

THE MOSQUE OF YILDIRIM IN EDİRNE

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The Mosque of Yıldırım, the earliest of all the existing mosques in Edirne¹, is a building whose past goes beyond the Ottomans and which presents us with a number of uncertainties owing to alterations accrued at various times. According to Dr. Osman Rifat, the mosque was erected on the ruins of the Church of *Tiris İye Hares*². Gurlitt, noting the resemblance between the mosque and the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, contended that the original structure was built before the Crusades, probably at a date not too distant from that of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (440 A. D. ?), and that it was converted into a mosque around 1400³. The plan of the mosque as drawn by Gurlitt does, in fact, exhibit a close relationship to the plan of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, if we disregard the scale of the two buildings and that the former is in the form of a Greek-cross and the latter of a Latin-cross (pls. 1 and 3). However, the plan and section drawings published by Gurlitt do not present an accurate picture of the mosque as it is today—or as it was when Gurlitt studied it—but rather project his opinion pertaining to the original condition of the mosque. Gurlitt himself states that the drawings may be incorrect and that he could not vouch for the accuracy of the barrel-vaulted entrance hall⁴. Indeed, the eastern arm of the cross, which serves as the vestibule, is different from the other three arms, which means that the interior space of the Mosque of Yıldırım in Edirne is not in the form of a perfect Greek-cross but of an asymmetrical cross where

¹ The mosque does not have an inscription plate. The conversion of the original building into a mosque is generally accepted to have taken place in 1397 (799 H.) or 1400 (802 H.) Oktay Aslanapa, *Edirne'de Osmanlı Devri Âbideleri*, İstanbul, 1949.p. 2.

² Dr. Osman Rifat, *Edirne Rehnüması*, Edirne, 1920. p. 35.

³ Von Cornelius Gurlitt, "Die Bauten Adrianoples" *Orientalisches Archiv* I, Leipzig, 1910/11. p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 4.

one of the arms is narrower and lower than the others : an arrangement of particular interest from the standpoint of early Ottoman-Turkish architecture (pl. 5) ⁵.

The mosque as it exists today comprises a fountain courtyard, a portico, a minaret and an interior consisting of two convent rooms and a prayer area. The fountain courtyard, which is enclosed by low, narrow walls, is rectangular in shape, measuring 24.30 m. by 17.65 m. on the inside. There are four window openings, two in front and two on either side, and three arched portals, one on each side. The main portal does not fall on the longitudinal axis of the building but is shifted toward the north by 1.35 m. . The upper structure of the fountain, located at the center of the courtyard, no longer exists; but the sockets of the eight timber posts that supported it can still be observed on the stone paving.

The roof of the five-bay portico, has also disappeared. Although all of the four column bases are intact, only one of the columns stands in place. The other three column shafts and their capitals lie on the ground against the wall outside the southern portal of the courtyard. Only the shaft up to the balcony remains of the minaret.

As for the interior of the mosque; one enters through a 3.70 m. wide, barrel-vaulted vestibule into a central space fed by three similar *eyvans*. The central space is a square, measuring 8.20 m. on the side, surmounted by a dome. The *eyvans* are also of square shape but they are covered by pointed-arch vaults. The *mihrab* and the *minber* are located at the corners of the southern *eyvan*. Although the convent rooms that flank the vestibule are rectangular volumes 1.05 m. by 6.30 m. in dimension, arches were placed on their long sides to create square bases for the domes to rest upon. The transition from the domes of the convent rooms, as well as the central dome, to the walls are carried out by belts of Turkish triangles. Each convent room originally had two windows, one opening on the side and the other onto the portico, and a fireplace of which plaster of Paris decorations, inlaid with turquoise colored tiles, still partially exist. Although neglected and in poor repair, the mosque is open to prayer. The convent

⁵ S.Eyice has published a plan which accurately shows the interior of the mosque. Semavi Eyice, "Zâviyeler ve Zâviyeli-Camiler" *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 - 4, 1963. p. 67

rooms, however, are in ruinous condition and their door and window openings have been much altered. The building is plastered on the inside; but the exterior is of alternating courses of stone and brick. Window arches are decorated with brick designs, each one having a different pattern. The walls are terminated by the saw-toothed (porcupine) cornice and the roofing is of sheet lead. After this brief description we shall venture to answer the following three questions that come to mind :

1. Was the original building in the form of a perfect Greek-cross with four similar arms around the central domed space, as Gurlitt suggests?

2. In what condition did the Turks find the building in the XIVth century, and what alterations did they make?

3. Did the mosque undergo new alterations after the XIVth century?

1. It is not possible to state with any reasonable certainty at this time whether the original building was in the form of a perfect Greek-cross as Gurlitt surmised. A simple excavation inside the convent rooms, however, might produce a satisfactory answer. On the other hand, it is our opinion that the east side of the original building was arranged differently from the others; in other words, it was not in the form of a cross like the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia. Because if it were so, the Turks, when they converted the building into a mosque, would have placed the convent rooms on either side of the western *eyvan* and built the portico on this side across from the *mihrab*. Or again, the entrance would have been from the north. Since neither more logical arrangement was exploited it can be deduced that the eastern side of the original building was a more favorable location for the convent rooms, which may mean that it was in the form of a central space flanked by two rooms. And this possibility brings to mind the Greek-cross Byzantine church whose apsidal east wing is enriched by the two small chapels on either corner.

The Greek-cross plan, which comprises four similar arms protruding from a central hall emphasized by a dome, appears in Byzantine architecture in the VIth century⁶. However, in both the Byzan-

⁶ Semavi Eyice, *Son Devir Bizans Mimarisi*, İstanbul, 1963. p. 45.

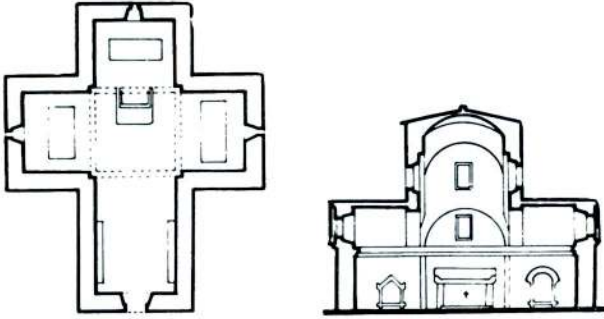
tine⁷ and in similar Greek-cross type Armenian churches of the VIIIth century⁸ the arms were not square but semi-circular. For this reason, we find it difficult to consider this building within the group of clover-leaf type centrally planned churches. On the other hand, the square shape of the arms suggests the possibility of domed-arms in which case the original building may have been a five domed edifice with the central dome rising above the others on a high drum. At the end of the eastern arm there may have been a semi-circular apse and two chapels on either side of it. And considering the location of the building, approximately 1 kilometer outside the city of Edirne, it may have been a monastery church. We shall leave the final verdict on the preceding contentions to those who specialize in Byzantine architecture.

2. A close study of the Mosque of Yıldırım will indicate that the building was in ruinous condition and without an upper structure when it was taken over by the Ottomans. The transition of the domes is effected by Turkish triangles which are typical of early Ottoman architecture and the northern, southern and western *eyvans* are covered by pointed barrel-vaults. Since the Ottomans, even in later times, in converting a church into a mosque imposed on the building the minimal number of changes required by their religion or architectural tradition, this fact indicates that the building had no upper structure in the XIVth century. The outer walls which exhibit a marked change of character in masonry technique above the height of 2.50 m. reinforce this view. As can be observed in the photographs of the exterior (pls. 7 and 8) the walls are of rubble masonry up to the middle of the windows then change to regular alternating stone and brick courses. The pointed-arches of the windows are further indications that, apart from the foundations and the lower section of the walls which determine the plan and the arrangement of the building, the mosque should be credited to Ottoman architecture.

As for the organization of the interior space : the vestibule with flanking convent rooms appears to be the most puzzling element (pl.

⁷ See; *ibid.* pl. 109 (Panghiotissa (The church of St. Mary Muokhliotissa)), pl. 112 (the church of Panagihka at Heybeliada (the island of Khalke)).

⁸ See: Josef Strzygowsky, *Origin of Christian Church Architecture*, Oxford, 1923, pl. 3, (Cathedral of Artik); A. Khatcharian, *L'Architecture Arménienne*, Paris, 1948, pl. 21 (Church of Bagaran).



Res. 1 — Galla Placidia Mozolesi, Ravenna Plan, Kesit
(Sir Bannister Fletcher'den).

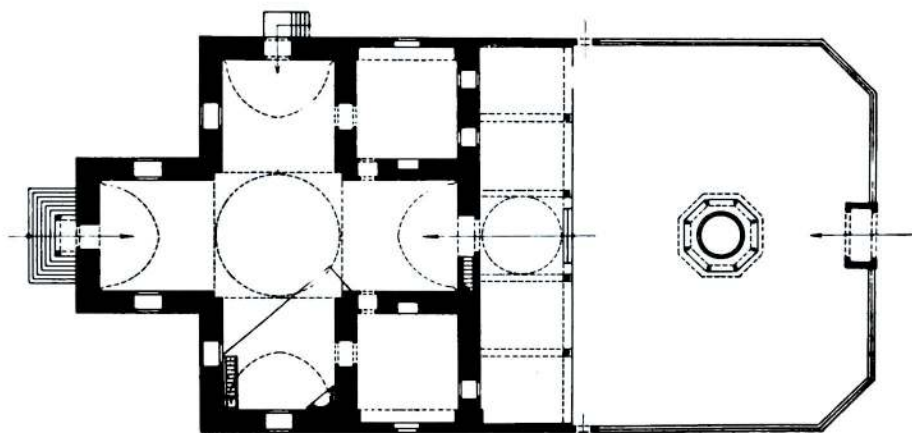
Pl. 1 — Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna Plan, Section
(from Sir Bannister Fletcher).



Res. 2 — Galla Placidia Mozolesi, Ravenna Dış Görünüş.

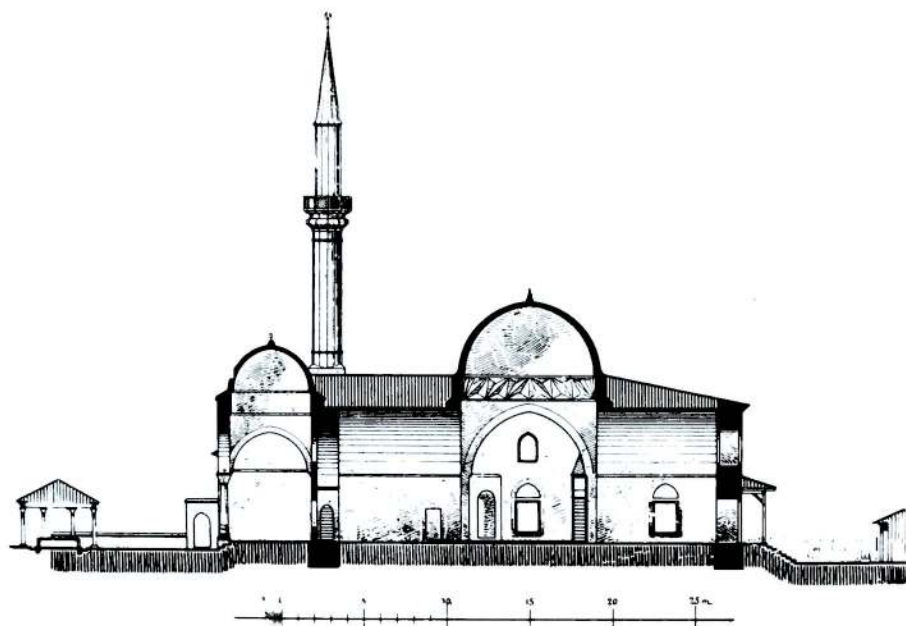
Pl. 2 — Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna Exterior view.

A. Kuran



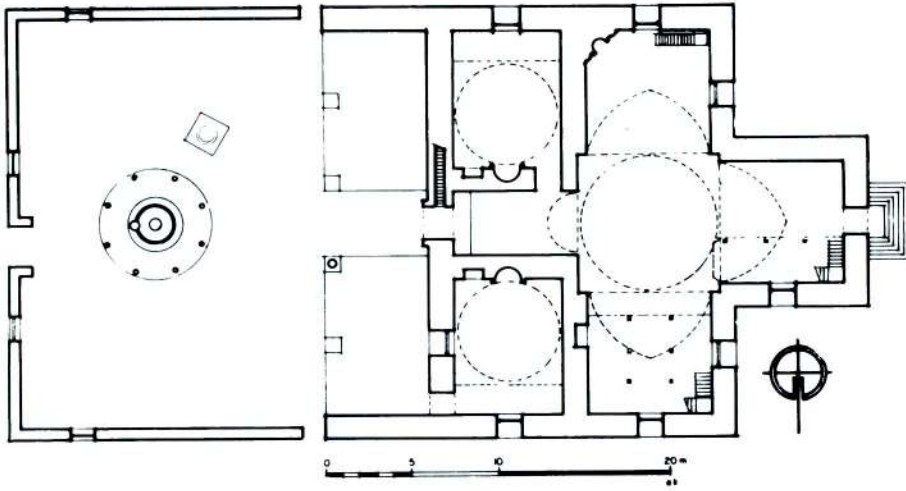
Res. 3 — Plan (Gurlitt'ten).

Pl. 3 — Plan (from Gurlitt).



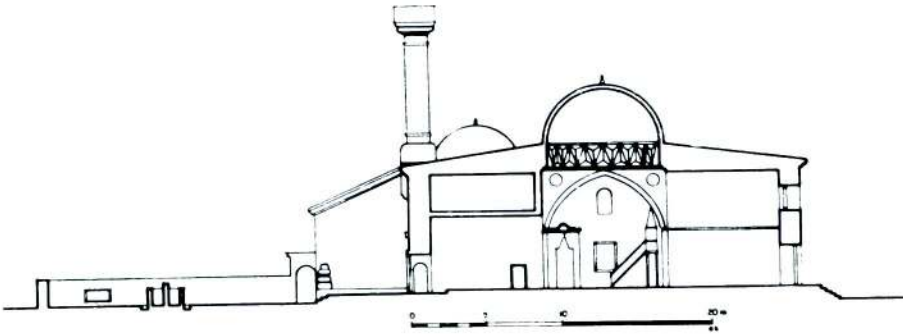
Res. 4 — Kesit (Gurlitt'ten),

Pl. 4 — Section (from Gurlitt).



Res. 5 — Plan (Bugünkü durum).

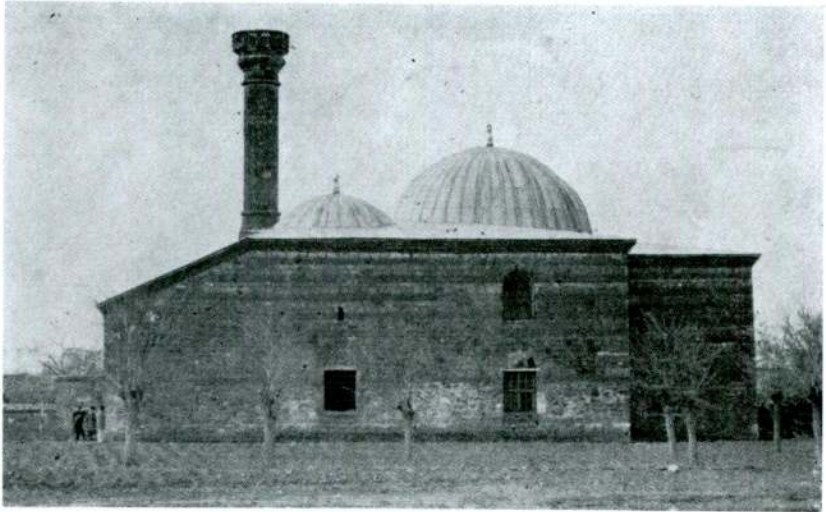
Pl. 5 — Plan (existing situation).



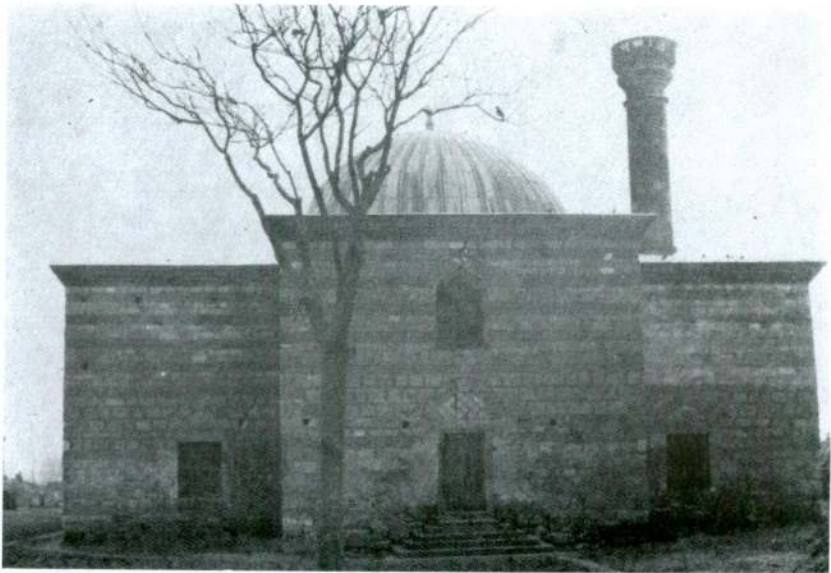
Res. 6 — Kesit (Bugünkü durum).

Pl. 6 — Section (existing situation).

A. Kuran



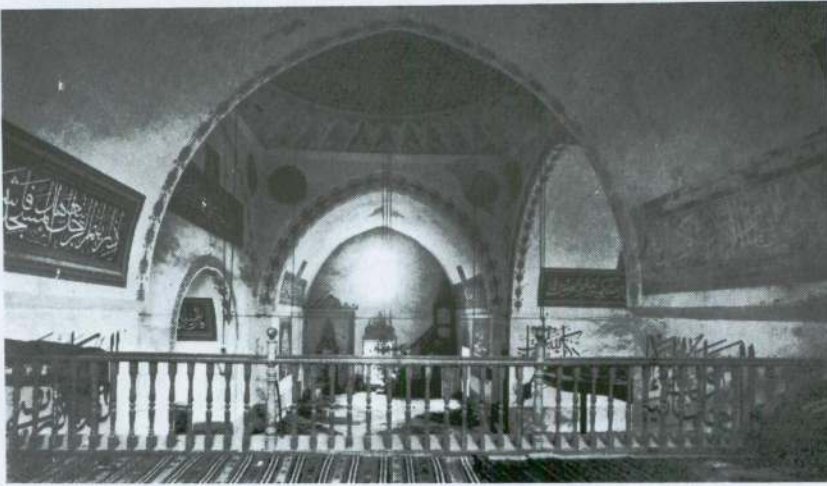
Res. 7 — Kuzey Cephesi.
Pl. 7 — North Elevation.



Res. 8 — Batı Cephesi.
Pl. 8 — West Elevation.



Res. 9 — İç Görünüş (Giriş eyvanı).
Pl. 9 — Interior View (entrance eyvan).



Res. 10 — İç Görünüş.
Pl. 10 — Interior View.

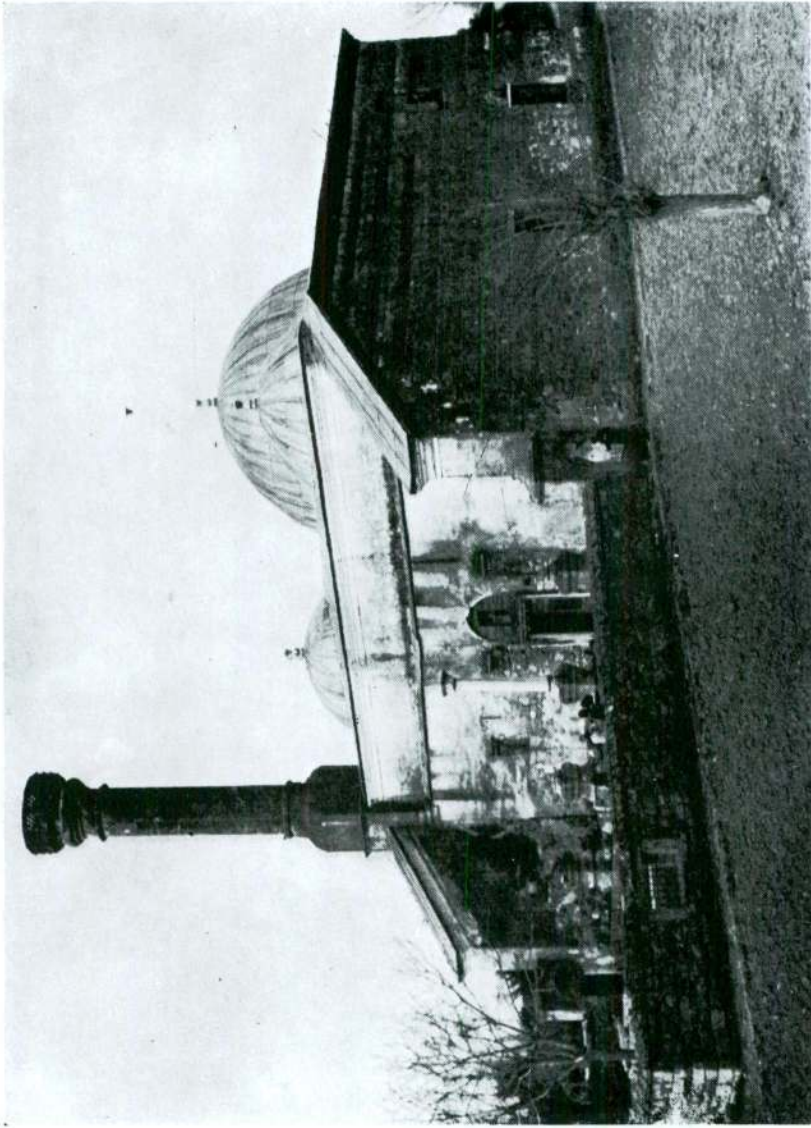
A. Kuran



Res. 11 — Tabhane Odası (kubbe).
Pl. 11 — Convent Room (the dome).



Res. 12 — Tabhane Odası (Ocak).
Pl. 12 — Convent Room (the fireplace).



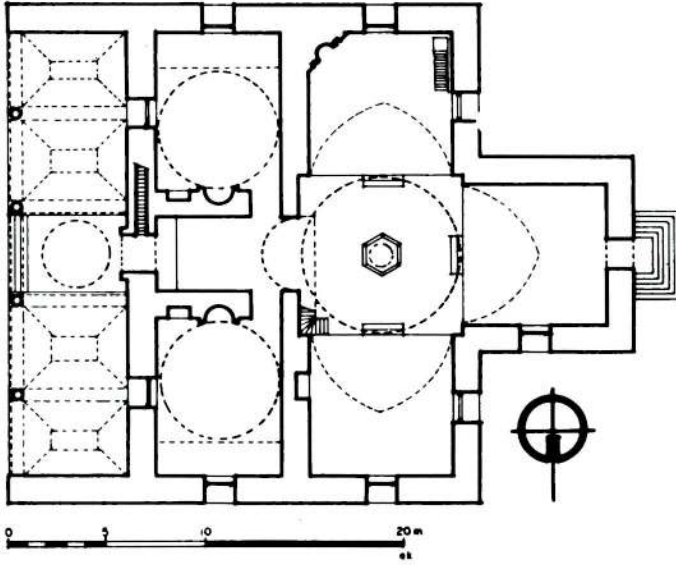
Kes. 13 — Son Cemaat Yeri.
Pl. 13 — The Portico.



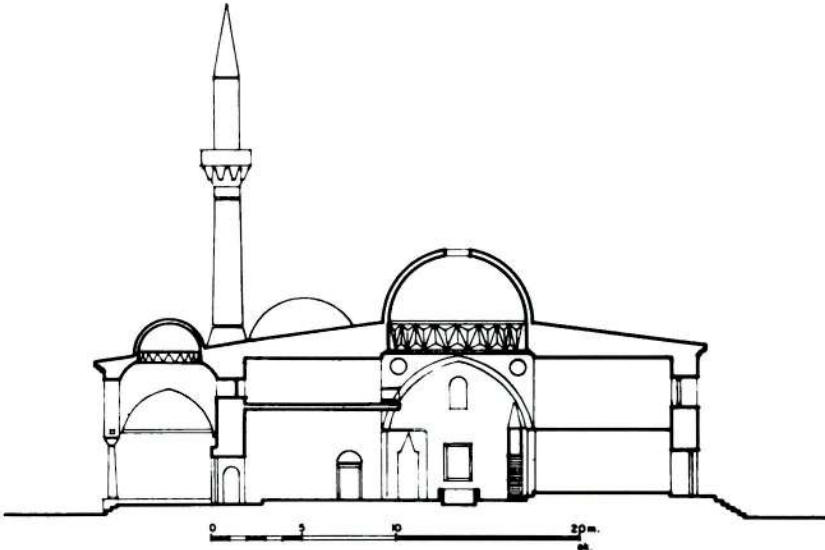
Res. 14 — Murad Hüdavendigâr Camii, Bursa.
Pl. 14 — Mosque of Murad Hüdavendigâr, Bursa.



Res. 15 — Yıldırım Medresesi, Bursa.
Pl. 15 — Medrese of Yıldırım, Bursa.



Res. 16 — XIV. Yüzyıldaki durumu gösterir tahminî Plân.
Pl. 16 — Imaginary Plan showing XIVth century building.



Res. 17 — XIV. Yüzyıldaki durumu gösterir tahminî Kesit.
Pl. 17 — Imaginary section showing XIVth century building.

9). This *eyvan* is lower and narrower than the others. Furthermore, it is covered by a semi-circular, and not a pointed barrel-vault. This feature immediately brings to mind the following question : the Turks had cut the walls of the original structure at approximately 2.50 m. height and rebuilt the upper structure above this base. Could it be then that the vestibule was intact with its semi-circular barrel-vault and that they kept it as they found it but built the taller *eyvans* with pointed barrel-vaults in accordance with their architectural tradition? In my opinion, the low narrow vestibule cannot have remained from the original structure. Because the original building, as Gurlitt points out⁹, was probably a church since it is oriented on the east-west axis. And the vaulted vestibule in question is on the east where the apse would have been. It is hard to imagine a church whose focal point is designed as a secondary spatial element. Therefore, it stands to reason that the eastern arm of the original structure was similar to the other three arms, as Gurlitt surmised. The Ottomans rearranged this space to suit their purposes, converting it into a vestibule which served the prayer area as well as the convent rooms. The exterior walls of the convent rooms and those adjacent to the prayer area probably were built on foundations dating back to the original structure. But their inner walls have fireplaces at their center whose tile inlaid plaster of Paris decorations (pl. 12) belong to the XIVth century. The walls facing the portico were also built in the XIVth century : a fact made evident by the location of the stairs that run up to the base of the minaret inside the length of the southern section of the portico wall.

A second question pertaining to the vestibule is the area above it. Since the cornice of the mosque retains the same height throughout the exterior of the building what happens above the low entrance *eyvan*? At present this area is closed to the exterior and the interior (pls. 9 and 13) and has no visible means of being reached. On the other hand, the crack in the plaster above the main door outlining a small, arched window indicates that this space, which must have a ceiling height of 2.60 m., was originally in use. A good possibility is that it was the private pew of the Sultan, similar to those in the Green Mosque or the Mosque of Hüdavendigâr in Bursa, and that it was reached

⁹ Gurlitt, *op. cit.* p. 4

by a wooden staircase from the central hall as in the Mosque of Yıldırım in Bursa.

A further feature that requires speculation is the matter of the side wall of the portico. Shown as much thinner than the walls of the mosque itself in the Gurlitt plan (pl. 3) these walls are, in reality, as thick as those of the mosque and exhibit the same dual masonry technique. This particularity leads one to think that the original structure may have been an axial building rather than one that was centrally planned. However, the presence of a long vertical crack in the wall where the mosque and the portico meet (pl. 7) suggests that the portico walls do not date to the original structure but were added to the building in the XIVth century, following the masonry technique of the original structure below, and the alternating stone and brick pattern above that.

3. It can be readily observed that the building was restored after the XIVth century during which a number of changes and additions were made. Although the side walls of the portico date from the XIVth century, the column which still stands erect indicates that the portico was subsequently altered because this column does not directly rest on the floor of the portico but sits on a high base. The bases that belong to the other three columns also remain in place (pl. 13). These moulded bases are not only alien to the XIVth century Ottoman architecture but the arch springs and the tops of the capitals of the raised columns do not fall on the same horizontal plane. That the portico was not built in the XIVth century but is a later addition cannot be considered; its side walls are in the character of the XIVth century. The columns and their capitals are of Byzantine origin and their existence today is proof enough of their employment in the XIVth century building. It is true that mosques without a portico, such as the Ulucami in Bursa, were built during the early years of Ottoman architecture. But the five-bay portico is an integral part¹⁰ of the "cross-axial" (çapraz-mihverli) mosque¹¹ into which type the

¹⁰ The Green Mosque in Bursa is the only exception. However, arch springs found on the entrance wall indicate that a five-bay portico was planned but was not built when, upon the death of Mehmed I, the construction was discontinued.

¹¹ For this term see: Aptullah Kuran, *İlk Devir Osmanlı Mimarisinde Cami*, Ankara, 1964

Mosque of Yıldırım falls. For this reason, considering the examples of the period, it can be surmised that the original portico of the Mosque of Yıldırım was a five-bay structure whose columns sat directly on the floor, in which case the tops of the capitals and the arch springs would be at the same level. The arches were secured by iron or timber tie beams in both directions, the central bay was surmounted by a dome, which rose above the roof, and the other four bays, by either shallow domes or flat-topped cross-vaults.

The indication as to the shape of the second portico, the character of whose details suggests that it was built in the Baroque period, is supplied by the column bases. Why were the columns raised? The probable reason for this could be that the roof structure of the second portico was of timber. The columns were raised on top of the high bases; the side walls were cut obliquely so that their outer elevation coincided with the top of the columns (that the portico walls were cut later is evident from the crude and ill-shaped manner in which the porcupine cornice is built on the inclined plane and the irregular manner in which the horizontal brick courses were terminated at the top section of the wall (pl. 13)); the columns were tied with timber beams; a pitched roof which followed the slope of the side walls under their mouldings was placed on top of this structure and the flat ceiling was decorated in accordance with the style of the period. The window openings of the convent rooms that overlook the portico as well as the small window above the main door—which remained inside the timber roof—were probably blocked off during this restoration. And again, in all probability, the effacement of the upstairs pew, the removal of the stairs leading up to it, the narrowing of the southern and the blocking off of the northern convent room doors and the opening of a new door onto the portico for the latter room were made in the same XVIIIth century restoration.

The stone minaret and the courtyard walls also date from the Baroque period because the cross-axial type of mosque did not have a courtyard; and Ottoman minarets were built of brick in the XIVth century. Gurlitt contends that the central dome was built in the XVIIIth century¹². We also think that the existing dome is not the original one and that even if it had not been totally rebuilt in the XVIIIth century, it was at least subjected to an alteration.

¹² Gurlitt, *op. cit.* p. 4.

The Ottomans captured Edirne (Hadrianopolis) in 1361¹³. The date of erection—or of restitution—of the Mosque of Yıldırım is not definitely known but is generally accepted to be 1397 (799 H.) or 1400 (802 H.)¹⁴ Since the Mosque of Yıldırım is the first known mosque built by the Ottomans in Edirne, did the city have no mosque for 35 - 40 years after its conquest? We know that the Ottoman Turks promptly converted a church into a mosque and put up religious edifices soon after they conquered a town. Why did Murad I (the Hüdavendigâr) who, upon taking Assos (Behramkale), a minor town compared with Edirne, order a mosque built there¹⁵, and not have one erected in Edirne? Despite the fact that we have no concrete evidence to prove this contention, we shall answer both questions in the negative : Edirne did not go without a mosque for 35 or 40 years after its conquest by the Turks and the mosque attributed to Beyazîd I (the Yıldırım) was built during the reign of Murad I (1360-1389).

The elements, aside from the factor of time indicated above, that led us to the preceding hypothesis are as follows :

1. There is a distinct resemblance between the masonry technique of the upper walls of the Mosque of Yıldırım in Edirne and the walls of the mosque of Hüdavendigâr in Bursa (1366-1385). In the Bursa mosque the stone courses are approximately 50 cm. high and the brick courses are 20 cm. high, with no bricks vertically placed between the stones—a feature that gives a strong sense of horizontality to the wall surface (pl. 14). In the Edirne mosque, the upper section of the walls are also of alternating stone and brick masonry, 60 cm. and 30 cm. high respectively, and there are no vertically placed bricks between the stones (pl. 8). On the other hand, if we are to consider the Medrese of Yıldırım in Bursa (1399) for instance (both mosques

¹³ Halil İnalçık, "Edirne'nin Fethi Tarihi" *Edirne Fethinin Altyüzüncü Yıldönümü Kitabı* (in the press).

¹⁴ Aslanapa, *op cit.* p. 2; Rıfki Melül Meriç, "Edirne'nin Tarihi ve Mimari Eserleri Hakkında" *Türk San'atı Tarihi Araştırma ve İncelemeleri I*. İstanbul, 1963. p. 445; Eyice does not give a date but states that it was probably built by Beyazîd I (1389 - 1403) during the latter part of the XIV th century. Eyice, *Zâviyeler ve Zâviyeli-Camiler*. p. 35.

¹⁵ The Mosque of Hüdavendigâr at Behramkale, like the Mosque of Yıldırım in Edirne, was built on the ruins of a church. It comprises an interior covered by an 11 m. dome, which was very large for its age, and a three-bay portico. Located in a high, wind-blown place, no minaret was provided.

built in Bursa by Beyazıd I, the Mosque of Yıldırım (1390-1395) and the Ulucami (1396-1399) are built of brickless stone, we observe a decrease in the ratio of height between the stone and the brick courses—approximately 25 cm.—and that there are vertically placed bricks between the stone pieces (pl. 15). The same masonry technique and proportioning are found in the other buildings of the Beyazıd I period.

The Mosque of Yıldırım, as has already been pointed out, falls into the cross-axial mosque type. The backbone of the cross-axial system is a central hall that has a pool at its center and is surmounted by an open-topped dome, suggesting an enclosed courtyard, with four architectural elements relating to the central hall placed at the ends of the longitudinal and transverse axes which intersect at the central hall. In the Mosque of Yıldırım at Edirne *foureyvans* open onto the central space. One of these is the vestibule, a second is the main prayer area holding the *mihrab* and the *minber* and the other two are the auxiliary *eyvans*. If we are to disregard the peculiarity of the non-axial *mihrab* with respect to the entrance *eyvan*, the reasons for which have been explained previously, the plan arrangement of the Mosque of Yıldırım is no different from the plan arrangement of the Mosque of Hüdavendigâr or the Mosque of Yıldırım in Bursa. However, there is a very distinct difference in terms of the organization of inner space and the exterior massing between the Mosque of Hüdavendigâr and the Mosque of Yıldırım in Bursa. In the latter mosque the four focal points at the ends of the two axes, as well as the central hall, are expressed on the exterior by domes, whereas in the former mosque the central hall is domed and the *eyvans* are covered by barrel-vaults. The amalgamation of the domed-square unit, which is the basic architectural element of Ottoman-Turkish architecture¹⁶, and the cross-axial system takes place for the first time in the Mosque of Yıldırım in Bursa¹⁷. Since the construction of the Bursa Yıldırım Mosque began soon after Beyazıd I's ascension to the throne, and since after this mosque all cross-axial mosques were built with domed *eyvans* and since the *eyvans* of the Mosque of Yıldırım in Edirne are vaulted then it must have been built before 1390. In view of the close resemblance between the Edirne mosque and the Mosque of Hüdavendigâr in

¹⁶ Kuran, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 88

Bursa, it can be suggested that the Mosque of Yıldırım was built not in the later years of Beyazıd I but in the early years of Murad I's reign. The interior of the "Yıldırım" Mosque in Edirne might have originally consisted of a stone or marble paved central hall with a pool at the center and covered by an open-topped dome, the low vestibule and three *eyvans* elevated by a step or two from the central hall. The *eyvan* in which the *mihrab* is located was the prayer area (pl. 16). The *eyvans* must have been later—probably in the XVIIIth century restoration—lowered to the level of the central hall to enlarge the prayer area, and as was done in many cross-axial mosques¹⁸, the pool was removed and the oculus of the dome was blocked. For this reason, the interior of the mosque in its present state gives the impression of an unbalanced and awkward space in which the *mihrab* is pushed to one corner and the entrance is from the wrong side. In reality, however, despite the fact that it was not an original building, the Mosque of "Yıldırım" is a perfect example that shows the architectural concept and practice of the early Ottoman period.

¹⁸ e.g. Mosque of Orhan, Mosque of Yıldırım in Bursa; Mosque of Murad II in Edirne; Mosque of İshak Paşa in İnegöl.