


Dukagjini Residential Tower			History
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Nijazi Shala	PhD Candidate – Public University of Tirana. Albania.		
Abstract			
<p>Architectural works of native character of Dukagjini region of Kosovo are mainly those built from the stone. The best way to understand the social and cultural significance of this type of constructions, examination of the local 'tower residences', is the core of this study. Towers are constructed entirely from locally excavated stone, thus, besides fulfilling the shelter and development needs for extended families, they also mark the historical achievement as a defense institution, often being considered as fortifications in their own meaning.³ Trying to understand the Dukagjini Tower as a symbol of the resistance, represent also a good way to try to understand the cultural thinking within the region.⁴</p>			

The History

Rock structures exist as long as history can recall and are the longest lasting buildings. In this regard, it is worth to mention the ancient stone structures of the Egyptian pyramids or Peruvian temples as world classical examples. Residential buildings such as; the so-called '*Cleits*' along the North Atlantic, '*Broks*' in Britain, '*Boris*' in France, '*Kabanes*' in Spain, '*Trullo*' in Italy and/or similar stone settlements that could survive, stretch from the Shetland Islands (North Britain) to the eastern Mediterranean⁵. Apart from the stone composition and spatial differences, residential homes of the Western Balkan must have had a similar evolution throughout the history since the earliest times. Being more concrete, when it comes to the so-called 'towers-residence', what we now witness in the Dukagjini region of Kosovo, should present the adaptation of regional residential stone constructions to spatial and historical social changes, which evolved parallel to Mediterranean technologies since the earliest prehistoric times. The particular theory suggests that tower-like residences come to expression, grow and/or reproduce mainly in those areas where the central authority is weak, leading to a need for symbolic status in addition to the private protection against small-scale attacks (mainly inter-regional ones). Similarly, when it comes to the region of the Western Balkans, a particular type of tower houses we face today is mainly those built during and after the Ottoman era conquest, which is considered as relatively modern periods (XVII century as it has been mainly defined)⁶. Besides fulfilling otherlife necessities, the purpose of tower-building was to protect from the unexpected attacks⁷. The very definition of 'tower' is synonymous with the towers centered on the fortress walls of the prehistoric and the earliest historical periods known to Europe and beyond⁸.

³ Greville Pounds, (1994). *An Economic History of Medieval Europe*. Publisher: *Routledge* (UK), pp: 335.

⁴ Flamur Doli, (2009). *Arkitektura Vernakulare në Kosovë*. Publisher: Public University of Pristina, pp: 67.

⁵ <http://www.merchantandmakers.com/history-of-dry-stone-walls/>

⁶ Michael Galaty, (2008). *Building a Landscape of Settlement in the Shala Valley of High Albania*.

⁷ Sidney Toy, (1985). *Castles: Their Construction and History*. Publisher: Courier Dover (UK), pp: 210-230.

⁸ *The History of Albanian Population, (Volume I)*. Publisher: Toena (Tirana), 2002. Chap. 1.

That the tower had a role of protection as well as a dwelling, is also proved by their four-angular construction, a special technique practiced since ancient times, where characteristic was exactly the grips for the rifle and the closure of the door locked from the inside⁹. From the history of the application, the protective character of the tower houses most likely came to terms more than ever since during and after the European medieval period (after the full abolition of Western Roman authority). This particularly in mountains, villages and other areas scarcely populated, namely natural strategic points to pledge and protect residential territories with reduced forces at the times of anarchy and personal insecurity. From this perspective, we can find tower-houses widely scattered on the British Isles, especially in Ireland and Scotland (mainly along their borders with England), many of which are still inhabited to this day. The classification system there is largely referred to the basement plan¹⁰, where they are divided into: 'tower-houses' or protective towers (widely concentrated within Scotland); so-called 'naked-towers' (mainly located along the Scottish border with England); 'residential-house' (Scottish home of special construction build for protection); 'fortified-Irish-house' (within the Ireland), and; 'lord-houses' (mainly concentrated within the territory of England). In Scotland, residential towers are often called castles, where despite compactness and size, they are often presented without clear distinction between a castle and a tower house¹¹. Scottish residences of the '*Broks*' type (mentioned above from the iron-era), often show resemblance to the medieval tower houses, especially in relation to the narrow passages and thick walls, except that they are much less imposing. Different from Scotland (whose southern border once served as the last line of advancement for the ancient Roman Empire), Irish towers that we can witness today, are mainly built between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries of our era, a period known for the wars and social disorder within the British Isles¹². Here also, the towers are known to have served for residential needs and at the same time to protect from unexpected attacks. They mostly accommodated the leading families, from where they could also impose the status and secure the inheritance for the descendants. Many of these settlements also had protective walls of the building¹³. The high concentration of tower settlements is also evident in northern Spain, particularly in the Basque province along the Apennine Mountains on the border with France, then also across the territories of other provinces in the northwest Iberian Peninsula such as Cantabria, Asturias and Galicia, some of which date back to the eighth century¹⁴. In this case, they are known to have served mainly as noble houses and shelter against Arab influence from the early middle ages, then also during the period of long consolidation from the 'Castilian and Aragón's' authority. The later medieval period, characterized by west-east migrations in the form of Crusades, also marks the high presence of residential stone castle-houses. On this occasion, the highest impact is in the Baltic States of northeastern Europe, especially in Estonia (the legacy from the Teutonic or German Order).

⁹ The History of Albanian Population, (Volume I). Publisher: Toena (Tirana), 2002. Chap. 1.

¹⁰ Gordon Macintosh, (1937). Publisher: Country Life Magazine (UK). pp 630-634.

¹¹ Michael Hogan, Sigvard Richardson & Peter Graves, (2004). History of Muchalls Castle. Publisher: Lumina Press (UK).

¹² Aonghus Mackechnie, (2015). Martial Scotland's Domestic Castles. Publisher: Edinburgh University Press (UK), pp: 14-21.

¹³ Aonghus Mackechnie, (2015). Martial Scotland's Domestic Castles, pp: 14-21.

¹⁴ <http://www.castlesofspain.co.uk/FortifiedTowerHousesofNorthernSpain.html>

Known also as iron castles, the form and character of the constructions once again were to control the subordinated or possessed areas¹⁵. Tower-residence cannot be defined solely as part of the European space legacy. We can take the example of hundreds of similar tower constructions in the near-east, especially within the territories of modern countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen¹⁶. Meanwhile, a considerable number of fortified houses can still be found in the Caucasus region along the borderline of Europe and Asia, this particularly within the country of Georgia, an area that once was identified with a clan-based social structure, and where fierce competition over limited natural resources has resulted in chronic neighborly hostility (especially during the 19th and 20th centuries)¹⁷. In a similar way, hundreds of home-towers in the western area of Tibet create the so-called tribal corridor, where older tower houses date back to the ninth century¹⁸.

Dukagjini Towers

What distinguishes the Albanian towers of Dukagjini region as a stone construction today from the other contemporary stone residences within the territory of Western Balkan's and the rest of the world, must have gradually evolved as the result of social and geopolitical changes beginning of the early medieval period, this especially considering:

- Invasions and migrations that characterize the period;
- Feudal social structure;
- Patriarchal and tribal principles;
- The principles where the law of nature has always been a balancing tool for social relations.

Most likely to resist Ottoman influence, sometime around the 17th century, the Dukagjini-tower appears to have gained more elements in construction, shifting slightly its cultural character¹⁹. The reason for protection is now the one that takes the central role or dominates more than ever this type of construction. What comes as essential, it is the thickness of the walls and the shape of the small and deep windows to avoid as much as possible the exposure as the target for the enemies. In fact, those are key features that were the most important over the past three hundred years to the tower buildings in Kosovo. Residential gates and gates of perimeter walls are also considered new elements that were introduced during this period.

Towers represent a very early tradition in the livelihood of the inhabitants of Dukagjini and Kosovo, this despite the fact that now-days, towers are less notable and that the new constructions have been scarce over the last decades. When they come to representation, they relate mainly to a modernized stylistic genre, which relies on nostalgia for the past that no longer exist.

¹⁵World Heritage Sites. (U.N.E.S.C.O). <https://collecting-u-n-e-s-c-o-world-heritage-sites>

¹⁶ Richard Covington, (2011). Roads of Arabia. Publisher: *Saudi Aramco World Magazine*, Volume 62 (USA).

¹⁷Towers of Svaneti. (<http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/towers-svaneti>).

¹⁸The Secret towers of the Himalayas. Film Documentary, 2003.

¹⁹The Secret towers of the Himalayas. Film Documentary, 2003.

Regarding the old towers or those that we can claim from the real former not so distant past, most of them are unable to adapt to the epochal changes and their traces are continuously disappearing. This comes particularly as a result of natural factors, wars, reuse of their materials for newer conventional constructions (especially when it comes to stone blocks), as well as lack of periodic supervision and/or restoration necessary to keep them 'alive'.

The towers that we can trace today in the Dukagjini region of Kosovo are narrow in diameter, usually three-floor constructions, mainly built by local craftsmen from localities like Gjakova or Dibra²⁰. The overall requests for security protection have forced anonymous domestic artisan to build them with strong and wide walls, and normally as always from the stone. They are usually positioned in the dominant and strategic points, on top of the hills or steep rocks, like small castles, isolated and apart from one another. In such cases, they are usually not surrounded by walls even when terrain permits such a thing. Otherwise, the towers can also be seen as clustered together, this usually as a result of the normal growth of the family or tribe, but always maintaining the character and the requirements for security protection.

Construction and Function

The type of tower houses that we can generally find in the villages and centers of the Dukagjini region represents a genuine and distinctive traditional and cultural monument as well as the material heritage for Kosovo. We insist that these are special because, within the distinctive architectural features of this genre of traditional constructions, it is easy to recognize unusual autochthonous features. The tower-houses were usually built on three floors.

If we stop and make a rough analysis of the shape and construction, what we first notice is that usually they represent a whole volume of stones crowned with a four-page pyramid roof. The lower part of the tower creates an impression of a strong prism, where it rests the lighter upper part often with rich architectural features. The other thing to notice immediately when you approach the tower-house, and which also gives the impression of a powerful fortification, are usually the small turrets scattered across its four sides (foundation to the roof). The entrance and the windows, protrusions and the corners of the construction, almost always are carved with perfect skill, art and technique. From inside, the towers are almost always scarcely furnished, with handicraft furniture made of wood, often engraved with floral geometric or joint motifs. The interiors are usually very dark and the only lighting they receive is through the small windows. The deaf treatment of the walls, the vaulted entrance and the few windows in minimal dimensions archly shaped, sensitively emphasize even more the strength of the defensive character of the residence. The ground floor with a single turret or sometimes even without any windows is usually presented as one single space. Paved in stone blocks, most often it serves two functions: for housing the livestock and for protection. Communication with upper floors for residential use is through the staircase, which sometimes can represent the only wooden material of the tower-house.

²⁰Drançolli Fejaz, (2001). *Kulla Shqiptare*. Publisher: Public University of Pristina, pp 46.

Communication between this floor to the external environment is almost always through a carved stone entrance bended along the top, whereas with the first floor, through an opening on the ceiling of the ground floor. The first floor, which is considered the most intimate space and almost always fulfills the role of the main environment for family members, features a corridor, main room or *fire-room*, and at least another so-called *room of the bride*. The *fire-room* is considered the main living room and as a kitchen, and then also as a bedroom for some of the family members (usually children). The *fire-room* is often paved with wooden planks and then covered by thick layer of clay (4-5 centimeters). Facing the door of this room from the inside, is the fireplace and chimney liner, while along the walls, there are usually small double or triple turrets.

The so-called *room/s of the bride/s* (small spaces, mostly without furnishings other than bedding and the ark) serve as bedrooms. Placed mainly in the vicinity of the *bride room/s*, the small windows, usually arched along the top, are almost always expanding upon the inside, thus enabling the best distribution of light within a modest environment. Frequently, the interior walls are painted with white lime. Through a door in the corridor, the first floor it interconnects with outside environment and the ground basement (courtyard of the tower) almost always by an external wooden staircase. Through another internal staircase in the first floor, almost always made from the boards, you can climb to the second floor. The second-floor, both from the outside and from the inside, for functional and architectural values, represents the most interesting part of the house.

The main parts of this space are the corridor, the so-called dormitory (open part attached to the corridor) and the guest room or what they call it the 'men's-chamber'. The dormitory (almost always carved in wood), is the outset (about 20-30 centimeters) from the outside of the tower walls. This space is also equipped with a considerable number of small windows curved above, which are internally enclosed in a wooden lid, thus giving an imposing look to the building. In the second-floor corridor, there are usually baths placed into the deep wall.

The man's-chamber is almost always the main and richest decorated environment within the whole tower-building. In comparison to the family/*women's* room (below on the first floor), the men's-chamber is more comfortable and warmer regarding the decorative treatment of various constructive and functional elements. Another characteristic of the chamber is that, like the family/fire/*women* room, on the daily bases is used as a main space for the reception of the guests, while during the night as a bedroom. Even on this occasion, the floor is paved with wooden planks covered with clay.

The roof above the third floor is made by wooden planks, usually of oak, while the walls (as in the first-floor), contain double and triple turrets/windows. The purpose of the frets that look at different directions is to observe and/or prevent attacks from the enemies if such a thing would occur. The housing roof has evolved from those with stone slabs, oak planks, to the tiled ones.

The Value

Towers represent one of the important elements that shall be considered as part of the heritage and culture in the Dukagjini region and the rest of Kosovo. Undoubtedly, the Albanian hospitality heritage has unique elements, and this often cannot be understood without the tower. Otherwise, not always there is sympathy for the understanding what do the towers represent. They are often unfairly used as a symbol of darkness, backwardness and patriarchy.

In the first place, it is not right to think that the turrets or small windows which illustrate somehow the character of the tower, have to do in any way with reputation for blood feud according to different interpretations. This is especially because according to the local traditional oral laws, the tower was never attacked by those who sought revenge, because there were almost always women and children within. The main purpose behind the small window was protection against the attacks of foreigners, and for this, it is enough to understand the history of the region, as well as the psychology and the habits of the highland mentality²¹.

Similarly, the Albanian tower-house was often taken as a synonym for so-called 'isolation', as if the word tower could have no other meaning than 'solitary tower'. But in fact, this should not be understood like this for the very fact that this association of ideas is not something natural, that the tower can consciously be linked to the isolation²². Identifying the tower with isolation it is unfair and at the same time inaccurate because Albanian towers were less than anything else residences of isolation. Even the term itself is more artificial than real, created mainly by foreigners and the former ideology of the communist system. In reality, the residents of the tower house always had the freedom to go out, to work or do whatever, except in cases of hostilities between the local families, and this does not represent something that must necessarily be identified with the type and/or form of residence. Unlike the concept of 'isolation', it would probably be somewhat more realistic if the towers from this part of the world, would be looked upon as 'collective household isolation' and/or 'confinement in itself', or even 'fear/apprehension from the unknown'. This in particular (as mentioned), considering general regional insecurity accompanied by migrations and later social changes during the period known as middle ages. From a local perspective, more than anything else, the tower is the household of the history, assemblies and national awakening movement. Of course that the tower was poor, with little furniture, but it was an authentic feature of its time. It is understandable that the inhabitant of the house did not do things against themselves, nor the tower as a residence, but to move toward new better times, like all humanity, with or without towers. Therefore, the tower-house shall be looked upon without exalting on its proverbial grandeur and/or without being frightened by its shadow of the past. For the local population, above everything the towers are known to symbolize hospitality, generosity and autochthonous nobility, something that distinguishes them (at least in their minds) from other Balkan people. In an informal way, tower residences supported the cultivation of the wisdom and philosophy.

²¹ So he claims a local by name Zef Kacolli from highland of Gjakova, who is 85 years of age.

²² Says Nosh Preka who is 75 years of age, also from the Gjakova highland.

For this, they are also considered a kind of Universities for the local inhabitants. Towers also served as courts of justice where family and national honors were protected²³. Last but not least, towers portray the strength of the autochthonous tradition and the symbol of resistance to national awakening during and after the XIX century²⁴. Dukagjini residential tower shall be studied without prejudice, because it was not an oppressive and exploitable force coming from the Ottoman Porte, but a small 'bastion' in itself, with all the attributes of the academic representation in the provincial assemblies of Kosovo, liberation battles and reconciliation. There were towers with up to one hundred family members. This was not just the house where people lived, but also the place where they made weapons, bells, crates, cradles, music instruments, banners or anything needed for the household. Therefore, it is not unusual to have so many tower-buildings as cultural monuments in Kosovo, and who knows, someday, cultural heritage projects, just like with the stone houses in localities of Berat and Gjirokastra in Albania, may decide to present them to the UNESCO.

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²³Such they were: 'Chamber of Junik', 'Chamber of Agajve të Rashkocit', Chamber of 'Demukajve të Deçanit'.

²⁴Such is 'The Tower of Haxhi Zeka', which became the seat for the best known as the 'League of Peja'.