001).

The first work in the field of Art History belongs to Karl Lehmann (Lehmann, 1945). Lehmann, in his work entitled ‘The Dome of Heaven’, explains how the dome in the Christian European culture evolved as a system of shelter reflecting the cosmic structure of the skies, starting with pagan structures. Alexander Coburn Soper, with an aim to expand this work towards Eastern culture, wrote an article entitled ‘The Dome of Heaven in Asia’ (Soper, 1947). Soper states that the idea of a celestial dome passed from the West to Asian cultures from the Hellenistic period on. Although the direction of the interaction route followed by Soper does not correspond to today’s findings, it is remarkable in that it reveals examples of the sky-like dome in Asia. Earl Baldwin Smith’s research on the dome has detailed the symbolism of the dome in different civilizations. (Smith, 1971)

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<sup>1</sup> Traditionalism/Perennialism: is a perspective in spirituality that views all of the world's religious traditions as sharing a single, metaphysical truth or origin from which all esoteric and exoteric knowledge and doctrine has grown.

Oleg Grabar dealt with the sky-like dome in Islamic architecture (Grabar, *From Dome of Heaven to Pleasure Dome*, 1990). Samer Akkach's work on cosmology and architectural relations in Islam draws attention to the major texts in order to understand the hermeneutics of Islamic architecture (Akkach, 2005). The works of Semra Ögel and Ali Uzay Heper explains the symbolic background of the Seljuk and Ottoman structures.

Since the study will be on hermeneutics, while describing the symbolism of the dome it will be necessary to examine how these symbols appear in the texts from the era in question. The reason why the Ottoman dome hermeneutics' counterparts in different civilizations are widely mentioned in this text is an attempt to "look at it from the perspective of vertical history. There is a human history that is interconnected and advances in a constant interaction. It would be incomplete to evaluate a cultural fact that is obvious in originality and freedom without relating to different times and civilizations.

## **2. HERMENEUTICS**

In this section, the concepts 'Hermes', 'Hermetic Knowledge' and 'Hermeneutic' will be primarily explained. 'Hermetic Knowledge' is a concept that should be explained at this point because of its relation to the texts evaluated in the 'Hermeneutics of the Dome'. Then the question of how to handle the 'Hermeneutics of Architecture' will be answered and throughout history the 'Hermeneutics of the Dome' will be addressed through examples from different cultures and the subject will be addressed.

### **2.1. Hermeticism and Hermeneutics**

Before moving on to the hermeneutics of architecture, it is necessary to explain the concept of hermeneutics. For this reason, it would be adequate to first define the concepts of 'Hermes' and 'Hermetic' and 'Hermetic Corpus'. The word Hermeneutic is Greek and originates from the name of the Greek god Hermes. In Greek mythology, Hermes is known as the son of Zeus and Maia, the messenger, the protector of shepherds, travelers, the god of secret agreements, sorcerers and commerce (Hançerlioğlu, 2004). The roman pantheon is equivalent to Mercury. It means 'knower' in Syriac. The Egyptian equivalent is Toth. It appears as 'Hanoch' or 'Uhnuh' in Hebrew. It takes the name 'Husheng' in Iran. In particular, 'Hermes Trismegisthos' or 'three times the great Hermes' was seen as a prophet. While Muslim scholars identify it with the Prophet Idris, it is said to be 'Buddha' in the Indian tradition. In any case, this figure is known as the conveyer of the divine message to humanity, the founder of knowledge. The 'Hermeticism' derived from this is the name of the school consisting of the unification of

Egyptian and Greek traditions in Alexandria. (Kılıç, Hermesler Hermes; İslam Kaynakları Işığında Hermes ve Hermetik Düşünce, 2017)

Hermetic texts are a corpus of seventeen books written from the third century B.C. The Hermetic Corpus includes the texts written in Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* and Stobaios' *Anthologion*, in Latin *Asclepius*, and in Coptic *Nag Hammadi* (Kılıç, Hermesler Hermes; İslam Kaynakları Işığında Hermes ve Hermetik Düşünce, 2017). In these books, the process of God's creating the cosmos and man is explained in detail. It is a narrative that is similar to kabbalist and Sufi (Islam) texts and the creation mythologies of many cultures. It describes the initiation stages that man must undergo in order to reach the level of god. Renaissance intellectuals who formed the Christian Kabbalah and interpreted the Hermetic texts had narratives about divinization and hence producing art (Yılmaz, 2019). The hermeneutics of the dome discussed in this study also lead us to the ontological equivalent of the dome in the hermetic text. This element of structure, which is described as a sky dome in many cultures, is identified with cosmic skies in hermetic ontology. In ancient Greece, Hermes established the link between earth and the sky, and the interpreter of the above: hermesneuta led to the emergence of the so-called "Hermeneutic" interpretation (Kılıç, "Ebu'l-Hukemâ": Hikmetin Atası, Hermetik Felsefenin İslâm Düşünce Tarihinden Görünümü, 1998).

Suhrawardî, the founder of the School of Ishrâqiyyah (Enlightenment) in Islamic mysticism, is an important figure that introduced the hermetic approach into Sufism. Muhyiddin ibn al-Arabi and his followers have integrated the *ishrâqî* philosophy with the philosophy of *wahdat al wujûd* (Kaya, 2001). There is an ontological concept that can be called Hermetic and Neo-Platonic in the Ibn Arabi school, also called the Akbari Tradition. When we consider that the Ottoman madrasah system was established by a devotee of this school, Dâvûd al-Kayserî, the perception of creation and cosmology in Ottoman culture would be better understood. Naturally, this perception did not remain one that exclusively belonged to scholars; Sufi tradition, particularly through such works as *Muhammadiyah* and *Mi'rajîyah*, planted this conception of creation in the layperson's mind as well. This approach, which Sufism claims in order to interpret the religion in depth, is a hermeneutic philosophy.

## 2.2. Hermeneutics of Architecture

Hans-Georg Gadamer explains the stages of understanding in *Truth and Method*. A sequence that begins with the experience of the work of art is finished with the interpretation of historical texts. During this dialogue, it is technically impossible for the observer to be free of prejudice. One should be able to determine the

point where one will stand, recognizing their own history, existence and prejudices, and make interpretations accordingly (Gadamer, 1975).

Selen Bahriye Morkoç examined the hermeneutics of Ottoman Architecture through architectural treatises. As a first step, she discussed how to make the hermeneutics of architecture. Although architecture is considered to be the most static form, the architectural experience itself contains dynamism. Considering different angles, directions, interior and exterior, it becomes an element that accompanies, limits and directs life. Accordingly, studying the hermeneutics of architecture, not only architectural texts but also texts on human cultural life will be required. The architectural work emerges in an ongoing style that connects the past and the future times. It does not only reflect the moment it appeared. It carries the traces of the past to future times (Morkoç, 2006).

In architecture, two methods can be used to make an organization based on time: synchronic and diachronic. Synchronic refers to comparisons made in the same time period, and diachronic refers to comparing the same or different cultural works from different periods. Since both methods may have impasses, Lindsay Jones recommends evaluating four factors together to make a sound hermeneutic assessment of comparative architecture:

1) In indigenous (ritual) experiences of architecture; 2) in academic interpretations of single ritual-architectural situations; 3) in synchronic, morphologic comparisons of religious architectures from different contexts; and 4) in diachronic, historical comparisons of the various architectural events in which a particular work is involved over (and in) time, that is in the composition of comparative ritual-architectural histories. (Jones, 2000)

### **2.3. Hermeneutics of the Dome Throughout History**

If we look at the history of the dome, informed by the history of religions, we can also begin to do a hermeneutic reading. Josef Strzygowski states that the origin of dome architecture is the domed houses of Mesopotamia and the tombs in Iran and Anatolia. He thinks that the starting point of these architectural structures is the form of a Turkish tent seen in Central Asia and Asia Minor. The form of this structure, called "earth house" or "Yurt Tent", represents the sky-dome in Turkish culture (Mülayim, 2002). The hole at the top of the tent is said to represent the cosmic mast (Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 1958).

Mircae Eliade explains that central symbolism is similar in every belief. A vertical line, also called *axis mundi*, is the center of the world. This central line points to the sacred mountain, which is believed to be the connection of the underworld, earth and the celestial realms, the holy city and the sacred temple on it (Eliade,

Patterns in Comparative Religion, 1958). The fact that the upper cover of the temples is similar to a dome or dome is the result of the perception of the celestial world as a dome from the surface of the earth. From the outer façade, it resembles a sacred mountain. Examples of this understanding are stupas in India with a central plan, pagodas in Far East Asia and other central domed temples. Coomaraswamy also describes the symbolism of the dome in Hindu and Buddhist buildings, while mentioning the universal axle and the realms on the upper and lower planes. The foundation stones of the structure are created by piling the point that corresponds to the head of the snake, which is believed to carry the earth. The column is the plane that unites the worlds, i.e. axis mundi. Architectural action, on the other hand, consists of actions that essentially repeat creation in the Buddhist Stupa or residential structure, and space defines six-way creation. (Coomaraswamy, *The Door in the Sky: Coomaraswamy on Myth and Meaning*, 1997)

The cosmic tree on the Axis mundi line represents the line of communication between the celestial realms above and the underground worlds below. In Central and North Asian mythology, the seven or nine branches of the cosmic tree symbolize the seven or nine layers of the skies. The shaman or priest who communicates with the lower and upper worlds leads the religious ceremony on this axle (Eliade, *Images and Symbols; Studies in Religious Symbolism*, 1952). This central cosmic axle is encountered in the concepts of leader (imam) and pole (qutub) in the Ihwān-ı Safa and The Karmatis, New Pythagoreans and The Sabiis' prayers and in the pleas for help of the ancient Hermetic and gnostic cultures and in the ishraqi thought in Islam (Kaya, 2001). The aforementioned schools are esoteric currents, and in Sufism, which is the theosophical thought of Islam, there is a great emphasis on the esoteric teaching, which cannot be achieved by ordinary people or through the senses (Gül, 2017).

Lehmann examined the origin of the iconographic template in Christian domes in Etruscan and Hellenistic examples. As a result of this investigation, we see that the pagan and astrological elements that formed the celestial dome template in civil and public architectural structures at different periods of Rome were continued in a similar way with some identity changes after Christianization. For example, while the Pantocrator figure at the center of the dome was Jupiter in Rome, in Christianity it became the Cosmocrator or Christ Pantocrator. While the figures in the four corners of the dome were sirens<sup>2</sup> in the Etruscans, in the Byzantine dome pendentives they change into the four evangelists (Lehmann, 1945). It is important to remember that the evangelists are depicted in a similar

<sup>2</sup> Sirens were known in archaic Etruria as heavenly demons of astrological character.

way to mythological figures. Mostly all four are depicted with wings. Each has a different attribute, which corresponds to four elements and four directions; Matthew is represented by the angel, Marcus is the lion, Lucas is the bull, and John (Saint John) is represented by the Eagle. If we follow the lineage, Christian Rome originated mainly from the pagan Rome. The pagan Rome originated from Greeks, Egyptians and Etruscans. The Etruscan belief system is based on Mesopotamia and perhaps Asia. Lehmann, too, states that Etruscan astrology originated in Mesopotamia. The figure known as Lamassu or lion, bull, eagle and human head and appears as protective figures on castle gates. In Greek cosmology, the Triple-Dragon God Phanes is the equivalent of Cherubim. This winged figure incorporates human, bull, lion and various creatures and can be depicted in different forms (Hall, 2005). As a result, Christian iconography in the dome is essentially like a rearranged version of ancient pagan templates. In general, Lehmann conducted an iconographic analysis evaluating ancient texts and presented the hermeneutic interpretation of the celestial dome as follows:

“In both the pagan and Christian worlds, the manifold visions of the dome of heaven, with their symbolism in canopies, figures, and structural forms, with the projections of heaven on ceilings, often coupled with an actual or supposed opening in the sky, all reflect the basic experience of man in visualizing the physical as well as the transcendental celestial realm. It is evidently because of this ever-increasing tradition of heavenly visions on ceilings that *coelum* [heaven] became a common term for roof or ceiling in late antique speech.” (Lehmann, 1945)

One of the most impressive buildings of the antiquity is the Pantheon temple with a hemisphere dome with a diameter of 43 m. It reflects the arched, domed circular plan of the Etruscan tradition. The window opening located right in the top center, called *oculus*, represents the sun, the center of the universe. This is the new universal order provided by the empire. The whole structure is a representation of the sphere-shaped cosmos (Akdeniz, 2016). The historian Cassius makes the following remark on the Pantheon, which was built during the reign of Emperor Augustus:

“It has this name, perhaps because it received among the images which decorated it the statues of many gods, including Mars and Venus; but my own opinion of the name is that, because of its vaulted roof, it resembles the heavens.” (Cassius, 1917)

The word ‘pantheon’ was translated into Latin from Greek. It consists of the words ‘Pan’ meaning ‘whole’ (all) and ‘Theios’, meaning ‘gods’. In the niches of the rotunda (the cylindrical body of the building bearing the dome), there are

statues of the gods of the Roman pantheon<sup>3</sup>. Renaissance drawings show that inside each crate that forms the caged structure of the dome is a gilded bronze star (Richard G. Tansey, 1997). This, as Cassius said, evokes the skies adorned with stars. Describing Rome in the 4th century, Ammianus Marcellinus said, “the Pantheon like a rounded city-district, vaulted over in lofty”. Rome represented the temple of the whole world, and the Pantheon represented the center of Rome in a world where Hadrianus had united the Mediterranean and Europe. At the head of the Roman pantheon, the celestial-god Zeus-Jupiter was represented in the space where the oculus is placed at the center of the dome (MacDonald, 1976). Here, the dome with the oculus is the center axis mundi. The height of the dome is equal to its diameter; that is, the structure contains the perfect sphere representing the cosmos.

As seen in the example of the Pantheon, the form of the dome is based on the cult of the sun as a symbol of the canopy. Its origins can be taken back to the concept of the Sun-God in Egypt. On certain feast days, the Egyptian pharaohs roamed under a baldaquin as a celestial symbol. This tradition was passed on to the ciborium in the Christian tradition (Diez, Bizans Sarayında ve Büyük Türk (Salatin) Camiinde Remiz, 1962). The ciborium on tombs, altars and thrones is a kind of sanctuary that can be found in an open or indoor space. In the early examples, it is a form of a tent bulging in the middle representing the canopy. Assyrian kings and Persian emperors also used this baldaquin structure in ceremonies (Özcan, 2004). The ciborium, which can be found in architecture, miniature painting or liturgical objects in the Byzantine art, is included in its cosmic expression, which gives the title of absolute ruler of the universe to the person or thing under which it is located. In the domes of architecture, it is seen that this symbolism continues (Smith, 1971).

The second largest dome that Rome brought to architectural history was the one of the Hagia Sophia's. After the Nika uprising, emperor Justinian built this church, which was unique at the time, to regain his reputation and represent the power of the Empire. This was the third “Hagia Sofia”, which had been a pagan temple first, and later a wooden church with the same name which had been burned down. It was designed by Anthemius of Tralles and mathematician, Isidorus of Miletos, and was completed in 537 during the Justinian period. With many spolio materials such as columns from the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, the church houses polytheist religions and stones from different regions.

The most striking feature of the structure is its huge dome, which is approximately 32 m in diameter, and its fenestrated drum separating it from the lower

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<sup>3</sup> Roman Pantheon: All gods of the Roman belief.



structures. Moving downwards, a transition element that is first used in this structure is pendentive. There are angel figures on the surfaces of each of these four concave elements (pendentives), which transfers the load of the dome to the bottom structures. These four angels are the characters on the pendentives, which are ancient cosmogonic figures. The number 4 is very important in the esoteric sense and has symbolic equivalents in temples. In almost all beliefs, it is possible to see the ontological equivalent of 4. First of all, it is a representation of the four elements in creation (air, water, earth, fire) and four directions on earth. The four angels bearing the arch are known as the angels closest to God, and named Cherubim and Serafim in the Torah and the Bible. The angel on the pendentive is Serafim since it has six wings (Diker, 2016). It was mentioned that the churches were arranged according to Christian iconography, winged figures representing the four evangelists were seen in the corners of the dome or on pendentives. Here, the depictions of angels bearing the throne were selected.



**Figure 1. The Four Evanlelists mosaic from the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy.**



**Figure 2. The Serafim mosaic on the pendentive of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.**



**Figure 3. The dome of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.**



**Figure 4. An inner illustration of Hagia Sophia before the restoration, The Fossati Album, 1852; Ottoman Archives Library no:6980.**

In Islamic literature, there is knowledge of the angels of “Karrūbiyūn” (Cherubim) carrying the throne. It is said that the number of these carriers, which are referred to as “Hamalat al-Arsh” in the verse, is eight (Qur’ān, 69:17). After being converted to a mosque, wooden plates with the names of the four Rightly Guided caliphs i.e. “Khulafā al-Rāshidūn”, known as the four pillars of Islam, were hung beneath these four pendentives. Also four more plates were hung on the other corners bearing the names of Allah, Mohammed and his grandsons Hasan and Hussein. While in the original dome, in accordance with the Orthodox tradition, the Christ Pantocrator figure was placed as ‘The Ruler of the Universe’. After the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, the center was adorned with the 35th verse of the Surah al-Nūr of the Qur’ān: “God is the light of the heavens and the earth.” This verse was also found in the dome in front of the altar (Diker, 2016). Although the use of this verse on the inside of domes was a common approach seen in the Ottoman royal mosques, the overlapping meanings with the biblical text in the mosaic of the emperor’s gate of the Hagia Sophia is remarkable: “I am the light of the universe” John 8:12 (Necipoğlu G. , 1992). The symbol of light that is essential for the Divine Unity continues in the Hagia Sophia in a different religion (Diker, 2016).



**Figure 5. Mosaic of Christ Pantocrator, south dome of the inner narthex, Chora Church, Istanbul.**



**Figure 6. 35<sup>th</sup> verse of the Surah al-Nūr of the Qur'an at the dome of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.**

Ernst Diez emphasizes that elements in the history of art should be looked at by the concept of 'endosmosis' or cultural penetration, put forward by cultural historian Karl Lamprecht (Diez, Endomoslar, 2012). In other words, it is necessary to investigate this by taking into account that each design has an origin. As we have seen in the examples above, the tradition of Canopy and axis mundi

continued in Göbeklitepe, in the Yurt tent in the steppes of Central Asia, in Mesopotamian domes, stupas in India, in Etruscan tomb structures, pre-Christian domes and eastern Roman churches, maintaining a specific scheme. The Islamic culture, which emerged in its first architectural structures in the 7th century, would inevitably benefit from the styles of deep-rooted civilizations with architectural and artistic traditions. In regards to its geography, these were mainly Sasanid and Roman traditions.

The first important structure of the dome tradition in the Islamic world is the Dome of Rock. The sacredness of Jerusalem for Muslims is based on a hadith about Jerusalem and the Miraj (the Holy Ascension). Islamic scholars concur that the 'Masjid al-Aqsā' mentioned in the Surah al-Isrā is Bayt al Maqdis in Jerusalem (Qur'ān, 17:1). The Arabic word "aqṣā" means "far away" and is named as such because of the distance of the temple to Mecca (Bozkurt, 2004). According to Judaism, the temple was in the heaven even before the world was created. The Lord began creating the world from where its shadow fell; from its projection, and then at that point he created Adam (Bozkurt, 2004). This building in Jerusalem is a center pointing to the point of omphalos and axis mundi. Likewise, the 'sacred rock' on which Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son can be described as omphalos. The belief that the mi'rāj phenomenon, which is the most obvious example of the vertical transition between the realms, took place through this rock is widespread among Muslims. When Caliph Omar conquered the city of Jerusalem in 638, he wanted to know the location of the Temple of Solomon. After examining the Temple Mountain (Mount Moria), he built a simple domed structure in this area (Yiğitoğlu, 2017). In the Umayyad period, a flamboyant domed basilica which would be known as Qubbah al-Sahra was built at the site of the rock, probably as a result of political concerns. This omphalos on Mount Moria, sacred to the Jews under Christian rule, was transferred to the Holy Sepulchre Church in Golgotta, another hill, and was moved to its ancient center by the construction of the Masjid al-Aqsa and Qubbah al-Sahra (Grabar, *The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem*, 1959).

In Islamic architecture, various examples of the celestial symbolism of the dome can be seen in intricate geometric decorations in the form of stars or muqarnas (stalactite) fillings in the dome. Grabar explains in detail the celestial structure of the two domes in the Alhambra Palace. He says that the domes with muqarnas covering the two spaces of the Courtyard with Lions are the revolving heavens. The light that glides through the window on the drum of dome at different times of the day creates a play of light similar to the one in the celestial spheres in the texture with muqarnas on the dome and creates a feeling of rotation. In these halls, a poem written at the eye level reveals the hermeneutic of the dome: "In

here is a cupola which by its height becomes lost from sight [a reference to the immensity of the sky]; beauty in it appears both concealed and visible [an allusion to traditional Islamic conception of the ways to interpret the visible]. The constellation of Gemini extends a ready hand [to help it] and the full moon of the heavens draws near to whisper secretly to it .... / When they [the parts of the room] are illuminated by the rays of the sun, you would think that they are made of pearls by reason of the quantity of celestial bodies in them." (Grabar, *From Dome of Heaven to Pleasure Dome*, 1990)

Before moving to the hermeneutics of dome in the Classical Ottoman era (16th century), the hermeneutics of the dome will be evaluated in the Renaissance as a contemporary culture with it. A number of secondary sources that both cultures refer to in their religious literature are common. We can do a hermeneutical reading primarily through ontological and cosmological texts because the cosmic arrangement of creation and the universe also gives the outline of the architectural structure. Since it is the central dome in question, we must first evaluate the sacred buildings.

According to the Neo-Platonist conceptions of the Quattrocento Humanists, man is creative and he is also the creator of himself. The human, consisting of the body (soma), the soul (psykhe) and the spirit (nous), is considered as three layers just like the world. Hermes Trimegistus represents the unity of the three. Man is the link between the sacred and nature, Pico Della Mirandola describes man as the dome of the world (Fernand Schwarz, 2016). Mirandola explains the "Seven Expositions of the Six Days of Creation" in the book *Heptaplus*, where he fuses the chapter of the Bible with the Kabbalistic elements. The description of the universe over three realms can be found in the antique literature. In this book, he describes how the three-tiered realms were schematized by the Prophet Moses while building the tabernacle. This is a key text to grasp the hermeneutics of the sacred space. The first of the three realms is the sublunary or worldly realm where people and animals live. The second is the celestial world where planets shine and are not open to external influences. Above it is the super-celestial realm, which is under protection. As for their counterpart in tabernacle; the outermost part is the representation of the earthly realm that people and animals can contact. The celestial part with the golden gild and the menorah (seven-arm candlestick) representing the planets and the super-celestial part with the winged Cherubim angels represent these three realms. The three realms are interconnected and what is in one is present in the other. But what happens in the upper realm degenerates as the lower realm passes. Anaxagoras, Pythagoreans and Platonists also explained in this way (Mirandola, 1998).

### **3. HERMENEUTICS OF DOME IN THE OTTOMAN CULTURE**

#### **3.2. Sufi Ontology and Cosmogony in the Dome**

The Sufi tradition is similar to the theosophical understanding of mystical teachings based on revelation, (Kashf) and inspiration as the source of knowledge. The Ishrāqiyya school which Suhrawardī pioneered, is also considered as a theosophical approach (Gül, 2017). The ontology and cosmological sequence described by Sufism is in line with the ancient theosophical understandings.

Sufis explained the formation of cosmos according to emanation<sup>4</sup> and manifestation theories. Accordingly, beings occur by gradually descending and moving away from God (Demirci, Mehmet, 1998). The first detailed description of this subject was made by the Andalusian Sufi Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240). The stations traversed by the Sufi to reach Allah are called "Hazarāt". Sadreddin Kunawî (1209-1274), who categorizes the accounts of Ibn Arabi, describes the five levels of presence with the title Hazarāt al-Khamsa (the Five Presences). Firstly, he examines the world of existence in three main sections; the invisible, the visible and the human (Chittick, *The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari*, 1982). The five stages are listed as follows; God himself/Divinity ('Alam al-Lāhūt), the Spiritual World ('Alam al-jabarūt/al-arwāh), the Imaginal World ('Alam al-malakūt /barzakh/mithāl), the Corporeal World ('Alam al-mulk or 'Alam al-shahāda /nāsūt), and the Perfect Human Being ('Al-insān al-kāmil') (Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge; Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, 1989).

Ibn al-Arabî explains the hermeneutics of the Throne in Sufism, which is symbolically represented by the dome. According to him, the five classifications made above are also referred to as the following names: Non-delimited Imagination (al-khayāl al-mutlaq), the World of Command (amr), the World of Creation (al-khalq), the Corporeal World ('Alam al-shahāda) and the Perfect

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of emanation is that all derived or secondary things proceed or flow from the more primary. It is distinguished from the doctrine of creation by its elimination of a definite will in the first cause, from which all things are made to emanate according to natural laws and without conscious volition. It differs from the theory of formation at the hands of a supreme artisan who finds his matter ready to his hand, in teaching that all things, whether actually or only apparently material, flow from the primal principle. In the Qur'ān (Islamic scripture), terms such as khalq ("creation") and ibdā' ("invention") are used in describing the process of creation. Early Muslim theologians dealt with this subject only in simple terms as stated in the Qur'ān, namely, that God had ordered the world to be, and it was. Later Muslim philosophers, such as al-Fārābī (10th century). and Avicenna (11th century) under the influence of Neoplatonism conceived of creation as a gradual process. Al-Ghazālī (a Muslim theologian of the 11th century) refuted the emanation theory on the grounds that it lowers God's role in the creation to mere natural causality.

Human Being ('Al-insān al-kāmil'). The Throne, The Footstool (Kursī), the heaven of Atlas and the Sphere with Fixed Stars exist in the World of Creation. The Throne encompasses all beings that come before and after it. In other words, it is an 'isthmus' (barzakh) between God and the created, the sphere of the spheres. It is the station of God's name of "al-Rahmān" (the All-Beneficent). The Throne has four pillars and they represent the four truths (haqāiq). A number of prophets and angels carry these pillars together; Seraphiel and Adam, Gabriel and Muhammad, Michael and Abraham, and Ridwān and Mālik (Nasr Hāmid Ebû Zeyd, 2018). The structure of four pillars with eight carriers is connected with the eight carriers of the Throne mentioned in the verse.

In order to understand the numerical symbolism in architecture, it is also necessary to know the hierarchy of saints in Sufism. Awtād (The Four) is the Sufi term used to refer to the four great saints believed to be in four directions, who protect the regions around them. The definition of awtād is found in a system called 'Rijāl al-Ghayb', by which Sufis define the saintly hierarchy. According to the Sufi understanding, the Qutb (pole) is at the top of the ruling hierarchy. It is followed by two imams, in this way "The Three" emerge. The imams follow the awtād. Each one of the awtād is in the heart of a prophet and gets help from the spirituality of the four archangels. The 'Abdāl' are seven people: the four awtād, the two imams and the Qutb. According to al-Ghazali, God has such servants that when they lived, they became successors to the prophets who were the pillars of the earth; that is, awtād. Ibn al-Arabi compares the 'Rijāl al-Ghayb' to the angels of Cherubim, who are always engaged in worship in the Divine presence and who do not know anyone but God (Uludağ, 2008). Considering that the awtād was identified with the four corners of the Kaaba and the four angels carrying the Throne called Serafim or Cherubim, it is understood that these four carrier figures in the dome scheme transferred their place to Khulafā al-Rāshidūn (The Four Caliphs); the four pillars of Islam.

Solar symbolism also coincides with the dome. If we explain it through the hermeneutics of Ibn Arabi, the sun is at the center layer of the celestial spheres in the Corporeal World. The Sun is the heart of this Corporeal Realm, the dwelling of the pole of human souls, and the source of the light of all stars. The pole of human souls is the prophet Idris (or Elijah) (Nasr Hāmid Ebû Zeyd, 2018). According to some sources in the Islamic literature, it is stated that the prophet Idris was Hermes. Considering that the axis mundi points to the polar star in ancient times, the representation of the sun as a pole overlaps with this belief. The center of the dome symbolizes the sun and the polar stage.



### **3.3. The Dome of Hagia Sophia from the Ottoman Perspective**

In order to observe the hermeneutics of the Ottoman dome, it is necessary to understand the hermeneutics of the dome of the Hagia Sophia. Knowing the meanings of this building, which comes from an older and different tradition and turns into an Ottoman work, will help evaluate the Ottoman dome correctly.

Historian Tursun Bey describes the arrival of Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror at the Hagia Sophia after the conquest. When you look at the ceiling from the floor you see a sky covered with stars and when you look at the building from above a wavy sea is observed. He explains that Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror examined the dome of the Hagia Sophia from the inside. He expresses with amazement and admiration that the mosaic figure in the center of the dome (Christ Pantocrator) had been made by a masterful artist and the eyes in the portrait seemed to follow their observers. He describes that this time Mehmet II had gone out to examine the facade, and that he had risen on the structure, like the rise of the Holy Spirit to the fourth heaven. (Tursun Bey, 1977).

This ascension analogy shows that the concept pointed out by a large dome is the vertical axis of ascension, which is the axis mundi. The concept of the fourth heaven shows that a Sufi perspective is encountered in the history literature. This semantic<sup>5</sup> view of the dome is frequently emphasized from the Ottoman perspective and various legends have been produced on this. Evliya Çelebi recounts one of them. He tells us that the dome collapsed in a severe earthquake around 570, the year in which Prophet Muhammad was born, and that the emperor wanted a permanent solution for restoring the dome. Khidr, called the Green Man by the Christians, told the monks in the guise of a derelict that he had found a cure for the destroyed dome: He said that the dome would not stand in its place until the saliva of the Last Prophet and Zamzam water were mixed with the building mortar, and then he disappeared. Upon this warning, the priests went to Mecca to find his uncle, Abu Talib, and with his permission, asked for the saliva of (the Prophet) Muhammad. Then they brought this together with Meccan soil and Zamzam, and they made a mixture and added this to the dome. To mark this blessed point, Sultan Mehmet II hung a chain with a golden ball with fifty bushels of wheat (Çelebi, 2006). Ottoman historians also quoted different versions of this legend.

In a book on the history of the Hagia Sophia, It is stated that the projection of the Great Mosque (Cami-ül Kübrâ) in the Paradise of Firdaws on Earth is the Small Mosque (Cami-üs Suğra), which is the Hagia Sophia (Celalzade, Koca nişancı

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<sup>5</sup> Semantic: Reflecting intended structure and meaning, concerned with the relationship between the signs and the objects.

Mustafa Çelebi, 1165 H.). In hadith sources and Sufi works, a similar prototype of the Hagia Sophia is mentioned, just like Beyt al- Ma'mūr is mentioned as a high dome made from red ruby in the Firdaws Paradise, as the prototype of the Kaaba (Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, 2015). These texts shed light on the perception of the Hagia Sophia in the Ottoman world. From the perspective of the Ottomans, the Hagia Sophia was one of the eternal sacred places like the Kaaba and its dome is the symbol of the sun on the fourth level of heaven. According to Ibn al-Arabi, Prophet Idris is in this layer of heaven. The dome of the Hagia Sophia represents the figure who is the qutb<sup>6</sup> (pole) of wisdom and its stage as the sun layer in heavens. The figure of the Christ Pantocrator in the Byzantine dome was replaced by the 35<sup>th</sup> verse of Surah Nūr: "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth." We can also see this point of view in Tezkirah al-Bunyān, which was written by Sa'i Çelebi from the narration of Mimar Sinan. The Hagia Sophia is considered to be a part of Ottoman history rather than being the product of a different civilization and all the semantics of its structure is transformed. (Morkoç, 2006).

### 3.4. Hermeneutics of Dome in the Ottoman Architecture

Oleg Grabar states that Islamic architecture, unlike Christian architecture, does not have a symbolic iconography that can be interpreted from texts. (Grabar, Symbols and Signs in Islamic Architecture, 1980). However, architectural treatises in Ottoman literary literature can present symbolic and semiotic<sup>7</sup> narratives. Pre-Islamic cosmology is also thought to have shaped the symbols of Islamic architecture. 'The image of the universe', which is an element of Asian culture, can be seen in madrasahs, caravanserais and shrines. (Ögel, 1994). The tomb structures that were included in the Islamic architecture by the Turks were mostly covered with a roof system like a cone or a dome. The origins of this tradition can be taken to the tumuli<sup>8</sup> in the pre-Islamic period. The dome-like top cover is the embodiment of the canopy (Heper, 1996).

The form of the great dome first appeared during the Great Seljuks period. In the plan of the great mosque with four iwans opening to the large courtyard, the dome in front of the mihrab began to show the principle of unity with its large spherical volume. Great Mosque of Isfahan is a good example of this plan. In

<sup>6</sup> Qutb is the perfect human being, al-Insān al-Kāmil (The Universal Man), who leads the saintly hierarchy.

<sup>7</sup> Semiotic: Relating to signs or indications; pertaining to the language of signs, or to language generally as indicating thought.

<sup>8</sup> Tumuli: plural form of *tumulus*, which refers to a mound of earth, especially one placed over a prehistoric tomb.

Anatolian Seljuks, a new concept of space was developed in the madrasas with a closed courtyard. The central domed plan was formed by covering the open courtyard with a dome. From the 14th century onwards, central dome examples can be seen in single-domed mosques and in the so-called zawiya-mosque plan type, which contain different functions in a single structure. Examining the mosques of Sinan, Godfrey Goodwin states that, with a movement towards the central dome, a model dominated by the unity is applied in the Sinan's mosques and the space makes sense of integrity (Goodwin, 1971). According to Burckhardt, in both eastern and western arts, the rectangular or cube shape of the temple is a representation of the circle turning into a square. The circle representing the celestial movements indicates the active one and the square representing the solid state of the earth indicates the passive. (Burckhardt, 2001). The windows in the ground level, which open to the rose garden of the cemetery or the courtyard with the fountain, remove the sharp distinction between interior and exterior. Burckhardt describes the gradual transition from cubic ground to the domes at the Edirne Selimiye Mosque, stating that this design is a smooth and valuable stone as a plan converted from Hagia Sophia (Burckhardt, 2001).

The model of the sacred structure which took its final form in the Ottoman mosque is also a model of cosmology. Burckhardt describes this symbolism as follows:

While the dome of a sacred building represents the universal Spirit, the octagonal drum that supports it symbolizes the eight angels, "bearers of the Throne", who in their turn correspond to the eight directions of the "rose of the winds". The cubical part of the building then represents the cosmos with the four corner pillars (arkān) as its elements conceived as principles both subtle and corporeal. (Burckhardt, 2001)

Here he mentions the eight angels in Surah al-Haqqah. (Al-Haqqah 69/17). However, Burckhardt's comments; four directions, and four elements; air, water, fire, earth symbolism and the cube form representing the cosmos are the concepts of ancient pagan cosmology. According to the traditionalist approach, 'Primordial Religion' (Religio Perennis), is an affirmation of 'Indefectible Truth' (Philosophia Perennis) (Nasr, 1996). This is the idea that revelation comes from tradition uninterruptedly in all periods.

So, as in the perennialist approach above, can a hermeneutic reading be made for the dome in Ottoman culture? For this purpose, it is necessary to check whether these symbols correspond to the written sources. First, what is written about the Kaaba should be evaluated. Because the architectural shape of the mosque is directly related to the symbolic structure of the Kaaba. The Quran

mentions the Kaaba as the first house: "Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at Makkah -blessed and a guidance for the worlds." (Ali 'Imran, 3/96). For Mecca, the mother of cities is used, which indicates that it is in the center of the world. (Al-An'am 6/92; Ash-Shuraa 42/7).

We can see the detailed information about the Kaaba in *Ahbāru Mecca*, written by Muhammad Al- Azrakī in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Özaydın, 1988). This should be the book used by Ottoman historians as a source. From a hadith about Miraj, we learn that the Kaaba, on the earth, is a projection, a replica of the Beyt al-Ma'mūr which is on the seventh layer.<sup>9</sup> Although the original form of Kaaba is controversial, the Islamic literature is dominated by the idea that it is in the center of the world and even the cosmos, signing the axis mundi. Azrākī stated that there are seven storeys above the Kaaba and seven storeys below it, and that Beyt al-Ma'mūr is located at the closest one to the Throne among these fifteen layers. It is also mentioned that the Kaaba in *Ahbāru Mecca* reflects the model of the Beyt al-Ma'mūr which is crowned with a red dome on four chrysolite columns (Akkach, 2005).

The cubic structure of the Ottoman mosque can be compared to the Kaaba and its dome can be compared to the unlimited circular form of heavens and even to the dome of Beyt al-Ma'mūr. These narrations were repeated by Islamic historians and Ottoman Sufi writers and strengthened by some hadith narratives. In fact, four hadiths about Beyt al-Ma'mūr, some of which contradict each other, are recounted in Yazicioglu Muhammad's *Muhammadiyah*, which is one of the most widely read books among the Turkish-speaking people since the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Yazicioglu Muhammed, 2011). Description of a red ruby dome associates with the use of red as the light of heaven on the canopies in ancient civilizations (Lehmann, 1945). In addition, the dome described on four columns is a baldaquin form. This type of structure has also been located above the 'million' point, which has been called the '0' point of the world by the Romans (Müller-Wiener, Wolfgang, 1977). The location of this stone is also close to the Hagia Sophia on the acropolis, which is believed to be on the axis mundi point. This can be regarded as a reflection of the ongoing ancient tradition of crowning the cosmic axis with a dome. Because the imposing dome of Hagia Sophia serves the same purpose. In the Qur'an, although the word Beyt al-Ma'mūr is mentioned, its

<sup>9</sup> Beytu'l-Mamur is situated in the 7th heaven, directly above the Ka'aba on earth. The angels make hajj to this House like we make hajj to Ka'aba. The Ka'aba on earth is a replica of it. It is also called "Al-Durah".

In the famous hadith about Miraj, Beytu'l-Mamur is mentioned:

"Then Beytu'l-Mamur was shown to me. Seventy thousand angels visit there every day."  
 "(Bukhari, Bed'u'l-Halk, 6).

meaning in the hadiths and narrations is not indicated.<sup>10</sup> The Kaaba's relationship with Beyt al-Ma'mūr in the hadiths assimilates the story of the emergence of Bayt al-Maqdis; The Temple of Solomon in the Jewish tradition. It is stated in the Old Testament that Moses built the tent (tabernacle) in accordance with the information given to him on the mountain, this temple was to be a shadow and a copy of the heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5).

In Ottoman culture, we find the description of architecture in literary texts of architectural treatises. The expression of architecture in literary texts in Ottoman culture can be found in architectural treatises. In *Risāle-i Mimariyye*, written by Ca'fer Efendi on the life and works of Sedefkar Mehmet Aga, architect of The Sultanahmet Mosque, there is a narrative on the Kaaba based on the hadith that mentions Beyt'ul Māmūr. The prophets who built the Kaaba; Adam, Seth (Shiith) and Abraham are mentioned as the masters of the profession of architecture (Ca'fer Efendi, 2005). From this text we understand that when the architecture is mentioned in the Ottoman capital, the first structure that comes to mind is the Kaaba, its relationship with Beyt al-Ma'mūr on the vertical axis based on the hadith, and the prophets who built it.

As in other texts of his age, Ca'fer Efendi refers to major sources in the fields of history, interpretation, hadith and literature. Sufi concept of creation that dominates the Ottoman literature is clearly visible in the *Risāle* (Düzenli, 2009). The 'Lawlāka' hadith qudsī, cited as the cause of creation<sup>11</sup>. This divine hadith affirms that Prophet Muhammad is the essence of everything that is created; Allah calls His Messenger; "Were it not for you, I would not have created the cosmos." This is the main source in Sufi literature that explains God's ultimate love to His Prophet who is also the reason, the beginning and the final destination of the whole creation. According to the Sufi Doctrine, Prophet Muhammad represents 'Al-insān al-kāmil' (Perfect Human Being/Universal Man). In this work, Ca'fer Efendi includes the lines that depicts the Creator of the universe as a perfect architect (Ca'fer Efendi, 2005).

In *Tezkiret-ül Bünyan Sa'î Çelebi* gives details of life and Works of Architect Sinan based on the information dictated by Sinan. He first describes the Creator's creation of the universe, and then the symbols of his own design.

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<sup>10</sup> Beyt'ul Māmūr is mentioned in The Holy Qur'an as follows:

"By the mount and [by] a Book inscribed in parchment spread open, and [by] the frequented House (Beyt'ul Māmūr), and [by] the heaven raised high, and [by] the sea filled [with fire], indeed, the punishment of your Lord will occur." (et-Tūr, 52/1-7).

<sup>11</sup> Hadith qudsī (divine/sacred Hadith); is a sub-category of hadith which are sayings of prophet Muhammad. Muslims regard the Hadith Qudsī as the words of God, repeated by prophet Muhammad and recorded on the condition of a document. "Law laaka law laaka maa khalaqat aflaak". *Ajlūnî*, II, 164; *Häkim, al-Mustadrek*, II, 615

Thanks and praise to that Creator of the foundation of the seven stories (of the heavenly spheres) and incomparable glory to that Builder of the heavenly canopy of nine vaults, who, in this workshop of water and earth, without level or compass, fashioned the private palace of Adam's body, which is the pavillion of the heart and soul, and rendered delightful that mosque of the hearts (of humankind) with the adornment of virtue. (Crane, 2006)

After such an introduction which continues by hierarchically praising Prophet Muhammad, the four Khaliphs, Ahl-al Bayt<sup>12</sup> and the Ottoman Sultan, he begins to portray his buildings with cosmological metaphors. This narrative shows that an architectural structure is an embodiment of concepts such as The Throne, the heavens and the earth in the stages of creation of the universe.

The detailed description of the columns, minarets, domes and coloured glass windows in the narration of the Süleymaniye Mosque are also given in a symbolism. To describe the perfection of the structure, the Kaaba analogy is made;

This well-proportioned mosque became Ka'ba.

Its four columns became (like) the Four Friends. (Crane, 2006)

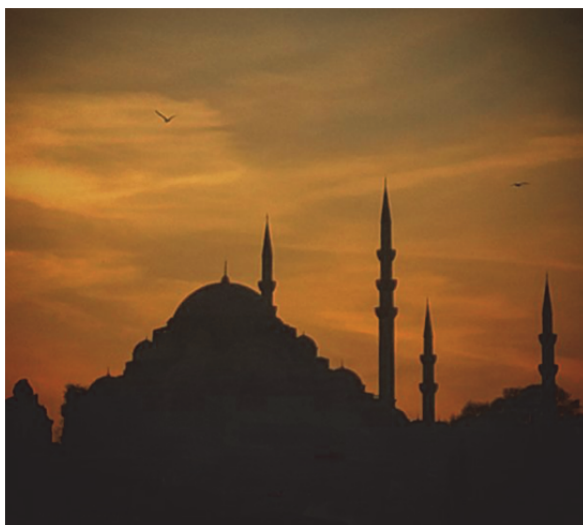


**Figure 7. Inner view of the dome of Süleymaniye Mosque.**

<sup>12</sup> Ahl al-Bayt, (Arabic: "People of the House,") designation in Islam for the holy family of the Prophet Muḥammad, particularly his daughter Fāṭimah, her husband 'Alī (who was also Muḥammad's cousin), and their descendants.



**Figure 8. Name of Khalif Uthman on a pillar**



**Figure 9. The Silhoutte of Süleymaniye Mosque, İstanbul**



**Figure 10. Silhouette of Selimiye Mosque, Edirne**

The gradually rising domes of the mosque are compared to the foams in the sea, the central dome represents the sky, its finial is as the golden gilded sun, the dome surrounded by four minarets are like the Prophet Muhammad and his friends; the four khaliphs (Crane, 2006). As can be seen, the so-called sirens or demons in ancient traditions were portrayed as four biblical writers in the Christian iconography and turned into the four khaliphs in the Ottoman mosque. This narrative shows that, an architectural structure is the embodiment of cosmic elements such as the Throne, the Kursî and the heavens. Here, it is necessary to pay attention to the symbolism of numbers as well as the celestial bodies.

The Selimiye Mosque topic also emphasizes its similarity with Ka'ba and Masjid-i Aqsa, the first two holy places of Islam, and relates to Beyt al-Ma'mûr which is the prototype of all mosques in the sixth heaven. Its dome is likened to a sphere mirror reflecting the earth, the milky way, the nine-fold heavens and even to a wise sheikh (spiritual teacher) (Crane, 2006). Here we see that the concept of Perfect Human Being in Sufism corresponds to the dome. Symbolizing the main dome as the Prophet Muhammad is a result of the same approach.

The central dome and the surrounding half and quarter domes are likened to bubbles in the sea (Harmankaya, 2018). Sometimes there may be a dome analogy associated with the location of the structure. For instance, the Mihrimah Sultan Mosque in Edirnekapı, built by Sinan, is shaped with a vertical movement, emphasizing the rise of the hill, unlike the Imperial Mosque with the same name on the Üsküdar coast. In the charter of the foundation of this mosque, the dome is likened to both a shiny foam in the sea and Mount Sinai where Moses received



the revelation and the divine light descended upon (Necipoğlu G., 2013). The sacred mountain metaphor describes the center that is found in almost all ancient civilizations, portraying the axis mundi or omphalos, and the vertical contact with the lower and upper realms.

The center of the dome, where sun cult has been represented throughout history, in Christianity; The figure of Jesus was settled as the Pantocrator inherited from Zeus. The center of the Ottoman central dome is crowned with a verse from the Qur'an which corresponds to the representation of the dome. Among the verses embroidered in the middle of the dome as calligraphic design; The 35<sup>th</sup> verse of Surah Nur, the 255<sup>th</sup> verse of Surah al-Baqara and the 41<sup>th</sup> verse from Surah al-Fatr can be counted<sup>13</sup>. The common concept of these verses is that Allah is the absolute and the only creator that ensures the existence of the universe. They also illustrate the heavens which correspond to the meaning of the dome.

The finials used at the top of the Ottoman domes also support the meaning pointed out by the dome. The finials are placed on top of buildings with religious functions, such as temples. The crescent-shaped finial was first used in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This is a symbol of the celestial dome, which goes back to the Turks' belief of The Sky God (Harmankaya, 2018). As can be seen in these treatises, the finials are the elements that carry the space to the celestial dimension as the symbol of the moon or the sun.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this paper was to expose the hermeneutical meaning of the Classical Ottoman dome. In order to attain this goal both synchronic and diachronic texts and samples have been evaluated. Synchronically Humanist culture of the

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<sup>13</sup> Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things. (An-Nur 24:35)

Allah there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Most Great. (Al-Baqarah 2:255)

Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving. (Fatir 35:41)

Renaissance was the comparison. On the other hand, endosmosis (cultural infiltration) of hermeneutics of dome throughout the world history has been traced in a diachronistic approach. In this method, indigenous (ritual) experiences of architecture was included especially as rituals and symbols of belief.

Classical Ottoman architecture (16<sup>th</sup> century) has its distinctive identity which developed gradually in its early period. Influences like Roman or Persianate cannot easily be detected from its imperial style. Central dome structure of the Ottoman mosque has been a milestone in architectural history. However, when such an architectural element is examined hermeneutically, one has to deal with the interpretations of religious texts. The interpretations are also hermeneutical approaches of that religion.

The Ottoman dome was likened to bright bubbles in the sea, nine-fold heavens, spherical mirror, Throne of Allah, Prophet Muhammad or a spiritual teacher. The four corners that have been supported by four pillars or four minarets, were metaphors of the four Khalifs/Friends of the Prophet. Although all these metaphors seem to be totally Islamic, the comparison made by the other civilizations has revealed that this structure is a perennial tradition that has been transformed and renamed by each culture.

'The Dome of heaven' concept, axis mundi or the cosmic axis, and omphalos have been constant since the archaic age. The dome has always been a gate through the heavens and it consecrated the below. Dome also showed the sacred center of the World in city scale. It blessed the inner space and outer space as the close neighborhood. The demons became the four evangelists, and then the four Khalifs. The center of the dome has converted from Sun-God symbol, Jupiter the Pantocrator to Christ Pantocrator and finally to a Quranic verse emphasizing Allah as the one and only creator of the universe. The only original Islamic message perceived must be these verses in the mosque's symbolic diagram. The rest are derived from Sufi interpretations which are closely related to the hermetical, theosophical and Neo-Platonical line.

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