



## THE SQUAT MINARET MOSQUE IN BIRGI

FÜGEN İLTER

In Birgi's Kurt Gazi section is a mosque which is distinguished from the surrounding houses in gardens by its minaret. Known as the Mosque of the Squat Minaret (Güdük or Kütük Minare Camisi), the building is presently in quite a dilapidated state<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1). Having been built on sloping land, the mosque is a single storey structure on the street side but appears to be of two storeys when viewed from the gardens down the slope.

The domed main hall, with the portico (son cemaat mahalli) to the West and the minaret to the North, has a simple setting<sup>2</sup>. Additions and repairs of the past are easily identified.

The entrance to the brick and rubble stone mosque is through a simple rectangular door, adjacent to the minaret on the North wall, which opens into the portico. The portico is the most dilapidated part of the mosque although it has undergone an extensive renewal (fig. 2). The timber flooring has collapsed on the South-West corner, but the entrance to the lower level as well as its window openings are tracable.

On the West wall of the lower storey and directly underneath the entrance to the main prayer hall there is a rectangular door similar to the one above, and a window to the right (Plate 2, see lower storey plân). The door has a wide pointed arch the tympanum of which has later been walled-in. In the square planned lower level

<sup>1</sup> Birgi has suffered extensive damage during the Greek occupation of 1920-22 and the town has been burned down in the retreat resulting in the total destruction of many a house and artistically important edifice. (Besim Darkot, article on Birgi, *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, p. 633). It would be safe to assume that the Squat Minaret Mosque has also suffered considerable damage during this destruction.

<sup>2</sup> There is no mention, so far, of the Squat Minaret Mosque in any of the works studying the *Aydinoğulları* or in those examining the early Ottoman architecture (some of these works will be cited later on). The mosque has been left out also of Rudolf M. Riefstahl's "Turkish Architecture in Southwestern Anatolia" (pp. 24-30) where a number of architectural works in Birgi have been studied.

of the main hall which presents a replica of the openings above, the ceiling is flat and there is a pair of closely placed, narrow and rectangular windows, on the South wall.

The domed main prayer hall is entered from the portico through a simple, rectangular opening at the North-West. This hall has a square plan and the interior dimensions are  $4.65 \times 4.65$  m. It is surmounted by a flat dome and the transition is effected by simple pendentives. The simple rectangular door to the North-West is the entrance to the minaret.

The mihrap, rising to more than three and a half meters, comes close to the springing of the dome (Plate 2, section BB). The arched head of its rectangular niche is rounded-off in section and fluted, with rows of stalactites hanging from the springing of the arch. The fragment of the belt of profile to the right is significant in that it is the only surviving part of the outer frame of the gypsum mihrap. The transition from the rectangular niche to the rounded-off head is effected by recessed steps<sup>3</sup>.

The base of the minaret, attached to the North facade facing the street, rises to the level of the drum (fig. 1, Plate 2). This prismatical base which is half of an octagon has been covered with stucco in one of the earlier repairs. The squat, cylindrical main body starts from a low transitory section which has survived the repairs with some re-pointing and new stucco applied here and there. The protrusions at the top of this part which is built of courses of bricks laid flat, support the balcony in the form of a series of cantilevers. The upper part of the minaret which has almost the same height as the lower one has later been topped with a conical cap bearing the crescent.

<sup>3</sup> The mihrap of the Grand Mosque in Sivrihisar which is one of the 13th century timber mosques is also of gypsum and, decoration-wise, a typical example of 14th-15th century works. (K. Otto-Dorn, "die Ulu Dschami in Sivrihisar", *Anadolu (Anatolia) IX*. Ankara, 1967. p. 167, Pl. XI).

The mihrap of Sivrihisar which K. Otto-Dorn dates to 14-15th century and the mihrap of the Squat Minaret Mosque in Birgi have similarities both in material and in their features (e.g. the stepped belt of profile framing the mihrap niche and the rounded-off fluted head). In addition, the mihrap of Ankara Ahi Elvan Mosque which is claimed by E. H. Ayverdi to be "a very beautiful example of the 14th century gypsum works" also shows similarities in Decoration (E. H. Ayverdi, *Fatih Devri Mimarisi*, İstanbul, 1953. p. 222, fig. 32).

The dome, resting on a low octagonal drum which has a saw-tooth cornice, is flat, low (Plate 2, section A-A) and, today, covered with cement. The saw-tooth cornice, consisting of two courses of brick, tops the corner walls as well giving a certain amount of plasticity to the mass. It is noteworthy that bricks, used occasionally along with the rubble stones in walling, have been preferred for the arches of the upper storey windows (fig. 3).

The portico which is to the side of the domed prayer hall, with its rather unbalanced mass and setting, falls short of forming a harmonical whole with the rest. Its pitched roof starts from a low level on the main hall wall and extends Westward. A portion of the portico to the South has collapsed, but there are remainings of an earlier work on the West wall<sup>4</sup>.

It would be more correct, on account of the low ceiling, to suppose that the rectangular opening in the earlier part of this wall was a window rather than an entrance. However, if there were an entrance to the lower level it must have been to the South of the West wall which, owing to the slope, is taller. Since the Southern part is in ruins, it is not possible to trace the mentioned entrance today.

When the collapsed wall to the South of the portico is examined the remainings of a window opening will be noted at the point where the wall joins the main hall (fig. 4). The remainings mark a rectangular opening only. It is not possible to trace whether or not there were others with segmental arches over them.

On the outer face of the West wall of the main hall where it joins the portico is a semi-circular dark patch of masonry pointing to the possibility of the earlier roof of the portico having been a dome (fig. 1, 5). However, this darker patch might have been caused by a semi-dome which was leaning on the wall<sup>5</sup> in which case it would be difficult to suggest the form of the earlier roof.

There are two more pairs of windows on the East wall of the mosque at the upper level, but these have been walled-in some time ago.

<sup>4</sup> According to the locals, the blocked-in rectangular opening in this section was a door which has been filled-in 13 years ago during the repairs.

<sup>5</sup> The protruding mihrap of the Davud Paşa Mosque in Istanbul, founded in 1485 A. D. (890 H.) by Grand Vizier Davud Paşa, is covered by a semi-dome (see E. H. Ayverdi, *op. cit.* p. 116, fig. 32). This semi-dome, leaning on the South wall of the mosque, is a similar example.

*Generalizations relating to the Mosque :*

Owing to the absence of an inscription, the date and the founder of the mosque are unknown<sup>6</sup>.

The mosque is one of the earlier applications of the domed-hall principle which constitutes the essential characteristic of the Ottoman mosque architecture. It is an inarticulated, square planned and domed building consisting of a main prayer hall, a portico, and a minaret<sup>7</sup>.

Where as the portico which begins to acquire its permanent place in early Ottoman architecture, generally speaking, occurs opposite the mihrap wall, that is, in the North, it is attached to the façade in the Squat Minaret Mosque. This difference in orientation is undoubtedly caused by the sloping land. The topographical condition of the ground has also resulted in a two storey building, the mosque possessing a "lower portico" underneath the main one.

The irregular employment of rubble-stone and brick in walling is interesting and enables the mosque to be placed among the early period works<sup>8</sup>. This disorderly use of building materials is easily

<sup>6</sup> During my researches on the subject, upon a written application to the Vakıflar Directorate in İzmir, I was informed that there were no records of the mosque in existence. However, in the archives of the Vakıflar General Directorate at Ankara the mosque is found as registered as the article 513 of the notebook "Aydın 8/5", numbered 213, where by mention is made of a foundation (vakıf) land : "A document, dated 327 H., about the transfer of a piece of land, being the bequest for the Kara Hasan Mosque in Süleyman village of Birgi, to the funds of the "Kütük" Minaret Mosque in Birgi town upon the collapse of the first mentioned mosque is recorded in this year 1268 H. as local information."

<sup>7</sup> Abdullah Kuran places the examples of this type of buildings in a group termed "single unit mosques" (İlk Devir Osmanlı Mimarisinde Cami, Ankara, 1964. p. 3). The subject is studied more extensively in the English edition (A. Kuran. The Mosque in Early Ottoman Architecture. Chicago, 1968. pp. 29-70) and a considerably larger number of "single-unit mosque" examples have been introduced.

<sup>8</sup> While the carefree and haphazard placement of rubble stones and bricks makes the building appear even more simple, it should at once be noted that this practice is not a general feature of the early examples. Hacı Şahabettin Mosque (1436) in Edirne, for example, and Şah Melek Paşa Mosque (1428), again in Edirne, are buildings which present regular courses of mixed rubble and brick (A. Kuran. The Mosque in. . . . pp. 42-66, figs. 25-64). In Iznik Hacı Özbek Mosque (1428) "the lower structure and the drum are of rubble stone with brick bonding courses, and there are vertically placed bricks between the stones" (A. Kuran. İlk Devir Osmanlı. . . . p. 8 .fig. 8).

observed at places where the thick and unsightly new stucco, covering the original walling, has disappeared. However, the arches over the window openings are of brick only.

The low and flat dome of the main hall rests on a low drum which, in turn, sits directly on the walls. The drum is slightly emphasized by the two rows of saw-tooth cornice.

Inside the hall, the transition to the dome is by pendentives. This feature requires some reflection from the point of dating the building. A. Kuran claims, by saying that the belt of triangles was the most frequently used method of effecting the transition to the dome in the 14th century, and that squinches are found less frequently in the same century whereas pendentives are hardly seen at all, that pendentive begins to be employed in Ottoman buildings from the second half of the 15th century onwards<sup>9</sup>. The same view had also been put forward by the late A. Kızıltan. Kızıltan, when he refers to Hoca Yedigâr Mosque in İnönü, states that mosques in which transition to dome is by pendentives are rare examples<sup>10</sup>. D. Kuban's views on this question are also interesting. He studies the transition elements on the base of the general argument that the Turks have regarded highly the decorative features and ornate appearance<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> A. Kuran, *İlk Devir Osmanlı*. . . . . p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> "As a 14th century buildings, we find the second example of transition to dome by pendentives here (i.e. Hoca Yedigâr Mosque) after Lal Mosque in Mut" (A. Kızıltan. *Anadolu Beyliklerinde Cami ve Mescitler*. İstanbul, 1958. p. 106).

<sup>11</sup> "Prior to the conquest of Istanbul, the Turks have employed stalactites and Turkish triangles as methods of transition to dome for they cared more for the decorative qualities of the transition elements" (D. Kuban. *Osmanlı Dini Mimarisinde İç Mekân Teşekkülü*. İstanbul, 1956. p. 18).

For stalactites as transition elements, see; Bursa Hüdavendigâr Mosque (after 1364-65) (E. H. Ayverdi. *Osmanlı Mimarisinin İlk Devri*, İstanbul, 1966. fig. 389), and for dating, see; (Sedat Çetintaş. *Türk Mimarî Anıtları —Osmanlı Devri—*. İstanbul, 1952. p. 1), İznik Yeşil Mosque (E. H. Ayverdi, *ibid*, fig. 479), Bursa Yeşil Mosque (S. Çetintaş. *Türk Mimarisi*. . . . "Bursa'da ilk eserler", İstanbul, 1946. p. 14. fig. 11).

Transition by triangles, on the other hand, can be seen in Afyon Kubbeli Mescit "1330" of Germiyanogulları (A. Kızıltan, *op. cit.* pp. 75-76, fig. 38), in Afyon Kâbe Mescidi "1397" which is another architectural work of the same family (A. Kızıltan, *ibid.* pp. 80-81, fig. 43), and in Kütahya Kurşunlu Mosque "1337" (Kızıltan, *ibid.* pp. 82-83. fig. 44).