

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE ARCHITECTURAL PLAN OF THE ALTUN ALEM MOSQUE BUILT IN NOVI PAZAR IN THE 16TH CENTURY

Enisa Huseinovic¹

Abstract: The Altun Alem Mosque is built in Novi Pazar between 1518-1528. According to the foundation charter of the mosque, patron of the mosque is Muslihudin Abdul Gani-Muezzin Hoja el Medini. The same patron in the equal period built almost same, but bigger mosque in Skopje, Macedonia. The Architectural plan of the Altun Alem's prayer hall is square, on the left side of the northwest wall there is the main door of the mosque and in front of this wall, there is a narthex covered with two domes. While comparing this architectural plan, with mosques built through the Balkans in a 16th century, we can notice that in this period mosques that are built, are mainly built in a typical Classical Ottoman Architectural style of the mosques. This notation is not the case with the Altun Alem Mosque, unlike with another mosques, the Altun Alem Mosque is built in Early Ottoman Architectural style of the mosques. Taking into account that this is not first example of using this kind of architectural plan, we can conclude that special features of the architectural plan of the Altun Alem Mosque is not exactly in its architectural plan, actually, its specification is in a period when it is built. Considering that the period when the mosque was built was the period of the reign of Sultan Suleiman I, the period of the rise of the Ottoman Empire, it is quite surprising to encounter this architectural type of mosque. Considering all these facts, it is easy to realize that the reason for building this kind of mosque in the 16th century in Novi Pazar, was much more than we can see at first. Altun Alem Mosque as a pearl hidden in shell, today proudly represents a rare example of Ottoman architecture in Serbia.

Keywords: Ottoman architecture, Ottoman heritage through Balkans, mosques

1 Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, enisa.huseinovic94@gmail.com

Introduction

According to foundation books, the Altun Alem Mosque is built between 1512 and 1528 years. In foundation books, the mosque was first mentioned as the Mosque of Muezzin, so we can consider it, as its origin name. The mosque was built in Novi Pazar, the city that was founded by an Ottoman Pasha, Gazi Isa Beg in the 15th century. By founding the city of Novi Pazar, the Ottomans established key points for their advanced conquests of Bosnia and Serbia.

The Altun Alem Mosque is one of 23 mosques that were built in Novi Pazar during the Ottoman period (Zirojević, 1977). Through the research of foundation books of this mosque, we gain to know that Altun Alem Mosque was built as a central point of a complex that consists of a mosque, mekteb, and graveyard. Since the mosque was built, it has been in active usage till nowadays, and through folk, it is known as Altun Alem Mosque. Considering that during the Ottoman Era in Novi Pazar were built 23 mosques, 17 of them survived till nowadays, the fact that just 3 mosques of 23 that were built in Novi Pazar, were mosques covered with domes must be emphasized. Mosques covered with domes are Gazi Isa Beg's Mosque, the first mosque built in Novi Pazar in the second half of the 15th century, Silahdar Ahmed Beg's Mosque, a mosque built immediately after the building of Gazi Isa Beg's Mosque in the 15th century and Altun Alem Mosque built at the beginning of 16th century. Of the three mosques mentioned above, only Gazi Isa Beg's Mosque hasn't survived nowadays.

Ottoman Empire lived its golden era through the 16th century, during this period there existed already certain prototypes of the architectural style of Ottoman mosques. While analyzing the architectural type of Altun Alem Mosque we can easily understand that the architectural style used in building this mosque was the type used in building of first Ottoman mosques, mosques that were built at beginning of the 14th century. The main question is, why exactly this type of architectural style was used in this case when we have in the same period in Sarajevo, Belgrade, Prizren, etc. usage of already settled prototype architectural models of Ottoman mosques? Considering that till now on this topic we have been faced with researches that are giving us fundamental pieces of information about historical and architectural facts connected to Altun Alem Mosque, this article's research is directed to architectural specificities, values, and rarity of this architectural type of mosque.

To gain scope and successfully research this topic, methods were used researching through foundation books, through already researched this topic, and terrain observations and research according to which it gained new points of

observations. Also, as a research method, observation of mosques that were built in the same period in Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia was used, so, for the sake of comparison, a greater connection or disconnection can be obtained between Novi Pazar and other parts with which Novi Pazar is territorially surrounded.

History of the Altun Alem Mosque

The Altun Alem Mosque is built at the beginning of the 16th century, according to mentions in foundation books, it is built between 1518-1528 years. The mosque is built under the patronage of the foundation of Muslihudin Abdul Gani, Muezzin Hoja el Medini. The mosque is built as a central point of the complex that consists of the mosque, mekteb, 3 houses for imams 1 inn, 6 shops, and 7 mills (Čar-Drndar, 1984:79). Muezzin Muslihudin had two more foundations one in Skopje, another one in Vucitrn (Kul, 2021:87). The history of the Muezzin Muslihudin is not known for sure, because of part in his name el Medini, according to some rumors that are mentioned through sources it is claimed that he was from Medina. According to some rumors, he was also the first muezzin of Fatih Sultan Mehmed (Andrejević, 1984:27).

The complex of Altun Alem Mosque was built in the Novi Pazar bazaar, a street that was during the Ottoman period known as a "Road to Istanbul". "Road to Istanbul" started from Belgrade and passed through all key points for merchants until Istanbul, Novi Pazar was one of those key merchant points (Mušović, Vučković, 1992:7). Considering that the mosque is located in one of the key points of the merchants it was mentioned in many travelogues, one the most famous that mentioned the Altun Alem Mosque is the travelogues of Evliya Celebi. Celebi mentioned the mosque as the Mosque of Muezzin Hoja and he wrote that the mosque has a unique appearance and that this kind of mosques were built only in Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul (Premović-Aleksić, 2013:49).

Regarding the renovations of the mosque during the Ottoman period, we do not have accurate information as to whether and in what period the mosque was renovated. As for renovations shortly, we are familiar with those from the last century. During the Yugoslavian period, conservation work was carried out on the Altun Alem Mosque twice, between 1970-1972 and 1985-1988. The Presidency of Religious Affairs in Serbia carried out conservation work in the Altun Alem Mosque between 2007 and 2011 (Premović-Aleksić, 2013:50). The last conservation of the mosque has still going on since the end of 2023. The mosque has been continuously used for prayers since its construction and remains so to this day.

Architecture and decorations of Altun Alem Mosque

The Floor plan of the Altun Alem Mosque has a rectangular architectural scheme. The prayer room of the building is covered with a low dome. The dome of the mosque is placed on approximately 1 meter high an octagonal drum. The transition from the square prayer room to the circular dome is provided by four wide pendentives. The mihrab wall in the prayer room is oriented towards the southeast. Minber and mihrap in the mosque are made entirely of stone. The stone minber is located on the right side of the mihrab. There is a relieving pointed arch at wall height on each wall of the harem section. Except for the wall facing the last congregational portico, there are four windows on each wall of the mosque. The windows in the lower part of the building are rectangular with a grid and each has a pointed relieving arch on it, while the windows on the upper part of the walls are flat pointed arch windows. At the same level as the three walls of the prayer hall, there is a pointed arched window on the octagonal drum of the dome. On the leftmost part of the northwestern wall of the mosque is the entrance door with a low barrel arch, on the right side of the entrance door is the pointed arched mihrabiye and a rectangular latticed window. In the northwest of the prayer hall of the mosque there is a two-unit, domed narthex. Although the portico is at the same height as the prayer hall, the domes used for the upper cover are lower than the dome of the main space. The two domes covering the portico are seated on octagonal drums. The narthex is open on two sides, to the northwest and east, with three, pointed arches resting on two columns, while the third side of the narthex, the west side, is closed by the entrance wall to the base of the minaret. The last congregation area of the mosque consists of two parts; the first part is the portico located on the northwest side of the prayer hall section, and the second part is the open part that is separate from the prayer hall section and continues after the last congregation portico. The last congregation place was provided by building a high stone sofa on two seats on either side of the entrance door to the mosque. The high stone sofas on both sides of the narthex provide additional space for the congregation in the narthex, and therefore this arrangement of the narthex emphasizes the low barrel-arched entrance door on the left-most side of the harim section.

There is a minaret as an adjacent wall on the right side of the last congregation portico in the west corner of the mosque. Entrance to the minaret is provided through the low pointed arched door on the left side of the west wall of the last congregation portico. The minaret located in the western corner is dodecagonal in shape, thin, tall and has a single balcony. The height of the minaret base is equal to the height of the prayer hall, and the body of the thinner dodecagonal

minaret is placed on it. At different heights on the body of the minaret, there are high pointed arch loophole windows.

Among the materials used to build the mosque, were used cut stone, rubble stone, sandstone and brick. The walls of the prayer hall were built by using cut stone, rubble stone and brick, while the dome and arches were built by using only brick. It is seen that the mosque's facade was decorated by using technic of putting cut stone in the middle and thin brickwork on four sides of the stone. By using this technic of façade it is actually gained completely style of the early ottoman architecture, that was used in architectural examples built in Bursa, Iznik, Edirne during the 14th and 15th century. The inside of the base of minaret is made entirely of bricks, inside of the body is made entirely of rubble stone, and the outside of the minaret base and body of minaret are made entirely of sandstone.

The interior of the Altun Alem Mosque is quite plain. The decorations we can see today, both inside and outside, of the mosque are decorations made of stone. The pointed arch of the mihrab in the place of worship is decorated with muqarnas. The pointed arched mihrab niche is located within a simple rectangular frame. There is a pediment inside the frame above the mihrab niche, and there was most likely a plaque on this pediment before.

When we look at the chamber of domes in the mosque from the inside, we see that the skirt of the dome is decorated with a frieze consisting of relieving pointed arches. There is a niche decorated in the shape of a crystal honeycomb on the upper part of the minaret wall in the portico of the mosque. There is a muqarnas decoration on the column capitals of the portico.

When we look from the outside, in relation to the prayer hall of the mosque, the minaret of the mosque is seen as an ornament in its own right. Its construction from sand stone is as noticeable as possible. On the high base, there is a curtain wall of the base in the form of a frieze consisting of narrow and long pointed arches. The existing geometric decoration on the balcony is a decoration program created using a triangle scheme that merges into one another. This kind of geometric scheme symbolizes eternity (Grabar, 1998:104). Presenting symbols of eternity through geometric schemes on architectural examples, such as the example here on the balcony of the minaret, can be linked to Islamic studies and beliefs about God's eternity. There is a muqarnas decoration under the balcony, and under this decoration there is a frieze of pointed arches.

The facade of the main area made with the technique of hewn bricks and the minaret made of sand stone gives the mosque a special decorative appearance from the outside.

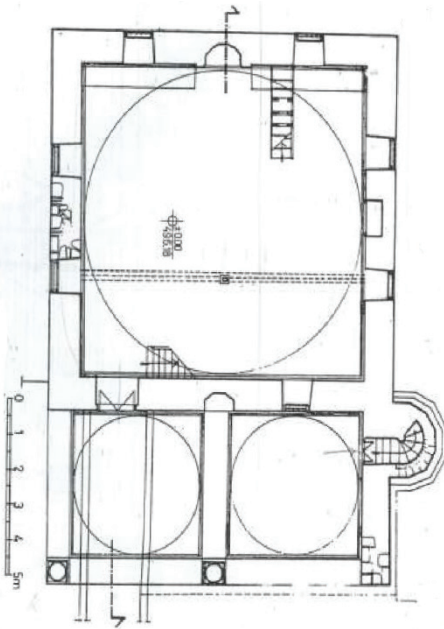
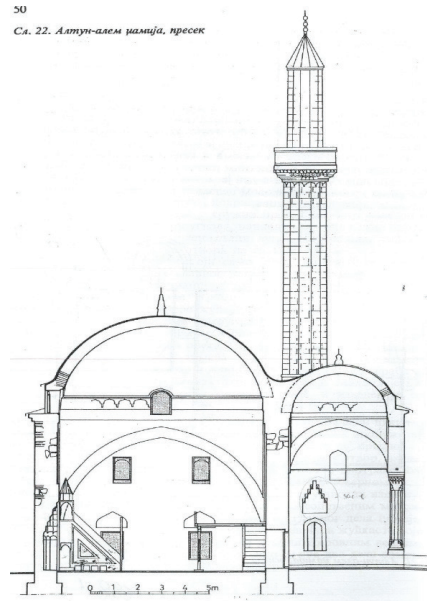


Fig. 1. Floorplan of the Altun Alem Mosque; Mušović, Vujović, 1992



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Сл. 22. Алтун-алем џамија, пресек

Fig.2. Profile of the Altun Alem Mosque; Mušović, Vujović, 1992

Comparison to similar mosques built through different periods of the Ottoman period

The architectural organization of the worship place in the Altun Alem Mosque, the dome sitting on the octagonal drum, and the positioning scheme of the doors and windows, almost the same were applied nearly two centuries before while building the first Ottoman mosque, the Iznik Hacı Özbek Mosque built in 1336 in Iznik (Sayın, 2016:150). Therefore, they used the thin brick and cut stone walling technique used in the first Ottoman mosques, which is similar to the one used in the Altun Alem Mosque. It is noticeable that the construction of a minaret next to the portico in a mosque was first implemented in the Alaadin Bey Mosque in Bursa, built in 1355.

If we look at the examples built in the Balkans during this period, the one that most resembles the Altun Alem Mosque is the Bali Bey Mosque, built between 1521 and 1523 in the castle of the city of Niš (Ayverdi, 2000:256). The architectural plan of the Bali Bey Mosque's prayer room, the narthex's arrangement, and the materials and knitting techniques used in the mosque are almost the same, as those used in the Altun Alem Mosque. Given we take into account the mosques built in the

same period in Sarajevo, Belgrade, Skopje, and Prizren, mosques such as Gazi Husrev Beg's Mosque, Bascarsijska Mosque built in Sarajevo, Bayrakli Mosque built in Belgrade, Mustafa Pasha's Mosque, Yahya Pasha's Mosque built in Skopje (Özer, 2006:190), and Sinan Beg's Mosque built in Prizren, we can notice many differences in the style of construction between them and Altun Alem Mosque. Each of the mentioned mosques has a larger space for prayer, the entrance door is exactly in the middle of the northwestern wall, and the entrance portico on most of them is longer and covered with 3 or 5 domes. The architectural plan of each of them reminds of the architectural plan used in the 16th century in mosques in Istanbul.

Conclusion

The Altun Alem Mosque is a structure that reflects the influence of both Early Ottoman Architecture and the architecture of the newly conquered lands in Europe. The period when the building was built was the 16th century, a period when Classical Ottoman Architecture was just beginning to emerge, yet this mosque was built as a mosque reflecting the characteristics of the Early Ottoman Architecture school at that time. There may be several reasons for this. Even though the Balkans were lands conquered by the Ottoman Empire while it was a state, they were lands far from the center of the Ottoman Empire. Although Ottoman architecture had been developing in these regions for a long time, architecture was built according to style of Early Ottoman Architecture. The architectural plan of the Altun Alem Mosque has a scheme similar to the plans of the first mosques built by the Ottomans in Anatolia. The reason for this may not only be that it was built in the countryside, but also that it was intended to reflect the idea of its founder.

While comparing it with mosques built a century or two before the Altun Alem mosque was built, it is easy to notice how many similarities, how many differences, and how much uniqueness this mosque has. As such, the mosque has great architectural and historical value. Despite the fact that in a relatively recent period, mosques of a more modern architectural style were built in Sarajevo and Belgrade, the aforementioned mosque was built in the style of early Ottoman architecture. By repeating the model of the first Ottoman mosques in the Ottoman province, during the 16th century, one may be reminded of the way of conducting politics and practicing Islam within the laws of the Ottoman state.

Although the architectural plan of the Altun Alem Mosque is in this form for whatever reason, as a result, this mosque is an example that reflects the architectural plan of the first Seljuk Mosques and then the first Ottoman Mosques on the Rumelian lands in an emphatic way.

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Add. 1. The Altun Alem Mosque before the last renovation, Huseinović 2021.



Add. 2. The Altun Alem Mosque during the last renovation, Huseinović 2024.