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Specific features of the compositional construction of historical mosques of Algeria as the basis for their preservation and restoration in the original form

Specyfika budowy kompozycyjnej historycznych meczetów Algierii jako podstawa ich ochrony i restauracji w oryginalnej formie

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Słowa kluczowe: meczety Maghrebu, Algeria, cechy stylowe, kompozycja

Introduction

Mosques on the territory of Algeria differ from the mosques of other Islamic countries by the specificity of their compositional structure¹. Alternatively to, for example, the Ottoman Islamic architectural school, in which the composition of mosques inherited from Byzantine traditions, and therefore it is a domed building with the dominant central dome; or from the Persian architectural school with a definite composition of iwan; in the Maghreb school, the composition of the mosque is traditionally built on the opposition the horizontal building of the mosque itself, often without a dome, as in the Cordoba mosque, and the vertical minaret of a simple geometric shape². The Kharijites mosques were of the same type. Similar compositions of mosques are widespread throughout the Maghreb, mostly in Morocco, in the west and north-west of Algeria and the territories adjacent to Morocco. The emergence of the composition with the identification of the dome or domes is associated with the period of Ottoman rule in Algeria, it is not an autochthonous type of mosques but it was borrowed from Turkey.

There is a close relationship between the volumetric-spatial composition of the Maghreb type mosques and the mosques of the Cordoba Caliphate, due to the simultaneous dominance of dynasties of the Almoravids and especially the Almohads and in North Africa (the Maghreb countries) and the Perinea Peninsula (the so-called Al-Andalus)³. It was this simultaneous domination of the dynasties in both Andalusia and the Maghreb that ensured the symbiosis of the Maghreb and Andalusian (united Arab-Maghreb) traditions⁴.

Certain conclusions can be obtained by comparing the compositions of all three countries of the Maghreb – Morocco (Western Maghreb), Algeria (Central Maghreb) and Tunisia (Eastern Maghreb). There is a higher similarity between the compositions of the mosques of Morocco and Algeria than Algeria and Tunisia, due to the commonality of the ruling dynasties and the direct impacts of Al-Andalus architecture, while for Tunisia it was not significant⁵.

Main part

It was analysed the volumetric and spatial compositions of 10 main mosques of Morocco, 29 most famous

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mosques of Algeria and 10 mosques of Tunisia. Remarkably, the largest number of historical mosques and various structures of mosques can be found in Algeria, the largest Maghreb country.

In particular, one can single out the traditional compositional techniques of the mosques of the Maghreb type with a square minaret, several prismatic tiers, reducing to the top, and specific ceramic decor, the insertions in the walls of minarets.

In Morocco, there are no such mosque compositions that can be found in Algeria, although we should note a certain similarity between domeless and minaretless mosques of the fortress type in Tinmel (1154-1156) in Morocco and El Beida in Mascara (sixteenth century) in Algeria.

Despite the fact that the Ottomans dominance in Algeria was noticeable from the point of view of introducing the Ottoman types of domed mosques, their impact was somewhat different than in Tunisia, where the domed mosques had numerous modifications (Sidi Mahrez Mosque, also known as Mohamed Bey El Mouradi Mosque in Tunis, Tunisia (1683), El Gorabaa in the city of Djerba (the 15th century).

In Algeria, these are El Kawthar Mosque in Blida (1531), the Sidi Khaled Mosque in Biskra (1100) (a combination of the type of domed mosque and the Maghreb type minaret), Sidi Ali Temasini in the city of Touggourt (1790), the Sidi Ali Ben Msaoud Mosque in El Oued (1600).

Besides, in the mosques of Tunisia, there is a more prominent impact of the early Arab architecture of the Umayyads, that is noticeable in the significant part of the courtyard and the notable role of order architecture of Roman time⁶. The type of domed mosque is represented by such mosques of Algeria: the Salah Bey Mosque in Annaba (1792), the Hassan Pasha Mosque in the city of Oran (1796), the Ali Bitchin Mosque in the city of Algiers (1622). As already noted, in the mosques of Algeria, the Maghreb type of minaret and the domed mosque can be combined (the Great Mosque of Mascara, the sixteenth century; the Djama'a al-Djedid Mosque (the so-called Mosque of the Fisheries) in Algiers (1660). One can trace the evolution of the volumetric-spatial composition of authentic mosques of Algeria on the example of the city of Tlemcen, where the development of the volumetric-spatial composition can be represented as follows:

1) The mosques of the period of the reign of the Almoravids.

The composition of the **Great Mosque or Djama'a al-Kebir** in the city of Tlemcen is a combination of the horizontal volume and the vertical dominant of the unplastered minaret of the Maghreb type; the cuboid angular volume crowned with a small hexagonal dome, which does not play the role of dominant. Each tier of the mosque is crowned with a double sloping roof covered with tiling – similar to the Great Mosque of Cordoba. The contrast to the emphatic closed fortress-like blind exterior facades is the open spacious inner



Fig. 1. The inner courtyard of the El Mechouar Mosque; photo by K. Rezga 2018.

courtyard with marble fountains and galleries with a combination of various types of arches – the central multifoil one and others of the horseshoe-shaped Maghreb type. The planes of the walls of the galleries of the courtyard are completed with modified cornices and dissected by flat scarps and corbels.

The **El Mechouar Mosque** in Tlemcen also combines the horizontal volume of the mosque and the vertical space of the Maghreb type minaret. However, the horizontal volume of the mosque is decided differently: the ochre-red unplastered walls, matching the color of the minaret's masonry, with the number of corbel arches, testifying to the echo of ancient Roman traditions. The mosque has a luxurious internal courtyard with the relics of the Al-Andalus traditions (fig. 1).

2) The mosques of the period of the reign of the Abd al-Wadids (the Zayyanid dynasty, Banu Zian)

The third mosque in the chronology of building is **the Sidi Brahim Mosque** in the city of Tlemcen is more similar to Djama'a al-Kebir in a combination of white plastered volumes and an unplastered ochre minaret of the Maghreb type. A courtyard solution is simi-



Fig. 2. The Sidi Belhassen Mosque; photo by K. Rezga 2018.

lar to the Djama'a al-Kebir and El Mechouar Mosque, however, unlike the Djama'a al-Kebir mosque, the surrounding galleries are open, as in El Mechouar Mosque, with arches of the Maghreb type on thin columns. The white plastered planes of the walls of the galleries are divided by pilasters and corbels and completed with a modified cornice, as in the El Mechouar Mosque.

The Sidi Bel Hassen Mosque in the city of Tlemcen also belongs to the period of the Abd al-Wadids' reign, where the horizontal volume of the mosque itself is combined with a vertical prismatic minaret (fig. 2). At the same time, there are noticeable differences from the compositions of the Maghreb type mosques of the earlier period: the external facades are more decorated, large and small windows appear in them; an accented entrance portal; a richly ornamented band of a polychrome frieze; the minaret is low; its upper tower tier becomes decorated.

The specific volumetric-spatial composition of the Maghreb type mosques is reproduced in Sidi El Benna, however, in a more simplified way: the minaret is also two-tiered, with an extensive prismatic tier and smaller and narrow upper one but its proportions are not so precise; the minaret is lower and simpler in decoration, comparing to the Tlemcen mosques of the earlier period. The contrast of a rather simple exterior is the solution of the courtyard with open galleries with lancet horseshoe-shaped arches on thin columns with solid white decor on the walls.

3) The mosques of the period of the reign the Marinid dynasty (the Merinids) Although **the Mansourah Mosque** near the city of Tlemcen is a characteristic example of the Maghreb type mosques, it differs from the previous ones in its high resemblance to

the fortress architecture, because it was a part of the castle of the same name built for the siege of Tlemcen (fig. 3).

Its composition is also built on the contrast of horizontal volumes and vertical dominant – the minaret, which leads to the main staircase. As the mosque and the castle are in a half-ruined state, it is difficult to restore the original appearance of the mosque and complete the reconstruction.

The El-Eubbad Mosque (Sidi Bou Médiène Mosque) is part of an extensive government-religious city center with the largest mosque, mausoleum, madrasah, palace, and other buildings located quite close to each other. The stereotype of the Great Mosque of Cordoba preserved – a combination of naves with many double sloping roofs covered with tiling, an open courtyard and a minaret tower. The volumetric-spatial composition combines white plastered parts with a tiled roof and the unplastered ochre dominant of the minaret. Like in Djama'a al-Kebir, the exterior plastered white walls are blind; however, they have an additional decorated entrance portal in the form of a horseshoe-shaped Maghreb arch, with brickwork and composite multi-tiered cornices. The decorated main entrance is distinctly marked. The defensive exterior contradicts with an open area of the courtyard with a pond encircled by galleries with horseshoe-shaped arches. The galleries are open; the arches are supported by immense pillars; walls are divided in several planes.

The Ouled El Imam Mosque in the city of Tlemcen belongs to the period of Marinids reign; it was built in a narrow street network, close to the surrounding buildings, therefore, the mosque and minaret are perceived from an angle (fig. 4). In the volumet-

ric and spatial composition of the mosque, the white plastered surfaces of the external walls of the mosque combine with the unplastered prismatic minaret of the Maghreb type, built of red brick. The minaret is not as high as in the period of the Almoravid dynasty or the minaret of Mansourah; it is low decorated, however, it is perceived as monumental architectural object due to the masonry technique and the proportions of tiers; it can be indicated that the impression is made by the proportionally calculated, pure, low decorated form.

A similar type of volumetric-spatial composition is in **the Sidi El Haloui Mosque** with a combination of plastered external walls of the domeless mosque with a tiled roof and an open courtyard with a gallery of Maghreb arches and the unplastered prismatic minaret made of brick. The Sidi El Haloui minaret is more decorated than the Ouled El Imam minaret; however, the specific brickwork contributes much to its aesthetics. In the volumetric and spatial composition, a more decorative solution of the exterior walls was applied, that differs the Tlemcen mosques of the period of the reign of the Abd al-Wadids and Marinids, namely, avoiding the simple fortress monumentality of the day of the Almoravids and Almohads to the greater decorativeness; the plastered walls of the mosque facades in combination with unplastered lower minarets; dissection of the surfaces of the facades by the protruding portals of the entrances with the Maghreb arches, revealing brickwork and cornices.

Conclusion

The specificity of the volumetric-spatial composition of the Maghreb type mosque is that the presence of a dome is uncharacteristic for it, its role is smaller than in the mosques of the Ottoman Islamic school, but the



Fig. 3. The decorative carvings of the facade of the minaret of Mansourah; photo by K. Rezga 2013.



Fig. 4. The mosque of Ouled El Imam; photo by K. Rezga 2018.

principle of contrasting the horizontal volume of the mosque with the vertical of the minaret, consisting of a few stacked prisms, reducing up.

The volumetric-spatial composition of the mosques of the Maghreb type is more simplistic, and it is similar to historical fortresses. The fact that the minaret was a strategic object evidenced by the fact that the mosques of early periods were often part of fortresses and stood on a high hill (it also applies to the Kharijites mosques).

Thus, unlike the Ottoman and Persian mosques that were not used for strategic purposes, the Maghreb mosques simultaneously performed a defensive function, and they can be considered as certain analogues of the West European defence-type fortified churches with emphasized massive walls and loopholes, where-

in the lower tier was a church, and at the top there were machicolations for defence. During the years of French colonization, many historical mosques were destroyed or redesigned for other functions (administrative or military buildings, Christian churches). One of the most famous examples is the Ketchaoua Mosque, which was turned into the Catholic Church of St. Philip and only recently it has returned to the original function of the mosque. Misapprehension of the specific compositional peculiarities of authentic Algerian mosques in different regions leads to the spread of features, unusual for the Maghreb architecture, in new buildings and presents particular difficulties in the restoration of historical mosques, some of which are in the emergency state.

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¹ T.S. Al-Hasani Salim, *1001 Inventions. Immortal heritage of Muslim civilization*, 2016, transl. A. Bezlepkin, Moscow 2016; R. Bourouiba, *L'art religieux mu-sulman en Algérie*, Alger 1981, p. 37, 47, 51, 89, 99, 102, 104, 113, 114, 124, 125, 126, 129, 171, 172, 176, 187, 201, 212, 250, 283, 287, 293, 313, 319; idem, *Apports de l'Algérie al'architecture religieuse Arabo-islamique. Offi ce des publications universitaires*, Alger 1986; idem, *Abd Al Mu'min fl ambe-au des Almohades*, Alger 1982, p. 86, 100, 102–106.

² Ibidem.

³ R. Bourouiba, *Abd Al Mu'min fl ambe-au des Almohades*, passim.

⁴ K. Rezga, *Multiculturalism in the Islamic architecture school of Algeria: national identity and external influences*, „Urban planning and territorial planning: Scientific and Technical Collection” Kyiv 2018, no 67, p. 228–234.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Ibidem.

Abstract

The article were analyzed the specific features of the spatial composition of authentic mosques of the Maghreb countries. It was determined that the traditional compositional scheme of the Maghreb mosque was built on a combination of the horizontal building of the mosque, often domeless one, and a vertical minaret of simple geometric shape. It was studied that the Khariji mosques were built in the same type. The appearance of the composition with a dome or domes is associated with the period of the Ottoman rule in Algeria since this type of mosque composition is borrowed from Turkey.

Streszczenie

W artykule zostały przeanalizowane cechy kompozycyjne oryginalnych meczetów państw Maghrebu. Stwierdzono, że u podstaw tradycyjnej kompozycji meczetów Maghrebu leży kombinacja horyzontalnego budynku meczetu, często bez kopuły, z wertykalnym minaretem o prostym, geometrycznym kształcie. Ustalono, że ten sam typ reprezentują meczety Kharijotów. Zjawisko kompozycji meczetu z kopułą lub z kilkoma kopułami związane jest z okresem osmańskim w Algerii – ten typ meczetu został tutaj przyniesiony z Turcji.