

Aiming Towards the Sky: The Vernacular ‘skyscrapers’ of the South-West Balkans

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Abstract

This paper brings together an understanding of common types of vernacular architecture in the geographic areas of today's Macedonia, Kosovo and Greece, by comparing the architectural design, built material, and forms. These lands were once part of the Ottoman Empire's Rumelia. The aim is to identify similarities in both urban and rural vernacular dwellings dated from the end of XVIII century onwards in the house's vertical distribution of the space. The study report was conducted in the areas dispersed over the furthest West of what was once Ottoman Rumelia. The paper concludes that there is a similarity in the aesthetic, constructive, spatial and typological forms of vernacular architecture, related generally to the geographical area, the topography, the local natural environment, ethnic characteristics and traditional understanding of construction.

Keywords: vernacular architecture in the Balkans, tower houses, Ottoman house, sofa, *chardak*

Introduction

The Balkan Peninsula is a mountainous geographic area with the Rhodope Mountains extending along the Greek-Bulgarian border and the Dinaric range that goes from the Adriatic coast all the way down to Albania. The region extends to North to the Julian Alps and the Carpathians¹. The Shara Mountain strip that continues down towards South connects with Bistra and Korab mountains and continues from Galichica towards Baba Mountain to end with the Verno (*Vicho*) Mountain in Greece. What these mountains have in common, besides holding peaks over 2000 meters high, is that they all, fall within the same longitude, (with 0.50 degrees' variation). These mountains are 'home' to some interesting vernacular examples that have similar or same architectural and spatial patterns. By analyzing the houses in their vertical developments as well as their plans, we see examples of vernacular skyscrapers that have developed in the Balkan areas named Rumelia by the Ottomans².

¹ See Encyclopedia Britannica; <https://www.britannica.com/place/Balkans>, (last accessed November 2018)

² Directly related to the Turkish word *Rumeli*, Rumelia means "the Land of the Romans" and is the former name used by the Ottoman to indicate their possessions in the Balkans. The territory of Rumelia was the European territory of the Ottoman Empire, covering the geographical areas of today's Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, some parts of today's Albania and Greece. The term derives from the word *Rum* that in the past was used to indicate the lands occupied by the Greeks and the Latins, linked to ancient Rome and later to the Byzantine that the Turkish tribes from Central Asia saw as a limit to the West. For further information, see: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rumelia>. Last accessed November 2018.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this paper is based on several key elements after defining the development of the Ottoman house. The geographic region that is host to these dwellings is presented in order to have a better outlook of the morphology of the terrain. An outlook on house types is presented defining the 'skyscraper' or tower houses and its two sub-groups that existed, and still do, in what once was Rumelia, part of the great Ottoman Empire. These houses can be both urban and rural which can be seen through the case studies. After pointing an existing specific example of a transitioning model of dwelling, the study moves on to confirming a division of the tower dwellings based on the building material and the distribution of the space that result in two types (A and B) of vernacular 'skyscrapers': a tower house built entirely with masonry known as *kula* house and a wide central wooden *chardak* tower house. An analysis of the B type of houses is presented determining its common denominators with an attempt to define an architectural vernacular style. The conclusions are derived from the case studies.

Development of the Ottoman House

The Ottoman urban development rising in the central areas of the Balkans, in the regions like Greece or Macedonia were implemented on the basis of the Ancient and Byzantine periods following the already set road arteries, that determine the minimum size required for the structures to intake the sun and air as well as their height. The protection against fire was complied with set conditions as cantilevered floors open to the street. Following these laws, similarities in urban neighborhoods and housing have come into being. However, this was not always the case with the villages, which sometimes, had dwellings dispersed over a wider area and not densely built. Still both town's and village's neighborhoods included extending roads, varying in width required by the lack of space, developing a full topography adapted settlements. The narrow streets of the neighborhoods created interesting perspectives with houses located on their sides.³

The Ottoman house developed its forms in different cultural areas, adapted itself to a variety of climatic and topographical situations, and even though many external factors contributed to its development, it was never anything other than an Ottoman house, presenting a synthesis of elements incorporating the lifestyle and aesthetics of the Turks. This is particularly well illustrated in the houses of the Balkan Peninsula, where there was not only a merging of elements, but also merging of different religions and cultures. The non-Muslim population native to this area made a contribution to the development of vernacular architecture in the region, particularly through the interaction of the artisans working in the region. This led to a form of vernacular where opposing elements stood side by side yet integrated in harmony with the Ottoman matrices.

After the Ottomans established their rule over the Balkans and the region of Rumelia, they maintained some of the building and housing elements that they found, but the superior housing concept that they developed later spread throughout Rumelia and came to be accepted everywhere⁴. The Balkan vernacular house has its roots deeply planted in the Ottoman house. An exception of this matrix were the houses that were inhabited mostly by the non-Muslim population. In some areas of the Empire, they managed to create their own

³ Akın, N. (2001). Balkanlarda Osmanlı dönemi konutları. Literatür. pp. 74

⁴ Ivkowska, V. (2018) Ottoman Vernacular Architecture in The Town of Kastoria (Kesriye), Greece, in *15th International Congress of Turkish Art. Proceedings*, edited by Michele Bernardini and Alessandro Taddei. T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Università di Napoli "l'Orientale", Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino, 2018: pp. 365-381.

architectural language that was developed on a very similar geographic topography and longitude.

Geographic spread of Tower Houses

This paper focuses on the architectural specific on the type of ‘skyscrapers’, built in stone, wood and adobe bricks and located in the mountainous regions of the South West Balkans. In the selected geographic region, they are spread along the same longitudinal strip and share common denominators in the vertical distribution of the space as well as the architectural expressions that are legible on the outside, the façade.

This type of house was widely developed in the Reka Region in Macedonia but similar or same examples can be found in the Epirus, the villages around and in the town of Kastoria in Greece, and the area around the town of Gjirokastrë in Albania (Fig.1). The region of Reka lies in the Western part of Macedonia and may be divided into several smaller regions: Gorna Reka, Dolna Reka, Golema Reka, Mala Reka, and Mijachija.⁵ Two structures in the village claim to present designs from the area: a generic regional house and a house that is claimed to represent the village of Galicnik. Galicnik is selected as a representative village even though, from the perspective of vernacular heritage, this area contains other perhaps more notable villages, such as Lazaropole, Gari, and Tresonche just because here we find examples of tower houses that we also find in Gjirokastrë in Albania. Even though the houses in this region may differ from village to village, they have some typical characteristics by which it is easy to determine their origin. This is a mountainous area, where some villages are covered with snow until early summer, and typical structures had to protect residents from a severe mountain climate. In terms of layout, houses from the Reka region, and from the mountain of Bistra where the village of Galicnik is located, were therefore generally articulated upward through multiple stories, with entrances to grade at each level.

The region of Western Macedonia is situated in north-western part of Greece, bordering the regions of Central Macedonia (east), Thessaly (south), Epirus (west), and bounded to the north at the international borders of Greece with the Republic of Macedonia (Bitola region) and Albania (Korçë County). Kastoria is situated at the western end of Macedonia in the far north of the country and is the third largest town in the area. It borders the regional units of Florina to the North, Kozani to the South-East, Grevena to the South and Ioannina to the South-West. The international border with the Albanian district of Korçë lies on the western edge of the regional unit. The main mountain ranges are Gramos and Voio in the west (both part of the Pindus range) and Verno (Vicho) in the northeast (Fig.1). The regional unit is mountainous with a pronounced continental climate, characterized by cold winters and hot summers.

Accounts concerning the site of Kastoria have survived from the early Christian and Byzantine period, providing us with a precise description of the settlement’s geomorphology. The first account comes from a historian of the period of Justinian, Procopius⁶, while the second comes from Anna Comnena’s work *Alexias*, which she dedicated to the exploits of her father.⁷ Judging from these accounts, the town was situated on a promontory on the western shore of Lake Orestiada, in a valley surrounded by mountains. Its town walls protected it on all sides – that is, not only on the narrow neck of land entering the peninsula, where the town lies. After the town fell to the Ottomans, the Turks settled in the fortress, and subsequently

⁵ Ivkowska, V. (2014). Re-inventing Vernacular Settlements for Tourists: Can the New Macedonian Village Represent True Vernacular Traditions?. *Journal of the International Society for the Study of Vernacular Settlements*, 3(2), 17-34.

⁶ Procopius of Caesarea (1913), *Peri ton tou Despotou Ioustinianou ktismaton* (Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia, edited by J. Haury, IV.3), Bonn: Teubner.

⁷ Moutsopoulos, N. (1990), *Kastoria*, Athens: Melissa.

Muslims lived side by side with Christians and Jews, creating a diverse ethnic and religious community.⁸

Gjirokaster is a city in the southern Albania, on a valley between the Gjerë Mountains and the Drino. Gjirokastra Prefecture has a favorable geographical position. It is situated in the center of southern Albania and passes through the two most important valleys of southern Albania, the valley of Upper Vjosa and the Valley of Drino River. Here, in these valleys exist the greatest part of Gjirokastra's Prefecture population and at the same time these are the main economic and industrial parts of the region with Gjirokaster as the biggest town in the region and its administrative center. Its old town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, described as "a rare example of a well-preserved Ottoman town, built by farmers of large estate".⁹

Berat and Gjirokastra are inscribed as rare examples of an architectural character typical of the Ottoman period. Located in the central Albania, Berat bears witness to the coexistence of various religious and cultural communities down the centuries. It features a castle, locally known as the Kala, most of which was built in the 13th century, although its origins date back to the 4th century BC. The citadel area numbers many Byzantine churches, mainly from the 13th century, as well as several mosques built in the Ottoman era which began in 1417. Gjirokastra, in the Drinos river valley in southern Albania, features a series of outstanding two-story houses which were developed in the 17th century. The town also retains a bazaar, an 18th-century mosque and two churches of the same period.¹⁰

According to the Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi, who visited the city in 1670, at that time there were 200 houses within the castle, 200 in the Christian eastern neighborhood of *Kuşuk Varosh* (meaning small neighborhood outside the castle), 150 houses in the *Büyük Varosh* (meaning big neighborhood outside the castle), and six additional neighborhoods, extending on eight hills around the castle. From the 16th century until the early 19th century Gjirokaster evolved from being a predominantly Christian city to one with a Muslim majority due to much of the urban population converting to Islam alongside an influx of Muslim converts from the surrounding countryside.¹¹

⁸ Ivkowska, V. (2018) Ottoman Vernacular Architecture in The Town Of Kastoria (Kesriye), Greece, in *15th International Congress of Turkish Art. Proceedings*, edited by Michele Bernardini and Alessandro Taddei. T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Università di Napoli "l'Orientale", Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino, 2018: pp. 365-381.

⁹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/569>

¹⁰ whc.unesco.org (accessed December 2018)

¹¹ Kahraman, A. S., (2011). *Evliya Çelebi Günümüz Türkçesiyle Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi: Gümülçine, Kavala, Selanik, Tırhala, Atina, Mora, Navarin, Girit Adası, Hanya, Kandiye, Elbasan, Ohri, Tekirdağı*, 8. Kitap 1. Cilt. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları.



Fig. 1. The Balkan Map after the War against Turkey in 1912—1913
(re-elaborated from www.promacedonia.org).

Typology

The impact of the physical environment is quite obvious in the whole Balkan area and especially in the region that is part of the research. Due to the uneven topography, village dwellings are usually scattered, with streets developing in a natural way and opening onto a single main road. A church is usually located on this road somewhere in the middle of the village. Because of a lack of infrastructure, old villages were usually supplied with drinking water from a common, central fountain (*çeşme*, *чешма*), fed by pipes from nearby springs¹². The spatial development of the Balkan village as well as the town has its roots in Ottoman concepts, including the institution of the *mahalle* (quartier). A *mahalle* constituted a single, physically compact social unity, a compartment of a village or city; and the division of a town into *mahalles* generally followed the ethnic origin or religion of its inhabitants. As a functional center, each *mahalle* was defined by social character rather than spatial order¹³. Typically, the physical shape of a village/town consisted of an organic accumulation of *mahalles*. The appearance of individual houses was thus influenced by both the formation of *mahalles*, the organic disposition of streets, and the morphology of the terrain.¹⁴

Various types of dwellings have been identified in the Balkan regions, and the focus of this article is towards the South-West region of the peninsula. These house types were distinguished by their structural characteristics, construction materials as well as their geographic environment¹⁵. The dwellings are divided as urban and rural, even though, in this article we will see that similar to same dwellings can be found in both villages and towns.

¹² Ivkowska, V. (2016) Reinventing Vernacular Traditions to Reveal National Identity: A Case Study of the "Macedonian Village" in *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, pp. 73

¹³ Doğan, K. (2010) Istanbul: An Urban History, Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, pp.242.

¹⁴ Ivkowska, V. (2016) Reinventing Vernacular Traditions to Reveal National Identity: A Case Study of the "Macedonian Village" in *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*.

¹⁵ Cvijić, J. (1922) Balkan peninsula and southslavica countries. *Basics of Anthropogeography* (1922).

Due to the climate, this typology that can be defined as Macedonian house needs to provide both a winter dwelling, with a massive ground floor constructed of stone, and a summer dwelling on the upper floors, made of lighter wooden construction. The entire site of a fully developed house might consist of a *poton*, which combined a cellar, woodshed and a stable; a courtyard enclosing the summer kitchen; a ground floor or mezzanine with a winter kitchen and living room; and an upper floor where summer life (including sleeping rooms) was organized around the *chardak*¹⁶. This last space was generally an upper porch that was open on at least one side, and that sometimes extended into a *tronj*, or open terrace.¹⁷ Due to the climate conditions, the Macedonian house needed to provide both a winter dwelling, with a massive ground floor constructed of stone, and a summer dwelling on the upper floors, made of lighter wooden construction. The entire site of a fully developed house might consist of a *poton*, which combined a cellar, woodshed and stable; a courtyard enclosing the summer kitchen; a ground floor or mezzanine with a winter kitchen and living room; and an upper floor where summer life (including sleeping rooms) was organized around the *chardak*.¹⁸

The buildings found in the areas of Macedonia and parts of Serbia, Kosovo and Greece share some similarities, generally due to the common characteristics of the local environment, building traditions and cultural influences. Three general types of houses based on their height, story, can be identified in these regions:

- (1) Ground-floor house which is a single-story dwelling, constructed in stone or timber-framed system with an earth infill;
- (2) Tower house, a structure with three or four stories and a ground-floor area, usually built of stone in mountainous areas. This is a very compact model with three or even four floors without distributive elements and loggias open to the outside, with only the last floor overhanging and it is widely windowed or has four bow-windows almost like the corner towers of the medieval castles. It can be found in areas only in the countryside as a manor house (for example in the Trabzon area) and is present in urban context only in Arbanasi in Bulgaria in Epirus, some of the Greek Islands, the Mani peninsula and in Albania.
- (3) *Chardak* house, that can have two or three stories and a hall or balcony (*čardak*, *chardak*)¹⁹ at the highest, top floor; these structures are usually built in a combination of stone and timber-framing. The Macedonian urban house with its emphasized works, the stone basement and the double row of windows on the upper floor, is more similar to the models of the Anatolian houses in the North and the houses in the Aegean Sea area, than to those of Istanbul. But it is characterized by the emphasized symmetry of the body of the building, by the beautiful workmanship of the stone and by the curvilinear or ornate fittings of the eaves on the façade walls.²⁰

These ways of segregating the vernacular structures related to their vertical distribution of the space and not related to the distribution of the space of the plan on each floor confirms that the approaches and methods, when it comes to building and constructing these dwellings, overlap in these areas. This can be a result of the shared housing traditions and the application

¹⁶ Grabrijan, D. (1986) Macedonian House or Its Transition from Old Oriental to Modern European House, Skopje: Mislja, pp. 37–62.

¹⁷ Ivkowska, V. (2016) Reinventing Vernacular Traditions to Reveal National Identity: A Case Study of the “Macedonian Village” in *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, pp. 73

¹⁸ Grabrijan, D. (1986) Macedonian House or Its Transition from Old Oriental to Modern European House, Skopje: Mislja, pp. 37–62.

¹⁹ On the *chardak* as an element see the recent publication of Judith Bing “CHARDAK, Between Heaven and Earth; Tracing Vernacular Space in Balkan Architecture”

²⁰ Cerasi, M. (1986) *La Città del Levante*. Jaca Books: Milano

of the same construction techniques throughout the period when the studied regions were exposed to common influences.²¹

As an architectural element, the *chardak* is of great importance in the Macedonian vernacular. Its origins are deeply rooted in the Turkish *hayat* house.²² And although it is present in all Balkan vernacular houses, its position and structure may vary considerably from region to region depending on the climate. Its general character does, however, allow the definition of several broad types of houses: those with an open *chardak* (terrace); those with a semi-closed (semi-open) *chardak*; and those with a closed *chardak*. The last type is specific to mountain villages and high altitude towns.²³

“Scyscraper’s” Typology:

These types of dwellings can be divided in two groups related to their presence and positioning of the *chardak* but they can also be divided based on the building material.

(A) The first type of vernacular “scyscrapers” is the tower house also known as *kula* that can be found in Epirus, Macedonia and Albania. This typological model (building type in extinction) is very compact as structure, with three or four floors, without distributive elements and loggias or balconies open to the outside, but with only the last floor jutting out largely with windows or with “bow windows” similar to the turrets corner of the medieval castles. The plan is usually square with sides that vary between 7,5-8x7.5-8.5 m.²⁴ This type of residence is found only in rural areas as a manor house (for example in the Oltenia region in Romania), and in the urban context in Arbanasi in Bulgaria, Epirus, Albania, as well as Montenegro and in the town of Kratovo and its surroundings in Macedonia.

(B) In Albania, (the region of Berat and Gjirocastro) and in the neighboring areas of Kosovo and Macedonia as well as in the Muslim district in what once was Ottoman Kastoria, there is a type of tower house that has two or more floors with pilaster loggia that runs along the entire main front or in its central zone. The distributive elements are internal or external. The façade is harmonious and punctuated by symmetrical and well-spaced windows: the presence of the *chardak*-gallery can be considered, to a certain extent, a transposition of the Dalmatian portico of Italian tradition. The symmetrical tower houses, have long balcony legible on the façade, enclosed due to their presence in harsh climatic zones and regions.²⁵

These two typological houses also have distinctive constructive materials. Each group related to the constructive material is differentiated as:

- Tower houses made entirely of stone
- Tower houses made of stone, wood and bricks.

²¹ Namičev, P. Vuksanović-Macura, V., Petrevska, B. (2018) “Vernacular architecture in Macedonia and Serbia: a comparative study”, in Proceedings of the International Conference *The Balkan Peninsula of Jovan Cvijić: Historical Background and Contemporary Trends in Human Geography*. Tršić Loznica.

²² Doğan, K. (1995) Turkish Hayat House Istanbul, Eren Yayıncılık, pp.38–46, 232–37.

²³ Ivkowska, V. (2016) Reinventing Vernacular Traditions to Reveal National Identity: A Case Study of the “Macedonian Village” in *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, pp. 73

²⁴ Kundak, A. (2018) Ottoman Tower Houses (Beg Towers) in the Republic of Macedonia in *15th International Congress of Turkish Art. Proceedings*, edited by Michele Bernardini and Alessandro Taddei. T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Università di Napoli “l’Orientale”, Istituto per l’Oriente C. A. Nallino. pp.449-459

²⁵ Tomasella, P. (2003) *La Casa Degli Slavi del Sud*, Edizioni Goliardiche : Udine

The tower houses made entirely of stone, the *kula* houses, as mentioned above, are typical for Kosovo, some parts of Albania, Epirus, the furthest south tip of Greece, the Mani Peninsula as well as some of the Greek Aegean Islands but also regions of Macedonia, Bulgaria and Montenegro (Fig.2).



Fig. 2: House of Osdautaj family, Kosovo; Mani tower house in Peloponnese, Greece; Zlatkova Tower in Kratovo.

(Source: www.balkanarchitecture.org)

Towards the pilaster loggia tower houses

One example of a dwelling that shows a transition or combination of architectural elements of both types is the tower house at the Arabati Baba Tekke in Tetovo, Macedonia. This structure is positioned on a flat terrain, the ground level with its rectangular plan (10x10m) that rises up in two floor heights is built entirely of stone but the top floor is built entirely of wood with a roof with extruded eaves on all four sides (Fig. 3). This combination of solid massive ground levels and wooden top floor is something that we will follow in the development of the B type of tower houses with one difference which is the size of the floor plan. This type holds wider and more elongated plans but still aim towards the heights in the “skyscraper” manner.

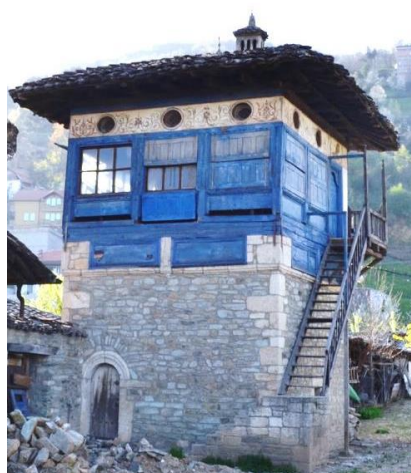


Fig. 3: *Kula* at the Sersem Arabati Baba Tekke, Tetovo, Macedonia

(Source: author's archives)

The B type of tower house is more present in the area of Bistra Mountain Strip and the Reka Region as well as the Vicho Mountain, especially the towns of Kastoria (in the once Muslim neighborhood), as well as the town of Gjirokastra and its area in Albania. The

difference between these two types of tower houses is not only in the construction material but also in the positioning of the dwelling to the ground or the site. The A type of tower houses, the *kula* houses, stand individually on a flat plot and probably originate from the medieval architecture related to the Italian (Venetians or Genoese) possessions in these areas whereas the B type of house is always positioned on a very steep slope, a mountainous terrain, that influences its architectural floor plan layout.

This type of house can be located in both urban and rural areas. Even though their presence dominates in the urban settlements, one village in Republic of Macedonia, the village of Galichnik, is the example of a rural zone that shares the same or similar architectural features as well as some other villages in the Reka region.

All these houses are positioned on a very steep terrain and the distribution of the space is conditioned directly by the topography (Fig.4). In all the examples of the area that hosts this type of dwellings, each floor has its individual separate entrance from the outside that is positioned on a different height where inside all the floors are interconnected with the stairs that run through all three to four floors. These tower houses also have rectangular floor plans varying from 10x10-12-12m, and are bit larger than the *kula* type houses. (Fig.5)

It is interesting that the architecture of the older mansions of Kastoria as well as those in Siatista or Ambelakia in Greece as well as the vernacular houses in the village of Galichnik and Gjirokaster, all from the beginning of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, appear with an unequivocal morphology and typology employing a tower like base and a linear arrangement of rooms on the floors (Fig.6). The “skyscraper” moment is captured not only in the height but also in the number of floor plans as well as in the square proportions of each individual floor, with slight deviation from this matrix, the houses in Kastoria that are somewhat elongated but still aim towards greater heights (Fig.7).



Fig. 4: Arrangement of the houses on the steep terrain in Kastoria (graphic by Velika Ivkowska, source: Moutsopoulos 1990)



Fig. 5: Separate entrances to the house on the steep terrain in the village of Galicnik
Source: Author's archives

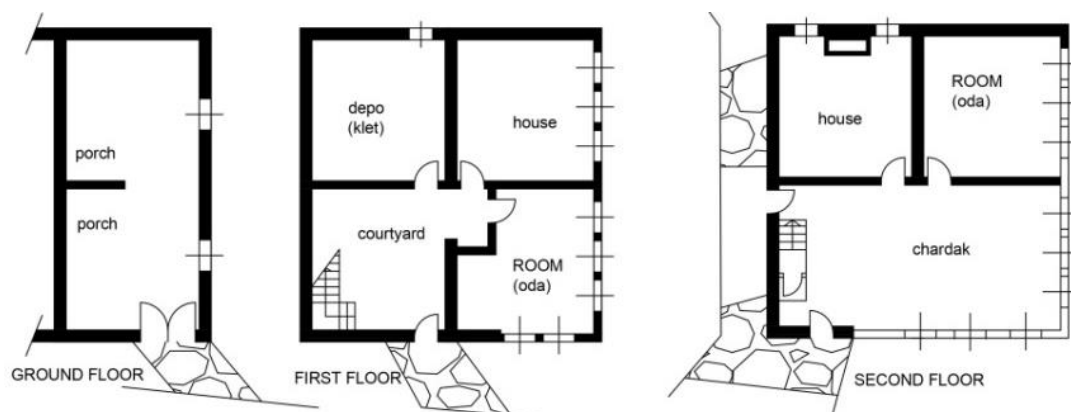


Fig. 6: Typical floor plan of the vernacular house from the village Galicnik
Source: Author's survey



Fig. 7: The tower mansions in once Muslim neighborhood of Kastoria

Source: Author's archives

The houses in Gironkaster in Albania hold such similar features. One example is the Zekate House with architectural tower characteristics (Fig.8). This three-storey house dates from 1811 and has twin towers and a double-arched niche.²⁶

²⁶ Bing, J., (2018) Chardak Between Heaven and Earth: Tracing Vernacular Space in Balkan Architecture. Procyon Lotor Press, Maine. p.158



Fig. 8: Zekate House in Gjirokkaster
Source: MIT Libraries Aga Khan Visual Archive

The massive masonry ground foundation spreads over several floors and its massiveness is eased by the double arched niches providing stability to the whole fort like structure on which top, the light wooden floor gently lies. Covered with the roof with extruded eaves supported by wooden braces, these masonry arched niches appear in the vernacular houses built in the village of Galicnik as well. The difference between these two is that the houses in Galicnik have a single niche, as a result of the smaller size of the ground floor plans, compared to the double tower foundation system that is seen in the Gjirokkaster example (Fig.9).



Fig. 9: Single arched niche in village of Galicnik
Source: Author's archives

The window openings on all these structures, existing in the high masonry floors are small and in some cases arched. The windows on the top floor however are always following the harmonic rhythm of solid and void interpolated in the light wooden walls. In some examples in Kastoria and Gjirokkaster, we also notice the so called *tepe pencere*, a small stained glass windows positioned on top of every window on the main façade always opening

onto the *chardak*, a typical Ottoman architectural element emerging from the styles of the Tulip period and the Turkish Baroque during the 18th century, characterized by many small windows with shutters and separate upper course windows - *tepe pencere*²⁷ (Fig.10). During the 19th century, the Imperial Style dictated larger openings (proportion 1:2) with neoclassical decorative elements, without separate upper course windows.²⁸



Fig. 10. Schwartz mansion in Ambelakia

Source: www.mapio.net

Conclusion

The two tower type house typologies help us follow the architectural vernacular development of the houses in the wide spread Ottoman Empire. The vernacular dwellings however were always influenced by their geographic location and topographic disposition. The materials available on site as well as the local craftsmanship were always the ones determining the construction methods. However, in this paper, we not only follow similarities related to these abovementioned factors but find an interesting architectural expression outsourced from those factors combined with the artistic expressions of the master builders as well as the social, economic and religious backgrounds of its inhabitants.

All these houses except for sharing the similar geographic longitude share several common denominators as well. The tower houses of the *kula* type are completely built of masonry, an element that appears in the B type of the vernacular towers in all of their floors except the last, top one. The roofs of the B type of towers are always extruded on cantilevered eaves that are supported by straight or arched beam braces providing stability to the eave and the whole roof system. Another common denominator, the type B tower houses have is the wooden top floor that hosts the *chardak*, the central element of the life in the dwelling. When it comes to the proportions of the sides of the floor plans, both cases follow almost perfect rectangular plans with equal widths and lengths, with slight elongation in the examples from Kastoria and Gjirokaster.

Much can be concluded from the analysis of this type of vernacular ‘skyscrapers’. All these structures, besides sharing common geographic area and longitude, also share common

²⁷ Günay, R., 1998. Tradition of the Turkish House and Safranbolu Houses. Istanbul: Yapi-Endüstri Merkezi Yayınları.

²⁸ Ibid.

stylistic approaches in their architectural expressions and construction appearance on the façade, which raises the question if they were all built by the same master builders or we are discussing about an architectural vernacular style that emerged in these regions and can be connected with the social and economic background of its owners and the current stylistic stream of the Empire. However, these examples show an unbreakable link in the vernacular heritage in the researched region influenced by the styles of the Great Ottoman Empire modified and adjusted to the geography and the terrain they were built on, the social status of its owners. Most importantly, they helped in the attempt to define an architectural vernacular style that can be referred to as vernacular neoclassicism and vernacular baroque.

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