

RETROSPECTIVE ON THE ORIGINS OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

Education in Albania as in many other countries initiated in the religious buildings and was associated with the clerics who were mostly the first educators and teachers. The core of the medieval city was the religious building, and Albanian schools and education was strongly connected with the mosques, churches, madrasas, monasteries, etc. The Catholics and Muslim religious edifices in Albania were also the first scholastic buildings.

The Medieval period found Albania mostly illiterate and the few imam or clerics who knew the language taught it only to the devoted Muslims, or Catholics who gathered near the Islamic institutions or the Catholic ones. Schools in Albania, in the form we know them today are a late product of less than a century, derived from normative, standards, imported and transformed to be as economical as possible. While, the first schools are related to the objects of worship. Clerics, priests, nuns, etc. were the first to try to spread religion and education simultaneously.

The relationship between the first education buildings in Albania and the religious edifices, is the main focus of this research which traces the history of Albanian education and school's architecture. This study tries to understand the first steps and traces of education in Albania and the buildings that hosted it, by evaluating the history and the structures where the process of learning and teaching happened.

KEYWORDS: School Buildings, Religious Edifices, History, Architecture

INTRODUCTION

“The first Albanian primary school with full national, secular and democratic physiognomy.” (Myziri, 2003, 133) is related to Korça School, opened on March 7, 1887, but the first traces of education in Albania are closely related to religions and to several occupiers during the centuries. As in many other countries, even in Albania, clerics, priests, nuns, imams etc. were the first to try to spread religion and education simultaneously. They gathered the masses teaching the Bible or Quran, next to or within the place of worship. Mostly of these teachers were Albanian and they secretly spoke and taught Albanian language, transforming these buildings into the first Albanian schools.

Through this study is sought to make clear that the first schools were religious one, or teacher’s houses, etc., and they date back long before Korça primary school. The intention of the paper is not to reduce the values of the Albania National Awakening movement, (1830-1912) where a lot of effort was dedicated in educating the population. It tries to bring some examples of schools functioning in Albania before the date settled. The research is done through magazines, archives, photos, and several documents which explain and bring back some of the first traces in Albania’s education. The study gathers some examples of religious buildings which functioned also as schools.

THE BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING PLACE IN ALBANIA

According to Ceka (2003), Albanian education is related with pre-historic period and later with the Roman one. There is very little evidence regarding the Illyrian period but is thought to be based on three principles: military, physical and that of labor.

In the Middle Ages, the Albanian education presents similarities with the Sunday School Buildings, where the religious buildings functioned not only as a place of worship but also as a place of teaching the new generations of clerics and people who wanted to learn the Bible. In the Medieval period schools and education closely linked to the Christian church, and after that to the Islamic religious institutions. Koliqi (2002) mentioned that “teachers were clerics or imams and teaching took place close to churches, monasteries (Catholic or Orthodox) and then later in madrasas which were the first Islamic schools. Dedej agrees: “Education continues to be on cleric’s hand. In Albania operated three types of schools: Catholic School in the north, Orthodox in the south, Turkish throughout Albania.” (2003, p. 64)

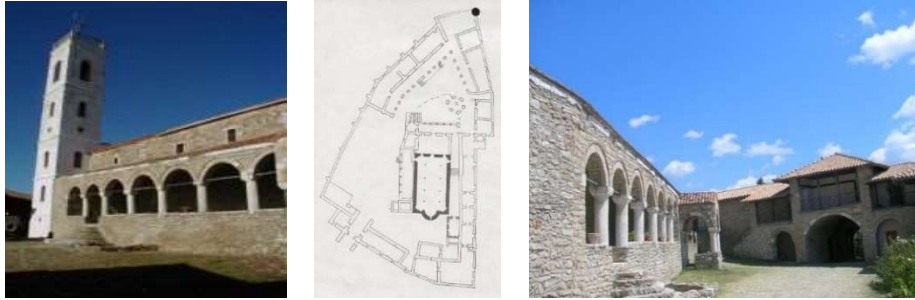


Figure 1: Ardenica monastery. Source: Institute of Culture Monuments

The significance and the symbol that the school presented in the medieval city, could be understood from the explanations of some authors. As described by Vokshi (2014) “the medieval cities had an oriental, chaotic and compact character, where 1-2 stories houses gather around the religious building...” which in most of the cases was also the school, the library and a place for meetings and announcements. Evlija Celebi (1611-1684), a foreign traveler described the Albanian cities, giving data on their cultural and historical characteristics “with tens of mosques and near every mosque there were a madrasas”. (Kazazi, 2014)

The presence of attached libraries next to the mosques was also a testimony that they functioned as a worship place and also a space for learning and reading, for the young Muslims. As for the case of Tekke Helveti, Berat, which dates on 1492-1493. According to the data attached to it there was a library that was linked to Tekke. The library building was burned during the First World War.

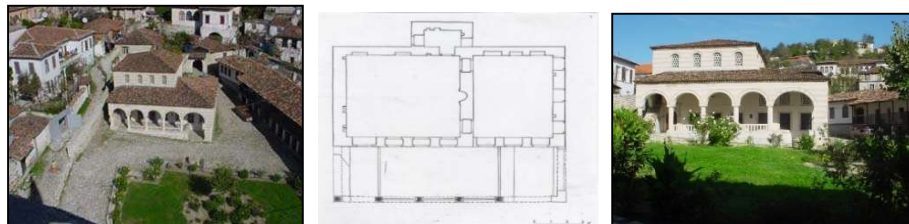


Figure 2: Tekke Helveti, Berat. Source: IMK

Koliqi together with various authors emphasize that one of the schools to be mentioned during this period is the ‘Academy of Voskopoja’ which initially opened as a primary school and then in 1744 turned in high school. The “New Academy” school, which was based on

the European model with subjects of Greek, Latin, philosophy, theology, etc., was recognized for the introduction of contemporary methods in education and recognized in the Balkan Peninsula. (Koliqi, 2002, p114) In addition to the school's academy, the building of the printing house, the rich library and other buildings were added, which attest to the importance and values that this school has given in education. Academy, printing house, library etc. burned in a mysterious way in 1767.

Figure 3: Engraving of Voskopoja during the medieval period, year 1742.



In all three Albanian regions, that of Shkodra, Ioannina and that of Misir, new schools were spreading like the example of “cultural education complex” in Shkodra, This complex of the 18th century, included the madrasas, the dormitory, the library and were opened firstly by Mehmet Pasha Bushati (The Old), during 1760-70, in the neighborhood of “Qafë” and later close to the “Grand Mosque of Bazaar”.

Kazazi (2014) mentions also the primary and secondary school *Mektep Rusdiye Asqerije* next to the bakery of Bejlikut. “Although this building was based on Eastern and Oriental model, and even though the madrasa was religious and the teaching was conducted in Turkish, etc., it influenced the cultural and educational development not only of Shkodra but of the entire region.” (Osmani, 1994) Of this period were also known the high school “Marruci” and the madrasa of Ioannina (Koliqi, 2002).



Figure 4: Photo of Madrasa and the library in Shkodra. Source: Central Technical Construction Archives

While for many scholars the development of education under Islamic influence was not considered as progress since the schools were under religious influences, it must be accepted that all the facts clearly show that these “schools” were a step forward in the development of education’s culture and that these were the first traces of school buildings in Albania. “At the end of the XVI century the invaders opened the first Turkish schools, while in the 17th century the number of these schools grew rapidly. Although essentially “the madrasas were Islamic institutions, they were intended to act over all human classes and to disseminate the knowledge ...” (Kazazi, 2014, p. 36) “The opening of a large number of elementary schools (*Mektepe*) was followed by then to a considerable number of secondary schools (*Madrassas*.” (Dedej, 2003, p. 68)

Despite the fact that the largest number of schools in Albania were sustained by Muslim religious schools, there were also some Catholic schools protected by the Austrian cult protectorate among the Albanian Catholic population. Among the Franciscan and Dominican religious orders were built many schools in Albanian lands, where the University of Durrës can be mentioned. Koliqi thinks that the University of Durrës opened in the 80s of the XIV century and was one of the first universities in Europe. (2002, p. 53)

Some of the Catholic schools of the nineteenth century were mentioned by researchers Kazazi and Koliqi positioned in the province of Shkodra and the northern area:



Figure 5: Photograph of pupils of the school (mejtebe) Ruzhdije in Shkodër, 1876. Second level school with three classes. Source: Central State Archives

One of the first ones is the Clergy school of Shkodra opened during 1854-1855 in one small house with only two rooms donated by the Catholic charitable people. (Kazazi, 2014) Subsequently the “Franciscan Seminar” became a well-known elementary school and in 1871 the Albanian language was introduced as a subject. In 1902 it passed under the direction of Gjergj Fishta as a school entirely in Albanian language. On the basis of Clergy school and according to the Franciscan Order in 1921, Gymnasium “Illyricum” was established.

On February 7, 1859, the “Albanian Pontifical College” opened, aiming at preparing Catholic clerics. It was directed the same as the Saverian College by the Order of the Jesuits. The “Saverian College of the Jesuits” opened in 1877, in the city of Shkodra, and in just one year became a true gymnasium. The school was named the Collegium of Saint Francis of Saver and until 1888 was held with private funds, afterwards in the framework of economic aid to Catholics in Albania was awarded a fund from Austria. During its lifetime there were various realistic, technical, commercial, normal profiles, but always at the core of its profile, it had the features of the classical gymnasium. (Kazazi, 2014) While in 1879, Stigmatine Sisters opened the first elementary school for girls. (Kazazi, 2014, p.20)

In addition to the schools of religious character during the years 1800-1861, Kazazi mentioned 12 schools (8 for boys and 4 for girls) of practical character - education institutions related to vocational training (craftsmen) (2014, p.114) Many Albanian patriots tried to spread education around the country and somewhat changed the alarming

numbers of illiteracy in Albania. “In the 1840s about 98% of the population was illiterate.” (Dedej, 2003, 90)



Figure 6: View of the Franciscan Collegium, Shkodra, Marubi Studio. Otherwise, it was called “Clergy school of Shkodra”. Source: Central State Archives

According to the last data of the 19th century, in the fourth vilayet of Shkodra, Kosovo, Manastir, and Ioannina, where Albanians constituted a compact majority of the population, there were: 1187 Turkish-language schools, of which 1125 elementary, 57 primary and 5 secondary schools, more than 1000 Greek-language schools and over 300 schools in Serbian, Bulgarian, etc., without mentioning the Italian-language schools held by Austria-Hungary and Italy.”(Myziri, 2003, p. 123). On the same idea is also Koliqi who states: “The schools that prevailed were primary schools in Turkish, Greek, Catholic schools in Italian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Vlachs etc. (Koliqi, 2002, p. 140)

The data of 1898 (1316) indicate that the schools in Turkish were:

- Primary school (First level school with 4 grades, *ibtidaiye*), in Ioannina (128 pieces), Bitola (451 pieces), Shkodra (101 pieces), Skopje (445 pieces)
- Secondary schools (*rusdiye*, or city schools with 3 grades), in Ioannina (11 pieces), Bitola (17 pieces), Shkodra (5 pieces), Skopje (24 pieces).
- High schools with 4 levels were 2 in Bitola and 1 in Ioannina, Shkodra and Skopje. (Secondary schools were of the type of civil gymnasium, military school, or normal school for the preparation of teachers)



Kolegja saveriane-gjezuite Shkoder 1889

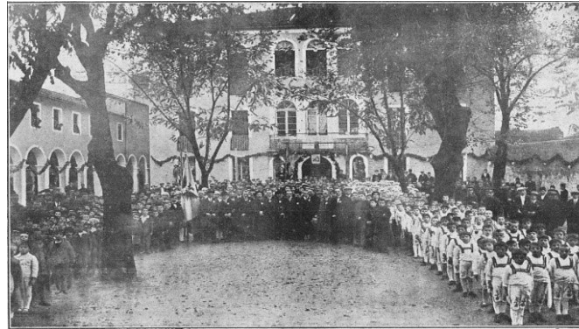


Figure 7: Saverian College of Jesuit. Left: year 1889. Right: on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its creation. Photos Marubi. 1927. Source: Central State Archives



Figure 8: Schoolgirls of Selezjane School in Shkodra, Religious School for Girls by Stigmati Sisters. 1923. Source: Central State Archives

As cited by Koliqi (2002), there were over 1000 schools in Greek, which were divided into: first-grade schools, second-level schools (licks) and third-level schools – universities, in Vlach language 40

schools, Bulgarian and Serbian 20-30 the school and in Albanian were only 2 schools in the city of Korça.



Figure 9: Greek School in Durres, Source: Central State Archives

FORCES IN EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS

Schools where the Albanian language was taught and schools opened by the Albanians are evidenced through different witnesses of history even before 1887 but for the existence of the Albanian schools there is no concrete data before 7 March 1887 where the primary school of Korça was opened, and “it represented the first Albanian primary school with full national, secular and democratic physiognomy.” (Myziri, 2003, p. 133).

The spread of Albanian schools had some deterring factors:

- There were just a few students which learned in religious buildings, and had the money to pay for private lessons, in parishes and monasteries from bishops and educated clerics, while the majority of population couldn't pay for their education.
- Albanians refused to go to the madrasas, or monasteries as the language, the culture and the religious were imposed by the invaders. During 500 years of Turk's oppression there were difficulties in finding learning places for Albanian population which refused to go to the mosques and madrasas, and the educational process was done in improvised places, houses, barns or storehouses. (Gecaj, 2008) “Cultures of Albanian schools were not recognized.” (Dedej, 2003, p. 45)
- The Ottoman Empire in Albania did not admit that there were Albanians and used religious denomination to determine their nationality, dividing Albanians as follows: 1. Muslims were called

Turks and could learn in Turkish schools, *Mektebe* (elementary Muslim schools) and *Madrassas*; 2. Orthodox were called rum (Greeks) who could attend Greek schools; 3. Catholics were referred as Latin and they could be educated in Catholic clergy schools. (Bakiu, 1998) However Bakiu points out that the Ottoman Empire had no organized education by the state.

According to Anne-Maire Chatelet, "Public Schools in Europe developed a lot in the 19th century, since the establishment of democracy and the right to vote required every person to read and write." Based on this reason, most European countries dedicated much effort to initially educate male and later, female populations. Education in Europe and Albania "passed hand in hand with the process of transformation from religious schools to secular education, with professors instead of religious ones, and placing schools in other buildings and not in churches." (Anne-Marie Chatelet, Marta Gutman, 2004)

Educational developments also relate to the evolution of cities and the need for practical learning. In the ranks of the bourgeoisie and rich strata of population, it was a necessity not only learning national language but also foreign languages as a way to trade, development and communication with the world. (Kazazi, 2014, p. 15) In Albania, during the Albanian National Renaissance (1830-1912) the same parallelisms were observed where two types of schools were created: special ones for the bourgeoisie and others for the children of the working masses. While schools of rich children appear with much better construction and favorable conditions "... Primary schools of children of working class, continued to be in a miserable state, although the bourgeoisie sometimes declared compulsory primary education. "- (Dedej, 2003, p. 91)

As these buildings represented the Roman or Ottoman Empire, and the language and lessons were not in Albanian the population refused them massively from time to time, but still the need for education brought the youth near the mosques, churches, monasteries, showing to the Ottoman Empire and the Roman one that through education and the religious buildings, they could conquer Albania's population in an easy and peaceful manner.

Although the schools (churches, mosques, madrassas, mektebs, monasteries, parishes etc.) had a religious character and the books were written not in Albanian, yet most of the teachers were Albanian and tried to speak Albanian inside these buildings. Unofficial Albanian schools were born since the Middle Ages and all these secular or non-

residential environments can be considered as the first Albanian school buildings.

CONCLUSION

This paper brought several different examples of school buildings of a period earlier than the date of the first Albanian school, in order to understand the developments and the reasons for this progress in Albanian education. The buildings that hosted education in Albania were the religious ones and schools started in small rooms or libraries linked to the mosques or churches. Albanian imams and clerics taught Albanian language to the children and masses, in the worship place, forming the first schools in Albania.

It is understood that schools in Albania were kept by religion, like Catholic ones with churches, monasteries, parishes, and Ottoman with mosques, mektebs, and madrasa. Albanian schools during Middle age and the Awaking Movement, although in a small number, went parallel to the ideology of schools in the world where education was run by the clergy or by some of the bourgeoisie who sponsored them.

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