

# THE SELIMIYE MOSQUE



## The Materials

There are some government documents requesting wooden logs from Enez, colour stones from Fere, marble from Marmara region and Kavala. There were also some marble pillars brought from Athens Kapidagi, Syria and Cyprus to use in the construction of the mosque. 'Kufaki' stone used for the walls was brought from Istanbul area.



## Some Figures about the Mosque

- Each minaret is 85 m tall including the cone.
- The total area of the complex is more than 22.000 m<sup>2</sup>.
- The dome weighs about 20 tonnes and the locking stone about 5 tonnes.
- The dome has 8 columns and 40 windows.
- Lead used to cover the exterior of the dome is about 18 tonnes.
- There are 25 steps on the minber making it a very high platform.

## Special times for the mosque

Mosques are used regularly for 5 daily prayers throughout the day. Islam is a very social religion and Muslims are encouraged to pray together to keep in touch with the community. Those who cannot attend a mosque due to family or work commitments can also pray at their work place, home or any available and clean space.

Still the mosques are more active every Friday when Muslims are required to attend a congregational prayer at noon time. After prayer work life resumes so it is not necessarily a holiday.

Other important times include festival days at the end of Ramadan 'Ramazan Bayrami' and on pilgrimage days 'Qurban Bayrami'. People come to the mosques for congregational prayers on these occasions and glorify and worship God.

Ramadan is the name of a month in the lunar calendar and it lasts 29 or 30 days. Muslims practice fasting during the day and attend long night prayers. Women, men and children young and old meet and gather in mosques so Ramadan is a very active time for Muslims around the world.

Pilgrimage to Bacca (the earlier name of Meccca was Bacca as is mentioned in the Qur'an) and sacrifice are traditions of Prophet Ibrahim and still practised by the Muslims worldwide. The meat from sacrificed animals is shared with poor people in the community and even internationally.



## Ablution Facilities

Muslims are required to be physically pure and clean at all times but especially before worship. Therefore they wash commonly used parts of their bodies including the hands, arms up to elbows, faces, and feet. Hair is simply rubbed with a wet hand. This also avoids the dirt to be carried into the prayer hall as well as disturbing smell from feet. The ablution facilities for Muslim women are in a covered area for privacy.



## The Main Gate of the Mosque (From courtyard)

The main gate welcomes the visitors to the mosque with grandeur. On the gate there are two Arabic inscriptions which act like notices to the approaching visitor.

The Arabic inscriptions on the main gate summarise the most essential faith in Islam which is the unity of God and messengership of Muhammad.

**'There is none worthy of worship but Almighty Allah, the only rightful king. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah and he is one who fulfils his promises and is trustworthy.'**

## Islam: What is it?

"Islam" is an Arabic word which means peaceful, willing submission to the will and way of God. So Islam is a complete way of life based upon a voluntary relationship between an individual and his Creator. It is the way of life ordained by God which was taught by each of His prophets and messengers such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and finally Muhammed. Islam emphasizes the exclusive worship of the one God who created the entire universe and to whom all creation will eventually return. It refuses to accept any form of creation whatsoever as a deity worthy of worship. It is as a religion covers two areas of responsibility: the relation between creation and the Creator (worship or servitude), the relation between individual and the rest of the creation (deeds or actions).

## Exterior of the Selimiye Mosque



The mosque has four minarets each with 3 balconies. These minarets are tall and slender towers to make the call to prayer. Originally 12 people made the 'adhan', call to prayer, simultaneously towards different directions from the minarets. An interesting and genius feature of the minaret is that each minaret has three separate staircases leading to separate balconies all intertwined in the same tower.

Today, with the use of current technology, one person stands at the bottom of the minaret and makes the same announcement which was made centuries ago. The "muezzin" emphasizes the unity of God 5 times a day and invites people to worship with a beautiful melodious voice. The announcement is always made in Arabic and is roughly translated here:

- Allah is greatest. (x4)
- I bear witness that there is no god except Allah. (x2)
- I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. (x2)
- Come to prayer. (x2)
- Come to success. (x2)
- Allah is greatest. (x2)
- There is no god except Allah.

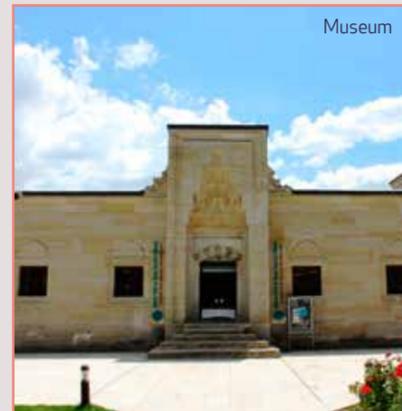
\* Morning call to prayer has one additional sentence which means "Worship is better than sleep". This is a motivational reminder that waking up at early in the morning to worship God is more beneficial than sleeping.



The call to prayer signals the beginning of a prayer period. For example from noon time (Dhuhr) until afternoon (Asr) call to prayer there is 2-3 or 4 hours depending on the season.

## FREE ENTRY

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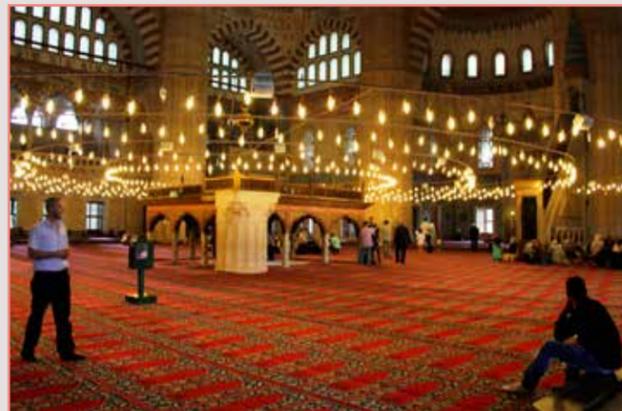
Museum

## Mosque Complex (Jami')

The mosque in Ottoman understanding was not just for worship but also for providing social services to the community. Therefore each place of worship would be surrounded by some facilities such as an arasta (shopping centre), an imaret (a kitchen for the workers as well as the poor), shifakhana (a small hospital), educational establishments (madrassahs), an elementary school for children and a hammam (public bath). This would make it into a complex called kulliye or jami' (spelt cami in Turkish).

In Selimiye Complex there are an arasta (Kavaflar Arasta), an elementary school, two madrassahs (for advanced Qur'an studies and Hadith studies), a muvakkithane (time-house for calculation of prayer times) and the central place of worship. Before the construction there was a public bath which was used after the construction as well. The madrassahs of the mosque today serve as the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts and Waqf (Charitable Organisations) Museum.

According to some experts design of the complex with the place of worship in the centre symbolises life as well. Worldly activities revolve around religion and spirituality. People scattered to meet some physical needs gather at certain times and unite for the remembrance and worship of their Creator. It may also refer to the Day of Judgement during which people will be resurrected, gathered and will stand in the presence of God to give account of their deeds on Earth.



## Interior of the Selimiye Mosque

Inside the mosque there are some common mosque features. These will be briefly explained.



Calligraphy

**Calligraphy:** The original calligraphy in the mosque was made by Molla Hasan Chalabi who was a successor of legendary calligrapher Ahmed Karahisari.

**Tiles:** Following the principle of moderateness in the mosques during the classical period there was limited use of tiles and colourful decoration. This meant less distraction from the design and the engineering of the structure as well as more focus on spiritual contemplation.

However elegant tiles were carefully used in parts of the mosque which are probably the best examples from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these contain verses from the Qur'an for people to read and reflect on.



Tiles



Wood drawings



Mihrab (Niche)



Minber

**Wood drawings:** In parts of the mosque, most notably on the muezzin's lodge, you can see hand painted drawings on wood. Interestingly this was covered with grey paint until 1982 when paint was removed and original drawings were brought back to light.

**Mihrab (Niche):** It looks like an elegant cavity in the marble wall and the structure reflects the voice of the imam (pray leader) to the people praying behind. The direction of the mihrab is the 'Kabah' in Mecca which marks the reference point for all Muslims around the world during ritual prayers.

On top of the mihrab there is 'Ke-lime-i Tawheed' which is the most essential faith in Islam. It basically says **'There is no god except Allah and Muhammad is His messenger'**.

**Minber:** Selimiye's minber is a monoblock marble structure which has a beautiful tiled cap and is known to be the finest in Turkey with exquisite side panels.

Minber looks like a tall staircase however it's used as a raised platform to deliver a sermon on congregational prayer days. These are every Friday noon time, the Feast of Ramadan and the Feast of Sacrifice. On these three occasions all healthy Muslims are encouraged to attend the congregation and the numbers reach about six thousand inside the main hall. From this high location the imam can be seen and heard easily by the worshippers inside.



Muezzin's Lodge



Fountain



Reverse Tulip

**Kursi (The Chair):** It is used to give a talk/lecture by scholars of religion and usually used when there is a high number of people attending the mosque. For decoration it is covered with mother of pearl.

There are also 4 marble chairs inside the pillars which were probably used for public lectures as well as lectures to students from the madrassahs.



Kursi

**Muezzin Mahfil (Muezzin's Lodge):** After the call to prayer from the minaret finishes, the muezzin comes inside the hall and stands on a platform where he repeats the call to prayer quickly. Hearing this, worshippers form straight lines to pray together. This raised platform allows the muezzin to see the imam and aids his voice to be heard easily. After the ritual prayer is finished, the muezzin says certain words of glorification and praise which are then repeated 33 times by the congregation (this process is called tasbeeh and in Turkish culture a prayer bead is usually used to count).

Under the lodge in Selimiye there is a small fountain which was used to drink water from and renew ablutions. The reverse tulip on one of the marble pillars under the platform is also a must see.

**The pillars:**

There are four pillars carrying the weight of the dome and the overall structure. In Turkish these are called 'filpaye' which literally means 'elephant feet' due to their resemblance to four sturdy legs of a huge elephant carrying the dome.



The pillars

**Hünkar Mahfil (The Royal Lodge):** Some Muslim rulers in the past were assassinated during prayers and therefore, as a security measure, royal lodges were built with a separate entrance. It enabled the Sultan and leading ministers to pray with the congregation without fear of assassination.

Again there is elegant design and decoration in this part of the mosque with green marble pillars, fine İznik tiles and a shuttered window in its mihrab which is a novel thing to see.

**The dome:** The central dome is about 31 m in diameter and 43 m in height. The weight is equally distributed to four huge pillars.

In Turkish Islamic architecture the dome is usually considered a representation of the heavens. The shape (hemisphere) and huge distance between the dome and the floor are two clues which somehow confirm this opinion.

The stone in the centre of the dome has a special mission. It is called 'kilit taşı' which literally means 'locking stone'. This is a huge stone carefully carved and placed so that it pushes all the smaller stones to the sides with its size and weight (locking them in a way). On this stone there is a quotation from the Qur'an talking about the unity and attributes of God:

**In the name of Allah the Most Compassionate the Most Merciful. Say (O Muhammad): "He is Allah, [who is] One, Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent." Qur'an 112**



The Royal Lodge



The Dome

## History of the Mosque

Name of the city 'Edirne' is attributed to Hadrian who established the city in AD 175. The name Hadiranapolis, Adrianapolis and then Edirne was used to refer to this beautiful city.

There are differing opinions about the reason why this mosque was built in Edirne instead of Istanbul. Some claim that it was because of the deep love Sultan Selim II had for this particular city. Others attribute it to a dream where he was instructed to build a mosque here by Prophet Muhammad himself. Yet others say that all the seven hills the city of Istanbul were occupied with some other royal mosques and this made Edirne, the former capital of the Ottoman Empire, a favourable option due to its available topography.

Different sources provide different dates as to the start and completion dates of the mosque complex. However official documents indicate it started around June 1568 and was asked by the Divan (King's Office) to be completed in December 1574. Due to his poor health the Sultan wanted the construction to be completed soon. However his death in early December means the Sultan has never prayed in this beautiful mosque. The construction was completed with some delay probably in March 1575.