

## **Platform of Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform/ Those who are backing our cultural heritage Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage / PartChapter 13**

"Selimiye Mosque and Complex and Edirne's UNESCO pProcess" with Yaşagül Ekinci

**TOPICS:** The Importance of Selimiye Mosque and Mimar Sinan, Edirne's Historical and Cultural Heritage, Architectural Details and Features of Selimiye Mosque, Issues to be Considered in the Application, The Effects of Selimiye Mosque's Inclusion in the UNESCO List

**Nükhet Everi: We are taking you to from Edirne in the interviews series of those who shoulder our cultural heritage of Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage series. In the last episode, we talked about UNESCO processes and in this context, we are discussing Selimiye Mosque, one of the most important files in Turkey Türkiye. Our guest is Trakya University Lecturer Yaşagül Ekinci. First of all, firstly, can we get to know you a little bit could you please introduce yourself? Who is Yaşagül Ekinci?**

Yaşagül Ekinci: I was born and raised in Edirne and completed all my education here. I went to Istanbul University's Faculty of Political Sciences for university and started working as a financial correspondent in the early 1990s. After the 2000 crisis, I shifted my focus from finance to cultural studies. After a short stay abroad, I returned to Turkey Türkiye and settled in Edirne. I participated in the nomination process of the Selimiye Mosque to the UNESCO World Heritage List and took part in this process. Later, I managed the process of Bergama's inscription on the World Heritage List and served as the head of the site. I am currently working as a lecturer at Trakya University.

**Nükhet Everi: Edirne is a very important city. Hadrianopolis, the city of Hadrian. It is a very colourful city with its churches, synagogues, and mosques. Could you tell us about your experiences during the UNESCO process of Selimiye Mosque? Can you share the interesting anecdotes you experienced rather than the official parts?**

Yaşagül Ekinci: The process of Selimiye Mosque's inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List is important in two aspects. Firstly, it was one of Turkey Türkiye's first very detailed dossiers. When I participated in this study in 2008-2009, there were very few World Heritage candidates. Places like Ephesus and Çatalhöyük were being considered. While preparing the Selimiye dossier, it was necessary to create a plan in the format required by UNESCO and in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. It was important to explain the mosque physically and historically and to emphasise its integrity within the city Edirne.

**Nükhet Everi: What kind of difficulties did you experience during the preparation of the dossier?**

Yaşagül Ekinci: At first, it was difficult to ensure compliance with UNESCO's criteria. For example, the second criterion, of the exchange between human and cultural values, was not fulfilled. We did not realise that Selimiye Mosque was so superior, masterful and unique. It was very different from other complexes and mosques. For this reason, we dropped the second criterion and applied for the third criterion. The third criterion was to bear witness to a lost or living cultural tradition. However, UNESCO suggested that we move towards focus on the fourth criterion.

**Nükhet Everi: What do you think makes the Selimiye Mosque so special?**

Yaşagül Ekinci: Selimiye Mosque is one of the most important buildings in the history of architecture and art, which Mimar Sinan called "my masterpiece". The mosque is an extraordinary structure in terms of aesthetics and engineering. It attracts attention with the height of its minarets and the size of its dome. However, it is not only large, but also a very delicate and elegant structure. It perfectly

reflects the goal of elegance and refinement of Islamic arts. While studying the architectural details and engineering marvels of the mosque, we learned many interesting facts. For example, the fineness of the stones used in the minarets of the mosque and the structural features of its dome were very impressive. Also, each of the tile decorations inside the mosque is a work of art.

**Nükhet Everi: What else was taken into consideration during the UNESCO application process?**

Yaşagül Ekinci: There were many issues to be considered in the process of the Selimiye Mosque's inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Firstly, the architectural and historical features of the mosque had to be documented in detail. In addition, the historical and cultural context of the city of Edirne, where the mosque is located, was also important. Therefore, extensive research was conducted on the history, cultural heritage, and urban planning of Edirne. In addition, the application file had to be prepared in accordance with the criteria set by UNESCO and every detail had to be meticulously handled.

**Nükhet Everi: Which other projects did you take part in during this process?**

Yaşagül Ekinci: I prepared the UNESCO nomination files of Uzunköprü and Beyazıt II Complex in Edirne. I also carried out the UNESCO nomination process of the natural heritage of Ballica Cave located in Tokat. We prepared the UNESCO World Heritage List preliminary nomination file for Izmir as a historical harbour city. I am currently continuing to work on various cultural and natural heritage projects.

**Nükhet Everi: What was the impact of the Selimiye Mosque's being included in the UNESCO World Heritage List?**

Yaşagül Ekinci: Selimiye Mosque's inclusion in the UNESCO list was a great source of prestige for Edirne. It revitalised tourism and increased interest in the cultural heritage of the city. It also inspired other historical and cultural heritage projects. The success of the Selimiye Mosque has set an example for other cultural heritage sites in Turkey to be included in the UNESCO list. Being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List is also of great importance for the preservation and promotion of the Selimiye Mosque. This process has led to better protection of the mosque and its surroundings and contributed to the acceleration of restoration work.