

## OTTOMAN AND POST-OTTOMAN BUILDING HERITAGE IN KOSOVO

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**Abstract:** Apart from other inheritance building structures, which in one or another form are presented as contemporary objects or their constituents, characteristic building objects in Kosovo also represent those with elements inherited from the Ottoman culture. This is especially true when it comes to those constructions within the urban neighborhoods that are still characterized by narrow streets and old houses, and where the Asian character can be clearly seen in the presence of a considerable number of Islamic religious sites (Mosque, *Tyrbe*, *Taçe* or *Medrese*), some of which mark the presence since the XV century. Other architectural objects built during the Ottoman period in Kosovo are also *hamams*, burial grounds, bridges, mills, water wells or clock towers. Residential homes and other objects characteristic with the elements inherited from the Ottoman ruling period can be still easily observed also within the urban centers of the Kosovo region. They are initially distinguished by the construction material in the form of the clay or adobe, then additionally in relation to the style of construction form, or in relation to the other elements such as the doors, windows and gates of the surrounding walls which can be also easily noticed. Such details figure mostly in residential units with a combined structure (stone, wood, mud, adobe), and which are mostly characterized by the protruding balcony or the home porch of the actual residences. On the other hand, rural settlements, similarly in all parts of Kosovo, are considered to have had a more stability and/or were more prone resistant in relation to the changes during the Ottoman rule. Until the twentieth century (when the housing foundation was almost completely renewed), the building form was manifested mainly in the form of so-called tower buildings or related variants. Otherwise, in addition to the very small footprints of constructions that mark the presence of Austro-Hungarian architecture (mainly during the beginning of the twentieth century), it can be distinguished also the post-war-one construction heritage, namely when the region was governed by the so-called kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Such elements are once again seen mostly in residential facilities within the urban towns of the region. These facilities are used (or rather used until before the last war in Kosovo) mainly to meet collective commercial needs, as residential houses / facilities, or administrative units of the former communist system.

**Keywords:** Building constructions, settlements, wood, stone.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Kosovo architecture is manifested in various forms and functions depending on the time and space when they came into manifestation. Building constructions of today are characterized from the shelter homes to the blocks of flats accommodating hundreds of people. There was adaptation throughout the history as a result of a large number of factors, namely: available building materials, weather and land conditions, prices, usage specifications, aesthetic reasoning and / or foreign transmitted influences. Building that are compatible with the elements or fragments inherited from the Ottoman and post-Ottoman era can be easily observed within the urban centers of the region even today. They are initially characterized by building materials, and then also to the particular style or construction form.

### 2. STONE BUILDINGS

In regard to the building works that are perceived as native in Kosovo, first of all we choose to distinguish the stone-based constructions. In this regard, to be able to better understand the character, social significance and the culture of the region's architecture, the so-called 'tower' residential houses', should present the best example to proceed with this<sup>48</sup>.

Most likely to resist Ottoman influence, sometime around the 17th century, the local tower-house, appear to have gained new elements in its construction, shifting maybe slightly its cultural character. The reason for protection is now the one that takes the central role or dominates more than ever this type of residence. What comes as essential now, it is the thickness of the walls and the shape of the small and deep windows to avoid as much as possible the exposure as the target for the enemies. In fact, those are key features that were the most important over the past three

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<sup>48</sup> Doli, F. Arkitektura Vernakulare në Kosovë. Public University of Pristina, (2009).

hundred years to the tower buildings in Kosovo. Residential gates and gates of perimeter walls are also considered new elements that were introduced during this period.

The tower-houses were usually built on two or three floors<sup>49</sup>. If we stop and make a rough analysis of the shape and construction, what usually we immediately notice, is the fact that most often they represent a whole volume of stones crowned with a four-page wooden pyramid roof. The lower part of the tower creates an impression of a strong prism, where it rests the lighter upper part often with rich architectural features. The other thing to notice immediately when you approach the tower-house, and which also gives the impression of a powerful fortification, are usually the small turrets scattered across its four sides (foundation to the roof). The entrance and the windows, protrusions and the corners of the construction, almost always are carved with perfect skill, art and technique<sup>50</sup>.

The tower design as a traditional stone residential houses, must have presented a natural inspiration and influence in relation to other constructions during the Ottoman era. Thus for example, the elements and the character of towers houses can be clearly distinguished when it comes to the constructions in the form of signaling, observation or a clock towers. Furthermore, it is also worth mentioning that, the actual form of tower construction during that period, corresponds closely with the constructions inherited from the medieval or Byzantine period. Constructions of this kind are particularly closely connected to the residential towers or guarding houses within or over the castle walls and religious buildings (such as the monasteries and churches). Otherwise, the elements of constructions, many of which coincide with those of the towers, abundantly can be found consecutively in the post Ottoman legacy era constructions, as in regard to the so-called '*Hane*' (type of the travelers-Inn or accommodation), 'Stone bridges' or '*Hamams*' (Ottoman-style public baths). It is worth mentioning the fact that even today, within the territory of Kosovo, we can see that the tower is imitated with many elements, as in relation to the construction architecture of many houses, villas or business venue buildings.

### 3. URBAN BUILDINGS

In addition to stone heritage objects, which in one form or another (as implied) are presented in the form of 'tower' or connected variants, other residential construction with a special character can be perceived those that came to being during the very period of the late Ottoman rule. Thus, apart from the Islamic character which can be easily discerned in the presence of a considerable number of religious buildings (such as Mosque, *Tyrbe*, *Taçe*, or *Medrese*), there are also the whole complexes of the so called bazaars, bridges, or clock towers, some of which mark presence since the XV century<sup>51</sup>.

Other objects that also reflect the very spirit of the Ottoman era, are these represented in the form of residences or the so-called urban houses. The urban houses in Kosovo, must also represent or testify the evolution of autochthonous architecture in parallel to the inter-regional building technique interactions and influences<sup>52</sup>. Otherwise, urban constructions are generally considered the ones that come to the fore before the introduction of new modern materials (19th century or after<sup>53</sup>), such as reinforced concrete or the clay brick. They represent mainly family houses build from the materials in the form of the mixture of the wood, stone and adobe-brick, thus benefiting certain architectural, constructive, functional and aesthetic features<sup>54</sup>. Mainly situated within urban neighborhoods that reflect the oriental legacy of the Ottoman era, these houses are built usually in one or two levels. On this occasion, we can distinguish the houses with wooden frames, combined structures and these with balconies or verandas.

#### *Wooden frame houses*

The wooden frame house is a typology of construction where wooden elements create the frame or skeleton for filling it with stones or adobe bricks. The basement walls are usually constructed of rugged stones and / or bricks, and then reinforced with horizontal wooden beams. The walls represent the retaining elements, and thus, they also serve as the foundation (all of this while the upper floor is constructed in a skeletal system of wood). The skeleton

<sup>49</sup> Drançolli, F. Kulla Shqiptare. Public University of Pristina, (2001).

<sup>50</sup> Such are: 'The Tower of Haxhi Zeka'; 'Tower of Junik'; 'Tower of Agajve të Rashkocit'; Tower of 'Demukajve të Deçanit'.

<sup>51</sup> Riza, E. (2009), Qyteti dhe banesa qytetare shqiptare shek. XV-XIX. Dita (2009).

<sup>52</sup> Doli, F. Shkolla kosovare dhe mjeshtrit popullor shqiptare. Zëri (1993).

<sup>53</sup> Drançolli, F. Kulla Shqiptare. Public University of Pristina, (2001).

<sup>54</sup> Drançolli, F. Destruction of Albanian Kulla. Public University of Pristina (2004).

frame is shaped by diagonal and horizontal stiffeners, thus providing lateral support to the building. The diagonals are located in the corner to support the pillars of the construction. These elements are mounted and tightened with nails. The walls are reinforced with beams set at intervals through the ceiling. The sloping roof structure is also constructed through rectangular wood profiles.

#### *Houses with balcony or veranda*

The house with a balcony is usually presented as a two-level structure and rectangular shape. The exterior walls (usually of the stone) are reinforced horizontally with the beams of wood. The upper floor is supported by the walls and by two or more wooden pillars. The pillar is shaped by the stone foundation, the body and the chapel of the wood. The balcony occupies the central part of the ground floor space, built entirely of wood elements. Alternatively, the house with veranda is generally characterized by an open or half-opened porch on the ground floor. The porch is constructed of assembled wooden elements. The construction technique is the same as that of a house with a balcony, however, the difference lies in the size and functional organization of the first floor.

#### **4. TRADITIONAL RURAL HOMES**

Old rural buildings in Kosovo are portrayed in the form of the residential buildings as a result of inherited art and local crafts<sup>55</sup>. Rural buildings are generally composed of two floors, the upper floor revealing the dynamism of the composition. Materials used in rural dwellings represent a combination of stone as the main building material, than also the wood, adobe or clay brick and/or modern block. In this paper we have elaborated on the typologies with components from wood, respectively: house with balcony, verandah and tower or fortified house (from what was discussed earlier). These houses incorporate wooden structural elements as well as small scale accessories inside the home complex, such as the barn.

#### **5. CONSTRUCTION LEGACY FROM THE ERA OF COMMUNISM**

Objects built within the frame of the last fifty years, namely when the region was administered by the Communist Regime after the Second World War, represent once more those constructions that are most commonly encountered in Kosovo's regional centers. Such constructions are mainly of concrete, with small or no decorations, and mainly constructed to fulfill the general necessities of the society. Most of them appear as residential houses, while the average height of collective facilities is mainly 5-6 floors.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

Building legacy in the region of Kosovo represents a wide range of influences, mainly since the medieval period. Thus, alongside the autochthonous element, the old local architecture reflects most diverse styles, especially those steaming during the period of Ottoman rule. It should not be ruled out that in this case, we are to deal with a region where geo-strategic interests are often misunderstood, and this must have directly affected a chronic architectural poverty which we find inherent today.

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