

A public meeting point: “Sebil” of Nuruosmaniye

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Abstract

During the Ottoman period “sebil” was the symbol of public possession and a mirror of the current architectural notion. Although they were modest and tiny structures many of them were used to create public meeting places and considered as landmarks because of their location and importance. Today they are either left to collapse or they are being used for purposes that contradict their original architectural identity. This study focuses on the restoration process of the Sebil of Nuruosmaniye which is renovated in order to be used for commercial purposes. Maybe that saved it from collapse but it has lost its value as a public meeting point. As the spirit of Sebil embodies and supports the idea of common benefit and complimentary service, it is certainly important to increase its value by keeping this spirit and eliminating the attempts to use it for commercial purposes. In order to preserve our cultural values it is not always enough to preserve the architectural structures but also their original identities. Beside physical continuity, functional and semantic continuity needs to be considered as an important issue.

Keywords: *Sebil, restoration process, westernization, public space, architectural identity*

Introduction

As it is well known, with its unique geographical condition and history, Istanbul has hosted various cultures, and fostered them in serenity and peace. Each civilization added new values to the existing physical environment in continuity with the heritage left from the previous. Although Istanbul has been a city which merged the traces of different cultures for thousands of years, the sustainability of its cultural and architectural heritage has not been evaluated sufficiently. One of the architectural types, which need urgent interventions for new functions to survive, is “the sebil” which symbolizes the importance of public life in Ottoman era. The sebils which have been emerged from the principal of dispensing of water for the sake of God, have completely lost their original intention since water –once considered sacred- has become commercial. Today, most of the sebils in Istanbul have either been left to their destinies, or contain rather different

commercial functions such as stores, cafes etc. which contradict with their original architectural identity. (Figure 1-2)



Figure 1. The Sebil of Gülnus Emetullah Valide Sultan (Saglar Onay archive)



Figure 2. The Sebil of Ibrahim Han (Saglar Onay archive)

Within this study, initially, the literal meaning of “sebil” and the values it symbolizes will be underlined. Then, the history of sebils and the effects of westernization on sebil architecture will be discussed. The main focus of the study will be on the revitalization of sebils through a case study of the restoration process of the precious sebil of Nuruosmaniye. The last section will include the discussion on the conditions of sebils today and future projections for their sustainability.

Public Identity and “Sebil”

The word “sebil” means “the water dispensed for the sake of god” or “the place it is dispensed” in Turkish. But, in the course of time, the word “sebil” has been transformed to a general concept for the things done for the sake of God.

In the sixteenth century, water flowing from the fountains and the sebils of Istanbul had been the symbol of public possession. The attempt to limit the consumption of water by the help of spigots, had been strongly protested by the public because the spigots had been interpreted as an instrument that destroyed the concept of public possession. The blessings of the nature were also perceived as the blessings of god and a worldly authority to limit them was considered unethical and inappropriate. (Işın, 1995)

Endowing money for the construction of a fountain or a sebil as a water supply was an act of piety which played an important role in Ottoman life. Numerous august people like sultan, sultan’s mother, sultan’s daughter, grand vezir, etc. endowed a fountain in expression of their economic, social

and political standing. So, fountains and sebils have become an inseparable part of the Ottoman culture and architectural tradition.

General characteristics of Istanbul sebils

According to the research done by Egemen in 1993, the number of surviving sebils in İstanbul is 53; 7 on the Anatolian side, 46 on the European side. The sebils on the Anatolian side are all located in Uskudar and they are built in the Classical Ottoman style. The sebils on the European side are generally located around the historical peninsula and show the characteristics of different architectural styles such as Ottoman Baroque, Ottoman Rococo, Ottoman Classical Architecture and other eclectic styles.

Initially, Sebils functioned as kiosks where water was distributed to passersby. During holidays or event celebrations, sweetened fruit drinks known as “sherbet” and fruit juice were also served. In order to serve as many individuals as possible, sebils have been located in the crowded pedestrian movement zones and their architectural formation have been based on the expedition of the dispensing of water. Basically sebils were consisted of two main closed parts, a cistern -in which the water was stored- and a closed space for the sakas –the attendants-. The main facade of the sebil had three sections. The lower section was called “skirt wall”, which was 80-120 cm high. The middle section was the part where the structure was considerably permeable. The huge openings separated by elegant columns or pilasters were secured by gilded window grilles generally made of cast bronze or iron. Between the skirt wall and the window grilles there were tiny gaps where the saka served the drinks out with copper bowls. Above the middle part there existed an upper wall which carried the ornamental friezes and the inscriptive cartouches which contained information regarding the founder, subsequent construction, renovation or the restoration dates and sometimes verses from the Quran.

Sebils usually had circular, hexagonal or octagonal plans and they were covered by single domes. They could be found on facades of bigger buildings, at street corners or as independent structures. (Aslanapa, 1971) The form and size of sebils varied according to their location, to its founder’s status and mainly to the current architectural fashion/style of the day. The earliest example of its kind, which could only survive until 1945, is the Sebil of Efdalzade. (Urfalioglu, 1989) It was located on the corner of the Efdalzade Mescit. The simple skirt wall, the window grills formed by wide iron grids, the plain circular columns supporting the grills and the pointed arches between these columns depicted the modesty of the building. One cannot find the simple design of Sebil of Efdalzade, in the design of the Sebil of Nuruosmaniye, which was built 260 years later with an elaborate sense of ornamentation and rich decoration. The difference observed in these 260 years is a consequence of the westernization process of the Ottoman Empire which was accelerated from the beginning of the 18th century. The effects of westernization were first and foremost have been observed in the sebil architecture of the era. By the combination of the Ottoman forms and the way of thinking of the European Baroque, the Baroque style was carried to a new level which is called Ottoman Baroque Architecture. Sebils and fountains present examples of pure design developed under the effect of trends resulting from relations with the west. The visual material coming from Europe is interpreted in a simple and unsophisticated manner and implemented on the facades of the sebils and fountains (Ödekan, 1999). The

Sebil of Nuruosmaniye, which is the main focus of this study, is considered as one of the best examples of Ottoman Baroque Architecture.

Sebil of Nuruosmaniye

Sebil of Nuruosmaniye is one of the buildings of the Nuruosmaniye complex which is located in Cagaloglu, Istanbul. The complex which is surrounded by a huge external courtyard with two entrances from the Grand Bazaar and Cagaloglu, is composed of a mosque, Moslem seminary (medrese), library, tomb, sebil, fountain, and surrounding retail shops. (Figure 3)

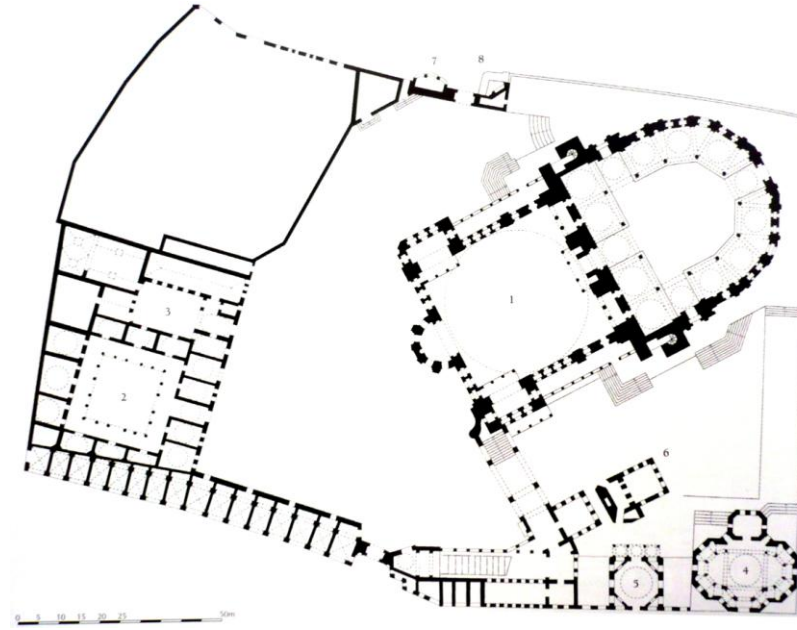


Figure 3. The plan of Nuruosmaniye Complex (Kuban, 2007)

One can find the diary of the construction, including information about the duration, builders and the opening ceremony of the complex in the tractate written by the construction amanuensis of the Nuruosmaniye complex; Ahmet Efendi. According to this source, before the complex had been built, there existed the tomb of Fatma Hatun-the wife of Hasancanzade Seyhülislam Hoca Saadettin Efendi in the same location. The construction had begun in 1749, January 1st by Mahmud I, but he passed away before the completion of the construction. The succeeding sultan, his brother Osman III has completed the construction of the complex in 1755 and named it Nur-u Osmaniye ; the light(wisdom) of Osman.

The sebil of Nuruosmaniye has a noticeable architecture with its incredibly rich and organic shaped cornice profiles, the cartouches with their three dimensional design and inscriptions. Three concave massive marble blocks stand between the shallow pilasters of the skirt wall. In the upper section, marble columns separate the arched windows enriched by the elaborate and intertwined window grilles. The gilded window grilles of bronze follow a

definite pattern partly defined by rows of small bosses. Convoluted arches above the windows, composed of shells and foliage strengthen the three dimensional effect. (Goodwin, 1992) In order to create a two layered capital look, seashell motives were used above the voluted capitals. (Işın, Akbayar, 1993)

After 18th century, the sebils and the fountains were designed as independent architectural compositions, separate from the building complexes. Even when they were built or designed as a part of a complex, they lost their integral formation with the whole. However, the architectural composition of the fountains and the sebil of Nuruosmaniye are in total harmony with the entire architectural complex. The constructional elements were considered as a plastic potential for which the Classical Ottoman Architectural forms were transformed into the patterns and forms of the European Baroque Architecture. (Arel, 1975)

The restoration process of the Sebil of Nuruosmaniye

The Sebil of Nuruosmaniye which belongs to the “General Directorate for Foundations”, has been rented for 49 years by a tradesman selling traditional Turkish carpets. The sebil, which is situated in between the main entrance of Grand Bazaar and the courtyard of the Baroque Nuruosmaniye Mosque, was under the threat of falling into ruins until 2003 although it is undoubtedly at a spot that all tourists pass by. To prevent the Sebil from collapse and to renovate it as a resting place for tourists, the project started in 2000. The Restoration Project of the Sebil which was considered in the First Prevention Group was approved in May 2001 and it was decided by the “Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Board” in December 2002 to proceed the restoration practice under the control of the Istanbul Regional Directorate for Foundations. The restoration which started in April 2003 was completed in September 2003.

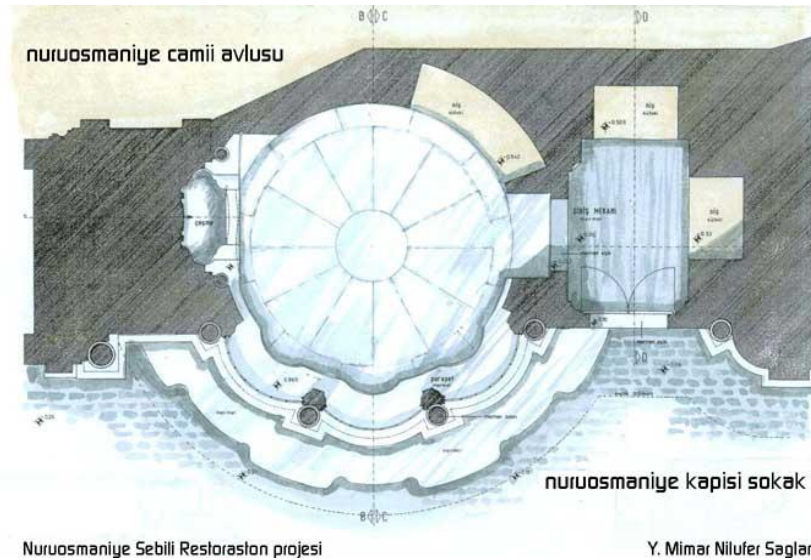


Figure 4. Sebil of Nuruosmaniye-Plan (The Restoration Project by Saglar Onay)

The Sebil of Nuruosmaniye is composed of a circular main space with a radius of 3.2 meters and on the right hand side a rectangular entrance hall

with dimensions of 1.2 x 2 m. The wall of the sebil adjacent to the courtyard of the Mosque has been completely built of Küfeki. Küfeki is a kind of limestone which was used as the main construction material by the Ottoman architects and had the potential to get harder in time although it was easily shaped as soon as it was quarried. The circular part on the side of the main entrance of Grand Bazaar has been built of Marmara marble which was commonly used in the ornamented facades of the religious and public buildings of the Ottoman Empire. The first step of restoration was to determine the marble structural elements on the front rectangular front facade like the columns and capitals which were weakened by deep cracks and could no longer support the upper structural elements (Figure 5). These structural elements were removed after the elements of the upper façade were supported by a precise scaffold. Afterwards, they were replaced by the most efficacious reconstructions made of the same quality of Marmara marble and they were fastened into their places by using special fittings. The cracks on the balustrade elements which were comparatively in better condition were filled by structural adhesives (Figure 6). The upper structural elements forming the tambour of the Sebil were kept in spite of the deep cracks and corrosion as they were holding the precious inscriptive cartouches. These upper elements were completed by filling the gaps of the existing stones with adhesives or tiny fittings.



Figure 5. The situation of the upper structural elements before the restoration (Saglar Onay archive)



Figure 6. The situation of the balustrade elements before the restoration (Saglar Onay archive)

The cracks in the dome were filled with Horasan mortar and the crumbled bricks were replaced by classical new bricks. After the structural elements and parts of the Sebil were treated, other decorative elements like copings and cartouches which were highly damaged were also replaced by one to one reconstructions.

The presence of a wooden eave was determined in a photograph which was taken in the beginning of the 20th century. Although no trace of the eave was detected on the existing structure the restoration drawings were created by

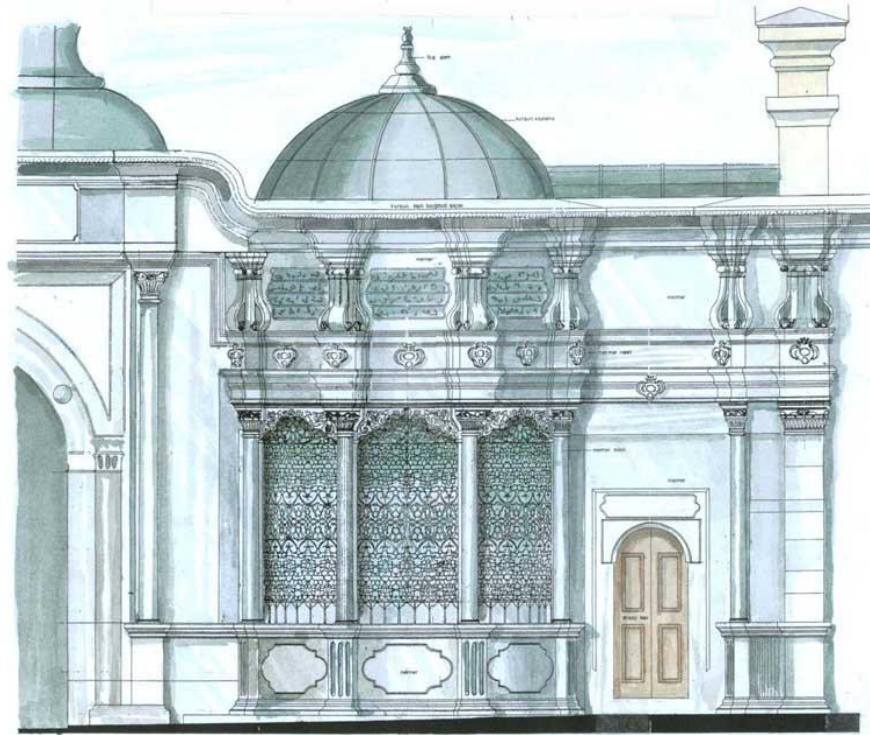
the help of the photograph and structural analyses on other Baroque Sebils in Istanbul which have wooden eaves. After the tambour was reinforced by mortar and adhesives, the eave was hanged on it by the help of fittings and anchorages.



Figure 7. The situation of the Sebil of Nuruosmaniye in the beginning of the 20th Century (Evren, 1999)



Figure 8. The situation of the Sebil of Nuruosmaniye before the restoration (Saglar Onay archive)

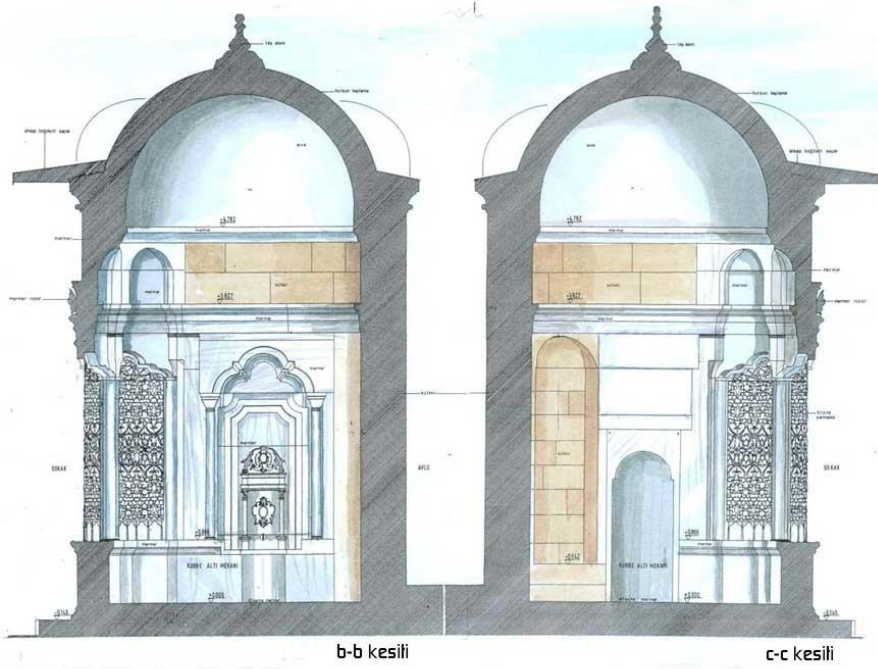


Nuruosmaniye Sebilli Restorasyon projesi

Y. Mimar Nilufer Saglar

Figure 9. Sebil of Nuruosmaniye-Front Façade (The Restoration Project by Saglar Onay)

After the structural elements and the outer shell of the building were restored, the interior which was comparatively in better condition was handled. The electrical installation which was scattered all around the interior was renewed and hidden. (Figure 10-11-12) The tin gratings originally called "sebeke" were cleaned with special metal brushes. The additional metals used to close the original bottom tiny holes, from which water was delivered, were removed.



Nuruosmaniye Sebilli Restorasyon projesi

Y. Mimar Nilufer Saglar

Figure 10. Sebil of Nuruosmaniye-Sections (The Restoration Project by Saglar Onay)



Figure 11. The Interior of The Sebil of Nuruosmaniye - The situation before restoration (Saglar Onay archive)



Figure 12. The Interior of The Sebil of Nuruosmaniye - The situation after restoration (Saglar Onay archive)

Finally the planar ornamentations originally called “tezyinat” on the inner surface of the dome were completed similar to the remaining ornamental details. The ornamentations under the outer eave were realized according to a 100 year old photograph. The colors of the inner and outer ornamentations were chosen to resemble other religious buildings and palaces in Istanbul; reddish outside, blue inside. The last ornamentation step was to cover the religious inscriptive cartouches with gold leaves. (Figure 13-14-15-16-17)



Figure 13. *The Inscriptive cartouches of the Sebil of Nuruosmaniye – The situation before the Restoration*



Figure 14.



Figure 15.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.

Table 1. The Inscriptive cartouches of the Sebil of Nuruosmaniye – The situation after the Restoration (Neftçi, 1996)

	Original text on the cartouches	Meaning
Figure 15	Hazreti Sultan Osman hilafeten mesnedin Cûy-bârî lütfuna Tesnim-i Cennet'dir adil Nûs iden atsâne bî-sübhe hayât îrâs eder Feyz-i lutf-u cevdet ve a'tafina olmus mesil	Sultan Osman is the owner of the Caliphate His kindness is just like river running through Paradise This fountain gives life to thirsty ones Is an example that shows his kindness, generousness and care
Figure 16	Ayn-ı cûdi etdi irvâ tesnegân-ı âlemi Tâ-be-mehser oldı câri böyle bir hayr-i cezîl Anıçün pâk ü ruhâni mizâc sâf kim Menbaı'dır ravza-yı huld içre cûy-i selsebil	His generousness fountain, revealed the thirst of all These caring acts of him should go on until the Day of Judgement The running pure liquid is like his fresh spirit Is like the sebil running through the immortal gardens of Paradise
Figure 17	Gel Hüseyin ile Hasan askına mâ-i zemzem iç iste cûd-ı sâh-ı âlem sahibi feyz-i cemîl Böyle insâd etdi Hâkim bendesi tarihini Eyledi Sultan Osman su gibi cûdin sebil	Come and drink the Zemzem (the sacred river running through paradise) water for the sake of Hüseyin and Hasan The Shah of the world is the owner of all generousness and beautiful prosperity His sage obedient fellow has written the history of the fountain Sultan Osman has built this running Sebil

Evaluations and suggestions

The Sebil of Nuruosmaniye is now being used as an exhibition and disposal space for traditional Turkish Carpets by the tradesman who had rented the Sebil for 49 years and paid for the restoration. (Figure 18-19) Although the present use of the Sebil seems to offer a public space conception, the general spatial organization is completely guided by commercial concern. In fact, the original typology of Sebil embodies a spatial conception that is formed by the principle of public benefaction.



Figure 18. The Sebil of Nuruosmaniye after Restoration, 2003 (Saglar Onay archive)



Figure 19. The Present Situation of the the Sebil, 2009 (Saglar Onay archive)

Renting Sebils to individuals can be considered as positive in some cases as this may contribute to the physical survival of the building. However, functional and semantic continuity needs to be the most important concern. Commercial usages of buildings which used to be public meeting points for hundreds of years, ruin public life and urban continuity.

In order to save the existing sebils of Istanbul, it is very important to remove the present functions which contradict the principle of public benefaction and threaten the physical endurance of the structures. Then the sebils must be reevaluated with public consciousness and experience in order to render meaningful public spots. Dispersion of water and “sherbet” which is the main functional aim of sebils could help to preserve our traditional values and could make us introduce these values to other cultures. But this does not

mean that sebils should be only used as they were used hundreds of years ago. At the same time it is possible to keep the remaining traces of the original functions and to define certain new functions which can satisfy contemporary public needs. The most appropriate functions can be determined according to the sizes and contexts of the sebils. The inappropriate buildings and structures around sebils can be removed and the sebils can be considered as landmarks. This can increase the continuity between the interior and exterior public spaces. Thus, the public aspect of the sebils can be rendered as more significant within a stronger exterior context.

The sebils which are located in touristic regions can be reconnected to contemporary public life by taking roles such as "information offices" orienting the public around the various entities and activities of the city. Bigger sebils over crowded pedestrian axes can be functioned as modest museums or showrooms in order to expose the original equipments and accessories of the Ottoman Sebil. Sebils facing wide public streets or squares can be reevaluated as urban faces and can be highlighted by special lighting during the night. In line with these suggestions and thoughts, a project can be developed accounting for all the sebils considering the past and present identities of the city. Each sebil can become a component of this holistic project that reevaluates the sebil according to its urban context.

It is a vital issue to preserve the public aspects of the existing sebils of Istanbul which are unique reminders of the Ottoman understanding of public life so that we can have the opportunity to talk of cultural and social continuity.

Author's Note: *The Restoration Project of the Sebil of Nuruosmaniye was prepared by Nilufer Saglar Onay in 2000. The restoration work was run by a private construction company under the guidance of Saglar Onay and approved by Istanbul Regional Directorate for Foundations in 2003.*

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Bir kamusal buluşma noktası: Nuruosmaniye sebili

“Sebil kelimesi” Türkçe’de hayrat olarak dağıtılan su veya bunun dağıtıldığı yer manasına gelir. Osmanlı Dönemi’nde gelip geçen kişilere parasız içme suyu; bayram, kandil gibi belirli özel günlerde ise şerbet verilen bu yapı tipine İstanbul dışında pek rastlanmaz. (Ödekan, 1998) Osmanlı’da “sebil” halk arasında zamanla Allah yolunda yapılan ve Allah’ın yapılmasını istediği her tür hayırı içine alan genel bir kavrama dönüşmüştür. Sıradan olduğu farz edilen su içme aktivitesine zamanla ayrı bir değer ve anlam yüklenmiş ve sebiller Osmanlı Kültürü’nün ayrılmaz parçası haline gelerek kamusal bir buluşma noktasına dönüşmüştür.

Sebiller, mümkün olduğunca çok kişiye hizmet verebilmeleri için genellikle yaya aktivitesinin yoğun olduğu bölgelerde konumlandırılmışlardır. Mimari biçimlenişleri de su dağıtım işlevini kolaylaştıracak şekilde kurgulanmıştır. Ön cepheleri, bel seviyesine kadar mermer parapetlerle kapatılırken, üst karnak ile parapet arasında yer alan boşluklar, tunç veya kurşun şebekelerle yarı şeffaf bir şekilde örtülmüştür. Bu şebekelerin altında maşrapaların geçebileceği kadar bir açıklık yer alır. Bir görevli sebilin içinde durarak, kaybolmamaları için ince bir zincirle demir parmaklıklara bağlanmış olan maşrapaları doldurur.

Nuruosmaniye Sebili restorasyon süreci

Nuruosmaniye Sebili, İstanbul’un Cağaloğlu semtinde bulunan Nuruosmaniye Külliyesi yapılarından biridir. Biri Kapalı Çarşı, biri Cağaloğlu tarafına açılan iki kapılı geniş bir dış avlu ile çevrili olan külliye, cami, medrese, imaret, kütüphane, türbe, muvakkit odası, sebil, çeşme ile etrafındaki dükkanlar ve handan ibarettir. (Şekil 3) Mimarı Mustafa Ağa, yardımcısı ise Simeon Kalfa’dır. (Öngül, 1994)

Nuruosmaniye Sebili, külliyenin genel kompozisyonuna katılan, plastik nitelikte bir bileşendir. Batılılaşma eğilimlerinin mimaride kendini gösterdiği ilk önemli yapı bütünü olan Nuruosmaniye Külliyesi, Osmanlı mimarisinde bir dönüm noktası olarak değerlendirilebilir. Külliye, Osmanlı yapısal kalıplarının Barok mimarisinden devşirilen biçimlerle zorlandığı bir uygulama olarak göze çarpar.

Günümüzde mülkiyeti Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü’ne ait olan Nuruosmaniye Sebili, 49 seneliğine sebilin bulunduğu Çarşıkapı Caddesi’nde esnafılık yapan özel bir şahsa kiralanmıştır. Nuruosmaniye Avlusunun devamında Kapalı Çarşı Nuruosmaniye ana giriş aksı üzerinde bulunan sebil, eşsiz konumundan ötürü İstanbul’a gelen turistlerin uğramadan geçmedikleri bir

noktada olmasına rağmen 2003 senesine kadar yıkılma tehlikesi ile karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Sebilin varlığının devam ettirilmesi ve yoğun turistik aktiviteyi barındıran bölgede turistler için bir soluklanma noktası yaratmak adına, restorasyon projesinin hazırlanmasına 2000 senesinde başlanmıştır. Koruma grubu 1 olarak belirlenen sebilin restorasyon projesi, Mayıs 2001'de onaylandıktan sonra Aralık 2002'de 1 Numaralı Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kurulu tarafından İstanbul Vakıflar Bölge Müdürlüğü denetiminde uygulamasının yapılmasına karar verilmiştir. Uygulanmasına Nisan 2003'de başlanan restorasyon, Eylül 2003'de ana hatlarıyla tamamlanmıştır.

Nuruosmaniye Sebili, 3.2 m'lik çapa sahip dairesel bir ana mekan ile sağında yer alan 1.2m x 2m boyutlarında dikdörtgen bir giriş mekanından oluşur. (Şekil 4) Sebilin camiye bakan duvarları, tamamen küfeki taşından inşa edilmiştir. Nuruosmaniye Kapısı Sokağı'na bakan dairesel kısımda ise Marmara mermeri kullanılmıştır. Söz konusu mermer dairesel cephedeki narin yapı elemanlarının ağır üst kasnak ve kubbeden gelen yükleri daha fazla taşıyamayıp, derin çatlaklara maruz kalmaları nedeniyle restorasyona ilk olarak, korunamayacak kadar kötü durumda olan mermer sütun ve silmeler gibi yapı elemanlarının belirlenmesiyle başlanmıştır. (Şekil 5) Söz konusu elemanlara gerekli yerlerde çürütme yapılarak, eksik parçaların yerine Marmara mermerinden yapılmış birebir rekonstrüksiyonları donatılı ankrajlar yardımıyla sabitlenmiştir. Mermer yüzeylerindeki kopma ve ufalanmanın çok fazla olduğu bazı sütun, başlık, silme ve rozetler, yapı gerekli yerlerde askıya alınarak söküldükten sonra yerlerine yeni parçalar yerleştirilmiştir. Mermer yüzeylerde pencere alt kotunda bulunan ayna taşlarında ise çatlakların derinliğine göre yapılaştırma ya da yenileme yoluna gidilmiştir. (Şekil 6) Özellikle kitabelerin yer aldığı silme kotunda ise mümkün olduğunca özgün parçaların korumasına dikkat edilmiş, çatlamış ve ayrılmış tüm parçalar kuvvetli yapıştırıcılarla bütünleştirilerek tamamlama yoluna gidilmiştir.

Yapının sağlamlaştırılması adına gerekli imalatlar yapıldıktan sonra, yapının nispeten daha iyi durumda olan iç mekanında gerekli sağlamlaştırma ve yenileme çalışmaları yapılmıştır. Özellikle kasnak bölümündeki kopma ve bozulmalar giderilmiş, içeride dağınık halde olan elektrik tesisatı yenilenmiştir. (Şekil 10-11-12) Sebilin içindeki çeşmenin de temizliği yapıp, eksik parçaları bütünlenmiştir. Yapının karakterini belirlemede önemli yeri olan şebekeler ise özel fırçalarla temizlenerek, maşrapa boşluklarını kapamak için sonradan eklenen parçalardan arındırılmıştır.

Son olarak yapının orijinal halinde var olduğu bilinen tezyinatlar tamamlamıştır. Bu kapsamda yine eski fotoğrafta varlığı tespit edilen saçak altı tezyinatı ve çinko etek de aslına uygun olarak şekillendirilmişlerdir. Kubbe altı tezyinatı saçak altı bezemelerine benzer şekilde yorumlanarak uygulanmıştır. Kasnak üzerindeki kitabelerin de tamiri yapıldıktan sonra yazılara altın varak uygulaması yapılmıştır. (Şekil 13-14-15-16-17)

Değerlendirme ve Öneriler

Nuruosmaniye Sebili günümüzde yapıyı kiraldıktan sonra restorasyonunu yaptıran kişi tarafından bir halı sergileme ve satış mekanı olarak kullanılmaktadır. (Şekil 18-19) Söz konusu kullanım kamuya açık bir mekan anlayışı getirirse de, aslında mevcut mekansal organizasyon, tamamen ticaret odaklı olarak oluşturulmuştur. Oysa ki sebil, özünde kamuya karşılıksız olarak hizmet verme prensibiyle oluşmuş bir mekan anlayışını barındırır.

Sebillerin günümüzde özel şahıslara kiraya verilmesi, kimi durumlarda yapının varlığını sürdürmesi açısından olumlu görülebilir ancak yapının fiziksel olarak korunmasının yanı sıra işlevsel ve anlamsal olarak da sürekliliğin sağlanması esas olmalıdır. Dolayısıyla yüzyıllar boyunca kamuya mâl olmuş yapıların, ticari amaçla kullanımı yadırganacak bir durum olarak nitelendirilebilir.

Bugün, İstanbul'da ayakta kalan toplam 67 sebilin sadece 2 tanesi orijinal işlevi ile hizmet vermektedir; Üsküdar Hüdai Sebili ve Gazanfer Ağa Sebili (Urfalıoğlu, 1989). Sebillerin varoluş amacı olan su ve şerbet dağıtma işlevinin tekrar hayata geçirilmesi, hem geleneğin sürdürülmesi, hem de kültürel değerlerimizin sürekliliğinin sağlanması açısından olumlu olacaktır. Ancak bu bakış açısı, sebillerin yalnızca özgün işlevini devam ettirmesi gerektiği şeklinde algılanmamalıdır. Özgün işlev korunurken güncel ihtiyaçlara cevap verecek kamusal amaçlı bir takım yeni işlevlerin yüklenmesi de toplumsal gelişime katkı sağlayacaktır.

Nuruosmaniye Sebili gibi turistik bölgelerde bulunan sebillerin, hayır amaçlı içecek dağıtımının yanısıra , yerli ve yabancı gezginleri yönlendirme amaçlı olarak çeşitli broşür, harita ve föylerin dağıtılabileceği bilgilendirme noktaları ("Tourist Information") olarak da değerlendirilmesi, çok daha kamusal ve anlamlı bir kullanım önerisi olabilir. Mimari biçimlenişinde de dağıtım prensibi olan sebiller, böylece bulunduğu bölgedeki toplumsal ihtiyaçlara hizmet verecek şekilde yeniden işlevlendirilebilirler. Söz konusu sebillerin, hem zarif bedenleriyle kentin mimari kimliğine katkıda bulunması, hem de kentte kamusal buluşma noktaları tanımlaması için en kısa sürede harekete geçilmelidir.