

A Study of the Architecture of *Anitkabir* within the Framework of Turkish Identity Building

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This paper takes the mausoleum of Kemal Ataturk as a vehicle for situating Turkish nationalistic quest for history, which seems to get entangled in an east-west dualism. In Turkey, *Orientalism*, the western vision of the east, coincides with *Occidentalism*, the eastern vision of the West. This phenomenon can be read in the 19th century Ottoman architecture, where the use of Oriental architecture through European architects does not form a contradiction, as in Europe. The Turkish nationalist project similarly makes use of variety of historical references, in order to empower the idea of nation, through creating a history, where east and west become indistinguishable tools. Turkish Architecture of 1930s borrows the language of German nationalistic architecture, which makes use of the language of Classical Greece and Ancient Near Eastern art and architecture, both of which are inherited through the Ottoman Empire in Turkey. The confusion hence appears due to the entanglement of references and interactions between East and West, which in Turkey turn into a series of reflections. The architectural level of discussion is helpful in orienting the complexity of interactions, especially in a quick nationalist project and at a bridging geography. The quest for nation, history, religion, tradition is peculiar to the paralleled nationalistic projects at the first half of the 20th century in Germany, Italy, ex-USSR and Turkey, while so-called social engineering placed great demand on city planning and architecture both functionally and symbolically. Monuments, festive decorations as well as buildings became the mediums of 'national' expressions.

The mausoleum is part of a related background of building the new capital of the Turkish Republic, Ankara, which was mainly planned and built during the 1920's and 30's with an explicit intention to replace the imperial capital, Istanbul. Its situation in Central Anatolia may seem to form a new balance between east and west, due to the topography of the new borders. The role of German architects in building the new capital also alerts one to the ambiguities of east and west interactions, entangled in the nationalist purpose within a modern secular age.

The Turkish nationalist discourse reached culmination after the decline of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. As the revolution developed into a reformist idea, it turned out to be a breakaway from the Ottoman *millet*¹ and heritage and a new identity was sought within new definitions of nation, history, religion and tradition. The war was won in 1920. The state was founded in 1923. And the reforms were mostly done by 1930. The nature of the proposed situation can be observed best in *the national history thesis*, which hypothesized that the achievements of the Ancient Near East civilizations were part

of the Turkish cultural heritage. The new situation was justified on the same roots of World civilization. Through this reading, the Turks overcame the West. The nationalistic approach is reminiscent of Voegelin's definition of the *ecumene* of the Eastern Empires, wherein the varieties are eliminated within a pot of mythical universalism of the nation, where both west and east become tools and challenges. The new idea of Turkish nation sought to distance itself from the east, which, however, also required a step back from the West. The national anthem of the republic, which constitutes the first two stanzas of Mehmed Akif's poem *To Our Heroic Army*, carries a reactive attitude towards the West. The poem embodies a conflict between *that monster* called *civilization* and the power of faith in the constitution of the communal order, a conflict between 'Gods' as ground of orientation.²

The parliament abolished the sultanate and the caliphate. It banned the traditional Islamic education and closed *madrasa*'s³. Religious orders were prohibited. Latin script was introduced in 1928 with the name 'Turkish Alphabet,' instead of the Arabic script of the Ottoman culture. Turkish was separated from Arabic and Persian, and a 'pure Turkish' was institutionalised. A new dress code referred to as the '*dress of the civilised nations*' was also introduced with the substitution of the 'fez' with the hat. The Christian calendar referred to as '*the international calendar*' replaced the *Hicri*, the Islamic calendar. The week holiday was changed from Friday, the sacred Islamic day, to Sunday, the sacred Christian day.

The ideology was hence shaped mainly as a break away from the Islamic Ottoman and around Turkish nationalism. Every mean were developed to turn this into a mythical beginning. The images, the materials hence became important. It turned this revolution in to a paradigm for the future, as it introduced holidays in remembrance of the War of Independence. The idea of a mythical beginning can also be read through the parallelism formed between the revolution and the origin myth of the Turks, '*Ergenekon*.'

The revolution had its parliament, however, one man, Mustafa Kemal, ran its ideology. He was given the title of Ataturk, which meant the father of the Turks. His death hence became a critical turning point within the nationalist project.

*'As a national leader Ataturk became a necessary, idealized object for his countrymen. He was too greatly idealized to be dispensed with, that is to be 'killed' in psychological terms. After his death, his body was embalmed, and his mourners, the Turkish people, postponed the final burial of his body for a decade and a half.'*⁵

A catafalque was erected soon in front of the parliament building. Similar to the ephemeral architecture of the era, it presented the coffin within a theatrical setting consisting of a raised podium and an arrangement of columns, fabrics, the national flag, torches and flowers against the backdrop of the parliament and the city⁶. The embalmed body was then kept in the Ethnographical Museum where a marble tomb was placed in the central entrance, under the dome⁷. An interesting coincidence with the pre-Islamic Turkish tribes' temporal burial tradition gives also a mythical insight to this burial process⁸. The death of Atatürk was greatly idealized by the time the mausoleum got build between 1944 and 1952, after an international competition in 1941-42 and the competition program dictated a high level of idealization of the death of the leader.

Initially, the competition was organized for a limited number of European architects, and Turkish architects were excluded. Hence, the *foreign*, the *West* was again seen as the best means. However, such an attitude drew reactions from within the country and a further competition had to be organized. 49 projects were submitted. The selection jury was composed of an equal number of Turks and Westerners. Three winners were chosen and five were considered worthy of purchase. Of the eight projects chosen, three were Turks, three were Italians, one was German, and one was Swiss. There was dissatisfaction on the results in architectural circles, and according to the architectural periodical of the time, *Arkitekt*, Europe's leading and most creative architects did not take part, due mainly to the Second World War⁹. Of the three winners of the competition, the project of two Turkish architects, Emin Onat and Orhan Arda, was built.

The two other winning projects by Italian and German architects are worth discussing in order to evaluate the contemporary Western view on the case of Turkey, especially from parallel nationalistic contexts. One of the winning projects was that of J. Krueger from Berlin.

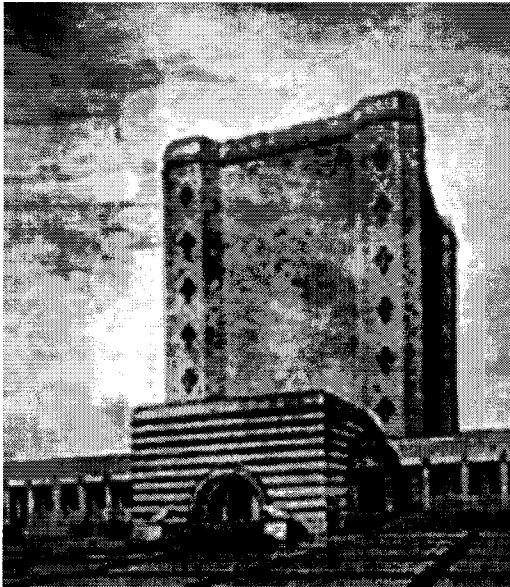


Figure 1: J. Krueger's Proposal

The design makes use of the medieval iconography of thick and blind walls, while inside an oculus lights up young man and woman statues, which inherit the classical language.

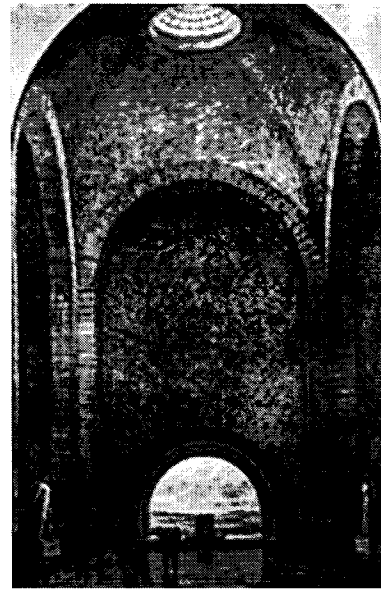


Figure 2: J. Krueger's Proposal, Interior View

The sarcophagus stands beneath a vault that connects to the square main hall and opens eastward to the horizon as its backdrop, by which the death is oriented to resurrection in the rising of the sun. The entrance is left small in comparison with the huge core and hence forms a cave image and transforms the core into an *axis mundi*¹⁰. The entrance is marked by a pair of lion-sculptures, which are inherited from ancient Middle East, Sasanian, and Seldjuk art again as the protectors of the gates of the *axis mundi*.

The other winning project was that of an Italian Architect, A. Foschini. Foschini formed the monumentality by a square prismatic structure that stood apart.

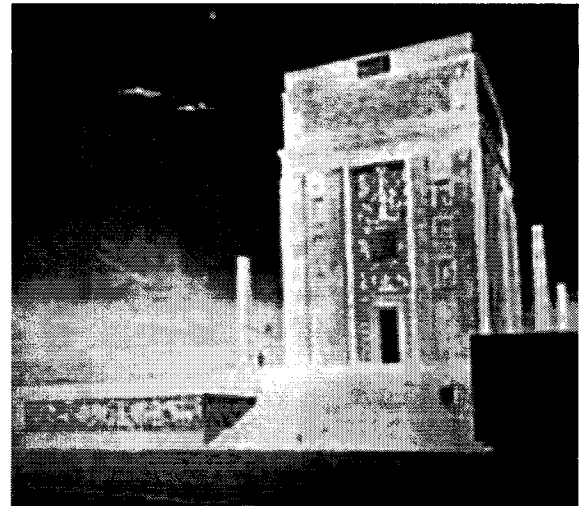


Figure 3: A. Foschini's proposal

The reliefs on the facades and the figurative compositions on the dome interior, pendentives and window jambs are interestingly suggestive of Christian sacred architecture. The sarcophagus is elevated at the center within a second sarcophagus-like structure, with a pyramidal cap that points to the oculus. This and the overlapping pedestrian and motor access and the symmetric layout evoke an ideal, 'futuristic' image, peculiar to the Italian architecture of the time. Unlike Krueger, however, the references are far away from the new Turkish quest for history. However, both proposals orient people around a central tomb, creating

a ritual atmosphere, similar to that of Islamic *kunbed* architecture¹¹. The Onat-Arda project on the other hand chooses to make use of the Roman forum with its axial layout, and is oriented towards a ceremonial procession rather than a ritual one.

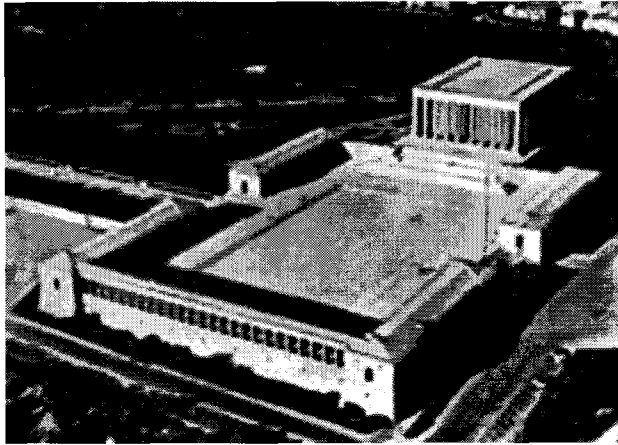


Figure 4: Mausoleum

The architectural topography determines the ceremonial process. The entrance is from a wide ceremonial road named *Lion's way* for its lion sculptures and is visually connected to the central city. A flagpole marks the vista of the city, and gives reference to the nationalist discourse.



Figure 5: Towards the Mausoleum

Monumental human sculptures and two low towers frame the entrance. The prismatic shape of the towers with low pyramidal roofs evokes a medieval vernacular image in its modest simplicity and it recalls the Turkish Tent form. Rectangular openings that are centrally and symmetrically arranged on the facades open panoramas into the city and are modernist in this respect.

The sculptures stand before the towers. Their guidelines was set out by the committee as that they should *express the deep grief felt upon the death of Atatürk and put visitors into a contemplative state of mind*¹². These highly stylized statues carry three themes for both men and women depicted in opposite sides and they form a paradigm for the visitors of the mausoleum¹³. The men of the new Turkish nation are symbolized by the figures of a 'soldier,' a 'peasant,' and a 'young' man. The peasant is depicted as standing aback, hence less powerful, his head bowed in grief, while the young man with a book and the soldier are situated on the front and are looking straight above the head of the visitor, carrying a more powerful image. A similar composition for the women is on the opposite side, where a 'young' woman and a 'mother' figure are depicted before a 'villager,' who covers her face in grief. The man with the book, and corresponding young woman symbolize the

Republic, which is the future, and hence are depicted in motion. The soldier and the mother figures are the sources for power. The mother figure holds a water cup in her hand and adds a mythological depth to the composition. The *powerful mother* theme is inherited from the matriarchal pre-Islamic Turkish tradition and from *Kybele* cult of ancient Anatolia¹⁴. The water cup is a symbol of fertility in altars of ancient Near East, in fountains of Islam, and with *tas* in nomadic tradition¹⁵. The peasant figures depict tradition as in need of involvement in the future. Passing before the sculptures, the visitors are then guided into a wide ceremonial road, which is programmed to create *a feeling of power and tranquillity*¹⁶.

The 12 pairs of life-sized lion statues erected along the road are copies of the lion sculptures, which had been found recently in the Charchemish excavations¹⁷. Their symmetrical arrangement also recalls the use of paired animal figures at the gates of palaces and temples in Ancient Near East, Sasanian and Seldjuk art and architecture as symbolical guardians of the *axis mundi*. The 12 lions also correspond to the 12 months of the year, and hence define a conceptual time of passage along the route. History is frozen and carried to a level of mythical time.

The journey ends in the ceremonial plaza with the mausoleum on the left. A colonnade surrounds the plaza and on the right side opens to a panoramic view of the city from between the columns, while on the other sides it forms a portico for the administrative and museum spaces. While the use of panoramic view is peculiar to 'modernism' in the West, permeable boundaries were used in Islamic Architecture as a means of screening the city¹⁸. The plaza recalls the Roman Forum, while the different functions of the spaces behind the corridor relate it to the *madrassa* architecture. The place of the mausoleum looking out to the plaza, on the other hand, parallels more that of the place of the temple in a Roman forum, and less the place of a mosque next to a *madrassa* courtyard.

The visitor needs to re-direct himself to face the mausoleum, hence adjusts to the ceremonial movement that leaves him facing just the mausoleum with two reliefs framing the stairs at both sides. These reliefs mark an elevation, at the height of the colonnade similar to the elevation of the flight of stairs to the courtyard. The program dictates the themes and the allegorical styles.

The one on the right side tells about the people leaving their homeland¹⁹.

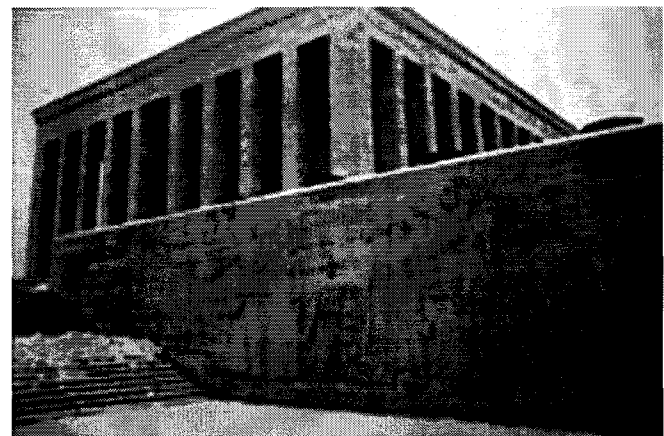


Figure 6: Battle of Sakarya Relief

It develops with the ascending of the stairs and parallels the movement of the visitor, forming a paradigm of feelings. The figures, which depict the feelings of home, nation and salvation, become the people who ascend up the stairs. On the other side, the 'Battle of the Commander-in-Chief' relief carries a more enthusiastic tone through its depiction of Atatürk pointing forward, with reference to his famous command,

“Armies, your first destination is the Mediterranean. Forward!” The visitors are taken into a spirit of eagerness for the future, based, however, on the motif of individual sacrifice for the nation. The reliefs follow the movement of the visitor in tribute and leave the visitor with the sacrificial death, as he reaches the top.

Reaching the top of the stairs, one faces a silhouette of the sarcophagus before a grilled window and beyond a tri-partite entrance, while on both sides of the entrance, Atatürk’s address to Turkish youth and his speech on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Republic are recalled in scripture, both of which carry the tones of sacrificial death. The use of reliefs and scripture are found in most mausoleums from the ancient times. The use of relief has the tones of the ceremonial death within its Egyptian reference and mythical power within its Hittite reference. The first monuments of the Turks, the *Orhun* monuments also are stones with scripture²⁰.

The variety of references to ‘a history’ is used as an instrument of an endless rebirth from an endless past. It addresses the Turkish nation with each individual, individually, as he/she ascends up the stairs, and faces the death, as reborn in scripture. The death is presented as a sacrificial death for the nation and hence as a rebirth into a more noble paradigmatic existence in history.

A peristyle, similar to that of Greek and Roman temples, surrounds the mausoleum, which at the time was also deployed by German architects as an instrument of expression of the German ideal. The tri-partite second entrance after the 9-partite colonnade is reminiscent of Ancient Near East palaces and Greek temples. The window openings at the side façades and the one window behind the sarcophagus inherit an Islamic language with the grillwork and are essential to the atmosphere of the main hall.



Figure 7: The Main Hall

The orientation in the main hall is towards a vault under which the sarcophagus is placed, which is also reflective of ancient Near Eastern and Islamic orientation to the king’s or the caliph’s throne, and Christian orientation to the apses. The architectural language used however is that of a mixture of mihrab²¹ and modernism. It also recalls the *maqsurā*, the place where the caliph sits under a dome to give speeches. A similar backlight can be found within the *maqsurā* of the ‘Mosque in Cordoba.’ The grilled back window also parallels the screening of the city behind *maqsurā* and also relates to contemporary modernist aspects in its creation of a panoramic view of the city. The doors on either side of the main hall open to corridors, which in turn open to the portico outside with the grilled openings. The stonewalls and architecture in general seem to have a neo-classic language, while the decorative details add richer tones to the atmosphere. The mosaics at the ceiling provide the light of the hall. Although the mosaic technique is inherited from the Byzantine architecture, the motifs are Turkish *kilim*²² motifs, which are abstracted from their context in the *kilim*, enlarged and applied

separately from each other. The Turkish-Islamic tile technique is extremely limited to subtle details in the towers. The decoration is concentrated on the ceiling both inside and in the porticoes, recalling the decoration of religious architecture especially that of Islam. Interestingly, a similar ceiling decoration can also be observed in Germany as well. Hence, the entanglement reappears.

The burial crypt, however, is situated beneath the symbolic one and is not allowed to be visited, and hence does not claim to embody such national tones. Its orientation is towards Mecca as with any other Islamic tomb and is set within an octagonal burial crypt in the ground floor. The floor includes 3 corridors with niches for possible future burials. The mausoleum hence foresees new sacrificial deaths. The crypt is reached through underground galleries, which open to the room with an arch.

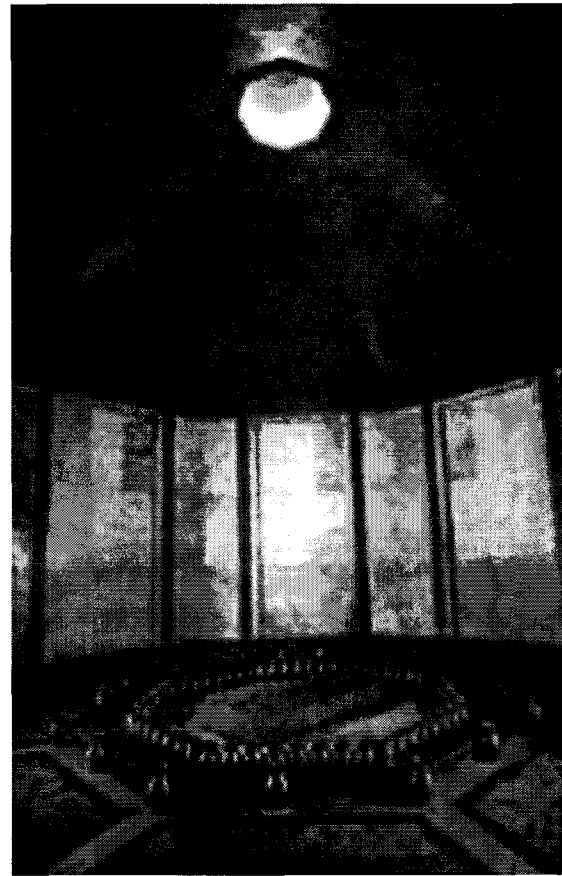


Figure 8: The Burial Crypt

The grave is level with the ground and bordered by octagonal projections. The room is decorated in marble, and green, gold mosaic tile concentrated especially in the eight-lobed vault. The oculus opens to the light of the grilled window on the upper floor. Rectangular niches create an outward movement, by the wavy texture of the marble surface. The *Dome of the Rock* in Jerusalem can be seen as to form an archetype for the plan of the room. It also refers to the ‘*sadirvan*,’ the central fountain in the courtyard of a mosque. This fountain image is emphasized with the ‘*testi*’s,²³ that were placed around the sarcophagus. They carry the same ruralist and peasant mythological undertones carried by the mother figure at the entry to the ‘Lion’s way.’ The real death, hence, is presented in a vernacular language.

Through the topography of Anitkabir, an interesting creation of a balance between the east and west are read continuously at all levels of symbolism. The styles wander and overlap in the revolutionary nationalist context, between east and west, in a modernist city, designed by a German city-planner and by Turkish architects. In the mausoleum, one

can see that the moment of stylistic selection places interpretation before a vast panorama of referential motifs, a museum of concepts and reflections dwelling in an a-historical, theoretical time and place. In order to ground this moment, the earth and the people are mobilized in an aura of sacrificial death as the very meaning of historical existence, symbolized as a collective agon. Within these panoramic and remote vistas of rhythmic stone, the project seeks to stabilize the perspectivity in a solemn evocation of the earth. It is not so much a ritual as it is its opposite, a profound manifestation of disorientation or maybe that of loss.

NOTES

¹*Millet* is the people of the Empire, and lacks nationalistic ethnic undertones.

²Some parts of the poem are as follows'

"Though the West gird itself with a wall of steel,

My bosom filled with faith is my fortress.

Fear not; how can that monster called 'civilization' smother this faith of a people

Which has but one tooth left in its jaw?"

"The days that the 'Hak' has promised you will come,

Who knows, maybe tomorrow, maybe even sooner than tomorrow."

"May no stranger lay hands on my shrine.

Those prayers calls whose affirmations are the cornerstone of faith

Must eternally ring out over my country."

"The birthright of my God-believing nation is Independence."

³*Madrassa* is the name of the religious schools, where Qur'an and few supporting topics are taught.

⁴*Ata* means ancestry in Turkish.

⁵Volkan and Itzkowitz, *The Immortal Ataturk* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984)

⁶The designer of the catafalque was Bruno Taut, who had come to Turkey after running away from the German political pressure. His activist background in the political and architectural circles in Europe at the beginning of the century creates an interesting twist within the interactions.

⁷The Ethnographical Museum was build as one of the first major buildings of the new capital to support the nationalistic idea also with its collection of Turkish folkloric elements.

⁸Diyarbakirli, "Turkler'de Mezar Yapisi ve Defin Merasimleri," *Prof. Dr. Muharrem Ergin'e Armagan* (1992): 53-79, tells that the dead body of an important person is laid in the middle of a tent, until a *kurqan*(the special kind of tomb)is built.

⁹Sayar, Zeki. "Anitkabir Musabakasi Munasebetiyle," *Arkitekt* (1943): 1-21.

¹⁰*Axis mundi* is the mythological axis, which is said to connect the underground, earth and the sky.

¹¹*Kunbed* is a traditional Islamic tomb for important people and is usually covered with a dome.

¹²Sayar, Zeki. "Anitkabir Musabakasi Munasebetiyle," *Arkitekt* (1943): 1-21.

¹³The designer was a Turkish student of Belling, Huseyin Ozkan. Belling was among the Western scholars, who came to Turkey to initiate education and it was he, who argued that the subject matter was entirely national and that only Turkish artists could express it in a sincere and heart felt manner.

¹⁴*Kybele* was the Goddess of Earth and Fertility in Ancient Near East.

¹⁵*Tas* means a water cup. Bolint (1986) observes abundance of the depiction of people with a water cup in Turkish Tomb Sculptures in Central Asia and interprets it as a symbol of a votive offering and an expression of respect.

¹⁶Sayar, Zeki. "Anitkabir Musabakasi Munasebetiyle," *Arkitekt* (1943): 1-21.

¹⁷*Charchemish*, *Report on the Excavations at Jerablis*, Trustees of the British Museum: 1952. *Charchemish* was a Hittite town at the north of Ankara in 9th century B.C.

¹⁸*Palacio de Comares* in Alhambra is an example.

¹⁹The relief was awarded to Ilhan Koman, who was also a student of Belling.

²⁰The monuments were created at the death of two brothers from *Gokturks*, who were one of the Turkish states founded up in Central Asia at 6th cc AD.

²¹*Mihrab* is a niche that orients the prayers in the mosque to Mecca.

²²*Kilim* is the name of the thin woven and highly decorative Anatolian carpet.

²³*Testi* is a nomadic water vessel, similar to that of amphora.

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