



Erken Osmanlı Dönemi Cami Mimarisi Bağlamında Bursa Ulu Camii, Orhan Camii ve Yeşil Camii'nin Koruma ve Restorasyon Süreçlerinin Değerlendirilmesi

Evaluation of the Conservation and Restoration Processes of Bursa Grand Mosque, Orhan Mosque, and Green Mosque within the Context of Early Ottoman Mosque Architecture

ÖZET

Tarihi yapılar, bulundukları çevrenin ve sosyal yaşamın temel bileşenleri olarak toplumsal hafızanın korunmasında önemli bir role sahiptir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Bursa kent merkezinde yer alan ve restorasyon uygulamalarına tabi tutulmuş camilerin koruma süreçlerini incelemek; modern müdahale yöntemlerini, tasarım kriterlerini ve yapısal yaklaşımları değerlendirmektir. Çalışmada, koruma ve restorasyon programlarının tarihsel gelişimi ele alınmış; geçmişten günümüze değişen yaklaşımlar irdelenmiştir. Yapısal, malzeme temelli ve zamana bağlı müdahaleler analiz edilerek cami örnekleri üzerinden değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışma kapsamında Ulu Camii, Orhan Camii ve Yeşil Camii'nin tarihsel bağlamı, mevcut durumu ve restorasyon süreçleri araştırılmış; yapım tekniği, plan şeması, strüktürel sistem, malzeme özellikleri ve cephe düzenlemeleri ayrıntılı biçimde incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erken Osmanlı Mimarisi, Cami Mimarisi, Koruma ve Restorasyon, Kültürel Miras, Kent Belleği, Bursa.

ABSTRACT

Historical buildings play a crucial role in preserving collective memory as fundamental components of their surrounding environment and social life. This study aims to examine the conservation processes of mosques in Bursa's city center that have undergone restoration and to evaluate modern intervention methods, design criteria, and structural approaches. The research discusses the historical development of conservation and restoration programs and examines the evolving approaches from past to present. Structural, material-based, and time-dependent interventions are analyzed and assessed through case studies of mosques. Within the scope of the study, the historical context, current conditions, and restoration processes of the Grand Mosque (Ulu Camii), Orhan Mosque, and Green Mosque (Yeşil Camii) are investigated. Construction techniques, plan schemes, structural systems, material characteristics, and façade arrangements are examined in detail.

Keywords: Early Ottoman Architecture, Mosque Architecture, Conservation and Restoration, Cultural Heritage, Urban Memory, Bursa

INTRODUCTION

Restoration is the process of repairing architectural structures of cultural and historical value that have deteriorated over time, preserving their original characteristics and ensuring their transmission to future generations. This process is not limited to physical interventions but is also critical for safeguarding cultural heritage, maintaining urban identity, and strengthening collective memory. Particularly in mosque structures, which serve as the spiritual and social centers of communities, restoration practices are of even greater significance for maintaining historical context and architectural authenticity.

As the first capital of the Ottoman Empire, Bursa played a central role in shaping early Ottoman architecture. The city's mosques, beyond serving religious purposes, have historically functioned as focal points of social, cultural, and commercial life, acting as carriers of urban memory. However, Bursa has been affected by various natural disasters throughout history—earthquakes, fires, and environmental factors—that have damaged these structures, leading to multiple restoration phases. This situation provides a valuable field of study for understanding both the continuity of conservation culture and the sustainability of architectural authenticity.

This study focuses on the Grand Mosque (1396–1400), Orhan Mosque (1326), and Green Mosque (1419) as characteristic examples of early Ottoman mosque architecture in Bursa. It evaluates their restoration processes in terms of historical context, architectural identity, cultural heritage value, and urban memory. The research employs methods such as literature reviews, archival studies, field observations, and photographic documentation. The

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collected data are analyzed comparatively to reveal the impact of restoration interventions on structural authenticity, artistic value, and spatial integrity.

Accordingly, the following sections present the historical background and architectural features of the examined mosques, followed by an evaluation of their restoration practices. In the final section, the findings are discussed in light of conservation and sustainability principles, and recommendations are developed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Conservation and Restoration

Conservation and restoration encompass comprehensive practices aimed at transmitting structures with historical, cultural, and architectural value to future generations. Within this framework, the preservation, revitalization, and sustainability of the original qualities of cultural assets are emphasized (Sağlam, 2022).

The Concept of Historical Building

Historical buildings are significant architectural artifacts that reflect a society's cultural identity, social life, and historical development. These structures play a decisive role in shaping urban identity and generating cultural memory, serving as tangible heritage elements that convey the traces of past civilizations to the present (Sağlam, 2022; Erşan & Demirarslan, 2020).

The Concept of Historical Environment

The historical environment refers to settlements where natural and built elements coexist, maintaining cultural continuity from the past to the present. These environments are crucial for preserving social identity and cultural heritage, and for their transmission to future generations (Sağlam, 2022).

Definitions of Conservation and Restoration

Conservation refers to preventive and sustainable interventions applied to protect the original values of cultural properties (Ersine, 2012).

Restoration, on the other hand, is a scientific process that involves the repair and revitalization of deteriorated or damaged structures, based on documented historical data, without compromising their authenticity (Aktaş, 2015; Savaş, 2024).

Historical Development of the Contemporary Restoration Approach

The modern restoration approach evolved into a scientific discipline worldwide during the 19th century. The 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 1975 Amsterdam Declaration represent significant milestones in the institutionalization of the conservation concept (ÇEKÜL, 2010).

In Turkey, the foundation of conservation policies dates back to the Tanzimat Era. Law No. 2863 on the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Assets, enacted in 1983, serves as the cornerstone of modern conservation legislation in the country (Sağlam, 2022).

Sustainable Conservation Approach

Sustainable conservation represents a holistic approach that considers not only the physical integrity of cultural heritage but also its social, economic, and environmental dimensions. This approach aims to ensure that heritage sites are preserved in harmony with contemporary life, thereby maintaining continuity (Ahunbay, 2019; ICOMOS, 2011).

Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse is the process of revitalizing historical structures that have lost their original function by assigning them new purposes without compromising their architectural authenticity. This method supports conservation processes while contributing to both economic and environmental sustainability (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

EARLY OTTOMAN PERIOD MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE

General Characteristics of Early Ottoman Architecture

The mosque architecture of the Early Ottoman period represents a developmental process in which the Seljuk tradition was synthesized with Byzantine architectural influences, gradually gaining unique formal characteristics. Shaped between the 14th and 15th centuries, this architectural approach evolved through multifunctional religious complexes constructed at the social and cultural centers of newly conquered cities (Kuban, 2007). During this period, mosques were not only places of worship but also spaces that fulfilled educational, social, and administrative functions (İnalçık, 2012).

The key characteristics of Early Ottoman mosque architecture include multi-domed spatial layouts, reversed T-plan schemes, small-scale single-domed structures, and arcaded courtyards. Influenced by the Seljuk Ulu Cami (Great Mosque) tradition, the multi-domed typology reached its most monumental form in the Bursa Ulu Mosque. Conversely, the reversed T-plan structures, which integrated religious and social functions, played a significant role in shaping the urban and cultural identity of Ottoman cities (Eyice, 1992).

From a structural perspective, the Early Ottoman period saw the extensive use of stone-and-brick masonry systems, pendentives and squinches as transition elements, stepped arches, and timber roof supports. Significant experimental steps were taken toward the development of dome architecture, leading to techniques that facilitated the transition between domes and rectangular plans (Goodwin, 2011). Thus, the foundations of the centrally planned single-domed mosques of the Classical Ottoman period were laid during this formative era.

The decorative approach of the period was characterized by tile ornamentation, kalem işi (painted decoration), marble mihrabs, and finely carved wooden minbars. The tile decorations of the Yeşil Mosque and Yeşil Tomb represent the finest examples of this period, reflecting the high production quality of imperial workshops (Arık, 1976). Additionally, Kufic and Thuluth calligraphy were employed as essential visual elements, serving not only as inscriptions but also as integral components of the architectural composition.

In conclusion, Early Ottoman mosque architecture represents a distinctive and formative phase in Ottoman architectural history, characterized by its transitional nature, multifunctional spatial organization, experimental dome construction, hybrid stone-brick building systems, and rich ornamental repertoire. The spatial and structural innovations developed during this period became foundational references that defined the identity of Classical Ottoman architecture.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA: THE CITY OF BURSA

Historical and Urban Development of Bursa

Throughout history, Bursa has hosted many civilizations and has become an important settlement area due to its strategic location and natural resources. The city, which was part of the Kingdom of Bithynia in antiquity, continued to develop as a regional administrative and commercial center during the Roman and Byzantine periods (Özdemir, 2019). With its conquest by the Ottoman Empire in 1326, Bursa became the first capital of the Ottoman State and, from that period onward, underwent rapid administrative, economic, and cultural development (Kuban, 2010).

During the Ottoman capital period, the city was enriched with palaces, complexes (külliye), caravanserais, bazaars, baths, and madrasas, forming a planned and multi-centered külliye system that dominated the urban fabric (Goodwin, 2003). Although Bursa's urban development was occasionally interrupted by natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, it continued through reconstruction each time (Yılmaz, 2021). Today, Bursa combines its historical texture, commercial core, and modern residential areas within a single urban unity. The city is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is recognized as one of Turkey's most significant cultural heritage cities.

The Place of Bursa in Early Ottoman Architecture

Bursa represents the primary center where early Ottoman architecture took shape and became institutionalized. As the first city where Ottoman political power was reflected in architecture, Bursa stands out as the place where the foundations of early mosque and külliye concepts were established (Kuban, 2010). The structures built during this period reflect Seljuk influences while accelerating the development of new plan typologies unique to the Ottomans. In particular, the reverse T-plan (zawiya) mosques and multi-domed mosque layouts emerged in Bursa and later spread to other Ottoman cities, especially Istanbul (Aslan, 2018).

The mosques in the city not only served as places of worship but also became focal points of social life, educational activities, and economic vitality. Structures such as the Grand Mosque (Ulu Camii), Orhan Mosque, and Green

Mosque (Yeşil Camii) are of great architectural significance for their plan schemes, structural systems, tilework, and painted ornamentation. These buildings contributed to the maturation of Ottoman construction techniques and provide qualified examples of early stone and brick craftsmanship. Therefore, Bursa functions as both an experimental and a theoretical center of development for early Ottoman architecture, establishing a strong sense of cultural continuity between the city's memory and the Islamic-Turkish architectural tradition (Goodwin, 2003).

CASE STUDIES

In this section, three significant structures representing the characteristic features of early Ottoman mosque architecture—Bursa Grand Mosque (Ulu Camii), Orhan Mosque, and Green Mosque (Yeşil Camii)—are examined. Each building is evaluated based on its historical background, architectural composition, and restoration interventions.

Condition Assessment of the Bursa Grand Mosque

The Bursa Grand Mosque was commissioned by Sultan Yıldırım Bayezid, the fourth ruler of the Ottoman Empire, between 1396 and 1399, and it is currently owned by the General Directorate of Foundations (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü). Following the victory at Nicopolis, twenty mosques were vowed to be built, but upon the advice of Emir Sultan, these were symbolically represented in a single mosque with twenty domes (Mutlu, 2015).

The mosque is situated on a sloping terrain, with a courtyard to the north, Emir Han to the east, and Gülşen Bath (Hamam) to the west. Throughout its history, the structure has suffered from numerous earthquakes and fires. The 1855 earthquake severely damaged much of the building, leading to the reconstruction of most domes. The 1889 fire destroyed the spire caps (külah) of the minarets, giving them their current form (Kul, 2021).

The mosque has two minarets, one at each corner, each rising independently from the main structure. The eastern minaret was rebuilt during the reign of Sultan Mehmed I (Çelebi Mehmet), and the upper parts of both minarets were renewed in the 19th century.



Photo 1. Exterior view of Bursa Grand Mosque

The building has a rectangular plan measuring 60 × 48 meters. The walls, built of yellowish limestone (küfeki stone), exceed two meters in thickness at specific points. The plan scheme follows the Seljuk multi-pier mosque tradition, with twelve piers connected by pointed arches. The load of the twenty domes is transferred to the foundation through octagonal drums and pointed arches.

In the interior, an open oculus above the ablution fountain (şadırvan) provides natural light and ventilation. The arrangement of stacked windows and drum openings defines the interior space's luminous character.

The eastern entrance door is original and features wooden ornamentation made using the künde-kari technique. Inside, the mihrab, minbar, müezzin platform, and preaching pulpit (va'z kürsüsü) reflect the decorative understanding of the period. The minbar is adorned with solar system motifs and symbols representing the 24 Oghuz tribes (Mutlu, 2015). The mihrab contains painted decorations and the names of Allah (Esma-ül Hüsna), though some parts have lost their originality during restorations.

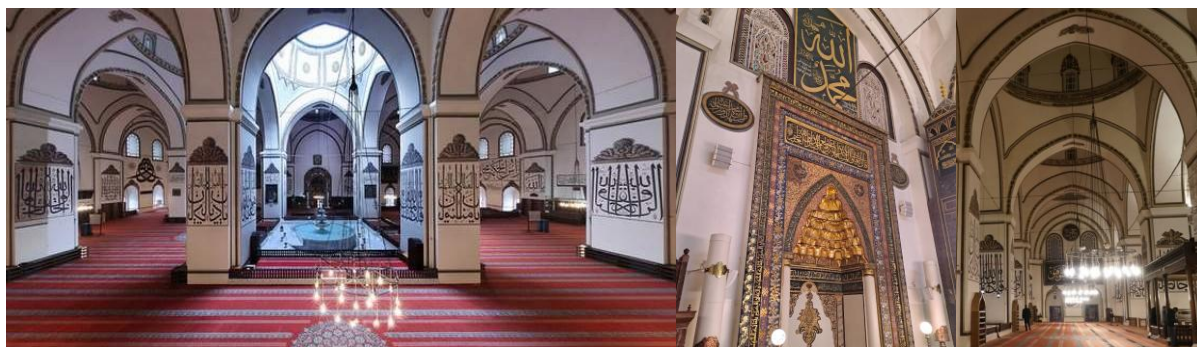


Photo 2. Interior view of Bursa Grand Mosque

Throughout history, the Bursa Grand Mosque has undergone numerous restorations following natural disasters and fires. The 1855 Bursa earthquake caused severe structural damage, leading to the reconstruction and repair of domes, arches, and minarets (Yurtseven, 2020).

During the 20th century and subsequent interventions, renewal and completion works were carried out, particularly on painted surface decorations (*kalemişi*), partially redefining the building's interior ornamentation. In the latest restoration phases, conservation-oriented approaches were adopted, focusing on the preservation of authentic materials and the application of structural strengthening techniques.

The Bursa Grand Mosque stands as one of the most monumental examples of early Ottoman mosque architecture, representing not only a place of worship but also a synthesis of the technical, aesthetic, and social values of its time. The multi-domed plan continues the Seljuk multi-pier tradition, serving as a crucial transitional step toward the centralized dome concept of classical Ottoman architecture. The spatial organization, natural lighting strategies, and decorative program embody the process of architectural identity formation in the early Ottoman era. With these characteristics, the Bursa Grand Mosque has played a defining role in shaping both the urban identity of Bursa and the architectural evolution of the Ottoman Empire.

Condition Assessment of Orhan Mosque

Following the conquest of Bursa, the Orhan Gazi Complex was constructed on reclaimed land formed by diverting the Gökdere stream (Yavaş, 2007). Commissioned by Orhan Gazi, the Orhan Mosque is recognized as the first mosque built outside the city walls after the Ottoman conquest of Bursa (Aydın, 2017).

Situated at the core of the complex — which includes a madrasa, imaret-zaviye, inn, bathhouse, and school — the mosque forms the nucleus of Bursa's earliest large-scale Ottoman urban development. The structure follows a zawiya-type plan with tabhane rooms and is among the first examples to employ the three-iwan plan (Yavaş, 2007). Derived from the Seljuk madrasa tradition, this scheme transformed the entrance iwan into a domed prayer space and added a porticoed narthex (*son cemaat yeri*) at the front, making the mosque an early prototype of the Reverse-T plan type in Ottoman architecture.

The mosque features two domes aligned along the mihrab axis, side iwans, and a front portico. Built of roughly hewn stone and brick masonry, the walls are accentuated with vertical brick bands for visual rhythm (Yavaş, 2007). Covered by four large domes, the structure integrates religious and social functions within a single architectural composition.

Throughout history, the Orhan Mosque has undergone several phases of restoration, especially after the 1855 Bursa Earthquake, which caused significant damage. During the 1904–1905 restorations, the window openings were redesigned — rectangular forms were replaced with pointed arches — and the minaret was rebuilt in 1905 under Sultan Abdülhamid II. An inscription “tağmir 1381” indicates another major repair completed in 1963 (Budak, 2018).

The façade is animated by two pointed-arch cornices extending from the base to the eaves, and the five-bay portico features side barrel vaults and a central dome. Brick arches, Turkish triangles, and sun-disc motifs are characteristic decorative features of early Ottoman architecture. In 1864, the French architect L. Parvillee replaced the original wooden tie beams with iron elements (Yavaş, 2007).

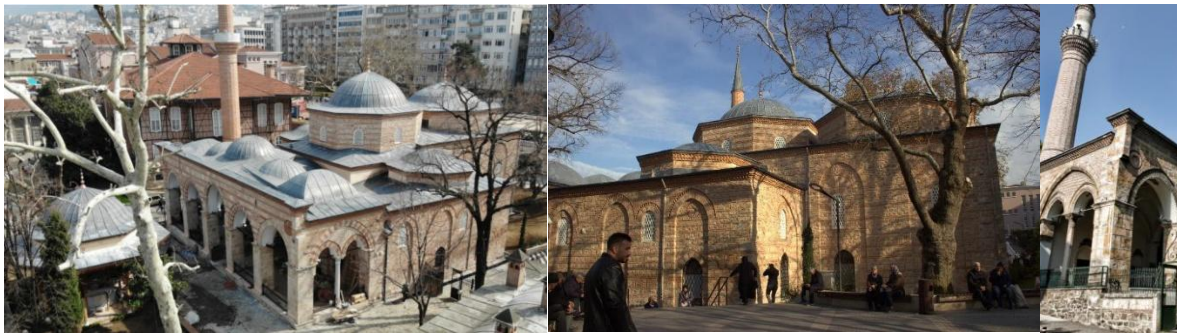


Photo 3. Exterior View of the Orhan Mosque, Bursa

Inside, plaster decorations adorn the pendentives, drum zones, and wall surfaces. The mihrab, executed in malakari technique, displays stalactite motifs arranged in seven tiers and refined rumi ornaments, reflecting the elegant decoration style of the 14th century. Painted ornaments and stained-glass windows enrich the spatial atmosphere (Aydın, 2017).



Photo 4. Interior View of the Orhan Mosque, Bursa

Together with the complex's associated buildings — madrasa, mausoleum, bathhouse, and imaret — the Orhan Mosque exemplifies the integrated planning approach of early Ottoman architecture, in which religious, educational, and social functions coexist harmoniously. Today, with its preserved architectural authenticity and thoughtful restoration history, the mosque stands as a significant example of sustainable cultural heritage preservation in Bursa.

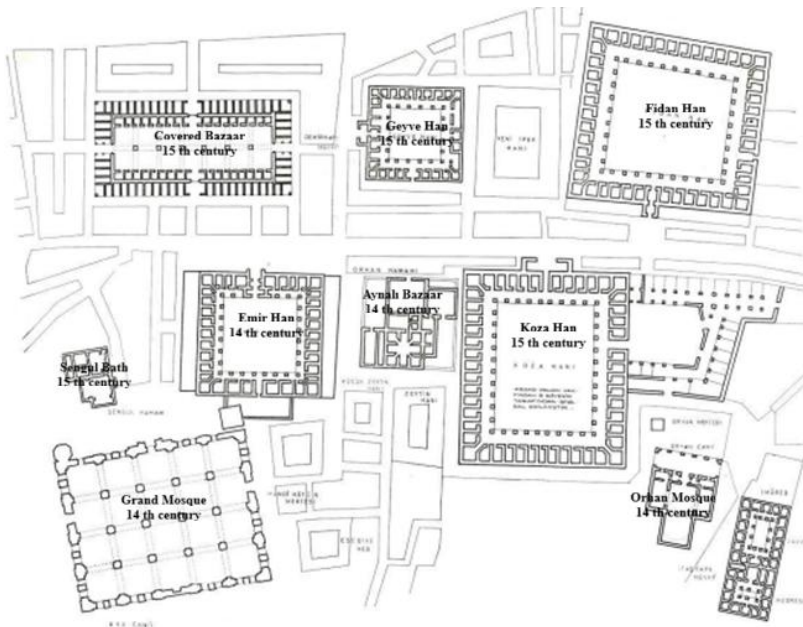


Figure 1. The Inns (Hanlar) District of Bursa

Condition Assessment of the Yeşil (Green) Mosque

The Yeşil Mosque is located within the district of Yıldırım, Bursa, in the neighborhood of Yeşil, as part of a complex layout. The mosque is one of the principal components of an architectural ensemble that also includes a madrasa, a mausoleum, and an imaret. The irregular topography of the site necessitated constructing the mosque and mausoleum at different levels, while the steep slope descending toward the Gökdere Valley to the north required access to the mosque via stairways (Alkan, 2013). To the present day, the mosque, mausoleum, and madrasa have survived mainly, whereas the imaret is only partially preserved.

The mosque sustained considerable damage during the 1855 earthquake, particularly in its minarets, which were later reconstructed to reflect the 19th-century stylistic characteristics. During the rebuilding process, the shafts were constructed of brick, while the upper parts were made of stone masonry (Kul, 2021). The construction of the mosque began in 1414 and, according to its inscription, was completed in 1419. The monumental portal, adorned with muqarnas details, intricate marble craftsmanship, and elaborate calligraphic compositions, represents one of the most distinguished examples of early Ottoman stone decoration (Atan Bülbül).

The building follows a reversed T-plan typology. From the entrance hall, access is provided to two symmetrical iwans, leading to the tabhane (guest rooms) and the upper royal loge (hünkâr mahfili). The upper loge, modeled on a small pavilion, reflects the reception culture of the Ottoman court during the early 15th century (Atan Bülbül).



Photo 5. Exterior View of the Yeşil Mosque, Bursa

The interior decoration of the mosque exhibits a rich synthesis of tile, wood, plaster, and painted ornamentation. The mihrab is entirely covered with tiles produced using the colored-glaze (cuerda seca) technique, framed by seven differently sized borders (Yıldırım, 2007, p.166). The stucco and tile decorations within the tabhane rooms are characterized by rûmî and hatâyî motifs arranged in intricate compositions (Terzi Doğan, 2010).

The painted decorations (kalemişi) are particularly concentrated around the iwans and drum sections. These were renewed during 18th-century restorations with Western-influenced motifs, while specific original examples were unfortunately lost during the 2010 restoration campaign (İrteş, 2021, pp.73–79). Some details from the recent interventions do not correspond to the Parvillee drawings, suggesting that additional structural modifications were introduced over time (Budak, 2017).



Photo 6. Interior View of the Yeşil Mosque, Bursa

The mausoleum section of the complex also underwent several alterations over the course of history; the number of sarcophagi recorded in historical sources varies, indicating ongoing interventions in the surrounding area (Budak, 2017).

The original architectural and artistic qualities of the Yeşil Mosque have been preserved through successive restoration efforts. Today, the mosque remains a central component of Bursa's cultural identity, serving as a significant example of sustainable cultural heritage and the transmission of historical memory across generations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bursa Grand Mosque (Ulu Camii), Orhan Mosque, and Green Mosque (Yeşil Camii) are distinguished architectural examples reflecting the identity of the Early Ottoman period. Despite numerous restorations following earthquakes, fires, and environmental interventions throughout history, their survival to the present day demonstrates the continuity of Ottoman architectural heritage. However, some of these interventions have led to a loss of authenticity, particularly affecting materials, decorative techniques, and spatial perception. This situation once again highlights the importance of adhering to scientific and ethical principles in restoration practices.

The multi-domed layout and monumental scale of the Grand Mosque, the multifunctional typology represented by the Orhan Mosque, and the tile decoration and ornamental craftsmanship of the Green Mosque elevate these structures beyond the realm of religious architecture. They have become central references for urban identity and collective cultural memory. However, urban interventions such as road rearrangements, elevation differences, and dense surrounding buildings have diminished the visibility of the Orhan Mosque and weakened its role within the city silhouette. Therefore, it is essential to reinforce its spatial presence through well-planned urban design and landscape strategies.

For the Green Mosque and its complex, preserving tile surfaces and original materials requires regular maintenance by expert teams. Similarly, the dome systems, interior decorations, and wooden craftsmanship of the Grand Mosque necessitate continuous monitoring and controlled interventions. Since these structures are major cultural heritage sites attracting large numbers of visitors, increasing public awareness through educational programs, digital information panels, and guided tours is strongly recommended.

In conclusion, the preservation of these three monumental buildings should not be limited to physical interventions. Within the framework of a sustainable conservation approach, the following strategies are essential:

- ✓ Establishing regular maintenance and monitoring programs,
- ✓ Integrating scientific methods with traditional craftsmanship,
- ✓ Strengthening the relationship between the monuments and the urban fabric,
- ✓ Enhancing visitor education and cultural heritage awareness,
- ✓ Supporting documentation and digital archiving initiatives.

By implementing comprehensive conservation strategies, the original architectural qualities of these monuments will be effectively preserved for future generations, ensuring the continuity of Bursa's historical and cultural identity.

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