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Some Considerations on the Mamluk Remains of Birecik (Şanlıurfa)

Aynur Durukan*

Birecik and its surroundings in the eastern part of the Euphrates situated at crossroads of the high Anatolian plateau with the broad Syrian planes of ancient Mesopotamia (Fertile Crescent) was continuously inhabited since the Palaeolithic Age. Birecik, the largest district of the Şanlıurfa province, known as Birthe in antiquity and Biret al-Firat in Ottoman times, has been in history one of the most significant sites in relation to Anatolian military and commercial activities with Syria, other Near Eastern countries and Europe (fig. 1). In the course of time, Birecik began to flourish in history as an important fluvial point (plate 1). The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Mamluk remains in Birecik, which can be regarded as a testimony for prestige and power, discuss their place in Birecik's urban structure and their part within the context of Islamic archaeology.

During the Middle Ages, besides its part in land and river transportation, Birecik gained a significant place for being situated on the Christian and Muslim pilgrimage routes. In 1262, following the Mongol attacks causing a conflict between the Mongols and the Mamluks, Birecik was taken by Baybars (1260-1277), the Mamluk sultan.¹ The location of the town as a passage to northern Syria has increased its significance in the region not only for the Mamluks, but also for the neighbouring principalities.² The Mamluk history of the region, starting especially after the final victory of the Mamluks over the Mongols in 1269, was very lively in military and political context. The Mamluk domination in Birecik lasted until the end of the 15th century (fig. 2).

The earliest building activities of the Mamluks appeared during the reign of

* Prof. Dr., Hacettepe University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Art History, Ankara, Turkey.

1 See P.M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517*, 3rd ed., (London: 1989), 87-95. Also see *Baybars Tarihi*, tr. M. Şerefüddin Yaltkaya, (Istanbul: 1941); Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250-1382*, (Great Britain: 1986); Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History*, (Leiden: 1995).

2 Specially for the Akkoyunlu, Karakoyunlu and Dulkadirid principalities.

vanished inscription dating from the end of 700 H/1301 on the mosque inside the citadel,⁴ there were others from the time of Sultan Qaitbay (1468-1496).⁵ According to Creswell, the non-existent inscriptions of the fortress placed on the two towers to the west are flanked by two animal figures.⁶ Seven inscriptions and a slab with a palmette motif (plate 3) from the citadel are preserved by the Directory of Culture at Birecik.⁷ No date or name of the founder is legible on these fragments. Only the title “our supreme master (eazze al-mavlane)” on one of the fragments might probably identify Sultan Qaitbay.⁸ Upon all the monuments in Birecik, including the Urfa Gate constructed by the order of Qaitbay, this expression is followed by “al-malik al-ashraf abu al-nasr Qaitbay.”

We can receive brief information about Birecik from the travellers' accounts of the 17th-19th centuries. Evliya Çelebi, visiting the town in 1646 claimed that Birecik was a “kaza” (administrative district) centre and the fertile plain was called “Vadi al-zaytun” (Olive Plain). The citadel, built of stones located to the northwest of the Euphrates on an inclined cliff was a hexagonal building with robust towers facing each other. An intact iron gate was opening to the fortress. Seventy small and large cannons were used for its defence. The two-storied houses built on the rocks were looking towards the Euphrates. There were eleven mosques-masjids, a khankah, primary school, market, bazaar, khan and a bath near the harbour. He adds that, valuable goods were sold in the shops of the town, since it was the harbour of Aleppo and Baghdad, the two important commercial centres in the Near East.⁹ Also, several European travellers visited Birecik, namely Niebuhr in 1766, Chesney in 1830-1831, Buckingham in the first decades of the 19th century, Marshall von Moltke in 1837-1839, Sachau before 1883 and Ainsworth before 1888.¹⁰ They all pointed out its commercial

4 For the inscription, see Max Freiherr von Oppenheim 1913, 102, nr. 128; for the transliteration and translation of the inscription, see Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 203-204, nr. 38.

5 It is mentioned that Qaitbay has renovated the fortress on his way to Syria in 1477-78. See Maximilian Streck, “Birecik,” *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. II, (İstanbul: 1961), 630. Also, see M. Streck-V.J. Parry, “Biredjik,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. I, (London: 1960), 1234.

6 See Keppel A.C. Creswell, “The Works of Sultan Bibars al-Bunduqdari in Egypt,” *Le Claire Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, XXVI (1926): 148.

7 For the fragments, see Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 204-206, nrs. 40a-40e.

8 See nr. 40e.

9 See Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname: Anadolu, Suriye, Hicaz (1671-72)*, vol. III, (İstanbul 1314 H/1896), 145-146.

10 Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und den umliegenden Ländern*, vol. II, (Graz, 1968), 412-413; Colonel Chesney, *Expedition for the Survey of the Rivers Euphrates and Tigris*, vol. I, (London, 1850), 83; J.S. Buckingham, *Travels in Mesopotamia*, (London, 1827), 33-35; Helmuth von Moltke, *Zustände und Begebenheiten in der Türkei aus den Jahren 1835 bis 1839*, (Berlin, 1911), 224-226; Eduard Sachau, *Reisen in Syrien und Mesopotamien*, (Leipzig, 1883), 179-180; W. Francis Ainsworth, *A Personal Narrative of the Euphrates Expedition*, vol. I, (London, 1888), 213.



plate 2. Birecik Citadel, looking southeast



plate 3. Birecik Citadel, a slab with a palmette motif

significance besides the limestone monuments, houses with gardens, the ruinous state of the citadel and the ramparts (plate 4). Moltke claims that the citadel known as Kale-i Beyda (White Fortress) was located at the peak of the town known as Birth or Bir. The Euphrates was flowing from the steep rocks and vessels were sailing on it. It was the centre of the great land transportation with Aleppo, Antakya and Antep. The remains of several ruined domes and three or four storied vaulted spaces could be distinguished inside the citadel. He adds that a pleasant looking high church on the southwest corner of the tower was intact with the chambers attached to the tomb of a Turkish saint Abu Yusuf Sekkaki known locally as the Tomb of Şeyh (Sheikh) Muftah (plate 5). It is indicated that Abu Yusuf Sekkaki was one of the disciples of Imam Abu Hanifa.¹¹ Also, there was another domed building with two large human figures and an inscription in Persian. He concludes that it was extremely difficult to capture the fortress of 60-80 feet high walls surrounded by 100 feet high rocks.¹²

The most significant Mamluk monument is the Great Mosque, the earliest mosque in Birecik, located at the centre of the town on Yaşar Kemal Street within the commercial district, which was formerly on the east bank of the Euphrates (plate 6). According to its vanished inscription it was erected in 766 H/1364-65.¹³ The name of the founder was illegible on the script; only the title of “just and supreme malik (al-malik al-a’zam al-adil)” was recognizable. The date suggests that the building was constructed by the order of Malik al-Ashraf

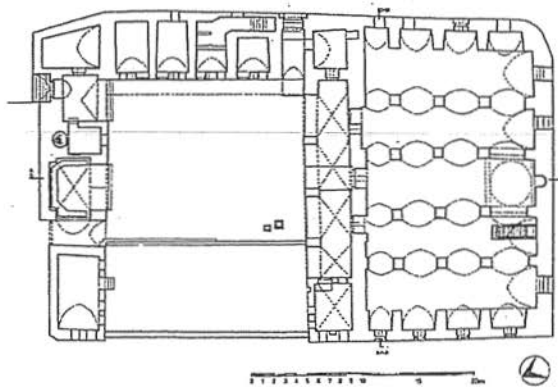


fig. 3. Ground plan of the Birecik Great Mosque (Burcu Ceylan - Erdal Eser - Aynur Durukan, September 1997; Burcu Ceylan, November 1997)

11 See Cihat A. Kürkcüoğlu, *Birecik*, (Ankara: 1996), 48.

12 Helmuth von Moltke 1911, 224-226.

13 For the inscription, see Max Freiherr von Oppenheim 1913, 106, nr. 133; for the transliteration and translation of the inscription, see Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 52, nr. 1.

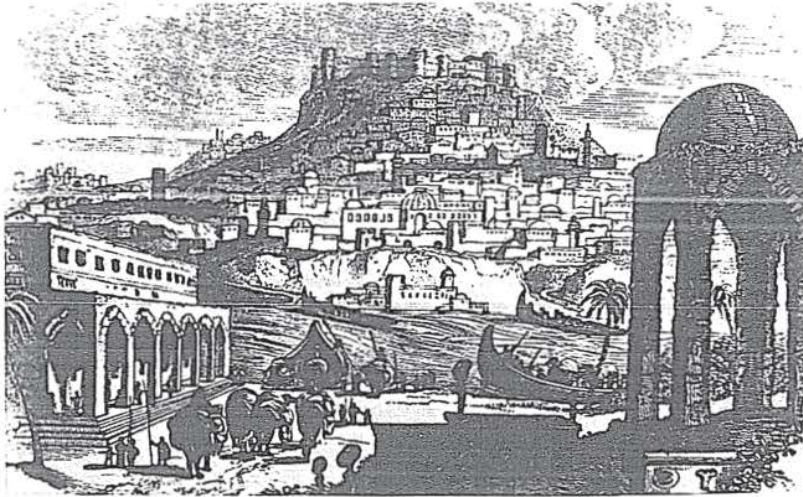


plate 4. Birecik in the early 19th century (J.S. Buckingham, *Travels in Mesopotamia*, London 1827)

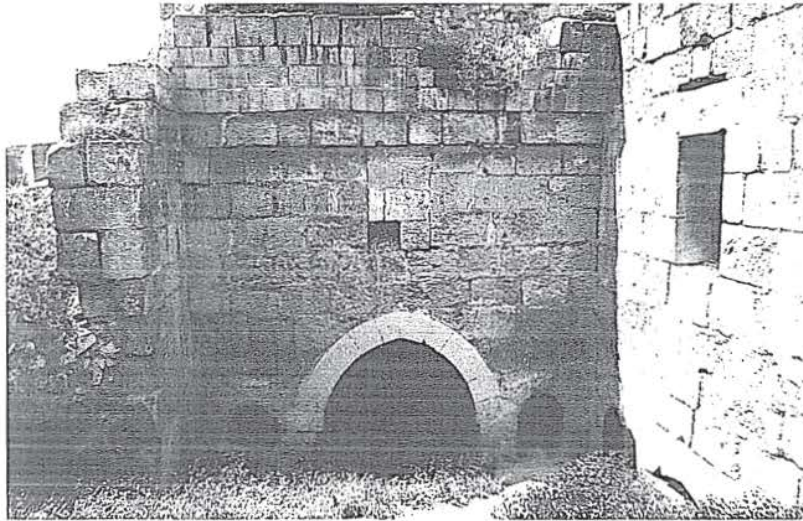


plate 5. Birecik Şeyh Müftah Tomb, looking south

Shaban (1363-1376), the Mamluk sultan. The three renovation inscriptions dated 1215 H/1801, 1217 H/1803 and 1337 H/1918-19 respectively are placed both on its south façade and above the doors of the south wall of its portico. Besides, the minaret has been renovated in 1232 H/1816-17.¹⁴

¹⁴ For the renovation inscriptions, see Aynur Durukan (ed) 2003, 53-55, nrs. 2-5

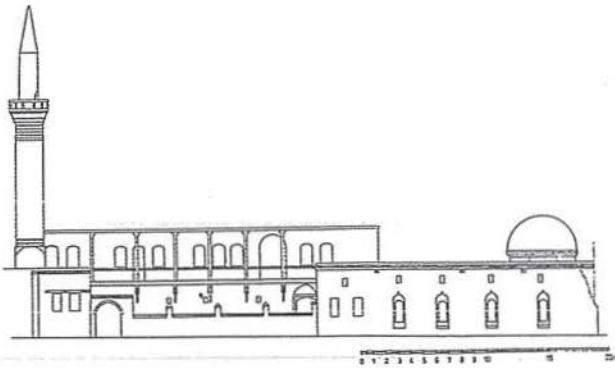


fig. 4. Birecik Great Mosque, west elevation (Burcu Ceylan - Erdal Eser - Mete Mimirolu, September 1997; Burcu Ceylan, November 1997)

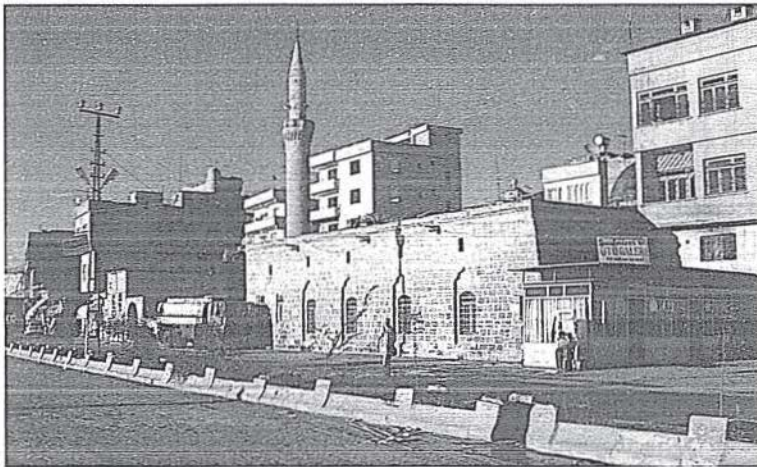


plate 6. Birecik Great Mosque, west façade

The mosque, which has an irregular rectangular plan on the north-south axis measuring 45.00x80.00 m, consists of a courtyard and a prayer hall with a portico (fig. 3). Although the main entrance to the courtyard is from the west façade opening to the Yaşar Kemal Street, it has two more porches on the northern and eastern façades respectively. The west façade similar to the east one is common both for the courtyard and the prayer hall. The northern section opening to the courtyard is higher and simpler in arrangement. The porch with a round arch to the north is accessible by three steps. A “soup kitchen” with two rectangular windows is adjacent to the entrance. The southern section is pierced by rectangular and pointed arched windows (fig. 4). The exterior features of the Great Mosque do not bear any common characteristics with the Mamluk

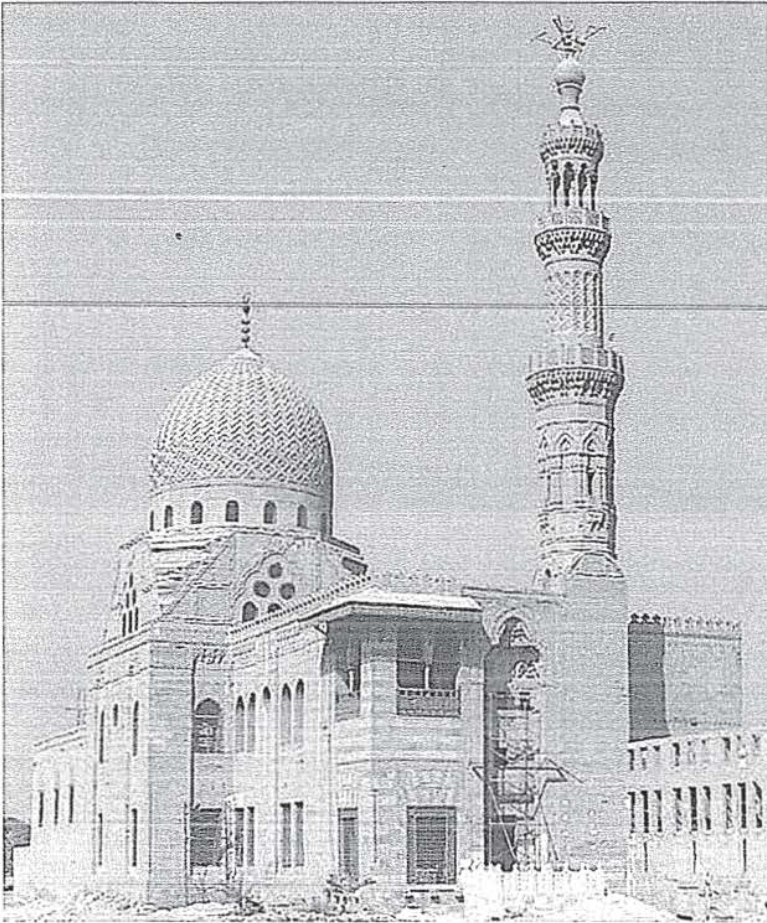


plate 7. Cairo Baybars Mosque (<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/38>)

mosques in Cairo, even with Baybars dated 1266-69 (plate 7) or Qaitbay from 879 H/1474-75 (plate 8). The minaret to the west of the north porch accessible through a rectangular door from the east has a grooved cylindrical shaft, a balcony and a lobbed topping (plate 9). The minaret is closely related to the Anatolian Seljuk and Ottoman examples, whereas elsewhere, especially in Cairo, minarets are distinguished with their three balconies and decorative elements like the Qaitbay.¹⁵

The northern and eastern wings of the courtyard measuring 17.20x22.00

¹⁵ For the minarets in Cairo, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *The Minarets of Cairo*, (Cairo, 1985).

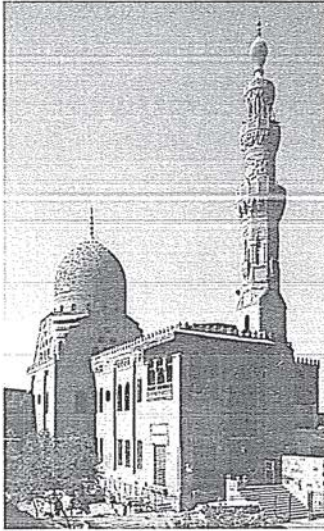


plate 8. Cairo Qaitbay Complex
(Markus Hattstein - Peter Delius [ed.]
2000, p. 189)

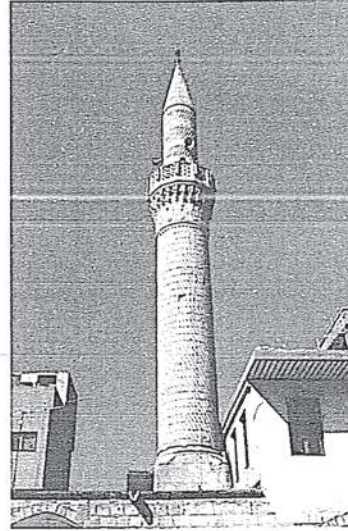


plate 9. Birecik Great Mosque, minaret,
looking south

m are surrounded by chambers with diverse functions. The east wing reveals a two-storied arrangement. The upper story is articulated by round and segmental arched doors besides six segmental arched windows. The wooden balcony of the upper floor is supported by stone and wooden consoles.

The rectangular portico with east-west orientation is placed between the prayer hall and the courtyard (plate 10). The main section is covered by four groined vaults supported by three piers. It opens to the courtyard with four large pointed arches fitted with a glass case besides two square chambers with barrel vaults at both sides. The bays are covered with groined vaults supported by three piers. The segmental arched door inside a niche with a three-lobed arch on the south wall of the central section (plate 11) is commonly used in Anatolia, besides other Near Eastern countries. Although much more monumental and decorative, it shows similarities only with its form in some respects to the recessed portal of the Mosque of Sultan Mu'ayyad Salih dating from 1415-20¹⁶ or Qaitbay in Cairo.

The prayer hall running east-west and measuring 14.60x26.30 m reveals a multi-unit spatial layout with a mihrab dome, but since the vertical axis is only marked by the iwans, it can be regarded as a fine example of the hypostyle plan represented by an axial nave and a dome in front of the mihrab. The interior

¹⁶ For the portal of the mosque, see Markus Hattstein-Peter Delius (ed.), *Islam: Art and Architecture*, (Cologne: 2000), 190.

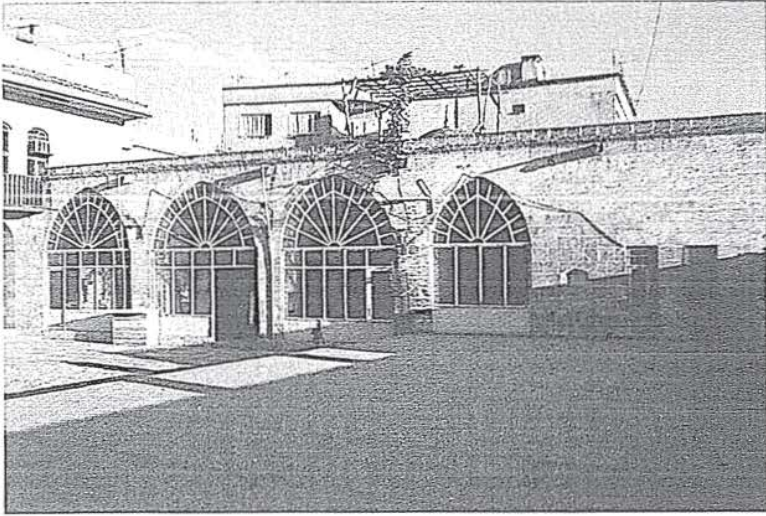


plate 10. Birecik Great Mosque, the north façade of the portico



plate 11. Birecik Great Mosque, main entrance on the south wall of the portico

is divided into five longitudinal aisles by three rows of free-standing piers and pointed arches running perpendicular to the qibla wall (plate 12). The aisles are covered by barrel vaults, whereas the square section in front of the mihrab is covered by a dome resting on pendentives. Due to barrel vaults penetrated to the vaulting system, four deep niches resembling iwans are created in front of the eastern and western walls respectively. Three rectangular windows and a whitewashed mihrab with a round arch are set on the south wall. A new minbar made of cut stones besides the two rectangular windows to its east are positioned to the west of the mihrab.

The building is quite plain with ornaments found only on the minaret, on two panels on the north wing of the courtyard, one above the door of the eastern chamber of the portico and two on the east façade.

The border inlaid with medallions on the minaret's shaft is decorated considerably with chain motifs, whereas the floral motifs adorn only the surface of the oval medallions. There are three rows of stalactites under the balcony. The middle one is filled with oyster shell, the rest are adorned with floral motifs. Three borders under the balcony are decorated with geometrical and floral designs. Blue and white tile dishes embellished with floral motifs are placed on the upper border. The lower one reveals a composite decoration. Six and twelve-sided stars besides flowers with four leaves are surrounded by six-sided stars and floral motifs with six leaves. Different compositions like round arches, five-sided stars and lozenges are distinguished on the balcony parapets. The mixed decoration composed of six and twelve-sided stars encompassed by floral motifs under the balcony are observed particularly on the Akkoyunlu and Ottoman mosques of Diyarbakır.¹⁷ Similar compositions are also found on the rosettes under the balcony of the Birecik Mahmut Pasha Mosque minaret dated to 981 H/1573-74 adorned with six, eight and twelve-sided stars,¹⁸ and on the rosettes of the north portal of the Suruç Great Mosque, with an unspecified date, decorated with eight-sided stars besides the bands and the colonnettes with five-sided stars.¹⁹ The extensions of these compositions are also found on the bosses at the southern façade of the Birecik Abd-i Kethüda Mosque, with an uncertain date renovated in 1243 H/1828, decorated with hexagons and six-sided stars.²⁰ These compositions can also be observed on the Diyarbakır,

¹⁷ See Metin Sözen, *Diyarbakır'da Türk Mimarisi*, (İstanbul: 1971).

¹⁸ See Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 67, plate 51.

¹⁹ See Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 271, plate 375.

²⁰ See Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 86, plates 93-95.

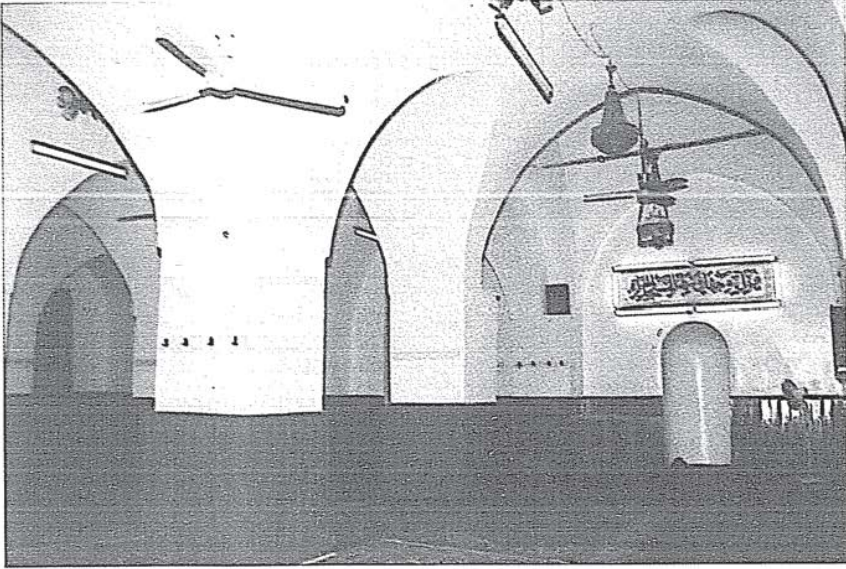


plate 12. Birecik Great Mosque, prayer hall, looking southeast

Mardin and Bitlis mosques.²¹ It is important to note that the rosettes and bosses of the mosques and medreses in Syria are also adorned with similar compositions.²² The tile dishes found particularly under the balconies of the minarets are observed on the Akkoyunlu and Ottoman mosques of Diyarbakır. Nonetheless, the closest parallel is the Şanlıurfa Dabbağhane Mosque dated to 970 H/1562.²³ All of these are, however, later examples. Similar examples are also encountered on the minarets of the mosques from Ankara to İznik by the 14th century. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to regard this application on the Birecik Great Mosque minaret as the influence of various ethnic groups in the region.

The pointed arched panel surrounded by a stalactite band on the spandrel of the western arch on the north façade of the courtyard is decorated with an interlaced geometrical composition (plate 13). Complete and half eight-sided

21 For the Diyarbakır mosques, see Sözen 1971; for the Mardin mosques, see Ara Altun, *Mardin'de Türk Devri Mimarisini*, (İstanbul: 1971); for the Bitlis mosques, see Oluş Ank, *Bitlis Yapılarında Selçuklu Rönesansı*, (Ankara: 1971).

22 See Carl Preusser, *Nordmesopotamische Baudenkmäler altchristlicher und islamischer Zeit*, (Leipzig: 1911); Jean Sauvaget, *Les monuments ayyoubides de Damas*, (Paris: 1938); Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture I-IV," *Ars Islamica*, IX-XIV (1942-1948); Michael Meinecke, *Die mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien (648 H/1250 bis 923 H/1517)*, 2 vols, (Glückstadt: 1992). Also, see Derek Hill - Oleg Grabar, *Islamic Architecture and its Decoration A.D. 800-1500*, (London: 1964).

23 See Cihat A. Kürkcüoğlu, *Peygamberler Şehri Şanlıurfa*, (Şanlıurfa: 1988), 35.

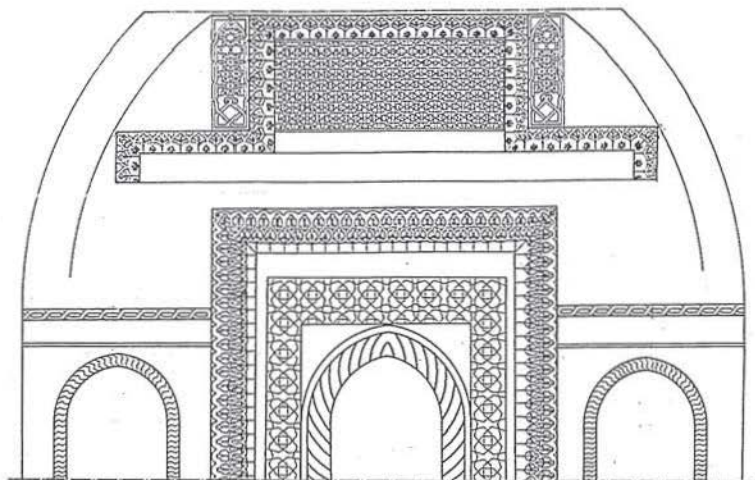


fig. 5. Hani-Diyarbakır Hatuniye Medrese, the south wall of the main iwan
[Aynur Durukan, "Hani, Hatuniye [Zeyneb Hatun ya da Zeynebiye] Medresesi",
Vakıflar Dergisi, XX (1988), 166, figure 8]

stars are intermingled with octagons and five-sided stars. The two rosettes on the lower part of the panel are surrounded by round and hexagonal frames. They are adorned with rosettes of floral designs. This composition is commonly applied to various buildings in Seljuk Anatolia, notably on the borders surrounding the windows besides the knotted round arch and the panels on the south wall of the main iwan of the Hani-Diyarbakır Hatuniye Medrese (3rd quarter of the 12th century; fig. 5), the portal of the Konya Sahip Ata Khankah (678 H/1278-79), the border on the minaret base of the Hazro Great Mosque (late 16th-early 17th centuries).²⁴ Besides it is employed on tiles like the Ali Paşa Mosque in Diyarbakır dated to 941-944 H/1534-1537.²⁵ It is also used in several buildings of Syria on stone, stucco and wooden materials, but not as currently and with rich examples as Anatolia, namely on the stucco window lattices of Damascus Maristan Nuri (549 H/1154),²⁶ on the wooden panels of Aleppo Makam İbrahim (479-505 H/1086-1111, renovated in 616 H/1219),²⁷ on an ornamental frame in Damascus Maristan al-Kaimari (3rd of Shaban 654

²⁴ For the portal of the Konya Sahip Ata Khankah, see Mahmut Akok, "Konya'da Sahib-Ata Hanikâh Camiinin Rölöve ve Mimarisi," *Türk Arkeoloji Dergisi*, XIX-II (1970): 20, figure 8; 29, plate 1, 3; for the border on the minaret base of the Hazro Great Mosque, see Rahmi Hüseyin Ünal, *Diyarbakır İlindeki Bazı Türk-İslâm Anıtları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*, (Erzurum: 1975), 37, figure 6.

²⁵ See Metin Sözen 1971, plate 18c.

²⁶ Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture I," *Ars Islamica*, IX (1942): 7, figure 2; 10, figure 5.

²⁷ Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture II," *Ars Islamica*, X (1943): 64, figure 27.

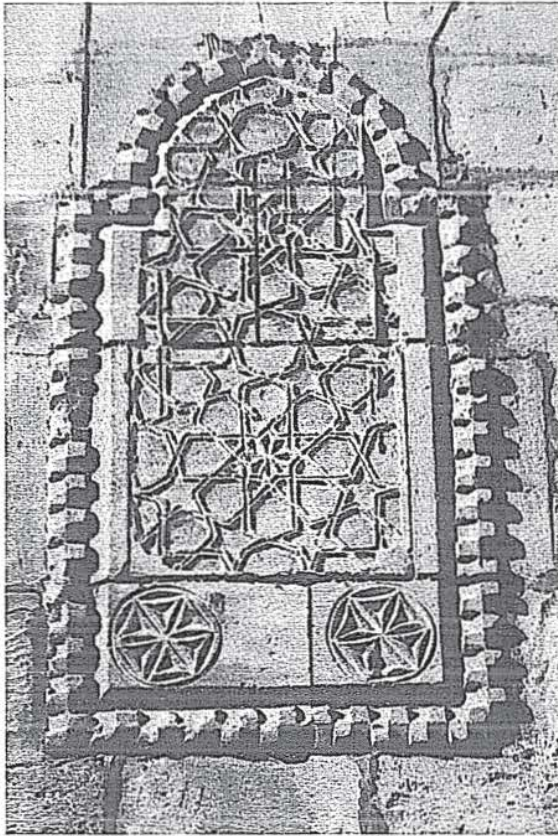


plate 13. Birecik Great Mosque, courtyard, pointed arched decorative panel on the north wing

H/25th August 1256),²⁸ on the portals of Ma'arra Abu'l Fawaris (595 H/1198)²⁹ and the Palace of al-'Aziz in the Aleppo Citadel (628 H/1230).³⁰ Window grilles with rather a resembling application can also be found on Ibn Tulun Mosque dating from 265 H/879.³¹

The rectangular panel above the door of the soup kitchen on the north wing of the courtyard is decorated with a grooved palmette (plate 14). Again parallel examples with a more complicated composition can be traced in

28 Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture III," *Ars Islamica*, XI-XII (1945): 34, figure 54.

29 Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture III," *Ars Islamica*, XI-XII (1945): figure 97.

30 Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture III," *Ars Islamica*, XI-XII (1945), figure 104.

31 See Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1991), 47, plate 47. For its variation, see Martin Frishman-Hasan-uddin Khan (ed.), *The Mosque: History, Architectural Development & Regional Diversity*, (London: 1994), 54.

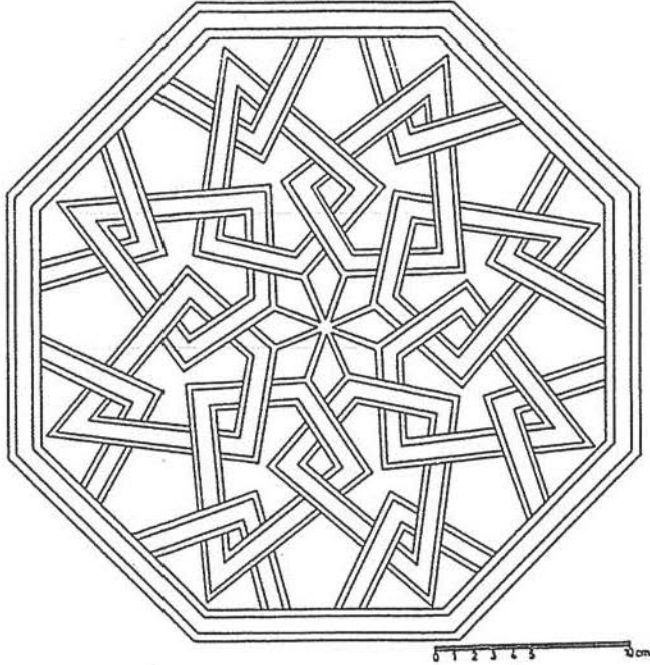


fig. 6. Birecik Great Mosque, portico, octagonal panel above the east door

Seljuk Anatolia, not only on mosques, but also on other buildings like the Sivas Gök Medrese dated 670 H/1271.³² The octagonal panel above the door of the portico, on the contrary, is decorated with eight-sided stars flanked by arrow-tipped motifs and eight-sided stars (fig. 6). The variations of this composition are currently used particularly on the octagonal panels or medallions of the Seljuk portals.³³ It is also encountered on the façades, porticoes and minarets of the later Akkoyunlu and Ottoman mosques in Diyarbakır and Mardin.³⁴

There are no similar examples in Birecik related to the Great Mosque with its large courtyard, vaulting system, multi-unit portico besides the plan scheme of its prayer hall. When the mosques in other parts of southern Anatolia are taken

³² See Ahmet Ertuğ, *The Seljuks: A Journey through Anatolian Architecture*, (Istanbul: 1991), 113, plate 82; Doğan Kuban, *Selçuklu Çağında Anadolu Sanatı*, 2nd ed., (Istanbul: 2008) (2002), 199, plate 125.

³³ For various examples, see Semra Ögel, *Anadolu Selçuklularının Taş Tezminatı*, (Ankara: 1966); Gerd Schneider, *Geometrische Bauornamentik der seldschuken in Kleinasien*, (Wiesbaden: 1980); Rahmi Hüseyin Ünal, *Osmanlı Öncesi Anadolu-Türk Mimarisinde Taçkapılar*, (İzmir: 1981); Selçuk Mülayim, *Anadolu Türk Mimarisinde Geometrik Süslemeler-Selçuklu Çağı*, (Ankara: 1982); Semra Ögel, "Anadolu Selçuklu Mimarisinde Taş Süsleme," in *Selçuklu Çağında Anadolu Sanatı* (Doğan Kuban), 2nd ed., (Istanbul: 2008) (2002), 321-338.

³⁴ See Metin Sözen 1971; Ara Altun 1971; Metin Sözen, *Anadolu'da Akkoyunlu Mimarisi*, İstanbul 1981.

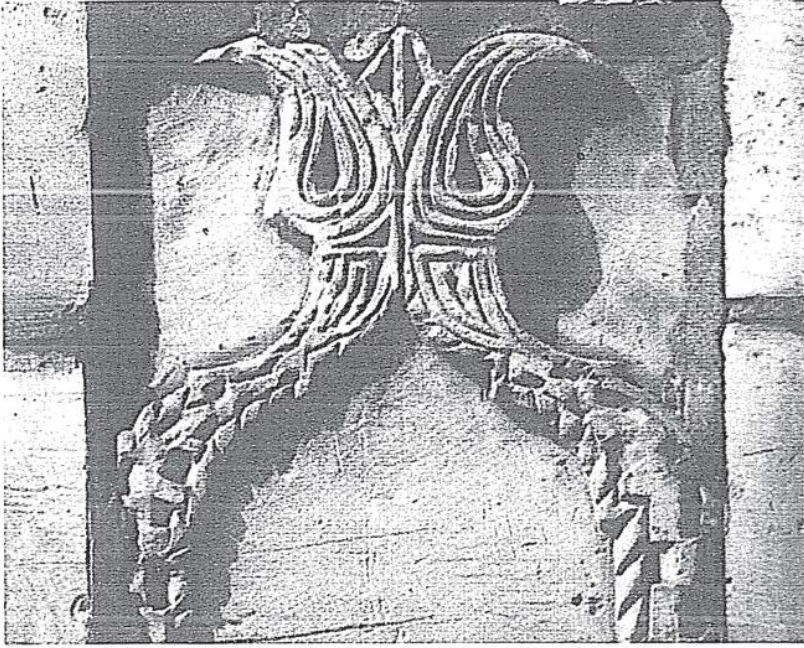


plate 14. Birecik Great Mosque, courtyard, north façade, rectangular panel

into consideration, we come across with multi-pillared lengthwise plans with a mihrab dome bearing a large courtyard mostly with colonnaded porticoes during the 12th-13th centuries. The majority of these examples are either Artukid mosques or the ones reflecting the same traditional characteristics. Even so, this plan scheme is mostly preferred in Diyarbakır, Mardin and their neighbourhood.³⁵ Kürkçüoğlu suggests that since the Birecik Great Mosque bears similarities with the Artukid (Mardin Great Mosque; 572 H/1176) and the Zenghid (Urfa Great Mosque) buildings, it might have been erected in the course of the 12th century.³⁶ Probably a slight resemblance with the Urfa Great Mosque,³⁷ especially with its courtyard, portico and a much smaller mihrab dome can be observed, however it seems difficult to make a comparison with the Mardin Great Mosque. No other example of this plan scheme can

³⁵ See Tom Sinclair, "Early Artuqid Mosque Architecture," *The Art of Syria and Jazira 1100-1250*, ed. Julian Raby, (London: 1985), 49-67.

³⁶ Cihat A. Kürkçüoğlu, "Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Tarihi Zenginlikleri ve Kelaynak Kuşlarıyla Ünlü Bir Şehir: Birecik," *Kültür ve Sanat*, 14 (1992): 70; Birecik 1996, 15.

³⁷ See Cihat A. Kürkçüoğlu, *Şanlıurfa Camileri*, (Ankara: 1993), 10-14, fig. 1.

be distinguished in this region.³⁸ When considering other neighbouring regions, no similar example, even later ones can be determined in Iraq.³⁹ Only the application of groined vaults in the upper structure of both the prayer hall and the portico is traditional in most of the mosques in the Şanlıurfa province and south-eastern Anatolia as a general rule. However, excluding the Aleppo Great Mosque originally dated to 751 H, but reconstructed in 1158 H during the Zenghid period,⁴⁰ strangely enough the groined vaults were not used extensively in Syria. Nevertheless, the secondary barrel vaults penetrated into the principal ones, as is the case in the prayer hall of the Birecik Great Mosque, is not favoured in south-eastern Anatolia, but it is rather a traditional application in Syria especially during the Zenghid and Ayyubid periods.

Similarities with the Birecik Great Mosque are restricted only in orientation with few examples outside Anatolia. We can claim that only the taste is Mesopotamian in some respects, but the plan scheme and architectural features bear more characteristics in common with the Central Anatolian Seljuk mosques, namely Kayseri Huand Khatun (635 H/1238) and Hacı Kılıç (677 H-1249-50) mosques from the first half of the 13th century.⁴¹ Also, the upper structure and architectural decoration, especially on the pointed arched panel adorned with geometrical patterns⁴² or the one with a palmette motif⁴³ bear more similarities with the Seljuk monuments rather than the south-eastern ones, or the mosques in Syria, Iraq and Egypt.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, it may not sound

38 Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture I-IV", *Ars Islamica*, IX-XIV (1942-48): 1-53, 13-70, 1-70, 118-138.

39 See Abdüsselâm Uluçam, *Irak'taki Türk Mimari Eserleri*, (Ankara: 1989).

40 For the Great Mosque of Aleppo, see Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture-IV", *Ars Islamica*, XIII-XIV (1948): 118-120, figure 17.

41 For the Huand Khatun Mosque, see Haluk Karamağaralı, "Einige Gedanken zur Rekonstruktion der Hunad-Moschee und zur Chronologie der Hunad-Baugruppe in Kayseri", *Fifth International Congress of Turkish Art*, 21-26 Sept. 1975, (Budapest: 1978), 495-535; for the Hacı Kılıç Mosque, see Gönül Öney, "Kayseri Hacı Kılıç Camii ve Medresesi", *Belleteri*, XXXI/119 (1966): 377-390.

42 For the Seljuk geometrical decoration, see Gerd Schneider 1980; Yıldız Demiriz, *İslam Sanatında Geometrik Süsleme*, (İstanbul: 2000). For the Ottoman geometrical decoration, see Yıldız Demiriz, *Osmanlı Mimarisinde Süsleme. I. Erken Devir (1300-1453)*, (İstanbul: 1979). For the geometric decoration in Islam, see Issam El-Said-Ayşe Parman, *Geometric Concepts in Islamic Art*, (London: 1976).

43 For the floral decoration of the Anatolian Seljuk monuments, see Semra Ögel 1966; Rahmi Hüseyin Ünal 1981; Gerd Schneider, *Pflanzliche Bauornamente der seldschuken in Kleinasien*, (Wiesbaden: 1989).

44 For the Mamluk monuments in Egypt and Syria, see Michael Meinecke 1992; for the monuments in Egypt, also see Keppel A.C. Creswell, *İslamische Baukunst in Ägypten*, (Leipzig: 1928) and *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt, II: Ayyubids and Early Bahrite Mamluks A.D. 1171-1326*, (Oxford: 1952-59); Dietrich Brandenburg, *İslamische Baukunst in Ägypten*, (Berlin: 1966). For the monuments in Cairo, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *İslamic Architecture in Cairo: An Introduction*, (Leiden: 1989); also, see Louis Hautecoeur-Gaston Wiet, *Les Mosquées du Caire*, 2 vols., (Paris: 1932). For the citadel and the buildings in Aleppo, see Jean Sauvaget, *Alep: Essai sur le développement d'une grande ville syrienne, des origines au milieu du XIXe siècle*, (Paris: 1941); H. Gaube-Eugen Wirth, *Aleppo*, (Wiesbaden: 1984). For the monuments in Damascus, see Jean Sauvaget 1938; Ernst Herzfeld 1942-48. For Syria, also see Gerard Degeorge, *Syrie: Art, Histoire, Architecture*, (Paris: 1983).

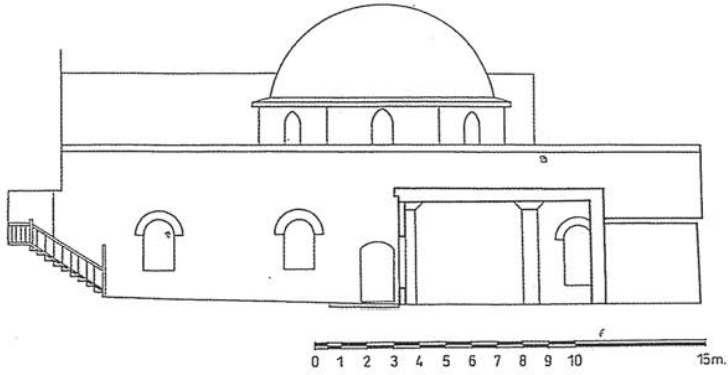


fig. 7. Birecik Çarşı (Market) Mosque, north elevation
(Meryem Acara-Suat Alp-Sema Gündüz, May 1998; Erdal Eser, July 1998)



plate 15. Birecik Çarşı Mosque, minaret, south face, two inscription panels above the door

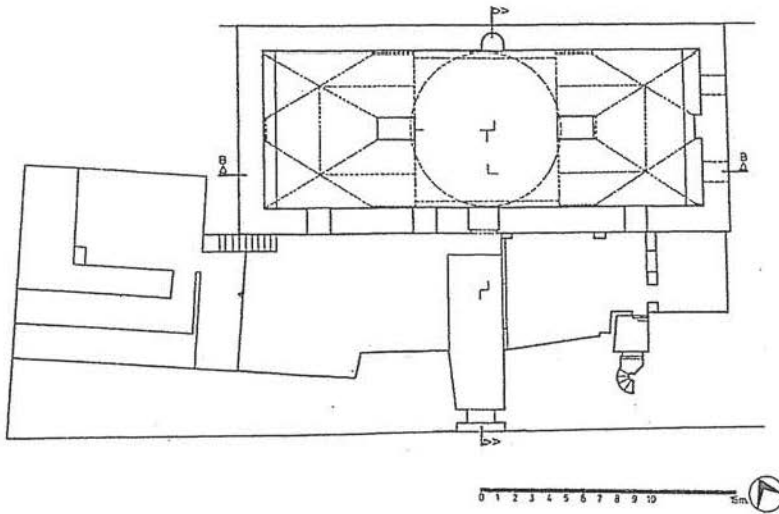


fig. 8. Ground plan of the Birecik Çarşı Mosque
(Meryem Acara-Erdal Eser-Aynur Durukan, May 1998; Erdal Eser, July 1998)

an error to regard the Birecik Great Mosque as an exceptional building in the light of Islamic architecture.

The second most remarkable Mamluk building of Birecik is the Çarşı (Market) Mosque situated in the middle of the trade centre, inside the Attar (Haberdasher) market (fig. 7). According to the lower inscription on the minaret, it was constructed in 771 H/1370 by Muhammad, the son of Omar (plate 15). The inscription above the interior porch of the building bears the reconstruction date of 1168 H/1754-55. In the course of time, the mosque was burnt in the market fire of 1332-33 H/1914-15 and was renovated by the Prefect Nuri Effendi Mirkelam. The date of 1370 on the minaret sheds light on the construction date of the building which was renovated after the fire during the course of the 18th century.⁴⁵ It can be assumed that the mosque was built at the latest during the Mamluk period and most probably during the reign of Malik Ashraf Shaban (1363-1376), similarly to the Great Mosque. The location of the building within the commercial centre indicates that it can be dated to the 14th century.

The rectangular building measuring 20.20x24.50 m on the east-west axis consists of a courtyard, a portico on the west, a minaret at the northeast corner and a praying hall on the south wing of the courtyard (fig. 8).

The portal on its north façade from the Attar Pazarı Street gives access

⁴⁵ For the inscriptions, see Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 60-63, nrs. 6-9.



plate 16. Birecik Çarşı Mosque, north façade, the portal

to the courtyard with a round-arched entrance inside a round-arched niche carried by consoles on its two sides. A decorative boss and a three-lined thuluth inscription are positioned above the door. An irregular iwan opens to the courtyard.

The northern façade of the prayer hall to the south of the courtyard is pierced by a segmental-arched porch with an inscription and a rectangular upper window flanked by round-arched windows (plate 16). The minaret located

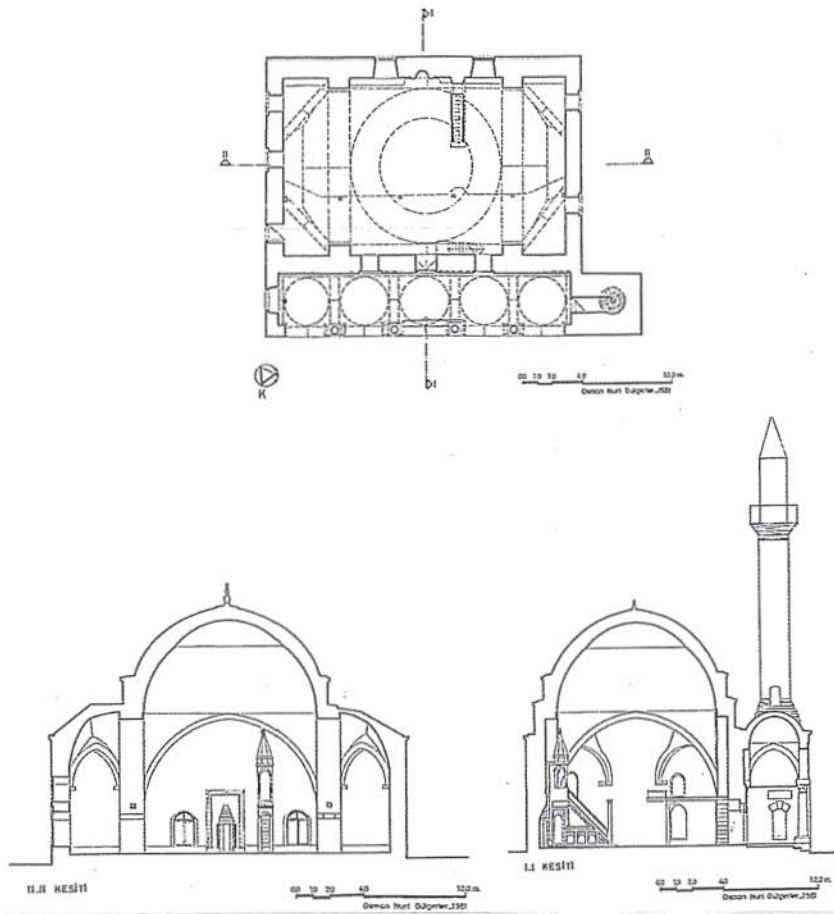


fig. 9. Mut Lal Agha Mosque, ground plan and sections
(Osman Nuri Dülgerler 2006, figure 42a-b)

to the northwest of the mosque has a square base, polygonal shaft and a conical roof. In the prayer hall measuring 7.80x20.10 m, the central domed area is enlarged to both sides by two iwans covered by groined vaults resting on free-standing piers and walls. The central dome has an octagonal drum rising on pendentives articulated by six rows of stalactites and round-arched windows (plate 17). On both sides, barrel vaults resting on piers and walls pierced to the groined vaults and the central section are separated from the lateral units. The semi-circular mihrab niche topped by a round arch is positioned on the centre of the south wall and the modern wooden minbar to its west.

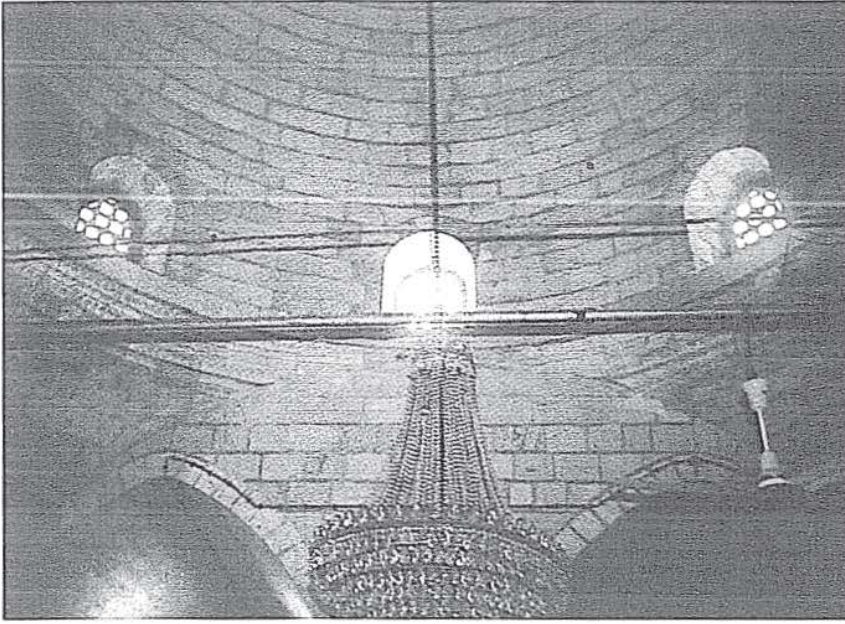


plate 17. Birecik Çarşı Mosque, prayer hall, the dome

Çarşı Mosque with its central dome remains an exceptional example within the region. Only in some respects, namely a central dome flanked by relatively large iwans, it can be compared to the early Ottoman mosques besides Mut Lal Agha Mosque from the Karamanid (fig. 9) and Diyarbakır Nebi Mosque from the Akkoyunlu principalities of the 15th century.⁴⁶ When neighbouring examples are taken into consideration, Kadioglu Mosque dating to the 15th century and Nimetullah Mosque to the 16th century in Şanlıurfa are the closely related examples.⁴⁷ But still, Çarşı Mosque remains a unique example within the context of Islamic architecture like the nearby Great Mosque. It would be barely sufficient to throw a glance to the classical Ottoman architecture in the evolution of this plan scheme. The variation of these examples witnessed in the mosques of the 15th and 16th centuries particularly in Edirne, Manisa, Istanbul

⁴⁶ For Mut Lal Agha Mosque, see Ali Kızıtan, *Anadolu Beyliklerinde Cami ve Mescitler (XIV. Yüzyıl Sonuna Kadar)*, (İstanbul: 1958), 20-23, figures 4-5; Mehlika Arel, "Mut'taki Karamanoğulları Devri Eserleri," *Vakıflar Dergisi*, V (1962): 242-244, figures II-IV; Osman Nuri Dülgerler, *Karamanoğulları Dönemi Mimarisi*, (Ankara: 2006), 94-97; figure 42a-b. For Diyarbakır Nebi Mosque, see Metin Sözen 1971, 43-47, figures 10 and 11.

⁴⁷ See Cihat A. Kürkçüoğlu, *Şanlıurfa Camileri*, (Ankara: 1993), 37-39, pl. 7 (Kadioglu Mosque); 22-25, pl. 5 (Nimetullah Mosque).

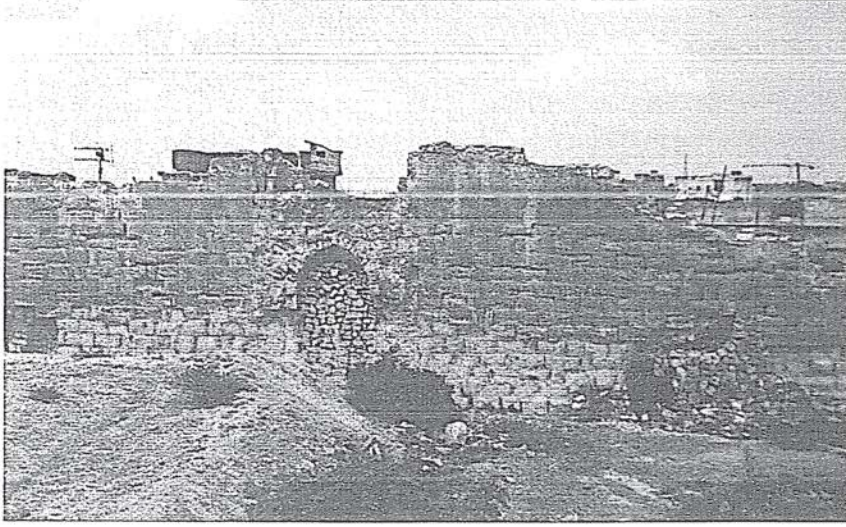


plate 18. Birecik Bağlar ramparts, east façade, central section

and Diyarbakır played a distinct role in the transition from the multi-unit plan to the central domed type.⁴⁸ The vaulting system of the Çarşı Mosque with its central dome and lateral groined vaults can be encountered in several parts of Anatolia by the 15th century. The only similar example with single lateral groined vaults in the neighbourhood is the Old Omariyya Mosque (prior to 1301) in Şanlıurfa. The central dome, on the contrary, rests on squinches.⁴⁹ Also, the round arched porches inside deep niches topped with round arches are particular only for Birecik.⁵⁰

These two mosques are the only monuments besides military examples in Birecik known to have been erected by the Mamluks. Although several other buildings of special interest, namely tombs and khans exist in the town, they bear no inscriptions and their architectural features point out to a later date.

The city walls have partly survived with several bastions and two gates. The inscriptions can be observed on its two gates, one bastion and one wall. These are all from the Mamluk period, dated 1482-1484.

The ramparts in the Bağlar region to the east of the town were presumably

⁴⁸ See Aptullah Kuran, *The Mosque in Early Ottoman Architecture*, (Chicago: 1968); Metin Sözen, *The Evolution of Turkish Art and Architecture*, ed. İlhan Akşit, (İstanbul: 1985).

⁴⁹ See A. Cihat Kürkçüoğlu, *Şanlıurfa Camileri*, (Ankara: 1993), 17-18, pl. 3.

⁵⁰ Similar examples in Birecik are Mahmut Paşa and Tekke Mosques, both dated to 981 H/1573-74, Şeyh (Sheikh) Sadeddin Mosque and Şeyh (Sheikh) Muhammad Zehravey Masjid both with unspecified dates. See A. Durukan (ed.), 2003, pls. 46-48 (Mahmut Pasha), pls. 61,63 (Tekke), pls. 98-99 (Şeyh Sadeddin).

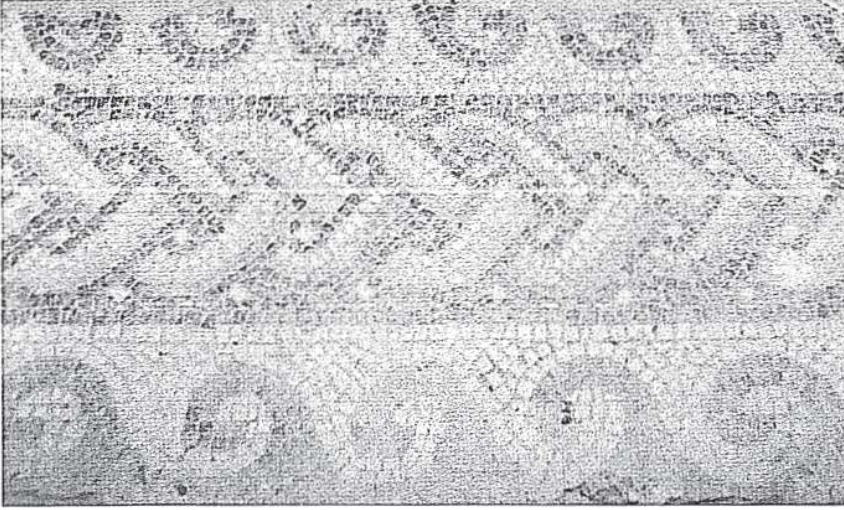


plate 19. Birecik Hüseyin Özateş House, upper floor, main room, reused window mosaics

surrounding the earliest section of the town, and the non-extant Bağlar Gate was opening to the urban area (plate 18). Likewise, only the section extending almost 50 m at the southeast opening to the town with the non-extant Meydan Gate has survived. When its relation with the commercial centre and the river is taken into account, we can suggest that this part was presumably extant before the Mamluks. Moreover, Oppenheim mentions that the inscription dated 887 H/1482-83 belonged to the interior wall of the Meydan Gate.⁵¹ However, we can not possibly assume that the town becoming a significant military and commercial centre even during the earlier periods was not fortified by the city walls up to the 15th century. The location of the earliest surviving buildings in the centre of the town, the aforementioned Great Mosque within the south walls entered through the Meydan Gate and the Çarşı Mosque from the 14th century suggests that the south part with the Meydan Gate was extant during this period. Presumably, the construction of the ramparts might go back before the Mamluks as early as the Byzantine period like other Anatolian cities which were surrounded by ramparts then.⁵² We are confirmed that this period was the time when the Byzantine town had emerged outside the borders of the citadel and the commercial centre surrounding the Great Mosque was also extant. Moreover, the existence of a Church used partly as a tomb in later periods

⁵¹ See Max Freiherr von Oppenheim 1913. 102-103.

⁵² See Uğur Tanyeli, *Anadolu-Türk Kentinde Fiziksel Yapının Evrim Süreci (11.-15. yy.)*, (İstanbul: 1987).

inside the citadel and the non-extant Virgin Mary Church assumed to be built by the Empress Helena in the 4th century suggest that a settlement outside the citadel was prevalent during this period. We have to bear in mind that this region is still today known as the “Church Site” besides Sancak quarter. Furthermore, the Roman drainage system existing at the east of the Bağlar Quarter and around the Meçan Gate besides the Late Roman-Early Byzantine mosaics of the Hüseyin Özateş House (plate 19) are the other physical evidences. It seems difficult to find affinities in the Near East, even in Aleppo and Cairo ramparts (plate 20).⁵³ Likewise Urfa, Diyarbakır and Mardin ramparts in the same region can accordingly be compared in minor details.

Three city gates of which one is non-existent were constructed during the reign of Qaitbay (1468-1496). Urfa Gate, the main gate of the eastern part of the ramparts in a better state of preservation, was erected by the order of the Mamluk Sultan Malik al-Ashraf Qaitbay in 14th Ramadan 888/16th October 1483 according to its long inscription (plate 21). It is indicated on the two-lined inscription inside an oval cartouche above the door arch that the administrator of the construction was Yunus al-Sharafi, the representative of the sultanate.⁵⁴ Kule (Tower) Masjid attached to the north inside a bastion bears no inscription, but supposedly it was built shortly after the construction of the gate (plate 22). It consists of a single-unit on east-west orientation covered by a barrel vault.

A moulded square porch with a lintel inside a pointed arch is positioned to the centre of the east wall of the ramparts. There is an inscription panel inside a cartouche above the lintel with a rectangular panel. It is topped with a scribed medallion in the centre and ten partially damaged consoles (fig. 10). The western entrance of the gate giving access to the Mahmut Paşa Street is, on the contrary, very plain in appearance.

The main entrance in the form of an iwan with a rectangular plan is covered by a barrel vault. The rectangular passage with a groined vault is adjoined to the pointed arched door from the west. Two chambers with barrel vaults at the south open to the passage with two pointed arches, whereas the square planned unit with a groined vault gives access to the south-eastern chamber with a rectangular door. The square iwan with a barrel vault serving as a shop is placed to the north side of the gate (fig. 11).

⁵³ For the section through the citadel of Aleppo, see George Michell (ed.), *Architecture of the Islamic World*, (London: 1991), 69. For the entrance to the citadel of Aleppo, see Barbara Brend 1991, 101, plate 64. For the Cairo citadel, see Paul Casanova, *Histoire et description de la Citadelle du Caire*, (Paris: 1891-92). For the walls of Cairo, see Barbara Brend 1991, 56, plate 29.

⁵⁴ For the inscriptions, see Max Freiherr von Oppenheim 1913, 103-105, nrs. 131-132; for the transliteration and translation of the inscriptions, see Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 189-191, nrs. 32-34.

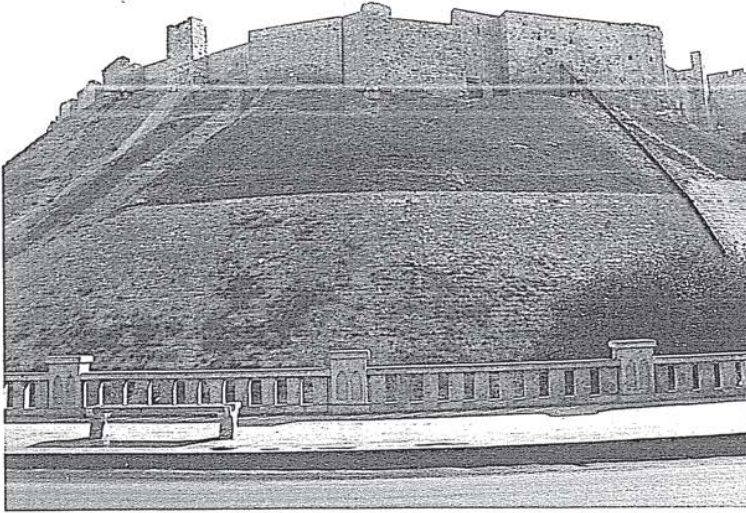


plate 20. The Citadel of Aleppo (Bülent İşler's Archive)

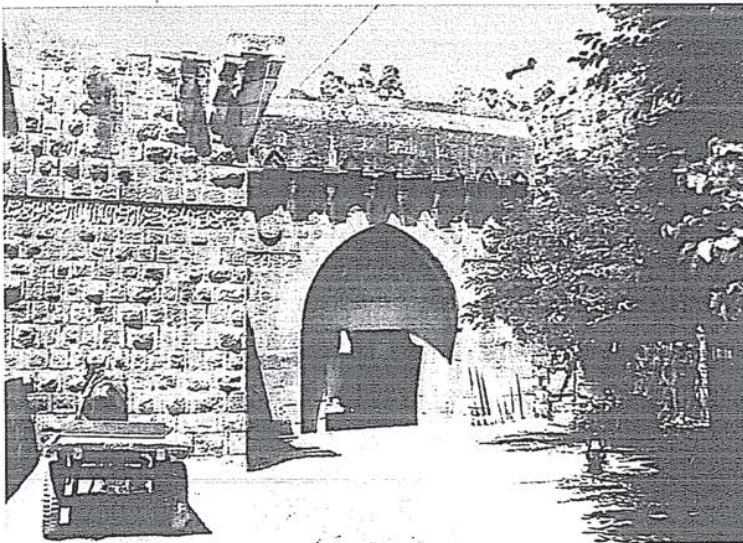


plate 21. Birecik Urfa Gate, looking east

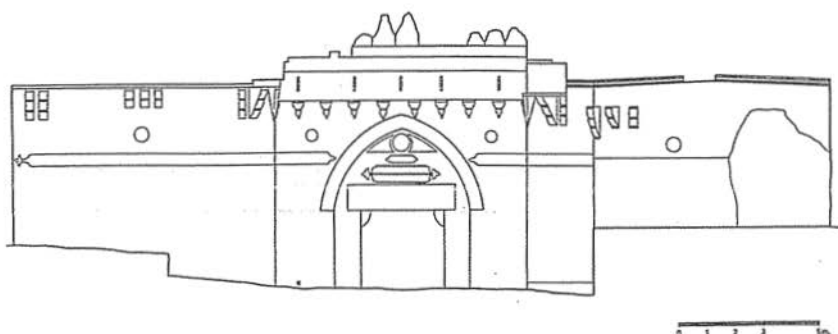


fig. 10. Birecik Urfa Gate, east elevation

(Muhammet Görür - Sema Gündüz - Aynur Durukan, September 1997; Sema Gündüz, July 1998)

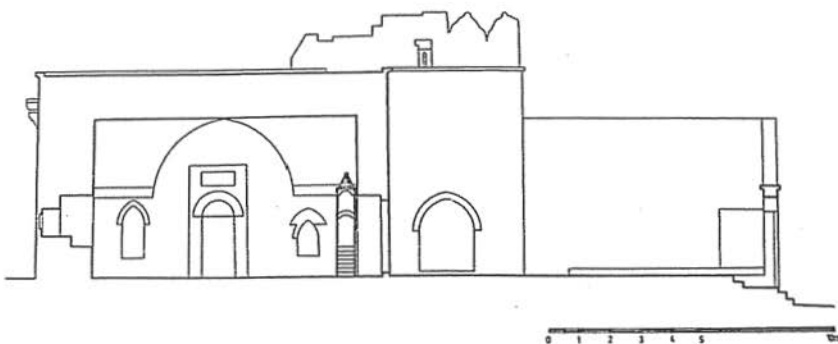


fig. 11. Birecik Urfa Gate, Section A-A

(Burcu Ceylan - Muhammet Görür - Makbule Terzi, September 1997; Erdal Eser, June 1998)

The entire decoration of the Urfa Gate is observed on the east door serving as the main gate of the town. The long inscription panel above the lintel is flanked by two palmettes. Floral motifs adorn the consoles above the pointed arch. One of the embrasures is also decorated with a palmette.

Meçan Gate, the main gate of the southern section, located at the southeast of the ramparts has been renovated recently by the Ministry of Culture (plate 23). According to its inscription running all along the western and southern walls, it was constructed by the order of the Mamluk Sultan Qaitbay under the administration of his representative Yunus al-Sharafi within the last ten days of 889 H/21st-30th December 1484.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ For the inscription, see Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 195, nr. 35.

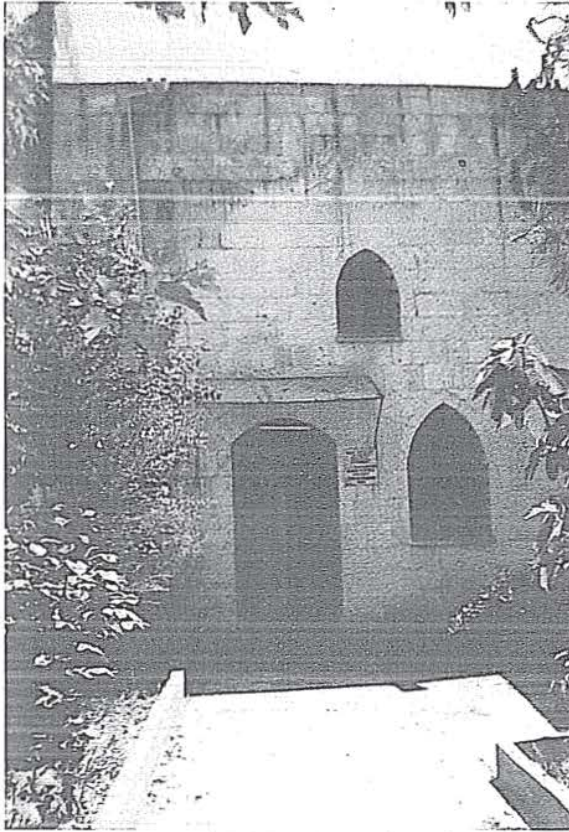


plate 22. Birecik Kule (Tower) Masjid, west façade

The northern, western and eastern walls is intact, the southern wall is however partly damaged. The gate resting on an inclined street has been surrounded by a platform during its renovation, leaving the original floor 3.40 m underneath.

It is evident that the damaged porch on the centre of the north façade was pointed arched in its original state. The iwan-like entrance is covered by a barrel vault; large niches are positioned on its eastern and western walls respectively. The western corner where the arch springs is adorned with two rows of stalactites. The holes of the door wings can be traced on both sides of the niches. The iwan, ascended by a single step, opens to the “L” shaped section through a rectangular door with moulded consoles.

The plain gate is constructed with rubble stones and dressed with cut stones.

The upper portions of the west façade and the walls surrounding the gate have been renovated. The vaulting system of the iwan is constructed by rubble and coarse cut stones.

Meydan (Square) Gate of the ramparts giving access to the Euphrates in the Meydan Quarter does not exist (plate 24). The Gate to the east of the Alaburç (Red Bastion) at the end of the ramparts was presumably opening to the İskele (Harbour) Street to the west of the Tekke Mosque dated 981 H/1573-74. We have no information about the architectural and decorative features of the Gate. It was constructed in the name of Qaitbay in 887 H/1482-83 according to its vanished inscription.⁵⁶

Alaburç (Red Bastion)/Meydan Gate Masjid situated in the centre of the town, to the southeast of the ramparts, being an extension of the non-existent Meydan Gate was renovated by the Şanlıurfa governorship (plate 25). Several houses are placed on the ramparts beginning from the bastion extending to the east. It was erected in the name of Qaitbay according to the thuluth inscription repeated inside the medallions on its façades (plate 26).⁵⁷ Considering the inscriptions giving no date but the founder's name, we can assume that it was constructed together with the Meçan Gate. It is not certain however, when the bastion was converted to a masjid.

The façades of the square building measuring 10.80x11.30 m reflect similar arrangements. The south façade is articulated with three rectangular windows, pointed arched segments with two inscribed medallions and seven consoles. The north façade is in a better state of preservation. The upper part of the façade, extending 1.80 m above the roof level, reflects a two-storied arrangement.

The entrance to the interior is through an "L" shaped and barrel vaulted vestibule. The rectangular door on the west wall of the vestibule gives access to the rectangular central section on east-west axis covered by a groined vault. The central section is surrounded by barrel vaulted iwans from western and southern sides. The square space to the north of the west iwan is covered by a dome resting on pendentives. Rectangular chambers covered by barrel vaults articulated with slit windows on their three walls are placed on both sides of the south iwan. A rectangular chamber covered by a barrel vault opens to the central section by a door on its south wall (fig. 12). A central slit window on the south wall of the southern iwan was blocked and converted to a larger semi-circular mihrab niche topped with a pointed arch (plate 27).

⁵⁶ For the inscription, see Max Freiherr von Oppenheim 1913, 102-103, nr. 130; for the transliteration and translation of the inscription, see Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 196, nr. 36.

⁵⁷ For the inscription, see Aynur Durukan (ed.) 2003, 105, nr. 19.

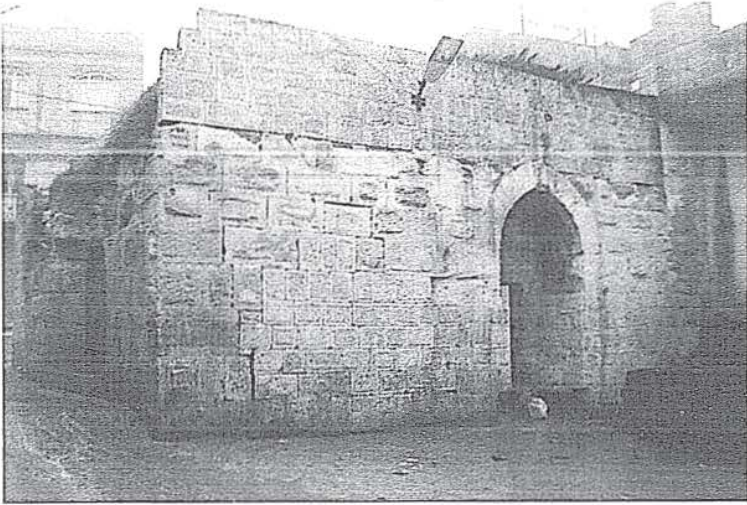


plate 23. Birecik Meçan Gate, looking northwest

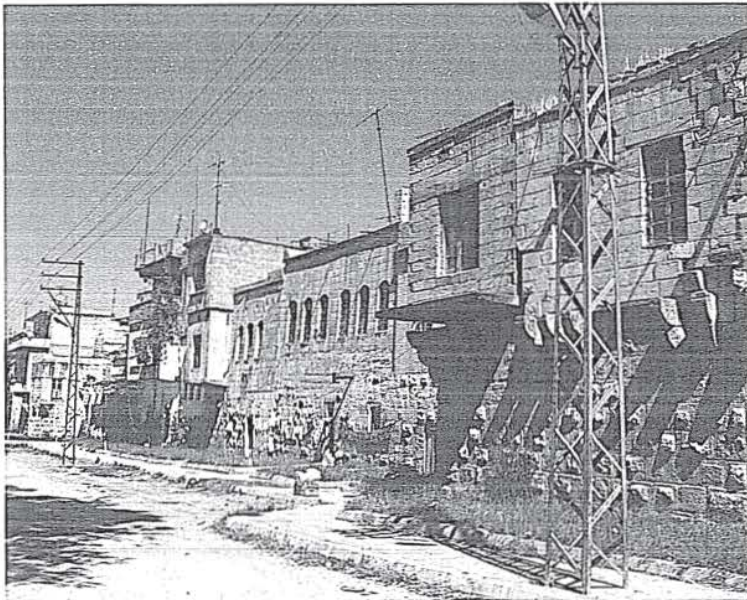


plate 24. Birecik Meydan quarter

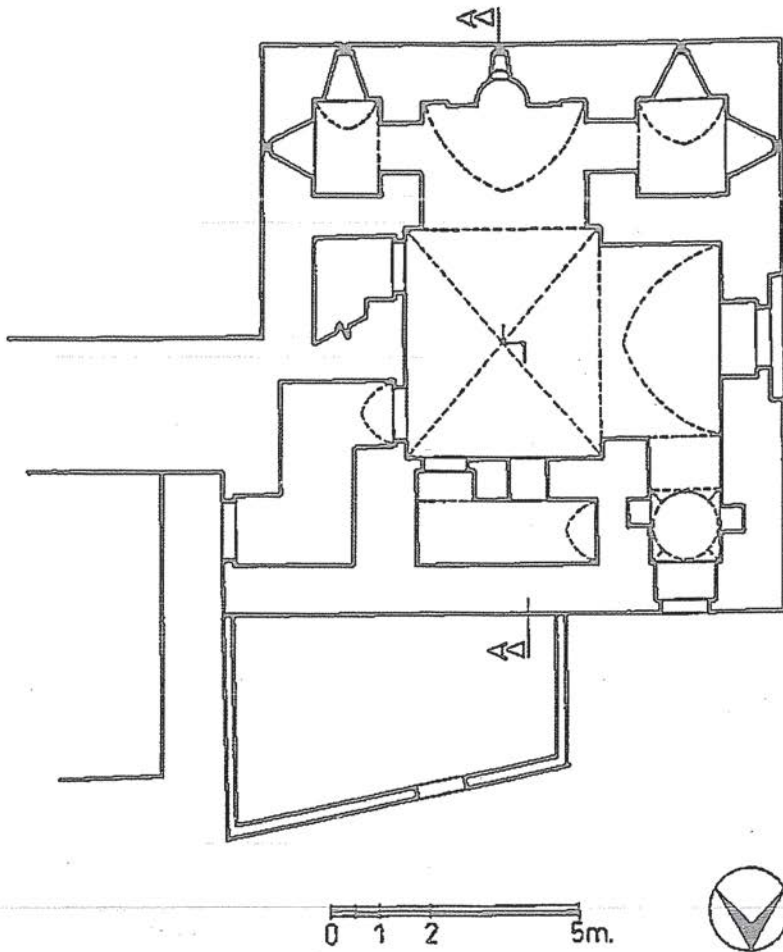


fig. 12. Ground plan of the Birecik Alaburç Masjid
(Mustafa Akpolat - Birgül Gökçe - Aynur Durukan, September 1997; Birgül Gökçe, January 1998)

The Alaburç Masjid remains a unique example within the region with its multi-unit plan-scheme. It reflects a variation similar to the Anatolian Seljuk medreses or convents (*tekkes*) with enclosed courtyards.⁵⁸

The only ornament besides the inscribed medallions, projecting arch

⁵⁸ For the Seljuk medreses with enclosed courtyards, see Aptullah Kuran, *Anadolu Medreseleri*, vol. I, (Ankara: 1969), 11-20, 44-63; Metin Sözen, *Anadolu Medreseleri, Selçuklu ve Beylikler Devri*, vol. II, (İstanbul: 1972). For the Seljuk convents, see İlhami Bilgin, "Über die Tekke Architektur des 13. Jahrhunderts in Anatolien," *Fifth International Congress of Turkish Art*, 21-26 Sept. 1975, (Budapest: 1978), 183-187.

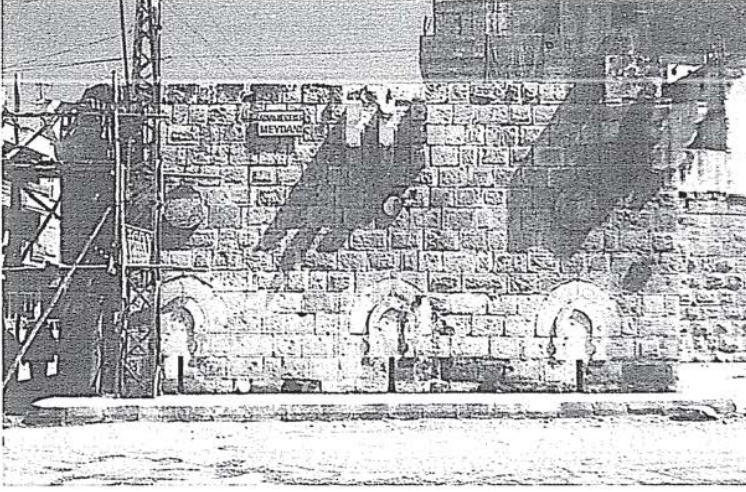


plate 25. Birecik Alaburç (Red Bastion) Masjid, south façade



plate 26. Birecik Alaburç Masjid, west façade, inscribed medallion

segments and profiled consoles on the corners articulating the façades, is observed on the mihrab. The palmettes are carved at both sides of the half dome of the pointed arched niche filled with oyster shell above the slit windows besides the inscription frieze.

It seems difficult to find similar examples either in Egypt or other Islamic countries, since the ramparts and the citadel are not in a good state of preservation. Still, we can trace some resemblances with the Aleppo fortress from the Ayyubid and Mamluk times, when location of the citadel and gates, besides the material and techniques employed on the walls and the gates are taken into consideration (plate 20). It is entirely difficult to make a comparison with the Cairo fortress.

Bağlar (Vineyard) Gate or the northern section of the ramparts does not exist today and no inscriptions have been found. Since this gate is opening to the oldest part of the settlement, we can assume that it was constructed before the 15th century and probably during the Byzantine period. Even as, the non-existent Church of Virgin Mary which might be dated to the 4th century was located inside this gate. This gate might have been renovated by the order of Qaitbay.

When the location of the buildings in the core of the town besides the ramparts, the surviving gates and the citadel are taken into consideration, it can be suggested that the Mamluk settlement outside the citadel was established in the middle of the 14th century. This can also be regarded as a testimony to the lively commercial life of Birecik during the Mamluk period.

Out of the four gates of the ramparts, excluding the non-extant Bağlar Gate on the northern and the Meçan Gate on the northeastern part of the fortifications, the remaining two gates (Urfa Gate and the non-existent Meydan Gate) open to the trade routes on the eastern and western districts of the town. The main roads leading to the north, south and west are on the junction of the intercity communication network of Birecik situated on the juncture of the routes connecting Anatolia to Syria, Persia and other eastern countries. The roads joining the gates of Urfa, Meçan and Meydan with the Citadel open to the large commercial districts and markets as we move to the centre of the town. If we claim that corresponding shops were arranged all along the roads in the medieval age as today, the significance of these routes can be realised. We can suggest that the commercial centre used throughout the Byzantine period was enlarged and developed in the Mamluk and Ottoman times. The texture still observed in the Attar Pazarı and Merkez (central) quarters reveal that the traditional structure has partly been preserved. With the help of the present communication network, we can assume that the roads were relatively irregular

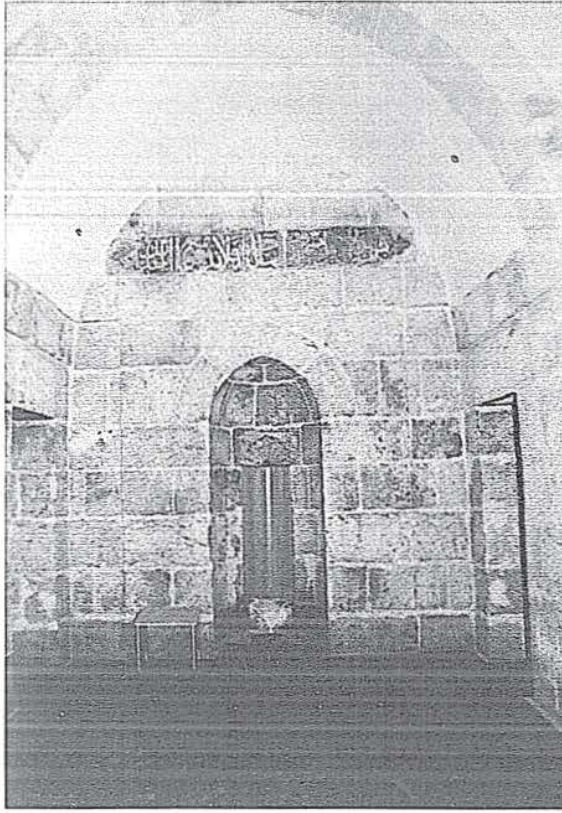


plate 27. Birecik Alaburç Masjid, interior, south wall

and narrow during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. Considering the present streets of the town, we can suppose that even if not so for the Mamluks, blind-alleys in the southern and eastern parts of the town were available during the Ottoman times as today. The blind-alleys numbering fifteen in total in various sections of the town still preserve their traditional texture.⁵⁹

When the urban structure of Birecik is taken into consideration, one of the most significant aspects of the streets is the *Kabaltı* (covered passage) with few surviving examples. These are pointed vaulted or timber roofed passages found in the junctures joining narrow streets to blind-alleys (plate 28). Considering the

⁵⁹ Faraş, Çelebi, Tekir Ağa, Şih Tahir, Hacı Meçani and Hacı Şerif in the Meydan Quarter; Sünnetçiler, Kelde and Kesik in the Kurtuluş Quarter; Çulcular, Asaf Bey and Tevfik Hoca in the Sancak Quarter; Tütüncüler and Kureş in the Saha Quarter; Demirci Kadir in the Hoca Şeref Quarter.

name of the Meydan Gate, we can assert that at least one square was extant in these periods. We have no information about the other quarters, if exist, and their names during the Mamluk times. However, we can presume that the town was sub-divided to four sections by two axes on northern-southern and eastern-western directions and the interior area was consisting of small quarters with narrow streets like the other medieval cities and towns in south-eastern Anatolia and Syria.

Two large graveyards are found in Birecik. Karşıyaka Graveyard from an earlier period is located on the western bank of the Euphrates (plate 29), whereas the latter is at the eastern section of the settlement in the Bağlar Quarter. Unfortunately both of them seem to be later than the Mamluk period. The earliest tombstone dating 1263 H/1847 in the Karşıyaka Graveyard belongs to a lady without any designation. The aforementioned earliest tomb, Deh Kubbe, inside the graveyard dates 935 H/1528-29 and the latest to the east, Şeyh (Sheikh) Jamal al-Din Tomb, bears a tombstone on its eaves from 1310/1892. This evidence reveals that the graveyard was in use at the latest since the 16th century. Although Bağlar quarter seems to be the earliest section of Birecik, the tombs and tombstones together with the graveyard are likely much later than the Karşıyaka graveyard.

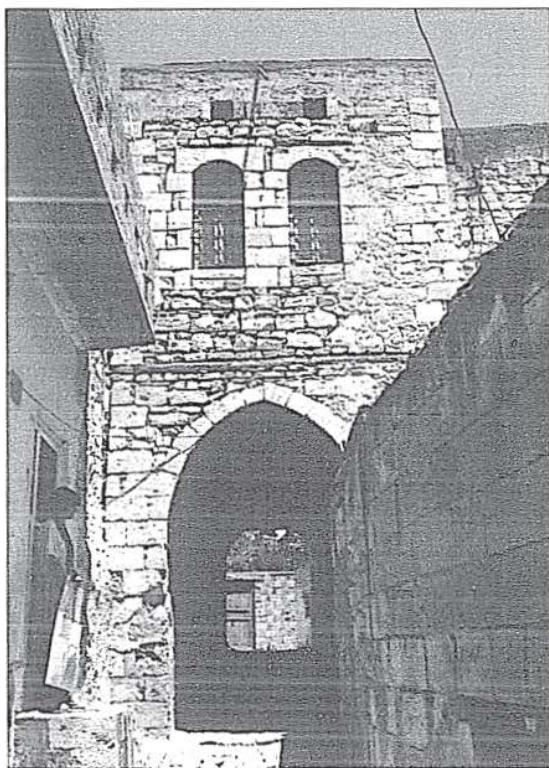


plate 28. Birecik Asaf Bey Kabaltı (Covered Passage), looking south



plate 29. Birecik Karşıyaka Graveyard, looking north