

## Diatopic Comparison of the Ottoman House in Balkan Area

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### ABSTRACT

The spread of the Ottoman house takes place during the decline of the Ottoman Empire, strongly subjugated by Western influence. This means long cohesion of local types with Ottoman until the total sharing and housing culture identification that took place definitively in the XIX century in all countries of the Balkan Peninsula. Therefore, the types analyzed are examples of the nineteenth century, located in Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The analysis of these houses, so far apart geographically and at the same time so near compositional, was carried out in accordance to a factorization method of the architectural organism according to tectonics stratification, which follows the spatial and functional study.

The breakdown in horizontal layers allows us to study both, the constructive aspect, also the spatiality and functionality of the house, dealing with the issue of vertical connections and the language of the facade. The categories chosen for the comparison are those that represent the distinctive characters of the Ottoman house i.e. the centrality of the garden, the plasticity of the base (introvert) vs the analytical composition of the first floor (extrovert), the room as compositional form, rhythm, and full report - empty of the extroverted facade on the street and at the end, the large roof that unifies and reflects the hipped composition on the top floor in the conformation of its multiple pitched.

The objective of the comparison is to verify the homogeneity of characters inhabited in geographic – cultural space of the Balkans and at the same time understand the conservation of native elements.

**KEYWORDS:** domestic architecture, ottoman dwellings, diatopic analyse, Balkan.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The comparison of domestic architecture in the Balkans requires the study of Ottoman architecture in its complexity and varying, and then the specificity of each different geographical context.

For the first issue the reference text were G. Goodwin and especially the monograph published in '89 by M. Cerasi. Cerasi gives the possibility to understand the homogenizing process of Ottoman architecture present in all the territories of the Empire. It also helps in categorize the predominant elements of the house allowing a critical approach to the study of the architecture of the nineteenth century in each Balkan country. The study of traditional houses, nationwide, was conducted by local scholars of great importance which have published extensive researches. These were published in different book collections, that put together the work of each local scholar. One of the most famous and known is *Architecture traditionnelle des Pays Balkaniques*. While an analytical collection and deliberately synthetic is found in the volume of N. Akin *Balkanlarda Osmanli Dönemi Konutlari*.

Therefore, the literature provides us with detailed studies of the typological evolution, of spatiality and functionality of the traditional house in every country. However, the comparative approach is lacking

and in particular, needs a direct search on homogeneous characteristics as a result of the prolonged domination and on indigenous and independent elements.

## 2 THE DIFFUSION OF THE OTTOMAN HOUSE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY IN THE BALKANS

The maximum spread of the Ottoman house in the Balkans does not coincide with the beginnings and even with the greatest expansion of the Ottoman Empire, rather with the moment in which it had lost its power of persuasion and imposition, and was exposed to storm influences, fashions and Western goods. This means a long assimilation of characters Ottoman "imposed" to feel them their own and adopt them at the precise moment of the coming of a new influences. It is therefore not just about sharing a building typology but a total sharing and identification of the living culture. This long process, started in the late fifteenth century and completed in the nineteenth century, has meant the co-existence in the various territories of the Ottoman type of dwelling alongside the local one. As evidence of this we have the chronicles of travelers and engravings of the period, showing the Ottoman house next to Anatolian house with mud-brick and flat roof, or next to Mediterranean house with patio and stone and Slavic house with wooden logs.

In fact, in Albania, the Ottoman type is preferred to local, centered around the fire, only in the first half of the nineteenth century; However, this delay is understandable given that implied the transformation of the conception of the composition and construction of the house. This until that moment represented a solid shelter built of stone, but now is adopted the technique of timber wooden frame and varied filling. It passed from a strong relationship with the ground, rooting it, to no longer inhabit (base is intended for economic activities) to live in the ephemeral upper floor (made of lightweight material).

To justify the delay in the adoption of the Ottoman type, in addition to the difficulty represented by having to radically change the design principle of the house, there were also the economic conditions of the Balkan cities. Which until the nineteenth century were formed by very poor houses built with mud-brick or stone with small openings.

The beginning of the nineteenth century the Balkan countries are living the period of rebirth Balkan rejecting the Ottoman rule and at the same time adhering to the housing model as motion reactionary, because until then it were exclusively for the Turkish bureaucratic aristocracy and Greek clergy.

Therefore, the adoption takes place when there are adequate economic conditions, allowing the distinction between living spaces and productive, but also in the instant in which cultural influences and innovations from the West had the need to go to Istanbul to be revised and "Orientalised".

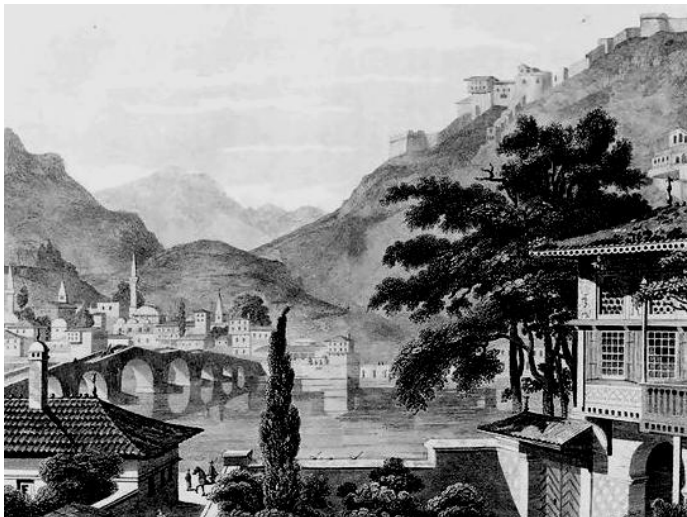


Figure 1: Berat, engraving by Charles Cokrell, 1830



Figure 2: Berat, the oldest type of house

### 3 COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE IN THE BALKANS: HOMOGENEOUS CHARACTERS

The Balkan Peninsula has been the domination of the Ottoman Empire for five centuries, representing at the same time for the occupiers of the site opening to the Western world. The long period of cohabitation has led to a cultural exchange which covered all aspects of socio-economic life, with a strong Ottoman influence in every sphere of society from language to architecture. Often, especially in language and architectural influences from Istanbul can be considered as the fashions or the most of technological innovations at other times, however, the typological similarities describe a strong homogeneity based on profound cultural fusion.

The similarities between the traditional domestic architecture in Anatolia and the Balkans are related to the duration of Ottoman rule in individual countries and at the distance of these from the capital or from the administrative centers. However, in addition to the relationships of similarity with Anatolia is interesting to see consistent and native elements in the architecture of the various Balkan countries.

The similarities concern the entire architectural structure of the traditional house, from floor plans, functionality, the design of the room and to the language of the facade.

The most common type in both contexts the Balkan and in Anatolian one, is that with semi-open spaces on the ground floor and especially on the first floor. It is present in Bulgaria, northern Greece, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Macedonia and Albania. In addition to interior design leaves no doubt as to the similarity of the architectural language both in the furniture in the decorative details. To confirm this, there is also the same terminology for the internal and constructive elements.

#### 3.1 Definition of the geographical area of study

The countries chosen for comparison were divided into two categories: countries bordering Albania (Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro) and the most distant countries but that lived similar historical events (Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina). Traditional architectures in Hungary and Romania were not considered. In the case of Hungary, the motivation is related to the short duration of Ottoman rule, only 150 years until the end of the seventeenth century, which has definitely left significant and interesting examples (due to the meeting between the Eastern and Western architectures) but too old and compromises. In fact, the examples chosen for the analysis all belong to the nineteenth century. Instead Romania despite the geographical proximity has never been fully under Ottoman rule, so we cannot speak of cultural exchange. Although the homes in the south of Romania there are elements of similarity in the presence of an upstairs veranda around which are aggregated rooms or furnishing of the room, these are attributable to the Bulgarian influences.



Figure 3: Map indicating the countries investigated

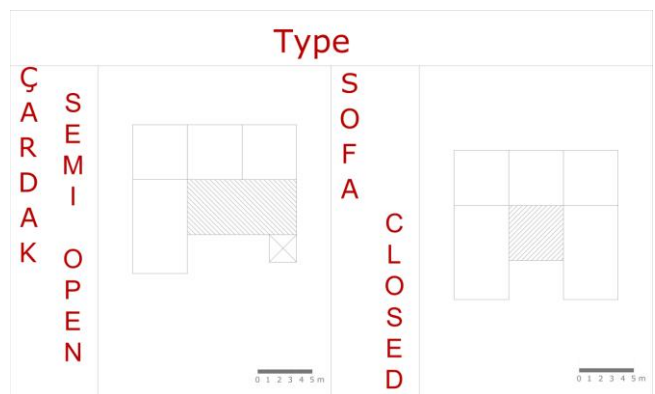


Figure 4: Compared types (drawing: F. Pashako)

### 3.2 The types chosen for the comparison

In the study area were selected most common types (Fig. 4), which belong to the nineteenth century as before described. The types widespread on which is applied a comparison diatopically are: outside "Sofa" (asymmetric) and inner "Sofa" (central). The first type appears to be the oldest. The evolution of this leads to the second type. Somehow we are faced with a diachronic transformation resulting in the closure of the semi-open spaces (open sofa) and with a gradual tendency to symmetrical plan, and with distributive spaces positioned centrally (sofa closed).

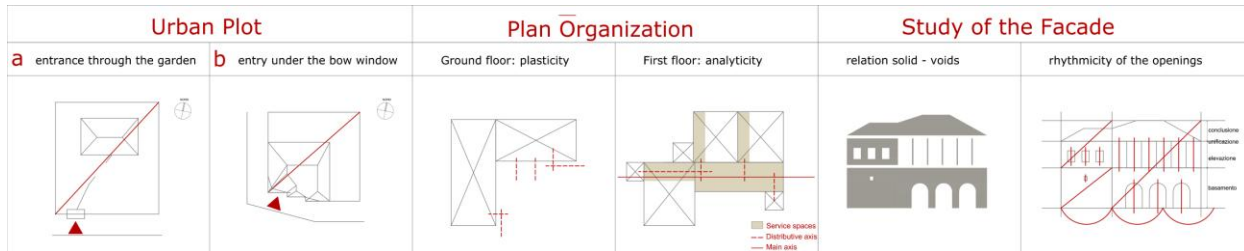


Figure 5: Categories of comparison (drawing: F. Pashako)

### 3.3 The urban lot and the centrality of the garden

The Ottoman house interacts with the urban morphology through the walled garden within which is located the house. This organism thus formed represents the urban lot in the Ottoman city. It refers to the necessity of introversion and privacy of the Greek home and then the Byzantine one.

The open space (vacuum) in the garden plays a central role, not only geometrically but compositionally; in fact around it develop the parts that compose the dwelling. The surrounding walls of the lot, the terraces of the garden and embankments that hold the soil in end of the lot, together with the base of the house creates a continuity and compactness of the surfaces that gives quality to this place.

The overall size of the lot is not very important what is important is rather its width, since the house has its umbilical cord in the street. Therefore the orientation of the house is conditioned by the direction of the road so as to have facade on the street. The methods of facing are different, ranging from overhanging the road to the making visible only the upper floors of the house from the street. The connection between the street and the house is always via the courtyard through the large front door. The door has in addition to its functional role an important symbolic role. The size and the majesty of the door represent the power of the family. The courtyard is an open space very qualified. It serves not only to the transit and connection but in it many activities of domestic life take place, such as cooking, washing, drying clothes etc. However, the relations (inside - outside) develop inside the house on the outside not vice versa, as in the Western world.

The typological evolution of the house or the adoption of the type with central or interior "sofa" also determined a renewal in the relationship city-house through the opening directly onto the street and the transformation of the ground floor in living spaces and no more auxiliaries. In addition, the increased tendency of extroversion and visibility has led to major projections on the upper floors and opening large windows also on the ground floor (now inhabited).

### 3.4 The plan: plasticity of the basement and the analytical composition of the upper floors

The house results to be a complex building organism composed both in plan and elevation. The ground floor plan does not coincide with that of the upper floors. The shape of the ground floor is irregular in as follows the topography and shape of the lot. In addition, it serves as a support and as a

basis for leveling the upper floor. In fact, it has a regular plan thanks to the projections that allow the construction of square or rectangular rooms.

Therefore, the basement shows a plastic compositional principle, where the design of the whole shape the single rooms. This way of building is widespread in the Mediterranean area and in the north-western Balkans before the diffusion of the Ottoman type. On the other hand the upper floors are characterized by analytical composition for assembling and repetition of elements defined rigorously and in some types the composition uses the repetition of pairs of rooms or multiple figures.

The connection between the rooms is accomplished by a series of environments originally open or semi-open and later from a sofa (deep gallery). The exterior *sofa* of the upper floors is called semi-open *çardak*, *divanhana*, o *hagiata*, it is the second most important space of the house after the guest room (*oda*).

This space has the important function of distribution node related with the vertical connection of the stairs, as well as that of summer place with privileged view due to the projection of one of its corner (*köşk*).

### 3.5 The room as standardized model

All the rooms of the house follow the same model, between them we can distinguish the guest room (*oda*) which has an important decoration.

The room is called *oda* in Turkish, the same word is also in use in Albania and Greece instead in Slavic languages we find the use of the words *soba* or *basoda*.

It is always located on the upper floor to the basement and does not have specialized functions, in both poor and rich classes, it presents a multifunctional space. In fact the space of the *oda* turns into bedroom during the night through the use of mattresses on the floor that during the day are put in closets (which occupies one of the short side of the room), the versatility of the room is also defined by the simplicity of the furnishings. In this section we try to describe the conformation of the model type of room in the Balkans. On the short side, where there is access to the room, we have a wooden wall divided into two levels. In the lower level there is the closet (*musandra*) which contains mattresses for the night and another door that leads to services. At the upper level we have a balcony (*mafil*) semi-open or closed, where stood the women and children who could not attend the ceremonies that took place in the room but that they could watch and intervene in case to the diners something was missing. On the short side, we find the windowed wall. The windows in a row and look to the urban landscape below them there are low sofas (*minder*) coated from tissues with white laces. On one of the long sides there 's always the fireplace and on all sides of the room on half of total height there is a wooden shelf where were exposed the decorations or copper utensils.

In the room there is a certain symmetry, sometimes on more than one axis, as reflected in the ceiling and central rosette decorated with octagon, radiant sun or false dome.

The room is an element strongly spatially independent, geometrically and linguistically so it is the module of composition of the upper floors to the basement

### 3.6 The facade: rhythm of openings and relation solid and void

The facade of the Ottoman house is characterized by different development and treatment of the ground floor (basement) and the upper floors.

The ground floor is substantially with an horizontal development as a result of the construction based on principles of the stone wall, therefore it is massive and blind and suggests introversion. The upper floors have a vertical development according with the wood technology of the timber wall, therefore, characterized by rows of windows and the projection from the base with clear elements of extroversion to the urban space or the road.

Consequently, the relations of solids and voids are different for different tectonics bands of the house, unified under the big roof.

However, it is easy to read in the facade the plan organization and composition of the upper floors through the combination of the rooms. Moreover, the rooms have a predominance in the facade creating an urban scene made by rooms architecture, confining the other elements to a minor role as connection between the rooms.

### **3.7 The roof between unification and articulation of the rooms**

The large roof has always been a powerful medium that unifies the volume of the entire house and it relates to the landscape. Furthermore, it has had an important social and psychological role as it is understood as a symbol of the union family under the same roof. A tradition common to the north-western Balkans, Europe Alpine and South-Alpine, but that does not find more similarities in the type of mature Ottoman house. In fact, the Ottoman roof appears to be the final result of the coverage of the individual rooms on the upper floors. Therefore, the roof slopes are a result of the geometry of the individual rooms to the overall detriment of the unity of the house, but a strong linkage between the planimetric projections of the rooms and the roofs and eaves of the roof. Despite the tendency to give symmetry to the building and hence to the roof, remains the composition by rooms perceived by the trend of roof slopes.

## **4 CONCLUSION: FINDING THE PERSISTENCE OF NATIVE ELEMENTS**

The native elements that persist in different types may be assimilated in the type of *kulla*. As it represents the architectural archetype of the Balkans, not only before the Ottoman conquest but many centuries before. In fact, several studies link the type of *kulla* with the dwellings of the ancient Illyrians reviewing their funerary monuments. This means a culture of native linked to the territory, materials originating from it but with characteristics of stable architectures, solid and well-defended. Obviously, this is different from the psychology of the ephemeral that we encounter in the living culture prevalent in the Ottoman period. Which favored the light and the light that realized through the adoption of technological solutions precarious and light, as opposed to religious austerity. Therefore, based on the analyzes and the literature consulted the indigenous elements can be summarized in the preference of bulk materials that guarantee solidity and defensibility. This creates architectures with specific characteristics often assimilated with defensive architecture. However, with this we do not intend to argue that the architectures studied are not the result of intellectual and practical nation to which they belong. Far from nationalism but is consistent with the principles of regionalism recognizes that each country developing its own living culture based on an ancient tradition. However, we wanted to bring in an "abstract" of what this study in order to understand the process of transfer of technological and stylistic changes, the permeability of the entire Balkans in the recognition of national histories.

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Type	Urban Plot		Plan Organization		Study of the Facade		Location					
	a entrance through the garden	b entry under the bow window	Ground floor: plasticity	First floor: analyticity	relation solid - voids	rhythmicity of the openings	City	Country				
									ALBANIA	Berat		
							GREECE	Berat				
											GREECE	Ambrakia
											MACEDONIA	Bitola
											MONTENEGRO	Rozaj
											SERBIA	Vranje

Figure 6: Comparison Table (drawing: F. Pashako)

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