

# SPATIAL QUALITIES WITH A CASE STUDY (THE TEKKIYE SÜLEYMANİYE)

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## ABSTRACT:

The Tekkiye Süleymaniye in Damascus is considered by many as the finest piece of Ottoman architecture in Syria. It symbolized the might of the Ottomans and affirmed their presence in Damascus. Notably, it had all the reasons to be a special piece of architecture: the patron was the great Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent; the architect was Sinan, the master of Ottoman architecture, and the city was an important station along the pilgrimage route. By the time the Ottomans entered Damascus in 1516, their architecture was coming very close to its full maturity and was almost reaching its zenith. By that time, he was a well experienced master who was very capable of designing complex projects. In fact, while he was working on the design of the Tekkiye Süleymaniye, he was involved in a yet much more important and grandiose masterpiece of his: the Süleymaniye Külliye in Istanbul. Also, there were two very legitimate reasons for the Tekkiye Süleymaniye in Damascus to enjoy special attention and care in its design and construction. It was a royal foundation, first of all, which carried the name of one of the greatest Ottoman sultans. Moreover, it was built in Damascus, a very important city on the way to Mecca, and the last main station before venturing through the desert. Hence, it was essential that it represented the Ottoman might. Understandably, the project was to be handled by Sinan himself. However, because of his involvement in the Süleymaniye and the simple fact that the Tekkiye was relatively distant from Istanbul, Sinan only designed it, but did not actually supervise its construction. It is also thought that because of these very two reasons, Sinan chose a simple composition for the Tekkiye. The actual supervision of construction was done by one of Sinan's most capable assistants who was, it is believed, an Iranian by the name of Malla Aga.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Tekkiye was built to act as a rest area for the pilgrims' caravans heading towards Mecca. Its location therefore must have been carefully selected; first, because of the importance of the monument as a symbol and as a function, and second, because Ottomans were never arbitrary in their selection of sites for their monuments. The site which was chosen for the Tekkiye was to the west of the city and, at the time, outside its urban limits. Barada River, which sustains Damascus and its oasis, runs just north of it, providing it with water and an especially attractive view (Figure 1).

Such a careful selection of the site is expected from an Ottoman architect, since in general Ottomans preferred two positions for their important facilities: either on top of a mountain or a hill, or close to a water body. Damascus provided both options: Barada River and, to the north of it, Qasseyoon Mountain. The views from the mountain were exceptionally attractive since one could see Damascus and Al-Ghoota around it. Such a natural setting reminds that of Istanbul and definitely Amasya. The hilltops of Istanbul were all occupied by important külliyes such as Fatih (1470) and Süleymaniye (1557); waterfronts also hosted several

külliyes such as the two in Üsküdar: Mihrimah Sultan (1548) and Şemsi Paşa (1581). Beyazıt II Külliye in Amasya (1431), however, seems to be the closest to the Tekkiye Süleymaniye in terms of its relationship with its natural setting. The Külliye in Amasya, like the Tekkiye in Damascus, was built to the south of the river which runs between the city to the south and the mountain to the north. There must have been a certain logic behind the selection of this particular site for the Tekkiye. The first question is why close to the River Barada and not on the mountain, especially, why not at the main branches of Barada? The Torah branch for instance, running at higher elevations, could have been a valuable alternative as a source of water. It is possible that the main function of the Tekkiye was the reason why a site on the mountain was not selected. The Tekkiye was to host the pilgrims with their caravans; thus sparing them the trouble of climbing a mountain after a long trip makes a lot of sense. Moreover, the travellers would have definitely liked to be close to the city, either to visit its religious sites, or to shop. A closer location with easy axis puts the chosen site at an advantage. It is to be noted here that the Tekkiye was built outside the city limits at that time (Wulzinger and Watzinger, 1984). A possible reason



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for this decision could be the need for a large open area for the caravans to rest. In fact to the west of the Tekkiye, where the Syrian National Museum is located now, an area twice as big as the Tekkiye was allocated for the camps. A nineteenth century engraving shows the whole area around the Tekkiye and on both sides of the river as a camping ground (Goodwin, 1987). Such a huge open land was most

probably not available inside the walls. Another reason for having the Tekkiye outside Damascus proper is possibly because the Ottoman administration wanted to minimize the disturbance of regular life in the city. There were many occasions when the official caravan of the pilgrimage entered Damascus and caused chaos and disorder (Rafeq, 1974)

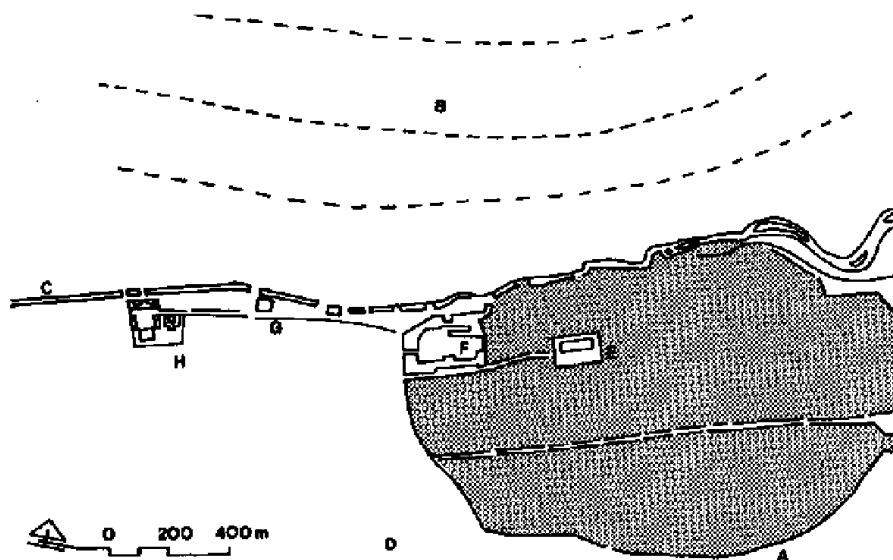


Figure 1. Damascus inside the walls. A. The walls of the city; B. Qasseyoon Mountain; C. Barada River; D. Al-Ghoota; E. Umayyad Mosque; F. The citadel of Damascus; G. An old road connecting the Tekkiye with the old city; H. The Tekkiye Süleymaniye

Locating the Tekkiye to the west of Damascus must have been based on some reasoning also. Barada River runs from west to east; in other words, the Tekkiye was located at a position where it could get the clean water of the river, before it entered the city. Moreover, the eastern side of the city was where the Christian quarters were located while most Muslim quarters were to the north and west. Thus, it seems reasonable to build the Tekkiye closer to the Muslim side. One additional reason for locating the Tekkiye to the west of the city was the natural beauty of that area. It had the river surrounded by unexploited green open land which was always used by Damascenes for recreation. And finally, the west side of the city was always where the richer neighbourhoods used to settle. Being a royal foundation, it was only natural that the site for the Tekkiye would be located with some kind of relation to the richer neighbourhoods of the city [1].

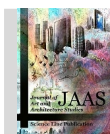
### Program of the Tekkiye

Since the Tekkiye was built to accommodate the pilgrims going to or coming back from Mecca, its functional program was not very complicated. It originally included a mosque; a tabhane (guesthouse) consisting of twelve rooms; and a service area for the preparation of food which included a main kitchen with a store and a bakery,

and two halls. Shortly after the Tekkiye was built, a medrese and two rows of shops were annexed to it. It is possible that some stables were also included in the program; however no trace of them can be seen anymore [2].

Areas for these functions were not very large. The area of the main Tekkiye is 127 by 95 meters; an area which is less than half the size of the main space surrounding the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul. Similarly, the annexed Medrese and shops occupy an area not more than 80 by 70 meters. The Mosque itself is a thirteen meter single-domed square; such a small size does not reflect the actual volume of the crowd to visit the Tekkiye. Similarly, the Tabhane has only twelve rooms, and the kitchen and its supporting facilities do not look over-scaled. It seems, thus, that the symbolic aspect of the Tekkiye was as important as its utilitarian role.

In other words, the Tekkiye was to show a strong presence, while its functions could be accommodated in and around it. Accordingly, caravans were to rest around the Tekkiye and not necessarily inside. As it was mentioned earlier, open spaces to the west of the Tekkiye, and even to the north of it at the other side of the river, were used as camping grounds for travellers. Because of the relatively moderate weather of Damascus, praying in the Tekkiye's courtyard and under the Mosque's



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arcade was quite possible. In fact, sizing the Mosque to such a small scale indicates a high level of understanding and sensitivity, since mostly a relatively small number of worshippers would have prayed in the Mosque, especially for the fact that it was located outside the city at the time. It was, therefore, not very logical to build an oversized structure knowing that it would be under-utilized. Pilgrims, who used to spend only a few days of the whole year in the area, could be accommodated in the open space of the Tekkiye [3].

### DESIGN OF THE TEKKIYE

The Tekkiye is located on a relatively flat site with a steep, but not very high slope on its southern side. It would have been possible to use this slope to the advantage of the design; especially keeping in mind that Sinan worked at the same time on a design concept for the Süleymaniye, based on the use of slopes. In other words, the Tekkiye could have been used as an experimentation ground for the greater monument. However, Sinan opted to push the slope to the south and deal with the site as if it were perfectly flat. A simple explanation for this decision is that he did not want to risk any complicated design in a location where he could not easily supervise. Another possible reason is that Sinan did neither see the program of the project elaborate enough, nor the existing slope exceptionally severe to justify a complicated design [4].

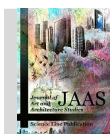
Beside the fact that the site was relatively flat, it was surrounded by practically no other function. Accordingly, there were no restrictions to affect the overall shape of the Tekkiye, as it was the case in most külliyes in Istanbul or any other city. To put it differently, in crowded urban areas the shape of the lot was affected by the streets and adjacent lots; therefore, in most cases it was of an irregular shape. Consequently, in külliyes where a clear geometry was sought, this geometry was broken at certain parts of the site because of its irregularity. Examples of this case, among works built by Sinan are many and include Haseki Sultan Külliye (1548), Şehzade Mehmet Külliye (1548), and even Süleymaniye Külliye (1557). In the case of the Tekkiye Süleymaniye, the land allowed the architect to choose the shape he desired. Sinan's choice was a rectangle to house the Tekkiye's buildings and open spaces. With this shape he was able to design a perfectly symmetrical form with unmistakable simplicity. As has been mentioned earlier, one other reason for the simple architectural composition was the fact that Sinan was unable to supervise the project personally. It must not be imagined though that the project was simplistic or lacked the splendour or greatness for which Sinan's projects were famous (Figure 2) [4].

Within the rectangular site, whose long axis runs in the direction of Mecca, the Mosque occupies the southern side. The Tabhane consists of two

rectangular structures located at the north of the Mosque and on its eastern and western sides. The Mosque is connected to the two blocks of the Tabhane on the east and west sides by two walls pierced with windows. Thus the Mosque and the Tabhane begin to form the inner court of the Tekkiye. The fourth side of this court is formed by the service block which includes the kitchen and its supporting facilities. The kitchen in the middle and the two side halls are also connected by a pair of short walls each of which incorporates a door and a couple of windows. Views to open space of the service area is possible through these openings. The Tekkiye has two main gates located between the Tabhane and the side halls of the service block. The eastern gate leads to the Arasta in the middle of which there is a gate to the Medrese. Facing this gate, there was another one which used to lead to what most probably were the stables [2].

There are several points to be discussed in relation to the overall design of the Tekkiye. The first point is the location of the two main gates. Their location on the east and west sides of the complex is not surprising, since such a positioning allows continuous flow of circulation from the open green areas to the Mosque and then to the old city. This axis runs parallel to the river and connects all spaces of the area together. A gate from the north would not have been very helpful, since, firstly, there is no heavy traffic from the north because of the river which acts as a barrier; and secondly, if such an access was allowed, the enclosure and privacy of the service area would have been sacrificed. Moreover, it was common practice in projects similar to the Tekkiye in their layouts, where two functions face each other (usually the mosque and the medrese), that the entrances would be located at the two sides [4].

However, the unique point in the Tekkiye is that these two entrances are located between the Tabhane and the two halls, and not immediately after the portico of the mosque, as it is typically the practice. For instance, Çoban Mustafa Paşa Külliye in Gebze (1520), Sinan Paşa Mosque and Medrese in Beşiktaş, Istanbul (1555), Sokollu Mehmet Paşa Mosque and Medrese in Kadırga, Istanbul (1571), Mihrimah Sultan Mosque and Medrese in Edirnekapi, Istanbul (1560), Lala Mustafa Paşa Külliye in Iğın (1576), and Zal Mahmut Paşa Mosque, Eyüp, Istanbul (1581) were all built by Sinan and have the two entrances to the main mosque-medrese space located immediately after the portico and before the medrese. Kara Ahmet Paşa Mosque-Medrese is the only exception where the two gates are in the middle of the east and west sides of the space. Courtyard mosques also have their side entrances at the first bay after the portico [4].



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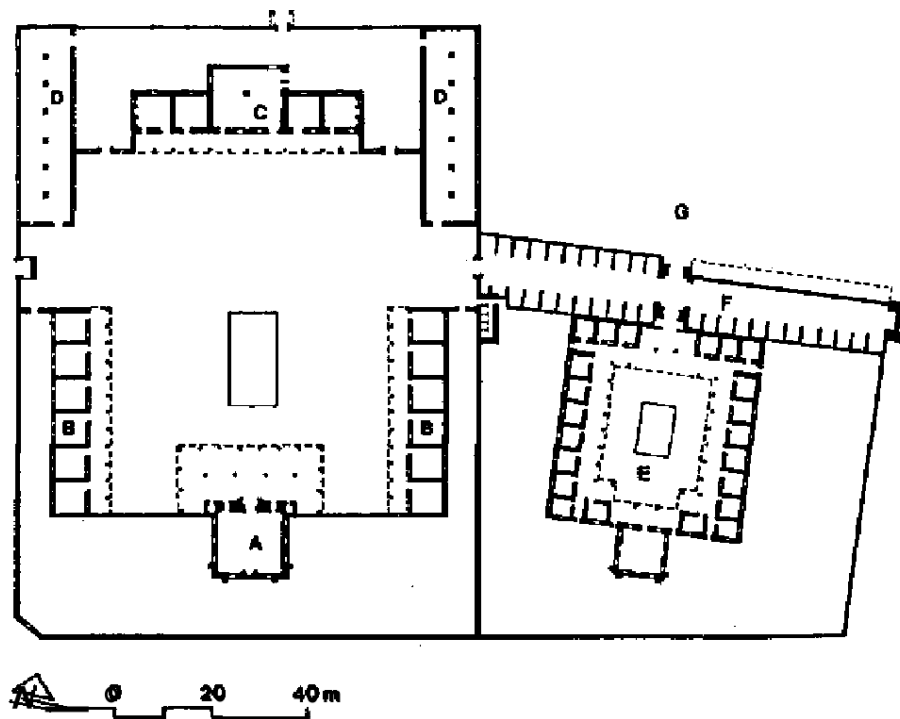


Figure 2. The Tekkiye Süleymaniye plan: A. Mosque; B. Tabhane; C. Kitchen; D. Halls; E. Medrese; F. Arasta; G. Location of the stables.

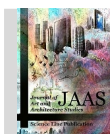
This unusual placement of the gates can be explained in at least two ways. First, the Tekkiye's site was cut into a gentle slope which increases towards the south. The site was to be kept at one level close to the level of the bottom of the hill which was at the northern side of the site. Thus, while the site was at the same level with the area around it at the northern part, a change in level between the site and its surrounding took place at the southern part. Therefore, in order to allow an easy axis to the site without stairs, it was necessary to have the gates as close to the north as possible. Accordingly, the gates could not be located after the Mosque which was to the south of the site, but after the Tabhane. Stairs were also needed at that point; however, it cannot be said whether these stairs were part of the original design or were added at a later date. Another reason for the gates to come after the Tabhane was to separate the service area from the main functions of the Tekkiye which were the Mosque and the Tabhane. The two gates which are located facing each other create an axis which suggests some kind of separation between the two sides of the Tekkiye.

The second point in relation to the overall design of the Tekkiye is related to the annex which includes the Medrese and the Arasta. As it was stated earlier, it was not part of the original design of the Tekkiye; however, it was built a relatively short time after the main Tekkiye was completed. The strange thing about it is that it is not aligned with the main Tekkiye. In other words, the main axis of the annex is not parallel with that of the main Tekkiye. It is to be added here that a change in orientation means an

error in orienting the structure towards Mecca. Thus, the question is whether it was a mistake, or purposely done. There is no definite way to prove either possibility. However, the following points should be kept in mind. Firstly, the rich experience of the Ottoman architect makes it very difficult to believe that it was a mistake. Secondly, the Medrese did not have to be directed towards Mecca, since it was not a mosque and did not have to be used as one, as the Mosque of the Tekkiye was very close by. Haseki Sultan Külliye (1539), Mihrimah Sultan Külliye (1547), Kılıç Ali Paşa Külliye (1580), Şemsî Ahmet Paşa Külliye (1581), and Atik Valide Külliye (1583) are examples of monuments built by Sinan that have their medreses along axes different from those of mosques. Thus, it is not unusual to see the medrese of a tekkiye not parallel with the mosque.

It is to be noted, though, that there were certain reasons for the change of axis in the layout of Ottoman Külliyes. The first was the shape of the site as in the case of Mihrimah Sultan Külliye. Another reason was the topography of the site which forced the designer to orient some buildings, so that he would not go very much against the contours of the land; Yıldırım Beyazıt Külliye in Bursa (1395) is one example of this situation. A third reason is the need to orient buildings along existing roads; examples are Hamza Bey Center in Bursa (1540's) and Atik Valide Külliye [5].

In the case of the Tekkiye Süleymaniye, the site was fully open and there were no clear limits to force any kind of squeezing of the Medrese in an odd direction. Moreover, the topography was not difficult



enough to suggest any need to change the direction of the annexed building. The only possible reason, thus, is that some kind of circulation access was in existence and connected the eastern gate of the Tekkiye with the old city. It seems possible to have this road at an angle; in fact, the angle of the Arasta is aligned with a line which connects the Tekkiye's gate with the north-western corner of Damascus'. Although it is difficult to confirm the existence of a road along this axis at the time, available maps of the city show a road along the discussed axis. It was possible to change the direction of the road, that is, if it existed, since the land around it was open and such a minor change would not have caused any harm. Accordingly, it is not possible to be sure of the reason behind the change in the Medrese's orientation. Perhaps the designer of the annex made use of the fact that the road's axis was tilted as a way to reinforce the idea that the Medrese and the Arasta are not part of the original plan of the Tekkiye. The change in orientation continues to be puzzling when the plan is observed; "however, in reality it is not very much felt when one walks through the complex. A third issue in connection with the layout of the Tekkiye to be pointed out here is the sensitivity to scale. Although the Tekkiye was a royal foundation, it was not oversized. It was monumental; however, not imposing. Again, reasons for the Tekkiye's small scale can be related to the fact that Damascus was only the capital of a region which cannot be compared with Istanbul, in addition to the small scaled program of the Tekkiye. Moreover, the heights of buildings in the complex are such as to provide a very human scale in the perception and feeling of the external spaces. Such sensitivity to the scale of monuments in relation to its setting, can also be observed in the Beyazıt II Külliye in Amasya (1481) and the Muradiye Külliye in Manisa (1592) [6].

Finally, with the shape that it was able to acquire, the Tekkiye may be one of Sinan's few buildings which have the perfect geometrical and symmetrical design that he perhaps, was striving to achieve. The other külliye of this quality is the Selimiye in Edirne. Almost every other külliye with strong geometrical and symmetrical order, had to lose its perfect form, because Sinan had to respect the conditions of the site, such as road layout, shape of the site, or the existing topography. One other reason to distort symmetry can be, as Erzen explains, to create surprise or movement [7, 8].

### **Spatial and visual qualities of the tekkiye**

As Kuran observes (1987), the open space or the courtyard occupies the center of the Tekkiye, and not a mass (which was typically the mosque in the classical royal külliyes). In fact, the Tekkiye can be closely related to külliyes with a shared space for the mosque and medrese [9].

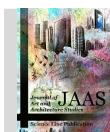
This type of külliyes, the open space occupies a central position around which the mosque and medrese are located. In the case of the Tekkiye, the

service block takes the place of the medrese because of the kind of function the Tekkiye carries. This central space was not a void left between buildings; it was the center of activities and the connector between all functions, exactly like any courtyard in residential units. It was used for praying as well as for social gathering and relaxation. It was an open living room of a sort surrounded by the rest of the functions in the Tekkiye. The walls which connect the mosque with the Tabhane and those which connect the kitchen with the two halls complete the enclosure and define the space. The arcades along the Mosque, the Tabhane, and the kitchen reinforce the relationship between the buildings and strengthen the unity of the space. One cannot be certain about the date of the trees in the courtyard; however, a nineteenth century engraving of the Tekkiye shows clearly that trees were as high as the dome of the Mosque. Many of the Ottoman külliyes had huge trees in their open spaces; one of their advantages is that they were good source of shade for the tired travellers [10, 11].

Two points can be observed about the main courtyard of the Tekkiye. First, it provides a good foreground for the Mosque, especially at the entrance points. Although the Mosque is not oversized, it is clearly much more massive than the other buildings around the courtyard and especially the kitchen which shares with it the same axis. The location of the entrances close to the kitchen gives the Mosque the advantage of being the most important mass, and emphasizes its position as the terminal object in the composition. This is so, because approaching the space from either one of the entrances, the viewer sees first to one side the kitchen and to the other the side wall of the Tabhane and the colonnade. The walls of these structures are relatively low. After a few steps, his eyes move towards the Tabhane in order to discover the space which is unfolding. Then his eyes rest on the Mosque with its impressive dome whose dominance is emphasized by the two minarets.

The second point about the courtyard is the fact that although it is fully enclosed, the designer has purposefully pierced its free standing walls with windows wherever possible, so that a feeling of continuity between open spaces could be achieved. Thus the space, although enclosed, has become more open and more of interest. This treatment of the free standing walls is typical in Ottoman architecture and can be seen in almost every külliye. The porticos which are semi-enclosed spaces, the open spaces, the enclosed spaces with many windows, and the pierced walls altogether make the spaces flow into one another in a very pleasant and easy manner.

The other open spaces had most probably specific functions. The space immediately behind the Mosque was typically used in all Ottoman külliyes as a hazire (graveyard) and/or türbe for both the patron and those close to him. The spaces behind the rooms of the Tabhane were most probably left in



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order to allow the windows of the rooms to open to a private space and not directly to the outside. And finally, the space in the service area would have been needed for all kinds of uses in the kitchen. As it was mentioned earlier, the spaces were not separated or isolated from each other when considered visually; however, because of their different functions they were separated physically and access was limited to some of them [12].

The Arasta is a linear space which shows a sharp contrast with the courtyard. It is a short and attractive shopping street which is about 83 meters long and 6 meters wide. The interesting point about it is again the fact that it is not aligned with the main Tekkiye. Accordingly, the main visual and circulation axis which runs between the two gates is broken. A surprise therefore awaits the viewer who approaches the site from the east through the Arasta; he would go through the Arasta with the wall of the western hall appearing through the gate. After he goes through the gate he slowly discovers the space while he changes his direction. In the same manner, the viewer from the west will discover the Arasta and it is fully length only after he goes through the eastern gate.

Along the Arasta, and approximately at its mid-point, one of its bays becomes a portal to the Medrese at one side and a gate to the outside at the other. The two openings are gently announced by their design and make a nice surprise in the middle of the continuous line of shops. The Medrese itself is a typical Ottoman one with the Darshane at the other end of the axis through its gate. Contrary to the main Tekkiye space, the courtyard here is fully enclosed by the cells.

From the above description the following conclusions about the spatial and visual composition of the Tekkiye can be reached. Firstly, the Tekkiye displays a variety of spatial configurations; some are linear and others are central. The shapes of these spaces correspond to their functions; but moreover, they bring a lot of interest and excitement to the visual experience in the Tekkiye. Secondly, the spatial continuity which was allowed by the windows in all the walls makes the visual experience very unique, but not unusual for Ottoman architecture (Hakky, 1992). Thirdly, the fenestration, the porticos, and the arrangement of spaces create a spatial continuity between the enclosed, semi open, and open spaces, a fact which strengthens the unity and beauty of the site. Again this is a quality which is seen in all Ottoman külliyes. And finally, the arrangement of entrances, openings, open and enclosed spaces, circulation axes, in addition to plants create visual stimulation and interest.

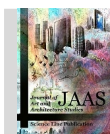
#### FINAL NOTES

The Tekkiye Süleymaniye in Damascus presents an Ottoman monument which is scaled to fit the functional requirements and to be appropriate to its setting. Its design, including site selection, functional program, overall design concept, and

finally spatial composition, is perhaps an ideal model of what the Ottoman architect would have wanted to achieve. Its architectural design is not discussed here, since it was studied by many who showed that it is, at that level too, a very fine Ottoman monument.

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