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THE SIGNIFICANCE AND REPRESENTATION OF THE NURUOSMANIYE MOSQUE AS A BAROQUE MONUMENT

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The Baroque style of architectural building, which had prevailed in much of Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, emerged for the first time in the mid-eighteenth century in Istanbul. It was the Nuruosmaniye mosque in its Baroque tendencies that broke away from the traditional Anatolian and distinctive classical Sinan style of building. As Cerasi puts it, “It is no rough quotation or mere imitation of foreign styles, but a clever transposition of a foreign vocabulary into a perfectly dominated indigenous poesis.” (Cerasi 1988: 98) This genius in reversing the roles and borrowing this foreign language of Baroque and applying it on a monument from Ottoman Turkey in a synthesis of two worlds is at the core of the Nuruosmaniye, which is considered one of the best representations of Baroque spirit in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, what adds to this mystery is the little information regarding the architect and the direct origins that influenced the building of this mosque. This paper addresses the events that led to the building of the Nuruosmaniye and the penetration of Baroque influence into Turkey. While the character of the Nuruosmaniye retains a certain originality amongst the mosques of its time, true recognition of the Nuruosmaniye seems to have been suspended. With the exception of a few historians, the likes of Dogan Kuban and Aptullah Kuran, one may postulate that the Nuruosmaniye has been poorly represented in current historiography on Ottoman art—especially in contrast with previous Ottoman monuments, namely those of the Sinan period. While presenting a rich and rare evaluation of the Nuruosmaniye, this paper attempts to counterbalance the Nuruosmaniye’s absence from literature dealing with Ottoman art history.

In his article Late-Ottoman Architects and Master Builders, Maurice

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Cerasi concludes with an intrigued question about the Nuruosmaniye and this dialectic between Ottoman elements and Baroque forms. “Where does the mastery [in the Nuruosmaniye] of the European Rococo-Baroque lexicon stem from,” Cerasi inquires. (Cerasi 1988: 98) It may be fitting to postulate that much of Nuruosmaniye’s eclecticism may be accredited to both geographical location and distinct circumstances that allowed for cross-cultural exchanges. Towards the seventeenth century, an inclination for things Western characterized the arts and architecture of the Ottoman Empire. This interest in the West, which manifested itself in the social life and architecture of the empire, is not without provenance. Since art and architecture are linked with the expression of power and society, the study of socio-cultural, political and economic conditions becomes imperative. Therefore, gaining an understanding of the Nuruosmaniye requires knowledge of its historical context and the precepts upon which it came to be.

Mahmud I, who came to power after the deposition of his predecessor Sultan Ahmet III, commenced the Nuruosmaniye. (Finkel 2005: 331, 354, 365) The period before Sultan Mahmud I took office was a period of unprecedented economic difficulty and problems within the military and public sectors. This seems to have become the status quo for the Ottoman Empire and its sultans towards the end of the sixteenth century. After Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, the sultans that followed lacked the qualities of a great ruler fit to lead the Ottoman Empire on a stable calibre of success. (Barber 1973: 61) By the late seventeenth century, the empire was suffering internal confusion and civil uprisings, where the Empire’s bureaucratic, religious and military institutions were slowly disintegrating and the society was declining in its professional and moral foundations. (Lewis 1958: 113) Moreover, the Ottomans were witnessing a chain of military defeats and blows from their European counterparts who were rising in defiance. This defiance began with the formation of the Holy League, an alliance of anti-Ottoman powers along with the Papacy, as a response to the Ottoman besiege of Vienna in 1683. The Ottomans engaged against the Holy League in a 16-year war, which lead to their defeat and the Treaty of Carlowitz in 1699, denying the Ottomans many of their European territory. (Finkel 2005: 285-289; Imber 1965: 86)

Of these territories lost, the empire’s greatest loss was Hungary, one of Sultan Suleyman’s most celebrated conquests, which Sultan Mustafa II relinquished to the Austrians by the Treaty of Carlowitz. (Imber 1965: 86) The Ottoman Empire, a power once distinguished for its military superiority, was falling behind the Europeans over whom the Ottomans once held sway.
Upon this happening, Mustafa lost the reverence of his Ottoman subjects, who were displeased with the empire’s mounting defeats and saw in Mustafa a disgraceful representation of the Muslim pride. (Finkel 2005: 330) Rebellions and revolts calling for the discharge of his government brought chaos to the empire and in turn led to his demise in 1703. (Finkel 2005: 330-331) Sultan Ahmet III took over, and, likewise, his period saw little rest. The Ottomans continued to be engaged in battles and wars with the Russians, Austrians, and Italians until the passing of the treaty of Passarowitz in 1718. Both this treaty—which placed the Ottomans in a position of inferiority with respect to their rivals—and France’s shared enmities with the Ottomans seemed to have served as the basis for strengthened Franco-Ottoman relations. (Gocek 1987: 7) Then came the breath of fresh air, which the Ottomans had been awaiting. In September 1739, a three-year war between the Ottomans and the Russians in collaboration with the Austrians came to an end with the Peace treaty of Belgrade, which restored the Balkan territories (Bosnia and Northern Serbia) won by the Austrians at Passarowitz to Ottoman rule. (Faroqhi 2006: 101-102) For the years to follow, the Ottomans would enjoy a relatively peaceful relationship with their European counterparts and an especially better relationship with the French. (Shaw 1977: 245)

Despite the above-mentioned military involvements, Istanbul did not cease to be a centre for artistic expression and architectural grandeur. In fact, improved Franco-Ottoman relations had begun to shape the cultural scenes in Istanbul long before the Nuruosmaniye. The Ottoman court was first exposed to European influence under Sultan Ahmet in the Lale Devri or Tulip Age, a period of exuberance characterized by a profusion of tulips, tulip gardens, and tulip designs on textiles, pottery, tiles, manuscripts, and tulip carvings on fountains. (Finkel 2005: 346-347) The Ottoman society, particularly the Ottoman royalty, the bourgeoisie and nouveaux riches of the 1720s, enjoyed improvidence and extreme extravagance mirrored in their regular flamboyant parties; most profligate of which were Sultan Ahmet’s parties, celebrations, and festivals, which would continue for several days throughout the imperial palaces. (Finkel 2005: 344) It was during his time in 1720 that diplomatic contact with France was strengthened with the first Turkish ambassador to Paris, Yirmisekiz Celebi Mehmed Efendi, heading a delegation of 80. (Aslanapa 1971: 231; Finkel 2005: 342) He was ordered “to visit fortresses and factories, and to make a thorough study of means of civilization and education, and report on those suitable for application in the Ottoman
Empire.” (Gocek 1987: 4) Sultan Mahmud I, as evidenced below, seemed to have shared Sultan Ahmet’s interest in things European; therefore, he may have demanded that the Ottoman ambassador to Russia, Mehmed Emni, take note of the arts and architecture of Russia. (Faroqhi 2004: 193)

However, the French had already been in the Ottoman Empire since the late sixteenth century. It was upon the Capitulations of 1569, an agreement between the French and the Ottomans, that Catholic missionaries were given permission to enter the Ottoman Empire. (Frazee 1983: 67) French rights and concessions would continue to grow thus placing the French ahead of their European neighbours; the French were granted exclusive trading privileges, the French ambassador assumed the role of representative of the Catholics, and the king of France was esteemed above all other European sovereigns with the title “brother of the sultan.” (Frazee 1983: 67-68) Such privileges persisted until the treaty of Carlowitz in 1699, which gave the Hapsburgs shared responsibility with the French over the protection of Catholic subjects. (Frazee 1983: 154) By the eighteenth century, the French community of merchants had grown noticeably large, and they were becoming influential in Istanbul. (Frazee 1983: 154) There was a flourishing market for French imports into Turkey, which seemed to have contributed to the dissemination of Baroque and Rococo influences. (Peker 2006: 71) Between 1730 and 1734, French imports increased from 25-30 million livres to 40 million. (Eldem 1999: 115)

In 1730, an uprising, which began with 25 to 30 rebels, mainly tradesmen and former soldiers, grew larger, and the Sultan, unable to curb them, relinquished his position to his nephew, Sultan Mahmud I, son of Mustafa II: (Finkel 2005: 353-354) Sultan Mahmud was thirty-four when he ascended to power. (Freely 1999: 202) Not only was he young and inexperienced, but he also came to rule an empire torn by turmoil and civil unrest. However, Mahmud immediately followed a set of reforms when he dispensed sums of money to the underprivileged, elderly, and army. (Freely 1999, 201-202) Nevertheless, in time, Mahmud demonstrated his incapacity as a ruler whose decisions were dependent upon his mother, the Valide Sultan Saliha, and the chief black Eunuch, Haci Besir Aga. The latter, who had worked with the previous three sultans, became known as the real authority behind the throne. (Freely 1999: 203) Seemingly, Mahmud’s incompetence may be matched with his extravagant indulgencies and moments of leisure spent in the harem, where he would sit behind a grille and watch the women in the baths of the harem. (Barber 1973: 110; Freely 1999: 206)
Thus, as mentioned above, the presence of a French mercantile society in Istanbul, together with trade and travels between France and Turkey brought about an easy exchange of cultures. Moreover, this was made most effectual thanks to the Ottoman Empire’s unusual mélange of diverse nationalities, languages and cultures, and the Ottoman society’s susceptibility for change. France, along with many Central and Eastern European nations, including Hungary and Romania (both Ottoman provinces until 1699 and 1878 respectively), was the host of Baroque. (Imber 2002: 86; Finkel 2005: 485) It may have been through this contact with the West that Baroque was able to infiltrate into the empire. Kuran believes that this increased interest in Western culture and its penetration into the arts and architecture of the Ottoman Empire was merely a reaction to military defeat rather than the artist’s need to explore novel features of expression or a wanting to be Europeanized. (Kuran 1961: 238; Kuran 1997: 305) In fact, the evolution of Ottoman aesthetics in the eighteenth century and the emergence of the Nuruosmaniye can be seen as a result of military and political conditions in the empire as much as a result of centuries of cultural exchange and an increased interest in Europe. Thus, these new feelings of political and military inferiority necessitated this change. The Ottomans may have wanted a chance to shine and reflect the prominence of the empire through architecture, which seemed to be the only way to portray the empire in its grandeur.

From then onwards, the prevalent and continued use of European building techniques and styles became a potent tool for the portrayal of Ottoman modernity and social reform—in this case, it was the Nuruosmaniye. The significance of the Nuruosmaniye lies in the fact that it is a monument of symbolic connotations, not only because of its timing, location, and grandeur, but also because it represented a revolutionary reaction with its newly adopted Baroque tendencies. When the word ‘Baroque’ came out in France in the late sixteenth century, it was a euphemism for something odd, peculiar, irregular, and uncultivated. (Bazin 1968: 15) By the early seventeenth century, the word began to enter French dictionaries and in 1771 it was given three meanings in the French Dictionnaire des Travaux. (Bazin 1968: 15; Cannon-Brookes 1969: 9) There are many speculations concerning the etymology of the word. The terms berrueco in Spanish and barroco in Portuguese seemed to have been used by jewellers for pearls with an irregular shape. Coincidentally, the Spanish word berrueco stands for a slight flaw and the Portuguese word barroco stands for a bulgy land. (Bazin 1968: 15) However, this negative association with
Baroque grew fainter with time and came to signify a period or stand for an artistic archetype especially when Heinrich Wolfflin in 1888 used the term ‘Baroque’ for artistic purposes rather than as a derogatory term. (Cannon-Brookes 1969: 9) Baroque is marked by circular forms, a blend of rhythm and volume, dramatic use of chiaroscuro (contrasted light and shades), completely frescoed ceilings with the combined effects of trompe-l’œil (painting with the illusion of being three-dimensional), more or less elliptical plans, and a ubiquitous dynamic character. (Bazin 1968: 103, 107, 289) Therefore, the Baroque architect often favoured the dynamism of the ellipse and rectangle over the static square and the circle. (Kuran 1997: 316)

Up until the Nuruosmaniye mosque, it had been almost 150 years—since the Sultan Ahmet I mosque in 1617—that a sultan sponsored the construction of an imperial mosque. (Finkel 2005: 365) Mahmud had begun the building of the Nuruosmaniye in 1748, however he died of a stroke on his way back from Friday service at the Hagia Sophia on December 14, 1754. (Crane 1999: 24; Finkel 2005: 372; Freely 1999: 208, Goodwin 1971: 382) It happened that Mahmud, who was laid to rest the next day in the turbe at the Yeni Valide Mosque, would leave behind a legacy other than the Nuruosmaniye. Upon his death, rumours began spreading throughout Istanbul about Mahmud having been buried alive and despite repudiations to this claim, it became a legend recounted by the people of Istanbul. (Freely 1999: 209) Thus, the construction of the mosque was taken over and completed in 1755 by his brother Sultan Osman III, after whom the mosque retains its name Nuruosmaniye or Light of Osman. (Finkel 2005: 365; Goodwin 1971: 382)

When Sultan Mahmud authorized the building of the Nuruosmaniye, he wanted to build his mosque in keeping with the plans and styles of European churches, which had been sent to him; however, he withdrew from his desires due to heavy opposition from the Ulema (a body of Muslim theologians) of the time. (Kuban 1981: 274) However, by comparing the Nuruosmaniye mosque to its predecessors and observing its layout, plan, and outer Baroque decorations, it seems the Sultan had it his way. Being the first mosque to be sponsored by a sultan in over a century, this mosque must have been of great importance to Mahmud as it was his chance to shine in his own right. Mahmud’s commitment to the Nuruosmaniye is noted in Tarih-i Cam-i Serif-i Nur-e-Osmani (History of the Construction of the Nuruosmaniye Mosque), an imperative document written by Ahmet Efendi, the secretary of the controller of the building, which provides valuable accounts of the foundation, construction, and building techniques of the Nuruosmaniye.
Ahmet Efendi recounts an incident when the Sultan expressed his feelings to Dervis Efendi, “Look, I have nothing more important than the building of this sacred mosque.” (Kuban 1981: 283) Mahmud obviously wanted a mosque that reflected in its novelty, uniqueness, and splendour the greatness of the Ottoman Empire.

It all began when inhabitants of the environs of the Fatma Hanim Mescidi made appeals to both Sultan Ahmet and Sultan Mahmud for the restoration of the mosque, which had been pending owing to its waqf (endowments) being insufficient for renovations. (Kuban 1981: 273) Sultan Mahmud responded and ordered the rebuilding of this mosque, assigning as the managing supervisor of the whole site Dervis Efendi, who assigned Ali Aga as the controller of the building. (Kuban 1981: 273) At first, Sultan Mahmud was not satisfied when he was presented with a simple composition of both the perspective and elevation of a monument with four walls. (Kuban 1981: 273) Upon his orders, a mucessem tersim (a three-dimensional drawing) of the monument was produced revealing the floors, elevations, mahfils (balcony or box), and the interior of the mosque without pillars; Mahmud was eventually content with the final output. (Kuban 1981: 273-274) With regards to the interpretation of the mucessem tersim, there is confusion as to whether it was a three-dimensional drawing or an actual model. Although many historians have interpreted it as an actual model, a most plausible explanation would be Kuban’s who disregards the idea of it being an actual model since mucessem stands for volume and tersim stands for drawing, thus literally implying a three-dimensional drawing of the monument. (Kuban 1981: 273-274)

There has been debate and confusion surrounding the direct origins of this mosque and the architect involved in its building. According to Tarih-i Cam-i Serif-i Nur-e-Osmani, the Chief Architect responsible for the design and execution of the mosque was Simeon Kalfa, a qualified and experienced Greek Christian carpenter. (Kuban 1981: 275) A further postulation about his origin maintains that Simeon Kalfa is a descendant of the imperial Byzantine Komnenos dynasty; this has yet to be verified. (Faroqhi 2006: 479) Regardless, this mosque is most likely the work of an architect who was very familiar with Baroque and who must have had contacts with Europe. Thus, the Nuruosmaniye required that the architects be well skilled in the language of Baroque for a successful integration of Baroque elements and character within the Ottoman configuration. Interestingly, it is suspected that 80 percent of the masons, who worked on the Nuruosmaniye, were non-Muslims (and probably a large number of them non-Turkish), which is a leap
from the figure of 40 percent non-Muslim workers during the classical period. (Cerasi 1988: 90) We learn that the administrative staff of the construction site was comprised of around 100 people with around 800-900 labourers on regular days, and up to around 1350 during the busiest periods. (Kuban 1981: 275) Iron was obtained from Samakov in Bulgaria, marble from Marmara Island, timber, hemp, and stone, Kufeki, and Odtasi, two kinds of limestone, were all transported from different parts of the empire and its provinces. (Kuban 1981: 276)

In examining the mosque plan, the first element to catch one’s attention is the elliptical courtyard, which retains the shape of a horseshoe. This courtyard in its oval shape constitutes a novel and authentic departure from the original plans of previous Ottoman monuments where the courtyard retained the shape of a rectangle or square. This daring innovation in the courtyard, which emulates the Baroque in its essence, is an isolated attempt not to be repeated in future mosques. (Goodwin 1971: 382) Unlike the usual trend in Ottoman mosques, there is no fountain in the centre of the courtyard. Kuban explains that although there exist several arguments regarding the absence of a fountain in the courtyard, there is no particular reason that could be directly lent to it. (Kuban 1954: 27) This attempt at presenting a curvilinear plan could be traced to the plans of several Baroque buildings in Europe. A parallel for Nuruosmaniye’s elliptical courtyard may be drawn with the oval-shaped plans at St. Peter’s in Rome (1607-14, designed by Carlo Maderno), the church of St. Andrea al Quirinale in Rome (1658-70, designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini), the Pilgrimage Church of Steinhausen (1727-33, designed by the brothers Dominikus and Johann Baptist Zimmermann), and the Pilgrimage Church of Die Wies (1745, also designed by the Zimmermann brothers).

The most prevalent feature of many Ottoman mosques is the intricate composition of a large central dome flanked by other half domes or complete domes, which may assume any size. (Kuran 1997: 303) Nevertheless, the Nuruosmaniye chooses a basic single-dome enclosed in a square structure, which seems to balance the dynamic movement of the elliptical courtyard. Whether it was an attempt at mere simplicity or at being nonpareil, Kuban seems to support the latter since it is not quite possible to pinpoint a specific plan, which had influenced this single-domed structure. (Kuban 1954: 29) Nevertheless, the static simplicity of this square-shaped prayer hall succeeded in accentuating the other dynamic elements of the mosque while at the same time preventing any effect of distortion, imbalance and confusion in its layout. Another of these elements would be the semicircular mihrab.
(niche), which protrudes on the outside of the qiblah wall. This small semicircular protrusion complements the elliptical-shaped plan and gives the mosque a conceptual framework loyal to Baroque. In previous mosques, the mihrab consisted of a semicircular apse cut into the thickness of the qiblah wall and sometimes protruding from the qiblah wall in an angular enclosure. Kuran praises the architect’s use of the semi-circular protrusion rather than an angular protrusion, which would have brought about a lack of harmony vis-à-vis the elliptical courtyard. (Kuran 1961: 241) A striking resemblance where the curved apse protrudes from a straight wall, usually the posterior wall facing the entrance, could be gleaned from the ground plans at the Church of the Sorbonne (1629, designed by Jacques Lemercier), Sta. Maria in Campitelli in Rome (1663-67, designed by Carlo Rinaldi), Theatinerkirche St. Cajetan in Munich (1663-88, designed by Agostino Barelli), and St. Anna im Lehel in Munich (1727-39, designed by John Michael Fischer).

The Nuruosmaniye was built at the entrance of the Kapalicarsi (the Covered Bazaar), which is situated within the vicinity of the southern hillside of the Golden Horn. (Finkel 2005: 365) From the exterior, the mosque is handsome and looks like a jewellery box with all its parts harmoniously interlocked. The monument is fully faced with marble and from what is mentioned in Ahmet Efendi’s letter, one may assume that the marble used is from Marmara Island. There is further mention of the walls at the Nuruosmaniye having been made of cut stone. However, Kuban doubts the accuracy of this information and settles it to cut stone on the outer sides of the walls with rubble stone infill. (Goodwin 1971: 281) The epitome of Baroque is achieved in the commanding elongated semicircular windows within the heavily corniced wide arches on the four lateral sides that appear to be springing from the four corner buttresses. These elongated semicircular windows along with the four buttresses and their large square turrets accentuate the dome in an upward movement. The dome, benefiting from the elimination of auxiliary domes, emerges monumental, dominating and liberated.

According to Ahmet Efendi’s report, the building has a system of iron bracing running round up to the dome to create a massive and uniform structure. (Kuban 1981: 279) The dome is 25.50 metres in diameter and 43.50 metres in height at its apex. It seamlessly rests on an elegant belt of 28 semicircular windows and 40 curvilinear buttresses topped with capitals. Of these buttresses, four larger buttresses extend beyond and below to meet the four turrets on each corner, thus dissecting the belt into six buttresses on each side. (Kuban 1981: 310) On first glance, what catches one’s attention is the
striking similarities between the Nuruosmaniye mosque and the Mihrimah Mosque at Edirnekapi (1562-65, designed by Sinan). There is a resemblance in the treatment of the dome, the drum, the four large turrets, and the wide arches that mantle the mosque's exterior on four sides except that the Nuruosmaniye arches are pointed, composed of many bands of mouldings, and richer in treatment. Goodwin is more appreciative of the balanced relation between the turrets, buttresses, and the elongated windows at the Nuruosmaniye than those at the Mihrimah Mosque and at the Selimiye at Edirne, Sinan's masterpiece, “where eight turrets encumber the expression of the dome and also blind eight of the windows of the drum.” (Goodwin 1971: 129, 254, 385)

Observing the mosque from the outside, it looks as if it is raised on a platform; however upon further examination one learns that the rather undulating geography of the land and the stairways allow for such an illusion. (Goodwin 1971: 384) The stairways, which are at the end of the courtyard on each side, both angular and semicircular in shape, are yet another novel introduction that delicately conforms to the spirit of Baroque. The fashioning of curved stairways is a difficult ordeal, especially for the Ottomans who were strangers to such a new feature. Borrowing from Levey, this architect seems to have been “straining everywhere to melt straight lines into curves,” and therefore, it may be possible to conclude that the stairs at the Nuruosmaniye were executed with the helping hand of foreign expertise. (Levey 1975: 122)

There are three major entrances to the courtyard: the main central and the two wing doors reached from the flight of stairs on the east and west sides respectively. By the eighteenth century, according to Goodwin, the true facade at the Nuruosmaniye became that at the east. (Goodwin 1971: 210) There is a fourth entry, which leads directly into the outstanding hunkar mahfil (sultan’s loggia), on the extreme end of the east wall, where it intersects with the qiblah wall. The entry into the sultan’s loggia is reached via a ramp, a feature that was first introduced into Ottoman mosques in the Sultan Ahmet complex (1609-1617). The Nuruosmaniye breaks away from its precedent in that the ramp is not connected to a pavilion but rather leads directly to the sultan’s loggia. This added detail echoed the glory and importance of the Sultan, representative and protector of the Ottoman Empire, allowing him to ride his horse from ground level up to his residence area without having to dismount from horseback. (Goodwin 1971: 384)

The portals of this mosque are true examples of a marked break from the conventional Islamic patterns and the muqarnas (stalactites). On the
underside of the portals’ semi-domes, the *muqarnas* carvings are replaced with intricately etched semicircles, which run vertically to converge at the vertex of the pyramid-like recess and are overwhelmed by shell-like convolutions, floral bouquets, curls, and frond decorations. The unconventionally tall portals have lateral niches, which are treated similarly and framed by pilasters crowned with floral-carved capitals. (Goodwin 1971: 385) These elements adorning the portals are prevalent on the exterior and interior of Baroque monuments throughout Europe. The Hall of Mirrors at Versailles is one of many examples, albeit more complex and refined than that at the Nuruosmaniye, of this intricate work of lavish foliations and convolutions.

The arcaded courtyard, which consists of a nine-domed *revak* (vaulted arcade) and a five-domed portico, seems to be something of its own or as Goodwin puts it, “a sanctuary within the precinct.” (Goodwin 1971: 384) This porticoed courtyard is suggestive of the portico at the Mihrimah Mosque at Uskudar (1547, designed by Sinan), also known as the Iskele Cami, which set the trend for double-porticoed courtyards in Anatolia. (Goodwin 1971: 214) The 14 domes of the courtyard are set on low drums, with the exception of the higher domes over the two axial north doors leading into the courtyard and into the mosque. A special feature of the drums on both the north doors is that they have windows and buttresses. (Goodwin 1971: 384) Upon entering the courtyard, one becomes overcome by the prolific elements of Baroque on and around the arches, columns, and windows. There are two levels of windows, where the upper level windows are cinquefoil and the lower level windows alternate between rectangular and cinquefoil. The arches, which spring from consoles, are carried on 12 marble columns. According to Ahmet Efendi’s letter, these columns were taken from an abandoned church in Bergama and their transportation included the construction of bridges, loading stations, pulley systems, the use of sleds with iron wheels and iron belts, and the labour of 500 to 600 people. (Kuban 1981: 276) Unlike previous Ottoman column capitals, these columns contain neither *baklava* nor *muqarnas* capitals; rather, the *baklava* and *muqarnas* column capitals were abandoned for simple Ionic capitals.

Although the two pencil-shaped minarets—respectively on the eastern and western sides of the five-domed portico of the courtyard—are in the image of Ottoman minarets, they contain subtle hints of Baroque. Their twin balconies are carried on horizontal mouldings, unlike the usual *muqarnas* carvings of the balconies in previous mosques. The stone caps of the minarets have been curved and fashioned in concave and convex finials. (Kuran 1997:
Perhaps some more elaborate work and rich detail could have been added to the minarets such as those seen at the Sehzade Complex (1543-48, designed by Sinan). It seems the intention was not to create an overcrowded whole; however to what extent could the minarets have been designed in the flamboyance and intricacy of the Baroque without appearing out of place will remain unknown.

The mosque interior remains faithful to the Ottoman spirit in its paintings and decorations. Generally, Baroque churches display an abundance of stucco, frescos and trompe-l'oeil, which cover the ceilings and domes in an attempt to create a grander sense of infinite space. Paintings covering the domes of Baroque churches portray the heavens, the saints and the angels in scenes of ecstasies, spiritual exaltation, celestial beauty and miraculous biblical narratives. (Bazin 1968: 45) However, the dome at the Nuruosmaniye is empty of such artistic representation and rather conforms to more of an Ottoman character with abstract designs, decorations, and intricate Quranic inscriptions. This may be due to the nature of Muslim religious worship, which is at the core of such an apparent difference. The Muslim praying ritual itself is a much simpler and basic act of submission to God than the Catholic and Orthodox rituals of theatrical worship of God. In Islam, the use of figurative sculptures, icons, and paintings of humans in places of worship is considered an act of idolatry and an inexcusable sin, unlike the trend in Catholic and Orthodox churches, which are often overwhelmed with icons, images and paintings of saints and biblical scenes. (Quran: 4.48, 6.82, 2.165, 21.52-54)

Therefore, when compared with the interior of Baroque churches, the Nuruosmaniye mosque is empty of figurative sculptures and scriptural representational paintings, and it is therefore lacking in motion, liveliness, and drama. Nevertheless, wherever the Nuruosmaniye is capable, it emphasizes its Baroque tendencies. The floral designs and foliations painted around the dome’s concentric epigraphic medallion and circulating it in S and C curves are very reminiscent of Baroque. These same floral designs circulate the perimeter of the dome where it meets with the drum in its arched windows. The general treatment of the dome, albeit less lavished, is unreserved with its curved lines and designs, which suggests the influence of Baroque. If a parallel is to be marked, then the inside of this dome may be compared to that of St. Ivo della Sapienza in Rome, where the dome is not covered with any illusional painting. The interior of the dome, which is in gold and white, is divided into 6 bays and covered with bands of stars and other elements, pulling the force towards the lit cupola, whose rim is also
circled with stars. (Cannon-Brookes 1969: 65) St. Ivo’s cupola represents the light of God and the heavens just as the Nuruosmaniye dome’s central medallion bears the word of God.

Inside the spacious prayer hall, the appearance of rich fenestration on the walls seems to flood the mosque with dramatic light attempting to create a bright and weightless mood—notwithstanding, Goodwin finds the prayer hall stuffy with feeble lighting. Three galleries run along the three walls and are interrupted at the corners where the east and west walls meet with the qiblah wall; at these corners there are two bays resting on columns, which Goodwin praises as “grand tier boxes at the opera.” (Goodwin 1971: 386) The most inviting element of the prayer hall would be the mihrab in its deep semi-circular depression on the qiblah wall. The semi-dome above the mihrab is richly painted with floral designs, foliations and convolutions, which, having the effect of being carved, resemble the carvings found on Baroque columns, capitals, walls, and domes. In addition, the minbar (pulpit) is treated similarly, especially at its bottom where the carvings are in round, curved and floral patterns. In addition, below the semi-dome of the mihrab, a gilded cornice with a Quranic inscription in relief of the Surat al-Fath (Chapter of Victory or Conquest) runs horizontally and uninterrupted all around the mosque. The choice of the Surat al-Fath comes as an element of celebration for their victorious wars in 1739 against the Russians and Austrians, which restored much of the Balkan territories the Ottomans had previously lost.

Of all the many Ottoman mosques, there is none that suffered from lack of interest as much as the Nuruosmaniye, considering what it represented as a revolutionary monument in its time and location. In terms of its plan and the general treatment of its interior, the mosque bears much of the Baroque language, although several Ottoman elements within the mosque suggest a strong intent for retaining the empire’s Ottoman identity while it attempts at Europeanizing itself. Therefore, the merging of Baroque and Ottoman traditions, on one hand an outcome of trade and cultural exchange with the Europeans, and on another an outcome of the empire’s military setbacks, could be interpreted as an act of both recapturing the empire’s lost glory and displaying equality with its European counterparts. By the early eighteenth century, the Ottomans had been greatly opened up to Europe through encounters of war and peace, the latter being mainly trade and travels. A combination of factors—such as strengthened ambassadorial relationships, developing trading relations, and a growing non-Ottoman community—laid the foundations for the Nuruosmaniye. Whoever the
architect was, whether Simeon Kalfa or not, his work brought about a monument, which broke convention in Ottoman Turkey and echoed the modernity and grandeur of an empire torn in turmoil. Although it does not reach the heights of European Baroque, the Nuruosmaniye is heavily imbued with the Baroque spirit—something to be repeated in future mosques but with much more reservation. This spirit is most visible in the abundance of floral ornamentation and mouldings, its curvilinear tendencies, its elliptical courtyard and circular mihrab, and the dynamic flow of its plan. And so it is with all these elements that the Nuruosmaniye stands distinct amongst the other mosques.

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Annexes

Fig. 1: Plan of Nuruosmaniye Mosque. (From Goodwin, Godfrey. *A History of Ottoman Art and Architecture*. London, Thames & Hudson Limited, 1971)

Fig. 2: Aerial view of the domed elliptical courtyard. (From Walter B. Denny. Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)
Fig. 3: Interior view showing the sultan's *mehfil* on the west.
(From Walter B. Denny. Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)

Fig. 4: Interior view of the *mihrab* and the protruding semi-circular apse.
(From Walter B. Denny. Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)
Fig. 5: Plan of S. Andrea al Quirinale. (From Brinckmann, A.E. Baukunst des 17 U. 18 Jahrhunderts in den Romanischen Laendern. Berlin, Nuebelsberg, 1919)

Fig. 6: Plan of the Church of the Sorbonne. (From Simpson, F.M. History of Architectural Development. vol. 3, London, 1922)
Fig. 7: Exterior view on the South of the Nuruosmaniye Mosque
(From Walter B. Denny. Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)

Fig. 8: Exterior view on the West of the Nuruosmaniye Mosque
(From Walter B. Denny. Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)

Fig. 9: Exterior view on the South of the Mihirmah Mosque in Edirnekapi