
The Characteristics of Urban and Architectural Development in Elbasan in the Beginning of the 20th century

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Abstract

In the beginning of the 20th century the city of Elbasan and its prefecture were amongst the biggest and most important in Albania. With a very favorable geographical position Elbasan is situated in the heart of Albania as a strategically site which connected the routs of Western with the Eastern European ones. Among the urban problems in this study will be treated the construction of the city and that of the main Bezistan Square, the communication network, the automobile transportation and that of the public sector. Amid these problems it will also be considered the role of Elbasan's City Hall. Furthermore in this study there will be treated the folkloristic architectural elements which are based on the activity of society, the ethnical features and the development of the Albanian creativity in the line of constructions such as dwellings, houses, water-suppliers, fountains, bazaars etc. In Elbasan there were still present the architectures of the Islamic and Christian cults by verifying the entrenchment of western elements and eastern elements in the architecture. This study will reflect the new characteristics in the urban and architectural development, the eastern and western influence the entrenchment of the old and modern in the architecture without neglecting the development of the autochthon element of Elbasan.

Keywords: urban development, architectural development, squares, inns, dwellings, the Islamic cult, the Christian cult.

1. Introduction

Elbasan city has an ancient history filled with important political-economical, educational-cultural events, which occupy a special place in our nationwide history. The inception of urban planning in Elbasan is related to its creation in the early middle Ages. Elbasan city, which is an important urban centre, is located on a fertile field, on Shkumbini's valley, which is one of the most transversal roads connecting the coast with the interior, occupying a very favorable economic and strategic position.

In this important geographical position, in the heart of Albania, Elbasan takes a versatile development, because of its two monuments that favored the city's development like a strategic point, and those monuments were: road Egnatia and the Castle. Road Egnatia had two baselines, one from Durres and the other from Apollonia, linked Durres with Byzantine and Rome with Constantinople and passed by Ohrid and Thesaloniki. For a long time this place has been identified as one of the stations of road Egnatia, and according to Hasan Ceka, its name should be pronounced Skampin not Skampa, as it is traditionally called. The populated centre, also known as the second most important station after Durres, was known by that name since the second century BC. In the fourth century, Skampini was presented as a castle formed by 28 towers and 3 entrances, while in 509 Skampini was known as an Episcopalian center. Then it falls apart by barbarian invasions, and so over time its ancient name lost, being labeled differently. In approximately XII century it is possible to have been called Valmi.

2. The History of Urban Development

At the beginning of the XX century, Elbasan city and its prefecture were one of the biggest and most important prefectures of the country. Situated almost in the centre of Albania, this prefecture as its northeastern border had Yugoslavia. Then it was bordered north of Tirana and Diber prefecture, in the southeast of the prefecture of Korca, in the

south of the prefecture of Berat and in the west of Kavaja prefecture. Elbasan is located at the crossing roads which connect the port of Durres with the east of the country, and then goes through to the interior areas of the Balkans. Roads connecting West Europe and East Europe have historically passed through Elbasan. This tradition continued even in the '20. The road which passed in Korca and Struga linked Durres with all the interior parts of Albania passing firstly through Elbasan, ensuring the city to make trades with Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Austria, etc.

Elbasan and lands around it recorded a population of 83627 residents in 1923 and the population density was approximately 28 residents per km. The surface of this prefecture reached about 2954.90 km² where the centre and the most important city was Elbasan. Over the years '20 Elbasan was one of the biggest and most important cities of Albania, coming immediately after Shkodra and Berati. It was also an important historical economical and cultural centre. The city consisted of 13 neighborhoods with a total of 2,041 houses, 8475 residents belonging to Muslim religion and 1924 to Orthodox religion, which makes a total of 10408 people. The main quarters were: Sulejmanie, Karaveli, Dylgjer Hysen, Asllan Bej, Xhami i Qebir, Daut Bej, Alejdine, Pervin Aga, Spaikorre, Hazinedare, Qejvan Bej, composed entirely of Muslim population, while in neighborhoods Kala and Shinkoll the largest number of population consisted of orthodoxy, respectively 1240 and 684 people. The castle, situated in the centre of the city, is full of brilliance. It was first mentioned by Kristobal, Turkish historian, who dedicates the castle's construction to Mehmed II. The Castle has the form of a rectangular, in the south about 327 m and in the east 632 m which means 1378 m linear length in total.

The castle has three iron gates, from the east, west and one from the south which matches with Bezistani square. Above the southern gate is located Hynqari Mosque, near her the great Clock. Inside the castle live Christian families.

The main market square in Elbasan has been Bezistani. Almost in the middle of the square magnificently rises an age long Rrapi I Bezistanit. For market day in Bezistani Square were made various trades. His designation relates to the closed market called Bezistan, important commercial core, built in the XVII century, which included a considerable number of stores. Historically has served as a landmark for historical, cultural and educational events in Elbasan. Dimensions show that it is over 500-year-old age. Westward to the foot of the mountain called Krasta stretch Bejlebe fields, from Turkish to mean Bey of Beys. This field was filled with olives. Through it passed a river that the people called Manasderja. Alajdine form the eastern neighborhood of the city. While, Spaikorre was situated in the northeast of the city. In eastern and northern side of the Castle neighborhood sweeps Sulejmani.

Communication network in Albania at this time was at low level. This situation was at a time when in 1920 the entire Balkan rail transport was developed and dominated over other transports. Albania was the only Balkan country that had no railways, except a few small segments of lines inherited and built at the time of the Austro-Hungarian occupation. These lines after 1922 were damaged so much that it became irreparable, walking out of order. Shipping was generally done with the help of animals. Automobile transport was almost non-existent. Maritime transport, which was less developed, had only 4 coves which played the role of ports.

The same situation of transport also appeared in the region of Elbasan. Until 1920, there were literally almost no roads motoring. There were only a few old roads paved with cobblestones that had long served as a link between the country's cities, and different areas of the region of Elbasan. The work for the adjustment and repair of the roads began to be carried during the '20's and 30's. The documents of the time, regarding this process, among other things stated that "Roads are being fixed in Elbasan"; - this referred to the way Rrogozhine - Elbasan - Pogradec and Elbasan - Tirana, which were important national routes by which ensured region of Elbasan connection with other areas of the country. In 1922 began to open the motoring road Durres-Elbasan, turning into a national road; in Rrogozhina an offshoot of its linked Elbasan with Berat. As a national road, although it was a full settings roadway, also served the segment Elbasan-Librazhd-Qafe Thane, which was national road with a length of 76, 50 km. In November 1931 was inaugurated the motor way Elbasan- Peshkopi. In 1934, during the Kingdom of Zog, was built Elbasan - Tirana road, 55 km, one of the most important national routes, with the help of a ZVEA loan. With the end of the First World War SHKUMBINI Foot Bridge had broken (blow by Austro - Hungarians in October 1918, to prevent the progress of Italian forces). This prevented the connection of the city with its surrounding villages. To ensure smooth transportation to outlying areas, the municipality organizes auctions for regulating broken bridges. Just to regulate *Shkumbini* Bridge in 1923 were spent 2,153 gold napoleons.

In 1925 the city of Elbasan was visited by Jan and Cara Gordon, who stood in the bazaar with 1000 shops, in the region with 80, 000 inhabitants, considering Elbasan as "the city with a real collection of coins".

Elbasan city had a circulation of 38 vehicles and 2 tracks in 1931. To prevent accidents a draft regulation of the movement of vehicles in the city was developed, where the speed would not be less than 10 km / hour and not more than 30 km / h. It was conditioned by the construction of new roads that connect the city with Tirana, Gramsh, Dibra, Korca, etc.

A special importance is devoted to works in the public service sector, where in addition to paving and road

maintenance, attention is paid to work for the protection of some neighborhoods from flooding. So to ensure Allan Be neighborhood from Zaranika floods in the year 1929-1930: were built 480 m reinforced concrete walls; about 480 m to protect Spahikorre neighborhood of water floods from Zaranika; drinking water wells were improved, and tables were covered with cement to avoid contamination of drinking water; works were done to clean water passing Baholles and Alajdine neighborhoods, which influence the pollution of the streets that were in the Eastern part of the city, etc. In 1928 began the construction of the water supply, in accordance with the technical parameters of time, which ended in 1938. The people of Elbasan celebrate the brilliance coming of drinking water. In the inauguration ceremony (September) Çausi Abedin, mayor ends his speech: "On this occasion of the inauguration on behalf of the honest Municipality perpetrator, of which I am charged to thank the noble people of Elbasan for its sacrifice. I also thank the government authorities to support the care given in this smashing masterpiece".

3. The Role of Elbasan Municipality in Solving Urban Problems

In urban problems cannot be left without mentioning the role of the Municipality of Elbasan. During the years 1920-1924, to deal with urban problems for the first time in the organization chart of the Municipality of Elbasan with Sejдини Kasem chairman, was raised the requirement of a technical office with an architect and a lighting specialist. He awards funds to expand the city's electricity grid, utility, construction and repairs, education etc. Under construction: in 1923 began the construction of the new town hall, which was damaged by the earthquake of 18 December 1920, which ends in 1926, the construction of the prefecture in 1923, the Cinema "National" in 1936; the construction of Hotel "Modern" and library "Qemal Baholli" in 1935, state bank, power plant etc. Municipality also allocates special funds for the repair and construction of educational network in Elbasan. During the times of Kasem Sejдини as a mayor (1919-1924) lays the foundations for 'Normal' school construction in Krasta which remained unfinished and in its place in military barracks built in 1926, there were also repaired schools in the "Kala" and "Shenkoll" neighborhood.

Abdul Dilaveri (1932-1933, 1934-1937) specifies the yellow line of the city which included these boundaries: Kisha Shën Thomasit, Ura e Narazanit, Mulliri Sallak, Ura e Shkumbinit, Tyrbja e Gocës, Fushë Mbret, Ura e Zaranikës., up to three mills.

In Elbasan were restored new road names with names of patriots like Avni Rustemi, Dylgjer Hysen, Naim, or the way Thompson dedicated to organizer of Wide gendarmerie government, insurgents killed by villagers in 1914, etc.

A map from Geographic Institute of Florence shows that Elbasan lied 1.5 km from east to west and 2 km from east to north. It had a surface of 250 hectares and it didn't have real industrial areas. The territory had free spaces, mostly gardens, agricultural plots planted with orchards. What makes special this city is the greenness in the gardens and the cultivation of plant trees. It is considered as "the city of flowers" from the foreign travellers.

4. The Historical of Architectural Development

The architectural development of the city followed the tradition with characteristic "elbasan" houses, the medieval market and the cobbled streets.

Evlija Celebiu considers Elbasan's houses as prosperous and full of light sarayes, with gardens similar to those of the heaven. These houses had two floors and a tap with pure water. Celebiu says they are comfortable houses with a red tiling roof.

The architecture of the city is based in the activity of normal people, ethnic traits, related with their way of living in different historical periods and developed as a composition of albanian, popular experts in construction such as: the buildings, water supply system, markets ect. Traditionally Elbasan has been the city of lower buildings, with one or two floors, with huge green gardens. Until the beginning of the XX-th century there are noticed two types of house. One is known as "döllmallie" which means "filled", with one floor and a porch which is characteristic in this city and is traditionally known as "hajati". The private houses were about 40-100 cm high from the ground and the most important place in them was "the house of fire" which had a central location in this houses. (Dedja, F., A.M.E.) The house of fire was without a ceiling and the fire was light in a fire-place without a chimney. The guest room had wall shelves and wooden ceiling. There was an open background with wooden pegs in the front of the room. The porch had an important part in the building and it had a sofa to relax when it was sunny. The porch had one or more corners to stay. Another typical element was the cellar, in the back of the house.

There is also another type of house with a single ceiling. (Dedja, F., A.M.E.) The house was built with ashlar and the roof was covered with some special tiles. The second type of elbasan's house was the house with a garret. It has two floors and the porch and the garret had a central location. This type of house is widespread in the Castle and some other

parts of the city. The first floor has an ashlar while the second has brick walls. Usually these houses have a common roof. The second floor has some special architectural elements such are: a group of vertical windows with a wooden framework. Some characteristic houses are the house of Sejdiñeve , which are a monument of culture.

In the years '30 in Elbasan is noted another type of house, two-floored or three-floored, with a contemporary architecture. There is a combination of the old and the modern in this house. This element is also emphasized by the foreign tourists that visited our city. In 1935 Bernard Newman travels through Albania with a bicycle and during this travel he considers Elbasan as one of the most interesting cities in Albania and in the Balkans; with well known people educated in the West. He gives a detailed description of the cobbled streets, which were narrow but enough for the traffic they held . (Tafani, V., 2003). He describes the suburbs as not an interesting part, with ordinary narrow streets and ashlar in the both sides, where every road represented a profession. Bernard Newman says that the people of Elbasan were muslims and that Elbasan was a city that belonged to the East.

The architecture of islamic and christian buildings was still present in Elbasan which proves the connection between the West and East elements. Some of the islamic buldings that are mentioned in this period in Elbasan are: Teqeja e Madhe e Baba Xhemalit, e Baba Rizait, e Sheh Shaqir Lunikut, Sheh Sulës, e Tabakëve; tyrbet are known as monumental graves and were spread in some special places such are: Tyrbja e Gocës, e Shutrit, Zyri Efeniut, Kalaner Pashës, Gjergjen Efeniut etj; the madrasah was a religious institution where children were educated in Turkish and Arab. Elbasan had madrasah near every mosque. In 1930 Elbasan had 17 mosques, 1 madrasah, 148 imams and 14 masjid.

The architecture of Christian buildings was represented by the churches such as: the church of St.Mary and the church of St. Kolli.

Another important building is "Qemal Baholli" library. This library is a charity act of Nazif Baholli, a famous owner in Elbasan. The construction of this library began in 1933 and some teachers such as: V. Llapushi, Mir Papajani and student Qamil Xhaja held speeches. After 2 years, with a modern architecture and comfortable surroundings, the building was ready. The inaguration ceremony was held in July 24-th, 1935. The library was given to the city hall becoming a public institution in service of the people of Elbasan.

In 1936 was built the Internacional's cinema with a romac style architecture, which was later turned into a theatre. (Meksi, Th., 1997)

"Beautiful Elbasan, in the centre of Albania...
His sons read the books of knowledge..."

These verses inspired a well known man, Xhavit Bicakun, to built this Temple of national culture. The desire and the passion of the youth of Elbasan gave to this theater elements such as: the scenography, the director and a contemporary interpretation. All these elements make this building one of the most modern theatres of the time. (Meksi, Th., 1997)

5. Conclusion

The early years of the XXth century include an important period for our nation in general and Elbasan in particular. He had a major cultural development compared with other cities. In this period of time Elbasan remains one of the most important economical, political and commercial cities together with Tirana, Durres, Korca, Shkodra ect. In 1912 it had almost 10.000 residents. (Duka, V., 1997). Elbasan had the features of an Oriental-Balkan city, where the main economical activity was artisanal production. Crafting was specialized and every small manufacturer worked in a specific craft. The most important crafts were those of metal working, clothing, woodcraft, and artistic crafting. The way of living and the apperance of the city reflects the medieval features of ottoman rule. The market consisted in small shops while the water supply system and electric light were missing. Another characteristic are the separated neighborhoods according their religion. This type of separation is seen in the types of houses, in their traditions and their social or economical customs. These separated neighborhoods prevented its development. During the years'20- '30 there were noted some new and modern elements in the development of urban planning and architecture a well as the traditional ones. These new elements were based in the western experience and were reflected in some basic buildings such were: The Library, the Theatre which remain being a value even nowadays.

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