

THE COVERING STRUCTURES OF THE MAIN PRAYER HALLS OF THE EXISTING MOSQUES BUILT DURING THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE PERIOD IN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the covering structures of the existing mosques built during Ottoman Empire period in Albania. The historical information and especially the plan schemes are taken from the existing sources. The buildings are also examined on the site and the relevant visual material has been provided, to explain the covering structures features of the main prayer halls. The study is organized according to a chronological order. Each building is explained by giving introductory information about the builder and the time of the mosques and then by examining the covering structures and their transitional elements. In conclusion the features of covering structures of the existing mosques built during Ottoman Empire period in Albania are compared between each other defining their typology and revealing the structural values of these buildings.

Key words: Albania, Ottoman Empire Period, mosques, main prayer halls, covering structures

1. INTRODUCTION

The historical buildings carry aesthetical, architectural and historical values of the proper period being constructed. Buildings like churches or mosques beside the historical values are of cardinal importance in defining the identity of the surrounding or the vicinity where they belongs. Due to the so called “Cultural Revolution” in other words mostly a destruction process of religious buildings in Albania in 1968, the examination and the preservation of these building as a part of national heritage is extremely important. Furthermore, facing natural disasters and environmental degradation, these physical evidences of rich cultural values of our past, which we receive from our ancestors, are to be preserved in their authenticity. Ensuring structural safety against environmental effects would start by examining their covering structures and transitional elements. This issue is the main focus of this study, analyzing the buildings one by one. There are nine existing mosques built during the Ottoman Empire Period in Albania. There are three mosques found in Berat: the one of Beyazid II, The Leaden Mosque and the one of Beqarëve. The mosque of Muradije is found in Vlorë, and The mosque of Pazar is found in Gjirokaster. The one of Nazireshtës is found in Elbasan and the mosque of Haxhi Et-hem Beg found in Tirana. The mosque of of Mirahor Ilyas Beg is founded in Korça. At last The mosque of Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu is found in Shkoder.

2.2. MOSQUE OF MIRAHOR ILYAS BEG IN KORÇË

2.2.1. Introduction

The mosque of Mirahor İlyas Beg is the only existing Ottoman monument in the city of Korçë. The mosque of Mirahor İlyas Beg is situated nearby the center of Korçë. The mosque is built by Mirahor İlyas Beg in 1495-96 (901AH)^[1]. The date is mentioned at the inscription over the entrance door.

2.2.2. The Covering Structure Features

The mosque of Mirahor Ilyas Beg consists of two parts: the prayer hall and the last prayer hall. The prayer hall has a square scheme plan (Figure 1). The side of the square is 11.75 meters long. The last prayer hall consists of a rectangular plan scheme which has three piers forming a structure of three arcades.



Figure 1: The plan of the Mosque of Mirahor Ilyas beg in Korça (from M. Kiel)

Figure 2: Perspective view of south-east (qibla) and north-east façades

Figure 3: The transition to the dome provided with squinches

The transition from the cubic mass to the dome in this building is done by using squinches (Figure 2). The squinches are adorned by stalactite work at the corner and in the middle of the lower part adjacent to wall. The octagonal drum is lit by eight windows, which are circular at the outside and arched at the inside. The triangular shoulders are covered by lead plates and they prepare the octagonal drum for the dome. (Figure 3).

2.3. THE LEADEN MOSQUE IN BERAT

2.3.1 Introduction

The Leaden Mosque of Berat is one of the best Ottoman buildings preserved in Berat and also in whole Albania. It is the only domed mosque of Berat. This building is situated about five hundred meters east to the Bayezid Mosque, which is located at the city centre. The mosque is constructed by a local Noble called Uzgur Ahmet Beg. Sulejman Dashi ^[2]an Albanian scholar gives the date as 1553-1554, which he based on the copy of the inscription once founded in the mosque

2.3.2. The Covering Structure Features

The building consists of a prayer hall, minaret and last payer hall. The prayer hall has a square formed plan, whose exterior side is 12, 48 meters ^[1]and is covered by a dome. The thickness of the wall is 1.05m (Figure 5).

The transition between the cubic mass and dome is performed by squinches (Figure 6). The drum in this building is minimized in maximum, because the dome is just constructed over the cubic masses, whose corners are shaven off and form triangular shoulders. Over triangular shoulders a low octagonal drum is formed by using only one block height (Figure 4). The triangular shoulders of the mosque are covered with tiles.

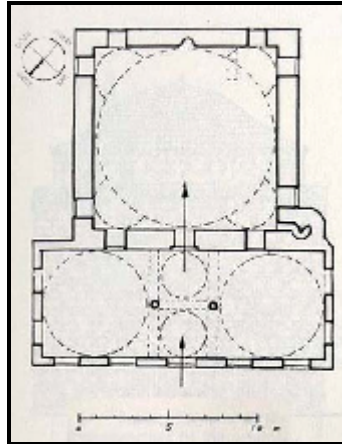


Figure 4: The Leaden Mosque of Berat after the restoration in 1978

Figure 5: The plan of Leaden Mosque in Berat (from M. Kiel)

Figure 6: The squinches as transitional element in the interior of Leaden Mosque in Berat

2.4. THE MOSQUE OF MURADIJE IN VLORA

2.4.1. Introduction

The mosque of Muradije is the only existing monument built during Ottoman Empire period in Vlora. The building is situated on one of the main roads of the city. Actually we don't have certain information related to its date of construction. Gj. Frasher and S. Dashi considering the construction in Kanuni's time, attribute the mosque to an early work of Master Sinan.^[3]

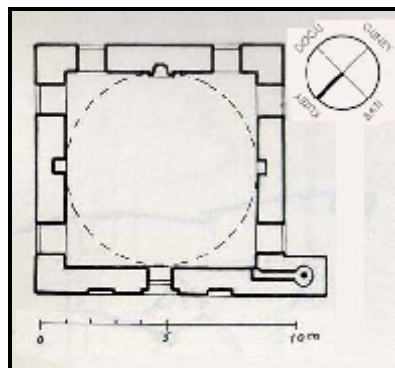


Figure 7: The south-west façade of the mosque of Muradije in Vlorë

Figure 8: The plan of Muradije mosque in Vlorë (from M.Kiel)

Figure 9: The melon rib like squinch, decorated with stalactite work at the adjacent parts to the wall

2.4.2. The Covering Structure Features

The building today consists of a prayer hall, a minaret and an opened last prayer hall, which is demolished in an uncertain date. The prayer hall has a square plan scheme, while the minaret of the building is positioned at the western corner of the building (Figure 8).

The transition from the cubic mass is done by the use of squinches. The squinches have melon like ribs and they are adorned with stalactite work at the lower corners to conjunct with the wall (Figure 9). The squinches are covered with tiled triangular shoulders, which prepare the base for the dodecagonal drum. The dodecagonal drum is very high and it consists of two parts; the old one made from cloisonné work and another one added at a later time which today is plastered. Just over the octagonal drum the low tiled dome covers the space. The dome of the building is covered with tiles (Figure 7).

2.5. THE MOSQUE OF NAZIRESHËS IN ELBASAN

2.5.1. Introduction

The mosque of Nazireshes is the only preserved mosque of Elbasan. The mosque is situated in the southern suburb of Elbasan, a few hundred meters to the north of the river Shkumbin and aside the national street. Vehbi Buharaja known for his study made on the Ottoman inscriptions in Albania says: “The mosque of Nazireshës was built before the year 1599, as we understand from the two notes in its interior”.^[4]

2.5.2. The Covering Structure Features

The mosque of Nazireshës a square plan schemed building. The outer side dimension of the square is 10.70 meters, while the inner space is 8.70 meters. The mihrap makes the transition to the wall by a (muqarnas) stalactite work. It has only a central prayer hall, which results in a cubic mass. (Figure 11).

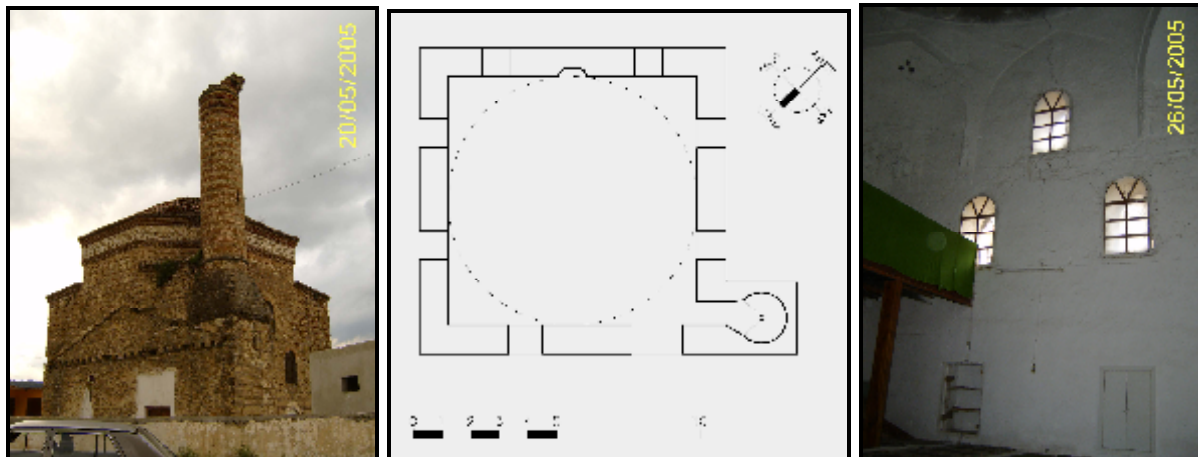


Figure 10 General view of the Mosque of Nazireshës in Elbasan

Figure 11 The plan of the Mosque of Nazireshës in Elbasan

Figure 12 The transition to the dome provided by squinches

The transition from the cube to the dome is provided by squinches (Figure 12). The lower middle part of the squinches in the interior of the mosque is adjacent to the corners of massive body. Triangular shoulders cover the squinches from the outside and the octagonal drum rises over them. The octagonal drum ends in a first cornice. Just over the first cornice another octagonal drum constructed by rough work stones also rises to end in a second brick cornice, which prepares the place for the octagonal tiled dome. The dome is worked in an octagonal form (Figure 10)

2.6. THE MOSQUE OF PAZAR IN GJIROKASTER

2.6.1. Introduction

The mosque of Pazar in Gjirokaster is one of the best buildings that still remains in South Albania. It is situated at an inclined side, under the old castle of the city. The building is constructed in 1168 AH (1754-55) and this is understandable from the Ottoman inscription put just over the entrance door.^[1]

2.6.2. The Covering Structure Features

As it is mentioned before, the mosque of Pazar is situated at the middle of traditional market (Old Çarşı), and it is constructed over an inclined site. The site needed a different solution and the mosque was constructed over a covered market. The mosque consists of three spaces the prayer hall, the last prayer hall and the lodge of imam. The platform over the shops is 15.90 meters wide; while the prayer hall has a square schemed plan which has a side 11.40 meters.^[1] The remaining area at the left part of the mosque was used as a lodge for the imam. (Figure 13).

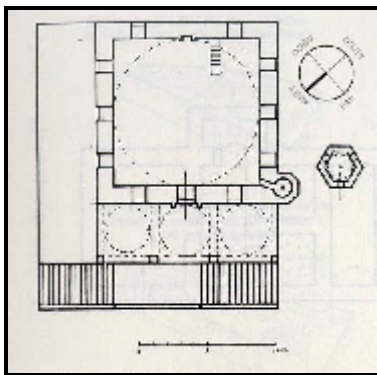


Figure 13 The plan of the mosque of Pazar in Gjirokaster (from M. Kiel)

Figure 14 The transition to the dome provided by squinches

Figure 15 The south-west façade of the Mosque of Pazar in Gjirokaster

The transition from cubic mass to the octagonal dome is provided by squinches (Figure 14). The squinches are decorated with five rows of bricks, three of them being placed diagonally forming a triangle at their lower part adjacent to the wall. The transition part formed by the squinches today is painted in light rose color and it is divided from the upper structure by two lines turning running around the space. The interior of the dome is regular, while its exterior has an octagonal

form (Figure 15). It rises over an octagonal drum, having a window in each side and ends in a cornice having five rows of bricks, two rows of which are put diagonally.

2.7. THE MOSQUE OF MEHMET PASHE BUSHATLLIU IN SHKODËR

2.7.1. Introduction

The mosque of Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu is the only building left in Shkoder that was built in the Ottoman period. At the same time it is the largest building in Shkoder and in Albania. The mosque is built by Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu in 1773-74.^[1]

2.7.2. The Covering Structure Features

The Mosque of Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu is inspired by the great Sultanic mosques of Istanbul. It has big dimensions and a different plan scheme. The mosque is composed of the prayer hall, the courtyard and the minaret (Figure 16).

The prayer hall has a square plan scheme, which has the internal side approximately ten meters long. The prayer hall has an apsidal rectangle protruded at the front part forming a special space dominated by mihrap. At the north-eastern facade of the prayer hall there is an arcaded portico, which stands over two rounded monolithic stone columns and masonry wall at the extreme corners.

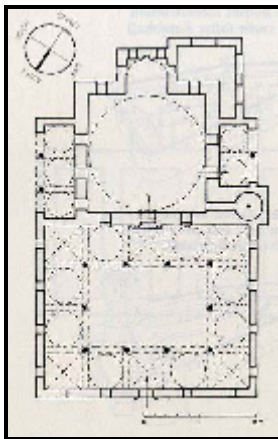


Figure 16 The plan of the mosque of Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu in Shkodër (from M.Kiel)

Figure 17 General view of the Mosque of Mehmet Pashë Bushatlliu

Figure 18 The pendentive and the brick dome at the lateral porchs

The apsidal rectangular space is covered by a half dome. Prof. Kiel says that pendentive was used for the transition from the cubic mass to the pentagonal drum, which ends in a cornice.^[1] The pendentives are covered with corniced triangular shoulders which are also coated with leaden (Figure 17)

The prayer hall is covered by a leaden semicircular dome. The transition from the cubic mass to the octagonal drum must have been done by the use of squinches, as only the lower part of them could be seen from the broken glass of the window. The drum is very high and almost it has the same height of the semicircular dome.

2.8. THE MOSQUE OF HAXHI ET-HEM BEG IN TIRANA

2.8.1. Introduction

The mosque of Et-hem Beg is the best maintained building in Albania and the only one that exists today in Tirana. The construction of mosque of Haxhi Et-hem Beg was began by Molla Beg in 1793-94 (1208 AH), which was the grant-son of the founder of Tirana Sulejman Pashë Mulleti. The minaret, the last prayer hall and the paintings were finished by the son of Molla Beg, Hadji Et-hem Beg in 1822-23 (1238 AH).^[5]

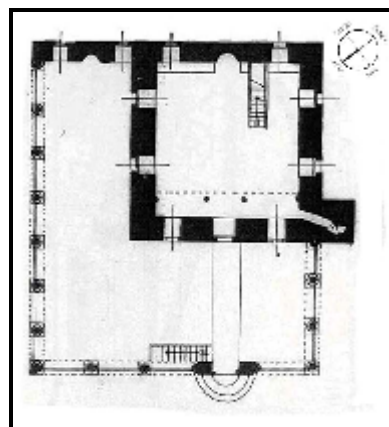


Figure 19 General view of the mosque of Haxhi Et-hem Beg mosque from Skenderbeg square

Figure 20 The plan of Haxhi Et-hem Beg mosque (from A. Meksi and Gj. Frashëri)

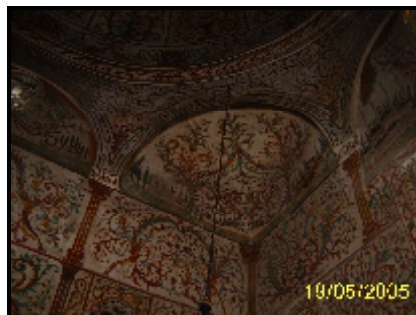
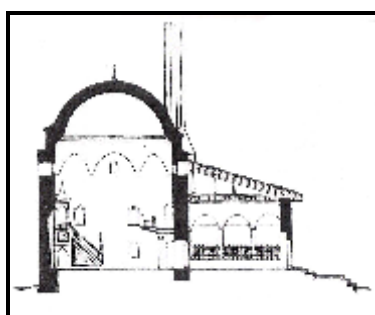


Figure 21 Longitudinal section (from A. Meksi and Gj. Frashëri)

Figure 22 The transition element of squinch

Figure 23 The last prayer hall of the mosque of Haxhi Et-hem Beg in Tirana

2.8.2. The Covering Structure Features

The mosque consists of three parts; the prayer hall, the last prayer hall and the minaret. The prayer hall has square plan scheme, which has a side of 10.50 m (Figure 20).

The transition from the cubic mass to the dome is realized by squinches (Figure 21-22). The transition structure consists of four normal arches and four squinches at the corners to form the base for the octagonal drum.

The cubic mass ends in a cornice and is shaven at the upper corners forming triangular shoulders which cover the squinches. The cornice and the triangular shoulders are covered with dark brown

tiles. The octagonal drum rises over the transition part to end in a cornice which is the continuation of the leaden dome. The dome is covered with leaden plates, which are very old and needs to be renovated (Figure 19).

2.9. THE MOSQUE OF BEQAREVE IN BERAT

2.9.1. Introduction

The mosque of Beqareve is situated at the lower part of Mangalem quarter of Berat aside the main street of the city. The mosque is built in 1243 AH (1827/28) by Sulejman Pashë Vlora, but in fact it is known popularly as “Mosque of Beqareve”. It means the mosque of Bachelors in English.^[6]

2.9.2. The Covering Structure Features

The mosque is composed of two main parts the prayer hall and the porch. One of the basic design factors in this building has been the site. The plan scheme of the prayer hall consists of a rectangle having the sides 11.25 x 9.63m. long (Figure 25).

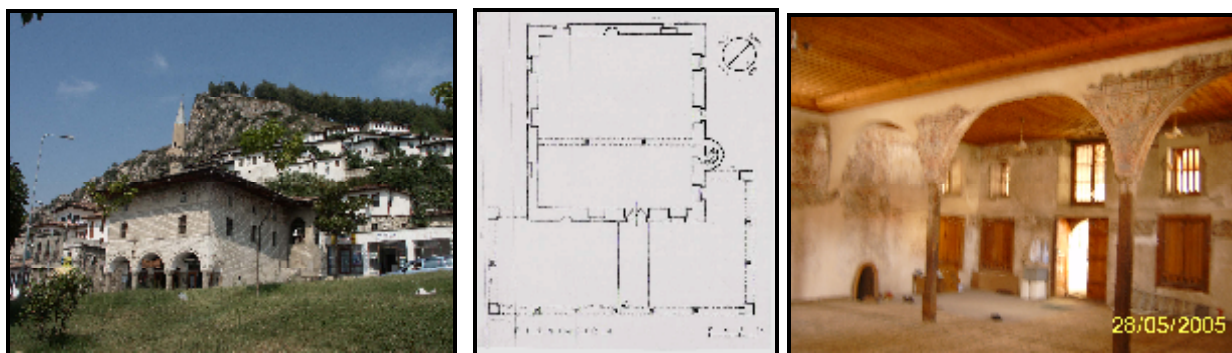


Figure 24 General view of the mosque of Beqarëve in Berat

Figure 25 The plan of the Mosque of the Beqareve (from A. Meksi)

Figure 26 The arches dividing the prayer hall in two spaces

At equal distances from the lateral sides and almost four meters from the entrance wall two wooden piers, supporting three arches, divide the central prayer hall into south-eastern and north-western parts. These piers carry the ceiling of the prayer hall. The roof is constructed with wooden elements. The eave of the mosque is protruded outside near 1 meter. The bottom part of the eave is covered with wooden planks, which are placed perpendicular to the wall of the mosque. (Figure 24)

2. THE COVERING STRUCTURES OF THE MAIN PRAYER HALLS OF THE EXISTING MOSQUES BUILT DURING OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN ALBANIA

2.1. The Mosque of Bayezid II in Berat

2.1.1 Introduction

The mosque of Bayezid II is situated in the northern part of the main square, which practically is the centre of Berat (Figure 2.1.1). Locally it is named as the mosque of the Ruler (King). According to the inscription found by Vehbi Buharaja, it is written that the reconstruction of the mosque was finished in the year 1248 AH (1832-1833). The reconstruction was made by the Grand Vizier of the Empire Mehmed Reşit Paşa.^[4]

2.1.2 The Covering Structure Features

The mosque is composed of two main spaces; the prayer hall and the last prayer hall. The prayer hall is a rectangle having 16, 85 x 13, 95 measures. (Figure 28).

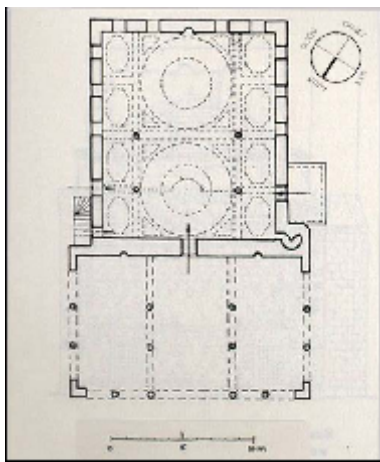


Figure 27: Plan of the Mosque of Beyazid II in Berat (from M. Kiel)

Figure 28 General view of the mosque of Beyazid II in Berat

Figure 29 The central dome and the smaller octagonal domes

The covering structure of the hall, which consists of two central domes and eight smaller lengthwise octagonal plans, is carried by two wooden posts. The backward two posts which are seen at the plan serve to carry the balcony of women's gallery (Figure 27). The domes which also are constructed by wood are raised over in an octagonal inset (Figure 29). The whole building is covered by pitched tiled roof with an eave that extends more than one meter from the wall's line (Figure 28).

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion the covering structures of the main prayer halls of the existing mosques built during Ottoman Empire period in Albania can be divided into two types: The prayer halls covered by dome and those covered by wooden pitched roof. Those covered by domes are one of The Leaden Mosque in Berat, The Mosque of Muradije in Vlora, The Mosque of Nazireshtë in Elbasan, The Mosque of Pazar in Gjirokaster, The Mosque of Mehmet Pashë Bushatlliu in Shkodër, The Mosque of Haxhi Ethem Beg in Tirana, while main prayer halls of The Mosque of Beyazid II and The Mosque of Beqarëve in Berat are covered by wooden pitched roofs. Seen

from a chronological point of view the last two ones are built in the 19th century, while the others date of construction vary from 1495 to 1822-23. Based on this fact can be said that two of the latest built mosques main prayer halls are covered by pitched wooden roof, while earlier examples are covered by domes. In the mosques whose main prayer hall is covered by domes, the transition from the cubical mass to the dome is provided by the usage of the squinches. The pendentive as a transitional element is used only in the lateral porches of The Mosque of Mehmet Pashë Bushatliu in Shkodër. The main prayer hall Mosque of Beyazit II in Berat is covered by a pitched roof. It possesses a covering structure, which consists of two internal central domes and eight smaller lengthwise octagonal plans, carried by two wooden posts. The Mosque of Beqareve possesses a ceiling constructed by wooden elements, supported by two wooden piers.

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