

construction of the foundation proceeded.

On the foundations, two stone walls were built. Under the outer wall, which was usually laid by the m'allem, an old silver coin or a green olive branch was laid while intoning "In the name of Allah". The white and green colours were considered heavenly colours. White is a good omen denoting light, while green is the lucky colour which brings prosperity.

After placating the malevolent spirits and assuring the blessing of God, the work proceeded. The outer wall, which was built out of regular stone courses was carefully constructed by the ma'llem. The inner wall, built out of rubble stones (nari) with irregular courses, was built by the peasant or the unskilled labourers brought by the m'allem. The space between the two walls was filled with rubble stone and lime water. The four corner pillars (rukkab) which were to carry and withstand the truss of the cross-vault, were constructed simultaneously with the walls. The four walls were built with a pointed arch end. Windows and doors were carefully constructed by the m'allem.

The cross-vaulted roof (el-aqd) which covered the whole house (Fig. 4.53) was the most difficult part in the construction and hence was carefully and closely supervised by the m'allem. When building the roof, most members of the immediate and extended family as well as other villagers, gave a helping hand while singing joyfully. Men and young boys helped in passing water, mortar, and stone to those on the roof.

If the cross-vault was small in size (3 x 3 m), the formwork was made out of a pile of earth on which the light stones (hadjar nari) were stacked. Earth was removed once the vault settled and dried (Wilson, 1906: 58). However, in most cases, the size of the cross-vault was about six by seven meters, and hence a wooden formwork, which took the form of the cross-vault, was made. To bring prosperity to the inhabitants of the new house, an olive branch was nailed to this wooden frame. Over the frame, dry brush (sheeh), grass and mud were placed to shape the curves of the cross-vault.